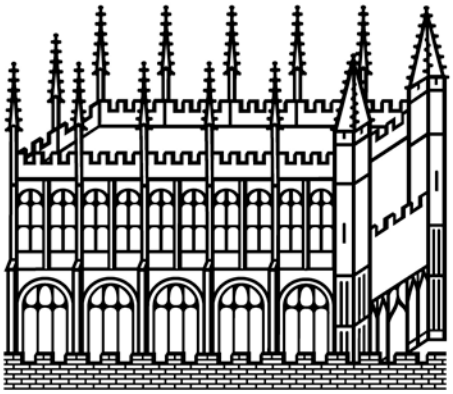

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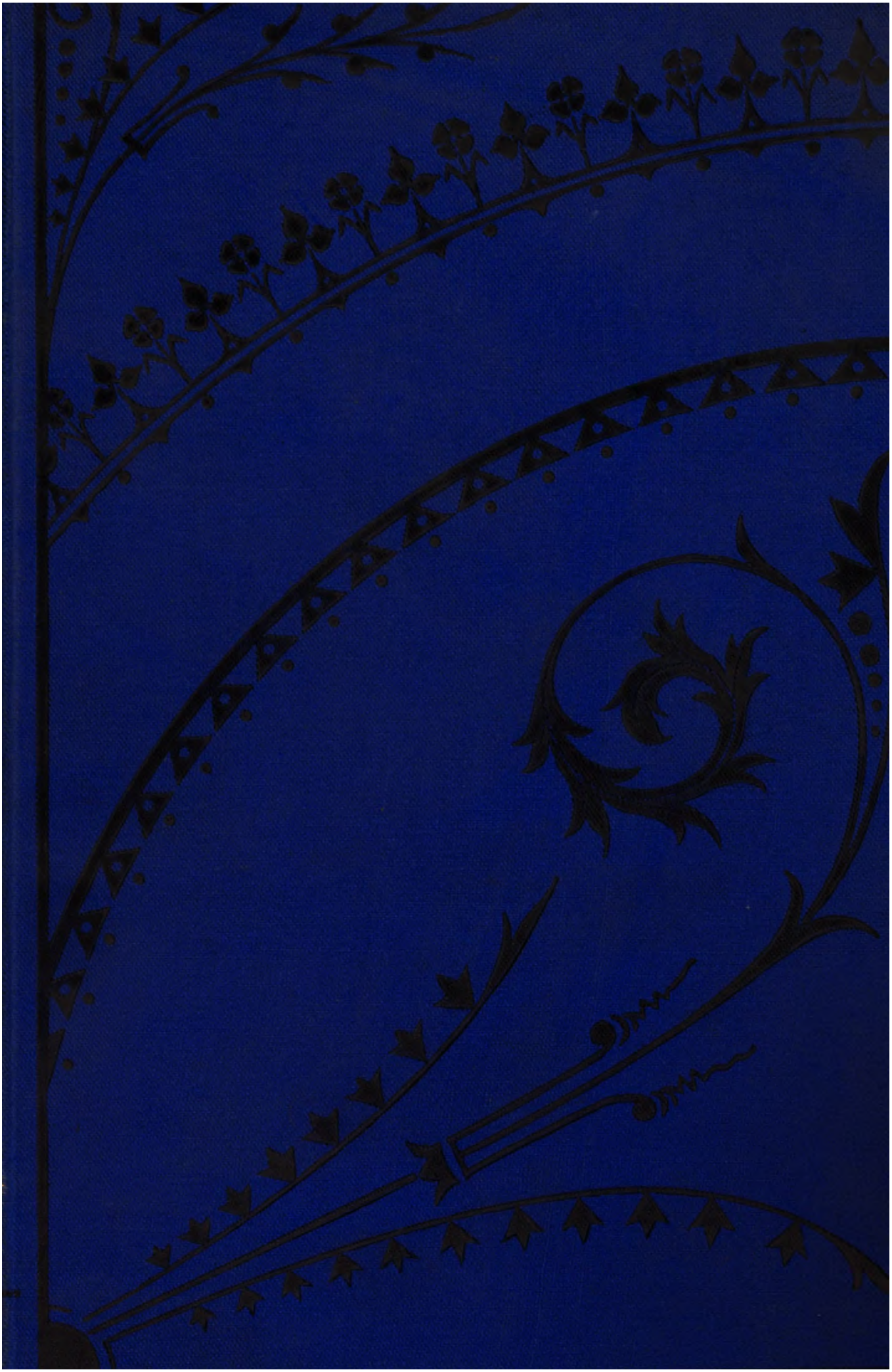

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STANLEY MEREDITH.

A Novel.

BY

SABINA.

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SAMUEL TINSLEY,
10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1875.

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STANLEY MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

Born in London, the only child of a printer and publisher, not unknown beyond the City, I was reared in a library and brought up among men of letters.

Deprived of a mother's care in early infancy, my mother memories dim and vague of a sweet face, which framed itself only in dreams, I grew up a wayward girl, conscious indeed of my loss, but, under my father's indulgence, with nothing to wish for save the love of "mother."

For my father, how shall I describe him, whose favourite virtue shone in his own uprightness, who loved in woman true womanliness and Christian charity, and demanded from his fellow-men unstained honour?

His chief characteristic was a conscientious can-

dour; his idea of happiness, "To make man happy and to keep him so"; of misery, "Living without God in the world."

For his favourite authors, the classic few and the many whom he had helped along the path of fame; his favourite heroes, the brave around him; and his favourite heroines, his beloved dead.

Profuse in his hospitalities, my father loved to surround himself with the good and great of London's heart. Happy days I spent in the society of the *literati,* imbibing from childhood the noble thoughts of men and women who gave to us the firstfruits of their genius.

Of all who entered my father's sanctum stands first and foremost the youthful poet, Stanley Meredith—he who, at one bound, cleared the bulwarks of depreciatory criticism, and entered the vessel which bore him swiftly on to the charmed portal of the Temple of Fame.

Well I remember the first time I saw him. My father and I had just returned from our morning walk in the park. Hand in hand we entered the library, whither had just been ushered an early visitor, who introduced himself as Stanley Meredith. His appearance was striking. Tall, well-proportioned, his shapely head surmounted by clustering waves of jet-black hair, dark eyes, large and languishing in repose, scorching and eloquent in animation, mouth

firm and resolute, and a rare smile, that harmonized the whole contour.

I was fascinated yet somewhat awed by his presence. I had entered chatting gaily, but my voice refused utterance while my father responded to our visitor's greeting.

In his hand the youth grasped a compact little parcel, which I, who had seen the tokens of authorship too often to doubt, knew contained the most blessed possession of most of our visitors. My father took all in at a glance, and sat down before his desk to await his young authorship's pleasure with his usual equanimity.

"But had this handsome youth within him the sacred fire of genius?" I wondered, detecting no trace of the "close-pent thinker" in his healthy aspect, and wondering, too, why I felt so deeply interested in him myself, stealing glance after glance at his ever-varying expression.

Speaking broke the spell. Laying the MS. before my father, he unhesitatingly began,—"I have written a number of poems, Mr. Sinclair, and I have brought them to you for publication. I should like them printed on toned paper, and handsomely bound. Can you tell me the cost of publishing?"

I looked again at the youth who with such assurance stood before my father. Could he really be a poet, when he neither hesitated nor blushed in speaking

of his MS.? It did not seem to occur to him to ask if his verses might be considered worthy of acceptance.

I looked from the poet to the publisher, who attentively listened to his visitor, then quietly opening the MS., glanced at the pages with that eagle glance peculiar to the literary connoisseur, perhaps in that brief scrutiny detecting gleams of genius, though his answer was scarcely indicative of entire satisfaction.

"I will consider your plans when I have looked over your poems, Mr. Meredith," my father said, "if you will leave the MS. with me for a few days."

"Leave it!" the youth repeated, his brow flushing momentarily with impatience. "Is it absolutely necessary that I leave it?"

"Absolutely," my father answered, smiling. "It will be quite safe," he added, guessing that a nervous apprehension of losing his treasure agitated the youth.

"I will leave it, then, and call upon you again. When may I have the honour?"

"In a few days. To-day is Tuesday—say Friday, when I will give you a definite answer."

"Thank you. I shall be here without fail." And, with a graceful adieu, the youthful poet took his departure.

"Who is he? What is his name? Stanley Meredith! Where does he come from?" I exclaimed, as the door closed, and I found the use of my tongue once more.

"Who? what? and where? Serious questions, Minnie. I am afraid you are too inquisitive," my father answered.

"He seems so young—he will not be over twenty, I am sure. What can he have written worth printing?" I said, mischievously touching the sacred roll.

"Hands off, curious maiden!" my father said. Then, as suddenly contradicting himself, he said, "Here; you may take it, Minnie. Take it, and look it well over, and tell me what you think of the verses to-morrow. It is never too soon to criticize, and in time, you know, you may be my sub-editor."

"Thank you, papa," I said, taking the roll; "I will read it very carefully."

"Run away, then; and don't believe everything you read."

With this injunction, I sped away to my own room, to ensconce myself in a quiet corner, and to exercise my powers as adjutant critic.

For an hour I read uninterruptedly; then homely duties intervened, and night closed in before I could return to the interesting manuscript. I was more than interested, I was engrossed—fascinated.

After another hour's reading, I laid the roll under my pillow, and, as a natural consequence, slept, and dreamt of the writer. I awoke the next morning early, to read again and again portions that satisfied my ideas of poetry infinitely beyond anything I had previously read. The breakfast-bell rang. I hurried down in a morning glow of ideal fancies, and accompanied my father, after breakfast, on a tour of the streets, with a reluctance I had never felt before.

CHAPTER II.

REGULAR as clock-work, in fine weather, my father and I rambled abroad in the early sunshine—sometimes in the parks, oftener in the busy thoroughfares, occasionally to the markets—always with an object in view, either in search of the picturesque or fresh air.

This morning we walked through the stirring environs of the Tower. Emerging on the clear space of Tower Hill, we looked in silence on the gaunt solidity of "London's shame."

Turning a sharp curve again, we suddenly met a lady, whose hurried movements denoted anxious haste. In fact, she nearly ran full tilt against us, in her endeavours to keep pace with a wretched-looking boy, a veritable street Arab, who dodged her most provokingly.

Our eyes met. The lady looked first at me—she stopped, then looked at my father—but the next moment started off again in pursuit of the refractory urchin.

"Miss Longson!" my father exclaimed, letting go my hand, and turning to look after the lady in much

surprise. "It *is* Miss Longson, is it not?" he said, as he hastened within speaking distance.

"Yes, it *was*," the lady replied, in a low, melodious voice, frankly extending her hand, and making no pretence of strangeness.

"I was sure I knew you," my father said. "Where do you spring from now?"

"Not from the sky," she smiled. "I was just pursuing a young reprobate, who defies all my efforts to safely lodge and feed him."

"May I ask where you are living now?"

"Is this your daughter?" she asked, instead of answering, as I approached them. "I know she is. How like *Mary!*"

"Yes, is she not?" my father said. Mary was the rarely-uttered name of my dead mother, and I felt a thrill of pleasure at being compared to her.

"*I* am not so fortunate," she said, smiling sweetly. "My little one died when young, and my husband is dead too," she added, steadily.

"I did not know whether you were living or dead," my father said.

"Ah! There the young rogue is again," she interrupted. "Excuse me, I must secure him. Good morning,"—and, with a loving look towards myself, she left us as suddenly as she had met us.

"Who is she, papa?" I asked, as we turned homewards.

"A very old friend of your mother's, Minnie. I have not seen her for how many years? Not since she went to St. Saviour's with your mother and me when we were married,—almost eighteen years ago."

"Was she mamma's bridesmaid?"

"Yes; a blithe handsome girl then, the same age as your mother; they had been very dear friends."

"And why have you never seen her since?"

"She left London suddenly, went down south, and we heard but seldom from her—never after you lost your mother, lammie."

"I should like to see her again," I said, the pleasant tones of her voice still lingering in my ears. "She seemed somehow to remind me of mamma very much."

"Her voice was wonderfully like your mother's. You will see her again some day, my lammie," my father said, pressing my hand in his strong grasp. He always called me his "lammie" when we talked of my mother.

We passed the old church of St. Saviour's on our return, wherein my father and mother were married; and as we walked past I pictured the bridal pair accompanied by the pale, handsome woman whom I had met for the first time to-day, but who, at that time, was young and blithe, and handsome too.

It was seldom that my father spoke of the past,

but this morning he told me of his early struggles—how he had come to London with a capital of five pounds, his goodwill in his willing heart, and how carefully he had invested in renting one room of our now extensive "establishment"; of his successes in following years, adding room to room, story to story; above all, of his few short years of happy married life, and then—he seldom spoke of *that* time of darkness when the shadow of death snatched away the sharer of his struggles.

* * * * * *

"The verdict, Minnie?" my father startled me by abruptly asking after dinner the same evening.

"On the MS., or mamma's bridesmaid?" I asked, aroused from a pleasant reverie.

"Either, or both; quick—you have not yet reached the critic's art of reviewing, not reading."

"Do not ask me yet for an opinion of the MS.," I said, bending my head lest he should see the tell-tale light that must be shining in my eyes.

"I must have the MS. myself now, child; fetch it, and let me see what there is in it."

I fetched it. Placing the roll beside him, I said, "I never read anything so poetic in my life,"—a verdict that might certainly have gone for more with any one less acquainted with me, for I had hitherto voted poetry a bore, and had seldom managed to read more than a couplet except upon compulsion.

"So you like the verses, Minnie? *We* must tell our young aspirant then, that *we* will do him the honour of publishing his poems."

"If *you* like them, too, papa. I wonder who he is. Stanley Meredith! Did you never hear of him before?"

"I know nothing more than you know, little Eve. Twice to-day you have wondered wonderfully."

"Mamma's bridesmaid, you mean now. Oh! I should like to meet her again!"

CHAPTER III.

STANLEY MEREDITH'S poems were published. The literary world was surprised into genuine admiration of the flashes of genius which characterized the book; and no wonder, written as they were with a pen of fire, full of passionate expression, yet dark and mystic in their meaning as a wizard's oracle.

Many were the inquiries, "Whom could he be?" and who was the new star ascending higher and higher, and shining with such sudden brilliance on the world of letters?

As yet, however, the youthful poet came almost "*incognito*," disappearing, meteor-like, for weeks together. At our house alone he professed to visit, and the few chosen spirits whom my father invited to introduce to him were as mystified as ourselves as to his family and neighbourhood. Our interest in him increased each time we saw him, yet he was close and mysterious. Not for some months did we glean from him that he was a lonely scion of an ancient race of Welsh chiefs, and that his life had hitherto been spent in Mid-Wales, among those ancient moun-

tains, drinking in, as it seemed, all that loveliness and awful grandeur of wild and picturesque scenery, reflecting nature in her most wayward moods, in his heart's first utterance—

"Married to harmonious verse,"

and moving other hearts and attracting them as with a hidden magnet.

I read his poems again and again, finding each time new beauties of expression, crowded as they were with brilliant metaphor, or shrouded in fitful allegory. Full of admiration as I was of the poetry, I as yet fought shy of the poet. At first, our intercourse was almost limited to the language of the eyes; but he soon understood my extreme timidity, and would smile sweetly and speak kindly, with the intention, I supposed, of disarming my fears. He soon succeeded in charming me to listen to him, my face confessing often how much impressed I was by the magic of his truly wonderful voice.

"Child," he would say, "I can see right through your eyes into your heart; and what a black heart it is!" making me shudder and close my eyes in affright. Then he would speak slowly, uttering some strange, weird fantasy with a pathos that drew tears from my eyes,—seeing which, he would change from grave to gay, and recite some ludicrous medley so comically, that the next minute I laughed and looked up merrily.

"You are an Æolian harp, Minnie; you have a tune for every breeze that passes over you. Shut up your heart; do not be carried about by any wind of words. You have a will of your own, exercise it, or we shall see you buffeted about by every one's opinion."

I was only a little one for my age—just turned sixteen,—"little and bright-eyed," Stanley would say. He was twenty, grave beyond his years in many things. It did not take us long to become good friends—visiting us frequently, welcomed by my father as a youth of good promise, and viewed by myself as a youthful impersonation of the graces.

I soon discovered that he was deeply passionate, and though admiring him greatly, I feared him as much. Even in his tenderest, calmest moods, there seemed a cloud o'ershadowing him which would not be dispelled. I feared, at times, his smiles, and almost dreaded his anger.

Did he smile? Ay! but it was a smile to which I was oftener unable to respond. It was too dangerous; though the stern mouth relaxed its firmness, and the eyes moistened while they flashed, the brow was heavy and troubled.

Have you never been out in a thunderstorm, when the sky and the earth threaten to meet? Dull and leaden are the lowering clouds, though in the south you may see a sudden gleam of yellow sunlight as

the sun sends his beams through a rent in the cloud, yet you close your eyes again rather than look up to greet the shine, for every moment the dreadful lightning-flash may affright you, coming, as it does, so suddenly, with a vividness as if heaven itself opened and showed you its streets of shining gold. Such was Stanley's smile. The atmosphere of passion surrounding him increased to storm-height so frequently, that I instinctively felt that hidden danger lurked behind his fascinating smiles and winning words.

He was daring in action and daring in thought; he dared to speak that which others only thought of subjects strange and mysterious; and I, so impressionable at that time, sat at his feet and thought his voice more musical than murmuring winds in summer,—his improvisations, breathed low for my ears alone, more precious than any words of mine can tell.

One evening, when we were honoured by the society of a number of writers whose names were familiar as "household words" in English homes, Stanley moved among them, restless, moody, and so wretched-looking that I pitied him greatly. He came and sat by my side as I sang in my girlish voice one of Schubert's songs. It was "Der Linden-Baum," a song that Stanley had chosen for me. My voice had scarcely borne itself against the stream of

conversation, which, somewhat hushed, continued around me. When I had finished, and louder tones were raised, I turned to Stanley and playfully asked him why he looked so miserable.

"Do I seem to be under the malign influence of the Evil One?" he asked, rousing himself to reply. "If powers there be beyond our strength, then is my soul tempted. Despair takes a savage possession of me."

"You mystify me; I never heard of such moods and tenses belonging to the young and gifted."

"Young you term me? I have lived a lifetime of thought." His brow darkened, his eyes flashed, his breath came quickly. I was reminded instantly of a fiend in beautiful human form—Satan himself, as Milton has pictured the Evil One, in all the alluring brightness of a fallen angel.

"Do you grieve, Stanley, that every one is not of your opinion? *You* a misanthrope!"

"Yes, when I think of the wrongs of humanity, when the might that is not right triumphs."

"What would you do?" I whispered faintly, feeling awed and frightened by his savage appearance.

"I *must* do something! I was born for action, and act I will. Great minds disdain the beaten tracks, and set at nought long-standing modes of thought."

"I have not the least doubt of your powers, Stanley," I said, smiling proudly in his face.

"Oh! that I could renew the youth of the gods! I must work. Give me the mind which casts away precedents, laughs at impossibilities,—that cries 'it shall be done.'"

"Will you not find your strongest weapon in your pen, Stanley?" I asked, cheerfully.

"How can I write? The fitful Muse inclines her head, her harp is neglected, her spirit is sad."

"Out of the bitter waters of Marah the well of hope bubbles forth," I said, wishing, yet unable, to give encouragement.

"When I think how few years we have to live, at most a century, and of how little one can do before he crumbles to dust—"

"Stanley,"—the calm voice of my father reached us as he bent his head to speak,—"conquer yourself, before you attempt the etherialization of the world. Fight, but conquer first the greatest enemy you have —self," he continued, gently, as Stanley turned to listen to him.

"Then I must fight till I die, Mr. Sinclair; and a tough struggle I shall have, too."

"'Ma vie est un combat!' We are all fighting against the old Adam."

"I must have the devil's fiddle-strings,—weak

nerves,—to-night," Stanley said, with a laugh, and changing his mood suddenly.

"I believe you, my boy," my father said, kindly; "but you can exorcise your assailant by sheer force of good intentions, supplemented by firm faith in higher powers than evil influences."

"Richard's himself again," Stanley said, almost cheerfully, shaking off, as if voluntarily, his strange mood, and entering into conversation with our other guests, and exerting himself to be amused and entertained.

CHAPTER IV.

THE hot July sun drove us out of town. Several months in the year we lived at Bromley, in a pretty miniature farm, low-roofed and ivy-porched, surrounded by a most enjoyable stretch of a well-cultivated garden. The neighbourhood, too, was a charming contrast to the City thoroughfares. Through the woods and over the fields and commons of Bromley and Chiselhurst I was free to wander. How often have I watched the sun rise and set from that breezy old common at Chiselhurst, with its sparse thickets and short tufted grass, decked here and there with a gipsies' tent and company.

We had not been out of town many days before the spirit moved me to indulge in one of my childish or girlish customs, a whole day's ramble in the fairy-land of the woods and fields. Rising early, I waylaid Martha, our old housekeeper, as she took the new-baked rolls from the oven for breakfast.

"Give me one," I said, helping myself to one warm

and crisp from the tin. Quickly I break it in two, inhaling its steamy fragrance, and, running into the dairy where stands the cool delicious cream, thick and luscious in the bowls, dip, dip into the sacred reserve go the two rough divisions of my loaf; then, deliberately joining that which I had so hastily broken asunder, I shot out of doors, into the awakening sunshine, and down the garden, rousing the very birds by my joyous carols. I stepped into the road, as much a child as ever, and set off to enjoy myself; no bird that rose heavenward singing more blithely, no colt just loosened springing from the ground more gaily, as on and on I sped to improve—gipsy fashion—the shining hours.

The morning hours soon flew away. How hungry I became! I had long since enjoyed my little feast, and now I was almost ravenous, and far away from home. I must go over the common—it was like a very sea-breeze to run over that long stretch, with the Kentish hills bounding the horizon.

I passed the church, and came to a pretty little cottage on the edge of the common: a cottage I had often visited before on behalf of a poor family who had lived in it some years. I paused at the gate, expecting to see my old friends as usual. But my attention was awakened. What transformation had the cottage undergone? The grass in front was carefully cut, the flower-beds more tastefully laid

out, while spotless muslin curtained the shining windows, which had before been much neglected. I hesitated whether or not to call. I could see beyond the porch, through the open door, a renovation of the interior arrangements, decidedly for the better, too; all seemed to indicate a change from the habits of the occupants whom I had known before.

I took my hand off the gate and turned away, when I heard a voice, sweet and low, exclaim, in pleased surprise, "Mary!"

I looked around. No one was in sight, and although the name uttered was not my own, it came so directly to me, that I almost answered it.

"Mary, won't you come in, love?" the voice said again; and, as no one but myself was in sight, I turned in through the gate and hastily glanced at the window. There the curtain was held back, the window thrown open, a pale face gleamed behind. Where had I seen those eyes before?

I entered the cottage. The face at the window turned towards me, two warm hands stretched forth, a motherly face bent to mine, and I was clasped to the heart of my mother's bridesmaid.

"And you had almost gone away, dear child. How pleased I am to see you,"—and she folded me again and again to her bosom.

"How did you know me?" I said; "and how long have you lived here?" and similar questions I

plied as we sat down, she still holding me within her arms.

"Know you, darling? I knew your *mother's* child! How glad I am to see you!"

"My name is not Mary," I laughed; "but I thought you meant *me*."

"I was sure your name *was* Mary. You are the image of your mother; it ought to be Mary."

"But it is not. I am called Minnie, after a friend of mamma's."

"It is my own name," she said, delightedly. "My own dear girl!"

"Then mamma named me for your sake. What shall I call you?"

"My husband's name was Atherton. Mrs. Atherton is my name, Minnie."

"And you live here, Mrs. Atherton, all alone?" I said, questioningly, as my eyes fell on sundry indications of other occupants.

"I have a large family," she smiled. "My boys call me auntie. I think *you* might call me auntie too, Minnie."

"So I will, auntie. But I thought you had no children living."

"Only Nobody's children," she said. "I have twelve boys living with me, whom I have gathered around me—homeless and friendless boys—street Arabs once they were."

"And no relations of yours?"

"Nobody's children, I told you, but very dear to me, Minnie."

"And are you not afraid of them?" I asked, thinking I knew the *genus* of City Arabs well.

"I love them all, and they are fond of me. But take off your hat, Minnie, and stay, and you shall see them. They will all be in shortly."

"Thank you. I 'm dreadfully hungry, auntie. I 've been roaming, and could eat wooden chairs, if they were only roasted ready."

"Poor child! You shall have something to eat directly. Sally!" she called; and a young girl came in with a huge can of milk. "Bring a little refreshment, Sally, and be quick, or this young lady will eat us all up."

In a few minutes I was drinking of the milk and partaking of the substantial better half of a strawberry tart, while Mrs. Atherton talked and questioned in the utmost friendliness.

"You were mamma's bridesmaid?" I said, after satisfying my girlish appetite.

"Yes; and since the day of your mamma's wedding I never once saw her."

"Why?" my eyes questioned.

"It is a long tale," she said. "Never mind now. I went down south with my husband, and often

thought of your mamma. She wrote to me up to your birth. I kept all her letters. Yes; you shall see them some day," she added, as my interested look assured her of my thoughts.

"Papa will be so pleased that I have found you. Did you know that we lived near, auntie?"

"Yes, I heard soon after I came here, and thought I should surely see you again. My boys are here now—most of them. See. What do you think of them?"

I watched them, as some half-dozen entered the cottage—bright, ruddy-faced children they were—coming in from the day's labour, two of them from Bromley, others from St. Mary's Cray, while one little tot of six or seven staggered under a load of fire-wood which he had picked up on the common.

"I make them all useful," Mrs. Atherton said, welcoming them, and addressing each by name affectionately. "They will now have a good wash, and then we all have tea together, and spend the evening in studying."

"I would like to stay very much," I said; "only papa will be coming from town, and I think I had better go; but I will come again."

"I hope you will. What do you think of my boys?" she whispered, as they filed out into the kitchen.

"They are not a bit like street Arabs," I confessed; "they look so happy and healthy."

"You would think so if you had seen them when I first brought each one in, poor destitute lads. I hope they will never look back again."

"Kiss me again, auntie," I said, "and let me go now,"—and with a sweet embrace we separated.

CHAPTER V.

I HURRIED home across the common, in time to meet my father coming from the station, accompanied by no less acceptable a visitor than Stanley Meredith. He read his welcome as I greeted him.

"What do you think, papa?" I said, as we walked homewards. "You'd never guess—I must tell you. Where do you think I have been, and whom do you think I have seen to-day?"

"Not knowing, cannot say, daughter mine."

"You know the cottage on the common where the Bartons lived? They've left, and *who* do you think lives there now?"

"Somebody else as poor and thriftless, whom you will encourage to dependence again?"

"Wrong—guess again."

"Somebody rich and crotchetty, who will frighten us some day with a sensational bursting forth."

"Quite wrong again. It is a lady, neither poor, nor rich, nor crotchetty. It is Mrs. Atherton."

"And who may Mrs. Atherton be?" my father asked, as mystified as ever.

"Why, papa, she was mamma's bridesmaid," I said, forgetting that he did not know her married name.

"And that is Mrs. Atherton—and she lives here. There is a Mrs. Atherton I have heard of—a sort of Samaritan."

"It is the same. She *is* kind, I 'm sure; she has twelve boys living with her now—homeless, destitute boys. Once they were"—

"Ah! you must take me to see her, Minnie, and Stanley too."

"Yes, I will, gladly," I said, as we entered Ashfield.

"Be quick, my dear, and let us have something to eat," my father said; "Stanley will have plenty of time to tell you the City news. He will not return this evening. Tell Martha to get the spare room ready."

"Yes, papa." I hurried away to obey him, in anticipation of a joyful evening.

Stanley was at his best—in a flush of success. He beamed forth after tea, and entertained us with a flow of good spirits that surprised as well as delighted us. For a whole week he remained with us—a week of thorough enjoyment and mutual happiness. Twice I called with my father and Stanley at the cottage. My father and Mrs. Atherton at once renewed their shadowed and interrupted friendship. Stanley pronounced her "nice," while each

time I saw my "auntie" I loved her more dearly. We were all interested in her "boys," and how effectually she taught them.

Sons of toil as they were, brands plucked from the burning, their little hands soiled by foul deeds of darkness, their young hearts not innocent of life's sad ways, she yet taught them with a single eye, never stinting the cup of knowledge that she held—oftener it was brimming over, running down. She hid nothing from them, revealing her inmost heart in all its wisdom and purity; sympathizing with them, calling them friends—beloveds; teaching them as possible companions of the future, not restraining her best from their ken, because Jemmy Ford or Tommy Knott must perforce become workers and hewers. No, while under her care they should have her best; and they had it.

One afternoon Stanley and I had wandered through the woods; tired and hot, we sat under the shade of a spreading oak.

"Let everything that hath breath praise Him," I said, as the bees buzzed and the birds fluttered, and busy caterpillars hastened past. "How beautiful is sunshine and the song of birds; how sweet life seems on such a day as this!"

"Let 's talk of graves, Minnie," Stanley said, lazily. "Shall you be sorry when I am dead and in my grave, and all my bones are rotten?"

"Yes, indeed I shall," I said, my heart sinking at the thought. "I should take up your book and think of you when by all else forgotten! Oh, Stanley, I should die, too—then God would re-unite us in heaven!"

