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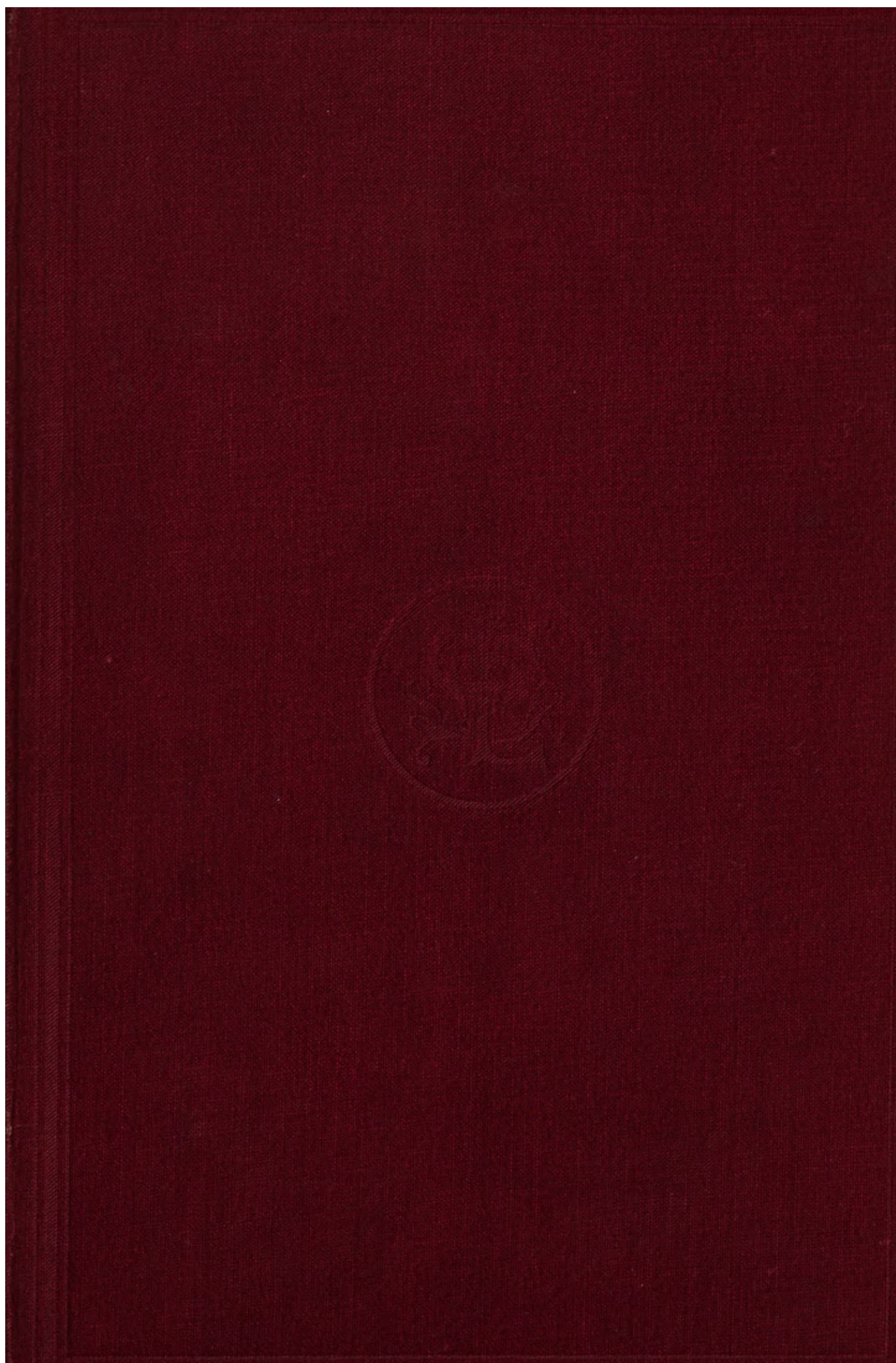
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WEIGHED AND WANTING

BY

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

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

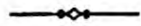
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251. k. 159.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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WEIGHED AND WANTING.

CHAPTER I.

THE JOURNEY.

IT was a lovely morning when they left London. The trains did not then travel so fast as now, and it was late in the afternoon when they reached the station at which they must leave the railway for the road. Before that the weather had changed, or they had changed their weather, for the sky was one mass of cloud, and rain was falling persistently. They had been for some time in the abode of the hills, but those they were passing through, though not without wonder and strange interest, were but an inferior clan, neither lofty nor lovely.

Through the rain and the mist they looked lost and drear. They were mostly bare, save of a little grass, and broken with huge brown and yellow gulleys—worn by such little torrents as were now rushing along them straight from the clouded heavens. It was a vague sorrowful region of tears, whence the streams in the valleys below were for ever fed.

This last part of the journey Saffy had been sound asleep, but Mark had been standing at the window of the railway-carriage, gazing out on an awful world. What would he do, he thought, if he were lost there? Would he be able to sit still all night without being frightened, waiting for God to come and take him? As they rushed along, it was not through the brain alone of the child the panorama flitted, but through his mind and heart as well, and there, like a glacier it scored its passage. Or rather, it left its ghosts behind it, ever shifting forms and shadows, each atmosphered in its own ethereal mood. Hardly thoughts were they, but strange other consciousnesses of life and being. Hills and

woods and valleys and plains and rivers and seas, entering by the gates of sight into the live mirror of the human, are transformed to another nature, to a living wonder, a joy, a pain, a breathless marvel as they pass. Nothing can receive another thing, not even a glass can take into its depth a face without altering it. In the mirror of man, things become thoughts, feelings life, and send their streams down the cheeks, or their sunshine over the countenance.

Before Mark reached the end of that journey, there was gathered in the bottom of his heart a great mass of fuel, there stored for the future consumption of thinking, and for reproduction in forms of power. He knew nothing of it. He took nothing consciously. The things kept sinking into him. The sole sign of his reception was an occasional sigh—of which he could not have told either the cause or the meaning.

They got into their own carriage at the station. The drive was a long and a tedious one, for the roads were rough and muddy and often steep, and Mr. Raymount repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction that

they had not put four horses to. For some time they drove along the side of a hill, and could see next to nothing except in one direction; and when at length the road ran into a valley, and along the course of a swollen river, it was getting so dark, and the rain was coming down so fast, that they could see next to nothing at all. Long before they reached their new home, Saffy and Mark were sound asleep, Hester was sunk in her own thoughts, and the father and mother sat in unbroken silence, hand in hand. It was pitch-dark ere they arrived; and save what she learned from the thousand musics of the swollen river along which they had been driving for the last hour, Hester knew nothing of the country for which she had left the man-swarming city. Ah, that city! so full of fellow creatures! so many of them her friends! and struggling in the toils of so many foes! Many sorrows had entered in at Hester's ears; tongues that had never known how to give trouble shape, had grown eloquent in pouring the tale—of oppression oftener than want, into the bosom of her sympathy. I do not say many

tongues—only many sorrows; she knew from the spray that reached her on its borders, how that human sea tossed and raged afar. Reading and interpreting the looks of faces and the meanings of actions around her by what she had heard, she could not doubt she had received but a too true sample of experiences innumerable. One result was, that, young as was Hester, she no longer shrank from the thought of that invisible, intangible solvent in which the generations of men vanish from the eyes of their fellows. She said to herself what a blessed thing was death for countless human myriads—yea doubtless for the whole race! It looked sad enough for an end; but then it was not the end; while but for the thought of the change to some other mode of life, the idea of this world would have been unendurable to her. “Surely they are now receiving their evil things!” she said. Alas, but even now she felt as if the gulf of death separated her from those to whom it had been her painful delight to minister! The weeping wind and the moaning rush of the river, through which they were slowly

moving towards their earthly paradise, were an orchestral part as of hautboys in the wailing harmony of her mood.

They turned and went through a gate, then passed through trees and trees that made yet darker pieces of the night. By and by appeared the faint lights of the house, with blotchy pallors thinning the mist and darkness. Presently the carriage stopped.

Both the children continued dead asleep, and were carried off to bed. The father and mother knew the house of old time, and revived for each other old memories. But to Hester all was strange, and what with the long journey, the weariness, the sadness, and the strangeness, it was as if walking in a dream that she entered the old hall. It had a quiet, dull, dignified look, as if it expected nobody; as if it was here itself because it could not help it, and would rather not be here; as if it had seen so many generations come and go that it had ceased to care much about new faces. Everything in the house looked sombre and solemn, as if it had not forgotten its old mistress, who had been so many years in it, and was such a little

while gone out of it. They had supper in a long, low room, with furniture almost black, against whose windows heavy roses every now and then softly patted, caught in the fringes of the rain-gusts. The dusky room, the perfect stillness within, the low mingled sounds of swaying trees and pattering rain without, the sense of the great darkness folding in its bosom the beauty so near and the moaning city miles upon miles away,—all grew together into one possessing mood, which rose and sank, like the water in a sea-cave, in the mind of Hester. But who by words can fix the mood that comes and goes unbidden, like a ghost whose acquaintance is lost with his vanishing, whom we know not when we do not see? A single happy phrase, the sound of a wind, the odour of the mere earth may avail to send us into some lonely, dusky realm of being; but how shall we take our brother with us, or send him thither when we would? I doubt if even the poet ever works just what he means on the mind of his fellow. Sisters, brothers, we cannot meet save in God.

But the nearest mediator of feeling, the

most potent, the most delicate, the most general, the least articulate, the farthest from thought, yet perhaps the likeliest to the breath moving upon the face of the waters of chaos, is music. It rose like a soft irrepressible tide in the heart of Hester; it mingled and became one with her mood; together swelling they beat at the gates of silence; for life's sake they must rush, embodied and born in sound, into the outer world where utterance meets utterance! She looked around her for such an instrument as hitherto had been always within her reach—rose and walked round the shadowy room searching. But there was no creature amongst the aged furniture—nothing with a brain to it which her soul might briefly inhabit. She returned and sat again at the table, and the mood vanished in weariness.

But they did not linger there long. Fatigue made the ladies glad to be shown to the rooms prepared for them. The housekeeper, the ancient authority of the place, in every motion and tone expressing herself wronged by their intrusion, conducted

them. Every spot they passed was plainly far more hers than theirs ; only law was a tyrant, and she dared not assert her rights ! But she had allotted their rooms well, and they approved her judgment.

Weary as she was, Hester was charmed with hers, and the more charmed the more she surveyed it. I will not spend time or space in describing it, but remember how wearisome and useless descriptions often are. I will but say it was old-fashioned to her heart's content ; that it seemed full of shadowy histories, as if each succeeding occupant had left behind an ethereal phantasmic record, a memorial imprint of presence on walls and furniture—to which she now was to add hers. But the old sleep must have the precedence of all the new things. In weary haste she undressed, and ascending with some difficulty the high four-post bed which stood waiting for her like an altar of sleep for its sacrifice, was presently as still and straight and white as alabaster lady lying upon ancient tomb.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN she woke it was to a blaze of sunlight, but caught in the net of her closed curtains. The night had passed and carried the tears of the day with it. Ah, how much is done in the night when we sleep and know nothing! Things never stop. The sun was shining as if he too had wept and repented. All the earth beneath him was like the face of a child who has ceased to weep and begun to smile, but has not yet wiped away his tears.

Raindrops everywhere! millions upon millions of them! every one of them with a sun in it! For Hester had sprung from her bed, and opened the eyes of her room. How different was the sight from what she saw when she looked out in Addison square! If heaven be as different from this earth,

and as much better than it, we shall be happy children—except indeed we be but fit to stand in a corner, with our backs to the blessedness. On each side she saw green, undulating lawn, with trees and meadows beyond ; but just in front the ground sloped rapidly, still in grass, grew steep, and fell into the swift river—which, swollen almost to unwieldiness, went rolling and sliding brown and heavy towards the far off sea : when its swelling and tumult were over it would sing ; now it tumbled along with a roaring muffled in sullenness. Beyond the river the bank rose into a wooded hill. She could see walks winding through the wood, here appearing, there vanishing, and, a little way up the valley, the rails of a rustic bridge that led to them. It was a paradise ! For the roar of London along Oxford street, there was the sound of the river ; for the cries of rough human voices, the soprano of birds, and the soft mellow bass of the cattle in the meadows. The only harsh sound in this new world was the cry of the peacock, but that had somehow got the colour of his tail in it, and was not

unpleasant. The sky was a shining blue. Not a cloud was to be seen upon it. Quietly it looked down, as if saying to the world over which it stood vaulted, "Yes, you are welcome to it all!"

She thanked God for the country, but soon was praying to him for the town. The neighbourly offer of the country to console her for the loss of the town she received with alarm, hastening to bethink herself that God cared more for one miserable, selfish, wife - and - donkey - beating costermonger of unsavoury Shoreditch, than for all the hills and dales of Cumberland, yea and all the starry things of his heavens. She would care as God cared, and from beauty gather strength to give to sorrow.

She dressed quickly, and went to her mother's room. Her father was already out of doors, but her mother was having breakfast in bed. They greeted each other with such smiles as made words almost unnecessary.

"What a *lovely* place it is, mamma! You did not say half enough about it!" exclaimed Hester.

“Wasn’t it better to let you discover for yourself, my child?” answered her mother. “You were so sorry to leave London, that I would not praise Yrndale for fear of prejudicing you against it.”

“Mother,” said Hester, with something in her throat, “I did not want to change; I was content, and had my work to do! I never was one to turn easily to new things. And perhaps I need hardly tell you that the conviction has been growing upon me for years and years that my calling is among my fellow-creatures in London!”

She had never yet, even to her mother, spoken out plainly concerning the things most occupying her heart and mind. Every one of the family, except Saffy, found it difficult to communicate—and perhaps to Saffy it might become so as she grew. Hester trembled as if confessing a fault. What if to her mother the mere idea of having a calling should seem a presumption!

“Two things must go, I think, to make up a call,” said her mother, greatly to Hester’s relief. “You must not imagine, my child, that because you have never

opened your mind to me, I have not known what you were thinking, or have left you to think alone about it. Mother and daughter are too near not to hear each other without words. There is between you and me a constant undercurrent of communion, and occasionally a passing of almost definite thought, I believe. We may not be aware of it at the time, but none the less it has its result."

"Oh mother!" cried Hester, overjoyed to find she thought them thus near to each other, "I am so glad! Please tell me the two things you mean."

"To make up a *call*, I think both impulse and possibility are wanted," replied Mrs. Raymount. "The first you know well; but have you sufficiently considered the second? One whose impulse or desire was continually thwarted could scarcely go on believing herself called. The half that lies in an open door is wanting. If a call come to a man in prison it will be by an angel who can let him out. Neither does inclination always determine fitness. When your father was an editor, he was astonished at

the bad verse he received from some who had a genuine delight in good verse."

"I can't believe, mamma," returned Hester, "that God gives any special gift, particularly when accompanied by a special desire to use it, and that for a special purpose, without intending it should be so used. That would be to mock his creature in the very act of making her."

"You must allow there are some who never find a use for their special gifts."

"Yes; but may not that be that they have not sufficiently cultivated their gifts, or that they have not done their best to bring them into use? Or may they not have wanted to use them for ends of their own and not of God's? I feel as if I must stand up against every difficulty lest God should be disappointed in me. Surely any frustration of the ends to which their very being points must be the persons' own fault? May it not be because they have not yielded to the calling voice that they are all their life a prey to unsatisfied longings? They may have gone picking and choosing, instead of obeying."

“There must be truth in what you say, Hester, but I am pretty sure it does not reach every case. At what point would you pronounce a calling frustrated? You think yours is to help your poor friends: you are not with them now: is your calling frustrated? Surely there may be delay without frustration! Or is it for you to say when you are *ready*? Willingness is not everything. Might not one fancy her hour come when it was not come? May not part of the preparation for work be the mental discipline of imagined postponements?—And then, Hester—now I think I have found my answer—you do not surely imagine such a breach in the continuity of our existence, that our gifts and training here have nothing to do with our life beyond the grave. All good old people will tell you they feel this life but a beginning. Cultivating your gift, and waiting the indubitable call, you may be in active preparation for the work in the coming life for which God intended you when he made you.”

Hester gave a great sigh. Postponement indefinite is terrible to the young and eager.

“That is a dreary thought, mother,” she said.

“Is it, my child?” returned her mother. “Painful the will of God may be—that I well know, as who that cares anything about it does not! but *dreary*, no! Have patience, my love. Your heart’s deepest desire must be the will of God, for he cannot have made you so that your heart should run counter to his will; let him but have his own way with you, and your desire he will give you. To that goes his path. He delights in his children; so soon as they can be indulged without ruin, he will heap upon them their desires; they are his too.”

I confess I have, chiefly by compression, put the utterance both of mother and of daughter into rather better logical form than they gave it; but the substance of it is thus only the more correctly rendered. Hester was astonished at the grasp and power of her mother. The child may for many years have but little idea of the thought and life within the form and face he knows and loves better than any; but at last the predestined moment arrives, the two

minds meet, and the child understands the parent. Hester threw herself on the bed, and buried her face in her mother's lap. The same moment she began to discover that she had been proud, imagining herself more awake to duty than the rest around her. She began, too, to understand that if God has called, he will also open the door. She kissed her mother as she had never kissed her before, and went to her own room.

CHAPTER III.

GLADNESS.

SCARCELY had she reached it, however, when the voices of the children came shouting along some corridor, on their way to find their breakfast ; she must go and minister, postponing meditation on the large and distant for action in the small and present. But the sight of the exuberance, the foaming overflow of life and gladness in Saffy, and of the quieter, deeper joy of Mark, were an immediate reward. They could hardly be prevented from bolting their breakfast like puppies, in their eagerness to rush into the new creation, the garden of Eden around them. But Hester thought of the river flowing turbid and swift at the foot of the lawn : she must not let them go loose ! She told them they must not go without her. Their

faces fell, and even Mark began a gentle expostulation.

A conscientious elder sister has to bear a good many hard thoughts from the younger ones on whom, without a parent's authority and reverence, she has to exercise a parent's restraint. Well for her if she come out of the trial without having gathered some needless severity, some seeming hardness, some tendency to peevishness ! These weak evils are so apt to gather around a sense at once of the need and of the lack of power !

"No, Mark," she said, "I cannot let you go alone. You are like two kittens, and might be in mischief or danger before you knew. But I won't keep you waiting ; I will get my parasol at once."

I will attempt no description of the beauties that met them at every turn. But the joy of those three may well have a word or two. I doubt if some of the children in heaven are always happier than Saffy and Mark were that day. Hester had thoughts which kept her from being so happy as they, but she was more blessed. Glorious as is the child's delight, the child-heart in the

grown woman is capable of tenfold the bliss. Saffy pounced on a flower like a wild beast on its prey ; she never stood and gazed at one, like Mark. Hester would gaze till the tears came in her eyes. There are consciousnesses of lack which carry more bliss than any possession.

Mark was in many things an exception—a curious mixture of child and youth. He had never been strong, and had always been thoughtful. When very small he used to have a sacred rite of his own—I would not have called it a rite but that he made a temple for it. Many children like to play at church, but I doubt if that be good : Mark's rite was neither play nor church. He would set two chairs in the recess of a window,—“one for Mark and one for God,”—then draw the window-curtains around, and sit in silence for a space.

When a little child sets a chair for God, does God take the chair or does he not ? God is the God of little children, and is at home with them.

For Saffy, she was a thing of smiles and tears just as they chose to come. She had

not a suspicion yet that the exercise of any operative power on herself was possible to her—not to say required of her. Many men and women are in the same condition who have grown cold and hard in it; she was soft and warm, on the way to awake and distinguish and act. Even now when a good thought came she would give it a stranger's welcome; but the first appeal to her senses would drive it out of doors again.

Before their ramble was over, what with the sweet twilight gladness of Mark, the merry noonday brightness of Saffy, and the loveliness all around, the heart of Hester was quiet and hopeful as a still mere that waits in the blue night the rising of the moon. She had some things to trouble her, but none of them had touched the quick of her being. Thoughtful, therefore in a measure troubled, by nature, she did not know what heart-sickness was. Nor would she ever know it as many must, for her heart went up to the heart of her heart, and there unconsciously laid up store against the evil hours that might be on their way to her. And this day her thoughts

kept rising to him whose thought was the meaning of all she saw, the centre and citadel of its loveliness.

For if once the suspicion wake that God never meant the things that go to and fro in us as we gaze on the world, that moment is the universe worthless as a doll to a childless mother. If God be not, then steam-engine and flower are in the same category. No; the steam-engine is the better thing, for it has the soul of a man in it, and the flower has no soul at all. It cannot mean if it is not meant. It is God that means everything as we read it, however poor or mingled with mistake our reading may be. And the soothing of his presence in what we call nature, was beginning to work on Hester, helping her towards that quietness of spirit without which the will of God can scarce be perceived.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN THE HILL.

WHEN Franks, the acrobat, and his family left Mrs. Baldwin's garret to go to another yet poorer lodging, it was with heavy hearts: they crept silent away, to go down yet a step of the world's stair. I have read somewhere in Jean Paul of a curiously contrived stair, on which while you thought you were going down you were really ascending: I think it was so with the Frankses and the stair they were upon. But to many the world is but a tread-mill, on which while they seem to be going up and up, they are only serving to keep things going round and round.

I think God has more to do with the fortunes of the poor a thousand fold than with those of the rich. In the fortunes of

the poor there are many more changes, and they are of greater import as coming closer to the heart of their condition. To careless and purblind eyes these fortunes appear on an almost dead level of toil and privation; but they have more variations of weather, more chequers of sunshine and shade, more storms and calms, than lives passed on airier slopes. Who could think of God as a God like Christ—and other than such he were not God—and imagine he would not care as much for the family of John Franks as for the family of Gerald Raymount? It is impossible to believe that he loves such as Cornelius or Vavasor as he loves a Christopher. There must be a difference! The God of truth cannot love the unlovely in the same way as he loves the lovely. The one he loves for what he is and what he has begun to be; the other he loves because he sorely needs love—as sorely as the other, and must begin to grow lovely one day. Nor dare we forget that the essential human thing is in itself lovely as made by God, and pitiably lovely as spoiled by man. That is the Christ-thing which is the root of

every man, created in his image,—that which, when he enters the man, he possesses. The true earthly father must always love those children more who are obedient and loving—but he will not neglect one bad one for twenty good ones. “The Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me;” but “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine that need no repentance.” The great joy is the first rush of love in the new-opened channel for its issue and entrance.

The Frankses were on the down-going side of the hill Difficulty, and down they must go, unable to help themselves. They had found a cheaper lodging, but entered it with misgiving: their gains had been very moderate since their arrival in London, and their expenses greater than in the country. Also Franks was beginning to feel or to fancy his strength and elasticity not quite what they had been. The first suspicion of the approach of old age and the beginning of that weakness whose end is sure, may well be a startling one. The

man has begun to be a nobody in the world's race—is henceforth himself but the course of the race between age and death—a race in which the victor is known ere the start. Life with its self-discipline withdraws itself thenceforth more to the inside, and goes on with greater vigour. The man has now to trust and yield constantly. He is coming to know the fact that he was never his own strength, had never the smallest power in himself at his strongest. But he is learning also that he is as safe as ever in the time when he gloried in his might—yea, as safe as then he imagined himself on his false foundation. He lays hold of the true strength, makes it his by laying hold of it. He trusts in the unchangeable thing at the root of all his strength, which gave it all the truth it had—a truth far deeper than he knew, a reality unfathomable, though not of the nature he then fancied. Strength has ever to be made perfect in weakness, and old age is one of the weaknesses in which it is perfected.

Poor Franks had not got so far yet as to see this, and the feeling of the approach of

old age helped to relax the springs of his hopefulness. Also his wife had not yet got over her last confinement. The baby, too, was sickly. And there was not much popular receptivity for acrobatics in the streets; coppers came in slowly; the outlay was heavy; and the outlook altogether was of the gray without the gold. But his wife's words were always cheerful, though the tone of them had not a little of the mournful. Their tone came of temperament, the words themselves of love and its courage. The daughter of a gamekeeper, the neighbours regarded her as throwing herself away when she married Franks; but she had got an honest and brave husband, and never when life was hardest repented giving herself to him.

For a few weeks they did pretty well in their new lodging. They managed to pay their way, and had food enough—though not quite so good as husband and wife wished each for the other, and both for their children. The boys had a good enough time of it. They had not yet in London exhausted their own wonder. The

constant changes around made of their lives a continuous novel—nay, a romance ; and being happy they could eat anything and thrive on it.

The lives of the father and mother over-vault the lives of the children, shutting out all care if not all sorrow, and every change is welcomed as a new delight. Their parents, where positive cruelty has not installed fear and cast out love, are the divinities of even the most neglected. They feel towards them much the same, I fancy, as the children of ordinary parents in the middle class—love them more than children given over to nurses and governesses love theirs. Nor do I feel certain that the position of the children of the poor, in all its oppression, is not more favourable to the development of the higher qualities of the human mind, such as make the least show, than many of those more pleasant places for which some religious moralists would have us give the thanks of the specially favoured. I suspect, for instance, that imagination, fancy, perception, insight into character, the faculty of fitting

means to ends, the sense of adventure, and many other powers and feelings are more likely to be active in the children of the poor, to the greater joy of their existence, than in others. These Frankses, too, had a strict rule over them, and that increases much the capacity for enjoyment. The father, according to his lights, was, as we have seen, a careful and conscientious parent, and his boys were strongly attached to him, never thought of shirking their work, and endured a good deal of hardness and fatigue without grumbling: their mother had opened their eyes to the fact that their father took his full share in all he required of them, and did his best for them. They were greatly proud of their father, one and all believing him not only the first man in his profession, but the best man that ever was in the world; and to believe so of one's parent is a stronger aid to righteousness than all things else whatever, until the day-star of the knowledge of the great Father goes up in the heart, to know whom, in like but better fashion, as the best more than man and the perfect Father

of men, is the only thing to redeem us from misery and wrong, and lift us into the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God.

They were now reduced to one room, and the boys slept on the floor. This was no hardship, now that summer was nigh, only the parents found it interfere a little with their freedom of speech. Nor did it mend the matter to send them early to bed, for the earlier they went the longer were they in going to sleep. At the same time they had few things to talk of which they minded their hearing, and to the mother at least it was a pleasure to have all her chickens in the nest with her.

One evening after the boys were in bed, the father and mother sat talking. They had a pint of beer on the table between them, of which the woman tasted now and then that the man might imagine himself sharing it with her. Silence had lasted for some time. The mother was busy rough-patching a garment of Moxy's. The man's work for the day was over, but not the woman's!

“Well, I dunnow!” he said at last, and there ceased.

“What don ye know, John?” asked his wife, in a tone she would have tried to make cheerful had she but suspected it half as mournful as it was.

