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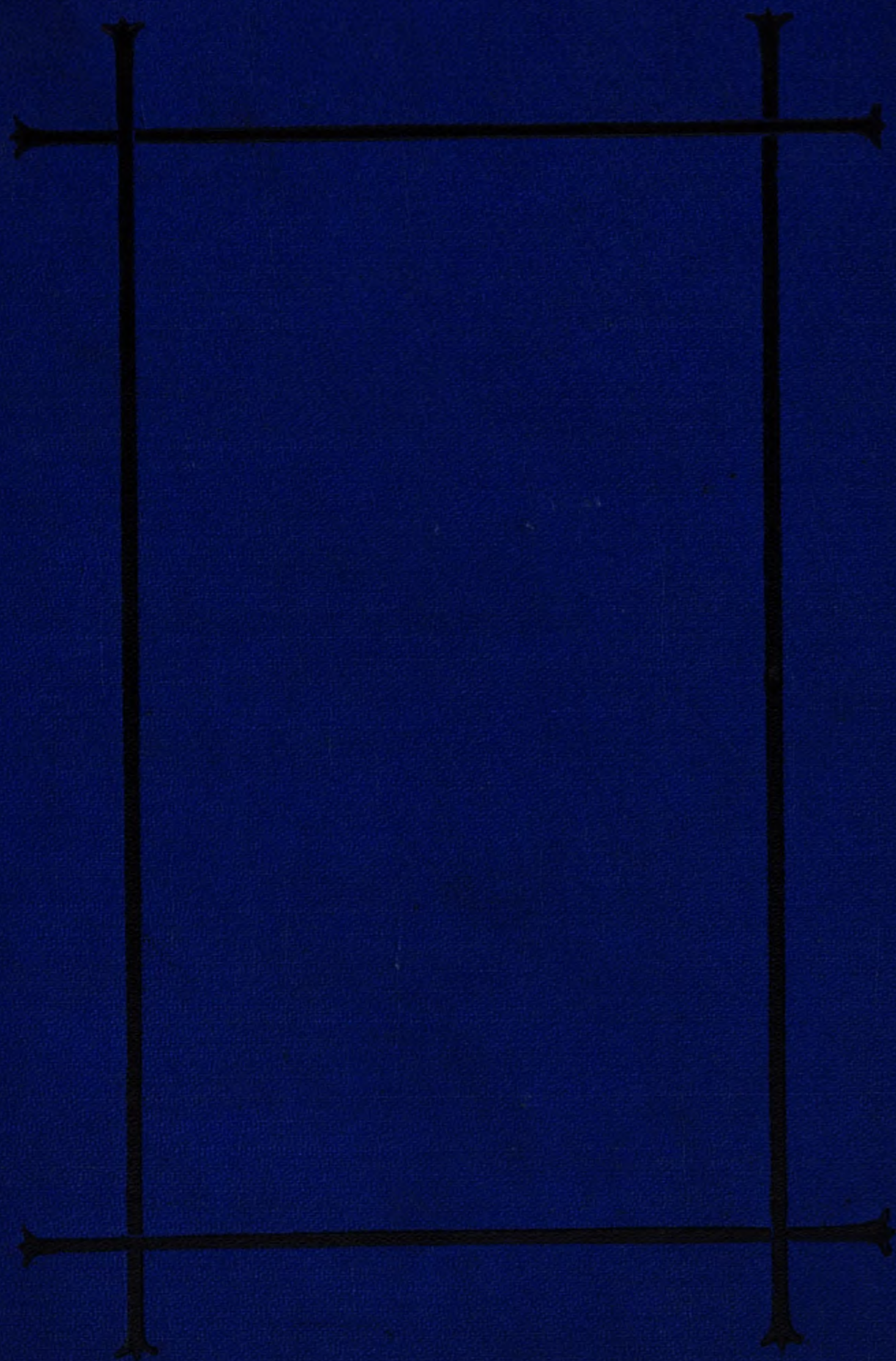
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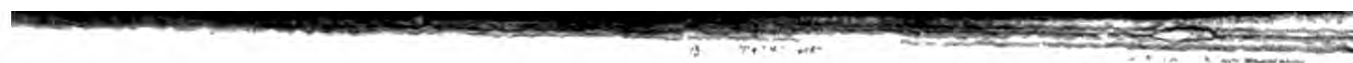


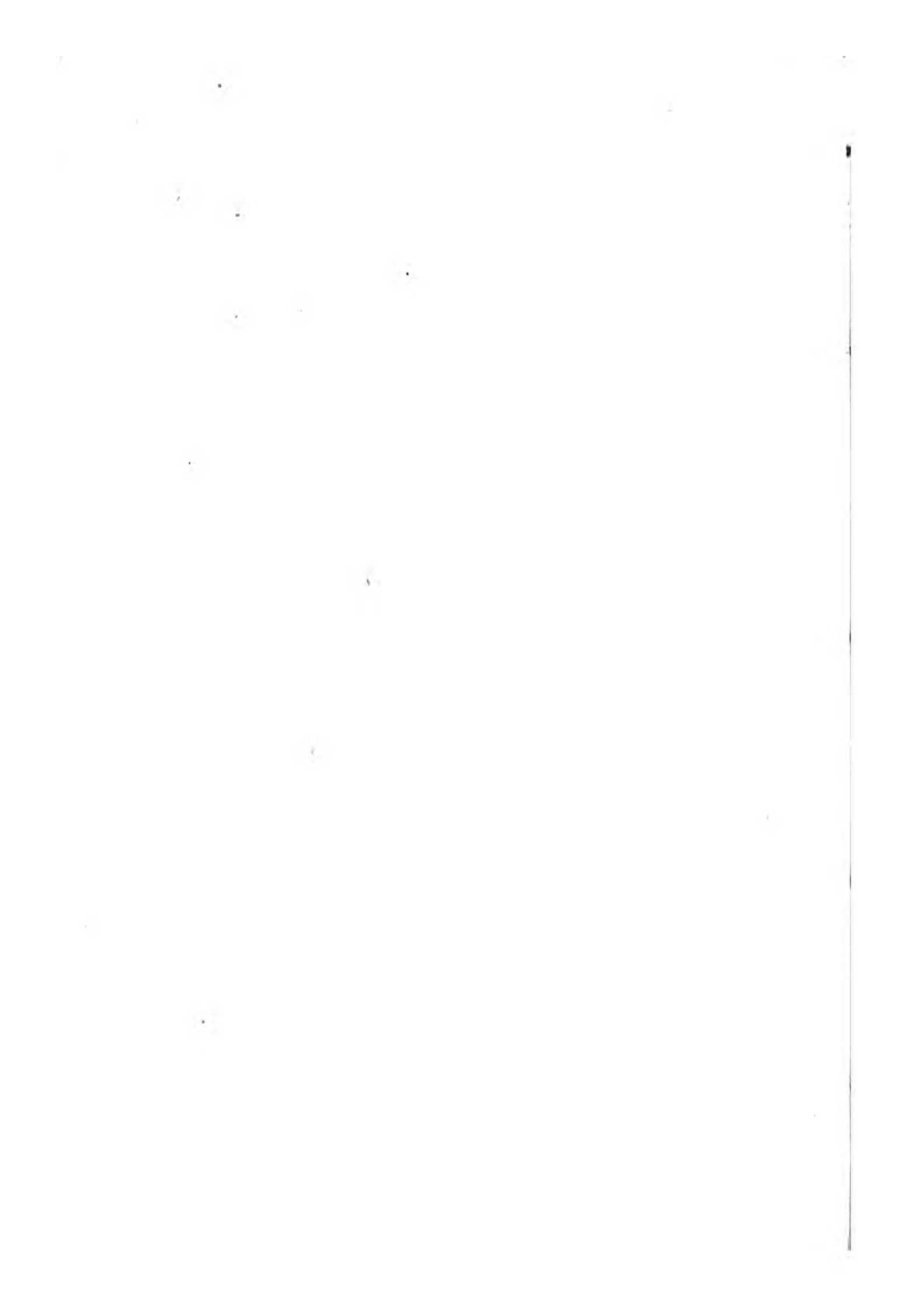
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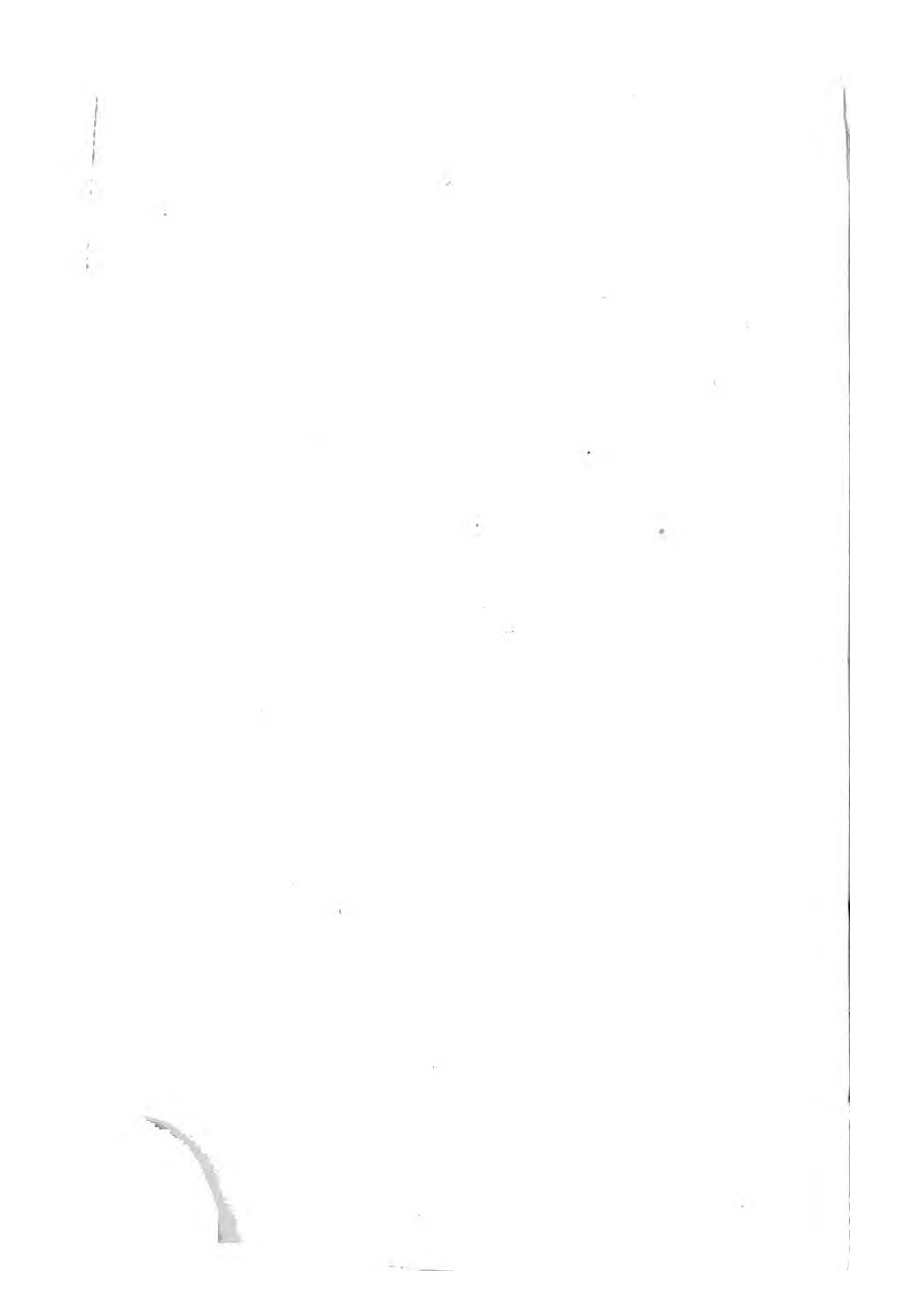








ONCE AND FOR EVER.



ONCE AND FOR EVER,

OR

*PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF THE
CURATE OF DANBURY.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"NO APPEAL." "SAVED BY A WOMAN."

THREE VOLUMES.

VOL I.



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ONCE AND FOR EVER.

CHAPTER I.

HE IS MINE.

“Do what you like with him,” said Dr. Littler to the nurse, in a whisper; “he can’t possibly live, whatever you do.”

But the whisper intended only for the ears of old Grace Morgan, the nurse, was heard by another person, who took a totally different view of the question, and who presently, in a faint and feeble voice, gave utterance to it.

“Give him to me, nurse,” said the soft

low voice of my mother, "whether he is to live or not; he is mine."

The poor little atom of mortality, scarcely an hour after his appearance in the sick room, was therefore handed over to her whose heart beat with all the warmth of a mother's love, and nestled down among the bed-clothes, close to the tender bosom and the loving arm that were to nourish and care for him through many a coming day of trial.

Dr. Littler was a little withered old man, with long, bony hands, and a grave and wrinkled face of the colour of fusty parchment, which I learned ere long to associate with rhubarb and magnesia, and other unpalatable but necessary dainties, with which it was then deemed impossible for children to be too early acquainted. But he was looked upon as an infallible authority, especially as a ladies' doctor, in the little seaport town of Dockstone;

and for many a long week and month after the utterance of his famous dictum concerning myself (as I afterwards learned from my mother's own lips), my life hung upon a mere thread, so frail and so thin that every chance puff of wind threatened to annihilate me. But the thread never snapped; and thanks to the untiring love of a mother whose tenderness and beauty would have made sunshine in the darkest home, and are yet imperishably stamped on her children's hearts,—in spite of the tender mercies of Æsculapius, the croakings of many female friends, and the forlorn prophecies of Grace Morgan,—I survived the perils of teething and all other infantine maladies, and grew up into a small and precocious urchin, always ready for mischief and fun, and strongly averse to the delights of A B C, and the multiplication-table. As I was then far too delicate to be sent to school, my time was

chiefly spent in a little dark and dingy room called the nursery, among two or three older sisters, who, when at home, made a sort of plaything of me; or in a wild, old-fashioned garden, that at the back of the house sloped down towards the blue sea.

In this garden were passed many of my happiest hours. There, on an old wooden seat facing the sea, my dear mother loved to sit with me by her side, answering all my childish questions, when they could be answered; there she talked to me of the great and wise Father of all in Heaven, who had built up the blue sky above us, and kept the broad sea within bounds; and of the loving Saviour who had died for man. There, with gentle and loving words, she reasoned with me of truth and falsehood, of all that was fair and beautiful in the world, as God made it, how He cared for it and watched over me, and was always

with me night and day, and would ever bless and keep me while I was good. Then she would look into my eyes with hers full of tears of happiness and of love, that said to me even more than her loving words.

The long slope, I remember, was covered with strawberry beds, among which I was allowed to ramble and feast pretty much as I liked ; old Grace the nurse being only too thankful to be rid of me for a time, and give herself up entirely to the knitting of grey worsted socks. What became of these socks I never knew, but if "her man," as she called him, wore out half of them, the wear and tear on board a man-of-war must have been ruinously destructive. She must have made scores of them in the course of a year, though I never recollect seeing a finished pair. Such strawberries, either for size or flavour, I have never since met with, though, in the fifty years that have

since passed, I have eaten some of the best that Covent Garden could produce. But good as they were, strawberries were not the only or the chief attraction of that pleasant garden. Stretched out before me lay the broad, blue sea, with all its infinite beauty of light and shade, in calm, unruffled deeps or stormy billows, constantly crossed and recrossed by boats and vessels of every size and character. For Dockstone was a busy seaport, and its noble bay—landlocked between two lofty headlands of rugged cliff—afforded safe and abundant harbourage for ships of the largest tonnage so that to the wondering eyes of a child there was a source of endless amusement in watching the snowy wings of yachts and pleasure-boats, trawlers with huge sails of tawny red, crawling slowly out to the fishing grounds, colliers and ships of war on their way up or down Channel.

My earliest recollections are connected

with that sunny garden; and there, on many a bright morning, I wandered about in happy ignorance as yet of all the sorrows and trials of life; there I watched the sun go down in cloudy splendour, as it seemed, into the distant line of grey sea; and there I mused and pondered in boyish fashion on the many problems which haunt the mind of a dreamy and inquisitive child. To this very day I can clearly see the old well by the summer-house, with its wooden cover which we were expressly forbidden on any account to lift, but which, with infinite labour, I every now and then managed to lift whenever the watchful eyes of my nurse gave me a chance. My great delight was to peer down into its gloomy depth, and drop small stones into the darkness, and listen for the sullen plunge they made into the unseen icy water far below; or greater delight still, because more strictly forbidden and more

dangerous, to let down one of my sister's dolls, secretly purloined for the purpose, by a string fastened round its neck, give it a good drowning, and drag it up again, streaming with water, to the surface.

Several years—of which I can remember little or nothing—must have passed away in this fashion, before I went to school; years in which I grew up to be a shy, thoughtful, but precocious boy, having no companions but my sisters, and no teacher but that best of all teachers, a mother. As to my father, at this time, I scarcely ever saw him except when I was brought in after dinner to dessert, for he was all day long engaged in the bank, the business of which was carried on in the lower storey of our old-fashioned square house in High Street. Or if not busy there, he was at work in his study among his books or water-colour sketches, though he always had a bright smile and a kindly word for little Harry, as

indeed he had for most people who fell in his way. But, oddly enough, though he made many acquaintances, his personal friends were few. He was the junior partner in the firm of Kingley and Norton, who carried on the County Bank under that title, and a great favourite among clients of all ranks, especially the country farmers and owners of land in the neighbourhood. He was not a learned man, but his intellect was keen and refined, and all his tastes, habits, and pursuits showed a cultivated and pure taste. He hated the drudgery of the bank and everything connected with the art of money getting. But the fates had been against him in early life, and by dint of considerable interest as well as some outlay, he had been, much against his own will, got into the bank as a fine opening, and there he had spent the best years of his life in work for which he was utterly unfitted. He was, by nature,

a poet and an artist, and a day's ramble in the woods or across the purple moor was one of the highest treats he ever knew. Such days were few and far between, but of their undoubted and graceful fruit his numberless sketch-books contained abundant proof. Clusters of wayside flowers, "bits" of rushing water from the valley of the river Docker, scraps of golden sunset and purple cloudland, peeps of wild moorland, or of misty sea; all alike in glowing colours showed the master's loving hand. Engaged at this work the hours rolled by unheeded, the cares and anxieties of the bank were, for a time, forgotten, and his heart was filled and flooded with a quiet joy, known only to the true disciple of Nature.

Next to these pursuits the passion of his life, and nearest to his heart, came the care of his wife and children. His had been a pure love-match, and Mary Bone, the only

daughter of an old naval officer on half-pay, brought to him no dowry but her own tender and delicate beauty, and the matchless treasure of an unselfish loving heart. With little or no book-learning, she was more than his equal in intellectual gifts, and, above all, in shrewd common sense. Keenly sensitive, with the inborn dignity and grace as well as the true pride of a lady, she lived only for her husband and children, and in their happiness alone sought and found her own.

But I must return once more to my own more immediate doings. Too small and delicate to be sent to school, yet always eager to pick up information of every kind, with scores of questions ready for everybody who would listen to them, I yet, in some way or other, managed to learn to read, and soon found a new and strange pleasure in the world of books. Luckily for me these were few in number, and still

more fortunately, all of a kind that appealed to my awakening imagination. There were no royal roads to universal knowledge in those days, and Mrs. Cramchild had not as yet begun her labours for the enlightenment and distraction of the infant world. There were no little 'Peeps of Day' opening to childish eyes with vulgar and cruel omniscience the mysteries of Sin, Hell, and eternal Death; no nauseous reading lessons informing me that Satan was always on the watch to devour little children, and that everlasting fire was my inevitable portion, unless I was a believer in certain awful texts on the opposite page.

Almost my only book of theology was a well-worn copy of Mrs. Barbauld's 'Prose Hymns,' unfolding to me the greatness and goodness of the Almighty in words of lofty and loving piety, the gracious beauty of the world of nature, the glory of the midnight sky, and the might of the broad sea.

My two romances were 'Robinson Crusoe' and 'Pilgrim's Progress,' both of which were regarded as true from beginning to end; then came a little thin duodecimo, called the 'Sorrows of Selfishness,' a volume of fairy stories containing immortal Bluebeard, Jack the Giant-killer, and Puss in Boots, and two quaint little podgy octavoes of Old Testament history which were my especial favourites. The woodcuts illustrative of David and Goliath, of Joshua and Samson, I can remember to this hour. A giant, sixteen feet high if he was an inch, bearing in his hand a spear far taller than a neighbouring spire, which somehow or other overtopped the hills of Philistia; Joshua, in a full suit of chain armour, erect on a mountain, stretching forth a right arm towards the sun through miles of air; and Samson carrying on his back a couple of brazen gates, as huge as the city which they guarded,—all these were things not to be

forgotten; their full artistic beauty I could not of course then appreciate, but, for all that, they had a true message and a meaning for me, and that I readily took in. They brought out into sharp clear light things in which I took a vital interest,—which I believed as truly as I did in my own existence, in the ships that sailed by, or the sailors whom I saw on the deck.

There was but one other book in my regular library, over which I had unchecked control, and that one, ‘Sandford and Merton,’ to me the least satisfactory of all my biblical treasures; Master Tommy Goodboy and Master Harry Badboy being alike to me unreal, while Mr. Barlow seemed a wearisome and disgusting old prig.

Still, a book was a book in those days, and every one of my treasures was read and re-read in its turn, until almost every page was known by heart; while every blot and

every dog's-ear had its own peculiar features, and served as a milestone on the road towards *Finis*. Books were companions that never failed me, who never seemed out of temper, and never scolded me ; we therefore got on famously together, and it was a sad day for me at first when we had, in some measure, to part, and I new acquaintances to make.

But for all that the fatal day came ; I had to taste of the tree of knowledge, and my eyes were to be opened. Thus it fell out :—

“Harry, my boy,” said my father one day after dinner as I waited for my usual biscuit, “Harry, my boy, how would you like to go to school ?”

He might just as well have asked me how I would like an earthquake. I was aghast at the very thought.

“How far is it ?” I answered, “and how long must I stay there ?”

“Stay there,” replied my mother, “you

won't *stay* there ; it is not far from home, and an hour or two every day will be quite enough at first."

"Oh ! then," I answered after my royal fashion, "I don't mind trying it."

And so in five minutes all was settled ; I was kissed and sent off to bed, and just as I left the room I heard my father's final words, "Mary, my dear," he said, "he wants being knocked about a little among other boys, instead of moping about all day long with a book in his hand. You had better go and see Miss Osborne at once."

"Who is Miss Osborne, and what is she like ?" said I to Morgan, when we reached the quiet haven of the nursery.

But Morgan's knowledge was of the most incomplete and unsatisfactory kind ; all she knew being that "Miss Osborne kep' a siminary for young gentlemen, and were supposed to wear a cork leg."

“A cork leg?” said I in amazement, “what *can* that be for?”

But on this point I could obtain no information whatever; and all that night I dreamed weary dreams of books that had “Osborne” printed in capital letters on every page, of legs of all shapes and sizes, wooden and cork; old women on crutches, and multiplication-tables that went beyond twelve times twelve to unheard-of numbers. But when I woke the next morning, the sun was shining into my room just as usual, and by the bedside stood my mother, as bright and joyful as the sunshine itself.

“Be quick, Harry, dress as fast as you can, and we will be off to the garden after breakfast.”

Our talk that day down by the blue sea was one of the longest and happiest we ever had; and little did I then think it was to be nearly the last. As I now look back on the dim lights and shadows of those happy

far-off days, they seem to me almost to belong to dreamland,—to some former state of golden unbroken peace beyond this weary care-worn life. And yet they are as living and as true days as ever floated by, crowned, even now, with shining tints of rosy dawn, light along the mountain-tops, and a radiance that is immortal.

The voice that was music to me all through that golden prime, and the loving hand that cared for me with unbroken love are now silent and still for ever,—at rest many a long year ago, in a quiet grave far away on the edge of the lonely moor; wild flowers, moss, and lichen cover her quiet resting-place, and once now and then, as the years go by, I spend a happy hour in the old churchyard, and muse upon the past, upon the happy dead. But such love as hers can surely never die, though I know not whither it has fled, or in what far land it yet waits for fuller life and more endur-

ing joy. Immortal I know it must be ;
some day I too shall pass to it perhaps, and
after sleep, unbroken by dreams, awake in
the sunshine which knows no night, and
the presence of unclouded Love.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.

FOR many of the smaller details of the preceding chapter, as the intelligent reader has already concluded, I must have been dependent upon others, the chance words of my sisters, of my mother, and of Grace Morgan, when I began to be a "big boy," and, as Grace said, to look after myself. They were a kind of floating tradition that hung about me in virtue of being the pet of the family, until other and younger pets one by one arrived, and my old corner in the nursery knew me no more. The one place

in my mother's heart of hearts I knew was mine to the last.

But from this time onward, I have to depend mainly on myself and my own personal recollections of those early days. The reader, therefore, must be merciful in dealing with the gaps in my story, its various shortcomings or redundancies. I will deal with him as fairly and as truly as I can, and he must give me credit for doing my best to amuse and interest him, even if I sometimes fail.

Up to this date, and I was now seven years old, I had wandered in the Garden of Eden, almost at my own free will, and found there all I could hope or wish for; but in another week I had passed out and away beyond the shining gates, and tasted the delights of freedom, of new and strange gods, and another service under another sovereign. On the following Monday I went to school.

Miss Osborne's modest red brick mansion was in a retired corner of Cold Harbour Lane, a broken winding line of houses that ran away out of the town towards the green fields. Why called *Cold Harbour* I have not the faintest idea. But I know that I shivered as my mother led me inside a little dingy paralytic wicket-gate that gave entrance to the domain, and said in her most cheerful voice,—

“Now, Harry, be a man! In ten minutes you will be quite at home with your new playfellows, and sorry when it is time to go back to dingy old High Street.”

As to which latter clause concerning “sorrow,” all I have to say is that *the* time alluded to has never yet arrived.

But in another moment the door was opened by a tall bony female in black, and we were presently ushered, at my mother's express request, into the awful presence of Minerva herself, who sat enthroned in a dry

skinny arm-chair, in a large dreary room, near a small oval table, round which stood a ring of little boys, all gazing with eager eyes at their sovereign.

Miss Osborne was a stout flabby woman of forty or thereabouts, with a complexion in which dusty grey and yellow strove for the mastery; the result being a sort of dingy neutral tint, certainly not conducive to beauty. She had a cold, measured, sugary voice that boded no good, either in times of cloud or sunshine, and a moist slimy hand, from which I shrank away at the first touch. But she received us both with many smiling words, and expressed her conviction that I was a most charming child, and that my days of happiness had begun when I entered Osborne House.

My mother having replied in equally warm terms, wished us all "Good morning," and in a few moments I found myself in a little dusty yard at the back of the

house, the centre of curious vulgar amusement to about twenty youngsters of my own age. This was the "Recreation Ground," and we had been dismissed to it for half an hour in honour of the new arrival.