"How do you know that I shall be in heaven?"

"You speak as though you doubted heaven itself," I said, surprised at his tone.

"Little innocent!" he said, as he loved to term me in his superior knowledge, "how coolly you take things for granted. You have been told there is a heaven above, and you believe it."

"Why should not I, Stanley? Are *you* an unbeliever—an infidel, perhaps?" I said, involuntarily shrinking from him.

"No names, if you please, Minnie. My creed—"

"What is it? You believe in—"

"My creed," Stanley repeated, "is this: I believe in all unbelief!"

"Then of all men you are most miserable. No wonder you are so often unsatisfied—unhappy."

"I am unsatisfied often—ever seeking, always thwarted—even in you, Minnie; for, now that you have discovered the cloven foot, even *you* will shrink from me."

"No," I quietly said; "*I* shall never change. Some day *your* eyes will be opened, and you will see as I see now—see and believe in heaven."

"Believe in myths—perfections—surrounded as we are by such practical misery, in a cold, wretched world, that increases in wickedness every day!"

"That may be; but in heaven above—"

"However beautiful, Minnie, it is all a chimera."

While we thus conversed, the summer sky was overcast, a deep, distant reverberation made me spring to my feet.

"It rains!" I said, hurrying away from the oak-tree's shade; "and, oh! the lightning!" I exclaimed, as a vivid flash came upon us.

"Yes, Jove is angry. Ah, that is grand!" Stanley said, looking boldly up as the thunder rolled heavily.

But I was frightened, and ran for shelter to the nearest hedgerow.

"Come back, Minnie!" Stanley shouted; "it is dangerous there,"—and, as crash succeeded flash, and flash preceded crash, I fled across the path swiftly back to him. With arms outspread he received me, and I hid my face on his breast while he clasped me to him with shielding fervour. With renewed fury the storm continued. I could feel the lightning flash, and trembled, while Stanley enjoyed the elemental strife.

"I like this," he said. "I like a storm—the wind soughing about, the thunder rolling; it moves my

very soul. Frightened, Minnie darling? Be calm. No powers of earth can harm you now. Look up, your sun shines down upon you!"

I looked up, half fearfully, and Stanley bent his head and kissed me, for a brief moment nestling his cheek against mine, as he whispered,—

"Bride of the storm! Jove giv es you to m May I perish in the next flash if I speak not that which I mean to fulfil!"

CHAPTER VI.

She loved too soon in life, her dawn
Was bright with sunbeams, whence is drawn
A sure prognostic that the day
Will not unclouded pass away.
Too young she loved, and he on whom
Her first love lighted, in the bloom
Of boyhood was, and so was graced
With all that earliest runs to waste.

Too much, indeed, I resembled Elena. I was happy, while I trembled in fear and hope of the rosy future mapped out for me.

Stanley was grave and thoughtful. Though he breathed no further words of love to me, we parted in mutual trust. I told no one of our betrothal. Young Love is shy, and flies away at the breath of reasoning. For the present, we loved, — perhaps, blindly.

I should have liked to have told Mrs. Atherton, but could not begin a confidence myself. I saw her almost every day; sometimes she came down to Ashfield with the freedom of an old friend, and made our evenings specially home-like and cheerful for my father and myself.

"What is your opinion of our talented young friend, Mrs. Atherton?" my father asked one evening, as she picked up Stanley's volume, which lay on the table.

"Of his poetry? I think he will improve as he continues to write. I cannot help admiring his verses, so flowery and vigorous as they are; he is very gifted. For himself, I fear his is a strong-willed, passionate nature, somewhat uncontrolled," she added, gently.

"He is exceedingly sensitive," my father said. "He has a nature so violent and contradictory that nothing satisfies him. He will break his heart in an attempt to etherealize the world, or commit some most dreadful crime in a paroxysm of despair."

I shuddered as I listened. My father knew him even better than I did myself.

"He is fatherless and motherless," I said; "he has been brought up by unfeeling guardians and careless teachers."

"Ah, he lacks the safeguard of a mother's hands," Mrs. Atherton said. "His future life will always be coloured by the loss of careful restriction."

"He is not used to correction," my father said. "When a young artist, with a fire in his heart that many waters of cold criticism cannot quench, dreams of future glory at any cost, he seldom realizes solid happiness."

"No; but Mr. Meredith has a fine, noble nature," she said. "I should like to see more of him. Minnie, love, will you bring your friend to see me again?"

"Yes, if he comes to see us again," I promised.

"And now, Mrs. Atherton, will you play for us?" my father said. "Play those airs you played once before. The old tunes are dearest, after all."

Mrs. Atherton could play well; she could interpret sympathetically and feelingly another's composition, no matter what style or stage of difficulty, interpreting it in a manner patent to herself. This evening she played piece after piece, until the twilight deepened and she threatened to leave us.

"How I wish I could play like you!" I said. "I have no originality; I strike the notes, but I cannot infuse into their sound the same feeling that you can."

"You must come to me for lessons in harmony," she said, in her winning manner, as she drew on her shawl. My father stood ready to accompany her home, and, as I watched them down the garden, I wished for a moment that I could always be near her. She bloomed like a flower, unconsciously shedding her fragrance on all around, even on Stanley, whom she treated as tenderly as one of her "boys," playing for him when depressed, or

following him sympathetically in his lamentations of an imperfect world.

The chief drawback to my happiness in possessing the affection of Stanley lay in the hopeless, despairing expression that at times shrouded him like a pall. I was oppressed by it; he was so different from any one else,—so inexplicable, mysterious. Perhaps this air of mystery, after all, was the principal charm in my eyes. Still, I regretted that we differed on so many subjects.

He came again to stay with us, and again we wandered together, sometimes my father with us. Occasionally we joined Mrs. Atherton at the cottage, and spent the evening with the "boys."

Under Mrs. Atherton's motherly influence, Stanley was drawn out to speak of his early home. Though he spoke with evident reluctance, he gave us bright, beautiful pictures of a home resplendent with all that wealth and honour could confer,—speaking with pride of his haughty ancestors, and dilating with a poet's tongue on the beauties of natural scenery amid which his ancestral home lay.

"How will Dolwyllyn look on such a morn as this?" I asked, one morning when we sat in the garden together.

"Beautiful exceedingly,—her towers gleaming, the white waves dashing against her rocky walls, the high mountains behind flooded in a purple sunlight."

"It is a lovely morning, Stanley. Can *you* look through this blue ether, upon yon fleecy clouds, veiling the brightness of the sun, and still believe there exists not something higher than all—a God, who makes all and loves us as his children? Oh! Stanley, listen to me," I said, as he impatiently turned away.

"Speak! thy lover listeneth," he said, coming near to me again.

"Are we not so dear to each other?" I said. "Should we not have one faith now—share one thought?"

"That is impossible, Minnie," he said firmly; "but do not fear. I will not breathe henceforth one word to weaken *your* faith, whatever it may be."

"Thank you, Stanley. I would prefer that you told me *all* your thoughts. Tell me everything. My faith, thank God, is not weak—not easily to be moved; not a peculiar delusion, which you seem to imagine it. You do, Stanley. I have seen you sometimes look at me as if I were interesting in possessing a certain faith or enthusiasm in chimeras, just as you might tolerate a belief in mythology in a heathen."

"Say on, most sage demoiselle."

"Try to think with me for a moment," I said, wishful, yet feeling unable, to express myself intelligibly.

"Command me, Minnie!"

"You are smiling at my enthusiasm. Oh, that I could influence you, Stanley!"

"I am thy slave, do with me as thou wilt! Were the year of jubilee at hand, still would I place my head at thy door to be pierced thy slave for ever."

"I wish I could tell you all I think."

"I think, therefore I am; I *see*, therefore I believe."

"And I think, therefore I shall continue. Believe me, Stanley, my faith is in another world—purer."

"Would that I could. If company will save, I would be happy, for

> **'If I travel in your company,**
> **You know the way to heaven's door.'**

Ah, Minnie dear, you are a good little soul. Try often the mesmerism of your presence upon poor me. Often take my two hands in yours; oftener seal my lips with holy kisses."

"My heart's love!" I said, embracing him, "go through with me; many have seen heaven's gate and entered not."

"My heaven is here, Minnie, near you, on earth; for the next world, let it take care of itself. You know nothing of the tempest of the heart, child. *You* never wonder and think almost to madness. One verse of your faith I *do* believe, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.'"

"You do not know me, Stanley. *I* think wildly enough at times, and crave to know everything. *I* often wonder, too, why God, who made us in his image, did not endow us also with diviner faculties of comprehending Him more fully. We have brief glances at times. Ah, Stanley! what is your poet's mind but a deeper revelation of self, a glimpse of glory?"

"Only a poet can fully understand a poet, Minnie," Stanley said, smiling. "*You* know me, and understand me."

"When I think of God's goodness," I resumed, "and look upon the earth with all her beauties, breathe the atmosphere, look up to the sun, are they not all wonderful? You say I know nothing of wild wishes. Ah! could I only penetrate the star depths or understand the secrets of nature,—fly towards the gorgeous sunset, float on the beautiful clouds, and visit the calm shores of the moon, and from its silvery concavities contemplate the beautiful worlds below! Nay, my spirit wanders further; I would roam to the very gate of heaven, look through its massive portals upon the blessedness within, and gladly die. Do not tremble, my Pætus, it is not painful, for then this opaque, shadowy mystery that hovers around us would be dissolved, and my freed spirit would flee away to the realms of ether."

"Too fast yet bound in earthly chains," Stanley said, embracing me fondly.

CHAPTER VII.

I BELIEVE most girls who have grown up motherless from infancy, particularly those whose memory is dim of a mother's arms encircling their tiny figures, often rend their hearts in a vain wish to grasp a more distinct idea of the dead parent.

How many times the lone one sighs for "mother," the tired one calls to the blessed! Even in happiness a deeper chord is yet unsounded for a mother's thrill of sympathetic interest; and yet these same mothers, now safe in heaven, might have proved, had they lived, cold and unkind. My own dead mother! How often have I cried unto thee, and thou answeredst not? How often have I sinned, and thy cold hand restrained me not? How many griefs and sorrows have I endured without thee?

In all my greatest happiness I ever thought it incomplete without the warm, living presence of a mother's love. Of all Charlotte Brontë's writings, there is nothing gives me greater pleasure than the chapter in 'Shirley' which describes the recognition of Charlotte Helstone by her loving mother, a parent

whom she had hitherto believed dead. How well the authoress describes their tender intercourse, the interchange of sweet affection, the full tide of impassioned motherhood! Charlotte spoke from a full heart; she, too, was motherless; she, too, had pined in lonely sickness for a mother's touch. Her lonely heart had often craved the expressed affection of a living mother, and in dreamland she found that mother restored: and how sweet is the restoration!

"The longing desire of them that thirst is changed into the sweet affection of those that find."

If any girl stood in need of a mother's shield, I did at this time. Absorbed as I had been for the last few months in the companionship of Stanley, I was somewhat suddenly aroused to a change in the state of affairs around me.

A word dropped by my father awoke my suspicions. I did not know whether to be pleased or otherwise. I was just at the age when thoughtful girls love to imagine themselves saddled with the weighty responsibilities of womanhood. I had hitherto prided myself on sustaining the position of mistress of our little household; my father seldom found fault with my domestic arrangements, and I flattered myself that I left nothing to be desired.

But a great surprise awaited me. Was I imagining it? I would observe. I did observe, and for a moment I was chagrined to think that my dear father

should take to himself a wife, to be a step-mother to me, even though he should marry so desirable an acquaintance as Mrs. Atherton, whom I loved most dearly.

For a day or two I was petulant; once Stanley found traces of tears on my face, and fondly inquired their cause. I clung to him, as I whispered mysteriously my suspicions that Mrs. Atherton was going to be married.

"Lord, who 's the happy man?" he instantly demanded.

"My father," I said, my eyes filling with tears again.

"Ah! a very good match they 'll make," he said, coolly.

"Stanley! fancy a step-mother at my age," I said, stretching myself up in the dignity of seventeen.

"Never mind, Minnie; I 'll come back and marry you myself."

"Are you going away?" I asked, my fears suddenly changing from one subject to another.

"Yes, Minnie. I must leave you—in smiles, I hope."

"Whither away, Stanley?"

"To the Far West—across the Atlantic. I may go round the world."

"But you will return?"

"Most certainly—as the needle to the pole."

"I trust you, Stanley."

My last words to Stanley were, "I trust you!"

Closely following his departure came my father's marriage.

To say that I welcomed my step-mother says little; she warmed to my heart more than I had supposed it possible. Sometimes, while my father and his new wife were away on their wedding tour, and my step-mother wrote to me freely of her happiness, jealousy tempted me to close my heart to her affectionate advances, to wound her cruelly.

When they returned I had become settled for the winter in town, and when my father's second wife entered our old-fashioned rooms, and cast the brightness of her presence around our time-honoured relics, I gave in, and clasped my arms about her, and called her "mamma."

She was pleased, my father was gratified, and it was something to see his smile lighter than I had ever known it, his eyes more restful, his brow clearer from wrinkled care; I could not selfishly ignore his happiness.

Very soon we became a happy trio—my father's health and comfort considered far beyond my capabilities, my wishes consulted and tastes gratified, even my studies directed, in a manner that convinced me that there dawned for me the pleasing prospect of a happy home. How many new interests had filled

my heart within the last year! First, there was Stanley Meredith, with the glamour of poetry surrounding him; secondly, my love for him, and his affection for myself; thirdly, the possession of my new mamma, whose daily influence upon me shone as nothing else had done before. Every night I knelt down and gave God thanks for these blessings.

CHAPTER VIII.

And now begins a new chapter of my mental history. Still in my teens, of a happy and contented disposition, loving study for its own sake, but loving ease and pleasure as much for theirs, I entered upon another existence. I was changed. More than one change, each happy in its turn, had passed over me, as I hoped, for the better.

First, the dawning of love in my heart; I loved, and was beloved. Next, my condition of a motherless girl, with wilful ways, was suddenly changed into that of a dutiful daughter, under a wise and sympathetic mother's eyes, a relationship which gave me more solid happiness, more daily and hourly enjoyment, passing all other earthly loves. My stepmother and I were inseparable, taking such evident and renewed pleasure in each other's society, that my father's happiness was thereby trebled.

For the third phase of my existence, I may try, but shall certainly fail, to describe it thoroughly.

Two years passed. The third winter after my father's marriage, mamma and I sat one day looking

through the window on the never-ceasing flow of human beings in the street below.

We liked the bustle, the life, of the City.

"Everybody seems to have a mission," I said. "I never look out five minutes without noticing the many interests so many faces express. I wonder if *I* look so business-like when I trudge along, mamma. Do you detect *my* mission in my face?"

"Let me see, now. Turn your face from the window again. Ah! you *have* a mission," she said, with a most knowing expression.

"My hands are willing," I said, laughingly; "they will be in mischief if I don't work."

"With all your abilities, Minnie, there is one subject you do not seem to know well."

"Indeed, mamma! Pray tell me what it is."

"*Know thyself.* You scarcely seem to have a definite idea of your own capabilities."

"Do I not?" I said, thinking the contrary.

"No," mamma said, seriously; "you are full of thought and ideality. Why do you not write?"

"Mamma! What must I write?" I asked, startled and confused to hear her express in words what I had sometimes *dreamt* of.

"Poetry," she said, smiling; while I laughed merrily at her originality.

"Do you think writing poetry will be my mission?" I asked.

"It may be your pleasure, and it might be your profit."

"Well, some people write for pleasure, I know, —more for profit. I am surprised you advise me to write."

"Are you, Minnie?" she said, sighing.

"Are you disappointed that I cannot, mamma?" I said, putting my arms round her neck.

"No; I do not *know* yet whether you can or cannot. I was sighing for lost opportunities of my own young life."

"I am sure *you* could write poetry, mamma; I am confident you could," I said, earnestly. "I can tell by your eyes—they look sometimes so far away, as if they saw things which no mortal may know."

"Dear child, you would be surprised to hear that I *do* write?"

"You *do* really write poetry?" I said, looking into the depths of her usually mild brown eyes, now glistening with animation.

"How else did you imagine I supported myself before I became your mamma, or kept up my little charities? My 'boys' are all supported by my pen."

"I wonder what next we shall discover that is admirable in you!" I said, embracing her.

"Literature has been a great help to me in more ways than one. I have often thought you would turn to writing, Minnie."

"Have you, mamma?" I said, feeling more curious to learn something of her past life, which she rarely mentioned, than of my supposed capabilities for writing poetry.

"Yes; you have a rich vein of composition in you, I am confident. Sometimes, too, I have noticed that you rhyme and string together melodious sentences, unconsciously perhaps."

"Quite unintentionally. Is that poetry?"

"It is not *all* that poetry implies; but you have, besides, the feeling heart and the intelligent mind. I am surprised that you have not burst forth yet."

"Dear mamma, my talent—if I possess any—is latent. I could think you were flattering me."

"You must not think so. I try to speak the truth in love, not to fill you with pride; far from that—I only do as I would be done by. Many talented young girls have led useless, unhappy lives through being ignorant of their special vocations. I suffered much when young in being restrained myself, and told to give up all thoughts of a literary life. I see now that *I* was right in the main, my advisers wrong. The cruellest wrong of all lies in the power of the hard, unfeeling, middle-aged woman, who has under her care and left to her charge a young trusting heart—a girl whose breath of life is kindness, who feeds on love, and sickens in neglect or distrust. Cruel, cruel, to darken hours which

should be brightest, to crush ardent hopes, to raise obstacles, to damp enthusiasm—nay, to give scorn for ambition, and ridicule for enthusiasm, instead of nourishing with the milk of human kindness the blossoming flower. A young heart exposed to such obnoxious influences either hardens and grows into no pleasant, fragrant flower—envy, hatred, and malice poison its sweetness—or it dies, like a lily bent at the first storm."

"You are sadly in earnest, mamma," I said, surprised at her warmth.

"It was near being so desperate with me, Minnie. If ever you are prompted to write, try and tell me, dear. I faithfully promise you my sympathy and encouragement, however little talent you may evince."

"Thank you, mamma. I *feel* poetry when I read or hear it. Nothing moves me so deeply; but it is not possible that *I* have within me the power to move others in like manner."

"It is more than possible, Minnie."

"And you are a poetess, mamma. Where, may I ask, are your poems?"

"In the fire, most of them," she laughed. "You must not think I publish everything that I write."

"And am I to write and destroy?" I asked, ruefully.

"If you choose. Many clever people write and

burn most of their compositions. Should your judgment, however, pronounce your productions worthy another's perusal, give them to the world."

"May I ask what *you* have given to the world, mamma? and have you a *nom-de-plume?* for I never saw your dear name in print."

"You read *St. Michael's?* Perhaps you have never noticed the poems signed 'M.A.'? Many a flower, you know, blushes unseen. Those initials cover a name quite unknown to fame."

"But a favourite of mine; doubly so now. I always read 'M.A.'s' verses with pleasure, little thinking they were yours. Does papa know of this?"

"Yes; my married life has no secrets now, Minnie."

CHAPTER IX.

PERHAPS because "the time was ripe" I chanced upon the poets. Under mamma's guidance I read our English poets systematically, beginning with the well-springs of inspired thought, and reading on to Wordsworth and Tennyson, the former of whom I found specially attractive. I appreciated and enjoyed reading poetry now; indeed, ever since I first read Stanley Meredith's I had searched for the expression of the beautiful in other poets. All this time I had heard nothing direct from Stanley. When he left he had certainly desired me to write to him, but I had firmly refused to do so without my father's knowledge, and Stanley had enjoined upon me the strictest silence regarding our betrothal. But the secret, as yet, pressed lightly upon me: the sense of loving and being beloved was so new and delicious in itself, that I was content to hear of my lover when trumpet-tongued fame sounded his praises, or when American newspapers eulogized the gifted English poet sojourning among them. At home, Stanley's name was frequently mentioned in our social circles. His first volume of poems still sold in new editions, while I kept allegiance true enough to my hero. His words

were engraved on the tablets of memory, and several of his most beautiful poems I could sing to a melody of my own. I now resolved to fix the time and tune on paper and arrange an accompaniment for these, and afterwards, if mamma approved, in her capacity of musical critic, to publish them, though they would be like precious gems reset in tinsel. I brought them out, and the musical world received them favourably; but I must endeavour to proceed with my attempt to describe the great change of my life.

The summer found us again in the country. This year I was no longer a girl. I had learned two lessons of life's teachings since Mrs. Atherton had taught her "boys" at the cottage. I had learned to love and to obey; my third lesson was already prepared for me.

We had not been out of town more than three weeks when mamma's health failed her. She was always working for others' comfort. The cottage on the common was still inhabited by a number of "boys," whose spiritual and temporal welfare was regarded by a "matron" and assistants under mamma's supervision, and supported mainly by her literary emoluments. It was a happy privilege, mamma would say, to do good any time; and when we "pitched our tent" at Bromley she visited the cottage daily. Owing to her frequent visits to one of the "boys," who suffered from an attack of fever, she caught the infection, and alarmed us by her depression and sudden weakness. We nursed her to con-

valescence, and a trip to the West coast was proposed to renew her wasted strength. Wales was decided upon, and papa told us to pack up and get ready.

"I shall not go, mamma," I said. "If you and papa go alone, you will enjoy yourselves much more."

"Oh, no, Minnie, love; you *must* go with us," mamma said. "We shall not leave you at home."

"I shall be very happy, indeed, now that you are better, mamma. I would rather you went without me. I shall enjoy myself at home, do not fear. I will be very idle, and read poetry, and live on strawberries all the day long."

I was firm in being left. It was not that I did not wish to go; but I knew that they were yet sufficiently lovers to enjoy travelling by themselves better than with me.

Besides, I was not sorry to have a little time to myself. Off they set, fortified by every comfort that love could suggest or money procure, and followed by my good wishes.

Now I am alone—free from the surveillance, even, of loving eyes—away, too, from the ceaseless voices of London,—free to wander in the sunshine—above all, free to visit, unobserved, the scenes of other years' happiness; to think of one who, if living now, breathes thousands of miles away from me. I had been happy then, and I was happy now in the recollection. In the mornings I rambled to those dear old haunts; in the afternoons I read my favourite poets.

One sunny afternoon I took Stanley Meredith's volume, and threw myself down on the grass under a shady linden tree in the garden, and read until I tired of the

"Linked sweetness, long drawn out,"

and shut the book, to refresh my eyes by looking upon "the beings woven of air by light" which adorned our parterre, inhaling their fragrance, and delighting in their beauty.

* * * * *

I was awakened from my day-dream — gently, lovingly aroused; nay, changed from a chaotic, pleasant, meandering reverie, into a blessed knowledge of a vivid sense of the Imagination. I *felt* the change; it is impossible for me to describe perfectly *what* I experienced.

Was I not, in a poetical sense, born of the Spirit?

To this day I know not what induced the awakening. I certainly remember that I had been reading Wordsworth and Coleridge most attentively for the first time in my life, both poets of high imagination; whether from these resulted the rapture, I cannot tell. I only know that in one moment, in the twinkling of an eye, I was changed. A thrill of sudden rapture—a subtle mysterious feeling, which I had never before experienced—passed over me; I trembled as a butterfly, just escaped from its chrysalis, trembles in its new-given powers.

* * * * *

It seemed as if I had hitherto blindly groped my way to heaven's door, and in one unexpected moment the gates had suddenly opened, and the very beauty of holiness was revealed to my longing eyes.

For an instant only, but that brief glance revealed more to me than months, nay, years of previous study and strivings had done.

It was not a strictly religious awakening, or sense of sin removed, that I attempt to describe; but it *was* something spiritual and undoubtedly Divine. I received it reverently, though half unconscious of its significance.

When I entered the house again, I knew that I was a changed being. I stepped through the open window into the library, and looking round on the familiar volumes of the poets, I *felt* with them a kinship, it might be remote, indeed. Was I, after all, worthy to be drawn into that charmed circle, wherein eyes see things in their pristine loveliness?—to stand with those who give to "airy nothings" a local habitation and a name? I was filled with inexpressible joy. I sank on my knees, and thanked God for giving me something infinitely more precious than rubies; and I prayed, too, that I might be kept pure in heart, and made meet for heaven and its full glories after death.

CHAPTER X.

No roseleaf couch was softer than mine that night. I seemed to recline on air itself. My sleep was sweet and dreamless.

* * * * *

I awake early; it is a bright morning, blue sky; no speck of cloud in sight, only its semblance as the white smoke blows adrift from the cottage chimneys in the distance. Birds are twittering on the eaves. Every few minutes a rush and scramble and upsetting, as if the old birds were thrusting out the young ones, saying, "Go out, go out; it's bright, it's bright; try your wings, try your wings!"

My heart is full of melody, too. Many a quiet song comes to me as I go about, only when I stay to listen more attent to "the beating of my own heart," the lovely fancies fly away like timid birds.

"It is summer," the lark sings, poised in mid-air, a speck above. "It is playtime," the throstle pipes, swinging on a bough. "It is a delicious time," the bee says, busy among the roses. "It is a day to be remembered," I say to myself, wondering if I am selfish in thus enjoying my loneliness. Though all I love are far away, my thoughts are kindly for the absent; they think of me, and we shall meet again.

How cheering the twitter outside; how sweet the zephyr as it ruffles the roses; and what a rich gush of melody again springs up in my heart, fresh as a brooklet, clear as a fountain!

Would that I could interpret all I hear and feel. Thoughts too deep for utterance fill my heart. I tremble, yet with a joyous sensation.

A rich harvest of fancies crowds upon me. I try to gather them, but they elude my grasp.

What is it all? Thank God for a feeling heart. I *live* when I think; my life henceforth shall be numbered by thoughts, not years.

* * * * *

The fancy comes again. Phases, surely, of other people's lives pass before my mental vision; scraps of imaginary conversations echo in my ears; characters, good, bad, and indifferent, dramatize themselves on my little stage, acting, speaking, laughing at their own sweet will; for surely I have no control over them. They possess me, carry me with them; over lands and seas I go, to tropical forests oppressively silent in their green depths. I sail on broad calm streams, in painted galleys, blown by zephyrs; I repose on mossy banks, lulled by the nodding flowers; I enter, with reverent step and slow, cathedrals hoary and ancient, listening to the sweet-voiced anthems echoing through the nave. Wherever these wilful little people wish, they take me with them. Sometimes they are scarcely friendly, giving me sundry raps of

attention; and then, when I just get to know and to be fond of them, they rush away like any "real folks"; changeling they are, gone astray from my very purpose this moment. Presto! the dream is over!

* * * * *

And now for the pen of a ready writer. First, my morning duties—household, pleasant duties—must be performed; then, secure of peace and no interruption, I sit down to transfer my ideal visions to paper. Alas! I took up my pen, pressed its fine point on the smooth surface of my foolscap, and—wrote? No; the attempt was futile.

No matter how I polished the lantern, the geni would not appear.

Never mind. I will try again before long; meanwhile I may write to mamma, to whom I can freely confess my inmost heart. I wrote at once. I do not now remember what I wrote; I know I told her of my day-dream, or awakening, and that, when I read my letter over after I had finished, it read but poorly. The vision had already faded.

But I sent the letter off. By return of post I received an answer from mamma, which, as a letter, was characteristic of her. Here it is:—

"Barmouth, July 12.

"My Dear Minnie,

"Your loving letter found me this morning almost laid up with a severe cold, caught during a too-

prolonged moonlight ramble on the wet rocks last night. Your papa set off early for the ascent of Cader this morning, and I felt very much disappointed through not being able to accompany him. But your letter has done me good, for, child, I catch your inexpressible meaning when you try to tell me of your day-dream—say, rather, your awakening. I know exactly how you feel: something like a painter feels when suddenly a thrilling scene passes before his mental vision in such glorious ideality that he, lingering, gazes, rapt and ecstatic, until he fails to grasp it actually or to place it upon his canvas in the true ideal light in which he first beheld it.

"Or you may perhaps feel this revelation something after the fashion of a savage when he first learns that there is a Great Spirit who sees and hears everything: he is simply awe-stricken; and before he can fall down and worship the Great Unseen the impression fades again, and back to his idols and his superstitions goes the unregenerate man.

"I have enjoyed the same feeling you describe, Minnie; but it is never lasting—the mind, perhaps, could not support the tension. Since coming here, I have had wonderful glimpses of God's goodness and of our Heavenly Father's wisdom and power. Were I to live amid these glorious mountains, continually to gaze on these scenes of wondrous rocks and rivers, of changing seas and skies, my soul would be filled to rapture and ready to burst its wings of earth.

"But I remember, too,

'How many a soul to-day lies dark,'

in our crowded cities, and not for ten beautiful Principalities would I relinquish the blessed privilege of infusing a living joy into the breast of one poor soul.

"You say you have failed to express yourself in composition. Do not despair at the first failure; be thankful for the present that you have become acquainted with the glorious ideal of your inmost soul. You weep, you smile, you are full of pure and holy emotions; they *must* lead on to poetic expression. Your wings are shaping; by-and-by you will ascend to the regions of expressed idealities.

"Write to me again on this subject, for am I not your sympathizing and loving

"MOTHER?"

The same to the same:—

"Barmouth, July 15.

"MY DEAR MINNIE,

"I write again in answer to your second letter on this subject, so interesting.

"What a change has taken place! I am wondering what you are like now. Surely I shall discover a brighter flash in your eyes, a sweeter tone in your voice, a nobler thrill in your embrace!

