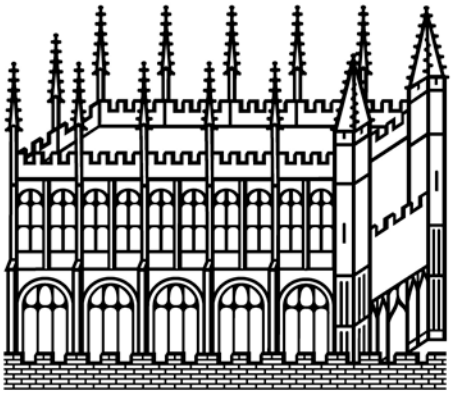

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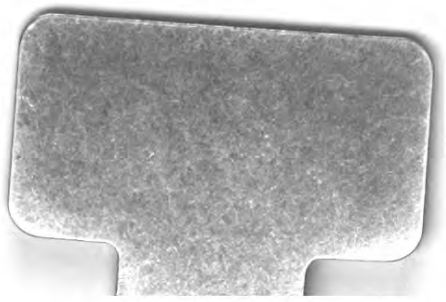

WEIGHED AND WANTING

BY

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"MARY MARSTON," "GUILD COURT," "VICAR'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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WEIGHED AND WANTING.

CHAPTER I.

DIFFERENCE.

About noon the next day, lord Gartley called. Whether he had got over his fright, or thought the danger now less imminent, or was vexed that he had *appeared* to be afraid, I do not know. Hester was very glad to see him again.

"I think I am a safe companion to-day," she said. "I have not been out of the house yet. But till the bad time is over among my people, we had better be content not to meet, I think."

Lord Gartley mentally gasped. He stood for a moment speechless, gathering

his thoughts, which almost refused to be gathered.

"Do I understand you, Hester?" he said. "It would trouble me more than I can tell to find I do."

"I fear I understand you, Gartley!" said Hester. "Is it possible you would have me abandon my friends to the small-pox, as a hireling his sheep to the wolf?"

"There are those whose business it is to look after them."

"I am one of those," returned Hester.

"Well," answered his lordship, "for the sake of argument we will allow it *has* been your business; but how can you imagine it your business any longer?"

Indignation, a fire always ready "laid" in Hester's bosom, but seldom yet lighted by lord Gartley, burst into flame, and she spoke as he had never heard her speak before.

"I am aware, my lord," she said, "that I must by and by have new duties to perform, but I have yet to learn that they must annihilate the old. The claims of love cannot surely obliterate those of friend-

ship! The new should make the old better, not sweep it away."

"But, my dear girl, the thing is preposterous!" exclaimed his lordship. "Don't you see you will enter on a new life! In the most ordinary cases even, the duties of a wife are distinct from those of an unmarried woman."

"But the duties of neither can supersede those of a human being. If the position of a wife is higher than that of an unmarried woman, it must enable her to do yet better the things that were her duty as a human being before."

"But if it be impossible she should do the same things?"

"Whatever is impossible settles its own question. I trust I shall never desire to attempt the impossible."

"You have begun to attempt it now."

"I do not understand you."

"It is impossible you should perform the duties of the station you are about to occupy and continue to do as you are doing now. The attempt would be absurd."

"I have not tried it yet."

"But I know what your duties will be, and I assure you, my dear Hester, you will find the thing cannot be done."

"You set me thinking of more things than I can manage all at once," she replied in a troubled way. "I must think."

"The more you think, the better satisfied you will be of what I say. All I want of you is to think; for I am certain if you do, your good sense will convince you I am right."

He paused a moment. Hester did not speak. He resumed.

"Just think," he said, "what it would be to have you coming home to go out again straight from one of these kennels of the small-pox! The idea is horrible! Wherever you were suspected of being present, the house would be shunned like the gates of death.

"In such circumstances I should not go out."

"The suspicion of it would be enough. And in your absence, as certainly as in your presence, though not so fatally, you would be neglecting your duty to society."

"Then," said Hester, "the portion of society that is healthy, wealthy, and—merry, has stronger claims than the portion that is poor and sick and in prison!"

Lord Gartley was for a moment bewildered—not from any feeling of the force of what she said, but from inability to take it in. He had to turn himself about two or three times mentally before he could bring himself to believe she actually meant that those to whom she alluded were to be regarded as a portion of the same society that ruled his life. He thought another moment, then said,

"There are the sick in every class: you would have those of your own to visit; why not leave others to visit those of theirs?"

"Then of course you would have no objection to my visiting a duchess in the small-pox?"

Lord Gartley was on the point of saying that duchesses never took the small-pox, but he did not, afraid Hester might know to the contrary.

"There could be no occasion for that,"

he said. "She would have everything she could want."

"And the others are in lack of everything! To desert them would be to desert the Lord. He will count it so."

"Well, certainly," said his lordship, returning on the track, "there would be less objection in the case of the duchess, in as much as every possible precaution would in her house be taken against the spread of the disease. It would be horribly selfish to think only of the person affected!"

"You show the more need that the poor should not be deserted of the rich in their bitter necessity! Who among them is able to take the right precautions against the spread of the disease? And if it spread among them, there is no security against its reaching those at last who take every possible care of themselves, and none of their neighbours. You do not imagine, because I trust in God, and do not fear what the small-pox can do to me, I would therefore neglect any necessary preventive! That would be to tempt God: means as well as results are his. They are a way of giving us a share in his work."

"If I should have imagined such neglect possible, would not yesterday go far to justify me?" said lord Gartley.

"You are ungenerous," returned Hester. "You know I was then taken unprepared! The small-pox had but just appeared — at least I had not heard of it before."

"Then you mean to give up society for the sake of nursing the poor?"

"Only upon occasion, when there should be a necessity—such as an outbreak of infectious disease."

"And how, pray, should I account for your absence—not to mention the impossibility of doing my part without you? I should have to be continually telling stories; for if people came to know the fact, they would avoid me too as if I were the pest itself!"

It was to Hester as if a wall rose suddenly across the path hitherto stretching before her in long perspective. It became all but clear to her that he and she had been going on without any real understanding of each other's views in life. Her expectations tumbled about her like a house of cards. If he wanted to marry her, full of designs and

aims in which she did not share, and she was going to marry him, expecting sympathies and helps which he had not the slightest inclination to give her, where was the hope for either of anything worth calling success? She sat silent. She wanted to be alone that she might think. It would be easier to write than talk further! But she must have more certainty as to what was in his mind.

"Do you mean then, Gartley," she said, "that when I am your wife, if ever I am, I shall have to give up all the friendships to which I have hitherto devoted so much of my life?"

Her tone was dominated by the desire to be calm, and get at his real feeling. Gartley mistook it, and supposed her at length betraying the weakness hitherto so successfully concealed. He concluded he had only to be firm now to render future discussion of the matter unnecessary.

"I would not for a moment act the tyrant, or say you must never go into such houses again. Your own good sense, the innumerable engagements you will have, the endless

calls upon your time and accomplishments, will guide you—and I am certain guide you right, as to what attention you can spare to the claims of benevolence. But just please allow me one remark: in the circle to which you will in future belong, nothing is considered more out of place than any affectation of enthusiasm. I do not care to determine whether your way or theirs is the right one; all I want to say is, that, as the one thing to be avoided is peculiarity, you would do better not to speak of these persons, whatever regard you may have for their spiritual welfare, as *your friends*. One cannot have so many friends—not to mention that a unity of taste and feeling is necessary to that much-abused word *friendship*. You know well enough such persons cannot be your friends."

This was more than Hester could bear. She broke out with a vehemence for which she was afterwards sorry, though nowise ashamed of it.

"They *are* my friends. There are twenty of them would do more for me than you would."

Lord Gartley rose. He was hurt.

"Hester," he said, "you think so little of me or my anxiety about your best interests, that I cannot but suppose it will be a relief to you if I go."

She answered not a word—did not even look up, and his lordship walked gently but unhesitatingly from the room.

"It will bring her to her senses!" he said to himself. "—How grand she looked!"

Long after he was gone, Hester sat motionless, thinking, thinking. What she had vaguely foreboded—she knew now she had foreboded it all the time—at least she thought she knew it—was come! They were not, never had been, never could be at one about anything! He was a mere man of this world, without relation to the world of truth! To be tied to him for life would be to be tied indeed! And yet she loved him—would gladly die for him—not to give him his own way—for that she would not even marry him; but to save him from it—to save him from himself, and give him God instead—that would be worth dying for,

even if it were the annihilation unbelievers took it for! To marry him, swell his worldly triumphs, help gild the chains of his slavery, was not to be thought of! It was one thing to die that a fellow-creature might have all things good! another to live a living death that he might persist in the pride of life! She could not throw God's life to the service of the stupid Satan! It was a sad break-down to the hopes that had clustered about Gartley!

But did she not deserve it?

Therewith began a self-searching which did not cease until it had prostrated her in sorrow and shame before him whose charity is the only pledge of ours.

Was it then all over between them? Might he not bethink himself, and come again, and say he was sorry he had so left her? He might indeed; but would that make any difference to her? Had he not beyond a doubt disclosed his real way of thinking and feeling? If he could speak thus now, after they had talked so much, what spark of hope was there in marriage?

To forget her friends that she might go

into *society* a countess! The thought was as contemptible as poverty-stricken. She would leave such ambition to women that devoured novels and studied the peerage! One loving look from human eyes was more to her than the admiration of the world! She would go back to her mother as soon as she had found her poor Corney, and seen her people through the small-pox! If only the house was her own, that she might turn it into a hospital! She would make it a home to which any one sick or sad, any cast out of the world, any betrayed by seeming friends, might flee for shelter! She would be more than ever the sister and helper of her own—cling faster than ever to the skirts of the Lord's garment, that the virtue going out of him might flow through her to them! She would be like Christ, a gulf into which wrong should flow and vanish —a sun radiating an uncompromising love!

How easy is the thought, in certain moods, of the loveliest, most unselfish devotion! How hard is the doing of the thought in the face of a thousand unlovely difficulties! Hester knew this, but, God helping, was

determined not to withdraw hand or foot or heart. She rose, and having prepared herself, set out to visit her people. First of all she would go to the bookbinder's, and see how his wife was attended to!

The doctor not being there, she was readily admitted. The poor husband, unable to help, sat a picture of misery by the scanty fire. A neighbour, not yet quite recovered from the disease herself, had taken on her the duties of nurse. Having given her what instructions she thought it least improbable she might carry out, and told her to send for anything she wanted, she rose to take her leave.

"Won't you sing to her a bit, miss, before you go?" said the husband beseechingly. "It'll do her more good than all the doctor's stuff."

"I don't think she's well enough," said Hester.

"Not to get all the good on it, I daresay, miss," rejoined the man; "but she'll hear it like in a dream, an' she'll think it's the angels a singin'; an' that'll do her good, for she do like all them creaturs!"

Hester yielded and sang, thinking all the time how the ways of the open-eyed God look to us like things in a dream, because we are only in the night of his great day, asleep before the brightness of his great waking thoughts. The woman had been tossing and moaning in undefined discomfort, but as she sang she grew still, and when she ceased lay as if asleep.

"Thank you, miss," said the man. "You can do more than the doctor, as I told you! When he comes, he always wakes her up; you make her sleep true!"

CHAPTER II.

DEEP CALLETH UNTO DEEP.

In the meantime yet worse trouble had come upon the poor Frankses. About a week after they had taken possession of the cellar, little Moxy, the Serpent of the Prairie, who had been weakly ever since his fall down the steps, by which he had hurt his head and been sadly shaken, became seriously ill, and grew worse and worse. For some days they were not much alarmed, for the child had often been ailing —oftener of late since they had not been faring so well; and even when they were they dared not get a doctor to him for fear of being turned out, and having to go to the workhouse.

By this time they had contrived to make

the cellar a little more comfortable. They managed to get some straw, and with two or three old sacks made a bed for the mother and the baby and Moxy on the packing-case. They got also some pieces of matting, and contrived to put up a screen betwixt it and the rickety door. By the exercise of their art they had gained enough to keep them in food, but never enough to pay for the poorest lodging. They counted themselves, however, better off by much than if they had been crowded with all sorts in such lodging as a little more might have enabled them to procure.

The parents loved Moxy more tenderly than either of his brothers, and it was with sore hearts they saw him getting worse. The sickness was a mild small-pox—so mild that they did not recognize it, yet more than Moxy could bear, and he was gradually sinking. When this became clear to the mother, then indeed she felt the hand of God heavy upon her.

Religiously brought up, she had through the ordinary troubles of a married life sought help from the God in whom her mother had

believed:—we do not worship our fathers and mothers like the Chinese—though I do not envy the man who can scorn them for it —but they are, if at all decent parents, our first mediators with the great father, whom we can worse spare than any baby his mother;—but with every fresh attack of misery, every step further down on the stair of life, she thought she had lost her last remnant of hope, and knew that up to that time she had hoped, while past seasons of failure looked like times of blessed prosperity. No man, however little he may recognize the hope in him, knows what it would be to be altogether hopeless. Now Moxy was about to be taken from them, and no deeper misery seemed, to their imagination, possible! Nothing seemed left them —not even the desire of deliverance. How little hope there is in the commoner phases of religion! The message grounded on the uprising of the crucified man, has as yet yielded but little victory over the sorrows of the grave, but small anticipation of the world to come; not a little hope of deliverance from a hell, but scarce a foretaste of a

blessed time at hand when the heart shall exult and the flesh be glad. In general there is at best but a sad looking forward to a region scarcely less shadowy and far more dreary than the elysium of the pagan poets. When Christ cometh, shall he find faith in the earth—even among those who think they believe that he is risen indeed? Margaret Franks, in the cellar of her poverty, the grave yawning below it for her Moxy, felt as if there was no heaven at all, only a sky.

But a strange necessity was at hand to compel the mother to rouse afresh all the latent hope and faith and prayer that were in her.

By an inexplicable insight the child seemed to know that he was dying. For, one morning, after having tossed about all the night long, he suddenly cried out in tone most pitiful,

"Mother, don't put me in a hole."

As far as any of them knew, he had never seen a funeral—at least to know what it was—had never heard anything about death or burial: his father had a horror of the subject.

The words went like a knife to the heart of the mother. She sat silent, neither able to speak, nor knowing what to answer.

Again came the pitiful cry,

"Mother, don't put me in a hole."

Most mothers would have sought to soothe the child, their own hearts breaking the while, with the assurance that no one should put him into any hole, or anywhere he did not want to go. But this mother could could not lie in the face of death, nor had it ever occurred to her that no *person* is ever put into a hole, though many a body.

Before she could answer, a third time came the cry, this time in despairing though suppressed agony,—

"Mother, don't let them put me in a hole."

The mother gave a cry like the child's, and her heart within her became like water.

"Oh God!" she gasped, and could say no more.

But with the prayer—for what is a prayer but a calling on the name of the Lord?—came to her a little calm, and she was able

to speak. She bent over him and kissed his forehead.

"My darling Moxy, mother loves you," she said.

What that had to do with it she did not ask herself. The child looked up in her face with dim eyes.

"Pray to the heavenly father, Moxy," she went on—and there stopped, thinking what she should tell him to ask for. "Tell him," she resumed, "that you don't want to be put in a hole, and tell him that mother does not want you to be put in a hole, for she loves you with all her heart."

"Don't put me in the hole," said Moxy, now using the definite article.

"Jesus Christ was put in the hole," said the voice of the next elder boy from behind his mother. He had come in softly, and she had neither seen nor heard him. It was Sunday, and he had strolled into a church or meeting-house—does it matter which?—and had heard the wonderful story of hope. It was remarkable though that he had taken it up as he did, for he went

on to add, "but he didn't mind it much, and soon got out again."

"Ah, yes, Moxy!" said the poor mother, "Jesus died for our sins, and you must ask him to take you up to heaven."

But Moxy did not know anything about sins, and just as little about heaven. What he wanted was an assurance that he would not be put in the hole. And the mother, now a little calmer, thought she saw what she ought to say.

"It ain't your soul, it's only your body, Moxy, they put in the hole," she said.

"I don't want to be put in the hole," Moxy almost screamed. "I don't want my head cut off!"

The poor mother was at her wits' end.

But here the child fell into a troubled sleep, and for some hours a silence as of the grave filled the dreary cellar.

The moment he woke the same cry came from his fevered lips, "Don't put me in the hole," and at intervals, growing longer as he grew weaker, the cry came all the day.

CHAPTER III.

DELIVERANCE.

Hester had been to church, and had then visited some of her people, carrying them words of comfort and hope. They received them in a way at her hand, but none of them, had they gone, would have found them at church. How seldom is the man in the pulpit able to make people feel that the things he is talking about are things at all! Neither when the heavens are black with clouds and rain, nor when the sun rises glorious in a blue perfection, do many care to sit down and be taught astronomy! But Hester was a live gospel to them—and most when she sang. Even the name of the Saviour, uttered in her singing tone and with the expression she then gave it, came nearer to them than when she spoke it.

The very brooding of the voice on a word, seems to hatch something of what is in it. She often felt, however, as if some new, other kind of messengers than she or such as she, must one day be sent them; for there seemed a gulf between their thoughts and hers, such as neither they nor she could pass.

In fact they *could not* think the things she thought, and had no vocabulary or phrases or imagery whereby to express their own thinkings. God does not hurry such: have we enough of hope for them, or patience with them? I suspect their teachers must arise among themselves. They too must have an elect of their own kind, of like passions with themselves, to lift them up, and perhaps shame those that cannot reach them. Our teaching to them is no teaching at all; it does not reach their ignorance: perhaps they require a teaching that to our ignorance would seem no teaching at all, or even bad teaching. How many things are there in the world in which the wisest of us can ill descry the hand of God! Who not knowing could

read the lily in its bulb, the great oak in the pebble-like acorn? God's beginnings do not *look* like his endings, but they *are* like; the oak *is* in the acorn, though we cannot see it. The ranting preacher, uttering huge untruths, may yet wake vital verities in chaotic minds—convey to a heart some saving fact, rudely wrapped in husks of lies even against God himself.

Mr. Christopher, thrown at one time into daily relations with a good sort of man, had tried all he could to rouse him to a sense of his higher duties and spiritual privileges, but entirely without success. A preacher came round, whose gospel was largely composed of hell-fire and malediction, with frequent allusion to the love of a most unlovely God, as represented by him. This preacher woke up the man. "And then," said Christopher, "I was able to be of service to him, and get him on. He speedily outgrew the lies his prophet had taught him, and became a devout Christian; while the man who had been the means of rousing him was tried for bigamy, convicted, and punished."

This Sunday Hester, in her dejection and sadness about Gartley, over whom—not her loss of him—she mourned deeply, felt more than ever, if not that she could not reach her people, yet how little she was able to touch them; and there came upon her a hopelessness that was heavy, sinking into the very roots of her life, and making existence itself appear a dull and undesirable thing. Hitherto life had seemed a good thing, worth holding up as a heave-offering to him who made it; now she had to learn to take life itself from the hand of God as his will, in faith that he would prove it a good gift. She had to learn that in *all* drearinesses, of the flesh or spirit, even in those that seem to come of having nothing to do, or from being unable to do what we think we have to do, the refuge is the same —he who is the root and crown of life. Who would receive comfort from anything but love? Who would build on anything but the eternal? Who would lean on that which has in itself no persistence? Even the closest human loves have their only endurance, only hope of perfection, in the

eternal perfect love of which they are the rainbow-refractions. I cannot love son or daughter as I would, save loving them as the children of the eternal God, in whom his spirit dwells and works, making them altogether lovely, and me more and more love-capable. That they are mine is not enough ground for enough love—will not serve as operative reason to the height of the love my own soul demands from itself for them. But they are mine because they are his, and he is the demander and enabler of love.

The day was a close, foggy, cold, dreary, day. The service at church had not seemed interesting. She laid the blame on herself, and neither on prayers nor lessons nor psalms nor preacher, though in truth some of these might have been better; the heart seemed to have gone out of the world—as if not Baal but God had gone to sleep, and his children had waked before him and found the dismal gray of the world's morning full of discomfortable ghosts. She tried her New Testament; but Jesus too seemed far away—nothing left but the story about him

—as if he had forgotten his promise, and was no longer in the world. She tried some of her favourite poems : each and all were infected with the same disease—with common-place nothingness. They seemed all made up—words ! words ! words ! Nothing was left her in the valley but the shadow, and the last weapon, All-prayer. She fell upon her knees and cried to God for life. "My heart is dead within me," she said, and poured out her lack into the hearing of him from whom she had come that she might have himself, and so be. She did not dwell upon her sorrows ; even they had sunk and all but vanished in the gray mass of lost interest.

The modern representatives of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar would comfort us with the assurance that all such depression has physical causes : right or wrong, what does their comfort profit ? Consolation in being told that we are slaves ! What noble nature would be content to be cured of sadness by a dose of medicine ? There is in the heart a conviction that the soul ought to be supreme over the body and its laws ; that

there must be a faith which conquers the body with all its tyrants; and that no soul is right until it has that faith—until it is in closest, most immediate understanding with its own unchangeable root, God himself. Such faith may not at once remove the physical cause, if such there be, but it will be more potent still; in the presence of both the cause and the effect, its very atmosphere will be a peace tremulous with unborn gladness. This gained, the medicine, the regimen, or the change of air may be resorted to without sense of degradation, with cheerful hope and some indifference. Such is perhaps the final victory of faith. Faith, in such circumstances, must be of the purest, and may be of the strongest. In few other circumstances can it have such an opportunity—can it rise to equal height. It may be its final lesson, and deepest. God is in it just in his seeming to be not in it—that we may choose him in the darkness of the feeling, stretch out the hand to him when we cannot see him, verify him in the vagueness of the dream, call to him in the absence of impulse, obey him in the weakness of the will.

Even in her prayers Hester could not get near him. It seemed as if his ear were turned away from her cry. She sank into a kind of lethargic stupor.

I think in order to convey to us the spiritual help we need, it is sometimes necessary —just as, according to the psalmist, "he giveth to his beloved in their sleep"—to cast us into a sort of mental quiescence, that the noise of the winds and waters of the questioning intellect and roused feelings may not interfere with the impression the master would make upon our beings. But Hester's lethargy lasted long, and was not so removed. She rose from her knees in a kind of despair, almost ready to think that either there was no God, or he would not hear her. An inaccessible God was worse than no God at all! In either case she would rather cease!

It had been dark for hours, but she had lighted no candle, and sat in bodily as in spiritual darkness. She was in her bedroom, which was on the second floor, at the back of the house, looking out on the top of the gallery that led to the great room.

She had no fire. One was burning away unheeded in the drawing-room below. She was too miserable to care whether she was cold or warm. When she had got some light in her body, then she would go and get warm!

What time it was she did not know. She had been summoned to the last meal of the day, but had forgotton the summons. It must have been about ten o'clock. The streets were silent, the square deserted—as usual. The evening was raw and cold, one to drive everybody in-doors that had doors to go in at.

Through the cold and darkness came a shriek that chilled her with horror. Yet it seemed as if she had been expecting it—as if the cloud of misery that had all day been gathering deeper and deeper above and around her, had at length reached its fullness, and burst in the lightning of that shriek. It was followed by another and yet another. Whence did they come? Not from the street, for all beside was still; even the roar of London was hushed! And there was a certain something in the sound of them that assured

her they rose in the house. Was Sarah being murdered? She was half-way down the stairs before the thought that sent her was plain to herself.

The house seemed unnaturally still. At the top of the kitchen stairs she called aloud to Sarah—as loud, that is, as a certain tremor in her throat would permit. There came no reply. Down she went to face the worst: she was a woman of true courage—that is, a woman whom no amount of apprehension could deter when she knew she ought to seek the danger.

In the kitchen stood Sarah, motionless, frozen with fear. A candle was in her hand, just lighted. Hester's voice seemed to break her trance. She started, stared, and fell a trembling. She made her drink some water, and then she came to herself.

"It's in the coal-cellar, miss!" she gasped. "I was that minute going to fetch a scuttleful! There's something buried in them coals as sure as my name's Sarah!"

"Nonsense!" returned Hester. "Who could scream like that from under the coals? Come; we'll go and see what it is."

"Laws, miss! don't you go near it now. It's too late to do anything. Either it's the woman's sperrit as they say was murdered there, or it's a new one."

"And you would let her be killed without interfering?"

"Oh, miss, all's over by this time!" persisted Sarah, with white lips trembling.

"Then you are ready to go to bed with a murderer in the house?" said Hester.

"He's done his business now, an' 'll go away."

"Give me the candle. I will go alone."

"You'll be murdered, miss — as sure's you're alive!"

Hester took the light from her, and went towards the coal-cellar. The old woman sank on a chair.

I have already alluded to the subterranean portion of the house, which extended under the great room. A long vault, corresponding to the gallery above, led to these cellars. It was rather a frightful place to go into in search of the source of a shriek. Its darkness was scarcely affected by the candle she carried; it seemed only to blind herself. She

tried holding it above her head, and then she could see a little. The black tunnel stretched on and on, like a tunnel in a feverish dream, a long way before the cellars began to open from it. She advanced, I cannot say fearless, but therefore only the more brave. She felt as if leaving life and safety behind, but her imagination was not much awake, and her mental condition made her almost inclined to welcome death. She reached at last the coal-cellar, the first that opened from the passage, and looked in. The coal-heap was low, and the place looked large and very black. She sent her keenest gaze through the darkness, but could see nothing; went in and moved about until she had thrown light into every corner: no one was there. She was on the point of returning when she bethought herself there were other cellars — one the wine-cellar, which was locked: she would go and see if Sarah knew anything about the key of it. But just as she left the coal-cellar, she heard a moan, followed by a succession of low sobs. Her heart began to beat violently, but she stopped to listen. The light of her candle

fell upon another door, a pace or two from where she stood. She went to it, laid her ear against it, and listened. The sobs continued a while, ceased, and left all silent. Then clear and sweet, but strange and wild, as if from some region unearthly, came the voice of a child: she could hear distinctly what it said.

"Mother," it rang out, "you *may* put me in the hole."

And the silence fell deep as before.

Hester stood for a moment horrified. Her excited imagination suggested some deed of superstitious cruelty in the garden of the house adjoining. Nor were the sobs and cries altogether against such supposition. She recovered herself instantly, and ran back to the kitchen.

"You have the keys of the cellars—have you not, Sarah?" she said.

"Yes, miss, I fancy so."

"Where does the door beyond the coal-cellar lead out to?"

"Not out to nowhere, miss. That's a large cellar as we never use. I 'ain't been into it since the first day, when they put some of the packing-cases there."

"Give me the key," said Hester. "Something is going on there we ought to know about."

"Then pray send for the police, miss!" answered Sarah, trembling. "It ain't for you to go into such places—on no account!"

"What! not in our own house?"

"It's the police's business, miss!"

"Then the police are their brothers' keepers, and not you and me, Sarah?"

"It's the wicked as is in it, I fear, miss."

"It's those that weep anyhow, and they're our business, if it's only to weep with them. Quick! show me which is the key."

Sarah sought the key in the bunch, and noting the coolness with which her young mistress took it, gathered courage from hers to follow, a little way behind.

When Hester reached the door, she carefully examined it, that she might do what she had to do as quickly as possible. There were bolts and bars upon it, but not one of them was fastened; it was secured only by the bolt of the lock. She set the candle on the floor, and put in the key as quietly as she could. It turned without much diffic-

ulty, and the door fell partly open with a groan of the rusted hinge. She caught up her light, and went in.

It was a large, dark, empty place. For a few moments she could see nothing. But presently she spied, somewhere in the dark, a group of faces, looking white through the circumfluent blackness, the eyes of them fixed in amaze, if not in terror, upon herself. She advanced towards them, and almost immediately recognized one of them—then another; but what with the dimness, the ghostliness, and the strangeness of it all, felt as if surrounded by the veiling shadows of a dream. But whose was that pallid little face whose eyes were not upon her with the rest? It stared straight on into the dark, as if it had no more to do with the light! She drew nearer to it. The eyes of the other faces followed her.

When the eyes of the mother saw the face of her Moxy who died in the dark, she threw herself in a passion of tears and cries upon her dead. But the man knelt upon his knees, and when Hester turned in pain from the agony of the mother, she saw

him with lifted hands of supplication at her feet. A torrent of divine love and passionate pity filled her heart, breaking from its deepest God-haunted caves. She stooped and kissed the man upon his upturned forehead.

Many are called but few chosen. Hester was the disciple of him who could have cured the leper with a word, but for reasons of his own, not far to seek by such souls as Hester's, laid his hands upon him, sorely defiling himself in the eyes of the self-respecting bystanders. The leper himself would never have dreamed of his touching him.

Franks burst out crying like the veriest child. All at once in the depths of hell the wings of a great angel were spread out over him and his! No more starvation and cold for his poor wife and the baby! The boys would have plenty now! If only Moxy—but he was gone where the angels came from—and theirs was a hard life! Surely the God his wife talked about must have sent her to them! Did he think they had borne enough now? Only he had borne it

so ill! Thus thought Franks, in dislocated fashion, and remained kneeling.

Hester was now kneeling also, with her arms round her whose arms were about the body of her child. She did not speak to her, did not attempt a word of comfort, but wept with her: she too had loved little Moxy! she too had heard his dying words—glowing with reproof to her faithlessness who cried out like a baby when her father left her for a moment in the dark! In the midst of her loneliness and seeming desertion, God had these people already in the house for her help! The back-door of every tomb opens on a hill-top.