After undergoing the usual inspection, examination, and summary verdict at the hands of my companions, and having told them my name, age, amount of pocket-money, who my father was, what he was, where I lived, and how many sisters I had, I suddenly became an object of little or no concern, and was not at all sorry when the sound of a noisy bell recalled us to the schoolroom. Here all eyes were again fixed on me as I stood, in obedience to a solemn voice, in front of the throne. Then followed a dialogue of some considerable length, the main features of which I related that very afternoon to a select audience in the nursery, including my mother, with no

small glee. These were the chief points in it :—

“Little boy, come here.”

“I *am* here.”

“Come nearer, little boy. Young gentlemen always say ‘*Ma’am*’ when they speak to a lady.”

“So do I,” I replied.

“I did not hear it just now, Norton. I trust that you understand the sin of falsehood, and what becomes of all liars. Shall I call up the first class in Scripture to repeat lesson No. III. on eternal fire?”

“You needn’t call them, *ma’am*,” I replied rather fiercely, “for I don’t tell lies.”

“Very good, little boy, but you need not raise your voice so loudly; we are not deaf here. I trust that your father and mother never encourage you in any such dreadful habits. How much is eight times nine?”

Now, I knew the multiplication-table a good way beyond eight times, but I was

very angry at her daring to speak of my father and mother in this fashion, and so I answered defiantly, eight times nine is thirty-six.

“Ah ! I thought I should find you out at last, little boy ; and how much is seven times twelve ?”

“Seven times twelve is fifty-six,” I replied with increasing exultation.

“Fifty-six, eh ? And, do you understand your geography and grammar as well as you do arithmetic, Norton ?”

“Oh ! a great deal better,” said I. “I have been all through Europe and Asia. My sister Emily is a first-rate hand at maps.”

“Indeed,” replied Minerva, “pray, what is the capital of Scotland ?”

“Dublin,” I answered, as she grew paler and paler with rising anger.

“And what is a Peninsula, little boy ?”

“A piece of water,” said I, “entirely shut in by the land.”

But this was more than Minerva could bear; and I was suddenly and ignominiously dismissed to a seat near the table, and told to learn the alphabet in large capitals on a card.

“You had better for the present study the elements, little boy, so as to join the lowest class to-morrow. Such ignorance, such deplorable ignorance I have never met with.”

So passed my first morning at school.

“And how do you like school, Harry?” said my father that night after dinner.

“I have been there quite enough,” said I, “and she is a horrible old cat.”

And then, once more, to his great amusement, I repeated the famous dialogue of the morning, with, no doubt, one or two slight embellishments of which at the time I was hardly conscious.

But no one seemed—not even my mother—to agree with my verdict that I had been there

enough, and the next morning accordingly saw me once more at the gate of Osborne House; not without some misgivings as to what was to happen next. The campaign had opened, and the first move had been made—as I at first thought, with victory on my side—but as it now seemed, in favour of the enemy. In a few minutes I found myself again under the sway of that solemn, measured voice; and again bidden, as the “little boy,” to draw near to the footstool of wisdom, and be instructed.

For a time on that day, and for many weary days to come, I assumed the mask of ignorance purposely put on at our first encounter; but, in some unaccountable way, how I know not, the imposture was gradually detected; and I was at last held up to the assembled classes as an example of juvenile depravity such as rarely presented itself to the eyes of a long-suffering governess. Not only was I ignorant and ill-be-

haved, but I had actually made my ignorance appear greater than it really was ; and in the matter of geography, the multiplication-table, and other branches of study, I had imposed on one entitled to the very highest respect, confidence, and love. No one could, of course, doubt as to the final result of such reckless and unprincipled conduct, although I seemed to be utterly hardened and unconscious of my impending doom ; but, meanwhile, she, the patient uncomplaining Elizabeth Osborne, the object of all my unparalleled insults, would never cease to care for, love, and instruct me ; and above all to offer up her “ ’umble prayers to the Throne of Grace ” that I might be converted and turn to the right way, and be a credit to my dear parents and to Osborne House.

But in spite of all this sugary cant, and much more to the same tune, when the days of our sparring matches were fairly over I began to find out that the enemy

carried too many guns for me. I discovered that I really *was* ignorant of many things which she could teach me, in the matter of history and geography, and other “profane subjects,” as she called them; though I still turned a stubborn and deaf ear to all her moral and religious exhortations and teachings of every kind. I hated her, and she hated me, but for widely different reasons we kept the peace; I, from fear of being possibly sent away from home to a distant boarding-school where my elder brother had once been a pupil,—she, lest she should offend my parents who, with the Hodgsons, the Vernons, and the Daventrys, were among the first families in Dockstone.

In the monthly report, therefore, sent home for the express edification of my parents, my conduct was *Exemplary*, and my progress *Satisfactory in all respects*; phrases, over which, as my mother read them to me, I certainly chuckled with much wonder as to

this fresh sign of the depravity of the youthful mind. I was therefore praised and be-lauded on all hands, and, little hypocrite that I was, began to give myself many airs of virtuous self-complacency at feeling so good.

If this is really the case, thought I, and being so wicked at school only produces such pleasant fruit at home, I had better go on as I have begun ; and continue to be the model child of iniquity at Osborne House. But if any such idea ever really entered my mind, it was soon put an end to, as I have already honestly confessed. My mask had been suddenly stripped off, and there was nothing for it but to appear in my real form.

All children, in Miss Osborne's eyes, seemed to be either silly, wicked, or greedy ; and the very smallest and most trivial fault instantly secured for the offender one or more of these paltry little epithets, which

at first annoyed me, but at last served only to make us hate the old woman that rejoiced in them.

As far as the mere routine work of the school went, therefore, I did all that was required of me, and made progress; but the moment that she attempted to touch on sacred subjects, or improve the occasion for my good, or, as she phrased it, for "my poor deluded soul's sake," I became obstinately deaf, and made such "faces" over the top of my book that the rest of the class were seized with convulsions of smothered laughter, which more than once exploded at the very crisis of her oily eloquence. Soon I proceeded to more vigorous steps of rebellion.

Put to stand one day behind her throne, out of sight of my victims, I cautiously tied one of her long black curls to the back of the chair, so that when she rose up in a majestic manner at the conclusion of the lesson, the whole of her wig was suddenly

reft away, and Minerva appeared with a bald head, to the great terror and delight of the whole school. For this enormity, seized upon and placed in a corner, with my face to the wall, and a card of certain fiery texts to learn by heart before I could be released, I contrived to get hold of the nearest inkstand and quietly obliterate the whole of the nauseous words in one hideous smear, of which my fingers bore the tell-tale marks for many a long day, in spite of Grace Morgan's hottest soap and water. Moreover, to crown my misdeeds on that eventful day, I drew with an inky finger on the wall an outline of a gigantic leg, bearing underneath the awful legend, "*Is it cork?*"

Traces of which legend—so Jack Norman afterwards told me—lingered on the wall for more than a week in spite of many applications of soap and scrubbing-brush; and were only removed at last by a fresh coat of whitewash.

After this last escapade, there came a time of peace—a sort of armed truce, during which both sides abstained from hostilities, and I was supposed to be repenting of my misdeeds; an idea which I soon grew weary of encouraging, and must soon have scattered to the winds, had not an event occurred in my home-life which suddenly put an end to the rule of Osborne, and entirely changed the whole current of my career.

It was not until long years after that I fully understood the nature of the terrible calamity that had befallen us; and then I heard it from the lips of my father, at that time a care-worn and anxious invalid, suffering from some terrible complication of gout and rheumatism, which at last made him a cripple both in hands and feet. Such a wreck did he finally become, that the last fourteen or fifteen years of his life were spent in two adjoining rooms, from his bed in one of which he was wheeled every day

in an easy-chair to the other. But, of these sad and dark days, not one of us as yet could foresee a single shadow ; and there is no need to make further mention.

I remember, however, that I had been unusually naughty at Osborne House during a whole week, and been saturated with texts of the most sulphury kind, when, on returning home one morning—for the school closed at one P.M.—I was amazed at the gloomy silence of the whole house. I shouted as usual for nurse, but my shouts were all in vain. I rushed into the dining-room,—it was empty ; the drawing-room,—but not a soul was to be seen.

I ran upstairs, two steps at a time, to the nursery. There, on an old arm-chair in the corner, sat Grace, with her apron thrown over her head, rocking herself to and fro, and sobbing as if her heart would break. And the worst of it was, that to all my repeated ejaculations, entreaties, and even

threats, she made no intelligible answer; at least, no answer that gave me the least clue to the cause of her trouble. All she said was, in broken and piteous words, "Oh! Master Harry, be a good boy, there's a dear lamb!" an adjuration of which I could make neither head nor tail; and to which, at last, I angrily replied by fiercely demanding what I had done to be so treated.

"Has that old mother Osborne been here," said I, "telling tales out of school?"

"No, no, my lamb," replied the woman; "worse than that. Oh, dear! oh, dear! What shall I do! what shall I do!"

"Do?" I exclaimed once more,—"*Do?*—why, tell me what's the matter, and what is the meaning of all this horrid row." But I might as well have talked to the arm-chair.

"If you don't tell me," said I, in utter

desperation, "I shall go off to my mother's room; she will tell me if you won't."

At this threat, however, the rocker in the chair only grew more frantic than ever, as she sobbed out,

"Oh! no, Master Harry; you'll kill your poor dear ma if you worrit her now. Stay along with nurse, and be a good boy."

But this was fairly more than I could stand, and in a couple of minutes I was knocking at my mother's door.

After a moment's pause, to my utter amazement, my father opened it,—deadly pale, and utterly unlike himself; but, seeing me, he came out, took me up in his arms, kissed me, and then said very gently, "Go in, Harry, my boy; go in, and cheer up poor mamma. Be a brave little man, and don't cry." For his sudden tenderness had sent a rush of tears into my eyes, and of terror into my heart, that made it beat as I had never known it beat before.

Then he wished me good-bye, and I went softly into the room, determined to be a man, and to do all my work mightily the next day, let old Osborne be as nasty as she pleased.

CHAPTER III.

THE EARTHQUAKE.

My mother was sitting in a low arm-chair, close to a window which looked out upon the long sloping garden, with its bright beds of sunny flowers ; and beyond it lay the broad stretch of blue sea, now sleeping in the golden sunshine. She was gazing steadily away across the waves to a huge bank of coppery storm-cloud, that fringed almost the whole horizon, like a range of misty, sullen mountains. A storm was clearly at hand, and the pleasure-boats and yachts were hastening in shore to fold their white

wings with all speed, and find safe mooring under shelter of the land. So softly had I entered the room, that she was not aware of my presence until I came close up and laid my hand upon hers.

“Oh, what a splendid storm it will be!” I cried, forgetting for a moment all my previous trouble. But when she turned her pale face towards me, I saw written there such terrible sorrow as made me tremble.

“What is the matter?” I said; “do tell me. Everybody is full of it, and I can’t make it out at all.”

“Come here, Harry; I will tell you what is the matter. You are a brave boy, and shall know all *I* can tell you and *you* can understand of this terrible trouble.”

Then, as her gentle eyes filled and glistened with sudden tears, she told me in few loving words the story of my father’s ruin, though many a year passed away before I fully knew the terrible meaning of the

words, "*The bank has stopped!*" All I could then gather was that we should have to leave the dear old house in High Street, the old garden, and the summer-house, and go away—she did not know where—into a smaller house, with only one servant, and very little money.

"But," said I, "I have five pounds in the bank that my godfather gave me; you can have all that."

To my utter horror and amazement, however, I found that even this special treasure was gone,—swallowed up in the ruin that had overtaken us all.

Years after I heard the whole story; how that John Kinley, the senior partner of the firm, had contrived to turn many of the securities deposited with them into ready money; had speculated and gambled with the floating capital until the whole property had become hopelessly involved, when, in the great panic of 18—, came a sudden run

upon the bank, his villany was detected, and, to escape exposure and punishment, he had laid violent hands upon himself, and was found dead in the bank parlour.

While I talked with my mother, in fact he was lying dead in the room below us. A crowd had collected round the house, and were then shouting out his name with unmistakable fury. He, poor wretch, was far beyond their reach; but my father, whose ignorance of business had made him an easy victim in the hands of such a villain, was utterly prostrate under the double burden of utter ruin and the bare suspicion of being in any way an accomplice.

Of the sad and terrible weeks which followed that day of gloom I have no clear recollection. At last the affairs of the bank were wound up, and at the sacrifice of the whole of my father's private property a small dividend was secured to the creditors, many of whom were all but ruined. But no stain

rested on the name of Norton; and when we left Dockstone for the little village of Netherley, in the northern part of the county, it was with the kindly words and good wishes of all who knew us. None the less, however, was the parting a sad and terrible one; and we had yet to learn by bitter experience the misery of being torn away from house and home, and having to take root in a strange place, and change warm and true friends for utter strangers. Still more was there to bear in the sudden fall from affluence to comparative poverty, and the loss of all those little home comforts which depend on well-trained servants and a large and well-ordered house.

But all these troubles, and many others of which we children then knew nothing, my mother bore with her usual tender patience; looking at the bright side in every trial, and always ready with a loving smile for her children and her husband—as

his malady; a complicated form of rheumatism, grew upon him, and he slowly became a confirmed invalid. I may as well here say, that in a very short time he was utterly disabled from all active exertion, and spent the rest of his life almost entirely in the house, hardly able to move from one room to another. All country walks had to be given up; and a bunch of wild flowers, or a scrap of moorland heath and moss, was his only reminder of the happy days of the past, and a chief source of pleasure during the lonely hours spent in a sick-room. His long and bitter trial was borne with an unbroken patience, such as I have never known equalled.

Our stay at Netherley, however, was but a short one; and it was a glad day for us when my father decided on going back to Dormouth, a small town within a few miles of Dockstone, where he still had many friends; and, above all, there were means of

education for myself and my sisters within reach of a poor man. We settled down at last at the outskirts of the town in a small house, with a little strip of garden at the back, and a look out into a quiet street free from shops, and chiefly tenanted by the better class of tradespeople.

My elder brother had now left school, and, having obtained a mastership at a grammar school near Ely, was keeping his terms at Trinity College, Cambridge. There he afterwards graduated with great distinction, and subsequently became a curate in the distant county of Herefordshire; then a vicar, and finally—by dint of hard work with his pen, and great success in taking pupils—a wealthy Archdeacon. I mention this fact, as he was the only member of his family who attained any such dignity, title, or position, and lived in unbroken affluence to the end of his life. He was a good scholar, and taught what he knew in a solid

matter-of-fact fashion, which, however unattractive to his young disciples, served to ground them admirably, and laid a foundation of deep and lasting value. In addition to this, his poetic taste and sense of beauty, refinement, and delicacy of touch, almost equalled his accuracy and power of observation; and thus he soon achieved a far more than ordinary success. And though he was at times severe, both in mind and body, many of his little scientific hand-books—now well-known manuals in school and college—yet remain to tell how wisely and well he wrote in the days when books for young people were as few and scanty and meagre as they are now full, fresh, and abundant. He appears but for a moment in a later page of my history, when a few words from his kindly, practical, pen, gave impulse to an event which formed a turning-point in my career.

Two of my sisters were preparing them-

selves to go out as governesses, and ere long were at work in the families of old friends ; fighting bravely against all the hardships and difficulties of a teacher's life, and rejoicing that they were thus able to lessen home expenses, for which the shattered remains of my father's income barely sufficed.

To this brief introductory sketch I need only add that, having now reached my twelfth year, I was again sent to school ; and fell into the hands of a young, weak-minded, evangelical clergyman, who was better versed in the dogmas of Calvinism than in the elegancies of Horace and Virgil. But he did what he could heartily, and was a gentleman in his manners, in the management of his school and household, which comprised about twenty boarders. The school-fees were moderate enough to be within my father's reach ; and I remained under the Rev. Richard Griffin's care, as a

day-boy, for four years. There was not much corporal punishment at Dormouth House, but in that little the Rev. Richard took a peculiar satisfaction, which was more than could be said of his pupils. Boys, as a rule, hate being caned on the hands; infinitely preferring a good sound licking *a tergo*, a mode of punishment to which Griffin rarely resorted. He used a long, thin cane, neatly bound at the end with waxed thread, and was terribly dexterous in applying this instrument of torture to the criminal's hands, which he always insisted on being held out at one exact height, until the fatal cut descended. I have known a stout, heavy fellow named Jowler have as many as six "refreshers" on each hand, every cut excelling its predecessor in scientific malignity. He had a trick of over-eating himself at dinner, and grew horribly lethargic when he came up with his Cæsar. Jowler must, I am convinced, have been

near akin to that 'Edax' of Charles Lamb's, whose mother had a trick of eating very fast, while his father was blessed with a habit of sitting long at his meals. Jowler took after both his parents.

My hands were peculiarly soft and delicate, and to this very day I retain on my right palm the scar from a stinging "refresher," one of six inflicted on me for trying to peep into my Virgil during a repetition lesson. Griffin was exquisitely happy in his performance that day, and successful in his prayer that "by the Lord's blessing I should never forget the sin I had been guilty of in trying to deceive my teacher."

I never forgot that one agonizing sixth cut; and I never opened my book again when it ought to have been shut.

One thing I must, however, add, in fairness to the Rev. Richard. He taught me the Eton Grammar, thoroughly, from beginning to end; and I can still go on, after the

lapse of forty years, at any one given line in the 'As in Præsenti,' or even that more barbarous jangle the 'Quæ Genus.' This, however, is all that can be said for him. In the true sense of the word, he taught me little or nothing. As a pedagogue, he had all the smaller, smooth vices of my old enemy Miss Osborne, and none of her varied information. All he did was by rule, all we learned by rote. No broad, healthy, wise views; nothing to make geography more than a pile of statistics; nothing to make history more than a string of dates. Euclid was repeated as a parrot might repeat it, by mere strength of memory,—a horrible and unintelligible puzzle; while the bright and sunny Odes of Horace were made as dry and tasteless as Cicero's 'De Officiis,' or sugared into nauseousness by a weak and watery comment, interlarded with pet texts from St. Paul, as to the utter depravity of the heathen mind.

One other good thing, however, I learned at Griffin's, which served me in good stead more than once during my after life, and must not be omitted; and this was the art of using my fists. For though fighting was strictly forbidden at school, an old Irish drill-sergeant named O'Connor came to drill the boys every week, and, on the sly, in return for sundry glasses of beer and screws of tobacco, initiated me and a few other fellows into the art of self-defence. For bullying of the worst kind went on, at Griffin's, though strictly forbidden, as it does at all such schools; and I, with several of the other younger and weaker boys, was driven to seek O'Connor's help against the tyranny of one or two big, hulking, fellows who kept the little chaps in a state of cruel bondage.

What Dormouth House ultimately became, when Griffin took to himself a wife, I know not; but, in after years, I heard that

Minerva, having migrated from Dockstone, opened a small akademus in close vicinity to the school; became acquainted with the revd. gentleman at chapel, embraced Calvinism, and ensnared its teacher into matrimony. By this happy arrangement of Providence, the race of Griffin escaped extinction, and one of the gifted family, so says report, still practises at Dormouth House the didactic art with that *curiosa felicitas* becoming so rare a parentage. The awful gifts of Minerva added to the sugar of Griffin's cane; the combination of her acid eloquence and his weak, treacherous smile; his washy, bitter theology and her cheerful views of the innate depravity of childhood, must have yielded fruits only inferior to the choicest of Dotheboys' Hall itself. From any share of such fruits, however, I was luckily saved by being taken away from school on the completion of my sixteenth year.

The fact was that my father could no longer afford to keep me at Dormouth House. Heavy doctor's bills, and the increasing expenses of my younger sisters, had fairly swallowed up all his income of late ; and the time was now come when I must go out into the world, and fight the battle of life for myself.

"Harry, my boy," he said one day, "I have now done all I can for you, and you will have to stand on your own legs. We must look out for some situation for you. What would you like to try?"

"Anything but a bank" I replied,—with a lively horror still fresh in my mind as to the terrible calamity in our old home at Dockstone. "Jowler is going to leave this half, and his father is going to make him an engineer ; he is to have a pony of his own, and go surveying out on the moor. I should like that very well. But, I don't care much what it is," I bravely

added, "as long as I can do it, and it is not very far away from Dormouth."

"There is no hurry, yet, however," said my mother's happy voice; "no hurry for a month or two. Something will be sure to turn up before long."

But, in spite of careful inquiries among our few friends, and many applications at an Agency Office in old Town Street, where, to judge by little Mr. Bates' advertisements, "Situations of every possible kind were always open, and always to be had on payment of the necessary fees," nothing did turn up. Months passed away; months of happy idleness at home, yet of anxious, weary, waiting; of long and cosy talks with my mother about the campaign just opening to me, to which I looked forward with boyish eagerness, and she with all a mother's hopeful love.

But when I speak of idleness at home, in truth I was never idle. For, when not

talking with her over some knotty childish problem, books of some sort or other always kept me closely enchained. As a rule, I always carried one in my pocket, so as to be ready for any stray opportunity. Good, bad, or indifferent, a book was a book to me; and something could be got out of it, at any time. Fortunately, too, for me, my father's store of books was a small but select one at this time; so that every one I could lay hands on—but some few heavy tomes of divinity (I remember one or two even now, 'Newton on the Prophecies,' and 'Secker on the Creed')—had to be read and re-read many times.

There was but a single volume on his shelves that I was forbidden even to touch—and this was Byron's 'Don Juan.' The awful volume was carefully tied up in brown paper, and solemnly tabooed; thus, of course, becoming the object of my supreme curiosity. In short—it is as well to confess the truth at

once—I never rested until I had surreptitiously obtained possession of the forbidden volume, carried it off to my bedroom, and there devoured it in secret and detached morsels as chance permitted.

On the whole I was disappointed with it. Who ever is satisfied with the plucking of forbidden fruit?

My father had said it was “wicked, witty, and blasphemous.” As for the wickedness, luckily for me, I was too young for it to do me much harm; while the blasphemy passed over my head, scatheless; but the inimitable wit, the matchless vigour, and the exquisite poetry I rejoiced in, as far as a precocious boy might. The *Shipwreck*, the story of *Haidee*, in all their wondrous power and beauty, were things which I could understand and feel—and never forget. The only misery was that I could tell no one of my sudden and secret pleasure, and not enjoy it over again by reading aloud to my

mother. It was the only book I had ever read, about which I dared not talk to her; and so fierce became my regret that at last I wished I had left the fatal parcel unopened, untouched; and in fact I had no rest until I had restored it to its old place on the bookshelf. Some days passed before I could manage this, during which I could not look in my father's face without a sense of guilty shame at the deception which I had practised on him.

To add to my suffering, too, he took it into his head, just then, to choose other parts of Byron, from 'Childe Harold,' for me to read aloud to him.

"Some day," he said, "Harry, you shall see 'Don Juan,' when you are older and wiser and stronger; though it will not do you much good, *then*."

That night, however, while talking with my mother about some clerkship of which we had heard, a few of her loving tender words, unlocked my heart.

“Wherever you go,” she said, “whatever you have to do, Harry, never let there come any secret between us two; never one thing which even if a fault you would be afraid for me to know. Always let there be truth in your heart, as I see it now in your eyes.”

This was more than I could possibly bear, knowing that in my heart at that moment there was a lie hidden, a secret which I had kept even from her. In another minute, I had told her all.

“Thank God,” she said, as I looked up into her gentle, loving eyes. “Thank God, Harry, that you have had the courage to tell the truth, even now. Fifty ‘Don Juans’ would not do you as much harm as a lie kept festering in your heart. Your father knew what was good for a boy to read, better than you did. Better to have trusted him at first; but, as you have deceived him, the next best thing was to own your fault.”

To my father himself I never confessed what I had done ; for though I loved him well, long illness and constant suffering had made him fretful and captious and easily annoyed ; and I dreaded his graver, severer tone. But a week later I felt sure that my mother had told him all that had happened ; as he, one day, said in his kindest voice,

“Untie that parcel, Harry, there on the shelf ; I ought to have left it open like all my other books, knowing that to any son of mine it was sacred, whether open or shut, when bound by his word of honour.”

This was his sole reproof, but a single glance at his face, as he uttered it, and his eyes met mine, told me more surely than any words that he was aware of my secret treachery, and had forgiven it. Then, I knew that he trusted me once more, and I resolved that neither by word nor deed openly

or in secret, would I ever deceive him again. And I kept my resolution.

About this time, too, a friend made me free of a small circulating library in the town, and there I found a host of old-fashioned books, voyages and travels, poetry and adventure, hitherto only known to me by name; which kept me busily and happily employed at all times. Another friend, too, living at some distance out of town, offered me the loan of Walter Scott's works, making but a single stipulation that I should have but one volume at a time, walk to fetch it, and *not* read by the way.

His house was four miles from Dormouth, and thus I had a good country walk of eight miles twice or thrice in every week; and laid up a store of health and strength of real and lasting benefit. Since those happy days I have again and again read the great magician's works, as a man, in the rare leisure of a busy and anxious life, but never

with keener relish, never with truer enjoyment, than as a boy of sixteen, to whom they opened a new world of brave and true men, of fair women and of noble deeds.

But my time of freedom was short, and now about to close in a sudden and most unlooked for fashion; to which I must hasten on. For many a long year no such a season of enjoyment ever came again; and if I have lingered over this early chapter of my life, it is because its golden light still haunts me, and memory dwells fondly on the details of a happy seed-time when the harvest seemed far off and uncertain.

And if, indeed,

“The child is father of the man,”

it is only fair that my readers should know somewhat of me from the first, and before I started on the great battle of life.

One great privation, which I have omitted to mention, brought about by our sudden descent into poverty, was the loss of our

piano, which my sisters were beginning to play well. But in spite of all our regrets, it shared the fate of many another precious possession, and many a long day passed before it could be replaced. One thing, however, could not be taken from us, and that was our love for music; a taste which we inherited from both our parents. Next to books, music had been my delight and passion, and so correct and so ready was my ear that I learned without effort every song that fell in my way. My voice had been a clear, bright, soprano, and many a happy hour did we still contrive to spend in singing duets and trios of all kinds. In fact, we made duets of almost every song we knew, and the memory of my mother's soft and liquid voice yet lingers in my ear, as one of the sweetest I have ever heard.

And when, to my great sorrow, my voice began to break into a husky tenor, I took to whistling with an intensity and keenness that boys alone can relish.

CHAPTER IV.

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

OUTSIDE the Gates ! what a world of romance, adventure, misery and joy often lies hidden in those few words, —a vision, happily, into which the eye of youth cannot penetrate, but which it colours for itself in strange and fitful hues, just as the whim or hope, the passion or desire, of the moment may prompt. In my own little drama, the first act fell out suddenly and oddly enough.

One sharp autumnal evening I was standing outside a bookseller's window in Dormouth Street, looking at some coloured

prints, and whistling, as my custom was, a favourite air with somewhat noisy vigour, when a stout elderly man stopped close by my side, apparently attracted as I had been by the gay prints. He had a pleasant, sunburnt face; and a bright smile greeted me as I turned to look at him, while a cheery voice said,

“You’ve a good ear, youngster!”