"'How dull the past seems,' you say, 'in comparison!' Truly you have burst forth into a melodious song of great joy; yet you have the coolness

to ask if I would counsel you to encourage such ecstasy of emotion.

"Most decidedly I say 'Yes.' Welcome these brighter hours whenever they come; they are the music given to those whose hearts are attuned to sing songs in the night. Yes; though many good, worldly people would be shocked at my advice, I still say, 'Enjoy, whenever you can, this self-communion'; and this I say judging from the experience of my own life. Indulge, then, in this sense of the beautiful steadily, every day, until at last you find no lack of words to express yourself. A brooklet will run, a river will hasten, and an ocean will float all the ships in the world.

"No, do not check the emotions as fanciful and idle; already your mind relaxes when you speak thus. Treasure the happy moments, for the feeling, like all precious things, is apt to 'fade into the light of common day.'

"Write, write your thoughts; persevere, for in such a frame of mind the best poetry is ever written. Write, if only to clothe most homely objects with a glow of composition—a placing of things actual in an ideal light.

"My dear child, may you often enjoy this happy state. It is the prerogative of youthful genius, therefore try to make a record of it. The experience of maturity has nothing equivalent to its fineness, its ecstasy; and though, through its influence, you will be

more sensitive to the rude shocks of daily life, your heart will have experienced a deeper sense of joy, a foretaste of heavenly bliss itself.

"Your father has seen your letters. He found me weeping over your last; but, darling, they were tears of joy. He is only afraid that you will injure your health by studying so assiduously as you intend; but I have no such fears for you if your heart is firm in God as its centre of enjoyment. If the idealizing of Nature sends your rapt soul to a higher contemplation of Nature's God, why should we fear for you?

"You say that your love of poetry, of reading poetry, has suddenly increased. Read on, my dear, until you are surfeited with good things. You will read with a keener vision than before; you will discern and appreciate the ideal as it is expressed in our greatest poets. Often you will find similar phases of feeling to those you have just experienced; and even where no ideal beauty is depicted, you will clothe a hero with such a garb, woven of your own bright fancies, that the author himself would not recognize his own creation.

"More when I see you. The tide is running in swiftly, and your father is waiting for me to take the boat.

"I am, as ever,

"Your affectionate

"MOTHER."

CHAPTER XI.

THE rude shocks of daily life, as mamma had foretold, nearly destroyed my airy castles.

Left to myself many hours of the day, my reveries, once so bright, grew morbid and melancholy. A deep and unaccountable depression came over my soul. I could no more write than fly. When I went into the village among the poor, sufferings which I had alleviated, burdens which I had lightened before, seemed to be now insuperable barriers to human happiness. When I looked into the depths of a sorrow-stricken creature's eyes my own brightened not; my hands, touching a fellow-sufferer's, seemed to convey no light and healing virtue of sympathy or relief. I went home again and renewed my studies, but the infinitude of knowledge startled me; I was not content with the few crumbs to be gleaned by my own efforts.

I turned to Art. I stood before the few choice pictures that adorned our walls. I looked on radiant skies, painted oceans, still blue lakes, and cloud-tipped mountains; yet my eye saw little beauty in those combinations of form and colours. *I remembered the brightness of my visions, and these were lifeless before me.*

I turned to Music, and struck the plaintive sounds that other times had soothed my soul. I played an *adagio* of Beethoven's; I tried an operatic strain of Bellini's; I followed the majestic chorus of Haydn's, "Of stars the fairest"; I opened the 'Messiah,' and tuned my voice to sing, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," and, God be thanked, I found rest for my soul once more.

Home again came my beloved parents. I laughed and sang before them. My father took me in his arms, and called me his "dear daughter with the dower of Genius." Mamma's clear eyes penetrated my heart, though some days passed before she talked much with me.

They were, for the present, full of their journey. Mamma's health was completely restored by the invigorating mountain air of Wales.

"It is the prettiest, most picturesque place you ever saw," mamma said. "Barmouth itself is so funnily built—only one flat street, at the foot of a great rock facing the sea—the houses are perched on the front of this rock, and you go up dozens of steps, from tier to tier, from house to house, all looking seawards. While the mountains,—Minnie, you must *see* them, my eyes were almost dazed with their massiveness, — they seemed to shut us in from all the world outside; while the deep, ever-moving green of the sea, with the foamy break of the waves on the harbour and the rocky caves, seemed to imprison

us in the fastnesses of the rocks. It is a place to dream of!"

"How you have enjoyed it," I said; "and you look so much better!"

"No wonder. I never was in such a hungry place. But, child, how thin *you* are!" She was affectionately anxious, and troubled herself no little about my health.

After the excitement of their return had subsided, my depression seized me again, and mamma questioned suddenly, yet not abruptly,—

"Are the dreams dispelled, Minnie?"

"Not quite, mamma," I said, leaning upon her bosom, and pressing my face to hers. "It is only a mood of mine. If I sigh, do not imagine that I have a why and a wherefore."

"But fears and doubts seem to oppress you. I know it is merely the reaction consequent upon your excitement. Give to the winds your fears. Set out with a clear conscience on whatever path you intend to follow."

"I have been thinking, mamma—"

"Of course; thinking too much."

"No, I have been thinking only of the dark side of human nature," I said, blushing even to mention the ideas of my hero to mamma.

As though she knew my inmost thoughts, she said reproachfully, "I trusted you further than that, Minnie. You know how miserable your friend

Stanley Meredith made himself by dwelling on the dark side. Faith, my dear, takes us far above the chasm of despair; trust, be hopeful; your talents slumber in repining. Ah, genius finds many thorns among the roses, after all!"

"It is doubtful yet whether I possess any genius," I said, despondingly. "If I could only express myself—"

Mamma smiled. "The hill of difficulty!" she said, cheerfully. "You wish to fly before you can walk steadily. Certes! all is not straightforward in your professional life; many things may be against you, even whilst your home companions are sympathetic. Perhaps, after all, you will begin to think an artistic life is a life of peculiar deprivation and trial."

"I think it must be the most satisfying life on earth, mamma," I said, earnestly.

"I am loth to dispel that illusion," she said, smiling again; "but of all the heart-breaking, soul-burdening, brain-straining lives, commend me to the literary."

"Oh, do not say so!"

"I *must* say it. You are thinking only of success when you speak of its being satisfying. But imagine what it must be to stake all and fail! I have known failures, terrible failures; seen discouragement, like a grim terror, seize a young aspirant in its icy grip, laying him low speedily. Others I have seen set out

with a high standard and mighty helps by the way, come to nought most unaccountably. Ah, even those who have succeeded, I have known them ignominiously lose their first estate!"

"And still you encourage me?—nay, when, perhaps, you have tasted the bitter-sweet yourself!"

"Yes; though I never yet attained the full perfection of my youth's aspirations, my life has not been unblessed. Some of my most delightful hours have been passed in the pursuit of literature under difficulties."

It must be true, then; the poet must suffer first; his heart-throes must be real, his ideal hopes, his ideal fears, are thence quickened; thus he interprets the revelations that stir his soul. He must suffer more keenly, weep bitterer tears, rejoice more sensitively than those around him,—live, for the greater portion of his life, strung to a painful tension, while the least jar upon his heartstrings may be fatal to him.

"Was it versification you tried, Minnie?" mamma asked.

"Yes," I laughingly answered. "This morning I made another attempt; but, alas! my lines were lame—they hobbled after each other in the most ludicrous fashion. And yet I often dream (now you are laughing, mamma!)—I *do* actually *dream* in such flowing verses. The rhymes come in delightfully, the ideas follow each other in order, and the

rhythm echoes in my ears when I wake as if some one had just read to me in measured tones. Only last night I dreamt such a dream."

"Genius comes in dreams. It shows how your thoughts run on poetry. But 'inspiration' has a wide meaning: there never was a thought expressed that could not have been better worded. I dare say you thought, Minnie, that to write poetry one should seize a pen and throw off in one moment an effusion. Be thankful for the present that you have the gleam within; nourish it, adhere to it, and in good time a voice will be given to you; that is, if you remember that genius is also 'an infinite capacity for taking pains.'"

Notwithstanding my coyness when mamma first spoke to me of writing, I had really thought much of being an author, though the wish had never before escaped my lips, and up to that time I had written scarcely a line of original composition.

To be a writer—a good and great writer—was ever my highest ambition. The brilliant successes of many of my countrywomen had stirred the depths of my nature. Taking the 'Life of Charlotte Brontë' as my text-book, *my* future success was a foregone conclusion. I was as confident of some day writing a novel as ever Columbus believed in the existence of the Unknown Land when he put forth to sea in the crazy Spanish caravels to find the Positive Unseen.

CHAPTER XII.

"MANY happy returns," mamma said, one morning, greeting me affectionately. "See, here is something for your birthday,"—giving me an exquisite little pearl penholder, with a real gold pen, diamond-pointed.

"Oh, thank you, mamma!" I exclaimed, kissing her. "What a temptation to write!"

"And here is another present," papa said, drawing forth a dainty writing-desk, of Italian walnut.

"Oh, what a beauty!" I said, embracing him. "Just what I wanted. Surely I shall write to some purpose now!" I opened the little drawers, peeped in the numerous recesses, and found sundry other little presents from friends.

"And what will you give me for this fine thing?" my father said, producing a small packet, which bore unmistakable signs of foreign despatch.

"What is it worth?" I said. "First let me see it."

"I did not know that you had foreign correspondents," mamma said, adroitly seizing the packet, as my father held it aloof.

"Neither have I," I said, with a sudden throb. I bent over her shoulder, and looked at the address.

The writing was surely familiar; and the foreign stamps—

"It came to town yesterday," papa said; "but I thought it would be a pleasant surprise for you this morning."

"It was too bad of you to keep it one instant!" I said, excitedly, holding my hand out for it. Mamma gave it to me, and I rushed away, through the open window, into the garden.

From whom could it be? I pressed it to my bosom, and refrained from opening it until I had gained the seclusion of the cosy nook under the linden.

I broke the seals and tore away the wrappers, and, to my intense delight, discovered a volume of poems by Stanley Meredith, published in America.

Had he sent it to me? Certainly; for on opening it I found that the volume was inscribed to myself! —"To Minnie Sinclair, from Stanley Meredith."

I could scarcely believe my own eyes, and looked, and looked again. I turned over the leaves, and found delicious breathings of a genius almost unearthly, full of fervour, sublime in ideas and expression. Under the genial influence of tropical regions the poet's mind had ripened and matured with a surpassing splendour. And he had not forgotten me. My name was entwined in his heart-breathings. "To my Minnie." "To my first love, my only love, Minnie." "In memory of a love which was quickened in a storm, fierce as the tempest of his own

heart, pure and bright as the lightning," &c. All these, and many more, were unmistakably meant for one who understood them; and was not I proud and happy to appropriate them to myself?

"Oh, my love, my own true love!" I cried, assured of my affection being returned fourfold. I sang aloud for very joy: "Soon, soon my love will surely come himself. Bloom, bloom, ye flowers; shine, shine out, ye golden rays, for my true love will come again, and ye shall be so bright and sweet that he will never wish to roam afar."

I verily believe mamma thought I was in trouble. There she stood in the garden, looking anxiously around for me. As she approached I met her, and gave her the book without uttering a word.

"I could not imagine who had sent it, unless young Meredith," she said, slyly. "Is it from him really, Minnie?"

"Read!" I said. "Come and sit in the shade and tell me what you think of my present."

Quietly turning over the leaves she read the inscription. She gave a little start, and my eyes drooped when she looked from the leaf to me. Then she read one or two of the poems. "To Minnie!" she repeated, turning again her full brown eyes questioningly upon me. "Is it so?" she said; and, as I did not deny it, she continued, "I little thought *you*, Minnie, the chosen one of our young poet." She put her arm round me as she spoke, and I whispered

in her ear our mutual promises, our hopes for the future. "But, mamma," I said, "it is a great secret. We have never written to each other, and I have never heard *once* directly from Stanley since he left until this morning. Sometimes I have feared that he had forgotten me, but he has not done so you see," I said, touching the book she held.

"Still you surprise me, Minnie," she said, frankly; "and I cannot say that I am altogether pleased."

"Why, mamma? I thought you and papa would be quite proud to know that Stanley loved me."

"No, Minnie, *I* am not," she said, thoughtfully. Then looking straight into my face she said, seriously, "You know people have said that Stanley Meredith was—"

"Mamma," I interrupted hastily, "I should love him were he the arch fiend himself!"

"Oh, Minnie!" she exclaimed, shocked at my vehemence. "Do not speak rashly, perverse girl," she said, with more impatience than I had ever seen her betray before. "I've a good mind to tell you something I heard of Stanley Meredith when we were in Wales."

"What was it, mamma?" I asked, eager to know anything concerning my lover.

"I heard it from an old woman who told us that she had nursed this same poet of yours in childhood, and that when he was born (the country people believed it), he had actually horns and a cloven

foot, and that his mother very naturally died with fright on seeing her child."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, horror-struck; "it is impossible! You *never* believe an old woman's tale?"

"The old woman also told us," mamma went on, smiling, "that it was seriously questioned if he should not be smothered, being a monstrosity. But he had so lovely a face, such winning smiles, that no one could be found hard-hearted enough to put him to death."

"Horrible, most horrible! I do not believe one word!"

"I tell the tale as 'twas told to me, nothing extenuated."

"But much set down in malice," I said; "though no matter; the man whom I love is sacred in my eyes for ever and ever!"

"Ah!" mamma said,—

"'To *waste* true love on anything
Is womanly, past question.'

So we will not dispute the point. Brighten up, dear. Come into the house. We will not quarrel about it, however diverse our opinions may be."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE following night I slept with the precious volume under my pillow, though no inducements were needed to make me dream of the writer.

I dreamt I walked along a dreary highway, my heart heavy, my feet weary. Stumbling over the rugged road, I wandered on in sore distress. Alas! I cried, of all my friends bereft, and, worse than friendship's slight, forsook of him who unto me is light and life and joy. Bereft of him, my heart for ever bleeds, and this poor frame, unless on him it rest, is worth no more than lifeless clay; let me return unto the dust from whence I came, unsought, unloved, remembered not. Away! to dead men's sepulchres, to death's domain!

Thus I raved in my despair, while the darkness was denser than any wakeful night of moaning pain. No moon nor stars illumined my path. My weary steps gave way, my voice grew fainter. I fell; life and hope forsook their throne,—

When, lo! there suddenly appeared to me
A form so bright, in darkness visible,
At once I knew him. Stooping, he raised me

Gently to his side, flinging his strong arms
Round me, reviving me with his sweet breath.
Oh, night! abide as long as he is near;
In his embrace oh let me rest and die!

And in my dream I could have died, but that his breath gave me new strength. From his embrace my pallid cheek grew hot with life once more.

And sweeter yet the joy his words did give.
"Mine own," he whispered in mine ear, "how long
Hath seemed the time since last I held thee here.
How sharp have been the pangs of absence!
Say,
Within thy heart dost cherish me alone?
Do I not love thee? Art thou not my bride?"

We wandered on together until the dawning broke, and green vistas opened to our view on either side the road. Sweet flowers suddenly bloomed wherever we trod—each opening flower, methought, displaying a tender message from my lover. We passed them, too happy in ourselves to pluck the blossoms, when suddenly the rising sun was overshadowed, and my companion vanished. I retraced my steps slowly along the same road; the blossoms had already closed—I could no longer read their signification.

"Thus," thought I, when I awoke, "thus might my life heretofore have been still brighter and happier had I consented to write to Stanley."

But he was faithful to me; I was full of hope,

and the days flew on; the weeks numbered up, the months registered themselves; still I carolled,

"Come when you will, dear, you 're welcome to me."

Summer, with all her wealth, passed by, and Autumn, with her russet eyes, looked in and smiled a mournful greeting; Winter came, sad-eyed at first, but merry and noisy at Christmas. The year was slipping away and I had nothing to show; still, I might say, this time last year I was not just what I am now. During the past year new ideas have asserted themselves, wider views have been opened; and though in many things I have been disheartened and discouraged, still, through every effort, some good has arisen, and for that good I am sincerely thankful.

The new year dawned in wintry splendour, the brown earth hid by the dazzling snow; as the bells rang out the departing year I lay listening, and felt as if they rang a knell to some of my dearest hopes; but the joyous chorus which ushered in the new year roused me a little. Perhaps the merry din may be echoed in my heart before this year is over. Or do I seek too much? Is my ambition so high? Well, as yet my flights have been too aspiring; not possessing the necessary wings to sustain me aloft after the force of the impetus is expended, down I come with a grievous fall.

I studied with renewed energies, especially the rules of composition, the subtle mysteries of metre, and this time tried my "'prentice hand" on prose.

My "efforts," as mamma termed them, were at first crude, but I visibly improved with practice, yet despaired of trusting my writings to any cooler tribunal than the flames. By-and-by, however, the desire for sympathy and criticism, if not appreciation, which every one in earnest craves for his work, prevailed, and I ventured to send, unknown to those at home, one of my trifles to a certain quarter, awaiting its fate with an eagerness known only to the initiated.

To my intense delight it *was* accepted, and I was solicited for further contributions. Shyly proud, I showed mamma the magazine, and took my reward in my father's quick look of pleasure. How they encouraged me! After this I wrote with avidity; there seemed to have been a fire within me, only waiting for the wind of circumstance to fan it into a blaze.

Spring drew on with all her promise, and not a word further had I heard of Stanley. I wondered if the spring of my life were passing away—if I should appear, when he did return, old and faded! Still my heart was too warm to lose its freshness, and I was not pining in loneliness. Friends were many, interests varied—nay, the door of the Temple of Fame had already opened, the crown of success awaited me in its inner temple. Was I not satisfied? No. Much as I loved Art for its own sake, it seemed to me that I must still say,—

> **"Art is much, but Love is more!**
> **Oh, Art, my Art, thou 'rt much, but Love is more.**
> **Art symbolizes Heaven, but Love is God,**
> **And makes Heaven."**

Yes, my love for Stanley increased—my thoughts were ever of him. No temptation to swerve from my allegiance disturbed me.

One day I read in the papers that the noted poet, Stanley Meredith, was on his way to England. How my heart leaped up "at the joy-giving news." I lived on the *qui vive* for several weeks, my spirits rising and falling as each morn I looked and each eve I saw not.

When terrific gusts of wind assailed the windows and doors, swept through the corridors, whistled through the crevices, and howled demoniacally in the chimneys, I prayed God to save all ships at sea.

Yes, he was coming, my boy-lover who had left me, now grown to full estate. Nearer and nearer, every zephyr wafted him nearer.

Now he had landed, I gleaned from friendly converse,—perhaps already in town. My thoughts no longer flew over the storm-tossed deep, my beloved was safe on *terra firma*.

I cared not a jot for news of a far country now *he* was safe on our sea-girt isle. I no longer took an absorbing interest in foreign affairs, for Stanley moved no longer among those republican throngs. The stormy winds might blow, the raging waves engulf the

British ships,—what cared I, in my selfish joy, when he whom I loved was restored to his own land?

At this time, if I had not been so much engrossed with my own thoughts, I might have noticed that mamma was unusually tender and considerate towards me, my father silent and moody, seldom chaffing me or taking much interest in my studies. I saw nothing, I was absorbed in thinking of Stanley—Mr. Meredith I must call him just at the first; after, it would be "Stanley" and "Minnie" as of old. We should soon meet—he must be already flying to greet me. Our hands would be clasping, my throbbing heart would rest on his breast, my mournful thoughts be exchanged for joyful laughter, and my fears dispelled by his assuring words.

CHAPTER XIV.

Alas for the frailty of human wishes!

I breathe, I move, I speak, I write, yet it is no more I that wrote so cheerfully, that prayed so hopefully, that looked so confidently for coming happiness. Why art thou cast down, oh, my soul?

Can I frame the words? * * * I said in my heart he would come, and he came; I said he would seek me, and he sought me; I said he would tell me again the words of a cherished affection, and he told me—

Yes, he came, he saw me; and I that loved him so purely yesterday—*loved*, did I say?—can I say *loved* so soon?—I that *love* him so, wish now that he or I, or both of us, were in that land where wishes are unknown.

What do I say? Only give me back but yesterday to call him mine in my inmost heart, to dwell upon his name in silent ecstasy, to hope in his return in loving rapture!

Peace, peace, my heart! Is it a time to recall thy tremulous beatings?

* * * * *

We met!

That memorable morning, when expectation was

at its highest, I rose early, for I could not sleep—the expectant reality of seeing *him* was sweeter than any passing dream.

My father and I went out into the park, I scanning each face we met, for *he* might come that way. I was eager to get home again, for not for worlds would I be away should he call. We met a little girl in the square selling "violets." I stopped her, and purchased some. Their perfume would please some one I knew. I arranged them lovingly in the drawing-room.

Before these flowers fade, I promised myself, I shall have seen him. Sweeter than violets is the breath of my true love, yea, unto me he is as "a cluster of camphire."

The short spring day closed, and yet he had not come; but he would come this evening. I ran upstairs to attire myself in my favourite dress—white, purest white, with bandeaux of embroidered violets. I was just putting a few of the fresh, living violets on my bosom and in my hair when my listening ears caught the sound of arrivals in the entrance below. I hushed the song that trembled on my lips, and heard the distant tones of a deep voice at last.

"I am coming, my own, my sweet!" I hummed softly, running swiftly downstairs, inhaling the stray perfume of the violets as I descended, and perceiving also a strong odour of tar, which came like a whiff of sea-air from a small box in the hall. How in-

finitely more fragrant than "violets plucked" did this seem to me at that moment, for it had come with my lover from over the sea.

* * * * *

There he stood, alone in the room; he, whom my soul loved, standing, expectant, erect, towering like a cedar, his black eyes flashing as of old, his hands outstretched, his smile as——

* * * * *

And I, how did I meet him?

I will not, cannot tell.

How does the flower meet the sunbeam after the storm? How does the lark greet the sun in the brightness of his rising?

* * * * *

Stanley Meredith was married to another!

* * * * *

"And you knew that he was married?" I said reproachfully to mamma after he had gone.

"I had heard a whisper, yet scarcely believed it; and I hoped to the last moment that we should hear directly from him, nay, I felt sure that he would not come if he were married."

"But you might have told me," I groaned.

"My dear, I did not wish to give you needless trouble. You looked forward to meeting him so joyfully, and all that we heard was a mere rumour, which I would not pain you by repeating."

"Thank you, mamma; you meant kindly, of that

I am sure," I said, sadly, feeling cold, and trembling like an aspen. "I shall be all right directly," I said, faintly, as mamma's kind touch aroused me for a moment.

"Of course you feel it, I know; but it cannot be helped; say what you think about it now, and then let it pass. Your happiness is not bound up in one hope, Minnie; I should be sorry indeed if it were so; and Mr. Meredith was never the one to satisfy a heart like yours."

"Oh, how I love him! You cannot fathom my heart, mamma," I said, throwing my arms around her.

"God knows your trouble, Minnie. Be patient; this may only be a little cloud, of which, by-and-by, you will see the bright lining. You know I did not approve of Mr. Meredith for a husband for one whom I love so dearly. He is too passionate; too—"

"Say not one word against him. I cannot bear it."

I turned to my only refuge in time of trouble — to the God whom I too often forgot in sunshine. To Him I poured out my griefs, for He alone understood the case for and against me. Yet my heart was very rebellious. I refused to be comforted; many days passed before I bowed my head in submission to say, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

CHAPTER XV.

A FURTHER test of courage awaited me. A meeting between Stanley Meredith's wife and myself was inevitable. All the world must not know that *I* had been deceived by the poet, whose recent arrival from Mexico was talked about in our social circles. After all it was a trouble, a romance of my own making. Who cared for a broken heart? What mattered it that, in the pageantry of literature, while lesser planets revolved around one shining sun, the brilliancy of one little star paled for awhile?

I thought I was very brave, and when I was introduced to the woman who had come between me and my hero I bowed and smiled, and even accepted her hand without betraying the shudder that seized me.

Mrs. Stanley Meredith was a full-blown Mexican beauty, ten years older in appearance than her husband, and evidently as passionate and uncontrolled in temper as he used to be.

She was very agreeable, amiable in manner, but proud in spirit; very soon taking an opportunity of telling us that her ancestors had been princes before the Spanish conqueror came, and nobody could deny that her blood was patrician.

However Stanley had been induced to marry her eclipsed all my speculations, unless, indeed, he had been attracted by her high degree.

The first time Stanley brought his bride to our house I seemed in a dream the whole evening. With some effort I entertained them, ever and anon relapsing into a reverie that refused to be shook off. Alas, how fondly had I imagined our re-union! And here my hero was, returned with a wife—a stranger! and here was I, welcoming them with smiles on my lips, while my heart was almost broken.

Ginevra, as Mrs. Meredith was named, was in excellent spirits—self-satisfied, laughing loudly, and talking English in pretty broken accents. She had flirtish, coquettish ways, charming attitudes, but no mind at all; even mamma remarked that omission. Still my jealous eyes pronounced her sharp and *piquante*—very pleasant and lovable in Stanley's estimation.

I had closed the piano before they came, for I had no heart to sing my happy songs. After dinner, however, Mrs. Meredith opened it herself, and, without saying a word, began to play.

Mamma and I sat near her while she played. First we thought she would have crashed all sound from our fine-toned Erard by her heavy and decisive touch, but the next minute she ran her fingers along the keys wildly, swiftly, and yet sweetly, with a seraph's touch, making the piano fairly sing again.

Wild, unearthly music she drew forth; now a joyous strain, then low and mournful as a monody, the air swaying my heart in its varying cadences, and my spirits rising and falling, and rising again, as she changed the theme into an uproarious *allegretto.*

"Here," suggested Envy, "here is her power. She is the soul of music, and as far above me in her powers as an angel of light."

Just then my father and Stanley joined us—my father enraptured by the sweet sounds. Stanley's brow, too, which during dinner had been heavy and frowning, relaxed its sternness. His mobile features assumed a quieter expression as he silently listened. Now and then, as I glanced at him, he smiled, reminding me of his old intractability, when his soul, like Saul's dark spirit, owned the influence of music.

Suddenly the music ceased; the player turned to us, her face brimful of emotion and "beautiful exceedingly" in its play of feature, transformed by the magic of her own invocations. She was full enough of soul now.

"Do you not play, Miss Sinclair?" she asked, sweetly, as we thanked her.

"Mamma has the nimbler fingers," I said; while mamma asked, "What was that you played just now, Mrs. Meredith?"

"That," she laughed and shook out her fan; and, bending her face to its shade, she said softly to me, "it ran in my head; I wanted to get it

out at my finger-ends. Perhaps I might call it the long-expected meeting of you and me," she went on *naïvely*, fluttering the fan in my face.

"Ginevra has often heard me speak of you, Minnie," Stanley coolly said, catching his wife's remarks.

"Yes," she said, graciously; "Stanley used often to tell me of his little friend Minnie (may I not call you Minnie, too?). My husband wrote many poems to you—to his dear Minnie."

"Time's rude hand has sent our schemes adrift, Minnie," Stanley said, smiling; "but for this wilful beauty things would have been very different."

"Oh! I am not at all jealous," Mrs. Meredith said, as she noticed my confusion. "You cannot blame *me*. What must be shall be."

"Minnie, will you not sing for Mrs. Meredith?" mamma said hurriedly, kindly interrupting a conversation so personal.

"Yes; do sing for me," Mrs. Meredith said, earnestly. "Let me hear your English ballads of loves and doves and truth triumphant, and the like."

She rose as she spoke, and took up one of the songs which lay in the portfolio near me. It happened to be one of Stanley's poems, which I had set to music. The familiar name caught her eyes.

"Ah! Miss Sinclair's music and my husband's words; charming arrangement. You will sing me this?" she said, winningly.

"What is that, Ginevra?" her husband asked, noticing her look of interest. She gave him the copy, and I dared not catch his expression as he read it.

Mamma spoke for me. "You know Minnie always admired your verses, Mr. Meredith, and she has had much pleasure in setting them to music."

"It is an honour I never expected, Minnie," Stanley said, his eyes flashing upon me in his earnestness, while I trembled as he persisted in calling me Minnie, as in the days of yore.

"You must let me hear this," he said, joining his wife in her persuasions.

I would have refused to sing, but I saw my father's eyes fixed sorrowfully, tenderly upon me; and for his sake, to delude him into the belief that I was not so painfully heart-struck as he imagined, I carelessly replied, "Of course I will sing if you wish."

I sang, and in the voice of song I somehow eased the sorrow that stung so sorely.

I was calmer after, and spent the evening with a serenity and composure which I had not anticipated.

We met the Merediths frequently. This spring was the first in my life in which I took no interest in our social *réunions*. I would have preferred solitude, and to remain alone while my father and mamma met the talented men and women who flocked into the capital. But mamma firmly insisted on my joining them, either in our own drawing-room or in meeting our friends elsewhere; and the Merediths

seemed to haunt our neighbourhood. Wherever we went they were either present, expected, or talked about, Mrs. Meredith shining by her illustrious partner's side as a Mexican belle, while his increasing fame as a writer made Stanley Meredith a welcome visitor at most houses.

For myself, Stanley's eyes contained a magnet. Wherever I met him, their gaze from the most distant corner of the room, with fifty pairs of eyes between us, swayed their irresistible influence; and though, through force of will, I questions answered and questions asked in common parlance, I never for one moment forgot his presence.