“There’s that Mr. Christopher as was such a friend!” he said: “—you don’t disremember what he used to say about the Almighty and that? You remember as how he used to say a man could no more get out o’ the sight o’ them eyes o’ hisn than a child could get out o’ sight o’ the eyes on his mother as was a watchin’ of him!”

“Yes, John, I do remember all that very well, and a great comfort it was to me at the time to hear him say so, an’ has been many’s the time since, when I had no other—leastways none but you an’ the childern. I often think over what he said to you an’ me then when I was down, an’ not able to hold my head up, nor feelin’ as if I should ever lift it no more!”

“Well, I dunnow!” said Franks, and paused again. But this time he resumed. “What troubles me is this:—if that there

mother as was a lookin' arter her child, was to see him doin' no better 'n you an' me, an' day by day gettin' further on the wrong way, I should say she warn't much of a mother to let us go on in that 'ere way as I speak on."

"She might ha' got her reasons for it, John," returned his wife, in some fear lest the hope she cherished was going to give way in her husband. "P'r'aps she might see, you know, that the child might go a little farther and fare none the worse. When the childern want their dinner very bad, I ha' heerd you say to them sometimes, 'Now kids, ha' patience. Patience is a fine thing. What if ye do be hungry, you ain't a dyin' o' hunger. You'll wear a bit longer yet!' 'Ain't I heerd you say that, John—more 'n once, or twice, or thrice?"

"There ain't no need to put me to my oath like that, old woman! I ain't a goin' for to deny it! You needn't go to put it to me as if I was the pris'ner at the bar, or a witness as wanted to speak up for him!—But you must allow this is a drivin' of it jest a *leetle* too far! Here we be come up to Lon'on a thinkin' to better ourselves—

not wantin' no great things—sich we don't look for to get—but jest thinkin' as how it wur time—as th' parson is allus a tellin' his p'rishioners, to lay by a shill'n' or two to keep us out o' th' workus, when 't come on to rain, an' let us die i' the open like, where a poor body can breathe!—that's all as we was after; an' here, sin' ever we come, fust one shillin' goes, an' then another shillin' goes as we brought with us, till we 'ain't got one, as I may almost say, left! An' there ain't no luck! I'stead o' gittin' more we git less, an' that wi' harder work, as is a wearin' out me an' the b'ys; an'——”

Here he was interrupted by a cry from the bed on the floor. It was the voice of little Moxy, “the Sarpint o' the Prairie.”

“I ain't wore out, father! I'm good for another go.”

“I ain't neither, gov'nor. I got a lot more work in me!”

“No, nor me,” cried the third. “I likes London. I can stand on my head twice as long as Tommy Blake, an' he's a year older 'n I am.”

“Hold your tongues, you rascals, an' go

to sleep," growled the father, pretending to be angry with them. "What right have you to be awake at this time o' the night—an' i' Lon'on too? It's not like the country, as you very well know. I' the country you can do much as you like, but not in the town! There's police, an' them's there for b'ys to mind what they're about. You've no call to be awake when your father an' mother want to be by theirselves—a listenin' to what they got to say to one another! Us two was man an' wife 'afore you was born!"

"We wasn't a listenin', father. We was only hearin' 'cause we wasn't asleep. An' you didn't speak down as if it was secrets!"

"Well, you know, b'ys, there's things as fathers an' mothers can understand an' talk about, as no b'y 's fit to see to the end on, an' so they better go to sleep, an' wait till their turn comes to be fathers an' mothers theirselves.—Go to sleep direc'ly, or I'll break every bone in your bodies!"

"Yes, father, yes!" they answered together, nowise terrified by the awful threat—which was not a little weakened by the

fact that they had heard it every day of their lives, and not yet known it carried into execution.

But having been thus advised that his children were awake, the father, without the least hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious, changed his tone: in the presence of his children he preferred looking at the other side of the argument. After a few moments' silence he began again thus:—

“ Yes, as you was sayin', wife, an' I knows as you're always in the right, if the right be anyhow's to be got at—as you was sayin', I say, there's no sayin' when that same as we was a speakin' of—the Almighty is the man I mean—no sayin', I say, when he may come to see as we have, as I may say, had enough on it, an' turn an' let us have a taste o' luck again ! Luck's sweet ; an' some likes, an' it may be as he likes to give his childer a taste o' sweets now an' again, jest as you an' me, that is when we can afford it, an' that's not often, likes to give ourn a bull's-eye or a suck of toffy. I don't doubt *he* likes to see us enj'yin' of ourselves jest as well as we like to see our little uns

enj'yin' o' *theirselves* !—It stands to reason, wife—don't it ? ”

“ So it do seem to me, John ! ” answered the mother.

“ Well,” said Franks, apparently, now that he had taken up the defence of the ways of the Supreme with men, warming to his subject, “ I dessay he do the best he can, an' give us as much luck as is good for us. Leastways that's how the rest of us do, wife ! We can't allus do as well as we would like for to do for our little uns, but we *always*, in general, does the best we can. It may take time—it may take time even with all the infl'ence *he* has, to get the better o' things as stands in *his* way ! We'll suppose yet a while, anyhow, as how he's a lookin' arter us. It can't be for nothink as he counts the hairs on our heads—as the sayin' is !—though for my part I never could see what good there was in it. But if it ain't for somethink, why it's no more good than the census, which is a countin' o' the heads theirselves.”

There are, or there used to be when I was a boy, who, in their reverence for the name

of the Most High, would have shown horror at the idea that he could not do anything or everything in a moment as it pleased him, but would not have been shocked at all at the idea that he might not please to give this or that man any help. In their eyes power was a grander thing than love, though it is nowhere said in the Book that God is omnipotence. Such, because they are told that he is omnipotent, call him Omnipotence; when told that he is Love, do not care to argue that he must then be loving! But as to doing what he wills with a word—see what it cost him to redeem the world! He did not find that easy, or to be done in a moment without pain or toil. Yea, awfully omnipotent is God. For he wills, effects, and perfects the thing which, because of the bad in us, he has to carry out in suffering and sorrow, his own and his Son's. Evil is a hard thing for God himself to overcome. Yet thoroughly and altogether and triumphantly will he overcome it; and that not by crushing it under foot—any god of man's idea could do that!—but by conquest of heart over heart, of life in life, of life

over death. Nothing shall be too hard for the God that fears not pain, but will deliver and make true and blessed at his own severest cost.

For a time, then, the Frankses went on, with food to eat and money to pay their way, but going slowly down the hill, and finding it harder and harder to keep their footing. By and by the baby grew worse, pining visibly. They sought help at the hospital, but saw no Mr. Christopher, and the baby did not improve. Still they kept on, and every day the husband brought home a little money. Several times they seemed on the point of an engagement, but as often something came between. At length Franks almost ceased to hope, and grew more and more silent, until at last he might well have appeared morose. The wonder to me is that any such as do not hope in a Power loving to perfection, should escape moroseness. Under the poisonous influences of anxiety, a loving man may become unkind, even cruel to the very persons for whose sake he is anxious. In good sooth what we too often count righteous

care, but our Lord calls the care of the world, consumes the life of the heart as surely as the love of money. At the root they are the same. Yet evil thing as anxiety is, it were a more evil thing to be delivered from it by anything but the faith of the Son of God—that is, faith in his Father and our Father; it would be but another and worse, because more comfortable form of the same slavery.

Poor Franks, however, with but a little philosophy, had much affection, which is indeed the present God in a man—and so did not go far in the evil direction. The worst sign of his degenerating temper was the more frequently muttered oath of impatience with his boys—never with his wife; and not one of them was a moment uneasy in consequence—only when the *gov'nor* wasn't jolly, neither were they.

The mind of Franks, as it appears to me, was mainly a slow sullen stream of sub-thought, a something neither thought nor feeling but partaking of the character of both, a something more than either, namely, the substance of which both are formed—

the undeveloped elemental life, risen a little way, and but a little way, towards consciousness. The swifter flow of this stream is passion, the gleams of it where it ripples into the light, are thoughts. This sort of nature can endure much without being unhappy. What would crush a swift-thinking man is upborne by the denser tide. Its conditions are gloomier, and it consorts more easily with gloom. But light and motion and a grand future are waiting for such as he. All their sluggish half-slumberous being will be roused and wrought into conscious life — nor the unconscious whence it arises be therein exhausted, for that will be ever supplied and upheld by the indwelling Deity. In his own way Franks was in conflict with the problems of life ; neither was he very able to encounter them ; but on the other hand he was one to whom wonders might safely be shown, for he would use them not speculatively but practically. “ Nothing almost sees miracles but misery,” perhaps because to misery alone, save it be to the great unselfish joy, is it safe to show miracles. Those who must see ere they

will believe, may have to be brought to the verge of the infinite grave that a condition fit for seeing may be effected in them. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

THERE is another person in my narrative whom the tide of her destiny seemed now to have caught and to be bearing more swiftly somewhither. Unable, as she concluded, any longer to endure a life bounded by the espionage, distrust, and ill-tempered rebuke of the two wretched dragons whose misery was their best friend—saving them from foreboded want by killing them while yet they had something to live upon—Amy Amber did at last as she had threatened, and one morning when, in amazement that she was so late, they called her, they received no answer, neither could find her in or out of the house. She had applied to a friend in London, and following her advice, had taken the cheap train overnight, and gone to her.

She met her, took her home, and helped her in seeking a situation—with the result that, before many days were over, her appearance and manners being altogether in her favour, she obtained her desire—a place behind the counter in one of the largest shops. There she was kept hard at work, and the hours of business were long; but the labour was by no means too much for the fine health and spirits which now blossomed in her three-fold.

Her aunts raised an outcry, of horror and dismay first, then of reprobation, accusing her of many things, and amongst the rest of those faults of which they were in reality themselves guilty towards her; for as to the gratitude and affection we are so ready to claim and so slow to pay, the debt was great on their part, and very small indeed on hers. They wrote to her guardians of course to acquaint them with the shocking fact of her flight, but dwelt far more upon the badness of her behaviour to them from the first, the rapidity with which she had deteriorated, and the ghastliness of their conviction as to the depth of the degradation she had pre-

ferred to the shelter of their—very moth-eaten—wings.

The younger of the two guardians was a man of business, and at once took proper measures for discovering her. It was not, however, before the lapse of several months that he succeeded. By that time her employers were so well satisfied with her, that after an interview with them, followed by one with the girl herself, he was convinced that she was much better where she was than with her aunts, whose dispositions were not unknown to him. So he left her in peace.

Knowing nothing of London, interested in all she saw, and much occupied with her new way of life, Amy did not at once go to find her friend Miss Raymount. She often recalled her kindness, often dreamed of the beautiful lady who had let her brush her hair, and always intended to seek her as soon as she could feel at some leisure. But the time wore away, and still she had not gone.

She continued a well-behaved girl, went regularly to church on Sundays, had many friends but few intimates, and lived with

the girl who had been her friend before her mother's death. Her new way of life was, no doubt, from its lack of home-ties, and of the restraining, if not always elevating influences of older people, dangerous : no kite can soar without the pull of the string ; but danger is less often ruin than some people think ; and the propt house is not the safest in the row. He who can walk without falling will learn to walk the better that his road is not always of the smoothest ; and, as Sir Philip Sidney says, " The journey of high honour lies not in plain ways."

Such were the respective conditions of Amy Amber and the Frankses, when the Raymounts left London. The shades were gathering around the family ; the girl had passed from the shadow into the shine. Hester knew nothing of the state of either, nor had they ever belonged to her flock. It was not at all for them she was troubled in the midst of the peace and rest of her new life when she felt like a shepherd compelled to leave his sheep in the wilderness. Amid the sweet delights of sunshine, room, air, grass, trees, flowers, music, and the precious

stores of an old library, every now and then she would all at once imagine herself a herald that had turned aside into the garden of the enchantress. Were not her poor friends the more sorely tried that she was dwelling at ease? Could it be right? Yet for the present she could see no way of reaching them. All she could do for them was to cultivate her gifts, in the hope of one day returning to them the more valuable for the separation.

One good thing that came of the change was that she and her father were drawn in the quiet of this country life closer together. When Mr. Raymount's hours of writing were over, he missed the more busy life into which he had been able to turn at will, and needed a companion. His wife not being able to go with him, he naturally turned to his daughter, and they often took their walks abroad together. In these Hester learned much. Her father was not chiefly occupied with the best things, but he was both of a learning and a teaching nature. There are few that in any true sense can be said to be alive: of Mr. Raymount it might

be said that he was coming alive ; and it was no small consolation to Hester to get thus nearer to him. Like the rest of his children she had been a little afraid of him, and fear, though it may dig deeper the foundations of love, chokes its passages : she was astonished to find, before a month was over, how much of companions as well as friends they had become to each other.

Most fathers know little of their sons, and less of their daughters. Because familiar with every feature of their faces, every movement of their bodies, and the character of their every habitual pose, they take it for granted they know them ! Doubtless knowledge of the person does through the body pass into the beholder, but there are few parents who might not make discoveries in their children which would surprise them. Some such discoveries Mr. Raymount began to make in Hester.

She kept up a steady correspondence with Miss Dasomma, and that also was a great help to her. She had a note now and then from Mr. Vavasor, and that was no help. A little present of music was generally its

pretext. He dared not trust himself to write to her about anything else—not from the fear of saying more than was prudent, but because, not even yet feeling to know what she would think about this or that, he was afraid of encountering her disapprobation. In music he thought he did understand her, but was in truth far from understanding her. For to understand a person in any one thing, we must at least be capable of understanding him in everything. Even the bits of news he ventured to send her, all concerned the musical world—except when he referred now and then to Cornelius: he never omitted to mention his having been to his aunt's. Hester was always glad when she saw his writing, and always disappointed with the letter—she could hardly have said why, for she never expected it to go beyond the surfaces of things: he was not yet sufficiently at home with her, she thought, to lay open the stores of his heart and mind—as he would doubtless have been able to do more readily had he had a sister to draw him out!

Vavasor found himself in her absence

haunted with her face, her form, her voice, her song, her music—sometimes with the peace and power of her presence, and the uplifting influence she exercised upon him. It is possible for a man to fall in love with a woman he is centuries from being able to understand. But how the form of such a woman must be dwarfed in the camera of such a man's mind! It is the falsehood of the silliest poetry to say he deifies the image of his beloved. He is but a telescope turned wrong end upon her. If such a man could see such a woman after her true proportions, and not as the puppet he imagines her, thinking his own small great-things of her, he would not be able to love her at all. To see how he sees her—to get a glimpse of the shrunken creature he has to make of her ere, through his proud door, he can get her into the straitened cellar of his poor, pinched heart, would be enough to secure any such woman from the possibility of falling in love with such a man. Hester knew that in some directions he was much undeveloped; but she thought she could help him; and had he thoroughly believed in and loved her,

which he was not capable of doing, she could have helped him. But a vision of the kind of creature he was capable of loving—therefore the kind of creature he imagined her in loving her, would have been—to use a low but expressive phrase—*a sickener to her.*

At length, in one of his brief communications, he mentioned that his yearly resurrection was at hand—his butterfly-month he called it—when he ceased for the time to be a caterpillar, and became a creature of the upper world, revelling in the light and air of summer. He must go northward, he said; he wanted not a little bracing for the heats of the autumnal city. The memories of Burcliff drew him potently thither, but would be too sadly met by its realities. He had an invitation to the opposite coast which he thought he would accept. He did not know exactly where Paradise lay, but if he found it within accessible distance, he hoped her parents would allow him to call some morning and be happy for an hour or two.

Hester answered that her father and

mother would be glad to see him, and if he were inclined to spend a day or two, there was a beautiful country to show him. If his holiday happened again to coincide with Corney's, perhaps they would come down together. If he cared for sketching, there was no end of picturesque spots as well as fine landscapes.

Of music or singing she said not a word.

By return of post came a grateful acceptance. About a week after, they heard from Cornelius that his holiday was not to make its appearance before vile November. He did not inform them that he had sought an exchange with a clerk whose holiday fell in the said undesirable month.

CHAPTER VI.

WAS IT INTO THE FIRE ?

ONE lovely evening in the beginning of June, when her turn had come to get away a little earlier, Amy Amber thought with herself she would at last make an effort to find Miss Raymount. In the hurry of escaping from Burcliff she left her address behind, but had long since learned it from a directory, and was now sufficiently acquainted with London to know how to reach Addison square. Having dressed herself therefore in becoming style, for dress was one of the instincts of the girl—an unacquirable gift, not necessarily associated with anything noble—in the daintiest, brightest little bonnet, a well-made, rather gay print, boots just a little too *auffallend*, and gloves that clung closer to the small short hand than they had clung

to the bodies of the rodents from which they came, she set out for her visit.

In every motion and feeling, Amy Amber was a little lady. She had not much experience. She could not fail to show ignorance of some of the small ways and customs of the next higher of the social strata. But such knowledge is not essential to ladyhood, though half-ladies think themselves whole ladies because they have it. To become ladies indeed they have to learn what those things and the knowledge of them are really worth. And there was another thing in which Amy was unlike many who would on the ground of mere social position have counted themselves immeasurably her superiors: she was incapable of being disagreeable, and from the thing in itself ill-bred recoiled instinctively. Without knowing it, she held the main secret of all good manners: she was simple. Many a one imitates simplicity, but Amy was simple—*one-fold*. She never put anything on, never wished to appear anything, never tried to look pleasant. When cross, which she was sometimes, though very rarely, she tried to *be* pleasant.

If I could convey the idea of her, with her peaceful temperament and her sunshiny summer-atmosphere, most of my readers would allow she must have been an engaging and lovable little lady.

She got into an omnibus, and all the way distinguished herself by readiness to make room. Can it be that the rarity of this virtue in England has to do with our living in a straitened island? It *ought* to work in the contrary direction! The British lady, the British gentleman too, seems to cultivate a natural repellence. Amy's hospitable nature welcomed a fellow-creature even into an omnibus.

She found Addison square, and the house she sought. It looked dingy and dull, for many of its shutters were closed, and there was an indescribable air of departure about it. She knocked nevertheless, and the door was opened. She asked if Miss Raymount was at home.

Now Sarah, with most of the good qualities of an old trustworthy family-servant, had all the faults as well, and one or two besides. She had not been to Burcliff, con-

sequently did not know Amy, else certainly she would not have behaved to her as she ought. Many householders have not an idea how abominably the servants they count patterns of excellence comport themselves to those even to whom special attention is owing.

"They are all out of town, miss," replied Sarah, "—except Mr. Cornelius, of course."

At the moment Mr. Cornelius, on his way to go out, stepped on the landing of the stair, and stood for an instant looking down into the hall, wondering who it might be at the door. From his position he could not see Amy's face, and had he seen it, I doubt if he would have recognized her, but the moment he heard her voice he knew it, and hurried down, his face in a glow of pleasure. But as he drew near, the change in her seemed to him so great that he could hardly believe with his eyes what his ears had told him.

From the first, Corney, like every one else of the family, was taken with Amy, and Amy was not less than a little taken with him. The former fact is not wonderful, the

latter not altogether inexplicable. No man needs flatter his *vanity* much on the ground of being liked by women, for there never yet was man but some woman was pleased with him. Corney was good-looking, and, except with his own people, ready enough to make himself agreeable. Troubled with no modesty and very little false shame, and having a perfect persuasion of the power of his intellect and the felicity of his utterance, he never lost the chance of saying a good thing from the fear of saying a foolish one ; neither, having said a foolish one, did he ever perceive that such it was. With a few of his own kind he had the repute of one who said very good things. Amy, on her side, was ready to be pleased with whatever could be regarded as pleasant—most of all with things intended to please, and was prejudiced in Corney's favour through knowing less of him and more of his family. Her face beamed with pleasure at sight of him, and almost involuntarily she stepped within the door to meet him.

“Amy! Who would have thought of

seeing you here? When did you come to town?" he said, and shook hands with her.

"I have been in London a long time," she answered.

Corney thought she looked as if she had. "How deuced pretty she is!" he said to himself. "Quite lady-like, by Jove!"

"Come up stairs," he said, "and tell me all about it."

He turned and led the way. Without a second thought, Amy followed him. Sarah stood for a moment with a stare, wondering who the young lady could be: Mr. Cornelius was so much at home with her! and she had never been to the house before! "A cousin from Australia," she concluded: they had cousins there.

Cornelius went into the drawing-room, Amy after him, and opened the shutters of a window, congratulating himself on his good luck. Not often did anything so pleasant enter the stupid old place! He made her sit on the sofa in the half-dark, sat down beside her, and in a few minutes had all her story. Moved by her sweet bright face and pretty manners, pleased with the deference,

amounting to respect, which she showed him, he began to think her the nicest girl he had ever known. For her behaviour made him feel a large person with power over her, in which power she seemed pleased to find herself. After a conversation of about half an hour, she rose.

“What!” said Corney, “you’re not going already, Amy?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Amy, “I think I had better go. I am so sorry not to see Miss Raymount! She was very kind to me!”

“You mustn’t go yet,” said Corney. “Sit down and rest a little.—Come—you used to like music: I will sing to you, and you shall tell me whether I have improved since you heard me last.”

He went to the piano, and Amy sat down again. He sang with his usual inferiority—which was not so inferior that he failed of pleasing simple Amy. She expressed herself delighted. He sang half a dozen songs, then showed her a book of photographs, chiefly portraits of the more famous actresses of the day, and told her about them. With one thing and another he

kept her—until Sarah grew fidgety, and was on the point of stalking up from the kitchen to the drawing-room, when she heard them coming down. Cornelius took his hat and stick, and said he would walk with her. Amy made no objection; she was pleased to have his company; he went with her all the way to the lodging she shared with her friend in a quiet little street in Kensington. Before they parted, her manner and behaviour, her sweetness, and the prettiness which would have been beauty had it been on a larger scale, had begun to fill what little there was of Corney's imagination; and he left her with the feeling that he knew where a treasure lay. He walked with an enlargement of strut as he went home through the park, and swung his cane with the air of a man who had made a conquest of which he had reason to be proud.

CHAPTER VII.

VAVASOR IN THE COUNTRY.

THE hot dreamy days rose and sank in Yrndale. Hester would wake in the morning oppressed with the feeling that there was something she ought to have begun long ago, and must positively set about this new day. Then as her inner day cleared, she would afresh recognize her duty as that of those who stand and wait: she had no great work to do—only to heed the common family duties of the hour, and her own education for what might be the will of him who, having made her for something, would see that the possibility of that something should not be wanting. In the heat of the day she would seek a shady spot with a book for her companion—generally some favourite book, for she was not one

of those who say of one book as of another —“ Oh, I’ve read that !” It was some time before she came to have a favourite spot—so many drew her, and the spirit of exploration was so strong. Under the shadow of some rock, the tent-roof of umbrageous beech, or the solemn gloom of some pine-grove, the brooding spirit of the summer would day after day find her when the sun was on the height of his great bridge, and fill her with the sense of that repose in which alone she herself can work. Then would such a quiescence pervade Hester’s spirit, such a sweet content come down upon her, that nothing seemed necessary for life but to live: mere existence was conscious well-being. But this feeling never lasted long; all at once would start awake in her the dread that she was out of the way, inasmuch as she was willing to be idle, and could rest inactive. Then to meet it would faith rouse herself and say: “But God will take care of you in this thing too. You have not to watch lest he should forget, but to listen, and be ready when he gives you the lightest call.” And

the ever faithful corrective to the noonday mood came in its turn ; for invariably from the tea-table she went to her piano, and there, through the sweet evening movements and atmospheric changes of the brain—for the brain has its morning and evening, its summer and winter as well as the day and the year—would meditate aloud, or awake and brood over the meditation of some master in harmony.

Oftener than she knew, especially when the days had grown shorter, and his mother feared for him the falling dew, would Mark be somewhere near in the dusky twilight, a lurking cherub feeding on her music—sometimes ascending on its upward torrent to a solitude where only God could find him.

At such time would come to Hester the thought of Vavasor, and for a while remain ; but it was chiefly as a helper in her work she thought of him. When for the time she had had music enough, softly as she would have covered a child she would close her piano, glide out into the night, and wander hither and thither through the gloom about the house. Then yet more

would she think what it would be to have a man for her friend—one who would strengthen her heart and make her bold in what was needful and right. And if at such time the thoughts of the maiden would fall to the natural architecture of maidens, and build one or two of those airy castles into which no man has looked or can look, and if through them went flitting the form of Vavasor, who will wonder! It is not the building of castles in steepest heights of air that is to be blamed, but the building of such as inspector Conscience is not invited to enter. To cherish the ideal of a man with whom to walk on her way through the world, is as right for a woman as it was for God to make man male and female; and to the wise virgin love will ever be a solemn thought, nor mockingly when most playfully handled. But there is a poor ambition to be married which is, I fear, the thought most present with too many women. Such a woman feels her worth unacknowledged, no place her own in society, until a man takes her under his

wing. She degrades womanhood who thinks thus of herself. It says ill for the relation of father and mother if the young women of a family recoil from the idea of marriage, but it says ill for the relation of parents and children if they long to realize it.

One evening towards the end of July, when summer is at its heat, and makes the world feel as if there never had been, and never ought to be anything but summer; but the wind of its nights comes to us from the land where the sun is not, to tell human souls that, dear as is the sunlight to their eyes, there are sweeter things far with which the sun has little to do—Hester was sitting in a fir-wood, under a fir-tree, on the fallen leaves of numberless years. Late in the day a man had come to tune her piano, and she had wandered up the hill in the last of the sunlight. Pine odours filled the air around her, as if they, too, stole out with the things of the night when the sun was gone.—Dusky gray in the forest brown, pine-scent, and silence!—All at once the wind woke, and began to sing

the strange, thin, monotonous Elysian ghost-song of the pine-wood, embodying to her spirit the sweet melancholy of the hour. A sad contentment filled her soul. So close was her heart to nature's that, when alone with her, she seldom or never longed for her piano; she *had* the music, and did not need to hear it. When we are very near to God, we do not desire the Bible.

As she sat thus in music-haunted reverie, she heard a slight rustle in the dry needles on the ground, and the next moment saw dark in the gloom the form of a man. She was startled. But he spoke instantly. It was Vavasor.

"I am so sorry I frightened you!" he said.

"It is nothing," she returned. "Why can't one help being silly? I don't see why ladies should be more easily frightened than gentlemen!"

"Men are quite as easily startled as ladies," he answered. "And nothing is more startling than to find some one near when you thought yourself alone."

“Except,” said Hester, “finding yourself alone when you thought some one was near. —But how did you find me?”

“Mark told me you were somewhere in this direction. In blind faith I ventured to follow, and—and something led me right, though all the time I seemed losing myself instead of finding you.”