With awe-struck faces the boys looked on. They too could now see Moxy's face. They had loved Moxy—loved him more than they knew yet.

The woman at length raised her head, and looked at Hester.

"Oh, miss, it's Moxy!" she said, and burst into a fresh passion of grief.

"The dear child!" said Hester.

"Oh, miss! who's to look after him now?"

"There will be plenty to look after him.

You don't think he who provided a woman like you for his mother before he sent him here, would send him there without having somebody ready to look after him?"

"Well, miss, it wouldn't be like him—I don't think!"

"It would *not* be like him," responded Hester, with self-accusation.

Then she asked them a few questions about their history since last she saw them, and how it was they had sunk so low, receiving answers more satisfactory than her knowledge had allowed her to hope.

"But oh, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Franks, bethinking herself, "you ought not to ha' been here so long: the little angel there died o' the small-pox, as I know too well, an' it's no end o' catching!"

"Never mind me," replied Hester; "I'm not afraid. But," she added, rising, "we must get you out of this immediately."

"Oh, miss! where would you send us?" said Mrs. Franks, in alarm. "There's nobody as 'll take us in! An' it would break both our two hearts—Franks's an' mine—to be parted at such a moment, when us two's

the father an' mother o' Moxy. An' they'd take Moxy from us, an' put him in the hole he was so afeared of!"

"You don't think I would leave my own flesh and blood in the cellar!" answered Hester. "I will go and make arrangement for you above, and be back presently."

"Oh, thank you, miss!" said the woman, as Hester set down the candle beside them. "I do want to look on the face of my blessed boy as long as I can! He will be taken from me altogether soon!"

"Mrs. Franks," rejoined Hester, "you mustn't talk like a heathen."

"I didn't know as I was saying anythink wrong, miss!"

"Don't you know," said Hester, smiling through tears, "that Jesus died and rose again that we might be delivered from death? Don't you know it's he and not Death has got your Moxy? He will take care of him for you till you are ready to have him again. If you love Moxy more than Jesus loves him, then you are more like God than Jesus was!"

"Oh, miss, don't talk to me like that! The child was born of my own body!"

"And both you and he were born of God's own soul: if you know how to love, he loves ten times better."

"You know how to love anyhow, miss! the Lord love you! An angel o' mercy you been to me an' mine."

"Good-bye then for a few minutes," said Hester. "I am only going to prepare a place for you."

Only as she said the words did she remember who had said them before her. And as she went through the dark tunnel she sang with a voice that seemed to beat at the gates of heaven, "Thou didst not leave his soul in hell."

Mrs. Franks threw herself again beside her child, but her tears were not so bitter now; she and hers were no longer forsaken! She also read her New Testament, and the last words of Hester had struck her as well as the speaker of them:

"And she'll come again and receive us to herself!" she said. "— An' Christ 'ill receive my poor Moxy to himself! If he wasn't, as they say, a Christian, it was only as he hadn't time—so young, an' all the hard

work he had to do—with his precious face a grinnin' like an angel between the feet of him, a helpin' of his father to make a livin' for us all! That would be no reason why he as did the will o' *his* father shouldn't take to him. If ever there was a child o' God's makin' it was that child! I feel as if God must ha' made him right off, like!"

Thoughts like these kept flowing through the mind of the bereaved mother as she lay with her arm over the body of her child—ever lovely to her, now more lovely than ever. The small-pox had not been severe—only severe enough to take a feeble life from the midst of privation, and the expression of his face was lovely. He lay like the sacrifice that sealed a new covenant between his mother and her father in heaven. We have yet learned but little of the blessed power of death. We call it an evil! It is a holy, friendly thing. We are not left shivering all the world's night in a stately portico with no house behind it: death is the door to the temple-house, whose God is not seated aloft in motionless state, but walks about among his children, receiving

his pilgrim sons in his arms, and washing the sore feet of the weary ones. Either God is altogether such as Christ, or the Christian religion is a lie.

Not a word passed between husband and wife. Their hearts were too full for speech, but their hands found and held each the other. It was the strangest concurrence of sorrow and relief! The two boys sat on the ground with their arms about each other. So they waited.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WAY UP.

HEARING only the sounds of peaceful talk, Sarah had ventured near enough to the door to hear something of what was said, and set at rest by finding that the cause of her terror was but a poor family that had sought refuge in the cellar, she woke up to better, and was ready to help. More than sufficiently afraid of robbers and murderers, she was not afraid of infection: "What should an old woman like me do taking the small-pox! I've had it bad enough once already!" She was rather staggered, however, when she found what Hester's plan for the intruders was.

Nothing more, since the night of the concert, had been done to make the great room habitable by the family. It had been well

cleaned out and that was all. Now and then a fire was lighted in it, and the children played in it as before, but it had never been really in use. What better place, thought Hester, could there be for a small-pox ward! Thither she would convey her friends rescued from the slimy embrace of London poverty!

She told Sarah to light a great fire as speedily as possible, while she settled what could be done about beds. Almost all in the house were old-fashioned wooden ones, hard to take down, heavy to move, and hard to put up again: with only herself and Sarah it would take a long time! For safety too it would be better to hire iron beds which would be easily purified—only it was Sunday night, and late! But she knew the little broker in Steeven's Road: she would go to him and see if he had any beds, and if he would help her to put them up at once!

The raw night made her rejoice the more that she had got hold of the poor creatures drowning in the social swamp. It was a consolation, strong even against such heavy

sorrows and disappointments as housed in her heart, to know that virtue was going out of her for rescue and redemption.

She had to ring the bell a good many times before the door opened, for the broker and his small household had retired for the night: it was now eleven o'clock. He was not well pleased at being taken from his warm bed to go out and work—on such a night too! He grounded what objection he made, however, on its being Sunday, and more than hinted his surprise that Hester should ask him to do such a thing. She told him it was for some who had nowhere to lay their heads, and in her turn more than hinted that he could hardly know what Sunday meant if he did not think it right to do any number of good deeds on it. The man assented to her argument, and went to look out the two beds she wanted. But what in reality influenced him was dislike to offending a customer: customers are the divinities of tradesmen, as Society is the divinity of society: in her, men and women worship themselves. Having got the two bedsteads extracted piecemeal from the disorganized

heaps in his back shop, he and Hester together proceeded to carry them home—and I cannot help wishing lord Gartley had come upon her at the work—no very light job, for she went three times, and bore good weights. It was long after midnight before the beds were ready—and a meal of coffee, and toast, and bread and butter, spread in the great room. Then at last Hester went back to the cellar.

"Now, come," she said, and taking up the baby, which had just weight enough to lie and let her know how light he was, led the way.

Franks rose from the edge of the packing-case, on which lay the body of Moxy, with his mother yet kneeling beside it, and put his arm round his wife to raise her. She yielded, and he led her away after their hostess, the boys following hand in hand. But when they reached the cellar door, the mother gave a heart-broken cry, and turning ran and threw herself again beside her child. They all followed her.

"I can't! I can't!" she said. "I can't leave my Moxy lyin' here all alone! He

ain't used to it. He's never once slep alone since he was born. I can't abear to think o' that lovely look o' his lost on the dark night—not a soul to look down an' see it! Oh Moxy! was your mother a leavin' of you all alone!"

"What makes you think there will not be a soul to see it?" said Hester. "The darkness may be full of eyes! And the night itself is only the black pupil of the Father's eye.—But we're not going to leave the darling here. We'll take him too, of course, and find him a good place to lie in."

The mother was satisfied, and the little procession passed through the dark way, and up the stair.

The boys looked pleased at sight of the comforts that waited them, but a little awed with the great lofty room. Over the face of Franks, notwithstanding his little Serpent of the Prairie had crept away through the long tangled grass of the universe, passed a gleam of joy mingled with gratitude: much was now begun to be set to rights between him and the high govern-

ment. But the mother was with the little body lying alone in the cellar.

Suddenly with a wild gesture she made for the door.

"Oh, miss!" she cried, "the rats! the rats!" and would have darted from the room.

"Stop, stop, dear Mrs. Franks!" cried Hester. "Here! take the baby; Sarah and I are going immediately to bring him away, and lay him where you can see him when you please."

Again she was satisfied. She took the baby, and sat down beside her husband.

I have mentioned a low pitched room under the great one: in this Hester had told Sarah to place a table covered with white: they would lay the body there in such fashion as would be a sweet remembrance to the mother: she went now to see whether this was done. But on the way she met Sarah coming up with ashy face.

"Oh, miss!" she said, "the body mustn't be left a minute: there's a whole army of rats in the house already! As I was covering the table with a blanket before I put on

the sheet, there got up all at once behind the wainscot the most uprageous hurry-scurry o' them horrid creaturs. They'll be in wherever it is—you may take your bible-oath! Once when I was——"

Hester interrupted her.

"Come," she said, and led the way.

She looked first into the low room to see that it was properly prepared, and was leaving it again, when she heard a strange sound behind the wainscot as it seemed.

"There, miss!" said Sarah.

Hester made up her mind at once that little Moxy should not be left alone. Her heart trembled a little at the thought, but she comforted herself that Sarah would not be far off, and that the father and mother of the child would be immediately over her head. The same instant she was ashamed of having found this comfort first, for was he not infinitely nearer to her who is lord of life and death?

They went to the cellar.

"But how," said Hester on the way, "can the Frankses have got into the place?"

"There is a back door to it, of course!"

answered Sarah. "The first load of coals came in that way, but master wouldn't have it used: he didn't like a door to his house he never set eyes on, he said."

"But how could it have been open to let them in?" said Hester.

When they reached the cellar, she took the candle and went to look at the door. It was pushed to, but not locked, and had no fastening upon it except the lock, in which was the key. She turned the key, and taking it out, put it in her pocket.

Then they carried up the little body, washed it, dressed it in white, and laid it straight in its beauty—symbol—passing, like all symbols—of a peace divinely more profound—the little hands folded on the breast under the well-contented face, repeating the calm expression of that conquest over the fear of death, that submission to be "put in the hole," with which the child-spirit passed into wide spaces. They lighted six candles, three at the head and three at the feet, that the mother might see the face of her child, and because light not darkness befits death. To Hester

they symbolized the forms of light that sat, one at the head and one at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they went to fetch the mother.

She was washing the things they had used for supper. The boys were already in bed. Franks was staring into the fire: the poor fellow had not even looked at one for some time. Hester asked them to go and see where she had laid Moxy, and they went with her. The beauty of Death's courtly state comforted them.

"But I can't leave him alone!" said the mother; "—all night too!—he wouldn't like it! I know he won't wake up no more; only, you know, miss,—"

"Yes, I know very well," replied Hester

"I'm ready," said Franks.

"No, no!" returned Hester. "You are worn out and must go to bed, both of you: I will stay with the beautiful thing, and see that no harm comes to it."

After some persuasion the mother consented, and in a little while the house was quiet. Hester threw a fur cloak round her, and sat down in the chair Sarah had placed for her beside the dead.

CHAPTER V.

BY THE DEAD.

When she had sat some time, the exceeding stillness of the form beside her began to fill her heart with a gentle awe. The stillness was so persistent that the awe gradually grew to dismay; and fear, inexplicable, unreasonable fear, of which she was ashamed, began to invade her. She knew at once that she must betake her to the Truth for refuge. It is little use telling one's self that one's fear is silly. It comes upon no pretence of wisdom or logic; proved devoid of both, it will not therefore budge a jot. She prayed to the Father, awake with her in the stillness; and then began to think about the dead Christ. Would the women who waited for the dawn because they had no light by which to minister, have been afraid to watch by that

body all the night long? Oh, to have seen it come to life! move and wake and rise with the informing God! Every dead thing belonged to Christ, not to something called Death! This dead thing was his. It was dead as he had been dead, and no otherwise! There was nothing dreadful in watching by it, any more than in sitting beside the cradle of a child yet unborn! In the name of Christ she would fear nothing! He had abolished death!

Thus thinking, she lay back in her chair, closed her eyes, and thanking God for having sent her relief in these his children to help, fell fast asleep.

She started suddenly awake, seeming to have been roused by the opening of a door. The fringe of a departing dream lay yet upon her eyes: was the door of the tomb in which she had lain so long burst from its hinges? was the day of the great resurrection come? Swiftly her senses settled themselves, and she saw plainly and remembered clearly. Yet could she be really awake? for in the wall opposite stood the form of a man! She neither cried out nor

fainted, but sat gazing. She was not even afraid, only dumb with wonder. The man did not look fearful. A smile she seemed to have seen before broke gradually from his lips and spread over his face. The next moment he stepped from the wall and came towards her.

Then sight and memory came together: in that wall was a door, said to lead into the next house: for the first time she saw it open!

The man came nearer and nearer: it was Christopher! She rose, and held out her hand.

"You are surprised to see me!" he said, "—and well you may be! Am I in your house?—And this watch! what does it mean? I seem to recognize the sweet face! I must have seen you and it together before! —Yes! it is Moxy!"

"You are right, Mr. Christopher," she answered. "Dear little Moxy died of the small-pox in our cellar. He was just gone when I found them there."

"Is it wise of you to expose yourself so much to the infection?" said the doctor.

"Is it worthy of you to ask such a quest-

ion?" returned Hester. "We have our work to do; life or death is the care of him who sets the work."

The doctor bent his head low, lower, and lower still, before her. Nothing moves a man more than to recognize in another the principles which are to himself a necessity of his being and history.

"I put the question to know on what grounds you based your action," he replied, "and I am answered."

"Tell me then," said Hester, "how you come to be here. It seemed to my sleepy eyes as if an angel had melted his own door through the wall! Are you free of ordinary hindrances?"

She asked almost in seriousness; for, with the lovely dead before her, in the middle of the night, roused suddenly from a sleep into which she had fallen with her thoughts full of the shining resurrection of the Lord, she would have believed him at once if he had told her that for the service of the Lord's poor he was enabled to pass where he pleased. He smiled with a wonderful sweetness as he made answer:

"I hope you are not one of those who so little believe that the world and its ways belong to God, that they want to have his presence proved by something out of the usual way — something not so good; for surely the way he chooses to work almost always, must be a better way than that in which he only works now and then because of a special necessity!"

By these words Hester perceived she was in the presence of one who understood the things of which he spoke.

"I came here in the simplest way in the world," he went on, "though I am no less surprised than you to find myself in your presence."

"The thing is to me a marvel," said Hester.

"It shall not be such a moment longer. I was called to see a patient. When I went to return as I came, I found the door by which I had entered locked. I then remembered that I had passed a door on the stair, and went back to try it. It was bolted on the side to the stair. I withdrew the bolts, opened the door gently, and beheld one of

the most impressive sights I ever saw. Shall I tell you what I saw ? "

"Do," answered Hester.

"I saw," said Christopher with solemnity, "the light shining in the darkness, and the darkness comprehending it not—six candles, and only the upturned face of the dead, and the down-turned face of the sleeping! I seemed to look into the heart of things, and see the whole waste universe waiting for the sonship, for the redemption of the body, the visible life of men! I saw that love, trying to watch by death, had failed, because the thing that is not needs not to be watched. I saw all this and more. I think I must have unconsciously pushed the door against the wall, for somehow I made a noise with it, and you woke."

Hester's face alone showed that she understood him. She turned and looked at Moxy to calm the emotion to which she would not give scope.

Christopher stood silent, as if brooding on what he had seen. She could not ask him to sit down, but she must understand how he had got into the house. Where was his

patient? "In the next house, of course!" she concluded. But the thing wanted looking into! That door must be secured on their side! Their next midnight visitor might not be so welcome as this, whose heart burned to the same labour as her own! "But what we really want," she thought, "is to have more not fewer of our doors open, if they be but the right ones for the angels to come and go!"

"I never saw that door open before," she said, "and none of us knew with what it made communication. We took it for granted it was the next house. But the old lady was so cross,——"

Here she checked herself; for if Mr. Christopher had just come from that house, he might be a friend of the old lady's!

"It goes into no lady's house, so far as I understand," said Christopher. "The stair leads to a garret—I should fancy over our heads here—much higher up, though."

"Would you show me how you came in?" said Hester.

"With pleasure," he answered, and taking one of the candles, led the way.

"I would not let the young woman leave her husband to show me out," he went on. "When I found myself a prisoner, I thought I would try this door before periling the sleep of a patient in the small-pox. You seem to have it all round you here!"

Through the door so long mysterious Hester stepped on a narrow, steep stair. Christopher turned downward, and trod softly. At the bottom he passed through a door admitting them to a small cellar, a mere recess. Thence they issued into that so lately occupied by the Frankses. Christopher went to the door Hester had locked, and said,

"This is where I came in. I suppose one of your people must have locked it."

"I locked it myself," replied Hester, and told him in brief the story of the evening.

"I see!" said Christopher; "we must have passed through just after you had taken them away."

"And now the question remains," said Hester, "—who can it be in our house without our knowledge? The stair is plainly in our house."

"Beyond a doubt," said Christopher. "But how strange it is you should know your own house so imperfectly! I fancy the young couple, having got into some difficulty, found entrance the same way the Frankses did; only they went farther and fared better! —to the top of the house, I mean. They've managed to make themselves pretty comfortable too! There is something peculiar about them—I can hardly say what in a word."

"Could I not go up with you to-morrow and see them?" said Hester.

"That would hardly do, I fear. I could be of no farther use to them were they to suppose I had betrayed them. You have a perfect right to know what is going on in your house, but I would rather not appear in the discovery. One thing is plain, you must either go to them, or unlock the cellar-door. You will be taken with the young woman. She is a capable creature—an excellent nurse. Shall I go out this way?"

"Will you come to-morrow?" said Hester. "I am alone, and cannot ask anybody to help me because of the small-pox;

and I shall want help for the funeral. You do not think me troublesome ? "

" Not in the least. It is all in the way of my business. I will manage for you."

" Come then ; I will show you the way out. This is no. 18, Adddison square. You need not come in the cellar-way next time."

" If I were you," said Christopher, stopping at the foot of the kitchen stair, " I would leave the key in that cellar-door. The poor young woman would be terrified to find they were prisoners."

She turned immediately and went back, he following, and replaced the key.

" Now let us fasten up the door I came in by," said Christopher. " I have got a screw in my pocket, and I never go without my tool-knife."

This was soon done, and he went.

What a strange night it had been for Hester—more like some unbelievable romance ! For the time she had forgotten her own troubles ! Ah, if she had been of one mind with lord Gartley, those poor creatures would be now moaning in darkness by the dead body of their child, or out with it in

their arms in the streets, or parted asunder in the casual wards of some workhouse! Certainly God could have sent them other help than hers, but where would *she* be then —a fellow-worker with his lordship, and not with God—one who did it not to *him!* Woe for the wife whose husband has no regard to her deepest desires, her highest aspirations! —who loves her so that he would be the god of her idolatry, not the friend and helper of her heart, soul, and mind! Many of Hester's own thoughts were revealed to her that night by the side of the dead Moxy. It became clear to her that she had been led astray, in part by the desire to rescue one to whom God had not sent her, in part by the pleasure of being loved and worshipped, and in part by worldly ambition. Surer sign would God have sent her had he intended she should give herself to Gartley! Would God have her give herself to one who would render it impossible for her to make life more abundant to others? Marriage might be the absorbing duty of some women, but was it necessarily hers? Certainly not with such a man! Might not the duties of some

callings be incompatible with marriage? Did not the providence of the world ordain that not a few should go unmarried? The children of the married would be but ill cared for were there only the married to care for them! It was one thing to die for a man—another to enslave God's child to the will of one who did not know him! Was a husband to take the place of Christ, and order her life for her? Was man enough for woman? Did she not need God? It came to that! Was he or God to be her master? It grew clearer and clearer as she watched by the dead. There was, there could be no relation of life over which the Lord of life was not supreme! That this or that good woman could do this or that faithless or mean thing, was nothing to her! What might be unavoidable to one less instructed, would be sin in her! The other might need the sufferings and confusions that resulted; but for her must remain a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!

When the morning came and she heard Sarah stirring, she sent her to take her place, and went to get a little rest.

CHAPTER VI.

MORE YET.

But she could not sleep. She rose, went back to the room where the dead Moxy lay, and sent Sarah to get breakfast ready. Then came upon her an urgent desire to know the people who had come, like swallows, to tenant, without leave asked, the space overhead. She undid the screw, opened the door, and stole gently up the stair, steep, narrow, and straight, which ran the height of the two rooms between two walls. A long way up she came to another door, and peeping through a chink in it, saw that it admitted to the small orchestra high in the end-wall of the great room. Probably then the stair and the room below had been an arrangement for the musicians.

Going higher yet, till she all but reached

the roof, the stair brought her to a third door. She knocked. No sound of approaching foot followed, but after some little delay it was opened by a young woman, with her finger on her lip, and something of a scared look in her eye. She had expected to see the doctor, and started and trembled at sight of Hester. There was little light where she stood, but Hester could not help feeling as if she had not merely seen her somewhere before. She came out on the landing, and shut the door behind her.

"He is very ill," she said; "and he hears a strange voice even in his sleep. A strange voice is dreadful to him."

Her voice was not strange, and the moment she spoke it seemed to light up her face: Hester, with a pang she could scarcely have accounted for, recognized Amy Amber.

"Amy!" she said.

"Oh, Miss Raymount!" cried Amy joyfully, "is it indeed you? Are you come at last? I thought I was never to see you any more!"

"You bewilder me," said Hester. "How do you come to be here? I don't understand."

"*He* brought me here."

"*Who* brought you here?"

"Why, miss!" exclaimed Amy, as if hearing the most unexpected of questions, "who should it be?"

"I have not the slightest idea," returned Hester.

But the same instant a feeling strangely mingled of alarm, discomfort, indignation, and relief crossed her mind.

Through her whiteness Amy turned whiter still, and she turned a little away, like a person offended.

"There is but one, miss!" she said coldly. "Who should it be but him?"

"Speak his name," said Hester almost sternly. "There is no time for hide-and-seek. Tell me whom you mean."

"Are you angry with me?" faltered Amy. "Oh, Miss Raymount, I don't think I deserve it!"

"Speak out, child! Why should I be angry with you?"

"Do you know what it is?—Oh, I hardly know what I am saying! He is dying! he is dying!"

She sank on the floor, and covered her

face with her hands. Hester stood a moment and looked at her weeping, her heart filled with sad dismay, mingled with a kind of wan hope. Then softly and quickly she opened the door of the room and went in.

Amy started to her feet, but too late to prevent her, and followed trembling, afraid to speak, but relieved to find that Hester moved so noiselessly.

It was a great room, but the roof came down to the floor nearly all round. It was lighted only with a skylight. In the farthest corner was a screen. Hester crept gently towards it, and Amy after her, not attempting to stop her. She came to the screen and peeped behind it. There lay a young man in a troubled sleep, his face swollen and red and blotched with the small-pox; but through the disfigurement she recognized her brother. Her eyes filled with tears; she turned away, and stole out again as softly as she came in. Amy had been looking up at her anxiously; when she saw the tenderness of her look, she gathered courage and followed her. Outside, Hester stopped, and Amy again closed the door.

"You *will* forgive him, won't you, miss?" she said pitifully.

"What do you want me to forgive him for, Amy?" asked Hester, suppressing her tears.

"I don't know, miss. You seemed angry with him. I don't know what to make of it. Sometimes I feel certain it must have been his illness coming on that made him weak in his head and talk foolishness; and sometimes I wonder whether he has really been doing anything wrong."

"He must have been doing something wrong, else how should *you* be here, Amy?" said Hester with hasty judgment.

"He never told me, miss; or of course I would have done what I could to prevent it," answered Amy, bewildered. "We were so happy, miss, till then! and we've never had a moment's peace since! That's why we came here—to be where nobody would find us. I wonder how he came to know the place!"

"Do *you* not know where you are then, Amy?"

"No, miss; not in the least. I only know

where to buy the things we need. He has not been out once since we came."

"You are in our house, Amy. What will my father say!—How long have you—have you been——"

Something in her heart or her throat prevented Hester from finishing the sentence.

"How long have I been married to him, miss? You surely know that as well as I do, miss!"

"My poor Amy! Did he make you believe we knew about it?"

Amy gave a cry, but after her old way instantly crammed her handkerchief into her mouth, and uttered no further smallest sound.

"Alas!" said Hester, "I fear he has been more wicked than we knew!"

Amy covered her face with her apron, through which Hester could see her soundless sobs.

"I have been doing what I could to find him," continued Hester, "and here he was close to me all the time! But it adds greatly to my misery to find you with him, Amy!"

"Indeed, miss, I may have been silly;

but how was I to suspect he was not telling me the truth? I loved him too much for that! I told him I would not marry him without he had his father's leave. And he pretended he had got it, and read me such a beautiful letter from his mother! Oh, miss, it breaks my heart to think of it!"

A new fear came upon Hester: had he deceived the poor girl with a pretended marriage? Was he bad through and through? What her father would say to a marriage, was hard to think; what he would say to a deception, she knew! That he would like such a marriage, she could ill imagine; but might not the sense of escape from an alternative reconcile him to it?

Such thoughts passed swiftly through her mind as she stood half turned from Amy, looking down the deep stair that sank like a precipice before her. She heard nothing, but Amy started and turned to the door. She was following her, when Amy said, in a voice almost of terror,

"Please, miss, do not let him see you till I have told him you are here."

"Certainly not," answered Hester, and

drew back, "—if you think the sight of me would hurt him!"

"Thank you, miss; I am sure it would," whispered Amy. "He is frightened of you."

"Frightened of me!" said Hester to herself, repeating Amy's phrase, when she had gone in, leaving her at the head of the stair. "I should have thought he only disliked me! I wonder if he would have loved me a little, if he had not been afraid of me! Perhaps I could have made him if I had tried. It is easier then to wake fear than love!"

It may be very well for a nature like Corney's to fear a father; fear may come in for some good where love is wanting; but I doubt if fear of a sister can be of any good.

"If he couldn't love me," thought Hester, "it would have been better he hadn't been afraid of me. Now comes the time when it renders me unable to help him!"

Then first it began to dawn upon Hester that there was in her a certain hardness of character distinct in its nature from that unbending devotion to the right which is imperative—belonging in truth to the region

of her weakness—that self which fears for itself, and is of death not of life. But she was one of those who, when they discover a thing in them that is wrong, take refuge in the immediate endeavour to set it right—with the conviction that God is on their side to help them; for wherein, if not therein, is he God our Saviour?

She went down to the house, to get everything she could think of to make the place more comfortable: it would be long before the patient could be moved. In particular she sought out a warm fur cloak for Amy. Poor Amy! she was but the shadow of her former self, but a shadow very pretty and pleasant to look on. Hester's heart was sore to think of such a bright, good, honest creature married to a man like her brother. But she was sure, however credulous she might have been, she had done nothing to be ashamed of. Where there was blame it must all be Corney's!

It was with feelings still strangely mingled of hope and dismay, that, having carried everything she could at the time

up the stair, she gave herself to the comfort of her other guests.

Left alone in London, Corney had gone idly ranging about the house when another man would have been reading, or doing something with his hands. Curious in correspondent proportion to his secrecy, for the qualities go together, the moment he happened to cast his eyes on the door in the wainscot of the low room, no one being in the house to interfere with him, he proceeded to open it. He little thought then what his discovery would be to him, for at that time he had done nothing to make him fear his fellow-man. But he kept the secret after his kind.

Contriving often to meet Amy, he had grown rapidly more and more fond of her—became indeed as much in love with her as was possible to him; and though the love of such a man can never be of a lofty kind, it may yet be the best thing in him, and the most redemptive power upon him. Without a notion of denying himself anything he desired and could possibly have, he determined she should be his, but from

fear as well as tortuosity, avoided the direct way of gaining her: the straight line would not, he judged, be the shortest: his father would never, or only after unendurable delay, consent to his marriage with a girl like Amy! How things might have gone had he not found her even unable to receive a thought that would have been dishonourable to him, and had he not come to pride himself on her simplicity and purity, I cannot say; but he contrived to persuade her to a private marriage—contrived also to prevent her from communicating with his sister.

His desire to please her, his passion for showing off, and the preparations his design seemed to render necessary, soon brought him into straits for money. He could not ask his father, who would have insisted on knowing how it was that he found his salary insufficient, seeing he was at no expense for maintenance, having only to buy his clothes. He went on and on, hiding his eyes from the approach of the "armed man," till he was in his grasp, and positively in want of a shilling. Then he bor-

rowed, and went on borrowing small sums from those about him, till he was ashamed to borrow more. The next thing was to *borrow* a trifle of what was passing through his hands. He was merely borrowing, and of his own uncle! It was a shame his uncle should have so much and leave him in such straits!—be rolling in wealth and pay him such a contemptible salary! It was the height of injustice! Of course he would replace it long before any one knew! Thus by degrees the poor weak creature, deluding himself with excuses, slipped into the consciousness of being a rogue. There are some, I suspect, who fall into vice from being so satisfied with themselves that they scorn to think it possible they should ever do wrong.

He went on taking and taking until at last he was obliged to confess to himself that there was no possibility of making restoration before the time when his *borrowing* must be embezzlement. Then in a kind of cold despair he laid hands upon a large sum and left the bank an unconvicted felon. What story he told Amy, to

whom he was by this time married, I do not know; but once convinced of the necessity for concealment, she was as careful as himself. He brought her to their refuge by the back way. She went and came only through the cellar, and knew no other entrance. When they found that, through Amy's leaving the door unfastened when she went to buy, there being no way of securing it from the outside, others had taken refuge in the cellar, they dared not, for fear of attracting attention to themselves, warn them off the premises.

