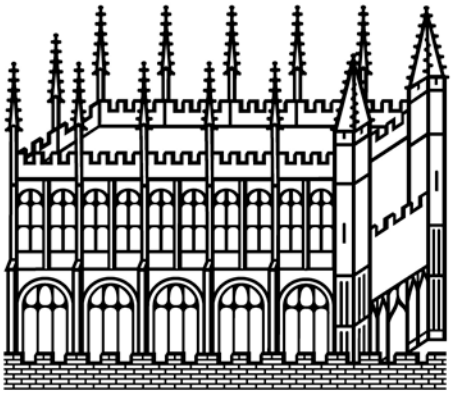

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# THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER

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VOL. I.

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# THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER

An Autobiographical Story.

By GEORGE MACDONALD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE SEABOARD PARISH," ETC.

THREE VOLS.—I.

LONDON

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# CHAPTER I.

## INTRODUCTORY.

I THINK that is the way my father would begin. My name is Ethelwyn Percivale, and used to be Ethelwyn Walton. I always put the Walton in between when I write to my father; for I think it is quite enough to have to leave father and mother behind for a husband, without leaving their name behind you also. I am fond of lumber rooms, and in some houses consider them far the most interesting spots; but I don't choose that my old name should lie about in the one at home.

I am much afraid of writing nonsense,

but my father tells me that to see things in print is a great help to recognizing whether they are nonsense or not. And he tells me too that his friend, the publisher, who—but I will speak of him presently—his friend the publisher is not like any other publisher he ever met with before, for he is so fond of good work that he never grumbles at any alterations writers choose to make—at least he never says anything, although it costs a great deal to shift the types again after they are once set up. The other part of my excuse for attempting to write, lies simply in telling how it came about.

Ten days ago, my father came up from Marshmallows to pay us a visit. He is with us now, but we don't see much of him all day, for he is generally out with a friend of his in the East End, the parson of one of the poorest parishes in London—who thanks God that he wasn't the nephew of

any bishop to be put into a good living, for he learns more about the ways of God from having to do with plain — yes, vulgar human nature, than the thickness of the varnish would ever have permitted him to discover in what are called the higher orders of society. Yet I must say that amongst those I have recognized as nearest the sacred communism of the early church —a phrase of my father's—are two or three people of rank and wealth whose names—are written in heaven, and need not be set down in my poor story.

A few days ago then, my father, coming home to dinner, brought with him the publisher of the two books — called the *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* and *The Seaboard Parish.* The first of these had lain by him for some years before my father could publish it, and then he re-modelled it a little for the magazine in

which it came out a portion at a time. The second was written at the request of Mr. S., who wanted something more of the same sort; and now, after some years, he had begun again to represent to my father, at intervals, the necessity for another story to complete the *trilogy*, as he called it; insisting, when my father objected the difficulties of growing years and failing judgment, that indeed he owed it to him, for he had left him in the lurch, as it were, with an incomplete story, not to say an uncompleted series. My father still objected, and Mr. S. still urged, until at length my father said —this I learned afterwards of course: "What would you say if I found you a substitute?" "That depends on who the substitute might be, Mr. Walton," said Mr. S. The result of their talk was that my father brought him home to dinner that day, and hence it comes that, with some

real fear and much metaphorical trembling, I am now writing this. I wonder if anybody will ever read it. This my first chapter shall be composed of a little of the talk that passed at our dinner-table that day. Mr. Blackstone was the only other stranger present, and he certainly was not much of a stranger.

"Do you keep a diary, Mrs. Percivale?" asked Mr. S. with a twinkle in his eye, as if he expected an indignant repudiation.

"I would rather keep a rag and bottle shop," I answered, at which Mr. Blackstone burst into one of his splendid roars of laughter—for if ever a man could laugh like a Christian who believed the world was in a fair way after all, that man was Mr. Blackstone; and even my husband, who seldom laughs at anything I say with more than his eyes, was infected by it and laughed heartily.

"That's rather a strong assertion, my love," said my father. "Pray what do you mean by it?"

"I mean, papa," I answered, "that it would be a more profitable employment to keep the one than the other."

"I suppose you think," said Mr. Blackstone, "that the lady who keeps a diary is in the same danger as the old woman who prided herself in keeping a strict account of her personal expenses. And it always was correct, for when she could not get it to balance at the end of the week, she brought it right by putting down the deficit as *charity*."

"That's just what I mean," I said.

"But," resumed Mr. S., "I did not mean a diary of your feelings, but of the events of the day and hour."

"Which are never in themselves worth putting down," I said. "All that is worth

remembering will find for itself some convenient cranny to go to sleep in till it is wanted, without being made a poor mummy of in a diary."

"If you have such a memory, I grant that is better—even for my purpose—much better," said Mr. S.

"For your purpose!" I repeated, in surprise. "I beg your pardon, but what designs can you have upon my memory?"

"Well, I suppose I had better be as straightforward as I know you would like me to be, Mrs. Percivale. I want you to make up the sum your father owes me. He owed me three books; he has paid me two. I want the third from you."

I laughed, for the very notion of writing a book seemed preposterous.

"I want you, under feigned names of course," he went on, "as are all the names in your father's two books, to give me the

further history of the family, and in particular your own experiences in London. I am confident the history of your married life must contain a number of incidents which, without the least danger of indiscretion, might be communicated to the public to the great advantage of all who read them."

"You forget," I said, hardly believing him to be in earnest, "that I should be exposing my story to you and Mr. Blackstone at least. If I were to make the absurd attempt — I mean absurd as regards my ability—I should be always thinking of you two as my public, and whether it would be right for me to say this and say that; which, you may see at once, would render it impossible for me to write at all."

"I think I can suggest a way out of that difficulty, Wynnie," said my father. "You

must write freely, all you feel inclined to write, and then let your husband see it. You may be content to let all pass that he passes."

"You don't say you really mean it, papa! The thing is perfectly impossible. I never wrote a book in my life, and——"

"No more did I, my dear, before I began my first."

"But you grew up to it by degrees, papa."

"I have no doubt that will make it the easier for you when you try. I am so far at least a Darwinian as to believe that."

"But, really, Mr. S. ought to have more sense—I beg your pardon, Mr. S., but it is perfectly absurd to suppose me capable of finishing anything my father has begun. I assure you I don't feel flattered by your proposal. I have got a man of more con-

sequence for a father than that would imply."

All this time my tall husband sat silent at the foot of the table, as if he had nothing on earth to do with the affair, instead of coming to my assistance, when, as I thought, I really needed it, especially seeing my own father was of the combination against me. For what can be more miserable than to be taken for wiser or better or cleverer than, you know perfectly well, you are? I looked down the table, straight and sharp at him, thinking to rouse him by the most powerful of silent appeals; and when he opened his mouth very solemnly, staring at me in return down all the length of the table, I thought I had succeeded. But I was not a little surprised, when I heard him say—

"I think, Wynnie, as your father and Mr. S. appear to wish it, you might at least try."

This almost overcame me, and I was very near—never mind what. I bit my lips and tried to smile, but felt as if all my friends had forsaken me, and were about to turn me out to beg my bread. How on earth could I write a book without making a fool of myself?

"You know, Mrs. Percivale," said Mr. S., "you needn't be afraid about the composition, and the spelling, and all that. We can easily set those to rights at the office."

He couldn't have done anything better to send the lump out of my throat, for this made me angry.

"I am not in the least anxious about the spelling," I answered; "and for the rest, pray what is to become of me, if what you print should happen to be praised by somebody who likes my husband or my father, and therefore wants to say a good

word for me? That's what a good deal of reviewing comes to, I understand. Am I to receive in silence what doesn't belong to me, or am I to send a letter to the papers to say that the whole thing was patched and polished at the printing office, and that I have no right to more than perhaps a fourth part of the commendation? How would that do?"

"But you forget it is not to have your name to it," he said; "and so it won't matter a bit. There will be nothing dishonest about it."

"You forget that although nobody knows my real name, everybody will know that I am the daughter of that Mr. Walton who would have thrown his pen in the fire if you had meddled with anything he wrote. They would be praising *me*, if they praised at all. The name is nothing. Of all things, to have praise you don't deserve, and not to

be able to reject it, is the most miserable! It is as bad as painting one's face."

"Hardly a case in point," said Mr. Blackstone. "For the artificial complexion would be your own work, and the other would not."

"If you come to discuss that question," said my father, "we must all confess we have had in our day to pocket a good many more praises than we had a right to. I agree with you, however, my child, that we must not connive at anything of the sort. So I will propose this clause in the bargain between you and Mr. S.—namely, that if he finds any fault with your work, he shall send it back to yourself to be set right, and if you cannot do so to his mind, you shall be off the bargain."

"But papa—Percivale—both of you know well enough that nothing ever happened to me worth telling."

"I am sorry your life has been so very uninteresting, wife," said my husband, grimly; for his fun is always so like earnest!

"You know well enough what I mean, husband. It does *not* follow that what has been interesting enough to you and me will be interesting to people who know nothing at all about us to begin with."

"It depends on how it is told," said Mr. S.

"Then, I beg leave to say, that I never had an original thought in my life, and that if I were to attempt to tell my history the result would be as silly a narrative as ever one old woman told another by the workhouse fire."

"And I only wish I could hear the one old woman tell her story to the other," said my father.

"Ah! but that's because you see ever

so much more in it than shows. You always see through the words and the things to something lying behind them," I said.

"Well, if you told the story rightly, other people would see such things behind it too."

"Not enough of people to make it worth while for Mr. S. to print it," I said.

"He's not going to print it except he thinks it worth his while, and you may safely leave that to him," said my husband.

"And so I'm to write a book as big as the *Annals*, and after I've been slaving at it for half a century or so, I'm to be told it won't do, and all my labour most go for nothing? I must say the proposal is rather a cool one to make—to the mother of a family."

"Not at all;—that's not it, I mean," said Mr. S.—"If you will write a dozen pages

or so, I shall be able to judge by those well enough—at least I will take all the responsibility on myself after that."

"There's a fair offer!" said my husband. "It seems to me, Wynnie, that all that is wanted of you is to tell your tale so that other people can recognize the human heart in it—the heart that is like their own, and be able to feel as if they were themselves going through the things you recount."

"You describe the work of a genius, and coolly ask me to do it. Besides, I don't want to be set thinking about my heart, and all that," I said peevishly.

"Now don't be raising objections where none exist," he returned.

"If you mean I am pretending to object, I have only to say that I feel all one great objection to the whole affair, and that I won't touch it."

They were all silent, and I felt as if I

had behaved ungraciously. Then first I felt as if I might *have* to do it after all. But I couldn't see my way in the least.

"Now what is there," I asked, "in all my life that is worth setting down—I mean as I should be able to set it down?"

"What do you ladies talk about now, in your morning calls?" suggested Mr. Blackstone, with a humorous glance from his deep black eyes.

"Nothing worth writing about, as I am sure *you* will readily believe, Mr. Blackstone," I answered.

"How comes it to be interesting then?"

"But it isn't. They—we—only talk about the weather and our children and servants, and that sort of thing."

"*Well!*" said Mr. S.—"and I wish I could get anything sensible about the weather and children and servants, and that sort of thing, for my magazine. I have

a weakness in the direction of the sensible."

"But there never is anything sensible said about any of them—not that I know of."

"Now, Wynnie, I am sure you are wrong," said my father. "There is your friend, Mrs. Cromwell: I am certain she, sometimes at least, must say what is worth hearing about such matters."

"Well, but she's an exception. Besides, she hasn't any children."

"Then," said my husband, "there's Lady Bernard——"

"Ah—but she was like no one else. Besides, she is almost a public character, and anything said about her, would betray my original."

"It would be no matter. She is beyond caring for that now; and not one of her friends could object to anything you who loved her so much would say about her."

The mention of this lady seemed to put some strength into me. I felt as if I did know something worth telling, and I was silent in my turn.

"Certainly," Mr. S. resumed, "whatever is worth talking about is worth writing about—though not perhaps in the way it is talked about. Besides, Mrs. Percivale, my clients want to know more about your sisters and little Theodora or Dorothea, or what was her name in the book?"

The end of it was that I agreed to try to the extent of a dozen pages or so.

## CHAPTER II.

### I TRY.

I HOPE no one will think I try to write like my father, for that would be to go against what he always made a great point of—that nobody whatever should imitate any other person whatever, but in modesty and humility allow the seed that God had sown in her to grow. He said all imitation tended to dwarf and distort the plant, if it even allowed the seed to germinate at all. So if I do write like him, it will be because I cannot help it.

I will just look how *The Seaboard Parish* ends, and perhaps that will put into my

head how I ought to begin. I see my father does mention that I had then been Mrs. Percivale for many years. Not so very many though—five or six, if I remember rightly, and that is three or four years ago. Yes, I have been married nine years. I may as well say a word as to how it came about, and if Percivale doesn't like it, the remedy lies in his pen. I shall be far more thankful to have anything struck out on suspicion than remain on sufferance.

After our return home from Kilkhaven, my father and mother had a good many talks about me and Percivale, and sometimes they took different sides. I will give a shadow of one of these conversations. I think ladies can write fully as natural talk as gentlemen can, though the bits between mayn't be so good.

*Mother.*—I am afraid, my dear husband, (This was my mother's most solemn mode of

addressing my father.)—they are too like each other to make a suitable match.

*Father.*—I am sorry to learn you consider me so very unlike yourself, Ethelwyn. I had hoped there was a very strong resemblance indeed, and that the match had not proved altogether unsuitable.

*Mother.*—Just think, though, what would have become of me by this time, if you had been half as unbelieving a creature as I was. Indeed I fear sometimes I am not much better now.

*Father.*—I think I am then; and I know you've done me nothing but good with your unbelief. It was just because I was of the same sort precisely that I was able to understand and help you. My circumstances and education and superior years—

*Mother.*—Now don't plume yourself on that, Harry, for you know everybody says you look much the younger of the two.

*Father.*—I had no idea that everybody was so rude. I repeat, that my more years, as well as my severer education, had, no doubt, helped me a little further on before I came to know you; but it was only in virtue of the doubt in me that I was able to understand and appreciate the doubt in you.

*Mother.*—But then you had at least begun to leave it behind before I knew you, and so had grown able to help me. And Mr. Percivale does not seem, by all I can make out, a bit nearer believing in anything than poor Wynnie herself.

*Father.*—At least he doesn't fancy he believes when he does not, as so many do, and consider themselves superior persons in consequence. I don't know that it would have done you any great harm, Miss Ethelwyn, to have made my acquaintance when I was in the worst of my doubts

concerning the truth of things. Allow me to tell you that I was nearer making shipwreck of my faith at a certain period than I ever was before or have been since.

*Mother.*—What period was that?

*Father.*—Just the little while when I had lost all hope of ever marrying you—unbeliever as you counted yourself.

*Mother.*—You don't mean to say you would have ceased to believe in God if he hadn't given you your own way? What is faith worth if it depends on being indulged?

*Father.*—No, my dear. I firmly believe that had I never married you, I should have come in the end to say *Thy will be done*, and to believe that it must be all right however hard to bear. But, oh, what a terrible thing it would have been, and what a frightful valley of the shadow of death I should have had to go through first!

I know my mother *said* nothing more just then, but let my father have it all his own way for a while.

*Father.*—You see this Percivale is an honest man. I don't exactly know how he has been brought up, and it is quite possible he may have had such evil instruction in Christianity that he attributes to it doctrines which, if I supposed they actually belonged to it, would make me reject it at once as ungodlike and bad. I have found this the case sometimes. I remember once being astonished to hear a certain noble-minded lady utter some indignant words against what I considered a very weighty doctrine of Christianity; but listening I soon found that what she supposed the doctrine to contain was something I considered vastly unchristian. This may be the case with Percivale, though I never heard him say a word of the kind. I think his difficulty

comes mainly from seeing so much suffering in the world that he cannot imagine the presence and rule of a good God; and therefore lies with religion rather than with Christianity as yet. I am all but certain, the only thing that will ever make him able to believe in a God at all is meditation on the Christian idea of God—I mean the idea of God *in* Christ reconciling the world to himself. He will then see that suffering is not either wrath or neglect, but sore-hearted love and tenderness. But we must give him time, wife; as God has borne with us, we must believe that he bears with others, and so learn to wait in hopeful patience until they too see as we see.

And as to trusting our Wynnie with Percivale—he seems to be as good as she is. I should for my part have more apprehension in giving her to one who would be called a thoroughly religious man; for not only

would the unfitness be greater, but such a man would be more likely to confirm her in doubt, if the phrase be permissible. She wants what some would call homœopathic treatment. And how should they be able to love one another if they are not fit to be married to each other? The fitness seems inherent in the fact.

*Mother.*—But many a two love each other who would have loved each other a good deal more if they hadn't been married.

*Father.*—Then it was most desirable they should find out that what they thought a grand affection was not worthy of the name. But I don't think there is much fear of that between those two.

*Mother.*—I don't however see how that man is to do her any good, when *you* have tried to make her happy for so long, and all in vain.

*Father.*—I don't know that it has been

all in vain. But it is quite possible she does not understand me. She fancies, I dare say, that I believe everything without any trouble, and therefore cannot enter into her difficulties.

*Mother.*—But you have told her many and many a time that you do.

*Father.*—Yes—and I hope I was right; but the same things look so different to different people that the same words won't describe them to both; and it may seem to her that I am talking of something not at all like what she is feeling or thinking of. But when she sees the troubled face of Percivale, she knows that he is suffering; and sympathy being thus established between them, the least word of the one will do more to help the other than oceans of argument. Love is the one great instructor. And each will try to be good and to find out for the sake of the other.

*Mother.*—I don't like her going from home for the help that lay at her very door.

*Father.*—You know, my dear, you like the Dean's preaching much better than mine.

*Mother.*—Now that *is* unkind of you!

*Father.*—And why? (my father went on, taking no heed of my mother's expostulation.) Because in the first place it *is* better; because in the second it comes in a newer form to you, for you have got used to all my modes; in the third place it has more force from the fact that it is not subject to the doubt of personal preference; and lastly because he has a large comprehensive way of asserting things, which pleases you better than my more dubitant mode of submitting them—all very sound and good reasons; but still, why be so vexed with Wynnie?

My mother was now however so vexed with my father for saying she preferred the Dean's preaching to his, although I doubt very much whether it wasn't true, that she actually walked out of the octagon room where they were, and left him to meditate on his unkindness. Vexed with herself the next moment she returned as if nothing had happened.—I am only telling what my mother told me, for to her grown daughters she is blessedly trusting.

*Mother.*—Then if you will have them married, husband, will you say how on earth you expect them to live? He just makes both ends meet now: I suppose he doesn't make things out worse than they are, and that is his own account of the state of his affairs.

*Father.*—Ah, yes! that *is*—a secondary consideration, my dear. But I have hardly begun to think about it yet. There will be

a difficulty there, I can easily imagine; for he is far too independent to let us do anything for him.

*Mother.*—And you can't do much, if they would. Really they oughtn't to marry yet.

*Father.*—Really we must leave it to themselves. I don't think you and I need trouble our heads about it. When Percivale considers himself prepared to marry, and Wynnie thinks he is right, you may be sure they see their way to a livelihood without running in hopeless debt to their tradespeople.

*Mother.*—Oh yes! I daresay!—in some poky little lodging or other!

*Father.*—For my part, Ethelwyn, I think it better to build castles in the air than huts in the smoke. But seriously, a little poverty, and a little struggling would be a most healthy and healing thing for Wynnie. It hasn't done Percivale much good yet, I

confess; for he is far too indifferent to his own comforts to mind it; but it will be quite another thing when he has a young wife and perhaps children depending upon him. Then his poverty may begin to hurt him and so do him good.

It may seem odd that my father and mother should now be taking such opposite sides to those they took when the question of our engagement was first started—as represented by my father in *The Seaboard Parish.* But it will seem inconsistent to none of the family; for it was no unusual thing for them to take opposite sides to those they had previously advocated—each happening at the time, possibly enlightened by the foregone arguments of the other, to be impressed with the correlate truth—as my father calls the other side of a thing. Besides, engagement and marriage are two different things, and although my mother

was the first to recognize the good of our being engaged, when it came to marriage she got frightened, I think. Anyhow I have her authority for saying that something like this passed between her and my father on the subject.

Discussion between them differed in this from what I have generally heard between married people, that it was always founded on a tacit understanding of certain unmentioned principles; and no doubt sometimes, if a stranger had been present, he would have been bewildered as to the very meaning of what they were saying. But we girls generally understood; and I fancy we learned more from their differences than from their agreements; for of course it was the differences that brought out their minds most, and chiefly led us to think that we might understand. In our house there were very few of those mysteries which in some houses

seem so to abound; and I think the openness with which every question, for whose concealment there was no special reason, was discussed, did more than even any direct instruction we received to develope what thinking faculty might be in us. Nor was there much reason to dread that my small brothers might repeat anything. I remember hearing Harry say to Charley once—they being then eight and nine years old—"That is mamma's opinion, Charley—not yours, and you know we must not repeat what we hear."

They soon came to be of one mind about Mr. Percivale and me—for indeed the only *real* ground for doubt that had ever existed was—whether I was good enough for him; and for my part I knew then and know now that I was and am dreadfully inferior to him. And notwithstanding the tremendous work women are now making about their rights—

I so wish they had them, if it were only that certain who make me feel ashamed of myself because I too am a woman, might perhaps then drop out of the public regard,) — notwithstanding this, I venture the sweeping assertion that every woman is not as good as every man, and that it is not necessary to the dignity of a wife that she should assert even equality with her husband. Let *him* assert her equality or superiority if he will; but were it a fact, it would be a poor one for her to assert, seeing her glory is in her husband. To seek the chief place is especially unfitting the marriage feast. Whether I be a Christian or not, and I have good reason to doubt it every day of my life, at least I see that in the New Jerusalem one essential of citizenship consists in knowing how to set the good in others over against the evil in ourselves.