“Have I?” I replied, “but how do you know?”

“You couldn’t whistle two bars of ‘The Sapling Oak,’ as you did a minute ago, if you hadn’t got it in you. You ought to learn the violin, boy; your ear is too good to be wasted on a mere whistle. Which way are you going?”

I told him my name and where I lived, and as it chanced that his route lay with mine, we went up the hill together; chatting as we went, like old friends.

“Would you like to learn the violin?” said he, as we halted at our door; “if so, come

to my house to-morrow morning at 10 o'clock, and you shall have a lesson.

"I have only got three and nine-pence," I answered, "and I have been saving up my money ever since last Christmas."

"Keep that for rosin, my boy; and tell your father that Lieutenant Scobell met you on your way home; say that he has turned fiddler on his half-pay, and is going to teach you something better than whistling. He will remember my name in the old Dockstone days, and will trust his son to Dick Scobell." And so we parted, after a hearty good-night.

"Hurrah!" said I, as I rushed into the little parlour where my mother sat busily engaged with her needle, and my father working away at a pen-and-ink sketch of some old and picturesque church on the moor; hurrah! I am going to learn the violin!"

Then, I told them my strange story of

meeting with Lieutenant Scobell ; and well pleased were they to hear it.

“Just like Dick Scobell,” said my father, “always on the look out to help some one. Do you remember, Mary, when the crash came, he was one of the first to come and offer me help to get away from Dockstone ? It was only a ten-pound note, he said, that he had to offer, but I was heartily welcome to that till the tide turned ; for turn it would, some day, he was sure.”

“And it has turned ” replied my mother, looking up with sunshine on her face ; “ here we are in a snug little house, able to pay our rent and taxes and the butcher’s bill, though it’s rather hard work at times ; and here is Harry going out into the world to make his fortune, if he only gets a chance.”

“And here am I,” answered my father, “shut up, I fear, like a helpless cripple, and able to do nothing for you all. Well, my boy (turning to me), you shall go to Scobell’s

if you like ; I can trust him without fear, though I am afraid that fiddling will bring no grist to the mill."

"But," said I eagerly, "I can be looking out all the same, and something is sure to turn up before long."

And then I rushed away upstairs to find my sisters, and tell them the good news. For a week or two after this I went regularly to the lieutenant's house ; a little trim, ship-shape, place, as he called it, on the outskirts of the town ; and there worked hard for an hour every day under the old man's kind guidance. How many hours a day I worked in the little outhouse, in our own garden at home, it would be hard to say. For a time I was infatuated with my new passion for the violin ; and gradually, as my eldest sister at last allowed, the noise I made grew to be "less horrible," even in their ears. To mine it was delicious ; and every hour spent in the outhouse was to me

a delight. I never became a proficient on the most difficult of all difficult instruments, though I learned to play with ease and joy to myself, and the power has been a constant source of pleasure to me through a long and busy life; and the only reason for mentioning the subject at all, here, is that my fiddle-playing, as my teacher would persist in calling it, won me a true friend who has never failed me when I most needed him, and who was indeed the cause of my first start in life.

Those were the old-fashioned days when the word 'Tory' had in it both meaning and importance, and in a little country-town, like Dormouth, really seemed almost like a passport to respectability. To be thought a Whig was very suspicious; to be suspected of being a Radical was almost a crime. Almost all the rich people in Dormouth and the most respectable tradesmen were Tories; so were the mayor and cor-

poration, the clergy, and most of the naval and military officers on half-pay. My father had been a Tory, and a Tory to the backbone was Lieutenant Scobell.

But, in spite of its intense Toryism, it so chanced that Dormouth had as yet no local newspaper of its own ; and the angel of the Reform Bill having just then suddenly stirred the placid depths of politics, the whole town woke up to a sense of its own importance ; and it was determined to start the 'Dormouth Gazette,' for the purpose of rallying round 'Church and King,' and saving the country from the insidious designs of the Whigs. Funds were soon forthcoming ; both the members for Dormouth subscribed liberally ; and a committee was formed to carry out the scheme, and appoint an editor. Foremost among these gentlemen was Lieutenant Scobell, who, having plenty of time on his hands and a little cash at the bank, possessing a ready tongue and an activity of

body and mind which nothing could quench, became a great gun at the board, and gave himself up heart and soul to the cause. A great fight of course ensued as to the appointment of an editor; party spirit ran high, and the committee was split into two rival factions, each determined to carry its own man. So close was the contest that when the day of election came, the votes were found to be equally divided; and as neither side would give way, it was a drawn game, and a compromise was at last effected by members of both sides imploring the lieutenant himself to undertake the office of editor, at all events for a time; and to this he at last consented.

He was about as fit to be made archbishop as to be an editor; but he had brains and intelligence, was eager for work, and was a thorough Tory. An office was soon taken in High Street, and in that office two clerks were engaged, of whom I was one.

“It’s better than kicking your heels about in idleness, youngster,” said the new editor, as he offered the post to me, “and you may at all events earn your bread and cheese there until a better berth turns up.”

As for me, I rushed home with the news, in a state of the wildest excitement; and though my father and mother made objections at first, I gave them no rest until they consented. I was to have ten shillings a week to start with, and the office hours for me were to be from nine to four, with a long hour free for dinner in the middle of the day.

The other clerk was, to my great surprise, a thick-set, clumsy fellow named Needer, a cousin or nephew of my old master at Osborne House. All that need be said of his personal appearance is that that he had a broad, white, meaty face, an immense mouth, and sleek black hair, much besprinkled, after the fashion of the day, with scented oil.

But he was my senior, and, by virtue of his age and superior knowledge of the world, soon managed to make me do a large portion of his work as well as my own. He was fresh from the Bluecoat School, and claimed to be fully up in all the mysteries of London life, of which he often talked in glowing terms. I soon found him to be as cunning and selfish as he was vain and loquacious; and though I listened at first with some interest to his stories of the great city and all its wonders, I soon got weary of his boasting and began to dislike him. But his desk was next to mine, and for some hours of every day I had to make the best of his company, and endure what I could not avoid.

The printers in the office below, to his great horror and indignation, gave him the nick-name of 'Greasy;' and in spite of all his fine airs, smart dress, and loud talk, always had a word of derision for him

whenever he went downstairs or passed the office door. My work was easy and simple enough, being mainly that of directing the covers of newspapers, and seeing the people who brought advertisements; and this I soon mastered. His was to keep the accounts and receive such moneys as were paid in, of which he rendered a daily account to the editor himself.

Gradually we came to be on more intimate terms; he left off patronizing me, and treated me more as an equal, but we never grew to be friends, and at last came to open warfare. Thus it fell out.

Several times my mother had invited him to sup at our house, an invitation which he gladly accepted, and very amiable he made himself to the whole circle, especially to an elder sister of mine, a bright-eyed girl of seventeen, with whom he used to play chess. So well, in fact, did he play his cards, that all my people except Sophy,

were inclined to like Needer, and to condemn me for being prejudiced against him. He now helped me in my work at the office, and even tried to initiate me into the mysteries of book-keeping. He was always offering me presents of one sort or another, which I resolutely declined, and at last began to send presents to my sister which were as regularly sent back the next day.

It was at this time that that he chanced to meet her one day walking in the town alone, forced his company upon her, and insisted on seeing her home, annoying her with silly compliments and love-making all the way. She let him clearly understand that all this was very disagreeable to her, as plainly as words could convey a meaning, and positively refused to meet him, as he begged she would, the next day, threatening to tell her father of what had happened if he dared to speak to her on such a subject again. That night she told the whole

story to me, and my resolve was soon taken, though I said not a word at the time. "Leave him to me," said I; "he shall not bother you again."

The next day as soon as the editor had gone out, the following dialogue between us ensued, and the opportunity for which I longed came sooner than I expected.

"Well, youngster," said my companion in his smartest and grandest manner, "your sister is a deuced fine gal, and we are as thick as thick can be. She knows what a smart young fellow is."

"Does she?" I answered; "but, however that may be, she knows what a cad is, and was sick enough of a fellow who followed her in the street yesterday, and as she had no one to take her part, forced himself upon her up to her own door."

At this, Needer's face grew pale with half-suppressed rage, as he angrily replied,

"Come, come, Norton; don't you try it on too strong. I can put up with a good deal from a sweetheart's brother, but I'm not going to stand this, and what's more, I won't stand it."

"Won't you?" said I; "then you had better sit it. My sister is no sweetheart of yours, and never will be. Nobody but a cad would make love to a young lady in the open streets, or anywhere else, when told that every word was disagreeable to her, and that he dared not utter one of them if her brother had been there."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my little bantam; gals like it—they *all* like it. She'll be as right as a trivet the next time."

"The next time I shall be with her," said I proudly.

"And what will you do if you are there, every bit of you, chimney-pot and all?"

"Do?" said I; "knock you down, as I would any lout who insulted my sister with his detestable chatter."

To this outburst he made no reply, but jumping down from his stool, sprang forward as if to strike me.

But I was as quick as he, and stood quite ready to receive him, and to ward off the intended blow.

Twice he struck fiercely at me, but both times I managed to keep my guard, and then, to his utter amazement, I gave him a ringing blow between his eyes which sent him backwards over the stool that had fallen down in the scuffle.

He was up again in a moment, and now paler than ever with rage,—for he had fallen heavily, and struck his face against a corner of the desk.

At this moment a printer's devil entered the room with a pile of proof for the editor, and, seeing what was going on, burst into a loud and approving hurrah.

“Well done, youngster,” he cried; “I’ll back you, two to one, against ‘*Greasy*,’ and

if he doesn't fight fair, give 'un a turn myself."

Then he rushed downstairs, shouting out as he went to some companion below,

"I say, Dick, old Scobell's out, and here's little cocky Norton giving old Greasy the best hiding that ever was; come up, come up."

In another moment the two grimy imps were in the room again, and, I with my blood now fairly up, found myself in mortal combat with a great, hulking fellow, at least six inches taller than myself, far stronger, and half crazy with rage.

He rushed upon me like a mad bull, swinging his big arms about, and striking desperately at me, as I dodged here and there, and did my best, as my old master O'Connor had taught me, to guard my face and elude the blows of my enemy. Had it not been, indeed, for the old drill sergeant's teaching I should have been half

killed, I believe. As it was, Needer, by sheer brute force, more than once broke down my guard, got me round my neck, and flung me to the ground, besides inflicting several heavy blows.

My nose was streaming with blood, my under lip was cut, and one ear felt as if it were dead; but the two imps befriended and cheered me after every round, wiped my face in their grimy aprons, and insisted on fair play.

And so, at it again we went. I determined to fight as long as I could stand, and my opponent fancying that after the next round I should cry for mercy.

His nose as yet had escaped, but both eyes were bunged up, and his thick under lip was swelled to double its usual size, and bled profusely. My only plan, I saw, was to weary him out by constant dodging, only striking when I was certain of my blow, and according to old Connor's favourite

advice, aiming again and again at one exact spot. The sight of one eye, I saw, was clearly gone, and I resolved to do my utmost to disable the other. More than once I got into "Chancery" again, and more than once could only evade the bully's long arm by quickly falling to the ground. But, I persevered steadily in my attack on his left eye, and at last succeeded in planting such a straight and vigorous blow as effectually sealed it up, and then I had it all my own way.

Mad with pain, and enraged by the jeers of the two seconds, Needer rushed at me with double fury ; but his sight was utterly confused, his blows were delivered wide of the mark, he tripped over the stool, fell heavily, and again rising, seized a heavy office ruler from his desk, and would have attacked me with it.

But this was more than Dick and his friend would for a moment allow. They

rushed in upon him at once, got him down on the floor, disarmed him, and applied the ruler to a portion of his fat frame well adapted for such a punishment, with such hearty vigour, that he cried out lustily for mercy.

At last he was permitted to rise, which he did in sullen and ferocious anger, and looking uglier, meaner, and coarser than ever; his clothes covered with dust, his whole face disfigured, unable to see, or walk without pain.

“Never mind!” he growled out, “never mind! you two rascals—you shall pay for this before a magistrate, and I’ll have it out with the other scoundrel some other time.”

“When you like, as soon as you like, and where you like,” replied I, dancing round him as I spoke. “But no time can be so good as the present. You are quite in training now, and the next time you

meet a lady in the street, perhaps you will get out of her way."

But, at this moment, a well-known step was heard ascending the stairs, and the two "devils" were off to the shades below as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Now," said I, "one word before Scobell comes into his room. We have had it out, *now*, and there's an end of it. Get away to the washstand there in the corner, and go in for soap and water. He won't notice you. I will be busy with the lid of my desk up, so that he shall not see me. And, as to the fight, if you breathe a single word about it to any human creature, I will tell the editor myself the very next morning, and he shall know how you got your too curious eyes. Keep silence, and not a word shall ever come from me."

Luckily for us both, the editor was in a great hurry, and very busy. He passed into his own sanctum without noticing us; and

as it was now long after our usual dinner hour we both made our way homewards.

But Needer never forgot the licking he got, and never forgave it.

As for me, on reaching home that day, after a hasty run through the streets, I made the best excuse I could for the bruises on my face, and a stained shirt-front. "I had been tripped up and got a bad fall, at the office ; and my nose had bled. But it wasn't much, and some cold water would soon put me to rights." My mother looked very grave at these words, but as her custom was, said nothing to me at the time, waiting until I, of my own accord, told her more. For many a day I found her now and then looking at me with loving, questioning, eyes ; but my word had been pledged to silence, and she never knew either of Sophy's insult, or my victory over the bully.

All my sister said, as she kissed me that night, was

“ Why did you provoke him to fight, Harry, you naughty, *good* boy ? ”

But, even to her, I told not a word, except that I had somehow managed to lose the key of my desk,—I supposed in my hasty run home.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

DURING the next two days Mr. F. Needer never showed his face at the office, explaining his absence by a note to Scobell, in which he said that he "had met with a severe accident, and fallen heavily downstairs, spraining his wrist, and at the same time injuring the sight of one of his eyes."

I know that these were his exact words, for the lieutenant handed the note to me when he had read it.

"There," said he, "look at that, Norton; about as queer a fall as any lubber ever had,

I should say; strained his bowsprit and damaged his topmast by one and the same capsize ! ”

“ Yes, sir,” I answered, “ it does seem a curious sort of a tumble, but Needer is an unlucky beggar, I know, and always was famous for falling, upstairs and down, where other people stand straight enough.”

When at last he did make his appearance, he wore his right arm in a sling, and a green shade over one eye; to the quiet astonishment of the old sailor, and the huge delight of Dick and his friend, whom, by the way, I had seen in private, and implored to keep secret the real cause of this strange metamorphosis. One consequence of his downfall, and in this he evidently rejoiced, was that I had for some days to do a great portion of his work, which he sulkily explained to me, and I believe purposely made as confused and difficult to understand as possible. Few words passed between us,

except those of strict business; but although not a single reference was made to our recent encounter, I felt that I had made an implacable and relentless enemy.

Work, however, soon fell into its old track, and I began to forget the sudden cause of its being troubled, when one morning, after Needer had gone as usual to the bank, Mr. Scobell called me into his room, told me to sit down, and with a grave face began the following dialogue:—

“Norton, my boy, I have always trusted you, not only for your father’s sake, but because you carried a good figure-head that would never sail under false colours. But Needer has just been here with such a strange story against you, that I thought we had better clear it up at once. A day or two ago, he says, though he never mentioned it to me at the time, he was £5 wrong in his cash. For the missing note he searched everywhere, high and low, but he searched

in vain. Not a creature, he says, except you, has been in the office when he had his cash-box out, and this he always keeps under lock and key. He charges you with the theft."

"Then," replied I, "he is a liar as well as a thief, and if the note is really missing, and it lies between us two, he must have taken it himself. I solemnly declare I know nothing of it. You can search me if you like, and I will account for every penny in my possession."

"Look me full in the face, Norton, and tell me once more that you know nothing of the note."

This I at once did, and was proceeding to turn out my pockets when, after knocking at the door, my accuser entered the room. He instantly begged to withdraw, but Scobell insisted on his remaining.

"Mr. Needer," said he, "you have brought a terrible charge against your

fellow-clerk, which he has absolutely denied in a way that leaves no doubt in my mind that he is speaking the truth. He offers to account for every farthing of his money. I see no ground for believing the accusation laid against him."

"No one, I am sure," replies Needer, "would be more delighted than I to find him innocent; but you must own, sir, that if he isn't guilty, it's hard to say how the note ever got out of my cash-box. It was there safe enough three days ago, has always been under lock and key, and Norton is the only person ever alone in the office but myself. He has no objection, I suppose, to have his desk opened and searched in your presence?"

"Not the very faintest," I answered, "but unluckily I lost the key a fortnight ago, and the lock must be picked."

"Lost your key?" interrupted Scobell, "that's a confoundedly stupid trick; how

have you done your work all this time, Norton? How is it you never mentioned this?"

"Well, sir," I answered, "it is unlucky; but I did lose the key one day about a fortnight ago, as I ran home, late, to dinner, and told my people of it at once, though I did not like telling you, sir, as I thought it might be found. And so I did my best without it. Needer remembers *the day*, well enough, though I never told him of my loss."

"There's a smith who lives close by," said my enemy, "shall I go for him?"

"By no means," replied Scobell, "I will send one of the boys."

A boy was sent immediately, with orders to bring the man at once. Then followed an awkward silence. The editor walked up and down the room, quarter-deck fashion, with his hands buried in his breeches' pocket, whistling snatches, of a grave, slow

air. I stood idly at the window, thinking of my mother and her horror at such a charge being brought against me ; knowing that I was innocent, and yet aware of the relentless malice of my accuser, that he was as cunning as he was malignant. Needer, for a moment or two, fidgeted in his chair, and then getting up, said,

“ I am sure, sir, I don’t for a moment wish to press this business against Norton, and, in fact, I had much rather it was quietly hushed up, as you seem to think he is innocent.”

“ Excuse me,” I fiercely cried out, “ no hushing up for me. It’s an infamous lie, as you very well know, and I wish it to be sifted to the very bottom.”

“ As you please, Norton—as you please,” was his answer, and then the locksmith entered the room.

At once we all went into the office. The man tried several of his picks, but to no

purpose, while we stood by eagerly watching him.

“It’s a goodish lock,” he said at last, “and it seems a pity to force it ; has nobody got any keys ? ”

“ Mine are all too large,” replied Scobell, taking out a bunch ; “and mine,” says ‘Greasy,’ are all too small, I know,” dropping, as he spoke, a bunch into his pocket.

Upon this the smith set to work again, but with no better result than before.

“ You had better force it,” said Needer, “there is no key here at all likely to fit it.”

“Not so sure o’ that,” said the man ; “the lock of this next desk is pretty much the same size and make too ; shouldn’t wonder if he’d do. Where is he ? ”

“It won’t go near it,” says Needer,—“not half big enough.”

“Never mind,” replies Scobell, “large or small, let the man try it—he can but force the lock, after all.”

Very slowly, and with apparent reluctance, Needer began searching for his keys, as if in doubt where they were.

“Look sharp, man,” interrupts the editor, “they were jingling in your pocket a minute ago.”

After several trials, a key was found that fitted the lock; the desk was opened, and in a corner among some papers was the £5 note.

“There,” exclaimed Needer in a fierce exulting tone. “I told you so, I knew that it must be there. But, now I have got it safe again, I’m sure that I don’t wish to press the charge against Norton.”

As for me, I turned pale with horror and amazement, but not a single word could I utter. Everything seemed dead against me, and I could only look up into old Scobell’s face in silent misery.

For a moment he took no notice of my piteous appeal or of Needer’s word, but

presently, turning to my accuser, he said, "There is no doubt, I suppose, about this being the missing note? Do you know the number?"

"Oh! yes," was the glib answer. "I luckily made a memorandum of it. It was 500,356."

"Read the number, Norton, yourself. Is it correct?"

Blinding tears filled my eyes, as I took up the fatal scrap of paper, and it was as much as my trembling lips could do to answer, "Yes, sir, five, nought, nought, three, five, six."

Then the editor turned to the smith,—
"You can go, my man, now, and as you pass the press-room door below, tell Nicholls the foreman I want him *here* at once."
(Exit the son of Vulcan.)

"You are quite sure, Needer, that you lost this note of yours three days ago?"

"Quite sure, sir," was the eager answer,

as his face flushed with malignant satisfaction at my complete downfall ; “ quite sure. I can swear to that and to the number.”

“ Good ! ” replied Scobell, “ Good ! ” and this one unfeeling word, uttered with a sort of quiet chuckle, was his sole remark.

Then followed a horrible silence, in the midst of which Nicholls, in his shirt sleeves, and grimy with ink, entered the room.

“ Nicholls,” said the editor, “ you remember telling me that you picked up a key at the foot of the stairs ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ How long ago was it ? ”

“ A fortnight to-morrow.”

“ Certain, Nicholls ? ”

“ I’ll take my davy to that same, sir, for I’d bin just paid my wages, and I only has ’em once a fortnight.”

“ Where is the key ? ”

“ In my pocket ever since ; here it is. I couldn’t hear of nobody as had lost a key, and so I let it bide.”

“All right, Nicholls, give it to me. It belongs to Norton’s desk, I believe. You can go.”

It was, in fact, my own lost key.

My heart began to beat fast enough now, and my eyes sparkled with new life, for I saw that my enemy’s plot, in spite of its cunning, had failed, and that I should soon be once more free from the foul charge of theft.

My first glance was at Needer. He was standing by his desk, pale as death, biting his nails, the very picture of sullen rage.

Then I looked at old Scobell. He was once more marching up and down the room, whistling softly to himself ‘The Bay of Biscay.’ Stormy weather was at hand, I plainly saw.

All at once he turned, and catching Needer fiercely by the collar, and shaking him as a terrier shakes a rat, said in a voice of quiet contempt,—

“You mean scoundrel! Do you know

what I should do with such a dirty swab if you were aboard ship? Give you three dozen with the cat, and a glass of grog to the bosen's mate for laying 'em well on. It's lucky for you we're not afloat, you miserable dog! Do ye see now the end of all your scheming? One paltry lie from beginning to end! The note was in Norton's desk, simply because you put it there; and it was your key that opened his desk, just ten days too late to prove him a thief, and just in time to turn you out of this office to the tune of the 'Rogues' March.' "

Another mighty shake was hereupon administered to the rat, but it drew from him not a single word of reply.

"Now," said the old man, at last releasing him, "I will give you five minutes to make a clean breast of it. If by that time you choose to clear up the whole rascally business by speaking the truth for once in your life, you shall take your papers, your

month's wages, and go. If *not*, by the Old Harry ! I'll have up all hands from below, and you shall be drummed out by the whole ship's company."

Long before the five minutes had expired, the miserable story was all told,—slowly dragged from the unwilling lips of the fellow who, in planning my ruin, had contrived his own.

Of the fight he, of course, said not a word, and I was content to let it simply appear that we had quarrelled, and that owing me a grudge, he had hidden the money in my desk.

Scobell heard it all in silence, then, turning to Needer, he said, "Like many another scoundrel before you, Needer, you have been too cunning by half; and your plausible story and pretended wish not to be hard upon Norton only convinced me that the whole story was a lie. There is your month's wages; clear out your desk at

once, while I look on, and then never darken this door again."

He left the office without a single word of regret, expostulation, or entreaty; and years passed away before I saw him again. But I knew that I had made an enemy for life, and the thought was anything but a pleasant one.

This was the last scene in my career as a boy, and I was soon to be launched on a wider and busier stage, to play a somewhat more manly part, away from home and among strangers. My connection with the 'Gazette' came suddenly to an end with the downfall of that famous paper itself. It failed simply from lack of support. The gallant lieutenant knew well enough how to fight a fifty-gun ship, or to write a despatch; but he understood nothing of the sacred mysteries of editing a newspaper, and was glad to resign a task which he had really never liked, and for which he was

unfit. Once more I gave myself up to my books and to the violin, when a letter from an old friend of my father's changed the whole current of my life, and set me afloat again in waters of which I little dreamed. A new chapter must tell how I set sail, and how far my voyage prospered.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER VI.

THE ROCKY LAND OF STRANGERS.

THE news of my adventure at the office—Needer's accusation and its failure—fell like a thunderbolt on my father and mother, though a single glance at Scobell's honest face when he called would alone have served to prove my innocence, if they had for a moment doubted it. But in a few weeks the 'Gazette' had ceased to exist, and I had once more to look for work.

It came, as work often does come, suddenly, and from a most unexpected quarter. One of my father's oldest friends was a Dr.

Arlington, head master of the grammar school of Tregartha, a remote little town in the wilds of Cornwall. They had been young men together, in a measure fellow-students of poetry and of nature; and when my father entered the bank, Arlington was the curate of the parish church of Dockstone. In due time the curate became a country rector; after a while Fellow of his College, a D.D., and finally master of an old endowed grammar school, which he had raised to a pitch of great prosperity, numbering among his pupils some of the sons of the best county families. His views and my father's were alike on many points, and a similarity of tastes and habits at last led to such intimacy, that in most cases of emergency the one applied to the other for advice and assistance. Thus it fell out that my father received from his old friend, just at this time, a letter which suddenly opened to me a new path in life.

A paragraph in it was read to me, of which one single phrase—highly characteristic of the writer—yet lingers in my memory after many a long year. “I am in want,” said the doctor, “of a youth of about eighteen,—of gentlemanly proclivities, with enough grammar to read ‘Cæsar,’ and enough poetry to admire a sunset? Do you know of such a phoenix?”

“There,” said my father, “how will that suit you, Harry? The doctor says that his junior classical master has just died, and that the place must be filled up at once. The only phoenix I know of is one Harry Norton. What does *he* say to the proposal?”

“I’m not eighteen yet, and as to ‘proclivities,’ ” said I—

“Will you go to Tregartha,” interrupted my father, “and let the doctor find out what yours are?”

“I can manage the ‘Cæsar,’ ” I an-

swered, "and the sunset, and I should like to go if he gives good long holidays."

And so the matter was soon settled.

More talk of course followed, but in a week from that time came a formal letter offering me the appointment, and begging me to come at once.

"Your son," wrote the doctor, "shall be to me as my own; and if he has his father's blood in his veins will be, I trust, the very 'ingenui vultus puer, ingenuique pudoris' that I want."

And thus it came to pass that I had to leave the quiet home where, in spite of all our trials, so many happy years had been spent, to go out into the world among strangers while little more than a boy, and to teach others almost before I had begun to learn myself. My little outfit—not obtained without much anxious frugal care on my mother's part, including, as I well remember, my first tail-coat—was ready in a few

days ; and as the doctor had urged the necessity of a speedy appearance on my part, there was no excuse for further delay. My father, in his old-fashioned way, gave me a few words of parting advice :—

“Don’t be too much in a hurry to make friends, and when made keep them. Don’t go into debt ; stick to your work like a man, and if it’s only a page of ‘Cæsar,’ do it with all your might. Above all, keep a journal—keep a journal.”

