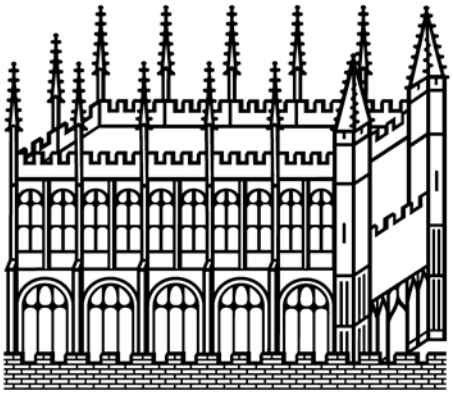


Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

600056179Y

KNOWLEDGE, THE WINGS WHEREWITH WE FLY TO HEAVEN
&Co.

MARRIAGE

AND

MARRIED LIFE.

A Novel

FOR GIRLS ABOUT TO MARRY.

By Jsha.

TWO VOLUMES

(*ONE GUINEA*)

VOL. II.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND W.C.

1877.

251. e. 376

MARRIAGE, AND MARRIED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

IMMEDIATELY after Eleanor's marriage with Sir John, and before they had returned from their wedding tour to the Scotch lakes, the news arrived of his mother's dangerous illness, and obliged them to return to her without delay. She recovered from this first attack of inflammation of the lungs, but with such a permanent weakness in those organs that her son was advised to take or send her to the South of France before the approach of the ensuing autumn, and it happened thus that the Mowbray family decided on spending some time

abroad before settling down at Dunmore Hall, under the changed aspect of affairs. Both ladies desired this, for each had reason to dread the consequences of being domiciled together under the roof of that home in which the elder Lady Mowbray had ruled alone as the female sovereign for so many years; she, because she had learned that while Eleanor had no aggressive tendencies as regarded her neighbour's rights, she had the strongest possible determination to be independent in her own, and Eleanor, because she was well aware that her mother-in-law would never abdicate in her favour in reality, however much she might make a pretence of doing so in name, and both mother and daughter-in-law knew that it is as hard for maids to serve two mistresses in a house, as we know it is for men to "serve two masters" in the world.

What, therefore, might otherwise have proved a serious annoyance to a newly-married couple desirous of taking possession of their mutual home, and in it commencing their united lives, with all those hopes and anticipations which are

the natural feelings of a young husband and wife, was to our Eleanor a welcome reprieve from a dreaded contest from which, she believed, it would be her duty not to shrink, and no disagreeable necessity to her husband; while to his mother it was the promise of temporary release from the fear ever before her, lest even Eleanor should not agree to her continued residence in her son's house, and should influence him to desire her removal to the one intended for her use by his father under existing circumstances.

The elder Lady Mowbray's health, therefore, although fairly re-established, remained a sufficient pretext in her opinion for objecting to a return home, and for two years Sir John had amused himself very well in making excursions to various parts of the Continent; sometimes alone, and sometimes accompanied by his wife, but since the birth of her child the latter had always avoided as much as possible any arrangement which could involve her separation from the only thing she really loved—and this, also, had caused a measure of that general dissatisfaction which,

under Almeria's influence, had at last found expression too unjustly for forgiveness or forgetfulness in his wife's heart.

A few weeks before the occasion on which this unlucky outburst took place, the Mowbrays had received an intimation of Ada's approaching marriage, with an urgent entreaty for Eleanor's presence, so, disregarding his mother's hints concerning the advisability of a longer stay, Sir John declared his determination of taking his wife and child home, finally recommending his mother to procure a companion for herself, if she desired to remain abroad, and this, after many tearful protestations against his unnatural want of affection for her, and reproaches of Eleanor, as the exciting cause, she did; fully determined not to live anywhere in England, but in her son's house, and yet dreading to find herself there on sufferance, and without her former supreme authority. In the end the place suited the good lady admirably. What her companion thought of it was, probably, not equally satisfactory, and was certainly of far less importance, but Lady

Mowbray herself was happier than at any time since her husband's death, for now she had always at hand, not only an abject slave, whom she could advise and direct on the minutest points, but a patient listener, who never wearied of hearing of the former domestic felicity of the lamented husband of her employer, and of the honour done by him to a wife of such transcendent virtues as that lady felt and humbly acknowledged herself to have been possessed of—feeling it the greatest boon to be permitted to hear of these edifying subjects, rather than of her own delinquencies, the only alternative—and Lady Mowbray, thus encouraged, soon began to add to her companion's stock of family information by yielding to the natural temptation of a mother-in-law to criticise her daughter-in-law —by which her listener soon ascertained, not only the fact of the elder lady's jealousy, but a distorted view of many occurrences between her and the younger Lady Mowbray, which she failed not, after the manner of her kind, to use in the interest of folly, instead of that

of wisdom. But of this we shall hear more eventually.

Now, having brought my heroine back to England, and established her in her own home as sole mistress, I wish, for her sake, that I could have told my readers how, when released from the ever watchful and severely criticising eye of her husband's mother—who never failed to point out and draw the notice of the former to every little item open to remark of an unpleasant nature in his wife's conduct—she began to win for herself, at last, her rightful place in his regard. On the contrary, no sooner had they reached Dunmore Hall, than a letter from Almeria, expressing unbounded delight at their return, and giving a dismal account of her solitary state owing to her husband's enforced absence from her on business, originated in Sir John's head the idea of inviting her to be their guest until the wedding day should take them all to Charlton.

Eleanor's heart fell at the proposal. She had no faith whatever in Almeria, and very little

liking for her, and it seemed strange to her that Ada's only sister should not avail herself of this ready-made opportunity for spending with her the last few weeks of her single life. True, however, to her principle to respect and yield to her husband's wishes, wherein it was possible, she kept her disappointed feelings to herself, and sent her a civil, though by no means affectionate invitation, to which Almeria, forgetting her usual pride, responded with an eager acceptance, quickly followed by her own appearance on the scene, which she was soon to turn into an abode of discontent and rebellion, instead of the home of peace and loving obedience which Eleanor had pleased herself with painting it under her honest intentions and righteous endeavours to do her duty as Sir John's wife.

Nothing, apparently—if we judge of circumstances according only to their present effects—could have been more unfortunate for our heroine than her cousin's arrival, everything about the latter serving to render more conspicuous the details in which Eleanor's beauty

and bearing were deficient, and Almeria herself, in the excess of her disappointed hopes in the past, and devouring vanity of the present, being altogether unmindful of the fact that Sir John Mowbray, as her cousin's husband, was no longer free to repent his mistake, so far as she was concerned—if, indeed, he had ever made one at all—while she herself, as Frederick Leslie's wife, was equally bound not to excite any other man's covetous admiration.

Covetousness is indeed the sentiment through which they sin against the Divine law, who laugh at crime being imputed to them, so long as they keep clear of that which is recognised by man as punishable as the actual infringement of the seventh commandment. But these light-hearted evil-doers forget that there is a tenth, which specifies a much smaller limit to their amusements as permissible in the sight of Divine justice, than that which man condemns also; neither is there any opening for a belief that one is more hateful or punishable *hereafter* than another in the sight of Him who gave them all.

And yet it seems as if, somehow, people have arrogated to themselves a perfect right to break the tenth, while they turn with holy horror from the idea of infringing the seventh. In this they show their worldly wisdom but their heavenly ignorance, and, I fear, the former will not be of so much use eventually as it is now. Therefore, it would be well if women of Almeria's type would remember in time that He who said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," said also, "Thou shalt not covet;" and those fair and outwardly lovely ladies who salve over their consciences by the reflection that they *only covet* a man's admiration, not himself or his love—to both of which his wife, poor thing, is quite welcome—if she can keep them—will find a change come over their views of right and wrong, sooner or later, when, having enjoyed the mean reward of so poor a gift as vanity, they are condemned, as we all shall be, to show themselves in their true colours, and find, to their surprise, that the covetous woman who has pitilessly robbed her neighbour of the devo-

tion of her husband, for no more sinful passion —as *she* considers it—than vanity and amusement, is classed with the spirits of those who only gratified *their* small and peculiar propensities by breaking any other well-known law of God and man.

To say that Almeria deliberately purposed to win Eleanor's husband from her would not be true; she would have deemed herself degraded by the idea. Nevertheless that is what she certainly did, in gratifying her ignoble love of admiration and excitement, and it is not easy to say why she was not as degraded by her act, as she would have been had she boldly admitted to herself what she was about. Indeed, some people would say there was not much difference in her actual guilt, but as yet we are still only at its commencement.

While Eleanor, in the natural gaiety of her disposition, which had begun to revive under the relief she experienced from her mother-in-law's absence, indulged unrestrainedly in the pleasure and freedom of an English home, constantly

disturbing her husband's sensitive temper and requirements without even observing this to be the case, Almeria, who noticed his every word and look, redoubled her watchfulness over her own words and movements, displaying in everything such perfect agreement with all that was most charming to him in woman, that it is not to be wondered at if he, unintentionally at first, mentally compared the two, and not to his wife's credit.

Now, no one would blame Almeria for having trained herself in such habits of taste, elegance, and outward appearance of decorum, as every woman ought to have, and should try to attain to if they are not hers by nature; her sin against Eleanor was not in being more attractive, but in using her own attractions against her. While Almeria noted with the eye of a kite, just where and how Sir John was perpetually wincing under Eleanor's heedless want of dignity and reserve, she yet studiously refrained not only from hinting her mistakes to her cousin, but she would even try to excite and lead her on to more unguarded

freedom of speech and manner, her own voice growing softer, her eyes more languishing, and her attitude more indifferent as poor unsuspecting Eleanor grew louder in voice, more flushed in face, and more energetic in argument.

It is true that an uncomfortable feeling of her husband having changed his former appreciation of her originality and independence, for annoyance at any display of them, had begun to dawn in the young wife's mind, but it was hard to change her nature on such a slight foundation, and while Sir John scrupled not to sulk and scold generally, he never had the justice to say honestly what vexed him in her.

So with her figure and dress. Long ago, Eleanor had given promise of development into a finely proportioned woman, but as yet that promise was unfulfilled. Her mental life had not had any sufficiently long interval of rest and enjoyment, without which no physical beauty of form can be brought to perfection. She lived in an atmosphere of worry, anxiety, and repression, and as a natural consequence she was thin and

angular, when she ought to have vied with Almeria in roundness and softness of outline, for her figure was equally good, although of a slighter build. Now, as Sir John himself and his pecularities of disposition were the main cause of this undeveloped condition, it was surely rather hard that he should visit with annoyance the meagreness which was due to a too anxious desire to satisfy and please him. Yet so it was, and Eleanor with a gracefully rounded figure, gentle voice, indifferent manner, and perfect dress could have twisted him round her little finger, as Almeria was now doing, however unlovely her character as a wife; while Eleanor, thin, impulsive, independent, and eager over everything, not very wisely always, either, and morbidly anxious to do her duty as a wife, had no power to win him from his gloomy abstractions or to lead him in the way which she knew better than he, because she despised that life for herself, which was the highest example his mother had placed before him, and the only one which he yet recognised.

For some two or three weeks after Almeria's arrival at Dunmore Hall, she kept up the outward feint of attachment to her cousin, while she and Sir John, as if by mutual consent, never purposely met and hardly spoke together save in the presence of others, but gradually this restraint began to fall before his increasing admiration and pleasure in her society, while she felt it becoming impossible to pretend longer an affection she had never felt, and which envy of Eleanor's husband and home was fast turning into positive dislike; and it was in this condition of mind that we have found the trio again. What it led to between the married pair we know; for Eleanor's respect for her husband once shaken, bid fair to crumble away altogether. She still obeyed his expressed wishes, and performed her duties as Lady Mowbray so far as she understood them, and she treated Sir John with outward deference and politeness, but her anxiety to please him was gone, and while her disturbed state of mind gave her an unnatural quietude of manner—for she

was far from satisfied as to the rectitude of her own line of conduct—she was fully determined to make no conscious or intentional change in dress or bearing, which could induce her husband to believe that she was following his wishes in copying her cousin, Mrs. Leslie. Of her, if she felt any jealousy, she showed none, but devoted herself exclusively to her little Violet, who hated Almeria, and resisted from the first all that lady's attempts to ingratiate herself with her.

It was an undeniable relief to Eleanor when Frederick Leslie joined them, and though *he* was as blindly devoted, and his wife as wearily indifferent as ever, his presence was welcome to all the inmates of Dunmore Hall for various reasons. He and Eleanor suited each other as if they had been cousins by nature, and in his cheerful companionship, and patient forbearance towards his wife, his example was not wasted on the wife, nor his conduct unobserved by the husband, who were mutually aggrieved against each other, and who could both appreciate in another what was

wanting in themselves; nevertheless outward peace only reigned at present, where true peace could never rule till both Eleanor and her husband learned the secret of finding and retaining it.

The day before Ada's wedding found her and Eleanor in happy conclave together, although it was with great difficulty that the young wife restrained herself from imparting her experience of married life to the ears of one whom she knew to be ever a safe guide; but she would not cloud Ada's anticipations by anxiety or sympathy on her own account, promising herself ample compensation in the future for her unselfish silence now. When Ada, however, remarked on her wearied and depressed look, which she attributed to Lady Mowbray's fault, Eleanor having unreservedly in her letters expressed the worry caused her by her mother-in-law's disposition, it suddenly occurred to them both, that a change to the quiet and freedom of Charlton Rectory would be desirable, and Sir John consenting without difficulty, it was arranged that Violet should be sent for, and with her mother take care of Mr.

Harrington in Ada's absence for a six weeks' honeymoon.

Mr. Leslie, who had observed nothing unusual in his wife's or Sir John's demeanour, innocently hurried on the folly into which they were fast drifting, by inviting the latter to make their house his home, as often as he pleased, while he was left alone at Dunmore Hall; the consequence of which was, that he spent a good deal more of the six weeks in London than elsewhere, and furnished another proof that although want of suspicion is a very noble quality in the abstract, it is extremely foolish to practise it towards people who have not a shadow of principle to justify your trust in them.

Now Frederick Leslie knew his wife to be thus destitute, but she was his idol, and he cared only to please her. He would have hindered her—as he had already done—from actual harm, but that was long ago, and Almeria now went where she pleased, and did as she liked, and having treated her husband with rather less indifference than usual in Sir John's presence, he was glad to

purchase her condescension on any terms not consciously wrong—little dreaming that his idolatry was about to be crushed cruelly and for ever, but only to be replaced by the true object of our worship.

CHAPTER II.

WEARY and dispirited with disappointment and neglect, I present once more to my readers the Eleanor Mowbray who once laughed at the idea of life's not providing her with happiness as a matter of course. She stands to-day, some four years after marriage, vainly striving to restrain the tears of wounded feeling and mortified pride, caused by her husband's harsh repulsion and unabashed preference of another woman—and that woman is Almeria Leslie.

See her now as she paces slowly, and with the languid grace so dear to the aristocratic gentleman who walks beside her, down the avenue of Dunmore Hall. Her figure is more perfect than ever, her face more fair, for at this moment it

is not disfigured by its ordinary expression of sullen discontent; and yet that evil passion is warring fiercely within Almeria's heart, and bidding her reject disdainfully, as of old, the things she has for the sake of those she has not.

Do not suppose that she is conscious altogether of the pain inflicted through her, on the cousin she had despised as a girl, and whom she now envies as a woman. She would indignantly deny the accusation of giving her the slightest cause for uneasiness, and express the most unbounded astonishment at the idea even of anything needful for perfect happiness being absent from her cousin's lot, and yet, deep down within her vain and selfish heart there lurks the thought, "Eleanor's husband despised me for her" (for she knows nothing of Julia Dennis); "I will show him what he has lost."

Not, of course, to lessen his love for his wife. Oh, no, certainly not—that is a thing apart, and not to be spoken or thought of. They are married, and that is enough. She has secured

her position as his wife—let her be satisfied with it; Almeria also has her's, but *she* is very far from being satisfied—and now, as there is no chance or possibility of change, why should not the wife of the despised Mr. Leslie demonstrate to the husband of the unappreciated Lady Mowbray what a charming creature she can be when she chooses, and how delightful and appropriate a mistress for his house Sir John deprived himself of by his delay in securing her? Almeria, too, fully recognises her own folly in not having acted with like discretion, and forgets what little satisfaction she has yet retained, from the effects of her own hasty acceptance of her husband, in the sight and temporary enjoyment of a position which exactly corresponds with her ideas of what is necessary to happiness, as she understands the word.

Let us draw near and listen to the idle talk between the two, who, though not practically united, were yet far more one with each other in spirit than with either of the absent halves, against whom they each felt the reproach which

is ever excited in the minds of those who live for self, against any one who, either intentionally like Frederick Leslie, or unwillingly like Eleanor, seeks to provoke them to place a higher object before them.

"How charming a home dear Eleanor has succeeded in obtaining," said the lady; "and, yet," she added pensively, "I should have thought her almost more suited to appreciate 'love in a cottage'—but fate is very arbitrary. We never know where it will land, or"—with a pause, and melancholy inflection of voice—"strand us."

Sir John made no answer. He was moodily pondering over a late scene with his wife, and, to his mind there was too much truth in his companion's reference to her fitness for a humble life rather than the one she had been placed in by a marriage with him, for him to care to discuss it.

"When we were girls together," pursued Almeria, "I well remember her contempt for all the elegancies, I might almost say proprieties, of life; but time alters our ambitions, although

not our fitness for that which we have aspired to."

"Do not speak of my wife just now," said her companion; "tell me of yourself, and your own life. It seems strange that we have been connected by marriage so long, and yet that we have hardly met till now. I hope"—in a more formal tone—"that I shall have the pleasure of making acquaintance with Mr. Leslie also before you leave us."

Almeria took no notice of the latter part of this speech, but she responded eagerly to its commencement—

"Yes, indeed, you seem to have been removed from us entirely. I conclude you felt it necessary to remain abroad for the sake of others, and you, perhaps, are not one of those men who think it right to thwart your womankind in all their wishes and enjoyments."

"Why, as to that," replied Sir John, rather hesitatingly, "I believe it was to please my mother, certainly, that we remained so long away; but Eleanor did not like it, she was always wishing to get home."

"No wonder," sighed Almeria, "when she had such a home to come to."

"I hear, however," continued Sir John, after a moment's pause, "that you and Mr. Leslie have just come into possession of a charming country home, so I hope you will no longer have to sigh over your present existence in London," for he did not, as yet, perceive the personal meaning of Almeria's remarks, and honestly thought she preferred a country to a town life.

"Indeed," she answered, "I fear my unreasonable husband will give me only too much cause to complain the other way, for he is as proud of what is, I believe, no larger than your gamekeeper's cottage, as if it were Dunmore Hall itself."

"And quite right too, I think," retorted the gentleman; "every man should think with respect of the inheritance that descends to him from his ancestors—however small it may be—and treat it well. It is better, to my mind, to inherit the smallest portion of this world than to

rent a far larger share of it from any one else. I quite expect to hear you say the same when you have made acquaintance with your new home."

"Oh, pray, let us talk of anything else," said Mrs. Leslie, with a shudder, for it was horrible to her, in present scenes and company, to contemplate the dreariness of life in the retirement she pictured to herself, of the small property, lately become her husband's by the death of an aunt, to whom it had been left by his grandfather for her life; especially with the added drawback of that husband's perpetual and restraining presence.

"You are surely hard to please, Mrs. Leslie," lightly replied Sir John, and he would have followed up his remark with a laugh, had he not perceived, as he turned to look at his companion, an ominous cloud over her face; whether of anger or sorrow he could not tell; so, hastily turning the conversation, he spoke of Ada and her approaching marriage, but for which event he and his wife would not now even have been in England.

"What sort of a man is she going to marry?" he asked. "A good one, I hope, for she is the best woman I know."

"Then you may be sure she will not be mated with an equally good man," replied Almeria. "Ada is quite saint-like enough herself not to require a saint as a husband, and I never yet heard of two saints getting on any better together than two ordinary mortals; indeed, I should think the dulness of such an existence would make them hate each other very quickly."

"Nevertheless," answered Sir John, smiling, "I rather like a little bit of the saint in a *woman*; it is pleasant to know that there is such a thing, even in this world, as a really sincere believer in and doer of goodness; and Ada never makes her's a nuisance, so far as I can see."

"Perhaps not, but she has very little idea of sympathy with the troubles of those who have been more tried than herself," said Almeria. "She has never known disappointment of any kind as yet, and evidently thinks every one else ought to ignore it, to whom it does come. I

only hope it will not come to her, as to others, in marriage."

This was too pointed a speech for Sir John to pretend not to observe, and the speaker, thoroughly ashamed for the moment of the weakness which had prompted her to give him such an insight into the result of her own marriage, hastened to hinder him from replying, by commencing an account of the brother-in-law in prospect for her, with details of his acquaintance with her sister, and their plans in the future.

Her anxiety to impress the man beside her with her attractions, both mental and personal, did not suffer her to speak on many subjects as her real feelings dictated to her. To him she desired to appear the elegant woman of the world, indeed, and one 'rendered doubly interesting by the possession of a hidden disappointment. She desired and intended him eventually also to understand how he was himself to blame for the mistake — as she deemed it—of her life; but she was aware that

he was not exactly the same type of man as those whose society pleased her best in her own circle of acquaintances, and, while she meant to make him pity himself for all he had lost in her, she had wit enough to know that, to do this, she must not risk the chance of any careless exposure of sentiments which would be likely to appear unbefitting a woman in the sight of Lady Mowbray's dutiful son, and the husband of so upright and high-principled a character as her cousin Eleanor, while that husband continued to respect these qualities in her, however discontented with other smaller but not less important attributes.

Sir John was himself very well pleased to second his companion's efforts to turn the conversation from the dangerous subject of disappointment in marriage. He admired her intensely, wished unceasingly that his wife possessed one half of her elegant indifference of manner and method of speech, wondered perpetually why she had married so quickly after he had left her, not giving him the opportunity of growing out of

admiration into love, and suffered himself to dwell far too often on the thought of the pride her husband must feel in owning so lovely and graceful a wife. But he had no wish to hear her speak of her disappointments in life; knowing quite well that such confidences have very awkward results sometimes, when made to the wrong people, and feeling supremely conscious that he was quite the wrong person to receive such confessions from Mrs. Leslie; neither did he like altogether to hear from her any allusion to his wife, having a clear perception that Almeria was not likely to be a friendly judge of her peculiarities, or a companion capable of appreciating her real virtues and beauties of character.

He, therefore, again recurred to the approaching marriage in the family, between Adriana Harrington and her father's curate, the Rev. Claude Davenport; a subject of great thankfulness to the Rector, who thus secured his eldest daughter's stay with him, while he had the happiness of believing that her's would be augmented and secured.

"Tell me," pursued Sir John, "how came this reverend gentleman to persuade such a hard-hearted person as Ada to take pity on him? Is he an Adonis, or a Solon, or anything of that kind, if he is not a saint, as I should have thought he ought to be?"

"I really do not understand," replied his fair companion, in a wearied voice, for the subject was becoming uninteresting from the absence of reference to herself or her own feelings. "I appreciate Ada immensely, but we do not understand each other. She appears to me never to have grown out of the first stage of blind obedience which our elders are so fond of exacting from us as children; only she makes a tyrant for herself in the shape of what *she* calls duty, but what appears to me a narrow-minded view of life. However, we cannot all attain to the same capacity for sorrow, any more than we can all appreciate happiness to the uttermost when we get it, and my wise sister has managed to steer clear of both, I think; but I don't envy her her mediocrity; to me there is something far grander

in the severest suffering, and more interesting in the greatest wickedness, than in that strait-laced jog-trot of respectability and religion which Ada rejoices in as the aim and end of life."

As Almeria ceased speaking, she raised her handsome eyes, full of languor and fictitious sentiment, to Sir John's face, and saw, without annoyance, in the look he cast upon them, a softening interest in her, who perpetually sought, by hints and inuendoes, to arouse in him a conviction of hidden grief, the result of others' wrong-doing, and to heighten his admiration by awakening a remorseful sympathy.

But while he was daily drawing comparisons between the cousins, to the disadvantage of his own wife, he had by no means arrived at that stage of admiration which led him to endorse all Mrs. Leslie's sentiments as superior to Eleanor's. On the contrary, he knew quite well that she was as inferior to the latter in nobility of soul and strength of character, as she was superior in that outward charm of manner, dress, and actual beauty which in her presence caused him to

forget in her the sentiment he could not approve, just as, on the other hand, Eleanor's want of attention to details by which her natural good looks might have been greatly added to, provoked him, when in her company, to forget the real value of her honest, high-principled mind and complete devotion to himself.

For, from the moment she realised the fact that she was severed from all possible connection with Captain Dennis, by her acceptance of Sir John Mowbray, she had as determinately set herself to the task of loving him as she would have set about learning to draw, or ride, or to pursue any other path dictated by duty, *as she saw it;* and consequently, if she had not attained to any really great amount of love for him, she did not herself know it, mistaking the intensity of her own zeal in obeying his expressed wishes, and in refusing to recognise his faults, for that love of which she really knew nothing, and which can only exist where there is sufficient sympathy between married lovers, to enable each to admire in the other those opposite qualities to their own

characters, which otherwise develop into grounds for perpetual dissension.

So, although Sir John looked admiringly into Almeria's soft dark eyes, and began to wish that it were quite correct for him to enquire more carefully into her capacity for suffering, and the food on which it had been nourished, he by no means approved of or agreed with her sentiments regarding "wickedness" or "respectability," for he had all the aversion of a true man to the former in connection with women, and their knowledge even of evil; while he had inherited and been educated in a most rigid adherence to the formal respectabilities of life, both civil and religious, and it gave him quite a pang to hear his beautiful companion speak slightingly of such necessaries. But then she *was* so beautiful, and she said wrong things and made uncharitable comments in such a sweet tone of voice, and with such perfect grace of manner, and she looked so bewitchingly at him for sympathy while she gave utterance to doubtful sentiments, that he could not find it in his heart to withhold the admiration

she claimed ; and so put aside all he did not like in her speech, to dwell on the thought of her apparent sadness and its cause.

But, being puzzled how to answer her, without committing himself to an assent he was not prepared to give, or without appearing to rebuke the fair object of his admiration, he contented himself with the irrelevant remark, "You are tired, I fear ; let me take you to a seat," and somehow —why, he never knew—he found himself offering his arm to Almeria, as if she had been a delicate invalid, when in fact she was a strong, healthy young woman, as well able to walk as himself, and suffering from nothing but a diseased appreciation of herself and of the meaning of life, and a strong feeling of disappointment at having missed securing for herself the position now possessed, but not enjoyed, by her less attractive and less worldly cousin.

In the meantime, Sir John's dutiful but less elegant wife was crying herself ugly and bewildered, in company with her little daughter, a tiny trot of three years old, Violet by name,

who was old enough to make her own observations on her elders, but not learned enough in this world's wisdom to know that we are not expected to say all we think in polite society.

This little damsel, after due indulgence in outward expressions of affection and condolence between her small self and her youthful mother, grew tired of the latter in her present doleful mood, and, unobserved by her, wandered off by herself in the direction of the avenue, where her father and Mrs. Leslie were walking together. She appeared alone just as they were approaching the seat whereon Sir John proposed to offer his companion the repose he imagined her to need, and trotting solemnly up, said to the former, "Mamma cry. Papa come," and taking his hand, she tried in her small fashion to lead him the way by which she had just arrived.

Both her grown-up hearers coloured uncomfortably, he with shame, she with anger at the unwelcome interruption, but as neither knew quite what to say, they obeyed the innocent guidance by which they were saved from a more

prolonged *tête-à-tête*, the result of which in her husband's mind would hardly have strengthened his love for Violet's mother, or inclined him to deal more tenderly with her sin of omission on the score of matters of taste and elegancies of manner.

Unfortunately, however, for poor Eleanor, she rushed after her charge, on discovering her absence, so quickly and anxiously, that almost as soon as the trio had turned at Violet's request, they encountered her in her search, and it was not lost upon her that Almeria instantly suffered her hand to fall from Sir John's arm, while he for a moment lost his ordinary attitude of superiority as regarded his wife, and forgetting the dignity of a husband who has only lately asserted his pre-eminence by bullying—excuse the vulgar term, but no other expresses what I mean—his wife until he had made her cry, actually began to explain, in rather incoherent terms, the cause of his support of her cousin.

Eleanor, although vexed beyond expression to have met the latter at all just then, and her

husband, with apparently complete disregard of his late strictures on her demeanour as Lady Mowbray, had too much self-respect and confidence in her husband (of whom, however, she really knew very little) to have attached any importance whatever to the fact above, but for the evident feeling on the part of him and her cousin that there was some occasion to hide it from her. Instantly recovering herself, she took the child's hand quietly away from her father's, and, with as much dignity as he could have desired at any time, and a good deal more than he liked just then, she said, as gently and firmly as became a wife and lady, "My husband's arm should always be at the disposal of any of my family; and none are more welcome to its help than you, Almeria. Come, Violet, race mamma to the house," she added, with more than her usual *brusquerie*, and the two were quickly out of sight; Eleanor looking in the plain cambric dress in which she delighted, and her plainly dressed hair, much more like her child's nurse than that fashionable lady herself, who met them at the

entrance of the hall, and gave as much evidence as she dared of her opinion concerning Lady Mowbray's fashion of amusing her child. Being, however, a faithful and kind attendant to her, Miss Violet showed no objection to accompany her to their private quarters, and Eleanor, full of angry and bewildered thoughts, betook herself to her own sitting-room, and there sat down to take counsel with herself, as usual. It was not long before her husband entered, and, quickly approaching her, kissed her hurriedly, but not unkindly, saying—

"I was too hasty, perhaps, this morning; but if you would only try, my dear, and be a little more like Mrs. Leslie, it would gratify me very much."

