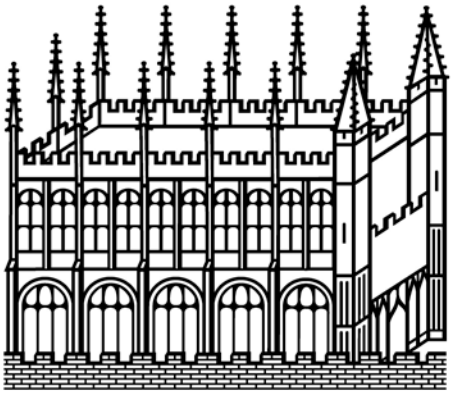

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A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By the Author of "A Fallen Angel."

"The ancient saying is no heresy,
Hanging and wiving go by destiny."
SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. III.

London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
NEW BOND STREET, W.

1882.

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TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL.

CHAPTER I.

> And must we be divided? must we part?
> Ay, hand from hand, my love, and heart from heart.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

ALICE left her husband, and went to lie down—but not to sleep. She closed her eyes, and tried persistently to lose her consciousness; but it was all in vain; she was tormented by waking visions and hideous dreams. She was surely getting more nervous than ever.

There was positively little to alarm her, and yet she was as much disturbed as if something really terrible had happened. Suppose Hugh *had* been killed, while she sat quietly awaiting his return! Her conscience reproached her bitterly, because she had imagined him to be drinking and gambling with a set of dissipated men, compared

with whom he was an angel, when in truth he had been engaged in a difficult and dangerous duty. And in this he had acted from motives of the purest and most disinterested charity. She ought to be thankful that things were no worse, and yet she could not control the morbid sensations of her mind.

At length she arose, for sheer relief from the haunting unrealities that beset her. She had seen Hugh, with an agonized face, working laboriously as an excavator might, covered with dust and lime, the perspiration starting from every pore of his body, while he dug and delved among a confused heap of ruins. She smiled at the absurdity of the thing, as the recollection of her wandering dream came back to her. She had not been able to dispossess herself of some horrible and insane picture since she had left her husband.

"I will be careful not to wake him—no doubt he is asleep by this time."

She passed quietly down the stairs, and gave the servant instructions to let her know the instant the baby woke, so that her master should not be disturbed.

But even now she was occupied, there was an unaccountable weight upon her spirits.

"It is the weather, I suppose." And the weather was certainly depressing enough. The sky was dark and lurid; the atmosphere was heavy and sulphurous. She threw open the window to admit a breath of air. The heat was more intense outside; the heavy leaves on the tree near the window hung down droopingly, as if they were faint and weary. There was not the slightest chance of a breeze to stir a fibre of vegetable life. But as she stood there watching, a slight but perceptible tremor passed through the shrub upon which her eyes rested.

"A sure sign of a storm," she said, "if there were nothing else to predict it."

On looking at her watch she found it was now past eight. At the same moment she saw the postman enter the gate, and she leant forward and took the letter from his hand.

"There's a fearful storm brewing ma'am!"

"Ah, it will do an immense deal of good," she answered cheerfully, "when it does come."

And even as she spoke the heavens frowned more darkly.

She glanced, as people frequently do, at the address before opening the letter. The handwriting was not familiar. It was a scratchy, sprawling hand, with uncertain flourishes. She was obliged to remain close by the window, or she could not have read a word.

She is reading now, and becomes suddenly pale—pale even to her lips, and she trembles from head to foot with the intensity of her excitement. With a spasmodic movement she clasps her disengaged hand to her throat as though she were choking, while her wild, eager eyes are fixed upon the paper. Unheeding the vivid flash of forked lightning and the long peal of distant thunder, she stood breathless, with straining eyes, oblivious of all but the words she read.

Her husband enters the room. She hears the door close, and instinctively her mind recognises the fact that he has come.

She turned and looked straight at him with wild confusion in her eyes. They pierced as

though she would read his very soul, but yet she saw—nothing! She did not note the still unnatural pallor of his face; she did not note the strange gleam of his eyes; she did not note the difference of his movements as he stole stealthily into the room, glancing quickly around him as if he suspected a surprise. She does not see that he is striving to speak; she knows only that *she* is striving. And at last she gasps out in accents of convulsive passion—

"How have I failed, Hugh—that this woman should come between us?"

He did not appear to comprehend her; he gazed upon her vaguely, with lips apart, still striving to speak. Alice is too far self-involved to observe that he has no comprehension of her words; but with a natural impulse she holds the open letter towards him. He snatched it from her hand. There was comprehension now! More than this—a startled fear—a strange awe in every aspect of his figure. *He* recognised the hand instantly. What could it mean?

The letter that Charlotte had threatened to

send!—and it had reached the hands of his wife!

It was a message from the dead!

"Oh God!"

A horrible crash of thunder, not a mile distant, so violent, so shocking, that the woman might have been excused if she had shrunk with fear. But *she* stood erect, while Hugh covered his eyes, and crouched, rather than sat, in the nearest chair.

There was something to her more terrible than all that had gone before, in this unwonted action of his—his exclamation and his positive betrayal of abject *fear*.

Fear in her husband?—the man who feared nothing under heaven!—this was unaccountable indeed.

For the moment she absolutely forgot all but him—it was she who lacked comprehension now.

He rose, and grasped the back of the chair for support.

"How did you get this?" he gasped hoarsely.

Was it the thunder?—was he so ill, his

nerves so shaken, that his terror had been at the violence of the storm?—or had her unpremeditated words so terrified him?

"By post. Have you anything to say?"

Anything to say! How can he reply to those calm measured tones? The man's mind was chaos itself.

There was an awful silence—the calm before the storm.

Hugh struggled vainly to gain the mastery of himself he knew he had so completely lost; but he struggled in vain against fate and a supernatural terror. How could that letter have reached Alice? How, indeed, could it have been written? Was it substantial?—or was it all a dream—and he had gone mad?

"No?" continued Alice. She found composure as he lost it. "Read! The writer asserts that she is as much your wife as I am; that she has been betrayed by you; that she now is scorned by you—and—and she mentions a child—is it yours?"

Her rapid rational words reached his blunted intelligence—she had no suspicion—thank God this was the worst she knew!

"Do you assume—that the assertion is true?" he stammered.

"If you can call it assumption! I do not know *how much* of truth the letter contains; but, Hugh—I am sane! *you* have given me instant proof that there *is* truth," she said, with passionate vehemence. "You have not read—you need not read! Do I not know you well enough to construe your confusion and dismay? Proof?—can I possibly have stronger? Had this been false—had it been the invention of malice—I should hear your scornful laugh at the momentary anger it would cause. Proof?—so positive that I can see the woman herself standing between us!"

Hugh saw her too—and heard her last words to him.

Will he ever cease to hear—or see?

Convictions that formed themselves unconsciously darted through Alice's mind with the rapidity of lightning itself.

"Answer me, Hugh. The time has come when I must have justice. Answer my question—how have I failed that this woman should come between us?"

"Failed."

He echoed the word with meaningless repetition.

"I *have* failed, Hugh—though God alone knows how I have striven to be a true wife!" she said, with the sustained power of passion kept in subjection. "My love—my trust in you—has been as boundless as space. I believed in you in my soul. I kept my love unchanged when my conscience—the still small voice which can never be silent—told me I was nothing to you. And yet—yet. . . . Have you forgotten our wedding-day? How soon to forget! Only three years! Do you remember the words you spoke so eloquently? —They were the gospel itself to me. I hear them now! Oh, Hugh, go back to that marriage day!—when we swore—one of us, thank God, in perfect faith—to take each other 'for better or worse'—'*to love and to cherish*' till death should part us. Can you forget the holy vow you made to me and Heaven—'*and forsaking all other cleave only to her?*' . . . Are you dumb? Would you have me believe that this behaviour is consistent

with innocence? . . . Why did you not plainly tell me that you were tired?—I should not have needed much persuasion to believe it!"

The keen, sarcastic words cut him like a knife; he writhed where he stood; but he uttered not a word.

The storm raged in wilder, more ungovernable fury, but still Alice stood between him and the open window, erect and weird-like, swaying now and then as though she would fall when her passion overcame her physical strength—forgetful of the raging elements, save when she paused of necessity because the thundering voice drowned all other sound.

"I suspected you were weary when you repelled my every act and word of spontaneous affection. Spontaneous?—how rarely I have dared to be natural! My pride—any woman's pride—could ill bear all repression of feeling. Oh, my husband!—*had I but known*. . . . Why act like a man who feared his wife? I—so unsuspecting—so easily deceived—so resolved to accept your defence—so bent upon excusing your most paltry fault—I, in my religious, tried submission, to be

answered by cruel deliberate betrayal! It is curious that your character could have stooped to deceive so weak, so poor a thing as myself!—Have you no words—or are you bereft of reason?"

She saw her scathing sarcasm could wound, and she paused to watch its effect; in the force of her passionate resentment she rejoiced that it was so.

"Deceit, Hugh, suits only a coward—and I thought *you* so noble—so honourable a man!—*I wish to heaven I had never been your wife*—I wish I could break the chain at this very moment! I wish I could break the chain no man can put asunder, so that you might be free to marry her whom you prefer!"

Again she paused, in a dread ominous stillness, waiting for a reply. None came. The stillness was broken by a crash of thunder that shook the ground beneath their feet.

Again Hugh shuddered, and passed his hand involuntarily over his blanched face, and over those gleaming eyes of his with their absent, haunted expression of horrible fear.

"How often am I to ask—have you no word in defence?"

"Alice," he answered, with an effort, "I—I never preferred her to you!"

"And you can condescend to deceive me still! It is an absurd attempt! Indeed, you must take me to be more foolish, more credulous, than I really am. Can there be, in the limits of reason, any other motive than preference? I *am* ignorant—I am unable to judge of much in this hateful world—but in your superior intelligence, will you not stoop for once to instruct me? Tell me why you set me aside—*me*, the woman to whom you were legally bound? I was implicitly obedient—like a child—was it because of this that you set me aside for another? Was she better fitted to be your companion and helpmate? Was she—doubtless, Hugh, she *is*—better informed on the world you inhabit than I? . . . You *shall* be free—as free as I can make you"—

"Alice! Alice, reflect!" he exclaimed, with a sudden gust of frenzy. "You are irrationally excited, and I—I am ill—quite

incapable to cope with you. What wonder I cannot speak?—You alarm and confuse me! Wait.—When you are cooler I can explain"—

"Explain! *You have admitted!* Nothing further is needed as explanation. I am cooler than you are—and you know it. Hugh, I am a woman, and although I have been an enduring wife—a neglected deceived wife—I cannot continue to live in subordination to—I know not what!—Oh, merciless! . . . Could you not at least have kept up the false mask of fidelity? Could you not have kept this corruption behind the veil? My ignorance—my ignorance was bliss indeed, compared with the hideous, revolting effects of my knowledge. I shall no longer be an impediment; you may bring her here—under this very roof. Be honest in the face of the world!—dare to appear what you dare to be. I am perhaps, intolerant—you have often told me so—my narrow and antiquated views of morality may be entirely original—but I shall act by them. I am of opinion that you are more immoral in keeping up the false sem-

blance of faith—than in deserting it openly. My rigid morality, at all events, will not allow me to aid you in the cowardly hypocrisy. Shall I play second voluntarily, and *she* hold the first place in your heart? No doubt she is content! You have probably explained yourself to her most satisfactorily.

> I was compelled to her, but I love you,
> By love's own sweet constraint.

The words are exquisitely poetical, don't you think so? It sounded well enough to her ears—no doubt it may be believed when the hateful bond of marriage *does* stand in the way"—

She stopped abruptly, averting her eyes from him.

Past recollections crowded upon her, until she was half maddened by the remembrance of her vain attempts to retain his affection—at the remembrance of the fond solicitude she had felt only the night before, when he was perchance just freed from another woman's arms, hating the mere touch of his loving wife, so that he shrank from her as though a caress were sacrilege. All the soft-

ness of her character hardened into rock at the vision she thus summoned before her.

"I am going to leave you," she said, fiercely and icily, "there will be no occasion for further mendacity, meanness, or cowardice. Bring her here, if you will, in open daylight—under this very roof—to take the position she deserves. *I* shall not remain."

"Oh, God! Alice, cease — she is here already—for ever in my sight—an eternal remorse—an eternal misery!"

He pressed his clasped hands across his eyes as if to shut out the sight.

The mad, concentrated passion, with which those words were uttered, seemed to paralyze his wife's very soul. She was mystified with a vague terror, and an unfathomable meaning.

"*Eternal remorse—eternal misery!*"

The words rang out with wild impetuous frenzy, like a knell of doom.

"It shall not be eternal misery, Hugh," said Alice, in a subdued voice. "I—I cannot endure to see you suffer so! Give me my child—and let me go. I will accept the

infamy of forsaking you—I will hide my uselessness from the world. I am ready to sacrifice anything for your happiness—but my child. I cannot sacrifice *her*—I cannot leave her to another's care. Oh, listen, my husband!" she entreated, her dry, tearless eyes shining with an unreal light, an evidence of the fiery force within; "listen to me! Is it not more immoral to live as we are living, than it would be if you follow the dictates of your heart—and I follow those of my conscience! We *must* part! I *cannot*, Hugh—I cannot stay."

He moved a step towards her, his horror-stricken bewilderment in no way decreased.

"Alice, have mercy!" he cried. "Do not decide upon your action now. I—I am ill—wretchedly ill! Oh, this infernal, crashing, deafening thunder!—it deadens my brain. For God's sake be patient! I have enough suffering for the time without your bitter reproaches—well deserved as they are! But you wrong me, Alice—by Heaven you do! I have been a vile scoundrel in that matter, but I swear by all the devils in hell that if I neg-

lected you it was not for *her ;* and that it was force of circumstance, and not deliberate will, that degraded me."

"I am to believe it was—*an accident?*" she retorted.

In spite of his almost rational words, there was something positively ridiculous to her in their implication ; there was something grotesquely absurd in his allusion to the storm. *She* scarcely knew that it was raging, so completely was it overpowered by the storm in her soul.

"She's gone, Alice!" he whispered, with wild impressiveness.

"Gone?" she inquired, calmly, pointing to the letter.

He flung his clenched hands into the air.

"She *shall* be gone from this hour ! Stay, my wronged wife, while I swear a solemn oath—I will never look upon her face again ! From this moment I will hold no communication of any kind—I will not even"—

"That would not be common humanity. Because, remember, if my wrong could be righted that would be no justice to her.

Because I must suffer, is no reason I should be vindictive to another woman who is also wronged—although she may not have been deceived. . . . I do not know how far she may have been misled, but I *do* know it is an unfair match when a man of education and refinement—in short, one who in society's sense is termed a 'gentleman'—stoops to decoy an ignorant girl completely out of his sphere. Men and women fight with unequal weapons in these days of advanced civilisation!"

He could not stand invulnerable before the sting of her satire. Here he made an attempt to speak, and failed.

Alice went on with quiet deliberation.

"I know the charm your powerful intellect had for me. Perhaps it was because I thought I understood it—I did not, you see! I know what the charm of your professions of love were to me—ah! I *will* not think. . . . She has experienced, in all probability, a still greater influence from your higher intelligence. I think the flattery of the knowledge that she had gained your unlawful love would

be sufficient in itself to overpower any restraining sense she might have possessed. You had better take her. Her written message—all I can ever know of her—convinces me that you could easily satisfy all the demands her limited capacity would require of you. *She* is no rigid moralist, poor woman! She would have no regret for the legitimate wife displaced, or she would never have taken this step to drag the shameful secret of her position before me. Why should she consider me—if *you* do not? Argument may as well cease; no cooler reflection can aid my judgment. You *may* make her happy—you never can make my life even endurable now. We are divided in soul, Hugh. . . . Unkindness, neglect, indifference, I could have borne—I *have* borne; but this humiliation is the one drop too much in the cup of bitterness. I could not annihilate, but I could have suppressed every token of my fond, foolish, feminine love for you, and have been only more slavishly faithful in the depths of my heart. I could have sustained any outrage—but *this!* It is the last straw which has

broken me. *This* is the step we can never retrace—this is the evil that admits of no remedy. Farewell, Hugh! You can injure me no more—but remember that *she* is on your mercy."

He uttered an awful imprecation.

Alice pressed both hands to her ears to shut out the sound—and fled.

CHAPTER II.

What hand hath made thy loveliness a dream?

RACINE.

IT would have been an almost impossible task to analyze Hugh Willoughby's mind after his wife flew from the room in horror at his dreadful oath. At first, he was positively stunned, amazed, maddened by the utter confusion of his mind. He knew that he was incapable of reasoning with himself; he therefore took refuge in his inevitable enemy —a glass of brandy.

After this, he began to see that some action must immediately be pursued. And having once recognised his incapability, he immediately despatched a telegram to the office to the effect, that being really unwell, and weary with the night's watch, he would not arrive till later in the day. Then he sat down to think.

He had compressed into the past few

hours of his life the wickedness of years. It has been said that "a great sin is a course of wickedness abridged into one act." He felt the truth of this. Years, spent in the commission of common sins, seemed to him religious compared with the sense he now had of having passed every boundary of righteousness. True he had hated Charlotte; it was hard indeed to believe that he had ever regarded her with even the lightest passion that men are apt to call love. But now the hatred had all died out; he would have given all his life—past, present, and future—to see once more the yellow-haired laughing girl, with her insolent airs and her fair childish face, as it was when he had first seen her, when she attracted his passing notice by her evident intention to interest him—but not as he had seen her last, with a vicious line about her mouth, and a bitter oath upon her lips.

"If you don't promise, I'll worry you both! I'll torment you—so help me"—

How terribly she had kept her word! By what supernatural power had she kept it

even in death? Of this he dared not—could not think.

And she was gone!—gone with all her imperfections, to answer for her short life of sin.

A tap at the door; the servant entered.

"I've sent the telegram, sir. Here is the change."

"That will do. Where is your mistress?"

"She's gone out, sir."

"Gone!" exclaimed Hugh. And then he checked his surprise, for it became necessary to deceive the girl. "She should not have gone in this torrent of rain. I do not think Mrs. Tennear's request to see her could have been so urgent."

Hugh's manner was perfection—the perfection of nature itself. But yet the girl could not help noticing his ghastly and unnatural pallor.

"And where is the baby?"

"Missus took her—and that's what I couldn't make out."

"It is not your business to 'make out' anything," said he rashly. "Your mistress

has her reasons, although she did not think it necessary to inform you."

"I'm sure I didn't mean any harm!" said the girl, with some spirit. "Anybody would have wondered at it! I'm sure just now, when missus ought to be so careful, it's downright wrong!"

"Go—go, my good girl! Of course, it was wrong; I am much concerned about it. I wish you had told me she was going," said Hugh, scarcely conscious of what he said.

She, too, had gone! He could not believe it.

It seemed inconceivable that she should have fled from him in such hot haste; should have taken the child, even while the terrific storm still raged. It was not an hour since he had been in the heat of a chaotic battle with her, and one in which he felt himself totally unequal to fight—and now, she had left him for ever!

Hugh Willoughby could scarcely conceive that he was the same man; he seemed to have lost his identity. Drink and dissipation had done their work, but they had brought

nothing in their train of evils which he could not master. With all the changes that had been wrought, he had been still himself, had felt himself capable of acting as he pleased. But now, this self-possession had deserted him; he could not speak as he pleased—even within the last minute he had been compelled to act a part.

When he had attempted to answer Alice, he experienced, as he had said, an utter incapacity—for the man was haunted by a supernatural fear in addition to all the cares of his mind.

The letter appeared to come from the dead! Charlotte had only threatened to send it—and here it was!

Alice's eye only had seen it. It lay there on the table crushed together, as he had held it in the frenzy of the moment. He could not have touched it—he could not have read the lines that conveyed that awful message.

Dead!—and buried!

> Oh the solemn, and strange
> Surprise of the change!

He was the same, and *not* the same; years

seemed to have been added to his life—he had a double existence; his brain threatened to give way under extreme pressure.

There was *one* thing clear—and *that* was too clear—a horrible spectre was at his side, whose shadow over-clouded him, and kept him lost to all but that memory. He shrank from the future with a dread that dared not anticipate even an hour.

He, who had smiled at all supernatural terrors, knew now that he was actually haunted.

CHAPTER III.

In the first days
Of my distracting grief, I found myself
As women wish to be who love their lords.

HOME.

"DEAR girl! I wish she were home again," sighed Mrs. Tennear, as she drank her coffee in solitary discomfort.

She had just finished reading one of Isabel's letters, in which she had said that her aunt had so much improved that she really thought charity ought to be transmitted home, and that her mother must need companionship quite as much as her aunt.

"Yes; indeed, I am forlorn in my loneliness. A woman is never happy unless she has something near and dear to her to protect and care for. I've a great mind to ask Alice to let Baby Bell come and stay with me for a time. That little sprite would wake any household into life. Dear me, how

the storm increases! The lightning is almost blinding."

She rose and drew down the Venetian blinds, and turned the light from the room.

"It may be foolish, but I cannot help feeling nervous. I remember when I was a girl like Bell, I always had the sensation she describes—though I was not at all timid then. How funnily she described to Colonel Macnamara, that day of the picnic, how the electric current danced through her veins, making her act quite involuntarily, so that she never knew what it would compel her to do next. Dear girl! I hope it will be long before she loses her bright spirits. They are a great gift, as far as this world's enjoyment is concerned. It has often astonished me, how Alice has retained so much of her natural vivacity under this heavy trial."

Mrs. Tennear rang the bell. Susan came into the room instantly, looking dazed and alarmed.

"Why child, what is the matter? Are you afraid of the lightning? You look thunder-struck!"

"Oh, it's Miss Alice, ma'am! and she's dripping wet—with no umbrella—and the baby wrapped up in a waterproof!"

"You, Alice? Go Susan—I shall need your assistance by-and-bye. But take baby—she is always pleased to go to you."

The door closed upon the baby, who had gone with laughing glee to an old friend.

"What is wrong, my child?"

"I've come back to you mother—to stay altogether this time."

Alice spoke in a dogged determined tone—in the voice of one enduring suppressed anger.

"I have come to stay for ever. Will you take me back again, mother?"

"Alice! Alice!" exclaimed Mrs. Tennear, "are you out of your mind?"

"Unfortunately, no. I was never more certainly in my own mind than I am at the persent moment. We needn't make any fuss about it—I am able to command myself thoroughly. The fact is Hugh has insulted me, and I have come to you for refuge—you will not deny it, mother."

Mrs. Tennear looked, as she felt, confounded. She was surprised out of her self-possession.

"My dear," she began hesitatingly, "little differences between man and wife should be between themselves alone. When they become reconciled, they would feel ashamed to"—

"This is no 'difference,' mamma," replied Alice, with the same rigid calm; "no paltry quarrel; we are too discreet to drag such matters before any one. But we do not quarrel—we never have quarrelled. *This* is a breach that can never be healed."

Then there was a pause, during which the mother partly read the spirit of her child.

"This is very dreadful!" she said, seriously. "The position of a woman who deserts her husband is a terrible one."

"But it would be a still more terrible condition to remain with him," retorted Alice, quickly.

"What has occurred? Under ordinary circumstances I object to all—to any interference between married people," she added

emphatically. "But I must know what has happened before I agree to take you under my protection."

"Do you doubt me?" asked the daughter, with sudden pain.

"Doubt *you*, child? God forbid! But I doubt your right to decide upon such a point as this."

"Then who has the right—if I have not?"

"No earthly thing! Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," said Mrs. Tennear, solemnly.

Alice was not impressed.

"If a man cannot do it—a woman may," she said, with abrupt decision. "A woman has parted us more effectually than any law, earthly or heavenly, can do. Hugh has found another wife—and he will have to abide by his later choice. He has probably discovered a better match—and, for aught I know, he may be justified in making it." There was a peculiarly pathetic sadness, mixed with the scornful tone, which sank almost so much as to become inaudible before she concluded her sentence. "But I should not be just in

separating him from her, whom he deliberately prefers."

"Good heavens! has he been so vile? . . . If, Alice, he has even committed bigamy, you alone hold the legal right," exclaimed the mother excitedly.

"My legal right may be intact—my moral claim has gone for ever," said the girl, in bitter wrathfulness.

"What *do* you mean, Alice?—for heaven's sake, be plain."

"He has taken another woman without the aid of the Church; and *I* have been—lending myself to their crime—in ignorance, thank God! Now the truth has come out I have no alternative."

"Excuse me, my dear, your duty is in quite an opposite direction."

Alice gave a start of contemptuous surprise; she was betrayed into this exhibition of feeling by her astonishment.

"That is what any worldling might say! And—I did not expect it from you, mother."

Mrs. Tennear's face was full of sorrow, but she was perfectly composed, and quite

sensible of the weight of meaning conveyed in her few words. She embraced her child with sympathetic tenderness, and there was not a shadow of resentment in her reply.

"We will talk when you are calm enough to listen to me without disgust, my dear, and when I have learnt more than the bare facts. For the present, come up to my room, and change your wet things. What a risk to come out in such weather, and carry that heavy child—in your condition too. It is unlike you to think of yourself first, my dear. Come, I insist upon making you comfortable. You look utterly worn out and fagged."

"I have had no sleep," was her daughter's brief reply; but she gave no further confidence.

After the dripping garments had been removed—Alice's clothes were positively wet through—and she was warmly enveloped in a dressing-gown, her mother insisted that she should lie down, if not to sleep, at least to rest. She brought a wine glass half filled with a syrupy fluid.

"That will set your nerves in order."

It certainly did that to some extent, for before Mrs. Tennear left the room Alice was lying quietly and peacefully upon the sofa.

Poor mother! she hoped her child would sleep and be refreshed, and wake and weep away the hardness of her sorrow; for tears do comfort an aching heart. Alas! she knew full well there was but little comfort to be anticipated for Alice. The first bright promise had faded, and the prospect had clouded drearily; then came a dire misfortune, which was a calamity, although it was not insurmountable. And upon this had followed Hugh's unquestionable retrogression, for his intemperance had increased to an extent that was bound to be recognised. And last, this shameful scandal, which had flung the loving, admiring, forbearing wife back to her mother's arms for protection.

And could she refuse it? And, on the other hand, how could she counsel the girl to leave the husband she had chosen from all the world? It was, she considered, only natural that the pure, high-toned, moral spirit of her daughter should resent this last

stab to her honour, with an acuteness no other calamity could provoke. There was something to be thankful for in the fact that Isabel was still away. But, as the poor mother thought of her elder daughter, she could not fail to be reminded that if this unfortunate incident could not be arrested, it would be both disadvantageous, as well as distressing, to Isabel.

Here, however, was the real difficulty—here at her door—in Alice.

For the rest of the day Mrs. Tennear deemed it expedient to leave Alice as much alone as possible, trusting that a calmer mood might intervene, and a calmer reflection might influence what appeared to be a hasty judgment, if, indeed, it were anything but a rash instinct.