CHAPTER VII.

AMY AND CORNEY.

THE Frankses remained at rest until the funeral was over, and then Hester would have father and sons go out to follow their calling, while the mother and she did what could be done for the ailing baby, who could not linger long behind Moxy.

Hester had a little money of her own—not much, but enough to restore to decency, with the help of the wife's fingers, the wardrobe of the family. For the present she would not let them leave the house; she must have them in better condition first, and with a little money in their pockets of their own earning. And the very first day, though they went out with heavy hearts, and could hardly have played with much spirit, they brought home more money than

any day for weeks before. And Franks as he walked home weary, took some comfort that his Moxy was not with him to trouble his mother with his white face and drawn look.

The same day lord Gartley called, but was informed by Sarah, who opened the door but a chink, that the small-pox was in the house, and that she could admit no one but the doctor. To his exclamation she made answer that her young mistress was perfectly well, but could and would see nobody—was in attendance upon the sick. So his lordship was compelled to go without seeing her, not without a haunting doubt that he was being played upon, and she did not want to see him.

As had happened more than once before, soon after he was gone the major made his appearance. To him Sarah gave the same answer, adding by her mistress's direction, that in the meantime there was no occasion to prosecute inquiry about Mr. Cornelius, for it was all—as Sarah put it—explained, and her mistress would write to him.

But what was Hester to tell her father

and mother? Until she knew with certainty the fact of her marriage, she shrunk from mentioning Amy; and at present it was impossible to find out anything from Cornelius. She merely wrote, therefore, that she had found him, but very ill; that she would take the best care of him she could, and as soon as he was able to be moved, bring him home to be nursed by his mother.

The great room was for the mean time given over to the Frankses. The wife kept everything tidy, and they managed things their own way. Hester made inquiry now and then, to be sure they were having everything they wanted, but left them to provide for themselves.

She did her best to help Amy without letting her brother suspect her presence, and by degrees she got the room more comfortable for them. Corney had indeed taken a good many things from the house to make habitable the waste expanse, but had been careful not to take anything Sarah would miss.

He was covered with the terrible eruption, and if he survived, which again and again

seemed doubtful, would probably be much changed, for Amy could not keep his hands from his face: in trifles the lack of self-restraint is manifested, and its consequences are sometimes grievous.

Hitherto Hester had not let her parents quite know how ill he was—for what may seem a far-fetched reason—not to save them from anxiety, but to save her mother from hearing his father say, the best thing he could do would be to die. Nor was she mistaken: many a time had her father said so to himself. It was simply impossible, he said, that he should ever again speak to him, or in any way treat him as a son. He had by his vile conduct ceased to be a son, and he was nowise bound to do anything more for him; though, from mere compassion, he would keep him from starving till he got some employment to which no character was necessary.

He began at last to recover, but it was long before he could be treated otherwise than as a child—so feeble was he, and so unreasonable. The first time he saw and knew Hester, he closed his eyes and turned

away his head as if he would have no more of that apparition. She retired; but, watching, presently saw him, in his own sly way, looking through half closed lids to know whether she was gone. When he saw Amy where Hester had stood, his face beamed up. "Amy!" he said, "come here;" and when she went, he took her hand and laid it on his cheek, little knowing what a disfigured cheek it was.

"Thank God!" said Hester to herself: she had never seen him look so sweet or loving or lovable, despite the disfigurement.

She took care not to show herself again till he should be a little accustomed to the idea of her presence.

The more she saw of Amy the better she liked her. She treated her patient with so much good sense, showed such a readiness to subordinate her ignorance to the wisdom of others, and such a careful obedience to the directions of the doctor, that she rose every day in Hester's opinion, as well as found a yet deeper place in her heart.

His lordship wrote, making an apology for anything he had said, from anxiety about

one whom he loved to distraction, in which he might have presumed on the closeness of their relation to each other. He would gladly talk the whole matter over with her as soon as she gave him leave. For his part he had not a moment's doubt that her good sense, relieved from the immediate pressure of her feelings, which were in themselves but too divine for the needs of this world, would convince her of the reasonableness of all he had sought to urge upon her. As soon as she was able, and judged it safe to admit a visitor, his aunt would be happy to call upon her. For the present, as he knew she would not admit him, he would content himself with frequent and most anxious inquiries after her, reserving argument and expostulation for a happier, and, he hoped, not very distant time.

Hester smiled a curious smile at the prospect of a call from Miss Vavasor: was she actually going to plead her nephew's cause?

As her brother grew better, and things became easier, the thought of lord Gartley came oftener, with something of the old feeling for the man himself, but mingled

with sadness and a strange pity. She would never have been able to do anything for him! It had been spiritual presumption to think she could save him by the preciousness of her self-gift to him and the strength of her power over him!

If God cannot save a man by all his good gifts, not even by the gift of a woman offered to his higher nature, but by that refused, the woman's giving of herself a slave to his lower nature can only make him the more unredeemable; while the withholding of herself *may* do something—may at least, as the years go on, wake in him some sense of what a fool he has been. The man who would go to the dogs for lack of the woman he fancies, will go to the dogs when he has her—may possibly drag her to the dogs with him.

Hester began to see something of this. She recalled how she had never once gained from him a satisfactory reply to anything she said worth saying; she had in her foolishness supplied from her own imagination the defective echoes of his response! Love had made her apt and able to do this;

but now that she had yielded entrance to doubt, she saw many things otherwise than before. She loved the man enough to die for him: she would not have one moment hesitated about that; but it was quite another thing to marry him! It was her brother now she had to save! His dear, good little wife was doing all she could for him, but it would take sister and mother and all to save him! She could not do so much for him as Amy now, but by and by there would be his father to mediate with: to that she would give her energy!

But his poor mother! would she recognize him—so terribly scarred and changed? He might in time, being young, grow more like himself, but now he was not pleasant to look upon. Some men are as vain as any women, and Corney was one of those some. While pretending to despise the kindest word concerning his good looks, he had taken the greatest pleasure in them; and the first time he saw himself in a mirror, the look of dismay, of despairing horror that came over his face was as pitiful as it was ludicrous. He had been accustomed to regard himself as one

superior on most grounds, on that of good looks in particular, to any one he knew—and now! He could not but admit that he was nothing less than unpleasant to behold—must be so even to those who loved him! It was a pain that in itself could do little to cast out the evil spirit that possessed him, but it was something that that evil spirit, while it remained in him, should be deprived of one source of its nourishment. It was a good thing that from any cause the transgressor should find his ways hard. He dashed the glass from him, and burst into tears which he did not even try to conceal.

It was notable that from that time he was more dejected, and less peevish; and this latter might not be only from returning health, for he had always been more or less peevish at home, where he never thought of cultivating the same conception or idea of himself as before the eyes of the world. Much of supposed goodness is merely a looking of the thing men would like to be considered—originating doubtless sometimes in an admiration of, perhaps in a vague wish to be that thing, but unaccompanied of de-

sire or strength enough to rouse the smallest endeavour after being it. Still Hester found it difficult to bear with his remaining peevishness and bad temper, knowing what he had made of himself, and that he knew she must know it; but at such hard moments she had the good sense to leave him to the soothing ministrations of his wife. Amy never set herself against him; first of all she would show him that she understood what was troubling him; then would say something sympathetic, or petting, or coaxing, and always had her way with him. She had the great advantage that not yet had he once quarrelled with her. That gave a ground of hope for her influence with him that his sister had long lost. God had made Amy so that she had less trouble from selfishness than all but a few people. Hester, more than Amy, felt her own rights, and was ready to be indignant. She would have far more trouble than Amy in getting rid of the self-asserting self in her, which closes the door against heaven's divinest gifts. In Hester it was no doubt associated with a loftier nature, and the harder victory would

have its greater reward, but until finally conquered it must continue to obstruct her walk in the true way. So Hester learned from the sweetness of Amy, as Amy from the unbending principle of Hester.

She at last made up her mind that she would take Cornelius home without giving her father the opportunity of saying he should not come. She would presume that he must go home after such an illness: the result she would wait! The meeting could in no case be a happy one, but if he were not altogether repulsed, if the mean devil in him was not thoroughly roused by the harshness of his father, she would think much had been gained!

With gentle watchfulness she regarded Amy, and was more and more satisfied that, whatever might be wrong, she had had a share in it not as one who did, but as one who endured wrong. The sweetness and devotion with which she seemed to live only for her husband was to Hester, who found it impossible to take such a position even in imagination towards Gartley, in her tenderer moments almost a rebuke.

But she could not believe that had Amy known before she married him what kind of person Cornelius was, she would have given herself to him. She did not think how nearly the man she had once accepted stood on the same level of manhood. But Amy was the wife of Cornelius, and that made an eternal difference. Her duty was as plain as Hester's—and the same—to do the best for him!

When he was able to be moved, Hester brought them into the house, and placed them in a comfortable room. She then moved the Frankses into the room they had left, making it over to them, subject to her father's pleasure, for a time at least. With their own entrance through the cellar, they were to live there after their own fashion, and follow their own calling, only they were to let Hester know if they found themselves in any difficulty. And now for the first time in her life she wished she had some means of her own, that she might act with freedom. She had seen hope of freedom in marriage, but now she wished it in independence.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS VAVASOR.

About three weeks after lord Gartley's call, during which he had left a good many cards in Addison square, Hester received the following letter from Miss Vavasor:

"My dear Miss Raymount, I am very anxious to see you, but fear it is hardly safe to go to you yet. You with your heavenly spirit do not regard such things, but I am not so much in love with the future as to risk my poor present for it. Neither would I willingly be the bearer of infection into my own circle: I am not so selfish as to be careless about that. But communicate with you somehow I must, and that for your own sake as well as Gartley's, who is pining away for lack of the sunlight of your eyes.

I throw myself entirely on your judgment. If you tell me you consider yourself out of quarantine, I will come to you at once; if you do not, will you propose something, for meet we must."

Hester pondered well before returning an answer. She could hardly say, she replied, that there was no danger, for her brother, who had been ill, was yet in the house, too weak for the journey to Yrndale. She would rather suggest, therefore, that they should meet in some quiet corner of one of the parks. She need hardly add she would take every precaution against carrying infection.

The proposal proved acceptable to Miss Vavasor. She wrote suggesting time and place. Hester agreed, and they met.

Hester appeared on foot, having had to dismiss her cab at the gate; Miss Vavasor, who had remained seated in her carriage, got down as soon as she saw her, and having sent it away, advanced to meet her with a smile: she was perfect in skin-hospitality.

"How long is it now," she began, "since you saw Gartley?"

"Three weeks or a month," replied Hester.

"I am afraid, sadly afraid, you cannot be much of a lover, not to have seen him for so long and look so fresh!" smiled Miss Vavasor, with gently implied reproach, and followed the words with a sigh, as if *she* had memories of a different complexion.

"When one has one's work to do,—" said Hester.

"Ah, yes!" returned Miss Vavasor, not waiting for the sentence, "I understand you have some peculiar ideas about work. That kind of thing is spreading very much in our circle too. I know many ladies who visit the poor. They complain there are so few unobjectionable tracts to give them. The custom came in with these Woman's-rights. I fear they will upset everything before long. But I hope the world will last my time. No one can tell where such things will end."

"No," replied Hester. "Nothing has ever stopped yet."

"Is that as much as to say that nothing ever will stop?"

"I think it is something like it," said Hester. "We know nothing about the ends of things—only the beginnings."

There had been an air of gentle raillery in Miss Vavasor's tone, and Hester used the same, for she had no hope of coming to an understanding with her about anything.

"Then the sooner we do the better! I don't see else how things are to go on at all!" said Miss Vavasor, revealing the drop of Irish blood in her.

"When the master comes he will stop a good deal," thought Hester, but she did not say it. She could not allude to such things without at least a possibility of response.

"You and Gartley had a small misunderstanding, he tells me, the last time you met," continued Miss Vavasor, after a short pause.

"I think not," answered Hester; "at least I fancy I understood him very well."

"My dear Miss Raymount, you must not be offended with me. I am an old woman, and have had to compose differences that had got in the way of their happiness between goodness knows how many couples.

I am not boasting when I say I have had considerable experience in that sort of thing."

"I do not doubt it," said Hester. "What I do doubt is, that you have had any experience of the sort necessary to set things right between lord Gartley and myself. The fact is, for I will be perfectly open with you, that I saw then—for the first time plainly, that to marry him would be to lose my liberty."

"Not more, my dear, than every woman does who marries at all. I presume you will allow marriage and its duties to be the natural calling of a woman?"

"Certainly."

"Then she ought not to complain of the loss of her liberty."

"Not of so much as is naturally involved in marriage, I allow."

"Then why draw back from your engagement to Gartley?"

"Because he requires me to turn away at once, and before any necessity shows itself, from the exercise of a higher calling yet."

"I am not aware of any higher calling."

"I am. God has given me gifts to use for my fellows, and use them I must till he, not man, stops me. That is my calling."

"But you know that of necessity a woman must give up many things when she accepts the position of a wife, and possibly the duties of a mother."

"The natural claims upon a wife or mother I would heartily acknowledge."

"Then of course to the duties of a wife belong the claims Society has upon her as a wife."

"So far as I yet know what is meant in your circle by such claims, I count them the merest usurpations: I will never subject myself to such—never put myself in a position where I should be expected to obey a code of laws not merely opposed to the work for which I was made, but to all the laws of the relations to each other of human beings as human beings."

"I do not quite understand you," said Miss Vavasor.

"Well, for instance," returned Hester, willing to give the question a general bearing, "a mother in your class, according at

least to much that I have heard, considers the duties she owes to society, duties that consist in what looks to me the merest dissipation and killing of time, as paramount even to those of a mother. Because of those 'traditions of men,' or fancies of fashionable women rather, she justifies herself in leaving her children in the nursery to the care of other women—the vulgarest sometimes."

"Not knowingly," said Miss Vavasor. "We are all liable to mistakes."

"But certainly," insisted Hester, "without taking the pains necessary to know for themselves the characters of those to whom they trust the children God has given to their charge; whereas to abandon them to the care of angels themselves would be to go against the laws of nature and the calling of God."

Miss Vavasor began to think it scarcely desirable to bring a woman of such levelling opinions into their quiet circle: she would be preaching next that women were wicked who did not nurse their own brats! But she would be faithful to Gartley!

"To set up as reformers would be to have the whole hive about our ears," she said.

"That may be," replied Hester, "but it does not apply to me. I keep the beam out of my own eye which I have no hope of pulling out of my neighbour's. I do not belong to your set."

"But you are about to belong to it, I hope."

"I hope not."

"You are engaged to marry my nephew."

"Not irrevocably, I trust."

"You should have thought of all that before you gave your consent. Gartley thought you understood. Certainly our circle is not one for saints."

"Honest women would be good enough for me. But I thought I had done and said more than was necessary to make Gartley understand my ideas of what was required of me in life, and I thought he sympathized with me so far at least that he would be what help to me he could. Now I find instead of this, that he never believed I meant what I said, but all the time intended to put

a stop to the aspiration of my life the moment he had it in his power to do so."

"Ah, my dear young lady, you do not know what love is!" said Miss Vavasor, and sighed again as if *she* knew what love was. And in truth she had been in love at least once in her youth, but had yielded without word of remonstrance when her parents objected to her marrying three hundred a year, and a curacy of fifty. She saw it was reasonable: what fellowship can light have with darkness, or love with starvation? "A woman really in love," she went on, "is ready to give up everything—yes, my dear, *everything* for the man she loves. She who is not equal to that, does not know what love is."

"Suppose he should have proved unworthy of her?"

"That would be nothing, positively nothing. If she had once learned to love him she would see no fault in him."

"*Whatever* faults he might have?"

"Whatever faults: love has no second thoughts."

"Suppose he were to show himself regard-

less of her best welfare—caring for her only as an adjunct to his display?"

"If she loved him, I only say *if she loved him*, she would be proud to follow in his triumph. His glory is hers."

"Whether it be real or not?"

"If he counts it so. A woman who loves gives herself to her husband to be moulded by him."

"I fear that is the way men think of us," said Hester sadly; "and no doubt there are women whose behaviour would justify them in it. With all my heart I say that a woman ought to be ready to die for the man she loves; that is a matter of course; she cannot really love him if she would not; but that she should fall in with all his thoughts, feelings and judgments whatever, even such as in others she would most heartily despise; that she should act as if her husband and not God made her, and his whims, instead of the lovely will of him who created man and woman, were to be to her the bonds of her being—that surely no woman could grant who had not first lost her reason."

"You won't lose yours for love at least,"

concluded Miss Vavasor, who could not help admiring her ability, though she despised the direction it took. "I see," she said to herself, "she is one of the strong-minded who think themselves superior to any man. Gartley will be well rid of her—that is my conviction! I think I have done nearly all he could require of me."

"I tell you honestly," continued Hester, "I love lord Gartley so well that I would gladly yield my life to do him any worthy good."—"It is easy to talk!" said Miss Vavasor to herself.—"Not that that is saying much," Hester went on, "for I would do that to redeem any human creature from the misery of living without God. I would even marry lord Gartley—I think I would, after what has passed—if only I knew that he would not try to prevent me from being the woman I ought to be and have to be;—perhaps I would—I am not clear about it just at this moment: never, if I were married to him, would I be so governed by him that he should do that! But who would knowingly marry for strife and debate? Who would deliberately add to the difficulties of

being what she ought to be—what she desired, and was determined, with God's help, to be! I for one will not take an enemy into the house of my life. I will not make it a hypocrisy to say, 'Lead us not into temptation.' I grant you a wife must love her husband grandly—passionately, if you like the word: but there is one to be loved immeasurably more grandly, yea *passionately*, if the word means anything true and good in love—he whose love creates love. Can you for a moment imagine, when the question came between my Lord and my husband, I would hesitate?"

"'Tis a pity you were not born in the middle ages," said Miss Vavasor smiling, but with a touch of gentle scorn in the superiority of her tone; "you would certainly have been canonized!"

"But now I am sadly out of date—am I not?" returned Hester, trying to smile also. "I could no more consent to live in God's world without minding what he told me, than I would marry a man merely because he admired me."

"Heavens," exclaimed Miss Vavasor to

what she called herself, "what an extravagant young woman! She won't do for us! You'll have to let her fly, my dear boy!"

What she said to Hester was,

"Don't you think, my dear, all that sounds a little—just a little extravagant? You know as well as I do—you have just confessed it—that the kind of thing is out of date—does not belong to the world of to-day. And when a thing is once of the past, it cannot be called back, do what you will. Nothing will ever bring in that kind of thing again. It is all very well to go to church and that sort of thing; I should be the last to encourage the atheism that is getting so frightfully common, but really it seems to me such extravagant notions about religion as you have been brought up in must have not a little to do with the present sad state of affairs—must in fact go far to make atheists. Civilization will never endure to be priest-ridden."

"It is my turn now," said Hester, "to say that I scarcely understand you. Do you take God for a priest? Do you object

to atheism, and yet regard obedience to God as an invention of the priests? Was Jesus Christ a priest? or did he say what was not true when he said that whoever loved any one else more than him was not worthy of him? Or do you confess it true, yet say it is of no consequence? If you do not care about what he wants of you, I simply tell you that I care about nothing else; and if ever I should change, I hope he will soon teach me better—whatever sorrow may be necessary for me to that end. I desire not to care a straw about anything he does not care about."

"It is very plain, at least," said Miss Vavasor, "that you do not love my nephew as he deserves to be loved—or as any woman ought to love the man to whom she has given her consent to be his wife! You have very different ideas from such as were taught in my girlhood concerning the duties of wives! A woman, I used to be told, was to fashion herself upon her husband, fit her life to his life, her thoughts to his thoughts, her tastes to his tastes."

Absurd indeed would have seemed, to any

one really knowing the two, the idea of a woman like Hester fitting herself into the mould of such a man as lord Gartley!—for what must be done with the quantity of her that would be left over after his lordship's mould was filled! The notion of squeezing a large, divine being, like Hester, into the shape of such a poor, small, mean, worldly, time-serving fellow, would have been so convincingly ludicrous as to show at once the theory on which it was founded for the absurdity it was. Instead of walking on together in simple equality, in mutual honour and devotion, each helping the other to be better still, to have the woman, large and noble, come cowering after her pigmy lord, as if he were the god of her life, instead of a Satan doing his best to damn her to his own meanness!—it is a contrast that needs no argument! Not the less if the woman be married to such a man, will it be her highest glory, by the patience of Christ, by the sacrifice of self, yea of everything save the will of God, to win the man, if he may by any means be won, from the misery of his self-seeking

to a noble shame of what he now delights in.

"You are right," said Hester; "I do not love lord Gartley sufficiently for that! Thank you, Miss Vavasor, you have helped me to the thorough conviction that there could never have been any real union between us. Can a woman love with truest wifely love a man who has no care that she should attain to the perfect growth of her nature? *He* would have been quite content I should remain for ever the poor creature I am—would never by word, or wish, or prayer, have sought to raise me above myself! The man I shall love as I could love must be a greater man than lord Gartley! He is not fit to make any woman love him so. If she were so much less than he as to have to look up to him, she would be too small to have any devotion in her. No! I will be a woman and not a countess!—I wish you good morning, Miss Vavasor."

"If I am not to help him," she said to herself, "what is there in reason why I should marry him? His love, no doubt, is

the best thing he has to give, but a poor thing is his best, and save as an advantage for serving him, not worth the having."

What her love to him would have been three months after marrying him, I am glad to have no occasion to imagine.

She held out her hand. Miss Vavasor drew herself up, and looked a cold annihilation into her eyes. The warm blood rose from Hester's heart to her brain. Quietly she returned her gaze nor blenched a moment. She felt as if she were looking a far off idea in the face—as if she were telling her what a poor miserable creature of money and manners, ambitions and expediencies she thought her. Miss Vavasor, unused to having such a full strong virgin look fixed fearless, without defiance, but with utter disapproval, upon her, quailed—only a little, but as she had never in her life quailed before. She forced her gaze, and Hester felt that to withdraw her eyes would give her a false sense of victory. She therefore continued her look, but had no need to force it, for she knew she was the stronger. It seemed minutes where

only seconds passed. She smiled at last and said,

"I am glad you are not going to be my aunt, Miss Vavasor."

"Thank goodness, no!" cried Miss Vavasor, with a slightly hysterical laugh.

Notwithstanding her educated self-command, she felt cowed before the majesty of Hester, for woman was face to face with woman, and the truth was stronger than the lie. Had she then yielded to the motions within her, she would, and it would have been but the second time in her life, have broken into undignified objurgation. She had to go back to her nephew and confess that she had utterly failed where she had expected, if not an easy victory, yet the more a triumphant one! She had to tell him that his lady was the most peculiar, most unreasonable young woman she had ever had to deal with; and that she was not only unsuited to him, but quite unworthy of him! He would conclude she had managed the matter ill, and said things she ought not to have said! It was very hard that she, who desired only to set things

right, looking for no advantage to herself—she who was recognized as a power in her own circle, should have been so ignominiously foiled in the noble endeavour, having sacrificed herself, to sacrifice also another upon the altar of her beloved earldom! She could not reconcile herself to the thought. It did not occur to her that there was a power here concerned altogether different from any she had before encountered—namely a soul possessed by truth and clad in the armour of righteousness. Of conscience that dealt with the qualities of things, nor cared what had been decreed concerning them by a class claiming for itself the apex of the world, she had scarce even a shadowy idea; for never in her life had she herself acted from any insight into primary quality. When therefore she had to do with a girl who did not acknowledge the jurisdiction of the law to which she bowed as supreme, she was out of her element—had got, as it seemed to her, into water too shoal to swim in; whereas, in fact, she had got into water too deep to wade in, and did not know how to swim.

She turned and walked away, attempting a show of dignity, but showing only that Brummagem thing, haughtiness—an adornment the possessor alone does not recognize as a counterfeit. Then Hester turned too, and walked in the opposite direction, feeling that one supposed portion of her history was but an episode, and at an end.

She did not know that, both coming and going, she was attended at a near distance by a tall, portly gentleman of ruddy complexion and military bearing. He had beheld her interview—by no means overheard her conversation—with Miss Vavasor, and had seen with delight the unmistakable symptoms of serious difference which at last appeared, and culminated in their parting. He did not venture to approach her, but when she got into a cab, took a Hansom and followed her to the entrance of the square, where he got down, his heart beating with exultant hope that "the rascal ass of a nobleman" had been dismissed.

All the time since he came to London with Hester, he had, as far as possible to

him, kept guard over her, and had known a good deal more of her goings and comings than she was aware of—this with an unselfishness of devotion that took from him the least suspicion of its being a thing unwarrantable. He was like the dog which, not allowed to accompany his master, follows him at a distance, ready to interfere at any moment when such interference may be desirable. She had let him know that she had found her brother, that he was very ill, and that she was helping to nurse him; but she had not yet summoned him. In severe obedience to orders, therefore, he did not even now call. Next day, however, he found a summons waiting him at his club, and made haste to obey it.

She had thought it better to prepare him for what she was about to ask of him, therefore mentioned in her note that in a day or two she was going to Yrndale with her brother and his wife.

"Whew!" exclaimed the major when he read it, "wife! this complicates matters! I was sure he had not gone to the dogs—no dog but a cur would receive him—without

help!—Marriage and embezzlement! Poor devil! if he were not such a confounded ape I should pity him! But the small-pox and a wife may perhaps do something for him!"

When he reached the house, Hester received him warmly, and at once made her request that he would go down with them. It would be such a relief to her if he would, she said. He expressed entire readiness, but thought she had better not say he was coming, as in the circumstances he could hardly be welcome. They soon made their arrangements, and he left her yet more confirmed in a respect such as he had never till now felt. And this was the major's share in the good that flowed from Hester's sufferings: the one most deficient thing in him was reverence, and in this he was now having a strong lesson.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CHRISTOPHER.

On the Sunday evening, the last before she was to leave for Yrndale, Hester had gone to see a poor woman in a house she had not been in before, and was walking up the dismal stair, dark and dirty, when she heard a moaning from a room the door of which was a little open. She peeped in, and saw on a low bed a poor woman, old, yellow, and wrinkled, apparently at the point of death. Her throat was bare, and she saw the muscles of it knotted in the struggle for life.—Is not death the victorious struggle for life?—She was not alone; a man knelt by her bedside, his arm under the pillow to hold her head higher, and his other hand clasping hers.

"The darkness! the darkness!" moaned the woman.

"You feel lonely?" said the voice of the man, low, and broken with sympathy.

"All, all alone," sighed the woman.

"I can do nothing for you. I can only love you."

"Yes, yes," said the woman hopelessly.

"You are slipping away from me, but my master is stronger than me, and can help you yet. He is not far from you though you can't see him. He loves you too, and only wants you to ask him to help you. He can cure death as easy as any other disease."

No reply came for a moment. Then, moulded of all-but dying breath, came the cry,

"O Christ, save me!"

Then Hester was seized with a sudden impulse: she thought afterwards the feeling of it might be like what men and women of old had when the Spirit of God came upon them: it seemed she had not intended song when the sounds issuing from her mouth entered her ears. The words she

uttered were those and no more, over and over again, which the poor dying woman had just spoken: "O Christ, save me!" But the song-sounds in which they were lapt and with which they came winged from her lips, seemed the veriest outpouring of her whole soul. They seemed to rise from some eternal deep within her, yet not to be of her making. She was as in the immediate presence of Christ, pleading with him for the consolation and strength which his poor dying creature so sorely needed. The holy possession lasted but a minute or so, and left her dumb. She turned away, and passed up the stair.

"The angels! the angels! I'm going now!" said the woman feebly.

"The angel was praying to Christ for you," said Christopher. "—Oh living brother, save our dying sister!"

"O Christ, save me!" she murmured again, and they were her last words.

Christopher laid the body gently back on the pillow. A sigh of relief passed from his lips, and he went from the room to give notice of the death. The dead or who

would might bury the dead; he must go to the living!

Inflated sentiment all this looks to the man of this world. But when the inevitable Death has him by the throat; when he lies like that poor woman, lonely in the shadow, though his room be crowded with friends, whatever his theories about future or no future, it may be an awful hour in which less than Christ will hardly comfort him.

Hester's heart was full when she found the woman she went to see, and she was able to speak as she had never spoken before. She never troubled her poor with any of the theories of salvation, which, right or wrong, are *not* the things to be presented for men's reception—now any more than in the days of the first teachers who knew nothing of them: they serve but to obscure the vision of the live brother in whom men must believe to be lifted out of their evil and brought into the air of truth and the room for growing deliverance. Hester spoke of Christ, the friend of men, who came to save every one by giving him back to God, as one gives back to a mother

the stray child who has run from her to escape obeying her.

The woman at least listened; and then she sang to her. But she could not sing as she had sung a little while before. One cannot have or give the best always—not at least until the soul shall be always in its highest and best moods—a condition which may perhaps be on the way to us, though I am doubtful whether the created will ever stand continuously on the apex of conscious existence. I think part of the joy will be to contemplate the conditions in which we are at our best: I delight to think of twilights in heaven—the brooding on the best. Perhaps we may be full of God always and yet not always full of the ecstasy of good, or always able to make it pass in sweet splendours from heart to heart.