As sure as I lifted my eyes I found his fixed upon me; and he, whose every expression I had once learnt to interpret, must now be met with the calm courtesies of artificial life. To see him thus after all my prayers for his safe return—to be near him, to hear him—oh! that we were still a thousand leagues apart, or that I could rush away to the quiet spring woods, away from the sound of his voice, now bold and loud, again low and mellow, reaching me in tones lower still and mellower. I feared sometimes lest the strain should break, and I should faint or fall as he passed me, and his locks sometimes appeared to me painfully significant. But the longest evening ends. Under cover of mamma's chaperonage, I gained the doors in safety, and often smiled adieu to the Merediths as we met in the corridors.

I think mamma was surprised at my powers of endurance. Little she knew of the struggle within to stifle thoughts sinful to encourage. For the spirit often refused to be controlled. A word, a look, just when I flattered myself of mastery, the tones of a deep voice, or the passing touch of a friendly greeting, called the deepest affections into play. For who can control the fetterless heart—restrain as we may, appear before the world with a cool eye, a firm hand, say "Yes" and "No," and answer with a smile? Ah! when unbridled thought rushed with a tumultuous bound over the chaos of intervening years, I saw myself walking with Stanley in the gloaming by the stealing river, heard the gentle ripple of the shallow water in its narrow bed, and lingered once more—how had I lingered!—with a strong arm round me, a warm, living presence beside me, transforming the lovely scene into an enchanted region reflected from his looks. Upon my lips yet lingered his love-kisses—a discordant voice arouses me from my momentary dream, a friend speaks, I challenge a smile again, and my spirit sinks down to its accustomed burden.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more we parted.

Stanley and his lovely bride left town for their home in Wales, and we shifted our quarters once more to Ashfield.

In the weeks succeeding the Merediths' departure I seemed to realize more fully my withered hopes. Now that the effort to keep up while constantly meeting them was no longer necessary, I relapsed into a wearisome despondency. I never once felt sufficiently indignant to bitterly accuse Stanley himself of cruel deception. No, I loved much, and, overwhelmed, in vain essayed to excuse him.

Now it was that mamma proved her worth again—ever by my side, tenderly ministering to my comfort; and, when my strength returned, animating me with a desire to do something worth living for.

Often, too, she talked of the Merediths, like a skilful physician probing my wounds, resolved to heal by gentle or rough measures. Well I knew that to her I was myself—a poor, weak creature, truly disappointed, all but heart-broken.

Browning speaks of—

"The bright side of a sorrow;"

but it was long ere I found the brighter side of mine. Fervently I prayed for strength to overcome the mighty passion struggling in my breast, fully conscious of the wickedness of indulging in it.

At this time, too, Stanley Meredith published another volume of poems. Was it in human nature to resist reading them? Secretly I devoured them, discovering in many pages lingering traces of the "fiery affection" he had once felt for "the darling of his soul."

How I exulted over these words, claiming them as my very own, and burdening my life with vain wishes.

My own pen was idle; even my "harp" was "hung on the willows," for how could I waft into the airy regions of fancy and imagination with the heaviness of heart that I experienced? How could I continue my steps on the weary road to fame with no sweet parterre of hope whereon to rest my wearied eyes; or run the race wherein was no well of refreshing for the thirsty soul, no tender assurances of a lover's affection undefiled to reflect itself in my heart?

Yes, the lightness of heart I had once felt was giving way to the heavy-heartedness that saps the life-blood of the young. Was I really losing my youthful freshness—entering so tremblingly upon the full estate of womanhood—a period to which I had looked forward as the most satisfactory of my life?

"Come with me for a walk, Minnie," mamma said, one fine afternoon.

I obeyed listlessly. We proceeded towards the common, past the green hedge-rows, under the heavy-laden trees of the orchards. As usual, we called at the cottage, to see the "boys." I tried to appear pleased when the little ones gathered round us and told us of their doings, and to seem interested in the kind matron's sketches of the likes and dislikes of the older ones. Mamma often stayed several hours with the children, but to-day she paid but a short visit, returning with me through the wood. Leaving the common, we met, unexpectedly, a friend from town, Mr. Fordham, a young lawyer, who, in virtue of having a taste for *belles lettres*, which amounted to an enthusiasm but which never incited him to emulation, was admitted to our coteries. He could appreciate—

"The fine pants and trembles of a line;"

but, content to enjoy and admire, he refrained expressing too often we believed the "thoughts burning on his lips ready to be uttered."

He adhered strictly to his profession, springing from point to point, attaining an honourable position, yet never forgetting his humble and obscure origin. Mamma herself had had no little influence on his career. He was quite a *protégé* of hers,—as much one of her "boys" as any Arab of the cottage.

He often came to the cottage and sat among the

boys. He was on his way thither when we met him. Mamma expressed her pleasure on seeing him, and asked him to come down to Ashfield to spend the evening with us. He readily promised to follow us shortly, and as we left him mamma said, warmly,—

"What a hearty grasp he has, and how thoroughly the English gentleman he is; so kind, yet so open and daring. Don't you think he is the essence of sincerity?"

"I know him to be that," I said; "for he tells me to my face of my faults."

"Does he, Minnie? Well, I think he is a most exemplary young—"

"Oh! don't praise him any more," I interrupted. "I know that he is everything that he should, would, or could be."

I had heard John Fordham's praises before this time rung by mamma, and I could see through her little plans. She was even now sighing softly, and I could not resist saying,—

"You will have me on your hands long enough, mamma; I shall never marry John Fordham."

"Has any one asked you to do that?" she said, quickly.

"No." I shook my head, but she was scarcely convinced.

"I could not wish you a better fate."

"Thank you," I said, wearily; "my future looms terribly prophetic of evil."

"Nay, remember the blessings of the present. Before I met your father, before you knew me, I had experienced nearly all my sorrows. My happiest days are of middle age. I had experienced the loss of many friends, had struggled against poverty, with a drunken husband."

"And yet you look back to those times cheerfully! I wonder if you always wore the look of contentment that beams from your eyes now?" I said, inquiringly.

"I always tried to *appear* contented. There is nothing racks mind and body so much as a constant craving for something different,—something, perhaps, impossible, unattainable."

"But you could know little contentment with a drunken husband. I did not know that Mr. Atherton was not kind to you," I said, putting my arm through hers.

"It is all past now," she said, softly. "I tried to appear to him contented, even when I feared my heart would break, and I succeeded in attaining an inward composure."

"I am not like you, mamma," I said, sorrowfully; for her quiet, resigned tone reproached me for my own wilfulness.

"I used to kneel down in the afternoons," she continued, looking straight before her. "My husband could not bear to see me on my knees, so I prayed in the daytime, casting all my care upon Him; and think you I came back comfortless? I came down-

stairs rejoicing, happy, until I touched the handle of the door and confronted *him* again; but even then I strove to be cheerful."

"And could you smile then?"

"Yes; I even laughed at his coarse jokes, and bandied words with him on safe subjects."

"But you could not *feel* pleasant towards him?"

"I had taken him for better and worse, Minnie; and when I married Mr. Atherton he was better. He was not always bad and unfeeling." She ceased speaking, as if remembrances were too painful. I pressed her arm to my side, and we walked on silently for a few minutes.

"Under God's goodness, Minnie," she said, presently, "I owe to Mr. Atherton many things of greater value than present comforts or gratifications. When first I married him I was indifferent and careless of deeper things than timely blessings. I would be better by-and-by. When I had more leisure, I would study the deep things of God. So that when my husband's conduct changed towards me, when the demon Drink possessed him, I was hardened and rebellious; but my little boy came and smiled on my bosom, and then died quite suddenly; and *then*, in thorough destitution, I found consolation in One who ever shared my troubles. My hopes followed my child, and I found peace."

"But were you never crossed again, or lost faith?"

"Sometimes; for who serves God with a perfect

heart? I had fearful times of anguish. It seemed as if my husband had spoiled this world for me; my constant prayer was that he might not rob me of my hopes for the next."

"Would he have done so?"

"Yes; he knew that I had found 'peace.' Often he said that he would make me lose faith, for he was a scoffer, Minnie,—he mocked God."

"Did he die in that condition?"

"I believe he found mercy in the last moment."

"I'm glad there was an end of him," I said decisively, springing forward to greet my father as he met us in our own garden.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. FORDHAM joined us in the evening, and mamma's little plans seemed well timed indeed. It pleased her to see me, lively and interested, conversing with him; and my father, too, always relished the young lawyer's society.

Do what he would, John Fordham won men's approbation. His acts were so open, defying the breath of detraction. He was integrity itself in a profession which has as many loopholes of deceit and fraud as any other. I admired him myself, liked him too; if he had been my brother I could not have partaken more warmly in his welfare.

I knew what was coming. I knew why my father walked out of the room without so much as an apologetic plea of "copy" and "proofs" to overlook. I knew why mamma suddenly remembered that the piano had not been open all day, and went to play her beloved sonatas.

Mr. Fordham and I sat just outside the open window, the fiery sunset lighting up our faces, and the evening breeze blowing gently towards us. There was something in the wind, too, that evening. It was coming, yet I felt conscience-free that no meditated

act of gratified vanity on my part had led to this result.

Pure and simple, the man was in love with something answering to the name of Minnie Sinclair. It might be her fair face, it might be her gifts or graces, it might be her wealth,—certain I am it was not all me that he liked. When he really uttered the words, "Will you marry me?" I felt no blush rising to my cheeks as I drew back window-wards; my heart bumped a trifle quicker, but the next moment I regained my equanimity. I should never enchant his whole being. I was conscious myself of not looking so well as usual just then, and that reflection did not trouble me, it was of no consequence. Had I been as ugly as sin, John Fordham would have said his say.

Strange, too, it was that the only two men who ever honoured me by their declared affection should speak of love on the eve of departure for foreign lands. In one week John Fordham would be on his way to Mexico, having undertaken an important commission, to be executed personally out West. In glowing language he painted the tropical regions, but my heart made no response to viewing those scenes reflected from his eyes, though I had often dreamt of travelling to the sunny South and the golden West. No, my corner at home in solitude seemed doubly preferable to threading life's thoroughfare with one to whom I was so indifferent.

"Unless you can think, when the song is done,
No other is soft in the rhythm;
Unless you can feel, when left by One
That all men else go with him;
Unless you can muse in a crowd all day
On the absent face that fixed you;
Unless you can love as the angels may,
With the breadth of Heaven betwixt you;
Unless you can feel that your faith is fast,
Through believing and unbelieving;
Unless you can die when the dream is past,
Oh, never call it loving."

I told him "I should never marry. I hoped he would find another to love and cherish; his wife would be dear as my sister." I convinced him that his case was hopeless; and he left me with a sadness in his voice that grieved me. I was sorry that I could not love him, for I knew my father had encouraged him, and mamma had set her heart upon it.

A few days after John Fordham left England. Mamma told me of his departure, and told me also that *I* had something to answer for in that quarter.

"I hope not," I said, seriously. "I did not procure Mr. Fordham his commission."

"Minnie, look at me. Are you sure that you have done wisely in sending him away comfortless?"

"Yes, mamma; wisely for Mr. Fordham's happiness. I am totally different from his idea of a wife. He is not really in love with me, I assure you. Very

soon you will hear of his meeting with one infinitely more charming than myself."

"I wish you could have liked him. I had looked forward to it, Minnie."

"Never look forward to me marrying," I said, firmly.

"But, honestly, Minnie, I am loth to believe but that you *could* have liked John Fordham."

"Honestly, mamma, it is not possible. I have thought the matter over often since he was here, and *I* regretted, too, that I could not like him. I even tried to feel sorry for him, and to pity him; but it was no use," I said, smiling. "It was not one bit of use, try as I would. I even repeated scraps of his favourite verses to induce a mutual feeling:—

'How could I tell I should love thee afar,
When I did not love thee anear.'"

"Do not jest about it, Minnie; he was sadly in earnest, if you were not."

"I, too, am in earnest, mamma, about one thing—*never, never* to marry! I shall live with you always; so do not pain me by giving me either to this, that, or the other worthy young man in your own mind. I am quite content with single blessedness."

I was in earnest, too, about another thing—to write once more. I had closed my desk, tumbled my numerous MSS. into a large tin trunk a month before. Now I took them all out again, arranged them, and proceeded to elaborate.

I never yet wrote a novel off-hand. It has always been a work of months lengthening into years, for I had invariably four or five distinct efforts shaping themselves, no one predominant for many months, each character and incident coming spontaneously. Sometimes singly, sometimes in companies, they swarm around me—long before I can crowd them definitely into ship-shape. To put all in one novel would be impossible. This their idiosyncrasies forbid. Gradually they fuse into something like marching order, and I send them forth, equipped in my poor wisdom, into the world, thus to make themselves a home among my fellow-creatures. Not every one who writes is free to communicate with such a mentor as mamma. An indefatigable, unselfish stimulator she was, provoking one to work, infusing life and individuality into one's crude conceptions, mild but firm in condemnation, pungent, but not bitter, candid to acknowledge merit and motives, and kindly appreciative of the smallest details.

I have often spoken of mamma, let me try to describe her once more.

At forty she was still as fresh-looking as when first I knew her. In our eyes she was beautiful, for we loved her; but something of youthful freshness ever surrounded her, though she had the "wiser mind" that

> "Mourns less for what age takes away
> Than what it leaves behind."

Sanguine she was, and full of a hope that stretched to eternity, beaming from her eyes and radiating from her words. She not only entered into your thoughts, but thought for you, with you,—reasoning by affection, admonishing by love. But how can I fully describe the gentle being whose favourite virtue was truth,—who admired most in man true manliness and godly fear, and possessed herself

> "That chief grace
> Of womanhood, a heart than can embrace
> All goodness in another woman's form"?

She had a heart framed for pure friendships, finding satisfaction, even happiness, in the serenity of unexacting affection in either sex, by no means exclusive, like myself. I *loved* a *few*, rarely liking the many. My ardour found little gratification in Platonic love; but mamma was, perhaps, too ethereal, purity itself, with scarce a stain of earthly passion, or it may be that she had been purified in the severe school of discipline, rising with more lightness,—

> "Like a soul that hath sinned,
> And is pardoned again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THERE, I've finished it, papa; and will you kindly take it and be my publisher?" I said one day, with a very pleasant feeling of having brought within the compass of five quires of foolscap some of the ideas and opinions which had been buzzing about me for so long before.

"Is it finished, then, at last?" papa said, graciously accepting my manuscript, and coolly laying it on the table beside him.

"Whether it is finished or not I must not say," I answered. "It is incompletely complete, mamma says."

"If there is not a tangible beginning, middle, and end,—if you have begun with a marriage and ended with a death, or left the villains unpunished and the virtuous unrewarded, you will have plotted against your interest."

"Anyhow, take it, papa; I'm heartily tired of it."

"Tired of what?" mamma's gentle voice inquired, as she joined us.

"Tired of writing," I said. "I want a change, mamma, now my novel is finished. I think an author should take a trip to the Antipodes the minute he

has finished a work, and not return until his novel has been snatched, its back broken, its component parts criticised, and its entity destroyed."

"But where is the author's reward?" mamma asked.

"In the effort. He has done it to please himself. No one wants him to write a novel; he may write another after, and find himself benefitted by his former efforts."

"The lass is wandering," my father said, looking from me to mamma. "Take her down to Brighton or Jersey, and give her some salt air and baths."

"A change would do you good, Minnie," mamma said, readily. "And that reminds me of my letter—here it is—from Mrs. Meredith, inviting us all to go for a month to Dolwyllyn."

"To Dolwyllyn!" I echoed, my thoughts flying instantly to that castle, ancient and hoary, that stood on the rock-bound shore.

"Yes. Mrs. Meredith says how beautiful the country is now autumn is drawing on, and she is sure we should enjoy the visit. *I* should like it very much myself."

"Should you like to go, Minnie?" papa asked.

"You say *you* would enjoy it, mamma?" I said, evading a direct answer.

"Yes, dear, very much indeed; but would you like to go anywhere else instead?"

"A little 'wild Wales' air would do you good,

Minnie," papa said, kindly, patting my pale cheeks.

"It would indeed," mamma said; "we could all go, could we not, dear?" she said to papa.

"I could not promise to spare all the time," he said; "but by all means accept the invitation if it is possible."

"Shall we go, then, Minnie, you and I, and papa come down when he can spare a few days?"

"Will you decide, mamma?" I said, my heart bounding with mingled pain and pleasure at the prospect of beholding the home of the Merediths.

It was finally decided that we should accept the invitation, and in a few weeks mamma and I found ourselves under the very shadow of Cader Idris.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOLWYLLYN was a castellated mansion, built on the site of a castle of immemorable antiquity, one massive tower of which still remained, a touching suggestion of a good old "has been,"—a mighty stronghold, wherein the haughty Merediths had stubbornly refused to yield to English subjection.

The newer building almost hung or perched on the jutting crag of a natural terrace of rocks, overhanging the beautiful estuary of the blue Maddwach.

"Beautiful for situation" stood the home of the Merediths, we thought, as we approached it. We had come from the crowded plains to the solitary valleys, and the grand, silent old mountains, which rose about and around us in seeming endless succession. We left the little village station in the valley, and rode up and up the rocky road that wound round the base of the mountain. Far below to our right hung the skeleton of a bridge across the wide mouth of the river, hemmed in by towering mountains that rose abruptly from either side; Cader itself stretching majestically wide and glowing on the right; Diphwis aloft on the left, while the proud Arenigs shut in the land view at the extreme east.

This, then, was the place which had given birth to the poetic genius of Stanley Meredith! and no wonder, I thought, as we drove along the terrace road, winding in and out with the river, as its course narrowed inland, with the whispering tide behind us, and the "white horses of the sea" plunging and foaming in the lovely bay beyond.

Yes, I read Stanley's poems in the ever-shifting panorama before us, heard them in the murmur of the waves as they broke on the rocky shore, saw them on the verdant slopes of the little hills, and on the bleak mountain-tops, now thinly veiled by the clouds.

Our welcome was more than kind, it was affectionate. Mrs. Meredith seemed really grateful for our company. She kissed mamma, then took me in her arms and kissed me on both cheeks, relinquishing me to Stanley, who stood smiling and apparently in good spirits. They led us through the great entrance-hall, up the grand old staircase, bidding us look out through the windows on *la belle vue*, then past richly-hung rooms, and along straight, wide galleries, of which there seemed no end.

It was still early evening; and, after refreshing ourselves with creature comforts, Mrs. Meredith invited us to stroll outside to listen to the night birds, and to see the sunset's hues on Cader's brow.

We hastened to the grounds; mamma and Stanley led the way, while Mrs. Meredith and I followed. Over the smooth-cut lawn we stepped, through the

ancient gateway, under the old tower, and descended a flight of marble steps that led to the sands and the waves, now coming up and retreating as if at the bidding of a monarch. The sun was rapidly sinking over the utmost bound of the sea, throwing his beams on Cader's brow, lighting up that dark stretch in the most enchanting colours. It was over in a few minutes; the mountain summits only were brightened, then their whole surfaces were darkened, and night seemed to rush in over the sea and spread her mantle on mountain and valley.

We went into the castle again, and Mrs. Meredith played some Welsh melodies,—strains of vengeful warriors, cries of injured innocence, and wails of desolation she conjured before us, sending me, when we retired, to sleep most dreamfully.

I awoke in the morning in the rosiest chamber one can imagine. I threw open the windows to inhale the fresh salt morning breeze, and to listen to the ceaseless ebb and flow of the waves just below. I could have stayed there for ever, just to listen to the waves, and to look over their swelling surface, and to dream my waking dreams; but suddenly I felt so hungry, ravenously hungry, that I wisely hurried my toilette, and sped downstairs for the morning meal.

I nearly lost my way in the numerous galleries; but Mr. Meredith was in the hall, and called a morning salutation from below. I was just then passing a door on my left, which slowly opened, and Mrs. Mere-

dith came forth, resplendent in a long flowing robe of pink lama, a rosy tint, the long, loose sleeves clasped by silver claws at the wrists, a pink feather fan in a silver sheath hanging from her waist.

"Good morning," she said, stooping to kiss me, and then leading the way to the breakfast-room below. Here mamma joined us, and a heartier breakfast I thought I had never eaten in my life. The Welsh bread and butter gave me new strength; the delicious cream coffee was like a cheering refresher; the fat, juicy chicken a morsel for a queen. I laughed and chatted and felt happy and comfortable, and wondered if I were really the same nerveless creature who had succumbed to disappointment so recently! I found myself laughing at my own folly. Here I was, with healthy spirits, sound digestion, and a heart just framed for enjoyment.

I wanted to see every corner of the castle; and when Mrs. Meredith proposed, after breakfast, that we should make a tour of the old building, I sprang up readily.

"First," she said, "you ladies must have wrappers. Yes, you must. Stanley, will you ring for the shawls? You will be frozen if you go down into the old vaults and through those old stone corridors."

Provided with the wraps we set out, under Mr. Meredith's guidance, to view the home of his ancestors. All glorious within was Dolwyllyn, as we traversed the long oaken corridors, in which had

resounded the steps of ancestral bravery, evidenced in the frowning habiliments of war which stood grim and forbidding on either side, cold and hard to the touch, here and there rusted as if stained with the tears of the loved ones of yore, while limp and gaunt against the walls hung antique chain mail, making me crill as I brushed past.

Then into the ruby and emerald drawing-rooms, resplendent with stately furniture. Wherever we turned Venetian mirrors reflected our moving figures; or exquisite paintings, glowing with life and colour, as if fresh from the easel, though the cunning hands that had wrought those marvellous effects were long since crumbled into dust.

The loveliest room of all was Mrs. Meredith's boudoir, a fragrant little room, bedecked with jewelled cabinets, fragile vases, and antique statuary, the windows opening wide upon a vista of wood and water, as though Nature without were contending with Art within for beauty of scene.

In strong contrast to this room were the dungeons below, opening out of this same boudoir, by long damp, dark passages, — recesses wherein rebels had languished their miserable captivity, whose walls, could they speak, would attest mediæval severity.

It was quite a journey to explore every nook and cranny, as well as every spacious room and gallery, and we did not get outside again until afternoon.

"Now we must have a sail," our host said. "There is a brisk wind; it is a pity to miss it."

So we stepped from the marble stairs, which the waves were washing now, into a gondola, two sturdy old Welshmen taking the oars and rowing us seawards, until the mighty heaving billows of the Atlantic warned us to return.

The happy days would pass too quickly while we roamed the country round, under beetling crags, along frightful precipices, or clambered to the highest peak, where the cloud-line shone most gorgeously.

CHAPTER XX.

One morning we rowed to the opposite side of the estuary, to picnic in the woods overhanging Arthog Falls. Entering the wood, which stretched over the brow of a hill jutting out to sea, we met with numerous waterfalls, gushing to the left of us, rushing to the right of us, splashing above, gurgling below, while the damp, rich vegetation almost enchanted mamma. We had not gone far before she had gathered twenty varieties of ferns and mosses.

After luncheon under the trees, Mr. Meredith proposed a further ascent. I was willing. "Yes," I said, "let us go to the top. 'Excelsior' is my motto."

"I think, if you will excuse me, I will rest instead of climbing further," Mrs. Meredith said; "but do you go, Mrs. Sinclair and Minnie; the falls are lovely higher up the glen."

"I will stay with you, Mrs. Meredith," mamma said; "those stones frighten me. We will rest here and arrange the ferns."

I sat down again, but Mrs. Meredith said to her husband,—"Take Minnie with you, Stanley, and

show her the chasm. It is a pity to miss it, now we are so near."

So Mr. Meredith and I went up. It was a toilsome ascent. My companion offered me his hand several times, but I missed it each time.

Almost breathless we reached the summit of the big hill, one of the shoulders of Cader.

The views, both sea and land wards, spread out below in enchanting perspective. Directly opposite, across the river, whence we had come, stood Dolwyllyn, rearing its grey towers in bold relief against the mountain stretches behind, with their bright green grassy slopes, darkening into brown and crimson heather higher still, while the gritstone paths, winding in every direction, gleamed like streaks of silver running up to meet the blue unclouded sky above.

Far, far below, on our left, the wide open sea stretched away in lonely grandeur, its glittering surface unbroken by boat or yacht.

We sat down to rest beside a sparkling waterfall, the spray blowing upon us in cool, feathery sprinklets. Around us the full green trees rejoiced in the warm air, the birds sang on the branches, bees buzzed about our ears, while innumerable companies of insects transacted business at our feet, creeping, creeping everywhere over the moist vegetation.

We sat silent for some minutes, while the waterfall plunged over the glistening stones.

Suddenly, above the roar and plash of spray, rM

Meredith's strong, deep voice resounded, as he abruptly questioned, — "Did you never wish to know, Minnie, why I failed to keep my promise true to you?"

The sound of many waters surely prevented him hearing my impulsive reply. Surprised at his question, with my heart ready to burst, I gave my secret to the winds.

"I must have appeared a villain in your eyes, Minnie,"—he bowed his head to speak again,—"and a self-inflicted curse will punish me for my treachery."

"Oh, Mr. Meredith," I said, smiling, as if he had said something amusing, "is not that a sail in the bay?"—and, rising, I looked over the sea intently.

He followed me. "I say, Minnie," he shouted in my ear, "did you not think me a villain?"

"Indeed I did not," I said laughingly, turning to retrace our way.

"I do not deserve your smiles, Minnie," he said, gloomily; "when I married—"

"Do not speak of that happy period," I said, running on before him.

"But I must, I will speak my mind if I die for it. You shall listen, Minnie," he exclaimed, excitedly. "My Minnie must know—my Minnie, whom I love so." He caught me as I ran, and forced me to stop.

"Hush!" I said, trembling in his strong grasp; "I will not hear another word."

"Have you no pity for me? I know your gentle

spirit has forgiven me, but your eyes have reproached me more than volumes."

"Oh! Stanley," broke involuntarily from my lips, as with desperate strength I tore myself from his grasp, and ran with my utmost speed down the narrow path, never once stopping until I arrived, breathless and panting, in sight of mamma and our hostess.

Close behind Mr. Meredith followed, but I was in "custody of eyes" now, and regained confidence.

Mamma raised her eyes questioningly, while Mrs. Meredith sweetly asked if I had "seen a forest gnome."

Before I could answer, her husband said sarcastically, "I threatened to throw Minnie into the chasm, but she showed the white feather and fled as if I were a demon pursuing her."

I scarcely know how I passed the next few hours. The passion which I thought I had so surely buried now asserted itself once more, evoked by the unholy questions of the husband of another. I had felt so sure of myself, and now a few words had undone the work of months of resignation.

Mamma saw through my studied observance of our host, and half playfully warned me that it bordered on affectation; but she left me seldom alone, or took care that Mrs. Meredith should chaperone me while she interested herself in Mr. Meredith.

Mrs. Meredith professed to become extremely fond

of me. She was "so fond of English girls," she said; "pretty girls, not shy or vindictive like the Spanish Mexicans, nor unblushing and daring like the North Americans."

"You are the best little girl I know," she would say, embracing me. "You have not a particle of jealousy, have you? or you would be too perfect. But it is as well, for you might take out your hair-pin and run it into my heart. I am secure in your goodness; I can trust a face like yours."

"I have no cause for jealousy, Mrs. Meredith," I said, amazed at her expressions.

"Nay, no prevarications are needed," she said, blandly. "Do not affect ignorance; I know all about it," she said, coquetting with her fan. "Before I came to England I often said, 'But about Minnie, Stanley, is she vengeful? For life is very beautiful, and I should not like to die so soon.'"

"Did you live quietly in Mexico, Mrs. Meredith?" I asked, wishing to divert the subject.

"No, indeed; I lived 'fast,' Stanley used to say; but my father was fond of company, and I spent a glorious time." She sighed behind her fan, and I turned to the window, and saw far below to the right Mr. Meredith and mamma walking on the terrace, she listening, he declaiming, in measured accents, some precious thoughts I was doomed to miss.

I looked again at Mrs. Meredith,—her pleasant smile, her handsome face, her faultless toilette, her

half-recumbent figure defined in a lustrous amber tinted dress, which fell in soft folds against the blue fauteuil, her glowing black hair and brown eyes full and languishing, her pearly teeth gleaming as she smiled.

I left the window and sat nearer to her, and asked her again of her bright home in Mexico. In "broken music"—for her voice itself was music and her English often broken—she described her father's palace-home at Itlaco, the balls Don Ganza had given, the officers, whose names were legion, whom she had charmed.

"I always said I would marry an Englishman," she said, "and you see I managed to have my own way."

"In marrying a Welshman," I smiled. "Did you meet many Englishmen before?"

"Did I not! My happiest hours have been spent with Englishmen at Itlaco. There was one, Leonard Wilson; I have not told you of him, how he used to come day after day, evening after evening, for ever so long. The lazy fellow loved me, I could see quite plainly, but he had not the energy to ask me to marry him. 'Ah!' he would say, 'ah, Ginevra, you are a wilful girl, you make one awfully tired with your arguments;' for I talked incessantly to tease him, you know, until he would lounge, and gape, and die of *ennui* every day. Yet I liked the fellow, he was so handsome and good-natured. No

matter what happened or what trouble came, 'it might be compensated by a smoke,' he said; and for the matter of that he was perfectly right. I miss my cigarettes dreadfully, but Stanley strictly forbids me to indulge. Did you never try a cigarette, Minnie?"