“It may have been both,” returned Hester; “for I can’t say I know my way home. We are on the eastern side of the hill, and that is the dark one at night.”

“Who would not be happy to lose himself and find you!” rejoined Vavasor—and ventured no farther.

“It is time we were moving anyhow,” said Hester, holding out her hand to him. “Who knows when we may get home!”

“Do let us risk it a few minutes longer,” said Vavasor, taking her hand, but instead of raising her, slipping down beside her. “Just think: my first burst from the dungeon-vault of London for a whole year—and here I am in paradise—in fairyland! You are getting used to it, of course: it is such

an age since you left London!—but for me!”

“It is the fairyland of the fancy, not that of the imagination,” replied Hester, “that we get tired of. None but the false are ever weary of the true, and the true are always weary of the false.”

Then she asked him about his journey, and about Cornelius, and told him how she came to be there instead of at her piano.

“But the tuning must be over by this time!” she said: “let us go and try it.”

She sprang lightly to her feet before Vavasor could offer his hand, and led the way. It seemed to open itself before her, and they were soon at home.

A whole fortnight Vavasor spent at Yrndaale. In those days Nature had a better chance with him, so to speak, than once yet since he came into her dominions.

Circe—I mean Society, substituting herself for God and Nature, may have had such success with a man that he sees no beast-faces in her rout; yet is he potentially a man, and who knows what may not some time be awakened in him! Profoundly un-

aware of approaches or preparation, the heartless may be surprised by emotion, the scoffer by admiration. Vavasor began to develop elements of which he had not merely had no consciousness, but in whose existence he had not really believed—had in fact believed the less that he had affected their presence in himself, and thought he possessed what there was of them to be possessed. The most remarkable event of his history during the fortnight—his history both real and phenomenal, was, that one morning he got up in time to see, and *for the purpose of seeing* the sun rise. I hardly expect to be believed when I tell the fact! I am not much surprised that he formed the resolution: something Hester had said accounts sufficiently for that; but that such a man should in the sleepiness of the morning keep the resolve come to in the wide-awakeness of the foregone evening, fills me with astonishment. It was a great stride forward. And he enjoyed it too—enjoyed the victory over himself, the clear invigorating air of the morning, and the glory of the sunrise. He had poetry enough to re-

ceive some hint of the indwelling grandeur of the vision itself—for a vision it still is, as when first it rose on the wondering gaze of man, and a prophecy it must for ever be to the soul that through its eyes can see what those eyes cannot see. A power of some kind was present to him in the sight; he called it poetic feeling, which he never imagined as having a jot to do with fact; but it was, in the so-called Christian, the rudiment of the worship developed in the Guebers; it was the drawing of the eternal nature in him towards the naturing Eternal, whom he was made for understanding, but of whom he knew so little.

In the evening, after almost a surfeit of music, if one dare employ such a word concerning a holy thing, they went out into the twilight.

“In such a still soft negative of life,” said Vavator, “as an evening like this gives us, one almost doubts whether there can indeed be such a constantly recurring phenomenon of nature as I saw this morning!”

“What did you see this morning?” asked Hester wondering.

"I saw the sun rise," he answered.

"Did you really? I am so glad! That is a sight rarely seen in London—at least if I may judge by my own experience!"

"One goes to bed so late and so tired!" he returned simply.

"True! and even if you were up in time, where could you see it from?"

"Coming home from a dance, I have seen it; but then somehow you don't seem to have anything to do with it. I have often smelt the fresh-mown hay in London of a morning."

Hester was checked by this mention of the hay—as if the sun was something that belonged to the country, like the grass he withered; but, ere she had time to explain to herself her own feeling, the next thing he said got her over it.

"I felt this morning as if I had never seen the sun before; and his way of getting up was a new thing to me altogether. He seemed to mean shining—and somehow I felt he did. In London he always looks indifferent—as if he had got it to do, and couldn't help it, like everybody else in the

swarming place. Who is it that says God made the country, and man made the town?"

"I think it is Cowper, but I am not sure," answered Hester. "It can't be properly true though. I suspect man has more to do with the unmaking than the making of either. I am glad the mines and factories have not come near enough to us yet to destroy air and water."

"They are creeping on though. And the quarries are not far from you now. I saw them as I came along."

"Quarries do no harm. There are many things man does that only bring out nature's beauty. It is the rubbish does all the mischief—the refuse of the mills and the pits and the iron-works and the potteries."

"True! And worst of all is the human rubbish of our great cities!"

"What do you mean by the human rubbish, Mr. Vavasor?" asked Hester.

He saw he must be careful, and would fence a little.

"Don't you think," he said, slowly choosing his words, "that in the body

politic there is something analogous to the waste in matter ? ”

“ Certainly,” she answered ; “ only we might differ as to the degree of the analogy, and as to the persons to be classed in the moral waste. I fancy the one thing the human faculty is least able to cope with is judgment. None but God can read in a man what he really is. It can’t be a safe thing to call any of our own kith and kin *rubbish*.”

“ I see what you mean,” answered Vavasor. But to himself he said, “ Good heavens ! ”

They were walking in the dark dusk, in a narrow path among the trees, and Hester was able to think and speak more freely than if they had been looking in each other’s face in the broad daylight.

“ You see,” she went on, “ rubbish with life in it is an awkward thing to deal with. Rubbish proper is that out of which the life has gone, rendering it useless. But suppose this rubbish—that which lies about the mouth of a coal-pit, say—could by some process be made to produce the most lovely flowers ; or that, if neglected, it would

bring out horrible poison weeds, or creeping things, then the word *rubbish* would mean either too much or too little to be applied to it. You see, Mr. Vavasor, I have been thinking a great deal about this kind of thing. It is my business."

"But are there not some for whom nothing can be done?"

"I cannot allow it of any I have had to do with. And who would dare to say it before he had himself done all he could! And then another might be able to do more. Who shall say when God can do no more—God who takes no care of himself, and is at work for his children!"

"I confess," said Vavasor, "the condition of the poor in our large towns is the question of the day which—"

"—which every one is waking up to talk about," supplemented Hester.

What she thought was, that, if all who found the question interesting, would, instead of talking about it, do what they might, not towards its solution, but towards its removal, they would at least make some mark on the *rubbish*-heap, of which

not all the world's wind of words would in ten thousand years blow a single spadeful away. And yet is talk far less to be complained of than the mischief of dabbling deed. Perhaps it may even serve to turn some aside from harmful experiment.

It is not those who, regarding the horrors around them as a nuisance, are bent upon their destruction, who will work any salvation in the earth, but those who see the wrongs of the poor, and strive to give them their own. It is neither those who desire a good report among men, nor those who seek an antidote against the tedium of a selfish existence, who will ever cause the light to rise upon such as sit in darkness and the shadow of death; but those who, loving their own flesh and blood, and willing not merely to spend but to be spent for them, draw nigh them, being to being, and sit down in the darkness with them. Love, and love alone, as from the first it is the source of life, love alone, wise at once and simple as a child, can redeem life. It is life drawing nigh to life, person to person, the human to the human, that conquers death.

This the enemy knows—therefore urges to large combination. The strength of men takes the place of the strength of God. The unfit, admitted or drawn in, are weakness and corruption. They destroy the work of honest hands by the sound of false tongues. Combination is strength only between such as can each do good work alone, and will do it if there be no combination. Whoever depends on his company is a weakness to that association, society, or church of which he may imagine himself a pillar. Combination should be only for this or that passing necessity, and the more easily it can be dissolved the better. The most dangerous quality in anything of human origin would be the durability which is so often one of its aims. Where the body outlasts the spirit, there is the moral atmosphere infected with strangest forms of evil, death-generated.

It is always by single individual communication that the truth passes in power from soul to soul. Love alone is the one eternal unbreakable bond. It is only where love is not, that law must go. Law is indeed

necessary, but woe to that community where love is not on its way to cast out law by rendering it needless, by fulfilling all its demands, and tenfold more. Not all the laws in the universe can save a man from poverty, not to say from sin, not to say from conscious misery. Work on, you who do not see this. Work your best. You will be rewarded according to your honesty. You will be saved by the fire that destroys your work. You will be compelled to see that the same faith Christ had in his Father, and nothing else, will redeem your life, or render the condition of the poorest or the richest wretch such as would justify his creation. If the mere passing of this or that more or less wise law, did, in the person of his descendant of the third or fourth generation, make a *well-to-do* man of him, that descendant would probably be a great deal farther from the kingdom of heaven than the ancestral beggar or thief over whom you now lament. The criminal classes, to use your phrase, are not in the eyes of the Supreme and in yours made up of quite the same persons.

Vavasor began to think that if ever the day should come when he might approach Hester, "a suitor for her hand," he must be very careful over "her philanthropic craze;" not but that, if ever he should in earnest set about winning her, he had full confidence in the artillery he could bring to the siege: he had not yet made any real effort to gain her affections! Neither had he a doubt that, having succeeded, all would be his own, and he might do with her much as he pleased. Hester once secured, he had no anxiety concerning the philanthropic craze. His wife, once in the society whose opinion determined the way things ought to be regarded, would of necessity yield any enthusiasm!

Under the influence of the lovely place, of the lovely weather, and of his admiration for Hester, the latent poetry of Vavasor's nature developed itself rapidly; and, this reacting, he grew more and more rapidly in love with Hester. Ere long, to use the phrase in which he confessed the fact to himself, he was "over head and ears in love with her," and nearer knowing what bliss

may be than he had ever been before. Most men have the gates of paradise thus once opened to them a little way, and by their closing again they may have some poor sense of what it is to be shut out. "Very hard!" Is it? Then why, in the name of God, will you not go up to them and enter? You do not like the conditions? But the conditions are nothing more than the mere natural possibilities of entrance. Enter as you are and you would but re-enter the desert you think to leave behind you, see no glimpse of a promised land. The false cannot inherit the true, nor the unclean the lovely.

It began to grow plain to him that his aunt could no longer look upon the idea of an alliance with the Raymounts as she must *naturally* have regarded it before. Hester in such grounds and such a house, with old-accumulated comforts and luxuries around her, was a very different Hester from the child of a toiling *littérateur* in the dingy region of Bloomsbury, where everything was—of course respectable in a way, but that way a very inferior and—well—snuffy kind of way! where, in fact, he had

himself found it almost impossible to dissociate the idea of brokers' shops and the newest bonnet on Hester's queenly head! It was well his aunt had not seen her in those old surroundings: if he could but get her presented in this new setting, her beauty, tuned here to its "right praise and true perfection," would have a chance of working its natural effect! His aunt was not a jealous woman, but ready to admire where prudence permitted: here, if prudence were not reduced to absolute silence, he would at least stand amid no small amount of justification.

By degrees, and without any transition marked of Hester, emboldened mainly by the influences of the soft twilight, penetrating at once and shielding, he came to speak with more warmth and nearer approach. His heart was tuned above its ordinary pitch, and he was borne a captive slave in the triumph of Nature's hour.

"How strangely all this loveliness seems to sink into the soul!" he said one evening, when the bats were coming and going like thoughts that refuse to take shape and be

shared, and when with intensest listening you could not be sure whether it was a general murmur of nature you heard, low in her sleep, or only the strained nerves of your own being imitating that which now was not.

“For the moment,” he went on, “you seem to be the soul of that which is around you, yet oppressed with its vastness, and unable to account for what is going on in it.”

“I think I understand you,” returned Hester. “It is strange to feel at once so large and so small!”

“That is it!” responded Vavasor. “When one loves, how it exalts his whole being, yet in the presence of the woman he worships, how small he feels, and how unworthy!”

Humility and greatness are not merely correlative—they are one and the same condition. This, however, was beyond Vavasor.

For the first time in her life Hester felt, nor knew what it was, a vague pang of jealousy. Whatever certain others may think, there are women who, having had

their minds constantly, actively, and nobly occupied, have come to woman's full dignity without having even speculated on love. Such a one therefore may well be somewhat in the dark when first it begins to show itself; and that it should be there without having been invited perhaps adds to her perplexity. She was silent, and Vavasor judged he might venture a little farther. But with all his experience in the manufacture of compliments and high-flown poetry, he was at a loss: he had no theories or meditations of love to talk from. Love was with him, *at its best*, the something that preceded marriage—after which, whatever boys and girls might think, and although, of course, to a beautiful wife like Hester he could never imagine himself false, it must take its chance! Yet as he sat thus, with his soul bare to the mightiest enchantment of life, though little imagining it an essential decree for the redemption of men, he saw, for broken moments and with half-dazed glimpses, into the eternal, and spoke as in a gracious dream:

“If one might sit for ever thus!” he said,

almost in a whisper, “—for ever and ever, needing nothing, desiring nothing! lost in perfect, in absolute bliss! so peacefully glad as not to want to know what other joy may lie behind! so content as, if told there was no other bliss, only to say, ‘I am the more glad; I want no other! I refuse all else! Let the universe hear, and trouble me with none! This and only this ought ever to be—on and on—to the far-away end! The very soul of me is music, and needs not the softest sound of earth to keep it alive!’”

At that moment came a sigh of the night-wind, and fanned into their ears the moan of the stream away in the hollow, as it broke its being into voice over the pebbly troubles of its course. It came with a swell, and a faint through the pines, which woke and answered it with yet more ethereal voice.

“Still! still!” said Vavasor, as if the river were a live thing and understood him; “do not speak to me. I cannot attend even to your watery murmur. A sweeter music, born of the motions of my own spirit, fills my hearing. Be content with thy flowing, as I am content with my being. Would

that God in the mercy of a God would make this moment eternal ! ”

He ceased, and was silent.

Hester could not help being thrilled by the rhythm, moved by the poetic phrase, and penetrated by the air of poetic thought that pervaded the utterance—which would doubtless indeed have entranced many a less woman than herself—yet was not altogether pleased. Never yet had she touched a moment as to which, even in transient mood, she might have prayed, “ Let it last for ever ! ” nor did the present hold for her any reason why it should not pass, and make way for a better behind it. Still, the show of such feeling was the unveiling of a soul of song, the revealing of a nature that must one day come to love the highest, come to know a bliss beyond all that imagination can anticipate ! She must not be captious and contrary with him, she thought, any more than with her poor friends : was he not afflicted with the same poverty that gave the sting to theirs ! To be true, she must help all she could help—rich or poor, nor show favour ! “ Thou

shalt not countenance a poor man in his cause."

"I do not *quite* understand you," she said. "I cannot imagine the moment I should wish to last for ever."

"Have you had so little happiness?" he asked sympathetically.

"I do not mean that," she replied. "Indeed I have had much—more than all but a very few, I should imagine. But I do not think much of happiness. Perhaps that is a sign—I daresay it is—that I have not had much of the other thing! But no amount of happiness could make me wish the time to stand still. I want to be growing—and while one is growing Time cannot stand if he would: you drag him on with you! I want—perhaps you will prefer it put that way—to be constantly becoming more and more capable of happiness. Whether I have it or not, I must be and ought to be capable of it."

"Ah!" returned Vavasor, "you are as usual out of sight beyond me. You must have pity, else you will leave me miles behind, and I shall never see you more; and what

eternity would be to me without you God only knows. Other punishment will hardly be necessary than to know that there is a gulf between us."

"It must not be so," answered Hester almost tenderly. "Our fate is in our own hands. It is ours to determine the direction in which we shall go. I don't want to preach to you, Mr. Vavasor, but surely so much one friend may say to another! If every one were reasonable enough to go the right way, there would be no parting; and all the love and friendship in the world will not keep people together if they are inwardly parted by such difference as you imply."

Vavasor's heart was touched in two ways by this utterance—first, in the best way in which it was at the moment capable of being touched; for he could not help thinking what a blessed thing it must be to feel good and have no weight upon you, as this lovely girl plainly did, and live like her in perfect fearlessness of whatever might be going to happen to you: religion would be better than endurable in the society of such an embodiment of it! he might even qualify

for some distinction in it with such a teacher!—second, in the way of self-satisfaction; for clearly Hester was not disinclined to enter on a closer intimacy with him! He would certainly accept, if not the help, yet the offer of the help she had *almost* made! that would bind him to nothing! He understood her at least so far as to have not the slightest suspicion of such coquetry as a fool like Cornelius would have imagined. He was nevertheless a fool also, of another and deeper sort. It needs brains to be a real fool.

From that night he placed himself yet more in the position of a pupil towards her, hoping in the influence of the relation. To sustain and deepen it, he went on imagining and presenting himself as in this and that difficulty he was never really in, or even quite knew he was not in. He was no conscious hypocrite in the matter—only his intellect alone was concerned, and not even much interested, where he talked as if his being was troubled. No answer he could have had would have had the smallest effect on the man Vavasor—could only have de-

terminated what he would say next. Hester kept trying to meet him as simply and directly as she could ; but in the endeavour to encounter his difficulties she unconsciously transformed them into something very different from anything in Vavasor's thoughts. What she said, however, or indeed whether she spoke to his point or not, made no difference to him, so long as she talked to him. Talk she did, sometimes with an affectionate fervour of whose possibility he had had no idea ; and her growing desire to wake in him the better life, brought her into relations with him which had an earthly side, as everything heavenly of necessity has, for this life also is God's.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

ONE afternoon, when Vavasor was in the library—writing a letter to his aunt, in which he described in not too glowing terms, for he knew exaggeration would only give her a handle, the loveliness of the retreat among the hills where he was spending his holiday—when her father was in his study, her mother in her own room, and the children out of doors, a servant entered where Hester sat at her piano, announcing a visitor, and she had scarcely time to throw a glance on the card brought her ere the visitor was in the room. The name she had read was *Major H. G. Marvel*, and she vaguely thought she had heard it, but in the suddenness of the meeting was unable to recall a single idea concerning its owner.

She saw before her a man whose tall yet pudgy figure bore a military air, and was not without a certain grace of confidence, while his bearing was *marked* by the total absence of even that air of apology which one individuality seems almost to owe to another. At the same time there was not a suspicion of truculence or even repulse in his carriage. There was self-assertion, but not of the antagonistic—solely of the inviting sort: his whole person beamed with friendliness. Notably above the middle height, the impression of his stature was reduced by a disproportionate valour in the central front, which for years must have always met the enemy in considerable advance of the rest of him. On the top of rather asthmatic shoulders was perched a head that looked small for the base from which it rose, and the smaller that it was an evident proof of the derivation of the word *bald*, by Chaucer spelt *balled*: it was round and smooth and shining like ivory, and the face upon it brought by the help of the razor into as close a resemblance with the rest of the ball as possible. The said face was a

pleasant one to look at—of features altogether irregular—a retreating forehead over keen gray eyes that sparkled with intelligence and fun, prominent cheek-bones, a nose thick in the base and considerably elevated at the point, a large mouth always ready to show a set of white, serviceable teeth—the only symmetrical arrangement in the facial economy—and a chin whose original character was rendered doubtful by its physical *duplicity*.

“Cousin Hester!” he said, holding out his hand as he advanced.

Mechanically she gave him hers. The voice that addressed her was at once a little husky and very cheery; the hand that took hers was small and soft and kind and firm. A merry, friendly smile illuminated eyes and face as he spoke. Hester could not help liking him—yet felt a little shy of him. She thought she had heard her mother speak of a cousin somewhere abroad: this must be he!

“You don’t remember me!” he said. “Well, it would be rather too much to expect, seeing you were not in this world,

wherever else you may have been, for a year or two after I left the country; and, to tell the truth, had I been asked, I should have objected to your appearance on any terms."

As this speech did not seem to carry much enlightenment with it, he went on to explain.

"The fact is, my dear young lady, that I forsook England because your mother and I were too much of one mind."

"Of one mind?" repeated Hester, bewildered.

"Ah, you don't comprehend!" said the major, whose bearing as he stood before her was as polite as confident. "The thing, you see, was this: I liked your mother better than myself, and so did she; and, without any jealousy of one another, it was not an arrangement for my happiness. I had but one alternative—stopping at home and breaking my heart, or going away, and getting over it as I best might. So you see I am by nature your sworn enemy—only it's of no use, for I've fallen in love with you at first sight; and if you will ask me to sit down, I will swear to forgive you, let

bygones be bygones, and be your true knight and devoted servant as long as I live. How you do remind me of your mother!—only, by Jove, you're twice as handsome!"

"Do, pray, sit down, Mr. Marly."

"*Marvel*, if you please," corrected the major; "—and I'm sure it's a great marvel if not a great man I am, after what I've come through! But don't you marvel at me too much, for I'm not a bad sort of fellow when you come to know me. And if you would let me have a glass of water, with a little sherry just to take the taste off it, I would show my gratitude on the first safe opportunity. I have walked farther for the sight of you than on such a day I find altogether refreshing: it's as hot as the tropics, by George! But I have seen you and am well repaid—even without the sherry!"

As he spoke, he was carefully wiping his round head with a red silk handkerchief.

"I will send it at once, and let my mother know you are here," said Hester, turning to the door.

“No, no, never mind your mother; I dare say she is busy, or lying down. She always went to lie down at this time of the day: she was never very strong you know—though I don’t doubt it was quite as much to get rid of me: she thought me troublesome in those days. But I bear no malice, and I hope she don’t either. Tell her I say so. It’s more than five and twenty years now! God bless me, it don’t seem more than so many weeks! Don’t disturb your mother, my dear. But if you insist on doing so, tell her old Harry is come to see her—much improved since she turned him about his business.”

Hester, much amused, ran to find her mother.

“There’s the oddest man down stairs, mamma, calling himself old Harry!” she said. “He’s having some sherry and water in the drawing-room!”

Her mother laughed—a pleased little laugh.

“You don’t say so!—Go to him, Hester dear, and tell him I shall be down directly.”

“Is he really a cousin, mamma?”

“To be sure—my second cousin! He was very fond of me once.”

“Oh, I know that! He has told me all the story already. He says you sent him about his business.”

“If that means that I wouldn't marry him, it is true enough. But he doesn't know what I went through for taking his part! I always stood up for him, though I never could bear him near me. He was such an odd, good-natured bear! such a rough, merry creature! always saying the thing he ought not, and making everybody, ladies especially, uncomfortable! He never meant any harm, but never saw where fun should stop. You wouldn't believe the things Harry would say out of pure fun!—especially if he got a very proper old maid in his power: he would tease and tease her till she was in a passion. Only if she began to cry, then Harry had the worst of it, and was penitent as a child.—He must be a good deal changed by this time!”

“He told me to tell you he was much improved. But if he is—well! I like him though, mamma—I suppose because you

liked him. So take care you are not too hard upon him ; *I* am going to take him up now."

"I make over to you my interest in him—only I must warn you, as he seems to have made a conquest of you already, that in India he married a black—or at least a brown woman."

"That's nothing to his discredit, mamma ! Has he brought her home with him, I wonder !"

"She has been dead now some ten years. I believe he had a large fortune with her, which he has considerably increased. He is a good-hearted fellow, and was kind to every one of his relations, so long as there was one left to be kind to."

"Well, I shall go to him, mamma, and tell him you are coming as soon as you have got your wig and your newest lace-cap on, and your cheeks rouged and pearl-powdered, to look as like the lady that would none of him as you can."

Her mother laughed merrily, and pretended to box her daughter's ears. It was not often a mood playful as this arose be-

tween them; for not only were they both serious in heart, but from temperament and history, from modes and direction of thought, serious in their ways also. Yet who may so well break out in childlike merriment as those whose life has in it no moth-eaten Mammon pits—who have no fear, no greed, and live with a will—rising like the sun to fill the day with the work given them to do?

“See what I have brought you, cousin!” said major Marvel when Hester re-entered the room, holding out to her a small necklace. “You needn’t mind taking it from an old fellow like me,” he went on, seeing her hesitate. “I don’t want to marry you off-hand. I must know first what sort of a temper you’ve got, and one or two things besides. There—take it.”

Hester drew near, and looked at the necklace.

“Take it,” said the major again.

“How strangely beautiful it is!—red, pear-shaped, dull-scratched stones, hung from a savage-looking gold chain! What are they, Mr. Marvel?”

“You describe it like a book!” returned the major. “It is a barbarous native necklace. But the stones are oriental rubies—only rough—not cut or polished.”

“It is beautiful!” repeated Hester. “Did you really intend it for me?”

“Of course I did!”

“I will ask mamma if I may have it.”

“Where’s the need of that? I hope you don’t think I stole it?—though faith there’s a good deal very like stealing goes on where that came from!—But here comes the mother!—Helen, I’m so glad to see you once more!”

Hester glided away with the necklace in her hand, leaving her mother to welcome her old admirer: till that was over she would not trouble her about his offered gift.

They met like trusting friends whom years had done nothing to separate; and while they were yet talking of bygone times, Mr. Raymount entered, received the major cordially, and insisted on his remaining with them as long as he could: they were old friends as well as rivals, and there never

had been any ground of bitterness between them. The major agreed; Mr. Raymount sent for his luggage, and showed him to a room.

CHAPTER IX.

MAJOR MARVEL.

As major Marvel, notwithstanding such rebuffs as he had met with, had never learned to entertain doubt of his acceptability, so was he on his part most catholic in receptivity. Yet there were persons whom he disliked, and then his dislike was strong. I suspect they were such as found the heel of his all but invulnerable vanity, and wounded it: unused to be hurt, his vanity resented hurt the more sorely. He was in one sense, and that not a slight one, a true man: there was no discrepancy, no unfitness between his mental conditions and his human presentation: his words, looks, manners, tones, everything that goes to express man to man, expressed him truly. What he felt that he showed. I almost think he was unaware of the possibility of doing other-

wise. At the same time he had very little insight into the feelings of others, and almost no sense of the possibility that what he was saying might affect his listeners otherwise than it affected him. If he boasted, he meant to boast, and would have scorned to look as if he did not know it was a good thing he was telling of himself—why not of himself as well as of another?—and had no idea of thus proving offensive. Neither had he ready sympathy with another in any suffering he had never himself experienced. But he was scrupulously fair in what he said and did; nothing was so apt to make him angry as any appearance of injustice or show of deception. He would have *said* that a man's first business was to take care of himself, but his conduct went far to cast contempt upon his opinion.

During dinner he occupied the greater part of the conversation, and evidently expected to be listened to. But that was nearly all he wanted. Let him talk, and hear you laugh when he was funny, and he was satisfied. He had no inordinate desire for admiration, or even for approbation. He

told tales of adventure, some wonderful, some absurd, some having nothing in them but his own presence, while occasionally, the detail being good, the point would be missing; but he was just as willing to tell one whose joke was against himself, as one amusing at the expense of another. Like many of his day who had been long in India, he was full of the amusements and sports in which so much otherwise idle time is passed by Englishmen in the east, and seemed to think nothing connected with the habits of their countrymen there could fail of interest to those at home. Every now and then throughout the dinner he would say, "Oh! that reminds me of what happened when I was at"—such or such a place, or "when" so and so "of our regiment was out tiger-shooting," or "pig-sticking," or whatever the sport might be; "—and if Mr. Raymount will take a glass of wine with me, I will tell him the story."