My mother said not a word but “God bless you, Harry,” as she kissed me ; but she looked at me with her tender, loving, eyes as a mother only can look ; and made tears of joy start into mine that *would* find their way down my cheek in the most undignified fashion. The little Bible which my sisters clubbed together to buy as a parting gift, even now, after forty years of good service, is on my study-table ; my name still legible on the flyleaf in the

angular girlish hand so frequent in those days; with the simple words *Watch and Pray* underneath.

I was glad when the parting was over, and I found myself on the deck of the little steamer that was to convey me from Dockstone to Pendleton, the first stage in my journey to Tregartha. It was a small tub of a vessel, but the voyage was only six or eight hours in a fair wind; and we were hardly out of sight of land the whole way. I had been pretty well used to the sea, and boating expeditions at Dormouth, nearly all my life; so I dined royally in the chief cabin, though I could ill afford it; and then went up upon deck to catch a last glimpse of the well-known cliffs and headlands. But we had got fairly out into the blue water by this time, and a faint line of low grey hills on the edge of the horizon was all that could be seen. The rush and sparkle of the foaming waves as

they dashed by was a new and charming sight ; but I soon grew weary of watching them, and curling myself up in a snug corner amidships was presently lost in an odd volume of ' Roderic Random,' which I had picked up in the cabin. To this day I can remember the exact cut of the greasy, well-thumbed, volume ; which I was horribly mortified in finding to be the second (of three) — that ended abruptly, and at a most exciting point in the hero's rather coarse adventures. I was hunting through the cabin in search of volume III., when a sudden noise and trampling over head told me that something unusual was going on on deck. Scrambling up the ladder, I found that the wind had suddenly freshened, the men were busy in shortening sail,—and land was plainly in sight right a head. In another hour we were in Pendleton harbour ; the anchor was dropped, and I and my small trunk were safely landed at the wharf.

All that need be said of Pendleton is that it was down in a hollow close to the sea, shut in on all sides by low hills of dingy moorland, and that the streets were dirty and narrow, and smelt of fish. I soon made my way to the 'Royal Oak,' to which I had been specially directed, and found it to my great surprise to be a large, well-ordered, inn; standing on a slope outside the town, with broad verandahs running round the whole extent of the house on the side facing the sea. It was full of guests at the time, and I had some difficulty at first in getting a bed; for Pendleton was then one of the famous old Packet Stations, and travellers were always coming and going there from and to all parts of the world. But I succeeded at last, and with my humble modicum of luggage was duly installed in No. 63, one of a series of small rooms in a long gallery near the top of the house. As I came out of my room, and

was hurrying along the gallery, the door of an adjoining chamber was hastily opened, and out rushed a well-dressed elderly man, who ran headlong against me at the top of a steep flight of stairs, over which I only just managed to save him from falling.

He was a peppery, old, white-haired fellow, and his first exclamation of

“Confound it, youngster, what the deuce do you get in the way for?” seemed rather to fasten the blame of the *rencontre* on the wrong person.

“Excuse me,” said I, “but I don’t quite see why I should be confounded for saving you from an awkward tumble?”

Whereupon he turned round, looked me full in the face, and burst into a hearty laugh, in which I could not help joining.

“Nor, on second thoughts, do I,” he replied; “but the second bell has rung, my people are gone down, and I am all behind-

hand. We are both bound for dinner, I suppose, let us go down together."

"With all my heart, said I;" and so down we went, chatting by the way.

When we reached [the coffee-room, we found a large table laid out for dinner at the upper end, some thirty or forty guests already assembled, and the banquet about to begin.

He hurried on to a place which I saw was reserved for him, while I begged one of the waiters to accommodate me with the more humble repast of tea, at a side-table.

He was a very staid, austere, person in black; and his white tie was of so irreproachable a kind that I addressed him with some trepidation.

"Dinner's just up," he gravely replied, "and I can find you a place, sir, directly."

"Thank you," said I, "I prefer tea, and I should like it at once."

"Stopping in the house, sir?"

“Yes, I am. But, do look sharp.”

Whereupon he walked majestically off to the upper end of the room, and left me to my meditations.

In a few minutes, however, an inferior order of being came my way, and he having settled me in a quiet corner, at a small table, presently brought me all I wanted.

Meanwhile, the banquet went on steadily at the great table, of which I got a good view from my corner; and had more than I wanted of savory odours from the various condiments of fish, flesh, and fowl that passed and repassed me on their way to and from the board.

My humble repast was soon finished, and to wile away the time I was soon deep in the contents of ‘The Pendleton Packet,’ a local newspaper of no small repute in the west. But this could not last for ever, and I was looking eagerly on to an adjoining

table for some stray volume or magazine, when a general rise among the guests took place, as the ladies in twos and threes began to leave the room.

As the various groups filed past, I now and then took a timid glance at them, and among the first recognized my old and peppery friend of the staircase. He now seemed to be in a far serener frame of mind, and was chatting gaily to two young girls who walked by his side ; and one of whom, a tall graceful maiden with light hair and dreamy, grey eyes, looked earnestly at me as they passed. The old man favoured me with a friendly nod ; and in a few minutes the great coffee-room was comparatively deserted ; only a few old codgers remaining, whose allowance of wine was not yet finished. They drew their chairs cosily round a crackling wood fire, and I was left to find what amusement I could in an old number of 'The Nautical Magazine ;' being

only once interrupted by the return of my elderly friend, who now rejoined his companions by the fire, and was heartily hailed by them as 'The Colonel,' and installed in the arm-chair.

I had soon devoured the magazine, and there in my solitary corner began to feel lonely enough. His excellency the waiter cleared away the tea-things, and then hovered about me in a half listless, half patronizing, way, as if on the watch to decide whether I should be urged to order supper, or incited to go to bed. Busy with home thoughts, and worn out with my long day's journey, at last I could bear his presence no longer, and asked for a bedroom candle.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, and after wandering vaguely about among many winding staircases, I finally made my way to No. 63, and was soon preparing to unpack my trunk, when all at once I remembered I had left my keys on the table of the

coffee-room below. Candle in hand, once more I explored the winding staircase, found my way to the old corner, rescued my lost property—much to the surprise of the sleepy waiter, who was still hovering about the room—and again started on my return journey. This time I made the ascent by a much more direct route, and was within a few yards of 63, when to my utter amazement a neighbouring door opened, and out sallied the young girl whom I had seen but a few hours before. She was clad in a long night-dress, carried a lighted candle in her right hand, and with her eyes closed passed calmly and steadily within a few feet of where I stood, fixed, trembling, and astonished at what seemed to me more like a dream than a reality.

Bewildered, I remained still, silently watching what would happen next. The gallery formed a complete circle at the top of a well-staircase, and I watched the figure

of the girl moving silently on through the gloom, until it came round once more to the starting-point, and then to my utter astonishment entered my own room, and closed the door !

What was to be done now ?

Whether the girl had mistaken my room for her own, or whether she was merely walking in her sleep ; whether she would presently find out her mistake, and again appear, I was equally at a loss to know what to do next.

Enter the room, under such circumstances, of course I dared not ; while to remain where I was, as if moonstruck, on the landing was quite as impracticable. Some of the other guests might be presently passing that way to their rooms ; or possibly some truant chambermaid or waiter might hail me with wondering eyes, or an inquiry as to my intentions. My only course was to go down once more to the coffee-room ; and think over

what was the best plan of proceeding. So down I went.

My friend the waiter was there, hovering about ; as busy and as silently interrogative as ever. The old fogies had all disappeared but two, playing cribbage by the fire ; and I betook myself again to the 'Nautical Magazine ;' the gentleman with the white tie watching me all the time with increased and increasing severity. Presently, in utter desperation, I exclaimed, "Waiter, let me have a glass of gin-and-water and a biscuit." As I sipped my grog, I gave myself up to the consideration of what my next step must be, but the more I thought, the more knotty became the problem. One thing was clear, I could not go back to No. 63 until I knew that its strange visitor had left it, and this I had no means of ascertaining. No one but the chambermaid could venture into the room now ; and once revealed to her, the fact that a young lady had gone

into a gentleman's bed-room would in ten minutes be known to the entire household.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to see the colonel, and tell him the exact state of affairs. So I put a bold face on the matter.

"Is the colonel gone to his room yet?" I said to the waiter.

"No, sir; he's smoking a cigar with some other gents in the verandah; you can hear 'em a walking up and down."

For some minutes the man hung about the table, after the fashion of his tribe, and then at last reluctantly disappeared.

Opening the window, I stepped out upon the balcony, and finding myself in the middle of the group, was forced to address myself at once to the object of my search.

"Can I speak to you, sir, for a few moments?"

"To *me*, my boy—what's the matter?"

"I must speak to you alone," I replied ; and, with these words, I stepped back into the room.

The two cribbage-players had departed, so we had the room to ourselves.

I was, I felt, pale with excitement, nor did his first words when we got near the fire-place at all tend to encourage me.

"Now, then, youngster, what on earth does all this mystery mean ? Have you seen a ghost ? For your face is as white as paper."

"No," said I ; "but I have seen what startled me as much as a score of ghosts."

And, then, in as few words as possible, I told him what I had seen and what I had done.

"Good God !" were his first words, "how can I ever thank you enough for what you have done ? You have saved my child from what might have been utter ruin !"

And then he shook me by the hand, as if he never meant to release it.

“I want no thanks,” I replied, “but for Heaven’s save, go up at once, or some wandering servant may undo all I have done, and half-a-dozen idle words in the kitchen——”

At this, he hurried away out of the room, merely pausing at the door to add in a low whisper, “Stay here till I come back.”

I needed no ‘Nautical Magazine’ now to amuse me as I stalked up and down the long coffee-room ; busy enough with a multitude of strange thoughts, and wondering what my mother would think of my adventure when she read my next letter.

In a few minutes back came the old man, with a look of joy and thankfulness on his face, which told me that his mission had succeeded.

Once more came the fervent grasp of his hand ; once more the eager, passionate, words of gratitude.

“I called you a boy just now,” he said at last, “but you have acted like a man, a man of sense and honour. May God bless you for it. My children and I are on our way to India, and the packet sails in the morning for Southampton; but if I live to come back to old England again, all I pray is that you may then want a helping hand and I be near enough to give you mine. You have saved my darling Edith from utter shame!”

And then he told me how his dear child's sister had gone cautiously into my room, and found the poor wanderer lying asleep on my bed; cautiously awakened her, and quietly led her back to her own room, unconscious at first, but then, of course, utterly ashamed and terrified at what had happened; and yet, luckily, unobserved by any stray servant or guest.

“There is my card and address,” added the old colonel, “and if all goes well with

us, I shall be at my post in India in less than six months ; and there, I shall rely upon hearing from you ; most certainly and above all if it ever happen, as I pray God it may, that I can render you the slightest service.

“ Now give me your own name and address, that I may write it in my own and my child’s heart ; as the name of one of our dearest friends and benefactors.”

I gave him my father’s address, and so, after another hearty shake of the hand, we parted ; not to meet again for many a long year. It was a singular name that I read on the card, “ Colonel Dartlake,” and one that I remembered long after the card itself had been mislaid and forgotten.

CHAPTER VII.

TREGARTHA.

THAT night, as may be well imagined, my dreams were both many and as strange as numerous ; but, oddly enough, they had nothing whatever to do with my extraordinary adventure in the evening. Neither the grey-headed old colonel nor the pale, weird, face of the sleep-walker mingled with them ; but I was involved in a succession of bewildering perplexities, all connected with the steamer in which I had sailed on the previous day, and some few home scenes in my early life which I had long before well-

nigh forgotten. Once more I was in the solemn presence of Minerva at Osborne House; again I heard the awful voice, and beheld the instruments of torture which she so well knew how to wield. Presently, after waking in terror, I was once more engaged in deadly fight with Needer at the newspaper office; searching for five-pound notes through an interminable series of boxes; and at last confronted with a magistrate at the Guildhall, to answer a charge of theft. Worn out at length by these wearisome tricks of my imagination, and unable to get a wink of untroubled sleep, I rose hastily soon after day-break, dressed, and packed my portmanteau; and, after some delay, went down into the desolate coffee-room. Not a creature in the house was stirring but the night-porter, and from him having obtained the address of the coach-office, I sallied out to procure some information about the best way of getting on to Tre-

gartha. This was soon obtained, for it simply amounted to the one plain fact that no coach ran to Tregartha, and that the only means of getting there was by van unless I chose to take a post-chaise.

With my finances, of course a chaise was utterly out of the question ; so that there was nothing for it but the Van ; a very rough and primitive looking machine, heavily laden with various goods, and drawn by a couple of cart-horses. It was then standing close by, at the door of a small wayside tavern, where the process of loading was going on under the driver's own directions, when a jolly looking farmer, in top-boots, hurried by me and put to him the very question to which I wanted an answer.

“ When do ’ee stairt then, Capen ? ”

“ Why, my dear, tidy and soon, now ; ’bout zeven, I do suppose.”

“ Surely, Capen ; then I’ll be here in main good time.”

This was enough for me, and I at once hurried back to the 'Royal Oak,' once more entered the desolate coffee-room, and there waited for the arrival of his majesty the waiter.

Soon after six, he made his appearance, and after some parley agreed that I should be allowed to have breakfast in time to leave by the Tregartha Van; though he seemed mightily shocked at my daring to depart from the 'Royal Oak' by any such conveyance.

I sat down to breakfast in solitary state (the waiter having at last given up my case as a hopeless one, and betaken himself to some other section of his domains), and was just finishing my repast when I heard the door softly open, and the young girl whom I had seen the night before came quietly down the room, to the table where I sat.

She was evidently equipped for the sea-voyage, and her strange, grey, eyes, full

of dreamy light, were fastened on me with a quiet steady gaze, before which mine trembled and shrank as I rose to meet her.

She, however, was wholly unembarrassed, and in a low, tender voice said,

“I could not go away without saying a word of thanks to you for what you did last night. And so I have stolen downstairs while they are all busy at their packing, to see and thank my preserver. Papa has told me what you did and said; but I must thank you myself; and, if we never meet again, say, Good-bye.”

And then, as calmly as if we had been old friends, she held out to me her hand, which I took timidly into mine, and shook, as I thought, most tenderly; though I stupidly had not a word to say for myself. In another minute she was back again at the door, where she paused briefly for a moment, and turning round said, in the same, low, musical voice, “Good-bye, Henry

Norton. Won't you say Good-bye to the poor little sleep-walker ? ”

“ Good-bye,” I cried ; “ Good-bye, I shall never forget you, never.”

The door softly closed, and I was alone. But the sweet, dreamy, face was printed on my heart ; and for many a long day carried with it the echo of that quiet, strange, farewell. I was in no mood now to care for much more of my unfinished breakfast, but glad to ring for the waiter, pay my bill, and begone. A man with a truck conveyed my luggage to the Van, which we found on the point of starting ; but the ‘ Capen ’ quite willing to delay for the advent of a fresh passenger. My few goods and chattels were soon bestowed on board, and I safely ensconced in the inside between a couple of market-women on their way to Tregartha Church Town, while my old friend the farmer sat outside with the driver. It was, in fact, a very small, narrow, omnibus ; hot

stuffy, with no ventilation, and smelling of musty straw. The two old women gossiped incessantly the whole way, only stopping now and then to munch fragments of pasty, and potato-cake; or to take sips of rum-and-water out of a small stone-bottle which one of them carried in her capacious pocket.

I had forgotten to take with me refreshment of any kind, but, much to the surprise of my companions, declined all their repeated offers of cake. I was silently feasting on far more ethereal viands, in a domain of my own, as I thought of the "poor little sleep walker," the story of her pale face, and loving eyes, which still gazed on me, as she once more said "Good-bye."

* * * * *

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

So far my old friend the Curate of Danbury had carried his intended autobiography, when a sudden and fatal illness overtook

him, and arrested the work. On his death-bed he wrote me a letter, giving into my hands all the letters, journals, sketches of dialogue, and description, and other papers which he had collected together, and arranged for the purpose, as he said "of completing the story of his life." Thus ran the final words of his letter. "There they are, old friend, do what you like with them; either for my children's use, or for a wider circle, as you see fit. Of no other man would I ask what I now ask of you for old acquaintance sake. Burn or print, as you think best; but if you decide on the latter course, you must complete the story which I have begun. My hope was to have finished it myself, but God has willed it otherwise; and I must be content. If you find the task not to your taste, or impracticable, by all means, burn. But, no other hands must deal with the Curate of Danbury

but your's. Once more, old friend, Good-bye."

After many days of doubt and careful consideration, it was thought best that the story should be completed from the author's own copious journals, notes, and letterbooks. The form of narrative, therefore, here abruptly changes from that of the first person to the third. Much has been omitted, which, though of interest to Norton's children, and evidently prepared for them, others would scarcely care to read. Nothing has been added, though many events have been put into their right place in order of time, so as to make the flow of the story clear and intelligible.

* * * * *

TREGARTHA.

The 'Celerity' van took three long weary hours in travelling to Tregartha; and the road, for the most part, was dull and un-

interesting. It wound its way steadily on, up hill and down dale; and after the rich soil of Devonshire, with her green, woody lanes and mossy hedgerows, the change to rough wild heath and sandy down, bare hills, and stunted trees, was, even in the eyes of the young traveller, dreary enough. But, just before ten o'clock, a sudden fit of animation seemed to seize on the 'Capen,' and even to infect his horses, for they now broke out into a heavy lumbering trot, and, rattling noisily down the side of a steep hill, dashed into the main street of Tregartha, — a long, straggling country town, stretching over the slope of a hillside, and some quarter of a mile down into the valley below. It contained some twelve or fourteen hundred people, and was governed by a mayor, who dwelt in the large brick house overlooking the bowling-green. A church tower of grey granite, a guildhall of a like tint and age, and the

two rival inns of the 'Unicorn,' and the 'King's Head,' both in the High Street, were the only buildings that caught the eye of the traveller; and all these were pointed out to Norton by the farmer who had got inside the van to escape a heavy downfall of thick rain, which had set in as they crossed the last piece of moorland waste, near Tregartha Down.

"It's a dreary-looking place," exclaimed the youth, as they rattled by the bowling-green; "but where is the grammar school?"

"Aye, aye, youngster; that's where the shoe pinches, my dear, is it? They that's coming from home to school-house mostly finds it dreary enough. But why didn't 'ee tell the Capen, and he'd have sot 'ee down to the school-gates, up to the top of town?"

To this Norton could at first make no reply; rather indignant, indeed, to be taken for a boy just going back to school.

“ I am one of the masters of the grammar-school,” he said at last to the driver, “ and I shall be glad if you will get one of the porters at the ‘ King’s Head ’ to take up my luggage at once.”

In ten minutes he was once more on the hill-top, and, passing under an old gothic archway by the roadside, soon found himself at the doctor’s gate, which a very jolly-looking old servitor in brown livery opened to admit him.

The doctor was in, and had been “ as-pecting ” Mr. Norton all day. Would he please to go to his room to once, or see the doctor first ?

Norton decided on going at once to his room, which he found to be at the top of the house—a large old-fashioned garret, with a dormer-window overlooking the playground, a huge fireplace, and bookshelves covering a large portion of the walls. Hastily putting himself to rights,

while John uncorded his box, Norton was soon ready to follow his guide. After traversing many winding passages, and going up and down several zig-zagging flights of stairs, they got at last to an arched doorway, and in another moment he found himself in the presence of some fifty or sixty boys, ranged in a series of sloping desks, which stretched over half the room. One section were busy at work round the desk of the second master, and the remainder engaged with the doctor himself, who was giving what he called a lecture on the literature of the Middle Ages. He was a tall, handsome man, of about fifty, with a striking face, good presence, and pleasant voice; and standing in front of a large blackboard, at the top of which was written, in chalk, the words

Picus Mirandola.

Below these the doctor was just then busily inscribing, in small side-columns, the names

of sundry other worthies, of whom Norton had never even heard, but of whom the lecturer had many curious and interesting things to say, and from whose writings he quoted many quaint morsels; of all which the class were supposed to be taking mental notes, though they were in fact far more intent on staring at the new-comer, and wondering how long he would remain unnoticed by the doctor.

On went the lecturer, however, in his usual discursive, gossipy, style, far too deeply immersed in 'Picus' to notice the stranger; and in this fashion ten—twenty—forty minutes passed away, to Norton's utter amazement; when at last the great clock in the tower suddenly struck twelve, the head monitor stood up, and began to read over a string of names, at the close of which a sudden rush was made to the school doors by the whole body of juveniles; and the doctor, having gravely laid aside his

cap and gown, found himself face to face with his new assistant.

“Why in the world didn’t you announce yourself?” were his first words of greeting, as he shook him heartily by the hand. “Of course, you are Harry Norton; you have my old friend’s voice and look, and I should have known you the moment you opened your mouth.”

“You were busy with ‘Picus,’ sir,” replied Norton; “and as I had never heard of him before, and you had so much to say, I thought it only polite to wait till the lecture was over. Besides,” added he with a smile, “you were close to me more than once, and looked me full in the face as if you were about to speak, so I held my tongue.”

The doctor expressed some surprise at Norton’s not being acquainted with ‘Picus’ even by name; but, luckily for him, the lecture was cut short by their entering

on a long winding passage, which led from the school to the house, and so narrow as to force him to go in front. This passage led them to the drawing-room, where Norton was introduced to Mrs. Arlington,—a beautiful, elegant, and stately woman,—who received him very graciously, and expressed many good wishes for his happiness at Tregartha.

“I knew your mother well at one time, when we were both younger than we are now,” she said, “and I shall hope to make her son happy while he stays with us. “Remember,” she added, with a very sweet smile, “I am your mother’s old friend, and as a friend you must regard me. Good-bye for the present, as I have a pile of letters to write for the next post.”

“Come, then,” said the doctor, “and I will take you now to Mr. Gresley, my second master,—a ripe scholar, and a most charming man, if he would but leave off

punning. Next, you shall see the captain of the school; he will take you into the playground, and then I shall leave you to stand on your own legs."

Gresley, being a married man, lived out of the school, in a small cottage on the other side of the road; but he had gone into the town when they reached the cottage, and so the doctor had to pilot his young friend back into the playground.

Some thirty or forty boys were there busy at play of one kind or another, and a wild, jolly, uproar echoed round the walls of the old school-house; but no one took the least notice of the "Head" except one bright-eyed fellow of seventeen, who, in his shirt sleeves, was playing rackets in a corner of the playground. He was a tall, well-made, youth, with an eye like a hawk's; and, at a sign from the doctor, came running up to them.

"Trevanion," said magister, "this is the

son of an old friend of mine, Mr. Henry Norton, who is come down to help us with some of the younger fellows. I put him under your charge. Take good care of him; and put him up to all the dodges—in school and out. And, Trevanion, mind that he is treated with proper respect. I shall look to you to see that all goes right to-day at dinner, and in the cricket-ground.”

With these words the doctor went off to his study, and the two youths were left to become acquainted with each other in their own fashion, which they very speedily did.

Trevanion was a brave, plucky, youth, with plenty of brains and no lack of hard muscle; a fellow whom the dunces envied, and the bullies feared; and being much pleased at the doctor's kindly words, he took real trouble to smooth Norton's way for him. They, in fact, soon became firm friends.

The next day Norton was duly installed in his new office; and though rather dis-

mayed at first at finding that he had to manage and teach a class of fifteen boys, some as big and almost as old as himself, soon contrived by firmness and good-nature to get on fairly, even with the most unruly. In a month's time, he had it all pretty well his own way; thanks in the first place to the captain's friendship, which saved him from many a mistake and annoyance, and secondly to a sudden interposition on the doctor's part, which had better be told in Norton's own words, in a letter to his mother, a part of which ran thus:—

“You ask specially how I am getting on in school. Well, it was rather difficult work at first, you see, because several of the chaps in my class were as old and as big as their master; and now and then tried to be cheeky. But, thanks to Trevanion,—he's a regular brick, and captain of the school,—the worst of the lot, a town-boy named Govett, caught it so smartly the

other day that he has been civil ever since. The bother began in the cricket-field, where I had charge of the junior eleven, who had begged me to be their captain in the place of Govett, because he bullied the little chaps, and bagged their pocket-money. Of course I agreed to this, and began to place my men. But, when I told Govett to be long-stop, his only answer was to lie down on the grass, and bawl out, '*Shan't!*' As he was a head and shoulders taller than me, I could do nothing but repeat my orders, and threaten to give up office if they were not obeyed. His only answer was, '*Shan't! Shan't! Shan't!*' bawled out more loudly and offensively than ever.

" 'Yes, you will,' suddenly replied a shrill, hearty, voice behind me. And, turning round, there I saw Dick Trevanion, with a fishing-rod under his arm, on his way down to the lake in the valley. 'Yes, you will,' said the clear, merry, voice; 'so, get

up, Lobster (that's Govett's nickname because of his having a purplish red face), get up, and set to work if you don't want a good licking.'

" 'Who from ?' says the bully in a furious rage.

" 'The third joint of my fishing-rod, as I have not got my ash stick with me,' replied Dick.

" And, suiting the action to the word, Trevanion here suddenly gave him five or six smart cuts, as he lay on the grass, without minding very much where they fell as long as they hit him. I thought that a fight would have followed as a matter of course; but the Lobster jumped up, without saying a word more, and then sulkily went to his place, growling as he went.

" 'If you shirk any more this afternoon,' says Dick, 'remember that you'll get the rest of the dozen in the evening, from the right stick.'

“ ‘And in the right place,’ added Gresley, who had been lying on the grass smoking a cigar close at hand unnoticed.

“The cricket went on very fairly after that, and the Lobster was pretty civil for some time, until one wet day, as the doctor was telling me the best way of correcting some Latin exercises, we suddenly turned into the school-room to fetch a book from his desk. There was a great row going on, as school was over, and in the centre of the room a crowd of younger boys were gathered round a chair, on which the Lobster had set up a little scrap of a fellow named Boxall, and was making him dance and sing at the top of his voice something which ended with this chorus,

‘Hogs’ Norton where the pigs all dance
And monkeys play the fiddle.’

In the midst of all the uproar, it was impossible to avoid hearing these words, or to doubt what was meant by Hogs’ Norton and

the fiddle; but, at the doctor's unexpected appearance, there suddenly fell upon the whole room a grim and terrible silence.

“ ‘Govett,’ said the doctor in his politest and most icy voice, ‘fifty lines of “Es in Præsenti” punctually to-morrow morning at first roll-call, if you please.’

“ ‘When the doctor said this there was an universal shout all over the room, which I couldn't at all understand until I saw Gresley in the evening.

“ ‘*Ease* in Præsenti,’ said he, ‘means “*Discomfort in Futuro*,” lamentation to-morrow morning; the doctor always licks a fellow when he gives that special fifty. The Lobster has really wanted a dose for a good while; all the better for you, young Norton,’ as he always calls me.

“ ‘After this, my dear mother, not a single fellow dared to bother me in any way; and it was a jolly good thing for me that I had had nothing to do with the Lobster's suffer-

ings in either case. If I had complained to the doctor, I should have been called a sneak. Some day I will tell you all about Gresley, who is *the most splendid fellow* I ever met. One word more, and I must stop. The next morning at nine, directly after roll-call and prayers, out comes the doctor from his study into school, with a new cane under his arm, walks across the room and takes up his place just under the clock; and then he begins whistling very softly to himself. 'By Jove!' I hear one fellow say in a whisper, 'the Lobster is going to catch it.' And, in five minutes, the Lobster *had* caught it, in the presence of the whole school.