She herself took up some food into the bedroom; "for," she said, "you will not be able to conduct yourself with ease. And it is only proper that at present we should do all that is necessary to avoid suspicion, until there can be a decisive arrangement."

"I think I have slept," said Alice wearily,

as she sat up. "Surely you must have given me a sedative."

"It was needful, I assure you; and, indeed, you look better already."

"You are very kind," said Alice, mechanically; but there was no warmth in her words. "You had better tell the truth, dear mother—that I am ill. I am sick to my heart's core."

Again alone, her mind dwelt morbidly on the past details of her life. She had passed them over, because she chose to consider them trifles—but were they trifles? It now appeared to her that she had been slighted, scorned, and abused to an extent, to which few women, even in our highly civilized state of society, are doomed.

Imagination lingered over Hugh's cool indifference until it appeared positive cruelty. The remembrance galled her. She hated to think of those tender, loving appeals she had made to his affection. They were agony to her now; they roused a spirit of wrathful indignation within her she could not quell. Had she but known! Jealousy?—no; it was

not that. Her honest pride forbade the mere idea.

To imagine such a man as Hugh infatuated by the attractions of such a woman, as the writer of that letter might be, was almost an absurdity. Yet he, her husband, had barely attempted to deny the fact. He had been surprised into admittance of the position, and—she must do him justice to the end—he had appeared overwhelmed at the revelation. Such utter confusion she had never witnessed in any mortal creature, and least of all did she expect to see it in a man of extreme power, self-control, and uncomplying strength. But then, such iniquity was also beyond her realization. This worldly, innocent woman could not attempt to indicate his temptation, because she could not understand it. Her knowledge that she had been entirely blameless, that she had erred only by giving without reserve the love he had not cared to retain, was no source of comfort to her now.

At this time, she experienced one of the bitterest of all the heart-rending pangs to which human nature is subject—she felt that

in all this wide world there was not one soul to sympathise with her grief, not one who could even comprehend her aversion to her husband's sin. In her injured, overthrown mind, she judged her own mother wrongly.

Alice had not acted on the spur of insane rage, and she was not the woman to overcome one revulsion of feeling by another.

"Every hand is against me," she cried, in her anguish, "against me and my dear innocent child."

With this reflection came another anguish, one keener still, which smote the inmost depths of her soul—the recollection of the child to come.

"Oh God!—oh Heaven! I cannot bear it!" she exclaimed in her misery, "I cannot live through it!"

CHAPTER IV.

The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers
Is always the first to be touched by the thorns.

MOORE.

ALICE came down to breakfast next morning, with a composure that her mother certainly had not expected.

"How have you slept?" was the first question.

"I scarcely know—I think I did sleep. Where is Bell?"

"I can't coax her away from Susan; but she is coming to breakfast."

Never was a little child's prattle more welcome. Excited by the change, the brilliant little creature chattered incessantly. This was an intense relief to her grandmother, if not to her mother; for it may be well believed that the child's pleasure found no echo in her sad heart.

Both women were thus able to avoid touching on the theme that each would will-

ingly have ignored—but ignored it could not be.

After the child had been fed, caressed, and sent away with her chosen companion, Mrs. Tennear closed the door, and drew her daughter over to a seat close beside her.

"Before I speak, Alice, read the letter I have received from your husband this morning."

Alice shuddered.

"What can he say? He cannot insist upon my going back! No, I shall not read the letter; for facts cannot be denied, and it is upon those I act."

Now Mrs. Tennear, as has been seen, had taken care to soothe her daughter by all means in her power. She had carefully attended Bell, who sadly lacked her mother's notice; she had tried to tempt Alice through some sort of meal at breakfast, and had failed; she had succeeded in rousing some interest in the child, but it was only at the moment the little thing was dismissed. After one clear day she certainly had expected to find her daughter's views some-

what modified; but this commencement was certainly not reassuring.

She sat with the letter in her hand, wondering how she had better continue the attack.

"The thunderstorm has quite cleared the atmosphere—I think we will send little Bell out."

"As you please," said Alice indifferently.

The allusion to the storm had brought back instantaneously the fearful scene that had been enacted the day before. The storm was indeed stamped upon her memory; it had raged in such wild accordance with her own passionate heart—it was the tempest at which even Hugh had trembled.

"Well, my dear?" interrogated Mrs. Tennear, hopelessly folding her hands over the letter, and looking thoroughly inconvincible.

"You wish to know my decision? I am even *more* satisfied that I am right, after mature reflection. There is but one thing—or two that are virtually but one—separation by mutual consent or divorce."

The words were spoken with a firmness that gave no doubt as to their sincerity. Hers had been no idle passion expending itself in a night's pain.

After this the two women sat in silence. Mrs. Tennear did not reply to the announcement which was so shocking to her. She watched the expression on her daughter's pale rigid face, and saw there no sign of yielding. Presently she said:

"You will not read, Alice? Then *I* must.

"'I appeal to you, my dear Mrs. Tennear, in this crisis of my life, because I believe, and I am firmly convinced, that your decision, be it what it may, will be actuated by one motive only — the happiness of your daughter.'"

At the word "happiness," Alice threw up her hands, and uttered an exclamation of fierce contempt.

"'I know that she has gone to you for protection, and I am doubly grieved that she

should have fled from me with a precipitation which, I fear, must have proved injurious to herself.

"'I acknowledge my sin, and bitterly and deeply regret the remarkable temptation by which I fell. No act of mine can repair the wrong to my wife, who has been only too perfect—immaculate. My life, for the last twelve months, has been one protracted trial. I have suffered more than I can expect even you to believe. My remorse has been true and lasting.

"'After this admission, I ask you, as a woman of the world, may I not entreat Alice to forgive me? My sin has been utterly and completely forsaken—I can swear to that by every vow under heaven—and I can promise as sincerely that the future shall be made as endurable as I can make it to her. Need I represent to you the terrible degradation, the dreadful results of bringing our lives, hitherto so truly and, for all but this, so mutually joined, to what may be actually called a public tribunal? For, unless my wife relent, publicity is unavoidable. If we separate, the

scandal will be almost as great, as if such means as those I dread to think of were really resorted to.

"'Need I remind you of Isabel? Need I remind you of our child—and the child that is to be? The stigma which would be attached to their future lives you cannot overlook. I know I need not urge these pleas on you, but I implore you to urge them upon Alice. Plead for our children—for herself—and last, if not least, for *me*. Tell her the truth—that I cannot live without her. I have been a bad man in some respects, but I have always loved and revered her, as I do now—as I ever shall—as I never can cease to do. If she deserts me, my life—my very soul is lost. I cannot write—I wait your answer in fear and trepidation, and in such affliction as man has seldom sustained.

"'With but one gleam of hope—with but one chance of refuge—in her pity and forgiveness—I am yours in all sincerity,

"'HUGH.'"

In all sincerity! Indeed he felt, as he

scrawled the hasty petition, as if he heard his own death-knell. If Alice took steps for their separation at this moment, what *might* happen to him was beyond mere conjecture. Oh, Charlotte!—poor, foolish, vain Charlotte!—what untold misery arose with your short selfish life!

Again there was silence. Alice made no comment on the letter. Her mother could not judge, from the downcast eyes and half-averted face, whether the rush of colour, so unusual, were the result of anger, or of some more tender emotion.

"Child, his argument is pure, if he is not. Cannot this throw some light upon the matter, my poor darling? Oh, Alice, how my heart bleeds when I look at you! Can't you see that, so far as the present is concerned, your husband can make no more perfect atonement? Cannot you feel how deeply sensible he is of your position? Can't you see that the revenge you would take would be, after all, but a selfish gratification? —that it would recoil and involve the suffering of others near and dear to you, whom

you are bound to cherish, even if you would not hesitate to sacrifice your two lives?"

"That last clause is thoroughly accomplished, I think," interrupted Alice, with quick sarcastic emphasis.

"I wish—I wish you were not quite so strong in your own virtue," sighed Mrs. Tennear.

"Mother!"

"My child, I *do*—in spite of your expostulation. There are circumstances in which we must throw over personal considerations on the principle"—

"The plain English is—can you advise me to advocate, and aid, gross immorality?" Alice asked hotly.

"You would be doing that, if you stooped to hold the position of a betrayed wife knowingly. But you cannot lower your moral tone by doing that of which you were ignorant. You have a penitent at your feet—a suppliant for your mercy. *One* suppliant—you have many. You decide, not for yourself, but for others—let that thought help your decision."

She stopped for a moment to control her voice, and wipe away the tears that had risen in her eyes; then she went on solemnly—

"There can be but one opinion—one religious opinion—and your resolve should follow that."

"I must speak the truth to you, mother," replied Alice, quite as solemnly; but there were no tears in her eyes. "The whole of your argument seems to me to be nothing short of sophistry and self-deceit. I say this honestly—and I know that you speak honestly too. You know the world much better than I do."—She paused and sighed heavily. "A knowledge of the world seems to me to imply nothing but a knowledge of its infamy, and the hardening of one's own conscience to meet its demands. I used to feel hurt, in days gone by, because I thought you were rather hard on Hugh—because I thought you regarded his venial errors as great faults. I cannot understand why, in a greater offence than any he has committed, you should be on his side."

"Yours, Alice—on yours!" corrected her mother.

"I have been injured and insulted in the eyes of the world, and in my own estimation. The substance—the very foundation of marriage is annulled. Assuming that *I* had broken the bond of faith—who do you think would have pleaded for *me?* Would you, mother?"

But the mother answered never a word.

"Hugh has done a grievous wrong—he has broken faith with Heaven, and himself, and me. His act has parted us essentially—and eternally," Alice said with intense emotional strength.

"*That* neither his act, nor yours, can do! He is your husband still—and the father of your *children.* Do not shrink from the word, Alice—you *must* meet the truth. He is your husband—the only man you can ever regard in that light, or I am mistaken in my child. Do you really think that any act of his, or yours, can separate you eternally? You are wrong! And if you take the course you are determined upon, you will find that I am

right. You scoff at my arguments, I know; and your morality is good ground; but your religion should, at least, be as good."

"Religion and morality are indissolubly combined."

Alice made this assertion as if it were incontrovertible.

"Well, the Christian law bids us forgive until seventy times seven. The Christian law forbids man to judge man"—

"The Christian law is wholly impracticable," said Alice, positively.

"Do you know what you are saying?" demanded her mother, shocked and bewildered by the assertion.

"The Christian law is simply impracticable! The old moral law is best fitted for our state of society—and society is compelled to defend itself by that law. Do not let us waste time—no argument can disprove what I have said. If we attempt no defence—if we turn our faces to receive yet another blow—how long pray should we be even permitted to exist? Why if we gave every article of our clothing to thieves—in-

cluding the cloak first stolen—if we lay down our very necks to be trampled upon by the vile oppressors of virtue and the unjust perverters of gain—then indeed our humility would inevitably become extinct, and all the law-breakers, thieves and sinners would be left to the triumph of a battle won without resistance. And how they would enjoy it! For they are all cowards, their very lives prove it—for are they not all shuffling to evade the just avenger? The truth is that either they, or we, must preponderate; we must fight for our rights boldly, bravely, and honestly, or we must, with moral cowardice, suffer the ignominy of being unfaithful, as well as weak. Take away—blot out the law of our land to-morrow, and how long could we continue to live in it? True, if men were not occasionally scoundrels and swindlers, we should need no law but the Christian religion to govern us. We must have *some* justice in this world—or there would soon be no need for justice being dispensed in the next. We moderate the old law—we do not demand an eye for an eye"—

"We do not," replied Mrs. Tennear, struggling through an abject confusion of ideas—"we do not go upon that principle in an enlightened age. We pray to reclaim the sinner."

"Yes!" exclaimed Alice, contemptuously —"but we punish him all the same."

"Even if he be an enemy, we give him that grace," pursued Mrs. Tennear. "We pray for those who persecute us"—

"Yes in church!—and we prosecute them during the week."

"Oh, Alice, your heart is hardened indeed! We ought to forgive all who injure us; and we ought to be ready to give our lives for those we love."

"That would be infinitely more easy than losing one's honour!"

"The easiest course may not be the most just, Alice. You *must* put aside personal considerations, my child—for you are a mother. What an abnormal, unnatural condition would yours be, if you were to part from the man who has, I know, your unfailing love. You are bitter against him

now; but a woman's love, Alice, is not so easily killed. Consider—you are a young woman—young enough to be interesting in the eyes of the world—and the world is very censorious."

"You could not use a more unavailing argument," Alice broke in bitterly. "I am dead to the world, the flesh, and the devil! I never could regulate my mind to worldly morality."

"Perhaps not, Alice; but you have not got to think of yourself. For the sake of others we must pay some regard to the 'world' while we live in it. No; in spite of the rancour you now feel, you would—believe me, Alice,—you would find your revenge dying out, and your undying love returning. Then the vain regret, of having exposed your husband's sin and folly to the scandalous world you despise, would be a perpetual torture. . . . Neither wife, maid, nor widow—and to have to teach this position to your children! For as they grow up to understand, their father's weakness must be published to them—the truth must eventually be told."

She paused for a reply; but none came.

"When you swore that sacred oath upon your bridal day, did you mentally insert a clause to the effect—that if the man you had voluntarily and trustfully chosen should err in his vow, you would on that account be justified in breaking your promise also?"

"*Mother!*"

"That is substantially your argument You should remember that one wrong can never compel another."

"I do not wrong him! I merely respect myself. I *cannot* wrong him. In one sense I shall be as everlastingly true, as he has been false."

"Yes, 'has been'—and now is repentant."

"And would that be your argument, had I so failed?"

"You really should not revert to that position as an argument! It is admitted that men are more liable to temptation than women," said Mrs. Tennear forcibly.

"It is a very convenient excuse—and I do not believe it! Woman is the weaker vessel—weaker in mind, in body, and, God knows, how much weaker in her heart."

"No, Alice; I must insist that she is stronger—stronger there. She will suffer more, endure more, forgive more than any man can."

"That being so—her heart being softer, more impressible than man's — proves woman's greater temptation. Man's weakness in truth! And we, the weaker still, must respect it—bow to it!"

Alice's lips curved in sympathy with the sarcasm of her words; her cheeks were burning in two bright spots, and her eyes had lost their normal expression in the fierce light that burnt in them.

"No, mother; I'll tell you what it is—the cant of society invented man's weakness for its own purposes. There *should* be one law for men and women. There *can* be but one moral law—one moral feeling—in the matter; and yet we allow a social law to condemn one human being, and excuse another for the same fault. Kind, palliative law!—tread down the weak! One thing is sure—their cries will never be heard, even if you listen with your ear down on their graves. . . . Oh, how I believed in him!" she went on with wild

passion. "What pride I had in his talents! How I honoured his exemption from all coarse and commonplace things! I thought he possessed the purest intellectual sensibility. He was *my* Arthur—my stainless king, and blameless man—

Who loved one only, and who clave to her."

"Ah, those fine idealisations!" sighed the mother. "You have been next to an idolater, Alice."

"And now I am an iconoclast!" she said bitterly. "You say my love cannot die—I do not wish that it should. But I can never 'reverence' my husband again, although I may pity him.

He for God only, she for God in him.

It cannot be wrong to love to any height," she continued, thoughtfully, her passion subsiding as suddenly as it had arisen. "Does not Heaven—does not nature teach us to adore a superior being—to submit to him? You said my beliefs were 'fine idealisations—' are there no 'Arthurs' then?"

"Women sometimes—think so, I believe."

CHAPTER V.

Alas! the love of women! It is known
To be a lovely and fearful thing;
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
And if 'tis lost life hath no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone.

BYRON.

"AND so the subject is dismissed for the day," said Mrs. Tennear, hopelessly. She folded her hands as she sat alone, and thought over her conversation with Alice. "I am, afraid that she is inflexible, and in that event her life is completely ruined! And the poor child is not four-and-twenty! Knowing, as I do, her devoted attachment to Hugh, I should have thought—I certainly *did* think his letter would move her. I suppose it is necessary that I should write and tell him how matters stand. I must say that Alice's reproach to me was deserved. I have been hard on him—I have thought very badly of him lately. It is singular indeed to admit it, even to myself; but I never thought more highly of him than when I read his letter.

Before that, I almost doubted he had a heart; but now I know he has one, and can suffer. This is the first sign of penitence he has shown. Disgraceful as the whole affair is, there is hope yet. I am now convinced, from this most unexpected event, that Alice has a tremendous influence over him."

She took up her pen, and wrote only these words:—

"I shall not trouble you with any personal feeling that *I* may have in this disgraceful matter. I merely hold it a necessity to reply to your letter, and to tell you that your wife absolutely refuses to return to you under any conditions.

"A. S. TENNEAR."

She enclosed and directed this to Hugh. Then she wrote another note, which was equally brief, and somewhat evasive, to her sister in Plymouth:—

"DEAR SARAH,—

"Bell, in her last letter, talked of coming home this week. I write a hasty

line to ask you to manage somehow to detain her. I have a little difficulty I should prefer to get through without her—girls are better out of the way sometimes. I am quite rejoiced to hear you are so much improved.

"Ever yours affectionately,

"ALICE."

This she also enclosed in an envelope; but she did not address it.

"Fred must do that," she said; "Isabel would expect to see a letter of mine. Oh, how hard it would be to be compelled to tell *her* this! I should loathe the task!"

Later in the day Alice came down. She wore an aspect of determined cheerfulness, which would have been ludicrous had it not been so pathetic. However, it is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous. She evidently meant to ignore the past.

"Mamma, I hope you will go out to-day; you must not treat me as a visitor now."

"I hope you will go too, my dear—you must think of your health."

"I could not possibly leave the house,"

replied Alice, with a shudder. "I should feel afraid."

"Well, well, you had better take a stroll in the garden," said her mother, soothingly. "I have written to Hugh, and told him your resolution. Perhaps it would be as well to remain quite in seclusion until this matter is finally settled."

"It *is* finally settled, mamma," said Alice, throwing back her head defiantly.

"Mr. Willoughby, ma'am."

Both women rose in consternation.

"Go, Susan," said Mrs. Tennear authoritatively; "show him into the dining-room."

The girl went in some astonishment.

"I will not see him," exclaimed Alice.

"Then I must," said her mother. And then as she moved towards the door, she stopped and turned suddenly, and looked at her daughter. She would not utter another appeal, but there was one to be read in her eyes.

Alice neither spoke nor moved in response; she retained the same defiant attitude, the same fixed gaze.

Mrs. Tennear summoned all her native dignity to her aid; and when she entered the dining-room it was with her most imposing presence.

"I am more astonished than I can express at seeing you," she said majestically.

Here she stopped, for she did not expect the little speech she had prepared to be so exactly expressive of fact. She was indeed "more astonished" than she could express, when she looked upon his face. Its colour was an ashen grey; the eyes were sunken, but the orbs prominent and brilliantly overpowering. He held himself well, but the tokens of his suffering were so plainly written upon brow and lip that there was no need for words to describe them.

She paused. He saw the effect he had produced, and caught up the position in an instant.

"I thought I should surprise you—indeed I surprise myself! For God's sake, do not reproach me now! Hear what I have to say!"

"I must ask if you have received the

letter I sent this morning? I do not think it is possible."

"I have not received it—I could not wait for an answer—I have come for one. What is it?"

"One, I think, you can but expect. You should know your wife, at least, as well as I do, though from your conduct it would appear you do not. . . . Oh, Hugh! when I gave you that girl—my youngest child—my little sunbeam, as I used to call her—how little did I dream"—

"Oh, have mercy!" cried Hugh, with an involuntary exclamation. He staggered to a chair and threw himself down. "I *cannot* bear additional reproach—my own is too great."

She gazed in fresh surprise upon this exhibition of emotion, and she saw that it was genuine.

"I could not have believed it!" she meditated. "I always thought him so cold."

Then memory carried her back to an occasion when she had heard him read some

poetical selections with strangely forcible dramatic power. And now, she told herself—"the latent passion was in the man."

He started to his feet. "You are *her* mother—I do not care how I humble myself to you!" Then he paced the room with rapid strides, and spoke, with tremendous energy, as rapidly as he moved. "Let me explain. If I tell you all, you will be able to understand my position, and you will help me for her sake. I must assume, from your words, that you know the cause of this misfortune. Some eighteen months ago I was drawn—ensnared—bewitched—what you will—by the woman who had the audacity to write to Alice, and assert, I have not the faintest doubt, a whole batch of ambiguous lies. I have not read the letter; it was accidentally destroyed. I scarcely know how my difficulty first arose—I was involved in it before I recognised my indiscretion. My boon companions were men whose morals were not strait-laced. Need I tell you that I had no conception of the affair being anything but a mere wild freak—it was not a

premeditated design; and I hated the temptation that led me astray as soon as I fell into it. Since that time my life has been one bitter reproach—one perpetual remorse. I have been like one labouring with an oppressive nightmare—I have been driven to habits of intemperance. This—you must have known"—

Here his voice sank, and he stayed his hasty strides.

"I have known it to my sorrow, Hugh."

"And you have doubtless attributed it to my pecuniary misfortunes. I swear to you that that was not so!" He paused for an instant, remembering that his real trouble with Charlotte commenced only at that time. "Had it not been for that sin which weighed upon my conscience, my other trials would have passed very lightly. I was at first greatly concerned, as to how Alice would bear the change in our fortunes; but she behaved so heroically, and made my home so bright, that I could not but feel our trouble was lessened. After my pride had had its fall, I strove to arrange—matters, so that I could

feel—a free man once more; and just as I thought I had succeeded—then the shameful secret, I would not for worlds have permitted to reach Alice's ears, was conveyed to her."

Mrs. Tennear sighed.

"It has caused incalculable misery," she said.

"I never anticipated such results for one moment! . . . Need it be irremediable? My prosperity is now assured; I have nothing to do but persevere and wait. In a year or two all will be well with us; we shall only have had to pass through some struggles in the early years of our lives—as thousands must of necessity. *The past is dead*," he said, emphatically. "Of that my wife shall be convinced. What interest have I in life, but in her and our child?—what interest for the future—what hope? Oh, tell me—give me one expression of sympathy! Can you feel for me? Do you believe in me?"

Believe in him! could she help believing? the man was pleading as if for his life. And it *was* for life!

He had sat alone and brooded, until lone-

liness had become insupportable, and the suspense more intolerable than the worst confirmation of his fears. It was as he had said—if Alice did not relent, he was indeed lost. The greatest danger he had to apprehend was exposure—if *that* should come, the secret of that horrible night's work must almost inevitably transpire. He could not endure to think of it—and yet it was before him every instant. What wonder that he should plead for his life! What wonder that his listener was confounded by this passionate abandonment of feeling!

Mrs. Tennear began to see, as it were, behind the veil—he had not ceased to love Alice after all; and through all her trials, his wife had recognised this love, and womanlike was happy in its possession. "And she must have it still," thought her mother.

She could not but acknowledge that there had been a deplorable retrogression. It was to her a marvel that an intellectual man, like Hugh, should have been guilty of such an error as this. But the fact must be faced. Other men had so erred—it was terrible—

but what was the alternative? Were so many more lives to be sacrificed to one evil? Was one wrong bound to generate more?

She answered him with grave precision.

"I believe in your thorough repentance, Hugh. I believe it is not possible for a man of your intelligence to think upon your wife and child, and not repent. To a certain extent I *do* sympathise with you—I sympathise with your present suffering; but I do *not* sympathise with your transgression. I must plainly say I cannot give you any hope of reconciliation; the message conveyed in my letter was to that effect. Alice's love for you has been, I know, absorbing; yet, at the present moment, she has no feeling whatever for you. *She* will not believe that you can feel remorse. You must know her absolute purity of life—you must know her innocence of all the worst of this world's crime—can you expect her to judge you leniently? If you had married a worse woman you might have found her more forgiving."

Hugh had listened to her in silence.

"You are treating me more kindly than I

deserve," he said. "If ever I am permitted to hold my proper place again, you shall see that I am not ungrateful. Help me, at least, in one thing," he cried, fervently, "let me see her!"

"Certainly, if she will agree to an interview."

Mrs. Tennear hesitated. It was possible, that if a meeting took place now, while Hugh was in this impulsively fervent frame of mind, some radical change in Alice's feelings might be effected. She could not but contemplate the softening of her daughter's heart, at the very sight of the distress she alone had the power to produce, or alleviate.

"For," thought she, "the love is there, warm and tender, however thick the ice that surrounds it."

"I will acquaint her with your request," she said, as she left the room, "but remember, I am determined to take nothing upon myself; this is not a dispute to be settled by any interference."

She left him with his hope somewhat revived. He was surprised at the treatment

he had received from this good, proud, affectionate woman, who had hitherto been somewhat misunderstood by him.

* * * * *

"I think, Alice, that you should not shrink from hearing what he has to say. His anxiety is most intense; and he knows better than you do—and better than I do—what immediate steps will have to be taken, what offensive disclosures will ensue, and into what painful publicity you will be brought. All this you forget, my child."

"I forget nothing," said Alice, firmly, standing erect as she always did, when moved to strong emotion. Her head was well thrown back, and her eyes met her husband's apologist with calm severity. "But I am no coward, mother—I will see him. He shall hear my decision from my own lips once more—but in your presence—I entirely refuse to see him alone."

"Come then!"

When Alice entered the room—she went

in first—Hugh made an advance towards her. She raised her hand as if to keep him at bay, but she did not raise her eyes to his face.

"I am not here to be subdued by your superior power," she said, "I am here to take an obligation from my mother—to let you know that I am not acting under any influence, but that of my own moral and religious feeling. My mother has advocated your cause in a most—unexpected manner. Her arguments, I am bound to admit, have touched me acutely—and they were *yours*. When my conscience guides me, I will allow no paltry lower feeling to interfere with my action. I believe that, with God's help, I shall be able to take care of my—children, as I might be able to do if they were fatherless by the decree of their Father in heaven. There can be no appeal after this—the whole thing must be settled at this moment. Both mamma and you seem to be much concerned about 'disclosures'—surely there need be none, if we agree to separate mutually!"

"Such an agreement can never be mutual between us," said Hugh, impressively.

For the first time during the interview Alice turned her eyes on him, and she too was amazed at the indescribable change a few hours had wrought. Although he exhibited more self-control, he looked quite as ill, quite as unaccountably perturbed as at their last stormy meeting.

"Do you mean to say, that it is in *your* power to refuse?" she exclaimed.

Hugh saw at once that he had gained an advantage.

"Certainly I *can* refuse. You are acting conscientiously Alice—I intend to take a lesson from you. *My* conscience forbids me to approve our separation."

"Then you drive me into the very position you have appeared anxious, for my sake, to avoid—publicity. This is a specimen of your self-abnegation, I suppose."

"Alice, do not be cruel! I have no desire, Heaven knows, to add to your injury. I have in view only one end—one aim—to be reconciled to you—to atone for my past errors, and to show you that my carelessness was not indifference."

"You have refused me," said Alice, with deliberate firmness, "the only desire *I* have left—I must do the same by you. We are at least mutual on one point—we can refuse each other the last favour."

Then she turned and left the room without another word.

Her husband and Mrs. Tennear regarded each other fixedly.