"No, never!"

"I could not have existed cigaretteless before I was married. Ah! I was telling you about poor Leonard. He came so long that papa frowned and said he should ask his intentions, and really I was almost tired of him myself; besides, the other officers shied and left the field to him. But Leonard did me a good turn after all. One day he told me that Mr. Meredith was in the country,—the poet, Stanley Meredith,—of whom he had raved, and of whose poetry I had learned much through Leonard's translations. I was in a fever when I knew that he was in the neighbourhood. Leonard promised to exert himself to bring Mr. Meredith; I was dying to see him. 'Only mind, Ginevra,' he said, 'that you do not fix your eyes too long upon our poet.'

"Mr. Meredith came, and I was delighted to make his acquaintance. Perhaps he has told you of his reception at Itlaco; metaphorically it was with open arms. I had never seen a real poet before: I was enchanted with his noble mien, his handsome features, glowing and passionate, and, above all, he was so energetic,—had so much *verve*. I liked him immensely, indeed we became engrossed with each other. Imagine

my delight, too, when Leonard actually grew lively enough to be jealous. He was furious, his look said 'pistols,' until I was frightened of my life. But Leonard had been a lazy lover; I enjoyed revenge, and found it sweet.

"The last ball of the season that my father gave, I danced thrice as often with Mr. Meredith as with Lieutenant Wilson, wilfully daring his fierce looks and disregarding his entreaties to listen to him. No; I listened to Stanley that night; 'the spell of love was cast around me,' my poet said. I left the ball-room in a most enviable frame of mind, entangled in love's spell. Marriage was my fate, and very near loomed the bridegroom. 'Which should it be?' I mused. I took counsel in my own heart in the solitude of the night, and knelt down in my ball-dress and fervently prayed for advice from Heaven, making use of a little prayer which I had composed before, and used on many similar emergencies, that God would show me which to choose.

"I arose in the morning with a firm conviction that Heaven advised me to marry Mr. Meredith—(I need scarcely say that my own inclination led me to coincide with the will of Heaven). Mr. Meredith was waiting for me at breakfast; I only saw *him.* Leonard Wilson I never saw again."

"Pray what became of him?" I asked.

"The usual thing in this life," she said, pouting her red lips.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Meredith."

"You do not?" she said, looking seriously in my face. "What a dear little innocent you are, as Stanley calls you! Now, if you lived in Mexico, you would not be surprised to hear anything."

"I am dreadfully stupid," I confessed; "will you not enlighten me?"

"As to Leonard's fate? Poor fellow! I really do not know it myself exactly. It would either be 'coffee and pistols,' or he might have supped on a sword suicidal. Do not be alarmed, Minnie; has no sword been unsheathed for your sake, child?"

"Do you mean to insinuate that Stanley—that Mr. Meredith killed the lieutenant?" I asked, grasping her hand tightly.

"Don't look so frightened, child," she laughed, mockingly; "it is nothing to cry about. We were married *instantly*, and we came away at once; and you may be sure I never asked Stanley any awkward questions."

"But Mr. Meredith could not, would not, fight a duel!" I said, excitedly.

"I never said that he did, Minnie. You *do* look so distressed. Is your English blood rising in your face for a trifle? Puff! You look handsome with that colour—keep it now."

"I shall run away for a little fresh air," I said, leaving her and running down into the garden.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT a house of shadows Dolwyllyn seemed to me with all its splendours! I felt almost stifled, and ran over the terrace, down the steps, and along the strip of sand by the tide-mark until I breathed more freely.

It was nearly noon, the sun high and cloudless, the air around hot, wafted now and then by a tempering breeze from the sea. On I ran, until exertion restored my overwrought nerves, and I stopped abruptly to sit down and rest on a pile of loose stones, that had apparently been detached from the low wall which divided the carriage-road from the sands.

I hoped I should soon get rid of the unpleasant suspicions in my head. The creeping, crawling sea came nearer; I arose and went further inland, stepping over the low wall, which seemed scarcely strong enough to resist the waves, for here and there it was broken, and the loosened stones lay scattered about on either side.

At one of these gaps I saw a man—a labourer, I supposed—repairing the wall. I looked again, something familiar in the outlines of his figure riveting my attention. He seemed of Herculean proportions,

hurling the huge stones from right and left as though they were pebbles in his fingers, or piling them swiftly and deftly, and then wantonly pulling them down again. "Silly fellow!" I said to myself, looking steadily at him. I forgot him the next moment, as in turning my head I caught a fresh glimpse of the castle, which frowned on me still, its one bare tower gaunt and weird even in the summer sunshine.

Rapidly pursuing my way again I came nearer the man of strength. I was about to pass him, when he raised himself to his full height, and I met his keen eyes fixed upon me.

I stood still, riveted by his gaze, while he stood before me with a monster stone in each hand, swinging his arms rapidly as if for another fling.

"Stanley! Mr. Meredith!" broke from my lips, suddenly recognizing my host. "What are you doing here?"

"Ha! ha! you did not know me," he said, enjoying my astonishment. "You never thought of me in this character, I'll warrant. I enjoy it! I could pile Pelion upon Ossa were these stones but little worlds!"

He threw the stones from his hands backwards, and set to work again piling and building the wall, and then overtoppling the stones once more, laughing at the noise they made in falling as heartily as any child enjoys the overthrow of his toy bricks.

"I see I astonish you, Minnie," he said. "I astonish the natives here by doing as I like with my

own property. It is a far better mode of gaining an ascendancy over the country people to show them what you can *do* than by what you *say*. My reputation here lies in feats of this kind."

"Is the poet without honour in his own country?" I asked.

"I do not write for the country, Minnie; you know that. My writing is a flash from soul to soul. I should like to show you what I have done in skilled labour, Minnie. I have built a Temple for the Muses,—it is within sight now; look aloft, not quite sky-high, for it is just terrestrial. Cast your eyes up the mountains, here—by the clump of firs to your right, higher up still in the same line, past the second plantation—there, on the top. What do you see?"

"A castle in the air," I was about to answer, for I could see no building save Dolwyllyn on the mountain; but stay, a steady look reveals a faint white glimmer of a pillar rising from the green mountain side. "Is it a chimney?" I asked. "I see something, Mr. Meredith; what is it?"

"Look through the double eye-glass of faith in my words," he said. But even as he spoke I detected the curved outlines of a small building.

"I see it," I exclaimed; "a tower, or round building surmounted by a tower."

"I built that myself — carried every block of marble, painted, gilded it myself, too. It is an exact model of an Indian temple. But you must see it,

Minnie—now, if you like. I will take you at once."

"On a bat's wing, I suppose?" I laughed. "It seems so far away."

"It is nearer than it looks. I shall make a railroad to it some day, and spirit you away on a wonderful little engine of uphill strength."

"I could manage to walk so far sometime, thank you, Mr. Meredith," I said.

"Why not go now—this moment?—

The day is bright;
Although the way is long, the sky is clear,
The air is fragrant with sweet autumn flowers,
And all the woodland paths are thickly strewn
With brown and yellow leaves; come with me, come."

I knew not whether to refuse or not. I could not find an excuse to deny the pleasure, and it seemed squeamish to hesitate.

But he had already led the way. Over the stones he stalked. I followed him slowly and carefully; then across the drive, and into the rocky paths beyond.

It was already steep, and we had gained a considerable height before we emerged from the first plantation. The mountain air revived me. I no longer felt weary and breathless as I followed my leader, for the path was scarcely wide enough for one. In silence, too, we journeyed; we almost seemed to be leaving the world below, coming to the quiet woods,

the silent moorlands. Sometimes I cast a backward glance at the expanding stretch of ocean below—deep blue, with one shadow of a cloud fleckering its wavy surface — a faint, hollow, murmurous sound reaching us, as the long, long waves came rolling up on the lonely shore ; ceaselessly they came, tumbling and jostling each other, and sputtering round stony breakers, and restless boats creaming in its ebb.

Higher still we travelled, Mr. Meredith still before me, like a one-idea'd man, while the land views grew more varied as the little forests of green that we had just passed, gently moving their dark green tops, revealed the dingles and hollows shaded deeper and darker. Then through another plantation, where the shifting shadows chased each other round the trees, and small birds sang without fear of interruption, and rooks flew out to caw as we passed, and startled rabbits skipped across the path.

At last we reached a clear open space beyond this wood, and the temple was before us in the midst of the plain. My guide turned round, and waited to see the effect it produced on me. I stood still in breathless admiration.

As Mr. Meredith had said, it was, in miniature, an Indian temple, built of the purest white marble, picked here and there with precious stones, that almost dazzled one's eyes in the revealing sunshine. The dome was pure and round, springing from four minarets set in with tiny coloured windows. Four

steps of lapis lazuli led to a small emblazoned door, which seemed to enclose the realization of a poet's dream.

"It is exquisite!" I said, enraptured with the symmetry and beauty of the building. "I should like to see inside."

"That is precisely our object in coming, Minnie, is it not? Here is the key to the mysterious temple. The princess has come, and to her it will yield."

I took the key which he offered me. It was a small key of pure gold, a scroll or device of letters interwoven forming the handle. I examined the letters; there were two, S. M. or M. S., whichever way it was held to read.

"I am almost afraid to enter," I said, pausing on the third step, "lest the fairies who dwell here should deem me too mortal."

"It was built for a fairy, nay, for an angel; but the Devil had a hand in it, and frustrated the design."

The door opened at my touch, and I stepped inside.

CHAPTER XXII.

I TROD upon the mosaic pavement of an outer corridor which ran around the inner temple. A mellowed light shone from the outer coloured windows, enriching the pure white marble statues that stood in the grooves of the inner wall, representing the Muses nine in all stages of inspiration.

Another door opened into the room beneath the dome. My companion, who had closely followed me, bade me open this one too. It swung back, and I turned round to express my admiration.

It was a small, round room, with panels full of glowing pictures; a ceiling of colour that Raphael might have limned—cherubs springing to the many-coloured dome, which closed in its extent. The floor was bright and smooth, with glittering pebbles welded together; a small table of jasper-like surface stood in the centre, while two white couches spread their luxurious arms for the wearied Muse.

> **"O, darling room, my heart's delight,**
> **Dear room, the apple of my sight,**
> **With thy two couches soft and white,**
> **There is no room so exquisite,**
> **No little room so warm and bright,**
> **Wherein to read, wherein to write."**

I quoted the lines as I sank on one of the couches. "What might not be written here, Mr. Meredith? No wonder you can write in such a paradise!"

"It is not always such a paradise," he said, taking the opposite couch.

"And you carried all these treasures up the mountain? Why, you must be strong as Vulcan! Did it take you long to finish?"

"I finished it last week. I brought most of the materials from abroad; the paintings I have roughly touched myself."

"I am surprised Mrs. Meredith has not spoken of it," I said; "doubtless she intended surprising us some day."

"You are the second who has seen this place, Minnie; it was not built for all the world."

"It is wonderful, beautiful!" I exclaimed, as the paintings seemed to glow while I looked; and I arose to examine them more minutely.

"'The brightest jewel in my crown
Should be my queen, should be my queen,'"

Stanley chanted softly, clutching my dress as I wafted past him. "Come, sit by my side, little queen, and let the world pass on below; we'll heed it not."

I sat down beside him, for I trembled at his touch, and, whether I liked or not, he pressed his arm around me and held me close, until I heard the beating of his heart against my own.

"You pain me most acutely, Mr. Meredith," I said, flushing angrily under his gaze; "you are strong, I am defenceless, and *trusted* in your honour."

"That is a commodity I flung away long since," he said, roughly. "Were I a man of honour I should be holding you here by rights, earthly and heavenly, but now—" he paused, while his hot breath seemed to scorch my cheek.

"It is ungenerous, unmanly, to treat me so, Stanley. By all that is pure in our lives, release me," I prayed.

"Tell me you hate me, and I will release you," he said; and I tried to say it, to belie my heart; but he read me through, and laughed in triumph.

"Remember your wife, Mr. Meredith," I faltered.

"Remember Lot's wife!" he said, impatiently; "my wife, whom I married—"

"How you torture me!" I exclaimed, fluttering in his grasp like a bird in the snare.

"Let me tell you one thing—"

"I do not wish to know it."

"Then stay here until you do."

"Be quick and tell me, if you must."

"Be quick! I will be slow; the hours are flying, flying, flying; they have dragged too much before. How can yon piece of pride be my wife?"

"You married her, Mr. Meredith!"

"I did, in a fashion; or, rather, she married me.'

"No matter, you are man and wife."

"No matter! I was married before ever I saw Ginevra."

"And your first wife?"

"Is living yet—is near me now—is—"

"Wretch! there is blood on your hands; you have killed—"

I started up, as my vehemence startled my captor, and he released me suddenly. I ran to the door—it was locked. I turned swiftly to Stanley and demanded my freedom.

His eyes were bright, his colour had deepened; shame and horror shadowed his dark brow; he followed me. "I killed my wife!" he said, as if awakening from a dream. "I have killed her often in my thoughts, Minnie. I am no angel, surely, to live with; I shall show the demon in me yet."

"There is not the slightest reason to excite yourself, Mr. Meredith," I said calmly, feeling as if a horrid nightmare pursued me, even in the midst of a fairy temple.

"Do not leave me, Minnie," he entreated, in a pitifully weak tone.

"I must go," I said, firmly; "give me the key and show me the way down again."

He gave me the key, and his spirit of evil rose again as I glided past him. He sprang after me. "I shall fetch you yet, Minnie," he said, "by all that is devilish; yes, though you fly to earth's remotest bound, I shall claim you; nay, though you ascended

the highest Heaven, I should hang on Heaven's gate, and, with sighs and groans and tears, lament until you came, an angel ten thousand times ten thousand purified, and I should snatch you, my Proserpine, across the gloomy Styx to Tartarus."

"You are dreaming, Mr. Meredith," I tried to say, calmly, and then broke down and cried wildly; "I wish I were in Heaven now, and the gate shut: no art or power of yours could touch me then."

"Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, my Proserpine," he said, or hissed, as I gained the outer door, and set off over the plain and through the wood.

He followed me. "Yes; let us go down to the haunts of hatred, to the houses of clay," he said, as I shot before him, careless of the right or wrong path; but the descent was easy. Without a word I sped on, and regained my own room in time to dress for dinner, in a state of exhaustion and excitement that made me wonder if I had not been dreaming horribly for the last few hours.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"We must have an entertainment to-night, ladies and gentlemen," Mrs. Meredith said, one morning. "It shall be poetical," she continued, as we looked up and listened; "living representations of beautiful episodes of your poets. Do you understand? I have just imagined it all; and how charming we may make it!"

My father had joined us the day before, and our party had been further augmented by the vicar of the parish and his daughter.

The vicar, Mr. Edwards, a grey-haired old gentleman, whose benignity of expression was sometimes sorely tried by his efforts to understand the quick speech of his beautiful hostess, smiled as she spoke; and my father said he was sure Mrs. Meredith could manage it to perfection.

"*Al fresco*, you mean, Ginevra?" her husband said, frowning at imaginary difficulties.

"Yes, *al fresco*." She caught the word as it dropped from his lips. "Incredulous!" she laughed. "We will show them whether it is impossible." Turning to mamma, — "Let me whisper to my friends," she said quickly; "the gentlemen shall be

our audience, *we* the performers. You, Mrs. Sinclair, and Minnie, and dear Miss Edwards; you will help me?"

The gentlemen dispersed themselves after breakfast, and we of the decisive sex put our heads together while Mrs. Meredith's suggestions were unfolded and discussed, and one of us thought this, another said that, and we fixed and planned, while ideas flew about like bees from a hive, and our schemes took shape and we rehearsed on the spot.

Until evening we were as busy as bees, too. The afternoon closed in autumnal splendour, the tide came up almost imperceptibly, with a gentle swell against the ramparts, while the natural scenery of the clouds disposed itself to our entire satisfaction. Below a faint, yellow-tinged sky, a big red cloud hung jagged against the empurpled crown of Cader, thus forming a magnificent background for our performances.

Our audience was still more numerous; a few of the thinly-scattered neighbours had been convened, —genuine Welsh families, who wondered what new freak possessed the wife of their strange neighbour at the castle.

It was arranged that the balcony should form scene number one, and that Mrs. Meredith herself should begin the tableaux.

The audience, therefore, stepped out on the terrace, and disposed themselves facing the balcony.

We looked up—I was among the audience now. Above, in the twilight, we saw Mrs. Meredith, leaning on the stone façade of the balcony, clothed in a picturesque robe of shimmering green, with golden stars gemming its flowing widths. Her jet black hair was coiled round her head in thick plaits, whereon gleamed seven gold stars; her lustrous dark eyes were still as a picture's, while in her motionless hands she held three magnificent lilies.

"What does it mean? How beautiful! How lifelike, yet so unreal!" were the pleased murmurs that passed below. The vicar put on his spectacles, and was sure it *was* Mrs. Meredith; but what did she represent—some Mexican heroine, or heathen divinity?

"Do you find yourselves mystified?" our host inquired, walking in front and surveying the tableau coolly.

My father guessed it at once.

"Don't tell yet," I said, as he whispered to me.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Mr. Meredith said, addressing the audience, "I trust that you fully appreciate the fine points of the exquisite tableau before us." Here the peach cheek of the tableau assumed a dusky hue, the black eyes flashed involuntarily.

"Pray enlighten us, Mr. Meredith," Mr. Edwards said.

"Nay, I only guess," Stanley said. "I will give my interpretation first, then:—

> **'The blessed damosel leaned forth**
> **From the gold bar of Heaven;**
> **Her eyes were deeper than the depth**
> **Of waters stilled at even;**
> **She had three lilies in her hand,**
> **And the stars in her hair were seven.'"**

"Ah, capital! exquisite!" The audience testified its satisfaction in the usual manner, while the *tableau vivant* withdrew and disappeared through the window, re-appearing below immediately to be congratulated on her success.

With a telegraphic glance to me to disappear, Mrs. Meredith announced the second *tableau* to be ready in a few minutes, during which the audience would kindly reverse their positions. They obeyed her,—some standing on the terrace, a few on the marble steps above the lapping tide as it heaved, now gently stirred by the evening breeze. All were to face the sea, which was our stage number two.

At some trouble, we had draped a barge with a feather covering of Mexican handwork—feathers of tropical birds cunningly fastened together—while a small black velvet cushion was placed on the prow. Upon this I lay, my soft white muslin dress falling over the feathery couch, a black lace scarf thrown over my figure, my face the hue of death, and all my loosened hair streaming down. Upon my breast my

hands were crossed; in the right I held a lily, in the left a letter. To complete the picture, at the helm sat old John Jones, the image of a dumb old servitor.

Carefully and slowly we passed in front of the castle, then as carefully we neared the steps, and John rested on his oars; and I lay in a dreamy reverie, my eyes closed, fancying myself the lily maid of Astolat, who died of love for a loveless knight.

Low, subdued murmurs of gratified surprise reached my ears; my father's voice, and Mr. and Mrs. Meredith's, above the rest. It was Stanley himself who was saying,—

"'Slowly passed the barge
Whereon the lily maid of Astolat
Lay smiling, like a star in blackest night.'"

I could not see, for my eyes were closed in the semblance of death, but I *heard* Mrs. Meredith's clear voice bidding her husband continue,—

"'All ye that hear,
Know that for this most gentle maiden's death
Right heavy am I; for good she was and true,
But loved me with a love beyond all love
In women, whomsoever I have known.'"

The rest was indistinctly borne to my ears. The barge seemed to sway away and then to float nearer again; and this time Mrs. Meredith spoke,—

"'You might at least have done her so much grace,
Fair lord, as would have help'd her from her death.'"

And her husband quickly returned,—

"'Queen, she would not be content
Save that I wedded her.'

Ginevra, the child has fainted,"—his voice changed,—"that colour is death itself;" and, splashing down the wet steps, Stanley plunged into the water and waded to my side.

"Oh, do not spoil the *tableau!*" Mrs. Meredith said. "She is not fainting."

But I neither moved nor spoke, though I felt the touch of her husband's hand and heard his hoarse whisper in my ears.

"Bother your acting, child," he said, lifting my head; and, as I was still powerless to answer, he took me up from the barge and strode back through the waves with me to the steps. My father here took me from him, and carried me against his trembling heart to my own room. I soon regained my full powers,—the vision seemed to have passed, I drank the wine mamma held, and sat up and laughed at their fears, promising never to spoil a *tableau* again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"WHAT shall we do this morning?" mamma asked, the morning after the entertainment *al fresco.*

"I vote for going a-fishing," Mr. Meredith said; "it is capital fun following the trout in the rough little streams. What do you say, Mr. Sinclair?"

"I am quite willing and ready to go—fishing, sailing, or anything out-doors."

"We'll go to Llyngrwil then," Stanley said, "if Mrs. Sinclair and Minnie have no objection."

Mamma was willing too, and I would not be behind. "But what is the place, and where is it?"

"Llyngrwil," Mrs. Meredith said, lisping the uncouth word like a native; "think of *thin gruel,* and you'll manage to say it."

"It is round by the bay curve, yonder," Stanley said, pointing across the bay; "just round, over the mountain—a splendid place, where there is a strong little stream full of fish."

So to Llyngrwil we go, rowing across the estuary, and landing at the little village, which nestles in a curve of the bay immediately under the protection of a mountain. Through the lanes we go, and up into the brake until we come to the stream which

rushes down its narrow bed in haste to join the inviting sea.

It is alarmingly wet near the bed of the stream; my father will not hear of us following the fishers.

"You must go up the hill then," Stanley says; "wind round to the top, and go down the other side, and meet us at the bend of the stream again in two hours or so."

"All right."

We divide—we three unprotected females rising higher at every step, while the gentlemen follow the stream below. Up we go, catching glimpses of wild hollows and feathery plains, with the full view of the bay on our right; whitening in the sunshine, it spreads away wider and more extensive as we rise, rolling and tossing in ceaseless emotion.

The steep green hill is mounted, we stand on a vast plain of heather; the mist curls inland around the neighbouring mountains, shutting out our view to the left, and leaving us no glimpse of the brook below. We wandered about for an hour and more, and never seemed to advance or to gain the stream at its rising. Mrs. Meredith grew anxious; mamma was tired. I proposed that we should sit and rest and wait until the mist cleared away. We sat down on the parched grass, a few sheep grazing near staring at us innocently. I was content to enjoy the scene; its wild, strange beauty filled my soul; no change around save in the bend of the sky above, or the

varying aspect of the sea's surface. Mrs. Meredith grew anxious, restless; she was frightened of the sheep, and dreaded meeting with snakes in the wet grass. I tried to re-assure her, and suggested going with mamma to seek our fishers. No, she would not be left alone. So mamma sat down with her again, and I ran over the plain to see if I could penetrate the mist further below.

I ran on until I thought I had almost reached our starting point; I was tired too, now, and sat down a moment. I was hot and thirsty, and took off my gloves and steeped my hands in the cool grass, and caught the glint of a ring near me as I did so—a ring on a mountain! Yes, it was a solid, plain gold ring. I picked it up. How could it have got there? Had some one lost it in passing? It was new and bright; had it ever been worn after a legal sanction? Perhaps two lovers had met here and quarrelled, and the ring had been cast away in disdain. Anyhow there it was; and what woman ever toyed with a ring, and refrained from slipping it on her finger? I tried it, first on one finger, then on the other; thirdly, on the wedding finger, which it fitted perfectly. I held my hand up, spread out my fingers, laughed, as I wondered what my companions would say. Just then a figure came in sight, and I forgot the ring in haste to recognize a familiar face. It was a woman who advanced, a scarlet-hooded gipsy, bearing a tiny child bundled up in her arms. Perhaps she had seen our

fishers—I would ask her. With her free, swinging gait she approached me, smiling, and flashing her dark eyes merrily. "Would the pretty lady like her fortune told?" she said, glibly.

"No, thank you," I said, smiling fearlessly, as she stopped, and, looking for the baby's face in the bundle, she displayed a dark-skinned cherub with a shock of black hair. "What a brunette!" I exclaimed.

"Give the child something for luck," the mother audaciously demanded.

"I will give it something for love," I said, putting a shilling in the chubby little fingers.

"You've a kind heart, lady; you're fond of the children, I can see; you'll be blessed with the same, too, yourself some day, lady."

"Yes, I'm fond of children," I said, patting the brown cheeks. "Have you seen two gentlemen down near the stream?"

"Yes, my lady; they were fishing; they are just below there. You can't see them for the mist."

So they were. As I looked the mist was rising, and I called, and the gipsy hallooed, and our fishers turned and saw us, and prepared to leave the stream.

I walked on with the woman towards mamma and Mrs. Meredith. The child hung heavy on the gipsy's arms; I offered to carry it for her. With the fearlessness of her tribe she gave her treasure to me, and promised me blessings by the score.

"You'll be as happy as myself some day, lady,"

she said, blandly. "You 're not happy, lady, in your married life now; but some day you 'll remember the poor gipsy who told you of good luck."

"Thank you, I don't believe in luck and prophecy; at least your wishes will do me no harm." I was laughing behind the child, as I remembered that the mother had seen the ring I had just found on my finger.

"If ever I wished good luck, I wish it for you, lady," she said. "I know by my art that you will be happier in time to come than ever you have yet been."

"Thank you; but I must be assured of things to come from a higher source than you pretend to," I said, assuming a little dignity.

"Ah! you 're the Pope at your house; one can see your husband does not always have his own way, but he 'll be a better man yet."

We were close upon mamma and Mrs. Meredith now, and the woman wanted to try her art upon them. I relieved their anxiety as to the fate of our wanderers, and then Mrs. Meredith amused herself with the Zingara, who would not leave us until she had bestowed her good wishes and showered her good luck in return for our gifts.

We set off across the plain again, and met our fishers coolly smoking.

"Never bring me 'a-fishing' again, Stanley," Mrs. Meredith said, wearily; "I have had horrors of snakes and reptiles in the grass."

"Why, are you tired already?" he said. "I wanted to show Mrs. Sinclair the view over the gorge, nearer Borth."

"Are you not satisfied, Mrs. Sinclair?" Mrs. Meredith said, turning to mamma. "Do *you* want either *broth* or *thin gruel* again to-day?"

"No. I want something more substantial," mamma said, laughing. "Let us go back, I 'm tired enough." So we walked towards the beach.

"Have you enjoyed the morning?" Stanley asked, walking by my side, his basket of fish swinging from his hand.

"Yes; very much," I said. "I am sorry Mrs. Meredith is so tired, I could walk twenty miles yet."

"Come along, my little Old Hundredth Psalm tune," he said, helping me down the rough path.

"Am I such an antiquarian, Mr. Meredith?"

"Yes, little one, you are, indeed," he said. "I 've a true consideration for you. Now, gazelle, don't be alarmed; I mean no harm. I was only thinking there 's no change of tune or key in you—no demi-semiquavers in your composition."

"I don't know; I think I am as changeable as most people," I said, laughing, as we entered the boat.

We soon rowed back with the tide, and I was following mamma into the castle, when Mrs. Meredith called me to her side.

"Come with me, child," she said, in a calm,

wearied tone. As she led the way to her own room, her step was slow.

I asked her if she were ill.

"No," she said, but her tone sharpened; "I'm unlucky to-day. Come in with me, and I'll tell you why."

I followed her into the boudoir. She closed the door, though her husband followed close behind; but with the utmost *sang-froid* she forbade him to enter.

"See, Minnie," she exclaimed, stretching out her hand; "see my hand."

"What is the matter, Mrs. Meredith?" I said, taking her hand in mine as she spoke. The ring I had found was still on my finger, but I had completely forgotten it. She saw it in a moment, and screamed impatiently, while I looked in her face wonderingly.

"Do you not see? I've no *ring* on my finger!" she shouted.

I *did* see, and the same moment recollected that I had a ring on mine. I snatched my hand away. Our eyes met, and our glances mingled in the deadliest jealousy for one moment. The next moment Mrs. Meredith had drawn a small stiletto from the handle of her fan, and simultaneously I took the ring from my finger, and held it towards her, saying, as calmly as I could,—

"I found this ring in the field at Llyngrwil."

"You found it!" She deliberately mocked my

words, in keenest irony. "You found it before it was lost, allow me to say."

"How could I tell whose it was?" I said, shrinking beneath her gaze.

"*I* never lost it. *My* husband—not yours, if you please—took it from me in one of his mad storms, and threatened—yes, threatened—"

"Say no more, Mrs. Meredith," I interposed, haughtily. "I do not wish to interfere between your husband and you. Take the ring. I am only too glad to restore it to you."

"Thank you, Minnie," she said, calming her voice, and taking the ring from me not ungraciously. "If Stanley *did once* care for you, remember that *I am the married woman.*" She stretched herself proudly as she spoke, and swept past me, leaving me trembling like a leaf in a withering blast.

"Mrs. Meredith," I said, "you must not talk to me like this."

"Ah, child," she laughed, turning to me again; "have I roused your English blood again? I meant no sword-thrusts. Kiss me. There, we are friends. Say no more. How could I hurt you, my little one?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE last days of our visit to Dolwyllyn passed quicker than ever. The last Sunday arrived. We accompanied the Merediths to the little Welsh church in the valley.

Mamma and Mrs. Meredith led the way; I followed with my father, Stanley sometimes joining us, but as often walking alone.