" 'That's the way I always serve a sneak,' said the doctor when the operation was concluded; 'and I advise you to give up the character for the future, *in toto.*' "

CHAPTER VII

NEW FRIENDS.

“NOTHING in any after times,” says a wise writer, “however radiant with pleasure or success those latter times may be, is so perfectly happy, so free from care, as the buoyant and fearless ignorance of the creature who has just left youth for manhood ; just first thrust out its head from the shell of dependence, and ventured alone to survey with dazzled and delighted eyes the domain that lies stretched before him in the mere possible.”

This might perhaps be more tersely ex-

pressed, but the thought is a deep and true one, as Harry Norton now began to find out, with no small delight to himself. For some time the old thoughts of home and home-life were with him too often to admit of his finding much pleasure in a small country town, where he at first knew but a single household, and every face he met in the street was that of a stranger. But, luckily for the new-comer, Tom Gresley took a fancy to him, made him a friend and companion, invited him to spend his leisure evenings at the cottage ; and, above all, introduced him to one or two pleasant houses in the town, where music and pleasant gossip (if nothing better) were to be found. Thus it came about that among new acquaintances, the desire of making himself agreeable sprang up, and with it a sense of freedom from home restraint, and a desire to begin life as it were more on his own account. Norton felt no longer a mere boy, as he had done at

Dormouth, but decidedly a young man, whose business it was to teach youngsters, and whom they therefore were bound to respect. It was in this light that he soon began to be regarded in the town, where the shopkeepers vied with each other in doing honour to the doctor's new assistant-master; and several anxious mothers paid attention to him, as being able to smooth the way for some of their young hopefuls at the school.

But what did more for him at that time, and for several years to come, was (as we have said), the friendship and wise help of the second master. Tom Gresley was, not only as the doctor had described him, both a wit and a scholar, but a kind-hearted, loving, and generous one. Winchester and Oxford had found in him apt material for the making of a really good fellow; the gods had sent him a shrewd, quiet, wife, who loved and understood him; who could dust his study-

table without groaning over its untidiness, and mend his shirts as well as appreciate his talents, without a lecture on blotted wristbands, the miseries of housekeeping, and the worthlessness of servants. No wonder, therefore, that in the society of two such people, Norton soon took increasing delight, and spent much of his leisure. In Gresley's rooms, too, he always found a box of cigars, and there also he in due time learned not only to smoke, but to enjoy smoking, while they talked over the toils of the day and the latest morsel of gossip from the town.

This was the state of things when one evening Norton dropped in as usual for an hour's chat with his new friend, who, as usual also, was busy with a pile of books spread wide-cast over a corner table, near the fire. Baby, a sturdy fellow of two years' old, was asleep in a wicker cradle; and close at hand was his mother at work on a pair of worsted socks.

“Well, young Norton,” said Gresley, “where have you been hiding yourself for the last week? for, except in school, not a single glimpse of you have I had. Light a cigar, and give an account of yourself.”

“I have really no account to give,” answers juvenis, lighting a cigar with a cedar chip, “but that I was very busy when your last note came; then I had a host of home letters to answer; then the doctor’s wife— (“and ruler,” interrupts Gresley; “uxor regina Jovis”)—who is very kind, but awfully strict, came up to me to suggest that I should keep certain caterpillars in the green-house instead of my bedroom, where she said they drove Jenkins, the housekeeper, nearly wild by crawling up the white curtains. But, I say, Gresley, it was such a rich scene. She came up the long staircase to my room in the evening, and tapped at my door. ‘Come in,’ said I, thinking it was Dick Trevanion, but

nobody came. Out I went, candle in hand ; and there she was halfway down the passage, also candle in hand, waiting to receive me. And then she told me about the caterpillars. The odd thing was that we both seemed afraid of approaching each other ; for if I took a step forward, she drew back ; and if she came too near, I retreated ; for I had been smoking in my bedroom, and was half afraid it was against the laws. The next morning after breakfast, her majesty said to me, with the pleasantest of smiles, ‘ Mr. Norton, we were terribly afraid of each other last night ; I, for fear that you might detect an odour of the doctor’s gin-and-water which I had just tasted ; and you, I suppose, just escaped from a cloud of tobacco smoke ? ’ And, then, she smiled again, and made me a polite little bow in that stately fashion she can put on, and with two words put an end to my smoking upstairs. ‘ I think,’ she said, ‘ you would perhaps find the school-

room or the playground best for an evening cigar.' ”

“ And what reply did you make, O fumose puer ? ”

“ What reply *could* I make ? ” said Norton. “ Before I could tell her that the doctor specially objected to all tobacco smoking in the school-room, she was out of the room, and beyond my reach. By Jove, Gresley, she manages everybody. ”

“ You are beginning to find that out, are you, O excellent young man ? She does manage most things and most people. A woman with such a face, such a pair of eyes, and such a manner as hers, if she only has an ounce or two of brains into the bargain, always does manage to get things her own way. But she must have a soft, low, voice, keep her temper, and talk with her eyes, and always be a lady ; *then*, nothing can stand against her. A pretty face, alone, is of no value except against a noodle. But, if

the whole combination besets a man, it is soon all up with him ; isn't it, my dear Sophy ? ” he added, turning to his wife, “ Don't listen to him, Mr. Norton,” replies the lady in the corner. “ One would imagine, to hear him talk, that he was a regular Don Juan.”

“ Don Juan, my dear ? I only wish I was half clever enough to be as amusing to my friends as that naughty personage. The requisite amount of naughtiness I might perhaps easily manage, I dare say ; but it's very much harder to rhyme like Whistlecraft, than to be as wicked as the world wishes. Mrs. Gresley, I really am surprised that you, the young and virtuous mother of a family, should have so far forgotten yourself as to name such a subject and such a person as the Don in our innocent young friend's presence. Of such a scoundrel he probably has never heard even the name until this moment.”

“I beg your pardon,” interrupts our hero, “he is quite an old friend of mine, and—”

But not a word more was audible, for at this point Gresley broke out into a long and riotous fit of laughter that fairly drowned the rest of the sentence.

“Bravo ! Bravo !” he cried, “it is not we, my dear, after all, who have corrupted or can corrupt this admirable and innocent youth, but he who may corrupt us ; the Don is his old friend !” Then, there came a few moments of silent smoking, broken in upon, at last, by Gresley suddenly inquiring,

“But who was your partner at the gala-dance yesterday, Norton ? I looked about at all corners for you, but could neither see nor hear of Mr. Norton on the Green, or in Church Street.”

“Who was she ? By Jove, Gresley—”

“Don’t swear, my dear sir ; don’t swear in that profane and barbarous fashion. By Venus, by Flora’s girdle, or Juno’s eyes,

if you like, but no Jupiters, in such a tender passage as this. Go on, Norton,—by Venus herself,—I adjure thee,—‘Venerisque columbas.’”

“Well, then, who *she* was is the very mystery that has bothered me ever since. I have searched high and low, and inquired right and left, but not a soul knows anything about her; not even her name.”

“How in the world, then, O Juan, came you to dance with her?”

“You ought to know the customs of Galad, Gresley, far better than a mere stranger. I went down to the Green yesterday morning, with Trevanion and all the doctor’s private pupils, at ten o’clock. And there, as you know, were all the *grandees* of the town, wives, husbands, sons, and daughters; all collected, ready to begin the dance. All the other fellows soon found partners; and were ready to start off as soon as the procession was formed. ‘All you have to do,’

said Trevanion to me, 'if you want a partner is to go up to Rookstone, the steward, that old sandy-haired man with the white choker, and ask him to introduce you to any young lady you like. He has a whole string of daughters of his own, and you can have your pick there, except the youngest one Cissy, who has promised weeks ago to dance with me. So, no poaching there, Mr. Norton.'

"Well, I looked round, and soon made out three tall girls with sandy hair, wide mouths, and freckles, all in a row; looking old enough to be my aunts; but all miles too grand for me. Then I caught sight of a quiet little thing in grey, with a straw hat and a single bunch of May in it; and such a pair of hazel eyes as made sunshine on her face. She was standing aside, with her mother, and like myself a stranger. In five minutes I was introduced, and danced with her all up Church Street, and across through Tregartha Lane. Then she got

tired, and I had to take her back to her mother; a very dignified little woman, who suddenly carried off my charming partner, and was gone in a trice."

"So ends chapter one, of 'Love's Young Dream,'" replied Gresley; "it was too bright and too delicious to last. No wonder you have been sleepless ever since, and were looking so horribly dismal when you came in. Remember the Eton grammar,

'Res est solliciti plena timoris amor.'

Never mind, young Norton, don't be down-hearted. You must find her again within a week; for in this little corner of the world, with its fifteen hundred people, everybody knows everybody, so that your charmer cannot long be hid. Besides, a little touch of disappointment at first is excellent as a tonic. If all had passed off smoothly, you might have gone home to tea, and found out that Miranda was engaged.

to a pious young grocer next door ; or that her dear papa was a Baptist minister of strong anti-episcopal views, who hated the doctor and all his household as the Scarlet Lady, and would have nothing to do with a Popish son-in-law."

"I am certain," says Norton rather fiercely, "quite certain that her name is not Miranda, and that she is miles and miles away above any grocer, however pious, and that her father is a gentleman by birth and education, though we never mentioned his name."

"Mentioned *papa's* name ? Well, no ; I should think *not*, on the first day's acquaintance. Hardly so fast as all that. All in good time, my dear youth. Perhaps, next Gala-day ; it's only a year off."

"You cannot for a moment suppose," says a quiet voice in the corner, "that Mr. Norton will be content to live for twelve long months in utter darkness and despair?"

“No, no, my dear; long before that day comes, he will have passed through half-a-dozen of such agonizing experiences,

‘From Donna Julia, Haidee, Helen, Rose
Down to plain, simple, Saxon Mary Anne.’

He will have died more than once of sheer despair, and revived under a new form of madness in the course of the following week. But, was she really so very lovely, O inflammable youth?”

“If you are going to bully me,” replied Norton, smiling in spite of himself, “I shall be off at once. Two to one is rather unfair odds, against one poor—”

“Harmless young Juan,” interrupts Gresley. “But you shall not be sent away hopeless. If you really want to know the lovely charmer’s name, I—”

“You don’t mean to say that you have known her name all this time?” cried out Norton, “and have kept me here in this

shameful way when a single word from you would have cleared up the whole mystery?"

"My dear Norton, allow me to give you one word of advice. Never interrupt your elders, especially in the middle of a sentence, and more especially when dealing with such a delicate matter as a lady's name; and that lady's name the name of all names. It's rude to interrupt an elderly gentleman like me; in his own house, too, and while smoking that gentleman's cigars. But I make allowances for you under the peculiar circumstances of the case, and now go on to say with infinite regret that I cannot help you, but I know who *can*."

"Good night, Mrs. Gresley," says Norton, getting up in a great hurry, "your husband is unusually perverse to-night; I had better leave him to his books, and hope that he will soon come to a more sociable frame of mind."

“Good night,” replied Gresley himself, “good night, O irascible youth,—and, as I was going on to say, if you really wish to find out the adorable, incomparable, maiden’s name, go down to old Rookstone and make friends with him.”

“What on earth can old Rookstone have to do with the business?”

“Go you down, and try him. He knows everything and everybody in Tregartha; and, if you can but get him into a good humour, will help you if anybody can. Be sure and listen to him if he talks about Virgil; or his favourite hero, the distressingly pious ‘Æneas.’”

And so the friends parted.

As Norton strolled back to the old grey school on the hill, he pondered on the advice just given to him, but could see no way to adopt it.

“It’s all very well,” he thought to himself, “to say go and call upon old Rookstone. I

never spoke to him but once, and then as a total stranger; and even if I did call, how could I ever ask him who the lady with the hazel eyes is?"

Having thus positively settled it that calling at the lawyer's was utterly and entirely impossible, he forthwith began to argue with himself as to the best hour for paying him a visit on the next day; and the best way of asking that very question which he had just before decided could not be asked.

The whole matter was duly recorded in his journal, June 13th, 18—, the final entry on which date runs thus: "In some way or other, old Rookstone must be got at. What a fool I was not to make Gresley go down with me himself! But, perhaps, after all, she doesn't care a straw about the dance and has forgotten all about it."

CHAPTER IX.

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.

TREGARTHA was one of those small, quiet, queer, old-fashioned country places, where what happens to one person is the business of everybody else. There were certain middle-aged, staid married people, whose children had gone out into the world, and were making homes for themselves; certain little bustling shopkeepers in High Street and Cross Street, who had business only enough to fill their hands on Wednesdays—market day—as well as a long array of unmarried females, who simply were troubled

with little or no business at all of their own to look after ; and all these alike gave some of their best time and attention to the settlement of other people's affairs. And the odd thing was, that however badly they seemed to manage their own special businesses, they had no difficulty whatever in managing those of their neighbours. They knew instinctively what ought to be done and said in every conceivable case ; and even if it were an inconceivable one, their genius and goodness of heart were always equal to the occasion.

If Mrs. Edward Pendarves, the doctor's wife, in the square red-brick house by the church, brought him a present of twins when he only expected his household to be increased by a single unit, old Miss Emily Seagrave, who lived two doors from the grammar school, and had rented her little garden and cottage for the last thirty years, knew perfectly well that under all circum-

stances no such increase to the next census paper ought to have been made, or would have been made, had Mrs. E. P.'s views of Providence accorded with her own.

If they had a dinner party at Polruin's (he was Mayor of Tregartha at the time, and belonged to one of the old county families), among all the people who ought to have been invited and were not, to say nothing of those who never expected to be invited, and protested that they didn't care a rush for dinner-parties or for Mr. Polruin's society, it was known the next day why the dinner had been given; why Rookstone was not invited, what it cost to get the fish over by carrier from Pendleton; and how frightfully young Sarah Greenfinch, the vicar's daughter—that's the one with very little hair—flirted the whole evening with Dick Trevanion, one of the doctor's private pupils.

Of course, therefore, Harry Norton's

affairs had long ago been canvassed, discussed, and rediscussed at many a tea-table in Tregartha. It was pretty well known by this time that his father, who was dead, after long service in the navy, had been an old friend of Dr. Arlington's; that Harry had lived with a widowed aunt and mother somewhere in Dorsetshire; and that these two were now entirely dependent on the young man's salary for a livelihood; that he was good to them on the whole, but had learned to smoke cigars—an extravagant, idle, habit in which Mr. Gresley encouraged him.

At Miss Betsy Tresidder's tea-party, a week or so after the gala, it was only natural, therefore, to find that his little adventure with the lady in black was all well known, and became a fruitful and happy theme for much discourse. The tea was potent, the afternoon warm, the windows which overlooked the bowling-green were open; and all these circum-

stances combined to keep up an uninterrupted flow of animated small-talk among the five maiden ladies who sat round the hospitable table. It ebbed and flowed in desultory fashion, which a single wave will suffice to illustrate, without individualising the speakers. The genus of the whole group was one, the varieties of species were slight.

“He danced with her the whole day, my dear, until 6 P.M., though the others changed partners more than once, and then saw her home.”

“Strange that nobody seems to know who she is, or where they came from; but Mrs. Rookstone tells me that they are lodging in one of the little houses—”

“No, my dear, not lodging, they have taken, so I hear on good authority, one of the little villas beyond the church, built by old Roger Kanway, the music-master. They have their groceries at my own shop—Garrett’s, and so I ought to know.”

"A mother and daughter, I believe, named Hastings?"

"No, 'my dear, *not* Hastings, but Harwood. I happened just to look at the address of the parcel on Garrett's counter. In fact, I took it up in mistake for my own, which I would not trouble Garrett to send, being such a very small order this week; so that it's clear they are not very stylish or wealthy people, to have such a small parcel for four people—no bigger than mine."

"But you said *two* just now, dear."

"Yes, but I heard Garrett tell his shopman to include both the servants' tea and sugar in the same parcel."

* * * * *

"Rookstone, it seems, knows something about them, as he introduced young Norton to the daughter on gala-day."

"My dear, that does not follow at all; it is his special business on that day. His house is the only one on the green, where

they all meet; and as he knows everybody in the town, it was agreed two years ago, when they had such a wrangle over the stewardship, to make him a perpetual M.C. If a stranger wants a partner, Rookstone must find one for him, after seeing his card; so, at least, it used to be in my old dancing days."

"And that," mischievously adds a certain spinster, "that, my dear Selina, is more than two years ago."

Not a very grammatical sentence, but one which was clearly understood and relished, as it roused a hearty laugh. So small an amount of facetiousness sufficed to keep due merriment alive in that friendly circle, and in others of a kindred nature which flourished on either side of High Street, that being the more aristocratic section of the town.

As for Norton himself, in the various shops of the town he was as freely discussed

as if he had come down to Tregartha for the one especial purpose of furnishing a theme for debate.

But wherever he went in the town, whether in parlour or shop, he was well received; the fact of his being a master in the grammar school was taken as a sort of guarantee for character and conduct, in such high respect was the doctor held, and so well disposed were the townspeople towards all his household.

But, although Harry Norton heard nothing but good of himself in such quarters, and was heartily welcomed as a customer if he bought but a stick of sealing-wax or a bundle of envelopes, and often treated like an old acquaintance or a friend, not a scrap of tidings could he gather about the unknown lady of gala-day. Again and again had he screwed his courage up to the sticking place, and determined without delay to call on Rookstone; but when he got as far as the

bowling-green his courage always failed him. Then he had turned into Gossetts's cigar shop, where he was now well known, and inquired of the gossiping owner for full information as to the history and meaning of the holiday—with its garlands of flowers in the windows, and quaint dance through the streets; and so gradually worked his way round to the presence of strangers on the occasion. So far, his guide went freely with him, and was as loquacious as could be wished, but not an inch further could he be induced to stir.

“I really can't say, sir, whether a party that is a stranger, and dances with another party, generally knows that party if they happens to meet again. You see, sir, it's very seldom, indeed, that strangers do come here on gala-day to do more than see the dancing; but the steward can help them to a partner if they likes; and there's mostly one to be had, because of the young gents

up to the School ; and strangers is mostly gone the next day."

"Did you happen to notice if there were many strangers here the other day?" inquires Norton in his most off-hand fashion.

"Not to my knowledge ; but, you see, sir, I have my shop to look after, and I could only be down to the Green by 'fliffs and jakes,' as they say."

"I thought all the shops were closed on gala-day ?"

"So they are, as a general rule ; but you young gents will have cigars, and I should be very sorry for any friend of mine to smoke any of the poor British stuff that comes out of Barber Terlizzick's shop. But, bless you, sir, if so be you care to know any more of the gala-day, go ask old Rookstone himself ; he's lived there on that Green forty years or more, man and boy, and is up to every move."

"I don't know Mr. Rookstone."

“There’s no call to care about that, sir. There he is a walking round the Green now, and he’ll take it quite a marcy if anybody from the grammar school has a question to put to him.”

Then Norton fairly took heart of grace, walked boldly across the road down to the Green, and came face to face with the old lawyer just outside his own door.

Mr. Rookstone was a very ugly man; the ugliest, so Norton thought, that he had ever set eyes on. He had no forehead to speak of, and his short stivery hair of sandy grey grew down over what little there was; his eyes were of much the same hue as his hair, and, being small and wide apart, were shaded by eyebrows that grew in irregular tufts along the slope. But he smiled graciously at the youth, as he lifted his hat, and paved the way for conversation by remarking that it was very hot. In two minutes they were in full chat, which in

due course of time wandered round under Norton's management to the topic of the gala-day, at which he had been all along aiming.

"I have to thank you for a partner," says Norton at last, with his heart in his mouth.

"And a very pleasant one she looked, Mr. Norton; not that I know much about her, but that her name is Hastings, and that her mother called at my office a few days ago on a little business matter; and that just reminds me there is a letter on my desk at this moment which my clerk ought to have posted—the idle dog!—before he left, and will now be barely in time—"

"I am going up the hill," interrupts Juan, "and will post it at once without fail, if you will trust it to me."

"Trust it! of course I will, with many thanks. The letter is important, and Mrs. Hastings ought to have it at once. Step into my office with me."

“Wouldn't it be better to deliver it at once?” says Norton, “or it may possibly not reach the lady until to-morrow? It will not be five minutes out of my way home,” he adds, looking at the address, “and I am at leisure till eight o'clock.”

“I really don't like to trouble you.”

“No trouble whatever. I will call and leave it on my way up the hill. Good night, Mr. Rookstone.” And so they parted.

After all his doubts and fears, planning and contriving, here was the whole mystery cleared up. He not only now knew who she was and where she lived, but was going to her house, and might possibly see her again. And all accomplished without a particle of difficulty; no cross-questioning or beating about the bush. By Jove! old Rookstone was not half so ugly as he looked; and as for being surly, nothing could have been more good-natured, in spite

of all the nonsense he talked about Virgil. Thus ran Norton's thoughts as he walked quickly up the hill past the church.

The only question now was as to the precious letter. Should he simply leave it at the door, or ask for Mrs. Hastings, and deliver it into her hands as a document of importance?

The latter was clearly a bold stroke, but the chance might never occur again, and he resolved to avail himself of it.

He therefore rang loudly at the gate, and his summons was presently answered by a servant, who informed him to his dismay that her mistress was not at home.

One more chance remained. "Is Miss Hastings at home?"

"Yes, Miss Hastings is at home. Who shall I say, sir, wants to see her?"

"Please say that I have a letter of importance from Mr. Rookstone, that I was to

give into her own hands. My name is Norton."

"Miss Mary is in the garden, sir; I will call her."

Presently he was shown into a small drawing-room, plainly but daintily furnished, and showing in many ways traces of womanly taste and refinement; a saucer full of pale green moss and violets, books here and there, that were clearly out for use, a bouquet of flowers on the open piano, and, above all, that undefinable air of simplicity and fitness of arrangement throughout the room, which mere abundance and costliness of ornament never ensure. It was a lady's room. Norton had barely time to notice this, and to glance through an open window at the western sky, where the light was dying slowly out amidst the amber clouds, when a light step entered the room, and turning quickly round he found himself face to face with his partner of the gala-day.

Bowing timidly, she quietly gave him her hand, without a tinge of affectation or reserve, though a ray of pleasure shone out from her brown eyes, which said as plainly as possible, "I am amazed to see you here, Mr. Norton, but just a wee bit glad."

Her eyes seemed to light up all her face, and as she sat by the open window, in the last faint radiance of the twilight, her white dress and hair were tinged with a gleam so soft and pure in its splendour as to make her look

"Just like an angel newly drest
In all the glory of the west."

So, at least, thought Norton, as he stood looking at the charming picture.

For a moment neither spoke, and the pause was getting to be awkward, when he suddenly recollected that he had not yet said a word as to the cause of his visit.

This was soon and easily told, and then the young lady calmly uttered a monstrous

fib, as young ladies will do sometimes when sorely tempted.

“I am sorry, Mr. Norton, that mamma is out.”

To which the gentleman responded with another fib of equal dimensions. “So am I, indeed,” he said, “for I promised Mr. Rookstone to deliver the letter into her hands.” And then, growing bold at having found a voice, he added by way of atonement for his sins, “And yet I am more glad than sorry,—a hundred times more glad,—for ever since that delightful gala-day I have been longing to know how you bore all your fatigues.”

After all his carefully compiled speeches, what a horrible prosy hash he had made of it! And yet how lightly and cleverly she lifted him out of all the prosiness; her very words were like music to him.

“It was too bright and full of pleasure to fatigue one,” she replied; “though I am

afraid you had rather a stupid partner. The dance was altogether new to me, and the music most peculiar ; so strange and so peculiar that they will not be easily or soon forgotten. And with me, you know, pain and trouble die out more quickly than joy. A real pleasure, too, leaves behind it a gleam of brightness that one can keep and treasure, like the memory of a strain of tender music. Don't you think so ? ”

Norton was gazing on the speaker with fixed eyes, and drinking in every word ; but her sudden animation, and the few glowing words which sprang from it were so unexpected, that, for a moment, he had not a word to say for himself.

“ I beg your pardon,” he stammered out at last, “ it was the brightest, most perfect, day I have ever known ; and now, you see, with a poet's wand you have made it brighter than before. It came so unexpectedly, and flashed by so swiftly, and

now wakens up once more, when I had given up all hope of catching a glimpse of it again. What a pity that gala-day only comes once a year! It's a terribly long time to wait, isn't it?"

"If gala-days were as common as Mondays," she replied gaily, "they would not seem half as bright. I am content to wait."

"You look at things like a philosopher, Miss Hastings, and perhaps such days are common to you. To *me* it was the day of my life."

"Perhaps," said the young girl with a happy smile, "I have seen more of life than you have—more of the rough water, I mean, and that has taught me to make the most of the smooth, though the future may perhaps have as good things in store for us as the past."

"What a happy creed," replied Norton; "but I assure you I have been in rough

water, too, before I got into this quiet haven."

At this moment a loud ring at the gate startled the two philosophers, and put an end to their pleasant dreaming. Both clearly thought that the mistress of the house had returned, though neither uttered a word as to their fears.

But both started from their seats, and Norton putting on a grave business air tried to look unconcerned as he demurely said, "Good-bye, Miss Hastings, I hope that I have not entirely upset your evening's work. It has been such a pleasure to me to see you again, that saying 'good-bye' seems a dreary word."

"Not at all," she answered cheerily; "'good-bye' only means that we shall meet again. One never knows how things may happen; at all events, *that* day was altogether a pleasant one, and one can't lose the enjoyment of it."

And so they shook hands once more. Mrs. Hastings had not yet returned, and the servant unlocked the gate for him as quietly as she had let him in ten minutes before; little dreaming that one act in the drama of life had been actually played out for her young mistress, in which Mr. Norton was the vital part.

As for him, he went down the hill that night in a state of intense happiness, such as had never before been his. It was all like a bright and golden dream. The old grey church on the hill, the twilight, darkening, sky, with its first few faint stars, the murmur of the little river in the valley below, as it wound its way down to the lake among the hills; the scattered lights of the town, the quiet streets, and the kindly "Good night" of a chance passer-by, —all seemed to be clothed in a special beauty for him. And when he got back to his lonely room, he set to work at his

usual books with double energy ; but his thoughts, in spite of himself, wandered back to the little house in the garden, and those happy moments he had spent with Mary Hastings. It was the sweetest and daintiest name he had ever heard. It was impossible to do any work that night ; impossible, in fact, to do anything but fill a long page of his journal with a record of all that had happened.

One thing was clear now beyond a doubt. His heart was hers for ever ; it seemed to him that he had known her all his life ; and dear to him as his mother and sister's love had been, and dear to him as the word "Home" had ever seemed, here was a new passion and a new love, before which all the other seemed pale and dead ; a new motive for hope and work, that he might some day win a name and a place not unworthy of being shared with her.