When he and Vavasor were introduced, he glanced at him, drew his eyebrows together, made his military bow, and included him in his audience.

Vavasor was annoyed with him—not that he much minded a little boring by Hester's side, or forgot that everything to another's disadvantage was so much in his own favour, but that he could not help thinking what his aunt would say to such a relative. Retaining the blindest expression, and ready to drink as many glasses of wine with him as he wished, he set the major down not merely as an ill-bred man and a boaster, which he was, but as a liar and a vulgar-minded man, which he was not.

Now although major Marvel had not much habitual insight into character, the defect arose mainly from lack of interest; if suspicion or antagonism was roused, he was just as likely to arrive at a correct judgment concerning a neighbour as any man ever is who does not love him.

One of his narratives—of the hunt of a man-eating tiger—was a specially thrilling one. He saw the eyes of Mark and little Saffy almost surpass the use of eyes, as they listened, and become ears as well. He saw Hester, who was still child enough to prefer a story of adventure to a love-tale, gaze as if,

but for the way it was bound over to sobriety, her hair would have stood on end. But at one moment he surprised an expression on the face of Vavasor which that experienced man of the world never intended to be seen, and betrayed only through annoyance at the absorption of Hester's listening: she seemed to have eyes for no one but the man who shot tigers as Vavasor would have shot grouse! Upon fitting occasion and sufficient cause, the major was quarrelsome as any turkey-cock. He swallowed something that was neither good nor food, and said, but not quite so carelessly as he intended,

"I see by your eyes, Mr. Passover, you think I am drawing the long bow!"

"Upon my life!" answered Vavasor, "nothing was farther from my thoughts! I was merely admiring the coolness of creeping into the mouth of a—a—jungle after a—a—what-you-call-him—man-eating tiger."

"Well, you see! what was a fellow to do?" returned the major suspiciously. "The fellow wouldn't come out! and by George, there was a fellow wanted him out! Besides, I didn't creep in; I only looked in

to see whether he was really there. That any one could tell by the eyes of him."

"But ain't a man-eating tiger something tremendous, you know? When once he takes to that kind of diet, don't you know? he likes nothing else half so well, does he? Good beef and mutton won't any longer serve his turn—at least so I've been told at the club. A man must be a very Munchausen to venture into a hole after him!"

"I don't know the gentleman—never heard of him," said the major—for Vavasor to cover it had pronounced the name German-fashion; "but you are quite mistaken as to the character of the man-eating tiger. It is true he does not care much for butcher-meat after once forming an attachment to human flesh; but it does not follow that it makes him fiercer. The fact is, it ruins his moral nature. He seldom surprises an Englishman; and the flesh of women and children and poor villagers takes its revenge upon him by destroying his courage. The brute is known for a sneak. He knows himself for a Thug, and the murderer of his master. The man-eating tiger is the

devil of his kind. The others leave you alone except you attack them; he attacks you—but on the sly—and runs when you go after him. From the top of your elephant, while the Bheels are beating up his quarters, you may catch sight of him, with his tail tucked between his legs, sneaking from cover to cover of the jungle. You can never get any sport out of him. *He* will never fly at your elephant, or climb a tree, or take to the water after you! If there's a creature on earth I hate, it's a coward!" concluded the major.

Thereupon Vavasor said to himself, "The man is a coward!"

"But why should you hate a coward?" asked Hester, feeling at the moment, with the vision of a man-eating tiger before her, she must herself come under the category. "How can a poor creature made without courage help being a coward? You can neither learn courage nor buy courage!"

"I am not so sure about the learning," returned the major. "But such as you mean, I don't call cowards. Nobody thinks worse of the hare, or even the fox, for

going away before the hounds. Men whose business it is to fight, go away before the enemy when they haven't a chance. To be killed when you ought not is to give in. There is a time to run and a time to stand. The man will run like a man, and the coward like a coward."

"Ten to one you know how to run!" said Vavasor to himself.

"What can harmless creatures do but run?" resumed the major, filling his glass. "But when the tyrant turns tail he is a coward. Man or beast, I would set my foot on him. That's what sent me to the hole after the brute."

"But he might have killed you though he was a coward," said Hester, "when you did not leave either him or yourself any room to run."

"Of course he might, my dear! Where else would be the fun of it? Without that, tiger-hunting would be no better than shooting pigeons or pheasants. I *had* to kill him, you know!—By George! there's a first cousin of his—a woman-eating tiger, rather common in London, I believe; only he

marries her, and eats her slowly up at his ease in his den ! ”

“ How about the black wife ! ” thought Mr. Raymount, who had been little more than listening.

But Mr. Raymount did not really know anything of that part of his old friend’s history : it was not to his discredit. “ The black wife ” was the daughter of an English merchant by a Hindoo lady. When first he made her acquaintance, she was a young helpless creature, kept almost in slavery by the relatives of her deceased father, who had left her all his property. The major had become interested in her from an attempt to lay the death of her father at her door : the shine of her gold had blinded her relations into imagining, almost *believing* her guilty. He had taken her part, and been of the greatest service to her. She was entirely acquitted, but, although nobody believed her guilty, *society* looked askance upon her. True, she was rich, but was she not black ? and had she not been accused of a crime ? and who saw her father and mother married ? Then thought the major :

“Here am I a useless old fellow, living for nobody but myself! it would make one life at least happier if I took the little dark thing home! She’s rather too old, and I’m rather too young to adopt her; but I dare say she would marry me! The trifle she has would eke out my pay and help us to live decently!” He did not imagine she had more than a very moderate income, but it turned out she had a very large fortune. That he rejoiced over it I do not doubt; but that he would have been other than an honourable husband had he on the contrary found she had nothing, I am far indeed from suspecting. When she left him a widowed father, he mourned sincerely over his loss; and when the child followed her mother, he was for some time a truly saddened man. Then, as if her money was all he had left, he went into speculation with it, and having at least doubled it, had now returned to his country to find but few of his old friends alive, and those few much changed. Little as one would have imagined it from his conversation or manner, it was with a kind of heart-despair that he had sought Mrs. Raymount.

With his first glance on the daughter of his old love he saw in her a grand creature, gracious as grand, and altogether new to him. His heart immediately claimed her: to have loved the mother seemed to give him a right in the daughter. And that right there might be a mode of making good! But this was only feeling yet, not thinking.

In proportion as he was taken with the daughter of the house, he disliked the look of the fine-gentleman visitor that seemed to be dangling after her. Who he was, or how there present, he did not know, but from the first sight of him he disliked him, and the more as he saw more of his attention to Hester. He was doubtless a woman-eater—after her money!

“But,” said Hester, fearing the conversation about to take a perilous turn, “I should like to understand the thing a little better. I am not willing to set myself down as a coward; I do not see that a woman has any right to be a coward more than a man. Tell me, major Marvel—when you know a beast may have you down and

begin eating you any moment, what is it keeps you up? What do you fall back upon? Is it principle, or faith, or duty, or what is it?"

"Ho, ho!" returned the major laughing, "a metaphysician in the very bosom of my family!—I had not reckoned on that!—Well, no, my dear, I cannot say it is principle, and I am sure it is not faith. Fact is, you don't think about falling back upon anything. It's partly your elephant, and partly your rifle—and partly, perhaps—well, there I daresay does come in something of principle!—partly that you are an Englishman, and have to kill their big vermin for them, poor things! But you don't think of that at the time. You've got to kill the brute—that's it—and that's all. When you catch sight of him, your rifle jumps to your shoulder of itself."

"Do you make up your mind beforehand that if the animal should kill you, it is all right?" asked Hester.

"By no means, I give you my word of honour," answered the major.

"Well, now," rejoined Hester, "except I

had made up my mind that if I was killed it was all right, I couldn't meet the tiger."

"But you see, my dear," said the major, "you do not know yet what it is to have confidence in your eye and your rifle. It is a form of power you soon come to feel—the power to destroy."

Hester fell a thinking. She could not bear the idea of feeling as her own a power that was not her own. The talk went on without her. She did not hear the end of the story. Her attention was roused by the laughter that followed it.

"That was the joke of the thing!" said the major. "It was no tiger at all! What a roar of laughter there was when the brute—a great lumbering loundering hyena, rushed into the daylight! But the barrel of my rifle was bitten together as a schoolboy bites a pen—a quill-pen, I mean. They have horribly powerful jaws, those hyenas!"

"And what became of the man-eater?" asked Mark, with a disappointed look.

"She stopped in the hole till it was dark, no doubt, and then went prowling after her next delicate meal."

"Just imagine the low rumbling growl at your back, as if it came out of a mine of teeth!" said Hester, with a shudder, and her eyes, like Hamlet's, bent on vacancy.

"By George! for a young lady," said the major, "you have an imagination! Much of that won't go to make you a good hunter of tigers!"

"Then you owe your coolness to want of imagination?" suggested Hester.

"Perhaps so.—Perhaps, after all," returned the major, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "tiger-hunters are a set of stupid fellows—too stupid to be reasonably frightened!"

"I don't mean that exactly. But I do think you don't know so well as you might where your courage comes from. For my part I would rather be courageous to help the good than to destroy the bad."

"Ah, but we're not all good enough ourselves for that!" remarked the major, with a serious expression, looking at her full out of his clear gray eyes, whence their habitual twinkle of fun had for the moment vanished.

"Some of us are only fit to destroy what is worse than ourselves."

"To be sure we can't *make* anything," said Hester thoughtfully, "but we can help God to make some things.—To destroy evil things is good," she went on after a pause, "but the worst things can be destroyed only by being good—and that is so hard!"

"It *is* hard!" responded the major, "—so hard that most people never try it!" he added, with a sigh, and a gulp of his wine.

Mrs. Raymount rose, and accompanied by Hester and the children, withdrew. The major rattled on, and his host now and then put in a word; but Vavasor sat silent, with an expression that seemed to say, "I am amused, but I don't eat all that is put on my plate."

CHAPTER X.

ADVENTURES.

AFTER breakfast the next day, all but Mr. Raymount went for a walk together.

The major kept as near Hester as he could, much to the annoyance of Vavasor, who judged him a most objectionable, indeed low fellow, full of brag and vulgarity, while the major judged him a supercilious idiot. It is curious, but not hard to explain, how differently a man's character will be read by two people in the same company : his carriage to each affects only the object of it, and is unobserved by the other. Like a man, and you will judge him with more or less fairness ; dislike him, fairly or unfairly, and you cannot fail to judge him unfairly. Each, ignorant of the other's pursuits, and nearly incapable of sympathy with him upon

any point, would gladly have shown him the fool he counted him. Only the major, being the truer man, was able to judge the man of the world with a better gauge than he could apply in return. The major was annoyed with Vavator's silent pretension, and disgusted with his indifference to everything in which he took an interest; Vavator regarded the major as a narrow-minded overgrown schoolboy—though, in fact, his horizon was very much wider than his own; and he looked down from afar on the vulgarity which made those who knew his worth more or less anxious every time he opened his mouth. But the major did not often seriously offend, only one never knew when he might not! Neither did the offence ever hurt—only rendered the sensitive, and others for their sakes, uncomfortable.

It seemed destined to be a morning of adventures. As they passed the gate of the home farm, out rushed all of a sudden a half-grown pig, and took his way right between the well parted legs of the major—with the awkward result that he was thrown down in a place which, to say the least, if he had

had a choice, he would not have chosen. With stony countenance Vavasor offered his assistance, but, heavy as he was, the major did not require it. He got cleverly on his feet again, with a cheerfulness which discomfited discomfiture, and showed either a sweetness or command of temper, or both together, which gave him a great lift in the estimation of Hester.

“ Confound the brute ! ” he said, laughing. “ He can’t know how many of his wild relatives I have stuck, else I should set it down to revenge. What a mess he has made of me ! I shall have to throw myself in the river like a Hindoo, for purification ! ”

Saffy laughed right merrily over his fall and the fun he made of it, but Mark looked concerned. He ran and pulled two handfuls of grass, with which he proceeded to rub the major down.

“ Let us go to the farmhouse,” said Mrs. Raymount. “ Mrs. Stokes will give us water and a sponge.”

“ No, no,” returned the major. “ Better let it dry. The mud will come off much easier then. An Indian pig once served me

much the same. Why shouldn't piggy have his turn? Come along, Mark."

"The pig didn't mean it, sir," said Mark, with serious justice. "He only wanted to get out."

A spirit of liberty was abroad. Mark and Saffy went rushing away like wild rabbits every now and then, taking a round and returning. It was one of those cooler of warm mornings that rouse the life in heart, brain, and nerves, making every breath a pleasure, and every movement an agreeable consciousness. It was no wonder there should be creatures about the place that wanted to get out.

They had not gone much farther, when, as they approached the paling of a paddock, a horse came blundering over the fence, hoping, perhaps, to range the world henceforth. Unaccustomed to horses except when equipped and attended, most of the party drew back a little startled. But as he lighted, bringing with him the top bar of the fence, he stumbled, and almost fell; and ere he had quite recovered himself, the major had him by nose and ear. He led him to

the gap, made him jump in again, and replaced the bar.

“Mind we mention it as we come back, Mark,” he said.

“Thank you! How brave of you, major Marvel!” said Mrs. Raymount.

The major laughed with his usual merri-ment.

“If it had been the man-eating horse, as they called him, of the rajah of Rumtool now,” he said, “I should have been brave indeed! only by this time there would have been nothing left of me to thank. It would have wanted some courage to take *him* by the head, Mark, I can tell you! but a quiet good-tempered carriage-horse none but a cockney would be frightened at!”

Therewith he began, and to the awful delight of the children, told them the most amazing and indeed horrible tales about the said horse. Whether they were all true or not, I cannot say; but besides what he had seen, he told only what he had heard and believed. Vavasor’s opinion was that in every word he said about the rajah of Rumtool’s horse the major was romancing.

They were following the course of the river, and had gradually descended from the higher grounds to the immediate bank, which here spread out into a small meadow. There were not many flowers, but Saffy ran about pulling stalks of feathery-headed grasses. Mark went walking by himself along the river's brink, stopping every now and then to look into the water. The bank was covered with long grass, here and there a bush of rushes amongst it, and in parts was a little undermined. On the opposite side lower down was a meal-mill, and nearer was the head of the mill-lade, whose weir made the river deeper—some seven feet deep at least, and on the surface as still to the eye as a lake.

The two ladies and two gentlemen were walking along the meadow, some distance behind the children, and a little way from the bank, when they were startled by a scream of agony from Saffy. She was running towards them shrieking. Mark was not to be seen. All started at speed to meet her, but presently Mrs. Raymount sank on the grass. Hester would have stayed with her, but she motioned her on.

Vavator outran the major, and reached Saffy first. But to his anxious questions—"Where is Mark? Where did you leave him? Where did you see him last?" she answered only by shrieking with her every available particle of breath. As the major came up he heard enough to know that he must use his wits, and not lose time in trying to draw information from a creature whom terror had made for the moment insane. He ran on, keeping close to the bank, and looking for some sign of the spot where the boy must have fallen in.

He had overrun the place, and was following a fruitless intent when he heard a cry behind him. It was the voice of Hester. "Across! Across!" she was crying.

He looked across, and, half-way over, slowly drifting in the direction of the mill-lade, towards which there was an under-current, saw a something dark, now appearing a little above the water, now sinking out of sight. The major, with experienced eye, perceived at once it must be the boy. He threw off his coat, plunged

in, found the water deep enough for swimming, and made for the object. But it showed so little that, fearing to miss it, he changed his direction, and swam straight for the mouth of the mill-lade, anxious of all things to prevent him from getting down to the undershot water-wheel.

In the meantime, Hester, followed by Vavasor, sped along the bank to the weir, over which hardly any water was running. When Vavasor saw her turn sharp round to it, he was alarmed, and laid his hand on her; but she turned on him with eyes that flashed, and lips white notwithstanding her speed, and he withdrew it, and submissively followed. The footing was uncertain, with deep water on one side up to a level with the stones, and a steep descent to deep water on the other. In two or three spots the water ran over, and those were slippery. But, rendered absolutely fearless by her fear, Hester flew across without a slip, leaving Vavasor yards behind, for he was neither very sure-footed nor very sure-headed.

When they landed, they were on the slip between the lade and the river, the lade

between them and the other bank, on to which they saw the major trying with wearily repeated effort to heave the unconscious form of Mark. The poor man had not swum for many years, and was almost spent.

“Bring him here,” cried Vavasor. “The stream is too strong for me to get to you; it will bring you here in a moment.”

The major muttered an oath, made a great wrathful effort, got the body half on the shore, and was then just able to scramble out, and draw it up.

When Vavasor turned, he found Hester had left him, and saw her already almost at the mill. There she crossed the lade, and running up the other side, was soon at the spot where the major was doing what he could to bring the boy back to life. But there was little hope without further help. She caught him up in her arms.

“Come; come!” she cried, and ran with him to the mill. The major followed, panting and dripping. When she met Vavasor, he would have taken her burden from her, but she would not give him up.

“Go to my mother,” she said. “Tell

her we have got him, and he is at the mill. Then go to my father, and ask him to send for the doctor."

Vavasor obeyed, feeling a little small. But Hester had never thought that he might have acted differently; she never even recalled his essay to prevent her from crossing to the major's help: she thought only of Mark and her mother.

In a few minutes they had him in the miller's blankets, with hot water about him, while the major, who knew well what ought to be done, for he had been tried in almost every emergency under the sun, went through the various prescribed movements of the arms, inflated the chest again and again with his own breath, and did all he could to excite the action of the breathing-muscles.

Vavasor took upon him to assure Mrs. Raymount that Mark was safe and would be all right in a little while, and ran on to the house. She rose then, and with what help Saffy could give her, managed to walk home.

Mr. Raymount crossed the river by the bridge, and arrived as the first signs of re-

turning animation appeared. His presence and calmness were a great relief to Hester. The major was more anxious as to the results of such a shock to a delicate child than he had been apprehensive of failure in restoring him. After about half-an-hour, the boy opened his eyes, looked at his father, smiled in his own heavenly way, and closed them again with a deep sigh. They covered him up warm, and he fell asleep.

That same night, as Hester was sitting by his bed, she heard him talking in a dream :

“When may I go and play with the rest by the river ?” he said. “Oh, how it talks ! and it runs through me and through me ! It was such a nice way, God, of fetching me home !—on a water-horse !”

It sent a pang to her heart. What if after all he was going to leave them ! The child had always seemed fitter for home than abroad, and he might now be sent for !

He recovered by degrees, but continued sleepy and tired. When he was taken home he begged to go to bed. He never

fretted or complained, received every attention with a smile, and told his mother not to mind, for he was not going away yet. He had been told that under the water, he said.

Before winter, he was able to go about the house and grounds, and was reading his favourite books again, especially the Pilgrim's Progress, which he had read five times.

CHAPTER XI.

POOR GENTLEMAN, POOR EARL !

THE major left Yrndale the next morning, saying now there was Mark to attend to, his room was better than his company. Vavasor said he would stop a day or two longer ; he could not go until he saw Mark fairly on the road to recovery.

In reality the major went because he could no longer endure the sight of “that idiot,” as he called Vavasor.

“The poltroon !” he said. “A fellow like that to marry a girl like cousin Helen’s Hester ! A grand creature, by George !—the grandest creature I ever saw in my life !—Rather than wet his clothes the sneak would have seen us both drown !”

He was not quite fair to Vavasor, who did not love his neighbour enough to grasp the

facts of the case, and so did not see the necessity for swimming.

He told Mark he was going to fetch some tiger-skins, a little idol with diamond eyes, and a lot of queer things he had brought home. When he came back he would tell him all about them, and let him have any of them to keep that he liked.

He told Mr. Raymount he had no end of business to look after, but now he knew the way to Yrndale, he might return any day. As soon as Mark was well enough to be handed over to a male nurse he would come directly. He told Mrs. Raymount he had got some pearls for her—he knew she was fond of pearls—and was going to fetch them.

Having made Hester promise to write to him at the Army and Navy Club every day till Mark was well, he departed, much blessed for the saving of the precious boy.

When he reached London he hunted up some old friends through whom to make inquiry concerning Vavasor; and did learn some things about him—nothing very bad as things went where everything was more or less bad, and nothing to his special credit.

That he was heir to an earldom specially annoyed him, for that made it the more likely he would please his beautiful cousin.

Vavasor was relieved to find that Hester, while full of gratitude to the major, had received no unfavourable impression concerning himself in connection with the late sad affair—not that he was dissatisfied with his own behaviour: it was reasonable! but what might not the other fellow have said to his prejudice? As the days went on, however, and enthusiasm might have been expected to tone down, he was annoyed to find her apparently quite heedless of the objectionable character of the man who, by mere good luck, had got the start of him in the rescue! He styled him “A beastly fellow, a lying braggart, a disgusting rascal.” He would have called him an army-cad, only the word *cad* was not then invented. If any more such relations were likely to turn up, the sooner he cut the connection the better! That Hester should not be shocked with him was more than he could bear to think of. He did not know that, as to the pure all things are pure, so the common mind is far

more annoyed with vulgarity in others than the mind of genuine refinement. The latter understands, therefore forgives, and disregards. Hester, able to look deeper than Vavasor, saw much that was good and honourable in the major, however much too loose the bridle of his tongue might be for safe riding in the crowded paths of society. "But," thought Vavasor, "where is the use of quarrelling about a man I am not likely to set eyes on again!"

A day or two before the natural end of his visit, as Mrs. Raymount, Hester, and he were sitting together in the old-fashioned garden, their letters were brought them: one for Vavasor had a great black seal. He read it through, and said quietly,

"I am sorry I must leave you to-morrow—or to-night if there is a train. I must be present at the funeral of my uncle, lord Gartley. He died yesterday, from what I can make out. What a bore it is to succeed to a title with hardly property enough to pay one's servants!"

"It is tiresome!" assented Mrs. Raymount. "But a title is not like a fever: if

you can live without one, you can live with one."

"True; very true! But society—don't you know! So much is expected of a man in my position!—What do *you* think, Miss Raymount?"

He turned to her with a look that seemed to say her judgment was his law.

"I think with mamma," replied Hester. "I do not see why a mere name should have any power to alter one's mode of life. The change may of course bring new duties, but in other respects why should you not go on as you are doing?"

"I must go a good deal by what my aunt thinks. Her one fixed idea has been the rehabilitation of the earldom. All her life she has been saving for that."

"Then she is going to make you her heir?" said Hester, who, having been asked her opinion, simply desired the grounds on which to give it.

"My dear Hester!" said her mother.

"I am only too much delighted Miss Raymount should care to ask me *anything*!" said Vavasor. "My aunt does

mean to make me her heir, I believe. I must not depend upon that, however, because, if I were to displease her, she might change her mind any moment. But she has been like a mother to me, and I do not think, for any small provocation such as I am likely to give her, she would yield the dream of her life. She is a kind-hearted woman—a little peculiar, but true as steel where she has taken a fancy. I wish you knew my aunt, Mrs. Raymount.”

“I should be much pleased to know her.”

“She would be delighted with this lovely place of yours. It is a perfect paradise! I feel its loveliness the more the nigher I come to hearing its gates close behind me. Happily there is no flaming sword ready to mount guard against re-entrance!”

“You must bring your aunt, Mr. Vavasor. We shall make her very welcome,” said Mrs. Raymount.

“Unfortunately, with all her good qualities, my aunt, as I have said, is a little peculiar. She shrinks from making acquaintances.”

He should have said—“out of her own

world." People beyond that existed for her only on the sufferance of remotion.

But by this time Vavasor had resolved to make an attempt to gain his aunt, and so Hester. He was confident she could not fail to be more than pleased with Hester if only she saw her in fit surrounding: with her the frame was more than half the picture. Therefore he was glad, as I have told, that she had not called on her in Addison square: she would look to her so much more satisfactory in the setting of Yrndale. He had, besides, the advantage of being himself now of greater importance—the title no longer in prospect but in possession: he was that earl of Gartley for whom she had been saving all the time he was merely the heir, subject to death, or waiting indefinite! She must either be of one mind with him now, or lose the cherished purpose of so many years! If he stood out for the woman of his choice, his aunt would be compelled to give in!

He left them in high spirits, with no pretence of regret for one whom he had never seen, or of sympathy for the daughter he had left behind him.

Hester was more interested in Vavasor's succession than she would herself have expected. They had been so much together of late, and in circumstances so favourable to the manifestation of what of lovable was in him, and to the revelation of how much her image possessed him, that she could hardly be a woman and not care about what befell him. Neither, although her life lay, and she felt that it lay, in far other regions, was she, any more than her mother, so absorbed in the best as to be indifferent to the pleasure of wearing a distinguished historical name, and occupying a somewhat exalted position in the eyes of the world. Her nature was not yet so thoroughly possessed with the things that *are*, as distinguished from the things that only appear, as not to feel some satisfaction in the thought of being a countess of this world, while waiting the inheritance of the saints in light. This was of course just as unworthy of her as it is of every one who has seen the hidden treasure not to sell *all* that he has and buy the field—as it is of every one who has had a true glimpse of Christ

not to count, with Paul, everything but dross to the winning of him—not even worth picking up on the way as he presses towards the mark of the calling up. I must, however, say this much for her, that she thought of the rank first of all as a buttressing help to the labours which it continued her chief hope to follow again among her poor friends. To be a countess would make some things easier, she thought. Little she knew how immeasurably more difficult it would make everything worth doing!—that at once she would have to fight for her freedom with hidden crafts of slavery potent in a region more than any other under the prince of the power of the air! She had the notion that, uplifted among the shows of rule, she would be able to lighten the load of injustice pressing her people earthwards! She had not yet sufficiently learned that, until a man begins to throw off the weights that seem to hold him down, it may even be a wrong to him to attempt to lighten those weights. We must do justice, but it may not be the best thing we can do for our neighbour to interfere

with the injustice of another. Why should I seek better wages for the man who will only spend them in the public-house? His master may be unjust in giving him so little, but is it worth my while to get him more? For the master it might be good, but not for the man. The primary claims of justice are of course imperative: its claims upon a mediator may be none. The claim may stand against man, but not therefore against God. God may be bound in his own nature—I speak after the manner of men—to make his creature just, but he is not bound to give to every man the special justice for which he has a claim on his neighbour. For the sake of a point of abstract justice, he will not injure his child, who has, upon God himself direct, far higher and juster claims, with which that point would interfere.