Now, stupid as this speech was, the poor man meant no harm by it; indeed, he spoke out of the fulness of his heart, which assured him that if Eleanor had but Almeria's grace of manner and taste in dress, she would far surpass the latter as a woman, having already what she had not, an unselfish goodness and upright rectitude

of principle. But in the absence of any explanation of her husband's meaning, and following so quickly on the little scene above narrated, his words seemed to her an insult, and his caress a pretence to conceal his real feelings of growing indifference to herself; and, proudly turning away from him, she replied—

"You are welcome to admire Almeria and her manners. I have little respect for her character, although she is my cousin, and I particularly *dis*like her manner, therefore you must excuse me for not copying it." Then, suddenly returning to her naturally impulsive method of speaking, she extended her hands towards her husband, clasping them round his arm, as she cried—"Oh, John, what is it that comes between us? I will do anything you wish—only don't be so hard and cold—you freeze up all my love."

At this turning of the tables, as it were, on himself as an object of blame, when he had intended magnanimously to receive into favour again a wife who had cried as usual an hour before for being scolded, perhaps it is not to be

wondered at that the son of Lady Mowbray gave full vent to the share he had inherited of his mother's iron but velvet-covered will, and to the natural indignation of a man, who sees for the first time a submissive wife converted, however feebly, into an accuser of himself as a being capable of improvement, and a possible cause of the evils of which he freely and loudly complains in others.

Anyhow, it is a certain fact that this very ordinary man launched forth into a most extraordinary style of reproach concerning his wife's general misdemeanours, and unheard-of temerity, and want of conjugal affection in even hinting at the possibility of his not being all and everything that she could possibly require, and far more than she deserved.

Eleanor heard him in dismayed silence. Was this the man she had married from respect and esteem? Was this the refined gentleman whom it was so hard to please? This her mother-in-law's dutiful and attentive son, who bore silently, if not patiently, all her tiresome ways and

querulous complaints? Was this the considerate master who never found unjust or needless blame with a servant or dependent? and was it really the husband who, before marriage, had assured her again and again that in her only could he look for comfort, for past hopes destroyed, and for future ones in her sympathising companionship?

Certainly the angry man before her was the very same individual who had appeared in these various attractive aspects, and would, to most wives, have quickly effaced the disagreeables of his present one, by a return to his normal condition when he had forgotten the cause of his anger; but Eleanor was not one of those women who can quarrel and make it up, kiss and sulk, confide and suspect alternately, and retain what they consider *love* for the husbands they live with in the interchange of such very conflicting feelings. Ever since her marriage she had been conscious that she did not fulfil her husband's expectations; but whether it arose from a false pride on his part, which forbade

him to complain of the trivial but perpetually recurring annoyances to himself from his wife's independent *brusquerie* of tone and manner, or from a fear of hurting her feelings by specifying them, it is a fact that he ever refused to state plainly the causes of his frequent fits of reserve and moodiness towards her, and yet suffered himself to feel aggrieved and injured, because, not guessing their cause, she made no attempt, or, at the best, very feeble ones to alter what was so important an item in his eyes—and very rightly too—as the inelegance of a too abrupt and eager manner, and the carelessness into which a complete want of vanity is apt to degenerate. But poor Eleanor, although aware that her husband was perpetually hinting at his admiration of a manner so opposite to her own, held firmly on to the anchor of certainty that he had sought her for his wife, while she was, so far as she knew, what she ever had been; why, then, she argued, should she imagine that he could wish her to change after marriage? She did not believe it possible; else why should he

have openly laughed at, and been amused during their short engagement, by the absence in her of those conventionalities of speech and manner which his mother had carried into excess to his extreme worry, at times when he had felt and owned the refreshment of Eleanor's honest nature and unaffected character? No wonder the poor young wife was puzzled, and fought her battle of small but constant trials, with a growing sense of defeat in the success of her well-laid schemes for a happy marriage; but as yet no touch of contempt for ungenerous injustice had been forced on her dutiful appreciation of her husband as the object of her love and duty, to make her feel the full burthen of a work to which she was unequal. To-day, for the first time, she experienced a sudden terror of being compelled to own to herself that Sir John was not as worthy of her respect as she had hitherto told herself he was, and must, and should be; and the sight was not attractive.

Eleanor recoiled from it, and, as I have said,

heard in amazed silence the torrent of angry passion evoked by her entreaty for more light on the cause of the reserve between them, and when it ceased, she knew that her husband would never again be the same in her eyes. Something of dignity had fallen from him, not to be replaced, she felt, with the disappearance of his anger, and, to his surprise, no tears followed his reproaches this time. His wife met his angry gaze with a fearless but determined demeanour, which he had never seen before, and did not at all like, or half understand; and when, having exhausted his anger in its expression, and returned to his usual condition of cold kindness, he prepared to leave the room, saying, "And now I hope, Eleanor, that you will be reasonable, and behave as my wife should, and not like a heedless school-girl."

She stopped him, and astonished him with these words—

"John, you are the unreasonable one of us two. I know at last the secret of your want of love for me; but you have told it me in such a

way as to destroy your own object. What I would have done willingly for you for love, I will never do for anything less. You chose me as I am, for I am what I always have been, and you must make the best of me now. Admire Almeria as much as you please; I do not care to be compared with her, and she shall not force from me, by her pretended unhappiness, the sympathy you are foolishly giving her. I know her well, and I would rather be in my own despised place as your wife than in her's now, while, she is making you regret your loss in her."

"Eleanor," cried Sir John, "how dare you—"

"Because," she interrupted, "I can see I do not love you well enough to be jealous"—poor Eleanor! I am afraid this was not quite true—"but you will not have me your devoted slave again as I have been."

And so she, in her turn, threw down the gauntlet, and the married pair who went, accompanied by Almeria and her unloved husband, to Charlton Rectory to be present at Ada's

wedding, added one more couple to those who wonder how soon the bride and bridegroom will find out that the vows "to love and cherish, and to honour and obey" are, whether they will or not, reduced to mere words, which will never give them the power to yield love and honour to that which is unlovable and contemptible in itself.

CHAPTER III.

WHILE we have been occupied in entering into the details of a marriage already made, and fast taking its place among the numbers of which the world only speaks as unsuitable, but which form by far the largest portion of the married state, we have neglected the last-made bride and bridegroom, and must, therefore, retrace our steps, while I tell, "as 'twas told to me," the history of their meeting, love, and union.

The year after Eleanor's marriage, Mr. Lewis, the then curate of Charlton, was preferred to a small living. He would gladly have taken Ada with him to share his new home, but fortunately taking the Rector first into his confidence, that good, but naturally selfish father where his own

comfort was concerned, had at once the pleasure and pain of assuring him that he hoped in vain to transfer to his own home the light of her father's; so without the unpleasantness of a direct refusal from herself, Mr. Lewis bade farewell to Ada with a sad and crestfallen heart, which, however, the reader will be glad to know, was ultimately very effectually consoled by a lady more suited to the ungainly curate than our pretty and youthful Ada. For although in age she was as near to thirty as to twenty, she was as youthful and fresh in appearance still as she had been five years before, and looked considerably younger than her sister, who, notwithstanding her superior beauty, privately resented her less gifted senior's retainment of the nameless charm of youth, combined with maturity, which she was conscious of having lost herself.

Believing, as I think most other people do, that this combination is a most desirable one in a woman, it is not to be wondered at that Ada, with less real beauty, should be more attractive in the eyes of her biographer than her more-

actually lovely sister; and if my readers agree with me, they will perhaps be glad to learn that the secret of perpetual youth resides quite as much in the possession of an obedient, child-like spirit, as in the application of those mysterious compounds so zealously used by those who devote themselves to the artificial reparation of effects which are most unjustly attributed to time alone, but which that universal friend or enemy, according as we use it, would never cause without the assistance of such unbeautifying agencies as ill-temper, discontent, disappointed wills, and all the rest of those uncomfortable feelings which are being perpetually called into destroying action, by youth's impatience of everything contrary to "its own *sweet (?)* will."

In Ada's case her will had early been subdued, as we know, to a Wiser than her own, and having had the sense to understand that the same Power which controls us, if we will let it, for our good, in the great events of our lives, must be equally capable of doing so in the smaller

ones, she had grown so accustomed to yield herself to the guidance of this inward monitor *for* good, and *against* self, that she was not conscious of one-half the fancied troubles of daily existence, *as* troubles; and where she was forced to feel them as such, she knew how to lighten them, by laying them before the first Cross-bearer, and receiving in return power to bear, which amounted to the same thing, as regarded her inward peace, as unconsciousness of anything *to* bear.

So dwelling within, in an atmosphere of peace and trust, it is no wonder that—without—she showed its signs; and if any of my readers desire to avoid the *un*pleasing symptoms of departing youth, let them try, by way of cosmetics, the beautifying influences of a womanly though child-*like* spirit of cheerful submission to a Power who rules only to bless, by which not only departing youth will be invested with unchanging loveliness, but advancing age will successfully compete with it, as a stage to be both desired and admired.

Thus Ada at twenty-five had gained, not lost,

in beauty; as also had Almeria; but while the latter owed her improvement to natural development of physical beauty, which was even now impaired at times by the ravages of discontent and rebellion, the former depended for her's on an equal growth in mental or spiritual charms; and nothing we know of has yet succeeded in effacing the attraction commanded by a possession which is far removed from the destroying influences of any bodily enemy, and respected by none so much as time and age themselves.

Mr. Lewis was succeeded at Charlton by the Rev. Claude Davenport, a man who had for many years served from choice in the army, but who, becoming impressed with a strong desire to work for the good of his fellow men, made the mistake of supposing that he could only do so effectually by entering the acknowledged ranks of an authorised priesthood, and accordingly deserted those in which his own inclination and circumstances had placed him, devoting himself to a profession for which he was in no way suited, except as one who sincerely desired to lead others

in the way he had himself learned to consider necessary to ultimate safety.

As an army chaplain he did not at first find out his mistake; and many were the brother officers and men who under his sympathising—because personally experienced—knowledge of their trials and hindrances, were led by him to see that these are no more than devices of the enemy to keep the soldier from the faithful performance of his duty, and were taught by him, who had shared their life and knew its tendencies, to obey, in spite of it and them, the unseen Leader of their spiritual conflict between good and evil. And in this work, Claude Davenport forgot for a time, what he had renounced of natural likings and innocent pursuits in taking on himself the narrowed sphere of life of an ordained teacher of men; but this did not make itself felt by him, until his father's death recalled him from the army altogether, by making him the possessor of a considerable property.

It was only after he had realised the difficulty of reconciling his duty as a landlord and pro-

prietor with that of a clergyman, that Claude Davenport began to feel he might have mistaken his true duty, especially as his mother, so far from assisting him to a solution of the dilemma in which he was placed, added to his distress by perpetual reproaches for his obstinacy in not having obeyed her when she opposed, as she certainly had done, his desertion of an earthly soldier's profession for that of a spiritual leader. This deed, however, was done, and could not be cancelled; and Claude's sincere spirit rose in determination never to quit this self-elected post, in proportion to the advice pressed on him, that he should leave it for the equally important work of the man who holds himself responsible for the right use of worldly possessions and the influence accruing from them; but it was a trial which he had not fore-calculated with sufficient appreciation, and although he persevered in what he considered right, and, leaving his mother and sisters in undisturbed possession of his home, sallied forth again to enlist his services as a curate under any needy rector he could find, yet

the doubt and distraction of his mind had by no means tended to increase his powers as a teacher of others, and he was fully conscious that the worldly business for his own interests, which his inheritance had forced on him, materially added to the difficulties of his being a living example of unworldliness and self-sacrifice.

After many fruitless attempts to find exactly what he required, he finally agreed to take for a time the vacant curacy at Charlton, tempted partly by the pleasant promise as regarded his Rector, but chiefly by the discovery that the long straggling parish offered a field for the employment of his energies and ample means, in the need existing of a new church at its extreme end; a distance far too great for the inhabitants of an outlying hamlet to benefit by the good Rector's Sunday ministrations, in any but the longest day and finest weather.

Mr. Davenport had not long been settled in Mr. Lewis's old lodgings, when he, too, fell a victim to the fascinations of his Rector's daughter, and with more promise of success

than any of his predecessors; for not only was he a handsome man of refined appearance and manner, but Ada's admiration for his character was called forth by the circumstances under which he accepted, for duty's sake, as he considered it, an inferior position in his profession, when he might otherwise have taken his place among the great and rich, whose time is claimed by, and too often given solely to, their own interests.

Not long, too, after the commencement of their acquaintance, Ada made a discovery, which, after its first pain had passed away in her mind, drew her towards her father's assistant with the strong cord of a common interest. Mr. Davenport and the Rector had been speaking of India, where the former had spent three years of his life, while he was yet content to teach his brother soldiers, by example and friendly exhortation only; and among the names which occasionally came up in the various reminiscences of his former life, in which the elder man took a natural and kindly interest, the curate men-

tioned that of Colonel Durnford. Luckily for Ada, who was present, neither of the gentlemen observed her change of countenance at the sound of a name which had long lived only in her memory, but the Rector, without doing so, turned towards her, repeating—

"Durnford, was not that the name of Gerald's friend, my dear, who once stayed here?"

"Yes," she replied, feeling that she could not have spoken another word, however great the need. But there was none just now, her father having again resumed his conversation with his guest; for Mr. Davenport was a frequent and welcome addition to their usual *tête-à-tête* dinners, and, I fear, even the quiet and easily satisfied Ada was beginning to find the Rectory less lively and pleasant without than within.

Nothing more was said of Colonel Durnford until, just as Mr. Davenport was about to take leave, Mr. Harrington suddenly said—

"You mentioned a Colonel Durnford just now; do you still know anything of him? I think he was once with my son in his regiment,

and we have reason to remember him with gratitude—he was a good friend to him when he needed one."

"Was his Christian name Robert?" replied Mr. Davenport, "for, if so, he must have been the man you mean."

The Rector turned to appeal to Ada, who had suddenly become deeply interested in the arrangement of a portfolio of music, and who answered without looking up—

"Yes, papa, I think it was."

"Well," continued Mr. Davenport, "you will regret then to hear that he is dead. He married badly; a gay, wild kind of girl, who cared for nothing but amusement and admiration. The Colonel let her have her own way far too much, and, besides nearly ruining him with her extravagancies, she destroyed herself, or, at any rate, her mind with excess—and he was thankful, poor fellow, when he got his death wound;" and here Mr. Davenport's voice trembled.

"Dear, dear," said the good Rector, "I am indeed grieved. I wonder Gerald never men-

tioned it before;" and he would have detained his curate with many more inquiries, had not the latter somewhat abruptly said—

"You must forgive me for not telling you more now, but he was my dearest friend, and it always troubles me when I recall what he went through for the sake of a worthless woman. I have his diary, and will bring it with me some evening, if you care to know more of his last days—there is no direct reference in it to his wife, so I don't think there can be any reason against his friends seeing it," and so saying, Mr. Davenport departed.

When he was gone, and father and daughter were again alone, the former continued to express his regret and wonder at his son's forgetfulness concerning the death of a friend who had once been highest in his friendship; but when he ended by saying—

"I shall write and ask Gerald if he knew of it," the latter at last broke silence, and forced herself to explain—

"He does know it, papa, for he told me in one

of his letters; but," she added, "I did not tell you at the time, and since then have had no opportunity."

Now, as the Rector saw, or thought he saw, all his son's letters as a rule, no wonder he was surprised and almost angry at this proof that the brother and sister had held private communication together, from which he was excluded; and he was about to express this feeling, when his words were arrested by the sight of his daughter's pale and distressed face.

"Why, my love," he said instead, "what is the matter; is anything wrong? Why, Adriana, my poor child, is it possible that you cared for this man?" and the Rector's anger was speedily transferred to him whom he supposed, too hastily, to have despised the love of his child.

Then Ada, who had quickly recovered her self-possession, at last confided to her father the truth concerning her short-lived hopes of happiness, and the cause of their destruction—simply assuring him that she had been far happier since she knew, as she had done from her brother, of

his friend's death, concerning which he had heard, from a mutual acquaintance, "that it was the result of an accident while on a shooting expedition, and that poor Durnford died quite peacefully and happily." Gerald himself was in Canada at the time, the two friends having been separated by Major Durnford's exchange into another regiment just sailing for India, immediately *after* his marriage; but although her brother never could quite understand this event, or whether there ever had been any real attachment between his friend and his sister, some instinct of brotherly sympathy had caused him to write the news of the former's death on a slip of paper, and apart from his letter in which it travelled, thus giving Ada the chance, if she desired it, of keeping its information to herself.

When she had explained all this to the good Rector, she was rewarded for the effort by his fervent sympathy and words of blessing, for, knowing better than any one else what her life was, he felt how hard a battle she must have fought thus to have set aside her own disappoint-

ment, and to have been the comforter and cheerer of others, both at home and elsewhere, while nature was urging her, like them, to think of and care for herself only. So Ada, while shedding her last tears to the memory of the only man who had, as yet, excited any feeling stronger than family affection in her heart, was comforted by the new but blessed gift of sympathy and appreciation from the father, for whose sake chiefly she had put from her all selfish indulgence in sorrow for the renunciation which God had exacted from her; while he, who was a teacher of others, did not shrink from owning to himself that in her the Divine Master had given him a living example of that which *he* should be in the petty details of every-day life, too often passed over by teachers as well as taught, in looking for some great and *conspicuous* burthen as their share of participation in the Divine suffering.

When father and daughter separated, it was with an unspoken but acknowledged feeling that their places were, in a measure, reversed; Ada rejoicing that she no longer stood alone in know-

ledge of a trial which had made her old in wisdom, though not in heart; her father reproaching himself for his unobservant acceptance of her unvarying obedience and respect, without a thought of the unselfishness expressed by its exercise, and owning—ordained priest though he was to others—that his own child had already realised the spirit of the Cross as he himself had never yet done, but as he humbly resolved by Divine help to attain to in the future.

Nor was it long before his resolution was put to the proof, and amply verified as sincere. His eyesight had long been failing, and, the year following his new curate's arrival, he submitted to an operation which was unsuccessful, and which hastened the approach of one of the greatest physical trials to which our nature is subject—first partial, and then total blindness—but whoever else thought him hardly dealt with, Mr. Harrington himself never did, and, in his cheerful patience and submission, he taught more to the flock, whom he could no longer guide in

any other way, than he had done during all the days of his activity and strength.

But we must hasten on to explain how it came about that Ada and Claude Davenport grew from acquaintance to sympathy, and from sympathy to love. The subject of Colonel Durnford's death was not again alluded to, Mr. Harrington refraining naturally, out of consideration for his daughter, from reviving an inquiry he felt it more appropriate to drop, and Mr. Davenport keeping silent on it for some reason best known to himself. It happened, however, that one Sunday evening shortly after the unsuccessful attempt to restore Mr. Harrington's sight, the curate leaving him to necessary rest in his own study, sought and found Ada alone in the drawing-room. After some desultory talk over church and school matters, in which neither felt at ease, or specially interested, Claude suddenly took Ada's hand, and, looking anxiously at her, said—

"Miss Harrington, I have a twofold confession

to make, and I do not know how to do it; but it is of no use to delay it—every day makes it harder, and yet adds to my desire to speak openly to you."

His face was so grave, and his manner so agitated, that Ada was conscious only of alarm; for if she had sometimes suspected the nature of one part of the confession he wished to make, she saw plainly now that it was not only love which formed its substance.

"What is it, Mr. Davenport?" she hurriedly inquired, and then as quickly flamed over with shame and annoyance at having been betrayed into a question, immediately answered by the words—

"I love you. That is my first confession, but it is not all. I wish it were; and before I ask you to let me try and win your love in return, I have something to tell you which may turn your heart completely against me."

Ada made no reply, except to put her hand out, which she had abruptly withdrawn at his first words; for she saw that his distress was real, and

had a serious foundation, which for the time overpowered any idea on his part of taking advantage of her movement of sympathy as a proof of love on her's—

"That is good," he said; "you will, at any rate, hear me patiently and judge me fairly. Miss Harrington, forgive the question, but were you not once attached to my friend Durnford? I know you were," he continued, holding fast the hand Ada again sought to withdraw; "and now, while I ask you to give me what he could not take, I tell you that the accident by which he died was due to me. It was my gun and my hand that fired the shot that destroyed his life." And Mr. Davenport then proceeded to relate how the accident had occurred, and how, on his death-bed, Colonel Durnford had assured him that he thanked God for his coming release; how he confided to him the sad story of his misplaced confidence in one woman whom he believed himself bound in honour to marry, and his real love for a brother officer's sister, whose name he withheld, but whose example had first taught him to think

of finding happiness in duty, not in self; and how he looked forward with joy, as well as peace, to the rest he humbly believed he had won by patient endurance of disappointment and forbearance towards the selfish woman who had caught and held him for her own unworthy ends only.

While Mr. Davenport hurried through his confession, Ada listened as if bewildered, but as her heart appealed, according to her custom, to Infinite Wisdom for light on that of which the outward facts alone would naturally make her shrink from her lover's destroyer, she perceived the truth which should rather draw her by bonds of sympathy, than part her by an imaginary barrier from the man who had thus suffered in being made the unconscious instrument of God's mercy to a suffering earthly life. How deeply the man before her had grieved, both for his friend and for his unintentional act, she needed no words to tell her, and, remembering only, as was just, that he who was gone had thanked God for it, she felt that she who remained should

surely not refuse the comfort of that sympathy which she would have felt in a measure towards any one in Mr. Davenport's position, but which, combined with the attraction she had gradually grown to feel towards him, amounted to something more like love than she had ever fancied she should feel again. But Ada, like all who take counsel with a Higher Wisdom than their own, was not always ready with an instant reply, and, while she was conscious of an overflowing pity for Mr. Davenport, she restrained herself from showing him anything beyond it, until she had fully tested the reality and nature of what she had to give him in return for the love he offered her. For this time, then, they parted with the understanding that while Ada retained no feeling but one of pity and sympathy, she was not as yet prepared to devote her life to her father's curate; but there came a day soon after when she realised that her *love* for the dead had died from the time she had known of his marriage, never to rise again through hopes renewed of union here, and that grief for his death had been

merged in thankfulness for his escape from trial and disgrace in his wife, and now more completely in sympathy with the man whose sorrow was embittered by self-reproach, and whose life needed her, whereas her love could no longer benefit the one removed to a life beyond her.

Thus, one bright morning, when the curate again urged his love, and pleaded for a return, Ada's smile assured him that he had it. Yet, somehow, this unreasonable man was not satisfied—

"Tell me," he said anxiously, "in plain words what you mean—do not only pity me. I want your love, but I shall not believe in it unless you put it into words."

Now this was very embarrassing to Ada, who had never been accustomed to make love herself. So she still only coloured more and more deeply, and murmured something which sounded much more like "foolish," than "love."

"I know," cried her anxious lover, "that I *am* a jealous fool, but I cannot help it; forgive me for saying it, but I can't forget that you did

love Durnford, and that he knew it. Why do you suppose I shall be satisfied with anything less?" and he almost hurt her hand in his impatient energy; but still this obstinate girl made no answer. She looked up though, at last, and what it could be in her face I cannot tell, but something caused him to waive all further ceremony, and, putting his arm round her, he deliberately kissed her, saying—"Did Durnford ever do this, my dearest?" while Ada made this most extraordinary reply, "No, nor I this," and shyly, but most unmistakably, returned the kiss. "Then I am satisfied," was Mr. Davenport's not very unnatural reply, and a silence, more speaking than words, fell on the two, who knew that whether for good or ill they had been led to each other as workers together in this life, which both believed to be given them for something better than selfish happiness, and, therefore, they had, to my mind, as fair a chance of comfort in each other as any couple within the scope of our general experience.

The marriage was delayed, for various small

reasons, another year, but this did not, trouble our lovers, who were very happy in the present, concerning which they wisely troubled themselves more than the future. Meantime it was arranged that Claude Davenport should enter his wife's home, taking on himself the Rector's duties, and employing a second curate as his assistant.

One point which may seem obscure to the reader remains to be explained, and Ada shall clear it up for the general benefit—

"How came you," she asked her betrothed, shortly before the marriage, "to guess that Colonel Durnford referred to me, or to accuse me of caring for him?"

"I saw your face," he replied, "when your father was questioning me about him. You pretended to be busy over your music, but I saw it was only pretence; you were very pale, and your voice shook when you answered your father."

"Well, I should never have thought you so observant."

"Neither am I, except where my own interests

are concerned, so don't you take advantage of me by and by, when I am not expecting it."

"Indeed," replied Ada demurely, "I give you fair warning that I shall keep my own counsel, and take my own way in everything."

"Do, darling," replied this foolish divine, "I am sure it will be a good way."

"So am I," said his wiser companion. "All the same, perhaps, you won't always like it, but," she added gravely, "it shall be God's way;" and Claude Davenport assented with an impulsive and reverent "So be it."

But God's way is not always pleasant at the time to others, any more than to those who persist in following it, and even Claude, good man as he was, had yet to experience this, ere it was accepted by him as his way also.

CHAPTER IV.

THE six weeks of Eleanor Mowbray's stay with her now totally blind uncle, during the absence of the newly married pair, were fast drawing to a close, and it became necessary for her to decide on her intentions as regarded her relations with her husband, when they again met, to take up their lives together in the home once so lovely in her eyes, but now, in spite of all its beauty, a dreaded place of trial; wherein the unfitness her husband had descried in her for the *rôle* of a fine lady would be unavoidably manifested to others also; who, little as they cared to be bored individually with the elder Lady Mowbray's affectations and over-refinements of manner and feelings, would be sure to look with scrutinising vigilance, not always of the kindest

nature, into the actions of the younger one, who would be placed on her trial, as it were, before a self-constituted jury of the so-called old friends and neighbours of the Mowbray family.

Acting on this belief, Sir John's unlucky young wife determined not to return to Dunmore Hall until quite obliged to do so, and accordingly she wrote to him requesting permission to remain with her uncle for another month, on the plea that she had seen nothing of Ada before her marriage, and might not have another opportunity of meeting her and Mr. Davenport if she did not now remain as was proposed.

It is not to be supposed that, in consequence of the hard words and angry feelings which had passed between this couple, they had ceased to hold any kind of matrimonial correspondence with each other. They wrote regularly and civilly, and each signed an "affectionate wife," or "husband," as the case might be, quite regardless of the fact that the one was bitterly aggrieved by her husband's irritable and to her unreasonable dissatisfaction with her, and blind admiration for

a woman whom she knew to be unworthy of it; while the other was disappointed beyond measure at the failure of all his lectures and strictures in impressing on his heedless wife a due sense of what he expected her to be, and at the undeniable fact that in consequence she had failed to justify to himself the wisdom of his conduct in marrying her, or to prove that he had rightly estimated the promise of her girlhood, in beauty and grace.

Without any strong capabilities as a lover, Sir John had an unusual share of what often passes for love, but is merely a great appreciation of the value of anything or any one belonging to a man; and he had flattered himself before marriage, that in Eleanor he should find and develop all the requisites for satisfying that which was rather pride *in* a wife than love *for* her. Eleanor's idea, on the contrary, being that what she was when he chose to marry her, *must* be what he really preferred, she persisted in patiently submitting to his ill-humours—never, however, permitting him to see that she was hurt by them—secure in the conviction that they were all due

to her mother-in-law's influence, and blindly determined to be true to her real nature, which she knew to be the direct opposite of that lady's, and which she might be pardoned for holding in higher estimation than that artificial unreality which made the Dowager Lady Mowbray so trying a companion.

Eleanor's chief fault was a dogged persistence in what she was once convinced to be right or good. It was foolish, in her opinion, to waste time over such a trifle as becomingness in dress. If you were pretty in one dress, you should be so in another, and if you were not, why it could not be helped. So that the dress was "tidy," what was the use of worrying and wasting time over it? It wearied her; and as Sir John had often, before marriage, inveighed in her hearing against the folly and vanity of girls, who thought of nothing but pranking themselves out for the purpose of attracting husbands, she determined to avoid that weakness in future to please him—as she supposed—as much as she had hitherto done it to please herself, and save herself trouble

and thought. Imagine, then, poor Eleanor's discomfiture when she continued to receive daily grumblings from this despiser of woman's vanity, on the score of her own want of taste, and inattention to the becoming.

I have already spoken of a similar experience on her part regarding that independence and originality which had afforded her husband his chief interest in her before their marriage, but which afterwards appeared to be a perpetual source of annoyance to him; and Eleanor is by no means the only young wife who has wearied herself in conjectures as to why the same things are charming in her before marriage, but afterwards are treated with disdain, if not with any more active disapproval.

However, so it was; and our heroine bore patiently and hopefully the want of admiration for which she did not care, and of sympathy and encouragement, for which she did, until the last blow to her faith in her husband was given by his offering to her as a desirable pattern the woman she most despised. From that moment

she set before herself, as a matter of certainty, that it was her duty to rebel altogether against such an insult to her sense and feeling as a wife, but her pride refused to let her show the degradation she felt, or her real jealousy of Almeria's attraction for her husband; therefore, after the outbreak already recorded, she professed to forget the matter and to take no special interest in Sir John's proceedings.

He, having spent the six weeks of the wedding tour far less usefully and innocently than his wife, began to think it would be very desirable for him to return peaceably home with her, and he was, therefore, by no means pleased with her request to remain away another month, particularly as she took no pains to conceal her own want of anxiety to return to him. This was an unpardonable offence in the eyes of a man who as yet had only considered whether marriage with Eleanor was likely to increase his own happiness, taking her's for granted as his wife; and he punished the unconscious culprit for it, by betaking himself to her cousin's house, where he

remained rather longer than usual, and from which he returned quite restored to his customary state of content with himself, and more sure than before that he had thrown himself away, in his anxiety to be comforted for the loss of Julia Dennis.

Returning to his own temporary residence, he indited a short and by no means affectionate reply, desiring his wife to please herself as to the length of her stay from their home, and intimating that he was equally well satisfied, but requiring her to send back Violet to Dunmore Hall, as he wished his child to be where he could see her if he chose.