But it was a secret as yet that he could

not breathe even to his mother, and 'sacred even from his friend Gresley. Old Rookstone was the most affable and admirable of lawyers, and Gossett was a brick; his cigars were quite unrivalled, let Trevanion say what he would about their never having paid duty.

CHAPTER X.

THE VOICE BY THE SEA.

THE months now went gaily by. Norton began to understand his work more thoroughly, to gain the confidence and respect of the boys under his care, as well as that of the doctor. His home-letters grew suddenly, and to his mother unaccountably, brighter and more cheerful. His friendship with the Gresleys was still as great as ever and as pleasant, but Norton began to find a new pleasure in lonely walks down the valley by the Carriston Lake, which stretched from the foot of the town, in winding and irre-

gular shape, to within a quarter of a mile of the sea. All saints' days were holidays at the school, and on these he would go away with his fishing-rod for the whole day, with no companion but a volume of poetry, or of Lamb's 'Essays and Letters,' which, thanks to Gresley's guidance, was one of his special favourites.

The little river Carr fell into the lake just below the town, and was famous for a breed of salmon trout of peculiar strength and beauty, as well as size; an excellence which they owed not to the stream itself, for it was at times full of poisonous mundie water, but to the fact that once every year during the rains of winter or early spring, the lake gradually rose far above its usual level, and flooded the lower part of the Town. As the lake had no outlet, the only remedy was to cut through the bar of fine sand which divided it from the sea, and allow the superfluous waters to escape.

This they did very gradually at first; but in the course of a day, or even at times in a few hours, the channel gradually widened, and the black waters of the lake rushed down to meet the blue waves of the Atlantic with a volume and mighty strength that carried all before them.

The cutting of the bar was considered one of the events of the year; and visitors to the town were considered lucky who were fortunate enough to be there in time to witness it.

After a day or two the lake sank back to its old, due, level; but, unless a strong southerly wind set in from the sea, the channel remained open—generally long enough to admit a good body of salt water from the mighty breakers which thundered all along that coast. This influx of sea water gave vitality to the whole lake, and a ruddy strength and colour to the fish in it, which made them greatly prized by anglers.

The coast on the eastern side of the lake gradually rose above the sea until it towered up into high rocky cliffs, at the foot of which nestled several small fishing-villages, planted here and there in lonely, picturesque, nooks, which Norton soon learned to explore; and there he often found employment both for his fishing-rod and pencil.

Of these expeditions his home-letters contained many brief sketches; and to one especially he seems to have owed a deep impression, of which his journal contains many careful records.

He had set out on one calm, sultry, day in September for some favourite haunt near "The Bar," and after spending many hours there in fishing and reading, wandered away, towards evening, along the eastern cliff. The fish had not risen well, and he had packed up his rod, and determined to extend his homeward walk to Pentire, a little village perched halfway down the cliff, to which

a winding path led up from the shore. He soon reached the top of the cliff below which it lay ; and was looking down from the rocky height across the wide expanse of sea that stretched away to the edge of the horizon, unruffled by the faintest breeze, and chequered only by the shadows of a few patches of misty cloud now slowly sinking down the western sky. It still wanted an hour or two of sunset ; and a sense of profound peace seemed to fill sea and sky, and to brood over the lonely cliffs.

Far below, across the smooth, grey, sand, he could just discern a faint white line of creamy foam, now stealing slowly in and now receding ; at the edge of which some snow-white gulls and sandpipers were wandering to and fro in search of supper ; but not a sound of any kind reached his ear.

But suddenly, in the midst of the silence, there came floating up the cliff side the sound

of many voices, and the words of the well-known west-country hymn.

“ O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come ;
Our shelter mid the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home.”

It was a wild, strange, sound, and as it echoed up the sides of the cliff, Norton could clearly distinguish the voices of men and women, and, as he fancied, even of little children, blending together in sweet and solemn harmony ; but of the singers themselves he could distinguish no trace. But, as there was a path from below to the village, so there was a much steeper, rougher, pathway from the cliff to Pentire ; and along this he now quickly descended. It zigzagged down the face of the descent for nearly half a mile with many a sudden twist, and all at once brought him to a little open space of smooth green sward, close to which the shaft of a

mine had been sunk, the workings of which stretched out far under the sand below, and at high water under the sea itself.

The edges of the sward were fringed with scattered furze bushes, and huge blocks of rough stone that looked like granite; and behind one of these Norton now halted and watched the whole scene. In the centre of the open space, on one of the blocks of granite, stood a tall man with a thin, sallow, face,—bareheaded, and with rather long black hair which reached almost to his shoulders. He was leading the singing in a shrill, melancholy, voice; and round him in scattered groups stood some twenty or thirty men, women, and children from the neighbouring hamlet. Most of the men were bareheaded, and some had short pipes in their mouths; a few of the women had children in their arms, and most of them were busy knitting, as they sang.

Their first hymn was now over; a prayer

had been offered up by the man in the centre, before Norton reached them; and now the second hymn was just closing, in which the voices seemed louder and more excited than in the first. Then all eyes turned upon the black-haired man in the centre of the crowd, and after a moment or two of silent thought, he burst out into a wild and passionate harangue of which the unseen listener afterwards found it most difficult to make any adequate record. Without any text or prefatory words, as it seemed to Norton, he at once dashed into a vehement description of Sin; its devilish nature; its cursed and poisonous fruit in this life; its certain wages in the world to come. Then, he flew off at a tangent to some awful shipwreck on that iron-bound coast, in which some scores of "sinners had," he said, "been sucked down into hell, hurried and unready, without time to draw breath or to cry for mercy." The captain, it was

reported, had been drunk all through the fatal night; the pilot three sheets in the wind; "and the devil holding the bottle and glass," urged the preacher. "Was it any wonder that a side door down into the pit was there and then open nigh and '*fitty*,' as you men say when your boat comes bowling in over the great waves, and by a foot's breadth just skims by the reef at the cove's mouth, and brings you in safe and sound upon the beach? O drink, drink, drink,—the cursed and devilish poison that eats into the brains and muscles of some of the bravest of you; and leads to foul words and cruel works; to things of lust and shame and death; and makes a coward and a tyrant out of a good father, and turns his son into a godless Sabbath-breaker, and brawler, or an empty idler. And which is the Devil's favourite child? It's hard to say. Don't you comfort yourselves, you young men who are loafing about all Sunday forenoon, with short pipes

in your mouths, thinking, mebbe, you're a doing no harm, because you an't breaking the law or the Ten Commandments. What is there that you put your heart into? That's what I want to know. Is it fishing, or mending your nets, or curing the fish,* or digging your taties, or getting in your bit o' barley? What is there that ye do mightily before God, as if ye knowed He was looking on; as if He set it, and marked it out, and set you to do it, because you were the very man fit for it, with just hands and wits enough for it, and no more? Ye haven't the face to deny Him, but ye haven't the courage to own Him; not cowards enough to turn your backs upon Him, and not grace enough to go boldly over to His side, and take His work, and accept His wages! Luke-warm; lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, neither good nor bad, neither hoping for

*The pilchard, taken in vast quantities all along this coast.

heaven nor caring for hell. How is it to end with you? Shall ye earn no wages, and get no pay? The devil, my friends, takes care of all such as these; and by-and-by he finds place and work for them when a good ship goes ashore, and breaks up upon the beach; among them that hang out false lights, and plunder the dead; that help to run cargoes and cheat the revenue; that spend half their time between beershop and beershop; and go about from Dan to Beersheba, making up strikes in field and market, or setting fire to hayricks; and they learn to do his work *in time*, and *in time* to like the doing of it, and he pays their wages to a penny without fail; and, if there's a hotter place than the flame of despair, it's there they are surely bound to, for ever and for ever."

This was but a single paragraph out of a long and rapid torrent of fiery invective which the preacher poured upon his group of hearers, and to which they at all events

responded by silent and wrapped attention to the very last, when he once more adjured "by the love of Christ to be in earnest and live like men." But the whole discourse struck Norton with utter and entire amazement. He had never in his life before heard anything like it. The quiet platitudes of a shallow evangelical curate at Dormouth, varied by an occasional rambling exhortation from the vicar on the perils of Romanism,—an old man who for want of teeth could not speak plainly, and for lack of *vows* could neither explain nor reason,—was his only experience in the matter of sermons. They had not even faintly affected him, more than luke-warm water affects a slab of cold marble over which it is poured. The ornate, silken, smooth philosophizings of the doctor at Tregartha on Sunday evenings had touched him still less.

But this strange, wild eyed, sallow man on the cliff side, with his strange, unbroken

flow of fiery, living, words, pierced him through and through. When, at last, the speaker ceased, and one by one the fishermen and their wives dropped away, by one path and another in the deepening twilight, Norton stood as it were petrified to the spot, where he had stood and listened behind the block of granite. For a moment or two he never stirred, but stood watching the preacher, wondering who he was and where he was going that night.

Should he meet, or try to avoid, him?

But this was a question which there was no need to debate, much less attempt to settle; for the stranger solved it by coming straight to his hiding-place behind the stone.

Both started as they came face to face in the gloom; the younger man as if detected in some unworthy position as a spy, and the elder in sheer surprise.

“Good evening, friend,” he said in a

pleasant, hearty, voice, quite free from the twang of the preacher, "you made me start, for I had no notion that a creature was near me but the poor souls from Pentire, to whom I say a word now and then. Which way does your road lie?"

"My road lies to Tregartha if I can but find it, and keep it when found," replied Norton."

"You did well, young man, to add those last words—*keep it when found*. Millions now on their way on the broad road to perdition once trod the narrow path, but they never kept to it. My road, too, lies to Tregartha, and I know it well, so that we may safely journey together. But why did you start, to see me?"

"Because," replied Norton, hesitating for a moment, "I was debating in my own mind whether I should meet you, or get out of your way."

"You could not have avoided me if you

would," answered his companion; "a higher power than yours has settled it for you, as you see."

"That, sir, is just what I do *not* see. If, instead of hesitating, I had lain down among the furze, you would have passed me by, and I should have chosen my own road."

"But," replied the stranger, "you did hesitate, and so here you are with me for a companion."

"Still, I could now leave you if I chose on the brow of the cliff, and hunt out my own road."

"True, and very likely break your neck among the crags on such a night as this. A storm is even now blowing up, and there is no moon. We shall make the journey together, I am convinced."

"And is your bare conviction as to any matter a proof of its being right or true?" urged Norton, bent it seemed on making his guide speak out.

“Such a conviction as I now have is not so much mine, as in me, young man. I neither formed it nor put it there.”

“Then, your free-will is gone?”

“Not so. My free-will is clear enough. But I know when to obey and when to disobey. Otherwise, the conviction is a mere whim.”

But, at this point, the storm of which the stranger had spoken began to show itself in real earnest. The darkness, thick enough before, suddenly and strangely deepened; a hollow wind swept with weary moanings over the sea, the heaven grew black with clouds, and the first great drops of the tempest overtook them where not a scrap of shelter was within reach.

“Step carefully, young sir,” said the elder of the two, “and keep close to me. I know the path well, having traversed it at all hours and in most seasons, but one awkward stumble may send you headlong down the cliff.”

For ten minutes the travellers made their way slowly and painfully up the rough pathways, and at length, half-drenched with rain, and blind with the fury of the storm, they reached the edge of the cliff.

“Here we are once more,” exclaimed the preacher, “once more on *terrá firmá*, and if all be well, in five minutes we shall be able to journey side by side. But be wary still, for there are old shafts and half-forgotten quarry-pits scattered about this bit of heath, into which it is easier to fall than to get out again.”

For half a mile or so Norton followed his guide in silence through the darkness, but at the end of that time they had reached a narrow winding lane, which, though darker than the open country, allowed them to walk abreast, and soon brought them into a good road. Then the talk began again.

“You won’t be offended,” said the preacher, “if I ask why you thought of

avoiding me?" in a soft, kindly, voice that contrasted strangely enough with his recent fiery utterance.

"I hardly know," replied Norton, shrinking a little at having his thoughts thus laid bare.

"Pardon me," said the stranger; "that answer is hardly fit for one who but half an hour ago was reasoning about exact motives and free-will. Did any of my words sting you, as you listened behind the heap of granite?"

"A chance word will sting at times."

"I doubt whether there are such things going as chance words. Mine were certainly not chance ones. You know where it is written, 'By thy words thou shalt be justified or condemned?'"

"Yes; and I know too," replied Norton, "that it is said, 'Of every idle word shall men give account.'"

"Just so, young man; but that goes.

rather on my side of the hedge than yours. Men may speak in haste, without thought, but not without cause, and not by chance. Words come out of thoughts—not without seed. If a man speaks in haste, thoughtlessly, like every other fool he must pay for his folly, and give account some day. But, if I read you rightly, you are not one of these. If a word of mine touched you, that was its message, and mine the mouth to carry it. Every bullet has its billet. It hit you too hard, perhaps, for you to like it, and so you thought of getting out of the speaker's way?"

"Perhaps," replied Norton, who did not relish the process of being turned inside out,—“perhaps it was so, if you like to say so.”

“But, my friend, my liking has nothing to do with it. What am I but a poor, blind, worm like yourself? The message never came from me, or it wouldn't have

got through your skin. Never be ashamed of being hit in a fair fight. You heard me pouring out sharp things upon the poor souls at Pentire, and all at once an arrow turned aside and pierced your heart. It came not from me, Jack Borlase—once a godless reprobate, who spent his substance in riotous living and on harlots, and fed on husks, till, starving and famished, the Father had pity on him and brought him home, once more—but from the living God himself, whose very sharpest arrow is dipped in love—love stronger, deeper, than death.”

And then he added in a yet lower, softer voice,

“You will not, dare not,—*cannot* avoid Him !”

“I have no wish to avoid Him,” answered his companion, thus terribly adjured. “And, as *you* say, I cannot avoid Him, even if I would.”

“But you dislike *me*, though I did but

draw the bow that was put into my hands? The shaft went home, and the wound is still sore. The deeper, the better. He that made the wound can heal it; only He,—both can and will.”

“I have not said as yet,” replied Norton, “that I *was* wounded; and why—why—”

“Speak out, dear friend, speak out, freely, fully; why should *I* meddle with another man’s heart, you think—what concern is it of mine? It is my work, simply because God has given it to me to do. To speak what He bids me, neither more nor less; in season or out of season. And woe is me, if I am silent. Was the wound so deep that you care not to show it, *even to a friend?*”

“You have taught me to-night,” said Norton, touched by the loving tone of his last words, “two things, not only that I never knew, but scarcely ever heard of, before—the meaning of ‘sin,’ and of being

‘lukewarm.’ They came upon me like a flash of light—light such as I can never forget.”

“Never is a long way beyond to-morrow. But, bless God, if it shines in you for days, or months, or years. Cherish it, keep the flame alive, that it may burn for ever—the lamp of conscience bright with living oil.”

Then there fell a silence on the two, as they tramped on in the darkness, which neither seemed willing to break, though Tregartha was still a mile away. But all at once, to Norton’s utter amazement, his companion began to chat again in the most cheerful, lively, fashion about the little town and all its old-fashioned, quaint customs, and the sayings and doings of the whole country side. He began with the Gala-day, its being an old pagan feast in honour of Flora; the fetching home of the May; the wishing well at the head of Carriston Lake; the Gipsy folks who told

fortunes hard by it; the fairy who haunted it; and then rambled off into stories of famous wrecks on The Bar, and wreckers from Cleavehole and Pentire; of mines and miners; of the Four Cornish Minerals, Fish, Tin, Copper, and Teaats;* and finally a word or two about the old Grammar School, and the doctor himself.

By this time they had fairly reached the town, and were in the midst of the High Street, when the stranger suddenly shook Norton by the hand, turned down a narrow bye street, and with a single word, was gone.

“Good-bye, my friend, we shall meet again.”

“The sooner, the better,” was the answer. More than this, there was no time to utter.

Weary and excited by his strange adven-

* Potatoes. “The Four Cornish Minerals” was a well-known toast, in the old West Country.

ture, Norton at last sought his room, and after a hearty supper worked hard at his journal for an hour. It was a day that he, indeed, never forgot.

CHAPTER XI.

WAKING UP.

THERE are many ways in which men and women wake up to the realities of life and work. Some are roused by the touch of sudden sorrow and pain, or the terror of misfortune; by unexpected blessing, or the rapture of success; some by the shadow of dark clouds, and others by the brightness of light. But not seldom as in the present case (for heroes and heroines are, after all, but mortal), a mere spark of true love, or of deep conviction, springs up into life within a man, and kindles his whole being. And

in both these ways, fresh life had come to Norton.

He had suddenly met with a young and fair girl who, almost at first sight, had won his heart; whom, as he thought, he already loved passionately, and who, he was convinced, though not a word of love had been spoken on either side, truly returned his passion. He thought that he read this in her quiet eyes and shy looks; in the tremor and earnestness of her words; in the music of her voice; among the ribbons in her hair; by her very walk and touch. She loved the same books and colours that he admired, the lights and shadows that pleased him pleased her, the same sort of poetry and music were favourites of both; and yet she was charmingly, whimsically, different from him in a score of ways, and had proved herself to be in the right too with such feminine and winning logic as baffled his utmost efforts at reply; and all this he

fancied that he had found out in a single day, and in that brief and happy ten minutes that afterwards came as a postscript to the epistle in chief.

Then, suddenly, after this touch of new life, had come that strange voice from the sea. Jack Borlase had shown to him in one short hour that his religion up to this time had been little more than a thing of outside phrases, feeling, and sentiment. The teaching of home, his sisters and his mother, had up to this time helped to save him from the grosser temptations of life, and there were many small sins and meannesses that he could no more have committed than he could have worn patches or a wig, or taken to cheating at cards. But this man had brought God face to face with him ; and, young as he was, had forced him to think, and to believe that religion, to be of any service or value at all, must be the very breath of a man's life and rule his daily words and actions.

Both convictions—of Love and Duty—had been sudden and sharp, and both seemed to have cut deeply into his heart, and thus were likely to abide there. Love and Duty are both steps towards unselfishness: the former teaching that there is some one else besides self to live for in the world; the other, that there is yet one supreme tribunal to which man's life as a whole—under all conditions—must be referred.

The result of this was that Norton insensibly began to live less for himself and more for other people, and thus gained both strength and happiness. He suddenly found out some good qualities in fellows before counted as utterly black sheep. His work in class went on as if oil had been secretly put to all the rusty wheels; former wounds seemed all healed up, and even the Lobster himself appeared to have got into a new shell. The small jealousies and petty scandals of the town were now as transparent

and amusing to him as they had always been to Gresley, and never brought a moment's annoyance, even if his own name was mixed up in them.

"My dear fellow," said his old friend, "these drones and even blue-bottles of Tregartha must exist, though they do not mind supping on their own relations, whether dead or living. So, pray don't you expect to escape. Thank God, too, there are a few spiders among them here and there in the holes and corners, who sally out now and then, and take a quiet fat prey among the Philistines, and so the enemy is kept within bounds."

Meanwhile time, to Norton, passed pleasantly and swiftly away. Summer had ripened into autumn, and golden October had slowly faded into the short dull days of winter; but though he had never before been so far and long from home, yet he determined to defer his holiday until the next year,

working hard meanwhile under his friend Gresley's direction, and living on from day to day in patient hope of somewhere or somehow once more catching a glimpse of his beloved M. H. But hitherto he had hoped in vain. For calling again at the house he could *now* invent no possible excuse that would hold water. He had left it alone too long after his first visit. He passed the well-known Rose Cottage scores of times, but neither there, nor in the streets, nor at church, was a glimpse to be seen of the face that to him was the sweetest of all faces.

And yet she had said, "Good-bye only means meeting again!" Then came some terrible days of doubt—doubt which seemed to be leading nowhere but to despair. But still Norton kept his secret. Not a word of it had been committed to his home-letters, not a hint given to Gresley. Could she ever have really cared for him to let all these weary months go by, and yet make no sign?

This was the question which continually haunted him, to which he could find no sufficient or even tolerable answer. One day he was all alive in the belief of her unchangeable constancy; the next, dying for want of a single hope. In sheer desperation therefore he at last turned to his old friend Gresley, and made a clean breast of it; and the chaffing he thereupon got was perhaps the best tonic he could have taken, though bitter to the palate, as all tonics should be.

They were walking one evening by the side of Carriston Lake when a dose was thus administered.

“Well, young Norton,” began Gresley after hearing his story, “I have been wondering for a good many weeks past why you seemed to be getting more and more inclined for the ‘dismals,’ with that long face of yours and a look of melancholy resignation that seemed always saying,

‘I have a silent sorrow here.’

And so you're in love, are you? One time in a fever, and the next freezing; all raptures to-day and despair to-morrow. But, my Juan, seriously I cannot see what you have to complain of?"

"To complain of!" replies Norton, "why the whole thing has come to an end. I cannot even find out that she is in the town; nobody has seen her, nobody heard of her."

"Whose word have you got for that? 'Nobody' may be ubiquitous enough, but he is not everywhere. A good many things happen of which he knows nothing; a good many people go about their business that he never hears of. Did you expect your charming inamorata to call on you at the grammar school? or to write and say, 'Here I am, Mr. Norton, waiting to be wooed, why dont you come?'"

What could poor Norton say in reply to such queries as these, poured upon him in fast and furious fun? He could only protest

that he never expected any such impossibilities.

“What then do you expect?” says Gresley. “You open your mouth wide, and then fall into lamentations because the plum won’t drop into it. You see a pretty girl with red hair,—I beg your pardon, I should have said delicious hazel eyes,—dance for several hours with her up-hill and down-hill, give her back to mamma, and then fancy that the whole business is done. Nonsense, my dear fellow, the campaign has but just begun; you have got through the prologue, and the curtain is up, but it’s a good way yet to ‘*Bless ye, my children;*’ besides, she may have changed her mind.”

“Never,” says Norton rather fiercely; “never!”

“Bravo, Juan; that’s a good deal better, more like yourself. Well, then, she may have a cold, or a fever, or the toothache, or the measles, or have gone on a visit and met

with a charming cousin who is teaching her to play this new-fangled game of croquet, or she may have suddenly come into a fortune, or mamma may have been cruel enough to say, 'Mary, my dear, keep out of that young man's way; I have heard that he is a very wild youth, and keeps dreadfully late—' "

"Do you mean to say," interrupts his listener, "that you ever heard any such rascally reports about me?"

"No, most excellent *juvenis*; no, I never have. But who knows what *she* has heard? Old ladies have sometimes far longer ears than little pitchers, and keep a mere morsel of idle tittle-tattle hoarded up for weeks, until at last they believe it. And, of course, if she has done this, she is now in a fever lest her dear child should be snapped up. 'Keep out of his way, my dear; he is afraid to show his face here, for, you see, he never called here again after leaving that letter

from the lawyer, as he might have done. There is something wrong about the business, depend on it.' And then what can poor Mary say or do but obey mamma? Do you see that, young Norton?"

"I see," replies *juvenis*. "What a precious fool I was not to have called the next day and talked to the old lady myself! There never was such an idiot as I have made of myself. Thrown away the game when it was in my own hands! The last chance gone!"

"Stuff, man, stuff! Have you forgotten what '*good-bye*' means? The lady who tells a young gentleman *that*, is not the one to forget either it or him."

"Then, you don't imagine she has forgotten me after all?"

"Forgotten her own Juan! How could she rid her dainty little loving heart of such a charming image? Very likely, at this moment of time, she may be working a

sampler with the one beloved name (if she knows it), and blistering every thread with burning tears that fall, and will persist in falling, from her hazel orbs !”

“ I believe,” says Norton, now thoroughly roused, “ that you will drive me mad if you go on—”

“ Impossible, my dear boy, impossible ; idiots never attain that furious but fortunate state.”

At this point, however, in spite of all he could do to prevent it, Norton himself broke out into a hearty laugh, in which his tormentor as heartily joined ; and so the two went back to Gresley’s rooms to smoke that pipe of peace which all true believers in nicotia count to be an infallible panacea in all troubles.

“ Now you have once more come to your senses, young man,” said Gresley, “ I will give you a pipe of real, genuine, cavendish ; and you shall see half-a-dozen ‘ *Longs and*

Shorts ' which I scribbled last night about the Census paper, though you scarcely deserve either the flowers or the *weed*. You shall not have a mild, dandified, sentimental cigar, or you will be falling into hysterics again, but one quiet, sober, prosy pipe that will sweep away all the cobwebs out of your lackadaisical brain, and make you dream of the three Miss Rookstones and their big mouths, the beauties of the multiplication-table, or the price of coals."

Having come to a cosy anchor in the well-known room, the walls of which were fairly lined with books from floor to ceiling—the remaining furniture being a cottage piano, three or four low chairs, and a cradle—the promised Longs and Shorts were produced, duly read, and duly discussed. How far worthy of discussion the reader may judge for himself. They are, at all events, too characteristic of Gresley to be omitted.

THE CENSUS AND THE FAIR DISSENTER.

“Rude querist ! my feelings your question enrages,
To ask a young woman like me what her age is !
Thirty-five, sir, it may be—about that or less.”

“And what the religion, ma’am, which you profess ?”

“Sir, I shall not, on any persuasion, decide
Till I know what is his who will make me a bride.”

IDEM ALITER.

“Improbe, me crucias, quæstor, præcordia, quæris,
Quot mihi sint anni, disce, ego vera loquor ;
Quinque et triginta numeravi circiter annos.”

“Quæ tua religio est, dic quoque, Virgo precor ?”

“*Nil ultra dicam*, dum norim quid probet ille
(Quisquis erit) conjux qui volet esse meus.”

“Very unfair, indeed !” said Mrs. Gresley from her quiet corner. “It’s very unfair to insist upon having a young lady’s exact age, to say nothing of her religious views published to all the world.”

“But very good for her, my dear. It will help her to make up her mind on two very important points before marriage.”

Long before this fruitful topic was exhausted, the pipes were finished, and it was time to say "Good night."

"I have but one word more to add," said Gresley, as they shook hands.

"Is she a Dissenter? If so, don't be too inquisitive about her age."

This final word produced another hearty laugh, and the result was that Norton went back to his solitary room all the better for the rough but kindly tonic that his friend had so freely administered to him. "Not by any means cured," as Gresley afterwards told his wife, "but in much better health."

Through the winter that followed, affairs went on much as usual in Tregartha. There were the same small, wearisome, musical parties; the same meetings of the Whist Club; and the same pompous dinners at Polruin's as usual. The school broke up and reassembled. The doctor began a fresh course of lectures in the spring, Picus

Mirandola now giving way to Synesius, the hunting Bishop of Cyrene.

“It is a part,” said the worthy old gentleman to Norton, “of a great course which I have had in view for years, and which I mean to complete ‘*haud invitâ Minervâ*,’ and of inestimable value to the young men who are now with me. I wish that you had heard them all.”

“I wish I had,” replied Norton. “The happiest days I ever spent in my life have been spent here.”