Again the days passed quietly on. Mark grew a little better. Hester wrote regularly, but the briefest bulletins, to the major, seldom receiving an acknowledgment. The new earl wrote that he had been to the funeral, and described in a humorous way

the house and lands to which he had fallen heir. The house might, he said, be made fit to live in, but what was left of the estate was a mere savage mountain.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

MR. RAYMOUNT went now and then to London, but never stayed long. In the autumn he had his books removed to Yrndalet, saying in London he could always get what books he wanted, but must have his own about him in the country. When they were accommodated and arranged to his mind, all on the same floor, and partly in the room next to the old library of the house, he began, for the first time in his life, to feel he had an abiding place, and talked of selling the house in Addison square.

It would have been greater progress to feel that there is no abiding in place or among things.

In the month of October, when the forsaken spider-webs were filled no more with

flies, but in the morning now with dew-drops, now with hoarfrost, and the fine stimulus and gentle challenge of the cold roused the vital spirit in every fibre to meet it; when the sun shone a little sadly, and the wraith of the coming winter might be felt hovering in the air, major Marvel again made his appearance at Yrndale, but not quite the man he was: he had a troubled manner, and an expression on his face such as Mrs. Raymount had never before seen there: it was the look of one who had an unpleasant duty to discharge—a thing to do he would rather not do—a thing it would cost him far more to leave undone. He had brought the things he promised, every one, and at sight of them Mark brightened up amazingly.

At dinner he tried to be merry as before, but failed rather conspicuously, drank more wine than was his custom, and laid the blame on the climate. His chamber was over that of his host and hostess, and they heard him walking about for hours in the night. There was something on his mind that would not let him sleep! In the

morning he appeared at the usual hour, but showed plain marks of a sleepless night. When condoled with, he answered he must seek a warmer climate, for if it was like this already, what would it be in January?

It was in reality a perfect autumn morning, of which every one except the major felt the enlivening influence—the morning of all mornings for a walk! Just as Hester was leaving the room to get ready to go with Saffy—Mark was not able for a walk—the major rose, and overtaking her in the anteroom, humbly whispered the request that she would walk with him alone, as he much wished a private conversation with her. Hester, though with a little surprise, also a little undefined anxiety, at once consented, but ran then to her mother.

“What can he want to talk to me about, mamma?” she concluded.

“How can I tell, my dear?” answered her mother with a smile. “Perhaps he will dare the daughter’s refusal too.”

“Oh, mamma! how can you joke about such a thing!”

“I am not quite joking, my child. There

is no knowing what altogether unsuitable things men will do!—Who can blame them when they see to how many unsuitable things women consent!”

“But, mamma, he is old enough to be my father!”

“Of course he is! Poor man! it would be a hard fate to have fallen in love with both mother and daughter in vain!”

“I won’t go with him, mamma!”

“You had better go, my dear. You need not be much afraid. He is really a gentleman, however easily mistaken for something else. You must not forget how much we owe him for Mark!”

“Do you mean, mamma,” said Hester, with a strange look out of her eyes, “that I ought to marry him if he asks me?”

Her mother laughed heartily. Hester was sometimes oddly stupid for a moment as to the intent of those she knew best.

“What a goose you are, my darling! Don’t you know your mother from a miscreant yet?”

But in truth her mother so rarely jested that there was some excuse for her.

Relieved from the passing pang of a sudden dread, Hester went without more words and put on her bonnet. But she did not at all like going, for no one could be certain what absurd thing the major might not do.

They set out together, but, until they were some distance from the house, walked in absolute silence, which seemed to Hester to bode no good. How changed the poor man was, she thought. It would be sad indeed to have to make him still more miserable !

Steadily the major marched along, his stick under his arm like a sword, and his eyes looking straight before him.

“Cousin Hester,” he said at length, “I am about to talk to you very strangely—to conduct myself indeed in a very peculiar manner. Can you imagine a man rendering himself intensely, unpardonably disagreeable, from the very best of motives ?”

It was a speech very different from any to be expected of him. That he should behave oddly was natural—not that he should know he was going to do so.

“I think I could,” answered Hester, wish-

ing neither to lead him on nor deter him : whatever he had to say, the sooner it was said the better !

“Tell me,” he said suddenly, after a pause just beginning to be awkward—then paused again. “—Let me ask you first,” he resumed, “whether you are able to trust me a little. I am old enough to be your father—let me say your grandfather ;—fancy I am your grandfather : in my soul I believe neither could wish you well more truly than myself. Tell me—trust me and tell me : what is there between you and Mr. Vavasor ? ”

Hester was silent. The silence would have lasted but a moment had she not had to ask herself, not what answer she should give to his question, but what answer there was to give to it. Whether one be bound, whether one please, to answer it or not, every question has its answer : what was the answer to this one ?

Before she could find it, the major resumed.

“I know,” he said, “ladies think such things are not to be talked about with

gentlemen; but there are exceptions to every rule—or, to put it more properly, there may be a good reason for breaking a good rule. Tell me—are you engaged to Mr. Vavasor? ”

“ No,” answered Hester promptly.

“ What is it then? Are you going to be? ”

“ If I answered that in the affirmative,” said Hester, “ would it not be much the same as acknowledging myself already engaged? ”

“ No! no! ” cried the major vehemently. “ So long as your word is not passed you remain free. The two are as far asunder as the pole from the equator. I thank God that you are not engaged to him! ”

“ But why? ” asked Hester, with a pang of something like dread. “ Why should you be so anxious about it? ”

“ Then he has never said he loved you? ” persisted the major eagerly.

“ No,” replied Hester hurriedly.

She vaguely felt it best to answer directly where was no obligation to silence. What he might be wrong to ask she was not there-

fore wrong to answer. But her *No* trembled a little, for the doubt came with it whether, though literally, it was strictly true.

"We are friends," she added. "We trust each other a good deal."

"Trust him with nothing, least of all with your heart, my dear," said the major earnestly. "Or if you must trust him, trust him with anything, with everything, except that. He is not worthy of you."

"Do you say so to flatter me or to disparage him?"

"Entirely to disparage him. I never flatter."

"You did not surely bring me out, major Marvel, to listen to evil of one of my best friends!" said Hester, now angry.

"I certainly did—if the truth be evil—but only for your sake. The man I do not feel interest enough in even to abuse. He is a nobody."

"That merely proves you do not know him: you would not speak so of him if you did!" said Hester, widening the space between her and the major, and ready to choke with what in utterance took such gentle form.

“I am confident I should have worse to say if I knew him better. It is you who do not know him. It astonishes me that sensible people like your father and mother should let a fellow like that come prowling after you !”

“Major Marvel, if you are going to abuse my father and mother as well as lord Gartley,—” cried Hester, but he interrupted her.

“Ah, there it is !” exclaimed he bitterly. “Lord Gartley!—I have no business to interfere—no more than your gardener or coachman! but to think of an angel like you in the arms of a——”

“Major Marvel !”

“I beg ten thousand pardons, cousin Hester! but I am so damnably in earnest I can’t pick and choose my phrases. Believe me the man is not worthy of you.”

“What have you got against him?—I do hate backbiting! As his friend I ask you what you have against him.”

“That’s the pity of it! I can’t tell you anything very bad of him. But a man of whom no one has anything good to say—one of whom never a warm word is uttered——”

“I have called him my friend!” said Hester.

“That’s the worst of it! If it were not for that he might go unchallenged of me!—I daresay you think it a fine thing he should have stuck to business so long! He was put to that before there was much chance of his succeeding; his aunt would not have him on her hands consuming the money she meant for the earldom. His elder brother would have had it, but he killed himself before it fell due: there are things that must not be spoken of to young ladies. I don’t say your *friend* has disgraced himself; he has not: by George, it takes a good deal for that in his set! but not a soul out of his own family cares twopence for him!”

“There are some who are better liked everywhere than at home, and they’re not the better sort,” said Hester. “That goes for less than nothing. I know the part of him chance acquaintances cannot know. He does not bear his heart on his sleeve. I assure you, major Marvel, he is a man of uncommon gifts and——”

“Great attractions, no doubt—to me invisible,” blurted the major.

Hester turned from him.

“I am going home,” she said. “—Luncheon is at the usual hour.”

“Just one word,” he cried, hurrying after her. “I swear by the living God I have no purpose or hope in interfering but to save you from a miserable future! Promise me not to marry this man, and I will settle on you a thousand a year—safe. You shall have the principal down if you prefer it.”

Hester walked the faster.

“Hear me,” he went on, in an agony of entreaty mingled with something like anger. “I mean it. Why should I not for Helen’s child!”

He was a yard or two behind her. She turned on him with a glance of contempt. But the tears were in his eyes, and her heart smote her. He had abused her friend, but was plainly honest himself. Her countenance changed as she looked at him. He came up to her. She laid her hand on his arm, and said—

“Dear major Marvel, I will speak to you

without anger. What would you think of one who took money to do the thing she ought to do? I will not ask you what you would think of one who took money to do the thing she ought not to do! I would not *promise* not to marry a beggar from the street. It *might* be disgraceful to marry the beggar; it *must* be disgraceful to promise not."

"Yes, yes, my dear! you are quite right—absolutely right," said the major humbly. "I only wanted to make you independent. You don't think half enough of yourself.—But I will dare one more question before I give you up: is he going to ask you to marry him?"

"Perhaps. I do not know."

"One more question yet: can you secure any liberty? Will your father settle anything upon you?"

"I don't know. I have never thought about anything of the kind."

"How could they let you go about with him so much and never ask him what he meant by it?"

"They could easier have asked me what I meant by it!"

“ If I had such a jewel I would look after it ! ”

“ Have me shut up like an eastern lady, I suppose ! ” said Hester, laughing ; “ make my life miserable to make it safe ! If a woman has any sense, major Marvel, she can take care of herself ; if she has not, she must learn the need of it.”

“ Ah ! ” said the major sadly, “ but the thousand pangs and aches and heart-sickenings ! I would sooner see my child on the funeral pyre of a husband she loved, than living a merry life with one she despised ! ”

Hester began to feel she had not been doing the major justice.

“ So would I ! ” she said heartily. “ — You mean me well, and I shall not forget how kind you have been. Now let us go back.”

“ Just one thing more : if ever I can help you, you *will* let me know ? ”

“ That I promise with all my heart,” she answered. “ I mean,” she added, “ if it be a thing I count it right to trouble you about.”

The major’s face fell.

“ I see ! ” he said ; “ you won’t promise anything ! Well, stick to that, and *don’t* promise.”

“ You wouldn’t have me come to you for a new bonnet, would you ? ”

“ By George ! shouldn’t I be proud to fetch you the best in Regent street by the next train ! ”

“ Or saddle the pony for me ? ”

“ Try me.—But I won’t have any more chaff. I throw myself on your generosity, and trust you to remember there is an old man that loves you, and has more money than he knows what to do with.”

“ I think,” said Hester, “ the day is sure to come when I shall ask your help. In the meantime, if it be any pleasure to you to know it, I trust you heartily. You are all wrong about lord Gartley though. He is not what you think him.”

She gave him her hand. The major took it in his own soft small one—small enough almost for the hilt of an Indian tulwar—and pressed it devoutly to his lips. She did not draw it away, and he felt she trusted him.

Now that the hard duty was done, and if

not much good yet no harm had resulted, he went home a different man. A pang of fear for Hester in the power of "that ape Gartley" would now and then pass through him; but he had now a right to look after her, and who could tell what might not turn up!

His host congratulated him on looking so much better for his walk. Hester hastened to her mother, and recounted their strange conversation.

"Only think, mamma!" she said; "he offered me a thousand a year not to marry lord Gartley!"

"Hester!"

"He does not like the earl, and he does like me; so he wants me not to marry him. That is all!"

"I thought I could have believed anything of him, but this goes almost beyond belief!"

"Why should it, mamma? There is an odder thing still: instead of hating him for it, I like him better than before."

"Are you sure he has no notion of making room for himself?"

“Quite sure. He would have it he was old enough to be my grandfather. But you know he is not that!”

“Perhaps,” said her mother merrily, “as he is too young to be your grandfather, you wouldn’t mind if he were a little younger yet!”

“I suppose you had a presentiment I should like him, and left him for me, mamma!” returned Hester in like vein.

“But seriously, Hester, is it not time we knew what lord Gartley means?”

“Oh, mamma! please don’t talk like that!”

“It does sound disagreeable—vulgar, if you like, my child; but I cannot help being anxious about you. If he does not love you he has no right to court your company so much.”

“I encourage it, mamma. I like him.”

“That is what makes me afraid.”

“It will be time enough to think about it if he comes again now he has got the earldom.”

“Would you like to be a countess, Hester?”

"I would rather not think about it. It may never make any difference whether I should like it or not."

"I can't help thinking it strange he should be so much with you and never say a word!"

"Might you not just as well say it was strange of me to be so much with him, or of you, mammy dear, to let him come so much to the house?"

"It was neither your part nor mine to say anything. Your father even has always said he would scorn to ask a man his *intentions*: either he was fit to be in his daughter's company, or he was not. Either he must get rid of him, or leave his daughter to manage her own affairs. He is quite American in his way of looking at those matters."

"Don't you think he is right, mother? If I let lord Gartley come, surely he is not to blame for coming!"

"Only if you should have got fond of him, and it were to come to nothing?"

"It can't come to nothing, and neither of us will be the worse for it, I trust. As to what I think about him, I don't feel

as if I quite knew ; and I don't think at present I need ask myself. I am afraid you think me very cool ; and in truth I don't quite understand myself ; but perhaps if one tries to do right as things come up, one may get on without understanding one's self. I don't think, so far as I can make out, St. Paul understood himself always. Miss Dasomma says a great part of music is the agony of the musician after the understanding of himself. I will try to do what is right—you may be sure of that, mother."

"I am sure of that, my dear—quite sure ; and I won't trouble you more about it. You may imagine I should not like to see my Hester a love-sick maiden, pining and wasting away !"

"Depend upon it, mamma, if I found myself in that state no one else should discover it," said Hester, partly in play, but thoroughly in earnest.

"That only reveals how little you know about such things, my love ! You could no more hide it from the eyes of your mother than you could a husband."

"Such things have been hid before now,

mamma! And yet why should a woman ever hide anything? I must think about that! From one's own mother? No; when I am dying of love, you shall know, mammy. But it won't be to-morrow or the next day."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAJOR AND COUSIN HELEN'S BOYS.

THE major was in no haste to leave, but he spent most of his time with Mark, and was in nobody's way. Mark was very happy with the major. The nature of the man was so childlike that, although he knew little of the deep things in which Mark was at home, his presence was never an interruption to the child's thoughts; and when the boy made a remark in the upward direction, he would look so grave, and hold such a peace that the child never missed the lacking words of response. Who knows what the man may not have gained even from silent communion with the child!

One day he was telling the boy how he had been out alone on a desolate hill all night; how he heard the beasts roaring

round him, and not one of them came near him.

“Did you see *him*?” asked Mark.

“See who, sonny?” returned the major.

“The one between you and them,” answered Mark in a subdued tone; and from the tone the major understood.

“No,” he answered; and taking into his the spirit of the child, went on: “I don’t think any one sees him now-a-days.”

“Isn’t it a pity?” said Mark. Then after a thoughtful pause, he resumed: “Well, not see him just with your eyes, you know! But old Jonathan at the cottage—he has got no eyes—at least none to speak of, for they’re no good to see with—he always speaks of seeing the people he has been talking with—and in a way he does see them, don’t you think? But I sometimes fancy I must have seen *him* with my very eyes when I was young; and that’s why I keep always expecting to see him again—some day, you know—some day. Don’t you think I shall, majie?”

“I hope so, indeed, Mark!—It would be a bad job if we were never to see him!” he

added, suddenly struck with a feeling he had never had before.

"Yes, indeed; that it would!" responded the child. "Why, where would be the good of it all, you know! That's what we came here for—ain't it? God calls children—I know he calls some, for he said, 'Samuel! Samuel!'—I wish he would call me!"

"What would you say?" asked the major.

"I would say—'Here I am, God! What is it?' We mustn't keep God waiting, you know!"

The major felt, like Wordsworth with the leech-gatherer, that the child was there to give him "apt admonishment." Could God have ever called him and he not have listened? Of course it was all a fancy! And yet, as he looked at the child, and met his simple believing eyes, he felt he had been a great sinner, and the best things he had done were not fit to be looked at. Happily there were no conventional religious phrases in the mouth of the child to repel him; his father and mother had a horror of pharisaic Christianity: I use the word *pharisaic* in its true sense—as *formal*, not as *hypocritical*.

They had both in their youth seen too many religious prigs to endure temple-whitewash on their children. Except what they heard at church, hardly a special religious phrase ever entered their ears. Those of the New Testament were avoided from reverence, lest they should grow common, and fail of their purpose when the children read them for themselves. "But if this succeeded with Hester and Mark, how with Cornelius?" I answer, if to that youth's education had been added the common *forms* of a religious one, he would have been—not perhaps a worse fellow, but a far more offensive one, and harder to influence for good. Inclined to scoff, he would have had the religious material for jest and ribaldry ready to his hand; while if he had wanted to start as a hypocrite, it would have been specially easy. The true teaching for children is persons, history, and doctrine in the old sense of the New Testament—instruction in righteousness, that is—not human theory about divine facts.

The major was still at Yrndale when, in the gloomy month to which for reasons he

had shifted his holiday, Cornelius arrived. The major could hardly accept him as one of the family, so utterly inferior did he show. There was a kind of mean beauty about his face and person, and an evident varnish on his manners which revolted him. "That lad will bring grief on them!" he said to himself. Cornelius was more than usually polite to the major: he was in the army, the goal of his aspiration! but he laughed in private at what he called his vulgarity, and delighted to annoy Hester with remarks upon her "ancient adorer." Because he prized nothing of the kind, he could see nothing of his essential worth, and took note merely of his blunders, personal ways, and oddities. The major was not properly vulgar, only ill-bred: he had not had a sharp enough mother, jealous for the good manners as well as good behaviour of her boy. There are many ladylike mothers—ladylike because their mothers were ladies and taught them to behave like ladies—whose children do not turn out ladies and gentlemen because they do not teach them as they were taught themselves. Cornelius had been taught—

and had learned nothing but manners. He was vulgar with a vulgarity that went miles deeper than that of the major. The major would have been sorry to find he had hurt the feelings of a dog; Cornelius would have whistled on learning that he had hurt the feelings of a woman. If the major was a clown, Cornelius was a cad. The one was capable of genuine sympathy; the other not yet of any. The latter loved his own paltry self, counting it the most precious thing in creation; the former was conceited, it is true, but had no lofty opinion of himself. Hence it was that he thought so much of his small successes. His boasting of them was mainly an uneasy effort at establishing himself comfortably in his own eyes and the eyes of friends. It was little more than a dog's turning of himself round and round before he lies down. He knew they were small things of which he boasted, but he had no other, and scorned to invent: his great things, those in which he had shown himself a true and generous man, he looked on as matters of course, nor recognized anything in them worth thinking of. He was

not a great man, but had elements of greatness; he had no vision of truth, but obeyed his moral instincts: when those should blossom into true intents, as one day they must, he would be a great man. As yet he was not safe. But how blessed a thing that God will judge us and man shall not! Where we see no difference, he sees ages of difference. The very thing that looks to us for condemnation may to the eyes of God show in its heart ground of excuse, yea of partial justification. Only God's excuse is, I suspect, seldom coincident with the excuse a man makes for himself. If any one thinks that God will not search closely into things, I say there could not be such a God. He will see the uttermost farthing paid. His excuses are as just as his condemnations.

In respect of Cornelius, the major was more careful than usual not to make himself disagreeable, for his feelings put him on his guard: there are not a few who behave better to those they do not like than to those they do. He thus flattered, without intending it, the vanity of the youth, who did not therefore spare his criticism behind

Hester; "it's only that you are not very strong—not up to a game of romps as you used to be. You will be merry again one day."

"I am merry enough," replied Mark; "only somehow the merry goes all about inside me, and don't want to come out—like the little bird, you know, that wouldn't go out of its cage though I left the door open for it. I suppose it felt just like me. I shouldn't care if I were never to go out of the house again."

He was indeed happy enough—more than happy when *Majie* was there. They would be together most days all day long. And the amount of stories Mark, with all his contemplativeness, could swallow, was amazing. That may be good food which cannot give life.

But the family-party was soon to be broken up—not by subtraction but by addition. The presence of the major had done nothing to spoil the homeness of home, but that was now for a time to be set aside.

There is something wrong with anyone who, entering a house of any kind, makes it

“he is afraid of being found out! And found out he is sure to be; he has not the brains to hide a thing! It's not murder—he 'ain't got the pluck for that; but it may be petty larceny!”

The weeks went on. Cornelius's month wore out, but he seemed restless for it to be gone, making no response to the lamentations of the children that Christmas was so near, and their new home such a grand one for keeping it in, and Corney not to be with them! He did not show them much kindness, but a little went a great way with them, and they loved him.

“Mind you're well before I come again, Markie,” he said as he took his leave; “you're not a pleasant sight moping about the house!”

The tears came in the child's eyes. He was not moping—only weakly, and even when looking a little sad, was quite happy.

“I don't think I mope, Hessy—do I?” he said. “What does Corney mean? I don't want to do what ain't nice. I want to be pleasant!”

“Never mind, Markie dear,” answered

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS VAVASOR.

A LETTER came from lord Gartley, begging Mrs. Raymount to excuse the liberty he took, and allow him to ask whether he might presume upon her kind wish, casually expressed, to welcome his aunt to the hospitality of Yrndale. London was empty, therefore her engagements, although Parliament was sitting, were few, and he believed if Mrs. Raymount would take the trouble to invite her, she might be persuaded to avail herself of the courtesy. "I am well aware," he wrote, "of the seeming rudeness of this suggestion, but you, dear Mrs. Raymount, can read between lines, and understand that it is no presumptuous desire to boast my friends to my relatives that makes me venture what to other eyes than yours might well

seem an arrogance. If you have not room for us, or if our presence would spoil your Christmas party, do not hesitate to put us off, I beg. I shall understand you, and say nothing to my rather peculiar but most worthy aunt, waiting a more convenient season."

The desired invitation was immediately dispatched—with some wry faces on the part of the head of the house, who, however, would not oppose what his wife wished.

Notwithstanding his knowledge of men, that is, of fundamental human nature, Mr. Raymount was not good at reading a man who made himself agreeable, and did not tread on the toes of any of his theories—of which, though mostly good, he made too much, as every man of theory does. I would not have him supposed a man of theory only: such a man is hardly man at all; but while he thought of the practice, he too sparingly practised the thought. He laid too much upon words altogether, especially words in print, attributing more power to them for the regeneration of the world than was reasonable. If he had known how

few cared a pin's-point for those in which he poured out his mind, just flavoured a little with his heart, he would have lost hope altogether. If he had known how his arguments were sometimes used against the very principles he used them for, it would have enraged him. Perhaps the knowledge of how few of those who admired his words acted upon them, would have made him think how little he struggled himself to do the things which by persuasion and argument he drove home upon the consciences of others. He had not yet believed that to do right is to do more for the regeneration of the world than any quality or amount of teaching can do. "*The Press*" no doubt has a great power for good, but every man possesses, involved in the very fact of his consciousness, a greater power than any verbal utterance of truth whatever. It is righteousness—not of words, not of theories, but in being, that is, in vital action, which alone is the prince of the power of the spirit. Where that is, everything has its perfect work; where that is not, the man is not a power—is but a walker in a vain show.

He did not see through or even into Gartley, who was by no means a profound or intentional hypocrite. But he never started on a new relation with any suspicions. Men of the world called him too good, therefore a fool. It was not however any over-exalted idea of human nature that led him astray in his judgment of the individual; it was merely that he was too much occupied with what he counted his work—with his theories first, then his writing of them, then the endless defending of them, to care to see beyond the focus of his shortsighted eyes. Vavasor was a gentlemanly fellow, and that went a long way with him. He did not oppose him, and that went another long way: of all things he could not bear to be opposed in what he so plainly saw to be true, nor could think why every other honest man should not at once also see it true. He forgot that the difficulty is not so much in recognizing the truth of a proposition, as in recognizing what the proposition is. In the higher regions of thought the recognition of what a proposition is, and the recognition of its truth are more

than homologous—they are the same thing. The ruin of a man's teaching comes of his followers, such as having never touched the foundation he has laid, build upon it wood, hay, and stubble, fit only to be burnt. Therefore, if only to avoid his worst foes, his admirers, a man should avoid system. The more correct a system the worse will it be misunderstood ; its professed admirers will take both its errors and their misconceptions of its truths, and hold them forth as its essence.

Mr. Raymount, then, was not the man to take that care of his daughter which people of the world think necessary. But, on the whole, even with the poor education they have, women, if let alone, would take better care of themselves than father or brother will for them. I say *on the whole* ; there may well be some exceptions. The only thing making men more fit to take care of women than the women themselves, is their greater opportunity of knowing the character of men concerned—which knowledge, alas ! they generally use against those they claim to protect, concealing facts from the woman

to whom they ought to be conveyed—sometimes indeed having already deluded her with the persuasion that that is of no consequence in the man which is essential in herself!

The day before Christmas-eve the expected visitors arrived—just in time to dress for dinner.

The family was assembled in the large old drawing-room of dingy white and tarnished gold when Miss Vavasor entered. She was tall and handsome and had been handsomer, for she was not one of those who, growing within, grow more beautiful without as they grow older. She was dressed in the plainest, handsomest fashion—in black velvet, fitting well her fine figure, and half covered with point lace of a very thick texture—Venetian probably. The only stones she wore were diamonds. Her features were regular; her complexion was sallow, but not too sallow for the sunset of beauty; her eyes were rather large, and of a clear gray; her expression was very still, self-contained and self-dependent, without being self-satisfied; her hair was more than

half gray, but very plentiful. Altogether she was one with an evident claim to distinction, never asserted, because always yielded. To the merest glance she showed herself well born, well nurtured, well trained, and well kept, hence well preserved. At an age when a poor woman must have been old and wrinkled, and half undressed for the tomb, she was enough to make any company look distinguished by her mere presence. Her manner was as simple as her dress—without a trace of the vulgarity of condescension, or the least more stiffness than was becoming with persons towards whose acquaintance, the rather that she was their guest, it was but decent to advance gently, while it was also prudent to protect her line of retreat, lest it should prove desirable to draw back. She spoke with the utmost readiness and simplicity, looked with interest at Hester but without curiosity, had the sweetest smile at hand for use as often as wanted—a modest smile which gleamed but a moment and was gone. There was nothing in her behaviour to indicate a consciousness of error from her sphere. The

world had given her the appearance of much of which Christ gives the reality. For the world very oddly prizes the form whose informing reality it despises.