Now this was a perfectly just requirement, and had he written it in more amicable terms, or had Eleanor been in a less irritated state of mind, she would not only have owned it to be so, but would have welcomed it as a proof of his affection for their only little one. But as it was, she saw in it only a desire to thwart her enjoyment during the prolonged absence she asked for, or to drive her to return home rather than part with her

child, from whom she had never willingly been separated, even when Violet was left under her grandmamma's care; but to send her home now, with the chance of her being left to the care only of servants, was impossible to her, and she, therefore, speedily determined to defy Sir John's injunctions, and to keep her child with her.

She, therefore, made no immediate reply to him, and merely told her uncle of his consent to her remaining longer, saying nothing to any one of that which related to Violet in her father's letter. And notwithstanding her sense of discomfort as regarded her home, and of wrong-doing towards her husband in disregarding his wishes, I cannot but own that Eleanor and her little Violet were as happy together as if there was not a care in the world. The whole strength of Eleanor's power of loving was centered on the child, for it had not been required in her as a wife, and it is circumstances quite as much as temperament which decide whether a woman's chief love shall be to her husband or her children.

As regards the latter, unless the mother by

carelessness or severity rejects the love which is hers by right, very few fail to give her in their devotion the reward of motherhood; and Violet was no exception to this rule. So mother and child rejoiced together; the one in blissful ignorance of the existence of sorrow, and the other almost equally happy for the time, in her forgetfulness of the things which lead to it.

But such times cannot last; and it is well for us who have a lesson to learn and be perfected in, that they do not; for were it otherwise, few would bestir themselves to find out the meaning of our task, and become in consequence fit for an existence of a more extensive and enduring nature, and as it is a lesson which reveals itself only to enquiry, so there are but one or two here and there amongst us who will even ask its meaning, without the propelling influences of disappointment and sorrow.

Nevertheless, Ada and Claude Davenport returned, and the whole party thoroughly enjoyed Eleanor's prolonged stay, while she perceived, with pleasure, that the last addition to the

family circle was likely to prove a real gain to all belonging to it. Mr. Davenport, also, was charmed with the sincere straightforwardness of character and freedom from worldly hypocrisy which were so evident in Eleanor Mowbray, and so unusual among the class of ladies to whom she belonged in name, but not in nature.

"Here, Eleanor," said her cousin, entering the room appropriated to Violet, where a game of romps was in progress before the child's bed-time, "I want you for a moment. There is a telegram just arrived, and papa cannot understand it."

Eleanor rose from the floor and followed Mrs. Davenport to the library, wherein sat the good Rector, looking disturbed and alarmed; for since darkness had settled down upon him, all his cheerful submission of will did not save him from a certain nervous weakness and apprehension in trifles, to which he had been a stranger in the days preceding it.

Ada took up the paper on which the message was written, and read aloud—

"From Sir John Mowbray, &c., to the Rev. E. Harrington, &c.—Please send Violet and her nurse home without fail to-morrow."

Then she looked at Eleanor, half expecting her to exclaim with alarm and wonder; for it so happened that as yet the latter had rigidly exercised complete reserve towards Ada regarding her matrimonial relations, allowing her to believe that, although not supremely happy or devoted, she was yet a contented and appreciated wife. On hearing the words contained in her husband's imperative request, it is not too much to say that for an instant her heart died within her at this proof of his anger and determination to make her feel his power; but this was quickly followed by a rush of passionate feeling against him for thus insulting her by transmitting to another person directions which affected herself so nearly, and thus not only disgracing her in the eyes of others as a rebellious wife, but obliging her to disclose all she had hitherto concealed of her disappointment in marriage, and her own and

Sir John's present state of unacknowledged but equally real warfare.

After a moment's pause, during which she forced herself to hide the tumult of passion within, she quietly took the paper, went up to her uncle, and kissed him, saying—

"Don't worry yourself, dear. I understand it all, and will arrange it," and left the room.

Ada soon followed her, and found her, with apparent calmness, superintending Violet's retirement for the night; nor did she give any sign, beyond a greater degree of tenderness and less of merriment towards the child, that she either anticipated a separation from her, or felt any special annoyance.

But when she and Ada had left the nursery, and turned by common consent into her own room, she suddenly locked the door, and, throwing herself on a sofa, gave vent to such a violent burst of tears and sobs that Ada stood aghast.

In vain she implored Eleanor to explain her distress; she either could not, or would not; and although she clung to her cousin and insisted on

her presence as the greatest possible comfort to her, she resolutely refused to explain the occasion of her distress or the meaning of the telegram.

Finding this to be her present determination, Ada next hinted gently, but positively, the necessity of preparing for the morrow's return of the little Violet, but Eleanor instantly answered—

"She goes or remains with me. I shall not part with her, and I suppose you will not turn us out of the house."

"But, Eleanor, consider what you are doing. I don't know particulars, of course, but I can see that you are opposing your husband in some way, and that he is anxious for Violet's return. You have no right to keep her without his consent. Why not take her back yourself? The disappointment to us of parting sooner than we expected is nothing compared to the risk of offending your husband."

"*Offending him!*" cried Eleanor; "it is he who has insulted and injured *me*. Why should I care about offending him? He cares for Almeria;

not for me, and I no longer trouble myself about him."

"Almeria!" echoed Ada. "Oh, stop, Eleanor, you are beside yourself with excitement. What has Almeria to do with your husband?"

"A great deal more than she ought to have," passionately answered Eleanor. "But that is not the question now, and I ought not to have spoken of it to you," she added, with a sudden change of tone. "I am, indeed, beside myself;" and with a weary sigh she rose up and began to re-arrange her tumbled hair and dress.

"But you will take Violet back yourself, dear, will you not?" pleaded Ada once more. "Whatever Sir John may be wrong in, do not you do otherwise than right."

"Dear, good Ada," replied her cousin, "do not trouble about me. I can take care of myself, but you must let me do it my own way."

"How you are altered!" said Ada sadly. "At one time you seemed to think only of what was right to do, and now you are bent on doing only as you choose."

"Yes," replied Lady Mowbray, "I am indeed changed, or rather my views of what is right are changed, and as I am quite convinced that it is not my duty to return home, and that it is my duty to take care of my own child, I shall keep her with me; so, Ada, do not say any more about it."

But more had to be said about it, although Ada did not say it. Late at night, after Eleanor had gone to her room, but not to bed, Claude Davenport knocked at her door, and then quietly pushed under the crevice at the bottom a note in his own handwriting, but dictated by her uncle. It ran as follows:—

"My dear Eleanor,

"I do not understand, or wish to enquire into, unless you desire it, the meaning of your husband's message to me; but it is right that you should know it *obliges* me, greatly as I regret it, to say that your dear little one must leave us to-morrow. It is for you to decide if you will accompany her. Be advised, my dear

child, and do not let a passing quarrel blind you to your duty.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"E. HARRINGTON."

When Eleanor had read this, she stood for a few minutes in deep and anxious thought; then quietly proceeded to Violet's room and woke her nurse, to whom she gave some instructions, and then, returning to her own room, spent the night in packing. She never attempted to undress or sleep, but the moment the servants began to stir she went downstairs and despatched the boy who cleaned knives and boots, and did all the other tiresome things which no one else cared to do, for a fly to take her to meet the first up-train to London; and, before the Rector or Ada and her husband were out of their rooms, Eleanor and her nurse and child had left the Rectory.

The sound of approaching wheels had, of course, startled the other inmates, but before they could enquire and ascertain the meaning

of it, Eleanor had managed to have her luggage put quickly on the carriage, and to escape without remark or question, leaving only in the hands of a servant a sealed note for Ada. She, as may be imagined, was distressed beyond measure; perceiving in Eleanor's hasty and private departure a wilful determination to consider herself as driven out of her uncle's home, and she was not much comforted by the perusal of her farewell note.

"DEAREST ADA,

"I understand my uncle's difficulty, and will release him from it; but neither you nor he can judge of what I ought to do. Thank you for all your love and kindness. I always said I should be happy if I might only live at Charlton Rectory, and I feel this a thousand times more now than ever.

"Your loving

"ELEANOR."

Ada's tears flowed fast as she realised how great a blight of some kind had fallen on the

cousin she had always loved as a sister; for, though she did not understand it, she saw its effects, and that these were not of a beneficial tendency in any way. Her husband entered the room while she was still giving vent to her feelings of sympathy and regret for the necessity which had thus unhappily terminated Eleanor's happy visit, and his regard for the latter did not dispose him to believe her to be as culpable as even Ada feared, for matters ever to have arrived at such a pitch of opposition between her and Sir John, who was a stranger to him, except by sight, and whom he had not admired on the only occasion of their meeting at his own marriage.

"Depend upon it," he said, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table, having at last persuaded Ada and her almost equally excited father to sit down and begin the meal, "depend upon it, he is a narrow-minded, selfish fellow. I did not like the shape of his forehead, and his eyes are much too close together. No one with such a narrow head can be anything but a tyrannical bigot."

Ada looked amazed. "Why, Claude," she said, "do you really mean it? Surely you don't teach your people on that principle?"

"Not exactly!" he answered, colouring and laughing, "but, for all that, I believe you can see a great deal of a man's character, and a woman's too, in the formation of the head, and my private belief is that Lady Mowbray is much too good for her husband."

"Shall you believe the same of me, if any one should ever make the same remark?" asked Ada, more by way of carrying on the conversation than anything else.

Mr. Davenport's bright eyes (they were very bright and very dark) gleamed perceptibly, and not with a smile, as he answered gravely, "I trust there will never be any cause for it in your case, and you should not joke, Ada, on such subjects."

By which she also received her first lesson, in the universal fact that a husband judges not as a man, but essentially *as* a husband.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE these events were taking place at the Rectory, it is necessary that the reader should have a few particulars of what was occurring elsewhere; and first let us follow Almeria back to her home in London, where, with her husband, she had returned immediately after her sister's marriage.

Rightly, it would have been *her* duty, and should have been her pleasure, to remain, during the absence of the newly-married pair, with her almost helpless father; and she was by no means destitute of natural pity and affection for him in his present state of trial; nor would she have refused to stay with him, if he or Ada had requested her to do so, but as they did not, she was only too pleased to be released from a place

where she was always *ennuyée*, and was likely now to be doubly so, from comparison with the life she had just been enjoying at Dunmore Hall.

Her father had refused, however, to ask her, or to allow Ada to suggest to her, to stay with him, suspecting that it would be more of a penance than a pleasure to her, and shrinking from imposing such a task, even on his own formerly spoiled and favourite child, so that all parties were relieved by Eleanor's delighted acceptance of a post so distasteful to her cousin.

Almeria, therefore, returned home; and, as we have said, profiting by Mr. Leslie's invitation, Sir John Mowbray spent much of his time in his house, adding materially to his wife's contempt for him, and means of amusement without him, and yet not only keeping on good terms with the husband who so signally failed in pleasing the woman he adored, but even making himself a welcome guest to him, because his presence relieved the matrimonial *tête-à-tête* from the dreary dulness into which it had long ago hopelessly sunk.

But Mr. Leslie was unconscious that his wife

and Sir John were far more frequent companions in his absence than in his presence. He had from the commencement of their residence in London sought and found innocent and useful occupation in the study and practice of painting, for which he had great natural talent, and, fearing also the ill effects of want of exercise, after his habitual life of activity in the open air, he had purposely taken a house in such a locality as forced on him the necessity of a considerable walk to the South Kensington School, which was his daily resort and delight. Had Almeria suffered him to be her companion, he would gladly have devoted to her amusement as much time as she required, making his own pleasure only a secondary occupation; but she very soon found that their tastes and ideas of what was necessary for happiness were so widely opposed that she preferred a life of freedom from so uncongenial a companion, and quickly made her husband feel that she was happier without him, with liberty to follow her own devices.

We have seen how he tried at first to put some

bound to these, and although he apparently succeeded on the occasion referred to, the opposition he constantly met with soon wore out his persistence, and Frederick Leslie endeavoured to forget his disappointments, and to console himself for his loveless home, in devotion to another and a less ungrateful pursuit. But nevertheless his heart was sore and sad, and he would have parted with all else for the love of the wife who despised *his* love and wearied of his companionship.

She, rejoicing in that of a man far inferior to her husband, in conscientiousness and true manliness, and losing all sense of right and justice in her tardy triumph over the lover who, as she supposed, was now, while ministering to her vanity, himself regretting what he had lost in her, had no suspicion of the real truth, which lay in the desire of Sir John to excite, through jealousy of Almeria, his wife's powers of competition, and while the grace and beauty of the one pleased him like a lovely picture, and made him continually more covetous of the same charms for Eleanor, he was far too clear-sighted

and cold-hearted a man to be in any danger of growing from admiration to love of a woman whose whole beauty as yet was centered in her outward form.

But this was not apparent to Mrs. Leslie, who flattered herself on the ascendency she had gained over her cousin's husband, although she never asked herself of what use it was likely to be to her, as the wife of another man; and if she had been required to answer the question, would, probably, have found that she had no better reason for seeking it than to gratify a paltry feeling of vanity and mortified pride, and to get what she could of exciting amusement out of the effort.

An end, however, was approaching to her foolish dreams, of a nature little anticipated by her.

It happened one afternoon when Sir John Mowbray was supposed by Mr. Leslie to be at Dunmore Hall, that the latter returned unexpectedly, at an unusually early hour, from his place of study and work, to find his wife out;

at which he was not surprised. The feeling of indisposition which had brought him home, induced him to lie down on a sofa in a little ante-room divided from the drawing-room only by a curtain. Here he fell asleep, and did not awake until aroused by voices in the adjoining room, his wife's and a visitor's.

It was impossible for Frederick Leslie to leave the little ante-room he was in, without passing through the larger room, and his headache having in a measure passed off, he got up and proceeded to shake himself into condition for making his appearance, when, as he was about to raise the curtain, he was startled by hearing his wife say, in tones of assumed sadness—

"Oh, pray do not speak, as if I and happiness had anything in common. Amusement I may have occasionally, but that palls upon me now. No, my life is a dreary and a loveless one, and no one can be happy where there is not sympathy at least, if not love."

There was a moment's pause after this speech of affectation and untruthfulness—untruthfulness,

at least, as regarded facts and Almeria's unhappy listener, for otherwise it was perfectly true that she was a stranger to happiness and *felt* neither sympathy nor love for any one. Then, while Mr. Leslie was still undetermined whether to draw aside the curtain or retire, he heard Sir John Mowbray's voice reply—

"Your's is not an uncommon case; but *you*, at any rate, should not complain of want of love. Leslie adores you. I wish it were possible to me to say the same of myself as a husband, but Eleanor seems determined to show more and more her unfitness for the position of my wife."

"It is a cruel case indeed, so far as you are concerned," said Almeria, with an inflection of tender sympathy in her voice, which her husband had never heard before. And as she spoke, Mr. Leslie drew the dividing curtains aside, and stood before the two foolish malcontents.

For the first time in her life Almeria felt abashed, but taking no notice of her evident confusion, her husband calmly greeted Sir John

as usual, inquired and heard the cause of his change of plan regarding his intended return to Dunmore Hall, and then quietly said—

"I know you will excuse my saying that it appears to me desirable *Lady* Mowbray should hear my wife's complaints rather than yourself, Mowbray. Women, no doubt, understand each other better than we do, but I have to thank you for kindly pointing out to my wife that she has no reasonable ground for complaining of want of *love;* forgive my adding that I believe you are mistaken in your estimate of your wife's character."

Sir John, who had felt extremely uncomfortable on Mr. Leslie's first appearance, not knowing how much of the false sentiment talked by himself and Almeria might have been overheard by him, rose with much relief, and prepared to go, but as he did so he replied—

"I may be wrong to speak of her, even to a relation," looking towards Almeria, "and stand corrected so far; but I fear it is likely to be some time before she will give herself the advan-

tage of the advice and experience of those capable of improving her by them."

"If you refer to my wife," answered Mr. Leslie gravely and severely, "she must, I think, feel conscious of needing such a friend herself;" and as neither Sir John nor Almeria had sufficient presence of mind to have a suitable reply in readiness, the former was reduced to the necessity of saying "good-bye," with considerably less *empressement* than usual, while the latter had the pleasure of seeing her pretended lover escorted politely downstairs by her extraordinarily behaved and daring husband.

As he came slowly and wearily back to the drawing-room, his unwonted exercise of conjugal authority fast fading into the sense only of wounded love, Almeria determined on her own plan of action, and, as usual, founded it on the persuasion, which her husband's hitherto blind affection had greatly tended to strengthen, that his duty was to minister to her wishes, and as he had now most unmistakably interfered with them, she was fully prepared to let him feel, as

he had not yet done, the folly of his conduct, as she considered it.

Before he could, as he was preparing to do, take his wife's hand to impress her with his forgiveness, even while he reproached her for her indiscreet complaints, she confronted him with looks as far removed from beauty as is possible, where form remains intact, while the soul within it is turned into the deformity of Evil by passion. Yet, though her face was changed and her beauty marred by the inward possession to which she was yielding, her voice was never more under control, or more steady with determination than now, as she quietly demanded—

"How came you to insult Sir John and disgrace me, as you have just done? You are mistaken if you think to bend me to your will by the meanness of eavesdropping and the rudeness of inhospitality."

For a moment, the evil nature thus rearing itself against him in the person of the woman to whom he had given every thought of his heart, communicated itself to the husband she was

tormenting. Their eyes met, her's full of angry contempt, his blazing with such sudden fury that Almeria's, in spite of herself, quailed under them. But this recalled him to a sense of the snare before him. He never yet had said an unkind word to her, he never yet had caused her to shrink from him by unjust accusations or impatient anger. He had ever remembered his vow to "cherish" her, even before her's was made to "honour" him, and with a tremendous effort he forced back the words of well-merited rebuke, feeling that once spoken *as* he then would speak them, they would indeed return to him profitless so far as his rebellious wife was concerned, while he would never cease to repent his late-found and unrestrained power of wrath against her.

In simpler words, as she shrunk instinctively from his stronger passion, now that she had aroused it, he felt—"Violence is useless to turn her, and I will not begin now to forget that she is still my wife." So, as no evil words were forced from the lips of the man whom the Tempter was thus cruelly assailing through the

object of his love, he escaped unharmed, and his short-lived passion fell before the tenderness which had already borne too much to be parted with thus terribly and suddenly.

Now, before proceeding to relate the answer made actually to his wife's unseemly and most unjustifiable taunt, I would have the reader understand that Frederick Leslie was by no means a religious man; that is to say, he very seldom went to church, except as a respectable way of passing the time on Sunday, which he found the dullest day of the week. He did not believe in anything particularly, except that there must be somewhere a Power greater than himself, who was said to have made all things "very good," whereas it was plain even to his unscientific mind, that this was not the case so far as our experience goes, and he therefore had not the reverence he felt persuaded he should have had for the Unseen Maker, had He really made this world as happy and comfortable a place as we should all like to find it; while, as regarded all he heard in church concerning the

means by which we are invited to secure such happiness in the future as we have not here, it had very little meaning for him. It certainly might be true, and he was inclined to believe it, because Almeria said "of course it was," and expressed the greatest disgust and disapprobation whenever he had ventured to suggest that no one could prove it, and very likely it was not a bit more true really than Mohammedanism, or Buddhism, or any other "ism" which the world cannot agree about; and he firmly believed that the only real way to make sure of being "all right" by and by, was to do your duty as a man or woman, in that state of life in which you found yourself located.

But this, which the greater number of us admit it as a truth, and then return to ignoble disuse in daily life, was the one creed not only of Frederick Leslie's faith, but the one effort of his existence. He was neither a clever, nor a thinking, nor even a moderately literary man; he could not talk well on anything, and not at all except on subjects well within his comprehension, and it bored him

to have to listen to what he did not understand; in fact, if the truth must be told, he was by no means equal in brains to his more intellectual but less conscientious wife, and yet, in *fact*, he was as far her superior as he who understands and is true to his nature ever must be to one who is false to it through ignorance or carelessness, for Frederick Leslie was essentially a *man* in the highest and noblest sense of the word.

To him, his strength was given to be used in the assistance, not in the injury of weakness; his power to enforce, for greater forbearance towards those incapable of resisting him; his right to command, that he might teach a willing obedience through kindness; his stronger passions, that he might set an example of temperance to those who, with weaker ones, have yet less power of repression; his intenser desires, for the good and not the harm of the object of them; and his greater courage, to pity, not to ridicule, the fears he did not know by experience.

This was Frederick Leslie's belief of his duty as a man, and he honestly practised it, not from

religious conviction, but from a sense of justice and honour. Furthermore, he believed that to be true at all, we must be so always and to all men; and when he married, although he cared very little about the ceremony as a so-called sacred rite, he fully believed that he was supposed to mean what he said, and owning this, he meant also honestly to do it. Hence his view of the marriage ceremony was decidedly higher and more really spiritual than that of those who look on the solemn adjuncts of the service as most important, while they rarely give a thought to the honourable fulfilment of the vows they make with such parade.

Hitherto, in his married life, however, it must be owned that Frederick Leslie had found little to reward him for his own strict adherence to what he believed to be his sworn duty as a husband; and were this life the end as well as the beginning of our existence, we might well say, with the unthinking world, that he was "a fool for his pains;" but, fortunately for the foolish mass of mankind, some few among us, both men

and women, recognise the nearly invisible, but none the less distinctly to be perceived, truth, that goodness is not valuable only for what it brings us here, but for its own sake, and if we faithfully endeavoured to imagine ourselves in the respective positions of Almeria and her husband, few among us, who have any true experience, would be able to pronounce in favour of the happiness enjoyed by the wilful wife, impatient of all restraint but that imposed by her own will, against the disappointment of the husband sinned against, but conscious of his own rectitude and forbearance.

As he now faced his unappreciative partner, after quelling the passionate words which surged up to, but not beyond, his lips, a great pity filled his heart for her. He saw the wild tempest of disappointment excited by the simple restraint forced upon him by self-respect and care for her whose honour was his to defend fully as much as his was in her keeping; he recognised more fully than ever how unable he was to satisfy her restless cravings for happiness which she could not reach,

because she was ever stretching forth to grasp it in imagination, instead of stooping to raise it where it lay around and beside her; and while his breast heaved with repressed emotion due to his own broken hopes and despised affection, he yet had patience to make one more appeal to the insensate girl before him.

Taking no notice of her insulting words to himself, he gently but firmly put his arm round her, and led her to a sofa; then sitting down by her, and forcing himself to speak calmly and kindly, he said—

"My wife, be patient, and do not *say* all you have it in your heart to say. You meant no harm. I will not think it possible that you could, but it is not to another man that you should lay bare the secrets of our life. Your love may not be mine, but mine is your's, and no man shall come between me and you while I have power to hinder it, least of all the husband of your own cousin."

"Stop," cried Almeria, who had listened with enforced patience only to this address; "it is

you, Frederick, who came between me and him. Oh!" she added, while angry tears rained down her face, "why did you persuade me? Why was I such a fool as to believe that you could ever make me happy?"

And now, for the first time in her married life, this rebellious woman began to think she might have been a little too explicit as regarded her feelings towards her husband.

He suddenly let her go, and stood up before her, and his look and manner had lost their usual patient fondness, as he asked—

"Do you mean that you and Sir John were once engaged or attached to each other? Answer me truly, Almeria, or *he* shall."

As yet, she was too much occupied with her own anger to observe the change in her husband's manner in all its significance, and she was rather relieved than not, by his quitting her side; so she replied sullenly—

"You may ask him anything you please. I tell you, it is true that but for you I should now have been his wife."

"What hindered you, or obliged you to marry me?" he asked, in a tone so cold that it excited his wife's astonishment first and then her resentment.

"My own convenience," she replied, with curt and only too real want of common kindness. "I was sick of my life, and you were glad *then* to take me on any terms, although you treat me now as if I were worth nothing," she ended angrily.

"Let that be now," he answered quietly, "and tell me why Sir John and you did not marry before I sought you."

"I will not," she cried; "you have no right to ask me anything about my life before I married you. You should have done so before if you cared to know it;" and she rose to leave the room.

"You are right so far, I own, but oh, Almeria," he exclaimed, with sudden pathos as he laid his hand on her shoulder, as she was passing him, "is it possible that you accepted my love, knowing that your's belonged to another man? Was mine of no value, that you should take it, only

to show me how you despised it? for that is what you have done—tell me, you did not really mean to do this?"

His voice and look had changed to such yearning tenderness that Almeria misinterpreted the anxiety they expressed. In her mad and selfish pride, she believed that this man, who, as her husband, had patiently borne with her caprices, and humoured her vagaries until they threatened the outward peace and respectability of his home, was gradually returning to his former desire to sacrifice all else for her love, and acting on this belief, she determined to assert her right to please herself on the disputed point, while he was, as she thought, in this yielding humour. So, ignoring the questions he had so urgently put to her, she answered—

"Don't make yourself uneasy about my love for Sir John or any one else. I have none. Nevertheless, I will not be debarred from a perfectly harmless acquaintance, simply because you are foolishly jealous; and if you are wise, Frederick, you will not try to hinder me."

"If I am wise!" he repeated mechanically. "Wise, indeed! It is time for my wife to teach me my folly in the past, but heaven knows you are the last person who *ought* to do it;" and turning away, he left her standing in perplexity as regarded his meaning, and uncertainty as to whether she had gained the victory or not; while he, with a bitter cry of "Oh, my God, I have not deserved this," as soon as he had gained and locked the door of his dressing-room, flung himself into a chair, and burying his head on his arms as they rested on a small writing-table, he wept the scalding tears of rejection, which ever follow idol-worship, and which are soothed only by the healing Spirit of Him whom we have displaced for one of His creatures.

Frederick Leslie was no exception to the rule, that while we are dim and uncertain about the reality and nearness of a Divine Upholder and Ruler in health and prosperity, we have such a certainty of Him as our only and supreme Refuge in danger and distress, that it is as natural *then* to the most hardened sinner as to the most ac-

customed church-goer, to apostrophise Him. And though Almeria's husband as yet knew not why his honest well-doing had met with so cruel a return, he felt that He, if He existed at all, was alone conscious of the extent of her injustice to him, and the bitterness of his disappointment.

But there was a deeper grief within his loyal heart than his own despised love; it was the far more cruel pain of witnessing the abasement and dethronement of his idol. So far, he had forgiven her discontent, her coldness and persistent indifference, and her perpetual opposition to his wishes; but he had persuaded himself that she was not to blame for desiring something more in life than he felt would content him.

He had always known that she had talents *socially* beyond his own, and he bore good-humouredly her frequent complaints that she had no scope for them. He never had forgotten what he had just been so callously reminded of, that he had been willing to take his wife on any conditions, but he had always till now believed that sooner or later he should win her heart and make

her happy and contented. To-day, however, not only were his hopes of this dispelled, but his eyes were opened to the sight of this treasured idol, not as he had blindly imagined her, but as she really was, a cold, unloving, selfish woman, who cared for nothing but her own way.

For Almeria truly affirmed that she loved no man. She never yet had been sufficiently free from self-consciousness and self-will to be capable of *loving* any one; and we know that the only man for whom she had really felt anything like the sentiment of love, was Sir John Mowbray; and further, how easily she crushed this natural and wholesome feeling, when it threatened to stand in the way of her worldly ambitions.

When the unhappy couple met again at dinner, Almeria perceived with surprise and anger that she certainly had not gained a victory *this* time over her hitherto only nominal lord and master.

He was scrupulously courteous and even gentle in every word and action, and no unobservant third person would have thought him anything

but a devoted husband, but his wife perceived a difference which she could not resent, and yet which made itself plainly felt by her. He was no longer her slave; and though she had yet to learn this, she felt that he knew her better than he had ever done yet, and did not love her the more for it. But she attributed this solely to jealousy caused by her hasty admission with reference to Sir John Mowbray, and mentally determined to be more on her guard, and less aggressive in her opposition to her husband's wishes, until she had once more established her dominion over him. But, although she knew it not, Almeria's kingdom, as she *had* known it, was gone from her never to return, and not till unavailing tears and useless regrets had worn out her proud and defiant will, was she to be again admitted as a woman where she had ruthlessly reigned as a queen.

CHAPTER VI.

LATE in the evening of the day but one after Eleanor, with her nurse and child, had left Charlton Rectory, a carriage drove up, out of which Sir John Mowbray hastily sprang, paying the driver and dismissing him, before the door was opened. Inquiring for Mrs. Davenport, as soon as the impatient summons he had given was answered, he entered the house, carrying in his hand a small valise, and requested the servant to say that he wished to see Ada alone. She was so at this moment, her father being asleep as usual after dinner, in his study, and her husband engaged at the village night-school.

Before she could speak, and the instant the door was shut behind him, Sir John said hurriedly—

"Where is Violet? I have come to fetch her;

it occurred to me that perhaps your father did not like to take the responsibility of sending her without Eleanor, but this sort of thing cannot go on."

"The child is gone, and Eleanor also," replied Ada, with some indignation; "they left us yesterday morning."

Sir John turned very pale, as he answered—

"I have just come from Dunmore Hall, and neither Eleanor nor Violet are there. I beg you will not blame me for the trouble you have had, as I see you do, until you have heard what I have to tell you."

Thoroughly frightened, Ada could only now sympathise in Sir John's agitation and dismay, and from vain conjectures as to the locality in which the missing mother and child were likely to be found, it was but a step to the discussion of Eleanor's motive for thus not only disobeying her husband regarding Violet's return, but for taking such an unusual and reprehensible step as to go elsewhere with her, as if she were a fugitive and an outcast.