“You young rascal!” whispers Gresley, who had just overheard the conversation, as they went down to Dinner; “you young rascal! to pretend you care one straw about the fifth century, when you know that the only date in all history that has a grain of flavour in it just now is the Battle of Hastings! By the way, any news of *her*? But never mind—never mind Phyllis for a minute. Stop; just look at the old doctor

as he goes up the great staircase. He has, so he fancies, had the rheumatism all the winter, and looks now, for all the world, as if he had been mended in half-a-dozen places."

"Not only mended," replies the junior master, "but as if he were coming to pieces again."

From which style of remark it may be gathered by the sagacious reader that the doleful phase of Mr. Norton's passion was at all events alleviated, seeing that he took no notice of the allusion to Charming Phyllis or the Battle of Hastings.

Moreover, as Gresley gravely remarked, he made a very hearty breakfast, which included fresh eggs and potato-cake. "And when a man seriously goes in for potato-cake, I look upon it that his liver is in good order, and he no longer on Cupid's sick list."

That very evening, however, there sud-

denly showed itself in the case a new feature which was utterly unforeseen alike by doctor and by patient.

School was over, and Norton had set out for his evening walk, in the face of a stiff east wind, across what was called Church Hill. But the keenness of the blast soon forced him out of the high-road, and drove him into one of the narrower and more sheltered lanes that led to the valley. As luck would have it, this brought him in a few moments past the gates of Rose Cottage. He looked earnestly across the garden at the house, after his usual fashion in passing; but in the dim light the only thing he could clearly make out was a printed notice on a tall board over the door of "*This House to Let,*" inquire, etc. etc.

For a moment he could hardly believe his own eyes, and fancied that he must have made some mistake in the house; but there was no mistake whatever in the case; and

the agent in the town, to whom he immediately went, knew nothing of the late tenants but that "they had duly paid their rent and gone away—where he knew not—about a month ago."

Further than this Norton could discover nothing, and with this miserable information he was obliged to be content.

CHAPTER XII.

BIG BROTHERS.

It was a sudden, sharp, and terrible blow ; but, having once fallen, had to be borne as best it might. There was no escape from it, and, as it seemed, no way of softening its severity. " Chaffing " from Gresley was all very well while there was ground for hope, but in the present state of things he was far too wise, delicate, and kindly to dream of such a remedy for a moment.

All he did was simply to ply his friend well with work, both in school and out, doing all in his power to make it pleasant,

and carefully avoiding the Battle of Hastings.

By degrees Norton recovered his usual tone, and, under Gresley's direction, made real progress in such true scholarship as Oxford bestows on her favourite sons. He worked hard and steadily—if without direct hope—yet as if some of the old roots within him were not all dead, but might, by some possibility, revive on some future day, and bring back a gleam of that sunshine which so lately had made his path both fair and bright. But this hope he dared not whisper even to his books. What his future line in life was to be, or on what profession he should try to enter, was as yet a thought he had scarcely entertained. There was no hurry—so said his home-letters—so said the doctor, and so said Gresley. But about this time there suddenly came for him a letter from that elder brother already alluded to, a few words in which at once

settled the question. It was the first letter Norton had ever received from him, and, therefore, thought all the more of. Eminently characteristic of the writer, and influencing Norton's whole career, we must look over his shoulders as he reads it.

“My dear Harry,

“I thought you might like to hear that I was settled at last in my new curacy at Stoneleigh. It is a wild, roughish, place, on the borders of the moor; and some half-a-dozen farmers, and a solitary squire of the John Bull breed, are my chief parishioners. The vicar is non-resident—very wisely, having a cosy rectory ten miles off, where he keeps another curate to do his work. The church here is threatening to tumble about the people's ears, but, of course, that is their look out, and doesn't trouble me. I hear of you in letters from home, now and then, and gather that you

have learned to smoke, and have found a new friend in a crack Eton man. I hope that *that* is not the only thing he has taught you. Remember me to the old doctor, whom I once knew long ago at Dormouth.

“By the way, do you mean to remain an usher in a school all your life ?

“Your affectionate brother,

“ROBERT NORTON.

“P.S.—There are roach and dace in the River Stone, near us—thin hungry dogs for the most part, and half devoured by pike.”

This letter naturally set Norton thinking for some days to come. There was something in the tone of it which he did not quite relish, though he hardly knew what to find fault with ; and the oftener he read it the less he liked it. Big brothers sometimes take up this tone, under the idea that it accords well with their bigness—not meaning to be “nasty,” and yet not taking

much trouble to avoid it. They fancy they have got upon the dunghill, and must crow a little, if only to show how well they can do it.

Younger brothers, however, don't seem to be as fully aware of this cleverness as they ought to be. A little ruffling of the neck-feathers takes place; and if their song is on a smaller, weaker scale, they now and then insist on trying a note or two, just to show that they, too, have a voice, and know how to use it.

Thoughts of this kind drifted through Norton's mind for a week or so; but none the less did he feel the force and wisdom of that little sentence, "Do you mean to remain an usher in a school all your life?"

Of course he didn't. Why should he? But, all the same, he couldn't see what there was so wrong or inferior in the position of an usher. On the contrary, only a year ago he had thought himself lucky

in obtaining such a post, especially under such a man as Arlington, to say nothing of such a friend as Gresley. And, as to smoking, what possible harm could there be in that? Gresley smoked, the doctor smoked, Trevanion smoked, when he could. Everybody smoked, *i.e.*, nearly every fellow. Why shouldn't Bob Norton's younger brother smoke? especially when he had begun to find out that cigars were rather costly indulgences, and had taken to short pipes.

As to Gresley having taught him nothing but smoking, he had never learned so much from any other fellow, or half as much, in his whole life. Such Latin prose, and such verse, as Gresley's he had never read in his life, except in Ovid and Cicero.

Luckily, however, he did not answer the letter at once, though he had talked to Gresley of doing so again and again.

“No, no,” said his wiser friend, “‘bide a wee, bide a wee,’ young Norton, until you’re as cool as the curate of Stoneleigh himself. It has taken him a year to find out where you are, and the danger you are in under the crack ‘Etonian.’ Let him wait a month. Meanwhile he can speculate as to how far his little discourse has agreed with your constitution. Then write him a civil note; but, whatever you do, don’t get angry; above all, don’t mention my name. I suppose you would rather like to pitch into him at once. You’ll be cooler in a month—perhaps wiser—who knows?”

This is what Norton wrote a month later:

“My dear Robert,

“I like my work here very much, but for all that I do *not* mean to be an usher all my life. In October I hope to enter Trinity College, Dublin, and some day, if all be well, to find a curacy in a parish where the

church is in good repair and the rector is not a drone. If I ever succeed, it will be owing to Gresley's generous help in more ways than he cares to have known. The doctor does not remember you very well, he says.

“Your affectionate brother,

“HENRY NORTON.”

“That will do very fairly,” said Gresley, after having perused this brief epistle. “It's rather cocky, but not ill-tempered, and will *do*, though you had no business to mention my name at all. No, no, you shall not write another letter ; your next might be longer, and perhaps cockier.”

“I ought to have said a word or two about the smoking,” replied Norton ; but from this his friend strongly dissuaded him.

“If you want a fire to go out, don't poke it—even with a quill pen.”

But in his next home-letter to one of his sisters there came the following passage :—

“Which of you girls is it that has been telling his reverence, the curate of Stoneleigh, that I smoke? How dare you accuse me to my big brother? I solemnly declare that you shall not hear one scrap of news again from me if you tell him how naughty I am. Besides, I only smoke a little now and then, and cavendish (smuggled) costs next to nothing; so that everybody here smokes. The old doctor smokes on the sly; and, when Juno is out, in the library. I went in rather suddenly to speak to him the other night, and caught him in the very act. He was in his library, and I had to go to him about some classes for the next day. There he was, comfortably settled in an easy-chair, with his legs on a T, a strong odour of Havanna all over the room, and a small glass of toddy on a little round table close by at his elbow. When he saw me, what does he do but pop his hand under the table, to hide the cigar; but he made a bad shot of it,

and in his hurry pushed his hand too far ; so that *it came out on the other side*. It was as much as I could do to manage to get through my bit of talk with him without laughing, but I did manage it, and escaped."

In the autumn of that year Norton began to keep his terms at Trinity College, Dublin, and in due course took an ordinary degree, going over there twice a year by steamer from Pendleton.

CHAPTER XIII.

VIRGIL IN EXTREMIS.

It was now the third year of Norton's keeping his terms at Trinity College, Dublin. He had worked hard and steadily under Gresley's kindly care, and with an occasional word of advice from the doctor ; and though he had taken no honours, had done enough to satisfy himself as well as them. Twice he had visited home, and, much to his mother's pride and delight, had shown to her and other admiring friends how much he had really gained since his old days in the newspaper office. He had

become a man, in fact, and yet with all the freshness and youth of a boy. His old homely pleasures and amusements, his few old worn books, the old songs, and the same old-fashioned Broadwood piano in the corner of the parlour with its soft sweet notes, the little arbour in the garden, where they had sung glees in the summer evenings,—all these were as dear to him as ever. He discussed new books with his father, or read aloud to him passages from some old favourite author ; showed him Latin verses that Gresley had taught him to write, and passages in his journal recording events great and small in the little Cornish world of Tregartha.

His sisters fairly worshipped him, and were never weary of hearing about Galad-day, the cutting of The Bar, and Jack Borlase, whom, by the way, he had never set eyes on nor heard of since their memorable walk from Pentire. In short, Norton still

found happiness in living over again with them his old boyish days, and always went back to Tregartha after his summer holidays with a new fund of hope and strength for the next half-year.

But of especial value and delight to him was the deep and unchanging love of his mother, who sympathised with him in all his pleasures, sorrows, and pursuits. From her he had no secrets, and to her alone had he revealed his precious secret of Mary Hastings, and her abrupt and mysterious disappearance from Tregartha; as well as the fuller details of that wondrous sermon he had heard on the cliff by the sea, and the fruit it had borne in his work and belief.

To all these things she had listened as only a mother can listen; her tender words helping to deepen every good impression, to soften every disappointment, and to cheer him for the future.

“My dear Harry,” she would say to him, “all that you tell me of this young girl, her beauty, grace, and winning ways, is most charming. Keep the memory of it in your heart. Your love for her, and hers for you, seems to have been sudden indeed, but yet no mere passing fancy ; and if so, like every other true passion God gives us, is meant for good. The love of a virtuous good girl is meant to be the life and joy of a brave true manly heart, such as my son’s is growing up to be. Whatever may be the cause of her strange disappearance, and of the long and still stranger silence, if it be for good, you will meet again some day or other ; or if not, you will find, my son, I hope, some other face as fair, and some other heart as loving and true as hers now seems.”

But against this possibility Norton would protest with many strong and ardent words.

“I dare say,” he would exclaim, “there

are plenty of other girls as beautiful as she was, though, mind you, I have never seen one; but no other love can be like hers. My dear mother, there was such heart in her face, such mind in her eyes, such music in her voice, that it was like sunshine to be near her. You felt brighter, stronger, better for only seeing her."

"And you only saw her twice, Harry?"

"Only twice. But then we were three whole hours together that first day. The people, you know, dance in couples all through the chief streets—except the old fogies, who soon get tired. In at the front door of some of the houses, through the garden, and out at the back; all the windows decked with flowers, bouquets in the hats, bonnets, and coats, and a jolly sort of Sir Roger de Coverley tune from the band all the time. By Jove! it *was* a day. In ten minutes we were talking away as if we had been old friends; I have got a bit of

her bouquet that fell to pieces in the street to this very day ; it was a spray of white jasmine, and I think I can see her now as I look at it, though that fellow Gresley *does* chaff my life out of me now and then for keeping it. But as to what has become of her, or why she has never sent me a single word, it's as great a mystery as ever."

"Well, well, my boy," replies the mother, "time unlocks many strange things, and may some day unlock this one. But possibly—I only say possibly, mind,—possibly, Harry, she may have changed, and—"

"My dear mother, it's wholly, utterly, entirely out of the question. A woman like that never changes."

"But girls do, my dear."

"Girls? Yes, school-girls may ; but she wasn't a girl ; she talked and reasoned like a woman that had seen the world, and thought out hard things, and knew her own mind."

“Yes, my dear,” replied his mother ;
“yes. Perhaps she did know her own mind when she began to think over what had happened. Perhaps she *had* seen the world, as you say ; and perhaps, too, somebody else, even more charming and attractive a cavalier than Harry Norton.”

“No, no, No, mother, that story won’t do ; I should have found it out in two minutes. You never saw her eyes, nor heard her voice, nor watched her face light up when she spoke ; if there had been anybody else, she would never have been what she was to me, nor I to her. She would just have been a pretty girl on the Gala-day, and I a stray partner who fell in her way, and we should both have forgotten each other the next day. No more ‘perhapses.’ ”

“Only one more, Harry. Perhaps this is the very thing she has done—simply forgotten the dance and the dancer.”

“By Jove! mother,” replies Norton, “you’re nearly as provoking as Gresley himself. I tell you I can hear her voice now saying,—‘*Good-bye only means meeting again* ;’ and I am as sure that she felt and meant it as that I am alive and talking to you, you provoking, disagreeable, old lady.”

“Very well, my son,” said the old lady, “you shall not be tormented any more. I too will believe that she has not changed, nor given her heart to somebody else, but is keeping it for one who trusts her, as only a true woman deserves to be trusted. You will be all the happier and better for this long talk when you get back to Tregartha; and the Pendleton steamer starts at three, so come now and make a good hearty dinner before you go on board.”

The next day found Norton safely back in his old quarters, and busier than ever, in consequence of some changes that had taken place since we were last there. His old

and friendly ally, Gresley, had during the two previous years been acting as curate of Tregartha; and having been offered a small vicarage in the neighbourhood, where he could take pupils, had resigned his mastership, and entered on his new duties. But, luckily for Norton, the school had just at this time fallen off in numbers, in consequence of which the doctor had determined to carry on his work with only one assistant, and offered him Gresley's post.

"I have given up some of my private pupils, Norton," said the doctor, "and so shall have more time for the school. I know you now, and can trust you; and though Gresley's place is a hard one to fill, you will do your best, I am sure."

"I can never do what he did," replied Norton, "as *he* did it, but my utmost and best shall be done; and, at all events, the fellows here now like me, and work with a will, as I hope they will prove at the next

examination day. And I thank you heartily, sir, for trusting me, and believing that I will do my best."

And so the matter was settled.

The loss of his old friend's society and helping-hand in his studies was one that Norton deeply felt, more deeply than he thought possible, or cared to own. But it brought him increased pay, and one step more on the ladder, so that his next home-letter was a joyful one, especially as it enabled him to enclose a five-pound note to his mother, and still left him sufficient for the expenses of his next and final trip to Dublin.

Above all, the change forced him at once to stand on his own legs entirely. He was obliged now to rely solely upon his own brains when at work for himself, and to make dictionary and lexicon his only reliance. The doctor was always ready to help, indeed, and in dainty little ingenious

criticism on a Greek adjective, a happy speculation on a point of poetic usage or licence, or in desultory small essay on such matters as "Picus," as felicitous as ever. But downright plodding hard work at an obscure chorus, or a crabbed piece of Tacitus, was altogether another matter, to which nothing but sheer necessity ever drove him.

Norton, therefore, was now content to plod on for himself; and if he missed—as he constantly did—the ready, brilliant knowledge, the happy wit, and accuracy of his old friend, all the keener and surer became his own industry and judgment when he had them only to rely on.

As the years went by, he had formed many acquaintances in Tregartha, but, oddly enough, not one that could be counted as a friend. Several pleasant home circles were open to him in the evenings, and now and then, though rarely, he was

solemnly invited to a banquet at Polruin's ; but its stateliness, intense dulness, and extreme length, when the six or eight portly old gentlemen calmly settled down for an hour's heavy port-wine, after the departure of the ladies, made the honour one that he never sought for. Red mullet were good things in their way, no doubt, but, as Gresley profanely remarked to old Rookstone, "Not the one thing necessary to salvation, or even for a good digestion."

This was the state of affairs, when one evening Norton, while strolling round the bowling-green, chanced to fall in with his old acquaintance, Rookstone the lawyer. They had met many times since the date of that little episode of "*The Letter*," which indeed the lawyer had all but forgotten. The old man was shallow and talkative, but good-natured enough, in spite of a crusty exterior, and had taken a liking to his "young friend," as he called him, and

frequently invited him to supper, though generally in vain.

But, on this occasion, Norton had been hard at work all day, and was just in the humour for an hour's idle chat.

"Come in, my dear young friend," said the old man, "and eat a crust of bread and cheese with us. I haven't seen you for months and months; not, in fact, since the last Speech Day. Let me congratulate you, my young friend, on your success; for since that Eton man left the doctor, you have, I know, been his right hand. Yes, yes, Gresham—"

"'Gresley,' Mr. Rookstone."

"'Greasely,' ah! to be sure. Greasely was all very well,—very brilliant and very witty, no doubt; always full of his jokes and his gibes, that, for my part, I didn't know when he was poking fun at me, and when he was in downright 'airnest.' Ye see, Mr. Norton, I belong to an old Scotch

family, as ye may have heard, and now and then a word of the old Doric breaks out, such as 'airnest.' But the Classics are my delight; and I have now settled down so long in these southern parts, that my speech has got to be quite purely English—I may say classical English—from studying the Latin tongue. And if ever I chanced to get on to a bit of Latin with that Eton man, he was sure to bewilder me; what with his nursery rhymes in Greek, and his dog-Latin, I never knew what he was at. But you, my young friend, I am glad to see, know how to treat the Classics as they deserve; with a proper respect, and it's always a pleasure to talk with you on such delightful themes."

And here the old man fairly paused for lack of breath.

The whole of his rambling address, however, had completely puzzled and mystified Norton, who had never once before heard

the old man launch out on the subject of the Classics, or of his having been born a Scotchman, and therefore was rather at a loss what answer to make. The only solution of the matter that occurred to him was that Rookstone must have been dining out, that the port wine had been old, fruity, and seductive, and set his tongue going in this strange fashion.

“But come now, Mr. Norton, don’t refuse my invitation to a slight repast after the toils of the day. Let us escape from this cold wind—this ‘*Euroclydon*,’ as one may say,—into my own quiet sanctum, and find a little refreshment for thirst of body and mind.”

The result of that evening’s talk, and the union of bodily and mental repast over a captain’s biscuit and some hot whisky-toddy, had better be told in Norton’s own words in a letter to “Greasely” himself:—

“My dear Vicar,

“You do not deserve to have even a short letter from me, but, in revenge, I will do my best to bore you with a long one. Not only do you rush away from Tregartha, and in hot haste become a vicar, but you pick 'out the very time of my absence as the best season for your migration, when I can neither warn you as to the perils which beset the beneficed clergy, nor receive your parting benediction. And not a single word of notice to me as to your intention. Here I come back to the old familiar seats of learning, under the venerable shadow of '*Picus*' himself, and find your old rooms as bare and empty as a peascod. In my despair, after a week or two of solitary mourning, I wander down to the bowling-green, and there fall in with old Rookstone, who, as usual of late, begins to persecute me with civility. I take it all very quietly,—*sicut meus est mos*,—when he

suddenly overflows into a panegyric on himself as an humble but ardent worshipper of the Classics, and of polite learning in general. Equally eloquent, and far more true to life, was he when he began to speak of one 'Greasily, an Eton man,' who was always poking fun at him, and mystifying him with nursery rhymes in Greek and dog-Latin; 'a fellow,' he said 'of parts, but a sad dog.' Naturally then he turned to your humble servant, as being *ingenui vultus puer*, etc., and, to my utter amazement, began to advise me as to his being a Scotchman by birth, but now happily softened in tongue and speech into southern and classical elegance!

"Here I fancy you crying out, 'What on earth does all this long rigmarole mean?'

"It means this, O learned vicar, that old Rookstone persuaded me to go in to supper with him; the said supper consisting of a captain's biscuit, which he avowed had

gone round the world in some hoary admiral's ship, and hot whisky-toddy, that was potent enough to carry on the idea of circular motion in the old boy's head, until he began to rave about Virgil. This was under tumbler the first. Under tumbler the second, he grew more loquacious and more poetical than ever, and made me wish that 'Greasey' himself had been present.

"One of his rhapsodies went on in something like this fashion :—

" ' You know the first book of Virgil, my young friend? That storm is the very prince of storms, and it's my "spaecial" favourite. You must know that wonderful line,—

" Apparent rari nantes in guh, guh, gurgite vasto."

" ' Yes,' said I; ' it has often struck me as a grand passage, even when translated by that Eton man you spoke of just now :—

Few that get into a whirlpool ever get out again.'

“ ‘It is a wonderful line, almost as wonderful in the English as in Latin.’

“ ‘Very good, Mr. Norton, very good indeed as a translation,—coming from Greasely, too; but it’s the beauty of the *Roman* tongue to which I wish to call your attention. That lovely word, *rari*, now; did that never strike you?’

“ ‘Never,’ said I, ‘Never as a “rarity” (puns were utterly wasted on him by this time), though I confess *now*—’

“ ‘My dear young friend, I am glad of this opportunity to help a youth of such singular (he left out a word here) to toil up the classic heights. Listen to the sound of that word again,—

“ Apparent *rari*,—*rari*,—”

now anybody else would have said *pauci*,—*pauci*,—a goodish word perhaps in its way, but nothing at all here in the whirlpool, as ye justly observed. No *paw-size* (drawling

out the word as he spoke) for *Virgilius Maro*. Maro, I apprehend, was his second and family name.'

" 'Possibly,' said I, 'from his birthplace, Marathon.'

" 'Just so, Mr. Norton; rightly enough, no doubt; I see ye have read your 'Heynsius.' No *paw-size* for Maro Virgilius, it would have sounded vulgar, man, vulgar; and so the real poet gives us the lovely word,—

" Apparent rari,—*rari*,—nantes in gurgite,"

or, as ye turned it just now,—

" Few that ever get out of a whirlpool ever get in again."

" 'For my part, my young friend, I prefer the dry land,—espaecially in such a storm of wind and rain as to-night's. No, no, a quiet corner such a night as this, with a morsel of whisky and a drop of bread, and an old friend who can partake of the feast of reason, and the flow of—of—'

“ ‘A whirlpool,’ I suggested.

“ ‘Exactly so, Norton,—if you will allow me so to call you, my young friend—“ *the flow of a whirlpool*,” exactly; it’s just there the beauty of *rari* comes out. Sir, it was in the poet’s mind when he wrote that word down, and no arguments of yours shall ever convince me to the contrary. You Eton men know a good deal, but you don’t know everything; you are not *in utrumque paratus*; you may learn a thing or two in Tregartha. I say, sir, the immortal bard had got that whirlpool in his pen when he wrote down *rari*, and if you talked on till to-morrow night, it would never convince me to the contrary. Till my dying hour I shall hold to that belief, if there were fifty Greaseleys against me.’

“And then, if you believe me, my dear vicar, this old babbler got up, and shaking me mightily by the hand, said, in the tenderest voice, ‘Young man, Mr. Greaseley,

temperance — that is, one tumbler — is the law of life. Never go beyond one, Greaseley, if your dearest friend, if Maro himself tempts you. Look on me as a living example of what temperance can do for a man and a scholar in the Classics; and that just puts me in mind that an old client of mine named Hastings, the other day asked if you—'

“ ‘Good Heavens, Mr. Rookstone!’ I madly exclaimed; ‘do you know her address?’

“ ‘And suppose I do know her address? I say, *suppose*, young sir. Do you think that I would betray my client to a man—to any man—in such a state of melancholy excitement, as to address me with an oath?’

“ ‘Oath?’ I cried out. ‘Oath, Mr. Rookstone? Good Heavens!’

“ ‘There you go again, sir; swearing at a man in his own house, at his own table, under his own mahogany. Sir, I am sorry

to beg you to leave my premises ; instanter, or sooner* if convenient. To-morrow, sir, to-morrow, in your calmer moments, when "reason resumes her reins," I will hear what you have to say for yourself.'

"And so the old scoundrel left me, to find my way out at his rascally door as well as I could.

"Well, my dear vicar, I didn't catch a glimpse of Rookstone again for nearly a week, when I overtook him on the way home from church. 'Ha!' he says, 'my young friend ; how are you this charming morning ? No headache the other night ? You young fellows are sad dogs, and more than a match for us quiet old men.'

" 'Thank you,' said I ; 'not a grain the worse, in spite of your splendid hospitality. And to get such a talk as I had that night one would run any risk of next morning's headache. In a place like this, as you know, Mr. Rookstone, Virgil is at a dis-

count, and to find a man who can appreciate and enter into all his beauties is a treat indeed.'

" 'Such sentiments do you honour, young man, do you honour; though I am afraid that you are flattering me in talking of my poor attempts in the critical department as worthy of notice.'

" 'My dear sir, in such cases truth itself may seem the highest flattery.'

" 'In short, Gresley, I fairly buttered the old goose into a state of radiant good temper, and by the time we got to the bowling-green corner, he was ready to number me among his very choicest acquaintances.

" 'Drop in again soon, my young friend, any evening when you have an hour to spare. I am always at leisure after 7 P.M. ;' we shook hands most cordially.

" 'By the bye,' said I, as he turned to go, 'you never heard, I suppose, any more of that old lady and her daughter that disap-

peared so suddenly from Rose Cottage, a year or two ago? a Mrs. Hailstone, or Hayball, was it?’

“ ‘Hastings, Hastings,’ was the name. ‘Why yes; oddly enough, I had a letter from her a month or two, from somewhere near Pendleton, I think, but I really won’t be sure. I don’t keep such letters after they are once answered. But why do you ask?’

“ ‘It occurred to me just now,’ I replied, as we passed by the empty house, ‘that I once called there with a letter from you.’

“ ‘Just so, just so, Mr. Norton. I thought perhaps you might have some special reason for asking. But as I see you have none, I need not regret tearing up the letter. One’s memory fails sadly after sixty. Doesn’t it?’

“ ‘In some cases,’ I replied, ‘it seems to fail most suddenly and curiously; but of course I cannot speak from personal experience as you do. Good-bye.’

“And so, my dear vicar, after being on the very edge of discovery, here I was foiled again; though it is something gained to know that M. H. is somewhere in the neighbourhood of Pendleton. It is not a large place, and might easily be explored. And now having amply fulfilled my threat of boring you at length, I pause awhile; and I shall not grumble if in reply you are equally lengthy. I defy you to write too much.

“Ever yours,

“H. NORTON.”

Some days passed away, during which Norton, now once more on fire for a voyage of discovery, seriously meditated what his next step should be. But the school was now in full work, so that even a day's leave of absence was impossible; and to search Pendleton thoroughly would consume two whole days at least. That scheme, there-

fore, had to be given up; and no other appeared to be practicable, or of any service, after anxious and careful thought. In the midst of his perplexity, however, came the following reply from Gresley.