Hester was walking homewards when, passing through a court on her way, she heard the voice of a man, which again she recognized as that of Mr. Christopher. Glancing about her she discovered that it came from a room half under ground. She went to the door. There was a little crowd

of dirty children making a noise round it, and she could not well hear what was going on, but what she did hear was enough to let her know it was the voice of one pleading with his fellows not to be miserable and die, but to live and rejoice. Now for all the true liberality of Hester's heart and brain both, she had never entered any place of worship that did not belong to the established church, thinking all the rest only and altogether sectarian, and she would not be a sectary. She had not yet learned that therein she just was a sectary—from Christ the head. But here was something meant only for the poor, she thought, and seeing they would not go to church, a layman like Mr. Christopher might surely give them of the good things he had! So she went in: she would sit near the door, and come out again presently!

It was a low room, and though not many were present, the air was stifling. The doctor stood at the farther end. Some of his congregation were decently dressed, some but sparingly washed; many wore the same clothes they wore through the week,

though probably most of these had a better gown or suit, if that could be called *having* which was represented by a pawn-ticket. Hester could hardly say she saw among them much sign of listening. Most of the faces were just as vacant as those to be seen in the most fashionable churches, but there were one or two which seemed to show their owners in some kind of sympathetic relation with the speaker, and that was a far larger proportion than was found in Sodom that was destroyed, or in Nineveh that was spared. That the speaker was in earnest there could be no manner of question. His eyes were glowing, his face was gleaming with a light of its own; his hands were often clenched hard and his motions broken by very earnestness: it was the bearing of one that pleaded with men, saying, "Why will ye die?" The whole rough appearance of the man was elevated into dignity. Simplicity and self-forgetfulness were manifest in carriage and utterance. He was not self-possessed—but he was God-possessed. He kept saying the simplest things to them. One thing she

heard him tell them was, that they were like orphan children, hungry in the street, raking the gutter for what they could get, while behind them stood a grand, beautiful house to which they never so much as lifted up their eyes—and there their father lived! There he sat in a beautiful room, waiting, waiting, waiting for any one of them all who would but turn round, run in, and up the stairs to him.

"But you will say," something as thus he went on, "—Why does he not send out a message to them, to tell them he is waiting there for them? How can they know without being told?—you say. But that is just what he does do. He is constantly sending out messengers to them to tell them to come in. But they mostly laugh and make faces at them. *They* won't be at the trouble to go up those stairs! 'It's not likely,' they say, 'a man like that would trouble his head about such as us, even if we were his children!' That makes me wonder how such people treat their own children! But some do listen and hear and go in; and some of them come out again, and say they

find it all true. Very few believe them a bit, or mind in the least what they say. They are not miserable enough yet to go back to the father that loves them, and would be as good to them as the bird that covers her young ones all over with her wings, or the mother you see wrapping her shawl round her child in her arms.

"Some of you are thinking with yourselves now, '*We* wouldn't do like that! *we* should be only too glad to get somebody that would make us comfortable without any trouble on our parts!' Ah, there's the rub! These children that won't go in, they're just like you: they won't take any trouble about it. Why now here I am, sent to you with the very message! and you fancy I am only talking, as you do so often, without meaning anything! I am one of those who have been into the house, and have found my father—oh, so grand! and so good to me! And I am come out again to tell you it is so, and that if you will go in, you will have the same kindness I have had. All the servants of the house even will rejoice over you with music and dancing

—so glad that you are come home. Is it possible you will not take the trouble to go! There are certain things required of you when you go: perhaps you are too lazy, or too dirty in your habits, to like doing them! I have known some decline to scrape their shoes, or rub them on the door-mat when they went in, and then complain loudly that they were refused admittance. A fine house would such make to their father, were they allowed to run in and out as they pleased!—such a house, in fact, as would very soon drive their father himself out of it! for they would make it unfit for any decent person to live in. A few months and they would have the grand beautiful house as wretched and mean and dirty as the houses they live in now. Such persons are those that keep grumbling that they are not rich. They want to loaf about and drink and be a nuisance to everybody, like some of the rich ones. They think it hard they should not be able to do just as they please with everything that takes their fancy, when they would do nothing but break and spoil it, and make it no good to anybody. Their father,

who can do whatever he sees fit, is not one to let such disagreeable children work what mischief they like! He is a better father than that would come to! A father who lets them be dirty and rude just as they like, is one of the worst enemies of his children. And the day is coming when, if he can't get them to mind him any other way, he will put them where they will be ten times more miserable than ever they were at the worst time of their lives, and make them mind. Out of the same door whence came the messengers to ask them in, he will send dogs and bears and lions and tigers and wild cats out upon them.

"You will, I daresay, some of you, say, 'Ah, we know what you mean; but you see that's not the sort of thing we care for, so you needn't go on about it.' I know it is not the sort of thing you care for, else you might have been in a very different condition by this time. And I know the kind of thing you do care for—low, dirty things: you are like a child, if such there could be, that preferred mud and the gutter to all the beautiful toys in the shop at the corner

of Middle Row. But though these things are not the things you want, they are the things you need; and the time is coming when you will say, 'Ah me! what a fool I was not to look at the precious things, and see how precious they were, and put out my hand for them when they were offered me!'"

It was something in this simple way, but more earnestly yet, and occasionally with an energy that rose to eloquence, that the man freed his soul of the things he had to give. After about twenty minutes, he ceased, saying, "We will now sing a hymn." Then he read a short hymn, repeating each verse before they sang it, for there was no other hymn-book than his own. It was the simplest hymn, Hester thought, she had ever heard. He began the singing himself to a well-known tune, but when he heard the voice of Hester take it up, he left the leading to her, and betaking himself to the bass, did his part there. When they heard her voice the people all turned to look, and some began to whisper, but presently resumed the

hymn. When it was ended, he prayed for two or three minutes, not more, and sent them away. Hester being near the door went out with the first of them, and walked home full of pleasure in the thought of such preaching: if only her friends could hear such! The great difficulty was to wake in them any vaguest recognition of a Nature from whom they came. She had been driven to conclude that the faculty for things *epouranian* was awake in them not an atom more than in the South-African Bushman, in whom most travellers have failed to discover even the notion of a power above him. But to wake the faculty in them what could be so powerful as the story and the message of Jesus? — and Mr. Christopher had not spoken of him! She did not know that every Sunday he taught them there, and that this sermon, if such it could be called, was but one wave in the flow of a river. The true teacher brings from his treasure things old and things new; at one time tells, at another explains; and ever and anon lets his own well of water flow to everlasting life.

But, as she thought, Hester, like the true soul she was, turned from ways and means to the questioning of herself: what of the faculty was awake in her? Had she been obedient only to that she had been taught, or obedient to the very God? This questioning again she left for better labour: she turned her whole soul towards God in prayer unutterable. Of one thing she could be sure—that she had but the faintest knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal.

She was near the turning that led to the square when she heard a quick footstep behind her, and was presently overtaken by Mr. Christopher.

"I was so glad to see you come in!" he said. "I was able to speak the better, for I was sure then of some sympathy in the spiritual air. It is not easy to go on when you feel all the time a doubt whether to one present your words are more than mere words; or, if they have some meaning to any, whether that meaning be not something very different from your meaning."

"I do not see," said Hester, "how any

one could misunderstand, or indeed help understanding what I heard you say."

"Ah!" he returned, "the one incomprehensible thing is ignorance! To understand why another does not understand seems to me beyond the power of humanity. As God only can understand evil, while we only can be evil, so God only can understand ignorance, while we only can be ignorant. I have been trying now for a good many months to teach those people, and I am not sure that a single thought has passed from my mind into one of theirs. I sometimes think I am but beating the air. But I must tell you how your singing comforted the poor woman at whose door you stopped this afternoon! I saw it in her face. She thought it was the angels. And it was one angel, for did not God send you? I trust your fellow-servants were waiting for her: she died a minute or two after."

They walked some distance before either spoke again.

"I was surprised," said Hester at length, "to find you taking the clergyman's part as well as the doctor's."

"By no means," returned Christopher; "I took no clergyman's part. I took but the part of a human being, bound to share with his fellow. What could make you think so? Did I preach like one?"

"Not very," she answered.

"I am glad of that," he returned, "for such a likeness would by no means favour my usefulness with such as those. If you see any reason why a layman, as was our Lord, should not speak to his fellows, I fear it is one I should be unable to comprehend. I do whatever seems to me a desirable action, so long as I see no reason for not doing it. As to the customs of society, my experience of them has resulted in mere and simple contempt—in so far at least as they would hamper my freedom. I have another master; and they who obey higher rules need not regard lower judgment. If Shakspere liked my acting, should I care if Marlowe did not?"

"But if anybody and everybody be at liberty to preach, how are we to have any assurance what kind of doctrine will be preached?"

"We must go without it.—But it is too late to object, for here are a few of us laymen preaching, and no one to hinder us. There are many uneducated preachers who move the classes the clergy cannot touch. Their preaching has a far more evident effect, I know, than mine."

"Why do you not then preach like them?"

"I would not if I could, and could not if I would: I do not believe one half of the things they say."

"How can they do more good if what they say is not true?"

"I did not say they did more good—about that I cannot tell; that may need centuries to determine. I said they moved their people more. And the fundamental element of what they say is most true, only the forms they express it in contain much that is false."

"Will you then defend a man in speaking things that are not true?"

"If he believes them, what is he to do but speak them? Let him speak them in God's name. I cannot speak them because

I do not believe them. If I did believe them they would take from me the heart to preach."

"Can it be," said Hester, "that falsehood is more powerful than truth—and for truth too?"

"By no means. A falsehood has in itself no power but for evil. It is the spiritual truth clothed in the partially false form that is powerful. Clearer truth will follow in the wake of it, and cast the false forms out: they serve but to make a place of seeming understanding in ignorant minds, wherein the truths themselves may lie and work with their own might. But if what I teach be nearer the truth, let it be harder to get in, it will in the end work more truth. In the meantime I say God-speed to every man who honestly teaches what he honestly believes. Paul was grand when he said he would rejoice that Christ was preached from whatever motive he might be preached. If you say those people, though contentious, may have preached good doctrine, I answer —Possibly; for they could not have preached much of what is called doctrine

now-a-days. If they preached theories of their own, they were teachers of lies, for they were not true men, and the theories of an untrue man cannot be true. But they told something about Christ, and of that Paul was glad."

Some may wonder that Hester, having got so far as she had, should need to be told such things; but she had never had occasion to think about them before, though the truth wrought out in her life had rendered her capable of seeing them the moment they were put before her.

"You interest me much," she said. "—Would you mind telling me how you, whose profession has to do with the bodies of men, have come to do more for their souls?"

"I know nothing about less or more," answered Christopher. "—You would find it, I fear, a long story if I were to attempt telling it in full. I studied medicine from guile, not therefore the less carefully, that I might have a good ostensible reason for going about among the poor. I count myself bound to do all I can for their bodies;

and pity itself would, I think, when I came to go among them, have driven me to the study, had I been ignorant. No one who has not been among them knows their sufferings—borne by some of them without complaint—for the sad reason that it is of no use. To be to such if only one to whom they can speak, is in some sort to mediate between them and a possible world of relief. But it was not primarily from the desire to alleviate their sufferings that I learned what I could of medicine, but in the hope to start them on the way towards victory over all evil. I saw that the man who brought them physical help had a chance with them such as no clergyman had—an advantage quite as needful with them as with the heathen—to whom we are not so *immediately* debtors. It would have been a sad thing for the world if the Lord of it had not sought first the lost sheep of the house of Israel. One awful consequence of our making haste to pull out the mote out of our heathen brother's eye, while yet the beam is in our own, is that wherever our missionaries go, they are followed by a foul wave of our vices.

"With all my guile I have not done much. But now after nearly two thousand years, such is the amount of faith I find in myself towards my Lord and his Father, that sometimes I ask myself whether in very truth I believe that that man did live and die as the story says: if it has taken all this time for such a poor result, I say to myself, perhaps I may have done something, for it must be too small to be seen; so I will try on, helping God as the children help the father.—You know that grand picture, on the ceiling of the pope's chapel, of the making of Adam?"

"Michael Angelo's?—Yes."

"You must have noticed then how the Father is accompanied by a crowd of young ones—come to help him to make Adam, I always think. The poet has there, consciously or not, hit upon a great truth: it is the majesty of God's great-heartedness, and the majesty of man's destiny, that every man must be a fellow-worker with God, nor can ever in less attain his end, and the conscious satisfaction of being. I want to help God with my poor brothers."

"How well I understand you!" said Hester. "But would you mind telling me what made you think of the thing first? I began because I saw how miserable so many people were, and longed to do something to make life a better thing for them."

"That was not quite the way with me," replied Christopher. "I see I must tell you something of my external, in order to explain my internal history."

"No, no, pray!" returned Hester, fearing she had presumed. "I did not mean to be inquisitive. I ought not to have asked such a question; for these things have to do with the most sacred regions of our nature."

"I was only going to cast the less in with the greater—the outer fact to explain the inner truth," said Christopher. "I should like to tell you about it.—And first,—you may suppose I could not have followed my wishes had I not had some money!"

"A good thing you had, then!"

"I don't know exactly," replied the doctor in a dubious tone. "You shall judge for yourself from my story.—I had money then

—a good deal too—left me by my grandfather. My father died when I was a child, I am glad to say."

"Glad to say!" repeated Hester bewildered.

"Yes: if he had lived, how do I know he might not have done just like my grandfather? But my mother lived, thank God. —Not that my grandfather was what is counted a bad man; on the contrary he stood high in the world's opinion—was considered indeed the prince of— — —well, I will not say what, for my business is not to expose him. The world had nothing against him.

"When he died and left me his money—I was then at school, preparing for Oxford—it was necessary that I should look into the affairs of the business, for it was my mother's wish that I should follow the same. In the course of my investigation, I came across things not a few in the books, all fair and square in the judgment of the trade itself, which made me doubtful, and which at last, unblinded by custom, I was confident were unfair, that is dishonest. Thereupon I began

to argue with myself: 'What is here?' I said. 'Am I to use the wages of iniquity as if they were a clean God-gift? If there has been wrong done there must be atonement, reparation. I cannot look on this money as mine, for part of it at least, I cannot say how much, ought not to be mine.' The truth flashed upon me; I saw that my business in life must be to send the money out again into the channels of right: I could claim a workman's wages for doing that.

"The history of the business went so far back that it was impossible to make return of more than a small proportion of the sums rightly due; therefore something else, and that a large something, must be done as well.

"To be honest, however, in explaining how I came to choose the life I am now leading, I must here confess the fact that about this time I had a disappointment of a certain kind which set me thinking, for it gave me such a shock that for some months I could not imagine anything to make life worth living. Some day, if you like, I will give you a detailed account of how I came

to the truth of the question—came to see what alone does make the value of life. A flash came first, then a darkness, then a long dawn; by and in which it grew clearer and ever clearer, that there could be no real good, in the very nature of things and of good, but oneness with the will of God; that man's good lay in becoming what the inventor of him meant in the inventing of him—to speak after the fashion of man's making. Going on thinking about it all, and reading my New Testament, I came to see that, if the story of Christ was true, the God that made me was just inconceivably lovely, and that the perfection, the very flower of existence must be to live the heir of all things, at home with the Father. Next, mingled inextricably with my resolve about the money, came the perception that my fellow-beings, my brothers and sisters of the same father, must be, next to the father himself, the very atmosphere of life; and that perfect misery must be to care only for one's self. With that there woke in me such a love and pity for my people, my own race, my human beings, my brothers and

sisters, whoever could hear the word of the father of men, that I felt the only thing worth giving the energy of a life to, was the work that Christ gave himself to—the delivery of men out of their lonely and mean devotion to themselves, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, whose joy and rejoicing is the rest of the family. Then I saw that here the claim upon my honesty, and the highest calling of man met. I saw that were I as free to do with my grandfather's money as it was possible for man to be, I could in no other way use it altogether worthily than in aiding to give outcome, shape, and operation to the sonship and brotherhood in me. I have not yet found how best to use it all; and I will do nothing in haste, which is the very opposite of divine, and sure to lead astray; but I keep thinking in order to find out, and it will one day be revealed to me. God who has laid the burden on me will enable me to bear it until he shows me how to unpack and disperse it.

"First I spent a portion in further study, and specially the study of medicine. I

could not work miracles; I had not the faith necessary to that, if such is now to be had; but God might be pleased I should heal a little by the doctor's art. So doing I should do yet better, and learn how to spend the money upon humanity itself, repaying to the race what had been wrongfully taken from its individuals to whom it was impossible to restore it; and should while so doing at the same time fill up what was left behind for me of the labours of the Master.

"That is my story. I am now trying to do as I have seen, working steadily, without haste, with much discouragement, and now and then with a great gladness and auroral hope. I have this very day got a new idea that may have in it a true germ!"

"Will you not tell me what it is?" said Hester.

"I don't like talking about things before at least they are begun," answered Christopher. "And I have not much hope from money. If it were not that I have it and cannot help it, and am bound to spend it, I would not trouble myself about any

scheme to which it was necessary. I sometimes feel as if it was a devil, restrained a little by being spell-bound in metal discs. I know the feeling is wrong and faithless; for money is God's as certainly as the earth in which the crops grow, though he does not care so much about it."

"I know what I would do if I had money!" said Hester.

"You have given me the right to ask what—the right to ask—not the right to have an answer."

"I would have a house of refuge to which anyone might run for covert or rest or warmth or food or medicine or whatever he needed. It should have no society or subscriptions or committee, but should be my own as my hands and my voice are mine—to use as God enabled me. I would have it like the porch—not of Bethesda, but of heaven itself. It should come into use by the growth of my friendships. It should be a refuge for the needy, from the artisan out of work to the child with a cut finger, or cold-bitten feet. I would take in the weary-brained prophet, the worn curate,

or the shadowy needle-woman. I would not take in drunkards or ruined speculators —not at least before they were very miserable indeed. The suffering of such is the only desirable consequence of their doing, and to save from it would be to take from them their last chance."

"It is a lovely idea," said Christopher. "One of my hopes is to build a small hospital for children in some lovely place, near some sad ugly one. But perhaps I cannot do it till I am old, for when I do, I must live among them, and have them and their nurses within a moment's reach."

"Is it not delightful to know that you can start anything when you please?"

"Anybody with leisure can do that who is willing to begin where everything ought to be begun—that is, at the beginning. Nothing worth calling good can or ever will be started full grown. The essential of any good is life, and the very body of created life, and essential to it, being its self operant, is growth. The larger start you make, the less room you leave for life to extend itself. You fill with the dead

matter of your construction the places where assimilation ought to have its perfect work, building by a life-process, self-extending, and subserving the whole. Small beginnings with slow growings have time to root themselves thoroughly—I do not mean in place nor yet in social regard, but in wisdom. Such even prosper by failures, for their failures are not too great to be rectified without injury to the original idea. God's beginnings are imperceptible, whether in the region of soul or of matter. Besides, I believe in no good done save in person—by personal operative presence of soul, body, and spirit. God is the one only person, and it is our personality alone, so far as we have any, that can work with God's perfect personality. God can use us as tools, but to be a tool of, is not to be a fellow-worker with. How the devil would have laughed at the idea of a society for saving the world! But when he saw *one* take it in hand, one who was in no haste even to do that, one who would only do the will of God with all his heart and soul, and cared for nothing else, then indeed he might tremble

for his kingdom! It is the individual Christians forming the church by their obedient individuality, that have done all the good done since men for the love of Christ began to gather together. It is individual ardour alone that can combine into larger flame. There is no true power but that which has individual roots. Neither custom nor habit nor law nor foundation is a root. The real roots are individual conscience that hates evil, individual faith that loves and obeys God, individual heart with its kiss of charity."

"I think I understand you; I am sure I do in part, at least," said Hester.

They had, almost unconsciously, walked twice round the square, and had now the third time reached the house. He went in with her and saw his patient, then took his leave to go home to his Greek Testament—for the remainder of the evening if he might. Except when some particular case required attention, he never went on trying to teach with his soul weary. He would carry material aid or social comfort, but would not teach. His soul must be shining

—with faith or hope or love or repentance or compassion, when he unveiled it. "No man," he would say, "will be lost because I do not this or that; but if I do the unfitting thing, I may block his way for him, and retard his redemption." He would not presume beyond what was given him—as if God were letting things go wrong, and he must come in to prevent them! He would not set blunted or ill tempered tools to the finest work of the universe!

CHAPTER X.

AN ARRANGEMENT.

Hester had not yet gone to see Miss Dasomma because of the small-pox.

Second causes are God's as much as first, and Christ made use of them as his father's way. It were a sad world indeed if God's presence were only interference, that is, miracle. The roundabout common ways of things are just as much his as the straight, miraculous ones—I incline to think more his, in the sense that they are plainly the ways he prefers. In all things that are, he is—present even in the evil we bring into the world, to foil it and bring good out of it. We are always disbelieving in him because things do not go as we intend and desire them to go. We forget that God has larger ends, even for us, than we can

see, so his plans do not fit ours. If God were not only to hear our prayers, as he does ever and always, but to answer them as we want them answered, he would not be God our Saviour, but the ministering genius of our destruction.

But now Hester thought she might visit her friend. She had much to say to her and ask of her. First she told her of herself and lord Gartley. Miss Dasomma threw her arms about her, and broke into a flood of congratulation. Hester looked a little surprised, and was indeed a little annoyed at the vehemence of her pleasure. Miss Dasomma hastened to excuse herself.

"My dear," she said, "the more I saw of that man, the more I thought and the more I heard about him, his ways, and his surroundings, the more I marvelled you should ever have taken him for other than the most worldly, shallow, stunted creature. It was the very impossibility of your understanding the mode of being of such a man that made it possible for him to gain on you. Believe me, if you had married him, you would have been sick of him—forgive

the vulgar phrase—yes, and hopeless of him, in six weeks."

"There was more and better in him than you imagine," returned Hester, hurt that her friend should think so badly of the man she loved, but by no means sure that she was wrong.

"That may be," answered her friend; "but I am certain also that if you had married him, you would have done him no good."

Then Hester went on with her tale of trouble. Her brother Cornelius had been behaving very badly, she said, and had married a young woman without letting them know. Her father and mother were unaware of the fact as yet, and she dreaded having to communicate it to them. He had been very ill with the small-pox, and she must take him home; but what to do with his wife until she had broken the matter to them, she did not know. She knew her father would be very angry, and until he should have got over it a little she dared not have her home: in a word she was at her wits' end.

"One question, excuse me if I ask," said Miss Dasomma: "*are* they married?"

"I am not sure; but I am sure she believes they are."

Then she told her what she knew of Amy. Miss Dasomma fell a thinking.

"Could I see her?" she said at length.

"Surely; any time," replied Hester, "now that Corney is so much better."

Miss Dasomma called, and was so charmed with Amy that she proposed to Hester she should stay with her.

This was just what Hester wished but had not dared to propose.

Now came the painful necessity not only of breaking to the young wife that she must be parted from her husband for a while, but —which was worse—of showing how sadly he had deceived her.

Had Cornelius not been ill and helpless and characterless, he would probably have refused to go home; but he did not venture a word of opposition to Hester's determination. He knew she had not told Amy anything, but saw that, if he refused, she might judge it necessary to tell her all.

And notwithstanding his idiotic pretence of superiority, he had a kind of thorough confidence in Hester. In his sickness something of the old childish feeling about her as a refuge from evil had returned upon him, and he was now nearly ready to do and allow whatever she pleased, trusting to her to get him out of the scrape he was in: she could do more than any one else, he was sure!

"But now tell me, on your word of honour," she said to him that same night, happening to find herself alone with him, "are you really and truly married to Amy?"

She was delighted to see him blaze up in anger.

"Hester, you insult us both!" he said.

"No, Cornelius," returned Hester; "I have a right to distrust you—but I distrust only you. Whatever may be amiss in the affair, I am certain you alone are to blame —not Amy."

Thereupon Cornelius swore a solemn oath that Amy was as much his lawful wife as he knew how to make her.

"Then what is to be done with her when you go home? You cannot expect she will be welcomed. I have not dared tell them of your marriage—only of your illness. The other must be by word of mouth."

"I don't know what's to be done with her! How should *I* know!" answered Cornelius with a return of his old manner. "I thought you would manage it all for me! This cursed illness——"

"Cornelius," said Hester, "this illness is the greatest kindness God could show you."

"Well, we won't argue about that!—Sis, you must get me out of the scrape!"

Hester's heart swelled with delight at the sound of the old loving nursery-word. She turned to him and kissed him.

"I will do what I honestly can, Cornelius," she said.

"All right!" replied Corney. "What do you mean to do?"

"Not to take Amy down with us. She must wait till I have told."

"Then my wife is to be received only on sufferance!" he cried.

"You can hardly expect to be otherwise

received yourself. You have put your wife at no end of disadvantage by making her your wife without the knowledge of your family. For yourself, when a man has taken money not his own; when he has torn the hearts of father and mother with anguish such as neither ever knew before—ah, Corney! if you had seen them as I saw them, you would not wonder that I tremble at the thought of your meeting. If you have any love for poor Amy you will not dream of exposing her to the first outbreak of a shocked judgment. I cannot be sure what my mother might think, but my father would take her for your evil genius! It is possible he may refuse to see yourself."

"Then I'm not going. Better stay here and starve!"

"If so, I must at once tell Amy what you have done. I will not have the parents on whom you have brought disgrace and misery, supposed guilty of cruelty. Amy must know all about it some day, but it ought to come from yourself—not from me. You will never be fit for honest company

till for very misery you have told your wife."

Hester thought she must not let him fancy things were going back into the old grooves—that his crime would become a thing of no consequence, and pass out of existence, ignored and forgotten. Evil cannot be destroyed without repentance.

He was silent as one who had nothing to answer.

"So now," said Hester, "will you, or must I, tell Amy that she cannot go home?"

He thought for a moment.

"I will," he said.

Hester left him, and sent Amy to him. In a few minutes she returned. She had wept, but was now, though looking very sad, quite self-possessed.

"Please, miss," she said—but Hester interrupted her.

"You must not call me *miss*, Amy," she said. "You must call me *Hester*. Am I not your sister?"

A gleam of joy shot from the girl's eyes, like the sun through red clouds.

"Then you have forgiven me!" she cried, and burst into tears.

"No, Amy, not that! I should have had to know something to forgive first. You may have been foolish; everybody can't always be wise, though everybody must try to do right. But now we must have time to set things straighter without doing more mischief, and you mustn't mind staying a little while with Miss Dasomma."

"Does she know all about it, miss—Hester?" asked Amy; and as she called her new sister by her name, the blood rushed over her face.

"She knows enough not to think unfairly of you, Amy."

"And you won't be hard upon him when he hasn't me to comfort him—will you, Hester?"

"I will think of my new sister who loves him," replied Hester. "But you must not think I do not love him too. And oh, Amy! you must be very careful over him. No one can do with him what you can. You must help him to be good, for that is the chief duty of every one towards a

neighbour, and particularly of a wife towards a husband."

Amy was crying afresh, and made no answer; but there was not the most shadowy token of resentment in her weeping.

CHAPTER XI.

THINGS AT HOME.

In the meantime things had been going very gloomily at Yrndale. Mrs. Raymount was better in health but hardly more cheerful. How could she be? how get over the sadness that her boy was such? But the thing that most oppressed her was to see the heart of his father so turned from the youth. What would become of them if essential discord invaded their home! Cornelius had not been pleasant, even she was to herself compelled to admit, since first he began to come within sight of manhood; but she had always looked to the time when growing sense would make him cast aside young-mannish ways; and this was the outcome of her cares and hopes and prayers for him!

Her husband went about listless and sullen. He wrote no more. How could one thus disgraced in his family presume to teach the world anything! How could he ever hold up his head as one that had served his generation, when this was the kind of man he was to leave behind him for the life of the next! Cornelius's very being cast doubt on all he had ever said or done!

He had been proud of his children: they were like those of any common stock! and the shame recoiled upon himself. Bitterly he recalled the stain upon his family in generations gone by. He had never forged or stolen himself, yet the possibility had remained latent in him, else how could he have transmitted it? Perhaps there were things in which he might have been more honest, and so have killed the latent germ, and his child not have had it to develop! Far into the distance he saw a continuous succession of dishonest Raymounts, nor succession only but multiplication, till streets and prisons were swarming with them. For hours he would sit with his hands in his pockets, scarcely daring to

think, for the misery of the thoughts that came crowding out the moment the smallest chink was opened in their cage. He had become short, I do not say rough, in his speech to his wife. He would break into sudden angry complaints against Hester for not coming home, but stop dead in the middle, as if nothing was worth being angry about now, and turn away with a sigh that was almost a groan.

The sight of the children was a pain to him. Saffy was not one to understand much of grief beyond her own passing troubles; it was a thing for which she seemed to have little reception; and her occasionally unsympathetic ways were, considering her age, more of a grief to her mother than was quite reasonable; she feared she saw in her careless glee the same root which in her brother flowered in sullen disregard. Mark was very different. The father would order Saffy away, but the boy might come and go as he pleased, nor gave him any annoyance, although he never or scarcely ever took any notice of him. He had been told nothing of the cause of his

parents' evident misery. When the news came of Corney's illness, his mother told him of that; but he had sympathy and penetration enough to perceive that there must be something amiss more than that: if this were all, they would have told him of it when first they began to be changed! And when the news came that he was getting better, his father did not seem the least happier! He would sometimes stand and gaze at his father, but the solemn, far-off, starry look of the boy's eyes never seemed to disturb him. He loved his father as few boys love, and yet had a certain dread of him and discomfort in his presence, which he could not have accounted for, and which would vanish at once when he spoke to him.