Proud as Sir John was, this decisive outbreak of rebellion on Eleanor's part, as he deemed it, went far to make him turn over rapidly in his own mind whether it were possible that she could have heard any such report of his intimacy at Mr. Leslie's house as to give her a reasonable motive for refusing to return to his home; and in his uncertainty and anxiety he suffered Ada to learn far more of the annoyance to which Almeria's vanity had exposed his wife, than Eleanor had herself betrayed. To say that she was horrified and disgusted is nothing—that followed as a matter of course—but it pained her far more to feel that she was not surprised. She knew much better than the foolish man before her, that Almeria cared no more for him than for a new dress, but she also knew that her insatiable vanity and ambition made her pretend, unconsciously to herself in extent, an interest in such persons as could gratify these unworthy aims out of all proportion to their claim and her real feelings; and she greatly feared that the sight of what she had lost, in her eager haste to marry,

of worldly advantages, had urged her sister's unrestrained spirit to the verge of propriety and womanly self-respect, to say nothing of regard for poor Eleanor's feelings.

Yet it was equally evident to her that as a husband Sir John had just cause of complaint, if it were true, as he now affirmed, that his wife refused all attention to his wishes in trifles, or at least what she deemed such, and continued to keep him in a perpetual state of worry and annoyance by her contemptuous disregard of them, not openly or defiantly, but quite as disagreeably by her heedless neglect and indifference towards them.

"And now, Ada," wound up Sir John, "I appeal to you, as a woman who has always lived with men, and for whom also I own to a sincere respect, can you honestly say that Eleanor is right in despising as trifles beneath her notice, what I think of importance in my wife, and am I altogether wrong in making her feel my displeasure on account of it?"

"Certainly not," replied Ada, firmly, "but

forgive me for saying that while I think you are right in principle, you are wrong in your method of establishing and forcing it on Eleanor."

Sir John looked annoyed, for although he valued Ada's opinion when in his favour, he had no idea of exposing himself by asking for it, to the expression of her blame where she did not think him blameless. He therefore coldly replied—

"That may be, but my opinion is, that if a man is right in principle, he is the best judge of the right method of enforcing his wishes."

Ada eyed her companion with a look very nearly approaching to contempt, but his worn and harassed face quickly bespoke her pity for the present, rather than blame for the past, and she answered kindly—

"I don't agree with you; but no one likes to be advised contrary to their own ideas, so please forget that I was about to offer you anything so unpleasant, and tell me if I can help you now."

"You are a wise woman," replied Sir John, "and kind as wise. Just now I can only think of

finding the child; but perhaps some day I may be able to profit by what you were about to say. As it is, I feel sick of everything; there is no satisfaction in life—at least, in married life—that I can make out; it is irritation from morning till night. And yet," he added, staring meditatively at the lamp, "my wife is a good woman—I don't understand it."

If he expected Ada to say that *she* did, and to offer an elucidation of the everyday mystery, he was disappointed. She knew better than to resign her present vantage-ground for an argument with a man who was convinced he could do no wrong, because he wished generally to do right, but she was honestly sorry for him, knowing very well that he was only at the beginning of his troubles, and perceiving that he would probably require much severer experience before he would care to take counsel with anything but his own will and sense of right.

Just at this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Davenport, who, as we know already, had formed no great liking

for Sir John, and a very decided one for Eleanor; and consequently he was by no means as sympathising and cordial towards him as Ada would have liked to see him—in fact, he was rather stiff, and inclined to show him much the same kind of disapproving censure in manner, that he would have bestowed in words on any parishioner who had made the mistake of trying to make known his wishes to his wife by means of his fists, instead of by the more enlightened method of verbal explanation.

Now, Claude Davenport was fully persuaded, in his own mind, that Sir John's wife was of more sterling worth than himself, and while, in the abstract, he rigidly upheld the authority and superiority of the man, he, in this individual case, pitied the woman for being tied to a being decidedly inferior, in his opinion, to herself, and was fully persuaded that it was entirely the fault of Sir John if he had failed in finding happiness with so charming and lovable a creature as Eleanor—in her uncle's house—had appeared to him.

It is, indeed, remarkable to how great advantage most of us show in other people's houses. Whoever saw, under such circumstances, the sullen looks, the careless untidiness, the selfish indifference, or heard the interchange of angry words and spiteful complaints so common *at home?* I never did myself, and while it is on no account to be desired that society should be afflicted by their introduction into it, it is a great pity that our bad qualities should be reserved for the daily fare of our own nest—but so it is, and so it was in Sir John Mowbray's home, and with his really good and right loving wife, as well as with his less agreeable and painstaking self.

But Claude Davenport did not know this, and he had yet to learn that he also, as a rule, was less charming at home than anywhere else, and more trying to his wife than to his adoring parishioners. Nevertheless, he owned the next morning, after a saunter round the garden with Sir John, that he was "a better fellow than he expected, and that it was a pity he could not find the right way to manage his wife better;" at

which Ada, to whom he said it, privately remarked to herself, "Men don't manage women; it is the other way;" while aloud she said, "Dear Claude, I am glad you find him better than you thought, but you must give him your advice, when he will listen to you—he will take, perhaps, from you, as a married man, what he would not from me."

"Ah, well, we shall see about that," replied her husband; "as a priest he may, perhaps, require my help, and then, of course, he can command it, but I don't know that I should be inclined to speak on the subject in any other way;" and, kissing his wife, he departed to the eleven o'clock service, which he had instituted in the village, every Wednesday and Friday, in addition to daily matins and evensong—as he called them—when he performed the duties of his office for the benefit of two old ladies, the clerk, and a Waterloo veteran and his granddaughter; perfectly satisfied in the useless labour thus apportioned to his lungs, which were none of the strongest, and fully convinced that he was

benefiting the spiritual condition of his parish, although no members of it, but those specified, ever attended these perpetual services; and the old veteran boldly answered, when congratulated by a non-attendant on his religious strictness, "Yes, ye see, I goo every day, I do. Got nothin' else to do, ye know—nothin' else to do." In which disposal of his idle time he was a bright example to those who, with equal truth, having nothing to do, take very good care to avoid this safest refuge for "*idle* hands," but not for those who have their work in the world yet before them.

Ada never attended her husband's daily services. He had required her at first to do so, but was easily then convinced by experience, that her own objections had been founded on truth, and that her real duties lay in her attention to her household cares, and that attendance on her father which his dependent state required; and now, as she heard his refusal to be of any assistance to Sir John, except as a priest speaking with authority, a feeling of disappointment and

depression came over her, while she watched his well-knit, upright figure depart, surmounted by the handsome head covered with the closely-cut curls whose waves refused to be flat and smooth, however short. She sighed as she thus looked and admired the man with whom her path was henceforth linked, and, as she sighed, she said—

"He is changed already from when I first knew him. He thinks so much more of his 'services,' and so much less of everyday religion. I wonder if it is my fault;" and, thus thinking, she turned to meet Sir John, who was advancing towards her from the garden with a piece of brown paper in his hand, and a look of relief, but not of pleasure.

He put the telegram into her hands, and merely saying, "I am going to put up my things," left her to peruse it. It ran thus—

"From Rev. G. MacMahon, &c., to Sir John Mowbray, &c.—Lady Mowbray and her child are here. They are safe, and there is no occasion for alarm."

This message had been sent first to Dunmore Hall, and forwarded again to Sir John the next

day, by the old housekeeper, who guessed, from various small items, that all was not well between her master and his wife.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Ada, on reading the words. "She is safe in every sense, for she could not be in better hands;" and when Sir John appeared, she would have congratulated him also, but that she saw at once, with the flight of his anxiety, the return of all angry and bitter feelings against his wife. She waited, therefore, for him to speak, for Ada was essentially wise; and did not regret having done so, when, holding out his hand, he said—

"Good-bye, Ada; you will not, at any rate, blame me, I suppose, for going to take my own child to her home, and if you can persuade Eleanor to behave a little more like a reasonable being, I shall be thankful. At present I can hardly realise that she is my wife."

This was not wonderful, but he would have felt greatly aggrieved if Ada or any one else had suggested that this same wife had often had cause to feel that he was not at all like the

husband she had expected to find in him. As neither Ada nor any one else, however, made any such remark, he departed, fully convinced that he was a most unfortunate man, and that no other woman but Eleanor would have been so unmindful of the advantages and benefits derived from the position with which he had foolishly invested her.

As to Almeria, he was making as much haste as he could to forget all about her, and took so much pains to convince himself that it was Mr. and not Mrs. Leslie's house which had lately been so attractive to him, that he would quickly have succeeded in establishing this desirable belief as a fact in his memory, but for a certain note at this moment in his possession, forwarded also from Dunmore Hall, where it had arrived a few minutes after he left, and was immediately reposted by the suspecting housekeeper. It was from Almeria, and said—

"My dear Sir John,

"F. is as sulky as a bear, and my life is miserable. Do not be kept away by his rude inhospitality. We are both unhappy—let us

console each other. Why, oh, why, did we not consider sooner the folly of marriage without love? But that is past. Yet, surely, no tyrant should be suffered to debar us from that harmless friendship which alone can at all compensate for domestic unhappiness.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"ALMERIA LESLIE."

Now this note did not at all please Sir John. There was a spice of folly and affectation in it, independently of any more serious objection, which annoyed and disgusted him; the fact being, that Almeria really wrote exactly as she spoke; but, unluckily for her, she could not impress the senseless vehicle of her sentiments with that beauty of appearance and charm of manner, so admirable in herself to the eyes of Eleanor's foolish husband, and, consequently, when he had read this note, instead of pitying her for being tied to another man, who could not appreciate her, he actually said, with a gesture of impatience—

"Oh, bother! I thought there was an end of

this humbug. What a silly woman she must be! Really, I begin to pity poor Leslie."

Here was an unreasonable man! Nevetheless, he felt the note must be answered, or it might be followed by another, and he had got far too well out of that foolish scene in Almeria's drawing-room to care to take part in any more of such dangerous amusements; so before he descended to wish Ada good-bye, he sat down and indited a reply, which he also put in his pocket to be posted on his road at the first opportunity.

"DEAR MRS. LESLIE,

"I was extremely sorry not to see yourself and Leslie again before I left town. I am summoned away for an indefinite time by urgent and disagreeable business. Thank you very much, both of you, for your kind hospitality during my enforced celibacy.

"Believe me,

"Most sincerely yours,

"J. MOWBRAY."

"*There,*" thought this wise-betimes, and

therefore *not*-to-be-despised man, "I hope that will do, without offending her too much. Oh, if only Eleanor would move and speak like her, there would be no fear of my giving her any cause for jealousy. As it is, one of us must give way—*but*—it will not be myself," and he finished his packing, and set off, as we have seen, in search of his recreant wife.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was three o'clock in the afternoon, and in a common lodging-house in the sea-side town where Eleanor and her mother had spent the peaceful years of the latter's widowhood, sat the former, now in her turn a mother, and showing unmistakable signs of suffering her full share of the trouble to which we are all born, because through it alone is the sure road to happiness.

At her feet Violet was playing with a favourite doll, and trying to induce her mother to join with her as usual in attending to its supposed wants at an imaginary dinner-table, when the servant of the house announced "Mr. MacMahon," and our former acquaintance of that name entered, signing to the servant to leave the door open

and to withdraw; and as there was some one else outside to make sure that she did so, she lost for once the benefit of conversation not intended for her ears.

"My dear," said Mr. MacMahon, advancing and taking the hand held out to him by Eleanor, "do not be angry at my having let your husband know of your safety; he is here in consequence," and at the same moment Sir John entered the room.

Taking no notice of his wife, he picked up the child, and kissed her, saying—"Will Violet come home with papa?" to which she replied—"Yes, and mamma too," and then tried to get back to her doll. Sir John let her go, and turning round to Eleanor, forced himself to say, with grim civility, "I conclude you have no intention of deserting your home altogether, but I should be glad to know why you have done so at all, and made yourself and your husband ridiculous in other people's eyes. I did not marry you," he continued, waxing wrath and rude, as Eleanor sat looking at him, without attempting to answer

him, "to be made a subject for public amusement, and—"

"Sir John," interrupted Mr. MacMahon, "excuse my interrupting you, but before you decide anything else concerning Lady Mowbray's movements, pray persuade her to return with you to my house, where, indeed, I wish she was at this moment," and he looked compassionately at poor Eleanor's tired and anxious eyes.

"My wife is perfectly at liberty to go where she pleases, and as to my persuading her, it seems that I have only to express a wish for her to do exactly the opposite," retorted the aggrieved gentleman.

"Oh, no, John, indeed," remonstrated Eleanor. "Mr. MacMahon knows that I only meant to keep away a day or two, until I was quite sure that it was my duty to take Violet home. You had given me leave to remain another month, and though I know you said I was to send Violet home, I could not do it when there was no one to take care of her but servants."

"And who am I, pray? Am I, her father, not fit to protect and take care of my own child?"

"No! you are not!" said Eleanor, with rising courage. "You were in London for one thing, and even if you had been at home, you cannot watch over her as I do."

Here the combatants perceived that Mr. Mac Mahon was absent; he had wisely retired, leaving them no witness but their innocent subject of dispute, who was apparently too much engrossed in putting her own make-believe baby to bed to concern herself with anything else. Nevertheless, Violet was by no means so unobservant as she looked, and although not understanding sufficient of what was passing to proclaim her own sentiment, she quite appreciated the fact that "mamma" was no use to her as a playfellow, such as she had been accustomed to for the last six weeks, while "papa" was there, and taking advantage of a momentary pause entailed on Sir John by the difficulty of refuting the truth of Eleanor's last positive statement, she trotted across the room to her father, seized him by the coat, and endeavoured to pull him towards the

door, repeating her dutiful desire that he would "go away."

Even her baby act angered the impatient man; he put her quickly from him, too quickly for gentle handling, and this being of course resented by a cry, and followed by a rush to Eleanor for comfort, drove away all his remaining self-restraint.

He deliberately turned to leave the room, fully intending to return alone to Dunmore Hall, but at the door he was met by Mr. MacMahon, who hearing Violet cry, concluded that her parents had ceased to discuss their own affairs and were occupied with her. Sir John's angry face showed him his mistake, and promptly taking him by the arm, he led him back, and up to Eleanor, to whom he said with solemn earnestness—

"Lady Mowbray, this is the husband you have sworn to obey. You best know why you have disobeyed him, but you surely will not continue to do so. Sir John," he continued, turning to him, "tell your wife in my presence what your

wishes are; you may feel assured of what my advice will be."

"At present, I merely wish her to send the child home, as I bade her do a fortnight ago. When she does that, I shall believe, and not before, that she regrets her disrespect and disobedience."

Now this was not exactly a nice or generous speech, but then Sir John was not of a naturally generous nature, and just now he was in anything but a nice humour; nevertheless, Mr. Mac Mahon, while fully appreciating the tyranny, mentally prayed that Eleanor might not do so to the continuance of the contest. Nor did she, but she misunderstood it, and rising almost cheerfully, she answered—

"We will get ready directly; come Violet, we are going home with papa."

"Not *we*," said Sir John, "I said Violet."

"Do you mean that you are going to forbid my accompanying her?" gasped Eleanor.

"Certainly I do," responded her husband.

"Surely not," anxiously interposed Mr. Mac Mahon. "Let me speak to you alone, Sir John.

I know all that has led to your wife's mistaken indulgence of her affection, contrary to your wishes, and that she has not intended all the rebellion you imagine: pray listen to me while I explain."

"Sir," replied his impatient hearer, "so far I thank you for your care of my wife and child, and for your well-meant desire to excuse the former, but I know what I am about, and shall do what I believe to be my duty," which was undoubtedly an admirable sentiment; but it was very unfortunate for poor Eleanor, that his idea of duty constrained him to punish her so unrelentingly, while it had been a most fortunate circumstance for him, that Mr. Leslie had not been quite so strict in demanding from him full compensation for the rebellion he had long been ministering to, in *his* household.

Eleanor stood for a moment speechless with impotent anger and fear, and there is no knowing what wild acts and words she might have been guilty of, had not Mr. MacMahon, with a swift and sudden movement, checked her.

"My dear," he said, with a look of something very like contempt at Sir John, "have patience. I know it is hard, but you were wrong at first, and we all must suffer for wrong-doing."

"Exactly," replied Eleanor's owner; "I am glad to find you really agree with me, and trust you will bring Lady Mowbray to a sense of my justice and her own fault, while she remains near you," for this conscientious man, as regarded the due punishment of his wife, had not perceived that the glance at him, which accompanied Mr. MacMahon's words to Eleanor, was very far from expressing approbation or agreement.

"I shall certainly endeavour to comfort her under a severe discipline, Sir John," answered the minister of peace, with a gravity which caused the former to look sharply at him, but seeing nothing more aggressive than gravity, he chose to consider that he had the sanction of the Church in the person of Mr. MacMahon, for vindicating his right as a man, to distress, and revenge himself on, a woman and child.

Within half an hour from this time, Violet and

her nurse were ready to accompany him. At the last moment, having spent the uncomfortable interval in going out to find a conveyance and ascertain the time for the next train to pass, he placed a cheque in Eleanor's hand, remarking—

"I do not wish you to be inconvenienced by your foolish conduct," and, adding, "You can return if you please at the end of the time you settled for yourself to be absent," turned away to summon his fellow-travellers.

But not even Mr. MacMahon's presence could now restrain Eleanor's bursting heart from the expressions it would have required the patience of ten Eleanors to withhold.

Without a word she tore the cheque across, and threw it on the floor; then approaching her husband, she said, so hoarsely that she hardly recognised her own voice—

"Are you mad, John, that you treat me thus? Do you think you can control my obedience in this way? Oh," she cried, suddenly bursting into tears, "be kind, and take me home with you. I cannot part from Violet!"

Ah! unlucky cry of the only real love of her heart. It reminded the husband, whose stern purpose had begun to melt at the sight of her tears and pleading to go home with *him*, that her real reason was love for the child, not for him, and with redoubled coldness he replied—

"You disobeyed me for her, now obey me in giving her up to me. She is mine, and I intend to have her apart from you, who only teach her to despise me."

"Take her, then," cried Eleanor passionately; "but what breaks my heart can never bless your's. I shall not see her again—I know it;" and by a violent effort she repressed her tears, as she heard the little pattering feet, and the dear baby voice approaching, chattering to her nurse as they descended to the room where the two beings, of whose union she was the greatest blessing and deepest cause of trouble, stood waiting for her.

As the child ran to Eleanor, exclaiming, "Mamma, get ready," Sir John advanced, and lifting her in his arms held her himself to her

mother's lips, thus causing them, as he intended —although with no really unkind motive—to shorten the parting so needlessly made of importance, as he regarded it.

He was glad that Eleanor did feel it, for otherwise it would have been no punishment to her, but as to all this fuss about letting the child go with him, her father, it was simply absurd. At least, this is what the evil counsellor now guiding the spirit of his actions said to him, and as it suited him to believe it, and to elevate this prime minister to the dignity of conscience for the time, of course, as he was persuaded he was only obeying so safe a guide, it was not likely that the foolish tears of a wilful woman, or the angry cries and kicks of a "mother-sick child," as he internally denounced little Violet to be, would turn a righteously angered man from his purpose.

For it was after this undutiful fashion that the child disappeared from poor Eleanor's sight, to accompany her other parent as his rightful companion in the solitude of his home. Right he

might have been, in claiming her companionship, but comfortable in it he certainly was not. The child screamed herself hoarse and exhausted, and, finally, sobbed herself to sleep, refusing to quit her nurse's lap for her father's, or even to take from him the sugar-plums with which he provided himself by the way for her consolation.

If it was a trial to this sensitive gentleman to see his wife not always acting with the decorum and dignity of the Dowager Lady Mowbray, what must his feelings have been now, when he found himself the undisputed possessor of a shrieking baby, and a fashionable nurse who was divided between anger with him for hurrying her off in this unseemly fashion, and with Eleanor for taking her to such a place as the lodging they had just left, while she had a private reason of her own for anxiety respecting her little charge, in addition to the dreadful present worry of her unusually naughty and violent behaviour?

The immediate consequences, under any other circumstances, would have been that the unlucky father would have retired to a compartment of

the train as far removed as possible from his two companions, but, although he had mentally mocked at Eleanor's frantic expressions concerning her belief that he was taking the child from her for good, when she spoke them, they returned to his hearing, and rang in his memory now; and he was sufficiently superstitious to feel constrained by them not to lose sight of his wife's lost delight, and his own great annoyance at the present moment.

For the time he almost felt that he hated the poor, naughty baby who was doing her unconscious best to prove that her mother was her proper keeper; and, indeed, Violet, roaring and disfigured by angry tears, was a very unattractive sight to her father, who had hardly ever seen her but at her best in every way, and who was now disgustedly astonished at the sight of such a change for the worse, in the child who—his mother had always assured him—was, happily, a Mowbray, and not a Castleton in disposition.

There was no possibility now of drawing back, however, and, after some hours of discomfort and

devout aspirations that he might not encounter any of his friends, Sir John arrived again at Dunmore Hall, triumphant, certainly, as a husband, but disenchanted as a father, and as thankful to pack Violet off out of his sight and hearing as the child was to get away from him.

Not that she disliked him; on the contrary, an occasional game of play with papa, or a trot round the grounds holding his finger, was a treat highly esteemed, but on these occasions, as yet, both father and child had seen each other only under happy conditions, and for a limited time, and Sir John, interfering with Violet's accustomed right to her mother, and appearing as the unaccustomed companion of herself and nurse, without mamma, was as unpleasant an experience to her as she was to him under the upsetting circumstances of their journey.

However, she was at home now, alone with him, and no longer making herself a distracting nuisance to him, and, no accident having befallen her on the road, Sir John ceased to hear the sound of Eleanor's despairing words, and once

more took counsel with his prime minister, who assured him that he had done well, and that when his wife returned she would certainly be more amenable to his wishes, seeing that she had now learned not only the duty but the necessity of obedience.

About eleven o'clock, on his way to his own room, he suddenly bethought himself that in his present capacity of father and mother, it would be correct for him to enquire if Violet was sleeping well after her journey. He knocked at the day-nursery door, and, no one answering, entered the room. It was empty and dark, and, concluding that the nurse was in bed also and asleep, he turned to go out, when, from the inner room, which communicated with the one in which he stood, and in which Violet and her nurse slept, he was startled by the sound of low sobbing and murmuring. Approaching the door between the two rooms, he distinctly recognised his little daughter's voice, in that subdued tone caused by fear and distress combined, imploring that "mamma would come."

Sir John instantly entered the room, and found that the nurse was absent, and Violet crouched down under the bedclothes, crying and trembling with fright and excitement. Of course he rang the bell violently, and equally, of course, when the nurse appeared, he overwhelmed her with angry reproaches—part of which she, no doubt, deserved, but not the dismissal she received in consequence of her "impertinence" in attempting to explain to Sir John what, in his virtuous fatherly wrath, he was pleased to consider "incapable of justification" in a woman who was entrusted with his child. The fact was, that she had stayed gossipping with the already suspicious housekeeper before named, and Eleanor being away, she had—not very unnaturally—thought it unnecessary to retire at her usual hour; but Violet was quite accustomed, as a rule, to be left alone during the evening, the nurse only remaining within call, and seeing her fall soundly asleep as soon as she was undressed, the latter had no reason to fear her awaking. That she had done so was an unusual thing, and equally unfortunate for Sir John

and all concerned. So, after all, that much disturbed man went to bed anathematising the whole world of women—Almerias, Eleanors, nurses, and babies—and, according to his light, he had reason to do so.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Eleanor was left gazing with dry but agonised eyes after the carriage which had received the struggling and distressed little Violet, and conveyed her from her sight, Mr. MacMahon stood for a few moments beside her in silent sympathy and pity; then, seeing that she made no movement to leave the window at which they were standing, he gently laid his hand on her's, saying kindly—

"Come, my dear Lady Mowbray; come with me to my wife; she will help and comfort you better than I can. I can only pity your mistake, but my wife will, no doubt, show you how to remedy it; women are each other's best advisers where husbands are concerned."

But Eleanor paid no attention to his words, and made no attempt to reply to them. Her

face, which had taken a cold, set look, in the effort to control her emotion before the child, suddenly became convulsed by a storm of passionate feeling; not sorrowful or indignant, such as Mr. MacMahon was prepared for, but so violent and unexpected that he recoiled for a moment as she turned towards him, saying distinctly, and with such passionate fervour that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity—

"Mr. MacMahon, I hate him."

For a moment the good man thus addressed not only recoiled from her, but was dumb with surprise at her words, and doubt how to answer them; but in that moment he perceived how hard it was to say to one so tried, that she must love where she now hated; and not only hard, but he saw that for the literal meaning of the words, "Love your enemies," when reduced to an individual case, like that before him, there could be no possibility of present acceptance in the conscience of one who, like Eleanor, had mistaken her own duty undoubtedly, but who had never lost the conscious desire to do what was right towards

the man who had persisted in driving her to her present extremity of feeling.

Before, however, her companion could form any reply likely to soothe, instead of to aggravate, the troubled conflict of her soul, Eleanor burst into passionate tears, and saying, "Take me away, anywhere you like," suffered herself to be assisted into a carriage, waiting only to put on her walking attire, and five minutes after found herself in the friendly arms of the good woman who was Mr. MacMahon's second wife, and who had been in former days her own schoolmistress and attached friend. With her Mr. MacMahon left our poor heroine, returning to the lodging she had just left with his own confidential servant to settle with her landlady, and remove her belongings, and then, having thus done all he felt it his present duty to do, he pursued his way to the bedsides of the sick and poor, where he spent the rest of the day, returning to his late dinner to find Eleanor asleep, and his wife full of anger against Sir John, and of sympathy with her former pupil.

How she arrived at the first state we must ascertain through the conversation which took place between herself and Eleanor, as soon as the latter was sufficiently composed to speak; as to the last—that of sympathy—it needs no explanation between two women, whether good or bad, who had both been mothers.

For a few minutes after Eleanor's arrival, Mrs. MacMahon made no effort to check the violence of her emotion; but, feeling that she was useless to her as a friend, if she were to encourage her only in giving way to grief or anger—and tears in women and children are sometimes caused as much by one feeling as the other—and being, moreover, a thoroughly practical, common-sense woman, she first gently begged her to remember that there is a remedy for every trouble not of our own causing, and then persuaded her to tell her from the commencement the trifles which had led to feelings so violent and opposed to those which should subsist between married people.

As Eleanor told her former instructress the history of her engagement—for Mrs. MacMahon,

like a wise adviser, insisted on knowing all, if she was to know anything—the truth began to dawn for the first time on her own mind, as it did at once on that of her hearer, that she who had made up her plans for happiness in marriage so carefully by avoiding, as she supposed, the rocks on which others had met with shipwreck, had run blindfold herself into certain loss of even the chance of that happiness which those who came before her had, at any rate, held, and, to a certain extent, enjoyed for a time, however short.

For, as she told how she had only grown to think of Sir John Mowbray as her husband because she saw that her sympathy in his sorrow for the loss of his real love, had made him seek her as his wife, and because she believed that her dead mother had greatly desired such an union, she could not but ask herself, as Mrs. MacMahon did not scruple to do, "But, Eleanor, where was your love?" Where indeed? Nowhere, so far as her husband was concerned. And she could see this gulf of sorrow before her ready to swallow up all her hopes of happiness

with him, now that she was so far within its destroying influence as to feel that she had neither will nor power to save herself from being drawn by it to any depths of sorrow or wrong-doing.

But, although she did not attempt to excuse her mistake by any pretence of love to Mrs. Mac Mahon, she still shrank from laying bare to her the whole truth—that she had been prepared to give to another man than Sir John the love she had never felt for him; but while she made no allusion to the existence even of such a man, her friend espied, in her complete indifference to her own feelings in marrying and respect only to Sir John's, the fact that hope on her own account of *love* in marriage had deserted her, and this, as we know, who know anything of love or marriage, could be caused only by the knowledge, or belief, that the love we all have to give where it is called forth, had been returned to her empty, and had left her without sufficient hope in the future to make her feel the danger and slavery of marriage without love.

"O, my poor child," said the elder and wiser

woman, as the younger one ceased when she had explained the history of her engagement, "how came you to risk so much without the help of a more experienced mind than your own?"

"I always thought that if I did what my own conscience told me was right, I should be kept from harm and helped to do what I ought," replied Eleanor.

"But did your conscience never suggest to you the need you had of a friend?"

"Yes. I often wished I had one whom I did not mind consulting. But I could not bring myself to ask for advice on a subject in which only my own feelings were concerned, and no one had a right to my confidence," answered Mrs. MacMahon's *ci-devant* pupil, with the faintest tint of pride in her now saddened voice.

"Not even myself, who always loved you, Eleanor?" said her friend.

"I did think of you, but I could not tell you I did not love the man I was to marry, just after telling you of my engagement to him."

"Hardly," replied Mrs. MacMahon smiling,

"but could you not have told me the latter, before you had promised to perform the first part of that arrangement?"

"Yes," replied Eleanor, with a sigh, "I could, of course, have done so; but I did not, and perhaps if I had it would have done no good. I think I should still have done what seemed right to me."

"No doubt; the only thing is that, perhaps, it would not have appeared right to you after we had talked it over."

"Tell me now, although it is too late, why it is so wrong to marry without love, and with respect only, when we see, as I had done in my own parents, that love, at any rate on the wife's part, does not ensure happiness or retain love from the husband," cried poor Eleanor. "Indeed, I only wish now to learn what is really right."

"I know it," replied Mrs. MacMahon, as her eyes filled with tears. "It was true of you as a school-girl, and it is still more so now when you are suffering for your mistakes." And drawing her young companion towards her, until her tired head

lay upon her shoulder, she continued, "You have only done what even the most conscientious among us constantly do. You have missed the first step in the right way, and so conscience, instead of helping, has bewildered you. Let us go back a little. You have not told me, but I guess, dear child, that you have seen some one you could have loved better than your husband."

Here Eleanor gave her friendly monitor an unintentional pressure, which confirmed her in what she had already guessed.