"I told you so!" she said.

"I thought I had some chance," said he. "Of course, I shall not dream of refusing whatever she may request. You will let her know that from me."

"But not yet," said the mother, "not until she has had time to reflect upon what you have said."

"No; tell her at once!" cried Hugh, impetuously—"at once! Let her not think I am hard to her, to whom I would willingly be so tender. Not even for both our sakes can I permit her to be driven back to me from fear of any result. She must come for love—or I will abide by the worst."

Again Mrs. Tennear found herself affected

to a degree. He was indeed agitated as she never could have expected to see him. He spoke with a warmth and intensity that told of strong passion—but Alice was rock!

"Promise me you will tell her!" he entreated. "She is to have everything her own way. Since there must be a sacrifice—I am the proper person to be offered up as an atonement for my own sin. . . . I go now. I will never disturb her peace again, since she has prohibited any other appeal. However she may decide—whether she chooses to preserve her honour in the strictest secrecy—whether she elects to return to a repentant husband, and save him from—God alone knows what future misery—or whether she desires to brand me before the world as an adulterous villain—it is for *her* to consider. I leave you now—I thank you, and I trust in you."

With these words Hugh left the house without waiting to make a formal departure—left Mrs. Tennear sitting quietly weeping, moved to her heart's core by this strange interview.

CHAPTER VI.

The days she never can forget,
Are earnest that he loves her yet.

TENNYSON.

THERE is nothing more easy than to make up one's mind to avoid a certain topic of conversation; and there is really nothing more difficult than to keep one's resolution; this is probably because the mind insists upon dwelling upon the subject to the exclusion of every other; having no relief in words, it avenges itself upon the mind.

Mrs. Tennear had resolved not to mention Hugh's name to Alice; she deemed it expedient to leave her daughter to the dictates of her own heart. She knew that sometimes opposition provokes opposition, and that too not out of mere obstinacy; so she determined that if by chance this troublesome matter again arose, and she had sufficient presence of mind, she would certainly rather appear to agree with her daughter than to disagree.

A week had now passed since Hugh had left the house in dismay and disappointment; and during the whole of that period once only had the topic been broached; and it was Mrs. Tennear then who had given the cue.

"Let it be understood, mamma, that I am ready for whatever Hugh insists upon," Alice had answered, taking up the allusion with her usual quickness. "He knows my decision; he will not agree to a mutual separation; and he knows the only alternative. Of course, if he will not agree to a mutual separation, I must be driven to a course I should not have chosen, and the matter *must* come before the Divorce Court."

At this time Mrs. Tennear had found it necessary to explain to her daughter that Hugh had not only given way, but that he had never even opposed her.

"He desired me to tell you at once;" and then she repeated Hugh's own forcible words. "So you see, Alice, he gives you the absolute right to decide on a matter as serious as life, or death."

Alice had listened to her mother with calm-

ness; but her eyelids drooped, and a shiver ran through her frame, when her mother quoted his last appeal.

"You are harder upon him now, than if he were a stranger and a foe."

"And I have a right to be!" Alice had answered hotly. "The stranger has sworn no oath to be to me what no other living creature can ever be; the stranger does not betray my trust—as Hugh has done."

They were the only words which had passed; and since then an unnatural calm had settled on the household. But for the child, there would have been no conversation at all, beyond the ordinary and necessarily trivial remarks at table; and yet Mrs. Tennear and her daughter were on perfectly good terms.

"Try to occupy yourself with something, my dear," the mother said.

"I have tried," Alice replied, wearily. "I can't feel any interest in what I do. I cannot even read. But do not disturb yourself about me, mamma; I shall get over that in a little while."

When a chance visitor called, Alice bore her part bravely. It could, of course, be no surprise to any of her mother's friends to find her there on a visit.

One elderly lady, who had known her from childhood, said to her mother, when she left the room to fetch little Bell to be admired and commented upon.

"Alice is not looking at all well; no doubt she misses the summer holiday to which she has been accustomed. Mr. Willoughby, I suppose, is too much engrossed in his business now to leave it."

"I am thinking of taking Alice away with me," said Mrs. Tennear, evasively. "I think she requires a change."

"I doubt that she will be persuaded to leave her husband for any length of time. She certainly is, to my idea, the most devoted and perfect wife."

It has been said that no further word was spoken, but this day—the one following that on which they had touched on the subject—Alice saw a note despatched to her husband; and so she knew that the die was cast—that

Hugh was informed that his last message had been delivered to her, and that the deed of separation would now be drawn up.

"Bell shall have the birds—of course, she shall!" and Mrs. Tennear removed the glass shade, and showed her grandchild the tempting treasures of stuffed birds without any veil to their splendour. Then she took the little child upon her knee. "Now which will she have to carry about, and have for her own?"

"Oh, mamma dear, you are too indulgent! she will only destroy it in her excitement."

"Of course, she will dear child! but she has no intention of the kind; Bell has no destructive propensities. In her excess of affection she may do some damage—but she'll love her bird quite as much when it is maimed —won't you, Bell?—you're quite woman enough for that. That's right! I knew you would choose the brightest colour from the feathered flock. You have a taste for art, I see; but it extends only to bright colours as yet."

Little Bell's face was flooded with delight,

as she took the gorgeous creature with awe and admiration from her grandmother's hand. The instant it was in her possession she fled to her mother with a natural impulse.

"Look, mamma! Look at 'ittle Bell's booty dickey bird!" she cried, with emphasis on every broken word.

"Do you love it?"

The child's answer was a rapturous hug, accompanied by a frantic caress.

"Ah, Alice, a little child is a great blessing—but a much greater responsibility."

Alice's perceptions were quickened in an instant to the suggestion.

"I think, mamma, you had to bring us up without a father's care."

"I had the misfortune, my love, to lose your father very early in life. I did my best for you, my children—but Heaven knows how much better he might have done!"

The allusion was plainly understood on both sides, but neither reverted to the subject on which it bore.

"We are all too apt to think," continued

Mrs. Tennear, thoughtfully, "that if children are well fed, well clothed and cared for, and educated in due time, that we have done our duty by them. But it is a great question to me how far a parent's real duty does extend —and where a parent's authority should cease. I revered my own father to such an extent, that I never dreamt of desiring what he denied me; and yet it was not that I believed in his capacity to guide, so much as in the implicit faith I had in him. I knew that he loved us so well that every action of his life was regulated by his love."

This was another indirect lesson. Alice was digesting it, when Susan announced that Mrs. Willoughby's servant wished to speak to her.

"Let her come in here!" Then Alice turned to her mother. "Hugh is indiscreet to send her with a message."

"We do not know that she has been sent," replied her mother, quietly.

Rose came in, in some consternation. Her message—if message it were—was decidedly incoherent. Little Bell had gone to her, and

she stooped and talked to the child incidentally.

"Well, ma'am—I don't know whether I was right to come to you—but then knowing you stayed here not being well—yes, my ducky, he is downright lovely! but for all that he ain't so nice as you. It's wonderful how's she's took to me, ma'am, isn't it?" And the girl's good-natured face glowed as she appealed to Mrs. Tennear. "Well, as I was saying, master being so curious, as he has been for two or three days, I didn't wonder a-seeing him come home downright knocked up yesterday. He didn't eat anything at all I know—not a crumb at home; so I said to him, I'd better fetch a doctor, and come and tell you, ma'am. But he wouldn't hear of it. He said he wouldn't have missus worried on his account, if it was ever so; and he told me to get out of the way, and leave him alone. And this morning I waited and waited, and he never came down. So after a bit I went and knocked at his door, and he said, 'Come in.' He hadn't got his coat on, and he tried to laugh.

'I think there must be something wrong with me,' he said. 'I've been trying to dress all the morning, and haven't got strength.' He was sitting down in the rocking-chair then, so I said, 'I think, sir, you had better let me help you over to the bed, and then you can lay and rest. I'll bring you a cup of coffee, and then I'll go for missus.' And then he jumped up and called out, 'No, no, no!' three times, and he staggered so that I was obliged to hold him by the arm to keep him from falling. With that I saw he wasn't able to move, so I helped him down in the chair again, and I said, 'You'll have the doctor fetched now, won't you?' And he said, 'You may go for Thompson now,' and shut his eyes. Well I went out of the room to get the coffee, and when I came back he was sitting just the same, with his eyes shut and quite still. So I said, 'Won't you try and take a drink of this—it will do you good.' But he never moved, nor stirred. I felt frightened, and I went a little closer, and I couldn't hear him breathe—and his face being so dreadful pale, I dropped the cup and

saucer out of my hands, and it went all to smash."

Mrs. Tennear's eyes had continually turned upon Alice during this detailed narrative. She saw her daughter's face pale perceptibly, and now the lips parted spasmodically, though no sound issued forth.

"And what happened then?" asked Mrs. Tennear, quite naturally. "Of course, he awoke with the noise?"

"Yes, he did make a most awful start! But I didn't mind then, though I was frightened enough, goodness knows! but I just put on my bonnet and ran straight here. I didn't go for the doctor—somehow I felt I must come to you first."

"A most natural and highly proper feeling, my good girl," said Mrs. Tennear, seeing her daughter's discomposure, and coming to the rescue. "Go to Dr. Thompson at once! Take the note I will give you; it is to beg him to come to Mrs. Willoughby immediately after he has seen your master, for I much doubt she will be permitted to leave this house."

"Yes, surely," said the girl, "missus do

look dreadful ill, that's certain." The girl's kindly eyes dwelt upon Alice's half-averted face. "Well, there—I'll be quick!"

"*I* will make all other necessary arrangements, and you must not leave the house again for the present," said Mrs. Tennear, and then the door closed upon Rose.

Alice stood like a statue.

"Of course, something must be done," said her mother. "I've given an excellent reason for your deficiency; but something must be done, in common humanity. You will have the satisfaction of seeing Dr. Thompson, and learning all particulars, while I go and hunt up Mrs. Peters—she's a trustworthy woman and a good nurse. Now understand me, Alice, I shall do my duty as far as my conscience dictates—just as you do yours, my child. I shall go and see Hugh, to assure myself of his condition."

"There will be no necessity for you to go out, mamma, nor—have any further difficulty," said Alice. And then she burst out parenthetically "I have been no end of trouble to you—have I not?"

Then she paused and looked at her mother; her eyes were glistening, and her fingers clasped each other nervously.

"I know *whose* duty it is to nurse my husband—and so—*I am going*. I shall meet Dr. Thompson there—and not here."

Mrs. Tennear did not answer immediately. She kissed her daughter's white cheek, and saw that it was excitement, and not a flow of tears to the eyes that caused them to glisten so strangely.

"Do not excite yourself," she whispered—"there need be no great haste—he has—like you—been overstrained."

So on this calm exquisite autumn morning—when this little suburban portion of the world seemed to be resting in the satisfaction of perfect peace, when the soft sunny haze produced delicious effects in these trim streets, with their occasional spots of fading verdure—Alice found her way back to the home she had forsaken; and her footsteps were quite as hurried, as when she had fled with her child, in the rude violence of the dying storm.

"The doctor hasn't come yet!" cried Rose

in accents of alarm. "And what will he say when he sees *you?*"

"I am not disobeying him," said Alice, "for I have taken care he should not prevent me. Send him upstairs the moment he arrives!"

Alice passed on, and went into her husband's room, without even removing her bonnet. She did not wait an instant to gather courage, and yet she could scarcely manage to draw her breath when she entered.

All her apprehension of the meeting might have been spared, for Hugh sat, or rather lay, in the rocking-chair, half dressed as the girl had described, and quite unconscious. Close beside him was the spilt coffee, and the fragments of the broken cup. She spoke gently, but her voice did not rouse him. She fell upon her knees beside him, and gave way to a bitter outburst of tears.

The violence of her grief relieved her considerably; she now felt it possible to do the work required of her. She rose to do the first thing that appeared needful; she com-

menced arranging the bed, and while she was doing this the doctor came.

After making a short examination of his unconscious patient, he turned to Alice, who was standing by with an anxiety that could not be all suppressed, and said, with evident conviction—

"You are, of course, aware, Mrs. Willoughby, that your husband has been suffering from a mental strain of no common nature?"

Alice shivered, but she made no reply.

"His condition, I admit, may be alarming to *you*, but *I* have no fear. There is no sign whatever of bodily illness. We have however to guard against an attack of brain fever. I must be informed of the first change that takes place. If, when he wakes to consciousness, he should appear sane, take care to impress his mind happily; if this can be done for a moment only, it will be of advantage. He may then be induced to take some light nourishing food. I find him very low; he cannot have eaten anything solid for days."

"Do you really think," asked Alice in

faltering accents, "that this is entirely due to mental worry?"

"I have not the least doubt of it!" said Doctor Thompson emphatically. "Your husband is blessed with a splendid constitution, which is as sound as a bell. His nervous energy is tremendous. I think, with all these things in his favour, you will find that he has sufficient strength to recover this blow. Do I understand that—you are unaware—of any matter, that can have occasioned a heavy mental trial? This is not a question of idle curiosity—remember, I am asking professionally; because if possible the pressure should be removed. As his wife, you would know of any difficulty, in his business; but if you do not I am inclined to suggest that he has been unwisely tempted to bear his difficulty alone—probably in the hope of surmounting it."

"I think," said Alice, whose nature was candour itself, "I think I know the cause of his past depression. It has nothing to do with his business—that is progressing quite beyond his hopes."

Again her voice faltered, and her tearful eyes were cast down.

Doctor Thompson asked no more. He bade her good-bye cheerily, left general instructions, and, as a last clause, advised her to retain her own composure, and consider the demands upon her own health.

So this was all! The struggle with her conscience was over now. Before her lay the man to whom she had been pitiless, now as weak and helpless as a child; and before the night he might be in a raging fever of the most fatal kind; and *she—no other woman*—the cause! Truly, with all her quickness of perception, she had been marvellously deceived in this matter of her husband's regard for her. "It has always been said," she argued, as she sat watching beside the bed, "that men have stronger feeling than women—that, although they do not weep, they feel sorrow more severely; perhaps although they do not show their love quite so warmly, it is deeper and more unalterable."

Then her memory wandered back to the

bygone days, that had been so joyously satisfying to her—the days of their courtship—and the days of their honeymoon—

> The days she never can forget
> Are earnest that he loves her yet,
> Whate'er the faithless people say.

And the recollection of the whole exquisite canto, ending with the intensely poetic words—

> I cannot understand: I love,

came back to her. The very line seemed to have been written to suit her mental condition. Had she not for years of her life suffered unnecessarily? Ought she not to have believed that—

> Though rapt in matters dark and deep
> He seems to slight her simple heart?

Ought she not to have believed that—

> Their love has never passed away?

Had not this very love driven him to despair?

Hugh moved and murmured. She strained her ears to catch the words.

"Curse that dog!" he muttered, "she seems to understand. Gone—and hidden—

Where is she? Oh, Alice!—Alice do not leave me! I cannot—Alice come back!"

She bowed her head upon the bed, and wept hysterically. She knew it was in vain to argue against the abandonment of her feeling; the time was come when all but *that* was powerless.

All else but what man feels is nought.

"Alice!" It was upon *her* the unconscious man called; the other name—the name she would have shuddered to hear—had not been uttered in his rambling talk.

The allusion to the dog was intelligible to her; for she distinctly remembered the incident of the night that Hugh had spent in the warehouse. He had told her that Snarl had been infuriated, and that he had found it difficult to subdue her.

Oh, that it were possible! oh, that she could forget the one inexcusable, revolting fact, that the woman existed, who could tempt this powerful man, with all his faithful heart, to stray from rectitude and from her whom he truly loved!

She arose from the bed, and determined to make an effort to arouse him. She went round to the other side, with so light a tread that not a footfall could be heard, and there she saw his eyes were partly open; not sufficiently for her to see into their gleaming depths, but the lids were certainly not closed.

Surely a recognition of her would prove the desirable happy surprise that the doctor had wished! Desiring to behave as naturally as possible, she spoke; and although her voice shook in spite of herself, she said lightly—

"You have been behaving very badly, Hugh!—Hush! don't move! I want to persuade you to take something to eat—just to please me."

"Where am I?" he cried wildly, struggling to rise. "What!—is it you, Alice? I thought I was dreaming! Perhaps, I have been dreaming all the time—Alice, did you go away from me? Yes—I'm sure you did! But you have come back—without coercion—you will stay with me, my wife?"

His voice was so weak, and low, that its

energy was expended before he had half finished speaking, and Alice had to stoop quite close to hear.

"It seems that no one else would take pity upon you," she said, making a mighty effort to retain some control over herself, for she dreaded the effect of any extra excitement on his brain.

Another moment and she knew she must escape, or her attempt at composure would be utterly futile. Her heart swelled with gratitude, for she knew that this was no delirium—this almost rational talk.

"There's a knock! now that's Rose with the beef—I'm going to make tea for you—so I beg you'll be quiet until I come back."

CHAPTER VII.

Our life is twofold; sleep hath its own world,
A boundary between the things misnamed,
Death and existence: sleep hath its own world,
And a wide realm of wild reality,
And dreams in their development have breath,
And tears and tortures.

BYRON.

As Doctor Thompson had expected, Hugh Willoughby's fine constitution triumphed, and he evaded the grim foe at his door. So soon indeed did he recover strength, that he was absent from his duty only a few days. There was an intense relief now that Alice was again by his side, for he saw that the immediate danger he feared was past—the overwhelming dread of an inquiry which, in all probability, would disclose the fearful secret of Charlotte's disappearance.

He was in fact a new man, now his wife had forgiven him, and his life again ran in its usual groove. Of course, there was still the constant struggle to keep up his mental capacity to its normal level—to seem the

man he used to be; and it must be admitted that with the outside world he succeeded. But all this was hard work; for from the very moment the torment of the living Charlotte had ceased, he had become enervated and apprehensive. Dead, she had power to absorb his whole soul, and that she had never achieved while living.

All the worldly ambition, which had been part of himself, forsook him now. The very efforts he made towards prosperity were false, for he felt as though it were impossible to anticipate one day of the future. But he did not turn away from all companionship; he led the old life, with scarcely a change that could be perceptible to any eye—but *one*. He had no fear he should betray his miserable secret. His iron nerve he knew was shattered; but he was courageous enough to keep the fragments together. He was colder, sterner to all humanity; but to Alice alone he would unbend, and be kind, if not tender. To her a change was palpable. She observed that the rapid movement of his eyes became more marked, that their pene-

trating glances were keener than ever. She noticed that sometimes he would stop abruptly in the middle of a sentence, his eyes distended and bent on vacancy; then after a minute a slow shudder would creep through his frame, and he would come back to reality with a sigh, drawn as it were from his heart's blood, and be utterly unconscious of the interval passed in his agony. She saw too, that he had contracted a peculiarly nervous habit of twisting his hands about, as though he were dragging some entangling substance from them. This action always ceased the moment he saw that it attracted her observation. When Alice saw these things, she would watch with apprehension, and, hypocrite as she was bound to be, ignore them. But she knew there was something wrong; she knew that he drank deeply and frequently, and because he never now became intoxicated, there was no reason his health both mental and physical should not suffer from his excess. In fact the habit had grown upon him, until he now made no effort to abandon it. He drank for oblivion. The

man's mind had been in a state of moral perversion for years. A wholesome chastisement brought to bear upon him at one point of his career undoubtedly would have had some salutary influence towards his salvation; but strong in his self-assertion, proud in his dominion, he forgot to control *himself*. In his contact with all men it was ever the same—he assumed and held supremacy. He could not even allow a check upon his vices; for he never deemed it possible their strength could exceed his own. He never felt the truest of all exultation—subjection to, and veneration for the Higher Power. "It is only in reverently bowing down before the higher that man feels himself to be exalted."

But now Hugh's self-respect failed him, for he felt the innate cause for shame. He would turn sharply down a by-street to avoid a man he had known in better days; not because of his poverty—his inability to meet the man on terms of equality—but because he knew he was insane of the deadly root that takes the reason prisoner. He hated this degradation of his intellect; but he knew

it was not an enemy that stole away his brains; in losing them he found his only friend—forgetfulness.

At such time as this, Hugh looks towards the calm haven of his home, and almost shrinks from entering its sacred portal. When the lowest part of his nature is paramount, he regards all restrictions with an irritable impatience; he loathes his wife's reproachful glance, from the mere knowledge that she has cause for her uneasiness. He knows that she will use no words to find fault with his delinquencies, that she will only proffer a tender sympathy; and although he would willingly avoid her pity, yet he finds it insupportable to remain alone. If he could frame no valid excuse to be at her side, when domestic matters engaged her attention, he would invariably go out—sometimes not to return.

One night a slight incident brought about a climax. Little Bell was suffering from a feverish cold which required attention. Roused in the night, Alice left her husband

asleep, and carefully closed the door of his room, when she went to soothe the restless child.

She was absent about half an hour; after which she returned as quietly as she had gone, and in darkness. The moment she entered the room she was painfully aware of a shocking and mysterious fear. Her blood seemed to curdle in her veins, and there was no conceivable reason for the sensation.

The room was shrouded in the blackest gloom of night, and yet it appeared to her that there was something in her path impeding her progress. What was it? There was the presence of an indefinable, impalpable thing. She was still—breathlessly still; she could hear the throbbing of her heart; she could hear too a hard laboured respiration from the bed.

Her rapid conjecture that her husband was ill instantly gave her courage. Hastily, as her trembling fingers would allow, she struck a match, and in a moment a sudden full blaze of gaslight filled the room.

Alice turned in terror and saw—nothing.

All was as usual—but Hugh. There was a sight never to be forgotten !

Half raised from the bed, in a crouching attitude, the white curtain dragged around him, as if for protection—with wildly glaring eyes, piercing space with an agonized fear—was the man who could once have faced demons unmoved.

Alice flew to his side.

" What is it you fear ? " she asked, trembling, reading his abstract thought, and watching his now searching, horror-stricken gaze.

" Nothing ! " he whispered, in a choking voice. " *Nothing !*—Oh God, I wish that it were something ! "

She clasped his head between her hands, and tried to soothe him ; her own fears were forgotten. To her quick perceptions his unaccountable terror meant but one thing—it was that which she had heard of so vaguely, read of with such revolting disgust—*delirium tremens.*

" Be quiet, dear ! you are excited without cause—you have only been dreaming."

"Why did you leave me?" he whispered, in the same hoarse voice, while he clung to her nervously.

"I had to go to Bell—I did not wake you."

"What did I say?—Did I speak?"

"No, dear, no."

He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Give me some brandy."

"No; I cannot—do that. You will be better without it! Here, take some water—and let me sponge your face. Talk about it—tell me—what did you dream? You thought you saw something in the room?"

"Thought!" he gasped. "I *felt!* Did you hear nothing?"

"No.—What was it?"

"A shriek—a woman's scream! Oh, it pierced my soul! It set my brain on fire!"

"Hush, hush!" she said soothingly; "you heard little Bell call out, and that woke you from your dream. You are weak still; you have not recovered your tone. I must take more care of you, I see, Hugh—this will not do," she went on gently. "Strive

to compose yourself, and I will watch by you for the rest of the night—I do not want to sleep."

* * * * *

After this, Alice observed an increasing peculiarity in the pertinacity with which Hugh kept to her side. She had conceived the new and terrible idea, that his brain was giving way under excess of drinking. Here she saw her duty clearly, and cost what it would, she came to the conclusion that that duty should be performed.

She said to him one day—

"Will you do something for me—for me only, if you will not care for yourself? I think if you passed your word to *me*, I could rely upon your not breaking it."

Yet even while she spoke, Alice had upon her mind the great oath Hugh had broken.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "There is but one thing I *can* do for you now, Alice—*lay myself dead at your feet!*—I lack the courage, or, by all that's holy, I'd do it!"

"Hugh," she exclaimed in alarm, "don't talk so! It is wicked, and—and—it is cruel to me."

She was timid in attempting the task she had set for herself. There was no indignation in her protest; there was nothing but pure, tender pity, and sorrowful regret.

Hugh's manner had been subdued, but natural, since the alarming event of the dream, and therefore she had not anticipated an outburst of this emotional character at her first simple words. She trembled in pursuing her subject, but *she* was brave—brave in the moral sense, which is far beyond all physical courage.

"Now tell me why," she asked, with patient enduring cheerfulness—"tell me why you do not take any interest in our lives? When you entreated me to come back to you, it seemed as if your life depended on my society."

"I think it did," he muttered thoughtfully.

"Well, dear, I have not added to your trials?"

"You are the only human being who has lightened them, Alice!"

"Ah! but if you talk so hopelessly, I shall think that I am failing to satisfy you; or else—shall I tell you what else I think?"

"Say what you like, Alice; I like to hear you talk."

"Then you will not be offended—promise me that?"

He cast his eyes, wearied, troubled, and indescribably anxious, upon the fragile figure of his wife; and that was all his reply.

"There can be nothing in your life *now* to cause such anxiety—unless it be that—something has occurred to bring back"—

She could not speak plainly—the subject was altogether too distressing to her.

Hugh had invented a most feasible tale. He had explained that Charlotte, finding she could not obtain as much luxury as she required, had eloped with another man; and with a vicious desire to do as much mischief as possible without fear of its results, she had written that letter on the very day of her departure; and this Alice had accepted in blind

faith, believing, too, that she had proof of his veracity. For during that stormy interview, she remembered that he had distinctly avowed that, in another day, he would be free. She felt it impossible to allude to the subject in any plainer words. But he understood the reference and replied.

"Not that—not that! Beyond the regret I shall never lose, I have nothing to grieve for."

"Then I can but attribute your melancholy to—you have promised to forgive me, dear—to the fact that you drink too much and—too often. I daresay it has been a relief to you in the trials you have had to bear; but, like all habits, it has increased, until you do not seem to be able to live without it. Do you know, I am convinced that if you would seriously try to take a little less every day—and your strength of mind, Hugh, is equal to that test I am sure—you would soon reduce the quantity to such a degree that it could not possibly injure you. You *can* do it—and let me say something stronger still—if you do *not*, I believe you will suffer more than you dream of now."

"I cannot do that!" he answered shortly, and with evident pain.

"*You cannot?*"

He answered her interrogation quickly, and checked his speech before it was ended.

"You do not know—pray that you never may"—

Again she was startled by his strange demeanour and the unnecessary force of his words.

"I shall not talk of it," she said, with affected carelessness. "I will wait, and see if you are inclined to do me this favour."

Singularly indeed was this position between man and wife. Since their reconciliation had come about, both were evidently on guard; she, not to let a word of reproach escape her lips; and he—

According to the unspoken compact, the past was to be dead to them both.

Could his past ever be dead to him with an eternal spectre stalking by his side, everlastingly repeating in ghostly gibberish *her* last utterance?

"I'll worry you both! I'll torment you—so help me"—

CHAPTER VIII.

And how the sprites of injured men
Shriek upward from the sod,
Aye, how the ghostly hand will point
To show the burial clod;
And unknown facts of guilty acts
Are seen in dreams from God!

HOOD.