There now—my father might have said that! and no doubt has said so twenty times in my hearing. It is however only since I was married that I have come to see it for myself; and now that I do see it, I have a right to say it.

So we were married at last. My mother believes it was my father's good advice to Percivale concerning the sort of pictures he painted, that brought it about. For certainly soon after we were engaged, he began to have what his artist friends called a run of luck: he sold one picture after another in a very extraordinary and hopeful manner. But Percivale says it was his love for me—indeed he does—which enabled him to see not only much deeper into things, but also to see much better the bloom that hangs about everything, and so to paint much better pictures than before. He felt, he said, that he had a hold now where before

he had only a sight. However this may be, he had got on so well for a while that he wrote at last that if I was willing to share his poverty, it would not, he thought, be absolute starvation, and I was, of course, perfectly content. I can't put in words—indeed I dare not, for fear of writing what would be if not unladylike at least uncharitable—my contempt for those women who, loving a man, hesitate to run every risk with him. Of course, if they cannot trust him, it is a different thing. I am not going to say anything about that, for I should be out of my depth—not in the least understanding how a woman can love a man to whom she cannot look up. I believe there are who can; I see some men married whom I don't believe any woman ever did or ever could respect; all I say is, I don't understand it.

My father and mother made no objection,

and were evidently at last quite agreed that it would be the best thing for both of us—and so, I say, we were married.

I ought just to mention that, before the day arrived, my mother went up to London at Percivale's request, to help him in getting together the few things absolutely needful for the barest commencement of housekeeping. For the rest, it had been arranged that we should furnish by degrees, buying as we saw what we liked, and could afford it. The greater part of modern fashions in furniture, having both been accustomed to the stateliness of a more artistic period, we detested for their ugliness, and chiefly therefore we desired to look about us at our leisure.

My mother came back more satisfied with the little house he had taken than I had expected. It was not so easy to get one to suit us, for of course he required a large room to paint in, with a good north light.

He had however succeeded better than he had hoped.

"You will find things very different from what you have been used to, Wynnie," said my mother.

"Of course, mamma; I know that," I answered. "I hope I am prepared to meet it. If I don't like it, I shall have no one to blame but myself; and I don't see what right people have to expect what they have been used to."

"There is just this advantage," said my father, "in having been used to nice things, that it ought to be easier to keep from sinking into the sordid, however straitened the new circumstances may be, compared with the old."

On the evening before the wedding, my father took me into the octagon room, and there knelt down with me and my mother, and prayed for me in such a wonderful way

that I was perfectly astonished and overcome. I had never known him do anything of the kind before. He was not favourable to extempore prayer in public, or even in the family, and indeed had often seemed willing to omit prayers for what I could not always count sufficient reason: he had a horror at their getting to be a matter of course and a form; for then, he said, they ceased to be worship at all, and were a mere pagan rite, better far left alone. I remember also he said, that those, however good they might be, who urged attention to the forms of religion, such as going to church and saying prayers, were, however innocently, just the prophets of Pharisaism; that what men had to be stirred up to was to lay hold upon God, and then they would not fail to find out what religious forms they ought to cherish. "The spirit first and then the flesh," he would say. To put the latter

before the former was a falsehood, and therefore a frightful danger, being at the root of all declensions in the church, and making ever recurring earthquakes and persecutions and repentances and reformations needful. I find what my father used to say coming back so often now that I hear so little of it —especially as he talks much less, accusing himself of having always talked too much— and I understand it so much better now, that I shall be always in danger of interrupting my narrative to say something that he said. But when I commence the next chapter, I shall get on faster, I hope. My story is like a vessel I saw once being launched: it would stick on the stocks instead of sliding away into the expectant waters.

## CHAPTER III.

### MY WEDDING.

I CONFESS the first thing I did when I knew myself the next morning was to have a good cry. To leave the place where I had been born was like forsaking the laws and order of the nature I knew—for some other—nature it might be, but not known to me as such. How, for instance, could one who has been used to our bright white sun, and our pale modest moon, with our soft twilights and far, mysterious skies of night, be willing to fall in with the order of things in a planet such as I have read of somewhere, with three or four suns, one red and

another green and another yellow? Only perhaps I've taken it all up wrong—and I do like looking at a landscape for a minute or so through a coloured glass; and if it be so, of course it all blends, and all we want is harmony. What I mean is, that I found it a great wrench to leave the dear old place, and of course loved it more than I had ever loved it. But I would get all my crying about that over beforehand. It would be bad enough afterwards to have to part with my father and mother and Connie and the rest of them. Only it wasn't like leaving them. You can't leave hearts as you do rooms. You can't leave thoughts as you do books. Those you love only come nearer to you when you go away from them. The same rules don't hold with *thinks* and *things*, as my eldest boy distinguished them the other day.

But somehow I couldn't get up and dress.

I seemed to have got very fond of my own bed, and the queer old crows, as I had called them from babyhood, on the chintz curtains, and the Chinese paper on the walls with the strangest birds and creeping things on it. It was a lovely spring morning, and the sun was shining gloriously. I knew that the rain of the last night must be glittering on the grass and the young leaves, and I heard the birds singing as if they knew far more than mere human beings, and believed a great deal more than they knew. Nobody will persuade me that the birds don't mean it; that they sing from anything else than gladness of heart. And if they don't think about cats and guns, why should they? Even when they fall on the ground, it is not without our Father. How horridly dull and stupid it seems to say that "without your Father" means without *his knowing it.* The Father's mere *knowledge* of a thing—if that could be,

which my father says can't—is not the Father. The father's tenderness and care and love of it all the time—that is the not falling without him. When the cat kills the bird—as I have seen happen so often in our poor little London garden—God yet saves his bird from his cat. There is nothing so bad as it looks to our half-sight, our blinding perceptions. My father used to say we are all walking in a spiritual twilight, and are all more or less affected with twilight blindness, as some people are physically. Percivale, for one, who is as brave as any wife could wish, is far more timid than I am in crossing a London street in the twilight; he can't see what is coming, and fancies he sees what is not coming. But then he has faith in me, and never starts when I am leading him.

Well, the birds were singing, and Dora and the boys were making a great chatter, like a whole colony of sparrows, under my

window. Still I felt as if I had twenty questions to settle before I could get up comfortably, and so lay on and on till the breakfast bell rang; and I was not more than half dressed when my mother came to see why I was late, for I had not been late for ever so long before.

She comforted me as nobody but a mother can comfort. Oh! I do hope I shall be to my children what my mother has been to me. It would be such a blessed thing to be a well of water whence they may be sure of drawing comfort. And all she said to me has come true.

Of course, my father gave me away, and Mr. Weir married us.

It had been before agreed that we should have no wedding journey. We all liked the old-fashioned plan of the bride going straight from her father's house to her husband's. The other way seemed a

poor invention, just for the sake of something different. So after the wedding, we spent the time as we should have done any other day, wandering about in groups, or sitting and reading, only that we were all more smartly dressed—until it was time for an early dinner, after which we drove to the station, accompanied only by my father and mother.

After they left us, or rather we left them, my husband did not speak to me for nearly an hour. I knew why, and was very grateful. He would not show his new face in the midst of my old loves and their sorrows, but would give me time to rearrange the grouping so as myself to bring him in when all was ready for him. I know that was what he was thinking, or feeling rather; and I understood him perfectly. At last, when I had got things a little tidier inside me, and had persuaded

my eyes to stop, I held out my hand to him, and then—I knew that I was his wife.

This is all I have to tell, though I have plenty more to keep, till we got to London. There, instead of my father's nice carriage, we got into a jolting, lumbering, horrid cab, with my five boxes and Percivale's little portmanteau on the top of it, and drove away to Camden Town. It *was* to a part of it near the Regent's Park, and so our letters were always, according to the divisions of the Post Office, addressed to Regent's Park, but for all practical intents we were in Camden Town. It was indeed a change from a fine old house in the country, but the street wasn't much uglier than Belgrave Square, or any other of those heaps of uglinesses, called squares, in the West End; and after what I had been told to expect, I was surprised at the prettiness of the

little house when I stepped out of the cab and looked about me. It was stuck on like a swallow's nest to the end of a great row of commonplace houses, nearly a quarter of a mile in length, but itself was not the work of one of those wretched builders who care no more for beauty in what they build than a scavenger in the heap of mud he scrapes from the street. It had been built by a painter for himself—in the Tudor style; and though Percivale says the idea is not very well carried out, I like it much.

I found it a little dreary when I entered though—from its emptiness. The only sitting-room at all prepared had just a table and two or three old-fashioned chairs in it—not even a carpet on the floor. The bedroom and dressing-room were also as scantily furnished as they well could be.

"Don't be dismayed, my darling," said

my husband. "Look here"—showing me a bunch of notes—"we shall go out to-morrow and buy all we want—as far as this will go, and then wait for the rest. It will be such a pleasure to buy the things with you, and see them come home, and have you appoint their places. You and Sarah will make the carpets, won't you?—and I will put them down, and we shall be like birds building their nest."

"We have only to line it; the nest is built already."

"Well, neither do the birds build the tree.—I wonder if they ever sit in their old summer nests in the winter nights."

"I am afraid not," I answered; "but I'm ashamed to say I can't tell."

"It is the only pretty house I know in all London," he went on, "with a studio at the back of it. I have had my eye on it for a long time, but there seemed no

sign of a migratory disposition in the bird who had occupied it for three years past. All at once he spread his wings and flew. I count myself very fortunate."

"So do I. But now you must let me see your study," I said. "I hope I may sit in it when you've got nobody there."

"As much as ever you like, my love," he answered. "Only I don't want to make all my women like you, as I've been doing for the last two years. You must get me out of that somehow."

"Easily. I shall be so cross and disagreeable that you will get tired of me, and find no more difficulty in keeping me out of your pictures."

But he got me out of his pictures without that; for when he had me always before him he didn't want to be always producing me.

He led me into the little hall—made

lovely by a cast of an unfinished Madonna of Michael Angelo's let into the wall—and then to the back of it, where he opened a small cloth-covered door, when there yawned before me, below me, and above me, a great wide lofty room. Down into it led an almost perpendicular stair.

"So you keep a little private precipice here," I said.

"No, my dear," he returned; "you mistake. It is a Jacob's ladder—or will be in one moment more."

He gave me his hand and led me down.

"This is quite a banqueting-hall, Percivale!" I cried, looking round me.

"It shall be, the first time I get a thousand pounds for a picture," he returned.

"How grand you talk!" I said, looking up at him with some wonder; for big words rarely came out of his mouth.

"Well," he answered merrily, "I had

two hundred and seventy-five for the last."

"That's a long way off a thousand," I returned, with a silly sigh.

"Quite right; and, therefore, this study is a long way off a banqueting-hall."

There was literally nothing inside the seventeen feet cube except one chair, one easel, a horrible thing like a huge doll, with no end of joints, called a lay figure, but Percivale called it his bishop; a number of pictures leaning their faces against the walls in attitudes of grief that their beauty was despised and no man would buy them; a few casts of legs and arms and faces, half a dozen murderous-looking weapons, and a couple of yards square of the most exquisite tapestry I ever saw.

"Do you like being read to when you are at work?" I asked him.

"Sometimes—at certain kinds of work,

but not by any means always," he answered. —"Will you shut your eyes for one minute," he went on, "and, whatever I do, not open them till I tell you?"

"You mustn't hurt me, then, or I may open them without being able to help it, you know," I said, closing my eyes tight.

"Hurt you!" he repeated, with a tone I would not put on the paper if I could; and the same moment I found myself in his arms, carried like a baby, for Percivale is one of the strongest of men.

It was only for a few yards, however. He laid me down somewhere, and told me to open my eyes.

I could scarcely believe them when I did. I was lying on a couch in a room—small, indeed, but beyond exception the loveliest I had ever seen. At first I was only aware of an exquisite harmony of colour, and could not have told of what it

was composed. The place was lighted by a soft lamp that hung in the middle, and when my eyes went up to see where it was fastened, I found the ceiling marvellous in deep blue, with a suspicion of green, just like some of the shades of a peacock's feathers, with a multitude of gold and red stars upon it. What the walls were I could not for some time tell, they were so covered with pictures and sketches. Against one was a lovely little set of bookshelves filled with books; and on a little carved table stood a vase of white hothouse flowers, with one red camellia. One picture had a curtain of green silk before it, and by its side hung the wounded knight whom his friends were carrying home to die.

"Oh, my Percivale!" I cried, and could say no more.

"Do you like it?" he asked quietly, but with shining eyes.

"Like it?" I repeated. "Shall I like Paradise when I get there? But what a lot of money it must have cost you!"

"Not much," he answered; "not more than thirty pounds or so. Every spot of paint there is from my own brush."

"Oh Percivale!"

I must make a conversation of it to tell it at all; but what I really did say I know no more than the man in the moon.

"The carpet was the only expensive thing. That must be as thick as I could get it, for the floor is of stone, and must not come near your pretty feet. Guess what the place was before."

"I should say—the flower of a prickly pear cactus, full of sunlight from behind, which a fairy took the fancy to swell into a room."

"It was a shed, in which the sculptor who occupied the place before me used

to keep his wet clay and blocks of marble."

"Seeing is hardly believing," I said. "Is it to be my room? I know you mean it for my own room, where I can ask you to come when I please, and where I can hide when any one comes you don't want me to see."

"That is just what I meant it for, my Ethelwyn—and to let you know what I *would* do for you if I could."

"I hate the place, Percivale," I said. "What right has it to come poking in between you and me, telling me what I know and have known for—well, I won't say how long—far better than even you can tell me?"

He looked a little troubled.

"Ah, my dear," I said, "let my foolish words breathe and die."

I wonder sometimes to think how seldom

I am in that room now. But there it is, and somehow I seem to know it all the time I am busy elsewhere.

He made me shut my eyes again, and carried me into the study.

"Now," he said, "find your way to your own room."

I looked about me, but could see no sign of a door. He took up a tall stretcher with a canvas on it, and revealed the door, at the same time showing a likeness of myself —at the top of the Jacob's ladder, as he called it, with one foot on the first step, and the other half way to the second. The light came from the window on my left, which he had turned into a western window, in order to get certain effects from a supposed sunset. I was represented in a white dress, tinged with the rose of the west; and he had managed, attributing the phenomenon to the inequalities of the glass in

the window, to suggest one rosy wing behind me, with just the shoulder-root of another visible.

"There!" he said. "It is not finished yet, but that is how I saw you one evening as I was sitting here all alone in the twilight."

"But you didn't really see me like that!" I said.

"I hardly know," he answered. "I had been forgetting everything else in dreaming about you, and—how it was I cannot tell, but either in the body or out of the body there I saw you, standing just so at the top of the stair—smiling to me as much as to say—'Have patience. My foot is on the first step. I'm coming.' I turned at once to my easel, and before the twilight was gone had sketched the vision. To-morrow you must sit to me for an hour or so—for I will do nothing else till I have finished it and sent it off to your father and mother."

I may just add that I hear it is considered a very fine painting. It hangs in the great dining-room at home. I wish I were as good as he has made it look.

The next morning, after I had given him the sitting he wanted, we set out on our furniture-hunt; when, having keen enough eyes, I caught sight of this and of that and of twenty different things in the brokers' shops. We did not agree about the merits of everything by which one or the other was attracted, but an objection by the one always turned the other—a little at least; and we bought nothing we were not agreed about. Yet that evening the hall was piled with things sent home to line our nest. Percivale, as I have said, had saved up some money for the purpose, and I had a hundred pounds my father had given me before we started, which, never having had more than ten of my own at a time, I was

eager enough to spend. So we found plenty to do for the fortnight during which time my mother had promised to say nothing to her friends in London of our arrival. Percivale also keeping out of the way of his friends, everybody thought we were on the continent—or somewhere else, and left us to ourselves. And as he had sent in his pictures to the Academy, he was able to take a rest, which rest consisted in working hard at all sorts of upholstery, not to mention painters' and carpenters' work; so that we soon got the little house made into a very warm and very pretty nest. I may mention that Percivale was particularly pleased with a cabinet I bought for him on the sly—to stand in his study, and hold his paints and brushes and sketches, for there were all sorts of drawers in it, and some that it took us a good deal of trouble to find out, though he was clever enough to

suspect them from the first, when I hadn't a thought of such a thing; and I have often fancied since that that cabinet was just like himself, for I have been going on finding out things in him that I had no idea were there when I married him. I had no idea that he was a poet, for instance. I wonder to this day why he never showed me any of his verses before we were married. He writes better poetry than my father—at least my father says so. Indeed I soon came to feel very ignorant and stupid beside him; he could tell me so many things, and especially in art — for he had thought about all kinds of it—making me understand that there is no end to it, any more than to the nature which sets it going, and that the more we see into nature, and try to represent it, the more ignorant and helpless we find ourselves;—until at length I began to wonder whether God might not have

made the world so rich and full just to teach his children humility. For a while I felt quite stunned. He very much wanted me to draw; but I thought it was no use trying, and indeed had no heart for it. I spoke to my father about it. He said it was indeed of no use if my object was to be able to think much of myself, for no one could ever succeed in that in the long run; but if my object was to reap the delight of the truth, it was worth while to spend hours and hours on trying to draw a single tree-leaf, or paint the wing of a moth.

## CHAPTER IV.

### JUDY'S VISIT.

THE very first morning after the expiry of the fortnight, when I was in the kitchen with Sarah, giving her instructions about a certain dish as if I had made it twenty times, whereas I had only just learned how from a shilling cookery-book, there came a double knock at the door. I guessed who it must be.

"Run, Sarah," I said, "and show Mrs. Morley into the drawing-room."

When I entered, there she was—Mrs. Morley, alias, Cousin Judy.

"Well, little cozzie!" she cried, as

she kissed me three or four times, "I'm glad to see you gone the way of woman-kind—wooed and married and a'!—Fate, child! inscrutable fate!" and she kissed me again.

She always calls me little coz, though I am a head taller than herself. She is as good as ever, quite as brusque, and at the first word apparently more overbearing. But she is as ready to listen to reason as ever was woman of my acquaintance, and I think the form of her speech is but a somewhat distorted reflex of her perfect honesty. After a little trifling talk, which is sure to come first when people are more than ordinarily glad to meet, I asked after her children. I forget how many there were of them, but they were then pretty far into the plural number.

"Growing like ill weeds," she said—"as anxious as ever their grandfathers and

mothers were to get their heads up and do mischief. For my part I wish I was Jove —to start them full grown at once. Or why shouldn't they be made like Eve out of their father's ribs? It would be a great comfort to their mother."

My father had always been much pleased with the results of Judy's training, as contrasted with those of his sister's. The little ones of my aunt Martha's family were always wanting something, and always looking careworn like their mother, he said, while she was always reading them lectures on their duty, and never making them mind what she said. She would represent the self-same thing to them over and over, until not merely all force, but all sense as well seemed to have forsaken it. Her notion of duty was to tell them yet again the duty which they had been told at least a thousand times already, without the slightest result.

They were dull children, wearisome and uninteresting. On the other hand the little Morleys were full of life and eagerness. The fault in them was that they wouldn't take petting, and what's the good of a child that won't be petted? They lacked that something which makes a woman feel motherly.

"When did you arrive, cozzie?" she asked.

"A fortnight ago yesterday."

"Ah, you sly thing! What have you been doing with yourself all the time?"

"Furnishing."

"What! you came into an empty house?"

"Not quite that, but nearly."

"It is very odd I should never have seen your husband. We have crossed each other twenty times."

"Not so *very* odd, seeing he has been my husband only a fortnight."

"What is he like?"

"Like nothing but himself."

"Is he tall?"

"Yes."

"Is he stout?"

"No."

"An Adonis?"

"No."

"A Hercules?"

"No."

"Very clever, I believe."

"Not at all."

For my father had taught me to look down on that word.

"Why did you marry him, then?"

"I didn't. He married me."

"What did you marry him for then?"

"For love."

"What did you love him for?"

"Because he was a philosopher."

"That's the oddest reason I ever heard for marrying a man."

"I said for loving him, Judy."

Her bright eyes were twinkling with fun.

"Come, cozzie," she said, "give me a proper reason for falling in love with this husband of yours."

"Well, I'll tell you, then," I said; "only you mustn't tell any other body: he's got such a big shaggy head, just like a lion's."

"And such a huge big foot—just like a bear's?"

"Yes, and such great huge hands! Why the two of them go quite round my waist! And such big eyes, that they look right through me; and such a big heart, that if he saw me doing anything wrong, he would kill me, and bury me in it."

"Well, I must say, it is the most

extraordinary description of a husband I ever heard. It sounds to me very like an ogre."

"Yes, I admit, the description is rather ogrish. But then he's poor, and that makes up for a good deal."

I was in the humour for talking nonsense, and of course expected of all people that Judy would understand my fun.

"How does that make up for anything?"

"Because if he is a poor man, he isn't a rich man, and therefore not so likely to be stupid."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because, first of all, the rich man doesn't know what to do with his money, whereas my ogre knows what to do without it. Then the rich man wonders in the morning which waistcoat he shall put on, while my ogre has but one, besides his

Sunday one. Then supposing the rich man has slept well, and has done a fair stroke or two of business, he wants nothing but a well-dressed wife, a well-dressed dinner, a few glasses of his favourite wine, and the evening paper, well diluted with a sleep in his easy-chair, to be perfectly satisfied that this world is the best of all possible worlds. Now my ogre, on the other hand——"

I was going on to point out how frightfully different from all this my ogre was—how he would devour a half-cooked chop, and drink a pint of ale from the public-house, &c., &c., when she interrupted me, saying with an odd expression of voice—

"You are satirical, cozzie. He's not the worst sort of man you've just described. A woman might be very happy with him. If it weren't such early days, I should

doubt if you were as comfortable as you would have people think; for how else should you be so ill-natured?"