"Do not say anything about this if you cannot contradict it," hurriedly interposed Mrs. Mac Mahon, fearing she was about to speak. "Such things, if true, are best kept silence on, when once a woman is married. To talk of other lovers than our husbands revives as realities what it should be our aim to turn into dreams. I speak of it only to show you your first false step towards yourself and first sin against your husband."

Eleanor started at the word "sin," and attempted to speak.

But with a smile, and gently expressed though

significant gesture, which she remembered of old, her monitor continued, without heeding her —

"Yes, Eleanor, 'sin.' He was more honest, I fancy, with you than you were with him. You knew why he regarded you and why he had sought you first as his wife. Did he know as much of your feelings for him, or rather of what they were not?"

"He never asked me," replied Sir John's unlucky choice rather sullenly. "He seemed to take it for granted that it must be all right for me if it was for him. And, surely, you would not think it my place to tell a man who does seek me that I love one who pretended to, and then left me to find that he had only made a goose of me." And tears of shame coursed slowly down her pale and sorrowful face.

"No, indeed, my dear, but still it was a sin against him to let him marry you, not knowing that it was so."

"What would you have had me do?" asked Eleanor.

"Listen to the *first* step suggested by con-

science, which when taken would have thrown light on the one following."

"And what was the first step which you think I did not take?" demanded Lady Mowbray.

"That which you own to have neglected; the suggestion that you should seek wiser counsel than your own. Forgive me, my dear," continued her friend, "but I should be unfit to help you now, if I were blind to your mistakes, or afraid to tell you of them; and I long to help you, if possible, to find the happiness you have missed so far."

"But all that is past," said Eleanor, "can it do me any good in the future to show me the faults that cannot now be rectified?"

"More good than anything else, if you will believe it," answered her companion, "for our faults, however varied, always spring from the same source, and my child, you have a hard task before you."

"Ah, yes," cried poor Eleanor, "hard indeed; no one knows how dreary my life has been since my marriage, and how much more lonely I have

felt since then, than I ever did before; more so even than when I was living alone with Uncle George and cross Mrs. Martin."

"And therefore," gently urged Mrs. Mac Mahon, "you need to go through it with special care; it is in every circumstance the first step we take which determines, as a rule, our success or failure, and you, my dear child, having rejected, or rather having not taken the first step urged on you by conscience, have become confused and unable to see right from wrong. We must remember, Eleanor, that the object of this life is to train us for another, about which other we know nothing except that it is one of obedience, and therefore of peace; but here in our inferior state, we fight for a liberty which we believe to be denied to the angel hosts of a superior one. What wonder, then, that we find trouble where we look for satisfaction, and sorrow where we hope for joy? God lights us safely and surely through this life, so long as we are content to see and walk in the one step on which alone the lamp of conscience shines.

Never yet was a soul left so in darkness here, as not to see any single guidance as to its course which commended itself as right; but so few among us will humble ourselves, to be content to see and understand that one step only. We keep our eyes fixed on the path far ahead, and provide ourselves against circumstances in the future, as you, my poor Eleanor, in your attempts to avoid the unhappiness you had seen in marriage, and all the while we are thus peering into the dark, we never see the tiny ray which falls at our feet, lighting the first step, and which moves to another and another as we follow, with equal certainty and steadiness, as that with which it refuses to cast even a gleam on the distant obscurity of the future."

As Mrs. MacMahon paused, she perceived that her hearer was weeping silently, and that she admitted by a closer clinging to herself the truth of her words, but she did not answer, and seemed to wait for more.

"Let us look now, dear Eleanor," pursued this late used friend, "at the next false step in the

only circumstance connected with your married life, at present known to me. You received your husband's letter desiring you to send back the child; you say conscience assured you that as a mother you ought not to send her from you without more reason, to be alone among servants; did this same conscience say nothing else, before you made up your mind that what you did was what she really bid you do?"

"Ada did," said Eleanor, in a tone of quiet resignation, as if, being convinced of one mistake she was prepared to see herself convicted of any amount of wickedness; "she begged me to take Violet home, when the telegram came, and I would have done it, only that I knew my husband had sent for her at first simply to vex me, and he had no right to telegraph such a message to any one but myself."

"Perhaps not; indeed, I feel pretty much as you do on that point," answered Mrs. Mac Mahon, "but we will talk of him presently; now, I only want to point out to you that again you disregarded the first step in your

difficulties, which was plain to your cousin also, and consequently you have wandered into a maze of trouble and uncertainty."

"Oh, Mrs. MacMahon, surely you are rather hard on me," cried Lady Mowbray. "If you only knew what provocation and unkindness I have met with in my husband's home, you would not think so much of my small mistakes."

"Yes, I should, Eleanor, for all great troubles begin with small mistakes, and no amount of what is wrong in others can justify the folly of our own refusal to follow the right track."

"At least, let me tell you something of what my married life has been," replied Lady Mowbray, raising her head from her friend's shoulder, and speaking with some return of her girlish independence and impulsiveness of manner. "Very soon after we were married—by which I mean within a week—I saw that my husband was worried and irritable. He began to answer me sharply, and was always hinting that his mother would expect me to be and to do this,

that, and the other, and instead of being amused by my conversation as he was while we were engaged, he either seemed bored by it, or found fault with me for being excitable. Then he was never satisfied with my dress. If one part of it was right, the other was wrong, or else my hair was not becomingly dressed, or I did not carry myself with sufficient dignity; indeed, I soon found that nothing I did ever was quite right, and the more patiently I took all his fault-findings, the more impossible I found it to please him. Of course I do not mean that we arrived at this stage so immediately as a week after our marriage, but it began as early as that, and before I had been married six months I felt as if it was as useless to think of pleasing my husband as it always had been to satisfy his mother. But I did not give up. I never quarreled with either of them, and when I felt too miserable to hide what I felt, I shut myself up and cried alone, for I thought it was my duty as a wife to meet ill temper with cheerfulness, and I shall never forget

my own father's anger at the sight of my mother's tears, when he spoke roughly and unkindly to her."

"Go on, my dear," said Mrs. MacMahon, as Eleanor looked inquiringly at her for approval; "you have had a hard penalty to pay for your first false step, but let me hear all before I suggest a remedy."

"What a physician you would have made!" replied Eleanor, smiling in spite of herself. "Well," she continued, "things went on better for a time just before Violet was born, and for a little while after; but John was disappointed because she was a girl, and Lady Mowbray maddened me with her perpetual interference. Then my husband began to complain more and more; he said I was only fit to be a country parson's wife, because I spent so much time with my baby, but until I had her, he had never seemed to care for my company except to lecture me, or to complain of his mother, and yet whenever she and I quarreled over Violet, for I would not give the child up to her management, he

always took her part, and insisted, if he could, on my doing as she desired. Oh! I was very unhappy. If I could have seen that doing right, and being forgiving and good-tempered, was of any use in making others happy, even if I were not so myself, I should not have cared so much, but my mother-in-law was always complaining of or to me, although she had for years let me see that she wished me to marry her son, and my husband looked and spoke always as a disappointed and injured man."

"But," interrupted Mrs. MacMahon, "are you so sure that you did do your best to make him happy, by studying his wishes? It seems to me that you did not concern yourself sufficiently, perhaps, to understand and accede to them."

"I understood them well enough," replied Eleanor indignantly, "to know that he thought quite differently after marriage from what he had done before it; and because he changed so completely, was I to do the same? I could not. What was right before marriage was right afterwards, and if he had liked me well enough for

my looks and character to marry me, was I to try and turn myself into something quite different afterwards, because he wished it? Besides, I did not believe he could be sincere in such a complete alteration of opinion. I thought, as I think still, that his mother influenced him by her complaints and jealousy, and I hoped if ever we were alone together in our own home that he would return to what he had been after Julia's death up to the time of our marriage."

"Do you mind telling me what your impression of Sir John was at that time?" asked Mrs. MacMahon.

"I was sorry for him, and I respected him," replied her companion. "He seemed to me to have borne patiently and well a great sorrow, and he was a good son to his mother, who was a most trying person at all times; so I thought I could not be wrong in hoping he would be a good husband."

"No doubt he might have been to a wife who loved him."

"But I had far more patience under his irritability than any woman who loved him would have had; he would have broken my heart if I had done so," answered Eleanor.

"No," replied her friend, "I think not. Hearts do not break, as a rule; they grow cold; but a wife who loved him would have shown her feelings more than you did, and have drawn from him the true cause of his discontent."

"Why, I have told it you, as far as I understand it," rejoined Eleanor, with some impatience; "he wanted me to be like his mother and the other fine ladies of our society, although he had often ridiculed and found fault with them in my presence, and pretended to admire me for being so unlike them. But it is of no use to talk any more of it; he is utterly changed, and I have given up all wish, as well as all hope, of pleasing him, for I no longer respect any more than I love him."

Mrs. MacMahon expressed no horror at this unwife-like sentiment, but gradually drew from Eleanor what the reader already knows of Sir

John's fruitless attempts to accomplish by means of jealousy what his irritable fault-finding had failed to impress on his wife as necessary if she would find favour in his sight; and her heart swelled with indignation, at the selfishness which she detected throughout Sir John's character, and which, indeed, was the key-note to all the discord of his home.

She saw plainly enough that he expected an amount of devotion to himself, and compliance with his fancies from Eleanor, which he never thought of extending to her; and while he had offered, and thought sufficient for her happiness, the remnant of feeling which amounted only to a desire that she should console him for past trouble, it was evident that he exacted as his just due the whole sacrifice of her individuality to him. But Mrs. MacMahon kept this view of the subject to herself at present; for her object was to show Eleanor her own faults, and not her husband's; so, after hearing all she felt necessary for her own guidance, she reverted to the pleasanter subject of Violet.

But here her young companion's tears again broke forth, as she explained to the wife what she had already done to the husband for whose advice she had sought her old home—that her conduct had been partly caused by a haunting of fear of some ill to Violet if she sent her from herself.

"I know it was foolish," she said, "and I have never given way to such fancies before. But it came upon me from the moment I got John's letter, desiring me to send her home, and grew stronger every day, until I felt it quite impossible to part with her."

"Yet you have had to do so at last, under more painful circumstances," suggested Mrs. Mac Mahon, "and this feeling would not have hindered you from taking her home."

"No. I allow that," replied Eleanor, "but the whole thing was hard and unjust. And after my husband's behaviour with Almeria, I did not feel that he had any right to expect my obedience. But, oh! Mrs. MacMahon, tell me, do you think my fears are quite foolish for Violet? I have them still, and feel as if I shall never, never hold

her in my arms again. Do people ever have these fears for nothing?" And she gazed anxiously at the pitying face of her friend.

"I do not know, my dear. None of us can tell; but this we all do know, that if we trust our dear ones to the only Power capable of taking care of them, we have done all that is possible towards averting from them any danger, either real or fancied. Have you given Violet into this keeping?"

"No. I have done nothing that I ought to have done since we came home. Almeria arrived directly after. And she made me feel so wicked that I have hardly even pretended to say my prayers since. What is the use of my asking to be forgiven as I forgive her? I don't forgive her at all, or my husband either. And yet I must if I am to be forgiven myself, people say."

"People say a great deal they do not understand; and the time has not yet come for you to forgive others. But it is now that you should ask protection for your child. And, remember, you would be as powerless to keep her from evil in

your own arms, as you are here, if a stronger than yourself be permitted to harm her. Pray, my dear child, for yourself and her. Pray and trust."

But Eleanor did nothing but weep and lament, until at last she slept from pure exhaustion.

And Mrs. MacMahon, meeting her husband at dinner—for which meal she would not have the sleeper aroused—detailed to him the particulars of their conversation, observing as she finished, "I fear the real troubles of Eleanor's married life have only just begun. As yet she has suffered passively; but she has now to find out the greatest pain of active warfare between good and evil; and unless she is quite changed, she will fight to the end for the former."

CHAPTER IX.

A WEEK of Eleanor's exile had passed away, and under the soothing care and kind sympathy of the MacMahons she had grown almost patient in her enforced absence from her home and child, of whose safe arrival a post-card had given her information.

Sir John had chosen this method of relieving her anxiety, because it precluded all possibility of the use of any affectionate terms, without committing him to the unpleasantness of intentionally withholding everything of the kind, as he must have done in a letter, had he addressed his wife as he really felt towards her at present. And he was far too rigid in his ideas of propriety, fortunately for all concerned, to give any opportunity for remark by desiring the nurse to let Lady Mowbray know of the child's safety.

As to Violet, she and her father had only very partially recovered their good opinion of each other, each being conscious of a certain drawback in their present companionship, when they were together, which the child, however, understood better than the man. She knew, and never forgot, that it was her mother's absence which made her downstairs visits so much less delightful and unrestrained ; while Sir John, who really did exert himself as he had never before done to amuse and please his little daughter, was annoyed and perplexed to understand the cause of her unwonted dulness and changed looks—for Violet had never recovered the rosy bloom which had first been destroyed by the passionate fit of crying consequent on her uncomfortable parting from Eleanor, with its attendant miseries.

The week, as I have said, had expired which followed these events, and Sir John, as well as the dismissed nurse, were privately rejoicing over the approaching end of the term of his wife's banishment, when, as he was preparing to mount his horse one morning, a message reached him

from the nursery that Mrs. Cobbett requested an audience concerning her small charge.

She made her appearance before her master, wearing the same dignified look of aggrieved displeasure which she had assumed towards him ever since the night of their return home; but, in addition to this, it was not difficult to see that she was restraining a feeling of alarm and anxiety.

"If you please, Sir John," she began, "I should be glad to know if you have taken any steps towards appointing my successor in the care of Miss Mowbray?"

Sir John stared and hesitated, for he had almost forgotten the fact of his having given his interrogator the warning of which she thus reminded him. But before he was compelled to reply that he had thought no more on the subject, Mrs. Cobbett continued, "I ask, sir, because I think it my duty to tell you that Miss Mowbray is not well. And if my lady is not coming home soon to see about her herself, it will be necessary for me to see and explain her state to the nurse who is to take my place with the dear child."

"Her state!" repeated Sir John angrily. "What are you talking about? If there is anything the matter with Miss Mowbray say so at once, and send for the doctor; but don't humbug about in this fashion."

Mrs. Cobbett reddened with virtuous indignation at language which she had never before heard from her particular master, who had hitherto been rather afraid of her, and consequently scrupulously polite. But his recent experiences had broken down some of the habits which had been second nature in his undisturbed enjoyment of the position of the acknowledged master before whose pleasure that of every one else must give way; and he was falling into quite unpolished manners under the severe pressure of irritation without Eleanor to bear the burthen of its expression.

"Will you please to see Miss Mowbray for yourself, Sir John?" answered his calm but really angry servant, with more assumed politeness than he felt at his own command. "You can then order what you think fit to be

done." And inwardly bewailing his unhappy lot, Violet's father followed her nurse to the room in which she was lying in the arms of the girl who attended on her and Mrs. Cobbett, and who had been left in charge of her during the temporary absence of the latter.

When Sir John entered, the child, who, to him, only looked pale and heavy, roused herself to take notice of his equipment for riding, and to play idly with his whip, while he asked her how she was, and if she wanted anything, or if her head ached. To all these questions she said, "No," until, hearing her father say to the nurse, as he turned to leave the room, "I don't see anything much the matter; but you had better send for Mr. Brown," she exclaimed, "Not Mr. Brown—mamma; I want mamma," and then began to cry in a subdued and pitiful tone, which occasioned Sir John to make good his escape without further delay, and the nurse privately to shake her fist at him, with the remark, "You're a nice sort of gentleman, you are, to keep the poor child away from her mamma,"

and then to take her nursling on her lap, and hush her tears with promises "that mamma would soon come."

Now, when Mrs. Cobbett and Eleanor were together, the former not seldom, from the height of her superior admiration for fashion and its accompanying requirements, looked down with something like contempt on her undignified mistress, but she was really attached to her, as well as to her child, and in the prospect of her own probable departure, and the sight of Violet's compulsory abduction from her mother, all her sympathy, apart from her own feelings, was given to them, while Sir John, whom she had heretofore regarded as "a nice, civil-spoken gentleman," was degraded to the level of any ordinary man who dared to interfere in matters that did not concern one with a wife.

So the day wore on, and when Mr. Brown arrived, he naturally, after seeing his small patient, at whom he looked very gravely, requested to speak to Lady Mowbray.

"She is not here, sir," replied Mrs. Cobbett.

"Not here!" echoed the doctor; "then she ought to be. Where is she, my good woman?" he added, drawing Mrs. Cobbett aside, for Violet was lying half asleep on the bed in which she always slept. "Do you know what I fear for the child?"

"I can guess, sir, because I have my own fears," answered the nurse.

"But why? Where has she been?" asked the doctor anxiously.

"Well, sir, you see, we have been staying away at one or two places, and in these country villages you're never safe; but I don't wish to say that any one could have helped it."

By which remark she, of course, informed Mr. Brown that she not only knew that her little charge was sickening with scarlet fever, but that she also knew how she had taken it, and believed that she had been needlessly put in the way of doing so.

Mr. Brown, who was not quite such a gossip as the rural medical fraternity usually are, made no reply. However, he wrote a note, to be given to

Sir John the moment he returned; directed the nurse how to proceed until his next visit in the evening, and departed, saying to himself—

"What can be the matter there? Not want of love to the child on Lady Mowbray's part, surely!" In which conclusion he was right; but as Sir John and his wife had only just returned to Dunmore Hall, Mr. Brown had, as yet, had no opportunity of judging for himself "what was the matter," beyond the patent present fact that Lady Mowbray was from home, her child ill, and the nurse apparently without thought or means of recalling her. "Very odd," he repeated to himself more than once; but in his profession he was always meeting with "odd" things which were beyond even his power to set straight and make even, so he wisely turned his thoughts to the ailments which he could occasionally cure, and forgot the oddity of Lady Mowbray's absence from home, until he found himself once more at Dunmore Hall.

When that happened, Sir John had been home some time, and was dining in solitary state in a

most uncomfortable phase of mind. He was distressed to find the child pronounced to be really ill, although the nurse, for her own reasons, withheld the information of the nature of her impending illness, leaving it to Mr. Brown to impart when he saw fit; and he was really in such a doubtful condition about Eleanor, and the propriety of sacrificing his pride to the exigency of the occasion, by re-calling her before the time named by himself to her, that all his married fraternity of like mental calibre would have felt the greatest commiseration for him, and that no punishment could be too bad for a wife who had placed her lord and master in such a disagreeable position. Besides which, Sir John felt a curious unwillingness to allow that Violet could need her mother really, and he was determined to wait, at least, as long as possible before allowing that it was so.

But when the doctor, on his return from the nursery, gravely assured him that the true nature of the complaint was now rapidly developing itself, and that the child showed symptoms of an

unusually severe attack of the disease, asking, at the same time, why he had not been summoned sooner, our much aggrieved acquaintance began to recognise the fact that he had vindicated his claim to obedience at too great a price for his own comfort and pride—for now it was unavoidable that he must not only recall the wife, whose imploring request to be allowed to return with him he had refused so lately, but he must also own, by so doing, that he had proved himself unequal to that care of their child which he had recklessly insisted on being yielded to him, and, worst of all, of owning by implication that his despised other half was of more use than his own honoured portion of the married unity between them, in some circumstances of life.

As Mr. Brown dilated with anxious eyes on Violet's impending danger, we may be sure he felt almost as much curiosity as anxiety to know where was Lady Mowbray, and why was no mention made of her return. But Sir John was not a man to let others know from himself of any discomfiture he might privately sustain,

and having nothing agreeable in explanation of his wife's absence to say, he said nothing at all about her, and would have gladly got rid of the doctor without any allusion to her, had not the latter, just as he was leaving, turned back to say—

"You will, of course, let Lady Mowbray know of the child's illness?"

To which Sir John replied only with a stiff bow, and an impatient "of course," in a tone which really meant, "I shall do as I think best. Lady Mowbray's absence or presence is of no consequence to you."

So poor Mr. Brown, having done his best for the sick child, and as yet unknown mother, drove away, feeling very glad that he was not the latter individual, and his mental comment on Sir John was, "Proud fool! a little trouble would do him good; but I am sorry for the poor mother," by which we may gather that Mr. Brown thought badly of Violet.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE these untoward events were passing in the married life of Almeria's late correspondent, she also had been, in a lesser degree, feeling the evil effects of that short period of amusement and gratified pride which her own visit to Dunmore Hall and Sir John's subsequent stay in London had afforded her ; and could either of these selfish people have foreseen what of trouble and annoyance was to fall on their shoulders as their share of these effects, they would probably have thought as others did—and do still in similar cases—that they had got very little of value, compared with the price they had eventually to pay for it.

Almeria, indeed, was in one sense even more

uncomfortable and disappointed in the result of her imaginary pleasure, now among those of the past, than the gentleman who had ministered to her vanity, while he intended only to stimulate his wife's; for had she not been betrayed by wilfulness into the folly of writing according to the style of conversation into which they had insensibly glided? And was it not the fact that she had, as yet, received no answer to her sentimental complaints and invitation?

Surely this was a greater trial of her pride than had befallen Sir John when he first faced the fact that he would have to offer to his wife, unsought by her, the right he had denied her when she had asked it at his hands. But so it was; and all Almeria's indignant feelings were as much wasted, except in making herself uncomfortable, as had been her husband's unavailing endeavours to satisfy her with the devotion of his time and life to her.

In vain she wearied herself with conjectures as to the cause of the neglect her missive had received, and the probability of its having

altogether failed to reach its destination. She dared not, of course, seek her husband's aid in ascertaining this, and her pride would not suffer her to remind Sir John that she was expecting an answer to her foolish communication; but, nevertheless, Almeria was more really troubled by this apparent trifle than she had been at the sight of her husband's late distress, or than she yet was by a certain but indescribable change which had passed over their mutual relations to each other. Frederick Leslie had never restored his wife to the place from which she fell, when he saw her for the first time as she really was, and not as he had fondly imagined her. He did not resent on her his own disappointment, nor did he weakly intrude it on her notice, and so work on her vanity to offer him a pretended for a real love. He bore his own pain in ceasing to be able to adore her, as he had formerly borne that of seeing his adoration despised, and his tenderness slighted as a thing of no value. He still offered her any companionship in her drives, or

protection in her walks, which, as her husband, Almeria had a right to claim from him, but he was evidently relieved, rather than displeased, when she declined both, and while he never forgot the patience and politeness which even a bad wife has a right to expect from one who should be her guide and counsellor, he never now wasted upon her the outward marks of a love which had been as long-suffering once as it was now apparently impossible to revive.

Not many days after the scene with his wife, which destroyed in him all belief of her sincerity towards him in the past, or hope in the future, his attention was accidentally drawn to a gentleman who was studying the same painting of which he himself was engaged in making a copy. The ice once broken by the interchange of a trifling act of politeness and its acknowledgment, the two men grew from this small beginning to a certain amount of intimacy; and finding in each other's views of life and people, an interest which opened up by degrees many subjects of more than passing importance, it fell out, that

by degrees an opportunity arose which brought to Mr. Gordon's observation the undoubted fact that his younger friend bore a heavier heart within, than so prosperous a man as he was outwardly had naturally a right to possess.

Mr. Gordon remembered, too, that long before they had formed their present acquaintance, he had observed the bright look and hopeful countenance, which had in a great measure deserted his companion, and he was not long in finding an occasion for ascertaining the cause of this change.

But he felt no curiosity, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. As it is only those who have never suffered bodily, who delight in hearing of and dwelling upon the details of other people's miseries from physical causes, so it is only those who have never known the pain of mental distress and spiritual affliction who are inquisitive concerning the causes which have brought others into a state they regard with a certain amount of interest as a subject for conversation or speculation, but for which they have not an atom of real

sympathy, and which they would not move a finger or give a shilling to relieve.

Such people as these abound everywhere in this selfish world; but Mr. Gordon was not one of them.

He had been deeply immersed in the knowledge of pain of all kinds himself, and while he anxiously looked for signs betraying the neighbourhood of those who had shared his lot in suffering, it was simply with the desire of imparting some of that comfort and strength which had raised him to a height of calm content, as far above the ordinary run of the minds of men, as his body was inferior in physical power and beauty. For he was a dwarf in stature, and plain to ugliness in face. Yet Frederick Leslie, in his strength and open manliness of beauty, was as much attracted by the conversation of this otherwise unattractive companion, as the latter to him, by his admiration for what was denied to himself.

It was not often that religion formed the topic of Mr. Gordon's conversation, however, with any

one, and never as yet with Frederick Leslie, and yet the latter was fully aware that it was the mainspring of his friend's life, and the source of his calm acceptance of a lot repulsive to the younger man to contemplate, even while he liked the man to whom it belonged.

The latter never spoke of religion, as I have said, because he regarded it as a state in which we ought to live, and not as a thing to be talked about, like an illness, which we may or may not have, or as a thing which we may or may not bring into our lives, according to our circumstances or our pleasure; but it was so evidently the atmosphere in which his own life was cast, that it drew Frederick Leslie, among many others, to lay before him what he would have carefully concealed from any spiritual pastor of his acquaintance, as well as from his most worldly companions; so, by degrees, Mr. Gordon found out that life had failed to satisfy the young man who sat beside him, in the possession of youth, health, strength, and sufficient riches, equally with himself, who had none of these.

Now Mr. Gordon was fortunately as wise in his way of suggesting help to those who seemed to him to need it, as he was anxious to offer it where it was likely to be accepted; therefore he suffered no allusion to pass his lips to the discovery he had made of Frederick Leslie's dissatisfaction with life, as here arranged, until he said plainly one day—

"I used to think that all trouble was a fellow's own fault, but I know better now. I expect I shall end by becoming a fatalist."

"Not unless you are a greater fool than you seem," replied Mr. Gordon calmly, and the subject dropped for the time, but was shortly renewed by the younger man enquiring—

"Why should a fatalist deserve to be classed as a fool, Mr. Gordon, in your opinion? I have known much wiser heads than mine who profess to have no creed but fatalism, and," he added bitterly, "it seems to answer quite as well as anything else."

"It answers its own purpose, no doubt," replied his friend.

"And what is that?" asked Mr. Leslie, with some curiosity.

"It keeps those who believe in it sufficiently comfortable for the time to make them satisfied with its falsehood, so that they shall not concern themselves to find its enemy."

"Its enemy?" questioningly repeated his fellow student.

"Yes, its enemy—Truth," answered the elder man, continuing his painting as if his whole soul was absorbed in it.

"Well," rejoined Frederick Leslie, after a pause, "if it is falsehood I should be sorry to believe it, but all I know is that the creed I have already tried hasn't answered. I am quite sure of that much," and his bright honest face clouded with the remembrance of the facts which had convinced him of this.

"What *is* your creed, may I ask?" and Mr. Gordon looked for the first time at his companion, as if he were more interested in him than in the picture before him.

"To love some one better than myself," replied

Frederick Leslie, with an evident effort and the bashfulness of a girl.

"And a very good creed too, my dear fellow; so good that it is the only one I know of which lands you in the right one," said his friend, with energy and a ring of satisfaction in his tone.

"It doesn't answer, though, for a fellow's own happiness, I can tell you," grimly replied Almeria's unfortunate husband.

"How old are you?" suddenly asked Mr. Gordon, apparently unheeding his last remark.

Frederick Leslie laughed, as he replied—

"Old enough to have been wiser than I have been. I have been an inhabitant of this special globe, I believe, for thirty years, and have not yet found out what I was put here for, except to worry other people and be worried by them in turn."

"Well, I am your senior by fifteen years, and I have made the discovery that I was put here for the exact reverse of that pleasant occupation," said Mr. Gordon, with a twinkle of his small bright eyes, which greatly detracted from his natural plainness.

"Ah, *you* may find that an easy matter, but I don't, you see," replied Mr. Leslie, painting away in his turn with desperate industry; "so I've had to give it up, and I don't mean to try it again in a hurry."

"If I were you I wouldn't be in a hurry about anything," answered his neighbour.

"I am not, that I know of," retorted the younger student, with some surprise and irritation.

"Oh, I thought you said just now that you had only found out as yet that you were sent here to worry, and *vice versa*, and as you had tried the reverse and given it up before that, and are yet only thirty years old, it appeared to me that you had been making extraordinary haste in your experiments; too much so, I should say, to give you a chance of knowing anything really with any certainty;" and Mr. Gordon rose and prepared to collect his goods, before taking his departure.

As he did so, Mr. Leslie rose also, and saying, "I will walk with you, if you don't mind," the two men pursued together their way and conversation.

Once out of the view of his companion, Frederick Leslie felt he could better seek the wisdom he perceived the former was possessed of, to his comfort in the midst of unusual trial, and risk the chance of not altogether concealing the secret of his own discontent, while he was apparently free from the commonest form of trouble—for his real skeleton, Almeria, was of course regarded by all but himself as what she ought to have been, but decidedly was not, his crown and the centre of his happiness.

"You are older than myself," he said, after a few minutes' silence, "and I can see you have thought more about things than most of us do; I don't think I am a bad fellow exactly, but I know very little about religion, and what I do know—well, if I am to be honest, I must say, I don't care about it; but I wish to do right, and not altogether for my own sake. Only it is so confoundedly hard to know what is right. Tell me your creed of right and wrong, Mr. Gordon, if you don't mind."

"I shall be delighted," cheerily answered the individual addressed. "More especially as it is exactly like your own, which, however, I am sorry to hear you have discarded. My creed is to love some one else better than myself."

"And," asked his companion, after a pause, "if you won't think me impertinent, whom *do* you love better than yourself? I," he added, hurriedly, "have loved my wife best; you won't say that is very wrong, I presume."

"That depends upon accompanying circumstances," replied his friend. "If your wife is worthy of such love, it may be quite right, and a safe path by which to find a worthier love even than that of herself; but if she is not, you are losing time, and probably injuring her equally with your own chances of happiness. You must excuse my suggesting the latter possibility; but women are not perfect any more than men. Moreover, my friend, remember that we are nowhere told to love a fellow-creature better than ourselves—only as well."