He had never recovered the effects of being so nearly drowned, and in the readier apprehension caused by accumulated troubles his mother began to doubt if ever he would be well again. He had got a good deal thinner; his food did not seem to nourish him; and his being seemed slipping away from the hold of the world. He was full of

dreams and fancies, all of the higher order of things where love is the law. He did not read much that was new, for he soon got tired with the effort to understand; but he would spend happy hours alone, seeming to the ordinary eye to be doing nothing, because his doing was with the unseen. So-called religious children are often peculiarly disagreeable, mainly from false notions of the simple thing religion in their parents and teachers; but in truth nowhere may religion be more at home than in a child. A strong conscience and a loving regard to the desires of others were Mark's chief characteristics. When such children as he die, we may well imagine them wanted for special work in the world to which they go. If the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and he said so who knew and is true, our children do not drop hap-hazard into the near world, neither are they kept out of it by any care or any power of medicine: all goes by heavenliest will and loveliest ordinance. Some of us will have to be ashamed of our outcry after our dead. Beloved, even for your dear faces we can

wait a while, seeing it is His father, your father and our father to whom you have gone, leaving us with him still. Our day will come, and your joy and ours, and all shall be well.

The attachment of Mark to the major continued growing.

"When Majie comes," he said one of those days, "he must not go again."

"Why, Markie?" asked his mother, almost without a meaning, for her thought was with her eldest-born, her disgrace.

"Because, if he does," he answered, "I shall not see much of him."

The mother looked at the child, but said nothing. Sorrow was now the element of her soul. Cornelius had destroyed the family-heart: must the family soon be broken up, and vanish in devouring vacancy? Do you ask where was her faith? I answer, Just where yours and mine is when we give thanks trusting in the things for which we give thanks; when we rest in what we have, in what we can do, in what people think of us, in the thought of the friends we have at our back, or in anything whatever but the

living, outgoing power of the self-alive—the one causing Potency in the heart of our souls, and in every clothing of those souls, from nerve, muscle, and skin to atmosphere and farthest space. The living life is the one power, the only that can, and he who puts his trust or hope in anything else whatever is a worshipper of idols. He who does not believe in God must be a truster in that which is lower than himself.

Mark seldom talked about his brother. Before he went away the last time he had begun to shrink from him a little, as if with some instinct of an inward separation. He would stand a little way off and look at him as if he were a stranger in whom he was interested, and as if he himself were trying to determine what mental attitude he must assume towards him. When he heard that he was ill, the tears came in his eyes, but he did not speak.

"Are you not sorry for Corney?" said his mother.

"I'm sorry," he answered, "because it must make him unhappy. He does not like being ill."

"*You* don't like being ill, I'm sure, Mark!" returned his mother, apprehending affectation.

"I don't mind it much," answered the boy sweetly, looking far away—as it seemed to his mother, towards a region to which she herself had begun to look with longing.

The way her husband took their grief made them no more a family, but a mere household. He brooded alone and said nothing. They did not share sorrow as they had shared joy.

At last came a letter from Hester saying that in two days she hoped to start with Corney to bring him home. The mother read the letter, and with a faded gleam of joy on her countenance, passed it to her husband. He took it, glanced at it, threw it from him, rose, and left the room. For an hour his wife heard him pacing up and down his study; then he took his hat and stick and went out.

What he might have resolved upon had Corney been returning in tolerable health, I do not know—possibly to kick him out of the house for his impudence in daring

to show his face there; but even this wrathful father, who thought he did well to be angry, could not turn from his door his sickly child, let him be the greatest scoundrel under the all-seeing sun! Not therefore would he receive or acknowledge him! Swine were the natural companions of the prodigal, and the sooner he was with them the better! There was truth in the remark, but hell in the spirit of it: for the heart of the father was turned from his son. The Messiah came to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. Strange it should ever have wanted doing! But it wants doing still. There is scarce a discernible segment of the round of unity between many fathers and their children.

Gerald Raymount went walking through the pine-woods on his hills. Little satisfaction lay in land to which such a son was to succeed! No! the land was his own! not an acre, not as much as would bury him, should the rascal have!

Alas! he had taken honesty as a matter of course in *his* family. Were they not *his* children? He had not thought of God as

the bond of life between him and them, nor sought to nourish the life in them. He was their father and was content with them. He had pondered much the laws by which society proceeds and prospers, but had not endeavoured in his own case to carry towards perfection the relation that goes first to the making of society: the relation between himself and his children had been left to shift for itself. He had never known anything of what was going on in the mind of his son. He had never asked himself if the boy loved the truth —if he cared that things should stand in him on the footing of eternal reason, or if his consciousness was anything better than the wallowing of a happy-go-lucky satisfaction in being. And now he was astonished to find *his* boy no better than the common sort of human animal! My reader may say he was worse, for there is the stealing; but that is just the point in which I see him likest the common run of men, while in his home-relations he was worse. It is my conviction that such an act of open disgrace as he had been guilty of, may

be the outcome of evil more easy to cast off than that indicated by home-habits embodying a selfishness regarded as a mere matter of course. There is little hope of the repentance and redemption of certain some until they have committed one or another of the many wrong things of which they are daily, through a course of unrestrained selfishness, becoming more and more capable. Few seem to understand that the true end is not to keep their children from doing what is wrong, though that is on the way to it, but to render them incapable of doing wrong. While one is capable of doing wrong, he is no nearer right than if that wrong were done—not so near as if the wrong were done and repented of. Some minds are never roused to the true nature of their selfishness until, having done some patent wrong, the eyes of the collective human conscience are fixed with the essence of human disapprobation and general repudiation upon them. Doubtless in the disapproving crowd are many just as capable of the wrong as they, but the deeper nature in them, God's and not

yet theirs, utters its disapproval, and the culprit feels it. Happy he if then at last he begin to turn from the evil itself, so repenting! This Cornelius had not begun to do yet, but his illness, while perhaps it delayed the time when the thought of turning should present itself, made it more likely the thought would be entertained when it did present itself.

The father came back from his lonely walk, in which his communion with nature had been of the smallest, as determined as before that his son, having unsonned himself, should no more be treated as a son. He could not refuse him shelter in his house for a time, but he should be in it on sufferance—in no right of sonship, and should be made to understand it was so!

But the heart of the mother was longing after her boy, like a human hen whose chicken had run from under her wing and come to grief. He had sinned, he had suffered, and was in disgrace—good reasons why the mother's heart should cling to the youth, why her arms should long to fold him to her bosom! The things which made

his father feel he could not speak to him again, worked in the deeper nature of the mother in opposite fashion. In her they reached a stratum of the divine. Was he unlovely?—she must love him the more! Was he selfish and repellent?—she must get the nearer to him! Everything was reason to her for love and more love. If he were but with her! She would clasp him so close that evil should not touch him! Satan himself could not get at him with her whole mother-being folded round him! She had been feeling of late as if she could not get near him: now that sickness had reduced his strength, and shame his proud spirit, love would have room to enter and minister! The good of all evil is to make a way for love, which is essential good. Therefore evil exists, and will exist until love destroy and cast it out. Corney could not keep his mother out of his heart now! she thought. There were ten things she could do for him now to one she could have done for him before! When, oh when would he appear, that her heart might go out to meet him!

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETURN.

The day came. It was fine in London. The invalid was carefully wrapt up for the journey. Hester, the major, and Miss Dasomma followed the young couple to the station. There the last received the poor little wife, and when the train was out of sight, took her home with her. The major, who got into the next carriage, at every stop ran to see if anything was wanted; and when they reached the station, got on the box of the carriage the mother had sent to meet them, and so Hester bore her lost sheep home—in little triumph, and much anxiety.

When they stopped at the door no one was on the outlook for them. The hall was not lighted, and the door was locked. The

major rang the bell. Ere the door was opened Hester had got down and stood waiting. The major took the youth in his arms and carried him into the dining-room, so weary that he could scarcely open his eyes. There seemed no light in the house except the candle the man brought when he came to open the door.

Corney begged to be put to bed.

"I wish Amy was here!" he murmured.

Hester and the major were talking together.

Hester hurried from the room and returned in a moment.

"I was sure of it!" she whispered to the major. "There is a glorious fire in his room, and everything ready for him. The house is my father, but the room is my mother, and my mother is God."

The major took him again and carried him up the stair—so thin and light was he.

The moment they were past the door of her room, out came the mother behind them in her dressing-gown, and glided pale and noiseless as the disembodied after them. Hester looked round and saw her, but she

laid her finger on her lips, and followed without a word. When they were in the room, she came to the door, looked in, and watched them, but did not enter. Cornelius did not open his eyes. The major laid him down on the sofa near the fire. A gleam of it fell on his face. The mother drew a sharp quick breath, and pressed her hands against her heart: there was his sin upon his face, branding him that men might know him! But therewith came a fresh rush from the inexhaustible fount of mother-love. She would have taken him into her anew, with all his sin and pain and sorrow, to clear away in herself brand and pollution, and bear him anew—even as God bears our griefs and carries our sorrows, destroys our wrongs, taking their consequences on himself, and gives us the new birth from above. Her whole wounded heart seemed to go out to him in one trembling sigh as she turned to go back to the room where her husband sat with hopeless gaze fixed on the fire. She had but strength to reach the side of the bed, and fell senseless upon it.

He started up with a sting of self-accusa-

tion: he had killed her, exacting from her a promise that by no word would she welcome the wanderer that night. For she would not have the father imagine in his bitterness that she loved the erring son more than the husband whose heart he had all but broken, and had promised. She was in truth nearly as anxious about the one as the other, for was not the unforgivingness of the one as bad—was it not even worse than the theft of the other?

He lifted her, laid her on the bed, and proceeded to administer the restoratives he now knew better than any other how to employ. In a little while her eyelids began to tremble. "My baby!" she murmured, and tears began to flow.

"Thank God!" he said, and got her to bed.

But for all his stern fulfilment of duty he did not feel fit to lie down by his wife. He would watch: she might have another bad turn!

From the exhaustion that follows excess of feeling, she slept. He sat wakeful by the fire. She was his only friend, he said, and

now she and he were no more of one mind! Never until now had they had a difference!

Hester and the major got Corney to bed, and he was instantly fast asleep. The major arranged himself to pass the night by the fire, and Hester went to see what she could do for her mother. Knocking softly at the door and receiving no answer, she peeped in: there sat her father, and there slept her mother: she would not disturb them, but, taking her share in the punishment of him she had brought home, retire without welcome or good-night. She too was presently fast asleep. There was no gnawing worm of duty undone or wrong unpardoned in her bosom to keep her awake. Sorrow is sleepy, pride and remorse are wakeful.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HEAVENLY VISION.

The night began differently with the two watchers. The major was troubled in his mind at what seemed the hard-heartedness of the mother, for he loved her with a true brotherly affection. He had not seen her looking in at the door; he did not know the cause of her appearing so withdrawn and unmotherly: he forgot his shilling novel and his sherry and water, and brooded over the thing. He could not endure the low-minded cub, he said to himself; he would gladly, if only the wretch were well enough, give him a sound horse-whipping; but to see him so treated by father and mother was more than he could bear: he began to pity a lad born of parents so hard-hearted. What would have become of himself, he thought, if his

mother had treated him so! He had never, to be sure, committed any crime against society worse than shocking certain ridiculously proper people; but if she had made much of his foibles and faults, he might have grown to be capable of—how could he tell what? Who would turn out a mangy dog that was his own dog! If the fellow were his he would know what to do with him! He did not reflect that just because he was not his, he did not feel the wounds that disabled from action. It was easy for him unhurt to think what he would do if he were hurt. Some things seem the harder to forgive the greater the love. It is but a false seeming, thank God, and comes only of selfishness, which makes both the love and the hurt seem greater than they are.

And as the major sat thinking and thinking, the story came back to him which his mother had so often told him and his brothers, all now gone but himself, as they stood or sat or lay gathered round her on the Sunday evenings in the nursery—about the boy that was tired of being at home, and asked his father for money to go away;

and how his father gave it him, thinking it better he should go than grumble at the best he could give him; and how he grew very naughty, and spent his money in buying things that were not worth having, and eating and drinking with greedy, coarse, ill behaved people, till at last he had nothing left to buy food with, and had to feed swine to earn something; and how he fell a thinking, and would go home. It all came back to his mind just as his mother used to tell it—how the poor prodigal, ragged and dirty and hungry, set out for home, and how his father spied him coming a great way off, and knew him at once, and set out running to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. This father would not even look at the son that had but just escaped the jaws of death! True, the prodigal came home repentant; but the father did not wait to know that, but ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him. Only he had to go home, else how was his father to receive him!

As the major thus reflected, he kept coming nearer and nearer to the individual *I*, lurking at the keyhole of every story.

"I wonder now," he said, "if when a man dies, this is counted for going home! I hardly think it; that is a thing the man can't help at all; he has no hand in the doing of it. Who would come out to meet a fellow because he was flung down dead at his door! I fear I should find myself in no better box than this young rascal when he comes home because he can't help it!"

The end of it was that the major, there in the middle of the night, went down on his knees, and, as he had not now done since the eve of his last battle, tried to say the prayers his mother had taught him. Presently he found himself saying things she had not taught him—speaking from his heart as if one was listening, one who in the dead of the night did not sleep, but kept wide awake lest one of his children should cry.

"It is time," said the major to himself the next day, "that I began to think about going home. I will try again to-night!"

In his wife's room Gerald Raymount sat on into the dead waste and middle of the night. At last, as his wife continued quietly

asleep, he thought he would go down to his study, and find something to turn his thoughts from his misery. None such had come to him as to his friend. He had been much more of a religious man than the major—had his theories concerning both the first and the second table of the law; nor had he been merely a talker, though his talk, as with all talkers, was constantly ahead of his deed: well is it for those whose talk is not ahead of their endeavour! but it was the *idea* of religion, and the thousand ideas its brood, more than religion itself, that was his delight. He philosophized, and philosophized well of the relations between man and his maker, of the necessity to human nature of belief in a God, of the disastrous consequences of having none, and such like things; but having such an interest is a very different thing from being in such relation with the father that the thought of him is an immediate and ever returning joy and strength. He did not rejoice in the thought of the inheritance of the saints in light, as the inheriting of the nature of God, the being

made partaker of the Father's essential blessedness: he was far yet from that. He was so busy understanding with his intellect, that he missed the better understanding of heart and imagination. He was always so pleased with the thought of a thing, that he missed the thing itself—whose *possession*, and not its thought, is essential. Thus when the trial came, it found him no true parent. The youth of course could not be received either as clean-handed or as repentant; but love is at the heart of every right way, and essential forgiveness at the heart of every true treatment of the sinner, even in the very refusal of external forgiveness. That the father should not have longed above all things for his son's repentance; that he should not have met even a seeming return; that he should have nourished resentment because the youth had sinned against *his* family in which as his he had gloried; that he should care to devise no measures for generating a sense of the evil he had done, and aiding such repentance as makes forgiveness a necessary consequence; that he should ruminate how

to make him feel most poignantly his absolute scorn of him, his loathing of his all but convict son—this made the man a kind of paternal Satan who sat watching by the repose of the most Christian, because most loving, most forgiving, most self-forgetting mother, stirring up in himself fresh whirlwinds of indignation at the incredible thing which had become the fact of facts, heaviest, stinging deepest, seeming unchangeable. That it might prove a blessing, he would have spurned as a suggestion equally degrading and absurd. "What is done is done," he would have said, in the mingled despair of pride and pride of despair; "and all the power of God cannot make the thing otherwise. We can hold up our heads no more for ever. My own son has not only disgraced but fooled me, giving men good cause to say, 'Physician, heal thyself!'"

He rose, and treading softly lest he should wake the only being he *felt* love for now, and whom he was loving less than before, for self-love and pride are antagonistic to all loves, left the room and went

to his study. The fire was not yet out; he stirred it and made it blaze, lighted his candles, took a book from a shelf, sat down, and tried to read. But it was no use; his thoughts were such that they could hold no company with other thoughts; the world of his kind was shut out; he was a man alone, because a man unforgiving and unforgiven. His soul slid into the old groove of miserable self-reiteration, whose only result was more friction-heat; and so the night slid away.

The nominal morning if not the dawn was near, when, behold, a wonder of the night! The door between the study and the old library opened so softly that he heard nothing, and ere he was aware a child in long white gown stood by his side. He started violently. It was Mark—but asleep! He had seen his mother and father even more than usually troubled all day, and their trouble had haunted him in his sleep; he had roused him without waking him from his dreams, and the spirit of love had directed his feet to the presence of his father. He stood a little way from

him, his face white, his mouth silent, haunted by a smile of intense quiet, as of one who, being comforted, would comfort. There was also in the look a slight something like idiocy, for his soul was not precisely with his body; his thoughts, though concerning his father, were elsewhere; the circumstances of his soul and of his body were not the same; and so being twinned, that is divided, *twained*, he was as one beside himself. His eyes, although open, evidently saw nothing; and thus he stood for a little time.

There had never been tender relations between Mark and his father like those between the boy and his mother and sister. His father was always kind to him, but betwixt him and his boys he had let grow a sort of hard skin. He had not come so near to them as to the feminine portion of his family—shrank indeed from close relations with their spirits, thoughts, or intents. It arose, I imagine, from an excess of the masculine element in his nature. Even when as merest children they came to be kissed before going to bed, he did not like

the contact of their faces with his. No woman, and perhaps not many men will understand this; but it was always a relief to Mr. Raymount to have the nightly ceremony over. He thought there was nothing he would not do for their good; and I think his heart must in the main have been right towards them: he could hardly love and honour his wife as he did, and not love the children she had given him. But the clothes of his affections somehow did not sit easy on him, and there was a good deal in his behaviour to Cornelius that had operated unfavourably on the mind of the youth. Even Mark, although, as I have said, he loved him as few boys love a father, was yet a little afraid of him—never went to him with confidence—never snuggled close to him—never sat down by his side to read his book in a heaven of twilight peace, as he would by his mother's. He would never have gone to his father's room for refuge from sleeplessness.

Not recognizing his condition his father was surprised and indeed annoyed as well

as startled to see him: he was in no mood for such a visit. He felt also strangely afraid of the child, he could not have told why. Wretched about one son, he was dismayed at the nocturnal visit of the other. The cause was of course his wrong condition of mind; lack of truth and its harmony in ourselves alone can make us miserable; there is a cure for everything when that is cured. No ill in our neighbours, if we be right in ourselves, will ever seem hopeless to us; but while we stand wrapped in our own selfishness, our neighbours may well seem incurable; for not only is there nothing in us to help their redemption, but there is that in ourselves, and cherished in us, which cannot be forgiven, but must be utterly destroyed.

There was an unnatural look, at the same time pitiful and lovely, about the boy, and the father sat and stared in gathering dread. He had nearly imagined him an angel of some doom.

Suddenly the child stretched out his hands to him, and with upcast, beseeching face, and eyes that seemed to be

seeing far off, came close to his knee. Then the father remembered how once before, when a tiny child, he had walked in his sleep, and how, suddenly wakened from it, he had gone into a kind of fit, and had for a long time ailed from the shock. Instantly anxious that nothing of the kind should occur again, he took the child softly in his arms, lifted him to his knees, and held him gently to his bosom. An expression of supreme delight came over the boy's face—a look of absolute contentment mingled with hope. He put his thin hands together, palm to palm, as if saying his prayers, but lifted his countenance to that of his father. His gaze, however, though not its direction, was still to the infinite. And now his lips began to move, and a murmur came from him, which grew into words audible. He was indeed praying to his father, but a father closer to him than the one upon whose knees he sat.

"Dear God," said the child—and before I blame the familiarity, I must know that God is displeased with such address from the mouth of a child: this was not a taught

prayer he neither meant nor felt:—"Dear God!" said the child, "I don't know what to do, for papa and Corney, I am afraid, are both naughty. I would not say so to anybody but you, God, for papa is your little boy as I am his little boy, and you know all about it. I don't know what it is, and I think Corney must be more to blame than my dear papa; but when he came home to-night he did not go to papa, and papa did not go to him. They never said How do you do, or Good-night—and Corney very ill too! and I am always wanting to come to you, God, to see you. O God, you are our big papa! please put it all right. I don't know how, or I would tell you; but it doesn't matter—you would only smile at my way, and take a much better one of your own. But please, dear God, make papa and Corney good, and never mind their naughtiness, only make it just nothing at all. You know they must love one another. I will not pray a word more, for I know you will do just what I want. Good-bye, God; I'm going to bed now—down there. I'll come again soon."

With that he slipped from his father's knee, who did not dare to detain him, and walked from the room with slow, stately step.

By this time the heart of the strong hard man was swelling with the love which, in it all along, was now awake. He could not weep, but sobbed dry, torturing sobs, that seemed as if they would kill him. But he must see the boy was safe in bed, and rising he left the room.

In the corridor he breathed more freely. Through an old window the bright moon, shining in peace with nobody to see, threw partly on the wall and partly on the floor, a shadow-cross, the only thing to catch the eye in the thin light. Severe protestant as Gerald Raymount was, he found himself on his knees in the passage before the shadow—not praying, not doing anything he knew, but under some spiritual influence known only to God.

When the something had reached its height, and the passion for the time was over —when the rush of the huge tidal wave of eternity had subsided, and his soul was

clearing of the storm that had swept through it, he rose from his knees and went up to Mark's room, two stories higher. The reflected moonlight was there too, for the boy had drawn back the window-curtains that from his pillow he might see the stars, and the father saw his child's white bed glimmering like a tomb. He drew near, but through the gray darkness it was some seconds before he could rightly see the face of his boy, and for a moment—I wonder how brief a moment is enough for a death-pang to feel eternal!—for an awful moment he felt as if he had lost him: when he left the study, he had been lifted straight to the bosom of the Father to whom he had prayed! Slow through the dusk dawned his face. He had not then been taken bodily!—not the less was he gone!—that was a dead face! But as he gazed in a fascination of fear, his eyes grew abler to distinguish, and he saw that he breathed. He was astonished to find how weak was the revulsion: we know more about our feelings than about anything else, yet scarcely understand them at all; they play

what seem to us the strangest pranks—moving all the time by laws divine.

The boy seemed in his usual health, and was sleeping peacefully—dreaming pleasantly, for the ghost of a smile glinted about his just parted lips. Then upon the father—who was not, with all his hardness, devoid of imagination—came the wonder of watching a dreamer: what might not be going on within that brain, inaccessible as the most distant star?—yea, far more inaccessible, for what were gravity and distance compared with difficulties unnamed and unnamable! No spirit-shallop has yet been found to float us across the gulf, say rather the invisible line, that separates soul from soul. Splendrous visions might be gliding through the brain of the sleeper—his child, born of his body and his soul—and not one of them was open to him! Not one of the thoughts whose lambent smile-flame flitted about his child's lips would pass from him to him! Could they be more divided if the child were dead, than now when he lay, in his sight indeed, yet remote in regions of separated existence?

But how much nearer was the child to him in reality when awake and about the house? How much more did he know then of the thoughts, the loves, the imaginations, the desires, the aspirations that moved in the heart and brain of the child? For all that his contact with him came to, he might as well be dead! A phantom of him moving silent about the house might fill the part as well! The boy was sickly: he might be taken from him ere he had made any true acquaintance with him! He was just the child to die young! He would see him again, it was to be hoped, in the other world, but the boy would have so few memories of him, so few associations with him, that it would be hard to knot the new to the old!

He turned away, and went back to his room. There, with a sense of loneliness deeper than he had ever before felt, he went down on his knees to beg the company of the great being whose existence he had so often defended as if it were in danger from his creatures, but whom he had so little regarded as actually existent that he had

not yet sought refuge with him. All the house was asleep—the major had long ended his prayers and was slumbering by the fire—when Raymount knelt before the living love, the source of his life, and of all the love that makes life a good thing, and rose from his knees a humbler man.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SAD BEGINNING.

Towards morning he went to bed, and slept late—heavily and unreposefully; and, alas! when he woke, there was all the old feeling returned! How *could* he forgive the son that had so disgraced him!

Instead of betaking himself afresh to the living strength, he began—not directly to fight himself, but to try to argue himself right, persuading himself on philosophical grounds that it was better to forgive his son; that it was the part of a wise man, the part of one who had respect to his own dignity, to abstain from harshness, nor drive the youth to despair: he was his son—he must do what he could for him!—and so on. But he had little success. Anger and pride were too much for him. His

breakfast was taken to him, in the study, and there Hester found him an hour after, with it untasted. He submitted to her embrace, but scarcely spoke, and asked nothing about Corney. Hester felt sadly chilled, and very hopeless. But she had begun to learn that one of the principal parts of faith is patience, and that the setting of wrong things right is so far from easy that not even God can do it all at once. But time is nothing to him, who sees the end from the beginning; he does not grudge thousands of years of labour. The things he cares to do for us require our co-operation, and that makes the great difficulty: we are such poor fellow-workers with him! All that seems to deny his presence and labour only necessitates a larger theory of that presence and labour. Yet time lies heavy on the young especially, and Hester left the room with a heavy heart.

The only way in such inward stubbornnesses of the spirit, when we cannot feel that we are wrong, is to open our hearts, in silence and loneliness and prayer, to the

influences from above—stronger for the right than any for the wrong; to seek the sweet enablings of the living light to see things as they are—as God sees them, who is never wrong, because he has no selfishness, but is the living Love and the living Truth, without whom there would be no love and no truth. To rise humbly glorious above our low self, to choose the yet infant self that is one with Christ, who sought never his own but the things of his father and brother, is the redemption begun, and the inheritance will follow. Mr. Raymount, like most of us, was a long way indeed from this yet. He strove hard to reconcile the memories of the night with the feelings of the morning—strove to realize a state of mind in which a measure of forgiveness to his son blended with a measure of satisfaction to the wounded pride he called paternal dignity. How could he take his son to his bosom as he was? he asked—but did not ask how he was to draw him to repentance. He did not think of the tender entreaty with which, by the mouths of his prophets, God

pleads with his people to come back to him. If the father, instead of holding out his arms to the child he would entice to his bosom, folds them on that bosom, and turns his back—expectant it may be, but giving no sign of expectancy, the child will hardly suppose him longing to be reconciled. No doubt there are times when and children with whom any show of affection is not only useless but injurious, tending merely to increase their self-importance, and in such case the child should not see the parent at all; but it was the opposite reason that made it better Cornelius should not yet see his father: he would have treated him so that he would only have hated him.

For a father not to forgive is in truth far worse than for a son to need forgiveness; and such a father will of course go from bad to worse as well as the son except he repent. The shifty, ungenerous spirit of compromise awoke in Raymount. He would be very good, very gentle, very kind to every one else in the house! He would, like Ahab, walk softly; he was not ready to walk up-

rightly: his forgiveness he would postpone! He knew his feelings towards Corney were wearing out the heart of his wife—but not yet would he yield! There was little Mark, however! he would make more of him, know him better, and let the child know him better! I doubt if to know his father better just then would have been for Mark to love him more.

He went to see how his wife was. Finding that, notwithstanding all she had gone through the day before, she was a trifle better, he felt a little angry and not a little annoyed: what added to his misery was a comfort to her! she was the happier for having her worthless son! In the selfishness of his misery he looked upon this as lack of sympathy with himself. Such weakness vexed him too in the wife to whom he had for so many years looked up with more than respect, with unacknowledged reverence. He did not even allude to Cornelius, but said he was going for a walk, and went to find Mark—with a vague hope of consolation in the child who had clung to him so confidently in the night. He

had forgotten it was not to him *his soul* had clung, but to the father of both.

Mark was in the nursery, as the children's room was still called. The two never quarrelled; had they been two Saffies, they would have quarrelled and made it up twenty times a day. When Mark heard his father's step, he bounded to meet him; and when his sweet moonlit rather than sunshiny face appeared at the door, the gloom on his father's yielded a little; the gleam of a momentary smile broke over it, and he said kindly,

"Come, Mark, I want you to go for a walk with me."

"Yes, papa," answered the boy. "—May Saffy come too?"

The father was not equal however to the company of two of his children, and Mark alone proceeded to get ready, while Saffy sulked in a corner.

But he was not doing the right thing in taking him out. He ought to have known that the boy was not able for anything to be called a walk; neither was the weather fit for his going out. But absorbed in his

own trouble, the father did not think of his weakness; and Hester not being by to object, they went. Mark was delighted to be his father's companion, never doubted all was right that he wished, and forgot his weakness as entirely as did his father.

With his heart in such a state, the father naturally had next to nothing to say to his boy, and they walked on in silence. The silence did not affect Mark; he was satisfied to be with his father whether he spoke to him or not—too blessed in the long silences between him and God to dislike silence. It was no separation—so long as like speech it was between them. For a long time he was growing tired without knowing it: when weariness became conscious at last, it was thorough, and poor Mark found he could scarcely put one leg past the other.

The sun had been shining when they started—a beautiful, though not very warm spring-sun, but now it was clouded and rain was threatened. They were in the middle of a bare, lonely moor, easily reached from the house, but of considerable extent, and the wind had begun to blow cold. Sunk in

his miserable thoughts, the more miserable that he had now yielded even the pretence of struggle and relapsed into unforgiving unforgiven-ness, the father saw nothing of his child's failing strength, but kept trudging on. All at once he became aware that the boy was not by his side. He looked round: he was nowhere visible. Alarmed, he stopped, and, turning, called his name aloud. The wind was blowing the other way, and that might be the cause of his hearing no reply. He called again, and this time thought he heard a feeble response. He retraced his steps rapidly.