ABOUT this time Hugh Willoughby became the victim of a strange magnetic influence—he could not keep away from the loft in the warehouse. With the utmost caution, he concealed his desire; but he was for ever inventing some trivial excuse for going there, and was restless and nervously wretched while he was in any other part of the house. But here there were no loving eyes to observe him, and so well did he manage to disguise his morbid feeling, that no one discovered the peculiarity.

There was another inhabitant of the warehouse, who found an unaccountable attraction in the loft—and this was Snarl,

"the cleverest dog that ever was known," the men said.

Perhaps there was the same attraction for both.

On one occasion when Marshall and Hugh were both present, the dog found her way into the loft, and taking up her seat near the centre of the flooring, the bare planks of which were soiled and time-worn, she commenced a low melancholy whine that soon changed into a prolonged and hideous howl.

Until this outbreak, the men had pursued their work without noticing the animal; they now exchanged significant glances.

When Marshall's voice could scarcely be heard, Hugh turned round impatiently, and said—

"Turn that brute out one of you!"

"That's what we're always doing sir—nobody can't keep her out!"

Marshall now looked round with some curiosity.

"If all accounts about Snarl be true, she's too clever a dog to be ignored. What's the matter, old girl?"

"It's a queer thing, sir, she sticks to that spot like wax—and we can't make her comfortable anyhow, as she used to be."

Hugh's face was overshadowed by a sickly pallor.

"Humbug!" he said, with quick displeasure, and he attracted the attention of Marshall at once.

"Yes, Willoughby, as I was saying there would be a great improvement by your suggestion; but I'm not prepared, just at present, to carry it out. We won't involve ourselves in too many enterprises at once. What *is* wrong with that dog?"

The speaker kicked the flooring with his heel.

"To my eye now there seems to be something unusual on the surface."

"Nothing but dirt," said Hugh, decisively.

"Dirt in plenty; but there's what I should call a screw loose; this plank for instance," he continued, examining it more closely, and stooping in order to do so, "this plank looks as if it had been removed. And it isn't clotted in as the others are with grease, and

other 'matter out of place.' A good general description that of dirt—and according to the best authority."

"There's a good reason for the disturbance," said Hugh coolly, "if that creature is always scratching there. We should be much wholesomer for a good scrub up."

"I believe, Willoughby, that scrubbing down is the term. We'll wait till the glaziers come. There must be something wrong—Snarl can't be wrong—rats, perhaps. I wish you could talk, Snarl!"

The dog looked up with a pathetic appeal in her eyes. She gave two or three emphatic wags of her tail, as much as to say "I wish I could," and she scratched at the wood with her paws, and yelped bitterly.

"Yes," replied Marshall, "we'll have the boards up when the men come to arrange the skylight, and find out what has been disturbing your peace of mind, my lady." He patted the dog's head. "There go out!"

If any one had managed to catch Hugh's eye at that moment, he might have read Snarl's threatened fate there at one glance.

Marshall's endeavours to resume the conversation failed; Hugh spoke coherently certainly, but that was all.

"Well, I think when we have despatched those letters, we may as well go and have a chop together. You're not looking well, Willoughby!"

"I am a little out of order I believe—liver wrong, I think—makes a man look worse than anything else. I'm not up to a chop," he said, as they strolled out; "but I'll have some oysters."

Now this incident of the dog, which was treated as a curious puzzle by all else, was a very serious matter to Hugh: it meant more than eye could see, or mind conjecture. The confusion in his mind was painful and alarming to the last degree—it was apprehension sharpened to its keenest intensity. His first impulse was one which was utterly unworthy of his own reasoning faculties—he determined that the dog should be missing that night. Upon cooler reflection however, he came to the conclusion that this step would be calculated to arouse suspicion instead of disarming

it. Snarl must remain, come what would; for Marshall, as well as every workman in the loft, was now on the scent. No; there was but *one* alternative, and from that revolting task he shrank in absolute horror.

While his mind dwelt upon all manner of contingencies, all outside possibilities, he was incidentally lunching, and occasionally conversing with men he happened to know. If his eye were vacant at times, they no doubt attributed his absence to the extra cares of his position.

"But though Willoughby looks worn to death, he's got such a deuced lot of pride that he carries his head higher than ever," remarked one friend to another.

Literally speaking, he certainly did. His figure was always erect and supple; and now, he seemed to carry himself more proudly, and more defiantly than in the days of his prosperity.

No mere mortal has a right
To carry that exalted air;
Best people are not angels quite—
While—not the worst of people's doings scare
The devils: so there's that proud look to spare

CHAPTER IX.

A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs.

SHAKESPEARE.

"I've brought Steve home with me, Alice! He was anxious to see you, and I said I'd allow him half an hour."

"I'm quite grieved to hear you have not been well," said St. Leger. "Your husband said that under the circumstances of our extremely confidential friendship, you would make no objection to see me."

"Of course, I would not!" said Alice. "Indeed, I have felt my isolation for the last few weeks very severely. But—how do you think Hugh is looking?"

St. Leger could detect the anxious hope in her voice, and he could not help for once speaking against his conscience.

"Capital! 'Richard's' almost, 'himself again!'" said St. Leger, and he was rewarded for his reply by her happy smile.

"Trouble brings all sorts of evil in its train—does it not?" said Alice contemplatively. "Even so strong a man as my husband has suffered from the strain of those unhappy months when—we were going down the hill."

"He is the last man I should have expected to suffer, however. His self-possession is to me something grand."

"I assure you," said Alice confidently, "that occasionally he is quite nervous."

St. Leger's surprise was expressed unreservedly at this, for, to the outside world Hugh was undoubtedly colder, and more impenetrable.

At this moment Hugh, who had been absent, entered the room.

"Now, tell me, as it is late, I must ask the question—have you dined?"

"Most certainly! I would not hear of troubling you to-day. We dined at the Woolpack together."

"Have you kept to medical orders, Alice, and been out to-day?"

"No," she said, averting her face playfully,

as if ashamed of the admission. "But I've been busy, and—as the evening is so deliciously fine, I thought a stroll in the garden would do me as much good."

"Little hypocrite!" said Hugh. "Pray how did you know the evening would be fine? You might have lost your constitutional to-day."

"I cannot stand by and hear you called bad names. Let me take you out in the garden at once," asked St. Leger in playful entreaty.

"Are you anxious to entrust her with the arcana of your soul as usual?" said Hugh with a laugh. "Well, you may go!"

"We were not waiting for your permission," said Alice laughing. "But you'll join us, and have your solacing cigar—will you not, dear?"

Hugh agreed; and St. Leger and Alice left the room.

Instantaneously the change came. The careless aspect he wore of necessity, entirely deserted him, and in its place arose an indescribable gloom; he threw himself back

in his chair, and sighed profoundly. In less than a minute he was lost to the present, as completely as though he had no part in it—lost to his own existence—to the common objects that met his eye on every side—to the sounds of cheerful talk that reached his ears—dead to all but his own visionary conceptions.

He saw again the scene no other eye but his had witnessed; he felt again the touch from which he had recoiled; he saw again the woman dead at his feet; he felt again the sudden detestation of himself; he shrank again from the horrible shudder that crept through all his veins, as he dropped the pistol from that dread right hand—the temptation past—the deed achieved!

The nervous action, which had puzzled and perplexed Alice, was unconsciously begun—he was positively in the act of disentangling Charlotte's yellow hair from his hands; it twisted, and clung, and coiled about his nervous fingers, and his impatience at the sensation of the elastic net that held him prisoner seemed too terrible to be endured.

This was now the most horrible recollection of all the ghostly work of that night. Those golden locks were like herself—for ever clinging to him.

He rose distracted, and flung up his arms to rouse himself to the present. The perspiration was starting from every pore—he might as well have done the work he had been dreaming of.

Oh! why had he trusted himself alone? Better to keep up the false semblance of ease to the last day, without one moment's relaxation, than this!

He composed his countenance, and walked into the garden; he could see no one, but he heard Alice's voice give a startled exclamation.

"Where are you hiding?" he asked.

"Mrs. Willoughby has got into a spider's web, and can't get out!"

By this time Hugh had reached St. Leger. Alice was laughing, and scrambling out of the bushes beside the summer-house.

"I went to get Mr. St. Leger a specimen of the curious insects that infest the laburnum

tree, and—will nobody give me a pocket-handkerchief? I've dropped my own somewhere, with the 'specimen' in it. Oh, what an irritating sensation is a spider's web drawn over one's face! I shall never get it out of my eye-brows!"

"I'm afraid not," said St. Leger laughing. "The owner of the mansion you have destroyed—an enormous creature, striped with black and yellow—is sitting on the top of your comb, speculating on his next airy scheme."

Alice had no timidity of the kind which makes women shrink from contact with an insect; she would not have objected to touch the creature. She stooped her head towards Hugh, and said—

"Take it off, do dear!"

In the rather hasty movement towards him, or more probably from the rude embraces of the shrubs, a loose coil of her hair had fallen from its fastening, so that when the spider ran, Hugh's hand, in the action of pursuit, was slightly obstructed by the floating tress. He gave a convulsive start of palpable aver-

sion at the entanglement, and the hand was suddenly withdrawn. So forcibly indicative of disgust was his face, that St. Leger could but gaze at him with blank astonishment.

Alice gave a little shriek, as the loose strands of her hair were torn out.

"Oh, what *are* you doing, Hugh? be more gentle!"

But in his rash violence, it had now become impossible to extricate the hand without great care; and this it was evidently beyond his power to give. He trembled—he turned livid.

St. Leger saw the necessity of interference, and, with some presence of mind, he quickly went into the house, and brought back a pair of scissors from Alice's work-basket.

"A knight to the rescue!" he exclaimed. "Let me release you! This is indeed a knot that no man can put asunder."

And he was absolutely obliged to cut away a portion of the loose tress of hair before Hugh's hand was freed.

"The sensation is a thousand times more offensive than your spider's web, Alice," said

Hugh, somewhat regaining his composure, and attempting to smile.

But the effort was so sickly, so ghastly, so meaningless, that Alice turned away her head in terror.

"Let me cut it from your fingers!" said St. Leger advancing, and noticing the nervous trembling his friend in vain tried to hide.

"No, no!" exclaimed Hugh angrily, aware that his behaviour must excite surprise, and feeling at the same time his inability to control himself. "I will leave you now—and *do* try to keep out of mischief—if you can! Perhaps you never felt the sensation of being caught by a woman's hair," he finished lightly.

"I never did," replied St. Leger; "but I should have thought the sensation rather pleasant than otherwise."

Alice's bright spirit was suddenly extinguished; she was confused and bewildered. Yet she could not propose to leave her visitor, even upon the reasonable excuse of putting her hair in order. She was embarrassed too, because she could but be aware that this

accident demanded explanation; and she knew that she had none to give.

And St. Leger was strangely silent; he too was meditating on the singularity of Hugh's conduct.

"Caught by a woman's hair," thought he. "Many a true word is spoken in jest!—and *that* was the worst attempt at one I ever heard!"

CHAPTER X.

Have I not hideous death within my view?
SHAKESPEARE.

To have dived into the recesses of Hugh Willoughby's mind at this time would have been to reach something altogether too horrible for contemplation. The ghastly details of one never-to-be-forgotten night racked the man's mind to its profoundest depths. When he realized the dire necessity of that fearful work, now to be undone—the disinterment of the murdered girl—he shrank with a horror that made him fear that he was losing his intellect. But madness was denied him—and madness would have been a boon.

How long was he to live in this torture of mind and body? With all his stern outward strength, every nerve in the man's frame thrilled with an indescribable agony, when he approached his place of business every morning. The dreaded suggestion that presented itself so formidably was that the discovery

had been made, and the relief was but momentary when he found that his secret was still his own. A miserable ejaculation would escape his lips, and then he would wipe his damp brow, and be a man again. Then came the haunting desire that could not be set at rest, until he had found his way to the loft from which it was so hard to be absent.

What was the magnet for him there? Day by day the danger seemed to grow nearer; it was like wearing a galling chain that grew tighter at every step. The terrible fact faced him in all its naked awfulness—*it* must be removed. And to no human being could the work be entrusted; his hand, and his alone, must accomplish the deed. At any moment the workmen might arrive, and by no stratagem of his could they be prevented from making the search for rats, which had been finally decided upon.

"But it's no rats, sir," Elliot had said, in strict confidence to Hugh. "Snarl's too clever a dog; she wouldn't sit and howl in that *hawful* way, if there was a thousand rats! Why, she'd be mad to get at 'em! she'd

snap and yelp, just as we've heard her scores of times—and what she got her name for. I tell you what I've been thinking," the man went on, in an awe-stricken whisper, "I've been thinking that somebody in that room was *a-going to die!* You know dawgs do seem to know that before anybody else."

"Oh, don't talk such abominable trash, Elliot! The creature's out of her mind; she'll be raving mad before the month's out, so look sharp for who's bitten—*he* will go for certain, and then your prediction will be verified."

Elliot, like many other men, had the firmest reliance on Hugh's knowledge; he accepted the statement in good faith, and instantly took alarm.

"Oh, sir, why don't you have her destroyed?"

"Well, I'm not master here now, Elliot; and she doesn't trouble me—that's Mr. Marshall's business."

He was not, however, displeased at the accidental talk, because he thought it might lead to the removal of the animal without

his being in any way responsible. But this was not the case.

Day after day Snarl moaned out her anguish in the loft, and day after day suggestions were thrown out by the men, who, Hugh said, must be the stupidest set of asses in the kingdom.

"This melancholy noise worries me as well as everybody else," said Marshall one day, "and I can't accuse Snarl of an unreasonable act, because animal instincts are never wrong. Jones, when *are* those carpenters coming? Curious thing house workmen are such an erratic set of men! In any other trade their unpunctuality would not be tolerated a day."

Hugh drew a deep breath—the moment had come at last, and the resolve was taken.

That night—that very night!

There was an occasion for him to go out this morning; he took it, and laid his plans accordingly. It was with a tremendous effort he performed the trivial and unavoidable task of buying that which he deemed necessary. In vain he argued with himself

that the shopman certainly could not guess his purpose. He felt as though he would have given thousands to the man, who would have procured for him a common chopper in the profoundest secrecy. But could he dare, feel as he might, put such power into the hands of any being, however secure?

No; he must pay the penalty his crime demanded. Himself and one dumb animal—thank God, dumb!—alone in the heart of the mystery.

In the midst of anticipations, too revolting for words, he met St. Leger face to face. He was, as it were, brought to bay before he knew who had intercepted him.

"Hugh! So long since I've seen you—should have been down before this, but I waited for permission. Well, how's your wife and—the little stranger?"

It was not surprise that caused the wild confusion of Hugh's senses—it was surely no astounding event to meet St. Leger, or any other friend, within the precincts of the city, but there was something in the genial, pleasant address that was so entirely out of

character with his own reflections, so exaggerated a contrast, that the reaction almost took his breath away.

He managed, however, to utter a few consistent words, and his deep measured voice did not shake.

"My wife is still an invalid."

"Not anything unusual, I hope."

"No. Mere weakness, I believe; but she's not up to the mark of entertaining yet."

"I'm very sorry to hear she is not quite recovered," said St. Leger heartily. "How are all the rest?"

Now, "all the rest" was a phrase that Hugh in his right mind could never have misunderstood. However, he replied vaguely—

"Oh! yes—how are *you* going on?"

"Capitally—for all but one thing! I've got into the right groove, I think. My new position suits me admirably, or I suit it. It's half the battle to feel an aptitude for one's work. Seen Staveley lately?"

"No," said Hugh. "He's sticking to his business now, I suppose; and so ought I—

there's a heap of work to be got through somehow. Good-bye!"

So they touched hands and parted.

Truly St. Leger might have been a ghost; he was just as unreal to his friend, at that moment, as if he had been a veritable shade. As he vanished, he was as instantly dismissed.

"There must be a device to get rid of Elliot—I don't think that he'd ever doubt me."

Then Hugh set the remnant of his agitated mind—the atom that did not dwell upon the removal of the *thing* that struck such terror to his soul, and raised such discontent in poor Snarl's uneducated brain—to originate ideas as to the accomplishment of his plans.

There was an amazing amount of power in this man, for, notwithstanding the bewilderment of his senses, he managed to comport himself with even more of the stringent haughtiness, which had always been his distinguishing point.

He reached the shop to which he was bound, and quietly examined the first object

that caught his eye on the counter. The shopman had to inquire three times the customer's pleasure. He could not have had the faintest conception from the demeanour of the gentleman, who was so evidently pre-occupied, that the man's whole mind was working up the mere effort of speech, that between him and his interlocutor there stood a distinct shadow of a fair-haired girl with a laughing face and impudent air! But for very shame he would have turned and left the shop.

But a worse strain than all this, he knew, was to follow. He could estimate the trial to nerve, and brain, and physical strength; but even *he* could not measure his own dogged endurance, his own stern unyielding determination. Could he but have dismissed his horrible anticipations with a shudder—but no, they were not to be dismissed. He lived as a man in a walking dream—himself an unreal substance. The visionary forms his mind conjured were indeed realities, but all else was delusion. Everything was shadowy and indistinct, but the shade that followed him.

"After this," he gasped, "after this there will be rest."

And yet he knew, from bitter experience, that there could be no annihilation of the past. Men may wipe out certain stains, and whiten the sepulchre; but through all impeding substances *his* stain would come through—*blood!*

* * * * *

"You're looking deuced ill, Elliot! Upon my word, I think Snarl is right—she had her eye on you! You'd better see about getting a holiday—there, I'll be generous, and give it without consultation! Jones can take your place for a day or two. So that's settled!"

This was taking the bull by the horns, with a vengeance; but Hugh knew there must be a bold stroke, or none.

"I take a kindly interest in you, Elliot. Tell me—have you been worse lately?"

"I am always bad enough, sir—but, of course, I struggle to keep my place. Do you.

see any particular bad signs, sir?" asked the old man, with palpable timidity.

"I can see from your symptoms," said Hugh, steadily regarding him, "that you require rest and change. I will take the responsibility, as I have said, and you can go and get a deeper draught of air than you can draw in this dense city. Now, be off—I'm busy. You can leave early—I'll arrange with Jones. And—look here, Elliot, you'd better take some tonic while you're about it."

"It is only the grasp of the nettle, after all!" said Hugh, between his clenched teeth.

He meant to grasp.

* * * * *

With all Marshall's aptitude for business, he was always anxious to be gone at the close of the day's work; therefore it was not unusual for Hugh to remain to the last. So well did he succeed that no one knew of his arrangement, and he, of course, designed to put somebody in Elliot's place next day.

And now again he was alone. By the dim

light he sat in his office brooding fearful thoughts; ostensibly reading, his nervous fingers never for one instant ceasing to trifle with the rustling leaves of the book. The noise was a relief; the silence was exciting.

He had to wait a specified time, until the world without should have surged homewards, out of the great metropolis of the world. With a strange thrill of amazement, he recognised that no one man in London's millions could bear comparison with him then. He stood indeed alone.

So great was his nervous haste, however, that he could not wait until the time he had allotted to himself should elapse—he could not rest now until the work was begun.

He fastened Snarl in a room, that she might make no disturbance; and then with cautious dragging, cat-like steps, he sought the loft.

* * * * *

The dim grey of the morning light fell through the skylight of the loft upon a scene

as rare as it was sickening and ghastly—upon one living man and one dead woman.

Every little while the man stopped and turned away, holding his hands clasped about his head, which throbbed with an aching pain no words could describe. He stopped to wipe his trembling hands, and to brush the large drops of perspiration from his forehead. He drank raw brandy from a flask at his side; and, often as he had resort to it, there was still no sign of intoxication; he might have drunk the fiery liquid to a much greater extent, but its power was incompetent to deaden the active brain of Hugh Willoughby.

He worked without any intermission, save for those fitful, sickening gasps for momentary relief. He worked on with strangely glittering eyes, and almost convulsive energy, for, before another hour should expire, the task must be completed, or he a lost man—detected.

* * * * *

Before the first ring at the door, the man within was dressed as usual; finished in every detail, his magnificent nut-brown hair arranged in its usual form, his hands scrupulously clean, and no particle of dust upon his clothing.

He sat in his office now, and the light was still burning. There was another light—a red glow from the fire which was smouldering, and sending out a horrible stifling odour.

Hugh, seated there, absorbed in thought, suddenly discovered it. In a moment he woke to action; he put out the light, opened the shutters, and threw open the window. He then left the room hastily, and returned with some light wood and a large piece of cloth, which he placed in the grate, and proceeded to set in flames. In a short time the smell of the burning calico destroyed all other odour. Then he carefully conveyed into the yard the burnt relics, and covered them with some other rubbish.

The last, and only one thing remained. There, on a bench, lay three large parcels,

neatly and carefully made up, fastened around and sewn with strong cord. These three innocent-looking parcels were to be conveyed from this spot to another some few miles distant—to the unused cellar of an unfinished house, which might remain in the same condition in all probability, for years—where they might rest in the grave prepared without fear of howling dogs, or chattering men.

Only a few miles, and it would be all over—only half an hour's drive with the revolting corpse alone, and then peace—then rest!

* * * * *

He would not excite suspicion by leaving the warehouse until the morning was well advanced—the work of the day at its fullest action. Then, gratified that Marshall was occupied elsewhere, and that no one save strangers had cast eyes on those inoffensive-looking parcels, he commenced, with studied deliberation, to take the last step. He drank more brandy, he lit a cigar

with the most careless air, and while he did so bade Jones, who stood in Elliot's place, to fetch a cab.

The time had come. How soon—how soon it would be all over!

The cab was there—that would do. He did not care to trouble Jones—Jones might evince a curiosity a stranger would not.

Hugh strolled out upon the steps. Of course, within a minute, a man who could act as porter would pass. The one chosen might have been selected out of hundreds for his stupidity. He gave proof of his density by first disobeying, or misunderstanding Hugh's directions, and placing the first package beside the cabman. This was immediately removed.

And as he clumsily huddled in the other parcels, he managed to fling down the last so heavily that it fell under the seat. He dragged at the wrappage with main strength, and in doing so a fastening of the cord gave way. From aimless curiosity the man pulled aside a corner of the cloth, and disclosed—*the fingers of a human hand.* He dropped

the parcel as though it burnt him, and hastily withdrew his head from the cab.

He looked quite idiotic as he received his shilling, and stood with it in his open hand as if his reward were unmerited.

"You've got a decent horse, I see—now drive fast—and a double fare!"

The arrangement was perfect. In another moment Hugh Willoughby, with a cigar between his lips, his nut-brown beard glistening in the sunlight, his fine white hand well displayed, flung himself back in the cab, and was driven rapidly from the door.

A few seconds, and the porter realized the meaning of what he had seen—a few more, and the man's dense brain realized another fact. With one wild leap he made his way among the passing vehicles in pursuit of the cab, which was still in sight. With reckless, mad speed, he ran between waggons and carts in the full traffic of a great thoroughfare. Drivers called out and swore at him—horses started in fright as he roughly pushed aside their heads—but he took no heed.

The stupid man was bent on self-destruction it would seem.

Too late—it must be too late! The cab had disappeared—the pursuer was out of breath. He stopped, and flung back his head for air, and gasped—but he could not speak—he made another wild struggle and dashed onwards.

CHAPTER XI.

I knew my secret then was one
That earth refused to keep.

HOOD.

But man cannot cover what God would reveal.

CAMPBELL.

"Now it is just an atom too bad!"

St. Leger is musing, while he sits in official state in a fine room with massive furniture well disposed about it. He is seated before a large table, imposingly arranged with papers.

At the present moment, he is doing nothing, unless castle-building, and day-dreaming may be considered occupations.

His handsome face is more handsome, if not quite so gaily debonair as it was wont to be before he took to "sighing like a furnace," and otherwise conducting himself after the manner of lunatics, lovers, and poets. He was beginning to be consumed by the green and yellow melancholy peculiar to his condition.

"It's many shades too bad! I come home, after more than a year's exile in a foreign land, where I have worked my way, into a position that secures my future prosperity, with the most exemplary discretion. I do violence to my own feelings—I refrain from honourable motives, from declaring my passion, until I am thoroughly justified in doing so; and after all this self-denial—when in any sensible play or novel I should be rewarded—when all is in my favour, suddenly the luck turns the other way—and I find myself worse off than ever! I know now what I ought to have done—I know now where I lost the 'tide in the affairs of man;' but any fool can find out his mistake when it is over. Of course, I ought to have followed up my success at the party, and not have allowed a day to pass without renewing my suit! Mrs. Willoughby's persuasions beat me—and perhaps she was right—it may not have been wise to hasten affairs on the moment of my return. Naturally Bell—my Bell—would retreat from such red-hot wooing—she who has never permitted another to woo her at all

—not even her cousin, poor devil! He has *only* been able to propose. But all would have been easy sailing, if it had not been for that confounded bankruptcy business—*that* kept us apart, although it was not a sufficient cause. If I had behaved more like a brick, and with—a little less delicacy, I don't think—no, by Venus!—I don't think she would have refused me! But fate is malignantly adverse, when a malicious old woman is bent upon having Bell as a companion—as if any hideous old nurse wouldn't have answered her purpose quite as well. She wouldn't answer my purpose quite as well—and that's where the whole thing is so annoying! Well, here I am fervently wishing for the old lady's release—or Bell's. I wish Mrs. Willoughby were not out of the pale of society. If I'd had a better chance I would have coaxed that address out of her, or I'm not Stephen St. Leger! I firmly believe that new baby must be two months old at least, and yet Hugh told me that his wife was still an invalid.

"I'll be hanged if I don't feel out of the world! I've no pleasure—no distraction left,

but the play ; and there, the sight of mock lovers only serves to inflame my passion. If I can manage to get leave for a day or two, I shall certainly run down to Plymouth, and hunt up every Trimmer in the town until I find Bell. There's no chance of help from her mother, I know. She is unapproachable—goes in on the side of the mild youth with the thick skin, and thinks me—it might fairly be presumed—one of the devil's own. Still I bear no animosity to the old lady, and I'd freely forgive her error if she is impressed with the idea that I should be a reflection of her one son-in-law—and she doesn't know the worst of that bad business, I'll wager my reputation ! "

Nor did St. Leger.

He abandoned his musings, and took up the morning paper.

" Fifteen minutes before my appointment with the Baron," he said, glancing at the clock. " Of course, there was a row at Manchester last night ! Well, if we get a few more Radical legislators in the House, we shall soon be able to match a French Assembly !

"'Shocking discovery!'—Well that's nothing new. 'Arrest of supposed murderer! Great excitement in the city!' Yesterday afternoon? I was at Croydon, or, of course, I should have heard of it. 'Praiseworthy conduct on the part of the man Tomkins, who pursued the cab in which the supposed murderer was driving with the remains of the body of a woman actually in his possession, packed carefully and neatly in American cloth.' How grotesquely absurd!—'The prisoner was smoking a cigar, with careless ease, at the time of his arrest, and displayed the utmost coolness and indifference with regard to his position. He at first refused to give his name; but it was perfectly clear that the cognomen of John Richards—that which he subsequently gave—was assumed.' Commonplace affair enough—can't see where they got the excitement from, unless in the novelty of the pursuit. 'According, however, to the latest intelligence, the name of the man under arrest is Hugh Willoughby!'"