We all stood together for a moment in the little whitewashed porch, and Mrs. Meredith looked back, to say to her husband,—

"Do you remember Pajedo's prayer, Stanley?"

"Yes," he said; "I always say it myself when entering a church."

"What is it, Mr. Meredith?" mamma asked.

"I will tell you; but step outside. I would not breathe it within the compass of these walls."

Mamma stepped outside, and Stanley said,—"It is the prayer of a converted heathen. Every time he entered the house of prayer, he exclaimed,—'Oh, Lord! do Thou chain up the devil outside, and then do Thou enter with me!'"

"I think we may all say that now," my father said, seriously.

We entered the low-roofed church through its ancient square pillars into the quaint, stiff, high-backed pews, facing its one stained window at the east end, while through the side-lights came a cool, green tinge from the high hills around.

The old vicar preached in his sonorous English, rating the worldly-minded as he spoke of death and the Judgment to a congregation of quiet country people. I thought, looking to the high hills, they seemed like a people in a Happy Valley, wherein nor death nor sin should find a place. Peace and kindliness shone on the faces of the peasantry; what did they know of death, of wickedness? these lay beyond their hills in the world far away.

"Did you utter Pajedo's prayer, Minnie?" Mr. Meredith asked, as we returned to the castle.

"Of course," I said, looking up unconcernedly.

"It was not in faith, then," he said.

"Why?—how can you tell?"

"You took the devil inside," he laughed.

"He was very quiet, then, and I did not know it."

"He sat beside you all the time, provoking you to evil thoughts. Confess, now, you thought—"

"I confess nothing. My thoughts are my own to-day. I must have exorcised *him* with my Bible; I held it in my hand during the sermon,—here I have it still, so can say, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!'"

Stanley stood still while I passed quickly on. He came alongside again the next moment, saying passionately to me, "You lure him on in spite of tomes and crosses."

"I am afraid of his shadow," I said, quickening my steps in feigned terror.

"The shadow ever follows the light," he said, keeping pace with me.

We joined the rest. I took mamma's arm, and asked her how she had enjoyed the service.

"Too much, Minnie," she said, sighing; "it was so peaceful, so primitive. But the world beyond these mountains is our sphere, Minnie; I am tired of doing nothing."

"So am I; let us go home to-morrow, mamma. We look ever so much better, papa, do we not?"

"Yes; I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Meredith for her kindness," he said; and as we came up with Stanley and his wife again,—"We must leave you, dear friends, very shortly."

"You must not—indeed, you shall not go," Mrs. Meredith said, warmly; "I shall be dead-alive without you."

"But we must, Mrs. Meredith," mamma said, firmly; "we have our work at home waiting for us."

"If you must go, at least leave Minnie with me. Do stay," she pleaded, coming to my side.

That was impossible. "No, thank you, Mrs.

Meredith," I said, "you are too kind. I must go home."

I was ready to leave wild Wales.

Had I acted wisely in going at all?

When we set off for home it seemed as if I was raised from a precipice into whose depths I had inadvertently slipped, and the further we travelled from Dolwyllyn, the more clearly were its awful blackness and its terrors made manifest.

Yes; grand and imposing as was the scenery around Dolwyllyn, and dangerous to look over its precipitous rocks and to linger on its treacherous shores, I had run a risk greater a thousand times in a moral sense. I had been treading upon smouldering volcanoes, and trembled on the brink of the valley whose shadow is death.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOME again and to work again.

My novel was on the eve of publication; I had plenty of occupation in correcting my proof-sheets. Seeing my unfledged ideas in print by no means discouraged me from further attempts.

After the last proof had been corrected, I wrote once more, or rather subjected sundry quires of my ghostly MSS. to further padding of the bones, weighted them with fuller experience, breathed into them a little elixir of life, oftener laying down my pen and indulging in imagination, which took me far away from the crowded city. Not that I was unhappy in my work. It was congenial, and successful too, for my novel made its mark; and my father, whose praise I valued more than all the world's, rewarded me with his kindly smile and careful criticism.

Success is a sweet morsel, even to a soul indifferent. I was not indifferent, but the sweet morsel, though it pleased me, only made me long for more substantial sustenance on life's course. My heart was in my task most certainly, but I was still not satisfied; another year slipping away, and yet

I feel so far from the haven—the haven of rest and contentment. Will middle age bring it? Mamma little knows me if she thinks no restless wish disturbs my daily life—there is not an hour in which I do not wish to be better, purer, more powerful to do good, more freely sympathetic with the needy, more thoroughly helpful to the suffering. And how little have I done in all these years!—how many hours wasted, how rough and uncultured yet are the talents I possess!

Every year that comes I hope and pray may leave me wiser, nearer my ideal hopes, and, lo! another year has flown, and here I am with so many of youth's purposes unaccomplished: and yet time never lags with me. It goes on relentlessly, leaving me no golden nick of time wherein to record my shining hours. I could write. I was thankful for this; and as my pen flew over the paper, and my fancies followed fast, I began to think mamma was right in her conjectures that, as yet, I had not met in real life that one whose image could be to me that absorbing all in all—that embodiment of joy and happiness realized but once in a lifetime.

Stanley married! I caught myself once repeating the truth, and for a moment the pain shot, and I knew that I was wounded.

But occupation conquered. Thankful indeed was I that I possessed in my little way a something that kept my head above the buffeting waves of despair,

something of an occupation absorbing and demanding the noblest efforts of a striving soul.

Do I never tire of writing even? Sometimes physical weariness overcomes me, and sometimes, too, when tired of my subject, as Nathaniel Hawthorne expresses himself, "It strikes me that the whole is an absurdity from beginning to end; but the fact is, in writing a romance, a man is always, or always ought to be, careering on the utmost verge of a precipitous absurdity, and the skill lies in coming as close as possible without actually tumbling over."

I had just finished writing this quotation when mamma came into the room, accompanied by no less a personage than Mr. Fordham.

My amazement was undisguised. He laughed cheerily as I shook hands with him, and asked me if I thought it was his ghost.

"No, indeed, but I imagined you far away at this time," I said, bewildered.

"I have been to Mexico—I have," he repeated, as I started at the magic name. He thought I was surprised at the distance accomplished.

"I was quite as much astonished as you, Minnie," mamma said, "for it is so recently that Mr. Fordham came to say good-bye."

"Has the time, then, seemed so short to you?" he said, his smiles vanishing.

"Oh, no!" I hastened to say, "but Mexico is so

far away, and your business there was so important, you said."

"I was in Vera Cruz just one week," he said; "my purpose was more than accomplished in the time, and right glad was I to return so soon."

"But the country," I said, — "you would see nothing of wonderful Mexico; it is a land I should love to explore."

"The climate is too tropical for my English nature," he said. "And business, you know, and inclinations must clash sometimes, though, for once, I was glad to be obliged to return."

"We are very glad to see you," mamma said, kindly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sinclair. I came to you immediately after landing; I came partly on business, too, connected with my Mexican expedition. Can you give me the town address of Mr. Meredith, your friend the poet?"

"Yes," mamma answered, quickly; "I can give it you, but at present the Merediths are in Wales. We have been there paying them a visit lately, and so much we enjoyed it; we had a glorious time. But the address — it is Dolwyllyn Castle, Dolwyllyn, Merionethshire."

"Thank you. I shall be off to Wales early in the morning. Will you be surprised to hear that my expedition to Mexico was connected with your friends?"

"Indeed we shall be surprised," mamma said; "though we have heard Mrs. Meredith often speak of her home there."

"I may speak freely," Mr. Fordham said, with the freedom of an old friend, "when I tell you that the lady whom you call Mrs. Meredith is not truly Mr. Meredith's wife. She was married two years before she met our poet; married to a Spanish gentleman whom she left, and returned to her father's house to —entrap Mr. Meredith."

"Is it possible?" mamma exclaimed. "If any one else told us of these things we should not believe them; but *you*, Mr. Fordham, you would not deceive—"

"Indeed, I would not; I state facts. It is a lamentable case of deception. Señor Carrache was a Spaniard of noble birth, whom Ginevra Ganza met at Vera Cruz, and secretly married. She lived with him six months only, when a quarrel separated them. Señor Carrache left Mexico to return to Spain, and his wife to her father's home. A rumour of her husband's death reached her, and doubtless she believed it true; but he was not dead then. He died, it is true, some six months ago; but he was most certainly living when she contracted the marriage with Mr. Meredith."

"Then, if her husband—her true husband—be dead," I said, interrupting Mr. Fordham, "why needlessly trouble our friends with the sad revelation?"

"It is out of my power to avert that; the rumour of bigamy has already circulated in London, my partner tells me, who met me this morning as I landed, and the relatives of the deceased, Señor Carrache, demand an exposure of his widow."

"It is a needless cruelty, Mr. Fordham," mamma said; "though lawyers, of course, must be given way to. If anything could prevent this, how gladly would I avert it!"

"A second marriage, a repetition of the ceremonial between Mr. Meredith and his wife, will set all to rights, surely," I said.

"Most certainly," Mr. Fordham said; "and I shall advise that course to be immediately taken."

"You must not go to Dolwyllyn without taking an assurance of our sympathy and affection for Mrs. Meredith," mamma said, warmly; "for, of course, *we* shall acknowledge her as Mr. Meredith's wife."

"The law is plain enough on the point; I have little doubt that Mr. Meredith will, as a gentleman, take the right course to save the honour of the lady to whom he believes himself married."

"I am sure of it. Yet how lamentable!" mamma said, feelingly. "Will you excuse me a few moments, Mr. Fordham, while I write to Mrs. Meredith?"

Mamma left us, and Mr. Fordham then remarked how pale I had become. I flushed as suddenly, as he spoke.

"You were always a great admirer of Mr. Mere-

dith, Miss Sinclair," he said. "I used to feel quite jealous of the open preference you showed for him."

"I admired Mr. Meredith exceedingly," I said, taking refuge in uttering the truth; "and I am exceedingly sorry to hear of anything so seriously unfortunate regarding him."

"It is very unfortunate, as Mr. Meredith is so well known; his fame as a writer is so great. A strange character is his, too; do you not think so?"

"His is no ordinary character, certainly; quite a genius—of course, in a literary sense."

"Geniuses are generally fools in their marriages," Mr. Fordham sapiently remarked. "How many of our greatest literary men live unhappily with their wives!"

"That is no reason why Mr. Meredith should be unhappy."

"I did not say that he was; though it was rumoured, when he brought his supposed wife from Mexico, that a certain English poetess pined for love of our great poet."

"Did you hear from rumour who that was?"

"No, I did not; and where she looked for a hero worth dying for in Mr. Meredith, puzzles me. So much, however, for a woman's taste."

"Perhaps it was some one who knew him well enough."

"Possibly. He was much to blame in uniting himself, so suddenly as he did, to a perfect stranger.

The marriage, I heard, was contracted very hastily. Suppose, for a moment only, that he no longer desires a union with the beautiful Mexican; he is now at liberty to put her away."

"Do not breathe such a calamity," I exclaimed, trembling. "Mr. Meredith will not lose one instant in repairing the wrong his wife has done."

Mamma this moment came back.

"I have enclosed your love, Minnie," she said, handing the letter to Mr. Fordham; "and I am sure you will call upon us again, Mr. Fordham, as soon as you return from Wales, and let us know the state of affairs."

"I shall not fail to do so," Mr. Fordham said.

After he left, mamma and I confided our fears to each other. We were thinking too much to talk readily; and as we sat, papa came in. The first words he uttered were a confirmation of the news we had just heard. The morning papers had got hold of the revelation, and Rumour, with her thousand tongues, assailed the fame of our friends. My father was seriously anxious — so anxious that he finally decided to prove his friendship by going down at once to Dolwyllyn, to tender his advice to Stanley. He left us, to take the evening mail train; and once more mamma and I were left, as women are so often left, to wait in that suspense so unbearable to man.

CHAPTER XXVII.

On the morning of the third day after my father and Mr. Fordham had left town they returned together. We questioned them eagerly for news. Mr. Fordham was quiet and constrained in manner, my father pale and worried.

"Not a word, Fordham, until we have breakfasted," he said, silencing us abruptly.

We hastened to supply their wants, with an ominous dread of unpleasant tidings.

I could not wait patiently. I left mamma with them, fearing lest I should betray my anxiety. She followed me in half-an-hour, with traces of tears on her face.

"What is there to tell, mamma?" I asked, frightened, my heart almost ceasing to beat as I spoke.

"Very sad news," she said, her tears flowing.

"Oh, tell me, there is some one dead!—there is some one dead!"

"There is," she said, slowly. "Our beautiful Ginevra is no longer—"

"Is *she* dead? How?—when?" I exclaimed, my heart throbbing but one degree less painfully than if I had heard of her husband's death.

"Yes," mamma said. "When Mr. Fordham arrived at Dolwyllyn he found the castle full of the news. Some one had preceded him, and Mr. Meredith and his wife were in the drawing-room,—he enraged and desperate, she daring and furious at the exposure. Mr. Meredith *must* have been more like a madman. He stormed, raved, threatened to kill his wife for the deception; and just before your father arrived, Stanley and the poor creature we knew as Mrs. Meredith went out on the balcony, still quarrelling, and, somehow or other, Ginevra fell over the side above the river, which was at high tide, and, though the water was scarcely high enough to carry her away, yet the fall so injured her that she died lmost im mediately."

I was too horror-struck to speak. Mamma's tears flowed afresh; my eyes were wide open, I scarcely understood the truth. When my father came in he saw my rigid face, and took me in his arms and soothed me gently, and yet I did not weep. I listened calmly while they went over every detail again with Mr. Fordham.

"Whether or not her husband pushed her over is known only to God and himself," Mr. Fordham said; and then my heart gave a great leap and I wept freely.

The newspapers gave us further particulars the next day of the sad disclosure and its fatal termination. Some said the poet was a raging lunatic,

and declared that he had killed his wife; others said that she had committed suicide. No matter—she was dead,—dead as nail in door,—gone to her account to a higher tribunal. The lovely, healthy form, the brilliant eyes, the lily hands with their matchless powers, were cold and stiff in the embrace of death, and her husband deprived, under the most violent and suspicious circumstances, of the beautiful being to whom he had given the honoured name of wife.

Mr. Fordham went to Dolwyllyn again the following week, and wrote to papa that Mr. Meredith was preparing to leave the castle, that he had declared his intention of going straight to Mexico to his supposed wife's father. Mr. Fordham said Mr. Meredith was desperate, and vowed vengeance on Don Ganza, that it was lamentable to see him in his wounded pride with so little human feeling betrayed for the sudden death of the unhappy Ginevra. He had at first refused a decent burial for her, suggesting that a watery grave was too good for her, but he had at last consented that she should be interred, not in the family vault within the castle walls, but in the old churchyard on the lonely coast, and a marble slab was to be placed over her, bearing the simple inscription "Ginevra."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TIME passed, bringing changes for many, but for me scarce a ruffle on the smooth current of my life. I still wrote; whatever I produced found a market. I was received first as the daughter of the well-known publisher; now my fame rested on what I had accomplished myself.

Mamma, too, again went in for literary honours. She accepted the post of editress of a London magazine, and busied herself in the task of discriminating true merit, and contributing her own graceful verses for the benefit of her dear "boys."

Many kindred souls gathered around us, known first through our writings, admiration and congeniality often ripening into pure friendships.

Our reunions were crowded, and mamma used all her womanly powers to bring about a covenant between myself and certain eligible *confrères;* but 'twas of no use. I possessed my share of attractions and, perhaps, had a chance or two of sharing the heart and home of more than one of our acquaintance; yet still another summer found us an unbroken circle again at dear Bromley.

The old magician, Memory, brought back the

scenes of long ago, as I roamed through the garden wherein my youthful dreams had sprung, and a mournful happiness I enjoyed in visiting my old haunts. It was a gloomy day, and I stood watching the dark clouds over the garden, and felt thankful, too, that now I was somewhat nearer understanding the couplet—

"If thou on darkest days canst find
An inner brightness in thy mind."

Yes; thanks to my home companions, I *could* find and enjoy that "inner brightness,"—a light that was not suffered to be hid, but set up by kindly hands and recognized as lovingly. I was thankful for the love and brightness of home, for the affection of dear and near friends, and were all I knew within the pale of my attraction—all and every one; what more could the heart of woman desire?

But one there was whose words rang in my ears, whose tones had thrilled my soul, of whom we never heard. Had he slipped this mortal coil? Could he and I be on the earth's surface and not meet? Can it be, that I possess no powers to bring him near me once more? Alas!

No syren's art have I to attract, nor song
Of sweet enchantment to beguile him near.

"A truce to such vagaries, I will indulge in them no longer," I said to myself, turning to the piano.

I began singing that gloriously-beautiful, though melancholy, song of Schubert's, 'Der Linden-Baum.'

I never hear or sing that song without being powerfully affected, for its delicious accompaniment, so musical and soothing in its softly swelling notes, with the steady, sustained melody, bring scenes long past to vivid remembrance. In the second verse the storm gathers, now *forte*, now *crescendo* and *diminuendo*, like the dying rumble of the thunder-cloud; then the quickened movement of the waters in the river-bed, swollen by the rains, indicated by the silvery triplets as the accompaniment rises and falls in quick succession. It is a luxury to sing that song, and now, more than ever, it seemed meet to sing.

It ceased abruptly, an echo of the song seemed floating through the room. With my hand still on the keys, I turned, and distinctly heard a whisper, "Proserpine!"

I started at the sound. Turning my head, I confronted—Stanley Meredith!

"This is a surprise," I said. "Is it really you, Mr. Meredith?"

"It must be. Have I no welcome at your hands?" he said, his dark eyes cast wistfully upon me.

"A thousand welcomes," I said, joyfully, too much surprised to say more.

"What! you never looked for me, my Proserpine!" he said, reproachfully.

"You disappeared so suddenly; we lost sight of

you. We did not even know whether you were living or dead."

"And I cared less. But here I am, looking up my old friends."

"Mamma will be glad to see you. She is, as usual, at the cottage, and papa will be in from town this evening."

"I shall see them, then," he said, seating himself near me. "Play on, Minnie, and soothe this savage breast."

"Obedient to a breath," I played a *morceau*, nervously and tremblingly, as I knew my listener could not avoid comparing my feeble touch to that of his dead partner.

"Sing, now," he as imperiously directed, when I had finished playing.

What did I sing?—a soft, sweet melody of unbroken vows, or a maiden's wail for a faithless swain, or a mournful tender song of heart memories? No; I felt my spirits rising, and, with a touch of saucy daring, sang Shelley's "Ode to a Skylark."

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?

From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now."

"'Harmonious madness!' Can there be such a combination, Minnie? 'Harmonious madness!' Discordant frenzy!" he repeated, in a low, firm voice, that impressed me as the utterance of a soul in pain. "Do not be alarmed, Minnie," he said lightly, reading my thoughts. I will not disturb your serenity. I will go. Your pure soul shall not be contaminated by my presence."

"Do not go," I said cheerfully, though the thoughts of leaving me so soon seemed like the gathering of the clouds.

"Have you your Bible near you, Minnie, then?" he asked, smiling. "It must be here to exorcise my influence."

"I have one just at hand, Mr. Meredith," I said. "Will you accept it from me? You may then keep it always as a preservative against evil."

"It would be of no use to me, child," he said, gently refusing my offer.

"Try it," I as gently urged. "It will do you no harm."

"You were ever my good angel, Minnie," he said, taking it. "Your wings flutter about you always."

"Nay, no flattery, if you please,

'Best people are not angels quite,'

and I am not one of the best of human creatures."

"And I am one of the worst."

"Are you going to Dolwyllyn, Mr. Meredith?" I asked, wishful to turn the subject.

"No!" he shuddered; "save me from that dismal place."

"You will not always say that," I said, gently, imagining that he was thinking of the brilliant beauty who had shared his ancestral home."

"Give me a draught of Lethe first."

"Ah!" I said; "my chief happiness consists in remembrance. Lethe's waters are valueless to me."

"Not so to me. You know, Minnie, I have not 'worn the white flower of a blameless life.' You little know what a demon I am."

"And I believe it less," I said. "I believe this rather, that you might live up to your ideal."

"Can *you* see one grain of good in *me?* Is it possible, were I to say—wicked and passionate as I am—that I love *you*, a being separated from me by the pureness of your life; were I to say that I loved you with the strength of—?— I will *not* say it. My love would drag you to perdition. It is a discordant frenzy when I tell you of it."

I was fascinated by his gaze. His power, as of old, was enthralling me. I could not speak.

"I can see right into your heart, child," he said, as he had told me years before. "It is useless denying that you love me. Nay, such 'discordant frenzy' now possesses me, that I should crush you to atoms in your defencelessness if you denied it."

"Stanley," I said, startled into replying, "why should you fear that I would agitate your soul. Are you mad?" I exclaimed, as he rose and looked "daggers" at me from under his dark eyebrows.

"Mad!" he replied. "No, I am not mad; but there 's a devil of a temper in me, and I must leave you or *love* you. I will not *leave* you, my good angel!" he said, following me as I shrank from his grasp.

"Look up, Minnie," he said, seizing me and almost crushing me in his arms. "Say to me — 'go and hate,' or 'stay and love.'"

Frightened at his vehemence, I frantically embraced

him, hiding my face on his breast; but I could not speak. He was not satisfied; he lifted my head and looked down upon me with such "harmonious madness" in his eyes, that I knew he would never leave me again. I threw my arms around his neck and embraced him.

So our second betrothal was scarcely exceeded in fervour by our first.

CHAPTER XXIX.

In the afternoon they came unto a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.

My glorious afternoon had come. I had stepped into the land of perpetual sunshine.

Too full of present enjoyment to longer delude myself into its seeming by conjuring, through imagination, its semblance only, I cast aside my books and pen. My own living, real romance possessed a thousand-fold greater interest for me now than any fictitious representation of another's love. And my hero—my lover! Was there ever such another? In spite of his morbid self-accusations, I firmly believed him the noblest, the most gifted of his sex. For of course he was clever,—please take that for granted. I can never sufficiently describe him. He was many-sided; and each side of his character that revealed itself to me was, in my eyes, perfection. Well, love is blind. Mamma, who was candour itself, was interested in Stanley, always had been; but *she* could not see in him that bright and shining light that I beheld. But she rejoiced with me in my happiness; while my father's voice had a tone of

doubtful foreboding, though he did not withhold his blessing. They were both kind and indulgent to me, entering into our plans heartily, advising and helping by word and deed, until I was afraid to breathe a wish, so quickly was it fulfilled.

Every day Stanley came. We took our rambles over and over the same places as of old; "like a young girl who, while walking along, has let drop the precious pearls from her necklace, and who returns, step by step, her eyes cast on the path to find them again, and to pick them up one by one." My lover's face brightened too; did a stray frown linger on his brow I soon chased it away by happy smiles and quick embraces.

"You are a witch or a spirit of good powers, Minnie," he said, his face illumined by the expression of his love. "Will your powers last your good will?"

"Let me be a gipsy and tell you your fortune," I said, taking his hand.

"The line of life is sadly chequered, Minnie."

"But its close is straight and uninterrupted," I said, drawing my finger across it.

"No matter; I shall never make 'old bones.' Life is too long to wait for."

"To wait for the next—the superhuman life? Do not say so,—this life of ours will be so happy," I said, confidently.

"I wish I could see it as you see,—you who have

no foul deeds to look back upon which might stain the 'white radiance' of your past."

"You are trying to give me the impression that you have been a great sinner, Stanley."

"I am not a prince of perfection anyhow," he said, quietly. "Is it not Montaigne who says there is no man who has not deserved 'hanging five or six times'? I am no exception to the common run of men."

It struck me that moment how Ginevra had once told me of the duel which took place between Stanley and Lieutenant Wilson. Could it be true? Had my hero reasons sufficient to warrant his frequent self-accusations? There must be no shadow of distrust between us.

"Did you ever shoot a man?" I asked suddenly, feeling that I must be well assured that my husband came to me without the stain of murder on his hands.

"Shoot! kill a man, Minnie! What on earth possesses you now?"

"A spirit of curiosity; please to answer me."

"I *must* obey? We'll turn the scales presently. Did I ever shoot a man?—I cannot say that I *never* shot *at* a man," he said, deliberately.

"Ah!" I exclaimed, my fears confirmed. "Was it in *malice prepense?*"

"It was,—decidedly intentional. I was walking along one day in one of the primeval forests in Mexico, when I met a native, who politely informed me that my money or my life must be at his service; where-

upon I drew my pistol unexpectedly, and answered him in complimentary terms."

"And then?" I asked breathlessly.

"What next? The rascal fled, yelling most awfully."

"Oh! that was in self-defence," I said. "Did you never shoot any one else?" I asked, persistently.

"No man has died by my hands yet," Stanley said. "The Indian I aimed at was not struck. I missed fire, and he escaped in fright. But why trouble yourself, Minnie, about such things—murders and sudden deaths? How you would shrink from me if you heard a suspicion breathed against me, if I *had* killed a fellow creature; suppose, for an instant, that I hadcau sed the death of—Ginevra!" He shuddered as he named her.

"You did not—you could not do that," I said, trustfully; "you were too kind, too manly."

"I was not all your fancy paints me, *then*. It is just possible that I may have done a thing so dreadful, and still look into your clear eyes, and murmur low the loving words that will woo even *you* to your own ruin."

"It is not possible, Stanley. Say no more."

"Are you satisfied? You are an Inquisition in yourself."

"One more question. There must be no shadows between your soul and mine. Do you remember

Lieutenant Wilson, in Mexico?" I asked, quickly, resolved to fathom the mystery of the duel.

"Leonard Wilson? What do you know of him?" he said, much surprised.

"Tell me if you know how he died?" I said, evading his question.

"I cannot answer that," he said, laughing; "for he is living still. I met him in Paris, not three months ago, as happy and heartily indolent as ever he was in Mexico."

"I am glad to hear it," I said, laughing, too. "Forgive my curiosity, Stanley."

"Not until you tell me *why* you were so anxious to hear of him. You *must* tell me this."

"*Must* is a very strong word for me, Stanley," I said, playfully.

"And what must be, shall be," he said, decisively, frowning upon me in feigned severity. "Once let me secure you—call you witch, sprite, wife—I 'll teach you the importance of the little word 'must.'"

CHAPTER XXX.

In a second delirium of happiness we passed the short time before our marriage.

A happy bride I was led to the altar, my life being bound by the plain gold ring to the man of my choice. In a dream of delight we set out for the Continent, like two children bent on finding the gayest flowers in holiday time.

Many moons arose and waned before we wearied of travelling. On and on, through La Belle France, lingering in the unspoiled capital; then through Switzerland, over the Alps, and down into Italy. Vienna, Rome, and the Bay of Naples—how these names conjure all lovely sights and sounds!

Rowing on the still lagunes, loitering on the marble steps where Anzoleto had slept o' nights, and Consuelo had sung her ravishing airs, or sauntering through St. Peter's, and the crumbling ruins of ancient greatness—all the time being a world to ourselves; for our affection abated not, all in all as we were to each other.

Happy indeed we were in those careless hours, of which nothing defined or certain can be recorded.

Only when our good times flee can we realize that we have been blessed.

I was the first to weary of the unclouded skies of the South, and panted for the bracing air and moist green fields of our own land.

Ever wishful to please me, Stanley arranged our return journey, and we arrived in London early in the season. Here our literary friends received us warmly. We entered into the social world with some *éclat*,—indeed, my husband's fame as a poet, together with my lesser celebrity as a novelist, made us much sought after, and nothing loth were we to receive "double honours."

Proudest of all was my father; but mamma took me in her arms, and tenderly whispered,—

"Are you happy?"

"Perfectly!" I said. "Why doubt it by a question? Possessed of a noble husband, with a happy home in prospect."

"Where shall you settle 'at home'?"

"At Dolwyllyn, of course," I answered, readily. "Settled there with Stanley, I shall have nothing to wish for on this side Heaven's gate."

"Bless you, dearie! May your skies be ever unclouded!" she said, though a sigh escaped her.

"Do you fear for my future, mamma?" I asked, anxiously.

"It is in God's hands, both yours and mine; keep a good heart, dear, and nothing will come amiss."

As the season drew to a close I began to wish for our going home. I had never had a moment's doubt that we should eventually settle at Dolwyllyn, and I said to Stanley one day, "Do you not wish that we were quietly at home?"

"We are at home now," he answered, smiling.

"Yes," I said, for we were staying in town with my father; "but I meant *home* at *Dolwyllyn*,—our own dear home."

"Dolwyllyn! Preserve me from its gruesomeness," he exclaimed, with the first angry, troubled look on his face that I had seen since our marriage.

It is probable, I mused, that my husband's recollections of Wales are not pleasant. He is thinking of Ginevra and the scene of her death.

"But we shall go to Dolwyllyn, Stanley?" I said, selfishly thinking of my own gratification. "Shall we not, dear? *I* like the place so much."

"It is full of horrors to me," he said, savagely. Then as suddenly changing his tone, he said, "No matter; where'er thou art, 'tis home to me."

"Let it be at Dolwyllyn, then," I said winningly, "for I think it is the loveliest place in all the world. I can see in its situation and in its environs traces of your deepest inspirations: those grand old mountains, that fine fresh sea, the bold curve of the bay, the shingly shore! I see them all through your eyes, dear one."

"Mine own, I relish your sweet flattery—it is

balm to my soul. Think you so well of your husband as of him when a lover?"