Some four or five hundred yards back, he came to a hollow, where on a tuft of brown heather, sat Mark, looking as white as the vapour-like moon in the daytime.

His anxiety relieved, the father felt annoyed: he was angry with its object, and rated the little fellow for stopping behind.

"I wasn't able to keep up, papa," replied Mark. "So I thought I would rest a while, and meet you as you came back."

"You ought to have told me. I shouldn't have brought you had I known you would

behave so. Come, get up ; we must go home."

"I'm very sorry, papa, but I think I can't."

"Nonsense!"

"There's something gone wrong in my knee."

"Try," said his father, again frightened: Mark had never shown himself whimsical.

He obeyed and rose, but with a little cry dropped on the ground. He had somehow injured his knee that he could not walk a step.

His father stooped to lift him.

"I'll carry you, Markie," he said.

"Oh, no, no, you must not, papa! It will tire you. Set me on that stone, and send Jacob. He carries a sack of meal, and I'm not so heavy as a sack of meal."

His father was already walking homeward with him. The next moment Mark spied the waving of a dress.

"Oh," he cried, "there's Hessie! She will carry me!"

"You little goose!" said his father tenderly, "can she carry you better than I can?"

"She is not stronger than you, papa, because you are a big man ; but I think Hessie has more carry in her. She has such strong arms!"

Hester was running, and when she came near was quite out of breath.

She had feared how it would be when she found his father had taken Mark for a walk, and her first feeling was of anger, for she had inherited not a little of her father's spirit: indirectly the black sheep had roused evils in the flock unknown before. Never in her life had Hester been aware of such a feeling as that with which she now hurried to meet her father. When, however, she saw the boy's arms round his father's neck, and his cheek laid against his, her anger went from her, and she was sorry and ashamed, notwithstanding that she knew by Mark's face, of which she understood every light and shade, that he was suffering much.

"Let me take him, papa," she said.

The father had no intention of giving up the child. But before he knew, Mark had stretched his arms to Hester, and was out of

his into hers. Instinctively trying to retain him, he hurt him, and the boy gave a little cry. Thereupon, with a new pang of pain, and a new sting of resentment, which he knew unreasonable but could not help, he let him go, and followed in distressed humiliation.

Hester's heart was very sore because of this new grief, but she saw some hope in it.

"He is too heavy for you, Hester," said her father. "Surely, as it is my fault, I ought to bear the penalty!"

"It's no penalty—is it, Markie?" said Hester merrily.

"No, Hessie," replied Mark, almost merrily. "—You don't know how strong Hessie is, papa!"

"Yes, I am very strong. And you ain't heavy—are you, Markie?"

"No," answered Mark; "I feel so light sometimes, I think I could fly; only I don't like to try for fear I couldn't. I like to think perhaps I could."

By and by Hester found, with all her good will, that her strength was of the things that can be shaken, and was obliged to yield

him to her father. It was much to his relief, for a sense of moral weakness had invaded him as he followed his children: he was rejected of his family, and had become a nobody in it!

When at length they reached home, Mark was put to bed, and the doctor was sent for.

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER AND SON.

In the meantime Cornelius kept his bed. The moment her husband was gone, his mother rose and hastened to him. Here again was a discord! for the first time since their marriage, a jarring action: the wife was glad the husband was gone that she might do what was right without annoying him: with all her strength of principle, she felt too weak to go openly against him, though she never dreamt of concealing what she did. She tottered across the floor, threw herself on the bed beside her son, and took him to her bosom.

With his mother, Corney had never pretended to the same degree as with other people, and his behaviour to her was now more genuine than to any but his wife. He

clung to her as he had never clung since his infancy; and felt that, let his father behave to him as he might, he had yet a home. All the morning he had been fretting, in the midst of Hester's kindest attentions, that he had not his wife to do things for him as he liked them done;—and in all such things as required for their well-doing a fitting of self to the notions of another, Amy was indeed before Hester—partly, perhaps, in virtue of having been a little while married. But now that Cornelius had his mother, he was more content, or rather less discontented—more agreeable in truth than she had known him since first he went to business. She felt greatly consoled, and he so happy with her that he began to wish that he had not a secret from her—for the first time in his life to be sorry that he was in possession of one. He grew even anxious that she should know it, but none the less anxious that he should not have to tell it.

A great part of the time when her husband supposed her asleep, she had been lying wide awake, thinking of the Corney she had lost, and the Corney that had come home to

her instead: she was miserable over the altered looks of her disfigured child. The truest of mothers, with all her love for the real and indifference to outsides, can hardly be expected to reconcile herself with ease to a new face on her child: she had loved him in one shape, and now had to love him in another! It was almost as if she had received again another child—her own indeed, but taken from her the instant he was born and never seen by her since—whom, now she saw him, she had to learn to love in a shape different from that in which she had been accustomed to imagine him. His sad, pock-marked face had a torturing fascination for her. It was almost pure pain, yet she could not turn her eyes from it. She reproached herself that it gave her pain, yet was almost indignant with the face she saw for usurping the throne of her son's beauty: through that mask she must force her way to the real beneath it! At the same time very pity made her love with a new and deeper tenderness the poor spoilt visage, pathetic in its ugliness. Not a word did she utter of reproach: his father would do

—was doing enough for both in that way! Every few minutes she would gaze intently in his face for a moment, and then clasp him to her heart, as if seeking a shorter way to his presence than through the ruined door of his countenance. Hester, who had never received from her half so much show of tenderness, could not help, like the elder brother in the divine tale, a little choking at the sight; but she soon consoled herself that the less poor Corney deserved it the more he needed it. The worst of it to Hester was that she could not with any confidence look on the prodigal as a repentant one; and if he was not, all this tenderness, she feared, and with reason, would do him harm, causing him to think less of his crime, and blinding him to his low moral condition. But she thought also that God would do what he could to keep the love of such a mother from hurting; and it was not long before she was encouraged by a softness in Corney's look, and a humid expression in his eyes, which she had never seen before. Doubtless had he been as in former days, he would have turned

from such overflow of love as womanish gush; but disgraced, worn out, and even to his own eyes an unpleasant object, he was not so much inclined to repel the love of the only one knowing his story who did not feel for him more or less contempt. Sometimes in those terrible half-dreams in the dark of early morn when suddenly waked by conscience to hold a *tête-à-tête* with her, he would imagine himself walking into the bank, and encountering the eyes of all the men on his way to his uncle, whom next to his father he feared — then find himself running for refuge to the bosom of his mother. She was true to him yet! he would say: yes, he used the word! he said *true!* Slowly, slowly something was working on him—now in the imagined judgment of others, now in the thought of his wife, now in the devotion of his mother. Little result was there for earthly eye, but the mother's perceived or imagined a difference in him. If only she could descry something plain to tell her husband! if the ice that froze up the spring of his love would but begin to melt! For to whom are we to go for refuge

from ourselves if not to those through whom we were born into the world, and who are to blame for more or less of our unfitness for a true life!—"His father *must* forgive him!" she said to herself. She would go down on her knees to him! Their boy should *not* be left out in the cold! If he had been guilty, what was that to the cruel world so ready to punish, so ready to do worse! The mother still carried in her soul the child born of her body, preparing for him the new and better, the all-lovely birth of repentance unto life.

Hester had not yet said a word about her own affairs. No one but the major knew that her engagement to lord Gartley was broken. She was not willing to add yet an element of perturbance to the overcharged atmosphere: she would not add disappointment to grief.

In the afternoon the major, who had retired to the village, two miles off, the moment his night-watch was relieved, made his appearance, in the hope of being of use. He saw only Hester, who could give him but a few minutes. No sooner did he learn Mark's condition, than he insisted on taking

charge of him. He would let her know at once if he wanted to see her or any one: she might trust him to his care!

"I am quite as good at nursing—I don't say as you, cousin Hester, or your mother, but as any ordinary woman. You will see I am! I know most of the newest wrinkles, and will carry them out."

Hester could not be other than pleased with the proposal; for, having both her mother and Corney to look after, and Miss Dasomma or Amy to write to every day, she had feared the patient Mark might run some risk of being neglected. To be sure Saffy had a great notion of nursing, but her ideas were in some respects, to say the least, a little peculiar; and though at times she was a great gain in the sick room, she could hardly be intrusted with entire management of the same. So the major took the position of head-nurse, with Saffy for aid, and one of the servants for orderly.

Hester's mind was almost constantly occupied with thinking how she was to let her father and mother know what they must know soon, and ought to know as soon as

possible. She would tell her father first; her mother should not know till he did: she must not have the anxiety of how he would take it. But she could not see how to set about it. She had no light, and seemed to have no leading—felt altogether at a standstill, without impulse or energy. She waited, therefore, as she ought; for much harm comes of the impatience that outstrips guidance. People are too ready to think *something* must be done, and forget that the time for action may not have arrived, that there is seldom more than one thing fit to be done, and that the wrong thing must in any case be worse than nothing.

Cornelius grew gradually better, and at last was able to go down stairs. But the weather continued so far unfavourable, that he could not go out. He had not yet seen his father, and his dread of seeing him grew to a terror. He never went down until he knew he was not in the house, and then would in general sit at some window that commanded the door by which he was most likely to enter. He enticed Saffy from

attendance on Mark to be his scout, and bring him word in what direction his father went. This did the child incalculable injury. The father was just as anxious to avoid him, fully intending, if he met him, to turn his back upon him. But it was a rambling and roomy old house, and there was plenty of space for both. A whole week passed and they had not met—to the disappointment of Hester, who cherished some hope in a chance encounter.

She had just one consolation: ever since she had Cornelius safe under her wing, the mother had been manifestly improving. But even this continued a source of dissatisfaction to the brooding selfishness of the unhealthy-minded father. He thought with himself—"Here have I been heart and soul nursing her through the illness he caused her, and all in vain till she gets the rascal back, and then she begins at once to improve! She would be perfectly happy with him if she and I never saw each other again!"

The two brothers had not yet met. For one thing, Corney disliked the major, and

for another, the major objected to an interview. He felt certain the disfigurement of Corney would distress Mark too much, and retard the possible recovery of which he was already in great doubt.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS DASOMMA AND AMY.

MISS DASOMMA was quite as much pleased with Amy as she had expected to be, and that was not a little. She found her very ignorant in the regions of what is commonly called education, but very quick in understanding where human relation came in. A point in construction or composition she would forget immediately; but once shown a possibility of misunderstanding avoidable by a certain arrangement, Amy would recall the fact the moment she made again the mistake. Her teachableness, coming largely of her trustfulness, was indeed a remarkable point in her character. It was partly through this that Corney gained his influence over her: superior knowledge was to her a sign of superior goodness.

She began at once to teach her music: the sooner a beginning was made the better! Her fingers were stiff, but so was her will: the way she stuck to her work was pathetic. Here also she understood quickly, but the doing of what she understood she found very hard—the more so that her spirit was but ill at ease. Corney had deceived her; he had done something wrong besides; she was parted from him, and could realize little of his surroundings: all was very different from what she had expected in marrying her Corney! Also, from her weariness and anxiety in nursing him, and from other causes as well, her health was not what it had been. Then Hester's letters were a little stiff! She felt it without knowing what she felt, or why they made her uncomfortable. It was from no pride or want of love they were such, but from her uncertainty—the discomfort of knowing they were no nearer a solution of their difficulty than when they parted at the railway: she did not even know yet what she was going to do in the matter! This prevented all free flow of communication. Unable to say what she

would have liked to say, unwilling to tell the uncomfortable condition of things, there rose a hedge, and seemed to sink a gulf between her and her sister. Amy therefrom naturally surmised that the family was not likely to receive her, and that the same unwillingness, though she was too good to yield to it, was in Hester also. It was not in her. How she might have taken this marriage had Corney remained respectable I am not sure; but she knew that the main hope for her brother lay in his love for Amy and her devotion to him—in her common sense, her true, honest, bright nature. She was only far too good for Corney.

Then again Amy noted, for love and anxiety made her very sharp, that Miss Dasomma did not read to her every word of Hester's letters. Once she stopped suddenly in the middle of a sentence, and after a pause went on with another! Something was there she was not to know! It might have reference to her husband! If so, then something was not going right with him! Was he worse, and were they

afraid to tell her, lest she should go to him? Perhaps they were treating him as her aunts treated her—making his life miserable —and she not with him to help him to bear it! All no doubt because she had married him! It explained his deceiving her! If he had told them, as he ought to have done, they would not have let her have him at all, and what would have become of her without her Corney! He ought not certainly to have told her lies, but if anything could excuse him, this would! So that, making the best of things, and excusing her husband all she could, she was in danger of lowering her instinctively high sense of moral obligation.

She brooded over the matter, but not long, she threw herself on her knees, and begged her friend to let her know what the part of her sister's letter she had not read to her was about.

"But, my dear," said Miss Dasomma, "Hester and I have been friends for many years, and we may well have things to say to each other we should not care that even one we loved so much as you should hear!

—A lady must not be inquisitive, you know."

"I know that, and I never did pry into other people's affairs. Tell me it was nothing about my husband, and I shall be quite content."

"But think a moment, Amy!" returned Miss Dasomma, who began to find herself in a difficulty; "there might be things between his family and him, who have known him longer than you, which they were not quite prepared to tell you all about before knowing you better. Some people in the way they treated you would have been very different from that angel sister of yours! There is nobody like her—that I know!"

"I love her with my whole heart," replied Amy, sobbing, "—next to Cornelius. But even she must not come between him and me. If it is anything affecting him, his wife has a right to know about it—a greater right than any one else; and no one has a right to conceal it from her!"

"Why do you think that?" asked Miss Dasomma, entirely agreeing with her that

she had a right to know, but thinking also, in spite of logic, that one might have a right to conceal it notwithstanding. She was anxious to temporize, for she did not see how to answer her appeal. She could not tell her a story, and she did not feel at liberty to tell her the truth; and if she declined to answer her question, the poor child might imagine something dreadful.

"Why, miss," answered Amy, "we can't be divided! I must do what I can—all I can for him, and I have a right to know what there is to be done for him."

"But can you not trust his own father and mother?" said Miss Dasomma—and as she said it, her conscience accused her.

"Yes, surely," replied Amy, "if they were loving him, and not angry with him. But I have seen even that angel Hester look very vexed with him sometimes, and that when he was ill too! and I know he will never stand that: he will run away as I did. I know what your own people can do to make you miserable! They say a woman must leave all for her husband, and that's true; but it is the other way in the

Bible—I read it this morning! In the Bible it is—'a man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife;' and after that who will say there ought to be anything between him and his parents she don't know about. It's *she* that's got to look after the man given to her like that!"

Miss Dasomma looked with admiration at the little creature—showing fight like a wren for her nest. How rapidly she was growing! how noble she was and free! She was indeed a treasure! The man she had married was little worthy of her, but if she rescued him, not from his parents, but from himself, she might perhaps have done as good a work as helping a noble-hearted man!

"I've got him to look after," she resumed, "and I will. He's mine, miss! If anybody's not doing right by him, I ought to be by and see him through it."

Here Miss Dasomma's prudence for a moment forsook her: who shall explain such *accidents!* It stung her to hear her friends suspected of behaving unjustly.

"That's all you know, Amy!" she blurted

out—and bit her lip in vexation with herself.

Amy was upon her like a cat upon a mouse.

"What is it?" she cried. "I *must* know what it is! You shall *not* keep me in the dark! I *must* do my duty by my husband. If you do not tell me, I will go to him."

In terror at what might be the result of her hasty remark, Miss Dasomma faltered, reddened, and betrayed considerable embarrassment. A prudent person, lapsing into a dilemma, is specially discomfited. She had committed no offence against love, had been guilty of no selfishness or meanness, yet was in miserable predicament. Amy saw, and was the more convinced and determined. She persisted, and Miss Dasomma knew that she would persist. Presently, however, she recovered herself a little.

"How can you wonder," she said with confused vagueness, "when you know he deceived you, and never told them he was going to marry you?"

"But they know nothing of it yet—at least from the way Hester writes!"

"Yes; but one who could behave like that would be only too likely to give other grounds of offence!"

"Then there *is* something more—something I know nothing about!" exclaimed Amy. "I suspected it the moment I saw Hester's face at the door!"—She might have said before that.—"I *must* know what it is!" she went on. "I may be young and silly, but I know what a wife owes to her husband; and a wife who cares for nothing but her husband can do more for him than anybody else can. Know all about it I will! It is my business!"

Miss Dasomma was dumb. She had waked a small but active volcano at her feet, which, though without design against vineyards and villages, would go to its ends regardless of them! She must either answer her questions or persuade her not to ask any.

"I beg, Amy," she said with entreaty, "you will do nothing rash. Can you not trust friends who have proved themselves faithful?"

"Yes, for myself," answered Amy; "but it is my *husband!*"—She almost screamed

the word.—"And I will trust nobody to take care enough of *him*. They can't know how to treat him or he would love them more, and would not have been afraid to let them know he was marrying a poor girl.—Miss Dasomma, what have you got against him? I have no fear you will tell me anything but the truth."

"Of course not!" returned Miss Dasomma, offended, but repressing all show of her feeling. "Why then will you not trust me?"

"I will believe whatever you say; but I will not trust you to tell or not tell me as you please where my husband is concerned. Tell me what it is, or——"

She did not finish the sentence: the postman's knock came to the door, and she bounded off to see what he had brought, leaving Miss Dasomma in fear lest she should appropriate a letter not addressed to her. She returned with a look of triumph—a look so wildly exultant that her hostess was momentarily alarmed for her reason.

"Now I shall know the truth!" she said. "This is from himself!"

And with that she flew to her room. Miss

Dasomma should not hear a word of it! How dared she keep from her what she knew about her husband!

It was Corney's first letter to her. It was filled not with direct complaints, but a general grumble. Here is a part of it.

"I do wish you were here, Amy, my own dearest! I love nobody like you—I love nobody but you. If I did wrong in telling you a few diddle-daddles, it was because I loved you so I could not do without you. And what comforts me for any wrong I have done is that I have you. That would make up to a man for anything short of being hanged! You little witch, how did you contrive to make a fool of a man like me! I should have been in none of this scrape but for you! My mother is very kind to me, of course—ever so much better company than Hester. She never looks as if a fellow had to be put up with, or forgiven, or anything of that sort, in her high and mighty way. But you do get tired of a mother always keeping on telling you how much she loves you. You can't help thinking there must be something behind it all.

Depend upon it she wants something of you —wants you to be good, I daresay—to repent, don't you know, as they call it! They're all right, I suppose, but it ain't nice for all that. And that Hester has never told my father yet!

"I haven't even seen my father. He has not come near me once! Saffy wouldn't look at me for a long time—that's the last of the litter, you know; she shrieked when they called to her to come to me, and cried, 'That's ugly Corney! I won't have ugly Corney!' So you may see how I am used! But I've got her under my thumb at last, and she's useful. Then there's that prig Mark! I always liked the little wretch, though he is such a precious humbug! He's in bed—put out his knee, or something. He never had any stamina in him! Scrofulous, don't you know! They won't let me go near him—for fear of frightening him! But that's that braggart, major Marvel—and a marvel he is, I can tell you! He comes to me sometimes, and makes me hate him—talks as if I wasn't as good as he—as if I wasn't even a gentleman! Many's the time

I long to be back in the garret—horrid place! alone with my little Amy!"

So went the letter.

When Amy next appeared before Miss Dasomma, she was in another mood. Her eyes were red with weeping, and her hair was in disorder. She had been lying now on the bed, now on the floor, tearing her hair, and stuffing her handkerchief in her mouth.

"Well, what is the news?" asked Miss Dasomma, as kindly as she could speak, and as if she saw nothing particular in her appearance.

"You must excuse me," replied Amy, with the stiffness of a woman of the world resenting intrusion. But the next moment she said, "Do not think me unkind, miss; there is nothing, positively nothing, in the letter interesting to any one but myself."

Miss Dasomma said nothing more. Perhaps she was going to escape without further questioning; and though not a little anxious as to what the letter might contain to have put the poor girl in such a state, she would not risk the asking of a single question more.

The solemn fact was, that his letter, in conjunction with the word Miss Dasomma let slip, had at last begun to open Amy's eyes a little to the real character of her husband. She had herself seen a good deal of his family, and found it hard to believe they would treat him unkindly, nor did he exactly say so; but his father had not been once to see him since his return!—Corney had not mentioned that he himself had, all he could, avoided meeting his father.—If then they did not yet know he was married, that other thing—the cause for such treatment of a son, just escaped the jaws of death, must be a very serious one! It might be very hard, it might be even unfair treatment —she could not tell; but there must be something to explain it—something to show it not altogether the monstrous thing it seemed! I do not say she reasoned thus, but her genius reasoned thus for her.

Of course it must be the same thing that made him take to the garret and hide there! The more she thought of it the more convinced was she that he had done something hideously wrong. It was a sore

conviction to her, and would have been a sorer yet had she understood his playful blame of her in the letter. But such was the truth of her devotion that she would only have felt accountable for the wrong, and bent body and soul to make up for it.

From the first glimmer of certainty as to the uncertain fact, she saw with absolute clearness what she must do. There was that in the tone of the letter also which, while it distressed her more than she was willing to allow, strengthened her determination—especially the way in which he spoke of his mother, for she not only remembered her kindness at Burcliff, but loved the memory of her own mother with her whole bright soul. But what troubled her most of all was that he should be so careless about the wrong he had done, whatever it was. "I must know all about it!" she said to herself, "or how am I to help him?" It seemed to her the most natural thing that when one has done wrong, he should confess it, and confess it wrong—so have done with it, disowning and casting away the cursed thing: this, alas, Cornelius did

not seem inclined to do! But was she, of all women in the world, to condemn him without knowing what he had to say for himself? She was bound to learn the truth of the thing, if only to give her husband fair play, which she must give him to the uttermost farthing! To wrong him in her thoughts was the greatest wrong woman could do him; no woman could wrong him as she could!

By degrees her mind grew calm in settled resolve. It might, she reasoned, be very well for husband and wife to be apart while they were both happy: they had only to think the more of each other; but when anything was troubling either, still more when it was anything *in* either, then it was horrible and unnatural that they should be parted. What could a heart then do but tear itself to pieces, thinking? It was enough to make one kill one's self!

Should she tell Miss Dasomma what was in her thoughts? Neither she nor Hester had trusted her: need she trust them? She must take her own way in silence, for they would be certain to oppose it! Could

there be a design to keep her and Corney apart?

All the indignant strength and unalterable determination of the little woman rose in arms. She would see who would keep them asunder now she had made up her mind! She had money of her own—and there were the trinkets Corney had given her! They must be valuable, for Corney hated sham things! She would walk her way, work her way, or beg her way, if necessary, but nothing should keep her from Corney!

Not a word more concerning their difference passed between her and Miss Dasomma. They talked cheerfully, and kissed as usual when parting for the night.

The moment she was in her room, Amy began to pack a small carpet-bag. When that was done she made a bundle of her cloak and shawl, and lay down in her clothes. Long before dawn she crept softly down the stairs, and stole out. Thus for the second time was she a fugitive—then *from*, now *to*.

When Miss Dasomma had been down some time, she went up to see why Amy

was not making her appearance: one glance around her room satisfied her that she was gone. It caused her terrible anxiety. She did not suspect at first whither she had gone, but concluded that the letter which had rendered her so miserable contained the announcement that their marriage was not a genuine one, and that, in the dignity of her true heart, she had thereupon at once and for ever taken her leave of Cornelius. She wrote to Hester, but the post did not leave before night, and would not arrive till the afternoon of the next day. She had thought of sending a telegram, but saw that that might do mischief.

When Amy got to the station she found she was in time for the first train of the day. There was a third-class to it, of course, and she found she had enough money for her ticket, though the purchase of it left her almost penniless.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SICK ROOM.

At Yrndale things went on in the same dull way, anger burrowing like a devil-mole in the bosom of the father, a dreary spiritual fog hanging over all the souls, and the mother wearying for some glimmer of a heavenly dawn. Hester felt as if she could not endure it much longer—as if the place were forgotten of God, and abandoned to chance. But there was one dayspring in the house yet—Mark's room, where the major sat by the bedside of the boy, now reading to him, now telling him stories, and now and then listening to him as he talked childlike wisdom in childish words. Saffy came and went, by no means so merry now that she was more with Corney. In Mark's room she would at times be her old self

again, but nowhere else. Infected by Corney, she had begun to be afraid of her father, and like him watched to keep out of his way. What seemed to add to the misery, though in reality it operated the other way, was that the weather had again put on a wintery temper. Sleet and hail, and even snow fell, alternated with rain and wind, day after day for a week.

One afternoon the wind rose almost to a tempest. The rain drove in sheets, and came against the windows of Mark's room nearly at right angles. It was a cheerful room, though low-pitched and very old, with a great beam across the middle of it. There were coloured prints, mostly of Scripture-subjects, on the walls; and the beautiful fire burning in the bow-fronted grate shone on them. It was reflected also from the brown polished floor. The major sat by it in his easy-chair: he could endure hardship, but saved strength for work, nursing being none of the lightest. A bedroom had been prepared for him next to the boy's: Mark had a string close to his hand, whose slightest pull of it sufficed

to ring a bell which woke the major as instantly as if it had been the opening of a cannonade.

This afternoon, with the rain-charged wind rushing in fierce gusts every now and then against the windows, and the twilight coming on the sooner because the world was wrapt in blanket upon blanket of wet cloud, the major was reading, by no means sure whether his patient waked or slept, and himself very sleepy, longing indeed for a little nap. A moment and he was far away, following an imaginary tiger, when the voice of Mark woke him with the question:

"What kind of thing do you like best in all the world, majie?—I mean *this* world, you know—and of course I don't mean God or any*body*, but things about you, I mean."

The major sat bolt upright, rubbed his eyes, stretched himself, but quietly that Mark might not know he had waked him, pulled down his waistcoat, gave a hem as if deeply pondering, instead of trying hard to gather wits enough to understand the question put to him, and when he

thought his voice sufficiently a waking one not to betray him, answered,

"Well, Mark, I don't think we can beat this same—can we? What do you think?"

"Let's see what makes it so nice!" returned Mark. "First of all, you're there, majie!"

"And you're there, Markie!" said the major.

"Yes, that's all right! Next there's my bed for me, and your easy-chair for you, and the fire for us both! And the sight of your chair is better to me than the feel of my bed! And the fire is *beautiful*, and though I can't *feel* that, because they're not my legs, I know it is making your legs so nice and warm! And then there are the shines of it all about the room! What a beautiful thing a shine is, majie! I wish you would put on your grand uniform, and let me see the fire shining on the gold lace and the buttons and the epaulettes and the hilt of your sword!"

"I will, Markie."

"I've seen your sword, you know, majie! and I think it is the beautifullest thing in

the world. I wonder why a thing for killing should be so beautiful! Can you tell me, majie?"

The major had to think in order to answer that question, but thinking, he hit upon something like the truth of the thing.

"It must be that it is not made for the sake of the killing, but for the sake of the right that would else be trodden down!" he said. "Whatever is on the side of the right ought to be beautiful."

"But ain't a pirate's sword beautiful? I've read of precious stones in the hilt of a pirate's sword! That's not for the right—is it now, majie?"

The boy was gradually educating the man without either of them knowing it—for the major had to *think* in order to give reasonable answers to not a few of Mark's questions. The boy was an unconscious Socrates to the soldier; for there is a Teacher who, by fitting them right together, can use two ignorances for two teachings. Here the ostensible master, who was really the principal pupil, had to think hard.

"Anything," he said at last, "may be

turned from its right use, and then it goes all wrong."

"But a sword looks all right—it shines—even when it is put to a wrong use!"

"For a while," answered the major. "It takes time for anything that has turned bad to lose its good looks."

"But, majie, how can a sword ever grow ugly?"

Again the major had to think.

"When people put things to a bad use, they are not good themselves," he said; "and when they are not good, they are lazy, and neglect things. When a soldier takes to drinking or cruelty, he neglects his weapons, and the rust begins to eat them, and at last will eat them up all."

"What is rust, majie?"

"It is the way a sword rots. A sword is a very strong thing, but not taken care of will not last so long as a silk handkerchief."

At this point the major began to fear Mark was about to lead him into depths and contradictions out of which he would hardly emerge:

"Sha'n't we go on with our reading?" he said.

Mark, however, had not lost sight of the subject they started with, and did not want to leave it yet.

"But, majie," he replied, "we haven't done with what we like best! We hadn't said anything about the thick walls round us—between us and the wide, with the warm fire-sun shining on their smooth side, while the rain is beating and the wind blowing on the rough side. Then there's the wind and the rain all about us, and can't come at us! I fancy sometimes, as I lie awake in the night, that the wind and the rain are huge packs of wolves howling in a Russian forest, but not able to get into the house to hurt us. Then I feel so safe! And that brings me to the best of all. It is in fancying danger that you know what it is to be safe."

"But, Mark, you know some people are really in danger!"

"Yes, I suppose so—I don't quite know! I know that I am not in danger, because there is the great Think between me and all the danger!"

"How do you know he is between you and *all* danger?" asked his friend, willing to draw him out, and with no fear of making him uneasy.