St. Leger literally jumped to his feet in horror and amazement. The thing was incredible!—and yet—

His mind became one wild chaos of confused conjecture. He could not now systematically read the account which he had merely scanned; but he did manage to find one other terrible confirmation of the truth by seeing Hugh's business address.

What could it mean?

St. Leger ran his fingers through his hair, and gazed with motionless frown upon the paragraph—

"Baron Henschel" announces the messenger, and the door closes.

St. Leger finds himself, if possible, more confounded—and here is the Baron in his presence.

Again he sends his fingers through his hair, with a force that seemed to imply that the yellow mass was the sole cause of his discomfiture.

"I am—not before my time, I trust," said the Baron, courteously.

Seeing the dire necessity before him, St. Leger advances, and greets the Baron with as much cordiality as he can assume.

"You must permit me to apologise," he says, in his own irresistible winning manner;

"but—but the real fact is—I have only this moment read news of a nature which disturbs me greatly, and I have had no time to compose myself."

The Baron looked at the handsome young fellow, and could not doubt his confusion, if only from the state of his hair.

"I think I would take a glass of sherry if I were you," said the Baron, sinking into an arm-chair—"and I should make no positive objection to take one myself."

Upon this St. Leger could do no other than produce a decanter and glasses.

"Have you gleaned much in that matter of the discount?"

"There's every reason to believe, that that affair can be brought to a settlement on your own terms," replied St. Leger. "But you must please understand that I am not authorised to make this statement."

"I see—this is a private communication with which you favour me. So I can hold over for another day or two with certainty, you think?"

"I have no doubt," said St. Leger, readily.

There was a tap at the door, and a messenger entered, and laid a note upon the table.

Ordinarily there would have been no interruption in an incident of this kind ; but unfortunately St. Leger had casually glanced at the address, and it was in Hugh Willoughby's hand. This at eleven o'clock in the morning ! How could St. Leger help connecting the unusual circumstance with what had gone before ? He flushed, and then paled ; how could he manage to keep his mind from wandering ?

The Baron was a shrewd man ; he saw the rapid glance at the letter, and St. Leger's further discomposure.

"I think I've got information satisfactory enough to last me till next week ; and I hope next time we meet you'll have managed to smooth your affairs a little."

"Thank God !" said St. Leger, impulsively, "it's no affair of mine—it is that of a friend in whom I am interested. I am sincerely obliged to you for your kind consideration."

Then they shook hands and parted.

With trembling fingers the envelope is torn open; and with eager eyes the short message is scanned—

"DEAR STEVE,

"You have doubtless seen by this morning's papers that I am under arrest for murder. I want you to grant me one favour—go to my wife and break the matter to her as gently as possible. I could not allow a stranger to impart such news. Lose no time; I want to prevent her from reading the reports in the newspapers.

"Yours,

"HUGH."

This was all! Not one word—not one hint as to his own condition. These were not the words of an innocent man, and St. Leger's blood seemed to freeze as he read them.

The demand itself—the favour—he dared not contemplate. He had always regarded Hugh's wife with respect, and latterly with a sympathy which might be almost said to

amount to affection; more especially since he had regarded her in the light of a probable relative. But there was no alternative—he *must* take this news to her; and he was neither sufficiently collected, nor sufficiently diplomatic to invent any plan of action.

So he hurried through the necessities of business, left instructions and a general notice to the effect that he would return possibly in an hour, and certainly before two, and went away, devoutly wishing that the time were past.

He took the first hansom, and told the driver to lose no time. It would have been infinitely easier to do the work at that moment, than to get through the hateful time between. He could not sit inactive, so he again had recourse to the newspaper, and re-perused the repulsive details described in the sensational language that became an incident of so shocking a character. He had slurred the sickening description of that which the open parcels had disclosed—portions of a partly decomposed female body. Again St. Leger felt a horrible creeping sen-

sation through his blood, and could absolutely feel his hair rise at the roots, when he read the words "curly yellow hair"—"age probably twenty-five." This description, and the circumstantial incidents that he by chance knew of, all pointed to one revolting truth—the victim of this foul crime—if crime it had been—was Charlotte Gardner.

This phase occupied his mind to the exclusion of the melancholy task before him; and the cab actually drew up to the door of Hugh's house before he knew that he had arrived. He felt his heart sink like lead—he would sooner have faced a row of bayonets at that moment! With a thought of danger—with the prospect of a hand-to-hand fight his courage would have mounted to its full height—but this—!

As he knocked at the door, another perplexing memory occurred to him—only two days ago Hugh had told him that Alice was still an invalid, and this caused him to shrink even more from his work. However, he had no time to reflect upon this, because he was at once admitted.

He was not surprised at finding the living-room, into which he was shown, empty; but on looking around he saw there were signs of the presence of the mistress. There was a work basket close beside the easy-chair, and on the other side near to the fire, was a daintily arranged cradle, into which he almost feared to look—it might have an occupant. So he gazed in another direction, and upon the sideboard he saw Hugh's unopened newspaper. So his last chance was gone—selfishly and unconsciously he had hoped to the last that some one, or something, would have superseded him.

Alice came in. Hugh certainly had cause to describe her as an invalid; she looked to St. Leger's eye like a shadow; but she was as cheerful, and gay as usual.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, warmly. "I've been quite incapable, until this week, of taking any exercise. You have never been ill, I suppose? Then you don't know what a relief it is to be able to move about again. Hugh and mamma have prohibited any visitors. Bell, as you may guess,

is still away, and I do miss her dreadfully now. I am rather afraid of *you*—and I must be rude enough to say that this is rather an untimely visit; it makes me suspect that you are here to upbraid me for want of sympathy—I *am* afraid of you, don't be too hard on me!"

He let her run on until she came to a stop, and he followed exactly what was passing in her mind. She thought he had obtained the desired holiday, and was intending to carry out the threat of going to Plymouth, about which he had jested. This made his choice of words most difficult; he could not speak one light sentence to save his life. Her face too was so bright and cheerful!

"Hugh sent me one of his brief messages last night—to the effect that business compelled him to go—somewhere—I couldn't read the word—at once. So if it be to Kamskatka or California I shall not expect him to-day. Of course, you know he is more than ever occupied in business. He and Mr. Marshall are doing great things, and hope to do greater."

"My errand," said St. Leger, abruptly, "is rather an unpleasant one. It is about your husband I have come—from him in fact."

"Unpleasant?" she echoed, in surprise.

"Yes. There was a necessity for his absence—but he's not away from London. I wish, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, you would be seated—and pray—pray do not excite yourself, for I have to explain something that is to me quite inexplicable, therefore I cannot hope to make it clear to you."

He saw the tremor of her frame, as she sank into the chair beside the cradle, and noticed the keen startling interest with which her eyes scanned his face. Then he ceased speaking, and she waited; and during the interval he heard the joyous prattle of little Bell in a room beyond, and heard, in unison with her voice, that of the servant maid, singing nursery rhymes—

> When the pie was opened,
> The birds began to sing.

This was all St. Leger could think about; it

completely absorbed his senses. He was now actually incapable of framing a sentence.

If the woman would only stop for one minute, he thought he might control himself.

"I am quite composed," said Alice, gently. "There is something wrong, I see!"

"I must admit that; and since you are sensible of it, I will not keep you longer in suspense. Some dreadful mistake must have arisen, and your husband is—the victim. He is at present—under arrest."

He stopped. Alice bowed her head and remained motionless—waiting.

But he said no more.

"It is strange," she said, with an evident effort, and with a peculiar light in her dilated eyes, that made him feel most uncomfortable. He could not understand it, but he knew it was unnatural.

"You may as well tell me to the end—don't you see that I am well prepared?"

"All may be cleared up in a day or two, so I would advise you not to attach too much importance to the affair."

"Tell me—if you please!" she said, im-

peratively, keeping those strange eyes searchingly fixed upon him.

May Stephen St. Leger be forgiven, if at that moment he mentally uttered an execration on his absent friend.

"The distressing point," he went on, hastily, but evading the question, "the distressing point is that there is sure to be great annoyance, if nothing worse. Where there is proof there has been crime, we must expect the law to be harsh. There are so many instances where the most honourable men have had to endure the infamy of suspicion."

"Of what is he accused?" she asked, in the same cold, commanding tone.

It was not Alice's voice: it was a harsh, grating sound, as unlike her gentle tones as anything human may be.

"Of—of—murder!" muttered St. Leger, under his breath, feeling, as he thought, like a man who had received his death wound.

She smiled sarcastically.

"You need not be afraid to speak out," she said, with the same cold harshness, "because it cannot possibly be anything but

a mistake—indeed it is too absurd to imagine even that. Who has been murdered?"

"I—I do not know," stammered St. Leger, "nobody knows yet."

"A wise thing to accuse a man of having murdered somebody—nobody knows who! Hugh *must* be innocent!" she cried out, passionately.

"I hope to God he is!" broke out St. Leger, impetuously, forgetting that he betrayed his feeling by the violent exclamation.

"You speak—as if—you had a doubt? How can you be so uncharitable—so unjust to the man you have held to be your friend?"

Oh, if she would only take away those awful eyes, and begin to cry hysterically, or do anything that another woman would!

"I—I think I had better go. Do not do me injustice, Mrs. Willoughby"—

"No; do not go until you have told me all that is necessary. Where can I see my husband?"

"You must not think of seeing him just

now—you are entirely unfit! He will, no doubt, write to you. I have nothing more to explain."

"Upon what fact is he assumed to be the man who is sought?"

"The fact," said he, incoherently, "that he had the—the body of—of the woman in his possession"—

"The woman! You said it was not known—who"—

"That is all," he replied, in confusion.

And then he thought on the almost positive certainty that he *did* know the woman.

"Mrs. Willoughby," he cried, as this recollection burst upon him—"Mrs. Willoughby, my heart—my heart bleeds for you!"

But she made no answer to his warm, impulsive speech; she maintained the same stern, and undaunted composure.

Then there was a dead silence; and next an outcry from the cradle, and St. Leger felt his blood curdle when he saw that stony gaze directed from him, and turned towards

the cot from whence he could see just one tiny hand with little struggling fingers.

Alice stood an instant looking drearily at the scene, as if it had no meaning for her. She clasped both hands over her heart suddenly, and then she drew a long moaning sigh. He watched for her next action in fear and dismay; but she only leant forward and rang the bell.

When Rose answered the summons, Alice said briefly and authoritatively—

"Take the baby away, Rose, and do not bring him near me on any account! Do the best you can—but keep him from me! And bring me Bell, I can take charge of her."

The girl looked at her mistress in dire perplexity. What was *she* to do with the infant she had scarcely touched, and which had never left its mother's side? Still she went over and took up the little thing tenderly in her strong arms; and, with another glance of confused intelligence, she went out.

"Good-bye, Mr. St. Leger! I had quite forgotten you. No doubt my husband will

be deeply indebted to you," said Alice, with another unflinching look.

He accepted this dismissal, and made a rapid escape.

When he got outside the house he breathed more freely, although he was now really alarmed, and knew not what to do. It was clear, to the little comprehension he possessed in the matter, that Alice had either been incapable of realizing the truth, or that it had affected her in a manner that suggested something too horrible for his contemplation.

An idea flashed across his mind, and he allowed the chance thought to decide for him—Mrs. Tennear, if anybody, was the proper person to be of assistance here. Her house was not far distant, and, regardless of delay, he resolved to go to her at once.

Before he had driven five minutes, he saw the lady herself walking hastily in the direction of her daughter's house. He signalled to the cabman and alighted.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Tennear, for an action which may appear abrupt, but I was in search of you, and I am in haste."

She drew her veil more closely around her face, but he could see through the black lace enough to know that *she* did not want information.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, in great agitation, "what does all this mean? I heard nothing last night; I have only just seen the paper. Can you tell me anything?"

"No. I, like yourself, have only just read the account. My difficulty is this—I received a brief message from Hugh this morning, desiring me to break the news to his wife. Mrs. Tennear, you do not know what I have suffered—but I've done it more tenderly and more delicately than I could have hoped. Your daughter does not seem to behave—naturally; though Heaven knows what I should call natural under such circumstances. Perhaps her weakness may account—I do not know! Do not waste an instant with me—I know you are required. May I call to-night? I will do all that is possible in the meantime."

She said—"Thank you," in a voice choked with emotion, and they parted.

As the day wore away, St. Leger's cogitations ran the gamut of all possibilities, probabilities, and results, till he felt as though no other earthly topic could enter his brain. When he got within the precincts of the City he saw many faces that he knew, and he was glad that he was not on foot, to run the chance of having to talk upon the subject that was doubtless upon every lip. He loathed such an ordeal almost as much as though he himself were suspected of the crime.

But the first moment he entered his office, a gentleman, who was awaiting his return, arose from his comfortable seat, and flung down the *Times* with the words—

"Give me a glass of something, St. Leger —why did you keep me waiting? I am as sick as a dog through reading that horrible murder case."

The first instant St. Leger was free from the necessities of business, he went straight to the police court, bent upon hearing for himself all that he could of the inquiry. He designed also to see Hugh; and he felt con-

vinced that from the interview he should know precisely what was to be feared. Having accumulated all possible information, he intended to inform Mrs. Tennear of everything—of Alice he could not think without a shudder.

He went into a refreshment bar in passing and took a sandwich, because he knew it was a duty, and that dinner was practically out of the question.

"And the beast of a thing stuck in my throat," he said afterwards. "I never shall forget the work I had to get it down!"

CHAPTER XII.

Despair is the paralysis of the soul.
SIR ARTHUR HELPS.

WORDS cannot describe the tormenting misery that racked the soul of Alice. At one moment, a wild agony of grief shivered her slight frame, as a reed is shaken by the wind; at another, every sense was pervaded by a sickening horror; again, a numbed deadness of despair—the paralysis of the soul—would seize her, and she would lay, conscious of nothing but the mere oppression of woe. But worst of all, the most poignant anguish was the terrible doubt that she herself was implicated—that she was the moving cause of all this evil. Had she not certain proof that Charlotte Gardner was alive when she received her letter, and went through that painful ordeal, she could never forget, with Hugh? She could not but remember that, after this, he had shown an anxiety in excess of anything she had anticipated for her for-

giveness and her return. He had shown a remorse which was, beyond all doubt, sincere; and he had sworn a wild and bitter oath, that the woman should be, in a sense, cast out from his life. Then had come the tale of Charlotte's elopement, which she had so implicitly believed, and which he had declared precluded the bare idea of any further demand upon him. She, too, had been fully satisfied, in the assurance he had given her, that the child Charlotte had deserted was well and carefully nurtured. And this part of his tale had alone been true.

Alice could not but believe that she had been the moving cause of the removal of the woman, who had occasioned her husband so much annoyance; and *this* was one of the clearest ideas presented to her mind—that she had been the innocent, yet direct cause, of the woman's death. Now here she made a palpable admission of his guilt; and yet, through the chaotic confusion of her mind, there was a firm conviction that, even if there had been crime, her husband was innocent. The two ideas were contradictory, and, in

fact, incompatible with each other; but she was equally convinced of each; her intellect was shattered under the stroke; her reason was impaired, she could only accept ideas, and feel them.

She had now been three days at her mother's house; Mrs. Tennear had brought her there, in the hopeless endeavour of bringing her to accept the position with something like resignation.

Now came a time when, by force of positive evidence, it could not but be admitted that crime had been committed—that Charlotte had been murdered—for a pistol ball had been found, which had undoubtedly caused her death; and it was also proved beyond a doubt, from the position of the ball, that the pistol could not have been discharged by her own hand.

It has been said that Alice's reason was clouded, or she would have seen that but one human being could have had motive for the crime—and that being *her husband.* Her belief in him, professedly unshaken, trembled at its very foundation, by the supposition

that her own influence had had power to force him into wrong-doing.

Her restless spirit was longing in frenzied expectation for one word of comfort; she counted the hours until she should next see St. Leger, and hear how the inquiry was progressing. During these awful days it had been judged prudent to keep her in ignorance of all that passed.

"Here's a telegram from Bell!" said Mrs. Tennear.

Alice gave a nervous start, like one who wakens from a dream.

"She won't be advised—she's coming home to-night, poor girl!"

A sudden light, almost amounting to relief, rose at the name of that beloved sister, but it was no sooner felt than it was more than annulled by the words "Poor girl!" Was it not she, Alice, who had so innocently drawn this trouble upon all who were near to her?

"I cannot say I shall be glad to see her, mother. I should only be glad of one thing now—death—and that would be no benefit to any one—perhaps not to myself."

"My child, my dear child, be reconciled," cried her mother, ready tears springing to her eyes. "You love Bell, Alice—don't you? You love us all!—and for our sakes make an effort to be calm."

"I am calm."

"My darling, you are not natural. You are cold and tranquil before me, but you are not so when you are alone. I listened all last night, Alice, and heard you walk about your room incessantly. You must accept—and endure whatever fate may have in store for you, my poor child."

"I will do all I can to please you," Alice answered, apathetically, falling at once into the kind of trance, in which she appeared to lose life itself.

* * * * *

"Oh, Bell, I'm so glad you've come! So glad, although I did all in my power to keep you away. You are my only comfort! You will be such a help to me! And—and we should be together in our trouble."

Isabel only clung the more closely round her mother's neck by way of response.

"Take off your wraps now, and sit down. I must tell you"—

"And yet, mother, you did not want me to come."

"It was of *you*, my child, I thought."

"As if I could be happy anywhere, but by your side when you want me."

Mrs. Tennear wiped away her tears, and said in a broken voice—

"Of course, you have read all the reports in the newspapers?"

"I have devoured every word," said Isabel, eagerly. "Aunt was very much upset. She tried so hard to keep me with her. Tell me, mamma, has there not been some little scheme to keep me away?—has there not been some suspicion of difficulty with Hugh and Alice? or was the arrest your first knowledge—as it was mine?"

"There was indeed, my dear, a difficulty, of which unfortunately, you must know now—you never would have heard a sound of it but for this. I think now I had better be

perfectly frank, and explain it all to you, because so much that is now confusing and mysterious to you will be made quite clear."

"Where is Alice, now, mother?"

"She is here. I was obliged to bring her —she requires constant watching, and I thought the change of scene might bring her more to herself."

"How does she bear it?"

"Anything so dreadful I have never seen. For the last few hours she has been lying in a kind of trance, or dream—I hardly know how to describe it. It is a condition of utter prostration of body, and, I hope, mind. It is not sleep—there is not the faintest movement; and although the eyes are wide open, they do not appear to see. I am told to leave her in quietness at these times."

"Perhaps she is gaining rest."

"I trust so, for she never sleeps. This is no ordinary grief we know—still her conduct is unaccountable. If she should remain any length of time in this condition, her intellect, I am convinced, must fail. This has con-

tinued ever since he was arrested. And, oh, Bell, she will not notice the baby!"

Isabel shuddered.

"She cannot be sane. What have you done?"

"All that I could. The child is well. Nature insists upon what is best; the boy might have died had she nursed him—such things have been."

"And wonderful, nature took from her all her strong maternal love."

"It is a most terrible complication. You see, Alice suffered very much at the time of the child's birth. She had had so much trouble beforehand—so much excitement—it is of this I have to tell you—and yet she bore it bravely."

"What was *it?*"

"The first I knew of the matter was that she came to an open rupture with her husband, and fled to me for protection. In plain English, she left him, and refused point-blank to go back. I did all I could to bring them together, but all my persuasions were unavailing. I remember how surprised

I was at Hugh's intense anxiety at that time; and I attributed it all to his love for Alice, and his consideration for her. But now the secret is out"—

"I do not understand," said Isabel, vaguely.

"How should you? I must say it, Bell.—You know the sort of false, irregular life Hugh was leading—well, among his other indiscretions, he formed a disreputable connection with a woman; and this led to a still greater evil—in the end he had to support her and a child. This, at the time of his failure in business, became a most intolerable burden. It has been shown by witnesses, that he had given her sums of money, from time to time, that were really quite inconsistent with her condition, or with his means."

"How can you talk so calmly of all this?"

"Because I have exhausted my indignation. There is the fact. These things *do* occur, we know, my child, to our sorrow; but thank God it is rarely they terminate in so much overwhelming misery! I believe the end of all evil is sorrow, as surely as I am convinced

of my own existence. But sometimes the penalty for sin is paid in secrecy, and none but the principal sufferer knows that it is paid."

"Mamma? I am afraid I must be very ignorant—I know that Hugh neglected Alice—but can you suppose he *loved* this other woman—and not his wife?"

"No, no," said Mrs. Tennear emphatically.

"Then it is all meaningless to *me*. Hugh may be the vilest wretch on the face of the earth, for aught I know—but he was not a fool. What motive do you assume he had for voluntarily disturbing his whole career, and sacrificing his own honour to this woman?"

"I fear, Bell, you will not be able to reconcile any of these events to *your* mind; it is almost impossible that you should. There is much in this world that is amiss—and we are powerless to mend it."

"But mother," said Isabel, with strong indignation, "we, who have our senses, know right from wrong, and we have no business to cloak evil; it is our duty to expose it"—

"Ah," interrupted Mrs. Tennear, "that is what your poor sister said."

"I cannot comprehend her going back to him. And—forgive me mother—I cannot understand your permitting her to go."

Mrs. Tennear gently placed her hand on Isabel's shoulder.

"We will talk that over another time, my dear; I think you will find it is the fault of your comprehension. The world is not all that it seems to a young girl who has been carefully trained, and whose heart is in the right place. It is not that we like to keep you in darkness; it is because we wish you to have all the joy of life while that is possible; to see the beauty of the world, and none of its depravity. I know that Alice would not have gone back but for his illness."

"Illness?"

"It was not exactly an illness, though it threatened to be one of a most dangerous kind—and Heaven knows I have no wonder now! The marvel is that he has managed to keep his reason at all under the circumstances."

"And has he been the same as ever?"

"As far as I have seen—but I daresay that Alice could tell a very different story. We know by what has already come to light, that Charlotte Gardner met with her death just about that time; the medical evidence proved that, from the state of decomposition in which the body was found. One of the most mysterious things to me is—how Hugh could have managed to bury the body in the loft, and that it should have remained there so long without discovery."

"I wonder what made him remove it," said Isabel, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"His conscience, I suppose—and his fear of detection combined. It is the merest accident only that has brought the terrible crime to light; if that man Tomkins had not been so clumsily awkward, there is little chance that the discovery would ever have been made."

"I cannot understand," said Isabel, "how it was the woman was not missed."

"Hugh took care to account for that. His cleverness was fully equal to that. You have not then seen the last accounts?"

"No; not the news of yesterday's inquiry. Do you know nothing but that which you read?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tennear, "Mr. St. Leger has been *very* kind to me. He has taken every possible pains to save me trouble and annoyance. He has given up a great deal of time; and he comes to me every day"—

Isabel turned paler.

"And tells me all that has occurred. It is a very different thing to hear evidence, and to read it—no matter how accurately it may be reported; the mere emphasis of a word alters the whole meaning of a sentence. A moment's hesitation—the intonation of a syllable even, has weight; and a fleeting expression in the face of a witness has an eloquence we do not understand."

"All that is very plain," said Isabel—"there can be no comparison in the impressions we receive, and those we should gain if we were in court. And what does—Mr. St. Leger say?—has he been able to form an opinion of the probable result?"

"My dear, his conviction is that nothing

can prevent Hugh's being committed on the charge of murder."

"And beyond that?"

"It is useless to conjecture," said Mrs. Tennear, quickly, and conclusively; seeing the repulsive horror creeping over her daughter's face.

Poor mother! She did not wish to shock her daughter's sensibilities too quickly, though in her heart she was convinced the time would come when the worst would have to be met.

"Now," said Mrs. Tennear, "I will not hear another word until you have changed your travelling dress, and taken something to eat. You would like some tea, I am sure."

Isabel rose to leave the room.

"But, mamma," she said, turning back, "you will let me go to Alice as soon as possible?"

Mrs. Tennear did not speak; she merely bowed her head; she would not renew the subject.

While Isabel was making a pretence to eat, her mother rose in some excitement and said—

"That is Mr. St. Leger's knock! I must go to him. Oh! Bell, you don't know how my heart beats! It is a most awful sensation to have to hear another word."

She left the room hurriedly.

Isabel pushed away her plate, and drank her tea at a gulp; then she fled from the room in something like fear, and remained upstairs until she was sure the visitor had left.

"Please will you come down, miss?" said Susan. "Oh! miss, how bad you do look! Don't you grieve so! because there's only you to keep missus up." And then the girl began to cry herself, and turned away in evident shame at her weakness.

Mrs. Tennear was standing lost in thought when Isabel entered.

"Well, mother?"

"Alice is moving. I am most anxious to discover the effect you will have upon her —go to her at once, my dear; she is in my room. Go to her alone, and God bless you!"

Isabel, trembling and pale, ran swiftly up

the stairs, and, before she entered the room, stood for a minute to draw a deep inspiration; for her breath came in such short gasps that she knew speech would be impossible. How she longed, yet dreaded, to meet her sister!

"I would not mind so much if she were only dying! That trial would not have been half so severe for either as this."

She went in. Alice was roving backwards and forwards aimlessly, with hands strongly locked together, and with a dull agonized face that looked at least ten years older than when Isabel last saw it. She stopped suddenly, and gazed at the intruder, saw the mute quivering lips, the sorrowful eyes, saw the extended arms, and heard one broken sob—and then she flung herself in utter abandonment upon Isabel's breast.

They spoke no word; and it was well: for words would surely have failed to express the meaning of this burst of grief. Isabel knew it was better so; she did not strive to speak. She clasped the frail powerless form of Alice, and held her tenderly, as if she had been an infant. Nor did she attempt to restrain her

tears; she rather thought her fervent sympathy would comfort the heart-broken woman.

By degrees Alice's convulsive sobs spent their force, and then ceased, Isabel gently released her arm, and gazed upon the pallid upturned face, with its closed eyes and pinched lips—she saw that there was consciousness, and she hoped the reaction would prove a relief.

Tenderly disengaging her half-fainting charge, Isabel placed her in a chair, and hastily left the room.

"Where is the baby, mother? Let him be brought here. I want him—together we may succeed."

"What has she said?" asked the mother, no less excited than Isabel.

"She has not spoken; but, oh, she has wept so bitterly!"

"And she has not shed a tear until now," exclaimed Mrs. Tennear, with emotion.

The child was brought; Isabel took him in her arms, keeping her tearful face hidden from him. And as she carried the infant to her sister, the words of the poet laureate's

touching song—a song she had often sung—occurred to her—

Sweet my child, I'll live for thee!

She brought him crowing and laughing to his mother's side. When Alice heard the sound, her eyes unclosed, and the baby she had not seen for many days was here beside her in Isabel's arms. She recognised him now without a shudder. Exhausted as she was, she made a natural inclination towards him; she opened her arms, and, without a word, strained the child to her breast—and then Isabel burst into tears.