It flashed upon me that without the least intention I had been giving a very fair portrait of Mr. Morley. I felt my face grow as red as fire.

"I had no intention of being satirical, Judy," I replied. "I was only describing a man the very opposite of my husband."

"You don't know mine yet," she said. "You may think——"

She actually broke down and cried. I had never in my life seen her cry, and I was miserable at what I had done. Here was a nice beginning of social relations in my married life!

I knelt down, put my arms round her, and looked up in her face.

"Dear Judy," I said, "you mistake me quite. I never thought of Mr. Morley

when I said that. How should I have dared to say such things if I had? He is a most kind, good man, and papa and every one is glad when he comes to see us. I daresay he does like to sleep well—I know Percivale does; and I don't doubt he likes to get on with what he's at—Percivale does, for he's ever so much better company when he has got on with his picture; and I know he likes to see me well dressed—at least I haven't tried him with anything else yet, for I have plenty of clothes for a while; and then for the dinner, which I believe was one of the points in the description I gave—I wish Percivale cared a little more for his, for then it would be easier to do something for him. As to the newspaper, there I fear I must give him up, for I have never yet seen him with one in his hand. He's *so* stupid about some things!"

"Oh! you've found that out, have you?

Men *are* stupid; there's no doubt of that. But you don't know my Walter yet."

I looked up, and, behold, Percivale was in the room! His face wore such a curious expression that I could hardly help laughing. And no wonder! for here was I on my knees, clasping my first visitor, and to all appearance pouring out the woes of my wedded life in her lap—woes so deep that they drew tears from her as she listened. All this flashed upon me as I started to my feet, but I could give no explanation; I could only make haste to introduce my husband to my cousin Judy.

He behaved of course as if he had heard nothing. But I fancy Judy caught a glimpse of the awkward position, for she plunged into the affair at once.

"Here is my cousin, Mr. Percivale, has been abusing my husband to my face, calling him rich and stupid, and I don't

know what all. I confess he is so stupid as to be very fond of me, but that's all I know against him."

And her handkerchief went once more to her eyes.

"Dear Judy!" I expostulated, "you know I didn't say one word about him."

"Of course I do, you silly coz!" she cried, and burst out laughing. "But I won't forgive you except you make amends by dining with us to-morrow."

Thus for the time she carried it off; but I believe, and have since had good reason for believing that she had really mistaken me at first, and been much annoyed.

She and Percivale got on very well. He showed her the portrait he was still working at—even accepted one or two trifling hints as to the likeness, and they parted the best friends in the world.

Glad as I had been to see her, how I longed to see the last of her! The moment she was gone, I threw myself into his arms, and told him how it came about. He laughed heartily.

"I *was* a little puzzled," he said, "to hear you inform a lady I had never seen that I was so very stupid."

"But I wasn't telling a story either, for you know you are ve-e-e-ry stupid, Percivale. You don't know a leg from a shoulder of mutton, and you can't carve a bit. However you can draw as you do, is a marvel to me, when you know nothing about the shapes of things. It was very wrong to say it, even for the sake of covering poor Mrs. Morley's husband; but it was quite true, you know."

"Perfectly true, my love," he said, with something else where I've only put commas; "and I mean to remain so, in order that

you may always have something to fall back upon when you get yourself into a scrape by forgetting that other people have husbands as well as you."

## CHAPTER V.

### "GOOD SOCIETY."

WE had agreed, rather against the inclination of both of us, to dine the next evening with the Morleys. We should have preferred our own society, but we could not refuse.

"They will be talking to me about my pictures," said my husband, "and that is just what I hate. People that know nothing of art, that can't distinguish purple from black, will yet parade their ignorance, and expect me to be pleased."

"Mr. Morley is a well-bred man, Percivale," I said.

"That's the worst of it—they do it for good manners; I know the kind of people perfectly. I hate to have my pictures praised. It is as bad as talking to one's face about the nose upon it."

I wonder if all ladies keep their husbands waiting. I did that night, I know, and, I am afraid, a good many times after—not, however, since Percivale told me very seriously that being late for dinner was the only fault of mine the blame of which he would not take on his own shoulders. The fact on this occasion was, that I could not get my hair right. It was the first time I missed what I had been used to, and longed for the deft fingers of my mother's maid to help me. When I told him the cause, he said he would do my hair for me next time, if I would teach him how. But I have managed very well since without either him or a lady's maid.

When we reached Bolivar Square, we found the company waiting; and as if for a rebuke to us, the butler announced dinner the moment we entered. I was seated between Mr. Morley and a friend of his who took me down, Mr. Baddeley, a portly gentleman, with an expanse of snowy shirt from which flashed three diamond studs. A huge gold chain reposed upon his front, and on his finger shone a brilliant of great size. Everything about him seemed to say, "Look how real I am! No shoddy about me!" His hands were plump and white, and looked as if they did not know what dust was. His talk sounded very rich, and yet there was no pretence in it. His wife looked less of a lady than he of a gentleman, for she betrayed conscious importance. I found afterwards that he was the only son of a railway contractor, who had himself handled the

spade, but at last died enormously rich. He spoke blandly, but with a certain quiet authority which I disliked.

"Are you fond of the opera, Mrs. Percivale?" he asked me, in order to make talk.

"I have never been to the opera," I answered.

"Never been to the opera? Ain't you fond of music?"

"Did you ever know a lady that wasn't?"

"Then you must go to the opera."

"But it is just because I fancy myself fond of music that I don't think I should like the opera."

"You can't hear such music anywhere else."

"But the antics of the singers, pretending to be in such furies of passion, yet modulating every note with the cunning of a carver in ivory, seems to me so prepos-

terous! For surely song springs from a brooding over past feeling—I do not mean lost feeling—never from present emotion."

"Ah! you would change your mind after having once been. I should strongly advise you to go, if only for once. You ought now, really."

"An artist's wife must do without such expensive amusements — except her husband's pictures be very popular indeed. I might as well cry for the moon. The cost of a box at the opera for a single night would keep my little household for a fortnight."

"Ah, well—but you should see 'The Barber,'" he said.

"Perhaps if I could hear without seeing, I should like it better," I answered.

He fell silent, busying himself with his fish, and when he spoke again turned to the lady on his left. I went on with my dinner.

I knew that our host had heard what I said, for I saw him turn rather hastily to his butler.

Mr. Morley is a man difficult to describe, stiff in the back, and long and loose in the neck, reminding me of those toy birds that bob head and tail up and down alternately. When he agrees with anything you say, down comes his head with a rectangular nod; when he does not agree with you, he is so silent and motionless that he leaves you in doubt whether he has heard a word of what you have been saying. His face is hard, and was to me then inscrutable; while what he said always seemed to have little or nothing to do with what he was thinking; and I had not then learned whether he had a heart or not. His features were well-formed, but they and his head and face too small for his body. He seldom smiled except when in doubt. He had, I understood, been very successful

in business, and always looked full of schemes.

"Have you been to the Academy yet?" he asked.

"No; this is only the first day of it."

"Are your husband's pictures well hung?"

"As high as Haman," I answered; "—skied, in fact. That is the right word, I believe."

"I would advise you to avoid slang, my dear cousin—*professional* slang especially; and to remember that in London there are no professions after six o'clock."

"Indeed!" I returned. "As we came along in the carriage—cabbage, I mean—I saw no end of shops open."

"I mean in society—at dinner—amongst friends, you know."

"My dear Mr. Morley, you have just done asking me about my husband's pic-

tures, and if you listen a moment you will hear that lady next my husband talking to him about Leslie and Turner, and I don't know who more—all in the trade."

"Hush! hush! I beg," he almost whispered, looking agonized. "That's Mrs. Baddeley. Her husband, next to you, is a great picture-buyer. That's why I asked him to meet you."

"I thought there were no professions in London after six o'clock."

"I am afraid I have not made my meaning quite clear to you."

"Not quite. Yet I think I understand you."

"We'll have a talk about it another time."

"With pleasure."

It irritated me rather that he should talk to me, a married woman, as to a little girl who did not know how to behave herself;

but his patronage of my husband displeased me far more, and I was on the point of committing the terrible blunder of asking Mr. Baddeley if he had any poor relations; but I checked myself in time, and prayed to know whether he was a member of Parliament. He answered that he was not in the house at present, and asked in return why I had wished to know. I answered that I wanted a bill brought in for the punishment of fraudulent milkmen, for I couldn't get a decent pennyworth of milk in all Camden Town. He laughed, and said it would be a very desirable measure, only too great an interference with the liberty of the subject. I told him that kind of liberty was just what law in general owed its existence to, and was there on purpose to interfere with; but he did not seem to see it.

The fact is I was very silly. Proud of being the wife of an artist, I resented the

social injustice which I thought gave artists no place but one of sufferance. Proud also of being poor for Percivale's sake, I made a show of my poverty before people whom I supposed, rightly enough in many cases, to be proud of their riches. But I knew nothing of what poverty really meant, and was as yet only playing at being poor; cherishing a foolish, though unacknowledged notion of protecting my husband's poverty with the ægis of my position as the daughter of a man of consequence in his county. I was thus wronging the dignity of my husband's position, and complimenting wealth by making so much of its absence. Poverty or wealth ought to have been in my eyes such a trifle, that I never thought of publishing whether I was rich or poor. I ought to have taken my position without wasting a thought on what it might appear in the eyes of those about me, meeting them

on the mere level of humanity, and leaving them to settle with themselves how they were to think of me, and where they were to place me. I suspect also, now that I think of it, that I looked down upon my cousin Judy because she had a mere man of business for her husband; forgetting that our Lord had found a collector of conquered taxes, a man, I presume, with little enough of the artistic about him, one of the fittest in his nation to bear the message of his redemption to the hearts of his countrymen. It is his loves and his hopes, not his visions and intentions, by which a man is to be judged. My father had taught me all this, but I did not understand it then, nor until years after I had left him.

"Is Mrs. Percivale a lady of fortune?" asked Mr. Baddeley of my cousin Judy when we were gone, for we were the first to leave.

"Certainly not. Why do you ask?" she returned.

"Because, from her talk, I thought she must be," he answered.

Cousin Judy told me this the next day, and I could see she thought I had been bragging of my family. So I recounted all the conversation I had had with him, as nearly as I could recollect, and set down the question to an impertinent irony. But I have since changed my mind: I now judge that he could not believe any poor person would joke about poverty. I never found one of those people who go about begging for charities believe me when I told him the simple truth that I could not afford to subscribe. None but a rich person, they seem to think, would dare such an excuse, and that only in the just expectation that its very assertion must render it incredible.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A REFUGE FROM THE HEAT.

THERE was a little garden, one side enclosed by the house, another by the studio, and the remaining two by walls, evidently built for the nightly convenience of promenading cats. There was one pear-tree in the grass plot which occupied the centre, and a few small fruit trees, which, I may now safely say, never bore anything, upon the walls. But the last occupant had cared for his garden, and when I came to the cottage, it was, although you would hardly believe it now that my garden is inside the house, a pretty

little spot—only if you stop thinking about a garden, it begins at once to go to the bad. Used although I had been to great wide lawns and park and gardens and wilderness, the tiny enclosure soon became to me the type of the boundless universe. The streets roared about me with ugly omnibuses and uglier cabs, fine carriages, huge earth-shaking drays, and, worse far, with the cries of all the tribe of costermongers—one especially offensive which soon began to haunt me. I almost hated the man who sent it forth to fill the summer air with disgust. He always put his hollowed hand to his jaw, as if it were loose and he had to hold it in its place, before he uttered his hideous howl, which would send me hurrying up the stairs to bury my head under all the pillows of my bed until, coming back across the wilderness of streets and lanes like the cry of a jackal growing fainter and fainter upon the wind,

it should pass and die away in the distance. Suburban London, I say, was roaring about me, and I was confined to a few square yards of grass and gravel walk and flower plot; but above was the depth of the sky, and thence at night the hosts of heaven looked in upon me with the same calm assured glance with which they shone upon southern forests, swarming with great butterflies and creatures that go flaming through the tropic darkness; and there the moon would come and cast her lovely shadows; and there was room enough to feel alone and to try to pray. And what was strange, the room seemed greater, though the loneliness was gone, when my husband walked up and down in it with me. True, the greater part of the walk seemed to be the turnings, for they always came just when you wanted to go on and on; but even with the scope of the world for your walk, you must turn and

come back sometime. At first, when he was smoking his great brown meerschaum, he and I would walk in opposite directions, passing each other in the middle, and so make the space double the size, for he had all the garden to himself, and I had it all to myself; and so I had his garden and mine too. That is how by degrees I got able to bear the smoke of tobacco, for I had never been used to it, and found it a small trial at first, but now I have got actually to like it, and greet a stray whiff from the study like a message from my husband. I fancy I could tell the smoke of that old black and red meerschaum from the smoke of any other pipe in creation.

"You *must* cure him of that bad habit," said cousin Judy to me once.

It made me angry. What right had she to call anything my husband did a bad habit? and to expect me to agree with her

was ten times worse. I am saving my money now to buy him a grand new pipe; and I may just mention here, that once I spent ninepence out of my last shilling to get him a packet of Bristol bird's-eye, for he was on the point of giving up smoking altogether because of—well, because of what will appear by and by.

England is getting dreadfully crowded with mean, ugly houses. If they were those of the poor and struggling, and not of the rich and comfortable, one might be consoled. But rich barbarism, in the shape of ugliness, is again pushing us to the sea. There, however, its "control stops;" and since I lived in London the sea has grown more precious to me than it was even in those lovely days at Kilkhaven—merely because no one can build upon it. Ocean and sky remain as God made them. He must love space for us, though it be needless for himself; seeing

that in all the magnificent notions of creation afforded us by astronomers—shoal upon shoal of suns, each the centre of complicated and infinitely varied systems — the spaces between are yet more overwhelming in their vast inconceivableness. I thank God for the room he thus gives us, and hence can endure to see the fair face of his England disfigured by the mud-pies of his children.

There was in the garden a little summer-house, of which I was very fond, chiefly because, knowing my passion for the flower, Percivale had surrounded it with a multitude of sweet-peas, which as they grew, he had trained over the trellis-work of its sides. Through them filtered the sweet airs of the summer as through an Æolian harp of unheard harmonies. To sit there in a warm evening, when the moth-airs just woke and gave two or three wafts of their wings and

ceased, was like sitting in the midst of a small gospel.

The summer had come on, and the days were very hot—so hot and changeless, with their unclouded skies and their glowing centre, that they seemed to grow stupid with their own heat. It was as if—like a hen brooding over her chickens—the day, brooding over its coming harvests, grew dull and sleepy, living only in what was to come. Notwithstanding the feelings I have just recorded, I began to long for a wider horizon, whence some wind might come and blow upon me, and wake me up, not merely to live, but to know that I lived.

One afternoon, I left my little summer-seat, where I had been sitting at work, and went through the house, and down the precipice, into my husband's study.

"It is so hot," I said, "I will try my little grotto; it may be cooler."

He opened the door for me, and, with his palette on his thumb, and a brush in his hand, sat down for a moment beside me.

"This heat is too much for you, darling," he said.

"I do feel it. I wish I could get from the garden into my nest without going up through the house and down the Jacob's ladder," I said. "It is so hot! I never felt heat like it before."

He sat silent for awhile, and then said:

"I've been thinking I must get you into the country for a few weeks. It would do you no end of good."

"I suppose the wind does blow somewhere," I returned. "But—"

"You don't want to leave me?" he said.

"I don't. And I know with that ugly portrait on hand you can't go with me."

He happened to be painting the portrait of a plain red-faced lady, in a delicate lace

cap—a very unfit subject for art—much needing to be made over again first, it seemed to me. Only there she was, with a right to have her portrait painted if she wished it; and there was Percivale, with time on his hands and room in his pockets, and the faith that whatever God had thought worth making could not be unworthy of representation. Hence he had willingly undertaken a likeness of her, to be finished within a certain time, and was now working at it as conscientiously as if it had been the portrait of a lovely young duchess or peasant girl. I was only afraid he would make it too like to please the lady herself. His time was now getting short, and he could not leave home before fulfilling his engagement.

"But," he returned, "why shouldn't you go to the Hall for a week or two without me? I will take you down and come and fetch you."

"I'm so stupid you want to get rid of me!" I said.

I did not in the least believe it, and yet was on the edge of crying, which is not a habit with me.

"You know better than that, my Wynnie," he answered gravely. "You want your mother to comfort you. And there must be some air in the country. So tell Sarah to put up your things, and I'll take you down to-morrow morning. When I get this portrait done, I will come and stay a few days, if they will have me, and then take you home."

The thought of seeing my mother and my father, and the old place, came over me with a rush. I felt all at once as if I had been absent for years instead of weeks. I cried in earnest now—with delight though—and there is no shame in that. So it was all arranged, and next afternoon I was lying on

a couch in the yellow drawing-room, with my mother seated beside me, and Connie in an easy chair by the open window, through which came every now and then such a sweet wave of air as bathed me with hope, and seemed to wash all the noises, even the loose-jawed man's hateful howl, from my brain.

Yet, glad as I was to be once more at home, I felt, when Percivale left me the next morning to return by a third-class train to his ugly portrait, for the lady was to sit to him that same afternoon, that the idea of home was already leaving Oldcastle Hall, and flitting back to the suburban cottage haunted by the bawling voice of the costermonger.

But I soon felt better, for here there was plenty of shadow, and in the hottest days my father could always tell where any wind would be stirring; for he knew every out

and in of the place like his own pockets, as Dora said, who took a little after cousin Judy in her way. It will give a notion of his tenderness if I set down just one tiniest instance of his attention to me. The forenoon was oppressive. I was sitting under a tree, trying to read when he came up to me. There was a wooden gate, with open bars near. He went and set it wide, saying—

"There, my love! You will fancy yourself cooler if I leave the gate open."

Will my reader laugh at me for mentioning such a trifle? I think not, for it went deep to my heart, and I seemed to know God better for it ever after. A father is a great and marvellous truth, and one you can never get at the depth of, try how you may.

Then my mother! She was if possible yet more to me than my father. I could tell her anything and everything without

fear, while I confess to a little dread of my father still. He is too like my own conscience to allow of my being quite confident with him. But Connie is just as comfortable with him as I am with my mother. If in my childhood I was ever tempted to conceal anything from her, the very thought of it made me miserable until I had told her. And now she would watch me with her gentle dove-like eyes, and seemed to know at once, without being told, what was the matter with me. She never asked me what I should like, but went and brought something, and if she saw that I didn't care for it, wouldn't press me, or offer anything instead, but chat for a minute or two, carry it away, and return with something else. My heart was like to break at times with the swelling of the love that was in it. My eldest child, my Ethelwyn—for my husband would have her called the same

name as me, only I insisted it should be after my mother and not after me—has her very eyes, and for years has been trying to mother me over again to the best of her sweet ability.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONNIE.

IT is high time though that I dropped writing about myself for a while. I don't find myself so interesting as it used to be.

The worst of some kinds especially of small illnesses is that they make you think a great deal too much about yourself. Connie's, which was a great and terrible one, never made her do so. She was always forgetting herself in her interest about others. I think I was made more selfish to begin with; and yet I have a hope that a too-much-thinking about yourself may not

*always* be pure selfishness. It may be something else wrong in you that makes you uncomfortable, and keeps drawing your eyes towards the aching place. I will hope so till I get rid of the whole business, and then I shall not care much how it came or what it was.

Connie was now a thin, pale, delicate-looking—not handsome, but lovely girl. Her eyes, some people said, were too big for her face, but that seemed to me no more to the discredit of her beauty than it would have been a reproach to say that her soul was too big for her body. She had been early ripened by the hot sun of suffering, and the self-restraint which pain had taught her. Patience had mossed her over, and made her warm and soft and sweet. She never looked for attention, but accepted all that was offered with a smile which seemed to say—"It is more than I need,

but you are so good I mustn't spoil it." She was not confined to her sofa now, though she needed to lie down often, but could walk about pretty well, only you must give her time. You could always make her merry by saying she walked like an old woman; and it was the only way we could get rid of the sadness of seeing it. We betook ourselves to her to laugh *her* sadness away from us.

Once, as I lay on a couch on the lawn, she came towards me carrying a bunch of grapes from the greenhouse—a great bunch, each individual grape ready to burst with the sunlight it had bottled up in its swollen purple skin.

"They are too heavy for you, old lady," I cried.

"Yes; I *am* an old lady," she answered. "Think what good use of my time I have made compared with you! I have got

ever so far before you: I've nearly forgotten how to walk!"

The tears gathered in my eyes as she left me with the bunch, for how could one help being sad to think of the time when she used to bound like a fawn over the grass, her slender figure borne like a feather on its own slight yet firm muscles, which used to knot so much harder than any of ours. She turned to say something, and, perceiving my emotion, came slowly back.

"Dear Wynnie," she said, "you wouldn't have me back with my old foolishness, would you? Believe me life is ten times more precious than it was before. I feel, and enjoy, and love so much more! I don't know how often I thank God for what befell me."

I could only smile an answer, unable to speak, not now from pity, but from shame

of my own petulant restlessness and impatient helplessness.