"My love is deeper, truer, a thousand-fold stronger now; and when we go to Dolwyllyn and enjoy its beauties of scenery together, one in heart and soul, I shall have tasted all the joy that earth can give."

"Thou knowest I can refuse thee nothing, sweetheart. We will go to Wales at once—to-morrow."

"Not quite so soon, dearest. Ah! you make me too happy."

"It is my only ambition; but why will you ask Bluebeard to take you to his castle of horrors? Fatima you are, and Fatima's fate may threaten you."

"I care not for Fatima, nor Bluebeard either," I laughed; "I am Minnie, whom Stanley has made truly happy."

CHAPTER XXXI.

We did not leave London the following day, but we went to the Principality early in autumn.

On the day of our departure a severe thunderstorm broke over the country. Dark and gloomy it was as we travelled fast over the heart of England, but darker and gloomier it seemed as we drew westward, the rain drenching the mountain-sides, and swelling the rapid rivers into a series of miniature torrents and cataracts. The winds whistled past like a host of Furies let loose from Tartaros, hurry, hurrying, through the green valleys, withering the full-leaved trees as they bent to the storm, and screaming and scudding away to hide in the furthest recesses of the rugged rocks. As we drove along the shore, the angry sea foamed and tossed its spray upon us, the horses lifted their heads, and seemed to gallop through a seething mist, while Cader's massive brow was hid in the still lowering clouds; the lovely rounded hills received the bursting vapours, the lightning flashed across our gaze, and the loud thunder rolled its heavy cannon overhead.

Stanley was silent and depressed, while I felt light of heart, defying the boisterous winds with merry tosses of my head, laughing and even joking as I tried to provoke a smile on my husband's face. Strangely unsympathetic with his melancholy, I could only think of my own happiness, my own dreams coming true; for was not my dream of life at its highest now?

Coming home with a husband dearer than life, and beloved by him with a passion and fervour that increased every day! In the full force of the storm we alighted, and were greeted by the kindly faces of the numerous servants. Every door was opened wide in the great entrance hall, the grim knights in armour stood awaiting us, the old banners waved as we passed beneath them, the great fires blazed cheerily, as though welcoming us home.

Safe within the massive walls of Dolwyllyn, I turned to my husband, my face radiant with wifely satisfaction, to say how pleased I was to be at home. Without a word in answer to my exclamation, he dropped my hand and left me abruptly. No matter, I was at home; no fears of conjugal variations disturbed me.

Recognizing among the domestics the maid who had attended Ginevra, I requested her to show me my own room.

She led the way up the well-remembered staircase, along the oaken corridor, to the boudoir of her

late mistress. I hesitated on the threshold, almost afraid to enter, and shivered as I advanced, although a bright fire aired the atmosphere.

I sank down on the fauteuil, overcome by remembrances; it was the very couch on which Ginevra and I had sat as she told me of her marriage with Stanley. My attendant busied herself in removing my wraps and tendering kindly services; but I was little used to being waited upon, and wanted to be alone, to look round at my leisure on the familiar objects.

"I will rest a short time," I said to her; "you may go; I will come down presently."

I lay dreaming or dozing; the comfortable heat of the fire and the soft cushions induced a drowsiness I could scarcely resist. The glowing cherubs on the painted ceiling enlarged and contracted, and flew after each other in quick confusion. The life-sized paintings of the beauties of the family seemed ready to step down from the walls to reproach me for lying there; even the carved cornices elongated and shrank again and flashed a thousand lights—or was it the lightning? I looked towards the window; the rain was lashing the panes, the tall treetops bent their heads before the wind, the wet leaves shook in fear, the noisy river below surging and moaning continually. I could not sleep, my brain was too active. I felt oppressed; I arose and opened the door leading from the boudoir into the next room

further,—Ginevra's chamber, now to be mine. I entered it slowly, stealing covert looks around, lest I should hear her noisy laughter, see her handsome form, as when last I stood on its threshold. I walked softly to the window, which projected on this side immediately over the river. Throwing it open, I leaned my arms on the embrasure and listened to the song of the angry waves. I looked and listened until my head grew dizzy; the mad, swift waters seemed to fascinate my gaze; a rose dropped from my hair as I leaned forth: it floated for an instant on the waters, then whirled out of sight the next. "Thus runs the world away," I thought, closing the window and trying to shut out all gloomy recollections too. Now the inner brightness, that inward life, must shine. I returned to the boudoir. I could not keep Ginevra out of my mind; everything around me spoke of her so forcibly,—her tiny work-table, with the snowy lace but half designed; her easel, on which she had coquetted with an artist's fancy; her pianette, its gleaming keys smiling as when responsive to her magic fingers; her harp, her own beloved harp, its silent strings awaiting her touch to awake the sounds that had rivalled the oldest of Welsh harpists.

I turned away, traversed the long corridor, and descended the massive stairs, feeling myself but an atom of humanity compared to Dolwyllyn's former mistress. All was quiet below, save when the wind

whistled through a gallery, or entered, lion-like, through an opening door.

Noiseless attendants ushered me into the dining-room, which gleamed with creature comforts for the wearied senses. But where was my husband—the lord of all these bounties, the giver of the feast to his chosen bride?

He came into the room a few moments after. I darted a glance to see if the storm had passed from his brow. He was still silent, or nearly so; but we fared sumptuously, for I was hungry, and Stanley relished invariably the good things of this life. My ghostly fancies withdrew their diminished heads as I renewed my inner woman. I was myself again, and would have beamed forth into tender inquiries of my husband, had not the presence of the staid, elderly Welsh servants restrained me.

The stately repast was over; the formal courtesies of the table would give way to the more communicative

"After-dinner talk
Across the walnuts and the wine."

The folding doors were thrown apart that divided the dining-room from the library, the servants withdrew and left us alone.

The evening clouds were gathering, the twilight was deepening, but the cheerful blaze of the fire contrasted pleasantly with the dusky shades outside, and flickered over the crimson walls, brightening

up the dark, polished furniture, and giving a roseate, quickening tinge to the familiar groups of Parian statuary in the niches dividing Stanley's unique collection of books and pamphlets.

I threw myself on a low couch in all the ease and comfort of feeling at home, the abundance of that homely feeling which a wife experiences when her heart is at home, be that home a cottage or castle. Let the waves rage, the winds blow outside, to-night we are safely sheltered — selfish thoughts, but my husband and I had travelled that day many hours, and for months before we had been so constantly moving amid the throngs of literary and social assemblies that we had scarcely been allowed an uninterrupted evening together.

Stanley soon followed me into the library and sat near me. I caught his hand as he leaned against the couch, and laid my cheek on it and prisoned it for a while.

"What a little pleasesd you, Minnie!" he said, smiling in spite of himself.

"Is it a little thing to be please now?" I said, looking up, surprised.

"*Can* this be an ideal home of yours, Minnie?" he asked gently. "How many fairer and happier have you depicted in your novels!"

"None," I said, firmly; "none dearer or more beautiful. Imagination failed to grasp one half so dear to me."

"Wait until the newness wears away," he said doubtfully, sighing and drawing away his hand.

"Are you very tired, Stanley?" I asked, noticing his weary looks; "your eyes are so heavy."

"Your ears are so large, your voice is so loud,"—he mimicked my tone. "Are you afraid of the wolf in his den?"

"No—should I have ventured in?" I laughed.

"You must remember Fatima if you go hunting up and down the castle."

"And *that* I shall certainly do," I said decisively. "My curiosity is not unusually small. You dear old Bluebeard, if you cut off my head to-morrow, I must say that, for to-night, I am happier than any queen."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE gilded hours of my life flew away into the dim darkening past, the sunshiny hours of unbroken intercourse followed by the wintry, darksome days, as yet enlivened by the brightness and warmth of our unabated love.

I was, perhaps, too happy to notice that my husband did not always share my elevation of spirits. I flattered myself that I made him happy, and his devotion to me was as constant as ever.

In the spring my father and mamma came to stay with us, rejoicing freely in my happiness; the one showing his paternal satisfaction by casting away the fears which had doubted my happiness before, the other finding herself each day more "free to confess" that her admiration for my husband was strengthening.

Had they known more of my husband's peculiar temperament, they would have been alarmed. But I revealed no skeleton. I was to all appearance happy to love, to honour, and to obey.

One afternoon, after rambling with my father over the nearer hills, and receiving his assurances of his

entire trust in my happiness, I found Stanley writing in his study. Without a word to interrupt the flow of inspiration, I sank down on the couch near him, as I often sat while he wrote, never presuming to look at his MS., but ever ready to listen, should he wish to repeat to me his compositions. This oneness of silent occupation grew out of our unselfish love for each other. I could look up to my husband and say that he wrote the sweetest songs I ever heard, while he always welcomed my presence, never manifesting any symptom of restraint in his inspired hours.

I was tired with my ramble, and fell into a doze for a few moments only. I opened my eyes again, and saw my husband standing near me, brandishing an open clasp-knife before my eyes. I did not flinch or murmur. I merely closed my eyes again, and felt safer than I could have imagined any one else to be in such a crisis. I *would* not see the *malice prepense* lurking in his expression. I loved my husband—he loved me. Love was our safeguard. "My love," I said calmly to him, watching him through my half-closed eyes, "you would not harm your own dear wife?"

"Suppose an irresistible impulse urges me," he said, his eyes gleaming cruelly.

"There is no impulse over which you have not power of will," I said, quietly and easily. "If you *will*, you may close that knife, and firmly lay it aside."

He wavered an instant,—a terrible temptation seemed to seize him.

I grew faint, and closed my eyes; but the next moment he had walked away from me, shut the knife, and flung it out of the window far away into the river outside, with a muttered imprecation.

Hastily returning, he flung himself at my feet, and impetuously besought me to forgive him.

"Forgive you, my Stanley!" I said, cheerfully. "You need not ask me, you know my inmost thoughts."

"Oh! wretch that I am," he cried, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

"My Stanley, you know only One can heal you, can release you," I said, gently soothing him.

He shook his head,—"For the good that I desire I do not, but the evil which I desire not, that I do." Oh! Minnie, you little know the weight of my sins—how my conscience accuses me!" he said, mournfully.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," I sang softly, soothing my captive as he lay at my feet.

"If a seraph's song will cheer, thine will, Minnie," he said, looking at me with penitent love shining through his passionate eyes.

The same evening we assembled ourselves before the fire in the library, to read over our several

compositions, criticizing and comparing them as freely as only congenial spirits dare.

Mamma had won further laurels in her sphere, besides bringing to Dolwyllyn a bagful of contributions to be gone through with her pruning pen.

Stanley was arranging with my father the publication of a new volume of poems. A few of these poems he recited to us now. Mamma and I were enthusiastic in our praises; my father, too, admitted their worth, as who could withstand the eloquence of that wonderful voice, uttering in measured tones the thoughts of a passionate, yearning soul?

Although the precious gift of expressing poetry in rhyming numbers was not bestowed on each of us alike, we happily shared a portion of that poetic feeling or intuitive perception of the beautiful. It was a mine of enjoyment to us; we revelled in the society of living poets in general, and that of Stanley in particular; interesting ourselves in his allusions, responding to his enthusiastic figures of speech, and following his idealizations with a rapture second only to his own.

"We must have the volume out early, Stanley," papa said, referring to my husband's poems. "It would be as well if you returned with me, to facilitate matters."

"Yes, I will go with you," Stanley said, while a sudden pain seemed to strike me, and I should have cried out, but remembered that it was scarcely wifely

to complain of my husband's intention to do his duty. Mamma, however, noticed my uneasiness.

"The little one is sad," she said, kindly; "but I will stay with you, Minnie, if you like."

"I shall like it very much," I said, delighted with her proposition.

My father and my husband left Dolwyllyn three days after. Mamma and I watched the carriage disappear down the long drive, and then I turned to her, and, banishing my sadness, I said,—

"Now come with me. We will have a nice quiet time together. I want, first of all, to show you how many things Stanley has done for me. You know well enough that he spares no expense in making the castle perfection."

"I was afraid you were going to show me the traditional skeleton of the family," mamma said, following me. "In some of those old rooms overhead one might fancy it safely locked up."

"Stanley calls me Fatima sometimes," I said, laughing. "He asks me every night if I have yet penetrated into all corners of the castle."

"And you answer with a free conscience each time?"

"Yes, hitherto; but I have my lifetime to find out all—to discover, not tragedies nor fearful secrets, but new beauties, new comforts, new luxuries, wherever I turn."

"I am almost sorry that you have not one poor

little ghost to speak of; it would have come in admirably for my next Christmas number. I almost trusted hearing of one—just padded with a few credulous absurdities."

"That is a pity. Suppose we commence a search for one? Anyhow, we are sure of finding something exciting; the Merediths, judging from their portraits, were no exceptions to the bravados of civil strife. Shall we begin at once with the round room in the West Tower, of which I surely have the key?" I said, jingling the small bunch of keys with which Stanley had entrusted me unconditionally.

"What is that?—a gold key?" mamma asked, her eyes falling on the bunch. "Is that the key of a cabinet, or of a room?"

"It is the key of the Temple of the Muses," I said, remembering instantly that it belonged to the temple on the mountain.

"Where is the Temple of the Muses? in the west wing?"

"No, outside the castle—up the mountain. I have not been in it since we were married," I said, blushing at the recollection of my only visit to it.

"When could you possibly have seen it before?"

"At the time when we came over, you and I. It is a most lovely place."

"How strange you never mentioned it to me

before! I should like to see it, Minnie; shall we go now?"

"It is a long and toilsome ascent," I said evasively.

"But you say it is a lovely place; we will set out at once, if you like. It will be an adventure, I see, —unless you are afraid of displeasing Stanley by taking me, Minnie," she said, as I hesitated for a response.

"No," I admitted. "The truth is, I had forgotten the place; but I can find the way, I think."

We were soon ready.

"Do not forget the key, Fatima," mamma said, as we set out.

"By no means; I have it safe."

We reached the upland path, and there, quite suddenly, I changed my mind.

"Mamma, dear," I said, stopping, "I would rather not go, after all. Stanley has never once mentioned the temple to me since we were married, and perhaps it would be better—"

"Just as you please, Minnie," mamma said, smiling, though I could see that she was disappointed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

We turned our faces towards the castle, my heart's dear home, spite of grim walls and sad traditions. The sun shone brightly on the walls, lighting up all nooks and angles, and casting long shadows on the green terrace, while the smooth water widened in the bay, and the yellow sands gleamed in their mid-day loneliness.

"Never mind," I said cheerily, "we will have an adventure yet. You see the old west wing there, how wide it is, and how many little windows look out from it; I have never yet been inside. Suppose we go and explore it to satisfy your ghostly fancies?"

"If you are not afraid," mamma said; "you lead and I will follow."

We entered the castle, and passed along the first gallery to the boundary marked "dangerous," beyond which the domestics never penetrated. The old butler was in the hall.

"Cedric," I said, as he approached us, "how many rooms are there beneath the old West Tower?"

"Not more than five or six, ma'am; they are dangerous to enter, too."

"Do you never go beyond the boundary?"

"No, ma'am; I am not so nimble as I used to be."

"Then you have been in it some time?" mamma said. "What is there to be seen?"

"There is the old chapel on the ground-floor, ma'am, and one round room above the chapel, full of master's nick-nacks, and two or three rooms above that, which are quite empty now."

"And can we not peep into the chapel?" mamma queried. "This door is not fastened," she said, pushing the door open easily.

A cloud of dust saluted us; Cedric drew back, shaking his bald head at our curiosity.

"Does no one ever enter the chapel now?" I asked.

"Only the master goes in occasionally."

"Ah! if Mr. Meredith ventures in surely the floor will admit our lighter weight. Is there really danger, Cedric?"

"I really cannot say, ma'am. The master has been used to rummaging in from a boy. He used to climb to the roof of the chapel through the choir, and he knows more about it than any one else. Shall I go first, ma'am, and see if all is safe?" the old man said, though he trembled at his own suggestion.

"No, thank you, Cedric; we will be very careful. Now, mamma, I lead if you will follow," I said, passing through the dark space beyond the door. I groped my way carefully, step by step, and the darkness gave way to a faint glimmer of light.

"Oh! where are you, Fatima?" mamma said, slowly following me.

"Here I am, safe in the light again," I said, encouragingly. Continuing our way we abruptly turned, in following the source of the light, into the chapel,—a small, octagon-shaped room, with long narrow windows, admitting a greenish light.

"There is nothing very alarming here," I said, standing in the centre, from whence had ascended the prayers of the dead-and-gone Merediths. The high ceiling was obscured by some hundred cobwebs, spun from rafter to beam, while time-worn banners hung, stained with blood and shot to ribbons.

The small pulpit and altar-table, of once white marble, were clothed in dark-grey webs of undisturbed contexture. We seemed to break through a thousand films as we advanced.

We ascended the steps leading to the choir, a door beyond which provoked still further curiosity.

"Shall we go?" I asked, touching the handle. It was fast.

"Open, Sesame!" mamma said. "Here is a mystery, surely. Try the keys," she suggested, like a spirit of mischief beside me.

I tried them all, with the exception of the small golden key, without success.

"Try the little one."

I tried it, and, to our surprise, it proved the blacksmith.

"You shall enter first this time, mamma," I said, stepping back; "and I hope you will find here something to harrow up your blood, to make you shudder."

She passed me, laughing; I followed. We stood in a small round room, that in its unimposing furniture seemed innocent enough of all offence. It appeared to me more like an ancient library or laboratory than a sanctum for devotion.

Mamma thought so too. "It is Faust's laboratory," she said.

> **"Pulleys and rules, and wheels of toothed brass,**
> **At learning's door ye play the porter's part."**

Mathematical instruments, globular bowls, and chemical-testing apparatus, mingled with dusty heaps of antiquely-bound volumes. Two books lay open on a table underneath the foremost window; I would look in their pages—but, alas!—

"Come away, come away, mamma," I said, turning sick at the sight of three skulls on the table. "Come away," I entreated, pointing to them.

Mamma shuddered. "Let us go; I don't like their expression. I am satisfied, Minnie."

Hastening to the door, I found it had sprung to and locked itself, and the bunch of keys had fallen to the floor *outside* the room. I could see them through the niche between the door and the floor.

"Caught! trapped! How can we get out?" I screamed, in terror, raising a shower of dust as I shook the door.

Mamma laughed at my fears. "Dust to dust," she said, wiping her face. "Let us sit down and await our fate. The ghosts and shadows will take us for their own."

I shivered. "Why did we venture? It was foolish."

Mamma looked serious. "Never mind," she said. "Cedric will hear us, and come to us; he knows that we are here, fortunately."

"I believe—I am sure—he was afraid of coming in."

I shook the door again. The chapel and the long corridor lay between us and the habitable portion of the castle. There was nothing for it but to wait; and we waited impatiently. It seemed an hour, though not ten minutes probably elapsed before I heard the old man's slow and cautious tread on the steps in the choir.

How thankful we were. We laughed, and told him to pick up the keys, and to unlock the door with the gold one. He soon unlocked it, and as we stood before him, we seemed once more to find ourselves in the land of the living. Cedric had anxiously waited our re-appearance, he told us, and at last ventured to follow us, fearing—

"You did well to fear, Cedric," I said; "and I am

thankful you came so soon. We have explored the place quite sufficiently."

"This key is of great antiquity, ma'am," he said, handing me the bunch, and indicating the smallest. "It unlocks the coffer in the chapel as well as the room above."

"Where is the coffer?" I asked, as we were now traversing the chapel again.

"It used to stand beside the altar—there it is," Cedric said, pointing to a long, dark chest, more like a coffin than anything else.

"What was there in the coffer? Full of treasure?"

"No, ma'am. When it was opened—how many years ago—fifty, at the least—"

"And what was then found?"

"A young and lovely lady, fresh and fair as if asleep, her long golden hair shining over her face."

"But she was dead?"

"Yes. She had been in that coffer more than seventy years, it was supposed—murdered and hid away, and the key thrown into the sea; but it came back; I found it myself one day on the sands. I was a boy when I found it, brought back by the current."

"And this was the coffer?"

"Yes; the very same. The body was taken out, and interred at Llanaber, where my late mistress is buried also."

"Whom do you suppose the lady to have been?" mamma asked, as we left the chapel.

"I couldn't say positively," Cedric said; "but I have heard my father say that she was supposed to be old Sir Owen Meredith's wife. He was a strange man, was Sir Owen—thought nothing of pitching a servant or a guest into the sea from the barbican if he were displeased. A most fearful temper he had; and they *do* say he married this lovely young lady, and killed her in one of his tantrums.

"I told you there was a legend or mystery, Minnie," mamma said, after we had emerged into the fresh sunshine outside.

"Yes," I mused; "there are few families that will stand an examination into their deeds, though Cedric may be mistaken. I will ask Stanley some day about the coffer."

"Take care that the key does not betray you, Minnie; it may be stained as a result of your curiosity."

"Say rather of yours," I said, looking at the little key. "It is all right — untarnished." A sudden idea struck me. "What fun it would be to stain it, and to make Stanley believe that I had pried into his Blue Chamber! I will do it!" I exclaimed; "I will stain it with violet ink, and then show it to my Bluebeard when he comes home."

"And I will be your sister Anne, then; so we 'll have the drama acted thoroughly."

I laughed, and shook my head. "No, no; there 'll be no need of you looking out for the horseman on the plain."

"We shall see. I only hope Stanley will return before I leave."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

We found the task of exploring the castle a difficult process. The modern newer portion was very extensive, and several days we spent in studying the older paintings, and in examining the various works of art which successive generations had accumulated.

In one of the cabinets in the library I found a printed catalogue of a collection of books said to be in the West Tower. "We know something of these, mamma," I said. "Here is a list of those musty old books in the laboratory. What a collection, mystical and sceptical. Can all these be there? I never even heard their names before."

"They are, doubtless, the forbidden books of all ages," mamma said, mysteriously. "You had better ask Cedric if he can tell you what they are."

"I will do so at once," I said, literally acting upon her advice by ringing the bell.

The old butler soon made his appearance.

"Can you tell me, Cedric," I questioned, "if this catalogue really includes the books we saw in that upper room in the West Tower?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, scarcely looking at the

catalogue. "Those are the magic books in the laboratory. The master will suffer no one to touch them but himself."

"How I wish I had looked at them more particularly," I said; "it was an opportunity I may never have again."

"They do no one any good, ma'am," was Cedric's opinion. "My late mistress," he said, with a bow to myself, "often wished to know why master was so often locked up in the West Tower; and once, ma'am, she gained an entrance," the old man's tones sank to a whisper, "and it is well known that there is one book missing, and—"

"Go on, Cedric; what were you saying?" I said, smiling at his hesitation.

"They do say—in fact it was madam's maid, Parnell, who said it—that my late mistress penetrated, as you did yourself, ma'am, the other day, into the secret room, and took one of the books and hurried away with it into the wood yonder, and opened it to read, when, lo! there suddenly came about the shore the most dreadful storm I ever heard or saw; it lightened and thundered and rained and hailed like mad, until madam was drenched. Parnell and I went out to seek her, and found her crouching under a tree, frightened and nearly fainting from exposure. The book was open in her hands; she gave it to me to carry—it was a large one—and it was no sooner shut than the storm ceased that

moment; believe me or not, it was as calm as calm could be."

"How strange! how wonderful! What followed?"

"Madam reached the castle, and when Parnell had changed her mistress's dress, she said to her, 'Give me that old book again, Parnell; I could not read it for the storm.' Now just at that moment I had run into the kitchen myself to peep into the big book I held; when I no sooner opened it than another storm began, worse than before. The lightning flashed over the page, the winds howled in the chimney, and my hair seemed to stand on end. The book dropped from my hands, closing as it fell, and the storm ceased that moment again. Then Parnell came down for the book and carried it up to her mistress, who opened it at once, and *again* the storm came on; and then madam was frightened. She bade Parnell throw it into the fire, and the storm ceased immediately; but out of the fire there came forth a black monster, with eyes as large as saucers; it leaped from the flames straight through the window, and both mistress and maid fainted."

"Is that true? Can it be?" I said, though the old man's earnest tones almost carried conviction.

"Is it true," mamma asked when Cedric had left us, "that you have at last reached the castle of enchantment?"

"No matter," I said, laughing; "I have no fears of either sorcerers or magicians."

"What do the servants know of poor Ginevra?" mamma said. "Do they know all the rumours of her Spanish connexions?"

"Yes; I think they know as much as we know," I said. "They speak of her always as their late mistress or 'madam.' She was very kind to them, I am sure; Parnell speaks of her quite affectionately."

"Have you visited Ginevra's grave yet?"

"Yes, I have seen it. You know the church is two miles away. I often think of that last Sunday we spent here with her, when she was so lively."

"Yes; she little thought how soon she would be lying there. Let us go over to Llanaber to-morrow, Minnie."

"Very well," I said. So on the morrow we walked on the sands as far as Llanaber. The old church, with its thronged graveyard, seemed quiet and lovely; no houses near, nothing stirring but the ceaseless ebb and flow of the waves washing up against its outer wall, it was almost dreary in its monotony, though mamma did not think so. She sat by Ginevra's grave a long time, planting with her own hands a few hardy shrubs which we had brought from the castle, and which would stand the rough sea air.

"Does Stanley never mention her, Minnie?" she asked, patting the grave affectionately.

"Never since we came here. If I have happened to mention her name he has shuddered. It was a

serious thing to him to deceive him so. He will never forget the deception."

"I should like to know really how she died. I never was completely satisfied with all that we heard."

"It is a mystery for the next world to clear," I said. "Come and let us go away from this cold graveyard, and from the ceaseless noise of this heavy sea. It wearies me with its moan."

We walked across the swampy fields into the lane. How peaceful it seemed to get within the friendly shelter of even the low walls on either side; the sea was no longer visible, its harsh, loud moans now came in subdued murmurs and sighs.

We spent most of our time out of doors, on the sands or on the river, or wandering in the woods, but never yet in the direction of the temple.

Although the time was passing so happily, I counted the days for my husband's return, but he was detained beyond his promises; and mamma's time was so precious too, that she was forced to leave me to return to town. She left me, taking her loving words, her bright smiles; and I was left alone, alone, more truly alone than I had been since our marriage.

There was nothing for it—nothing to rid me of my painful *ennui* than to turn to my old occupation. To write now was surely easy—to write with a free, unfettered mind, in the leisure of a happy life. I took up my husband's pen, sat in his chair, and

wrote the shining hours away; then read the evening hours, and dreamt away the darkest.

One morning I awoke to learn that my husband was coming home. Before the sun set again he would be at Dolwyllyn.

I busied myself in seeing that all was carefully prepared for my lord's return, and, as the hour drew nigh, I drove down to the station to meet him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OVER the bridge the train rattled into the new little Welsh station.

There he was, my dear husband; stepping out, his hand in mine. In two minutes we were seated together in the luxurious carriage, and were being whirled away to our own domain.

"All right, Minnie dear?" he said, looking down upon me affectionately.

"Yes, now you have returned. I have been very lonely since mamma left. How did you leave our dear ones in town? However does papa manage without me?"

"He can do very well without you when he's busy, I know."

"That is what you cannot, Stanley," I said.

"I should not like to try again. Been in mischief, Minnie?"

"Of course," I answered, gaily. "Do you think I could keep out of mischief all this time?"

"What have you done? Peeped in the Blue Chamber?"

"You suspicious old Bluebeard! Think you I should be so pleased to see you had I—"

"You are prevaricating. Where are my keys?" he asked, peremptorily.

"Here they are," I said, producing them speedily.

"Thanks." He counted them and examined them.

I laughed as he held up the little gold key.

"You are looking for the stains," I said. "Suppose—"

"Suppose that it betrays you! As I live there is a spot on it!" he said, detecting my mark.

The carriage stopped. We were at home. My husband handed me out with his wonted carefulness. We entered our cheerful dining-room, the cosy warmth renovating our chilled sensations.

In the evening we sat in the library. Stanley was very tired—too tired he seemed to tell me of the news in town.

"You shall do the talking to-night, Minnie," he said, stretching himself on the couch. "Either talk or read; your voice will cheer me."

I talked awhile of various home matters, of my rambles with mamma, of the books I had read, and of the pages I had written.

"Which of your ancestors was it who shut up that lovely girl in the old coffer, Stanley?" I asked, when I had exhausted ever so many subjects.

"What do *you* know of her?" he asked, fiercely, raising himself on his elbow.

"Not very much," I said, coolly; "and you need tell me no more unless you please, Stanley."

"Your curiosity will be your ruin," he said, almost savagely.

"Not under your reign, Bluebeard," I said, stroking his cheek affectionately. "Has the little key really betrayed me?"

"It needs neither stain nor spot to tell me that you have pried into my laboratory."

"*Pried!*" I said. "Surely it is no crime on my part to see whatever my husband sees."

"You went through the chapel?" he demanded, austerely.

"Yes," I admitted. "I saw also the nameless skulls in your sanctum; and here 's another to add to their number," I said, laying my head on his breast.

"You are the fiend's own!" he exclaimed, unable to resist my confidence.

I lay confidently a moment or two, smiling, in spite of his dark frowns.

"What have you in your pocket?" I asked, as my head came in contact with a hard substance. "Is it a book? May I look at it?" I said, taking it, without further permission.

Stanley laughed when he saw my astonishment on opening it.

"Why," I exclaimed, "it is the History of the Devil!"