"Hush, dear, hush!" whispered Alice, in quite her natural voice; and then with sudden warmth, "How kind—how good you all are to me!"

She hid her face in the baby's dress, and wept again—wildly and passionately now—

Like summer tempests came her tears.

There were no convulsive heart-rending sobs now, though the tears, that had seemed exhausted, fell so fast.

Isabel moved away quietly, as if to leave her.

"Come back, Bell!—I am a wicked, miserable wretch to increase your trouble by my want of courage. Take my innocent darling again—I must not injure or excite him—you will be a better mother to him than I."

"Dear, Alice! If you are once yourself again, there will be no difficulty in managing the child. Come, now, be brave for his sake, come down and sit with us—mamma is grieving so terribly about you. We shall help each other—you will come? That's right! You must let me assist you. It will be a joyful surprise to mamma! You can—you feel that you *can* do it?"

After this Alice behaved with touching resignation; she took care to suppress every exhibition of her grief; and both her mother and her sister were amazed at her strength.

The day after Isabel's arrival, they were sitting together quietly, and were rationally, if not cheerfully, occupied—for these three women were beyond even the pretence of cheerfulness. Isabel struggled to talk of any other possible topic than the one that lay so heavily on their minds; but the conversation

always flagged after the first few sentences, and she was fain to resort to the children for relief. And if ever children were a blessing, these two were at this time; for they demanded attention, and secured it. Little Bell, however, objected to the solemnity of the drawing-room so much, that she made the most frantic efforts to escape with Susan whenever the girl appeared.

She flew towards the door now as it opened.

"Mr. St. Leger has called to see you, ma'am," said Susan, addressing Mrs. Tennear.

Alice arose hastily.

"I think it is right that *I* should see him to-day," said she, with calm self-possession.

"No, no;—I am afraid"—

"You need have no fear—I am perfectly capable of controlling myself. After what you have told me of his kindness, I am surely justified in thanking him."

"Would you prefer to go alone?"

"Yes," said Alice, simply; and she went instantly, with the sedate calmness of manner she had made compulsory.

CHAPTER XIII.

There cannot be a pinch in death more sharp than this is.
SHAKESPEARE.

ALICE did not attempt to speak ; but, the moment she saw St. Leger, her anxiety betrayed itself by a visible trembling, and an eager imploring light in her eye.

He pressed her cold thin hand ; he did not wait for a question ; he gave her the answer.

"Everything is in our favour to-day," he said, in a reassuring tone.

And then he stopped abruptly conscience-stricken ; for, though, according to the letter, his words were true, he knew full well that it would be but cruelty to buoy up her broken spirit with false hope.

"You must allow me," he went on hastily, "to express my pleasure at seeing you again ; I have been so much concerned at Mrs. Tennear's accounts of your health."

"I think the blow took away my senses," she said, solemnly. "Perhaps it was better

so. Have you forgiven me for my unconscious unkindness to you? I remember it all —*so well!*"

He felt precisely as though some abominable substance was sticking in his throat, as he replied hastily—

"We won't talk about that, if you please."

"No," she said, still as calmly; "I came down especially to thank you for all your goodness to mamma, and—all of us. You will find I'm quite fit to hear anything you have to say. I want you to be *quite* unreserved with me, for the sake of our past friendship. Keep nothing from me in mistaken kindness—I will have no more of ignorance if I can help it. Mamma is afraid—she has hidden away the newspapers—and I'm sure she is not candid."

St. Leger scarcely knew which he pitied most, at this pathetic explanation—mother or child.

"I agree with you," said he, "nothing should be suppressed!" and then he stopped fearful of her next words.

"Well?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Your husband bears himself like a man —that is in his favour. At present, we can only *hope*, my dear Mrs. Willoughby—so pray keep up your courage."

"But tell me, please," she said, with painful humility, "is the inquiry ended to-day?"

"No. It would have been, but for a little conflicting evidence, which is not quite conclusive as to dates. The question of a letter has arisen, which it is sworn was posted by the landlady of the house in which Charlotte Gardner resided. Beyond the assertion of this woman there is no proof of the existence of this letter. It was written by the—the—dead woman, and addressed, as far as the landlady can remember, to some one of the name of Willoughby."

Alice sank upon a chair, and covered her eyes. Great Heaven! Was this horrible disgrace to be dragged into existence again? Would she have to go through the degradation of a public examination?

St. Leger saw at once that she was in the heart of this mystery, and he was sorry he had spoken.

"However, this witness has not proved trustworthy in some respe cts. She has told two stories as to her belief of the cause of Charlotte's disappearance."

"I must see Hugh," she said, excitedly—"I *must* go to him."

"I fear that would not be possible. I think if you were to trust me, I could convey any message."

"I am afraid it is a wild wish," she said, impatiently. "Until I am a little stronger, I shall not be permitted to go."

"You could do no good—you would surely do *yourself* harm."

"I do not care for that," she cried impetuously, "if I could help or encourage him!"

"His deportment, Mrs. Willoughby, is perfection itself; he cannot injure his cause, I assure you. Well, good-bye! I must not tax your strength too much. Remember me to Mrs. Tennear, I cannot stay to see her today.—I saw luggage in the hall yesterday—has your sister arrived? Mrs. Tennear did not mention her."

"Yes," murmured Alice, almost inaudibly, again conscience-stricken at the pain she was bound to inflict upon others.

* * * * *

"No; Alice," said Mrs. Tennear authoritatively; "I must see Mr. St. Leger alone to-day. There is but one question to be asked, and it would be most improper to allow you to ask it."

She hurriedly left the room.

"Mr. St. Leger," she said breathlessly, as she closed the door behind her, "I have saved you some unnecessary pain—I have prevented Alice from seeing you. You need not speak—I expected the worst—and I can see it in your face."

"There is no hope," said he, blankly.

"I knew it!"

"There will be another period of suspense"—

"And how will it end?"

"Mrs. Tennear, if you can possibly do so, prepare your daughter—or, at least, prevent

her from imbibing false ideas. It will be better that the dreadful truth should grow upon her by degrees, than that it should break upon her like a thunderbolt—it would crush her then entirely, I fear."

"Have you the faintest doubt—of the termination?"

"*Have you?*" he asked emphatically.

"No," she said with a shudder. "I see him—I dream of him with a rope around his neck!"

* * * * *

There was, indeed, a terrible period of suspense to be passed through, as St. Leger had said. He knew what a severe trial this would be to the anxious wife and mother; and he did not like to think of Isabel at all. His visits were less frequent now, for the reason that he felt that unless he had some communication to make, he was intruding upon them in their grief. After an interval of a week he called, and was received by Alice alone. Her mother, she told him, had

been literally driven out of doors to pay a visit to a dear friend, who was seriously ill; the change, they all thought, would be of immense benefit to her. The grotesque pathos of this genuinely innocent explanation struck him most painfully.

He found Alice very calm, but he knew that she was acting under a strain, and that she was striving not to pain him. He hesitated for a while, and then wondered whether he might not be forgiven for leading her into the one other subject, upon which he could not bear to remain silent.

"Will you do me a favour, Mrs. Willoughby? It is no small one, or I should not ask you. Will you persuade your sister to see me? I say *persuade*, because I expect her to deny. But you will ask her to see me once—and for a few minutes only—and *now?* If we were both to live a thousand years, that time would be as nothing compared to a minute now. Ask her if she cannot trust me? But—I know your heart will dictate all I would say."

Alice looked up into his earnest face—was

it not she, herself, who had written those sorrowful lines there? In her abject depression, it seemed as if the whole of this misery were due to herself.

"I will do all that I can," she said gravely, as she turned and left him.

"What a horrible weight that man's conscience must be!" soliloquised St. Leger. "*One* murder? It is more than that—it is downright slaughter all round! And yet how coolly self-reliant he appears! I am sometimes tempted to believe that even I feel more than he does. But that is impossible; he must possess tremendous power of self-government."

* * * * *

"Bell, my dear," began Alice, in a hesitating way, "Mr. St. Leger is still here. He has asked me to grant him a favour—after all his kindness I could not refuse—he has deputed me to plead for him. He has seen, only too clearly, that you have avoided him, and his desire is only this—that you will see him for a few minutes."

Isabel flushed and paled, and looked around hopelessly; but she and Alice were alone. In her mother she might have had help.

"It is impossible, Alice! I must have my own way in this."

"You came to my rescue when I was in need," said Alice gravely and appealingly; "Stephen too has done the same. Shall I not, in common gratitude to both, be faithful to my trust?"

"You are exonerated, Alice—and so is he; *I* only am in fault. I obstinately and entirely refuse."

"Can I give him that rough, repulsive answer? Consider, Bell—you never were uncomplying—will you see him for my sake?"

"No."

"I think, dear, you owe some concession, however slight. Remember, you would meet any one else without hesitation. He has done more than a man can be expected to do; his unwavering constancy deserves a better reward than your contempt."

"My contempt?"

"It looks like contempt, or—Bell, dear, you have not seen him for months—you have no idea how he has changed."

"Changed?"

"You would pity him as much as I do, if you had to answer the appeal in his eyes."

"As much as you do," repeated the girl vaguely.

She turned deadly white, and walked suddenly across to the window, and gazed out upon the fast-drifting rain. As she moved her very attitude was profoundly pathetic in its nerveless, hopeless constraint.

With a tearful voice, Alice urged St. Leger's entreaties.

"I cannot," Isabel answered, with spasmodic energy. "Let that be enough!"

"It does seem hard to deny him even that—a request one might grant to a stranger," said Alice sadly.

"I *cannot*," said Isabel in a hushed whisper, turning round and facing her sister bravely, but with no tear in her eye, no

colour in her face, "I cannot—*I love him so!*"

In that moment Alice saw into the depths of her sister's soul. The explanation was only too perfect.

"I love him so." These four words had been torn from her heart; and there she meant to strangle this strong, long-cherished love before it should ever see the light. And Alice could not wonder, for her own poor tortured mind failed to perceive the morbid feeling, the utter repugnance to all things natural, which possessed her sister.

"Still," she whispered tearfully, "I think you cruel in not granting his last request."

"Cruel!" Isabel exclaimed excitedly. "I must be cruel—it is the only kindness I can show him—now. He does not know—I shall never—I *can* never marry! Thousands of women must have to renounce their love as I do now. But he shall never know it! Ah, no—God bless him!—he will never know it."

She sank upon her knees, and fell upon the old chair, in which she had sat and dreamt all

those pure and holy love dreams, that were to be nothing more than dreams—now gone for ever! Here she had dreamed of those days in the happy hazy future, when Stephen and she should taste the bliss of perfect union in the pure romance of ideal pleasure, where life is all sunshine and no cloud.

Which of us looks forward to the misfortunes of this life? — the inevitable miseries?—the sublime chastenings? Few, it is devoutly to be hoped. It is certain that we can seldom imagine the *evil*, although we can so readily invent the *good* which may accrue to us. Some sage has said something to this effect—that we should act for the best—hope for the best—but be prepared for the worst; and then, if the *worst* comes, we can *make* the best of it.

Nature, in her supreme benevolence, will not give our apprehension, of the evil we do not know, much power to add to our trials.

Alice had gone down, but still Isabel did not move. The few suppressed sobs her emotion wrung from her did not serve to relieve the girl's overcharged heart. She

had not one gratification, but that she had saved her honour—she had not allowed St. Leger to sacrifice himself to her. She had not even one caress to remember—not one solemn kiss to sanctify her love—the kiss, over the mere idea of which she had lingered with delight and awe.

"Ah! it is better so," she cried, "better over and—done with."

* * * * *

St. Leger's first look at Alice's tear-stained face told him there had been a struggle.

"I have done what I could," she said timidly; "will you believe me?"

Believe her! she was the very incarnation of truth. St. Leger took her hand.

"Tell me?"

"I can make no impression," replied Alice regretfully; she was bound to respect her sister's confidence, for the confession had been wrung from her. "She absolutely refuses to see you."

There was a pause.

"Did she show no regret—no emotion?"

How could Alice, the loyal, the true, answer this?

St. Leger regarded her evident confusion, and repented. How could he ask for one word of confidence, one bright hope for his future, from this woman steeped to the very lips in misery? So he only said, "Thank you—and good-bye," as kindly, and as cheerfully as he could.

And as he walked home, sad and disappointed, he tried to find some comfort by inventing excuses for the girl, who, with all her holding off, was no coquette.

"Perhaps it is the best possible sign that she should be afraid to meet me. She knows what I would say—and how could she give herself to me now?"

Then he grew calmer, and felt a glow of satisfaction in the knowledge that, though he had failed, he had acted in a way that certainly could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ask me no more; thy fate and mine are sealed.
I strove against the stream but all in vain:
Let the great river take me to the main:
No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield!
Ask me no more.

TENNYSON.

AFTER a little consideration, St. Leger resolved to take the law into his own hands; what might occur in the future—what *must* occur—was nothing to him. At this juncture he felt justified in making himself understood. In point of fact, he disliked going into the house where *she* seemed to forbid his presence. It was plain to him now, that Isabel felt too severely the trouble that had befallen them. There was no doubt whatever that her tendency was a true one, and to her mind perfectly satisfactory; but by some means, or another, she should know *his* mind. That he determined upon; and also, that he would absolve her from the necessity of making a decision.

He sat down, and commenced to write a

letter. It was no tedious composition; he wrote the first words that occurred to him rapidly and unhesitatingly, just as he would have spoken to her if he could.

"My Dear Isabel,

"You must not wrong me by supposing that I wish to add one atom of disturbance to your mind; but I must speak. You will forgive me for intruding upon you after your refusal to see me, because in my case, it is a point of honour that I should let you know my whole and entire affection.

"If you have only a shadow of the love I have for you, you will understand that I cannot allow you to suffer alone, and that I cannot permit you at the same time to take a false view of our positions with regard to each other. Fate has been against me hitherto, though not so unkindly as now. Remember, you have fled from me on almost every occasion; but even now I do not desire that you should give me an answer. I insist only upon *one* thing—that you should believe in my unchanging love, and that I shall

never give you up unless you accept some one else to whom your heart is more inclined.

"So farewell, Isabel. If I could see your face I *know* it would not look angry, however sad it might be.

"Yours unalterably,

"STEPHEN."

After this he had one minute's delicious reverie, and sweet oblivion from the event that was so constantly in his mind, and was lost in the remembrance of that lovely soul-speaking face he dreamt about so often, and had not seen for so long.

Surely she would be moved by the delicate consideration which demanded positively nothing. He told himself, that hold him off as she would, he knew by that past toying dalliance with his passion, that she virtually regarded him as her lover. And that admitted—was it not tantamount to an acceptance from a woman of her rectitude of character?

"A change came o'er the spirit of his

dream," and now—his splendid castle fell suddenly to the ground, shivered into fragments—an abject ruin.

This moral rectitude, which he knew was part of herself, was the strongest point in her character; and she would obey it he knew. She would *not* ally herself to him for honour's sake—she was the very woman to forswear herself for honour's sake.

* * * * *

St. Leger called next day much later than usual; this was not an accident, but a design. He could not restrain an overpowering impulse to know something of the fate of his letter, and he meant to stand by his colours, this time, bravely.

He rang the bell, and omitted to knock; there was a dash of cunning in this that did him real credit. Of course, the bell was answered from the area.

"Oh, is that you, sir! I beg your pardon, I did not hear the knock."

When the girl opened the door, he asked

quietly, and with as much carelessness as he could assume, if Miss Tennear were at home?

"She's in the dining-room, sir," said the unsuspicious girl, "and Mrs. Willoughby is lying down—and Mrs. Tennear is out."

How cleverly he had calculated! Of course, he was not expected at this time of the day.

"Well, Susan, I'll go in—never mind, don't announce me."

And then feeling a strange thrill of elation, notwithstanding his ignoble position, he walked forward and opened the dining-room door.

The glimmering twilight had grown very dim, but the room was not quite dark, for it was illumined by a blazing coal fire. Down upon the soft rug before it, was the baby Bell playing with her namesake—his Isabel—quite unconscious of his presence. There was a great bound at his heart, when he saw that reclining figure, and caught the graceful contour of her bent head. He was alone with the girl he loved so well. At this moment it seemed impossible to realize that

they had been parted for months, which had seemed like centuries to him; his mind completely failed to recall the events that had passed since they had met. He was in fact only just capable of feeling her presence.

It was not fair to watch the unconscious girl—of course, it was not, unless love and war can justify any stratagem. But then it was a fascinating sight! In the red glow of the flickering light, he could see the head was bent, not exactly over little Bell, who was sprawling in an utter abandonment of delight, but over a letter that lay in her lap. And could he doubt that the words she meditated upon were his? And did he read her absorption rightly?

He purposely rattled the handle of the door; and then she looked round.

The mere outline of his figure, scarcely discernible in the shadowy light, was instantly recognised. Isabel sprang to her feet; but she made no further movement to approach him.

While these two stood irresolute, the little child made up her mind. As soon as *she*

discovered St. Leger, she uttered a shriek of delight and ran to him.

He took the little girl in his arms.

"Oh, sweet ingenuous childhood!" he exclaimed. "Kiss me, Baby Bell!"

Isabel stood dumb. She was too suddenly surprised, and too embarrassed to decide upon instantaneous action—it never even occurred to her to run away.

He put down the child.

"I beg a thousand pardons for my intrusion—pray do not imagine I pay no deference to your wishes. Can I see Mrs. Willoughby?" The formality of both voice and manner was well assumed.

Stephen paused; still there was no reply from Isabel. He stood aside as if to let her pass, beginning to be sensible of his utter brutality. She could not speak, she could not move; she never dared to look at him after that first glance; all power seemed to have deserted her. She made however one bold concentrated effort to do what he seemed to propose—to walk straight out of the room.

He watched her gather herself to the task, saw her face pale, despite the red fire glow, saw the tension of her hand upon her dress, and his heart leapt triumphantly; he watched a hurried footstep, saw it come to a dead stop, saw the tall exquisite outline of her figure swerve and waver.

Then his heart refused to be guided, and took command of the man instead.

"Isabel, my darling! don't—now don't faint, there's a good girl!—because you *will* frighten me so."

He was close to her side, and uttered the simple words in perfect good faith.

She moved her head in denial, still not meeting his eye, not framing a word with her trembling mouth.

Was this Isabel—this white, statuesque creature?

By some means he must bring back the glow of real, warm life into that beautiful form.

He threw his arms around her with impassioned fervour before she had strength to rebel.

"Fling all false doctrine to the winds, Isabel! Let all impediment perish—there is none between us! Do you know how long it is since I have gazed on all I love best in the world?"

He released her tenderly, and solemnly placed his hand upon her head, and smoothed her hair as a mother might. And then he took her hands, and stood off to look at her; to get, if he could, the satisfaction of recognition from that sweet, perturbed face.

Isabel's heart had gone out of her, and had thrown itself at his feet at that strong loving touch. He stooped and kissed her forehead, almost solemnly; and then he spoke in a low voice, full of emotion, but firm as the wild outburst of passion which had conquered her.

"Now, dear, you may go—if you will. I am satisfied—my wife that is to be!"

Truly she had bidden him, in the old days, to "be bold;" but it was not in answer to her teaching that he was so now; it was a compelling dictation of his long-suppressed passion, which prompted his audacity. She *was* his! She *did* love him! Was he then

wrong in insisting upon a right to his position?

While this cloud, this terrible ominous cloud, hung, if not over her, so near her, he recognised a demand upon his honour to assert his sincerity. And surely a man could have no stronger reason? Now he knew that he had succeeded; he had grasped the rose, thorns and all—in other words he had vanquished Isabel.

"No, no," she said, in a scarcely audible voice, "that can never be!"

But by her bright cheeks, and by the half-unconscious words of her protest, he read quite another tale.

"What must be, shall be!—I will not refuse denial if you give it this day twelve months. Now I have established my claim, you shall find I will not offend by word or deed. I will even keep our secret until you give me leave to make it known. Can't you trust me? Let us not, from false delicacy, forswear our love—the best and holiest thing under heaven. We *have* admitted—and it will give us rest."

She moved away from him with a clinging caress of her hand, as if she fain would stay, and she struggled with the hysterical throb in her throat.

The next moment Alice came in, but the room was too dark to distinguish the faces of Isabel and St. Leger; indeed, the poor wife's distracted anxiety entirely destroyed the remembrance of their relative positions with regard to each other.

Isabel caught up the child and escaped.

Alice went straight to St. Leger, and laid her hand upon his, partly as a mute appeal, and partly for support. His jovial, sonorous voice was low and constrained as he looked downwards, and spoke to the slim, frail creature.

"I saw him yesterday—I told him how well you were keeping your promise."

She bowed her head, but kept her eyes upon his face, waiting for his next words.

But he said no more.

"Did he give you no—message for me?" she asked, anxiously.

"None."

"None? Did you ask him why he has not written to me?"

"He said he feared any communication from him would be exciting."

Alice did not reply.

"He was glad to hear you were well. There was no positive message; but your husband expressed a wish that you would dismiss all idea of going to see him."

Alice looked disappointed—she had speculated with such certainty that, when the inquiry was over, he would answer her pleading by desiring to see her, that she felt this indifference most keenly.

"Are you positive the trial will—be soon?" she asked, in a low, hurried whisper.

"Towards the end of next week it is understood."

* * * * *

The trial had just commenced, and the public excitement had reached its height. The interval of agonizing apprehension had passed, and Alice had become really ill from

suppressed foreboding, and enforced inaction.

Now, however, she seemed to gain a false strength, and her intense anxiety to learn from St. Leger more than she could glean from the newspapers became absorbing.

On the third day, when she made her usual appeal to St. Leger, he said—

"There has been further evidence concerning that unfortunate letter, which was so doubtfully alluded to at the police court. From the fact that the letter was left with a probable design of sending it by a later delivery, and because a milliner's parcel, addressed to her, was received at her house on that night, there is every presumable reason to believe that she intended to return. But as she was not seen alive after this well-authenticated date, it can but be inferred she met her death on that very night."

To Alice's mind there was something almost supernatural in this. She scarcely knew how great had been the weight of remorse upon her own mind, until this blessed relief came. A few tears fell from her half-

closed eyes, but she wept noiselessly and, oh, so wearily! Then here was certainty that *her* impulsive action had not been the cause of Charlotte's death! But no sooner had the relief solaced her, than her mind, struggling, as it were, for light, remembered the circumstances of the night before she had received that letter, and another and more terrible conviction forced itself upon her—Hugh's strange behaviour on his return home!—his long absence!—the blood upon his coat!—the terrible gash upon his wrist, the existence of which he had not permitted any one but herself to know!

All this fell upon her as so much damning proof.

But she would not accept it—she shrank—she fought—she was determined to kill the unholy suspicion before it had time to grow.

"What does *he* say?"

"Little—next to nothing—but he bears himself admirably."

"That is his pride," she thought. "No one but myself ever saw him humbled."

With a momentary loss of the habitual calm, she strove so hard to maintain, she broke out impetuously—

"Tell me your opinion—how will it end? . . I fear your kindness—you would all deceive me for my peace, I know. I shall go to the court to-morrow! "

"Oh, you would be most unwise! You have no idea of the ordeal—you would never bear it. Oh, Mrs. Willoughby, let those who love you most persuade you! Your mother and sister know how incapable you are of an extra strain. Be as patient as possible for their sakes."

Alice stood in silence for a moment, as if gathering up her strength for resistance, but it all relaxed in a tearful sigh.

"Mr. St. Leger, will you do me yet another kindness? Mr. Staveley is in London for the express purpose of seeing me and—*him*. I wish you would see Mr. Staveley for me, and convey my sincerest thanks for his sympathy. But I do not want to see anybody—you do not know the agony I suffer until the—verdict."

Here she stopped abruptly, and turned aside to hide her emotion.

"He will not preach to you," suggested St. Leger, "and I think you would regret denying him. But I will do just as you please—you can command me, Mrs. Willoughby."

This deferential kindness, this consideration shown by every one to herself, touched her deeply.

"As *you* think best," she answered, meekly. Then he bade her good-bye, and left the sorrow-stricken household with a heavy heart.

Even though he had tasted the long-desired first kiss, his inmost soul was not satisfied, for he could not dwell upon this gleam of joy. That he had taken it in spite of fate was to him an augury that the reality of bliss was but deferred. But he dared not think of it—he could but think of the one terrible subject that was literally ringing in the air. From lip to lip the latest intelligence—the wildest reports on the great murder case—flew like an electric current

through society. There were times when he could not realize that this man, the friend of his youth, of whose intellect and power he had held so high an opinion, was at this moment lying in jail a common felon—a man prejudged guilty by universal consent—the talk of a whole nation—a man abhorred by thousands of human beings, as the perpetrator of a horrible crime.

CHAPTER XV.

For men at most differ as heaven and earth;
But women, worst and best, as heaven and hell.
TENNYSON.

ON St. Leger's road homeward he met Staveley; and a strange meeting it was! Before a few words had been uttered on either side, it was clear no difference of opinion existed between them; on the contrary, there was a tacit admission on both sides that the man, with whom they had spent so many hours in the confidential careless ease of youthful friendship, had committed the crime, for which he was now being tried.

"It's hard to talk about, and almost beyond realization," said Staveley. "How do they—her family I mean—bear it?"

"As reasonably as it is possible, I think; but there is necessarily much suffering—more than I ever hope to see again. Can you turn back, and spend an hour with me? I'm going home."

"Nothing I should like better!" replied Staveley. "Besides I'm here for the express purpose of seeing Mrs. Willoughby, and I want all the private information I can get."

"No one, but myself, knows anything but what transpires at the trial. Of course, they live in the strictest seclusion. Is it your intention to see Hugh?"

"It is," replied Staveley. "But I do not mind admitting to you, that I—I almost fear the work. I never had much confidence in myself, but—

> He that of greatest works is finisher—
> Oft does them by the weakest minister.

Willoughby was always the most obdurate of men!—but if I can find his fortitude shaken, it will be enough."

"Do you remember his last readings?"

"I was not present at the last," said Staveley, "indeed, I have not heard him read since—an occasion you will remember—when I was with you."

"One was an extraordinary performance," said St. Leger; "and it was remarked by everybody. Even the selection was singular.

We are within a minute's walk—I think I can put my hand upon the programme. We had, I remember, an accumulation of horrors, interpreted with such vivid force, that several ladies had to be removed from the audience. It was said to be 'artistic' in a very high degree; and no doubt it was. But I felt ill, and had resort to an extra stimulant that night. He read 'The Raven' with morbid ambiguity. When he uttered the words, 'Take thy beak from out my heart,' one could positively see the thrill that ran through the people. There was a selection from 'Hamlet' —of course the soliloquy—Campbell's 'Last Man'—his favourite, which, of course, you've heard him read the 'Dream of Eugene Aram' —I shall never forget the passion or the effect of the words—

> The horrid thing pursues my soul—
> It stands before me now!

I don't care to recall that night! he actually chose, Staveley, for one recitation—'The Bridge of Sighs!"