Lord Gartley was in fine humour. He had not before appeared to so great advantage. Vavasor had never put off his company-manner with Hester's family, but Gartley was almost merry, quite graciously familiar—as if set on bringing out the best points of his friends, and preventing his aunt's greatness from making them abashed, or their own too much modesty from showing a lack of breeding. But how shall I describe his face when major Marvel entered! he had not even feared his presence. A blank dismay, such as could seldom have been visible there, a strange mingling of annoyance, contempt, and fear, clouded it with an inharmonious expression, which made him look much like a discomfited commoner. In a moment he had overcome the unworthy sensation, and was again impassive and seemingly cool. The major did not choose to see him at first, but was presented to Miss Vavasor by their hostess as

her cousin. He appeared a little awed by the fine woman, and comported himself with the dignity which awe gives, behaving like any gentleman used to society. Seated next her at dinner, he did not once allude to pig-sticking or tiger-shooting, to elephants or niggers, or even to his regiment or India, but talked about the last opera and the last play, with some good criticisms on the acting he had last seen, conducting himself in such manner as would have made lord Gartley quite grateful to him, had he not put it down to the imperial presence of his high-born aunt, cowing his inferior nature. But while indeed the major was naturally checked by a self-sufficing feminine presence, the cause that mainly operated to his suppression was of another kind and from an opposite source.

He had been strongly tempted all that day to a very different behaviour. Remembering what he had heard of the character of the lady, and of the relation between her and her nephew, he knew at once, when told she was coming, that lord Gartley was bringing her down with the

hope of gaining her consent to his asking Hester to marry him. "The rascal knows," said the major to himself, "that nothing human could stand out against her! There is only her inferior position to urge from any point of view!" And therewith arose his temptation: might he not so comport himself before the aunt as to disgust her with the family, and save his lovely cousin from being sacrificed to a heartless noodle? To the extent of his means he would do what money could to console her! It was at least better than the empty title! He recalled the ways of his youth, remembered with what delightful success he had annoyed aunts and cousins and lady friends, chuckled to think that some of them had for months passed him without even looking at him: "I'll settle the young ape's hash for him!" he said to himself. "It only wants a little free-and-easiness with my lady to do the deed. It can cost me nothing except her good opinion, which I can afford. But I'll lay you anything to nothing, if she knew the weight of my four quarters, she would have

me herself after all! I don't quite think myself a lady-killer: by George, my—hum!—*entourage* is against that, but where money is money can! Only I don't want her, and my money is for her betters! What damned jolly fun it will be to send her out of the house in a rage!—and a good deed done too!—By George I'll do it! See if I don't!"

He might possibly have found it not quite so easy to shock Miss Vavasor as some of his late country cousins.

In this resolution he had begun to dress, but before he had finished had begun to have his doubts. Would it not be dishonourable? Would it not bring such indignation upon him that even Mark would turn away? And Hester would never accept so much as a postage-stamp from him if he brought disgrace on her family, and drove away her suitor! Besides, he might fail! They might come to an understanding and leave him out in the cold! By the time he was dressed he had resolved to leave the fancy alone, and behave like a gentleman.

But now with every sip of his wine the

temptation came stronger and stronger. The spirit of fun kept stirring in him. Not merely for the sake of Hester, but for the joke of the thing, he was tempted, and had to keep fighting the impulse till the struggle was almost more than he could endure. And just from this came the subdued character of his demeanour! What had threatened to destroy his manners for the evening, turned out the corrective of his usual behaviour: as an escape from the strife within him, he tried to make himself agreeable. Miss Vavasor being good natured was soon interested, and by and by pleased with him. This reacted; he began to be pleased with her, and was more at his ease. Therewith came the danger not unforeseen of some at the table: he began to tell one of his stories. But he saw Hester look anxious; and that was enough to put him on his careful honour. Ere dinner was over he had said to himself that if only the nephew were half as good a fellow as the aunt, he would have been happy to give the young people his blessing and a handsome present.

“By Jove!” said lord Gartley, “the scoundrel is not such a low fellow after all! I think I will try to forgive him!”

Now and then he would listen across the table to their talk, and everything the major said that pleased his aunt pleased him amazingly. At one little witticism of hers in answer to one of the major's, he burst into such a hearty laugh that his aunt looked up.

“You are amused, Gartley!” she said.

“You are so clever, aunt!” he returned.

“Major Marvel has all the merit of my wit,” she answered.

This gave the *coup de grâce* to the major's temptation to do evil that good might come, and sacrifice himself that Hester might not be sacrificed.

After dinner, they sat down to whist, of which Miss Vavasor was very fond. When however she found they did not play for money, though she praised the asceticism of the manner, she plainly took little interest in the game. The major therefore, who had no scruples either of conscience or of pocket in the matter, suggested that his lordship

and Hester should take their places, and proposed cribbage to her—for what points she pleased. To this she acceded at once. The major was the best player in his regiment, but Miss Vavasor had much the better of him, and regretted she had not set the points higher. All her life she had had money in the one eye and the poor earldom in the other. The major laid down his half-crowns so cheerfully, with such a look of satisfaction even, that she came quite to like the man, and to hope he would be there for some time, and prove as fond of cribbage as she was. The fear of lord Gartley as to the malign influence of the major vanished entirely.

And now that he was more at his ease, and saw that his aunt was at least far from displeased with Hester, lord Gartley began to radiate his fascinations. All his finer nature appeared. He grew [playful, even teasing; gave again and again a quick repartee; and sang as his aunt had never heard him sing before. But when Hester sang, the thing was done, and the aunt won: she perceived at once what a sensation such a singer would

make in her heavenly circle ! She had, to be sure, a little *too* much expression, and sang well enough for a professional, which was too well for a lady with no object in her singing except to please ! But in manner and style, to mention neither beauty nor accomplishment, she would be a decided gain to the family, possessing even in herself a not inconsiderable counterpoise to the title. Then who could tell but this cousin—who seemed to have plenty of money, he parted with it so easily—might be moved by like noble feelings with her own to make a poor countess a rich one. The thing, I say, was settled, so far as the chief family-worshipper was concerned.

CHAPTER XV.

COURTSHIP IN EARNEST.

I do not care to dwell upon what followed. Christmas was a merry day to all but the major, who did not like the engagement any better than before. He found refuge and consolation with Mark. The boy was merry in a mild, reflected way, because the rest were merry, but preferred his own room with "dear majie," to the drawing-room with the grand lady. He would steal from it, assured that in a moment the major would be after him, to keep him company, and tell him *such* stories!

Lord Gartley now began to make love with full intent and purpose. "How could she listen to him!" says this and that reader? I can but echo the exclamation, "How could she!" To explain the thing

is more than I am bound to undertake. As I may have said twenty times before, how this woman will have this man is one of the deeper mysteries of the world—yea, of the maker of the world, perhaps. One thing I may fairly suggest—that, where men see no reason why a woman should love this or that man, she may see something in him which they do not see, or do not value as she does. Alas for her if she only imagines it! Another thing we may be sure of—that in few cases does the woman see what the men know: much of that which is manifest to the eyes of the male world, is by that male world scrupulously hidden from the female. One thing more I would touch upon, which men are more likely never to have thought of than to have forgotten: that the love which a beautiful woman gives a man, is in itself not an atom more precious than that which a plain woman gives. In the two hearts they are the same, if the hearts be like; if not, the advantage may well be with the plain woman. The love of a beautiful woman is no more thrown away than the love of the plainest. The same

holds with regard to women of differing intellectual development or endowment. But when a woman of high hopes and aims—a woman filled with eternal aspirations after life, and unity with her divine original, gives herself to such a one as lord Gartley, I cannot help thinking she must have seriously mistaken some things both in him and in herself, the consequence, probably, of some self-sufficiency, ambition, or other fault in her which requires the correction of suffering.

Hester found her lover now very pleasant. If sometimes he struck a jarring chord, she was always able to find some way of accounting for it, or explaining it away—if not entirely to her satisfaction, yet so far that she was able to go on hoping everything, and for the present to put off any further consideration of the particular phenomenon to the time when, like most self-deceiving women, she *scarcely* doubted she would have greater influence over him—the time, namely, when, man and wife, they would be one flesh. But where there is not already a far deeper unity than marriage can give,

marriage itself can do little to bring two souls together—may do much to drive them asunder.

She began to put him in training, as she thought, for the help he was to give her with her loved poor. “What a silly!” exclaims a common-minded girl-reader? “That was not the way to land her fish!” But let those who are content to have fishy husbands, net or hook and land them as they can; a woman has more in herself than any husband can give her, though he may take much from her. Lord Gartley had no real conception of Hester’s outlook on life, and regarded all her endeavour as born of the desire to perfect his voice and singing. With such teaching he must soon, he imagined, become her worthy equal. He had no notion of the sort of thing genius is. Few have. They think of it as something supreme in itself, whereas it is altogether dependent on truth in the inward parts. It may last for a time separated from truth, but it dies its life, not lives it. Its utterance depends on enthusiasm; all enthusiasm depends on love and nobility of purpose; and love and nobility depend

upon truth—that is live truth. Not millions of years, without an utter regeneration of nature, could make such a man as Gartley sing like Hester. His faculties were in the power of decay, therefore of the things that pass; Hester was of the powers that give life, and keep things going and growing. She sang because of the song that was in her soul. Her music came out of her being, not out of her brain and her throat. If such a one as Gartley can sing, there is no reason why he should be kept singing. In all the arts the man who does not reach to higher things, falls away from the things he has. The love of money will ruin poet, painter, or musician.

For Hester the days now passed in pleasure. I fear the closer contact with lord Gartley, however different he was in her thought from what he was in his own fact, influenced at least the *rate* of her growth towards the upper regions. We cannot be heart and soul and self in the company of the evil—and the untrue is the evil, however beheld as an angel of light in the mirage of our loving eyes, without sad loss. Her

prayers were not so fervent, her aspirations not so strong. I see again the curl on the lip of a certain kind of girl-reader! Her judgment here is but foolishness: she is much too low in the creation yet, be she as high-born and beautiful as a heathen goddess, to understand the things of which I am writing. But she has got to understand them—they are not mine—and the understanding may come in dread pain, and dire dismay. Hester was one of those who in their chambers are not alone, but with him who seeth in secret; and not to get so near to God in her chamber—I can but speak in human figure—did not augur well for the new relationship. But the Lord is mindful of his own. He does not forget because we forget. Horror and pain may come, but not because he forgets—nay, just because he does not forget. That is a thing God never does.

There are many women who would have bewitched Gartley more, yet great was his delight in the presence and converse of Hester, and he yielded himself with pleasing grace. Inclined to rebel at times when

wearied with her demands on his attention and endeavour, he yet condescended to them with something of the playfulness with which one would humour a child : he would have a sweet revenge by and by ! His turn would come soon, and he would have to instruct her in many things she was now ignorant of ! She had never moved in his great world : he must teach her its laws, instruct her how to shine, how to make the most of herself, how to do honour to his choice ! He had but the vaguest idea of the *folly* that possessed her. He thought of her relation to the poor but as a passing—indeed a past phase of a hitherto objectless life. Anything beyond a little easy benevolence would be impossible to the wife of lord Gartley ! That she should be contemplating the pursuit of her former objects with even greater freedom and devotion than before, would have seemed to him a thing utterly incredible. And Hester would have been equally staggered to find he had so failed to understand her after the way she had opened her heart to him. To imagine that for anything she would forsake the work

she had been sent to do ! So things went on *upon a mutual misunderstanding*—to make a bull for my purpose—each in the common meaning of the phrase getting more and more in love with the other every day, while in reality they were separating farther and farther, in as much as each was revelling in thoughts that were alien to the other. An occasional blasting doubt would cross the mind of Hester, but she banished it like an evil spectre.

Miss Vavator continued the most pleasant and unexacting of guests. Her perfect breeding, sustained by a quiet temper and kindly disposition, was easily, by simple hearts, taken for the sweetness it only simulated. To people like Miss Vavator does the thought never occur—what if the thing they find it so necessary to simulate should actually in itself be indispensable ? What if their necessity of simulating it comes of its absolute necessity ?

She found the company of the major agreeable in the slow time she had for her nephew's sake to pass with such primitive people, and was glad of what she might

otherwise have counted barely endurable. For Mr. Raymount, he would not leave what he counted his work for any goddess in creation: Hester had got her fixedness of purpose through him, and its direction through her mother. But it was well he did not give Miss Vavasor much of his company: if they had been alone together for a quarter of an hour, they would have parted sworn foes, hating each other almost as much as is possible without having loved. So the major, instead of putting a stop to the unworthy alliance, found himself actually furthering the affair, doing his part with the lady on whom the success of the enemy depended. He was still now and then tempted to break through and have a hideous revenge; but, with no great sense of personal dignity to restrain him, he was really a man of honour and behaved like one, curbing himself with no little severity.

So the time went on till after twelfth night, when Miss Vavasor took her leave for a round of visits, and lord Gartley went up to town, with intention thereafter to pay a visit to his property, such as it was. He

would return to Yrndale in three weeks or a month, when final arrangements for the marriage would be made.

A correspondence naturally commenced, and Hester, unwarned by former experience, received his first letter joyfully. But, the letter read, lo, there was the same disappointment as of old! And as the first letter so the last and all between. In Hester's presence, she suggesting and leading, he would utter things that seemed to indicate the presence of what she would have in him; but alone in his room, without guide to his thoughts, without the stimulus of her presence or the sense of her moral atmosphere, the best things he could write were poor enough; they had no bones in them, and no other fire than that which the thought of Hester's loveliness could supply. So his letters were not inspiriting. They absorbed her atmosphere, and after each followed a period of mental asphyxy. Had they been those of a person indifferent to her, she would have called them stupid, thrown them down, and thought no more of them. As it was, I doubt if she read many of

them twice over. But all would be well, she said to herself, when they met again. It was her absence that oppressed him, poor fellow! He was out of spirits, and could not write! He had not the faculty for writing that some had! Her father had told her of men that were excellent talkers, but set them down pen in hand and not a thought would come! Was it not to his praise rather than blame? Was not the presence of a man's own kind the best inspirer of his speech? It was his loving human nature—she would have persuaded herself, but never quite succeeded—that made utterance in a letter impossible to him! Yet she *would* have liked a little genuine, definite response to the things she wrote! He seemed to have nothing to say from himself! He would assent and echo, but any response he gave was always such as made her doubt whether she had written plainly, invariably suggesting things of this world and not of the unseen, the world of thought and being. And when she mentioned work, he always replied as if she meant an undefined something called *doing*

good. He never doubted the failure of that foolish concert given by ladies and gentlemen to the riff-raff of London had taught her that whether men be equal in the sight of God or not, any attempt on the part of their natural superiors to treat them as equals can be only disastrous.

CHAPTER XVI.

CALAMITY.

ONE afternoon the post brought, side by side with a letter from lord Gartley, one in a strange-looking, cramped hand, which Mrs. Raymount recognized.

“What can Sarah be writing about?” she said, a sudden bodement of evil crossing her mind.

“The water-rate, perhaps,” answered Hester, opening her own letter as she withdrew to read it. For she did not like to read Gartley’s letters before her mother—not from shyness, but from shame: she would have liked ill to have her learn how poor her Gartley’s utterances were upon paper. But ere she was six slow steps away, she turned at a cry from her mother.

“Good heavens! what can it be? Some-

thing has happened to him!" said Mrs. Raymount.

Her face was white almost as the paper she held. Hester put her arms round her.

"Mother! mother! what is it?" she cried. "Anything about Corney?"

"I thought something would come to stop it all! We were too happy!" she moaned, and began to tremble.

"Come to papa, mammy dear," said Hester, frightened.

She stood as if fixed to the ground.

Mr. Raymount's letters had been carried to him in the study, and one of them had put him into like perturbation. He was pacing up and down the room almost as white as his wife, but his pallor was that of rage.

"The scoundrel!" he groaned, and seizing a chair hurled it against the wall. "I had the suspicion he was a mean dog—now all the world will know it—and that he is my son! What have I done—what has my wife done, that we should give being to a vile hound like this? What is there in her or in me——?"

There he paused, for he remembered : far back in the family, some five generations or so, one had been hanged for forgery.

He threw himself in a chair, and wept with rage and shame. He had for years been writing of family and social duties : here was his illustration ! His books were his words ; here was his deed ! How should he ever show himself again ! He would leave the country ! Damn the property ! But the rascal should never succeed to it ! Mark should have it—if he lived ! But he hoped he would die ! He would like to poison them all, and go with them out of the disgrace—all but the dog that had brought it on them ! Hester marry an earl ! Not if the truth would prevent it ! Her engagement must at once be broken ! Lord Gartley marry the sister of a thief !

While he was thus raging a knock came to the door, and a maid entered.

“ Please, sir,” she said, “ Miss Raymount says will you come to mis’ess : she’s taken bad ! ”

This brought him to himself. The horrible fate was hers too ! He must go to

her. How could she have heard the vile news? She must have heard it! what else could make her ill! He followed the maid to the lawn. It was a cold morning of January sunshine. There stood his wife in his daughter's arms, trembling from head to foot, and apparently without power of motion! He asked no question, took her in his arms, bore her to her room, laid her on the bed, and sat down beside her, hardly caring if she died, for the sooner they were all dead the better! She lay like one dead, and do what she could, Hester was unable to bring her to herself. But by and by the doctor came.

She had caught up the letter, and as her father sat there, she handed it to him. The substance and manner of it were these :

“Dear mistress, it is time to let you know of the goings on here. I never held with bearing of tales against my fellow-servants, and perhaps it's worse to bring tales against Master Cornelius, as is your own flesh and blood, but what am I to do as was left in charge, and to keep the house

respectable? He's not been home this three nights; and you ought to know as there's a young lady, his cousin from New Zealand, as is come to the house a three or four times since you went away, and stayed a long time with him, though it is some time now that I 'ain't seen her. She is a pretty, modest-looking young lady; though I must say I was ill pleased when Mr. Cornelius would have her stay all night; and I up and told him if she was his cousin it wasn't as if she was his sister, and it wouldn't do, and I would walk out of the house if he insisted on me making up a bed for her. Then he laughed in my face, and told me I was an old fool, and he was only making game of me. But that was after he done his best to persuade me, and I wouldn't be persuaded. I told him if neither he nor the young lady had a character to keep, I had one to lose, and I wouldn't. But I don't think he said anything to her about staying all night; for she come down the stair as innocent-like as any dove, and bid me good night smiling, and they walked away together. And I wouldn't by no

means have took upon me to be a spy, nor I wouldn't have mentioned the thing, for it's none o' my business so long as nobody doesn't abuse the house as is my charge; but he 'ain't been home for three nights, and there's the feelings of a mother! and it's my part to let her know as her son 'ain't slept in his own bed for three nights, and that's a fact. So no more at present, and I hope, dear mistress, it won't kill you to hear on it. O why did his father leave him alone in London, with none but an old woman like me, as he always did look down upon, to look after him! Your humble servant for twenty years to command, Sarah Holdich."

Mrs. Raymount had not read the half of this. It was enough to learn he had not been home for three nights. Parents with no reasonable ground for believing their children good, nay with considerable ground for believing them worse than many, are yet seized as by the awfully incredible when they hear they are going wrong! Helen Raymount concluded that her boy had

turned into bad ways because left alone in London, although she knew he had never taken to good ways while they were all with him. If he had never gone right, why should she wonder he had gone wrong?

The doctor was sitting by the bedside, watching the effect of something he had given her. Mr. Raymount rose and led Hester from the room—sternly, as if she were to blame for it all.

Some people, when they are angry, speak as if they were angry with the person to whom they are in fact looking for comfort. When in trouble few of us are masters enough of ourselves, because few of us are children enough of our Father in heaven, to behave like gentlemen—after the fashion of “the first stock-father of gentleness.” But Hester understood, and did not resent.

“Is this all your mother knows, Hester?” said her father, pointing to the letter in his hand.

She told him her mother had read but the first sentence or two.

He was silent—returned to the bedside,

and stood silent. The life of his dearest had been suddenly withered at the root, like the gourd of Jonah, and she had not learned nearly the worst!

His letter was from his wife's brother, in whose bank Cornelius was a clerk. A considerable deficit had been discovered in his accounts. He had not been to the bank for two days before, and no trace of him was to be found. His uncle, from regard to the feelings of his sister, had not allowed the thing to transpire, but had requested the head of his office to be silent: he would wait his brother-in-law's reply before taking any steps. He feared the misguided youth had reckoned on the forbearance of an uncle; but for the sake of his own future, if for no other reason, the thing could not be passed over!

"Passed over!" Had Gerald Raymount been a Roman with the power of life and death over his children, he would in his present mood have put his son to death with his own hands. But for his wife's illness he would have been already on the way to London to repay the missing money;

for his son's sake he would not cross his threshold! So at least he said to himself.

But something must be done. He must send some one! Who was there to send? There was Hester! With her uncle she was a favourite! nor would she dread the interview, which, as the heat of his rage yielded to a cold despair, he felt would be to him an unendurable humiliation. For he had had many arguments, not always quite friendly, with this same brother-in-law concerning the way he brought up his children: they had all turned out well, and here was his miserable son a felon, disgracing both families! Yes; let Hester go! There were things a woman could do better than a man! Hester was no child now, but a capable woman! While she was gone he could be making up his mind what to do with the wretched boy!

He led Hester again from her mother's room to his, and gave her her uncle's letter to read. Tell her its content he could not. He watched her as she read—watched his own heart, as it were, in her bosom—saw her grow pale, then flush, then turn pale

again. At length her face settled into a look of determination. She laid the letter on the table, and rose with a steady troubled light in her eyes. What she was thinking of he could not tell, but he made at once the proposal.

"Hester," he said, "I cannot leave your mother; you must go for me to your uncle and do the best you can. If it were not for your mother, I would have the rascal prosecuted; but it would break her heart."

Hester wasted no words of reply: she had often heard him say there ought to be no interference with public justice for private ends.

"Yes, papa," she answered. "I shall be ready in a moment. If I ride Hotspur I shall catch the evening train."

"There is time to take the brougham."

"Am I to say anything to Corney, papa?" she asked, her voice trembling over the name.

"You have nothing to do with him," he answered sternly. "Where is the good of keeping a villain from being as much of a villain as he has got it in him to be? I

will sign you a blank cheque, which your uncle can fill up with the amount he has stolen. Come for it as soon as you are ready."

Hester thought as she went whether, if it had not been for the possibility of repentance, the world would have been made at all.

On her way to her room she met the major, looking for herself to tell him about her mother, of whose attack, as he had been out for a long walk, he had but just heard.

"But what did it, Hester?" he said. "I can smell in the air something has gone wrong: what the deuce is it? There's always something getting out of gear in this best of worlds!"

She would have passed him with a word in her haste, but he turned and walked with her.

"The individual, any individual, all the individuals," he went on, "may come to smash, but the world is all right notwithstanding, and a good serviceable machine! —by George, without a sound pinion in all

the carcase of it, or an engineer that cares there should be !”

They had met in a dark part of the corridor, and had now, at a turn in it, come opposite a window. Then first the major saw Hester's face : he had never seen her look like that !

“Is your mother in danger ?” he asked, his tone changing to the gentlest, for his heart was in reality a most tender one.

“She is very ill,” answered Hester. “The doctor has been with her now three hours.—I am going up to London for papa. He can't leave her.”

“Going up to London—and by the night-train !” said the major to himself. “Then there has been bad news ! What can they be ? Money matters ? No ; cousin Helen is not the one to send health after money ! It's something worse than that ! I have it ! That scoundrel Corney has been about some mischief—damn him ! I shouldn't be surprised to hear anything bad of him !—But what can you do, my dear ?” he said aloud. “It's not fit——”

He looked up. Hester was gone.

She put a few things together, drank a cup of tea brought to her room, went to her father and received the cheque, and was ready by the time the brougham came to the door with a pair of horses. She would not look at her mother again lest she might be sufficiently revived to wonder where she was going, but hastened down, and saw no one on the way. One of the servants was in the hall, and opened the carriage-door for her. The moment it closed she was in movement through the gathering dusk towards the railway-station.

While the lodge-gate was being opened, she thought she saw someone get up on the box beside the coachman, and fancied it must be a groom going with them. The drive was a long and anxious one; it seemed to her all the time as if the horses could not get on. In spots the road was slippery, and as the horses were not roughed they had to go slowly, and parts were very heavy. What might not be happening to Corney, she thought, while she was on the way to his rescue! She kept fancying one dreadful thing after another. It was like a terrible

dream, only with the assurance of reality in it.

The carriage stopped, the door opened, and there was the major in a huge fur coat, holding out his hand to help her down. It was as great a pleasure as surprise, and she showed both.

“ You didn’t think I was going to let you travel alone ? ” he said. “ Who knows what wolf might be after my Red-riding-hood ! I’ll go in another carriage of course if you wish it ; but in this train I’m going to London.”

Hester told him she was only too glad of his escort. Careful not to show himself in the least curious as to the cause of her journey, he seated himself in the farthest corner, for there was no one else in the carriage, and pretended to go to sleep.

And now first began Hester’s private share in the general misery of the family. In the presence of her suffering father and mother, she put off looking into the mist that kept gathering deeper and deeper, filled with forms undefined, about herself. Now these forms began to reveal themselves in

shifting yet recognizable reality. If this miserable affair should be successfully hushed up, there was yet one must know it: she must immediately acquaint lord Gartley with what had taken place! And therewith one of the shapes in the mist settled into solidity: if the love between them had been of an ideal character, would she have had a moment's anxiety as to how her lover would receive the painful news? But therewith her own mind was made up: if he but hesitated, that would be enough! Nothing could make her marry a man who had once hesitated whether to draw back or not. It was impossible.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN LONDON.

It was much too early to do anything when they arrived. Nor could Hester go to her uncle's house : it was in one of the suburbs, and she would reach it before the household was stirring. They went therefore to Addison square. When they had roused Sarah, the major took his leave of Hester, promising to be with her in a few hours, and betook himself to his hotel.

As she would not be seen at the bank, with the risk of being recognized as the sister of Cornelius and rousing speculation, she begged the major when he came to be her messenger to her uncle, and tell him that she had come from her father, asking him where it would be convenient for him to see her. The major undertook the com-

mission at once, and went without asking a question.

Early in the afternoon her uncle came, and behaved to her very kindly. He was chiefly a man of business, and showing neither by look nor tone that he had sympathy with the trouble she and her parents were in, by his very reticence revealed it. His manner was the colder that he was studiously avoiding the least approximation to remark on the conduct or character of the youth—an abstinence which, however, had a chilling and hopeless effect upon the ardent mind of the sister. At last, when she had given him her father's cheque, with the request that he would himself fill it up with the amount of which he had been robbed, and he with a slight deprecatory smile and shrug had taken it, she ventured to ask what he was going to do in regard to her brother.