I believe she had a special affection for poor Sprite, the pony which threw her—special I mean since the accident—regarding him as in some sense the angel which had driven her out of paradise into a better world. If ever he got loose, and Connie was anywhere about, he was sure to find her: he was an omnivorous animal, and she had always something he would eat when his favourite apples were unattainable. More than once she had been roused from her sleep on the lawn by the lips and the breath of Sprite upon her face; but, although one painful sign of her weakness was, that she started at the least noise or sudden discovery of a presence, she never started at the most unexpected intrusion of Sprite, any more than at the voice of my father or mother. Need I say there

was one more whose voice or presence never startled her?

The relation between them was lovely to see. Turner was a fine, healthy, broad-shouldered fellow, of bold carriage and frank manners, above the middle height, with rather large features, keen black eyes, and great personal strength. Yet to such a man, poor little wan-faced big-eyed Connie assumed imperious airs, mostly, but perhaps not entirely, for the fun of it; while he looked only enchanted every time she honoured him with a little tyranny.

"There! I'm tired," she would say, holding out her arms like a baby. "Carry me in."

And the great strong man would stoop with a worshipping look in his eyes, and taking her carefully would carry her in as lightly, and gently, and steadily, as if she had been but the baby whose manners she

had for the moment assumed. This began, of course, when she was unable to walk, but it did not stop then, for she would occasionally tell him to carry her after she was quite capable of crawling at least. They had now been engaged for some months, and before me, as a newly married woman, they did not mind talking a little.

One day she was lying on a rug on the lawn, with him on the grass beside her, leaning on his elbow, and looking down into her sky-like eyes. She lifted her hand and stroked his moustache with a forefinger, while he kept as still as a statue, or one who fears to scare the bird that is picking up the crumbs at his feet.

"Poor, poor man!" she said; and from the tone I knew the tears had begun to gather in those eyes.

"Why do you pity me, Connie?" he asked.

"Because you will have such a wretched little creature for a wife some day—or perhaps never — which would be best after all."

He answered cheerily:

"If you will kindly allow me my choice, I prefer just *such* a wretched little creature to any one else in the world."

"And why, pray? Give a good reason, and I will forgive your bad taste."

"Because she won't be able to hurt me much when she beats me."

"A better reason, or she will."

"Because I can punish her if she isn't good by taking her up in my arms and carrying her about until she gives in."

"A better reason, or I shall be naughty directly."

"Because I shall always know where to find her."

"Ah, yes; she must leave *you* to find *her*. But that's a silly reason. If you don't give me a better, I'll get up and walk into the house."

"Because there won't be any waste of me. Will that do?"

"What do you mean?" she asked with mock imperiousness.

"I mean that I shall be able to lay not only my heart but my brute strength at her feet. I shall be allowed to be her beast of burden, to carry her whither she would; and so with my body her to worship more than most husbands have a chance of worshipping their wives."

"There! take me, take me!" she said, stretching up her arms to him. "How good you are! I don't deserve such a great man one bit. But I *will* love him. Take me directly, for there's Wynnie listening to every word we say to each other, and

laughing at us. She can laugh without looking like it."

The fact is I was crying, and the creature knew it. Turner brought her to me, and held her down for me to kiss; then carried her in to her mother.

I believe the county people round considered our family far gone on the inclined plane of degeneracy. First, my mother, the heiress, had married a clergyman of no high family; then they had given their eldest daughter to a poor artist, something of the same standing as—well, I will be rude to no order of humanity, and therefore avoid comparisons; and now it was generally known that Connie was engaged to a country practitioner, a man who made up his own prescriptions. We talked and laughed over certain remarks of the kind that reached us, and compared our two with the gentlemen about us—in no way to

the advantage of any of the latter, you may be sure. It was silly work; but we were only two loving girls with the best possible reasons for being proud of the men who had honoured us with their love.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CONNIE'S BABY.

IT is time I told my readers something about the little Theodora. She was now nearly four years old, I think—a dark-skinned, lithe-limbed, wild little creature, very pretty—at least most people said so, while others insisted that she had a common look. I admit she was not like a lady's child—only one has seen ladies' children look common enough; neither did she look like the child of working people—though amongst such again one sees sometimes a child the oldest family in England might be proud of. The fact is, she had a certain

tinge of the savage about her, specially manifest in a certain furtive look of her black eyes, with which she seemed now and then to be measuring you, and her prospects in relation to you. I have seen the child of cultivated parents sit and stare at a stranger from her stool in the most persistent manner, never withdrawing her eyes, as if she would pierce to his soul, and understand by very force of insight whether he was or was not one to be honoured with her confidence; and I have often seen the sidelong glance of sly merriment, or loving shyness, or small coquetry; but I have never, in any other child, seen *that* look of self-protective speculation; and it used to make me uneasy, for of course, like every one else in the house, I loved the child. She was a wayward, often unmanageable creature, but affectionate—sometimes after an insane, or, at least, very ape-like fashion. Every now and then

she would take an unaccountable preference for some one of the family or household, at one time for the old housekeeper, at another for the stable-boy, at another for one of us; in which fits of partiality she would always turn a blind and deaf side upon every one else, actually seeming to imagine she showed the strength of her love to the one by the paraded exclusion of the others. I cannot tell how much of this was natural to her, and how much the result of the foolish and injurious jealousy of the servants. I say *servants*, because I know such an influencing was all but impossible in the family itself. If my father heard any one utter such a phrase as "Don't you love me best"—or, "better than" such a one? or, "Ain't I your favourite?"—well, you all know my father, and know him really, for he never wrote a word he did not believe—but you would have been astonished, I

venture to think, and perhaps at first bewildered as well, by the look of indignation flashed from his eyes. He was not the gentle, all-excusing man some readers, I know, fancy him from his writings. He was gentle even to tenderness when he had time to think a moment, and in any quiet judgment he always took as much the side of the offender as was possible with any likelihood of justice; but in the first moments of contact with what he thought bad in principle, and that in the smallest trifle, he would speak words that made even those who were not included in the condemnation tremble with sympathetic fear. "There, Harry, you take it—quick, or Charley will have it," said the nurse one day, little thinking who overheard her. "Woman!" cried a voice of wrath from the corridor, "do you know what you are doing? Would you make him two-fold more the child of

hell than yourself?" An hour after, she was sent for to the study; and when she came out her eyes were very red. My father was unusually silent at dinner; and after the younger ones were gone, he turned to my mother, and said: "Ethel, I spoke the truth. All *that* is of the devil—horribly bad; and yet I am more to blame in my condemnation of them than she for the words themselves. The thought of so polluting the mind of a child makes me fierce, and the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. The old Adam is only too glad to get a word in, if even in behalf of his supplanting successor." Then he rose, and taking my mother by the arm, walked away with her. I confess I honoured him for his self-condemnation the most. I must add that the offending nurse had been ten years in the family, and ought to have known better.

But to return to Theodora. She was subject to attacks of the most furious passion, especially when anything occurred to thwart the indulgence of the ephemeral partiality I have just described. Then, wherever she was, she would throw herself down at once—on the floor, on the walk or lawn, or, as happened on one occasion, in the water — and kick and scream. At such times she cared nothing even for my father, of whom generally she stood in considerable awe—a feeling he rather encouraged. "She has plenty of people about her to represent the gospel," he said once; "I will keep the department of the law, without which she never will appreciate the gospel. My part will, I trust, vanish in due time, and the law turn out to have been, after all, only the imperfect gospel, just as the leaf is the imperfect flower. But the gospel is no gospel till it gets into the heart, and it

sometimes wants a torpedo to blow the gates of that open." For no torpedo or Krupp gun, however, did Theodora care at such times; and after repeated experience of the inefficacy of coaxing, my father gave orders that, when a fit occurred, every one, without exception, should not merely leave her alone, but go out of sight, and if possible out of hearing—at least out of her hearing—that she might know she had driven her friends far from her, and be brought to a sense of loneliness and need. I am pretty sure that if she had been one of us, that is, one of his own, he would have taken sharper measures with her; but he said we must never attempt to treat other people's children as our own, for they are not our own. We did not love them enough, he said, to make severity safe either for them or for us.

The plan worked so far well, that, after a time varied in length according to causes

inscrutable, she would always reappear smiling; but as to any conscience of wrong, she seemed to have no more than nature herself, who looks out with *her* smiling face after hours of thunder, lightning, and rain; and, although this treatment brought her out of them sooner, the fits themselves came quite as frequently as before.

But she had another habit, more alarming, and more troublesome as well: she would not unfrequently vanish, and have to be long sought, for in such case she never reappeared of herself. What made it so alarming was that there were dangerous places about our house; but she would generally be found seated, perfectly quiet, in some out-of-the-way nook where she had never been before, playing, not with any of her toys, but with something she had picked up and appropriated, finding in it some

shadowy amusement which no one understood but herself.

She was very fond of bright colours, especially in dress; and if she found a brilliant or gorgeous fragment of any substance, would be sure to hide it away in some hole or corner, perhaps known only to herself. Her love of approbation was strong, and her affection demonstrative, but she had not yet learned to speak the truth. In a word she must, we thought, have come of wild parentage, so many of her ways were like those of a forest animal.

In our design of training her for a maid to Connie, we seemed already likely enough to be frustrated; at all events there was nothing to encourage the attempt, seeing she had some sort of aversion to Connie, amounting almost to dread. We could rarely persuade her to go near her. Perhaps it was a dislike to her helplessness—

some vague impression that her lying all day on the sofa indicated an unnatural condition of being, with which she could have no sympathy. Those of us who had the highest spirits, the greatest exuberance of animal life, were evidently those whose society was most attractive to her. Connie tried all she could to conquer her dislike, and entice the wayward thing to her heart, but nothing would do. Sometimes she would seem to soften for a moment, but all at once, with a wriggle and a backward spasm in the arms of the person who carried her, she would manifest such a fresh access of repulsion, that for fear of an outburst of fierce and objurgatory wailing which might upset poor Connie altogether, she would be borne off hurriedly—sometimes, I confess, rather ungently as well. I have seen Connie cry because of the child's treatment of her.

You could not interest her so much in any story but that if the buzzing of a fly, the flutter of a bird, reached eye or ear, away she would dart on the instant, leaving the discomfited narrator in lonely disgrace. External nature and almost nothing else had free access to her mind: at the suddenest sight or sound, she was alive on the instant. She was a most amusing and sometimes almost bewitching little companion, but the delight in her would be not unfrequently quenched by some altogether unforeseen outbreak of heartless petulance or turbulent rebellion. Indeed her resistance to authority grew as she grew older, and occasioned my father and mother, and indeed all of us, no little anxiety. Even Charley and Harry would stand with open mouths contemplating aghast the unheard-of atrocity of resistance to the will of the unquestioned authorities. It was what they

could not understand, being to them an impossibility. Such resistance was almost always accompanied by storm and tempest, and the treatment which carried away the latter, generally carried away the former with it: after the passion had come and gone, she would obey. Had it been otherwise—had she been sullen and obstinate as well—I do not know what would have come of it, or how we could have got on at all. Miss Bowdler, I am afraid, would have had a very satisfactory crow over papa. I have seen him sit for minutes in silent contemplation of the little puzzle, trying no doubt to fit her into his theories, or as my mother said, to find her a three-legged stool and a corner somewhere in the kingdom of heaven; and we were certain something or other would come out of that pondering, though whether the same night or a twelvemonth after, no one could tell. I believe the

main result of his thinking was that he did less and less with her.

"Why do you take so little notice of the child?" my mother said to him one evening. "It is all your doing that she is here, you know. You mustn't cast her off now."

"Cast her off!" exclaimed my father: "what *do* you mean, Ethel?"

"You never speak to her now."

"Oh yes I do, sometimes."

"Why only sometimes?"

"Because — I believe because I am a little afraid of her. I don't know how to attack the small enemy. She seems to be bomb-proof, and generally impregnable."

"But you mustn't therefore make *her* afraid of *you*."

"I don't know that. I suspect it is my only chance with her. She wants a little of Mount Sinai, in order that she may know

where the manna comes from. But indeed I am laying myself out only to catch the little soul. I am but watching and pondering how to reach her. I am biding my time to come in with my small stone for the building up of this temple of the Holy Ghost."

At that very moment—in the last fold of the twilight, with the moon rising above the wooded brow of Gorman Slope—the nurse came through the darkening air, her figure hardly distinguishable from the dusk, saying—

"Please, ma'am, have you seen Miss Theodora?"

"I don't want you to call her *Miss*," said my father.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the nurse; "I forgot."

"I have not seen her for an hour or more," said my mother.

"I declare," said my father, "I'll get a retriever pup, and train him to find Theodora. He will be capable in a few months, and she will be foolish for years."

Upon this occasion the truant was found in the apple-loft, sitting in a corner upon a heap of straw, quite in the dark. She was discovered only by the munching of her little teeth, for she had found some wizened apples, and was busy devouring them. But my father actually did what he had said: a favourite spaniel had pups a few days after, and he took one of them in hand. In an incredibly short space of time, the long-drawn nose of Wagtail, as the children had named him, in which, doubtless, was gathered the experience of many thoughtful generations, had learned to track Theodora to whatever retreat she might have chosen; and very amusing it was to watch the course of the proceedings. Some one would come run-

ning to my father with the news that Theo was in hiding. Then my father would give a peculiar whistle, and Wagtail, who (I must say *who*) very seldom failed to respond, would come bounding to his side. It was necessary that my father should *lay him on* (is that the phrase?), for he would heed no directions from any one else. It was not necessary to follow him, however, which would have involved a tortuous and fatiguing pursuit; but in a little while a joyous barking would be heard, always kept up until the ready pursuers were guided by the sound to the place. There Theo was certain to be found hugging the animal, without the least notion of the traitorous character of his blandishments: it was long before she began to discover that there was danger in that dog's nose. Thus Wagtail became a very important member of the family—a bond of union, in fact, between

its parts. Theo's disappearances, however, became less and less frequent—not that she made fewer attempts to abscond, but that, every one knowing how likely she was to vanish, whoever she was with had come to feel the necessity of keeping both eyes upon her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FOUNDLING RE-FOUND.

ONE evening, during this my first visit to my home, we had gone to take tea with the widow of an old servant, who lived in a cottage on the outskirts of the home farm—Connie and I in the pony carriage, and my father and mother on foot. It was quite dark when we returned, for the moon was late. Connie and I got home first, though we had a good round to make and the path across the fields was but a third of the distance, for my father and mother were lovers, and sure to be late when left out by themselves. When we arrived, there was

no one to take the pony, and when I rung the bell, no one answered. I could not leave Connie in the carriage to go and look, so we waited and waited till we were getting very tired, and glad indeed we were to hear the voices of my father and mother as they came through the shrubbery. My mother went to the rear to make inquiry, and came back with the news that Theo was missing, and that they had been searching for her in vain for nearly an hour. My father instantly called Wagtail, and sent him after her. We then got Connie in, and laid her on the sofa, where I kept her company while the rest went in different directions, listening from what quarter would come the welcome voice of the dog. This was so long delayed, however, that my father began to get alarmed. At last he whistled very loud, and in a little while Wagtail came creeping to his feet, with his

tail between his legs—no wag left in it—clearly ashamed of himself. My father was now thoroughly frightened, and began questioning the household as to the latest knowledge of the child. It then occurred to one of the servants to mention that a strange-looking woman had been seen about the place in the morning—a tall, dark woman, with a gipsy look. She had come begging, but my father's orders were so strict concerning such cases that nothing had been given her, and she had gone away in anger. As soon as he heard this my father ordered his horse, and told two of the men to get ready to accompany him. In the meantime, he came to us in the little drawing-room, trying to look calm, but evidently in much perturbation. He said he had little doubt the woman had taken her.

"Could it be her mother?" said my mother.

"Who can tell?" returned my father. "It is the less likely that the deed seems to have been prompted by revenge."

"If she be a gipsy's child,——" said my mother.

"The gipsies," interrupted my father, "have always been more given to taking other people's children than forsaking their own. But one of them might have had reason for being ashamed of her child, and, dreading the severity of her family, might have abandoned it, with the intention of re-possessing herself of it, and passing it off as the child of gentlefolks she had picked up. I don't know their habits and ways sufficiently; but, from what I have heard, that seems possible. However, it is not so easy as it might have been once to succeed in such an attempt. If we should fail in finding her to-night, the police all over the country can be apprised of the fact

in a few hours, and the thief can hardly escape."

"But if she *should* be the mother?" suggested my mother.

"She will have to *prove* that."

"And then?"

"What then?" returned my father, and began pacing up and down the room, stopping now and then to listen for the horses' hoofs.

"Would you give her up?" persisted my mother.

Still my father made no reply. He was evidently much agitated—more, I fancied, by my mother's question than by the present trouble. He left the room, and presently his whistle for Wagtail pierced the still air. A moment more, and we heard them all ride out of the paved yard. I had never known him leave my mother without an answer before.

We who were left behind were in evil plight. There was not a dry eye amongst the women, I am certain, while Harry was in floods of tears, and Charley was howling. We could not send them to bed in such a state, so we kept them with us in the drawing-room, where they soon fell fast asleep, one in an easy chair, the other on a sheepskin mat. Connie lay quite still, and my mother talked so sweetly and gently that she soon made me quiet too. But I was haunted with the idea somehow—I think I must have been wandering a little, for I was not well—that it was a child of my own that was lost out in the dark night, and that I could not anyhow reach her. I cannot explain the odd kind of feeling it was—as if a dream had wandered out of the region of sleep, and half-possessed my waking brain. Every now and then my mother's voice would bring me back to my

senses, and I would understand it all perfectly; but in a few moments I would be involved once more in a mazy search after my child. Perhaps, however, as it was by that time late, sleep had, if such a thing be possible, invaded a part of my brain, leaving another part able to receive the impressions of the external about me. I can recall some of the things my mother said—one in particular.

"It is more absurd," she said, "to trust God by halves, than it is not to believe in him at all. Your papa taught me that before one of you was born."

When my mother said anything in the way of teaching us, which was not often, she would generally add, "Your papa taught me that," as if she would take refuge from the assumption of teaching even her own girls. But we set a good deal of such assertion down to her modesty, and the

evidently inextricable blending of the thought of my father with every movement of her mental life.

"I remember quite well," she went on, "how he made that truth dawn upon me one night as we sat together beside the old mill. Ah! you don't remember the old mill; it was pulled down while Wynnie was a mere baby."

"No, mamma; I remember it perfectly," I said.

"Do you really?—Well, we were sitting beside the mill one Sunday evening after service; for we always had a walk before going home from church. You would hardly think it now, but after preaching he was then always depressed, and the more eloquently he had spoken, the more he felt as if he had made an utter failure. At first I thought it came only from fatigue, and wanted him to go home and rest; but he

would say he liked nature to come before supper, for nature restored him by telling him that it was not of the slightest consequence if he had failed, whereas his supper only made him feel that he would do better next time. Well, that night, you will easily believe he startled me when he said, after sitting for some time silent, 'Ethel, if that yellow-hammer were to drop down dead now, and God not care, God would not be God any longer.' Doubtless I showed myself something between puzzled and shocked, for he proceeded with some haste to explain to me how what he had said was true. 'Whatever belongs to God is essential to God,' he said. 'He is one pure, clean essence of being, to use our poor words to describe the indescribable. Nothing hangs about him that does not belong to him—that he could part with and be nothing the worse. Still less is there anything he could

part with and be the worse. Whatever belongs to him is of his own kind, is part of himself, so to speak. Therefore there is nothing indifferent to his character to be found in him; and therefore when our Lord says not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, that, being a fact with regard to God, must be an essential fact—one, namely, without which he could be no God.' I understood him, I thought; but many a time since, when a fresh light has broken in upon me, I have thought I understood him then only for the first time. I told him so once, and he said he thought that would be the way for ever with all truth—we should never get to the bottom of any truth, because it was a vital portion of the all of truth, which is God."

I had never heard so much philosophy from my mother before. I believe she was led into it by her fear of the effect our

anxiety about the child might have upon us: with what had quieted her heart in the old time she sought now to quiet ours, helping us to trust in the great love that never ceases to watch. And she did make us quiet. But the time glided so slowly past that it seemed immovable.

When twelve struck, we heard in the stillness every clock in the house, and it seemed as if they would never have done. My mother left the room and came back with three shawls, with which, having first laid Harry on the rug, she covered the boys, and Dora, who also was by this time fast asleep, curled up at Connie's feet.

Still the time went on, and there was no sound of horses, or anything to break the silence, except the faint murmur which now and then the trees will make in the quietest night, as if they were dreaming, and talked in their sleep; for the motion does not seem

to pass beyond them, but to swell up and die again in the heart of them. This and the occasional cry of an owl was all that broke the silent flow of the undivided moments—glacier-like flowing none can tell how. We seldom spoke, and at length the house within seemed possessed by the silence from without; but we were all ear —one hungry ear, whose famine was silence —listening intently.

We were not so far from the high road but that on a night like this the penetrating sound of a horse's hoofs might reach us. Hence, when my mother, who was keener of hearing than any of her daughters, at length started up, saying, "I hear them! They're coming!" the doubt remained whether it might not be the sound of some night-traveller hurrying along that high road that she had heard. But when *we* also heard the sound of horses, we knew they

must belong to our company; for except the riders were within the gates, their noises could not have come nearer to the house. My mother hurried down to the hall. I would have stayed with Connie; but she begged me to go too, and come back as soon as I knew the result; so I followed my mother. As I descended the stairs, notwithstanding my anxiety, I could not help seeing what a picture lay before me, for I had learned already to regard things from the picturesque point of view—the dim light of the low-burning lamp on the forward-bent heads of the listening, anxious group of women, my mother at the open door with the housekeeper and her maid, and the men-servants visible through the door in the moonlight beyond.