Staveley shuddered.

"His mind must have been impregnated

with his crime—no wonder that he produced an alarming effect! What power the man has! I watched him only yesterday—I was in court—and I was literally astounded at his self-command!"

"Were you in court? So was I for about an hour. How was it I did not see you?"

"I was in a very out-of-the-way place; but I saw you, and saw you leave, or I should have tried to meet you. To speak the truth, I rather avoided a prominent position—the whole thing was so repulsive"—

"Repulsive!" exclaimed St. Leger, with warmth. "I am at a loss for words to express my contempt for the disgraceful public exhibition of bad taste—and worse feeling!"

"You are right, St. Leger! it is a scandal on our administration of justice, that a gaping crowd should be permitted to disport itself in the presence of the grave, dignified, learned men who give majesty to our law."

"As if they were a set of buffoons paid to amuse the populace!" remarked St. Leger.

"It is an insult to those who are engaged in the highest, and most responsible duty that

devolves upon man. A court of justice demands almost as much reverence as a church! There is as much indecorum in disrespect to our law, which stands next to our religion, as there is in impropriety in a place of worship"—

"For which you would, very properly, have a man kicked out!"

"The whole thing is bad enough—but take the most offensive item—the conduct of the 'ladies!' who are present"—

"Ladies?" echoed St. Leger, scornfully.

"They are creatures at all events who call themselves women! who come bedizened with finery, provided with opera glasses as if they were at a theatre, and escorted by men who ought to be"—

"Kicked out of society—as you kick your man out of church!"

"To see them regaling themselves with sandwiches and champagne, and parading their flirtations, is as revolting a sight as any I know. They are without the refinement of a kitchenmaid, if she be blessed with a heart!" said Staveley, contemptuously.

"They are feelingless and immodest"—

"You make no reservations, I find," interrupted Staveley, interested in his friend's warm seconding.

"Of course, I make none!" exclaimed St. Leger. "No decent woman would subject herself to hear all that passes in the elicitation of revolting and indecent details. I tell you, Staveley, whatever we may put up with, or put aside, they *are* immodest to the last degree. In spite of their perfumes, their jewellery, their costly dresses, and their 'positions in society,' they are women who lack no element that belongs to the lowest class of humanity."

"We need not then expatiate upon the matter to convince each other that we are entirely of the same opinion. There is something peculiarly repelling to me in seeing the highest of God's creatures degraded to a condition that disgusts. But it only goes to prove one of my own theories—that there are but two kinds of women; they do not take degrees of virtue as men do. It has been said by a man, with courage enough to state

his belief, that 'the loveliest flowers when they become putrid are the most offensive; and that a nasty woman is the nastiest thing in the world!' "

"I never before heard you give an opinion of women's worse side, although I've been accustomed to hear you lavish praises on the fair sex, till you've gone near to rival their staunchest advocates including Mill, Ruskin —and even Shakespeare himself! By the bye, have you heard what that beast Lorrimore has done?"

"No," replied Staveley, with some curiosity.

"Why the cold-blooded scoundrel has written a formal letter to Helen Willoughby, informing her 'of what she cannot fail to see, namely—that their engagement must at once terminate.' Just how that mean-spirited sneak would express himself."

"Poor girl!" said Staveley thoughtfully, "poor girl!—though I don't pity her for the loss of such a lover. She'll be a happier woman without him. A man who could throw her away so hastily, and so cruelly, for

what is no sin of hers, is not worthy the name."

"I quite agree with you, Staveley—I wouldn't have permitted the girl to give me up, if she had desired it!"

"I'm very glad to hear that, Steve!" said Staveley, meaningly.

"I—if I'd been in his place, I would have given up the whole interest of my life, only to ease her trial," and with this emphatic expression St. Leger's colour arose. "I don't consider any one—the nearest relative Hugh has—any more injured, or involved, than if he had been of another sphere."

"I congratulate you on the liberality of your opinions, and—am rejoiced to hear there's no chance of more misery!"

Staveley slapped his friend affectionately on the shoulder, and both men thoroughly understood the vague allusion.

CHAPTER XVI.

It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.

* * * * *

Of all acts, is not, for a man, repentance the most divine?

CARLYLE.

ALICE was not surprised when a card bearing Staveley's name was brought to her. Perhaps she turned a shade paler, but the settled pallor of her face scarcely admitted of a perceptible change. She was alone, so Staveley was instantly shown into her presence.

"Thank you, Mrs. Willoughby! I can quite understand the sacrifice of your own personal feeling in seeing me. For this kindness I am truly grateful; I consider it an honour to be allowed to show my sympathy."

He pressed her hand warmly, and went on talking while he stood near her.

"No, thank you, I will not sit, if you do not mind dispensing with ceremony, for I am more at home standing. Tell me in the first place—how are your children?"

She murmured a reply to the effect that they were well. And then he went on quickly—

"In that you have much to be thankful for. There was a great risk of your infant's life, I am aware, at the time of your illness."

"Who has told you of that?"

"St. Leger, of course! I have seen him twice since I arrived. Please remember that I have come on purpose to see you; I took the first opportunity that offered, after I heard of the dreadful occurrence. If you are inclined to think that this is an intrusion, you must pardon me if I tell you that it is not. I am not here to offer commonplace consolations, nor to foster false hopes—what little power I may have to console fails me here—but I have come to take your hand in mine, and prove my sympathy—my deep and entire sympathy with you both."

Alice looked at him; and he saw by her swimming eyes and quivering lips, that she had long denied herself the luxury of tears.

"There is One, alone, who can soften the

blow—He can understand us all, with our complicated imperfections and shortcomings. . . . That is right, weep—weep as heartily as you will! Better wear yourself out in tears than strive too much against nature. Have you seen him?—No? You must—*you must!* Your mother has been wise in preventing you for your own sake. *I* am not thinking of you—you are safe—it is of *him* I think. Do you look with detestation upon his crime?"

Alice gave a violent start, and opened her eyes with horror-stricken amazement.

"*I* must speak it, and *you* must bear it—for it is a deadly crime, and it is better to face the fact. It would be sheer cruelty to deceive you, for there is no missing link in the whole chain of evidence. And why cling to hope? He cannot be proved innocent; and if it were possible that the law could not prove him guilty, or that any earthly accident could clear him, his conscience could not. No man in his senses could hold him innocent."

Alice listened to these forcible words, and, at each confirming clause, it seemed as

though a knife had entered her heart. She reeled mentally under the stroke; for no one had dared to allude to, or hint at, Hugh's guilt before her; and although no opinion to the contrary had been expressed, all had agreed in keeping from her the terrible fact that each could not but accept.

To hear this man, in quite another character, affirm her husband's guilt unconditionally, was confounding indeed; and yet, strange constitution of the human mind, through all her aversion it seemed as though she had grasped reality, and heard its echo from every other mind.

"Only a miracle, or a legal flaw, can save him. Then why hope?—then why waste hours, days, in vain anticipations that can never be realized? I can speak to you as to a sister, and you will understand; for, believe me, if I were related to you by any close bond of kindred, I could neither respect nor admire you more than I do. Just help me to analyse the case, if you have strength. Your joint lives can have no further pleasure in existence, at *any* termination of this

event. For though I know your whole soul struggles, with an instinct which cannot be described, and that your feeling insists upon your husband's innocence; yet your mind—your reason, Mrs. Willoughby—as truly and as instinctively points to—the *truth*. There is nothing in all this wide world we should allow to annihilate truth. Even for our own sakes—upon the common, though selfish principle, that honesty is the best policy—we should not suppress truth. We cannot live—that is, not in the general acceptation of the term, but in its truest meaning—we cannot *live* on a lie! May I go on? . . . You turn away—I will leave, if you desire it."

In spite of the harshness of the unvarnished truth, Staveley's words were exquisitely sympathetic. He spoke with a fervour that seemed to vouch for his sincerity; and if his words were not carefully chosen, they were certainly emphatic.

Alice made a slight negative movement.

"Do not go," she said gently. "I am trying to understand you. I am not generally so helpless as I must appear to you

now; but, oh, your words have cut me to the heart! I can only think."

Here again she restrained her tears.

"Do not speak—pray do not strive against yourself in any way—let your own strong moral and religious sense speak for itself. Now, my dear Mrs. Willoughby, listen.—I believe," he went on, with emphatic solemnity, "that your husband—and my friend—murdered Charlotte Gardner—as certainly as if I had seen the crime committed. But although I deplore the *crime*, I do not abhor the *man*—and this is what I want you to understand. . . . Let us try, in the full light of the 'charity that thinketh no evil,' to find extenuating evidence. We are all human—all imperfect. But you—excuse me, it is no empty flattery—you are like many other pure and good women, far above the grosser and coarser degradations of humanity. Your imperfections are rather excessive virtues than anything else; for it may clearly be seen that if we push a virtue to an extreme, it will inevitably meet a vice. An excess of honest thrift may run into avarice; the

social virtue of hospitality will frequently merge into reckless prodigality; chastity may harden into cold insensibility; philanthropy, itself, may cease to be justice; and even religion, with all its inestimable grandeur, may sink into superstition and bigotry. Some of the greatest spirits this world has known have fallen by this very exaggeration of a virtue; that is why the man who thinks he is secure must take heed lest he fall. But a great spirit falls only by a momentary impulse, and never by premeditated sin. And it is possible to regard this terrible crime as a momentary fall—a temptation by the devil of man's degenerate nature. Thank God! we have still the angels to minister unto us—a part of the Godhead militant! . . . I do not loathe your husband—could I dare? Will my God loathe me after my repentance? Now, do you see to what I am drifting? Now, what is left for us—what is our work? It is needless to argue on the fact of repentance, nor of the trivial commonplace influence which may affect it; for sometimes it arises in a man's own heart without power

or will of his own. I will assume, Mrs. Willoughby, that in a sense your husband has repented long ere this. With all his fine, keen appreciation of high subjects, it is impossible that he can have been dead to remorse—or I do not know the man. Do you see what remains to us? I think you do. You must purge your mind of hatred of him through that crime."

Alice started; and, with uneasy troubled brow, and absent eyes, she echoed the word—

"Hatred!"

"Yes. Your strict moral views will but permit you to hate the sin; but you must disassociate it from the sinner: for he is immortal, and his sin is not. Sin is mostly the result of one act; it is seldom—perhaps never—the object of a life. Sin is not eternal—not everlasting. Nothing that is eternal, or universal, can be evil; and that is why we should take care not to misinterpret the laws of nature—that is why death should not be regarded as a misfortune. . . . I have had *my* experience—to hear it may assist your perception of my full meaning. The

world called mine venial sins, and I may say in my own extenuation that they certainly wronged no one but myself; but, as nothing in this world remains stationary, my course might have run easily to perdition. It was my belief in good women—my comprehension of them, if you will—that stayed my downward course. I rejoiced in being regarded by my mother and sisters as an immaculate being—a piece of abnormal perfection—and I was false. Shame cured me; and it was love that prompted shame. Here you see an unintentional influence did the work. I hated my profession when I first entered the Church, because I was false to it. But now, as far as man may hope, I live a true life. Going upon the broad principles of truth, as a foundation, I am troubled by no conscientious scruples; and I never inculcate a dogma my conscience does not uphold. I *know* that I succeed in aiding my fellow-workers and fellow-sufferers through the fight for the right, which is the only end of life; and the result is, that I now glory in my work. Now, do you see the drift of my argument?—I believe

there is a true religious principle in you; and I believe that through that, you can bear all that may be in store for you, and still glory in your faith, and in your work. Do not imagine that you are incompetent, simply because you may be, what is called, unorthodox. A man need not live entirely for religion, before he can lead an entirely religious life. This is not an unsound doctrine; because you will easily see that the man whose religion absorbs himself can be of little use to others. What is the end of a life spent in the regulation of a creed, when we have two or three hundred kinds of faith to cope with? Indeed, I am inclined to think that the shades of difference in each acknowledged religion, are as various, and as vast, as those which affect the races of mankind. I speak of this in case you may possess the honest doubt of your ability to do that which is required of you; and because you may not abandon hope, in case your husband's ideas may not accord with your own. You must not forget that you have moral duties, and a responsibility with your family that cannot be ignored; so far you must go with me."

Alice bowed her head; she was now listening attentively.

"I owe my reformation to my perception of goodness in others. Now, your husband can be influenced by *you*—and by you, to an extent which *no other human being* could reach. Repentance is essential. I assumed there had been repentance, but I cannot assert the fact. If there should be none—yours is the task to awaken it."

Staveley's eloquent voice ceased, and Alice buried her face in her hands.

She made no response; but he could see the quivering of her thin fingers, and the tremulous thrill of her whole frame.

"Let me try to raise your spirit to its full height," he said, gently—"you only lack courage. Sometimes the greatest latent power needs that—the force, as it were, to bring it to the surface. I remember you once saying that a knowledge of theology must be necessary for religious faith. I have told you that I differ from you in that opinion. No religious faith can be perfect for obvious reasons; and it is the insistent craving of

human nature for perfection, which often results in a morbid reaction, and disgust to all acknowledged creed. I am but an instrument in the dissemination of what is, in my belief, the truest, the most liberal, the grandest, of all religions on the face of the earth. Is it not wonderful to reflect that the same grand devotional spirit runs through all mankind, and that the same Great Cause must be worshipped in some ideal shape, from the sun to the graven image? You will think that I am straying into my extremes; but by confiding to you my own feeling in the matter, I hope to convince you that your religion, as it stands at this moment, is fully equal to the occasion for which it is required. Your conscientiousness must not be the means of preventing your influence from asserting its full power. Religion exists in true perfection in the heart, and not in outward forms. You may find your husband's opinions difficult to reach—for that very reason you need not despair. Let me quote to you the words of one of our deepest thinkers and highest philosophers—'In short

the Letter is not the Spirit, and the Bible is not Religion. Consequently objections to the Letter and Bible are not objections to the Spirit and Religion. Religion was before the Bible existed.' Your husband may deny all in which you believe, and yet not be destitute of the religious spirit which we desire to rouse."

There were no tears in Alice's eyes, as she raised them now to his face; there was indeed a new brilliancy in them.

"I never fully understood Hugh's views —has he ever given any confidence to you?"

"Not exactly; but one can generally gather facts from a man's tone."

"I have not been a strict churchwoman myself," said Alice, meekly. "Is it possible then my understanding can affect his?"

"Devotion to the Church and its ceremonial does not always mean devotion to God, or to His work. We have the Parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us that. Do you remember the lines—

One, nearer to God's altar trod
The other, to the altar's God.

It is hard to judge of each other. And we must remember there is joy in heaven when one spirit returns to seek the mercy that is never denied. This little span, we call life—this less than drop in the great sea of eternity—what is it all? As the childish philosopher, the May Queen, says—

What is life, that we should moan? why make we such ado?

It is only because we fear 'to be, we know not what—to go, we know not where'—that 'dread of something after death' awes our poor minds. 'It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps'—and because they turn aside we must not shrink from bringing them back to the right path. There are two things to be accomplished now; but I need your help and co-operation."

"I will give you both!" she cried with fervour, starting to her feet, and letting him read the sincerity of her avowal in the fervid language of her face.

"I *knew* you would—if I could make you see"—

"I *do* see that you are right! and that I

have been wrong in not submitting. *This* is not the end of all things," she said, with intense excitement, though her voice was low —"even if the father of my children suffer death from the hands of the law, that is not the end of all things—for him—for them,—or for me!—Oh, go to him! You will go! Help *him* to submission, as you have helped me."

"Alas!" said Staveley sadly, "alas! I have not to deal with such a subject as yourself—would to God I had!"

CHAPTER XVII.

There is no power in holy men,
Nor charm in prayer—nor purifying form
Of penitence—nor outward look—nor fast—
Nor agony—nor, greater than all these,
The innate tortures of that deep despair,
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
But all in all sufficient to itself
Would make a hell of heaven—can exorcise
From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge
Upon itself; there is no future pang
Can deal that justice on the self-condemned
He deals on his own soul.

BYRON.

It did not require much prescience to foretell the termination of the great trial for murder; the result had been foreshadowed from the day of Hugh Willoughby's arrest.

Staveley had gone to the court on the last day, compelling himself to be present, painful as the task was to him. And yet there were the fashionably dressed ladies suffering no such pangs of human sensation. They jested over, and enjoyed as usual, their champagne lunch, used their opera-glasses freely, and, it may be presumed, were dis-

appointed in reading no signs of agonized apprehension in the face of the prisoner. They were evidently anticipating the climax of excitement—the sensational moment when the verdict should be given.

Talk of a Spanish bull fight!—it is no worse than this!—this audience is actuated by the same motive. When in ancient Rome the malefactors were delivered over to the wild beasts, to be rent and torn asunder, the assembled multitude, eager to witness the show, was influenced by the same motive—and that the most barbaric! Is individual human nature no higher in conscience, no purer in heart, than when men were—

Butchered to make a Roman holiday!

After the interval of relaxation, Staveley became again absorbed in the words that fell from the lips of the judge, who was summing up the evidence of the whole case, with the solemn grandeur and dignity befitting the occasion; combining and disuniting links in the chain of events that dragged an erring mortal to execution—perhaps to perdition.

And now the inexorable fiat had gone forth—the last degree of punishment that man can decree for man had been pronounced —and the criminal was condemned to death.

* * * * *

Permission having been obtained, Staveley went to Newgate. He was fully aware that no interview had been granted for some days past. He, himself, had failed; St. Leger, he knew, had failed; and Alice, he had heard from Mrs. Tennear, was utterly incapable of action, therefore Hugh had been left, according to his desire, in the strictest solitude.

"He is a very strange man," said the warder, who conducted Staveley to the cell; "I never saw anybody so high and determined before! Plenty of gentlemen have wanted to see him, but he refused every one but his lawyers."

"I am a very old friend, and a clergyman as you see. I have come some distance for the purpose of seeing him, as he knows."

Then he was admitted into the presence of the condemned man.

Hugh was sitting quite at his ease, in his own natural posture—the elbow resting on the table beside which he sat, and the chin supported by his hand. His keen bright eyes were raised with their slow, cautious, habitual movement, and they encountered the well-known features of his friend, and their expression was scarcely so thoroughly controlled and serene as his own.

Still Staveley managed so well to govern his countenance, that it betrayed neither awe nor pity. He advanced cordially, and said—

"I thank you for seeing me! I thought *I* should be an exception—I did not expect to be treated as a mere acquaintance, or an enemy."

But, notwithstanding the freedom of this almost unembarrassed address, Hugh felt an unreasonable hostility surging in his breast at the sight of the "cloth." He had seldom seen Staveley in clerical garb, and now it bore a scent of business to which he objected.

"No, Staveley, you're very good to show your friendship in this way—but you will

quite understand that I should have been bored to death, if I had chosen to see everybody."

But though Hugh spoke with quiet ease, he made no responsive movement to take Staveley's proffered hand. Upon this the other made no remark; he merely withdrew it.

"Steve has been of inestimable value to me, but I told him last time we met that it must be 'good-bye.' He's a splendid fellow —one whose generosity can't be mistaken— his kindness has relieved me from all communication with my—family."

"Have you seen none of them?"

"I decided, upon mature consideration, that such interviews would be most ill-advised, and be, in fact, more harmful than beneficial."

"You were probably right," replied Staveley. "Directly I arrived in town, I took the first opportunity of going to Mrs. Willoughby."

Then he waited for comment, but none was made. He was trenching on delicate ground.

"Yes," said Hugh, referring to his former subject; "if I had not taken care, I should have been the victim of a worse infliction than—the rest. I never felt the aphorism 'Save me from my friends' so keenly."

"That's rather unmerciful to them, though!"

"Subtract the element of curiosity, and I don't think there would be any motive left in the majority of cases. I do not know how I stand with the world outside Newgate—but I do know how the world stands with me—and we are not upon good terms."

Staveley saw that they were drifting into a different line of conversation from that which he had anticipated—and which, indeed, he had designed. Hugh's remark—assuming he were innocent—was not an unnatural one; but this was an assumption his friend could not accept, and one that he felt no man of common understanding could accept. He did not know what ground he was expected to take; and the interview, he feared, might prove beyond his management if, in justice to himself, he were com-

pelled to assert his own conviction of Hugh's guilt.

"When you speak of the 'world,' it ought to be understood to be entirely exclusive of your real friends. That you should regard the world bitterly is not wonderful—but for God's sake, Willoughby, do not judge us all alike!—we are not all unfeeling monsters. Whatever my shortcomings were, you never doubted my word; so if you will take me on the same terms as of old, I may tell you that I have not slept one whole night—I have not had more than an hour's snatch of sleep since I heard of your arrest."

"Why *I* have not been affected to that extent!" said Hugh, with a half-cynical smile.

"Perhaps not. There are reasons why your interests should attach themselves more to—*other points*—than to your own actual condition."

"Don't talk about my 'condition,' please!" said Hugh, with the same dash of satire. "Do not let us dissolve our friendship by a mere business connection!"

"Business?" ejaculated Staveley.

"Yes. I have had enough of the chaplain, and I don't want you to remind me of him by more than your cloth—which you don't wear presumptuously."

"Well," replied Staveley, "do not let us sneer at each other, as an end to our friendship—though, personally, I do not see *an end* to that, or any other earthly thing."

"Probably not! that is all a matter of fiction—and you know how I hate damned hypocrisy!"

"Willoughby—don't you know *me* better?" interrogated Staveley, mildly.

"I hope I do. But preaching always sickened me! A man with a shred of mind has opinions of his own, and—I never discuss mine."

"I know that. But doesn't it take more than 'a shred of mind' to know how far one may go in certain intangible beliefs? I do not hold it impossible that a man should discover an element in his own mind to-day, of which he was ignorant yesterday."

"Nor for a wiser man than he to assist in the discovery," said Hugh sententiously.

"Sarcasm is said to be the language of the devil—and he is welcome to it! No, Willoughby, I did *not* mean that a wiser man must show the light; I think that any extraneous circumstances may do it. I believe that even a little child may sometimes achieve the result; indeed, I look upon children as angels in the regeneration of mankind. The most simple mind may sometimes help the wisest to knowledge; so pray, in justice, retract that imputation on my cleverness!

> Wisdom is ofttimes nearer when we stoop
> Than when we soar!"

"What a modest fellow you are! Most men swallow a compliment as easily as a shark would them. I am not convertible—nor even, as you know, amenable to reason—if it be the reason of any other man. Now be plain, Staveley! You are an honest man, and you know that 'I am myself indifferent honest'—now was not the object in this visit to enlighten me with some of your views?"

"If it were," said Staveley, boldly and

frankly, "it was with the best motive man ever had!"

"Ah, you have forgotten me! You, like the rest of the world, allowed *me* to fall with my fortunes. You came to see quite another creature—a man you imagined: a shaking, cowardly, sneaking fool, who hopes to win Heaven's pardon for an ill-spent life by an hour or two's canting repentance. I have been—*what I have been*; and I must stand upon my own merits."

"No man's merits are worth weighing," said Staveley, solemnly.

"Is this your turn of sarcasm? or are you going to repeat the old story, in which there is neither justice nor sense—that which commands us to rely upon another man's merits, and to be rewarded or punished according to our faith? You may take up your shield, and do as you like—good or evil; you hold a defence before yourself, and feel a moral and religious man."

"That is perversion of reason. You assume that pretended repentance—pretended belief—is all that man can possess. This is contrary to reason if you will."

"Then I will take another side of the question—a man's belief is entirely dependent on the capacity of his mind. Is he to be punished for not being able to believe—or for believing that which his intelligence imposes upon him?"

Staveley warmed rapidly. He sat down upon the edge of the table upon which he was leaning.

"You were always ready for an abstract argument."

"Yes; *pour passer le temps*. I am now, as long as you steer clear of the shop."

"Well then, when a man's intellect *is* incapable of reaching higher subjects, we can't blame him; though commonly—and this is in parenthesis—such a man will often enjoy a simple childlike faith, free alike from doubts or fears. But—without being personal—let us take an abstract case. Let us take a man of intellect—one capable of measuring the value of arguments, and one who founds his opinions upon absolute reason—take a man who may boast of never being guided by an instinct in the course of his life—is not he more liable to change his opinion, than he

who acts upon the instincts of nature—who merely feels his convictions and cannot argue upon them?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Now, although I doff my hat to the stupendous power of reason, one of my teachers—and I admit of having many—tells me that—

All else but what man feels is nought.

I may think so—and I may also think that it takes wisdom's supreme power to understand that line—but I will not touch upon feeling. This is our argument—so far granted—a man of any power may rationally change his opinion upon *any* subject you will admit?"

"Certainly, every man but a pig-headed fool!"

"Who may not be the worse for that, since he is at least genuine in his stupidity."

"Here, indeed, is an implication on our abstract man!—he is to be a hypocrite."

"Not at all—*he* may obstinately refuse to be convinced!"

Hugh shook his head, and smiled in his most superior manner.

"You know that I am half a pagan, and therefore your abstractions are unfair. I think the real *subject* will answer our purpose better than the ideal man. We cannot abuse each other as we can him. I know the ground you would hold, Staveley, and it seems that I am going back to old times —you have beguiled me. . . . I am a man judged, and prejudged, as guilty of a capital offence. Sin cannot be measured by words. The sin of one man's thought is heavier than another man's impulsive deed. We make our grades of crime; and the arrangement satisfies the mind that requires to be taught on every point. There is no absolute order in sin as far as I shall ever see. Broadly, I may estimate myself, as a man who has not striven in the right path—that path had too many pit-falls for me! Creeds would not help my mind—they were too narrow. My doubts are dearer to me, than any man's religious convictions—you may as well leave mine alone! I may be no

Christian—I may be nothing at all—'but I would sooner be a Paulician, Manichean, Spinozist, Gentile, Pyrrhonian, Zorohestian, than one of the seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord, and hatred of each other.'"

"'All sects are different, because they come from men; morality is everywhere the same, because it comes from God,'" said Staveley, suggestively.

"There is breadth in that view, certainly. But I don't quite think that morality *is* everywhere the same—notwithstanding the sceptical authority you quote. I see what you would imply—and it is quite fair to attack my morality, if not my religion. I cannot, for instance, credit that the man, who is born and bred in the belief—say of a Mohammedan, conceives anything like immorality in having one wife or a dozen; and"—

"That is not so much from a law of nature, as from a law generated of a certain state of society. You have admitted the Mohammedan to be tutored in his belief, and so I conceive

that he is blinded to his instinct. Yes, Voltaire was right, although he was a sceptic, as you say; I must insist that he is right—morality does come from God straight. But if you pervert human nature, if you take means to train man from childhood upwards, contrary to his instincts, you either distort or utterly destroy natural feeling. For example—take a certain French and American custom—concerning the publication of which we have had some legal difficulties lately—Englishmen are universally agreed upon the point; so you see what other nations may practise with impunity, we hold as moral corruption and social sin. I do not blame nature for imperfection in this instance, or any other; *she* can never be wrong—she is merely suppressed. Few minds, as you know, can think for themselves; the first teaching is usually accepted as the true. And so man is blinded to his instinct—just as our thieves are trained from gutter-children, and born and bred of thieves. You will not deny a moral feeling in favour of honesty all the same?"