“When I take this cheque,” answered her uncle, “it indicates that I treat the matter as a debt discharged, and leave him entirely in your father's hands. He must do as he sees fit. I am sorry for you all,

and for you especially that you should have had to take an active part in the business. I wish your father could have come up himself. My poor sister ! ”

“ I cannot be glad my father could not come,” said Hester, “ but I am glad he did not come, for he is so angry with Cornelius that I could almost believe he would have insisted on your prosecuting him. You never saw such indignation as my father’s at any wrong done by one man to another—not to say by one like Cornelius to one like you, uncle, who have always been so kind to him ! It is a terrible blow ! He will never get over it—never ! never ! ”

She broke down, and wept bitterly—the more bitterly that they were her first tears since learning the terrible fact, for she was not one who readily found such relief. To think of their family, of which she was too ready to feel proud, being thus disgraced, with one for its future representative who had not even the commonest honesty, and who, but that his crime had been committed against an indulgent relative, would assuredly, for the sake of the business morals

of his associates, if for no other reason, have been prosecuted for felony, was hard to bear! But to one of Hester's deep nature and loyalty to the truth, there were considerations far more sad. How was ever such a child of the darkness to come to love the light? How was one who cared so little for righteousness, one who, in all probability, would only excuse or even justify his crime—if indeed he would trouble himself to do so much—how was one like him to be brought to contrition and rectitude? There was a hope, though a poor one, in the shame he must feel at the disgrace he had brought upon himself. But alas! if the whole thing was to be kept quiet, and the semblance allowed that he had got tired of business and left it, how would even what regenerating power might lie in shame be brought to bear upon him? If not brought to *open* shame, he would hold his head as high as ever—be arrogant under the protection of the fact that the disgrace of his family would follow upon the exposure of himself.

When her uncle left her, she sat motionless a long time, thinking much but hoping

little. The darkness gathered deeper and deeper around her. The ruin of her own promised history seemed imminent upon that of her family. What sun of earthly joy could ever break through such clouds! There was indeed a sun that nothing could cloud, but it seemed to shine far away. Some sorrows seem beyond the reach of consolation, in as much as their causes seem beyond setting right. They can at best, *as it seems*, only be covered over! Forgetfulness alone seems capable of removing their sting, and from that cure every noble mind turns away as unworthy both of itself, and of its Father in heaven. But the human heart has to go through much before it is able to house even a suspicion of the superabounding riches of the creating and saving God. The foolish child thinks there can be nothing where he sees nothing; the human heart feels as if where it cannot devise help, there is none possible to God; as if God like the heart must be content to botch the thing up, and make, as we say, the best of it. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are

his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.

“But what *can* be done when—” so and so? says my reader; for, whatever generalities I utter, his hurt seems not the less unapproachable of any help. You think, I answer, that you see all round your own sorrow; whereas much the greater part of the very being you call yours, is as unknown to you as the other side of the moon. It is as impossible you should understand it, therefore its sorrow, as that you should understand God, who alone understands you. Be developed into the divine idea of you; for your grief’s sake let God have his way with you, and not only will all be well, but you shall say, “It is well.”

It was a sore and dreary time for Hester, alone in the room where she had spent so many happy hours. She sat in a window, looking out upon the leafless trees and the cold gloomy old statue in the midst of them. Frost was upon every twig. A thin sad fog filled the comfortless air. There might be warm happy homes many, but such no more belonged to her world! The fire was burn-

ing cheerfully behind her, but her eyes were fixed on the dreary square. She was hardly thinking—only letting thoughts and feelings come and go. What a thing is life and being, when a soul has become but the room in which ghosts hold their revel; when the man is no longer master of himself, can no more say to this or that thought, thou shalt come, and thou shalt go, but is a slave to his own existence, can neither cease to be, nor order his being—able only in fruitless rebellion to entangle himself yet more in the net he has knotted around him! Such is every one parted from the essential life, who has not the Power by which he lives one with him, holding pure and free and true the soul he sent forth from the depths of his being. I repent me of the ignorance wherein I ever said that God made man out of nothing: there is no nothing out of which to make anything; God is all in all, and he made us out of himself. He who is parted from God has no original nothingness with which to take refuge. He is a live discord, an anti-truth. He is a death fighting against life, and doomed to endless

vanity ; an opposition to the very power by whose strength yet in him he opposes ; a world of contradictions, not greedy after harmony, but greedy for lack of harmony—his being an abyss of positive negation. Not such was Hester, and although her thoughts now came and went without her, they did not come and go without God ; and a truth from the depths of her own true being was on its way to console her.

How would her lover receive the news ?—that was the agitating question ; what would he thereupon do ?

She would not at once write to acquaint him with the grief and disgrace that had fallen upon them, for she did not know where precisely he was : his movements were not fixed ; and she dreaded the falling of such a letter as she would have to write into any hands except his own.

But another, and far stronger reason against writing to him, made itself presently clear to her mind : if she wrote, she could not know how he received her sad story ; and if his mind required making up, which was what she feared, she would have time

for it ! 'This would not do ! She must communicate the dread defiling fact with her own lips ! She must see how he took it ! Like Hamlet with the king at the play, " If he but blench, I know my course ! " she said. If he showed the slightest change towards her, the least tendency to regard his relation to her as an entanglement, to regret that he had involved himself with the sister of a thief, marry her he should not ! That was settled as the earth's course ! If he was not to be her earthly refuge in this trouble as in any other, she would none of him ! If it should break her heart she would none of him ! But break her heart it would not ! There were worse evils than losing a lover ! There was losing a true man—and that he would not be if she lost him ! The behaviour of Cornelius had perhaps made her more capable of doubt ; possibly her righteous anger with him inclined her to imagine grounds of anger with another ; but probably this feeling of uncertainty with regard to her lover had been prepared for by things that had passed between them since their engagement, but upon which, regard-

ing herself as his wife, she had not allowed herself to dwell, turning her thought to the time when, as she imagined, she would be able to do so much more for and with him. And now she was almost in a mood to quarrel with him! Brought to moral bay, she stood with her head high, her soul roused, and every nerve strung to defence. She had not yet cast herself for defence on the care of her Father in heaven, who is jealous for the righteousness of those who love righteousness. But he was not far from her.

Yet deeper into the brooding fit she sank. Weary with her journey and the sleepless night, her brain seemed to work of itself; when suddenly came the thought that, after so long a separation, she was at last in the midst of her poor. But how was she to face them now! how hold up her head amongst them! how utter a word of gentlest remonstrance! Who was she to have dared speak to them of the evil of their ways, and the bad influence of an ill-behaved family! But how lightly they bore such ills as that which was now breaking her

down with trouble and shame ! Even such of them as were honest people, would have this cousin or that uncle, or even a son or the husband *in* for so many months, and think only of when they would have him out again ! Misfortune had overtaken them ! and they loved them no less. The man or the woman was still man or woman, mother or husband to them. Nothing could degrade them beyond the reach of their sympathies ! They had no thought of priding themselves against them because they themselves had not transgressed the law, neither of drawing back from them with disgust. And were there not a thousand wrong things done in business and society which had no depressing effect either on those who did them, or those whose friends did them—only because these wrongs not having yet come under the cognizance of law had not yet come to be considered disgraceful ? Therewith she felt nearer to her poor than ever before, and it comforted her. The bare soul of humanity comforted her. She was not merely of the same flesh and blood with them—not even of the same soul and spirit

only, but of the same failing, sinning, blundering breed; and that not alone in the general way of sin, ever and again forsaking the fountain of living water, and betaking herself to some cistern, but in their individual sins was she not their near relative? Their shame was hers: the son of her mother, the son of her father was a thief! She was and would be more one with them than ever before! If they made less of crime in another, they also made less of innocence from it in themselves! Was it nor even better to do wrong, she asked herself, than to think it a very grand thing not to do it? What merit was there in being what it would be contemptible not to be? The Lord Christ could get nearer to the publican than the Pharisee, to the woman that was a sinner than the self-righteous honest woman! The Pharisee was a good man, but he thought it such a fine thing to be good that God did not like him nearly so well as the other who thought it a sad thing to be bad! Let her but get among her nice, honest, wicked, poor ones, out of this atmosphere of pretence and ap-

pearance, and she would breathe again! She dropped upon her knees, and cried to her Father in heaven to make her heart clean altogether, to deliver her from everything mean and faithless, to make her turn from any shadow of ill as thoroughly as she would have her brother repent of the stealing that made them all so ashamed. Like a woman in the wrong she drew nigh the feet of her master; she too was a sinner; her heart needed his cleansing as much as any!

And with that came another God-given thought of self-accusing. For suddenly she perceived that self had been leading her astray: she was tender towards those farther from her, hard towards the one nearer to her! It was easy to be indulgent towards those whose evil did not touch herself: to the son of her own mother she was severe and indignant! If she condemned him, who would help his mother to give him the love of which he stood in the sorer need that he was unworthy of it? Corney whom she had nursed as a baby—who used to crow when she appeared—could it be that she

who had then loved him so dearly had ceased and was loving him no more? True, he had grown to be teasing and trying in every way, seeming to despise her and all women together; but was not that part of the evil disease that clung fast to him? If God were to do like her, how many would be giving honour to his Son? But God knew all the difficulties that beset men, and gave them fair play when sisters did not: he would redeem Corney yet! But was it possible he should ever wake to see how ugly his conduct had been? It *seemed* impossible; but surely there were powers in God's heart that had not yet been brought to bear upon him! Perhaps this was one of them—letting him disgrace himself! If he could but be made ashamed of himself there would be hope! And in the meantime she must get the beam out of her own eye, that she might see to take the mote or the beam, whichever it might be, out of Corney's! Again she fell upon her knees, and prayed God to enable her. Corney was her brother, and must for ever be her brother, were he the worst thief under the

sun! God would see to their honour or disgrace; what she had to do was to be a sister! She rose determined that she would not go home till she had done all she could to find him; that the judgment of God should henceforth alone be hers, and the judgment of the world nothing to her for evermore.

Presently the fact, which had at various times cast a dim presence up her horizon without thoroughly attracting her attention, became plain to her—that she had in part been drawn towards her lover because of his social position. Certainly without loving him she would never have consented to marry him for that, but had she not come the more readily to love him because of that? Had it not passed him within certain defences which would otherwise have held out? Had he not been an earl in prospect, were there not some things in him which would have more repelled her, as not manifesting the highest order of humanity? Would she, for instance, but for that, have tried so much to like his verses? Clearly she must take her place with the sinners!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TALK WITH THE MAJOR.

WHILE she meditated thus, major Marvel made his appearance. He had been watching outside, saw her uncle go, and an hour after was shown to the room where she still sat, staring out on the frosty trees of the square.

“Why, my child,” he said, with almost paternal tenderness, “your hand is as cold as ice! Why do you sit so far from the fire?”

She rose and went to the fire with him. He put her in an easy chair, and sat down beside her. Common, pudgy, red-faced, bald-headed as he was, she came to him, and that out of regions of deepest thought, with a sense of refuge. He could scarcely have understood one of her difficulties,

would doubtless have judged not a few of her scruples nonsensical and over-driven ; yet knowing this it was a comfort to her to come from those regions back to a mere, honest, human heart—to feel a human soul in a human body nigh her. For the mere human is divine, though not *the* divine, and to the mere human essential comfort. Should relations be broken between her and lord Gartley, she knew it would delight the major ; yet she was able to look upon him as a friend in whom she could trust. Unity of *opinion* is not necessary to confident friendship and warm love.

As they talked, the major, seeing she was much depressed, and thinking to draw her from troubled thought, began to tell her some of the more personal parts of his history, and in these she soon became so interested that she began to ask him questions, and drew from him much that he would never have thought of volunteering. Before their talk was over, she had come to regard the man as she could not have imagined it possible she should. She had looked upon him as a man of so many and

such redeeming qualities, that his faults must be overlooked and himself defended from any overweighing of them; but now she felt him a man to be looked up to—almost revered. It was true that every now and then some remark would reveal in him a less than attractive commonness of thinking, and that his notions in religion were of the crudest, for he regarded it as a set of doctrines—not a few of them very dishonouring to God; yet was the man in a high sense a true man. There is nothing shows more how hard it has been for God to redeem the world than the opinions still uttered concerning him and his so-called *plans* by many who love him and try to obey him: a man may be in possession of the most precious jewels, and yet know so little about them that his description of them would never induce a jeweller to purchase them, but on the contrary make him regard the man as a fool, taking bits of coloured glass for rubies and sapphires. Major Marvel was not of such. He knew nothing of the slang of the Pharisees, knew little of the language of

either the saints or the prophets, had, like most Christians, many worldly ways of looking at things, and yet I think our Lord would have said there was no guile in him.

With her new insight into the man's character came to Hester the question whether she would not be justified in taking him into her confidence with regard to Cornelius. She had received no injunctions to secrecy from her father: neither he nor her mother ever thought of such a thing with her; they knew she was to be trusted as they were themselves to be trusted. Her father had taken no step towards any effort for the rescue of his son, and she would sorely need help in what she must herself try to do. She could say nothing to the major about lord Gartley, or the influence her brother's behaviour might have on her future: that would not be fair either to Gartley or to the major; but might she not ask him to help her to find Corney? She was certain he would be prudent and keep quiet whatever ought to be kept quiet; while on the other hand her father had spoken as if he would have nothing of it

all concealed. She told him the whole story, hiding nothing that she knew. Hardly could she restrain her tears as she spoke, but she ended without having shed one. The major had said nothing, betrayed nothing, only listened intently.

“My dear Hester,” he said solemnly, after a few moments’ pause, “the mysteries of creation are beyond me !”

Hester thought the remark irrelevant, but waited.

“It’s such a mixture !” he went on. “There is your mother, the loveliest woman except yourself God ever made ! Then comes Cornelius—a—well !—Then comes yourself ! and then little Mark ! a child—I will not say too good to live—God forbid !—but too good for any of the common uses of this world ! I declare to you I am terrified when left alone with him, and keep wishing for somebody to come into the room !”

“What about him terrifies you ?” asked Hester, amused at the idea, in spite of the gnawing unrest at her heart.

“To answer you,” replied the major, “I

must think a bit ! Let me see ! Let me see !—Yes ! it must be that ! I am ashamed to confess it, but to a saint one must speak the truth : I believe in my heart it is simply fear lest I should find I must give up everything and do as I know he is thinking I ought.”

“ And what is that ? ”

“ Turn a saint like him.”

“ And why should you be afraid of that ? ”

“ Well, you see, I’m not the stuff that saints—good saints, I mean—are made of ; and rather than not be a good one, if I once set about it, I would, saving your presence, be the devil himself.”

Hester laughed, yet with some self-accusation.

“ I think,” she said softly, “ one day you will be as good a saint as love can wish you to be.”

“ Give me time ; give me time, I beg,” cried the major, wiping his forehead, and evidently in some perturbation. “ I would not willingly begin anything I should disgrace, for that would be to disgrace myself, and I never had any will to that, though

the old ladies of our village used to say I was born without any shame. But the main cause of my unpopularity was that I hated humbug—and I do hate humbug, cousin Hester, and shall hate it till I die—and so want to steer clear of it.”

“I hate it, I hope, as much as you do, major Marvel,” responded Hester. “But, whatever it may be mixed up with, what is true, you know, cannot be humbug, and what is not true cannot be anything else than humbug.”

“Yes, yes! but how is one to know what is true, my dear? There are so many differing claims to the quality!”

“I have been told, and I believe it with all my heart,” replied Hester, “that the only way to know what is true is to do what is true.”

“But you must know what is true before you can begin to do what is true.”

“Everybody knows something that is true to do—that is, something he ought to lose no time in setting about. The true thing to any man is the thing that must not be let alone but done. It is much easier

to know what is true to do than what is true to think. But those who do the one will come to know the other—and none else, I believe.”

The major was silent, and sat looking very thoughtful. At last he rose.

“Is there anything you want me to do in this sad affair, cousin Hester?” he said.

“I want your help to find my brother.”

“Why should you want to find him? You cannot do him any good!”

“Who can tell that? If Christ came to seek and save his lost, we ought to seek and save our lost.”

“Young men don’t go wrong for the mere sake of going wrong: you may find him in such a position as will make it impossible for you to have anything to do with him.”

“You know that line of Spenser’s,—

‘Entire affection hateth nicer hands’?”

asked Hester.

“No, I don’t know it; and I don’t know that I understand it now you tell it me!” replied the major, just a little crossly, for he did not like poetry: it was one of his

bugbear humbugs. "But one thing is plain: you must not expose yourself to what in such a search would be unavoidable."

The care of men over some women would not seldom be ludicrous but for the sad suggested contrast of their carelessness over others.

"Answer me one question, dear major Marvel," said Hester: "Which is in most danger from disease—the healthy or the sickly?"

"That's a question for the doctor," he answered cautiously; "and I don't believe he knows anything about it either. What it has to do with the matter in hand I cannot think."

Hester saw it was not for her now to pursue the argument. And one would almost imagine it scarce needed pursuing! For who shall walk safe in the haunts of evil but those upon whom, being pure, evil has no hold? The world's notions of purity are simply childish—because it is not itself pure. You might well suppose its cherished ones on the brink of all corruption, so much afraid does it seem of having them tainted

before their time. Sorry would one be, but for the sake of those for whom Christ died, that any woman should be pained with the sight of evil; but the true woman may, even like God himself, know all evil and remain just as lovely, as clean, as angelic and worshipful as any child in the simplest country home. The idea of a woman like Hester being *in any sense* defiled by knowing what her Lord knows while she fills up what is left behind of the sufferings of Christ for her to suffer for the sake of his world, is contemptible. As wrong melts away and vanishes in the heart of Christ, so does the impurity she encounters vanish in the heart of the pure woman: it is there burned up.

"I hardly see what is to be done," said the major, after a moment's silence. "What do you say to an advertisement in *The Times*, to the effect that, if C. R. will return to his family, all will be forgiven?"

"That I must not, dare not do. There is surely some other way of finding persons without going to the police!"

"What do you think your father would like done?"

“I do not know; but as I am Corney’s sister, I will venture as a sister may. I think my father will be pleased in the end, but I will risk his displeasure for the sake of my brother. If my father were to cast him off, would you say I was bound to cast him off?”

“I dare say nothing where you are sure, Hester. My only anxiety would be whether you thoroughly knew what you were about.”

“If one were able to look upon the question of life or death as a mere candle-flame in the sun of duty, would she not at least be more likely to do right than wrong?”

“If the question were put about a soldier I should feel surer how to answer you,” replied the major. “But you are so much better than I—you go upon such different tactics, that we can hardly, I fear, bring our troops right in front of each other.—I will do what I can for you—though I greatly fear your brother will never prove worth the trouble.”

“People have repented who have gone as far wrong as Corney,” said Hester, with the tears in her voice if not in her eyes.

“True!” responded the major; “but I don’t believe he has character enough to repent of anything. He will be fertile enough in excuse! But I will do what I can to find out where he is.”

Hester heartily thanked him, and he took his leave.

Her very estrangement from him, the thought of her mother’s misery and the self-condemnation that must overtake her father if he did nothing, urged her to find Cornelius. But if she found him, what would come of it? Was he likely to go home with her? Would he be received if he did go home? and if not, what was she to do with or for him? Was he to keep the money so vilely appropriated? And what was he to do when it was spent? If want would drive him home, the sooner he came to it the better! We pity the prodigal with his swine, but then first a ray of hope begins to break through the darkness of his fate.

To do nothing was nearly unendurable, and she saw nothing to do. She could only wait, and it took all the patience and submission she could find. She wrote to her

father, told him what there was to tell, and ended her letter with a message to her mother:—"Tell darling mother," she said, "that what a sister can do, up to the strength God gives her, shall be done for my brother. Major Marvel is doing his best to find him."

Next day she heard from her father that her mother was slowly recovering; and on the following day that her letter was a great comfort to her; but beyond this he made no remark. Even his silence however was something of a relief to Hester.

In the mean time she was not idle. Hers was not the nature even in grief to sit still. The moment she had dispatched her letter, she set out to visit her poor friends. On her way she went into Mrs. Baldwin's shop and had a little talk with her, in the course of which she asked if she had ever heard anything more of the Frankses. Mrs. Baldwin replied that she had once or twice heard of their being seen in the way of their profession; but feared they were not getting on. Hester was sorry, but had many more she knew better to think of.

There was much rejoicing at her return. But there were changes—new faces where she had left friends, and not the best news of some who remained. One or two were in prison of whom when she left she was in good hope. One or two were getting on better in the sense of this world, but she could see nothing in themselves to make her glad of their “good luck.” One who had signed the pledge some time before she went, had broken out fearfully, and all but killed his wife. One of whom she had been hopeful, had disappeared—it was supposed with another man’s wife. In spite of their sufferings the evil one seemed as busy among them as among the world’s elect.

The little ones came about her again, but with less confidence, both because she had been away, and because they had grown more than they had improved. But soon things were nearly on the old footing with them.

Every day she went among her people. Certain of the women—chiefly those who had suffered most with least fault—were as warmly her friends as before. Amongst

them was just one who had some experience of the Christian life, and she had begun to learn long before Hester came to know her : she did not seem, however, to have gained any influence even with those who lived in the same house ; only who can trace the slow working of leaven ?

CHAPTER XIX.

RENCONTRES.

THERE was no news of Cornelius. In vain the detective to whom the major had made liberal promises continued his inquiries. There was a rumour of a young woman in whose company he had lately been seen, but she too had disappeared from public sight.

Sarah did her best to make Hester comfortable, and behaved the better that she was humbled by the consciousness of having made a bad job of her caretaking with Cornelius.

One afternoon—it had rained, but the sun was now shining, and Hester's heart felt lighter as she took deep breaths of the clean-washed air—she turned into a passage to visit the wife of a bookbinder who had

been long laid up with rheumatism so severe as to render him quite unable to work. They had therefore been on the borders of want, and for Hester it was one of those happy cases in which she felt at full liberty to help with money. The part of the house occupied by them was pretty decent, but the rest of it was in bad repair and occupied by yet poorer people, of none of whom she knew much. It was in fact a little way beyond what she had come to count her limit.

She knocked at the door. It was opened by the parish doctor.

"You cannot come in, Miss Raymount," he said. "We have a very bad case of small-pox here. You good ladies must make up your minds to keep away from these parts for a while. Their bodies are in more danger than their souls now."

"That may very well be," replied Hester. "My foot may be in more danger than my head, but I can better afford to lose the one than the other."

The doctor did not see the point, and thought there was none.

"You will only carry the infection," he said.

"I will take every precaution," answered Hester. "I always take more, I am certain, than it can be possible for you to take. Why should not I also do my part to help them through?"

"While the parish is in my care," answered the doctor, "I must object to whatever increases the risk of infection. It is hard, while we are doing all we can to stamp out the disease, to have you, with the best of motives I admit, carrying it from one house to another. How are we to keep it out of the West End, if you ladies carry the seeds of it?"

The hard-worked man spoke with some heat.

"So the poor brothers are to be left for fear of hurting the rich ones?"

"That's not fair—you know it is not!" said the doctor. "We are set here to fight the disease, and fight it we must."

"And I am set here to fight something worse," returned Hester with a smile.

The doctor came out and shut the door.

"I must beg of you to go away," he said. "I shall be compelled to mention in my report how you and other ladies add to our difficulties."

He slipped in again and closed the door. Hester turned and went down the stair, now on her part a little angry. She knew it was no use thinking when she was angry, for when the anger was gone she almost always thought otherwise. The first thing was to get rid of the anger. Instinctively she sat down and began to sing; it was not the first time she had sat and sung in a dirty staircase. It was not a wise thing to do, but her anger prevented her from seeing its impropriety.

In great cities the children are like flies, gathering swiftly as from out of the unseen: in a moment the stair below was half-filled with them. The tenants above opened their doors and came down. Others came in from the street and were pushed up by those who came behind them. The stair and entrance were presently filled with people, all shabby, and almost all dirty—men and women, young and old, good and

bad, listening to the voice of the singing lady, as she was called in the neighbourhood.

By this time the doctor had finished his visit at the bookbinder's, and appeared on the stair above. He had heard the singing, and thought it was in the street; now he learnt it was actually in the house, and had filled it with people! It was no wonder, especially when he saw who the singer was, that he should lose his temper. Through the few women and children above where Hester sat, he made his way towards the crowd of faces below. When he reached her he seized her arm from behind, and began to raise at once and push her down the stair. He, too, was an enthusiast in his way. Some of the faces below grew red with anger, and their eyes flamed at the doctor. A loud murmur arose, and several began to force their way up to rescue her, as they would one of their own from the police. But Hester, the moment she saw who it was that had laid hold of her, rose and began to descend the stair, closely followed by the doctor. It was not easy; and the annoy-

ance of a good many in the crowd, of some because Hester was their friend, of others because the doctor had stopped the singing, gave a disorderly and indeed rather threatening look to the assemblage.

As she reached the door she saw, on the opposite side of the crowded passage, the pale face and glittering eyes of Mr. Blaney looking at her over the heads between. The little man was mounted on a box at the door of a shop whose trade seemed to be in withered vegetables and salt fish, and had already had the pint which, according to his brother-in-law, was more than he could stand.

“Sarves you right, miss,” he cried, when he saw who was the centre of the commotion; “sarves you right! You turned me out o’ your house for singin’, an’ I don’t see why you should come a singin’ an’ a misbehavin’ of yourself in ourn! Jest you bring her out here, pleeceman, an’ let me give her a bit o’ my mind. Oh, don’t you be afeared, I won’t hurt her! Not in all my life did I ever once hurt a woman—bless ’em! But it’s time the gentry swells

knowed as how we're yuman bein's as well as theirselves. We don't like, no more'n they would theirselves, havin' our feelin's hurt for the sake o' what they calls bein' done good to. Come you along down over here, miss ! ”

The crowd had been gathering from both ends of the passage, for high words draw yet faster than sweet singing, and the place was so full that it was hardly possible to get out of it. The doctor was almost wishing he had let ill alone, for he was now anxious about Hester. Some of the rougher ones began pushing. The vindictive little man kept bawling, his mouth screwed into the middle of his cheek. From one of the cross entrances of the passage came the pulse of a fresh tide of would-be spectators, causing the crowd to sway hither and thither. All at once Hester spied a face she knew, considerably changed as it was since last she had seen it.

“ Now we shall have help ! ” she said to her companion, making common cause with him notwithstanding his antagonism. “ — Mr. Franks ! ”

The athlete was not so far off that she needed to call very loud. He heard and started with eager interest. He knew the voice, sent his eyes looking, and presently found her who called him. With his great lean muscular arms he sent the crowd right and left like water, and reached her in a moment.

“Come! come! don’t you hurt her!” shouted Mr. Blaney from the top of his box. “She ain’t nothing to you. She’s a old friend o’ mine, an’ I ain’t a goin’ to see her hurt!”

“You shut up!” bawled Franks, “or I’ll finish the pancake you was meant for.”

Then turning to Hester, who had begun to be a little afraid he too had been drinking, he pulled off his fur cap, and making the lowest and politest of stage bows, said briefly,

“Miss Raymount—at your service, miss!”