The first news that reached me was my father's shout the moment he rounded the

sweep that brought him in sight of the house.

"All right! Here she is!" he cried.

And ere I could reach the stair to run up to Connie, Wagtail was jumping upon me and barking furiously. He rushed up before me with the scramble of twenty feet, licked Connie's face all over in spite of her efforts at self-defence, then rushed at Dora and the boys one after the other, and woke them all up. He was satisfied enough with himself now; his tail was doing the wagging of forty; there was no tucking of it away now—no drooping of the head in mute confession of conscious worthlessness; he was a dog self-satisfied because his master was well pleased with him.

But here I am talking about the dog, and forgetting what was going on below.

My father cantered up to the door, followed by the two men. My mother hurried

to meet him, and then only saw the little lost lamb asleep in his bosom. He gave her up, and my mother ran in with her, while he dismounted, and walked merrily but wearily up the stair after her. The first thing he did was to quiet the dog; the next, to sit down beside Connie; the third, to say, "Thank God!" and the next, "God bless Wagtail!" My mother was already undressing the little darling, and her maid was gone to fetch her night things. Tumbled hither and thither, she did not wake, but was carried off stone-sleeping to her crib.

Then my father—for whom some supper, of which he was in great need, had been brought—as soon as he had had a glass of wine and a mouthful or two of cold chicken, began to tell us the whole story.

## CHAPTER X.

### WAGTAIL COMES TO HONOUR.

AS they rode out of the gate, one of the men, a trustworthy man, who cared for his horses like his children, and knew all their individualities as few men know those of their children, rode up alongside of my father, and told him that there was an encampment of gipsies on the moor about five miles away, just over Gorman Slope, remarking that, if the woman had taken the child, and belonged to them, she would certainly carry her thither. My father thought, in the absence of other indication, they ought to follow the suggestion, and told

Burton to guide them to the place as rapidly as possible. After half an hour's sharp riding, they came in view of the camp—or rather of a rising ground behind which it lay in the hollow. The other servant was an old man who had been whipper-in to a baronet in the next county, and knew as much of the ways of wild animals as Burton did of those of his horses: it was his turn now to address my father, who had halted for a moment to think what ought to be done next.

"She can't well have got here before us, sir, with that child to carry. But it's wonderful what the likes of her can do. I think I had better have a peep over the brow first. She may be there already or she may not; but if we find out, we shall know better what to do."

"I'll go with you," said my father.

"No, sir; excuse me; that won't do.

You can't creep like a sarpent. I can. They'll never know I'm a stalking of them. No more you couldn't show fight if need was, you know, sir."

"How did you find that out, Sim?" asked my father, a little amused notwithstanding the weight at his heart.

"Why, sir, they do say a clergyman mustn't show fight."

"Who told you that, Sim?" he persisted.

"Well, I can't say, sir. Only it wouldn't be respectable—would it, sir?"

"There's nothing respectable but what's right, Sim, and what's right always *is* respectable, though it mayn't *look* so one bit."

"Suppose you was to get a black eye, sir?"

"Did you ever hear of the martyrs, Sim?"

"Yes, sir. I've heerd you talk on 'em in the pulpit, sir."

"Well, they didn't get black eyes only—they got black all over, you know—burnt black; and what for, do you think, now?"

"Don't know, sir, except it was for doing right."

"That's just it. Was it any disgrace to them?"

"No, sure, sir."

"Well, if I were to get a black eye for the sake of the child, would that be any disgrace to me, Sim?"

"None that I knows on, sir. Only it'd *look* bad."

"Yes, no doubt. People might think I had got into a row at the Griffin. And yet I shouldn't be ashamed of it. I should count my black eye the more respectable of the two. I should also regard the evil judgment much as another black eye, and wait till they both came round again. Lead on, Sim."

They left their horses with Burton, and went towards the camp. But when they reached the slope behind which it lay, much to Sim's discomfiture, my father, instead of lying down at the foot of it, as he expected, and creeping up the side of it, after the doom of the serpent, walked right up over the brow, and straight into the camp, followed by Wagtail. There was nothing going on—neither tinkering nor cooking; all seemed asleep; but presently out of two or three of the tents, the dingy squalor of which no moonshine could silver over, came three or four men, half undressed, who demanded of my father, in no gentle tones, what he wanted there.

"I'll tell you all about it," he answered. "I'm the parson of this parish, and therefore you're my own people, you see."

"We don't go to *your* church, parson," said one of them.

"I don't care; you're my own people for all that, and I want your help."

"Well, what's the matter? Whose cow's dead?" said the same man.

"This evening," returned my father, "one of my children is missing; and a woman who might be one of your clan—mind, I say *might be;* I don't know, and I mean no offence—but such a woman was seen about the place. All I want is the child, and if I don't find her, I shall have to raise the county. I should be very sorry to disturb you; but I'm afraid, in that case, whether the woman be one of you or not, the place will be too hot for you. I'm no enemy to honest gipsies, but you know there is a set of tramps that call themselves gipsies who are nothing of the sort—only thieves. Tell me what I had better do to find my child. You know all about such things."

The men turned to each other, and began talking in undertones, and in a language of which what my father heard he could not understand. At length the spokesman of the party addressed him again.

"We'll give you our word, sir, if that will satisfy you," he said, more respectfully than he had spoken before, "to send the child home directly if any one should bring her to our camp. That's all we can say."

My father saw that his best chance lay in accepting the offer.

"Thank you," he said. "Perhaps I may have an opportunity of serving you some day."

They in their turn thanked him politely enough, and my father and Sim left the camp.

Upon this side the moor was skirted by a plantation which had been gradually creeping up the hill from the more shel-

tered hollow. It was here bordered by a deep trench, the bottom of which was full of young firs. Through the plantation there was a succession of green rides, by which the outskirts of my father's property could be reached. But, the moon being now up, my father resolved to cross the trench, and halt for a time, watching the moor from the shelter of the firs, on the chance of the woman's making her appearance; for if she belonged to the camp, she would most probably approach it from the plantation, and might be overtaken before she could cross the moor to reach it.

They had lain ensconced in the firs for about half an hour, when suddenly, without any warning, Wagtail rushed into the underwood and vanished. They listened with all their ears, and in a few moments heard his joyous bark, followed instantly however by a howl of pain; and before they had got

many yards in pursuit, he came cowering to my father's feet, who, patting his side, found it bleeding. He bound his handkerchief round him, and fastening the lash of Sim's whip to his collar that he might not go too fast for them, told him to find Theodora. Instantly he pulled away through the brushwood, giving a little yelp now and then as the stiff remnant of some broken twig or stem hurt his wounded side.

Before he reached the spot for which he was making, however, my father heard a rustling, nearer to the outskirts of the wood, and the same moment Wagtail turned and tugged fiercely in that direction. The figure of a woman rose up against the sky, and began to run for the open space beyond. Wagtail and my father pursued at speed, my father crying out that if she did not stop, he would loose the dog on her. She paid no heed but ran on.

"Mount and head her, Sim. Mount, Burton. Ride over everything!" cried my father, as he slipped Wagtail, who shot through the underwood like a bird, just as she reached the trench, and in an instant had her by the gown. My father saw something gleam in the moonlight, and again a howl broke from Wagtail, who was evidently once more wounded. But he held on. And now the horsemen having crossed the trench, were approaching her in front, and my father was hard upon her behind. She gave a peculiar cry, half a shriek, and half a howl, clasped the child to her bosom, and stood rooted like a tree, evidently in the hope that her friends, hearing her signal, would come to her rescue. But it was too late. My father rushed upon her the instant she cried out. The dog was holding her by the poor ragged skirt, and the horses were reined snorting on the

bank above her. She heaved up the child over her head, but whether in appeal to heaven, or about to dash her to the earth in the rage of frustration, she was not allowed time to show; for my father caught both her uplifted arms with his, so that she could not lower them, and Burton, having flung himself from his horse and come behind her, easily took Theodora from them, for from their position they were almost powerless. Then my father called off Wagtail, and the poor creature sunk down in the bottom of the trench amongst the young firs without a sound, and there lay. My father went up to her, but she only stared at him with big blank black eyes, and such a lost look on her young, handsome, yet gaunt face, as almost convinced him she was the mother of the child. But whatever might be her rights, she could not be allowed to recover possession, without those who had

saved and tended the child having a word in the matter of her fate.

As he was thinking what he could say to her, Sim's voice reached his ear.

"They're coming over the brow, sir—five or six from the camp. We'd better be off."

"The child is safe," he said, as he turned to leave her.

"From *me*," she rejoined, in a pitiful tone; and this ambiguous utterance was all that fell from her.

My father mounted hurriedly, took the child from Burton, and rode away, followed by the two men and Wagtail. Through the green rides they galloped in the moonlight, and were soon beyond all danger of pursuit. When they slackened pace, my father instructed Sim to find out all he could about the gipsies—if possible to learn their names and to what tribe or community they belonged. Sim promised to do what

was in his power, but said he did not expect much success.

The children had listened to the story wide awake. Wagtail was lying at my father's feet, licking his wounds, which were not very serious, and had stopped bleeding.

"It's all your doing, Wagtail," said Harry, patting the dog.

"I think he deserves to be called *Mr.* Wagtail," said Charley.

And from that day he was no more called bare Wagtail, but Mr. Wagtail—much to the amusement of visitors, who, hearing the name gravely uttered, as it soon came to be, saw the owner of it approach on all fours, with a tireless pendulum in his rear.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A STUPID CHAPTER.

BEFORE proceeding with my own story, I must mention that my father took every means in his power to find out something about the woman and the gang of gipsies to which she appeared to belong. I believe he had no definite end in view further than the desire to be able at some future time to enter into such relations with her, for her own and her daughter's sake—if indeed Theodora were her daughter—as might be possible. But the very next day, he found that they had already vanished from the place; and all the inquiries he set

on foot, by means of friends and through the country constabulary, were of no avail. I believe he was dissatisfied with himself in what had occurred, thinking he ought to have laid himself out at the time to discover whether she was indeed the mother, and, in that case, to do for her what he could. Probably, had he done so, he would only have heaped difficulty upon difficulty; but as it was, if he was saved from trouble, he was not delivered from uneasiness. Clearly, however, the child must not be exposed to the danger of the repetition of the attempt; and the whole household was now so fully alive to the necessity of not losing sight of her for a moment, that her danger was far less than it had been at any time before.

I continued at the Hall for six weeks, during which my husband came several times to see me; and at the close of that

period took me back with him to my dear little home. The rooms, all but the study, looked very small after those I had left; but I felt notwithstanding that the place was my home. I was at first a little ashamed of the feeling; for why should I be anywhere more at home than in the house of such parents as mine? But I presume there is a certain amount of the queenly element in every woman, so that she cannot feel perfectly at ease without something to govern—however small, and however troublesome her queendom may be. At my father's, I had every ministration possible, and all comforts in profusion; but I had no responsibilities, and no rule; so that sometimes I could not help feeling as if I was idle, although I knew I was not to blame. Besides, I could not be at all sure that my big bear was properly attended to; and the knowledge that he was the most

independent of comforts of all the men I had ever come into any relation with, made me only feel the more anxious that he should not be left to his own neglect. For, although my father, for instance, was ready to part with anything, even to a favourite volume, if the good reason of another's need showed itself, he was not at all indifferent in his own person to being comfortable. One with his intense power of enjoying the gentleness of the universe could not be so. Hence it was always easy to make him a little present, whereas I have still to rack my brains for weeks before my bear's birthday comes round, to think of something that will in itself have a chance of giving him pleasure. Of course it would be comparatively easy if I had plenty of money to spare, and hadn't "to muddle it all away" in paying butchers and bakers, and such like people.

So home I went, to be queen again. Friends came to see me, but I returned few of their calls. I liked best to sit in my bedroom. I would have preferred sitting in my wonderful little room off the study, and I tried that first; but the same morning somebody called on Percivale, and straightway I felt myself a prisoner. The moment I heard the strange voice through the door, I wanted to get out, and could not, of course. Such a risk I would not run again. And when Percivale asked me the next day if I would not go down with him, I told him I could not bear the feeling of confinement it gave me.

"I did mean," he said, "to have had a door made into the garden for you; and I consulted an architect friend on the subject; but he soon satisfied me it would make the room much too cold for you, and so I was compelled to give up the thought."

"You dear!" I said. That was all, but it was enough for Percivale, who never bothered me, as I have heard of husbands doing, for demonstrations either of gratitude or affection. Such must be of the mole-eyed sort, who can only read large print. So I betook myself to my chamber, and there sat and worked—for I did a good deal of needlework now, although I had never been fond of it as a girl. The constant recurrence of similar motions of the fingers, one stitch just the same as another in countless repetition, varied only by the bother when the thread grew short and would slip out of the eye of the needle, and yet not short enough to be exchanged with still more bother for one too long, had been so wearisome to me in former days, that I spent half my pocket-money in getting the needle-work done for me which my mother and sister did for themselves. For this my

father praised me, and my mother tried to scold me and couldn't. But now it was all so different! Instead of toiling at plain stitching and hemming and sewing, I seemed to be working a bit of lovely tapestry all the time—so many thoughts and so many pictures went weaving themselves into the work; while every little bit finished appeared so much of the labour of the universe actually done — accomplished, ended: for the first time in my life, I began to feel myself of consequence enough to be taken care of. I remember once laying down the little—what I was working at—but I am growing too communicative and important.

My father used often to say that the commonest things in the world were the loveliest — sky and water and grass and such; now I found that the commonest feelings of humanity — for what feelings

could be commoner than those which now made me blessed amongst women? — are those that are fullest of the divine. Surely this looks as if there were a God of the whole earth—as if the world existed in the very foundations of its history and continuance by the immediate thought of a causing thought. For, simply because the life of the world was moving on towards its unseen goal, and I knew it, and had a helpless share in it, I felt as if God was with me. I do not say I always felt like this—far from it; there were times when life itself seemed vanishing in an abyss of nothingness, when all my consciousness consisted in this—that I knew I was *not*, and when I could not believe that I should ever be restored to the well-being of existence. The worst of it was that, in such moods, it seemed as if I had hitherto been deluding myself with rainbow fancies as often as I had been

aware of blessedness, as if there was in fact no wine of life apart from its effervescence. But when one day I told Percivale—not while I was thus oppressed, for then I could not speak, but in a happier moment whose happiness I mistrusted—something of what I felt, he said one thing which has comforted me ever since in such circumstances:

"Don't grumble at the poverty, darling, by which another is made rich."

I confess I did not see all at once what he meant, but I did after thinking over it for a while. And if I have learned any valuable lesson in my life, it is this, that no one's feelings are a measure of eternal facts.

The winter passed slowly away — fog, rain, frost, snow, thaw, succeeding one another in all the seeming disorder of the season. A good many things happened, I believe; but I don't remember any of them. My mother wrote offering me Dora for a

companion, but somehow I preferred being without her. One great comfort was good news about Connie, who was getting on famously. But even this moved me so little that I began to think I was turning into a crab, utterly encased in the shell of my own selfishness. The thought made me cry. The fact that I could cry consoled me, for how could I be heartless so long as I could cry? But then came the thought it was for myself, my own hard-heartedness I was crying — not certainly for joy that Connie was getting better. "At least, however," I said to myself, "I am not content to be selfish. I am a little troubled that I am not good." And then I tried to look up, and got my needlework, which always did me good by helping me to reflect. It is, I can't help thinking, a great pity that needlework is going so much out of fashion, for it tends more to make a

woman — one who thinks, that is — acquainted with herself than all the sermons she is ever likely to hear.

My father came to see me several times, and was all himself to me; but I could not feel quite comfortable with him—I don't in the least know why. I am afraid, much afraid, it indicates something very wrong in me somewhere. But he seemed to understand me; and always, the moment he left me, the tide of confidence began to flow afresh in the ocean that lay about the little island of my troubles. Then I knew he was my own father—something that even my husband could not be, and would not wish to be to me.

In the month of March my mother came to see me, and that was all pleasure. My father did not always see when I was not able to listen to him, though he was most considerate when he did; but my mother—

why, to be with her was like being with one's own—*mother*, I was actually going to write. There is nothing better than that when a woman is in such trouble, except it be—what my father knows more about than I do: I wish I did know *all* about it.

She brought with her a young woman to take the place of cook, or rather general servant, in our little household. She had been kitchen-maid in a small family of my mother's acquaintance, and had a good character for honesty and plain cooking. Percivale's more experienced ear soon discovered that she was Irish. This fact had not been represented to my mother, for the girl had been in England from childhood, and her mistress seemed either not to have known it, or not to have thought of mentioning it. Certainly my mother was far too just to have allowed it to influence her choice, notwithstanding the prejudices

against Irishwomen in English families—prejudices not without a general foundation in reason. For my part, I should have been perfectly satisfied with my mother's choice, even if I had not been so indifferent at the time to all that was going on in the lower regions of the house. But while my mother was there, I knew well enough that nothing could go wrong, and my housekeeping mind had never been so much at ease since we were married. It was very delightful not to be accountable; and for the present I felt exonerated from all responsibilities.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN INTRODUCTION.

I WOKE one morning after a sound sleep —not so sound however but that I had been dreaming, and that when I awoke I could recall my dream. It was a very odd one. I thought I was a hen strutting about amongst ricks of corn, picking here and scratching there, followed by a whole brood of chickens, towards which I felt exceedingly benevolent and attentive. Suddenly I heard the scream of a hawk in the air above me, and instantly gave the proper cry to fetch the little creatures under my wings. They came scurrying to me as fast

as their legs could carry them—all but one, which wouldn't mind my cry, although I kept repeating it again and again. Meantime the hawk kept screaming, and I felt as if I didn't care for any of those that were safe under my wings, but only for the solitary creature that kept pecking away as if nothing was the matter. About it I grew so terribly anxious that at length I woke with a cry of misery and terror.

The moment I opened my eyes there was my mother, standing beside me. The room was so dark that I thought for a moment what a fog there must be; but the next I forgot everything at hearing a little cry, which I verily believe in my stupid dream I had taken for the voice of the hawk, whereas it was the cry of my first and only chicken, which I had not yet seen, but which my mother now held in her grandmotherly arms, ready to hand her to me.

I dared not speak, for I felt very weak, and was afraid of crying from delight. I looked in my mother's face, and she folded back the clothes, and laid the baby down beside me, with its little head resting on my arm.

"Draw back the curtain a little bit, mother dear," I whispered, "and let me see what it is like."

I believe I said *it*, for I was not quite a mother yet. My mother did as I requested; a ray of clear spring light fell upon the face of the little white thing by my side—for white she was, though most babies are red—and if I dared not speak before, I couldn't now. My mother went away again, and sat down by the fireside, leaving me with my baby. Never shall I forget the unutterable content of that hour. It was not gladness, nor was it thankfulness that filled my heart, but a certain absolute content-

ment—just on the point, but for my want of strength, of blossoming into unspeakable gladness and thankfulness. Somehow too there was mingled with it a sense of dignity, as if I had vindicated for myself a right to a part in the creation, for was I not proved at least a link in the marvellous chain of existence, in carrying on the designs of the great Maker? Not that the thought was there—only the feeling which afterwards found the thought in order to account for its own being. Besides, the state of perfect repose after what had passed was in itself bliss; the very sense of weakness was delightful, for I had earned the right to be weak, to rest as much as I pleased, to be important and to be congratulated.

Somehow I had got through. The trouble lay behind me; and here, for the sake of any who will read my poor words, I record the conviction, that, in one way or other,

special individual help is given to every creature to endure to the end. I think I have heard my father say, and hitherto it has been my own experience, that always when suffering, whether mental or bodily, approached the point where further endurance appeared impossible, the pulse of it began to ebb, and a lull ensued. I do not venture to found any general assertion upon this: I only state it as a fact of my own experience. He who does not allow any man to be tempted above that he is able to bear, doubtless acts in the same way in all kinds of trials.

I was listening to the gentle talk about me in the darkened room—not listening, indeed, only aware that loving words were spoken. Whether I was dozing I do not know, but something touched my lips. I did not start. I had been dreadfully given to starting for a long time—so much so that

I was quite ashamed sometimes, for I would even cry out—I who had always been so sharp on feminine affectations before; but now it seemed as if nothing could startle me. I only opened my eyes—and there was my great big huge bear looking down on me with something in his eyes I had never seen there before. But even his presence could not ripple the waters of my deep rest. I gave him half a smile—I knew it was but half a smile, but I thought it would do—closed my eyes, and sunk again—not into sleep, but into that same blessed repose. I remember wondering if I should feel anything like that for the first hour or two after I was dead. May there not one day be such a repose for all—only the heavenly counterpart, coming of perfect activity instead of weary success?

This was but the beginning of endlessly varied pleasures. I dare say the mothers

would let me go on for a good while in this direction; perhaps even some of the fathers could stand a little more of it; but I must remember that if anybody reads this at all, it will have multitudes of readers in whom the chord which could alone respond to such experiences hangs loose over the sounding-board of their being.

By slow degrees the daylight, the light of work, that is, began to penetrate me, or rather to rise in my being from its own hidden sun. First I began to wash and dress my baby myself. One who has not tried that kind of amusement cannot know what endless pleasure it affords. I do not doubt that to the paternal spectator it appears monotonous, unproductive, unprogressive; but then, he looking upon it from the outside, and regarding the process with a speculative compassion, and not with sympathy, cannot know the communion into

which it brings you with the baby. I remember well enough what my father has written about it in the Seaboard Parish; but he is all wrong—I mean him to confess that before this is printed: if things were done as he proposes, the tenderness of mothers would be far less developed, and the moral training of children would be postponed to an indefinite period. There, papa! there's something in your own style!