"Yet you own to doing this very thing, and say you find it answer, if I am not mistaken in your words a minute ago," said Mr. Leslie.

"You are mistaken. I said my creed was to love some one better than myself; but that some one is not a human being like the rest of my fellow-creatures—it is Him who created me."

Frederick Leslie was dumb with astonishment. He had an idea that some very good women and saintly clergymen professed, and, perhaps, really felt, this love for a Being whom, nevertheless, he was sure they could not comprehend or know anything more of than others, seeing that He was equally invisible and mysterious to all. But when Mr. Gordon, an ordinary mortal, with no claim to be suspected of anything but common-sense and every-day acquirements, as a man, and as one of this more reasoning portion of mankind, being naturally more free than women from the sentimental bias, which is supposed so often and so wrongly to be a sign of religious feeling in and by those who display and feel it—when he boldly, but as a mere statement of a

fact about which there was no manner of doubt, professed such a love as the guiding influence of his life, it is not, perhaps, to be wondered at that his hearer's first impulse, after recovering from his surprise, was to laugh, and his next to apologise for the difficulty he felt in believing or comprehending the fact.

But Mr. Gordon accepted with equal unconcern his surprise, amusement, and doubt—only saying, "You won't offend me by anything you may think or say about what, of course, as yet, is strange to you in words. But it strikes me, Leslie, that you are nearer to it, in reality, than you know."

"I wish it might be so," said Mr. Leslie, whose momentary amusement had been followed by a conscience-stricken remembrance of his own first impulse, under the bitterness of his disappointment, when he felt that there was but One anywhere who knew his heart and saw his sufferings; and little by little he permitted his companion to see enough of his inner self to assure him that, although he knew it not, he had been

nearer in spirit to the worship of Him who created him for that express purpose, but whom he had not yet learned to acknowledge in word or thought, than the wife, who could and did profess the most reverent belief with her lips, in a Divine Master, and yet thought nothing of rejecting His counsels, while she gladly admitted the opposing influences of the evil spirit of selfishness.

"My dear Leslie," ended Mr. Gordon, as after a conversation which had lasted far beyond the intention of either, they stopped, at length, before the door of his lodging, "be sure of this, when the creature we adore, be it man, woman, or child, is placed where only the Creator should be, not only is the worshipper certain to be disappointed, but the thing worshipped is never made happy. There is a place for every one, as well as for everything; and where this order is not observed, confusion follows in the invisible region of mind and conscience, as surely as in our visible homes. Love your wife *as* yourself, and remember that she is in very deed yourself, so

that you cannot neglect or ill-treat her without injuring and degrading yourself also. But you don't need this reminder. What you do need is to avoid making her pleasure the *motive* of your life. From what I see and guess of you, I should say that you have made but one mistake, which is equally simple and important. You have had a wrong motive for your right-doing, or rather you have not recognised the necessity of a motive at all. Let your motive be obedience to the Power who created you, and you will soon understand my creed, as well as you have done your own, to your disappointment. I can promise you mine will not fail you, if you give it a fair trial. Another day we can, if you choose, speak again on this subject."

And entering the door of his lodgings, Mr. Gordon escaped, feeling that enough had been said to open Frederick Leslie's eyes as to the cause of his failure as a husband; and to lead him, if he were as honest and sincere as he appeared in his search after "right," to find wherein it lay with comparative ease.

And Mr. Gordon was not mistaken. But it was not till after many such conversations as the above, and much troubled questioning in his own mind, and doubts which, as his friend assured him, only his own experience could allay, and turn to a settled conviction or faith, that Frederick Leslie gradually learned to believe that duty, however carefully performed, brings no reward unless it is rendered primarily to the right Master. What he called that Master to himself, I know not, but, taught by his friend to see that amongst the many true and false prophets of the world, none but *One* ever really and systematically abjured self, *for no other came for that purpose,* although many yielded willing obedience when it was *required* of them; he owned at last that the great Creator of the world had not left us without such an embodiment of His power, wisdom, and love as to convict us of wilful and self-inflicted darkness and doubt in refusing as His Type the Spirit which dwelt within Him whom men call "Jesus."

CHAPTER XI.

ADRIANA (now Mrs. Davenport) waited patiently after Sir John Mowbray had taken his leave, for news of Eleanor. But when a week passed and not a line reached her, she became uneasy, and took the resolution of writing herself to ask if all were well. Her only difficulty arose from uncertainty where to address a letter; but she finally did so to Dunmore Hall, feeling tolerably sure that her cousin must have returned there; for it naturally had not occurred to her to doubt her power to do so. The letter arrived, and was put aside by Sir John, the very morning of Mr. Brown's visit. But when he had finally left, it occurred to Eleanor's discomfited husband to open and read it, which, contrary to his usual custom, he proceeded to do, deriving from its con-

tents little that was satisfactory to himself as an injured man; although its arrival recalled to him a sense of relief, by pointing out a means of letting his wife know of Violet's illness, without compromising his own dignity by telling her of it. At once, therefore, he sat down and indited the following epistle to Mrs. Davenport, whom he had learned to regard as a relative during the time which preceded his engagement to Eleanor:

"DEAR ADA,

"Your cousin is still away from home, making a lengthened stay with the MacMahons. Perhaps you may wish to write to her there; if you do so, please let her know that Violet is not well. If she is aware of this it may probably hasten her return.

"Yours truly,

"J. MOWBRAY."

Now, when Sir John had written this he inwardly exulted at the escape his pride had had, through his statesmanlike treatment of the affair, from the abasement of a formal request or permission to

Eleanor to return. Poor man! He little knew how thoroughly Ada took in the whole matter at a glance, and how pitiful and mean his ungenerous lack of courage and kindness made him appear in her eyes. It is the custom to say that people who perpetrate meannesses are indifferent to what nobler natures think of them. But this is not true. They care very much to be held in more respect than they deserve, and therefore it was that Sir John made this feeble but quite futile effort to pretend to Ada that Eleanor was away on a visit for her own pleasure, and that Violet's indisposition was a trifling matter, which he, nevertheless, had sufficient consideration for his wife to mention. The only people in the world who are not anxious or troubled about its good opinion are those who, while living in it in body, are not of it in the spirit; and this could not, by any means, be said as yet of Sir John Mowbray.

As soon as Ada had read his note, she sat down and instantly enclosed it to her cousin, making no comment on it, but begging her to

write as soon as possible either from her present place of abode, or from her own home. Meantime three days had passed since Mr. Brown's first visit, it having been too late for Sir John to send his letter until the next day, and two more had been spent by it in making its way first to Ada, and from her to Eleanor; so, when the latter at last received it, she knew that her one hope and treasure had been ill three days at least; how much longer she dared not think.

She found Ada's letter and its enclosure on the breakfast table, to which she descended late and languid, after a restless night, spent like the preceding ones, since she had been separated from Violet, in anxious fears for her, and sad thoughts for herself. Mr. MacMahon had already breakfasted and gone to his study, but his wife was waiting patiently for her unwilling and yet grateful guest. As the latter tore open her letter—the only one she had received beyond the post-card from Dunmore Hall—and saw her husband's writing, she eagerly

opened his note to Ada, leaving her longer letter for after perusal, but no sooner had she read it than with a gasping cry she sprang from her seat, and holding Sir John's open note before Mrs. MacMahon, she cried in a voice whose despair was only equalled by that which looked from her eyes—

"I knew it, I knew it—oh, my Violet, I have lost you!" Then starting frantically forward, she seized Mrs. MacMahon's hand, and pressed it violently against her own heart. "My heart will burst," she said, in a low, restrained voice; "I cannot bear it."

"My dear, my dear," exclaimed her now terrified companion, "be reasonable; your child is not dead, nor perhaps even ill; besides, you may return, you see, if you choose, at once to her. You will be with her to-night, and then you will laugh at your excited fears."

"Oh no," replied Eleanor, in the same quiet voice which contrasted strangely with her late violent action, "I shall not, but it is not with grief I feared my heart would burst; it was,

it is, with *hate*," and she pressed her hand to her side, while again her face became a mirror wherein the passionate fire within was reflected all too clearly.

"Poor child, you are overdone, and know not what you say," gently argued Mrs. Mac Mahon.

"I do know," almost fiercely answered Eleanor —"I know that I hate my husband; the man who has never cared for me except so far as I ministered to his fancies of the moment, and who has taken from me the only thing I cared for. Oh, Mrs. MacMahon," she added, "hate is a dreadful pain, and what will cure it in my case?" and she broke down again into the bitter weeping, which to others appeared so disproportioned to its cause.

"Why do you refuse to believe that your husband has not really injured you to the extent you imagine, my dear Eleanor?" asked her friend anxiously. "Are you withholding from me any knowledge you have of probable danger to the child, from which your presence could

have saved her? Do you distrust your nurse, or any one else, about Violet?"

"No, oh no," replied Eleanor, "I have no real reason, but yet I cannot hope; something has told me all along that she would be taken from me. I have felt so certain of it, that I have not even been able to pray that she might be left to me. But," she cried, rousing herself with sudden energy, "why am I losing all this time? I may, at any rate, see her again, and you, dear good friends, must forgive me all the trouble I have been to you."

Mrs. MacMahon made no reply, but hastening to her husband's study, as Eleanor flew upstairs, having refused even to taste any breakfast, she there conferred with him for a few minutes, at the end of which time she, too, hastened to her room, and summoning a servant, had soon packed a small bag with necessaries, and presented herself ready dressed for travelling just as Eleanor opened her door to announce that she was prepared to start.

After a sad but hurried leave-taking of Mr.

MacMahon, who attempted no consolation but that of silent sympathy, the two ladies went on their way together; the one almost as much oppressed by anxiety for her companion, as the latter was by anticipation of the sorrow in store for her. Yet neither gave any further expression to her feelings, Mrs. MacMahon inwardly seeking that wisdom which she knew she should need ere long as Eleanor's counsellor in her conduct towards her husband, and that husband's unhappy wife using all her remaining energy to keep in abeyance what she felt, by which she succeeded in gaining an outward coldness which to her companion's eye was more distressing, because more unnatural, even than her former exaggerated excitement.

When at last the carriage which they had hired at the station nearest to Dunmore Hall, stopped before the principal entrance, Lady Mowbray's agitation was so excessive that she was hardly able to stand, much less to speak, but Mrs. Mac Mahon interposed to ask for her, what she was

unable to do for herself, of the young footman who appeared to answer the coachman's ring.

"How is the child? Lady Mowbray fears she is ill," thus, wise woman as she was, unconsciously betraying to a member of the servant's hall in Sir John's establishment, the certainty of the suspicions already aroused in that august assembly, that all was not well between Sir John any "my lady."

The young man's face, which had turned pale, in addition to his already grave and concerned look, was sufficient answer without the hesitating reply—

"I—I don't know quite, ma-am—my lady, I mean," looking at Eleanor, whose eyes horrified him with their changed expression and suppressed look of terror.

So, waiting to hear no more, but leaving him to settle accounts with the driver, and clinging for support to Mrs. MacMahon, while she dragged her upstairs and in the direction of the nurseries, Eleanor in less than two minutes stood again within view of her child, taking in the

assurance at the same moment that she had not been deceived in her fears regarding her.

The room was changed in all its aspects, the carpet being gone, the curtains and bed furniture vanished, the nurse's dismantled bed pushed into a distant corner, while Violet's stood alone; and round it were grouped Mrs. Cobbett, Sir John, Mr. Brown, and a stranger, which last individual was a physician, whose aid had been called in, only in time to certify that his less renowned brother practitioner had done all he could himself have done.

But Eleanor saw none of these. Her eyes flew to the little bed on which lay the hardly recognisable face and form of the little fighting, struggling child, who had been taken from her ten days ago; and it seemed as if she had no power to withd raw them. In an instant she was beside the dying treasure of her heart, pushing aside she knew not whom, and paying no attention whatever to the varied exclamations of relief, sympathy, and surprise given vent to by those already in the room. She turned her back upon

them all, and gathering the poor baby into her arms, murmured—

"Oh, Violet, my darling, my darling, look at mamma." Then, as no answer met her prayer, either by word or look, she turned for a moment as if searching for some one, and as her eyes met those they sought—her husband's—she said, with a fixed expression of the most unmitigated hate, but in a strangely subdued voice, "You have had your share of her—leave her to me." As no one replied or moved, she repeated again, "Leave her to me, I say, if you don't want to drive me mad—unless," she added, turning to the two men whose profession she guessed, "you can do anything more to save her." But they had no need to answer by words; their sorrowful and pitying looks assured her that Violet's little life was ended here; and holding her still closely to her she urged them so imploringly to leave her alone with the child that they reluctantly did so, Sir John accompanying them under pretence of seeing after their due refreshment.

But Lady Mowbray's expression of face when she addressed him, as well as her words, had given the two doctors an insight into another of those family secrets which it so often falls to their lot to unravel; and if only they were all honourable and kind-hearted men, as so many of them are, it would not matter, as it does sometimes, that such knowledge cannot always be kept from them.

When Eleanor was left alone with the now unconscious child, and Mrs. MacMahon and the nurse, she continued to kneel in silence by the bed, embracing still the changed and fading form which she felt with agonising pain was no longer her Violet. The little soul within was already so far on its way out of the earthly covering which had hitherto concealed it from the sight of its more lasting and spiritual habitation, that it knew not the pain alone possible now, had she been permitted to hear her mother's despairing voice, and to have seen her grief-stricken face; and yet the Good Shepherd, who, as yet not fully seen by her,

was leading His little one gently through the dark valley to the green fields and flowery pastures of the Paradise beyond, was as mindful of the mother's cry for comfort from her child, as of that beloved one's safety in His care; and though He suffered not the lovely vision now dawning on her baby sight, to be clouded by the call or view of earthly sorrow, He yet gave a portion of her coming joy to the longing gaze of her who must be left behind for a time in the darkness and desolation of her loss. For as Eleanor, though speechless, yet ceased not to call on her child to return to her, if but for a moment, and to implore God to give her yet one conscious sign of her darling's existence, suddenly the glazed and vacant eyes opened wide, with an earnest and delighted look, and over the baby face there rippled a laughing smile, while the tiny wasted hand was raised in feeble but evident desire to point forward to the object of delight.

"Thank God," said Eleanor, "she is conscious."

But as she spoke, the hand fell, the eyes closed, the smile faded, and over the little face fell the unspeakable look, the inexplicable change, which says to those who watch the departure of the dying, "I am away, seek me here no longer."

For one instant Eleanor gazed in confused uncertainty at the now silent and motionless form before her, then as Mrs. Cobbett suddenly burst into natural and long-restrained weeping, Mrs. MacMahon laid her hand on her young and sorrow-stricken friend, and while her own tears fell fast, said—

"The Lord gave her, Eleanor, and He has taken her back again."

"No," cried the poor bereaved mother, as she saw it was only too plain that her child was gone from her, "it is not the Lord; it is the cruelty of man which has done this, and it is mockery to bid me submit with resignation when my heart is broken with undeserved sorrow, which God has *not* sent. Do not speak to me," she continued wildly, "you cannot comfort, and every

word hardens me against him whose work it is. Cobbett," she added, turning to the nurse, "you loved her, and you could not help this, I know; don't tell me anything yet, but while I can do it, help me to lay her so that no one else shall need to touch her. She is mine now, at any rate, no one else shall see her even. But oh, my baby, my darling, you are not mine, for you are gone, and I can never find you again;" and to the great relief of her companions, Eleanor burst into such a violent passion of tears, that she was soon too much exhausted to speak or move. She watched the nurse, who with tender hands, and aided by Mrs. MacMahon, laid the senseless baby form in pure and snow white array, meet for the reverent keeping of that innocent clothing, unstained by any deed of wilful sin, which had been known as the only child of Sir John and Eleanor Lady Mowbray, and when the last fond touch was given, and Violet as she had been, lay ready for the cradle in which her left-off garment of the flesh should find its last and long repose within the grave, then, and then only, with gentle violence

did her faithful friend and servant force the sinking mother to her bed of suffering; for Eleanor had succumbed, mercifully to herself, to the same illness of which she and her child had caught the infection at the same moment and from the same cause. But she did not know this, or anything else, for some three weeks after Violet had entered the dwelling of the Heavenly Parent, and all signs were cleared away of her short sojourn with her earthly ones; and during that time, Mrs. Mac Mahon gathered from the nurse such details as enabled her to appease in a measure the bitter self-reproach of Violet's father. He, poor man, with all his petty faults and foolish pride, was not so blamable as his wife believed him; and while he could not now forgive himself for his harsh treatment of Eleanor, and heedless denial of her comforting presence to his child in her sickness and death, he was not, as the nurse alone well knew throughout, in any way responsible for the fatal illness which made him a childless man; for it was in the hurried and mistaken journey from Charlton Rectory to her old home, that

Eleanor and her child both caught the disease so fatal to the latter. In the same railway carriage there travelled with them a nurse and child, the latter too recently recovered from scarlet fever to be a safe neighbour, but Violet, taking a fancy to a doll carried by her little fellow traveller, the two children were permitted by the inexperienced Eleanor to play together, and it was not until they had been too near for security that Mrs. Cobbett detected in the roughened state of the skin, the unmistakable signs of recovery from infectious fever, in her little charge's temporary playmate. Not daring to alarm Eleanor, she yet addressed a few questions to the child's nurse, the answers to which assured her of the truth of her conjectures, and thus it was that the nurse had in a measure known all along the impending fate of her beloved nursling, while yet she was powerless to avert it, and unusually hampered by difficulties as to her own action.

All this Mrs. MacMahon thought it her duty to detail to Sir John, whose grief was almost as excessive as his wife's, and while he suffered her

without contradiction to impress on him his want of kindness, and hardness towards unintentional failings, and listened to her assurance of the honesty of will and purpose to please him, with which Eleanor had married him, he owned that he had not deserved her love, and at his little daughter's grave prayed for the first time in his life, with any reality, that the wife who had soothed his sorrow formerly for another woman, might be restored to him, to learn that he was not so deficient in love towards herself as she had hitherto found or fancied him.

Thus already, the loss of her dearest object was preparing for the unconscious Eleanor the way of peace with him whom she now abhorred.

But days and nights had spread over three more weeks before she revived to life sufficiently to know that she was still a wife, but not a mother, and to cry in silence to an ever impartial but most pitying Judge, "How shall I live the life before me, made desolate by Thee?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE summer had waned, and autumn was far advanced ere Eleanor Mowbray was sufficiently recovered to be removed from home for change of air and scene. At first she strenuously refused to go, or to leave for any other the place where her child was buried. From her bedroom window she could see the spot, the little church and beautifully planted surrounding graveyard, standing, as long ago described, within the grounds belonging to Dunmore Hall, and although every object about the place recalled the memory of the last few months of her darling's life, she felt as if she should nowhere else recover even the smallest interest again in her own, for here, at least, she could look forward to the only one apparently

before her, that of visiting and tending the little grave which held all she had loved most dearly, and still wept for unresignedly.

It was long before the nurse, by Mrs. Mac Mahon's direction, ventured to set before her the truth as regarded the means by which infection had been conveyed to Violet and herself, but after the first burst of renewed grief over her fatal mistake had wearied itself out, it was a comfort to her generous nature to feel that it was her own folly quite as much as her husband's severity which had deprived them both of a child; and softened by the suffering which lost half its bitterness under this discovery, Eleanor consented at last to see her husband, and to own that he alone was not to blame for the trouble that had befallen them—indeed, correctly speaking, he had no hand whatever in the matter, except that the continued fretting of the child for her mother had predisposed her to yield herself an easier victim to that most malignant form of the disease which had been communicated to her blood.

The meeting between the husband and wife, though far more kindly than either could have supposed possible a month previously—for Sir John was left in no doubt, or any one else about her either, of the nature of his wife's sentiments for and accusations against him, revealed in the ravings of delirium—still greatly distressed and tried them both. Sir John was shocked at Eleanor's appearance, and inwardly vowed that no word or act of his in the future should risk again the consequences, which he had little calculated on in the past, as the result of his selfish but not intentionally unkind conduct. Whatever beauty his wife had promised or possessed in his eyes was, so far as he could see, completely gone. But he knew this was the just reward for the unworthy means he had taken, not to improve her for her own sake, but for the gratification of his vanity only; and he accepted the fate he saw before him in the future, of a man who coveting beauty and grace as the highest desiderata in a wife, sees himself the owner of one who has neither.

Of course Sir John was premature in thus deciding against any probable return of Eleanor's good looks; but in this he was like the rest of us, who go from the extreme of determination to secure a thing at all risks—Almeria had found the risk Sir John had ventured on—to the other of hopeless acceptance of its impossibility to attain, as soon as we see the ill-effects of our over-anxious exertions in the attempt; besides which, Eleanor was materially and, in some respects, lastingly altered for the worse in looks. Yet her husband penitently resolved that he would never again seek her improvement, having learned, happily, to distrust his power and office as a trainer and director of a woman's nature. Eleanor, on her part, though generously thankful to feel that he did not deserve the intense bitterness of her first indignation against him, was yet conscious of a deep-rooted feeling of indifference—even if of nothing worse, and sometimes indifference makes all association with the person for whom we feel it as painful and wearisome as actual dislike. So she was thankful when Sir John, having sat a few minutes

beside her holding the hand which she neither gave nor withdrew, offered to retire for fear of fatiguing her. But as he rose for the purpose, receiving from her no encouragement to remain, she collected her thoughts from their aimless wandering after her vanished treasure, and, with a sudden effort, requested her husband to resume his place beside her.

"Sit down, John," she said; "I will not keep you long, for I am tired; but I have something to tell you. When you left me under Mr. Mac Mahon's care"—here she struggled for a moment to check the tears which rose at the mention of a circumstance so fatal to her married peace, and to her happiness as a mother, and then continued—"you left behind you—by accident, of course—two notes, one sealed and directed to Almeria, the other open and addressed to you from her. These were packed up by Mr. MacMahon's servant when I left the lodgings for the vicarage. I never saw or knew of their existence till last week; when Cobbett brought them to me among other articles which she was

collecting to burn for fear of infection. As I had never touched them, I knew they could not hurt those to whom they belonged; but it struck me that you had doubtless forgotten to send your own note, and that it could only renew a painful subject to no purpose to speak of it now. I therefore directed Cobbett to burn Almeria's note to you and to post yours to her; only telling her that, although forgotten, and probably of no consequence, it had better go."

Sir John made no reply to this long explanation, which had evidently fatigued and tried his wife, so, after a minute, she roused herself to add, "I did what I thought most right and fair by you; and, of course, you understand that no one read Almeria's note to you;" and Eleanor sank back in her chair, anxious for her husband to go; but no longer dreading, as she used to do, his rebuke, or caring for his praise.

"Why have you told me this now," he said at last, "instead of sending me the notes at the time?"

"At first I thought to have said nothing at all

about it, but now I think it more fair to tell you of my unintentional knowledge of your correspondence," replied his wife wearily and coldly.

"Do you mind it now that you do know of it?" asked Sir John in a curiously anxious tone.

"No," she said, "not as I did once. It does not hurt me, but," after a moment's hesitation, "it does not make you more worthy of respect in my eyes."

"Eleanor!" exclaimed her husband, with more energy and earnestness than she had ever seen in him, "believe me if you will or not, I declare to you that there was no harm in Almeria's note worse than folly, and my own was intended to repress even that. Your cousin must have been well punished for the false sentiment of her's by my unintentional silence. But even as it is, I had no intention of being drawn into any further mistake, regarding you, by her."

"I do not understand you," answered Eleanor, with heightened colour. "What had I to do with

your admiration for Almeria and her shameful preference of you to her own husband?"

"Only the foolish hope of stimulating you, by my admiration of your cousin, to imitate her in some things," replied Sir John, with extraordinary humility and unwonted truthfulness.

Lady Mowbray smiled scornfully as she said, "One so ignorant as you about women, and the way to manage them, should be careful how you try to do so. You would have found me a very impracticable pupil in learning that lesson."

"I know it," he said, so quietly and dejectedly that Eleanor turned to look at him. His face was pale and careworn, and showed unmistakable signs of recent suffering, and his lip was working with emotion—whether of pain or annoyance she could not tell. But, at any rate, he was doing his best to control it. And Eleanor, forgetting for one instant that she did not love him, and never meant to do so, put her hand out and, to her astonishment, found his head lying on her shoulder the next moment, while the proud, reserved man, who had turned coldly from the sight

of her own tears, suffered his to fall unchecked before her, as he spoke the entreaty—

"Forgive me, dear, even if you cannot love me."

"I will—I do," she answered, "as God, I pray, forgives me." And then it dawned upon her that Mrs. MacMahon had bidden her wait, when she had expressed the impossibility of her forgiveness of this man, whom now she forgave so freely and easily to herself—expressing no horror at her words, but only telling her the time for proving them had not come. And now it had come and passed. And though Violet was dead, and all her future life darkened by the fact, yet she had forgiven, and even felt she almost loved, the husband who had so harshly dealt with her. "Why was it? Was it only weakness—or excited feeling?" she questioned with herself. Let Mrs. MacMahon answer her.

But, first, we must return to look over that lady's shoulder as she reads the following letter from her friend and pupil now, as she was formerly:—

"My dearest Mrs. MacMahon,

"You need no assurance of my solitary and sad feelings without you. But it would be a poor return for your kindness and devotion to tell you nothing but what is disagreeable to hear. Yesterday I saw my husband for the first time. He asked me to forgive if I could not love him. I have done the first, and feel as if it were not now quite impossible that I may some day accomplish the rest. But tell me, if you can, how is it that I have changed so suddenly? It is so strange to me that I should have done so, that I fear lest it should be a dream, and my old dreadful state of mind about him should return. Sometimes I feel, too, as if it ought, and as if I have been too hasty to be sincere. We have settled to leave this next week, to rejoin Lady Mowbray. It breaks my heart to leave my darling in her grave alone. But the doctor insists on change for me, and my husband wishes to see his mother, who writes word, through her companion, that she is not well. Everything seems so sad and dreadful now, that I am almost

relieved to find anything to be done as an unmistakable duty. Ah! if I had always done, as I think and hope I shall in the future do, my Violet might now be here. Thank Mr. MacMahon a thousand times for sparing you so long to nurse me both in body and spirit.

"Ever your grateful and attached

"ELEANOR MOWBRAY."

And this was Mrs. MacMahon's answer—

"MY DEAREST ELEANOR,

"Your letter is my best thanks for past anxiety and fatigue. Do not wonder at your present power to forgive, or fear a return of former sinful, though natural, feelings. You have forgiven your husband as God forgives us. That is, now that he wishes and asks for your pardon. It is this wish and request from those who injure us which disarms the anger and revenge of those who are the injured. And God requires nothing that is too hard for us. It is too hard for us to forgive those who injure and seek no forgiveness, as a rule. He who Himself forgives not until the sinner cries for mercy with penitence and love,

requires of his creatures only the same amount of charity and justice. For everything of God's ordaining there is a simple rule, by which, as it is kept or broken, we live in unquestioning peace or incomprehensible disturbance. And you have now found out the secret of our power, always to forgive where God demands we should, through penitence and returning love. I shall think with pleasure of you next week. The pain you speak of is a false sentiment, for Violet, dear Eleanor, is not where you shrink from leaving her—where, as in the real duty of doing as you ought to please the living, you will, I know, find your only comfort in the loss of one you now call 'dead.' Forgive the word. It has a harsh sound, because, again, it is not true. Your Violet blooms elsewhere, and her memory will bring forth sweeter blossoms in her mother's life than her presence with you, I foresee.

"Your loving friend,

"MacMahon."

Three days after the receipt of this letter, Sir John led his wife to bid farewell, for a time, to

the grave of little Violet. And, as they stood together by its side, the husband and wife, for the first time, realised the impossibility of happiness in marriage, save through mutual forbearance towards each other's failings, and silently prayed that out of the sorrowful and foolish past might arise the wisdom and peace of the future, which yet, to Eleanor at least, looked so dark, without the child she had loved too fondly to cheer and brighten it. For a few moments her tears fell freely, but as she raised her head at last, and saw the surrounding beauty of the scene, in its many-coloured autumn tints, glorified by the brilliant sunshine of a perfect October morning, she felt, involuntarily, how far lovelier and sweeter even was the Paradise of God, wherein she thoroughly believed her child was living, and of which her parting smile had given the promise; and her heart refused to indulge longer the selfish wish, "Oh, that she could return!"

As they turned slowly and reluctantly away from this first and last visit to the little resting-place, so peaceful and secure, for they were to

leave home the next morning, Eleanor said, with evident effort, "There is one question I should like to ask you, concerning the past. Is it possible that you intended to let Violet die without me, supposing that Ada had, by any accident, neglected to send me your letter? I know we were both to blame, but it is so hard to me to get over your delay, and to think that, but for Ada, I should not even have seen her."

Sir John looked round at his wife with surprise and trouble.

"Did you not come in answer to my telegram?"

"I never received any. All along I had been tortured with an instinct of danger to Violet, and it was that, John, which made me disobedient to your wishes more than anything else," replied Eleanor, "so that when I got Ada's note, enclosing yours, I seemed to know at once that she was ill, in a different way from that which you spoke of."

"My poor Eleanor," said her husband kindly, as he pressed her hand, which lay on his arm, "what a brute you must have thought me."