"I don't know how I know it; I only know that I'm not afraid," he answered. "I feel so safe! For you know if God were to go to sleep and forget his little Mark, then he would forget that he was God, and would not wake again; and that could not be! He can't forget me or you, majie, any more than one of the sparrows. Jesus said so. And what Jesus said, lasts for ever. His words never wear out, or need to be made over again.—Majie, I do wish everybody was as good as Jesus! He won't be pleased till we all are. Isn't it glad! That's why I feel so safe that I like to hear the wind roaring. If I did not know that he knows all about the wind, and that it is not the bad man's wind, but the good man's wind, I should be unhappy, for it might hurt somebody, and now it cannot. If I thought he did not care whether everybody was good or not, it would make me so miserable that I should like to die and never come to

life again!—He will make Corney good—won't he, majie?"

"I hope so, Markie," returned the major.

"But don't you think we ought to do something to help to make Corney good? You help me to be good, majie—every day, and all day long! I know mother teaches him, for he's her first-born! He's like Jesus—he's God's first-born! I'm so glad it was Jesus and not me!"

"Why, Mark?"

"Because if it had been me, I shouldn't have had any Jesus to love.—But I don't think we ought to leave Corney to mother all alone: she's not strong enough! it's too hard for her! Corney never was willing to be good! I can't make it out! Why shouldn't he like to be good? It's surely good to be good!"

"Yes, Mark; but some people like their own way when it's ever so nasty, better than God's way when it's ever so nice!"

"But God must be able to let them know what foolish creatures they are, majie!"

It was on the major's lips to say, 'He has sent you to teach it to me, Mark!' but

he thought it better not to say it. And indeed it was better the child should not be set thinking about what he could do so much better by not thinking about it!

The major had grown quite knowing in what was lovely in a soul—could see the same thing lovely in the child and the Ancient of Days. Some foolishly object that the Master taught what others had taught before him, as if he should not be the wise householder with his old things as well as new: these recognize the old things —the new they do not understand, therefore do not consider. Who first taught that the mighty God, the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, was like a child? Who first said, "Love one another as I have loved you"? Who first dared to say, "He that overcometh shall sit down with me on my throne even as I overcame and am set down with my father on his throne"?—taught men that the creature who would but be a true creature should share the glory of his creator, sitting with him upon his throne?

"You see, majie," Mark went on, "it won't do for you and me to be so safe from

all the storm and wind, wrapped in God's cloak, and poor Corney out in the wind and rain, with the wolves howling after him! You may say it's his own fault—it's because he won't let God take him up and carry him: that's very true, but then that's just the pity of it!—It is so dreadful! I can't understand it!"

The boy could understand good, but was perplexed with evil.

While they talked thus in their nest of comfort, there was one out in the wind and rain, all but spent with their buffeting, who hastened with what poor remaining strength she had to the doing of His will. Amy, left at the station with an empty purse, had set out to walk through mire and darkness and storm, up hill and down dale, to find her husband—the man God had given her "to look after."

CHAPTER XVIII.

VENGEANCE IS MINE.

That same morning, Mr. Raymount had found it, or chosen to imagine it necessary —from the instinct, I believe, to oppose inner with outer storm, to start pretty early for the county-town, on something he called business, and was not expected home before the next day. Assuming heart in his absence, Cornelius went freely wandering about the house, many parts of which had not yet lost to him the interest of novelty, and lunched with his mother and Hester and Saffy like one of the family. His mother, wisely or not, did her best to prevent his feeling any difference from old times: where one half of the parental pair erred so much on the side of severity, perhaps it was well that the other should

err on that of leniency—I do not know; I doubt if it was right; I think she ought, but am not sure, to have justified her husband's conduct, to the extent to which it would bear justification, by her own. But who shall be sure what would have been right for another, where so much was wrong and beyond her setting right! If what is done be done in faith, some good will come out of our mistakes even; only let no one mistake self-will for that perfect thing faith!

Their converse at table was neither very interesting nor very satisfactory. How could it be? As well might a child of Satan be happy in the house of Satan's maker, as the unrepentant Cornelius in the house of his mother, even in the absence of his father. Their talk was poor and intermittent. Well might the youth long for his garret and the company of the wife who had nothing for him but smiles and sweetest attentions!

After dinner he sat for a time at the table alone. He had been ordered wine during his recovery, and was already in some danger of adding a fondness for that to his

other weaknesses. He was one of those slight natures to which wine may bring a miserable consolation. But the mother was wise, and, aware of the danger, kept in her own hands the administering of the medicine. To-day, however, called from the room by some accident, she had not put away the decanter, and Cornelius had several times filled his glass before she thought of her neglect. When she re-entered he sat as if he were only finishing the glass she had left him with. The decanter revealed what had taken place, but the mother, blaming herself, thought it better to say nothing.

Cornelius, leaving the room in a somewhat excited mood, but concealing it, sauntered into the library, and thence into the study, where was his father's own collection of books. Coming there upon a volume by a certain fashionable poet of the day, he lighted the lamp which no one used but his father, threw himself into his father's chair, and began to read. He never had been able to read long without weariness, and from the wine he had drunk and his weak-

ness, was presently overcome with sleep. His mother came and went, and would not disturb him, vexed that she failed in her care over him. I fear, poor lady! her satisfaction in having him under her roof was beginning to wane in the continual trouble of a presence that showed no signs of growth any more than one of the dead. But her faith in the over-care of the father of all was strong, and she waited in hope.

The night now was very dark, "with hey, ho, the wind and the rain!" Up above, the major and the boy talked of sweet, heavenly things, and down below the youth lay snoring, where, had his father been at home, he dared not have showed himself. The mother was in her own room, and Hester in the drawing-room—where never now, in the oppression of these latter times, did she open her piano. The house was quiet but for the noise of the wind and the rain, and those Cornelius did not hear.

He started awake and sat up in terror. A hand was on his shoulder, gripping him like a metal instrument, not a thing of flesh and blood. The face of his father was

staring at him through the lingering vapours of his stupid sleep.

Mr. Raymount had started with a certain foolish pleasure in the prospect of getting wet through, and being generally ill used by the weather—which he called *atrocious*, and all manner of evil names, while not the less he preferred its accompaniment to his thoughts to the finest blue sky and sunshine a southern summer itself could have given him. Thinking to shorten the way he took a certain cut he knew, but found the road very bad. The mud drew off one of his horse's shoes, but he did not discover the loss for a long way, not until he came to a piece of newly mended road. There the poor animal fell suddenly lame. There was a roadside smithy a mile or two farther on, and dismounting he made for that. The smith, however, not having expected anything to do in such weather, and having been drinking hard the night before, was not easily persuaded to appear. Mr. Raymount, therefore, leaving his horse in the smithy, walked to an inn yet a mile or two farther on, and there dried his clothes and

had some refreshment. By the time his horse was brought him and he was again mounted, the weather was much worse; he thought he had had enough of it; and it was so late besides that he could not have reached the town in time to do his business. He gave up his intended journey therefore, and turning aside to see a friend in the neighbourhood, resolved to go home again the same night.

His feelings when he saw his son asleep in his chair, were not like those of the father in that one story of all the world. He had been giving place to the devil for so long, that the devil was now able to do with him as he would—for a season at least. Nor would the possessed ever be able to recognize the presence of the devil, if he had not a minute or two of his will with them. Or is it that the miserable possessed goes farther than the devil means him to go? I doubt if he cares that we should murder; I fancy he is satisfied if only we hate well. Murder tends a little to repentance, and he does not want that. Anyhow, we cherish the devil like a spoiled child, till

he gets too bad and we find him unendurable. Departing then, he takes a piece of the house with him, and the tenant is not so likely to mistake him when he comes again. Must I confess it of this man so much before the multitude of men, that he was annoyed, even angry, to see this unpleasant son of his asleep in *his* chair! "The sneak!" he said; "he dares not show his face when I'm at home, but the minute he thinks me safe, gets into my room, and lies in my chair!—Drunk, too, by Jove!" he added, as a fume from the sleeper's breath reached the nostrils beginning to dilate with wrath. "What can that wife of mine be about, letting the rascal go on like this! She is faultless except in giving me such a son—and then helping him to fool me!" He forgot the old forger of a bygone century! His side of the house had, I should say, a good deal more to do with what was unsatisfactory in the lad's character than his wife's.

The devil saw his chance, sprang up, and mastered the father.

"The snoring idiot!" he growled, and

seizing his boy by the shoulder and the neck, roughly shook him awake.

The father too had been drinking, not what would have been by any of the neighbours thought too much, but enough to add to the fierceness of his wrath, and make him yet more capable of injustice. He had come into the study straight from the stable, and when the poor creature looked up half-awake, and saw his father standing over him with a heavy whip in his hand, he was filled with a terror that nearly paralyzed him. He sat and stared, with white, trembling lips, red, projecting eyes, and a look that confirmed the belief of his father that he was drunk, whereas he had only been, like himself, drinking more than was good for him.

"Get out of there, you dog!" cried the father, and with one sweep of his powerful arm, half dragged, half hurled him from the chair. He fell on the floor, and in weakness mixed with cowardice lay where he fell. The devil—I am sorry to have to refer to the person so often, but he played a notable part in the affair, and I should be

more sorry to leave him without his part in it duly acknowledged—the devil, I say, finding the house abandoned to him, rushed at once into brain and heart and limbs, and *possessed* them. When Raymount saw the creature who had turned his hitherto happy life into a shame and a misery, lying at his feet thus abject, he became instantly conscious of the whip in his hand, and without a moment's pause, a moment's thought, heaved his arm aloft, and brought it down with a fierce lash on the quivering flesh of his son. He richly deserved the punishment, but God would not have struck him that way. There was the poison of hate in the blow. He raised his arm again; but as it descended, the piercing shriek that broke from the youth startled even the possessing demon, and the violence of the blow was broken. But the lash of the whip found his face, and marked it for a time worse than the small-pox. What the unnatural father would have done next, I do not know. While the cry of his son yet sounded in his ears, another cry, like its echo from another world, rang ghastly through the

storm like the cry of the banshee. From far away it seemed to come through the world of wet mist and howling wind. The next instant a spectral face flitted swift as a bird up to the window, and laid itself close to the glass. It was a French window, opening to the ground, and neither shutters nor curtains had been closed. It burst open with a great clang and clash and wild tinkle of shivering and scattering glass, and a small figure leaped into the room with a second cry that sounded like a curse in the ears of the father. She threw herself on the prostrate youth, and covered his body with hers, then turned her head and looked up at the father with indignant defiance in her flashing eye. Cowed with terror, and smarting with keenest pain, the youth took his wife in his arms and sobbed like the beaten thing he was. Amy's eye gleamed if possible more indignantly still. Protection grew fierce, and fanned the burning sense of wrong. The father stood over them like a fury rather than a fate—stood as the shock of Amy's cry, and her stormy entrance, like that of an avenging angel, had fixed him.

But presently he began to recover his senses, and not unnaturally sprang to the conclusion that here was the cause of all his misery—some worthless girl that had drawn Cornelius into her toils, and ruined him and his family for ever! The thought set the geyser of his rage roaring and spouting in the face of heaven. He heaved his whip, and the devil having none of the respect of the ordinary well bred Englishman for even the least adorable of women, the blow fell. But instead of another and shriller shriek following the lash, came nothing but a shudder and a silence and the unquailing eye of the girl fixed like that of a spectre upon her assailant. He struck her again. Again came the shivering shudder, and the silence: the sense that the blows had not fallen upon Corney upheld the brave creature. Cry she would not, if he killed her! She once drew in her breath sharply, but never took her eyes from his face—lay expecting the blow that was to come next. Suddenly the light in them began to fade, and went quickly out; her head dropped like a stone upon the breast

of her cowardly husband, and there was not even mute defiance more.

What if he had killed the woman! An inquest! A trial for murder!—In lowest depths Raymount saw a lower deep, and stood looking down on the pair with subsiding passion.

Amy had walked all the long distance from the station and more, for she had lost her way. Again and again she had all but lain down to die on the moorland waste on to which she had wandered, when the thought of Corney and his need of her roused her again. Wet through and through, buffeted by the wind so that she could hardly breathe, having had nothing but a roll to eat since the night before, but aware of the want of food only by its faintness, cold to the very heart, and almost unconscious of her numbed limbs, she struggled on. When at last she got to the lodge-gate, the woman in charge of it took her for a common beggar, and could hardly be persuaded to let her pass. She was just going up to the door when she heard her husband's cry. She saw the lighted win-

dow, flew to it, dashed it open, and entered. It was the last expiring effort of the poor remnant of her strength. She had not life enough left to resist the shock of her father-in-law's blows.

While still the father stood looking down on his children, the door softly opened, and the mother entered. She knew nothing, not even that her husband had returned, came merely to know how her unlovely but beloved child was faring in his heavy sleep. She stood arrested. She saw what looked like a murdered heap on the floor, and her husband standing over it like the murderer beginning to doubt whether the deed was as satisfactory as the doing of it. But behind her came Hester peeping over her shoulder. She understood at once. Almost she pushed her mother aside as she sprang to help. Her father would have prevented her. "No, father!" she said, "it is time to disobey." A pang as of death went through her at the thought that she had not spoken. All was clear! Amy had come, and died defending her husband from his father! She put her strong arms

round the dainty little figure, and lifted it like a seaweed hanging limp, its long wet hair continuing the hang of the body and helpless head. Hester gave a great sob. Was this what Amy's lovely, brave womanhood had brought her to! What creatures men were! As the thought passed through her, she saw on Amy's neck a frightful upswollen wale. She looked at her father. There was the whip in his hand! "Oh, papa!" she screamed, and dropped her eyes for shame: she could not look him in the face—not for his shame, but for her shame through him. And as she dropped them she saw the terrified face of Cornelius open its eyes.

"Oh, Corney!" said Hester, in the tone of an accusing angel, and ran with her burden from the room.

The mother darted to her son.

But the wrath of the father rose afresh at sight of her "infatuation."

"Let the hound lie!" he said, and stepped between. "What right has he to walk the earth like a man! He is but fit to go on all fours!—Ha! ha!" he went

on, laughing wildly, "I begin to believe in the transmigration of souls! I shall one day see that son of yours running about the place a mangy mongrel!"

"You've killed him, Gerald!—your own son!" said the mother, with a cold, still voice.

She saw the dread mark on his face,—felt herself like one of the dead. Staggered, and would have fallen. But the arm that through her son had struck her heart, caught and supported her. The husband bore the wife once more to her chamber, and the foolish son, the heaviness of his mother, was left alone on the floor, smarting, ashamed, and fearing for his wife, yet in ignorance that his father had hurt her.

A moment and he rose. But, lo, in that shameful time a marvel had been wrought! —The terror of his father which had filled him was gone. They had met; his father had put himself in the wrong; he was no more afraid of him. It was not hate that had cast out fear. I do not say that he felt no resentment: he is a noble creature who, deserving to be beaten, approves, and

accepts: there are not a few such children: Cornelius was none of such; but it consoled him that he had been hardly used by his father. He had been accustomed to look vaguely up to his father as a sort of rigid but righteous divinity; and in a disobedient, self-indulgent, poverty-stricken nature like his, reverence could only take the form of fear; and now that he had seen his father in a rage, the feeling of reverence, such as it was, had begun to give way, and with it the fear: they were more upon a level. Then again his father's unmerciful use of the whip to him seemed a sort of settling of scores, thence, in a measure, a breaking down of the wall between them. He seemed thereby to have even some sort of claim upon his father: so cruelly beaten he seemed now near him. A weight as of a rock was lifted from his mind by this violent blowing up of the horrible negation that had been between them so long. He felt—as when punished in boyhood—as if the storm had passed, and the sun had begun to appear. Life seemed a trifle less uninteresting than before. He did not yet

know in what a condition his wife was. He knew she was safe with Hester.

He listened, and finding all quiet, stole, smarting and aching, yet cherishing his hurts like a possession, slowly to his room, there tumbled himself into bed, and longed for Amy to come to him. He was an invalid, and could not go about looking for her! it was her part to find him! In a few minutes he was fast asleep once more, and forgot everything in dreams of the garret with Amy.

When Mrs. Raymount came to herself, she looked up at her husband. He stood expecting such reproaches as never yet in their married life had she given him. But she stretched out her arms to him, and drew him to her bosom. Her pity for the misery which could have led him to behave so ill, joined to her sympathy in the distressing repentance which she did not doubt must have already begun, for she knew her husband, made her treat him much as she treated her wretched Corney. It went deep to the man's heart. In the sense of degradation that had seized him—not for

striking his son, who, he said, and said over and over to himself, entirely deserved it, but for striking a woman, be she who she might—his wife's embrace was like balm to a smarting wound. But it was only when, through Hester's behaviour to her and the words that fell from her, he came to know who she was, that the iron, the beneficent spear-head of remorse, entered his soul. Strange that the mere fact of our knowing *who a person is* should make such a difference in the way we think of and behave to that person! A person is a person just the same, whether one of the few of our acquaintance or not, and his claim on us for all kinds of humanities just the same. Our knowledge of any one is a mere accident in the claim, and can at most only make us feel it more. But recognition of Amy showed his crime more heinous. It brought back to Mr. Raymount the vision of the bright girl he used to watch in her deft and cheerful service, and with that vision came the conviction that not she but Corney must be primarily to blame; he had twice struck the woman his son must have

grievously wronged! He must make to her whatever atonement was possible—first for having brought the villain into the world to do her such wrong, then for his own cruelty to her in her faithfulness! He pronounced himself the most despicable and wretched of men: he had lifted his hand against a woman that had been but in her right in following his son, and had shown herself ready to die in his defence! His wife's tenderness confirmed the predominance of these feelings, and he lay down in his dressing-room a humbler man than he had ever been in his life before.

CHAPTER XIX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

HESTER carried poor little Amy to her own room, laid her on her own bed, and did for her all one child of God could do for another. With hands tender as a mother's, and weeping as she had never wept before, she undressed her, put her in a warm bath, then got her into bed, and used every enticement and persuasion to induce her to take some nourishment—with poor success: the heart seemed to have gone out of her. But instinctively Amy asked for milk, and that brought her round better than anything else could have done. Still she lay like one dead, seeming to care for nothing. She scarcely answered Hester when she spoke, though she tried to smile to her: the most pitiful thing was that smile

Hester had ever seen. Her very brain and blood were haunted with the presence of Corney's father. He seemed ever and always to be standing over her and Corney with that terrible whip. All her thought was how to get him away from the frightful place. Hester did her best to reassure her. She told her Corney was fast asleep and little the worse; did all she could to keep her quiet, and soothe her to sleep; and a little after midnight was successful. Then she lay down herself on the sofa beside her bed, sorely exhausted.

In the gray of the morning Mr. Raymount woke. He was aware of a great hush about him. He looked from the window, and saw in the east the first glimmer of a lovely spring-day. The stillness awed, almost frightened him. It was not around him only, but in him; his very soul seemed hushed, as if in his sleep the Voice had said, "Peace! be still." He felt like a naughty child, who, having slept, seems to have slept away his naughtiness. Yesterday seemed far away—only the shudder of it was left; but he knew if he

began to think, it would be back with its agony. Had some angel been by his bedside to soothe him? A demon had surely possessed him! Had it been but hinted as within the bounds of possibility that he should behave to a woman as he had behaved, he would have laughed the idea to scorn! He had always thought himself a chivalrous gentleman! This was the end of his faith in himself! His grand Hester would not feel herself safe from him! Truly a demon had possessed him: might not an angel have been by him as he slept?

What had become of the poor girl? But he needed not be anxious about her: neither his wife nor his daughter would have turned her out into the night! He would still be able to do something for her! He must make atonement for treating her so brutally! Hope dawned feebly on his murky horizon. He would be good to her as he would never have thought of had he not ill-used her so! There was something to be done for everybody—for himself and for poor Amy Amber! If she was gone he

would spend every penny he had to find her! But Cornelius would know! He must see him! He would tell him he was sorry he had struck him!

In the yet dark gray of the morning he went to his son's room.

When he had all but reached the door he saw it was a little open. The next instant he heard a soft voice within speaking persuadingly. He went close and listened. It was Amy's voice!—In his house! In his son's room! And after the lesson he had given them both but the night before! This was too bad!—He pushed the door and looked in! The dainty little figure that had haunted his dreams was half lying on the bed, with an arm thrown round his son. He could not see her face, but he could hear perfectly the words that came through the dusk.

"Corney darling!" she said, "you must get up. You must come away. Here I am to take you from them. I was sure they were not treating you well! That was what made me come. I did not know how cruel they were, or I would have come long

ago. But, Corney, you must have done something very wrong! I don't mean to me; I don't care what you do to me; I am your own. But you must have done something very wrong to make your father so angry with you! And you cannot have said you were sorry, or he would have forgiven you! He can't be a bad man—though he does hurt dreadfully!"

"He is a very good man!" muttered Corney from the pillow.

"But I'm afraid," continued Amy, "if he hasn't been able to make you sorry before, he will never be able now! To beat you as he did last night will not make you repent."

"Oh, he didn't hurt me much! You don't think a fellow would mind that sort of thing from his own father—when he was in a passion, don't you know! Besides, Amy—to you I will confess it—I only gave him too good reason."

"Come, come then. We will go somewhere. I want to make you think the right way about the thing; and when you are sorry, we will come back and tell him so.

Then perhaps he will forgive me, and we shall be all happy again."

What was this he heard! The cunning creature! This was her trick to entice him from his home! And just as the poor boy was beginning to repent too! She knew her trade! She would fall in with his better mood and pretend goodness! She would help him to do what he ought! she would be his teacher in righteousness! Deep, deep she was—beyond anything he had dreamed possible! No doubt the fellow was just as bad as she, but not the less must he do what little he yet might for the redemption of his son!

But as he thought thus it smote him that Cornelius could not but prefer going with one who loved him, and talked to him like that, let her be what she might, to staying with a father who treated him as he had been doing ever since he came home! He would behave to him very differently after this! But he must interfere now, cost what it might! What else was he father for!

He pushed the door wide and went in.

Amy heard and raised herself from the

bed, stood upright, and faced the comer. There was just light enough to see that it was the father. The horrid idea shot through her mind that it was his custom to come thus to his son's room in the night and lash him. She roused every fevered nerve to do battle with the strong man for his son. Clenching her little hands hard, she stood like a small David between the bed and the coming Goliath.

"Get out of this," he said, with the sternness of wrath suppressed.

"I came to take him away," said Amy, beginning to tremble from head to foot. "It is my business to take care of him."

"Your business to take care of him from his own" — he hesitated, then said — "mother?" which certainly was the more fitting word.

"If," answered Amy, "a man is to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, it's the least thing the wife can do to take care of him from his father!"

Mr. Raymount stood confounded: what could the hussey mean? Was she going to pretend she was married to him?

Indignation and rage began to rise afresh. But if he gave way, what might he not be guilty of a second time! A rush of shame choked the words that crowded to his lips; and with the self-restraint came wholesome doubt: was it possible he had married her? Was it not possible? Would it not be just worthy of him to have done so and never told one of his family! At least there need be nothing incredible in it! This girl—yes—plainly she had both cunning and fascination enough to make him not only run after her but marry her! How was he to come at the truth of the thing? The coward would not have the courage to contradict her, but he would know if he were lying!

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that he has married you—without a word to his own father or mother?"

Then out at last spoke Cornelius, rising on his elbow in the bed:

"Yes, father," he said, with slow determination; "I have married her. It is all my fault, not one bit hers. I could never have persuaded her had I not made her believe

you knew all about it and had no objection."

"Why did you not let us know then?" cried the father in a voice which ill suited the tameness of the question.

"Because I was a coward," answered Corney, speaking the truth with courage. "I knew you would not like it."

"Little *you* know of what I like or dislike!"

"You can soon prove him wrong, sir!" said Amy, clasping her hands, and looking up in his face through the growing light of the morning. "Forgive us, and take me too. I was so happy to think I was going to belong to you all! I would never have married him, if I had known—without your consent, I mean. It was very wrong of Corney, but I will try to make him sorry for it."

"You never will!" said Corney, again burying his head in the pillow.

Now first the full horror of what he had done broke upon the mind of Mr. Raymount. He stood for a moment appalled.

"You will let me take him away then?"

said Amy, thinking he hesitated to receive her.

Now whether it was from an impulse of honesty towards her, or of justification of himself, I cannot tell, but he instantly returned:

"Do you know that his money is stolen?"

"If he stole it," she replied, "he will never steal again."

"He will never get another chance. He cannot get a situation now."

"I can. I will work for both. It will only be me instead of him, and that's no difference; he belongs to me as much as I do to him. If he had only kept nothing from me, nothing of this would have happened.—Do come, Corney, while I am able to walk; I feel as if I were going to die."

"And this is the woman I was such a savage to last night!" said Mr. Raymount to himself.

"Forgive me, Amy!" he cried, stretching out his arms to her. "I have behaved like a brute! To strike my son's wife! I deserve to be hanged for it! I shall never

forgive myself! But you must forgive me for Christ's sake."

Long ere he had ended, Amy was in his arms, clinging to him—he holding her fast to his bosom.

The strong man was now the weaker; the father and not the daughter wept. She drew back her head.

"Come, Corney," she cried; "come directly! Out of your bed and down on your knees to your own blessed father, and confess your sins. Tell him you're sorry for them, and you'll never do them again."

Corney obeyed: in some strange, lovely way she had got the mistress-ship of his conscience as well as his heart. He got out of bed at once, went straight down on his knees as she told him, and though he did not speak, was presently weeping like a child. It was a strange group in the gray of the new morning—ah, indeed a new morning for them!—the girl in the arms of the elderly man, and the youth kneeling at their feet, both men weeping, and the girl radiant. Gerald Raymount closed the door on his

son and his son's wife, and hastened to his own to tell her all.

"I feel," he concluded, "as if her forgiveness had taken away my disgrace, which seemed eternal!"

"Then surely will the forgiveness of God and his father take away Corney's disgrace!" said the mother.

Forgiveness is life's one destructive power; no sin can stand before it. Love is the one devouring fire. He casts our sins behind his back, and there everything becomes nothing, less than nothing, and vanity.

That morning, the first time for many weeks, Mrs. Raymount got up immediately after breakfast, and in a few days seemed nearly well. When Corney came down, urged by his wife he went straight to the room where his father sat. He rose and received him with the air of one who had thrown the past away, but with the respect due to a guest rather than the affection that belonged to a son. The father was far from a perfect father yet: he received his son only for Amy's sake. But there was

this fine thing in it—that he showed him *respect* in spite of his bygone faults because he belonged to a woman—a woman the father had himself injured: in virtue of her sufferings, she was the mediator between them. That in other circumstances he would have strongly resented the bringing of her into his family scarcely crossed his mind. She was not in the house a day before he felt as much as Hester that the lodging-house girl was immeasurably beyond Corney's deserts.

"She's a great deal too good for him," he said to her. "The rascal!"

"Except she be the means of changing him quite," returned Hester; "then she will only be *good enough* for him: he can't do with less."

"God alone is good enough for anybody," said the mother.

Father and mother and all began a rapid race of loving her. Corney, though delighted with, and not a little self-important because of her reception, looking on sometimes as if he had made, or at the very least discovered her, was occasionally more than a little

jealous of the pleasure she showed in their affection, and her care to be worthy of it; he seemed to think her in danger of making less of his supreme and far more precious affection! But he could not be expected to make a great or sudden stride in goodness after the kind of life he had hitherto led. It was enough for the present, that he was somewhat changed from the old Corney. The wonder of it was that his acknowledgment of wrong and request for forgiveness which seemed the turning-point, were not of his own initiation but of his wife's. Two are better than one, and two may run marvellously into one.

The major was so much pleased with "the rascal's little wife," that he conceived a real affection for her; and was for her sake not merely civil but kind to "the rascal."

The arrival of this state of things was much favoured by the severe illness into which Amy fell immediately the strain was off her. She was brought almost to death's door. Corney in his turn became nurse, and improved not a little from his own

anxiety, her sweetness, and the sympathy of everyone, his father included, with both of them. But such was her constitution that when she began to recover she recovered rapidly, and was soon ready for the share lovingly allotted her in the duties of the house.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MESSAGE.

But the precious little Mark did not get better; and it soon became very clear to the major that, although months might elapse ere he left them, go he must before long. It was the sole cloud that now hung over the family. But the parting drew nigh so softly and with so little increase of suffering, also with such a changeless continuance of sweet loving ways, and mild but genuine enjoyment of existence, that of those who would most feel the loss of him he only was thoroughly aware that death was at the door. The rest said the summer would certainly restore him; but the major expected him to die in the first of the warm weather. The child himself

believed he was going soon. His patience, resting upon entire satisfaction with what God pleased, was wonderful.

"Isn't it nice, majie," he said more than once, in differing forms, "that I have nothing to do with anything—that there is no preparation, no examination wanted for dying? It's all done for you! You have just to be lifted and taken—and that's so nice! I don't know what it will feel like, but when God is with you, you don't mind anything."

Another time he said,

"I was trying, while you were resting, majie, to tell Saffy a dream I had; and when I had told her, she said, 'But it's all nonsense, you know Mark! It's only a dream!'—What do you think, majie?"

"Was it a dream, Mark?" asked the major.