Next I began to order the dinners; and the very day on which I first ordered the dinner, I took my place at the head of the table. A happier little party—well, of course, I saw it all through the rose-mists of my motherhood, but I am nevertheless bold to assert that my husband was happy, and that my mother was happy; and if there was one more guest at the table concerning whom I am not prepared to assert that he was happy, I can confidently affirm

that he was merry, and gracious, and talkative, originating three parts of the laughter of the evening. To watch him with the baby was a pleasure even to the heart of a mother, anxious as she must be when any one, especially a gentleman, more especially a bachelor, and most especially a young bachelor, takes her precious little wax-doll in his arms, and pretends to know all about the management of such. It was he indeed who introduced her to the dining-room; for, leaving the table during dessert, he returned bearing her in his arms, to my astonishment, and even mild maternal indignation at the liberty. Resuming his seat, and pouring out for his charge, as he pretended, a glass of old port, he said in the soberest voice:—

"Charles Percivale, with all the solemnity suitable to the occasion, I, the old moon with the new moon in my arms, pro-

pose the health of Miss Percivale on her first visit to this boring bullet of a world. By the way, what a mercy it is that she carries her atmosphere with her!"

Here I, stupidly thinking he reflected on the atmosphere of baby, rose to take her from him with suppressed indignation—for why should a man who assumes a baby unbidden, be so very much nicer than a woman who accepts her as given, and makes the best of it? But he declined giving her up.

"I'm not pinching her," he said.

"No; but I am afraid you find her disagreeable."

"On the contrary, she is the nicest of little ladies; for she lets you talk all the nonsense you like, and never takes the least offence."

I sat down again directly.

"I propose her health," he repeated,

"coupled with that of her mother, to whom I, for one, am more obliged than I can explain—for at length convincing me that I belong no more to the youth of my country, but am an uncle with a homuncle in his arms."

"Wifie, your health! Baby, yours too!" said my husband; and the ladies drank the toast in silence.

It is time I explained who this fourth—or should I say fifth?—person in our family party was. He was the younger brother of my Percivale, by name Roger—still more unsuccessful than he; of similar trustworthiness but less equanimity, for he was subject to sudden elevations and depressions of the inner barometer. I shall have more to tell about him by and by. Meantime it is enough to mention that my daughter—how grand I thought it when I first said *my daughter!*—now began her acquaintance with

him. Before long he was her chief favourite next to her mother and—I am sorry I cannot conscientiously add *father;* for, at a certain early period of her history, the child showed a decided preference for her uncle over her father.

But it is time I put a stop to this ooze of maternal memories. Having thus introduced my baby and her uncle Roger, I close the chapter.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A NEGATIVED PROPOSAL.

IT may well be believed that we had not yet seen much company in our little house. To parties my husband had a great dislike; evening parties he eschewed utterly, and never accepted an invitation to dinner, except it were to the house of a friend, or to that of one of my few relatives in London, whom, for my sake, he would not displease. There were not many even among his artist-acquaintances whom he cared to visit, and, altogether, I fear he passed for an unsociable man. I am certain he would have sold more pictures if he had

accepted what invitations came in his way. But to hint at such a thing, would, I knew, crystallize his dislike into a resolve.

One day after I had got quite strong again, as I was sitting by him in the study with my baby on my knee, I proposed that we should ask some friends to dinner. Instead of objecting to the procedure upon general principles, which I confess I had half anticipated, he only asked me whom I thought of inviting. When I mentioned the Morleys, he made no reply, but went on with his painting as if he had not heard me, whence I knew of course that the proposal was disagreeable to him.

"You see we have been twice to dine with them," I said.

"Well, don't you think that enough for a while?"

"I'm talking of asking them here now."

"Couldn't you go and see your cousin some morning instead?"

"It's not that I want to see my cousin particularly. I want to ask them to dinner."

"Oh!" he said, as if he couldn't in the least make out what I was after, "I thought people asked people because they desired their company."

"But, you see, we owe them a dinner."

"Owe them a dinner! Did you borrow one then?"

"Percivale, why will you pretend to be so stupid?"

"Perhaps I'm only pretending to be the other thing."

"Do you consider yourself under no obligation to people who ask you to dinner?"

"None in the least—if I accept the invitation. That is the natural acknowledgment of their kindness. Surely my company is

worth my dinner. It is far more trouble to me to put on black clothes and a white choker and go to their house, than it is for them to ask me, or, in a house like theirs, to have the necessary preparations made for receiving me in a manner befitting their dignity. I do violence to my own feelings in going—is not that enough? You know how much I prefer a chop with my wife alone to the grandest dinner the grandest of her grand relations could give me."

"Now, don't you make game of my grand relations. I'm not sure that you haven't far grander relations yourself, only you say so little about them, they might all have been transported for housebreaking. Tell me honestly, don't you think it natural if a friend asks you to dinner that you should ask him again?"

"Yes; if it would give him any pleasure. But just imagine your cousin Morley dining

at our table. Do you think he would enjoy it?"

"Of course we must have somebody in to help Jemima."

"And somebody to wait, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course, Percivale."

"And what Thackeray calls cold balls handed about?"

"Well, I wouldn't have them cold."

"But they would be."

I was by this time so nearly crying, that I said nothing here.

"My love," he resumed, "I object to the whole thing. It's all false together. I have not the least disinclination to asking a few friends who would enjoy being received in the same style as your father or my brother—namely, to one of our better dinners, and perhaps something better to drink than I can afford every day; but just think with what uneasy compassion Mr. Morley

would regard our poor ambitions—even if you had an occasional cook and an undertaker's man. And what would he do without his glass of dry sherry after his soup, and his hock and champagne later, not to mention his fine claret or tawny port afterwards? I don't know how to get these things good enough for him, without laying in a stock, and that you know would be as absurd as it is impossible."

"Oh, you gentlemen always think so much of the wine!"

"Believe me, it is as necessary to Mr. Morley's comfort as the dainties *you* would provide him with. Indeed it would be a cruelty to ask him. He would not, could not enjoy it."

"If he didn't like it, he needn't come again," I said, cross with the objections of which I could not but see the justice.

"Well, I must say you have an odd notion

of hospitality," said my bear.—"You may be certain," he resumed after a moment's pause, "that a man so well aware of his own importance, will take it far more as a compliment that you do not presume to invite him to your house, but are content to enjoy his society when he asks you to his."

"I don't choose to take such an inferior position," I said.

"You can't help it, my dear," he returned. "Socially considered, you *are* his inferior. You cannot give dinners he would regard with anything better than a friendly contempt, combined with a certain mild indignation at your having presumed to ask *him*—used to such different ways. It is far more graceful to accept the small fact and let him have his whim, which is not a subversive one, or at all dangerous to the community—being of a sort easy to cure. Ha! ha! ha!"

"May I ask what you are laughing at?" I said with severity.

"I was only fancying how such a man must feel—if what your blessed father believes be true—when he is stripped all at once of every possible source of consequence—stripped of position, funds, house, including cellar—clothes, body, including stomach——"

"There, there! don't be vulgar. It is not like you, Percivale."

"My love, there is far greater vulgarity in refusing to acknowledge the inevitable, either in society or in physiology. Just ask my brother his experience in regard of the word to which you object."

"I will leave that to you."

"Don't be vexed with me, my wife," he said.

"I don't like not to be allowed to pay my debts."

"Back to the starting-point, like a hunted hare! A woman's way," he said merrily, hoping to make me laugh, for he could not doubt I should see the absurdity of my position with a moment's reflection. But I was out of temper, and chose to pounce upon the liberty taken with my sex, and regard it as an insult. Without a word I rose, pressed my baby to my bosom as if her mother had been left a widow, and swept away. Percivale started to his feet; I did not see, but I knew he gazed after me for a moment; then I heard him sit down to his painting as if nothing had happened, but, I knew, with a sharp pain inside his great chest. For me, I found the precipice, or Jacob's ladder, I had to climb, very subversive of my dignity; for when a woman has to hold a baby in one arm, and with the hand of the other lift the front of her skirt in order to walk up an almost perpendicular

staircase, it is quite impossible for her to *sweep* any more.

When I reached the top—I don't know how it was, but the picture he had made of me, with the sunset-shine coming through the window, flashed upon my memory. All dignity forgotten, I bolted through the door at the top, flung my baby into the arms of her nurse, turned, almost tumbled headlong down the precipice, and altogether tumbled down at my husband's chair. I couldn't speak, I could only lay my head on his knees.

"Darling," he said, "you shall ask the great Pan Jan with his button atop, if you like. I'll do my best for him."

Between crying and laughing, I nearly did what I have never really done yet—I nearly *went off*. There! I am sure that phrase is quite as objectionable as the word I wrote a little while ago, and there it shall

stand, as a penance for having called any word my husband used *vulgar*.

"I was very naughty, Percivale," I said. "I will give a dinner-party, and it shall be such as you shall enjoy, and I won't ask Mr. Morley."

"Thank you, my love," he said; "and the next time Mr. Morley asks us I will go without a grumble, and make myself as agreeable as I can."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MY FIRST DINNER-PARTY.

IT may have seemed to some of my readers occasion for surprise that the mistress of a household should have got so far in the construction of a book without saying a word about her own or other people's servants—without even a remark on servants in general. Such occasion shall no longer be afforded them, for now I am going to say several things about one of mine, and thereby introduce a few results of much experience and some thought. I do not pretend to have made a single discovery—but only to have achieved what I count a certain measure

of success, which, however, I owe largely to my own poverty, and the stupidity of my cook.

I have had a good many servants since, but Jemima seems a fixture. How this has come about, it would be impossible to say in ever so many words. Over and over I have felt, and may feel again before the day is ended, a profound sympathy with Sindbad the sailor, when the old man of the sea was on his back, and the hope of ever getting him off it had not yet begun to dawn. She has by turns every fault under the sun—I say *fault* only—will struggle with one for a day, and succumb to it for a month; while the smallest amount of praise is sufficient to render her incapable of deserving a word of commendation for a week. She is intensely stupid, with a remarkable genius—yes, genius—for cooking. My father says that all stupidity is

caused, or at least maintained, by conceit. I cannot quite accompany him to his conclusions, but I have seen plainly enough that the stupidest people are the most conceited, which in some degree favours them. It was long an impossibility to make her see, or at least own, that she was to blame for anything. If the dish she had last time cooked to perfection made its appearance the next time uneatable, she would lay it all to the *silly* oven, which was too hot or too cold; or the silly pepper-pot, the top of which fell off as she was using it. She had no sense of the value of proportion—would insist for instance that she had made the cake precisely as she had been told, but suddenly betray that she had not weighed the flour, which *could* be of no consequence, seeing she had weighed everything else.

"Please, 'm, could you eat your dinner

now, for it's all ready?" she came saying an hour before dinner-time, the very first day after my mother left. Even now her desire to be punctual is chiefly evidenced by absurd precipitancy, to the danger of doing everything either to a pulp or a cinder. Yet here she is, and here she is likely to remain, as far as I see, till death, or some other catastrophe, us do part. The reason of it is, that, with all her faults—and they are innumerable—she has some heart; yes, after deducting all that can be laid to the account of a certain cunning perception that she is well off, she has yet a good deal of genuine attachment left; and after setting down the half of her professions to the blarney which is the natural weapon of the weak-witted Celt, there seems yet left in her of the vanishing clan instinct enough to render her a jealous partizan of her master and mistress.

Those who care only for being well-served, will of course feel contemptuous towards any one who would put up with such a woman for a single moment after she could find another; but both I and my husband have a strong preference for living in a family, rather than in a hotel. I know many houses in which the master and mistress are far more like the lodgers on sufferance of their own servants. I have seen a worthy lady go about wringing her hands because she could not get her orders attended to in the emergency of a slight accident, not daring to go down to her own kitchen, as her love prompted, and expedite the ministration. I am at least mistress in my own house; my servants are, if not yet so much members of the family as I could wish, gradually becoming more so; there is a circulation of common life through the household, rendering us an organization,

although as yet perhaps a low one; I am sure of being obeyed, and there are no underhand out-of-door connections. When I go to the houses of my rich relations, and hear what they say concerning their servants, I feel as if they were living over a mine, which might any day be sprung, and blow them into a state of utter helplessness; and I return to my house blessed in the knowledge that my little kingdom is my own, and that, although it is not free from internal upheavings and stormy commotions, these are such as to be within the control and restraint of the general family influences; while the blunders of the cook seem such trifles beside the evil customs established in most kitchens of which I know anything, that they are turned even into sources of congratulation as securing her services for ourselves. More than once my husband has insisted on raising her wages

on the ground of the endless good he gets in his painting from the merriment her oddities afford him—namely, the clear insight, which, he asserts, is the invariable consequence. I must in honesty say, however, that I have seen him something else than merry with her behaviour many a time.

But I find the things I have to say so crowd upon me, that I must either proceed to arrange them under heads—which would immediately deprive them of any right to a place in my story—or keep them till they are naturally swept from the bank of my material by the slow wearing of the current of my narrative. I prefer the latter because I think my readers will.

What with one thing and another, this thing to be done and that thing to be avoided, there was nothing more said about the dinner-party, until my father came to

see us in the month of July. I was to have paid them a visit before then, but things had come in the way of that also, and now my father came commissioned by my mother to arrange for my going the next month.

As soon as I had shown him to his little room, I ran down to Percivale.

"Papa is come," I said.

"I am delighted to hear it," he answered, laying down his palette and brushes. "Where is he?"

"Gone up stairs," I answered. "I wouldn't disturb you till he came down again."

He answered with that world-wide English phrase, so suggestive of a hopeful disposition—"All right!" And with all its grumbling, and the *tristesse* which the French consider its chief characteristic, I think my father is right, who says that,

more than any other nation, England has been, is, and will be, saved by hope. Resuming his implements, my husband added:

"I haven't quite finished my pipe—I will go on till he comes down."

Although he laid it on his pipe, I knew well enough it was just that little bit of paint he wanted to finish, and not the residue of tobacco in the black and red bowl.

"And now we'll have our dinner-party," I said.

I do believe that, for all the nonsense I had talked about returning invitations, the real thing at my heart even then was an impulse towards hospitable entertainment, and the desire to see my husband merry with his friends, under—shall I say it?—the protecting wing of his wife. For, as mother of the family, the wife has to mother her husband also, to consider him as her first-born, and look out for what will

not only give him pleasure but be good for him. And I may just add here, that for a long time my bear has fully given in to this.

"And who are you going to ask?" he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Morley to begin with, and——"

"No, no," I answered. "We are going to have a jolly evening of it, with nobody present who will make you either anxious or annoyed. Mr. Blackstone"—he wasn't married then—"Miss Clare, I think—and——"

"What do you ask her for?"

"I won't if you don't like her, but——"

"I haven't had a chance of liking or disliking her yet."

"That is partly why I want to ask her—I am so sure you would like her if you knew her."

"Where did you tell me you had met her?"

awkwardness and possible disaster of the private precipice.

The principal dish—a small sirloin of beef—was at the foot of the table, and a couple of boiled fowls, as I thought, before me. But when the cover was removed, to my surprise I found they were roasted.

"What have you got there, Percivale?" I asked. "Isn't it sirloin?"

"I'm not an adept in such matters," he replied. "I should say it was."

My father gave a glance at the joint. Something seemed to be wrong. I rose and went to my husband's side. Powers of cuisine! Jemima had roasted the fowls, and boiled the sirloin! My exclamation was the signal for an outbreak of laughter, led by my father. I was trembling in the balance between mortification on my own account and sympathy with the evident

amusement of my father and Mr. Blackstone. But the thought that Mr. Morley might have been and was not of the party, came with such a pang and such a relief, that it settled the point, and I burst out laughing.

"I dare say it's all right," said Roger. "Why shouldn't a sirloin be boiled as well as roasted? I venture to assert that it is all a whim, and we are on the verge of a new discovery to swell the number of those which already owe their being to blunders."

"Let us all try a slice, then," said Mr Blackstone, "and compare results."

This was agreed to, and a solemn silence followed, during which each sought acquaintance with the new dish.

"I am sorry to say," remarked my father, speaking first, "that Roger is all wrong, and we have only made the discovery that

custom is right. It is plain enough why sirloin is always roasted."

"I yield myself convinced," said Roger.

"And I am certain," said Mr. Blackstone, "that if the loin set before the king, whoever he was, had been boiled, he would never have knighted it."

Thanks to the loin, the last possible touch of constraint had vanished, and the party grew a very merry one. The apple-pudding which followed, was declared perfect, and eaten up. Percivale produced some good wine from somewhere, which evidently added to the enjoyment of the gentlemen, my father included, who likes a good glass of wine as well as anybody. But a tiny little whimper called me away, and Miss Clare accompanied me, the gentlemen insisting that we should return as soon as possible, and bring the homuncle, as Roger called the baby, with us.

When we returned, the two clergymen were in close conversation, and the other two gentlemen were chiefly listening. My father was saying:

"My dear sir, I don't see how any man can do his duty as a clergyman who doesn't visit his parishioners."

"In London it is simply impossible," returned Mr. Blackstone. "Besides—in the country you are welcome wherever you go; any visit I might pay, would most likely be regarded either as an intrusion, or as giving the right to pecuniary aid, of which evils the latter is the worse. There are portions of every London parish which clergymen and their coadjutors have so degraded by the practical teaching of beggary, that they have blocked up every door to a healthy spiritual relation between them and a possible pastor."

"Would you not give alms at all, then?"

"One thing, at least, I have made up my mind upon—that alms from any but the hand of personal friendship tend to evil, and will, in the long run, increase misery."

"What, then, do you suppose the proper relation between a London clergyman and his parishioners?"

"One, I am afraid, which does not at present exist—one which it is his first business perhaps to bring about. I confess I regard with a repulsion amounting to horror the idea of walking into a poor man's house, except either I have business with him, or desire his personal acquaintance."

"But your office——"

"Makes it my business to serve—not to assume authority over them—especially to the degree of forcing service upon them. I will not say how far intimacy may not justify you in immediate assault upon a man's conscience; but I shrink from any

plan that seems to take it for granted that the poor are more wicked than the rich. Why don't we send missionaries to Belgravia? The outside of the cup and platter may sometimes be dirtier than the inside."

"Your missionary could hardly force his way through the servants to the boudoir or drawing-room."

"And the poor have no servants to defend them."

I have recorded this much of the conversation chiefly for the sake of introducing Miss Clare, who now spoke.

"Don't you think, sir," she asked, addressing my father, "that the help one can give to another must always depend on the measure in which one is free oneself?"

My father was silent—thinking. We were all silent. I said to myself, "There, papa! that is something after your own

heart." With marked deference and solemnity he answered at length—

"I have little doubt you are right, Miss Clare. That puts the question upon its own eternal foundation. The mode used must be of infinitely less importance than the person who uses it."

As he spoke, he looked at her with a far more attentive regard than hitherto. Indeed, the eyes of all the company seemed to be scanning the small woman; but she bore the scrutiny well, if indeed she was not unconscious of it; and my husband began to find out one of my reasons for asking her, which was simply that he might see her face. At this moment, it was in one of its higher phases. It was, at its best, a grand face—at its worst, a suffering face; a little too large, perhaps, for the small body which it crowned with a flame of soul; but while you saw her face you never thought of the

rest of her, and her attire seemed to court an escape from all observation.

"But," my father went on, looking at Mr. Blackstone, "I am anxious, from the clergyman's point of view, to know what my friend here thinks he must try to do in his very difficult position."

"I think the best thing I could do," returned Mr. Blackstone, laughing, "would be to go to school to Miss Clare."

"I shouldn't wonder," my father responded.

"But, in the meantime, I should prefer the chaplaincy of a suburban cemetery."

"Certainly your charge would be a less troublesome one. Your congregation would be quiet enough, at least," said Roger.

"'Then are they glad because they be quiet,'" said my father, as if unconsciously uttering his own reflections. But he was a little cunning, and would say things like

that when, fearful of irreverence, he wanted to turn the current of the conversation.

"But, surely," said Miss Clare, "a more active congregation would be quite as desirable."

She had one fault—no, defect: she was slow to enter into the humour of a thing. It seemed almost as if the first aspect of any bit of fun presented to her was that of something wrong. A moment's reflection, however, almost always ended in a sunny laugh, partly at her own stupidity, as she called it.

"You mistake my meaning," said Mr. Blackstone. "My chief, almost sole, attraction to the regions of the grave is the sexton, and not the placidity of the inhabitants; though perhaps Miss Clare might value that more highly if she had more experience of how noisy human nature can be."

Miss Clare gave a little smile, which afterknowledge enabled me to interpret as mean-

ing—"Perhaps I do know a trifle about it;"—but she said nothing.

"My first inquiry," he went on, "before accepting such an appointment, would be as to the character and mental habits of the sexton. If I found him a man capable of regarding human nature from a stand-point of his own, I should close with the offer at once. If, on the contrary, he was a common-place man, who made faultless responses, and cherished the friendship of the undertaker, I should decline. In fact, I should regard the sexton as my proposed master; and whether I should accept the place or not would depend altogether on whether I liked him or not. Think what revelations of human nature a real man in such a position could give me. 'Hand me the shovel. You stop a bit—you're out of breath. Sit down on that stone there, and light your pipe; here's some tobacco. Now

tell me the rest of the story. How did the old fellow get on after he had buried his termagant wife?' That's how I should treat him; and I should get in return such a succession of peeps into human life, and intent, and aspiration, as, in the course of a few years, would send me to the next vicarage that turned up, a sadder and wiser man, Mr. Walton."