And, privately, conscience said to him, "So you were;" for although he had not carried his pride and obstinacy quite to the extent his wife supposed, he knew that he had done so sufficiently to deserve the loss of all claim to be considered a kind husband or a generous man; and he did not at all like the view of his share in the late transactions, which memory and conscience persisted in holding up for his inspection and instruction whenever he suffered his thoughts to dwell on the past few weeks; but as these inconvenient attendants had no claim to worry him quite to the extent hinted at by Eleanor's speech, he boldly abjured the hateful title to her, not thinking it necessary to own that he dared not do so altogether when he was alone in the company of the above-named intruders on his present peace. So, when Eleanor assented to his proposition, and did not deny that she had certainly been tempted to think him less than man, he had the satisfaction of showing her how great a mistake she had made by assuring her that he had not himself known of, or believed in, Violet's

danger till the night before her death, when it was too late to telegraph either for her or the physician. He had, however, thus written for both, and the latter having arrived in consequence, it had not occurred to him to suppose that his wife had started independently of his message. Luckily for their new-made peace, Eleanor was not disposed to make too many inquiries of him, or of herself mentally, or she might have thought that his pride had held out, as he very well knew it had, until it was too late for any concession but that which necessity forced on him. However, fortunately for her husband, as well as for herself, Lady Mowbray was beginning, as all do in the end, to lose sight of the second causes through whom our afflictions come, in her submission to the will of the First Great Cause who suffers them; and Sir John escaped, therefore, with the remark, "I am thankful to know that you did send, although too late for me to know it. I suppose Mr. MacMahon did not think it necessary to mention the arrival of your message after we had left."

And this was exactly what had happened.

CHAPTER XIII.

"ALMERIA, are you ready?" asked Mr. Leslie, one Sunday morning, when his wife, contrary to her usual custom, had not presented herself punctually—in obedience to her own will—to ensure being in her appointed seat five minutes before the commencement of the service, which she rigidly attended in all weathers, and at each repetition during the day. "Are you not coming to church?" he enquired, somewhat anxiously, as on looking in at the drawing-room door, he perceived his wife sitting near the fire in an easy-chair, with every appearance of intending to remain where she was.

"Not this morning," she answered shortly; and merely replying, "Very well, dear," without any attempt at his former lover-like de-

monstrations of anxiety and affection, Frederick Leslie quietly shut the door, and left the house alone.

The moment he was safely gone, Almeria, first muttering to herself, "What can have changed him so? He would have been wild with anxiety six months ago, and now he never even asked me if I were well or not," drew from the pocket of her dress a letter which she had received the night before, but which she ought to have had at least six weeks ago. It was Sir John's carefully worded reply to her own extremely careless and foolish note, and Almeria congratulated herself on her good fortune in having been alone when the letters were brought in the previous evening, so that her husband had had no opportunity of observing the torrent of angry shame which had dyed her whole face, as well as overflowed her inner being, at the receipt of such a curt and unsympathising note from her late companion in dangerous folly.

As she again read the disagreeable missive, she observed how tumbled and soiled it looked, and

knowing all that had taken place at Dunmore Hall connected with Violet's death, she decided, after a time, that Sir John had retained it out of forgetfulness, though much she wondered that he should eventually have sent it at all. Her object in remaining at home was a very vague one, and indeed arose from the extremely simple cause that she did not feel inclined to go to church; and as she attended to the forms of religion from exactly the same cause that she did or did not do everything else, viz., because it suited herself to do one or the other, so it gave her no concern now to neglect them on this special Sunday, when she felt too much aggrieved by things in general, and by Sir John Mowbray in particular, to be equal to the self-restraint necessary during the hour and a half occupied by morning service.

She, therefore, remained at home, and although her thoughts were in no way different from what they would have been had she been outwardly occupied in the public service of the church to which she professed to belong, they led her to no more satisfactory conclusion than if she had been

in her accustomed place, so that all she had gained by the time her husband returned, was an uninterrupted space wherein to exercise her private disgust at the termination of her summer's amusement, and to assure herself of a feeling of contempt and dislike towards Sir John Mowbray, quite as strong and real as her former fancied and sentimental liking for him.

Nevertheless, this was no satisfactory or happy result of an idle morning's occupation, even to herself; especially as she saw no chance of impressing on the guilty man the depressing fact that she no longer cared for him, and feeling naturally dull and dispirited by the present turn which events seemed to be taking in her life, she found herself actually wishing for her husband's return quite ten minutes before it took place. He did not, however, ascend to disturb her meditations, only meeting her at the luncheon-table with his usual kindness, quite liberated now from his former anxious watchfulness of her every word and look; the consequence being, that as he ceased to offer Almeria his devotion, she began

to observe him with greater interest, first from astonishment, and then from a vague sense of injury in the possibility of his being less concerned than formerly in anything connected with her.

Not having been at church herself, she was naturally rather curious to know what others had seen and heard there, but her husband showed no intention of relieving this laudable thirst after knowledge, not even volunteering the text, still less the substance of the sermon—in fact, he looked thoughtful and preoccupied; so much so that he omitted the ordinary politeness of helping his wife to a glass of wine, but actually pushed the bottle towards her that she might help herself. This was too much for Almeria, who with all her faults had not yet arrived at that interest in a bottle of wine which would have induced her to pardon her husband's omission on the score of politeness, out of consideration for his careless unobservance as to the use made of it, so she quietly but decidedly refused the proffered refreshment, saying,

"Thank you, not any for me," in the same tone in which she would have addressed a strange butler.

It recalled her husband, as she meant it to do, from his wandering thoughts, and he filled her glass deliberately, notwithstanding her refusal, saying as he did so, with a smile—

"You must excuse my absence of mind—I was thinking of something else."

"So I perceive," she answered fretfully. "You have said nothing but 'yes' or 'no' ever since I came into the room."

"Well," he answered, with his never-failing courtesy towards her, "I will say something more now. Do you know that our clergyman is going to leave us, and that his place will be filled by a new man, who is, they say, a thorough-going Ritualist?"

"No, I have heard not a word of the kind until now," said Almeria, who already began to wish that she had wasted her time in church instead of at home. "Who told you? and who is the new man?"

"Englefield told me as we walked home," replied Mr. Leslie, "and the name of the new man is Davenport."

"Davenport," repeated Almeria, "is he a relation of Claude?"

"No, he is Claude himself, and I am very sorry for it," answered her husband.

"How extraordinary of Ada to have given me no idea of such a thing," exclaimed Almeria, forgetting in her indignation to resent the last portion of her husband's speech.

"Perhaps it has been a hasty arrangement," he suggested, "but," he added again, "I am sorry for it, partly on your father's account, but chiefly on Davenport's."

"And why, pray, on his?" asked Almeria irritably, ignoring the reference to her father, in which she would have felt obliged to agree, and amiably fixing on that which related to her brother-in-law, and which she combated simply because she knew nothing of her husband's reasons for his opinion, but made a point of always contradicting them if possible.

"My dear," he said quietly, "I will leave you to find out; although most likely you will not agree with me when you do. Shall you go to church at all to-day? because, if not, I am going with a friend of mine to the Abbey."

"Pray go with your friend, whoever he may be," she answered angrily; "it is a new thing for you to care so little what I do."

"So it would be if I did," was the calm response; "if you are going to church I will go with you, but if not it will be a good opportunity for fulfilling an engagement I made long ago with Mr. Gordon."

"I hate the very name of that little hunch-back," retorted his wife; "he does you no good, except to make you disagreeable at home," for it happened that on two occasions this much aggrieved woman had met her husband walking with his ungainly-looking friend, and though it had never really occurred to her before to connect the latter with any change in the conduct of the former, it did now by mere accident, as we call it, and by mere accident also she had unwittingly

reached the truth so nearly, that Mr. Leslie felt himself colouring guiltily, although he answered, with a smile at his wife's unreasonableness—

"I am sorry you find me more disagreeable than usual, but it is rather hard on Gordon to lay my sins on his shoulders. Come now, Almeria, don't be foolish, will you go or not? I am ready to do as you like."

His imperturbable good temper jarred upon her angry nerves; and his determined self-restraint and patience towards her, combined with the bitter pill of mortified vanity administered by one far less tender, though openly preferred, in the letter over which she had wasted her morning, overcame her little remaining self-control. She walked determinately towards the door, refusing to see the outstretched hand of her husband, and, saying with more than lady-like energy, "Please not to trouble yourself about me at all," she left the room, and betook herself to her own, where after a few angry tears she arrayed herself carefully in what she was pleased to

consider the most suitable attire for divine service.

As a girl, Almeria had always expressed the strongest objection to the Sunday finery usually and lavishly indulged in by her father's congregation of her own sex, and loudly declared against it, on principle, both as a distraction of each other's thoughts, and a symptom of bad taste in general. Not having the means then to show her vain and vulgar sister her idea of Sunday dress—for, if sombre, it was by no means inexpensive—she had fully indemnified herself for the temporary annoyance by the expression of her sentiments after her marriage.

No gaudy colours, or bright hues, or inferior but smart-looking material disgraced her taste, or drew away the attention of her neighbours from their occupation. Almeria always appeared at church in black; but it was black of the loveliest and richest material; and there were few costumes reserved for week-day use which set off her fair beauty and elegant figure like the rich silk dress with its soft mossy fringe, the

close-fitting velvet *paletôt*, trimmed with dark fur, and the tiny bonnet to match, glistening with jet, from under which the bright beautiful hair peeped in charming contrast. Of course Almeria was unaware of the fact that she was a far more distracting object in this array than in many a more elaborate one, both to the admiring and curious eyes of her neighbours, but being convinced, in spite of it, that she was setting a most praiseworthy example of soberness and good taste, she felt, when she did own to herself that she had not attained obscurity by the carrying out of her principles, that it was the due reward of her strict adherence to them. It is no wonder therefore, that as a rule Mrs. Leslie liked going to church from more than one reason.

As she descended the stairs she opened the dining-room door again, with the intention of ringing for the servant to usher her out of her house in due form, and found, to her surprise, that Mr. Leslie was still there. He was sitting at the uncleared luncheon table, his head leaning on his hands, and his face quite concealed

from view, and he did not, apparently, hear his wife's entrance. She, with just indignation as a conscientious mistress, at the delay which threatened the necessity of an extra pair of hands in the household being kept from church, exclaimed, as she walked to the bell, and pulled it unceremoniously—

"If you *must* go to sleep after lunch, Frederick, I wish you would allow the servant to clear away first, especially on Sunday."

As she spoke, her husband raised his head, and showed that his face was very pale, and his lips compressed with pain. He made no reply until the servant appeared in answer to Almeria's ring, when, before she could speak, he said to the youth who entered—

"Go to Mr. Gordon's house; you know where it is, and say, with my compliments, that I cannot accompany him this afternoon," and, as he closed the door behind him, Mr. Leslie continued—

"Let the table be for once, Almeria; I have something to tell you. I was not asleep when

you came in, but in great pain. What it proceeds from I don't quite know, though I may guess; it is right I should tell you, or I would not trouble you with it. Ah! my dear," he ended with a sigh, "I am glad, for your sake, that I shall not always be a hindrance to your happiness. Now let us go. I see you are ready, and I shall be all right again for the present;" and he spoke the last words so cheerfully, and looked again so much as usual, that Almeria, to whom as yet alarm or sympathy on his account was unknown, could think of nothing suitable to say, and found herself walking with him beside her—but not arm in arm, she had never countenanced such an absurdity—on their way to afternoon service, before she could make up her mind whether to believe him or not.

The next morning brought a letter from Ada, giving particulars of the fact of their removal from Charlton, and of those which had led to it. Briefly, they were as follows. While Mr. Davenport was occupied in the erection of a new church at the latter place, and in reviving

and reorganising the services and schools according to his own ideas, he was comparatively contented, especially as this, his professional work, was combined with the prosecution of his private arrangements for his own future happiness. But when he was reduced to the ordinary everyday work of a country parish, and to the common-place companionship of a wife in fact, instead of one in prospect, he began to weary of daily services to which no one came, and to sigh for some more engrossing toil than the poor people of Charlton, with the best of intentions, could afford him. There were sinners, of course, of all kinds among them, but not enough for Mr. Davenport's energies. He would have gloried in possessing fifty drunkards at a time among his parishioners, to be reclaimed by him, and in Charlton he could only get hold of one or two, who were bad enough to give him the kind of work, and amount of it, which he required for the satisfying of his "conscience"—*he* would have said—but his wife inclined to the belief that it was his physical, rather than his

spiritual half which demanded this increase of labour, and perhaps she was right; for it was certainly strange that, having failed to convert the few bad characters with whom Charlton was afflicted, their energetic pastor yet felt convinced that he only required numbers to work on to make him a successful shepherd in collecting his wandering sheep, and securing them from the prowling wolves of intemperance and worldliness. However, this was what the Rev. Claude Davenport believed of himself, and, believing it, no one could wonder at his acceptance of a London living, poor, indeed, in pecuniary value—which was a matter of no importance in this case—but rich in misery and sin; both of which were satisfactorily evidenced by the fact of a large number of the parishioners being very poor, having miserable abodes, and indulging largely in drink, theft, and vice of all kinds. As these represented the misery and sin, so, of course, the remaining parishioners, of whom Almeria was one, were the visible embodiments of whatever was good, happy, and honourable in

the parish, on the care of which her brother-in-law entered with such zeal and earnestness. It never occurred to him, any more than to his flock, that he had much harder hearts to deal with among these embodiments of respectable religion than among those who supplied the visible misery and sin on which he came to work; and the reason why none of them, either pastor or people, found this out as a probable truth, was, that neither of them thought it worth his while, or at all his business, to make the attempt of inquiring as to whether the *real* sin and misery might not find as frequent a home in the hearts of the outwardly respectable and rich as we are sure it does, from observation, in the bodies and habits of the class doomed to poverty and scorn.

We must, however, leave Mr. Davenport to find out his own difficulties; but his father-in-law being willing to go anywhere, provided his daughter and he were not separated, while Ada declined to advise her husband, knowing perfectly well that he would do as he chose, the

whole family were shortly installed in their new home, but ten minutes' walk from Almeria and her husband. And now it happened that as the latter grew more and more independent of home affection, feeling within him the seeds of that best friend who promises release to the prisoner weary of his captivity, and daily realising more clearly the transitory and unsatisfying nature of life apart from the Divine essence which sustains the only portion of it doomed to last—so it became apparent to Almeria that at length her imaginary woes and blighted hopes—whatever they were—were fading before a dim, creeping fear of the approach of a real sorrow. Not that she would own, even to herself, the truth of her husband's words, which she chose rather to regard as an attempt to evoke her love, but she began to see that he was changed, not for a time, but for good, she feared, towards herself. In vain she resented the patient, pitying superiority with which he met and answered her outbursts of angry irritation—in vain she assured herself she had been a fool in marrying

him—the fact remained, as palpable to her as to every one else, that he was her superior in all points of any value, and that, whether she would or not, she did respect him, and—oh, bitter draught to the proud ungoverned heart!—that she was beginning to love him, and to desire his love, just as she had realised that she had lost it. For Almeria's only idea of love, in her own case, was utter devotion and subjection to her will, and a never-failing adoration of her charms. All this she had had, despising it while it had cost her nothing; and now it was withdrawn, the same spirit of evil who had tempted her to throw it away, tormented her with desire for it, while yet, with redoubled pride, she refused to seek it as she should.

So days and weeks passed into months, and as the tutored spirit of the husband yielded a more complete and perfect submission to the decree which had deprived him of earthly love, to teach and give him a better aim in life, the wife's unchastened soul was torn with real but angry sorrow at the fate prepared for her by her own hands; for

though, as yet, no whisper of the truth had reached her ears, the disease developed in her husband was pronounced, by those whose advice he sought, to have been so at a premature and untimely period, mainly the consequence of a mind perpetually harassed by anxiety and disappointment. But, even without this knowledge, Almeria had entered at last fully into the sea of regret for the past, and was being daily carried nearer to the seething gulf of unavailing remorse, her yet unconquered pride not suffering her to own herself a sinner.

There came a day when Frederick Leslie was forced to succumb to pain and weariness, and bid his wife once more prepare to find herself released from an unloved husband. He spoke so simply and yet so certainly of the fact, and in so composed and loving a voice of her want of love, that Almeria, taken by surprise at the moment, felt herself on the verge of discomfiture. To save herself, she retreated without answer; and, to do her justice, it must be owned that she had long tried—though not very successfully—to subdue the irritable impatience

which had become as a second nature to her in her intercourse with her husband; and, safe in her own room, she sought to overcome once more the cry her heart had long sent up unheeded, for the love she had despised; while, with a terror she had never yet suffered herself to indulge, she knew, and owned she knew, that Frederick Leslie's unloving wife would, ere long, be his remorseful widow. Backwards and forwards she paced, fighting at one moment with her pride, at the next with her grief, and as the latter was Divinely sent, while the former was the tormenting messenger of sin, so grief prevailed at last. "Oh Lord," she cried, as it forced her to her knees, "I have sinned; have mercy on me, and give me back my husband;" and then she wept; not angry tears, such as her eyes had often known, but bitter drops of disappointed love, too late conceived, mingled with still more painful sobs, by which she owned the breaking up of that unhallowed pride, the destroyer of her own as well as her husband's happiness. Still, it was not even then that she

suffered him she had so injured to know her sorrow. False shame and want of opportunity contributed to keep her silent on the past, for some weeks longer, but, returning one afternoon from visiting her father, to find her husband prostrated with pain, and faint with weariness, she suddenly dismissed the servant who was his special attendant, and kneeling down by the sofa on which he lay in temporary ease, after the abatement of the paroxysm in which she had found him, she took his hand in hers, and with bowed head and conscience-stricken voice, spoke at last her sense of guilt, and prayer for pardon. As she did so a red flush passed over the sick man's face, and then a smile, not of triumph, but of content, settled upon the pale lips, and looked from his sunken eyes; he did not speak at first, but gently drew her head towards his breast, and, as it lay there for the first time in love and contentment, he blessed God for his wife. At last the victory was his—through sorrow and pain he had torn an answering love from her whom he still loved best on earth, but whom

he had now learned to love the better in the heaven before him.

Almeria, however, could not rest in peace. His silence terrified her after the first few moments, and, raising herself, she looked at him, with eyes full of a new-born love and entreaty, as she implored—

"Fred, speak to me. Tell me you love me still, and will try to live for my sake."

"My darling," he faintly said, "I cannot. God knows I love you now and ever, but He has given me a foretaste of better things, and I cannot wish, even for the sake of your love, to relinquish them now."

Then, as she wept and poured forth unrestrained the measure of her sorrow and repentance, her husband's tears of sympathy were mixed with hers.

"I know so well," he said, "the sorrow of the path before you; for while all life is sad, unless we spend it for the true Master, it must be doubly so when we know we have saddened it for ourselves. And, my poor Almeria, you could not

love me till it was too late to hope for happiness together. What makes you love me now?" he suddenly asked; "is it only pity for my suffering?"

"Ah no!" she cried, "I have begun to love you from the day I told you I married you only for my own convenience. It seemed as if the evil spirit drove me to drive you from me, and then let me see my folly and mistake."

"Poor child, poor wife," he answered, and once more drew her towards him. "Your punishment is great, but so was mine, Almeria, for making you my idol. Try and learn the lesson given to me, that when we meet again, we may be one in spirit, and not, as we have been here, only in name."

Here, becoming exhausted, their conversation ceased; but from this day forward, Almeria's place was ever at his side. Not as a nurse; he would not suffer it; and she, too, felt that her inexperienced hand would fail to do successfully what was accomplished easily by those accustomed to such lingering scenes of pain and

weakness; but she never left him, except for exercise; and if it were possible for repentance to undo the work of selfishness and pride, which it is not, truly hers would have atoned. But it could only soothe the present to the dying husband now so dearly loved; and, day by day, as she saw the end approaching, which was to leave her a solitary woman, she asked herself, with ever increasing pain, "Was I mad to treat him as I did, and take so little heed of his affection and goodness?"

"Certainly you were, Almeria," conscience replied, "as mad as every one else who listens to the evil monitor of self in place of me, who speaks to you from God."

Not long, however, were husband and wife suffered to enjoy their new-found peace.

Increasing pain obliged the medical men to keep their patient under the influence of opiates. One evening, however, he resisted the administration of the usual dose, and only begging his wife to keep beside him, lay quiet and apparently painless through the night. Whether he suffered

or not she could not tell, but he was so still that both wife and nurse slept till, at daybreak, Almeria was awakened by a touch, and opened her eyes to see her husband gazing eagerly towards the window, at which the first gleams of the rising sun were entering. As she gently attempted to raise him, he fell back, and murmuring, "The everlasting morn begins to break," he left her, and Almeria Leslie was a widow.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO years are come and gone since Frederick Leslie left his wife to grieve in vain for that short-sighted wilfulness which had set her at liberty as a woman, but hampered her future peace with memories of past folly. It was not long after her husband's death that, through the inadvertent remarks of one of his medical advisers, as to the probable causes of that anxiety which had developed the disease so fatal to him, Almeria understood how completely she had been cajoled by the enemy of peace into destroying her own. Yet what could she say? Or whom could she blame? Not the husband who loved her too well to bear uninjured the pain of her contempt. Nor even the foolish husband of another woman, who, among many others, had helped to make

Frederick Leslie's idol his tyrant; nor those few women who, touched with a deeper and truer sense than Almeria of a wife's position and power, had ventured to draw her notice, sometimes, to the careworn face and growing gravity of the husband she neglected. No. She knew well enough that none of these were to blame; and as the wilfulness with its results stared her wildly in the face, she felt that God Himself rebuked her, and that none may ever escape His judgments, because they follow, naturally the breaking of His laws and the neglect of His counsels. Now, too, when a real and unmistakable sorrow was upon her, Almeria could see how actually free from all that is worthy of the name of trial her former state had been. Surely the Divine hands had been outstretched to draw her through mercies and loving-kindnesses, but she would not see them. Health, affection, beauty, and ample means for all her wants had been lavished upon her from her birth; but these had failed to reach her half-dead heart, or to quicken within her the pulses of love and gratitude. Yes, she could see

this plainly now. But while she owned that nothing short of a miracle would have changed her heart towards her husband, except the loss, first of his love, next of himself, she felt no resignation to her fate; rather she said perpetually to herself, "Oh that I could be as in times past."

And as this could not be, the vain lament brought her no peace or comfort.

Immediately after Mr. Leslie's death, Almeria, at her own request, became again a member of her father's household. She who had so long been the object of devoted care, could not bear the solitary and unheeded state of widowhood; and as in his life, she had believed that she alone gave consequence to her less worldly husband, so in his death she found, that he who as his wife had given her this assured position, had left her to discover that his absence had only altered it; while she had yet to learn that only as a desirable wife to some one else could she command as a widow the position which belongs to a woman in right of marriage alone. So Almeria returned again to her own family, sobered and chastened,

to a certain extent, but yet far from desiring to learn in patience the lesson left to her by her husband. Restless and unhappy, she abjured the world, as she thought, from choice, but really because it left her, during the first stages of her widowhood, and believing that she could only repair the harm of a past life by a rigid devotion to religion, she gradually developed into an amateur sister of charity, under the influence of her brother-in-law, and spent her whole time in hurrying from the church services to her district and *vice versâ*.

When we again meet her, two years have passed since she was left a widow; and for eighteen months of that time, she had been seeking peace in what she considered God's work, with what success let her tell the reader in her own words.

She and Ada, who has an infant on her lap and a boy just able to toddle at her knee, whom she is amusing with a book of pictures, are seated in a pretty drawing-room at the back of the house, and opening out of the front room reserved for afternoon and evening use; but the one now

occupied is in every way as well furnished and carefully arranged as its now vacant neighbour. Almeria, who has just come in from daily service, looking wearied and fretful, is waiting for a servant to bring her the basket, which is her invariable companion in her district visits, and of which she provides the contents out of her own ample means. Ada, who looks the picture of calm content and younger than her sister, is too much occupied with her babies to observe that Almeria has evidently some unusual subject of annoyance which she is longing to discuss, and which makes her almost repulse her little nephew in his efforts to interest her in his own occupation. The door, however, opens to admit the nurse, and the babies being despatched for their morning walk, Almeria draws a letter from her pocket, which she gives to her sister, at the same time exclaiming fretfully—

"Perhaps you can advise me what to do; I am afraid of asking advice from Claude in these matters, for he, of course, cannot sympathise in my feelings."

Ada took the letter and read it.

It was from the present tenant of the small country home belonging to her sister's husband, which was hers for life, and near to which he was buried, but which she had as resolutely refused to visit since that event as before, in consequence of which it had been let, to Almeria's great content, and her disgust was now caused by the announcement of the sudden death of the present tenant, and necessity for a different disposal of the property.

"What troubles you?" asked Ada. "Can it not be re-let, if you wish it?"

"Of course," replied Mrs. Leslie; "at least, I suppose so. But, Ada, the truth is I don't know what to do. Frederick begged me, before his death, to have him buried there—as he is—and to give it a fair trial as a home for myself in the future. But I should be miserable in the country, and yet Claude declares that the reason why I am not happy here, is because I have not fulfilled my husband's wishes."

"But you could not until now," remarked Ada.

"Yes I could; the people only took it by the year. Frederick would not let it in any other way. He had such a hankering after it. I think he always had a faint hope of getting me there some day. But I hate the very mention of the place. And oh! Ada, I hate everything, everything," she said wearily. "When I look back, and think what my life was, and what it is, I feel as if God had dealt very hardly with me in taking all that makes the world pleasant a way from me so early."

Almeria, we may perceive, had, for a time, forgotten how very little she had valued the condition attached to her former position of worldly advantages. Not so Ada. But it was neither her place nor her nature to remind her sister why they were hers no longer. And, before she could speak, her husband entered the room with a list of names and houses, and directions for Almeria, which she received with such marked distaste that, as soon as she had vanished, as she felt obliged to do, he said to his wife—

"I am not at all satisfied with Almeria's state of mind. She is evidently not as much in earnest over her work as she should be. Her heart is not in it as I could wish to see it." And he walked up and down the room with a dejected look and anxious manner, which showed itself, by no means, for the first time to his wife.

She waited till he approached her, and then taking his hand, and drawing him with gentle but determined force, to a place on the sofa beside her, said—

"I am going to give you a bit of my mind, Claude, regarding Almeria and things in general. But first, tell me, have I worried you, since we came here, with fault-findings or objections?"

"Certainly not," he replied, "but, my dear, as the wife of a priest, what have you to say? It is on me, not on you, that the responsibilities of my work lie," and with pardonable manly indignation at the idea of the infringement of his prerogatives; "it is for you, as a woman, to help but not to hinder me in it."

"That I quite allow," said his wife, as she

drew his head down on her shoulder—this Ada was a very cunning woman. "But I have a private theory, and surely even 'priests' wives'"—with a little laugh—"may have these,—that men are not always helped best by being agreed with on all points."

"At any rate," said her husband from his comfortable pillow, "you have not tested its truth yet. I will do you that justice."

"Not in words," she answered, as she gently smoothed his curly hair, "only, as yet, in my own practice; but now I am coming to words, if I may;" and she turned his face up to hers as she spoke. She looked so sweet and fair, and her shoulder was so soft and comfortable, that although Mr. Davenport greatly feared he was going to hear something not altogether appreciative of his favourite theories for the conversion of souls, he could not refuse to let her speak, especially as he, of course, knew quite well, that by the never failing assistance of "the Fathers" he could quash all her pretty female fancies at a moment's notice. So, graciously accepting her

offered kiss, he composed himself with an amused smile to hear Ada's opinions.

"First of all," she said, "I want to tell you my opinion of Almeria's state, and what she needs. She applied to you first and only for advice, and it seemed to her, as well as to you, that in devoting her life to God and those of His children who needed her most, she would most certainly find peace and rest from repentant sorrow. But, dear, she does not. I can see and feel it, although I know nothing of her private confessions to you; which, by the way, are quite unnecessary."

Here Mr. Davenport uttered a sound, but of what nature Ada did not wait to ascertain, as she continued—

"Your theory for her was right, of course; for, it is the only right one for anybody, but the method of putting it into practice is, to my idea, quite wrong."

"Ada," said her husband reproachfully, "do you really mean that the services of our Church, and visiting the sick and needy, are wrong methods of working for God and showing repentance?"

"Quite wrong," replied his wife boldly, "when people have other ways of doing it closer at hand, and more naturally flowing from the position in which God Himself has placed them."

"And how do you make this out in Almeria's case?" asked Mr. Davenport, with some interest.

"In this way. She is not, in the first place, fit for what she undertakes as a visitor of the poor and ignorant, for although her pride has been broken by loss and sorrow, as regarded her husband, she has not yet learned to submit willingly and to learn obediently; and if she has not done this herself, how can she teach others? And if she cannot teach the poor this, she is of no use to them except as a bearer of bodily comforts. Then, again, she wearies herself out with services early and late, and returns so dejected and out of spirit that she is cross with every one, herself included, and made wretched by self-reproach in consequence."

"Well," said her husband, "this is only half your case," as Ada paused, not feeling sure how

much he would hear with patience. "If my plans for her are wrong, state your own."

His wife pressed his handsome head more closely to her, and kissed his forehead as she continued—

"I would teach her to show repentance towards one whom she neglected living, by the sacrifice of self, not to numbers who have no special claim on her, but to one who has."

"Who on earth is that?" said her wondering husband.

"My father," she replied. "Claude, you do not know how he doted on her as a child, or the pain she gave him by her carelessness of him and neglect of his wishes. And if Almeria desires to show her penitence for an unloving wife now, my advice to her would be to take up the neglected duty of her girlhood. Let her go to the home her husband wished her to occupy, and devote herself to the comforts and happiness of her father in it."

"Why, that is what I am constantly impressing on her; that she ought to go and live where her

husband wished, and carry out there what I have endeavoured to teach her here," said Mr. Davenport. "So, my dear, there is nothingnew in your ideas."

"Yes, there is," replied Ada, smiling; "you would condemn her to a home she hates, for an ideal duty to the dead, who, after all, did not impose it. I would persuade her to try it for the sake of the living, and to seek peace in making it a home of peace to one who has natural claims on her first; let her *spare* time, if you please, be devoted to the poor around her. Dear Claude," she continued, "you don't know how my father pines for the country air and the freedom which alone can make his blindness less sorrowful. He is too unselfish to say how he misses the life he left at Charlton, but it is very palpable to me, and my time and love and thoughts are so distracted now that I feel he is often neglected and set aside."