“I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Franks,” said Hester. “Do you think you could get us out of the crowd?”

“Easy, miss. I’ll *carry* you out of it like a baby, miss, if you’ll let me.”

“No, no ; that will hardly be necessary,” returned Hester, with a smile.

“Go on before, and make a way for us,” said the doctor, with an authority he had no right to assume.

“There is not the least occasion for you to trouble yourself about me farther,” said Hester. “I am perfectly safe with this man. I know him very well. I am sorry to have vexed you.”

Franks looked up sharply at the doctor, as if to see whether he dared acknowledge a claim to the apology ; then turning to Hester,—

“Nobody ’ain’t ha’ been finding fault with you, miss?” he said—a little ominously.

“Not more than I deserved,” replied Hester. “But come, Franks ! lead the way, or all Bloomsbury will be here, and then the police ! I shouldn’t like to be shut up for offending Mr. Blaney !”

Those near them heard and laughed. She took Franks’s arm. Room was speedily made before them, and in a minute they were out of the crowd, and in one of the main thoroughfares.

But as if everybody she knew was going to appear, who should meet them face to face as they turned into Steevens's Road, with a fringe of the crowd still at their heels, but lord Gartley ! He had written from town, and Mrs. Raymount had let him know that Hester was in London, for she saw that the sooner she had an opportunity of telling him what had happened the better. His lordship went at once to Addison square, and had just left the house disappointed when he met Hester leaning on Franks's arm.

"Miss Raymount !" he exclaimed, almost haughtily.

"My lord !" she returned, with unmistakable haughtiness, drawing herself up and looking him in the face, hers glowing.

"Who would have expected to see you here ? " he said.

"Apparently yourself, my lord ! "

He tried to laugh.

"Come then ; I will see you home," he said.

"Thank you, my lord.—Come, Franks."

As she spoke she looked round, but Franks was gone. Finding she had met one of her

own family; he is supposed to have quietly
withdrawn; but instantly he was no longer
wanted; he soon returned and felt himself
free to wander round a corner here, to be
assured that was going to be taken care of,
and seeing these walk away together he was
satisfied, and went with a sigh.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE HOUSE.

THE two were silent on their way, but from different causes. Lord Gartley was uneasy at finding Hester in such a position—led into it by her unreflecting sympathies, no doubt, so unbefitting the present century of the world's history! He had gathered from the looks and words of the following remnants of the crowd that she had been involved in some street-quarrel—trying to atone it no doubt, or to separate the combatants. For a woman of her refinement, she had the strangest proclivity for low company!

Hester was silent, thinking how to begin her communication about Cornelius. Uncomfortable from the *contretemps*, as well as from what she had now to do, and irritated

at the tone in which his lordship had expressed the surprise he could not help feeling at sight of her so accompanied and attended, she had felt for a moment as if the best thing would be to break with him at once. But she was too just, had she not had too much regard for him, to do so. She felt, however, for that one moment, very plainly, that the relation between them was far from the ideal. Another thing was yet clearer: if he could feel such surprise and annoyance at the circumstances in which he had just met her, it would be well to come to a clearer understanding at once concerning her life-ideal and projects. But she would make up her mind to nothing till she saw how he was going to carry himself now his surprise had had time to pass off: perhaps it would not be necessary to tell him anything about Corney! they might part upon other grounds! In the one case it would be she, in the other it would be he that broke the engagement: she would rather it were his doing than hers! No doubt she would stand better in the eyes of the world if she dismissed him;

but that was an aspect of the affair she would never have deigned to heed had it presented itself.

These thoughts, with what of ratiocination was in them, hardly passed through her mind ; it was filled, rather, with a confused mass of tangled thought and feeling, which tossed about in it like the nets of a fishing fleet rolled together by a storm.

Not before they reached the house did lord Gartley speak, and Hester began to wonder if he might not already have heard of Cornelius. It was plain he was troubled ; plain too he was only waiting for the coverture of the house to speak. It should be easy, oh, very easy for him to get rid of her ! He need not be anxious about that !

It was doubtless shock upon shock to the sensitive nature of his lordship to find, when they reached the house, that, instead of ringing the bell, she took a latch-key from her pocket, opened the door herself, and herself closed it behind them. It was just as a bachelor might enter his chambers ! It did not occur to him that it was just such as his bachelor that ought not to have

the key, and such as Hester that ought to have it, to let them come and go as the angels. She led the way up the stair. Not movement of life was audible in the house ! The stillness was painful.

“Did no one come up with you?” he asked.

“No one but major Marvel,” she answered, and opened the door of the drawing-room.

As she opened it, she woke to the consciousness that she was very cross, and in a mood to make her unfair to Gartley : the moment she had closed it, she turned to him and said,

“Forgive me, Gartley ; I am in trouble ; we are all in trouble. When I have told you about it, I shall be more at ease.”

Without preamble, or any attempt to influence the impression of the dreadful news, she began her story, softening the communication only by making it as the knowledge had come to her—telling first her mother’s distress at Sarah’s letter, then the contents of that letter, and then those of her uncle’s. She could not have done it with greater

fairness to her friend: his practised self-control had opportunity for perfect operation. But the result was more to her satisfaction than she could have dared to hope. He held out his hand with a smile, and said, "I am very sorry. What is there I can do?"

She looked up in his eyes. They were looking down kindly and lovingly.

"Then—then—," she said, "you don't—I mean there's no—I mean, you don't feel differently towards me?"

"Towards you, my angel!" exclaimed Gartley, and held out his arms.

She threw herself into them, and clung to him. It was the first time either of them had shown anything approaching to *abandon*. Gartley's heart swelled with delight, translating her confidence into his power. He was no longer the second person in the compact, but had taken the place belonging to the male contracting party! For he had been painfully conscious now and then that he played but second fiddle.

They sat down and talked the whole thing over.

Now that Hester was at peace she began to look at it from Gartley's point of view.

"I am so sorry for you!" she said. "It is very sad you should have to marry into a family so disgraced. What *will* your aunt say?"

"My aunt will treat the affair like the sensible woman she is," replied the earl. "But there is no fear of disgrace; the thing will never be known. Besides, where is the family that hasn't one or more such loose fishes about in its pond? The fault was committed inside the family too, and that makes a great difference. It is not as if he'd been betting and couldn't pay up!"

From the heaven of her delight Hester fell prone. Was this the way her almost husband looked at these things? But, poor fellow! how could he help looking at them so? Was it not thus he had been from earliest childhood taught to look at them? The greater was his need of all she could do for him! He was so easy to teach anything! What she saw clear as day it could not be hard to communicate to one who loved as he loved! She would say nothing now—

would let him see no sign of disappointment in her !

“ If he don’t improve,” continued his lordship, “ we must get him out of the country. In the meantime he will go home, and not a suspicion will be roused. What else should he do, with such a property to look after ? ”

“ My father will not see it so,” answered Hester. “ I doubt if he will ever speak to him again. Certainly he will not except he show some repentance.”

“ Has your father refused to have him home ? ”

“ He has not had the chance. Nobody knows what has become of him.”

“ He’ll have to condone, or compromise, or compound, or what do they call it, for the sake of his family—for your sake, and my sake, my darling ! He can’t be so vindictive as expose his own son ! We won’t think more about it ! Let us talk of ourselves ! ”

“ If only we could find him ! ” returned Hester.

“ Depend upon it he is not where you

would like to find him. Men don't come to grief without help ! We must wait till he turns up."

Far as this was from her purpose, Hester was not inclined to argue the point: she could not expect him or any one out of their own family to be much interested in the fate of Cornelius. They began to talk about other things; and if they were not the things Hester would most readily have talked about, neither were they the things lord Gartley had entered the house intending to talk about. He too had been almost angry, only by nature he was cool and even good-tempered. To find Hester, the moment she came back to London, and now in the near prospect of marriage with himself, yielding afresh to a diseased fancy of doing good; to come upon her in the street of a low neighbourhood, followed by a low crowd, supported and championed by a low fellow—well, it was not agreeable ! His high breeding made him mind it less than a middle-class man of like character would have done; but with his cold dislike to all that was poor and miserable, he could not fail to find it

annoying, and had entered the house intending to exact a promise for the future—not the future after marriage, for a change then went without saying.

But when he had heard her trouble, and saw how deeply it affected her, he knew this was not the time to say what he had meant; and there was the less occasion now that he was near to take care of her!

He had risen to go, and was about to take a loving farewell, when Hester, suddenly remembering, drew back, with almost a guilty look.

“Oh, Gartley!” she said, “I ought not to have let you come near me! Not that *I* am afraid of anything! But you came upon me so unexpectedly! It is all very well for one’s self, but one ought to heed what other people may think!”

“What *can* you mean, Hester?” exclaimed Gartley, and would have laid his hand on her arm, but again she drew back.

“There was small-pox in the house I had just left when you met me,” she said.

He started back and stood speechless—manifesting therein no more cowardice than

everyone in his circle would have justified : was it not reasonable and right he should be afraid ? was it not a humiliation to be created subject to such a loathsome disease ? The disgrace of fearing anything except doing wrong, few human beings are capable of conceiving, fewer still of actually believing.

“ Has it never occurred to you what you are doing in going to such places, Hester ? ” he faltered. “ It is a treachery against every social claim. I am sorry to use such hard words, but—really—I—I—cannot help being a little surprised at you ! I thought you had more—more—sense ! ”

“ I am sorry to have frightened you.”

“ Frightened ! ” repeated Gartley, with an attempt at a smile, which closed in a yet more anxious look, “—you do indeed frighten me ! The whole world would agree you give me good cause to be frightened. I should never have thought *you* capable of showing such a lack of principle. Don’t imagine I am thinking of myself ; *you* are in most danger ! Still, you may carry the infection without taking it yourself.”

“I didn’t know it was there when I went to the house—only I should have gone all the same,” said Hester. “But if seeing you so suddenly had not made me forget, I should have had a bath as soon as I got home. I *am* sorry I let you come near me!”

“One has no right either to take or carry infection,” insisted lord Gartley, perhaps a little glad of the height upon which an opportunity of finding fault set him for the first time above her. “But there is no time to talk about it now. I hope you will use what preventives you can. It is very wrong to trifle with such things!”

“Indeed it is!” answered Hester; “and I say again I am sorry I forgot. You see how it was—don’t you? It was you made me forget!”

But his lordship was by no means now in a smiling mood. He bade her a somewhat severe good night, then hesitated, and thinking it hardly signified now, and he must not look too much afraid, held out his hand. But Hester drew back a third time, saying, “No, no; you must not,” and with solemn

bow he turned and went, his mind full of conflicting feelings and perplexing thoughts : —What a glorious creature she was!—and what a dangerous! He recalled the story of the young woman brought up on poisons, whom no man could come near but at the risk of his life. What a spirit she had! but what a pity it was so ill-directed! It was horrible to think of her going into such abominable places—and all alone too! How ill she had been trained!—in such utter disregard of social obligation and the laws of nature! It was preposterous! He little thought what risks he ran when he fell in love with *her*! If he got off now without an attack he would be lucky! But—good heavens! if she were to take it herself! “I wonder when she was last vaccinated!” he said. “I was last year; I daresay I’m all right! But if she were to die, or lose her complexion, I should kill myself! I know I should!” Would honour compel him to marry her if she were horribly pock-marked? Those dens ought to be rooted out! Philanthropy was gone mad! It was strict repression that was wanted! To sympathize

with people like that was only to encourage them! Vice was like hysterics—the more kindness you showed the worse grew the patient! They took it all as their right! And the more you gave, the more they demanded—never showing any gratitude so far as he knew!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAJOR AND THE SMALL-POX.

HIS lordship was scarcely gone when the major came. So closely did the appearance of the one follow on the disappearance of the other, that there was ground for suspecting the major had seen his lordship enter the house, and had been waiting and watching till he was gone. But she was not yet to be seen: she had no fear of the worst small-pox could do to her, yet was taking what measures appeared advisable for her protection. Her fearlessness came from no fancied absence of danger, but from an utter disbelief in chance. The same and only faith that would have enabled her to face the man-eating tiger, enabled her to face the small-pox: if she did die by going into such places, it was all right.

For aught I know there may be a region whose dwellers are so little capable of being individually cared for, that they are left to the action of mere general laws as sufficient for what for the time can be done for them. Such may well to themselves seem to be blown about by all the winds of chaos and the limbo—which winds they call chance! Even then and there it is God who has ordered all the generals of their condition, and when they are sick of it, will help them out of it. One thing is sure—that God is doing his best for *every* man.

The major sat down and waited.

“I am at my wits’ end!” he said, when she entered the room. “I can’t find the fellow! That detective’s a muff! He ’ain’t got a trace of him yet! I must put on another!—Don’t you think you had better go home? I will do what can be done, you may be sure!”

“I *am* sure,” answered Hester. “But mamma is better; so long as I am away papa will not leave her; and she would rather have papa than a dozen of me.”

“But it must be so dreary for you—here

alone all day!" he said, with a touch of malice.

"I go about among my people," she answered.

"Ah! ah!" he returned. "Then I hope you will be careful what houses you go into, for I hear the small-pox is in the neighbourhood."

"I have just come from a house where it is now," she answered. The major rose in haste. "—But," she went on, "I have changed all my clothes, and had a bath since."

The major sat down again.

"My dear young lady!" he said, the roses a little ashy on his cheek-bones, "do you know what you are about?"

"I hope I do—I *think* I do," she answered.

"Hope! Think!" repeated the major indignantly.

"Well, *believe*," said Hester.

"Come, come!" he rejoined with rudeness; "you may hope or think or believe what you like, but you have no business to act but on what you *know*."

"I suppose you never act where you do not know!" returned Hester. "You always *know* you will win the battle, kill the tiger, take the small-pox, and be the worse for it?"

"It's all very well for you to laugh!" returned the major; "but what is to become of us if you take the small-pox! Why, my dear cousin, you might lose every scrap of your good looks!"

"And then who on earth would care for me any more!" said Hester, with mock mournfulness, which brought a glimmer of the merry light back to the major's face.

"But really, Hester," he persisted, "this is most imprudent. It is your life, not your beauty only you are periling!"

"Perhaps," she answered.

"And the lives of us all!" added the major.

"Is the small-pox worse than a man-eating tiger?" she asked.

"Ten times worse," he answered. "You can fight the tiger, but you can't fight the small-pox! You really ought *not* to run such fearful risks."

"How are they to be avoided? Every

time you send for the doctor you run a risk! You can't order a clean doctor every time!"

"A joke's all very well! but it is our duty to take care of ourselves."

"In reason, yes," replied Hester.

"You may think," said the major, "that God takes special care of you because you are about his business—and far be it from me to say you are not about his business or that he does not take care of you; but what is to become of me and the like of me if we take the small-pox from you?"

Hester had it on her lips to say that if he was meant to die of the small-pox, he might as well take it of her as of another; but she said instead that she was sure God took care of her, but not sure she should not die of the small-pox.

"How can you say God takes care of you, if he lets you die of the small-pox!"

"No doubt people would die if God forgot them, but do you think people die because God forgets them?"

"My dear cousin Hester, if there is one thing I have a *penchant* for, it is common

sense! A paradox I detest with my whole soul!"

"One word, dear major Marvel: Did God take care of Jesus?"

"Of course! of course! But he wasn't like other men, you know."

"I don't want to fare better, that is, I don't want to have more of God's care than he had."

"I don't understand you. I should think if we were sure God took as good care of us as of him,——"

But there he stopped, for he began to have a glimmer of where she was leading him.

"Did he keep him what you call safe?" said Hester. "Did he not allow the worst man could do to overtake him? Was it not the very consequence of his obedience?"

"Then you have made up your mind to die of the small-pox?—In that case——"

"Only if it be God's will," interrupted Hester. "To that, and that alone, have I made up my mind. If I die of the small-pox, it will not be because it could not be helped, or because I caught it by chance;

it will be because God allowed it as best for me and for us all. It will not be a punishment for breaking his laws ; he loves none better, I believe, than those who break the laws of nature to fulfil the laws of the spirit—which is the deeper nature, ‘the nature naturing nature,’ as I read the other day : of course it sounds nonsense to anyone who does not understand it.”

“That’s your humble servant,” said the major. “I haven’t a notion what you or the author you quote means, though I don’t doubt both of you mean well, and that you are a most courageous and indeed heroic young woman. For all that, it is time your friends interfered ; and I am going to write by the next post to let your father know how you are misbehaving yourself.”

“They will not believe me quite so bad as I fear you will represent me.”

“I don’t know. I must write anyhow.”

“That they may order me home to give them the small-pox ? Wouldn’t it be better to wait and be sure I had not taken it already ? Your letter too might carry the infection. I think you had better not write.”

“You persist in making fun of it! I say again it is not a thing to be joked about,” remarked the major, looking red.

“I think,” returned Hester, “whoever lives in terror of infection had better take it and have done with it. I know I would rather die than live in the fear of death. It is the meanest of slaveries. At least, to live a slave to one’s fears is next worst to living a slave to one’s likings. Do as you please, major Marvel, but I give you warning that if you interpose—I will not say *interfere*, because you do it all for kindness—but if you interpose, I will never ask you to help me again; I will never let you know what I am doing, or come to you for advice, lest, instead of assisting me, you should set about preventing me from doing what I may have to do.”

She held out her hand to him, adding with a smile,

“Is it for good-bye, or a compact?”

“But just look at it from my point of view,” said the major, disturbed by the appeal. “What will your father say if he finds me aiding and abetting?”

“You did not come up at my father’s request, or from the least desire on his part to have me looked after. You were not put in charge of me, and have no right to suppose me doing anything my parents would not like. They never objected to my going among my friends as I thought fit. Possibly they had more faith in my good sense, knowing me better than major Marvel.”

“But when one sees you doing the thing that is plainly wrong,——”

“If it be so plainly wrong, how is it that I, who am really anxious to do right, should not see it wrong? Why should you think me less likely to know what is right than you, major Marvel?”

“I give in,” said the major, “and will abide by the consequences.”

“But you shall not needlessly put yourself in danger. You must not come to me except I send for you. If you hear anything of Corney, write, please.”

“You don’t imagine,” cried the major, firing up, “that I am going to turn tail where you advance? I’m not going to run from the small-pox any more than you. So

long as he don't get on my back to hunt other people, I don't care. By George! you women have more courage ten times than we men!"

"What we've got to do we just go and do, without thinking about danger. I believe it is often the best wisdom to be blind and let God be our eyes as well as our shield. But would it be right of you, not called to the work, to put yourself in danger because you would not be out where I am in? I could admire of course, but never quite justify sir Philip Sidney in putting off his cuisses because his general had not got his on."

"You're fit for a field-marshal, my dear!" said the major enthusiastically—adding as he kissed her hand, "I will think over what you have said, and at least not betray you without warning."

"That is enough for the present," returned Hester, shaking hands with him warmly.

The major went away hardly knowing whither, so filled was he with admiration of "cousin Helen's girl."

“ By George ! ” he said to himself, “ it’s a confounded good thing I didn’t marry Helen : she would never have had a girl like that if I had ! Things are always best. The world needs a few such in it—even if they be fools—though I suspect they will turn out the wise ones, and we the fools for taking such care of our precious selves ! ”

But the major was by no means a selfish man. He was pretty much mixed, like the rest of us. Only, if we do not make up our minds not to be mixed with the one thing, we shall by and by be but little mixed with the other.

That same evening he sent her word that one answering the description of Cornelius had been descried in the neighbourhood of Addison square.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOWN AND DOWN.

Down the hill, and down!—to the shores of the salt sea, where the flowing life is dammed into a stagnant lake, a dead sea, growing more and more bitter with separation and lack of outlet. Mrs. Franks had come to feel the comforting of her husband a hopeless thing, and had all but ceased to attempt it. He grew more hopeless for the lack of what she thought moved him no more; and when she ceased to comfort him, the fountain of her own hope began to fail: in comforting him she had comforted herself! The boys, whose merriment even was always of a sombre kind, got more gloomy, but had not begun to quarrel; for that evil, as interfering with their profession, the

father had so sternly crushed that they had less than the usual tendency to it.

They had reached at last the point of being unable to pay for their lodging. They were indeed a fortnight's rent behind. Their landlady was not willing to be hard upon them, but what could a poor woman do, she said. The day was come when they must go forth like Abraham without a home, but not like Abraham with a tent and the world before them to set it up in, not like Abraham with camels and asses to help them along. The weakly wife had to carry the sickly baby, who, with many ups and downs, had been slowly pining away. The father went laden with the larger portion of the goods yet remaining to them, and led the Serpent of the Prairie, with the drum hanging from his neck, by the hand. The other boys followed, bearing the small stock of implements belonging to their art.

They had delayed their departure till it was more than dusk, for Franks could not help a vague feeling of blame for the condition of his family, and shrank from being

seen of men's eyes: every one they met must know they had not a place to lay their heads! The world was like a sea before them—a prospect of ceaseless motion through the night, with the hope of an occasional rest on a doorstep or the edge of the curb-stone when the policeman's back was turned. They set out to go nowhither—to tramp on and on. Is it any wonder—does it imply wickedness beyond that lack of trust in God which is at the root of all wickedness, if the thought of ending their troubles by death crossed his mind, and from very tenderness kept returning? At the last gasp, as it seemed, in the close and ever closer siege of misfortune, he was almost ready, like the Jews of Masada, to conquer by self-destruction. But ever and again the sad eyes of his wife turned him from the thought, and he would plod on, thinking, as near as possible, about nothing.

At length as they wandered they came to a part where seemed to be only small houses and mews. Presently they found themselves in a little lane with no thorough-

fare, at the back of some stables, and had to return along the rough-paved, neglected way. Such was the quiet and apparent seclusion of the spot, that it struck Franks they had better find its most sheltered corner, in which to sit down and rest awhile, possibly sleep. Scarcely would policeman, he thought, enter such a forsaken place ! The same moment they heard the measured tread of the enemy on the other side of the stables. Instinctively, hurriedly, they looked around for some place of concealment, and spied, at the end of a blank wall, belonging apparently to some kind of warehouse, a narrow path between that and the wall of the next property. Careless to what it led, anxious only to escape the annoyance of the policeman, they turned quickly into it. Scarcely had they done so when the Serpent, whose hand his father had let go, disappeared with a little cry. A whimper ascended through the darkness.

“ Hold your n’ise, you rascal ! ” said his father sharply but under his breath ; “ the bobby will hear you, and have us all to the lock-up ! ”

Not a sound more was heard. Neither did the boy reappear.

“Good heavens, John!” cried the mother in an agonized whisper, “the child has fallen down a sewer! Oh, my God! he is gone for ever!”

“Hold your n’ise,” said Franks again, “an’ let’s all go down a’ter him! It’s better down anywheres than up where there ain’t nothing to eat an’ nowheres to lie down in.”

“’Tain’t a bad place,” cried a little voice in a whisper broken with repressed sobs. “’Tain’t a bad place, I don’t think, only I broken one o’ my two legs; it won’t move to fetch of me up again.”

“Thank God in heaven, the child’s alive!” cried the mother. “—You ain’t much hurt, are you, Moxy?”

“Rather, mother!”

By this time the steps of the policeman, to which the father had been listening with more anxiety than to the words of wife or child, were almost beyond hearing. Franks turned, and going down a few steps found his child, where he half lay, half sat upon

them. But when he lifted him, he gave a low cry of pain. It was impossible to see where or how much he was hurt. The ather sat down, and took him on his knees.

"You'd better come an' sit here, wife," he said, in a low dull voice. "There ain't no one a sittin' up for us. The b'y's a bit hurt, an' here you'll be out o' the wind at least."

They all got as far down the stair as its room would permit—the elder boys with their heads hardly below the level of the wind. But by and by one of them crept down past his mother, feebly soothing the whimpering baby, and began to feel what sort of place they were in.

"Here's a door, father!" he said.

"Well, what o' that?" returned his father. "'Tain't no door open to us or the likes on us. There ain't no open door for the likes of us but the door o' the grave."

"Perhaps this is it, father," said Moxy.

"If it be," answered his father with bitterness, "we'll find it open, I'll be bound."

The boy's hand had come upon a latch ; he lifted it, and pushed.

"Father," he cried with a gasp, "*it is open!*"

"Get in then," said his father roughly, giving him a push with his foot.

"I daren't. It's so dark!" he answered.

"Here, you come an' take the Sarpint," returned the father, with faintly reviving hope, "an' I'll see what sort of a place it is. If it's any place at all, it's better than bein' i' the air all night at this freezin' time!"

So saying, he gave Moxy to his bigger brother, and went to learn what kind of a place they had got to. Ready as he had been a moment before for the grave, he was careful in stepping into the unknown dark. Feeling with foot and hand, he went in. He trod upon an earthen floor, and the place had a musty smell: it might be a church-vault, he thought. In and in he went, with sliding foot on the soundless floor, and sliding hand along the cold wall—on and on, round two corners, past a closed door, and back to that by which he

had entered, where, as at the grave's mouth, sat his family in sad silence, waiting his return.

"Wife," he said, "we can't do better than take the only thing that's offered. The floor's firm, an' it's out o' the air. It's some sort of a cellar—p'r'aps at the bottom of a church. It do look as it wur left open jest for us!—You *used* to talk about *him* above, wife!"

He took her by the hand and led the way into the darkness, the boys following, one of them with a hold of his mother, and his arm round the other, who was carrying Moxy. Frank closed the door behind them, and they had gained a refuge. Feeling about, one of the boys came upon a large packing-case; having laid it down against the inner wall, Franks sat, and made his wife lie upon it, with her head on his knees, and took Moxy again in his arms, wrapt in one of their three thin blankets. The boys stretched themselves on the ground, and were soon fast asleep. The baby moaned by fits all the night long.

In about an hour Franks, who for long

did not sleep, heard the door open softly and stealthily, and seemed aware of a presence besides themselves in the place. He concluded some other poor creature had discovered the same shelter; or, if they had got into a church-vault, it might be some wandering ghost; he was too weary for further speculation, or any uneasiness. When the slow light crept through the chinks of the door, he found they were quite alone.

It was a large dry cellar, empty save for the old packing-case. They must use great caution, and do their best to keep their hold of this last retreat! Misfortune had driven them into the earth; it would be fortune to stay there.

When his wife woke, he told her what he had been thinking. He and the boys would creep out before it was light, and return after dark. She must not put even a finger out of the cellar-door all day. He laid Moxy down beside her, woke the two elder boys, and went out with them.

They were so careful that for many days they continued undiscovered. Franks and

the boys went and returned, and gained bread enough to keep them alive, but it may well seem a wonder they did not perish with cold. It is amazing what even the delicate sometimes go through without more than a little hastening on the road the healthiest are going as well.

END OF VOL. II.