"Yes, it was a dream; but do you think a dream is nothing at all? I think, if it is a good dream, it must be God's. For you know every good as well as every perfect gift is from the father of lights! He made the thing that dreams and the

things that set it dreaming; so he must be the master of the dreams—at least when he pleases—and surely always of those who mind him!—The father of lights!" he repeated; "what a beautiful name! The father of all the bright things in the world! Hester's eyes, and your teeth, majie! and all the shines of the fire on the things in the room! and the sun and the far-away stars that I shall know more about by and by! and all the glad things that come and go in my mind, as I lie here and you are sitting quiet in your chair, majie!—and sometimes at night, oh, so many! when you think I am sleeping! Oh, I will love him, and be afraid of nothing! I know he is in it all, and the dark is only the box he keeps his bright things in! Oh, he is such a good father of lights! Do you know, majie, I used to think he came and talked to me in the window-seat when I was a child! What if he really did, and I should be going to be made sure that he did—up there, I mean, you know—I don't know where, but it's where Jesus went when he went back to his papa! Oh, how

happy Jesus must have been when he got back to his papa!"

Here he began to cough, and could not talk more; but the major did not blame himself that he had not found the heart to stop him, though he knew it was not what is called *good* for him: the child when moved to talk must be happier talking, and what if he died a few minutes sooner for it!—was born again rather! thought the major to himself—and almost added, "I would that my time were come!" For the child's and the soldier's souls had got nearer to each other than were yet any two souls in that house in absolute love.

A great silent change, not the less a development, had been and was passing in the major. Mark not only was an influence on him altogether new, but had stirred up and brought alive in him a thousand influences besides, not merely of things hitherto dormant in him, but of memories never consciously operant — words of his mother; a certain Sunday-evening with her; her last blessing on his careless head; the verse of a well-known hymn she had

repeated as she was dying; old scraps of things she had taught him: dying little Mark gave life to these, and many other things. The major had never been properly a child, but now he lived his childness over again with Mark in a better fashion.

"I have had such a curious, such a beautiful dream, majie!" he said, waking in the middle of one night the major was sitting up with him: he was never left alone now.

"What was it, Markie?" the major asked.

"I should like Corney to hear it," returned Mark.

"I will call him, and you can then tell it us together."

"Oh, I don't think it would do to wake Corney up! He would not like that! He must hear it sometime—but it must be at the right time, else he would laugh at it, and I could not bear that. You know Corney always laughs, without thinking first whether the thing was made for laughing at!"

By this time Corney had been to see Mark often. He always spoke kindly to

him now, but always as a little goose; and Mark, the least assuming of mortals, being always in earnest, did not like the things he wanted to go in at Corney's ears to be blown away by Corney's nose! For Corney had a foolish way of laughing through his nose, and it sounded so scornful, that the poor child would not expose to it what he loved. Hence he was not often ready to speak freely to Corney—or to another when he was within hearing distance.

"But I'll tell you what, majie," he went on, "—I'll tell *you* the dream, and then, if I should go away without having told him, you must tell it to Corney. He won't laugh then—at least I don't think he will. Do you promise to tell him, majie?"

"I will," answered the major, drawing himself up with a mental military salute, and ready to obey to the letter whatever Mark should require of him.

The child began without another word.

"I was somewhere," he said, "—I don't know where, and it don't matter where, for Jesus was there too. And Jesus gave a little laugh, such a beautiful little laugh,

when he saw me! And he said, 'Ah, little one, now you see me! I have been getting your eyes open as fast as I could all the time! We're in our father's house together now!—But, Markie, where's your brother Corney?' And I answered and said, 'Jesus, I'm very sorry, but I don't know. I know very well that I'm my brother's keeper, but I can't tell where he is.' Then Jesus smiled again, and said, 'Never mind, then. I didn't ask you because I didn't know myself. But we must have Corney here—only we can't get him till he sets himself to be good! You must tell Corney, only not just yet, that I want him. Tell him that he and I have got one father, and I couldn't bear to have him out in the cold, with all the horrid creatures that won't be good! Tell him I love him so that I will be very sharp with him if he don't make haste and come home. Our father is *so* good, and it is dreadful to me that Corney won't mind him! He is *so* patient with him, Markie!' 'I know that, Jesus,' I said; 'I know that he could easily take him to pieces again because he don't go well, but he would much

rather make him go right!'—I suppose I was thinking of mamma's beautiful gold watch, with the wreath of different-coloured gold round the face of it: that wouldn't go right, and papa wanted to change it, but mamma liked the old one best. And I don't know what came next.—Now what am I to do, majie? You see I couldn't bear to have that dream laughed at. Yet I must tell it to Corney because there is a message in it for him!"

Whether the boy plainly believed that the Lord had been with him, and had given him a message to his brother, the major dared not inquire. "Let the boy think what he thinks!" he said to himself. "I dare not look as if I doubted." Therefore he did not speak, but looked at the child with his soul in his eyes.

"I do not think," Mark went on, "that he wanted me to tell Corney the minute I woke, for he said—*only not just yet:* he knows I am afraid of his laughing! I think when the time comes he will let me know it is come. But if I found I was dying, you know, I would try and tell him,

whether he laughed or not, rather than go without having done it. But if Corney knew I was going, I don't think he would laugh."

"I don't think he would," returned the major. "Corney is a better boy—a little—I do think, than he used to be. You will be able to speak to him by and by, I fancy."

A feeling had grown upon the household as if there were in the house a strange lovely spot whence was direct communication with heaven—a little piece cut out of the new paradise and set glowing in the heart of the old house of Yrndale—the room where Mark lay shining in his bed, a Christ-child, if ever child might bear the name. As often as the door opened, loving eyes would seek first the spot where the sweet face, the treasure of the house, lay, reflecting already the light of the sunless kingdom.

That same afternoon, as the major, his custom always of an afternoon, dozed in his chair, the boy suddenly called out in a clear voice,

"Oh, majie, there was one bit of my

dream I did not tell you! I've just remembered it now for the first time!—After what I told you—do you remember?—"

"I do indeed," answered the major.

"—After that, Jesus looked at me for one minute—no, not a minute, for a minute—on mamma's watch at least—is much longer, but say perhaps for three seconds of a minute, and then said just one word,—'Our father, Markie!' and I could not see him any more. But it did not seem to matter the least tiny bit. There was a stone near me, and I sat down upon it, feeling as if I could sit there without moving to all eternity, so happy was I; and it was because Jesus's father was touching me everywhere; my head felt as if he were counting the hairs of it. And he was not only close to me, but far and far and farther away, and all between. Near and far there was the father! I neither saw nor felt nor heard him, and yet I saw and heard and felt him so near that I could neither see nor hear nor feel him. I am talking very like nonsense, majie, but I can't do it better. It was God, God everywhere, and

there was no nowhere anywhere, but all was God, God, God; and my heart was nothing, knew nothing but him; and I felt I could sit there for ever, because I was right in the very middle of God's heart. That was what made everything look so all right that I was anxious about nothing and nobody."

Here he paused a little.

"He had a sleeping draught last night!" said the major to himself. "—But the sleeping draught was God's, and who can tell whether God may not have had it given to him just that he might talk to him! Some people may be better to talk to when they are asleep, and others when they are awake!"

"And then, after a while," the boy resumed, "I seemed to see a black speck somewhere in the all-blessed. And I could not understand it, and I did not like it; but always I kept seeing this black speck—only one; and it made me at last, in spite of my happiness, almost miserable. 'Only,' I said to myself, 'whatever the black speck may be, God will rub it white when he is ready!'

for you know he couldn't go on for ever with a black speck going about in his heart! And when I said this, all at once I knew the black speck was Corney, and I gave a cry. But with that the black speck began to grow thin, and it grew thin and thin till all at once I could see it no more, and the same instant Corney stood beside me with a smile on his face, and the tears running down his cheeks. I stretched out my arms to him, and he caught me up in his, and then it was all right; I was Corney's keeper, and Corney was my keeper, and God was all of us's keeper. And it was then I woke, majie, not before."

The days went on. Every new day Mark said, "Now, majie, I do think to-day I shall tell Corney my dream and the message I have for him!" But the day grew old and passed, and the dream was not told. The next and the next and the next passed, and he seemed to the major not likely ever to have the strength to tell Corney. Still even his mother, who was now hardly out of his room during the day, though the major would never yield the active part of

the nursing, did not perceive that his time was drawing nigh. Hester also was much with him now, and sometimes his father, occasionally Corney—and Mrs. Corney, as Mark called her with a merry look—very pathetic on his almost transparent face; but none of them seemed to think his end quite near.

One of the marvellous things about the child was his utter lack of favouritism. He had got used to the major's strong arms and systematic engineering way of doing things as to prefer his nursing to that of any one else; yet he never objected to the substitution of another when occasion might require. He took everything that came to him as in itself right and acceptable. He seemed in his illness to love everybody more than even while he was well. For every one he kept his or her own place. His mother was the queen; but he was nearly as happy with Hester as with her; and the major was great; but he never showed any discomfort, not to say unhappiness, when left alone for a while with Saffy—who was not always so reasonable as he

would have liked her to be. When several were in the room, he would lie looking from one to another like a miser contemplating his riches—and well he might! for such riches neither moth nor rust corrupts, and they are the treasures of heaven also.

One evening most of the family were in the room: a vague sense had diffused itself that the end was not far off, and an unconfessed instinct had gathered them. A lamp was burning, but the fire-light was stronger.

Mark spoke. In a moment the major was bending over him.

"Majie," he said, "I want Corney. I want to tell him."

The major, on his way to Corney, told the father that the end was nigh. With sorely self-accusing heart, for the vision of the boy on the stone in the middle of the moor haunted him, he repaired to the anteroom of heaven.

Mark kept looking for Corney's coming, his eyes turning every other moment to the door. When his father entered he stretched

out his arms to him. The strong man bending over him could not repress a sob. The boy pushed him gently away far enough to see his face, and looked at him as if he could not quite believe his eyes.

"Father," he said—he had never called him *father* before—"you must be glad, not sorry. I am going to your father and my father—to our great father."

Then seeing Corney come in, he stretched his arms towards him past his father, crying, "Corney! Corney!" just as he used to call him, when he was a mere child. Corney bent over him, but the outstretched arms did not close upon him; they fell.

But he was not yet ascended. With a strength seeming wonderful when they thought of it afterwards, he signed to the major.

"Majie," he whispered, with a look and expression into the meaning of which the major all his life long had never done inquiring, "Majie! Corney! you tell!"

Then he went.

I think it was the grief at the grave of Lazarus that made our Lord weep, not his

death. One with eyes opening into both worlds could hardly weep over any law of the Father of Lights! I think it was the impossibility of getting them comforted over this thing death, which looked to him so different from what they thought it, that made the fearless weep, and give them in Lazarus a foretaste of his own resurrection.

The major alone did not weep. He stood with his arms folded, like a sentry relieved, and waiting the next order. Even Corney's eyes filled with tears, and he murmured, "Poor Markie!" It should have been "Poor Corney!" He stooped and kissed the insensate face, then drew back and gazed with the rest on the little pilgrim-cloak the small prophet had dropped as he rose to his immortality.

Saffy, who had been seated gazing into the fire, and had no idea of what had taken place, called out in a strange voice, "Markie! Markie!"

Hester turned to her at the cry, and saw her apparently following something with her eyes along the wall from the bed to the

window. At the curtained window she gazed for a moment, and then her eyes fell, and she sat like one in a dream. A moment more and she sprang to her feet, and ran to the bed, crying again, "Markie! Markie!" Hester lifted her and held her to kiss the sweet white face. It seemed to content her; she went back to her stool by the fire; and there sat staring at the curtained window with the look of one gazing into regions unknown.

That same night, ere the solemn impression should pass, the major took Corney to his room, and recalling every individual expression he could of the little prophet-dreamer, executed, not without tears, the commission intrusted to him. And Corney did not laugh. He listened with a grave, even sad face; and when the major ceased, his eyes were full of tears.

"I shall not forget Markie's dream," he said.

Thus came everything in to help the youth who had begun to mend his ways.

And shall we think the boy found God not equal to his dream of him! He made

our dreaming: shall it surpass in its making his mighty self? Shall man dream better than God? or God's love be inferior to mans' imagination or his own?

CHAPTER XXI.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT.

When Mark's little cloak was laid in the earth, for a while the house felt cold—as if the bit of Paradise had gone out of it, and the sun did not care to shine in any more at its windows. Mark's room was like a temple forsaken of its divinity. But it was not to be drifted up with the sand of forgetfulness! the major put in a petition that it might continue to be called Mark's, but should be considered the major's: he would like to put some of his things in it, and occupy it when he came! Every one was pleased with the idea. They would no longer feel so painfully that Mark was not there when his dear majie occupied the room!

To the major it was thenceforth chamber

and chapel and monument. It should not be a tomb save as upon the fourth day the sepulchre in the garden! he would fill it with live memories of the risen child! Very different was his purpose from that sickly haunting of the grave in which some loving hearts indulge! We are bound to be hopeful, nor wrong our great-hearted father.

Mark's books and pictures remained undisturbed. The major dusted them with his own hands. Every day he read in Mark's bible. He never took it away with him, but always when he returned, whatever part of the bible he might have read in the meantime, he resumed his reading where he had left off in it. The sword the boy used so to admire for its brightness that he had placed it unsheathed upon the wall for the firelight to play upon it, he left there, shining still. In Mark's bed the major slept, and to Mark's chamber he went always to shut to the door. In solitude there he learned a thousand things his busy life had prepared him for learning. The master had come to him in the child. In him was fulfilled a phase of the promise

that whosoever receives a child in the name of Jesus receives Jesus and his father. Through ministering to the child he had come to know the child's elder brother and master. It was the presence of the master in the child that, without his knowing it, opened his heart to him, and he had thus entertained more than an angel.

Time passed, and their hearts began, not through any healing power in time, but under the holy influences of duty and love and hope, to cover with flowers their furrows of grief. Hester's birthday was at hand. The major went up to London to bring her a present. He was determined to make the occasion, if he could, a cheerful one.

He wrote to his cousin Helen asking if he might bring a friend with him. He did not think, he said, his host or hostess knew him, but Hester did: he was a young doctor, and his name was Christopher. He had met him amongst "Hester's friends," and was much taken with him. He would be a great acquisition to their party. He had been rather ailing for some time, and as

there was much less sickness now, he had persuaded him to take a little relaxation.

Hester said for her part she would be most happy to see Mr. Christopher; she had the highest esteem for him; and therewith she told them something of his history. Mr. Raymount had known his grandfather a little in the way of business, and was the more interested in him.

I may mention here that Corney soon began to show a practical interest in the place—first in the look of it—its order and tidiness, and then in its yield, beginning to develop a faculty for looking after property. Next he took to measuring the land. Here the major could give him no end of help; and having thus found a point of common interest, they began to be drawn a little together and to conceive a mild liking for each other's company: Corney saw by degrees that the major knew much more than he; and the major discovered that Corney had some brains.

Everything was now going on well at Yrndale—thanks to the stormy and sorrowful weather that had of late so troubled its

spiritual atmosphere, and killed so many evil worms in its moral soil!

As soon as the distress caused by Corney's offences was soothed by reviving love for the youth and fresh hope in him, Hester informed her parents of the dissolution of her engagement to lord Gartley. The mother was troubled: it is the girl that suffers evil judgment in such a case, and she knew how the tongue of the world would wag. But those who despise the ways of the world need not fret that low minds attribute to them the things of which low minds are capable. The world and its judgments will pass; the poisonous tongue will one day become pure, and make ample apology for its evil speaking. The tongue is a fire, but there is a stronger fire than the tongue. Her father and the major cared little for this aspect of the matter, for they had both come to the conclusion that the public is only a sort of innocent, whose behaviour may be troublesome or pleasant, but whose opinion is worth considerably less than that of a wise hound. The world is a fine thing to save, but a wretch to

worship. Neither did the father care much for lord Gartley, though he had liked him; the major, we know, both despised and detested him.

Hester herself was annoyed to find how soon the idea of his lordship came to be altogether a thing of her past, looking there in its natural place, a thing to trouble her no more. At his natural distance from her, she could not fail to see what a small creature her imagination, and the self that had mingled with her noblest feelings concerning him, had chosen as her companion and help in her schemes of good. But she was able to look on the whole blunder with calmness, and a thankfulness that kept growing as the sting of her fault lost its burning, lenified in the humility it brought.

There was nothing left her now, she said to herself, but the best of all—a maiden life devoted to the work of her master. She was not willing any more to run the risk of losing her power to help the Lord's creatures, down-trodden of devils, *well-to-do* people, and their own miserable weaknesses and

vices. Even remaining constant to duty, she must, in continuous disappointment and the mockery of a false unity, have lost the health and, worse, the spirits necessary to wholesome contact and such work as she was fain to do. In constant opposition to her husband, spending the best part of her strength in resistance ere it could reach the place where it ought to be applied entire, with strife consciously destroying her love and keeping her in a hopeless unrest, how could any light have shone from her upon those whose darkness made her miserable! Now she would hold herself free! What a blessed thing it was to be her own mistress and the slave of the Lord, eternally free! To be the slave of a husband was the worst of all slavery except self-slavery!

Nor was there in this her conclusion anything of chagrin, or pettish self-humiliation. St. Paul abstained from marriage that he might the better do the work given him by the Lord. For his perilous and laborious work it was better, he judged, that he should not be married. It was for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

Her spirits soon returned, more buoyant than before. Her health was better. She found she had been suffering from an oppression she had refused to recognize—already in no small measure yoked, and right unequally. Only a few weeks passed, and, in the prime of health and that glorious thing feminine strength, she looked a yet grander woman than before. There was greater freedom in her carriage, and she seemed to have grown. The humility that comes with the discovery of error had made her yet more dignified: true dignity comes only of humility. Pride is the ruin of dignity, for it is a worshipping of self, and that involves a continuous sinking. Humility, the worship of the Ideal—that is, of the man Christ Jesus, is the only lifter-up of the head.

Everybody felt her more lovable than before. Her mother began to feel an enchantment of peace in her presence. Her father sought her company more than ever in his walks, and not only talked to her about Corney, but talked about his own wrong feelings towards him, and how he

had been punished for them by what they wrought in him. He had begun, he told her, to learn many things he had supposed he knew: he had only thought and written and talked about them! Father and daughter were therefore much to each other now. Even Corney perceived a change in her. For one thing, scarce a shadow remained of that "superiority" which used to irritate him so much, making him rebel against whatever she said. She became more and more Amy's ideal of womanhood; and by degrees she taught her husband to read more justly his beautiful sister. She pointed out to him how few would have tried to protect and deliver him as she had done, how few would have so generously taken herself, a poor uneducated girl, to a sister's heart. So altogether things were going well in the family: it was bidding fair to be a family for evermore.

Miss Dasomma came to spend a few days with Hester, and help celebrate her birthday: she was struck with improvement where she would have been loath to allow it either necessary or possible. Compelled

to admit its presence, she loved her yet more—for the one a fact, the other was a necessity.

Her birthday was the sweetest of summer days, and she looked a perfect summer-born woman. She dressed herself in white, but not so much for her own birthday as for Mark's into the heavenly kingdom.

After breakfast all except the mother went out. Hester was little inclined to talk, and the major was in a thoughtful, brooding mood. Miss Dasomma and Mr. Raymount alone conversed. When the rest reached a certain spot whither Mr. Raymount had led them for the sake of the view, Hester had fallen a little behind, and Christopher went back to meet her.

"You are thinking of your brother," he said, in a tone that made her feel grateful.

"Yes," she answered.

"I knew by your eyes," he returned. "I wish I could talk to you about him. The right way of getting used to death is to go nearer the dead. Suppose you tell me something about him! Such children are rare! They are prophets to whose word we have to listen."

He went on like this, drawing her from sadness with gentle speech about children and death, and the look and reality of things; and so they wandered about the moor for a little while before joining the rest.

Mr. Raymount was much pleased with Christopher, and even Corney found himself drawn to his side, feeling, though he did not know it, a strength in him that offered protection.

The day went on in the simplest, pleasantest intercourse. After lunch, Hester opened her piano, and asked Miss Dasomma, gifted in her art even to the pitch prophetic, to sit down and play—"upon *us*," she said. And in truth she did; for what the hammers were to the strings, such were the sounds she drew from them to the human chords stretched expectant before her. Vibrating souls responded in the music that is unheard. A rosy conscious silence pervaded the summer afternoon and the ancient drawing-room, in which the listeners were one here and one there, all apart—except Corney and "Mrs. Corney," as for love of

Mark she liked to be called, on a sofa side by side, and Saffy playing with a white kitten, neither attending to the music, which may have been doing something for both notwithstanding. Mr. Raymount sat in a great sofa chair with a book in his hand, listening more than reading; his wife lay on a couch, and soon passed into dreams of pleasant sounds; the major stood erect by Miss Dasomma, a little behind her, with his arms folded across his chest; and Christopher sat on a low window-seat in an oriel, where the balmiest of perfumed airs freely entered. Between him and all the rest hung the heavy folds of a curtain, which every now and then swelled out like the sail of Cleopatra's barge "upon the river of Cydnus." He sat with the tears rolling down his face, for the music to which he listened seemed such as he had only dreamed of before. It was the music of climes where sorrow is but the memory of that which has been turned into joy. He thought no one saw him, and no one would have seen him but for the traitor wind seeming only to play with the curtain

but every now and then blowing it wide out, as if the sheet of the sail had been let go, and revealing him to Hester where she sat on a stool beside her mother and held her sleeping hand. It was to her the revelation of a heart, and she saw with reverence. Lord Gartley could sing, lord Gartley could play, lord Gartley understood the technicalities of music; Christopher could neither play nor sing—at least anything more than a common psalm-tune to lead the groans of his poor—and understood nothing of music; but there was in him a whole sea of musical delight, to be set in motion by the enchantress who knew the spell! Such an enchantress might float in the bark of her own will across the heaving waves of that sea, moon and wind of its tides and currents! When the music ceased she saw him go softly from the room.

After an early dinner, early that they might have room for a walk in the twilight, the major proposed the health of his cousin Hester, and made a little speech in her honour and praise. Nor did his praise make

Hester feel awkward, for praise which is the odour of love neither fevers nor sickens.

"And now, cousin Hester," concluded the major, "you know that I love you like a child of my own! It is a good thing you are not, for if you were then you would not be half so good, or so beautiful, or so wise, or so accomplished as you are! Will you oblige me by accepting this foolscap, which I hope will serve to make this blessed day yet a trifle more pleasant to look back upon when Mark has got his old majie again. It represents a sort of nut, itself too bulky for a railway truck. If my Hester choose to call it an empty nut, I don't mind: the good of it to her will be in the filling of it with many kernels."

With this enigmatical peroration, the major made Hester a low bow, and handed her a sheet of foolscap, twice folded, and tied with a bit of white ribbon. She took it with a sweetly radiant curiosity. It was the title-deed of the house in Addison square. She gave a cry of joy, got up, threw her arms round Majie's neck, and kissed him.

"Aha!" said the major; "if I had been a young man now, I should not have had that! But I will not be conceited; I know what she means it for: it is the kiss collective of all the dirty men and women in her dear slums, glorified into that of an angel of God!"

Hester was not a young lady given to weeping, but she did here break down and cry. Her long-cherished dream come true! She had no money, but that did not trouble her: there was always a way of doing when one was willing to begin small!

This is indeed a divine law! There shall be no success to the man who is not willing to begin small. Small is strong, for it only can grow strong. Big at the outset is bloated and weak. There are thousands willing to do great things for one willing to do a small thing; but there never was any truly great thing that did not begin small.

In her delight Hester, having read the endorsement, handed the paper, without opening it, to Christopher, who sat next her, with the unconscious conviction that he would understand the delight it gave

her. He took it and, with a look asking if he might, opened it.

The major had known for some time that Mr. Raymount wanted to sell the house, and believed from the way Hester spent herself in London, he could not rejoice her better than by purchasing it for her; so, just as it was, with everything as it stood in it, he made it his birthday-gift to her.

"There is more here than you know," said Christopher, handing her back the paper. She opened it and saw something about a thousand pounds, for which again she gave joyous and loving thanks. But before the evening was over she learned that it was not a thousand pounds the dear majie had given her, but the thousand a year he had offered her if she would give up lord Gartley. Thus a new paradise of God-labour opened on the delighted eyes of Hester.

In the evening, when the sun was down, they went for another walk. I suspect the major, but am not sure:—anyhow, in the middle of a fir-wood, Hester found herself alone with Christopher. The wood rose

towards the moor, growing thinner and thinner as it ascended. They were climbing westward full in face of the sunset, which was barred across the trees in gold, blue, rosy pink, and a lovely indescribable green, such as is not able to live except in the after sunset. The west lay like the beautiful dead not yet faded into the brown dark of mother-earth. The fir-trees and bars of sunset made a glorious gate before them.

"Oh, Hester!" said Christopher—he had been hearing her called *Hester* on all sides all day long, and it not only came of itself, but stayed unnoticed of either—"if that were the gate of heaven, and we climbing to it now, to go in and see all the dear people!"

"That would be joy!" responded Hester.

"Come, then: let us imagine it a while. There is no harm in dreaming."

"Sometimes when Mark would tell me one of his dreams, I could not help thinking," said Hester, "how much more of reality there was in it than in most so-called realities."

Then came a silence--full of feeling.

"Suppose," began Christopher again, "one claiming to be a prophet appeared, saying that in the life to come we were to go on living just such a life as here, with the one difference that we should be no longer deluded with the idea of something better; that all our energies would then be, and ought now to be spent in making the best of what we had, without any foolish indulgence in hope or aspiration:—what would you say to that?"

"I would say," answered Hester, "he must have had his revelation either from God, from a demon, or from his own heart: it could not be from God, because it made the idea of a God an impossibility; it must come from a demon or from himself, and in neither case was worth paying attention to.—I think," she went on, "my own feeling or imagination must be better worth my own heeding than that of another. The essential delight of this world seems to me to lie in the expectation of a better."

They emerged from the wood: the bare

moor spread on all sides before them, and lo, the sunset was countless miles away! Hills, fields, rivers, mountains, lay between!

Christopher stopped, and turning, looked at Hester.

"Is this the reality?" he said. "We catch sight of the gate of heaven, and set out for it. It comes nearer and nearer. All at once a something they call a reality of life comes between, and the shining gate is millions of miles away! Then cry some of its pilgrims, 'Alas, we are fooled! There is no such thing as the gate of heaven! Let us eat and drink and do what good we can, for to-morrow we die!' But is there no gate because we find none on the edge of the wood where it seemed to lie? There it is, before us yet, though a long way farther back! What has space or time to do with being! Can distance destroy fact? What if one day the chain of gravity were to break, and, starting from the edge of the pine-wood, we fared or flew farther and farther towards the bars of gold and rose and green! And what if even then

we found them recede and recede as we advanced, until heart was gone out of us, and we could follow no longer, but sat down on some wayside cloud, and fell a thinking! Should we not say—'Justly are we punished, and our punishment was to follow the vain thing we took for heaven-gate'? Heaven-gate is too grand a goal to be reached by foot or wing. High above us, it yet opens inside us; and when it opens, down comes the gate of amber and rose, and we step through both at once!"

He was silent. They were on the top of the ridge. A little beyond stood the dusky group of their companions. And the world lay beneath them.

"Who would live in London who might live here?" said the major.

"No one," answered Hester and Christopher together.

The major turned and looked at them almost in alarm.

"But I *may not*," Hester said. "God chooses that I live in London."

Said Christopher,—

"Christ would surely have liked better to go on living in his father's house than go where so many did not know either him or his father! But he could not go on enjoying his heaven while those many lived only a death in life. He must go and start them for home! Who, in any measure seeing what Christ sees and feeling as Christ feels, would rest in the enjoyment of beauty while so many are unable to desire it! We are not real human beings until we are of the same mind with Christ. There are many who would save the pathetic and interesting, and let the ugly and provoking take care of themselves! Not so Christ, nor those who have learned of him!"

Christopher spoke so quietly there seemed even a contrast between his manner and the fervour of his words.

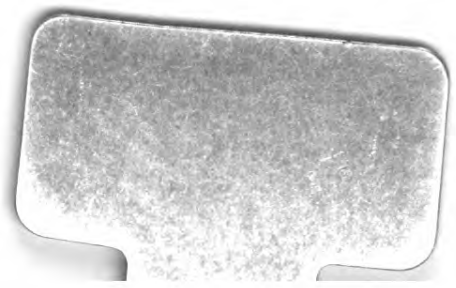
"I would take as many in with me," he said, turning to Hester, "as I might, should it be after a thousand years I went in at the gate of the sunset—the sunrise rather, of which the sunset is a leaf of the folding door! It would be sorrow to go in alone.

My people, my own, my own humans, my men, my women, my little ones, must go in with me!"

Hester laboured, and Chistopher laboured. And if one was the heart and the other the head, the major was the right hand. But what they did and how they did it, would require a book, and no small one, to itself.

It is no matter that here I cannot tell their story. No man ever did the best work who copied another. Let every man work out the thing that is in him! Who, according to the means he has, great or small, does the work given him to do, stands by the side of the Saviour, is a fellow-worker with him. Be a brother after thy own fashion, only see it be a brother thou art. The one who, weighed, is found wanting the most, is the one whose tongue and whose life do not match—who says, "Lord! Lord!" and does not the things the Lord says; the deacon who finds a good seat for the man in goodly apparel, and lets the poor widow stand in the aisle unheeded; the preacher who descants on the love of God in the pulpit, and

looks out for a rich wife in his flock; the missionary who would save the heathen, but gives his own soul to merchandize; the woman who spends her strength on the poor, and makes discord at home.

THE END.

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