"Well, now you mention it, Ada, it does not seem a bad idea at all," said her husband. "I am sure I have only sought Almeria's good in my advice to her; but as I don't seem to have suc-

ceeded, you had better try and persuade her to follow your plan. But what will your father say? And why can't she look after him here?"

"Of course she could, but it would not be fair to ask her. She has had her own house, and if she undertakes the care of my father, it should be where she is mistress; besides, it is the greatest mistake for her to be released from the troubles which property entails; they are natural ones, and, therefore, of God's provision for her daily discipline; a much more wholesome kind than her present occupation, I think," answered Ada.

Mr. Davenport looked grave and anxious, then turning to his wife, he said—

"You touch me there. Did you mean it?"

"Yes and no," she replied. "I think it is true of you also. But I did not think of you when I said it."

"I really don't know at times what I ought to do," he replied, getting up and walking backwards and forwards; "my parish is quite worry enough, and yet hardly a week passes without my having to be troubled about all kinds of

things at home, either by my mother, or the agent, or the lawyers. It is not right that my mind should be so divided, but there is no help for it now. Well," he continued, looking at his watch, "good-bye, little wife. Don't wait lunch for me. I have a lot of visits to pay before four o'clock."

"And then," she said, mischievously laughing, as she received his farewell kiss, "confessions. Oh, what novels you might write, Claude!"

"Ada, my dear," he answered with real reproach, "I know you do not feel with me in these things, but, at least, you should not treat with levity the feelings of others on such subjects."

"Not your's, dear, because you are in earnest, but I really cannot respect the feelings of those ladies who seek my handsome husband's advice so often. If nothing worse, they must be a set of silly incapables, unless they are always committing sins which would bring them before a magistrate properly instead of before a clergyman in a lower class of life."

And Ada escaped before her husband had time

to recover from his astonishment at her unusual freedom of speech; but as he went on his way, he said to himself, "I wish she thought more as I do, and yet she is right about these women; they certainly are troublesome and not altogether satisfactory, but it must be right to help them. I wonder if Almeria will do as Ada proposes. I really wish she would; it would be one responsibility off my shoulders."

But just then he met one of his lady parishioners, whose anxiety about her own soul, or somebody else's, was so immediate and pressing, that it forced her to detain Mr. Davenport quite twenty minutes after he was due elsewhere, and to cause him, priest as he was, to think very disrespectfully of her silly, tiresome sex, and of her in particular, but he never disclosed this opinion to Ada; it was much too like her own.

I have not space to record the steps by which Almeria was at last persuaded to lose sight of her own fancied dislike and rooted fear of existence in the country home in which her husband had failed to interest her. Nor can I enter into

a description of the good old Rector's joy over the return of his prodigal daughter to her right mind.

He had clung to Ada, for he knew her worth, and no one would ever equal her in his estimation, but he loved his youngest child with an unreasoning love, because she was his youngest; and tears of grateful love fell from his sightless eyes as Almeria herself proposed that he should make his home with her amidst the yet unknown scenes of her dreaded residence; promising him the love and care of a daughter if he would trust himself with her; her one condition being that they should not be condemned to remain there during the dreary winter.

At the end, then, of the ensuing April, Ada and her babies accompanied her father and Almeria to spend a few weeks with them in their future home, and an extract from a letter, written from thence to Eleanor, will give us some idea of what they found:

"Before we leave Almeria, I must tell you how greatly I am comforted about her. The

place, though small, is simply charming. A pretty house, the loveliest lawn, grand old trees, and a delightful shrubbery walk for my father, where he can be sheltered and independent, promise well for their happiness inside the place; while outside are many neighbours, both poor and otherwise; lovely drives and walks, and an excellent neighbourhood. Almeria has already visits enough to return to take her out every day for a month. She has bought a pretty pony carriage, in which she drives a pair of grey ponies, and poor papa is as happy as a child. It is something so new to them both for him to be dependent on her, that it would be amusing, were it not touching, to see them together. I am afraid a qualm of something very like jealousy comes over me sometimes when I see my charge so taken from me; but when I remember all I have at home, and all that poor Almeria has not, it is too mean to grudge her even the whole of my father's affection—and that I know she has not."

Here, also, is a portion of another letter

written to Mr. Davenport : " When we return I shall have much still to tell you, but meanwhile I must relieve myself of some of my thankfulness on Almeria's account. At last, and only, I believe, since she came here, does she own the mercy which has followed her, and brought her safely to a life which she looks on with changed eyes. That which she dreaded she tells me now she feels is really capable of giving her more satisfaction than she has ever yet known. She is a person of consequence in this village, which in London she never was, of course. She can be a Lady Bountiful, without the depressing toil of her late attempts, and (forgive me for saying it, in case you don't agree with me) she will have far more chance in some ways of being useful by her example, which will be watched by all her neighbours, than in the obscurity of a crowded London parish. With my father's presence, also, she is raised more to the standing of a married woman again than she could be alone, and yet defended from those who would certainly seek her for her money—and all these

advantages she sees and owns herself. Her one regret is now, that her husband cannot know how repentantly she owns the folly which, throughout her married life, drove her to sacrifice to fancied wants the real means of happiness within her reach. She is very sad at our leaving, and I know not how I can part with my dear father, but I have you to go to, and Almeria must comfort him."

And so it was. Not all at once did peace and rest creep into Almeria's breast, but step by step, as she learned to live for another, and to forget her own wishes in ministering to his. Sad often she felt, and looking back with wistful eyes to the years of her girl and wifehood, she wondered at her blindness and rejection of all innocent means of happiness. By this I mean not only those which are removed from vice, but the more frequent sources of our joy which are the consequences of unselfish action. All these exist for any who will see them, and more than half the so-called trials of life are born, as were Almeria's, of our own selfish course in it. Yet,

as years went on and other interests grew into her life, although she never gave to any other man the late-found love her husband held more firmly in his grave than in the whole period of his earthly existence, Almeria became more buoyant in spirit, and far more capable of enjoyment than she had ever been as a girl, for her thoughts were not centred on herself; and thus, becoming more assimilated to the Divine Nature, now suffered to work within her soul, she shared in the Divine insight communicated to all unselfish spirits, by which, even in the midst of evil, good is seen, and to whom, through the shadows of the earthly life, the heavenly one sends down its tender light.

CHAPTER XV.

WE must return for a time to follow Sir John and his wife to the foreign residence in which the Dowager Lady Mowbray and her companion had been left by them some months before. The plan, as we have said, had answered admirably at first, the elder lady greatly enjoying the society of one who never contradicted her either by word or manner—and the last is far more annoying, to my mind, than the first—and who listened with apparent, if not real interest to all her self-centred histories and complaints; while the one who was reduced to the pitiable condition of pandering to another's faults and weaknesses at her own expense, was thankful to feel that her compliance with these requirements assured to her, at any rate, not only

the necessaries, but the comforts of life; and people not born to these latter, as a matter of course, sometimes cling to them more tenaciously than those who occasionally lose them suddenly and unexpectedly.

But as time went on, and Sir John's letters gave no cheering tidings of his family prosperity, while Eleanor's ceased altogether, Lady Mowbray began to fret and worry at the distance between herself and her son; and when the news of her grandchild's death arrived, coupled with that of Eleanor's illness, she gave as full vent to her impatient sorrow and annoyance as she had ever done when her own private wishes and arrangements were interfered with. So disturbed was she, that had not Sir John written and positively forbidden her to come to Dunmore Hall, she would have insisted on making her appearance there for the purpose of retaking the reins of government, so unwillingly relinquished by her into Eleanor's now helpless hands. The nature of the latter's illness did not trouble her, for, as

she sagely said to her companion, "The place is large enough for complete isolation from the infected part, but my return would enable me to be to my dear son and his dependents that comfort and support which can reside only in the presence of a mother and mistress, and of which, I fear, even in her days of health, my daughter-in-law possessed no idea as her mission in life." Now her companion, Miss Matthews, was quite willing to accept any view her employer desired of the young Lady Mowbray's character, but she was by no means equally ready to brave the risk of infection, even for the sake of restoring "comfort and support" to the inmates of Dunmore Hall; so she rejoiced when Sir John's letter arrived, in which he positively refused to receive his mother; but its effects on the latter lady were such as speedily to replace this transient joy with an abiding sadness of spirit, so tyrannical did the Dowager become under the influence of her disappointment, and it was really astonishing how ingeniously she contrived

to turn the "comfort and support" intended for Sir John's mixed household, into the persecution and discomfort of her own more limited one.

Time, however, consoled Lady Mowbray for her disappointment, as it also assuaged her real grief for the loss of her little granddaughter, although she had by no means a grandmother's usual affection for her, owing to Eleanor's determined resistance against any innovations of her own supreme authority, and not being able, consequently, to manage the child, and to take the credit of her management to herself, Lady Mowbray had withdrawn in dudgeon from any special notice of her for some time before her son with his wife and child returned to England. Yet all these events had cast a perceptible gloom over her self-engrossed life and the less selfish but more trying one of Miss Matthews; and a late drive on a chilly evening added at last sickness as a real evil to the imaginary woes in the enjoyment of which poor Lady Mowbray lived. It was when she was recovering from a return of her old enemy, bronchitis, and had arrived at

that stage in which nothing and no one could satisfy her for more than five minutes at a time, that Sir John and Eleanor arrived once more to take up in her company the burthen of life.

And now it was that poor Miss Matthews committed the grievous error of seeking to strengthen her own position with the new comer by betraying the confidential complaints of her to whom her service was due. Not many days had passed after her return before Eleanor found herself embroiled in a dispute with her tyrannical mother-in-law, the subject of it being the companion herself. She, poor thing, with all her present patience and fear of future homelessness, looked, as she was, nearly worn out with her close confinement in a sick-room, and perpetual attendance on her capricious tyrant, and Eleanor, entering the apartments devoted to the latter with the intention of sharing the labour now devolving entirely on Miss Matthews, for as long as her strength would permit, found the invalid sleeping soundly, and therefore despatched her companion to the re-

freshment of a walk, promising to fulfil her duties should any be needed before her return.

Eleanor had proved a great surprise to Miss Matthews in more ways than one, the Dowager Lady Mowbray having painted her in such colours as to lead her listener to infer that the younger one was a hoydenish girl, obstinate, and rough in mind and manner, and quite unfit for the position she occupied. But even to one so prepossessed against her, she appeared, as she was, a simple, natural girl still, in speech and action, perfectly free from affectation, and equally so at present from the kind of dignity to which Sir John had grown accustomed in his mother, and which, while it worried him *in her*, had yet caused him so persistently to worry his wife, because it was *not* in her. Just now, however, Eleanor's sorrowful heart and weakened frame gave her a certain measure of calm and leisurely movement and speech which was extremely soothing to her husband's fanciful exactions, and astonished Miss Matthews into a mental confession that the only true remark made by her employer on her

daughter-in-law was the lamentable fact that "never were two people so dissimilar." And she had good reason to rejoice that this was so; for the poor companion quickly found the relief of contact with the younger Lady Mowbray's honest, straightforward kindness and treatment, after her long experience of the elder lady's oppressive affectation and selfishness.

But we must return to the latter, to find, as always happens in these cases, that she had awoke, after an unusually short sleep, to discover her companion absent without her leave, and her daughter-in-law in possession of her apartment; this was her view, at least, of the position of affairs; and it was perfectly true, as she most veraciously affirmed, with the quiet wrath peculiar to people who pride themselves on their breeding and religion as heirlooms, of which they can no more be deprived than of those of a more material nature, that such a thing had never happened before, as her *paid* companion to leave her for an instant without her own special consent.

At first Eleanor endeavoured to appease her

by explaining that she wished herself to share Miss Matthews' labours. The good lady would listen to nothing but her own voice, so after a first repulse Eleanor sat quietly under the infliction, watching the administration by her mother-in-law's maid of various well-known and accustomed restoratives, applied without much outward show of sympathy, but refusing to vacate her self-imposed duty until Miss Matthews herself appeared.

When that unlucky woman appeared she retired, leaving her to a fate she knew partly by experience, but from which she was also well aware no *human* power could save her, and the effects of which speedily dissipated whatever benefit her unaccustomed walk might have produced.

Sir John was cited to appear shortly after before his mother's bed, from whence he was solemnly charged to take into consideration, and deliver final judgment on, the following proposition—"Was his mother, now left unprotected to his care by the death of her departed husband,

to be trodden under foot by his wife? because, if so, she was of course prepared as a Christian to submit to an inevitable affliction, but if he still loved her who had shielded and nurtured his youth, she entreated him to spare her this last humiliation, and to exert his authority over his wife," &c.

Now the poor man not only knew that he had no intention of doing the latter, as in days gone by, but he was distressed to find how extremely ludicrous his mother's assumption of dignified anger and injured innocence appeared to him. He could not bear to laugh at her, and yet he knew not how to look grave. Fortunately, in deference to her afflictions and widowed woe, the room was more than usually darkened, and poor Miss Matthews, the only other person present, was so occupied in shedding and wiping away her own tears, that she was not a very close observer of the effects of Lady Mowbray's speech on Sir John, who got himself away as soon as he could, assuring his mother that no one should interfere with her wishes. Then he

went to Eleanor, who was sitting alone in patient and sad idleness, where she had formerly spent hours in merry play with the now silent and vanished Violet.

"My dear," he began, "I am not going to find fault, but I wish you had not vexed my mother."

"So do I," she answered, "but if my dutiful care and kindness is to vex her, I don't see how anything I do can please her." And at her husband's request she told him what had happened.

The facts, joined to his late appreciation of the absurdity of his mother's exaggerated representations and feelings, made him for the first time allow that she might possibly be less immaculate in the frequent jealousies which had always been arising between the two ladies, than he had ever formerly admitted to Eleanor, and as she, encouraged thereby, assured him that her only wish was to live in peace and charity, he suffered her to put before him the pain with which she had hitherto felt that he had not, as other men do, left his mother to "cleave" to her, his wife.

Not actually, of course—it seems unkind to force that on a mother—though I believe it right, but surely in heart and will the man should support his wife. Even if she is wrong he will do less harm in the end, for a wife whose husband sides against her opinion always with his mother, learns soon to hate the latter, and it is difficult to disunite the two in her angry thoughts, while, if her husband will only show that he and she are one, and that his mother cannot treat his wife with contempt or unkindness without offending him, there are few women who will attempt to live with a mother-in-law at all, who will not modify, to please their husband's privately expressed wish, the views which are obnoxious to his mother.

This, in other words, Eleanor said to Sir John, and as he listened for the first time in patience to anything concerning which she and his mother were opposed, he owned that reason lay with the inexperienced wife he had despised, but who with a single mind desired to do the right thing, rather than with the older woman, whose sense

of reason and justice was warped by the constant presence of self in all her views.

"Eleanor," he said kindly, when she had spoken, "I think you are wiser really than I have given you credit for being; do not take it amiss if I say that half our quarrels, or rather," he corrected himself, "my vexations, would not have existed, if you could have taken things as calmly and mentioned them as reasonably as now."

"You would not let me," she replied.

"Did you ever try?" he answered, with quickly rising irritation.

"No, John, for I never understood clearly what annoyed you in me; nor do I now."

This was an awkward moment for Sir John. He was determined not to get angry with his wife; he did not feel equal just now to the concoction of any false excuses, still less did he wish to tell her that the real cause of his annoyance was, that she had failed in every way to develop into the kind of woman *he had expected*, and thought suitable for his wife. While he thus

hesitated, Eleanor saved him further annoyance by saying quietly—

"Do not tell me till you like; but one thing promise me, that in future, whenever I offend, you will tell me openly and fairly, and keep back your anger, until I have refused to do as you ask."

"I will, my dear, if I can," modestly replied her husband, relieved at the turn the conversation had taken, and wondering how it was that he was beginning to feel as much desire for his wife's approval of him, as she had formerly shown to please and satisfy him, but in which she had failed as much from want of candour and openness on his part, as from her own too determined adherence to a preconceived idea of what was right.

The day following these apparently trifling events was productive of anything but what she hoped for to poor Miss Matthews. She was repulsed at all points by the angry dowager, who refused to let her perform her usual duties towards herself, making her maid her victim to a

degree highly resented by that individual, who had quite as defined ideas of her own dignity as her mistress, only that whereas the latter bemoaned her sufferings and wrongs with becoming outward propriety even in the midst of her absurd wrath, the latter, once out of her superior's hearing, cast aside all her assumed elegance of manner, and declared her sense of being "put upon," and determination of not being so, as violently and unpolitely as the kitchenmaid could have done.

On the present occasion, however, both of her attendants dared not dispute the invalid lady's will, and Miss Matthews, wandering idle and disconsolate about the house, quickly found a share of that mischief waiting for her employment which is truly said ever to be ready for hands not preoccupied with legitimate work.

She ventured at last to tap at the door of Eleanor's sitting-room; ostensibly for the purpose of asking after her health, but really because she wanted to unburthen her mind of her own grievances against the Dowager Lady Mowbray,

and fancied she had it in her power to enlist the entire sympathy of the younger one on her side.

Being admitted, and kindly asked to sit down, on relating how the elder lady's anger had refused her the performance of her daily occupations, she quickly proceeded to inform the younger one, of the indiscriminate "abuse," as she termed it, heaped upon her in her absence, and of the details of her shortcomings as a wife and mother, which had, according to her own showing, so deeply distressed the maternal heart of the Dowager Lady Mowbray.

Eleanor listened in silence, wishing she could stop Miss Matthews, but not knowing how, without hurting or offending her, so that well-meaning but not well-instructed lady had exhausted her stock of confidences and her hearer's interest before the latter found courage to say—

"I am sorry you have told me this, Miss Matthews, because I am sure my mother-in-law never meant me to hear it; and I think a companion is meant to hear but not to repeat, if you will pardon me for saying so."

Miss Matthews coloured painfully, and with some trepidation implored Lady Mowbray to overlook her mistake, and forget what she had told her. But this the latter honestly assured her could not be, as it convinced her that it was her duty to bring about a different state of feeling between her mother-in-law and herself, and that to do this it would be necessary for her to consult Sir John.

So poor Miss Matthews retired in lower spirits than those with which she had entered Eleanor's presence, blaming every one but herself, and sorrowfully predicting a fresh change in her troubled existence. In which she was a true prophetess, for Eleanor lost no time in repeating what had passed to her husband, and in entreating him to persuade his mother to dismiss her companion, and to suffer her to do all else for her that her maid was not sufficient for.

"My reason for wishing this is," was Eleanor's conclusion, "that she may be *forced* by experience to trust and like me. I know I am honest in desiring to do my duty, and I have

none now, but to you and her, so I cannot be wrong this time, I hope."

"But have you considered the difficulties?" asked Sir John, who, being a man, naturally began to see impossibilities the moment his wife proposed to accomplish a thing which he had repeatedly blamed her for not doing, as a matter of course, while the great cause of dispute, his child, was in existence.

"They will do me good," she answered. And so by a friendly co-operation between husband and wife, the invalid was at last persuaded to trust herself to Eleanor's companionship, and having no one with whom to talk over the sins and failings of the latter, and no grandchild to create jealousy and disappointment as before, ere many months were over, the excellent lady was as firmly persuaded of her daughter-in-law's virtues, and of their all being due to her, as she had formerly been obstinate in promoting an unsuitable marriage, and then ungenerously disappointed and angered because it was proved to be so.

Now, however, the burthen of her tale was changed. "It was her foresight and good sense which had detected Eleanor's latent perfections in sense and temper; it was her maternal instinct which had led her to desire so good a wife for her dear son; it was her faithful regard for the memory of her early friend which had made her discourage all more advantageous matches for her said son, that she might ensure the happiness of her friend's daughter with him;" and in this very foolish but harmless belief she lived, providing Eleanor with a daily trial over which she rose triumphant, rejoicing in the unacknowledged victory she had won, and contented to recognise it, only in the greater respect of her husband, and increased power of self-restraint within herself, to say nothing of the pleasure of being admired as a daughter who could do no wrong, instead of disliked as a daughter-*in-law* who could do nothing right.

The following spring saw them all re-established at Dunmore Hall, and not long after a little son appeared, who comforted his

mother for Violet's loss, and obtained a far greater measure of his father's and grandmother's love than his sister had ever had, and as the elder Lady Mowbray solemnly committed him to the special guidance of Sir John, thus cleverly evading the awkwardness of owning that she had learned it would be wise for her not to interfere while that gentleman, he, with growing common sense, left him entirely alone to his mother's care, and as she had self-command enough not to assert, or boast of this to the grandmother, all three were satisfied; each being persuaded that they did exactly as they chose in the case of the son and heir, who, happily for himself, did not arrive until his parents had profited by past experience to make their home the seal of that unity and peace without which no precept will "train up a child" in the right way.

For four more years, during which time two girls appeared to claim a place each in the family circle, the Mowbrays lived together in harmony and charity. Then the grandmother was called away; and some of her last words to Eleanor

will best prove that repentance may be real and true, long before circumstances bring it to the light. It was as Eleanor closed the Book, from which she had been reading words of hope and comfort, that her mother, as she now called her, asked—

"Does it not say somewhere 'at eventide it shall be light'?"

"Yes, dear mother, is it not so with you?"

"I think, I trust it is, and in more ways than one," was the faint response. "I see the light I hope to reach, and my dear daughter, I ought to tell you, for you have suffered most from it, I see also as I never used to do, the selfishness which has overlaid even my best actions. I know I have ever thought too much of self, and too little of others, but it did not always seem so. Now, I hope it is forgiven, for I have prayed it may be; and having told you this, perhaps you also will love me better when I am gone than you could do here."

Then, as Eleanor kissed her, and assured her of

her love, she closed her eyes in peace, and bade her gently "good night." A long good night it was—far longer than either of them thought—for out of that sleep, although it lasted long, the elder Lady Mowbray woke no more on earth.

CHAPTER XVI.

"CLAUDE, may I finish what I wished to say to you this morning?" asked his wife, as that gentleman returned to the drawing-room for the evening after an unusually hard day's work.

He had spent two hours in the study since taking the cup of coffee which always followed his dinner, and now he came out to find Ada sitting alone and waiting for him, as was her usual custom. It was the evening of the day on which she had suggested a different view of Almeria's duty and work in life—since carried out—and Mrs. Davenport was looking extremely well, dressed in a *demi toilette* costume of black and blue silk, set off by delicate lace, and a smart little cap, to match on the the top of her bright

brown hair. This was Ada's only indirect protest against the female worship to which her husband was exposed, and whose dangers, if there were any, were aggravated by the newly introduced practice of confession, which she thoroughly despised and disapproved of, as we already know. But beyond the lengthened remarks we have heard, and which her husband's surprise proved to have been unaccustomed, she never spoke on that or any other subject on which they disagreed, unless quite obliged to do so; and showed her contempt for her sex only by a determined competition in personal adornment and appearance, with any fair specimens of spiritual weakness who might have beguiled Mr. Davenport's time and attention during the day; and she succeeded so well that he seldom failed to tell her how much prettier she was than any other woman he had seen.

As he came in and sat down for his customary chat before bedtime, she asked the question with which our chapter began, and receiving a somewhat weary assent, proceeded to urge upon him

the resignment of his present incumbency and return to his own home and duties as a landlord.

Mr. Davenport was both shocked and angry at first, although this opinion of his wife's had reached him before as having existence in her mind ; but, so long as she did not press it on his notice, he did not care what her own view of the case might be. Now, however, that she had done so, it behoved him to bring her to reason and show her the wickedness of her ways in seeking to draw him away from his priestly work and office. So, putting on a severe expression, he attempted to give effect to the displeasure he really felt in such terms as should impress his wife with a conviction of her offence. But Ada was a curious combination of very opposite elements. It was as impossible to frighten her outward assurance of manner away, when once convinced that she was right, as it was to induce her to alter the conviction itself.

" Opinion," she would say " is one thing, conviction is another."

And while she very rarely argued, and was

always willing to accommodate her own habits on indifferent matters to others', the whole ordained body of the Church would have failed to remove her from a conviction based on common sense and strengthened by personal experience. So, not at all put out of countenance by her husband's rebuke, she patiently persisted that his first duty still was in the place which was his birthright.

"You despised it," she said, "for one in which you thought you could serve God better, but *He* has not released you from the obligation of the first. Now you must combine them, and I am satisfied that you can do more good in your generation by doing so than by destroying your health by overwork, or your peace with duties which you cannot reconcile."

Of course she was assured that she knew nothing about it, and reminded of the subordinate position assigned to women in the world; to all of which she smilingly agreed, adding, however, with boldness, which a carelessly dressed woman could hardly have assumed with safety—

"Nevertheless, my dear, good man, you are

not as wise as I am, and so, I hope, time will prove."

And then she devoted herself so effectually to her husband's amusement, charming him, as she always could, with a voice as sweet, but not as powerful, as Almeria's, that he forgot how disrespectful she had been to his superior position and office, and only thought again what a pretty, sweet wife she was.

Ada vindicated her claim to wisdom by steadily refraining from pressing on Mr. Davenport her once honestly expressed advice. She had sown the seed in obedience to what she believed to be true in itself, and to her duty as his helpmate, and she left it to bring forth fruit when and how it seemed good to the wisdom in which she sought and found that which made her life so calm and contented, and herself a stream of comfort to those with whom she lived.

For three more years her husband apparently gave no heed to her advice, but this did not affect their happiness together.

At the end of that time, having become embroiled in a disagreement with his parishioners, some of whom objected to the extreme practices into which he had suffered himself to drift, more from a feeling of honour towards the party to which he ostensibly belonged, than from conviction on his own part, and finding, at the same time, that he must relinquish either the cares of his parish or those of his property, he decided as his wife had already advised, knowing well the animadversions his decision would bring on him from his clerical brethren, but preferring to feel that he did not incur anything but comfort and help from the wife whose true and practical holiness of life and love for the Divine Master he had witnessed and felt from the day of their marriage.

"And now, Ada," he said, as he told her of his intention, "it is for you to show me how to use my office which still remains, for I do not, as yet, see; and I cannot free myself from my voluntarily made obligation to preach the Gospel of Christ."

"Dear Claude," she said, "I hope and trust that you will teach it more boldly and persistently than you have ever done."

And this was finally the way in which he did it. Engrossed through six days of the week with the business always accompanying the conscientious care of property and of those who are its temporary owners in their several degrees, and labourers on its surface, when the seventh arrived Mr. Davenport betook himself to the help of his brother clergy. He was an impressive and eloquent preacher, and, as no distance or expense deterred him in carrying out that share of toil which he had grown to look upon as specially his own, he had not only the advantage to himself of a more extended and quite unfettered sphere of teaching, but the added comfort of knowing that many a poor over-worked and under-paid brother blessed the charity which gave him time for rest, and yet provided spiritual food, unpaid, for the people under his care.

Once more, two years have passed; and on a

lovely summer evening, Almeria's lawn is gay not only with flowers, but the happy faces and cheerful talk of many of one family met together.

The occasion is her brother's return from India, bringing with him his bride, as yet a stranger among his people, and, to Almeria's great delight, it was under her roof that all she cared for met for the first time, in the calm of trials past but not forgotten.

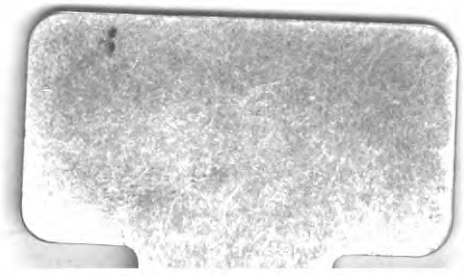
Eleanor is there, a tall and quiet matron, not beautiful as Almeria is, or youthfully pretty as Ada still remains; but she has a face that attracts all strangers. It has now recovered the bloom which was, in youth, her chief beauty, and her dusky hair is less thick and bright, but the clear pale skin has its own beauty, and sets off with far more effect than any other colour could do the dark brilliancy of her beautiful and thoughtful eyes. Her dress is rich but very quiet; her manner as straightforward but less impulsive; and Sir John, who remains as he always was, an eminently nice-looking gentleman, although he

still admires Almeria, thinks his wife equal, in all respects, to any woman living, for is she not what he has made her? So he fondly flatters himself, and she does not contradict him any more than she did his mother, although she knows whose Hand it is that really guides her, and to Whom she yields the daily obedience of her life.

The sisters, sisters-in-law, and cousins are grouped together according to the custom of women, and their respective husbands are walking up and down the lawn together in desultory talk, while the good old Rector, Almeria's charge, sits a little apart, not dull or neglected, but happy in his own thoughts, and more interested in them than in the busy talk of those who still have life before them in all its many changes. As he thus sat, the bells of the parish church, near which lay the missing husband among his children's circle, broke forth in peals of joyful recognition of the presence among them of a bride and bridegroom, Gerald and his wife, in whose honour they were

rung. To them there was no undertone of sadness in the sound, for life, as yet, had shown them only its fair side and promise; and yet, within a few short years, he would return once more to this sweet home; bringing not his pretty bride, as now, but two motherless children to leave them to the offered care of the once selfish and unloving sister, to whom this refuge from school and strangers belonged; and where, when death came peacefully to guide her father to where there is no more darkness, they tried and found the happiness of her who thus took a mother's place, receiving from them, in answer, the love no child of her own would ever give her.

And now, husbands and wives draw near each other, while Almeria seeks her father's side, and as the bells ring, sounding more sweetly as the shadows fall, and speaking more of heavenly than earthly love, and as darkness hides the visible and leaves the soul to search for the invisible, more than one heart among the well-known group looks back upon the strong griefs of youth, and

while it owns that no state is without its trials, yet sees that of all the ills which pervade the daily life, none are so hard to bear aright, and none so purifying and ennobling when thus borne, as the crosses and disappointments met with in Marriage and Married Life.

THE END.