"I don't doubt it," said my father; but whether in sympathy with Mr. Blackstone, or in latent disapproval of a tone judged unbecoming to a clergyman, I cannot tell. Sometimes, I confess, I could not help suspecting the source of the deficiency in humour which he often complained of in me; but I always came to the conclusion that what seemed such a deficiency in him was only occasioned by the presence of a deeper feeling.

Miss Clare was the first to leave.

"What a lovely countenance that is!" said my husband, the moment she was out of hearing.

"She is a very remarkable woman," said my father.

"I suspect she knows a good deal more than most of us," said Mr. Blackstone. "Did you see how her face lighted up always before she said anything? You can never come nearer to seeing a thought than in her face just before she speaks."

"What is she?" asked Roger.

"Can't you see what she is?" returned his brother. "She's a saint — Saint Clare."

"If you had been a Scotchman now," said Roger, "that fine name would have sunk to *Sinkler* in your mouth."

"Not a more vulgar corruption, however, than is common in the mouths of English lords and ladies, when they turn *St. John*

into *Singen*, reminding one of nothing but the French for an ape," said my father.

"But what does she do?" persisted Roger.

"Why should you think she does anything?" I asked.

"She looks as if she had to earn her own living."

"She does. She teaches music."

"Why didn't you ask her to play?"

"Because this is the first time she has been to the house."

"Does she go to church, do you suppose?"

"I have no doubt of it; but why do you ask?"

"Because she looks as if she didn't want it. I never saw such an angelic expression upon a countenance."

"You must take me to call upon her," said my father.

"I will with pleasure," I answered.

I found, however, that this was easier promised than performed, for I had asked her by word of mouth at Cousin Judy's, and had not the slightest idea where she lived. Of course I applied to Judy, but she had mislaid her address, and promising to ask her for it, forgot more than once. My father had to return home without seeing her again.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A PICTURE.

THINGS went on very quietly for some time. Of course I was fully occupied, as well I might be, with a life to tend and cultivate which must blossom at length into the human flowers of love and obedience and faith. The smallest service I did the wonderful thing that lay in my lap, seemed a something in itself so well worth doing, that it was worth living to do it. As I gazed on the new creation, so far beyond my understanding, yet so dependent upon me while asserting an absolute and divine right to all I did for her, I marvelled that

God should entrust me with such a charge, that he did not keep the lovely creature in his own arms and refuse her to any others. Then I would bethink myself that in giving her into mine, he had not sent her out of his own; for I, too, was a child in his arms, holding and tending my live doll, until it should grow something like me, only ever so much better. Was she not given to me that she might learn what I had begun to learn—namely, that a willing childhood was the flower of life? How can any mother sit with her child on her lap and not know that there is a God over all—know it by the rising of her own heart in prayer to him? But so few have had parents like mine! If my mother felt thus when I lay in her arms, it was no wonder I should feel thus when my child lay in mine.

Before I had children of my own, I did not care about children, and therefore did

not understand them; but I had read somewhere—and it clung to me although I did not understand it—that it was in laying hold of the heart of his mother that Jesus laid his first hold on the world to redeem it; and now at length I began to understand it. What a divine way of saving us it was—to let her bear him, carry him in her bosom, wash him and dress him and nurse him and sing him to sleep—offer him the adoration of mother's love, misunderstand him, chide him, forgive him even for fancied wrong! Such a love might well save a world in which were mothers enough. It was as if he had said, "Ye shall no more offer vain sacrifices to one who needs them not, and cannot use them. I will need them, so require them at your hands. I will hunger and thirst and be naked and cold, and ye shall minister to me. Sacrifice shall be no more a symbol but a real giving

unto God; and when I return to the Father, inasmuch as ye do it to one of the least of these, ye do it unto me." So all the world is henceforth the temple of God; its worship is ministration; the commonest service is divine service.

I feared at first that the new strange love I felt in my heart came only of the fact that the child was Percivale's and mine; but I soon found it had a far deeper source—that it sprung from the very humanity of the infant woman, yea, from her relation in virtue of that humanity to the Father of all. The fountain *appeared* in my heart: it arose from an infinite store in the unseen.

Soon, however, came jealousy of my love for my baby. I feared lest it should make me—nay, was making me neglect my husband. The fear first arose in me one morning as I sat with her half dressed on my knees. I was dawdling over her in my

fondness, as I used to dawdle over the dressing of my doll, when suddenly I became aware that never once since her arrival had I sat with my husband in his study. A pang of dismay shot through me. "Is this to be a wife?" I said to myself;—"To play with a live love like a dead doll, and forget her husband!" I caught up a blanket from the cradle—I am not going to throw away that good old word for the ugly outlandish name they give it now, reminding one only of a helmet—I caught up a blanket from the cradle, I say, wrapped it round the treasure, which was shooting its arms and legs in every direction like a polypus feeling after its food—and rushed down-stairs, and down the precipice into the study. Percivale started up in terror, thinking something fearful had happened, and I was bringing him all that was left of the child.

"What—what—what's the matter?" he gasped.

I could not while he was thus frightened explain to him what had driven me to him in such alarming haste.

"I've brought you the baby to kiss," I said, unfolding the blanket and holding up the sprawling little goddess towards the face that towered above me.

"Was it dying for a kiss then?" he said, taking her, blanket and all, from my arms.

The end of the blanket swept across his easel, and smeared the face of the baby in a picture of the *Three Kings*, at which he was working.

"Oh, Percivale!" I cried, "you've smeared your baby!"

"But this is a real live baby; she may smear anything she likes."

"Except her own face and hands, please, then, Percivale."

"Or her blessed frock," said Percivale. "She hasn't got one, though. Why hasn't the little angel got her feathers on yet?"

"I was in such a hurry to bring her."

"To be kissed?"

"No, not exactly. It wasn't her I was in a hurry to bring; it was myself."

"Ah! you wanted to be kissed, did you?"

"No, sir. I didn't want to be kissed; but I did so want to kiss you, Percivale."

"Isn't it all the same, though, darling?" he said. "It seems so to me."

"Sometimes, Percivale, you are so very stupid! It's not the same at all. There's a world of difference between the two; and you ought to know it, or be told it, if you don't."

"I shall think it over as soon as you leave me," he said.

"But I'm not going to leave you for a long time. I haven't seen you paint for weeks and weeks—not since this little troublesome thing came poking in between us."

"But she's not dressed yet."

"That doesn't signify. She's well wrapped up, and quite warm."

He put me a chair where I could see his picture without catching the shine of the paint. I took the baby from him, and he went on with his work.

"You don't think I'm going to sacrifice all my privileges to this little tyrant—do you?" I said.

"It would be rather hard for me, at least," he rejoined.

"You did think I was neglecting you, then, Percivale?"

"Not for a moment."

"Then you didn't miss me?"

"I did—very much."

"And you didn't grumble?"

"No."

"Do I disturb you?" I asked, after a little pause. "Can you paint just as well when I am here as when you are alone?"

"Better. I feel warmer to my work somehow."

I was satisfied, and held my peace. When I am best pleased I don't want to talk. But Percivale, perhaps not having found this out yet, looked anxiously in my face; and, as at the moment my eyes were fixed on his picture, I thought he wanted to find out whether I liked the design.

"I see it now!" I cried. "I could not make out where the Magi were."

He had taken for the scene of his picture an old farm kitchen, or yeoman's hall, with

its rich brown rafters, its fire on the hearth, and its red brick-floor. A tub half full of bright water stood on one side, and the mother was bending over her baby, which, undressed for the bath, she was holding out for the admiration of the Magi. Immediately behind the mother stood, in the garb of a shepherd, my father, leaning on the ordinary shepherd's crook; my mother, like a peasant-woman in her Sunday-best, with a white handkerchief crossed upon her bosom, stood beside him, and both were gazing with a chastened yet profound pleasure on the lovely child.

In front stood two boys and a girl—between the ages of five and nine—gazing each with a peculiar wondering delight on the baby. The youngest boy, with a great spotted wooden horse in his hand, was approaching to embrace the infant in such fashion as made the toy look dangerous,

and the left hand of the mother was lifted with a motion of warning and defence. The little girl, the next youngest, had, in her absorption, dropped her gaudily dressed doll at her feet, and stood sucking her thumb, her big blue eyes wide with contemplation. The eldest boy had brought his white rabbit to give the baby, but had forgotten all about it, so full was his heart of his new brother. An expression of mingled love and wonder and perplexity had already begun to dawn upon the face, but it was as yet far from finished. He stood behind the other two, peeping over their heads.

"Were you thinking of that Titian in the Louvre, with the white rabbit in it?" I asked Percivale.

"I did not think of it until after I had put in the rabbit," he replied. "And it shall remain, for it suits my purpose, and

Titian would not claim all the white rabbits because of that one."

"Did you think of the black lamb in it, then, when you laid that black pussy on the hearth?" I asked.

"Black lamb?" he returned.

"Yes," I insisted, "a black lamb, in the dark background—such a very black lamb, and in such a dark background, that it seems you never discovered it."

"Are you sure?" he persisted.

"Absolutely certain," I replied. "I pointed it out to papa in the picture itself in the Louvre: he had not observed it before either."

"I am very glad to know there is such a thing there. I need not answer your question, you see. It is odd enough I should have put in the black puss. Upon some grounds I might argue that my puss is better than Titian's lamb."

"What grounds—tell me."

"If the painter wanted a contrast, a lamb, be he as black as ever paint could make him, must still be a more Christian animal than a cat as white as snow. Under what pretence could a cat be used for a Christian symbol?"

"What do you make of her playfulness?"

"I should count that a virtue, were it not for the fatal objection that it is always exercised at the expense of other creatures."

"A ball of string, or a reel, or a bit of paper, is enough for an uncorrupted kitten."

"But you must not forget that it serves only in virtue of the creature's imagination representing it as alive. If you do not make it move, she will herself set it in motion as the initiative of the game. If she cannot do that, she will take no notice of it."

"Yes, I see. I give in."

All this time he had been painting diligently. He could now combine talking and painting far better than he used. But a knock came to the study door, and remembering baby's unpresentable condition, I huddled her up, climbed the stair again, and finished the fledging of my little angel in a very happy frame of mind.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### RUMOURS.

HARDLY was it completed, when Cousin Judy called, and I went down to see her, carrying my baby with me. As I went, something put me in mind that I must ask her for Miss Clare's address. Lest I should again forget, as soon as she had kissed and admired the baby, I said—

"Have you found out yet where Miss Clare lives, Judy?"

"I don't choose to find out," she answered. "I am sorry to say I have had to give her up. It is a disappointment, I confess."

"What do you mean?" I said. "I thought you considered her a very good teacher."

"I have no fault to find with her on that score. She was always punctual, and I must allow both played well and taught the children delightfully. But I have heard such questionable things about her! —very strange things indeed!"

"What are they?"

"I can't say I've been able to fix on more than one thing directly against her character, but—"

"Against her character!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed. She lives by herself in lodgings, and the house is not at all a respectable one."

"But have you made no further inquiry?"

"I consider that quite enough. I had already met more than one person, however,

who seemed to think it very odd that I should have her to teach music in my family."

"Did they give any reason for thinking her unfit?"

"I did not choose to ask them. One was Miss Clarke—you know her. She smiled in her usual supercilious manner, but in her case I believe it was only because Miss Clare looks so dowdy. Nobody knows anything about her, though, except what I've just told you."

"And who told you that?"

"Mrs. Jeffreson."

"But you once told me she was a great gossip."

"Else she wouldn't have heard it. But that doesn't make it untrue. In fact, she convinced me of its truth, for she knows the place she lives in, and assured me it was at great risk of infection to the children that I allowed her to enter the house; and so, of

course, I felt compelled to let her know that I didn't require her services any longer."

"There must be some mistake, surely!" I said.

"Oh! no—not the least—I am sorry to say."

"How did she take it?"

"Very sweetly indeed. She didn't even ask me why, which was just as well, seeing I should have found it awkward to tell her. But I suppose she knew too many grounds herself to dare the question."

I was dreadfully sorry, but I could not say much more then. I ventured only to express my conviction that there could not be any charge to bring against Miss Clare herself; for that one who looked and spoke as she did, could have nothing to be ashamed of. Judy however insisted that what she had heard was reason enough for at least ending the engagement; indeed, that no

one was fit for such a situation of whom such things could be said, whether they were true or not.

When she left me, I gave baby to her nurse, and went straight to the study, peeping in to see if Percivale was alone.

He caught sight of me, and called to me to come down.

"It's only Roger," he said.

I was always pleased to see Roger. He was a strange creature—one of those gifted men who are capable of anything, if not of everything, and yet carry nothing within sight of proficiency. He whistled like a starling, and accompanied his whistling on the piano, but never played. He could also do a little on the violin, and during the first few months after my marriage, I often accompanied him. He could copy a drawing to a hair's-breadth, but never drew. He could engrave well on wood,

but although he had often been employed in that way, he had always got tired of it after a few weeks. He was for ever wanting to do something other than what he was at; and the moment he got tired of a thing, he would work at it no longer; for he had never learned to *make* himself. He would come every day to the study for a week to paint in backgrounds, or make a duplicate; and then, perhaps, we wouldn't see him for a fortnight. At other times he would work, say for a month, modelling, or carving marble, for a sculptor friend, from whom he might have had constant employment if he had pleased. He had given lessons in various branches, for he was an excellent scholar, and had the finest ear for verse, as well as the keenest appreciation of the loveliness of poetry, that I have ever known. He had stuck to this longer than to anything else, strange to say; for one

would have thought it the least attractive of employments to one of his volatile disposition. For some time indeed he had supported himself comfortably in this way; for through friends of his family he had had good introductions, and, although he wasted a good deal of money in buying nick-nacks that promised to be useful and seldom were, he had no objectionable habits except inordinate smoking. But it happened that a pupil—a girl of imaginative disposition, I presume—fell so much in love with him that she betrayed her feelings to her countess-mother, and the lessons were of course put an end to. I suspect he did not escape heart-whole himself, for he immediately dropped all his other lessons, and took to writing poetry for a new magazine, which proved of ephemeral constitution, and vanished after a few months of hectic existence.

It was remarkable that with such instability his moral nature should continue uncorrupted; but this I believe he owed chiefly to his love and admiration of his brother. For my part, I could not help liking him much. There was a half-plaintive playfulness about him, alternated with gloom, and occasionally with wild merriment, which made him interesting even when one felt most inclined to quarrel with him. The worst of him was that he considered himself a generally misunderstood, if not ill-used man, who could not only distinguish himself, but render valuable service to society, if only society would do him the justice to give him a chance. Were it only, however, for his love to my baby, I could not but be ready to take up his defence.

When I mentioned what I had just heard about Miss Clare, Percivale looked both

astonished and troubled; but before he could speak, Roger, with the air of a man of the world whom experience enabled to come at once to a decision, said—

"Depend upon it, Wynnie, there is falsehood there somewhere. You will always be nearer the truth if you believe nothing, than if you believe the half of what you hear."

"That's very much what papa says," I answered. "He affirms that he never searched into an injurious report in his own parish without finding it so nearly false as to deprive it of all right to go about."

"Besides," said Roger, "look at that face! How I should like to model it! She's a good woman that, depend upon it!"

I was delighted with his enthusiasm.

"I wish you would ask her again, as soon as you can," said Percivale, who always tended to embody his conclusions in

acts rather than in words. "Your cousin Judy is a jolly good creature, but from your father's description of her as a girl, she must have grown a good deal more worldly since her marriage. Respectability is an awful snare."

"Yes," said Roger; "one ought to be very thankful to be a Bohemian and have nothing expected of him, for respectability is a most fruitful mother of stupidity and injustice."

I could not help thinking that *he* might, however, have a little more and be none the worse.

"I should be very glad to do as you desire, husband," I said, "but how can I? I haven't yet learned where she lives. It was asking Judy for her address once more that brought it all out. I certainly didn't insist, as I might have done, notwithstanding what she told me; but if she

didn't remember it before, you may be sure she could not have given it me then."

"It's very odd," said Roger, stroking his long moustache, the sole ornament of the kind he wore.—"It's very odd," he repeated thoughtfully, and then paused again.

"What's so very odd, Roger?" asked Percivale.

"The other evening," answered Roger, after yet a short pause, "happening to be in Tottenham Court Road, I walked for some distance behind a young woman carrying a brown beer-jug in her hand—for I sometimes amuse myself in the street by walking persistently behind some one, devising the unseen face in my mind, until the recognition of the same step following causes the person to look round at me, and give me the opportunity of comparing the two —I mean the one I had devised and the real one. When the young woman at

length turned her head, it was only my astonishment that kept me from addressing her as Miss Clare. My surprise however gave me time to see how absurd it would have been. Presently she turned down a yard and disappeared."

"Don't tell my cousin Judy," I said. "She would believe it *was* Miss Clare."

"There isn't much danger," he returned. "Even if I knew your cousin, I should not be likely to mention such an incident in her hearing."

"Could it have been she?" said Percivale thoughtfully.

"Absurd," said Roger. "Miss Clare is a lady, wherever she may live."

"I don't know," said his brother, still thoughtfully; "who can tell? It mightn't have been beer she was carrying."

"I didn't say it was beer," returned Roger. "I only said it was a beer-jug—

one of those brown, squat, stone jugs—the best for beer that I know, after all—brown, you know, with a dash of grey."

"Brown jug or not, I wish I could get a few sittings from her. She would make a lovely St. Cecilia," said my husband.

"Brown jug and all?" asked Roger.

"If only she were a little taller," I objected.

"And had an aureole," said my husband. "But I might succeed in omitting the jug as well as in adding the aureole and another half foot of stature, if only I could get that lovely countenance on the canvas —so full of life and yet of repose."

"Don't you think it a little hard?" I ventured to say.

"I think so," said Roger.

"I don't," said my husband. "I know what in it looks like hardness; but I think it comes of the repression of feeling."

"You have studied her well for your opportunities," I said.

"I have; and I am sure, whatever Mrs. Morley may say, that, if there be any truth at all in those reports, there is some satisfactory explanation of whatever has given rise to them. I wish we knew anybody else that knew her. Do try to find some one that does, Wynnie."

"I don't know how to set about it," I said. "I should be only too glad."

"I will try," said Roger. "Does she sing?"

"I have heard Judy say she sang divinely; but the only occasion on which I met her—at their house, that time you couldn't go, Percivale—she was never asked to sing."

"I suspect," remarked Roger, "it will turn out to be only that she's something of a Bohemian like ourselves."

"Thank you, Roger; but for my part

I don't consider myself a Bohemian at all," I said.

"I am afraid you must rank with your husband, wifie," said *mine*, as the wives of the working people of London often call their husbands.

"Then you do count yourself a Bohemian: pray what significance do you attach to the epithet?" I asked.

"I don't know, except it signifies our resemblance to the gipsies," he answered.

"I don't understand you quite."

"I believe the gipsies used to be considered Bohemians," interposed Roger, "though they are doubtless of Indian origin. Their usages being quite different from those amongst which they live, the name Bohemian came to be applied to painters, musicians, and such like generally, to whom, save by courtesy, no position has yet been accorded by society—so called."

"But why have they not yet vindicated for themselves a social position—and that a high one?" I asked.

"Because they are generally poor, I suppose," he answered; "and society is generally stupid."

"May it not be because they are so often, like the gipsies, lawless in their behaviour, as well as peculiar in their habits?" I suggested.

"I understand you, perfectly, Mrs. Percivale," rejoined Roger, with mock offence. "But how would that apply to Charlie?"

"Not so well as to you, I confess," I answered. "But there is ground for it with him too."

"I have thought it all over many a time," said Percivale, "and I suppose it comes in part from inability to understand the worth of our calling, and in part from the difficulty of knowing where to put us."

"I suspect," I said, "one thing is that so many of them are content to be received as painters merely, or whatever they may be by profession. Many, for instance, you have told me, accept invitations which do not include their wives."

"They often go to parties, of course, where there are no ladies," said Roger.

"That is not what I mean," I replied. "They go to dinner-parties where there are ladies, and evening parties, too, without their wives."

"Whoever does that," said Percivale, "has at least no right to complain that he is regarded as a Bohemian; for in accepting such invitations, he accepts insult, and himself insults his wife."

Nothing irritated my bear so much as to be asked to dinner without me. He would not even offer the shadow of a reason for declining the invitation. "For,"

he would say, "if I give the real reason, namely, that I do not choose to go where my wife is excluded, they will set it down to her jealous ambition of entering a sphere beyond her reach; I will not give a false reason, and indeed have no objection to their seeing that I am offended; therefore, I assign none. If they have any chivalry in them, they may find out my reason readily enough."

I don't think I ever displeased him so much as once when I entreated him to accept an invitation to dine with the Earl of H——. The fact was, I had been fancying it my duty to persuade him to get over his offence at the omission of my name, for the sake of the advantage it would be to him in his profession. I laid it before him as gently and coaxingly as I could, representing how expenses increased, and how the children would be

requiring education by-and-by—reminding him that the reputation of more than one of the most popular painters had been brought about in some measure by their social qualities and the friendships they made.

"Is it likely your children will be ladies and gentlemen," he said, "if you prevail on their father to play the part of a sneaking parasite?"

I was frightened. He had never spoken to me in such a tone, but I saw too well how deeply he was hurt to take offence at his roughness. I could only beg him to forgive me, and promise never to say such a word again, assuring him that I believed as strongly as himself that the best heritage of children was their father's honour.

Free from any such clogs as the possession of a wife encumbers a husband withal,

Roger could of course accept what invitations his connection with an old and honourable family procured him. One evening he came in late from a dinner at Lady Bernard's.

"Whom do you think I took down to dinner?" he asked, almost before he was seated.

"Lady Bernard?" I said, flying high.

"Her dowager aunt?" said Percivale.