“Dear young Friend,

“I am lost in astonishment at your letter; hardly knowing which to admire most, the cleverness with which old Rookstone bamboozled you, or the simplicity of the narrative in which you write yourself down an ——; no, *not* that objectionable monosyllable you wot of, but a much longer and more poetic phrase—an unsophisticated child of nature. How that old, loquacious, whisky-drinker must have chuckled when he fairly turned you out of his house at 3 A.M., hardly able to discern between your right hand and your left! I’d have given pounds to hear him bully you for swearing. As for his being a Scotchman, *credat Judæus*. I have

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heard him claim kindred with ould Ireland on grounds equally valid, though the only morsel of brogue he could muster was 'be aisey.' But whether Hibernian or Caledonian, Norton, he turned you inside out as neatly as you could desire. You deserved all you got, if only for that detestable pun 'rarity,' worse than even the worst of mine. (My last was on a boy named Blaney who comes to 'do up' the vicarage boots and shoes and knives. It was freezing hard the other morning, and he met me at the garden-gate with a face and hands like beet-root. Said I, you look *chill-blainey*!) Not bad! is it?

"Your allusions to that 'Eton man,' after your snuffy old lawyer had coined the epithet, are in bad taste; exceedingly bad taste. But, I make allowance for a man under the fourth tumbler; and spare you for the present. But when you submit to be hopelessly gulled a second time, by the high-priest of the bowling-green, into a

belief that M. H. is at, or anywhere near, the ancient and fishy town of Pendleton, then it becomes the duty of a friend to interfere. Cannot you perceive, O short-sighted, infatuated, youth, that he sees through the whole of your scheme, the sudden mixture of eagerness and indifference, your big oaths of Saturday and politeness on the Sabbath ?

“ Mrs. Hailstone’s letter is at this moment on Rookstone’s file in that little poky dark back office where he cashes, so says lying Fame, *post obits* and I O U’s at 50 per cent., and plies his victims with strange and fiery waters until their thirst is more than quenched, and their vision unable to detect the difference between seventeen and seventy.

“ He once had, and I suppose still has, a red-haired clerk named Harris, much given to freckles, and to flirtation with the ugliest of the three Misses Rookstone whenever

his master's back was turned. Open, I should opine, to bribery in the shape of penny cigars or wholesale flattery. He thinks he has a voice, and sings. So did Madam Corvus in the fable. His master lunches at 2 P.M., and then Isaiah Harris is open to the attack of a fellow with brains. Canst thou not undertake him? (Formerly a day-boy at the T. G. S.) Norton, my friend, the life of a vicar arrides me. I know nearly every soul in the parish; preach mercifully on Sundays; am king and chief, chairman and vice, at all vestry meetings. When will you come and hansom the best bedroom?

Late or soon, a welcome waits;
Come soon, and spite the grudging fates.

“ Affectionately yours,
“ T. GRESLEY.”

“ P.S. My wife bestows on thee all the love this scanty corner will hold.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“THE PROPHET ISAIAH.”

How “Izzy” Harris ever acquired the name of “Prophet” is not accurately known. He somehow got it at the grammar school, where for a year or two he had passed muster as a day-boy, under a certain old rule in the charter, by which the sons of “natives” had right to a free education, on payment of a small fee for “rods.” He was a fat youth, sleek and cunning, and much given to “tuck” whenever he could get hold of any of the little chaps’ pocket-money at cricket or elsewhere ; hence his

second nickname of "Potts." All this information Trevanion imparted to Norton within an hour of the receipt of Gresley's letter.

"He's safe to rise at a pork-pie," said the captain, "if you really want to hook him; and once hooked, there'll be no more play in him than a chubb. Just one feeble spurt at first, and then you may do what you like with him, only, when he's safe in the net, he will cover you with slime, or perhaps give you a nip, if not on the look out. His mother is the little screw of a Dissenting widow that keeps the chandler's shop next door to the meeting-house in Church Lane. Izzy was weaned upon candles, so our fellows used to say, and they somehow got into his blood. Anyhow, he's safe to rise at a pork-pie."

For a day or two after this, Norton hesitated as to what his line of action should be; whether to call boldly on Rookstone

and ask again for the address, or attack “the Prophet” in his stronghold. But second thoughts only convinced him that Gresley was in the right, and that *the* letter was in all probability safely filed in the poky little office, and he decided on immediate action.

The town clock had just struck two as he crossed the green, and rang the office-bell at the side of the main entrance.

After a brief hurry-skurry within, as if chairs and tables were being suddenly moved, the door was opened by “Potts” himself.

“Is Mr. Rookstone at home, and disengaged?”

“Well, sir, he isn’t far off, but he is *rather* engaged, unless you wants him on partic’lar business. You see, sir, he’s very regular at his meals, and don’t like being called off his feed. But if there is anything I could do,—my lunch won’t spoil, not at all.”

“Really,” replies Norton, entering the office and taking a chair, “I am sorry to disturb you at luncheon time, Mr. — ‘Harris’? thank you, Mr. Harris; but if you could spare me five minutes, I have no doubt we may avoid disturbing Mr. Rookstone. You are his managing clerk, Mr. Harris, I suppose?”

“Well, yes, as far as any managing goes, I dare say I am. I copies all his letters for him,—that is most of ’em,—and post ’em; and now and then I calls on a gent that’s behind with his bill, or serves a writ, or looks after some of them Irish tenants in Church Lane.”

“Hard work, and plenty of it, Mr. Harris, eh?”

“Well, quite enough.”

“You ought to have plenty of time to lunch now, after such a morning’s work.”

“Time? Bless you! that’s the very deuce of it. When *he’s* done his lunch, I’m

supposed to have half an hour for dinner; or if I bring some cold prog with me of a morning, to get through it here while he's a feeding himself; and if nobody don't call and keep me a talking, and get their business pretty nearly done for nothing, I gets on tidy; but if a customer do come, and regularly go in for it, it's awkward like—very awkward."

"Very true, Mr. Harris," replies his visitor; "I see now how thoughtless I have been in keeping you so long. But, do you know, it occurs to me at this moment that I have had no lunch myself. Is there any pastrycook's, or any such shop near at hand, where one might get such a thing now as a pork-pie?"

At the sound of this word, Isaiah got down off his office-stool, and having carefully closed the green baize door leading into the house, and the outer one towards

the green, exclaimed with a soft, low chuckle,

“Porkies? I should rather think there was a shop; not bad at sixpence, better at eight, tip-top meaty ones at a shilling. Close by, just across the green too. Shall I fetch one, it’s done in a minute?”

“The very thing I was going to suggest, but I hardly liked to ask you to leave your office. *Two*, I should say, would be better than one, if you can venture to leave me in charge for the moment.”

“Why, it’s as easy as a glove. There is nothing here to steal,—he always locks up everything; and you won’t run away, with the two lovely pies just coming, not if you ever tasted a real porky. I’ll leave you in charge,—safe enough,—and be back in a jiffy. Where’s the money? Gossett won’t give tick to me, not beyond a penny. That’s it, now I’m off.”

No sooner was Harris out of the room,

than Norton at once made a sharp and rapid survey of the whole office. Except the two chairs, two stools, a high desk, divided by a central rail into two sloping domains, a fender, and an empty scuttle, there really was nothing to steal if the visitor had been feloniously inclined. Not a scrap of paper,—not even a bill-file was visible. In utter despair, he was on the point of giving up all hope, when chance did for him what skill might have never attained.

Harris had left the door open ; this created a draught, and the draught suddenly blew aside a strip of dirty brown holland, which hung down from the lowest of three corner book-shelves, and hid a nook below, between it and the top of a cupboard ; on this recess Norton now saw several papers and a file. It was the work of but a minute to rush to this corner, and to see that the second letter on the file was dated,

“3, Gascoigne Terrace, Dorminster,” and signed, “Elizabeth Hastings.” The letter itself was only a single line, which it was hardly possible to avoid reading. Thus it ran :—

“Sir,

“I comply with your demand, and send a P.O. Order.

“Yours etc.,

“E. HASTINGS.”

This done, the file thrust back into its place, Norton had just time to regain his seat, when “Porcifer” returned in hot haste, bearing in each hand one of the dainties in which his soul rejoiced.

“They kept me an awful time,” said he, “but here I am at last ; and they are prime ones, I can tell you. By Gosh ! here’s the gravy trickling out of one of ’em all down my sleeve,—quite warm too, fresh from the

oven. Stop a minute, and I'll get the plates ; but don't you begin, mind, before I come."

But Norton was now some millions of miles above the region of pork-pies, however much in want of a lunch.

"Upon my word, Mr. Harris," said he, "you are a first-rate hand at a lunch, and the pies seem admirable,"—cutting off a piece from the corner of one as he spoke ; "but is Mr. Rookstone likely to be engaged much longer? It seems a pity to trouble you with business now, with your hands already full ; and my little affair will keep until I am passing this way again."

"Oh! come now," replied Harris, "*that* won't do at all. I can hear all you've got to say, and go on with the pie all the same. I often make my half-crown that way before he comes back, especially on market-days, when the chawbacons come in to see old Rookstone."

“But, you see, I am not a chawbacon ; and I really cannot think of using up your precious time when—”

At this moment a hungry-looking dog strolled in through the open door, and looking wistfully at the pies, sat up on his hind legs, and begged.

“I knew that he’d smell ’em,” cried Izzy with his mouth full, “he always does. But all the same, mind you. I can’t exactly make out what you’re up to, coming here in this way, and then backing out. It’s not business.”

“No,” replied Norton, “it is not business certainly ; but you can give my compliments to your master, and say that Mr. Griffin called, and will look in again another day.”

“Oh ! that’s the line, is it ? Griffin, eh ? I know better than that. Mr. *Griffin* be hanged ! There’s none of the doctor’s privates, up at the school, nor masters neither,

of that name. Whatever you're called, it's not Griffin ; and there will be a jolly good row, mind, when I let the governor know ; I can tell 'ee that beforehand."

"Indeed," answered Norton ; "why, you are never going to turn prophet again, Isaiah ? Anyhow, as you don't seem to relish the pies, I dare say Ponto won't mind trying them."

And with these words, before Harris could interfere, he quietly swept what remained of the two dainties on to one plate, and emptied it in front of the hungry beast at the door, leaving the managing clerk pale and almost speechless with rage and amazement.

"Bye-bye, Mr. Harris, tell your master as much or as little as you like ; but if you tell him a single word that is not true, he shall hear the whole history of the pies,—how nicely you take care of the office when his back is turned, and of the chawbacons'

half-crowns on market-days. He will be glad, no doubt, to hear what a treasure he has in his managing clerk."

In reply to this, Isaiah uttered not a word. His only answer was to slam the office-door violently after "Mr. Griffin," and bestow a sudden benediction on poor Ponto, who was utterly puzzled to understand the sudden change from pork-pie to savage kicks and curses, which sent him howling across the green.

CHAPTER XV.

LUX IN TENEBRIS.

HOWEVER pale or exasperated Isaiah Harris may have seemed after his defeat, it was soon clear enough that he had wisely kept his own counsel about Rookstone's curious client, Mr. Griffin. In the course of the next month or two Norton frequently met his crusty friend, who was, if possible, more cordial than ever, and thus thoroughly convinced him that nothing had transpired at all likely to raise any suspicion *in re* Hastings.

As to the question of a visit to Dor-

minster, until the summer holidays no such trip could possibly be undertaken, and so Norton reluctantly put aside the question for the present. His final examination at Trinity College, too, was at hand; and for this he now resolutely set to work, as his journal abundantly testified. In due time he took his degree, and having made up his mind to take orders, his only business was to get a title on some curacy in a pleasant neighbourhood under a good vicar. But for this there was no immediate hurry, as he was as yet barely old enough to present himself for ordination.

The doctor himself recommended him to remain in Tregartha, and, if the bishop allowed it, retain his mastership at the grammar school; but another voice beckoned him to seek for employment in another direction—in or near Dorminster; and on this he ultimately decided, agreeing, however, to remain at his old post until Christmas.

The autumn therefore passed quickly away, his old rambles being now renewed round Carriston Lake, and many a good trout brought home, to the great edification of Mrs. Arlington's guests at dinner. Then came the short dark days of December, and long evenings mainly devoted to preparing for the bishop's examination. It was on one of those days that Norton heard in the town that the lake had risen, and the bar having been cut on the previous evening, there was a good chance of witnessing the curious spectacle of the escape of the imprisoned waters from the lake, which, oddly enough, Norton had never yet seen when at its full height. He therefore resolved to avail himself of this his last opportunity, and at once went in search of Trevanion as a companion.

But the captain was otherwise engaged, and Norton had to set out alone. It was a dark, stormy, afternoon as he started, and

squalls of thick rain were flying across the wooded hills on either side of the valley; but wrapped in a thick boating-coat, and armed with a stout stick, he made his way steadily on, though it was not until long after 4 P.M. that he at last found himself on the huge bar of dusty sand dividing the black waters of the lake from the sea.

It was now almost dark, but the moon was rising, and a few faint stars here and there peeped out from among the clouds, while a fresh wind came sweeping in from the shore, on which the mighty billows were beginning to break with increasing thunder. As far as he could judge, the channel cut in the sand was now some twenty feet wide, and through this a strong current of dark, swirling, water was rushing out with silent but resistless fury. Making his way cautiously across the sandy waste, into which his feet sank heavily at every step, he at last got nearer and nearer to the

point where the stream met the foaming waves, and then looked on a sight not to be easily forgotten.

Luckily, too, at that moment the moon shone fully out, and flung strange patches of silver splendour down upon the dark mass of raging water. It was a grand and terrible spectacle; for the furious stream from the lake rushed down to meet the foaming breakers, and where they met towered up—so it seemed—amid the darkness against the crash of the broad sea, as if contending for the mastery. Wild clouds hurried across the stormy sky, the wind rose higher and higher, the thunder of the waves echoed along the shore with deeper and deeper roll, until Norton, awe-struck with the solemn and beautiful spectacle, turned away from the scene to regain the path which wound along the side of the lake below the hills.

Then, for the first time, he heard the

sound of voices, and found that some visitors besides himself had witnessed the strange sight of the meeting of the waters, and were now making their way through the darkness across the sand to where he stood, while others were advancing from an opposite direction. Who or what they were, in the dim light it was difficult to discern ; but on such a night the chance of any companionship was one not to be neglected, and he therefore waited for his unseen friends to come up. They were mostly people from Tregartha or some of the neighbouring villages, and one or two fishermen from Pentire, but all strangers to Norton. With one of the latter Norton soon fell into conversation, and found from him that it was very near high-water and a spring tide ; and this being the case, if the wind held from the same quarter, most likely that the sea would, when at its height, sweep across the whole bar down into the lake itself. “ And

this," said the old man, "if the moon do come out again, will be a sight to see." Some few of the visitors, therefore, agreed to stay with him and Norton until high-water, while the others went back to Pentire with the fishermen, and there regained the high-road.

Within an hour the moon was well up in the sky, but, oddly enough, the wind began gradually to fall as the tide rose, the clouds became thicker, and ere long the little party were in a dead calm, with a grey mist drifting in from the sea, and slowly shutting them in on every side. Under the guidance of the old fisherman, they had taken up a position at some distance from the outlet of the lake, and partly under the shelter of a ridge of rocks which ran down like a spur from the cliff. So slowly, however, had the mist drifted in, that no one seemed fully aware of its density until every feature of sea, land, and sky was completely

blotted out, and they found themselves in a darkness that could be felt. One by one the voices grew still as the strange darkness fell upon them, when their guide suddenly exclaimed,

“It sims to me, mates, time for ’ee to be up and going. It’s a ‘goller’* that’s set in; and there won’t be nothing more to be sin to-night of the lake, if so be we was fools enough to stay.”

It was, therefore, soon agreed on all hands that their only course was to start at once, but in what direction to make their steps through the surrounding darkness not one was able to decide. In broad daylight, or even in the usual gloom of the evening, Norton might easily have found his way, but now he was utterly puzzled, while the other visitors knew nothing of the path by

* A local word for a sea mist which often besets the coast, and is counted dangerous even by those who know it well.

the lake, or up the cliff towards Pentire. The roar of the great breakers on the sand showed where the sea lay ; but this was the only point of which they could be sure.

All, therefore, turned eagerly to the old fisherman, who professed to know the whole coast. But, in such a mist, even he declared it would be worse than useless to attempt finding the path, much less to keep it. Their only chance was "to bide" where they were for a time, and see what would turn up.

"Where you be," he added, "you won't get nothing worse than a wet jacket. The tide don't get up to this corner reef 'cept when it's blowing half a gale, so bide where you be. And, if ye don't mind, mates, we'll give 'em a verse or two of one of Jack Borlase's hymns meanwhile. If so be there's any of our chaps about, they'll give us a hail and bear a hand ; and, as for that, the dear Lord is near enough, I reckon, to hear, goller or no goller."

Then, in a wild, hearty, voice, which echoed along the hillside, the old man started the old, well-known West Country hymn, beginning—

“O Lord, to whom the darkening night
Is bright and clear as day,
Be with us now, thyself the light,
The truth, the living way.”

The others, with Norton, as well as they could, joined in here and there with the singer, and where their knowledge of the words failed, went with him in heart till he reached the final verse, which was in fact a repetition of the first, and so formed a full chorus.

As its last sounds died away over the dark waters and among the rocky crags, to their utter amazement the verse was taken up at some distance by a voice far shriller and clearer than that of the old man, who instantly cried out in joyful tones,

“All right, my hearties, there’s Jack

Borlase hisself. Dear Lord, dear Lord, to think o' that now. I should know 'un 'mong a thousand. He's out with his lantern, as he oftentimes do be of a stormy night, and in half an hour we'll be safe up to top o' cliff side."

In a few minutes, accordingly, they made out a spot of dim, unsteady, light in the gloom moving to and fro ; it seemed now here and now there, but gradually getting nearer, until it appeared suddenly close upon them, and the same shrill, cheery voice cried out,

"Stand by, friends, all safe now ; the goller won't lift till the tide goes down, so we must have a climb for it, and, God willing, soon get to Pentire Green."

To all but Norton and the old fisherman, Borlase was known only by name, but his few words had already put new life into the whole party, and they gladly waited to carry out his exact orders, which were few and simple enough.

“I go first,” he said, “with the light which I fasten behind my back to a belt that goes round my waist. Next to me come Jem Bolitho, who is the only one up to this kind of work, and after him in single file the rest of you ; keep your sticks tight in the right hand, and pass your handkerchiefs from left hand to left hand, with a knot at each end. And then, please God, we start.”

These directions were soon carried out, and the whole party set forward through the darkness which, if possible, was now growing more and more intense. Most of the party were by this time wet through, but in good spirits, and thus they slowly and cautiously made their way first across the sandy waste, and then still more carefully along the narrow path which zizzagged up the face of the cliff. Fainter and fainter grew the sound of the waves below, and at length, without a single mishap, they reached the little open green where Norton years ago had first

heard the thrilling words of their strange guide.

“And now,” he said, “we have got into smoother water, friends, we’ll try a verse or two of the old hymn again; and don’t be in a hurry; but change hands with sticks and handkerchiefs, for we’re going on another tack. Keep well to the right all the way up, and sing out hearty.”

Once more the verses of the hymn rang out through the cloudy domains of night—Borlase’s voice high above the rest—until they all stood safe and sound on the brow of the cliff. At this point one or two of the party went off by a side-path towards the hamlet under the old fisherman’s guidance; while the rest still followed their guide across the down to the high-road. This was comparatively plain sailing, and having reached the turning to Tregartha, and heartily thanked Borlase for his good services, the Tregartha visitors set out on their way

alone, the road being well-known to them.

“Good night, friends,” replied their guide, “and don’t forget the old Cornish Hymn ; it must be dark indeed where that won’t bring light. You and I,” he added, turning to Norton, “are old acquaintances, and must crack a word or two together before we part. My cottage is only a hundred yards down the lane ; come in and dry your jacket by the peat-fire.”

In a few minutes they came to a small cottage in a little garden by the road-side. It consisted of but three rooms, a kitchen and parlour on the ground-floor and a bedroom above ; “but,” as Borlase said, “quite enough for a lone man like me.”

“Come in, friend ; get off your wet jacket, and sit ye down by the fire while I hunt up a dry coat ; with maybe a bit of meat and drink ; for the body must be cared for as well as other things ; and you’re not much

used to rough it, I reckon, in weather like this."

A thick rough boating-coat was soon found, and Norton comfortably settled by the peat-fire on which his host had thrown a bunch of dry furze from the chimney-corner. The bright flame crackled cheerfully, and threw patches of ruddy light across the little stone-paved room and its scanty furniture, consisting of a rough deal table, a couple of chairs, and a dresser decked with a few plates and dishes, such as might be found in the neighbouring fishermen's cottages.

A loaf of coarse bread, with a slice or two of salt beef, and a cup of some warm compound which Borlase brewed in an odd-looking iron vessel over the fire, formed their supper. But Norton was tired and hungry and, like his host, made a hearty supper.

"I take it, friend, that you never saw a

‘tammy’* before ; and never tasted Dog’s-nose.”

“Both are new to me,” said Norton, “but both, I must say, famously good, for their work. I never tasted a better brew, and you have made quite a new man of me.”

“A new man !” replied his friend ; “that’s a work beyond Jack Borlase to manage. But I hope you’re none the worse for your climb up the cliff. It was a bad night for such as you to be out ; and ye must rest a bit here, till ye’re fit for the road again. And, how have things gone with you, friend, since you and I parted in Tregartha Church Town ? I told you we should meet again. Do you mind that ?”

“I remember it well,” answered Norton. “One is not likely to forget such a night as that, or such words as yours. At all events,

* A sharp-pointed iron saucepan, shaped somewhat like a funnel without a spout ; well-known in the remoter parts of Cornwall.

I have worked hard since then, and I hope for good."

"And are you going to spend all your days in Tregartha? You must have done with schooling by this time."

"My work has been teaching boys, so far, in the school-room; but I hope soon to be a parish priest, if I can find a curacy to suit me, and try what I can do among men and women; perhaps at Dorminster."

"Dorminster? And what has called you that way, into the great city?"

"The hope," said Norton, "of finding one who is very dear to me; dearer than I can even tell you."

"If she is a virtuous, good, girl, bless the Lord, friend, for the hope of winning her. But mind ye the Master's words, *His* love must come first. No father or mother, or wife or child must be between you and your work."

"She is the very one," replied Norton,

“to help and cheer me in the work; the very one to be a curate’s wife.”

“If so, then,” said Borlase, “ye won’t search in vain. Maybe, some day you two will work together, though I never thought of you yet as a minister, nor a married man. I didn’t take ye indeed for much more than a youth. The Master’s vineyard is wide enough, and there’s work enough for a score of labourers at Dorminster, for I knew it from East Gate to West Gate in the old days. And has *He* called you to the work, for it’s His, mind ye, and for every soul that you meddle with, you will account to Him. It’s no matter, this, for bishops or archdeacons to settle, or to call a man to.”

In reply to this, Norton could only answer “that he hoped his motive in entering the ministry was a right and true one, and that he might do the work of it heartily.”

The power that this strange, outspoken, rough man exercised over him years ago at

Pentire, was again at work ; and Norton felt like a child in his hands. He shrank from the catechising, and yet had no strength to escape from it.

“Your hope, friend,” answered Borlase, “is all well enough. But you must have more than hope ; if ye would save men’s souls. You must feel and know, before ye set out, your Master’s presence face to face ; and take the message from Him, and nobody else ; and carry it as His into the darkness, and speak it out of your heart, neither more nor less, the whole, living, truth from Him. He *has* spoken to you once ; and maybe you didn’t heed the message. Now comes a word for you again ; open your heart, and take it in. Never mind that it’s sent by me, Jack Borlase, a poor, ignorant, lost sinner, once as blind in spirit, as now in body—”

“Blind !” exclaimed Norton, “what do you mean ?”

“Just what I say, friend, for two years

and more these eyes have never had a glimpse of God's blessed sunshine. The whole place hereabouts was ringing with it, so I thought, the story of the blast in the old quarry-pit. You must have heard of it, and forgotten—"

"Never, till this moment. But, in such a night as this and such a storm, how could a blind man lead us across the bar, and up the cliff-side? It's simply impossible."

"Possible or not, young man, it's true. Jack Borlase is not given to lying, least of all about the Lord's doings. I tell you again; from the Bar to the top of Cliff-side, I could not have seen one step of the way if it had been broad daylight; and that pile of blazing furze there now on the stones to me is black as midnight. Do you doubt me, still?"

"Nay, nay," answered Norton. "I have every reason to believe you. But you must not forget that it all came upon

me suddenly, without a word of warning. There we were, recollect, five or six of us, in a thick darkness by the sea, hardly daring to stir hand or foot; when all at once there comes wandering through the mist a voice that is said to be Jack Borlase's, and presently a light that guided us safely to *terra firma*; how could I ever dream for a moment that our guide was a blind man, and able to do for us what the sharpest pair of eyes in Pentire would fail in? Why, it was about the very last thing that could ever have entered a man's mind."

"Just so," replied the blind man; "just the very way the Master works. Go on guessing till you're tired, friend, and you won't pitch upon the *now* and the *when* that He works by. You were in the thick of it, and had lost your way, and He sends you help by a man whose eyes can't tell noon from night; but who walks up cliff-side, by the old zigzags and the winding paths,

in the darkness surer and safer than he ever did in broad sunshine. It was a sharp blow to me at first, my friend; and it's a long night to me sometimes now; for it takes a goodish time to find out what's left for you when your eyes are gone. But He has been nearer to me in the darkness than He ever was in the light; and *He* knows every step of the way. And now, friend, you can see why you didn't go over the cliff to-night."

"You are a greater wonder and mystery to me than ever," answered Norton, "and I can but thank you heartily for all you have done, once more."

"No thanks," interrupted Borlase, "no thanks to me. Give thanks to Him who sent you down to the Bar this wild night, and the blind man to meet you. But it's time for you to be going, and for me to be off to 'Blanket Bay,' as the folks hereabout call it; there's a prayer meeting on the

Green at 5 in the morning; and a long tramp lies between you and High Street, Tregartha. I will see you safely to the cross roads, and then we must say good night, and, perhaps, good-bye."

At the cross roads they parted, and it was not until long after that Norton heard the full story of the blast in the old quarry pit at Pentire. When Norton reached Tregartha that night, he found two letters awaiting him. One from his brother, short as usual, which ran thus:—

"My dear Harry,

"Among the recent list of B.A's at Dublin, I see your name in the paper. Perhaps you may find some use for the enclosed cheque, to clear off expenses at T.C.D. Don't scruple to accept it, as I am in cash just now, and can well spare it.

"Always yours,

"ROBERT NORTON."

The cheque was for £100! The gift was

as sudden and unexpected as it was generous and opportune ; for it enabled him at once to repay Gresley all he had borrowed. But before he could fully realize his good fortune, he turned to his second letter, which carried away his thoughts into another and sadder channel. It was from his sister, saying in a few hurried words that his mother had been suddenly taken ill, and now lay in a dying state. If he wished to see her alive, he must come at once.

Note.—The true story of the old Quarry pit was this. Some workmen engaged in blasting, had lighted a long fuse, not knowing that their companions were still at work just below. No one dared go down and remove the fuse, nor was there time to give other warning. At this moment Borlase came by, and at once went down. The charge suddenly exploded ; he lost his sight, and the men their lives. Another minute would have saved them.

END OF VOL. I.

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