"That does you credit—indeed it does," said Hugh, condescendingly. "I give in on that point, unless I could prove the instincts of savage life, about which I know nothing. Anyhow morality can be no more limited than sin. What is morality to me is not quite the same to you. Now, Staveley, you are a good fellow and a true—so go away, and don't disturb yourself about me! I want the imaginative faculty, therefore I cannot see in your light. One thing I grant —that if a man *can* believe, it is better for him. There can be nothing more satisfactory than the conviction that you are to be well provided for, both in this world and the next. Men are constantly so impressed, I imagine, rightly or wrongly; and it is a comforting condition of mind which takes all other trouble upon its shoulders. My incapacity to accept it will not make the fact other than it is—true or false. It is like describing the beauty of moonlight on Lucerne, or of an autumn sunset in South Devon, to a blind man; he can only say—'I wish I could see.' This would be my position, after you had ex-

hausted all your arguments. No; let me alone! The full voice of society calls out against me; I am accused—arraigned—condemned upon its own proofs, upon its own estimation of purpose—crime—motive. All this has been settled to general satisfaction; there is no occasion for me to do other than accept the position. If my puny force exhausted itself a thousand times, there would be no more effect than if I took the matter coolly—as I cannot help doing. Society has adjudged a penalty from one, whom it holds to have been an offender against the purity of a social system we need not discuss. I shall not shrink from my penalty—there is no disgrace in merely dying."

"If you accept the justice of the judgment, it is one thing," said Staveley, sadly, "but if you hold yourself the victim of injustice, it is another. A man is in duty bound to fight for the right—the true—while he lives. With his last breath, I would have a man vouch for his innocence, and protest against his punishment. But while we have any foundation to society at all, unholy and unnatural

outrage upon its own and Heaven's laws must be avenged. Therefore, it is entirely a matter for a man's own knowledge which course he shall pursue—whether he shall rebel or submit."

"And that, you decide, should be according to his guilt or innocence," said Hugh, carelessly.

"Most emphatically! To an unprejudiced judgment there is but one sense of right."

"You don't grant then, that a man may be philosophical enough to bow to the inevitable?"

"Philosophy will clip an angel's wings.

All philosophy is not truth."

"Nor is all superstition religion! I am of Bacon's opinion—that in all superstitions wise men follow fools."

"I have scarcely dared mention religion," said Staveley; "but since you have started the forbidden subject, I am free to do likewise. I do not even mind your sarcasm, Willoughby; and that may be scathing enough, because you know the very worst of

me. And I say this in the lowliest spirit, and not in one of self-assertion. I do not pretend to anything but honesty. I have conscientiously endeavoured to forsake all that I saw was evil. I cannot bear you to think me pretentious! That is why I speak of myself. Willoughby, you know that notwithstanding my indiscretions, I have always been what the world, in its broad sense, considers a moral man, because in one way I have never swerved. But do you think I am going to take any merit to myself for that exception? I know what the temptation of a woman can be—the devil himself can be no greater tempter. But I do not say this to woman's disadvantage, more than to man's; either may be the greater tempter, as the case may be; there is neither more blame, nor more excuse, for one than the other. I firmly believe that your greatest difficulties have resulted from a false estimation of women. You have classed them together, and placed them infinitely lower than men, and so you have never estimated either their merits or demerits. I know you well enough to be

sure of one thing," said Staveley with emphasis, "and I will be bold enough to say it at any risk of your displeasure. Creed or no creed—morality or no morality—your conscience—that which I hold to be natural instinct—your conscience has scourged you incessantly in the suffering you have brought upon your wife—the woman you have wronged, perhaps, more than any other."

Hugh moved uneasily.

"I don't approve of the confessional," he replied, with persistent evasion. "A man's own errors rest with himself. Of what value can any admission that I could make be to you?"

"To me?"

Then Staveley hesitated. It seemed altogether hopeless to get an inch nearer to this man, in his unapproachable calm. "*I* cannot reach his heart," he thought. "Would he be deaf to the pleading that could?" He knew he dared not enter upon the theme he had intended; it would only cause offence. Still he ventured upon the reply that was forcing itself upon his mind—

"I was not thinking of myself, Willoughby, but of the future, as it may affect you."

"I am not troubled about it. The '*Great First Cause least Understood*' will do that which is right for me, without my interference. As Byron says—'I will have nothing to do with your immortality; we are miserable enough in this life without the absurdity of speculating upon another.'

> The past is nothing - and at last
> The future can be but the past."

"Willoughby, before I go, tell me that you exonerate me from any but my true motives? You have not allowed me to approach you in my own way; and I fear that you misconstrue my intention."

"I have said 'no' to that already: I know you came with the best possible intention—but I am not a plastic culprit. I am what I always was—a self-willed obstinate man. Something more now: I have a strength which is not my own—desperation, if you will—and I am not to be touched by unrealities, however tempting they may be."

"In plain English, you do not wish to lose the self-possession you have gained."

"I cannot lose what is a part of myself. I, like the world without, am content with the decision of the law. I shall not find it difficult to die."

"Willoughby—as a last favour—will you only listen to me without prejudice?"

"I cannot!" replied Hugh wearily. "I *would* willingly do as much for you, as you desire to do for me; but *I* cannot—and *you* cannot."

"Do not let this be a final farewell. Remember I have come on purpose"—

"Dear old fellow," said Hugh warmly, extending his hand, which the other took, and held in his warm grasp, "believe me, I am grateful! I appreciate your kindness; but I can allow no man to dictate to me on matters that are beyond the reach of us all. I think it had better be good-bye."

Staveley wrung the hand he held in silence—words would not come just then. The men looked into each other's eyes for

one moment, and then they simultaneously turned away.

As Staveley left the prison, sadly and slowly, he could not but admit that he had failed. But he had still a hope that could not be destroyed—it was in Alice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

There is a love which acts to death, and through death,

* * * * * * *

It is beyond the accidents of life.

FESTUS.

Though all the world forsake thee—

MOORE.

"MAMMA," said Isabel, entering her mother's room, hastily, and closing the door, "Alice is resolved to go! I think—indeed I do—I think there had better be no more opposition."

"We have kept her all this time, and—I cannot help fearing the results, weakened as she is both in mind and body. Bell, she is no more fit"—

Then Mrs. Tennear broke down altogether, and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"She told me," said Isabel in a hushed voice, "that Mr. Staveley strongly urges the propriety of her going—that he depends entirely upon *her* influence to effect any softening of Hugh's mind. You know he

told us he found him even more difficult than ever. Just consider, she has been entreating, imploring, to be allowed to go all this time, and you and I, and Mr. St. Leger and the doctor, have all had enough to do to restrain her. Now she knows Mr. Staveley does not disapprove"—

"And he is the only person who does not!" sobbed Mrs. Tennear.

"Because, mamma, he has higher reasons for desiring her to go, than any we can have for keeping her away," said Isabel tearfully.

Dressed in black, and heavily veiled, Alice came downstairs. Without a word, Mrs. Tennear rose to leave the room.

"I wish you would not insist upon accompanying me, mamma," Alice said quite calmly, and without a tremor in her voice.

Mrs. Tennear turned away; she did not answer, simply because she could not.

"I deplore the idea of giving you more pain. Don't you see that I am perfectly composed?"

"Yes, Alice, yes," stammered her mother, "but *I* cannot—we cannot expect you to keep so. Let me be near you—only in case you want me."

"Dear mother!—come then," replied Alice with a sigh, "the cab is at the door."

Without another word they descended the staircase; Isabel with her pale face and wet eyes accompanying them. She longed to throw her arms around the slim, small, black figure that moved so silently from the house, but she feared to break the serene composure of the sister she loved, and pitied to the core of her heart.

Without another word, the mother and daughter drove to Newgate; Alice leaning back in the corner of the cab hidden from all view. Not a sound issued from her lips—not a sigh, nor a sob.

She pressed her mother's hand at parting, but still in silence; Mrs. Tennear could get no glimpse of the face behind the black gauze veil.

Alice did not wait to gather courage; she submitted herself instantly to the direction

of the warder; she walked straight onward with a firm, rapid step.

If *she* had been doomed to death, she could not have gone more readily.

The dark narrow passages, the ghostly echoes, the grating sound of locks and bars, had no fears for her. She was conscious but of one thing—capable of but one thing—to hold herself under the strongest restrictions, lest she should lose all control, and be utterly useless at the only time which was given her to perform the duty that her conscience had magnified into a destiny.

At the first glance of Hugh's figure, in the half-reclining attitude she knew so well, she received a shock of surprise. For though she had courageously forbidden herself to dwell upon a change, she could not help the unconscious belief that he would seem to her another being—that even if he were but a shadow of himself, she must see him in quite another light. But here was Hugh—Hugh himself—in the very attitude in which he was most at ease. His eye as bright, and keen as ever; his chestnut hair arranged just as when

he had prepared to meet the eyes of what—she could not doubt—had been an admiring world—and what was this world to him now!

He was dressed well, and with the scrupulous care that always characterized him; no sign—no, not one—of down-trodden wretchedness; no sign of the degradation of his condition; no brand of Cain upon his brow; but just plainly and simply her Hugh—her husband as she had always known him. *He* was not a murderer—he could not be! And the ghastly details—the fearful suppositions were all obscured at once—were all past as a dream.

She had read—she had heard, that he was outwardly calm and self-possessed; that he had stood to bear the strain of his trial with no defiance in his demeanour—and no humiliation; that he had borne to hear every fresh proof of his guilt with imperturbable courage. And it was so; for he was self-involved—he had already arraigned himself, and had passed his own sentence.

So impressed was she by his proud air of

resignation, that involuntarily the clinging, haunting dread of his guilt was cast entirely away—and yet he had not spoken, he had not moved towards her.

Alice threw aside the veil that shrouded her face, and *now* he found cause for disquietude. That face!—so wan, so pale, so utterly sorrow-stricken—stung him to the quick. She was like an avenging spirit to the man, who had hardened himself to bear execrations and reproaches from all mankind.

With her tender, native instinct, Alice read his pity and astonishment. "And," thought she, "he may think that even *I* am against him—he may fear a repulse from *me!*"

She stood another moment rocking her slender form to and fro, clenching each hand with spasmodic force to subdue her emotion, and then she cried out—

"Hugh—welcome me!"

"You—half frightened me, Alice," he said, with a ghostly shadow of a smile upon muscles that would not relax. He arose now, and stood beside her. "You were

always brave, you know, beyond your sex, and

> Spirits are not finely touched
> But to fine issues.

You are not going to sink down in despair, and make me miserable now?"

"No, Hugh!" she exclaimed eagerly; "I have not come to do that! I came to comfort, and help you. . . . My husband—at last let us stand face to face—soul to soul—as I think we have never stood! Do not throw me aside from you now!—now that you have no one left to cling to you but me—no one else who believes in your innocence!"

She spoke with all the fervent warmth of her impulse, for at this moment she believed, in the depth of her pure soul, in the man before her—the man who had been the idol of her heart. If he should tell her now—at this last moment—that the whole chain of evidence has been a mere mystery of coincidence; if he should tell her now that he is innocent—his word the only proof—she will take that word against the world.

"So you did not come to add your convictions as to my depravity?"

"I came because—because 'floods of water cannot quench love'"—

She went on speaking with passionate impetuosity.

"Love is stronger than death! Did you not *know* that I could never fail you—come what would? . . . What if another came between us? What if you tell me now that *she* was dearer than I? . . . Let us be true to each other now! . . . I loved you after that trial of my faith, with as strong a devotion as ever. Had you not sworn that you had put her aside for ever?—not for my sake only—but as much for your own. Because you hated the sin—because you said that you had suffered from its commission—because you swore that it would have been repulsive to you to continue the connection—because you assured me she had sustained no injury—for these reasons I forgave you. I worked upon my conscience, and stamped out the instinctive sense of purity—that made me love only what I thought was pure—and came back to your side wiser and sadder. Hugh, you can never know the sacrifice that step was to me!

I strove, with all my might, to prevent you from knowing; but God knows—and He alone knows—how every vestige of my self-respect fell away from me with that act. The knowledge—the very knowledge of the whole infamy the world chooses to regard so lightly—lowered me! I felt myself a degraded thing—I hated the thought of looking in your face again. . . . You came—you knew my feeling. I remember my mother's arguments, and the abuse they seemed to be of all moral law. When I thought you might die—I went to your aid; scarcely acting upon reason, but impelled by love. . . . I know you kept your word, Hugh! . . . I have been able to do all this for you, and as I have said—to forgive you utterly and entirely—and will you now doubt my faith? Oh, Hugh! do not hold yourself apart from me! You will let me—you *will* gratify me, by letting me feel that you can confide in me—and that I can comfort you?"

"I do not require comfort," he replied slowly, and emphatically.

And what would this speech imply? To Alice's mind, it implied innocence, and the

courage of a brave spirit wronged ; and yet a shudder ran through her, as she looked upon his rigid face which gave no sign of softening or tenderness.

Alas ! must she never get help in this world !—must she fight her battle to the last —alone ?

With a strenuous endeavour to overcome a rising conviction of his coldness—perhaps heartlessness—she said with a curious change of voice—

" Then I must fail. . . . Have you no request to make ? Is there nothing—you would wish to say ? "

Hugh cast his eyes downwards ; and he kept them down while he said, with a burst of genuine emotion—but well suppressed—well governed—

" The children ! I have not noticed them much—perhaps men don't notice—children while they are young. Alice—you must never let them know their father's fate ! Their lives must not be contaminated by mine. Do not let them know of my existence—but as a shadow—and—oh God !—never by name !

The stigma will cling—the blot must still remain known to some few. Keep their innocent souls free. . . . *Are* you reconciled, Alice—with all your calm? *Am I?*"

Reconciled! The woman's face was an answer. She was making the greatest—perhaps the noblest—effort of her life—and for *his* sake.

"In God's name," she implored, in a solemn whisper, with wet beseeching eyes, and a cruelly painful break in her voice—"in God's name, do not let me hear you speak like that!"

The vivid pain, the conviction of his guilt that had been supplanted by other emotion, now set in with fierce reaction. Could *this* be innocence? Would innocence rebel with this harsh indifference, even against the power that would annihilate existence? The momentary vacillation of her mind overcame her—and she had not commenced her task!

She bent forward, and took both his hands in hers, and raised those loving, pleading, pitiful eyes to his.

"*Your confidence*, Hugh? I ask it for my

peace. . . . Let me, for once, be a part of your soul!"

The broken, incoherent words expressed as much to Hugh, as though she had put the startling question he had dreaded from the first, and had prepared himself to repel.

He uttered a terrible ejaculation.

"*Your confidence*, Hugh!"

The wretched man's eyes fell before the pure light of hers, and his past resolutions—his prepared evasions—failed him. Could he undeceive her sacred trust?—could he disregard her appeal?—could he attempt to misunderstand that appeal?

A dull chaos of past events crowded upon his mind, sharpened as it were to agony point in the absolute present. He had never had much feeling for others; even now, it was a strange compelling power that caused him to weigh the words of his reply.

Deceive *her* with his last breath?—No! His heart emphasized the denial.

Then speak?—and throw away the last remnant of faith in himself that this world, which had been all to him, held?—Yes!

What! must he confess, and take from her the only comfort she might make for herself —take from her the belief he knew she would cherish in the face of all the universe? He had only to speak—to say that he was innocent and a martyr—

Yes?—No? Truth and falsehood trembled in the balance.

His heart beat to suffocation; his breath came heavily; his averted eyes became expressionless, for they were inverted to his soul. He brushed the drops of moisture from his brow, and groped with his right hand, as if for support; and she, his wife, fell at his feet, and kissed the hand, and guided it to a resting place.

A strong shudder ran through all his veins--that hand!

A man's hard, struggling, broken sob—a man's laboured breath—the kindling emotion of a spirit about to break the bonds of life—an unknown dreaded eternity before—an inspired intelligence flashing with a momentary brilliancy of its past power—a conscience at mortal combat with self—a life of selfish

indulgence gone by—and here, at the feet of the condemned man, a broken-hearted woman! a greater sufferer than he—and suffering alone from his rank sins; her ruined life rising in judgment against him—her soul like a white, imperial palace beside his—a soiled mud hut.

His eyes fixed themselves slowly upon her upturned face.

"Not at my feet, Alice!" and he raised her up.

She was completely broken down; too weak to weep, and fairly stunned in her sorrow, for she had read the awful conflict in her husband's soul, and she knew the moment had come when she *must* know the truth.

"Not at my feet, Alice! not at my feet! at the throne of Heaven you may kneel for me. . . . Psha! why do we make this fuss!—am I the only man who has suffered innocently?"

Alice looked up with a wondrous light in her eyes—a light almost of joy!

When, in hoarse accents, he had muttered "the throne of Heaven," she had mentally prepared herself to pray with him. If he

could bid *her* pray—could he refuse to kneel himself and ask for mercy? But then came his eloquent pause, and the admission of his innocence! Ah, Heaven! this was joy. Her lips are parted, and her breath comes in short, thick gasps. *He is innocent!* and she never ought to have had a doubt. Indeed, she had not thoroughly comprehended him!—not been true in the spirit, or she would have allowed no chain of circumstance—no legal proof—no remembrance of that torturing night—to shake her trust in him!

Hugh was now looking at her, with half-closed eyes, studying with curious interest the face that was telling its story so plainly.

"What," thought he, "is the last good I can do for her? Need I ask the question when I see that light in her eye—that inextinguishable hope? Adieu conscience! You have never troubled my life hitherto—and shall not now."

He drew his breath with an effort, and commenced to talk in an easy strain; not carelessly, but in the spirit of quiet resignation.

"After all, what am I the worse for this, Alice? It is *only you* who will really suffer. You can appreciate that speech from me—and you will forgive even my irony now. Consider, if one of us must be taken—if part we must—it is better that I should be the victim . . I am not much to lose—I have not been a good husband to you, my poor girl. You must not regret me much; it is not right that you should do so, for you are infinitely more capable of rearing the children than I; and your life is a thousand times more valuable than mine! People are parted by death every minute—every instant; we do not stay our joys and pleasures because of them. The nine days' wonder—the only difference in my case—will soon cease, and the great world go on whirling through space"—

He spoke slowly, and with marked emphasis, although so lightly; and all the while he kept his eyes fixed upon her face, reading his work there—and it satisfied him.

The rigid muscles had relaxed; the calm,

even softness of her face was momentarily regained; she was like the Alice of bygone days. The steady light was burning brightly in her dark hazel eyes; the lovely curves of her lips were as sweet and tender as they had been in her girlhood. This was worth doing!

"Now, Alice, your mind can receive a subject philosophically, as I know; so we shall have reversed your order of things—and *I* shall have comforted *you*"

Here he abruptly stopped—interrupted by —what? Alice had not spoken, but there was a positive smile—a pathetic, tranquil smile—upon the face so close beside him.

She put her arms around him, and sighed —one of those long, heavy, releaseful sighs, that seem to throw a whole weight of overpowering anguish from the mind.

"And let me think, Hugh, for extra comfort, that I have not troubled you by my presence. Now, if I behave entirely according to your wish—will you be glad I came?"

Her accents were soft and tender, but in

her heart there raged a fire that seemed to be consuming her. Would she let him die a felon's death innocent? She would move heaven and earth before that awful end should be accomplished! Wild speculations flew across her mind—the names of men great enough to have power, perhaps, to remove even the iron hand of the law—the memories of past reprieves surged in her brain—but he—he must not know!

"Will you be *glad* I came?" she repeated unconsciously.

"Yes, Alice. But you must admit yourself wrong in doubting me—you must not stamp pride as guilt."

She murmured something incoherently, her mental excitement increasing as the desire for action grew upon her. She leaned upon him heavily, and yet with so light a weight that his strong frame scarcely felt the demand made upon it.

"I have borne myself to my own satisfaction throughout. I shall go to my death like a man, you may be sure—and 'die game,' as the roughs say. If I have been a

coward—remember, Alice, it has only been to you. There is an admission! Was it because you could forgive me anything, I wonder? I ought to make a full and true confession to satisfy you, Alice, so that you may comfort yourself by the reflection that *at last* you knew all—the best and the worst of me."

"Oh, we can never retrace our steps, my darling!—we can never bring back the past. I do not mean it as a reproach—but, Hugh, if I had your confidence *once*"—

"I know it, Alice—you would have saved me! The fault was mine; I admit it freely." He spoke with the sudden warmth of impulse. "Let me make a clean breast of it—you shall do me justice before I die."

"I will do you justice!" she exclaimed as impulsively.

"Then listen. Do you think, for one moment, that I ever gazed upon the woman—who nearly broke your heart, and who has broken mine—with the same eyes that looked upon you? I am afraid, Alice, I can never make you understand the temptation of a bad

woman. But perhaps you may be able to see, that once in the net, a man, unless he is an absolute brute, is caught irrevocably. *Love?*—the word with which you taunted me when you first heard of her existence—love was an impossibility. It was vain to make *you* see motive, or cause, without that power—I feel that I shall fail to make you see it now. But *shall* I fail to make you believe in this?—that I can swear by all that is holy in heaven or earth, that I have never loved, and scarcely respected, any woman but yourself! You have blamed me for being a cynic, and you were right; for I have not even granted to *you* the full measure of admiration your high-toned character demands. . . . Perhaps it was because of this perfection, my Alice, that I shrank from giving you my entire confidence. You were—not 'too perfect to be loved,' but far too perfect to realize the imperfections of such a man as I."

"Do not upbraid yourself! it was your thorough self-reliance that kept us apart. If blame there be, I do not object to take it, but

it must rest upon some other foundation than that of my perfection. I *know* how far from perfect I am—what tremendous efforts I have made to conquer my temper, and how signally I have sometimes defeated myself. *You* do not know the false pride which has prevented me from seeking a closer intercourse with you. I imitated you; and when you were cold, I strove to outdo you. If I had wept and grieved, as my honest nature, divested of pride, would have prompted me, you would have soothed my sorrow. You did not know what I suffered! You *were* cold—but you were in ignorance. I appeared to agree with you that indifference to each other was the wiser course of action."

"So, Alice, to please me, you pretended to agree to that which was false—false reasoning from the very basis! Ah! Alice, we have thrown our lives away. It will be all the same a hundred years hence! I think if I had to live now, my selfishness would entirely die out of me. At the present time, I think only of two things—you and my children. Of myself I neither care—nor dare to think."

"*Dare?* It cannot be *death* that you fear —for I know you have spoken truly! Of what do you *dare* not think?"

"My useless, mistaken career is before me, Alice! Am I likely to improve upon it in the next stage of existence, do you think?"

"Oh, my love!—you have seen the error —you repent the wrong. Whatever fate may be hidden behind the veil of futurity, *you* have nothing to fear. For after all, what have been your sins? Why, from what you, yourself, have told me, hundreds of men do worse, and hold their heads proudly aloft. I do not defend them; but I *do* say that your conscientiousness is too excessive, Hugh. You will not even stoop to defend yourself. Pride has been your predominant fault, as it has been mine; and for that reason we have misunderstood each other. We did not imagine that we were both governed by the same weakness. . . . I do not like to hear you say you 'dare not' think of yourself. It hurts me, dear, to think you irreligious—and it *is* irreligious to doubt the mercy of an omniscient God! You may be

too sensible of your own sin, and harden your heart, because you expect Him to be hard. . . . Hugh, it is an old belief, and a rational one, that, if a man die a martyr, all other offence shall be forgiven "—

"Don't expect me to believe in mystical superstitions, child!"

"I did not mean that I wished you to believe in what may be superstition; but I do want your heart to soften—I *do* want you to give me a last comfort by telling me—*me*, to whom you will show no pride—that you believe in—hope for—trust in—Divine mercy!"

Hugh checked the contemptuous profanity upon his tongue. Alice leaned her head upon his breast, and, while she waited his reply, her mind again wandered from the present into the indefinite hopes that had stirred her very life-blood.

And meanwhile, Hugh? Had he not, in the space of half an hour, made two sacrifices for her peace? Why should his conscience rebel so strangely, because he desired to make another? A subtle, and peculiar change was attacking the man's heart; it was working

within him, and he was conscious of nothing but the strangeness of the sensation—the desire to give up conscience, honour, veracity—to sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of this woman.

"Will it content you, my true loving wife, if you are convinced that I *do* so believe?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried in intense excitement. "Keep nothing from me! Let me feel, and speak, and move in sympathy with you for the rest of my life—so that I may *know* that we shall meet hereafter—so that I shall long for *my* verdict,—my death warrant! I shall do my duty *then* Hugh—have no fear! But let it be said of us—'in death they were not divided.' If I could rend all rancour from your soul—if you could say—'My wife, I am at peace'—oh! I could live a century in content."

She finished with a wild outburst of emotion—a perfect tempest of tears.

Hugh stood as immovable as a rock, and held her against his breast; but quite mechanically, with no consciousness of her being there. Another conflict was raging in his

soul—the same conflict returning with redoubled force, and his spirit fought against it with a strength he could not understand. He was subdued by the power of her intense love, carried away by the eternal truth of the divine and universal law, convinced past all human argument of the solemn grandeur of the God-like essence of Love. He recognised, for the first time, the infinite immortality of Love; and a flash of inspiration showed him how much greater must be the Source and Centre of Love!

Was he immutable, as he had professed, and felt himself to be? Had he not, hundreds of times, denied that religion had been revealed? And here, in one moment, by the acknowledgment of one eternal truth, it seemed to stand revealed in all its grandeur.

Since Hugh Willoughby had been a child, he had heard the words, which have passed into a proverb, and are lisped by the lips of children—

"*God is love!*"

And never once had he reached their sublime meaning.

All creation might be fabulous, might pass into nothingness, and die. But here was a supreme and holy power, in all its purity and perfection, which could *never* die; designed te let men know the bare fact—the essence of all religion in its true simplicity and greatness.

Love is the only good in the world.

He was like a man who had made a wonderful discovery—another spirit seemed to have been sent to inhabit his mortal frame—he gave up the ghost of himself.

There was a struggle—as if between life and death—a vain attempt to speak, and then—the inspiration!

"Come near, Alice! There are but a few minutes left to us—I *must* be true to you, because I cannot bear to lose the hope you have aroused. . . . *I will not deceive you with my last breath!* . . . I *cannot* speak—may God comfort you!—for I must undo *my* comfort—I prefer to die—and be honest! Do you understand me *now?—It is better as it is.*"

Yes; she understood him too well! But

Heaven was merciful—her understanding did not last long!

Her eyes dwelt upon the settled gloom of that solitary erect figure, and the sight was imprinted upon her agonized mind with unerring accuracy—a picture that must last for ever—her husband as he stood before her *self-condemned!*

She fell—or rather sank—quietly at his feet.

The next sound, that broke the solemn stillness, was the dismal clang of the heavy door—the signal that those two people, with all their sin and suffering, were divided for ever on this earth.

THE END.

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