"No, no—Miss Clare."

"Miss Clare!" we both repeated, with mingled question and exclamation.

"Yes, Miss Clare—incredible as it may appear," he answered.

"Did you ask her if it was she you saw carrying the jug of beer in Tottenham Court Road?" said Percivale.

"Did you ask her address?" I said. "That is a question more worthy of an answer."

"Yes, I did. I believe I did. I think I did."

"What is it, then?"

"Upon my word, I haven't the slightest idea."

"So, Mr. Roger! You have had a perfect opportunity, and have let it slip! You are a man to be trusted indeed!"

"I don't know how it could have been. I distinctly remember approaching the subject more than once or twice; and now first I discover that I never asked the question. Or if I did, I am certain I got no answer."

"Bewitched."

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Or," suggested Percivale, "she did not choose to tell you—saw the question coming, and led you away from it—never let you ask it."

"I have heard that ladies can keep one

from saying what they don't want to hear. But she shan't escape me so a second time."

"Indeed, you don't deserve another chance," I said. "You're not half so clever as I took you to be, Roger."

"When I think of it, though—it wasn't a question so easy to ask, or one you would like to be overheard asking."

"Clearly bewitched," I said. "But for that I forgive you. Did she sing?"

"No. I don't suppose any one there ever thought of asking such a dingy-feathered bird to sing."

"You had some music?"

"Oh, yes. Pretty good, and very bad. Miss Clare's forehead was crossed by no end of flickering shadows as she listened."

"It wasn't for want of interest in her you forgot to find out where she lived! You had better take care, Master Roger."

"Take care of what?"

"Why, you don't know her address."

"What has that to do with taking care?"

"That you won't know where to find your heart if you should happen to want it."

"Oh! I'm past that kind of thing long ago. You've made an uncle of me."

And so on, with a good deal more nonsense, but no news of Miss Clare's retreat.

I had before this remarked to my husband that it was odd she had never called since dining with us; but he made little of it, saying that people who gained their own livelihood ought to be excused from attending to rules which had their origin with another class; and I had thought no more about it, save in disappointment that she had not given me that opportunity of improving my acquaintance with her.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A DISCOVERY.

ONE Saturday night, my husband happening to be out, an event of rare occurrence, Roger called; and as there were some things I had not been able to get during the day, I asked him to go with me to Tottenham Court Road. It was not far from the region where we lived, and I did a great part of my small shopping there. The early closing had, if I remember rightly, begun to show itself—anyhow several of the shops were shut, and we walked a long way down the street, looking for some place likely to supply what I required.

"It was just here I came up with the girl and the brown jug," said Roger, as we reached the large dissenting chapel.

"That adventure seems to have taken a great hold of you, Roger," I said.

"She *was* so like Miss Clare!" he returned. "I can't get the one face clear of the other. When I met her at Lady Bernard's, the first thing I thought of was the brown jug."

"Were you as much pleased with her conversation as at our house?" I asked.

"Even more," he answered. "I found her ideas of art so wide, as well as just and accurate, that I was puzzled to think where she had had opportunity of developing them. I questioned her about it, and found she was in the habit of going, as often as she could spare time, to the National Gallery, where her custom was, she said, not to pass from picture to picture, but keep to one

until it formed itself in her mind—that is the expression she used—explaining herself to mean—until she seemed to know what the painter had set himself to do, and why this was and that was which she could not at first understand. Clearly, without ever having taken a pencil in her hand, she has educated herself to a keen perception of what is demanded of a true picture. Of course the root of it lies in her musical development.—There," he cried suddenly, as we came opposite a paved passage, "that is the place I saw her go down."

"Then you do think the girl with the beer-jug was Miss Clare after all?"

"Not in the least. I told you I could not separate them in my mind."

"Well, I must say, it seems odd. A girl like that and Miss Clare! Why, as often as you speak of the one, you seem to think of the other."

"In fact," he returned, "I am, as I say, unable to dissociate them. But if you had seen the girl, you would not wonder. The likeness was absolutely complete."

"I believe you do consider them one and the same; and I'm more than half inclined to think so myself, remembering what Judy said."

"Isn't it possible some one who knew Miss Clare, may have seen this girl, and been misled by the likeness."

"But where, then, does Miss Clare live? Nobody seems to know."

"You have never asked any one but Mrs. Morley."

"You have yourself, however, given me reason to think she avoids the subject. If she did live anywhere hereabout, she would have some cause to avoid it."

I had stopped to look down the passage.

"Suppose," said Roger, "some one were

to come past now and see Mrs. Percivale, the wife of the celebrated painter, standing in Tottenham Court Road, beside the swing-door of a corner public-house, talking to a young man"—

"Yes; it might give occasion for scandal," I said. "To avoid it, let us go down the court and see what it is like."

"It's not a fit place for you to go into."

"If it were in my father's parish, I should have known everybody in it."

"You haven't the slightest idea what you are saying."

"Come anyhow, and let us see what the place is like," I insisted.

Without another word, he gave me his arm, and down the court we went, past the flaring gin-shop, and into the gloom beyond. It was one of those places of which while the general effect remains vivid in one's mind, the salient points are so few

that it is difficult to say much by way of description. The houses had once been occupied by people in better circumstances than its present inhabitants, and indeed they looked all decent enough until turning two right angles we came upon another sort. They were still as large, and had plenty of windows, but in the light of a single lamp at the corner, they looked very dirty and wretched and dreary. A little shop, with dried herrings and bull's-eyes in the window, was lighted by a tallow candle set in a ginger-beer bottle, with a card of "Kinahan's LL Whisky" for a reflector.

"They can't have many customers to the extent of a bottle," said Roger. "But no doubt they have some privileges from the public-house at the corner for hanging up the card."

The houses had sunk areas, just wide

enough for a stair, and the basements seemed full of tenants. There was a little wind blowing, so that the atmosphere was tolerable, notwithstanding a few stray leaves of cabbage, suggestive of others in a more objectionable condition not far off.

A confused noise of loud voices, calling and scolding, hitherto drowned by the tumult of the street, now reached our ears. The place took one turn more, and then the origin of it became apparent. At the further end of the passage was another lamp, the light of which shone upon a group of men and women, in altercation, which had not yet come to blows. It might, including children, have numbered twenty, of which some seemed drunk and all more or less excited. Roger turned to go back the moment he caught sight of them, but I felt inclined, I hardly knew why, to linger a little. Should any danger

offer, it would be easy to gain the open thoroughfare.

"It's not at all a fit place for a lady," he said.

"Certainly not," I answered; "it hardly seems a fit place for human beings. These are human beings, though. Let us go through it."

He still hesitated; but as I went on, he could but follow me. I wanted to see what the attracting centre of the little crowd was; and that it must be occupied with some affair of more than ordinary interest, I judged from the fact that a good many super-terrestrial spectators looked down from the windows at various elevations upon the disputants, whose voices now and then lulled for a moment only to break out in fresh objurgation and dispute.

Drawing a little nearer, a slight parting of the crowd revealed its core to us. It was

a little woman, without bonnet or shawl, whose back was towards us. She turned from side to side, now talking to one, and now to another of the surrounding circle. At first I thought she was setting forth her grievances, in the hope of sympathy, or perhaps of justice; but I soon perceived that her motions were too calm for that. Sometimes the crowd would speak all together, sometimes keep silent for a full minute while she went on talking. When she turned her face towards us, Roger and I turned ours, and stared at each other. The face was disfigured by a swollen eye, evidently from a blow; but clearly enough, if it was not Miss Clare, it was the young woman of the beer jug. Neither of us spoke, but turned once more to watch the result of what seemed to have at length settled down into an almost amicable conference. After a few more grumbles and

protestations, the group began to break up into threes and fours. These the young woman seemed to set herself to break up again. Here, however, an ill-looking fellow like a costermonger, with a broken nose, came up to us, and, with a strong Irish accent and offensive manner, but still with a touch of Irish breeding, requested to know what our business was. Roger asked if the place wasn't a thoroughfare.

"Not for the likes o' you," he answered, "as comes pryin' after the likes of us. We manage our own affairs down here—*we* do. You'd better be off, my lady."

I have my doubts what sort of reply Roger might have returned if he had been alone, but he certainly spoke in a very conciliatory manner, which, however, the man did not seem to appreciate, for he called it blarney; but the young woman, catching sight of our little group, and supposing, I

presume, that it also required dispersion, approached us. She had come within a yard of us, when suddenly her face brightened, and she exclaimed, in a tone of surprise,—

"Mrs. Percivale! You here!"

It was indeed Miss Clare. Without the least embarrassment, she held out her hand to me, but I am afraid I did not take it very cordially. Roger, however, behaved to her as if they stood in a drawing-room, and this brought me to a sense of propriety.

"I don't look very respectable, I fear," she said, putting her hand over her eye. "The fact is, I have had a blow, and it will look worse to-morrow. Were you coming to find me?"

I forget what lame answer either of us gave.

"Will you come in?" she said.

On the spur of the moment, I declined. For all my fine talk to Roger, I shrunk

from the idea of entering one of those houses. I can only say, in excuse, that my whole mind was in a condition of bewilderment.

"Can I do anything for you, then?" she asked, in a tone slightly marked with disappointment, I thought.

"Thank you, no," I answered, hardly knowing what my words were.

"Then good night," she said, and, nodding kindly, turned, and entered one of the houses.

We also turned in silence, and walked out of the court.

"Why didn't you go with her?" said Roger, as soon as we were in the street.

"I'm sorry I didn't if you wanted to go, Roger; but—"

"I think you might have gone, seeing I was with you," he said.

"I don't think it would have been at all

a proper thing to do, without knowing more about her," I answered, a little hurt. "You can't tell what sort of a place it may be."

"It's a good place wherever she is, or I am much mistaken," he returned.

"You may be much mistaken, Roger."

"True. I have been mistaken more than once in my life. I am not mistaken this time though."

"I presume you would have gone if I hadn't been with you?"

"Certainly, if she had asked me, which is not very likely."

"And you lay the disappointment of missing a glimpse into the sweet privacy of such a home to my charge?"

It was a spiteful speech, and Roger's silence made me feel it was, which, with the rather patronizing opinion I had of Roger, I found not a little galling. So I

too kept silence, and nothing beyond a platitude had passed between us when I found myself at my own door, my shopping utterly forgotten, and something acid on my mind.

"Don't you mean to come in?" I said, for he held out his hand at the top of the stairs to bid me good night. "My husband will be home soon, if he has not come already. You needn't be bored with my company—you can sit in the study."

"I think I had better not," he answered.

"I am very sorry, Roger, if I was rude to you," I said; "but how could you wish me to be hand-and-glove with a woman who visits people who she is well aware would not think of inviting her if they had a notion of her surroundings? That can't be right, I am certain. I protest I feel just as if I had been reading an ill-invented story — an unnatural fiction. I

cannot get these things together in my mind at all, do what I will."

"There must be some way of accounting for it," said Roger.

"No doubt," I returned; "but who knows what that way may be?"

"You may be wrong in supposing that the people at whose houses she visits know nothing about her habits."

"Is it at all likely they do, Roger? Do you think it is? I know at least that my cousin dispensed with her services as soon as she came to the knowledge of certain facts concerning these very points."

"Excuse me—certain rumours—very uncertain facts."

When you are cross, the slightest play upon words is an offence. I knocked at the door in dudgeon, then turned and said—

"My cousin Judy, Mr. Roger—"

But here I paused, for I had nothing

ready. Anger makes some people cleverer for the moment, but when I am angry I am always stupid. Roger finished the sentence for me.

"—Your cousin Judy is, you must allow, a very conventional woman," he said.

"She is very good-natured anyhow. And what do you say to Lady Bernard?"

"She hasn't repudiated Miss Clare's acquaintance, so far as I know."

"But, answer me—do you believe Lady Bernard would invite her to meet her friends if she knew all?"

"Depend upon it, Lady Bernard knows what she is about. People of her rank can afford to be unconventional."

This irritated me yet more, for it implied that I was influenced by the conventionality which both he and my husband despised, and Sarah opening the door that instant, I stepped in, without even saying good night

to him. Before she closed it, however, I heard my husband's voice, and ran out again to welcome him.

He and Roger had already met in the little front garden. They did not shake hands—they never did—they always met as if they had parted only an hour ago.

"What were you and my wife quarrelling about, Rodge?" I heard Percivale ask, and paused on the middle of the stair to hear his answer.

"How do you know we were quarrelling?" returned Roger gloomily.

"I heard you from the very end of the street," said my husband.

"That's not so far," said Roger; for indeed one house, with, I confess, a good space of garden on each side of it, and the end of another house finished the street. But notwithstanding the shortness of the distance, it stung me to the quick. Here

had I been regarding, not even with contempt, only with disgust, the quarrel in which Miss Clare was mixed up; and half an hour after, my own voice was heard in dispute with my husband's brother, from the end of the street in which we lived! I felt humiliated, and did not rush down the remaining half of the steps to implore my husband's protection against Roger's crossness.

"Too far to hear a wife and a brother though," returned Percivale jocosely.

"Go on," said Roger; "pray go on. *Let dogs delight* comes next. I beg Mrs. Percivale's pardon. I will amend the quotation: 'Let dogs delight to worry——'"

"Cats," I exclaimed; and rushing down the steps, I kissed Roger before I kissed my husband.

"I meant—I mean—I was going to say *lambs*," said Roger.

"Now, Roger, don't add to your vices flattery and——"

"And fibbing," he subjoined.

"I didn't say so."

"You only meant it."

"Don't begin again," interposed Percivale. "Come in, and refer the cause in dispute to me."

We did go in, and we did refer the matter to him. By the time we had between us told him the facts of the case, however, the point in dispute between us appeared to have grown hazy, the fact being that neither of us cared to say anything more about it. Percivale insisted that there was no question before the court. At length Roger, turning from me to his brother, said—

"It's not worth mentioning, Charley, but what led to our irreconcilable quarrel was this: I thought Wynnie might have ac

cepted Miss Clare's invitation to walk in and pay her a visit; and Wynnie thought me, I suppose, too ready to sacrifice her dignity to the pleasure of seeing a little more of the object of our altercation. There!"

My husband turned to me and said:

"Mrs. Percivale, do you accept this as a correct representation of your difference?"

"Well," I answered, hesitating—"yes, on the whole. All I object to is the word *dignity*."

"I retract it," cried Roger, "and accept any substitute you prefer."

"Let it stand," I returned. "It will do as well as a better. I only wish to say that it was not exactly my dignity——"

"No, no; your sense of propriety," said my husband; and then sat silent for a minute or two, pondering like a judge. At length he spoke:

"Wife," he said, "you might have gone with your brother, I think; but I quite understand your disinclination. At the same time, a more generous judgment of Miss Clare might have prevented any difference of feeling in the matter."

"But," I said, greatly inclined to cry, "I only postponed my judgment concerning her."

And I only postponed my crying, for I was very much ashamed of myself.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MISS CLARE.

OF course my husband and I talked a good deal more about what I ought to have done, and I saw clearly enough that I ought to have run any risk there might be in accepting her invitation. I had been foolishly taking more care of myself than was necessary. I told him I would write to Roger and ask him when he could take me there again.

"I will tell you a better plan," he said. "I will go with you myself. And that will get rid of half the awkwardness there would be if you went

with Roger, after having with him refused to go in."

"But would that be fair to Roger? She would think I didn't like going with him, and I would go with Roger anywhere. It was I who did not want to go. He did."

"My plan, however, will pave the way for a full explanation—or confession rather, I suppose it will turn out to be. I know you are burning to make it—with your mania for confessing your faults."

I knew he did not like me the worse for that *mania* though.

"The next time," he added, "you can go with Roger, always supposing you should feel inclined to continue the acquaintance, and then you will be able to set him right in her eyes."

The plan seemed unobjectionable. But just then Percivale was very busy, and I being almost as much occupied with my

baby as he with his, day after day and week after week passed, during which our duty to Miss Clare was, I will not say either forgotten or neglected, but unfulfilled.

One afternoon, I was surprised by a visit from my father. He not unfrequently surprised us.

"Why didn't you let us know, papa?" I said. "A surprise is very nice, but an expectation is much nicer, and lasts so much longer."

"I might have disappointed you."

"Even if you had, I should have already enjoyed the expectation. That would be safe."

"There's a good deal to be said in excuse of surprises," he rejoined, "but in the present case, I have a special one to offer. I was taken with a sudden desire to see you. It was very foolish no doubt, and you are

quite right in wishing I weren't here, only going to come to-morrow."

"Don't be so cruel, papa. Scarcely a day passes in which *I* do not long to see *you.* My baby makes me think more about my home than ever."

"Then she's a very healthy baby, if one may judge by her influences. But you know, if I had to give you warning, I could not have been here before to-morrow, and surely you will acknowledge that however nice expectation may be, presence is better."

"Yes, papa. We will make a compromise, if you please. Every time you think of coming to me, you must either come at once, or let me know you are coming. Do you agree to that?"

"I agree," he said.

So I have the pleasure of a constant expectation. Any day he may walk in un-

heralded; or by any post I may receive a letter with the news that he is coming at such a time.

As we sat at dinner that evening, he asked if we had lately seen Miss Clare.

"I've seen her only once, and Percivale not at all, since you were here last, papa," I answered.

"How's that?" he asked again, a little surprised. "Haven't you got her address yet? I want very much to know more of her."

"So do we. I haven't got her address, but I know where she lives."

"What do you mean, Wynnie? Has she taken to dark sayings of late, Percivale?"

I told him the whole story of my adventure with Roger, and the reports Judy had prejudiced my judgment withal. He heard me through in silence, for it was a rule with him never to interrupt a narrator. He used

to say, "You will generally get at more, and in a better fashion, if you let any narrative take its own devious course, without the interruption of requested explanations. By the time it is over, you will find the questions you wanted to ask mostly vanished."

"Describe the place to me, Wynnie," he said, when I had ended. "I must go and see her. I have a suspicion amounting almost to a conviction that she is one whose acquaintance ought to be cultivated at any cost. There is some grand explanation of all this contradictory strangeness."

"I don't think I could describe the place to you so that you would find it. But if Percivale wouldn't mind my going with you instead of with him, I should be only too happy to accompany you. May I, Percivale?"

"Certainly. It will do just as well to go

with your father as with me. I only stipulate that, if you are both satisfied, you take Roger with you next time."

"Of course I will."

"Then we'll go to-morrow morning," said my father.

"I don't think she is likely to be at home in the morning," I said. "She goes out giving lessons, you know; and the probability is that at that time we should not find her."

"Then why not to-night?" he rejoined.

"Why not, if you wish it?"

"I do wish it, then."

"If you knew the place, though, I think you would prefer going a little earlier than we can to-night."

"Ah well, we will go to-morrow evening. We could dine early, couldn't we?"

So it was arranged. My father went about some business in the morning.

We dined early, and set out about six o'clock.

My father was getting an old man, and if any protection had been required, he could not have been half so active as Roger; and yet I felt twice as safe with him. I am satisfied that the deepest sense of safety, even in respect of physical dangers, can spring only from moral causes; neither do you half so much fear evil happening to you, as fear evil happening which ought not to happen to you. I believe what made me so courageous was the undeveloped fore-feeling that if any evil should overtake me in my father's company, I should not care; it would be all right then, anyhow. The repose was in my father himself, and neither in his strength nor his wisdom. The former might fail, the latter might mistake; but so long as I was with him in what I did, no harm worth counting harm could come to

me—only such as I should neither lament nor feel. Scarcely a shadow of danger, however, showed itself.

It was a cold evening in the middle of November. The light, which had been scanty enough all day, had vanished in a thin penetrating fog. Round every lamp in the street was a coloured halo; the gay shops gleamed like jewel-caverns of Aladdin hollowed out of the darkness; and the people that hurried or sauntered along looked inscrutable. Where could they live? Had they anybody to love them? Were their hearts quiet under their dingy cloaks and shabby coats?

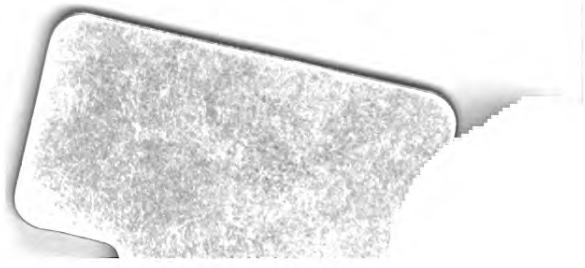
"Yes," returned my father, to whom I had said something to this effect, "what would not one give for a peep into the mysteries of all these worlds that go crowding past us! If we could but see through the opaque husk of them, some would

glitter and glow like diamond mines; others perhaps would look mere earthy holes; some of them forsaken quarries, with a great pool of stagnant water in the bottom; some like vast coal pits of gloom, into which you dared not carry a lighted lamp for fear of explosion. Some would be mere lumber-rooms; others ill-arranged libraries, without a poet's corner anywhere. But what a wealth of creation they show, and what infinite room for hope it affords!"

"But don't you think, papa, there may be something of worth lying even in the earth pit, or at the bottom of the stagnant water in the forsaken quarry?"

"Indeed I do; though I *have* met more than one in my lifetime concerning whom I felt compelled to say that it wanted keener eyes than mine to discover the hidden jewel. But then there *are* keener eyes than mine, for there are more loving

eyes. Myself I have been able to see good very clearly where some could see none; and shall I doubt that God can see good where my mole-eyes can see none? Be sure of this that as he is keen-eyed for the evil in his creatures to destroy it, he would, if it were possible, be yet keener-eyed for the good to nourish and cherish it. If men would only side with the good that is in them—will that the seed should grow and bring forth fruit!"

**END OF VOL. I.**

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