"Your curiosity again!" he chuckled. "Now you will never rest until you have read it."

"I will not read it unless you wish, Stanley," I

said, almost afraid to open it, as I remembered Cedric's tale of the magic volume; "though whatever interests you should interest me, dear."

"Listen!" Stanley exclaimed. "She does not say, as Ruth said, 'Thy God shall be my God,' but, 'Thy *diabolos* shall be my *diabolos*.'"

"Stanley, do not speak so recklessly!" I exclaimed, sorrow-struck at his levity.

"You led me to speak on the subject," he said, morosely.

"That is a man's excuse from the very beginning, —'The woman persuaded me.'"

"Very good. Your fingers are on the book yet, Eve's daughter; open, and edify yourself."

"I will *not* open it unless you like."

"I *do* like immensely; now read it, I command."

I opened the book, for my curiosity was certainly much excited, and I had never seen the edition before.

I chose a portion to read aloud that amused me, wherein the author stated that he possessed the gift of "second sight," wherewith he could discern by the faces of those with whom he conversed each particular devil that lurked beneath, and he had met with some of the most hateful and wicked spirits under the guise of fair and handsome faces.

"Rubbish!" I exclaimed, laying down the book in disgust. "I'll read no more to please even you, Stanley."

"Why? Is it not interesting? That little book has been my companion since leaving you, my daily text-book."

"Allow me to replace it with another—a better," I said. "And why, after all, should it be interesting to you, Stanley, if, as you used to say, there is no heaven? Then surely there is no hell?"

"But there *are* devils in the present world," he said, quickly. "There is, too, a satanic power that moves us at times, whether we will or not."

"You think so? Then is there not also

'A Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will'?"

"Sermonizing again, Minnie? No use; your trouble is cast away."

"I do not know enough of theology to sermonize," I returned. "You cannot mean, Stanley, that you have any doubts of a future state yet?"

"Do not argue, Minnie. It is a subject upon which I am not silent for want of thought."

"But you know, dear," I persisted, "we must meet death staring us in the face, and then—"

"Then we die; and, dying, lie like dogs."

"Oh, Stanley! does not your better nature assure you of a future state which dogs enter not?" I asked earnestly, sensitive of my husband's scepticism, though scarcely shocked or surprised at his assertions.

Well as I knew him, I did not understand him thoroughly; many of his expressions were "dark say-

ings" to me; but I loved him—faults and excellencies —blindly adored him. Often the depth and wisdom of his impenetrable character were only added charms in my eyes.

"Ah! your ideas are too strong for me to-night, Minnie," he said, lazily; "I think you might read me something less weighty, more digestive."

"So I will, dear," I said, obediently; "here is 'Don Quixote' at hand," turning to a superb edition of the Spanish romance which lay on the table.

"The Don is always charming. Yes, read a portion, please—anywhere. I know it all well."

"Then I will read the chapter at which I have opened, hap-hazard."

I began at once to read. The particular chapter on which I had lighted, singularly enough, proved to be the account of Sancho Panza and Don Quixote's meeting with the party of maskers returning from a play in their various costumes, the image of the Infernal One driving them.

It was certainly odd, I thought, that the unpleasant topic of the Evil One should appear again; but Stanley laughed at the quaint conceit of the doughty knight. I finished the chapter and laid the book aside, saying, "You are tired, Stanley, I am sure, now."

"Your choice of subjects amuses me, Minnie," he said, smiling. "Try again; find another book, the third time pays for all."

There were several other books on the table, among these I espied Milton.

"Here is something substantial," I said, taking it up. "I shall please you this time. Poetry will be more *à propos* to your dreamy state."

"Yes," he murmured softly; "only

'Lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice.'"

I found 'L'Allegro,' and read aloud the lovely poem, eliciting Stanley's sincere admiration of its exquisite imagery.

"Thank you, Minnie. That book is indeed the 'precious life-blood of a master-spirit.' I remember reading Milton's life just before I left home."

"I see there is a passage marked," I said, turning to the sketch of the poet's life at the beginning.

"Yes; will you read that also?"

"Of course, if you wish," I answered. I read aloud the interesting passage which explained Milton's peculiar ideas of Paradise and the representation of Jehovah. As I proceeded, I suddenly found myself reading the further description of Milton's superior power of delineating Satan as a most glorious and beautiful creation, but awful in his sensitive and vengeful nature, terribly conscious of having fallen from his high estate.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I CEASED reading somewhat abruptly, and looked up, expecting to meet Stanley's derisive smile again at my choice of subject.

To my surprise, however, he had fallen asleep, and was dreaming, too, for his features were not in the calm repose of "balmy sleep,"—his brow was frowning, his whole expression, to say the least, was scarcely charming.

"Stanley, dear," I said softly, closing the book, and laying my cool hand on his heated brow.

My touch startled him, he raised himself and flung his hands towards me.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed, adding, with a loud oath, "if you tell me that I did it, I will push you over, too, and let the foaming waves receive you in their cold embrace. Go!" he continued, rising in his excitement, and fiercely glaring upon me through his half-closed eyes. "See how they lift their white arms to bear you to the mermaids' cave!"

Amazed and stunned, I knew not what to think or do for one moment; the next, collecting my thoughts, and fearing lest the servants should hear

us and conclude that we were quarrelling, I tried to soothe my husband, though I was frightened. His half-closed eyes and deeply-flushed face convinced me that he was delirious with pain or excitement.

"Stanley!" I whispered close to his ear, and firmly grasping his arms. "Stanley!" I repeated, thinking it the greater kindness to rouse him perforce than to allow him to suffer in troubled sleep.

He heard me, though as one calling from afar. He sank down quietly, while I gently soothed and tenderly embraced him.

In a few moments he opened his eyes with a calmer expression in their dark depths, strangely differing from his late paroxysm.

Almost *sotto voce*, he murmured,—

"'I dreamt my lady came and found me dead
(Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think),
And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,
That I revived and was an emperor.'"

"And so you are, my Stanley," I said impulsively, as I knelt beside him; "nay, more, the god of my idolatry!"

"Minnie, darling," he said, speaking more rationally, and pressing his hand to his side, "I cannot say:

'My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne.'

You made me melancholy with your infernal readings."

"Forgive me!" I cried; "you should have told me sooner."

"It matters not; I must have fallen asleep and dreamt fearfully."

"You shall have a sedative. You are tired, too."

"I am glad that I am at home, Minnie," he said, as he took the draught which I speedily prepared.

"I must have wearied you dreadfully with chattering and reading."

"No, dearest, you never weary me. I love to hear your voice. I like to see you fire your volley of words."

"But how contradictory I have been, how wilful!" I said; "and you so tired."

"Do not reproach yourself, Minnie," he said kindly. "It would be 'varra dull' never to have a 'wrang word' in married life."

The next morning my husband was still feverish and unusually excited.

Imagining that he must have taken cold on his journey from town, I sent to Dolgelly for the doctor, who soon arrived, and pronounced Stanley to be suffering from a slight attack of a contagious fever.

How soon the house was hushed and quiet, save for the noise outside of the waves at high tide or the sea-bird's cry as it breasted the wave and flew up in the blue!

But my husband did not improve. A week after his return he was so much emaciated as to be unable to move, except at times when he suddenly grew delirious, and raged like a strong man in his wrath.

Trouble and heaviness oppressed him; charmed I never so wisely, he sank lower and lower, and as day after day and night after night I lovingly tended him, I too lost my strength, and grew sick and weary at heart through hope deferred.

Once only he seemed fully conscious.

Turning his languid eyes upon me, he groaned, "Am I dying, love?"

"No—oh no!" I cried, as Charlotte Brontë cried on her death-bed. "God will not separate us, we have been so happy."

"I cannot die," he said; "my work is not half done. I must get up; this weakness must be overcome; I *must* finish my work!"

"Dear one, be calm; do not trouble yourself."

"I must recover," he cried. "Pray, pray to your God—anything, to make me the man I was a few weeks ago: active, able to work, to think clearly. Ah, was it not yourself who told me that only One in this world finished His work? I must finish mine; and yet how weak and incapable I feel! Lift me up, Minnie; revive me—give me something—anything—if it be an elixir of life."

I raised him gently and gave him strengthening

food. In a few hours he breathed more freely; my hopes revived. He slept calmly that night, and I sank on my knees and thanked Heaven for these comforting signs. Long and earnestly I prayed that this precious life might be spared. Fearful of disturbing him, I remained kneeling so long that exhaustion overcame me, and, almost unconsciously, my head drooped on the bed and I fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

For several hours I must have slept heavily.

I suddenly awoke, startled by a swift movement near me. Raising my head, my attention was instantly attracted towards the window, which was wide open, the bright moonlight streaming into the room.

But what was there *outside* the window?

As plain as now I see, I saw the face of my husband—his wraith, surely—clutching the window-frame convulsively.

Too much shocked by his strange appearance, I neither moved nor spoke; my knees seemed glued to the floor—all presence of mind deserted me. Yet I heard most distinctly my husband's voice,

"Piercing the fearful hollow of mine ear"

with its most terrible revelations:—

"I see her stand
On the bright confines of a distant land.

She fingers now a harp of gold, and I shall wave a rod of iron! She sings a strain of heavenly rapture, while I in darkness wail with devils! Ah!" he continued savagely, "how the wild waves leap to-

night and the night winds sigh! Only the pitiless moon looks down, as she looked and gleamed *that* night on a fouler scene than this! I was—I am—a wretch," he exclaimed more furiously, and louder. "I shall be a double-dyed fiend. Ah!"

The next moment his fingers relaxed their painful grasp—his face disappeared; another moment, and a splash below, a cry sent up, and then all was still but the lapping of the waves, while the unfeeling moon sailed on in a sea of blue ether; and then I lost consciousness and fainted right away.

* * * * *

With a dim remembrance as of a troublous dream I awoke to consciousness once more.

Where late the moon had beamed, the sunbeams now shone forth through the still open window.

I tried to rise from my stiffened posture. "Stanley—my beloved!" I said, not seeing my husband before me. "Stanley!" I cried again, but no answer came to my invocation.

As though still in a dream, I rose and staggered to the open window. Leaning over, I drew in a breath of the cool, fragrant morning air as I looked below. There the bright waters, gleaming in the sunshine, tossed and leaped in the returning of the tide.

Hoarsely again I shouted "Stanley!" while the waves rose and fell, seeming to answer me exultingly,—

"We have borne him, we have borne him, on our waves away so far!"

I crept into the room again.

"Oh, merciful Father," I cried, "what dreadful fear oppresses me!" And then I must have fallen and fainted once more in my anguish.

* * * * *

For three weeks after that fearful night I "existed" in the land of shadows, wherein my husband and I once more rambled hand in hand over the merry Campanian plains.

This dream of joy was followed by an awakening of sorrow. Reason and memory once more asserted their powers; I awoke to find

That all my joy was but a fleeting dream,
A torture of my own imagining.

I awoke to find my father and mamma standing near me; but that other one, that "dearer and nearer" one, where was he? I dared not ask.

It was on mamma's faithful bosom that my head was pillowed. Her sweet voice uttered the first words that intelligibly reached my ears.

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face."

"I see it in your looks, mamma," I said. "I know my Stanley is—"

"We are all in God's hands, my darling," my father said, taking my hand in his.

I could not weep. I begged them to tell me all there was to be told. I listened,—listened to my pale-faced watchers, who had been summoned by Cedric to Dolwyllyn to find its owner mysteriously disappeared, and its mistress in a death-like stupor. They knew even less than I knew myself, and I could give them but further confirmation that my husband had sought death with his own hand, during a state most surely of temporary insanity.

Is it possible that I could rally into convalescence, bereft as I was of my husband in the most horrifying manner, our separation accompanied with such awful and suspicious circumstances, that suggested everything worse than it appeared?

When my husband had "raged" of causing the death of his other wife—of Ginevra, I mean—I had never even suspected him capable of such guilt, nor been alarmed by his fierce self-condemnatory expressions. Wild as they were, I attributed them to an over-heated imagination, and took no further notice of his frenzied speeches, except as the outpourings of a nature hasty and passionate, but never really criminal.

And even now must I believe it? Was it thrust upon me that Stanley had wilfully caused the death

of Ginevra in some inexplicable manner? And must I listen to the whispers floating around me, that my husband's return to the scene of this dreadful crime had so wrought upon him as to lead him to commit an act no less appalling,—to throw away his own life into the dark abyss of the unknown future?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THAT mysterious incomprehensibility we call Death on this side Eternity—whatever sweeter name we may give him beyond—dreadful, horrid, unwelcome Death, has visited Dolwyllyn, has snatched my beloved away. "He is dead," they say, he that "was," but is not, is no longer, for who can pierce the dark veil that intervenes between us and the souls of the departed?

Whither hath my husband's soul fled? Who received it from its clayey tenement? Could I only have closed my beloved's eyes, received in his last expiring breath an assurance that he departed in peace!

But this consolation was denied to me. The terrors of death encompassed the manner of Stanley's death, filling me with terrible presentiments that all was not well with him.

Was he not this moment lying beneath the cold, cold waves, his fainting form sinking to the unsunned depths of ocean, while his immortal spirit winged its way through the water-deeps to the upper realms of space?

How did it wing its way? Did angels wait, ready to bear my Stanley's purer and nobler part to the plains of Heaven; or did a gorgeous chariot await his release as in Elijah's case, and he stepped into the luminous air, unweeting of so great an equipage awaiting him?

I know not. I peer into the brightening dawn, shout aloud in the blue morning air, as the rising sun shines as lavishly as when *he* still walked on earth with me.

I watch the soft and dewy twilight; I see the moon steal forth from her hidden chambers, but her pure light reveals no mystery; the stars blink on, the clouds rush on through the spacious firmament, day follows day, night to night succeeds, and yet I vainly seek to penetrate the mystery hid, which must be revealed some day, were it under Dolwyllyn's corner-stone or Egypt's Pyramid.

"If I had only peacefully buried my husband's remains," I selfishly exclaimed, "consigned them peacefully to the repose of his native earth, I could find peace." But to lose him thus, to imagine his dear form in the cold embrace of the monsters of the deep, to fancy him floating in the sunless caves, the wet sea-weeds around his brow, was so realistic that every day renewed my terror and every night I dreamt afresh.

Could nothing be done to recover my husband's remains?

Everything that affection could prompt or influence could further had speedily been done. Surmises followed; the shore watched night and day; but the waters still rolled on and told no tale, still ebbed and flowed, yet revealed not the secret of their depths.

I was not friendless and alone all this time. Mamma stayed with me many weeks, only leaving me when absolutely compelled to return to town. She entreated me to go with her for a change, but I could not leave my husband's home.

I was no longer seriously ill; I could walk, eat, converse with friends almost cheerfully, though my husband's form was ever in my thoughts; sleeping I dreamed of him, waking I pictured him, and this was why I remained spell-bound at the castle. Though so full of painful associations, the place possessed a charm no other spot possessed for me, and as returning strength enabled me to walk, I wandered on the lonely shore in the vain hope that some day I might yet discover some vestige of my dear one. I thought that it would comfort me could I but snatch from the angry ocean one stiver of those precious relics.

But this was denied. Only a loving wife could hope against hope when every one else believed the last descendant of the Merediths to be dead—drowned—and borne away by the current to the far-off depths of the wide, wide sea.

And I still lived; still to me 'twas given

> **"To wander on a darkened earth,**
> **Where all things round me breathed of him."**

* * * * *

With reverent hands I touched my husband's numerous MSS., which I found in confused heaps in numerous recesses of the library. Fervidly expressed, but imperfectly composed, I vainly lamented the touch of the "vanished hand" to endue them with Promethean fire.

With fear and trembling I examined them carefully, to see if I could trace in their heart-breathings a confession or acknowledgment of his having caused the death of Ginevra, for the statement which he had made in my hearing had rankled in my memory, and I sorely felt the stain of self-implied murder.

But no trace of such confession could I find. I saw, in my investigations, many things to confirm me in my former jealous suspicions that he had loved Ginevra and sought her hand in marriage for love alone, in utter forgetfulness of his early vows to myself. His affection for me had waned in absence; the brilliant Mexican beauty had enthralled him to faithlessness. He had most surely loved her, or wherefore these love sonnets for a dark-eyed beauty's ear?

I accepted the truth, faced it bravely, thankful that he *had* loved her and lived in love with the

imperious foreigner, for where love dwelt surely hatred could not suggest so bitter a crime.

But why had he made those dreadful asseverations? I was not satisfied; might there not be a taint of insanity in the blood of the Merediths?

I scrutinized the ancient portraits again, ransacked the family archives for a trace of my suspicion. Dark and treacherous deeds there were indeed recorded, and brave and noble actions too, but the haughty Merediths had ever been free of the taint of insanity.

The little gold key of the temple I had detached from the household ring. It was so small, scarcely larger than the cross I wore suspended on my breast, and there was such a charm in the very touch of the key of so many associations, that I wore it as an amulet next to my heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was the anniversary of my husband's death.

I went out alone, to wander by the sad sea waves.

A gloomy October morning, when all nature seemed in mournful harmony; the meek-browed mountains had already resigned themselves to the chilling embrace of early winter; bright specks of pure untrodden snow fleeced their huge declivities, while the furze and hardy ferns and bare trees struggled out of the soft white flakes, their blackened stems chequered into a thousand devices.

I wandered slowly along the shore—my usual walk, that vast stretch of foam my daily centre of attraction. I walked on till within sight of the old ruined wall, the spot where I had once seen Stanley working in his superfluous energy.

The gap was still in unrepair, the stones lay piled about on either side. I passed the fragments and walked steadily on to the bridge that spanned the wide mouth of the bar, then abruptly turned and retraced my steps, indulging the while in morbid fancies of my former happiness.

What was it that startled me so suddenly? A vision in the sunlight?

I was looking straight at the gap, not a stone's throw in advance, when my eyes detected—no, when my busy brain *imagined*—a Titanic figure piling those very stones one upon the other, just as I had seen Stanley handle them on the day of my visit to the temple.

Though believing myself painfully deluded, I rapidly approached the moving figure, the vision with such lifelike movements. I ran nearer; it might only be a labourer from the village. But no; that striking *contour* contradicted this supposition.

"So like, yet so unlike," I said, as my noiseless footsteps on the soft sands did not betray my approach until I was close to *it*, and then the figure, vision, wraith, or shadow, vanished from my sight into the thin air.

In a fearful tremor I sank down on the stones just touched by spirit hands.

If that was not my husband's face and form I was surely dreaming. Was he in or out of the body? I could not tell. I cared not but for a look, another look from those weird eyes.

"Spirit or demon — man or angel — come once again!" I cried, but only the whisper of the advancing tide answered my invocation.

I returned to the castle, deeply pondering on the apparition. I was not frightened, yet I trembled. I was not nervously distressed, nor sorry that I had

seen it, though before I entered the castle I succeeded in convincing myself that I had been the victim of a delusion through constantly dwelling upon my husband's dear image.

The next day I was drawn irresistibly to the same spot.

I examined the gap in the wall more minutely. The wall, where it extended unbroken, was high enough to cover the figure of a full-grown man; while the sturdy hedge that enclosed the carriage road on the land side afforded abundant shelter to one wishful to screen himself from observation. I also noticed the position of the fallen stones on either side the gap, nervously apprehensive lest I should see the vision once more while I looked.

Three days running I came, and—was it fancy?—the stones were in different positions, as though the wall had been built up again, and the waves or ruthless hands had thrown the stones down once more.

To make assurance doubly sure, I fetched my sketch-book and pencil and rapidly sketched the then position of the broken wall, jotting down each fragment as it lay about.

On my next visit I carefully compared it again with my sketch, and, if I must believe my own eyes, the stones once more had been displaced. Puzzled, I pondered over this phenomenon, wondering if it were really possible for departed spirits to revisit earthly scenes.

I slept uneasily the following night.

I awoke suddenly in the darkness, arrested by the touch of a realistic presence; or was I journeying in dreamland once more with my beloved?

"Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand," I murmured to myself, not frightened, but lulling myself to sleep again to dream the blissful dream.

"And the sound of a voice that is still" was distinctly echoed in my ears, as from the very depths of an opened tomb, yet in a voice whose softest whisper made my heart rejoice unspeakably.

"Stanley!" I called, half fancying myself in dreamland still; "speak once more."

But no voice responded. I dozed again, and on awakening in the morning smiled as I remembered my happy dream.

"My key—my key!" I exclaimed, a moment after missing it.

Quickly I searched the room. I was positively conscious of having possessed it the previous night.

The touch of the dream-hand came back to me. I shuddered. Matter and spirit are so mysterious in their relationship. Was it possible that a superhuman being had touched me?

Restlessly I passed the day, too nervous to venture outside. I kept Parnell near me, and summoned old Cedric to tell me of my household expenses, entering into the details of expenditure and revenue in futile efforts to banish thoughts of less unearthly character.

CHAPTER XL.

MAMMA came again, bringing her bright cheery words, her pure face beaming in the calm content of middle age; came to find me restless, nervous, *distraite.* I wished I could tell her of my nervous fancies, but they seemed so absurd; I was sure she would laugh them away; and yet so strange is the heart of woman, that I preferred to cherish them in secret.

But with her intuitive skill she soon divined my fears, and cheerfully strove to divert my mind from painful topics.

"What have you been writing lately, Minnie?" she asked, as we sat before the fire on the morning after her arrival.

"Nothing." I shook my head. "How can I write? I tremble when I touch a pen."

"You will get over that. Your heart is sound, your eyes are bright. You will live many years yet, and your pen will lighten those years."

I sighed. "What have you been doing? Busy with the magazine yet?"

"Yes. I have been at it night and day. I was glad you sent for me; it will be a rest, for letters cannot follow me here so quickly."

"I am afraid you have undertaken too much for your strength."

"No; I like the work, though editing is no trifle, and we are in full swing now. But you must not expect me to be idle *all* the time I spend with you. My letter-box is here, you know," she said, tapping her forehead. "I have sixteen pages to supply for next month."

"Horrid old editress! You are worked like a sand-horse! Can I not help you any way?"

"You could, I am sure," she said, looking delighted.

"In which way, mentor?"

"By contributing an article on Marine Algæ."

"Out of my line entirely."

"I think not. You could manage that. Do you no longer take an interest in sea-weeds?"

"Oh, yes! I spend many hours on the sands, and the weeds cast up by the sea are plentiful enough at Dolwyllyn."

"Then promise me that you will at least try."

"But I know little or nothing of the science."

"Read up well. There is nothing like the freshness of practice with the details of theory, even if faulty in technicalities; but you must confine your observations strictly to accurate personal knowledge, remember," she said, pleased to assume her old position as mentor.

"I cannot do it, then. If I have no licence, I have no wings—I cannot rise."

"I see. Suppose you speculate on the origin and ultimate destiny of the Algæ. You may rise or fall as you please."

"I will try to please you; but I cannot make a 'leather bottel' out of a sea-weed. Shall we go on the shore? It is bright and warm at present, and the short day will be over soon."

"It is too cold to go hunting about those sea caves." Mamma shuddered. "You need not hurry."

"It is not too cold for a brisk walk," I said, thinking, if it were too cold for us, well-clothed and in health, how cold and chilling it must be for that poor form in ocean's depths.

However, we went up the woods for a walk, and returned all the better for the bracing air breathed on the mountain slope.

In the afternoon we separated, mamma to write, and I to read.

I took up my Tennyson, which I had left open on the library table the previous evening. It was open still at 'Maud,' and round the twenty-sixth stanza there were some pencil marks in ominous distinctness.

> **"O that 'twere possible,**
> **After long grief and pain,**
> **To find the arms of my true love**
> **Round me once again!**

* * * *

A shadow flits before me,
Not thou, but like to thee;
Ah, Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be!"

I read it over, wondering if mamma had marked the passages. I had often read 'Maud' recently, and last night I was positive that it had not been pencilled by myself.

I showed her the passage after, and asked her if she had marked it. She had not.

The next morning I set out early in the morning sunshine to walk in sight of the gap.

"'Tis the blot upon the brain
That will show itself without,"

I said, as I fancied once more I saw the vision before me. I turned back, afraid to meet it, or to rid myself of the fancy. Mamma stood watching me from the library window. She playfully reproached me for leaving her, and said she would go with me towards the village.

We passed the gap together. All was still and motionless on either side, and I felt less afraid to look round well.

If I could only tell mamma all my foolish fears! her nature was itself so bright and hopeful, she was seldom in despair on hearing of a case apparently desperate. A great hope, part of her very nature,

combined with as great a desire to help in time of trouble, made her believe that by her own powers she could in some way or other so lighten one's distress, if not completely remove it, by at least taking the burden from the sufferer or by representing the trouble as something not so very terrible after all.

"Mamma, dear," I said, as we returned after an hour's walk past the gap again, "I will tell you the truth."

"Of course you will," she said, surprised; "I never knew you to speak untruthfully."

"I feel very selfish in constantly throwing myself upon your kindness."

"It is no burden, Minnie. Have I been so cruel and unfeeling a step-mother to you?"

"No, no; you have been, you are, my best friend; and I will confess to you now that which I would acknowledge to no other human being."

"Confess, dear; I will at least absolve you."

"If you can," I said, doubtingly. "But I will tell you. If any one knows me, *you* know me; if any one knows how I loved, nay, *love*, my husband, *you* know; and since his death not one moment's real happiness has been mine. Hear me, please. *You* know, too, how suddenly we were parted, how full of horrors was— Oh! I cannot rid myself of all these things. You are sure I think of them, —most of all do I think of my Stanley as he is

now; or *is* he dead? I wildly ask myself, for we have no positive proof that he *did* die. Now to come to my morbid fancies, which you may laugh away or explain as you please; but if I do not tell them I shall go mad—my brain will turn."

Mamma pressed my hand; we were near the castle as I spoke. She said, "Do not go in yet; tell me of all these fancies outside, while the sun shines, and where there are no walls to listen."

"There are walls without as well as within," I said, yielding, and retracing our steps. "You see where the outer wall along the sands curves nearest the tide"—I said, pointing to the gap before us—"there, where the stones have fallen—where the water washes over at high tide? I was walking along the sands one day, just as we are walking now, when I *saw*, or *fancied* I saw, a figure so like Stanley's piling up those very stones—as he used to do before he died." Mamma drew her hand from mine, but not before it had trembled in my grasp. "I was not afraid," I continued. "I hastened to the place, and then—the figure vanished."

"As it ought to have done," mamma said, lightly. "You may be perfectly sure that it was neither ghost nor spectre."

"I wished to tell you," I said, fretfully.

"And I am all ears, my love. But you know how matter-of-fact I am in the broad sunshine."

"Another day, when I passed again, I felt positive that the stones were in different positions from the previous day, just as if they had been disturbed."

"Any one might remove or disturb them; even the tide might roll them over."

"But I have not told you all yet," I murmured.

"Something more wonderful?"

"Yes. The other night, before you came, I awoke suddenly from sleep, and *some one was speaking in the room*—it was not Parnell; it was a voice like—and that little gold key of the temple was taken from me that night. Of *this* I am quite certain."

"You were dreaming, Minnie," mamma said, sharply, though her cheeks blanched.

"Dreaming or waking, I felt sure—I *feel* sure that *some one* was there."

"Tell me no more. You have made me nervous, too," she said, trying to laugh.

It was scarcely in accordance with her usual kindness and forbearance to treat me so, and I was still more surprised when she suddenly declared her intention of leaving me the next day.

"Have you been up to the temple yet, Minnie?" she asked, suddenly.

"No. What is the use of going now I have lost the key?"

"Well, you shall take me when I come again, will you?"

"If you like; but when will you come again?"

"Oh! some time next year. Stay but a little, I *will* come again."

Certainly, next year would soon be here. It was now December. Christmas was coming once more, and dreary it would be for me to spend it in my loneliness.

CHAPTER XLI.

ALONE again with my nervous fancies.

Were I left alone in my room and sighed in my heaviness, a sympathetic breath was drawn beside me; did I utter an impatient exclamation, an echo reached my ears as from a soul in unison with mine. There might be hollow panels round the room, wherein the wind could gather.

I sounded them, tapping each one cautiously. The centre side panel was hollow. I examined its exterior, then called Cedric, to ask if there was not some communication with the lower portion of the castle.

"Yes," he acknowledged; "there used to be a sliding panel, giving an entrance into a passage that led to the old wine-cellars."

"That is an idea—a communication between a boudoir and wine-cellar."

"But this room was once a study for the master's uncle Stephen, who was a priest, and caroused and feasted himself and boon companions with free access to the bottled sunshine."

"Have you been through the passage, Cedric?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have been through it; but not for

many years to my knowledge has it been opened. It is probably choked up now; and the old wine-cellar is not used, on account of its nearness to the old chapel in the west wing."

"I should like to know if, by any possibility, any one could pass through now."

"It is most unlikely, ma'am, most unlikely," the old man said, decisively.

But I was not satisfied. I determined to search the passage myself; and when Cedric had gone, I set to with a will to find the spring that opened the panel. I soon found it, and watched it move noiselessly aside, then glided softly into the dark space beyond with a brave but throbbing heart.

I stumbled on another door, within a step or two, which yielded to my touch, as it opened from me. It was pitch dark now, and the next move was downwards a step. I struck a match, and peered fearlessly around. A dozen stone steps were below me, which I at once descended; then a breath of wind blew out my light. I struck another, and found beyond the steps a second door, which swung ajar. Through this I passed into an octagon-shaped cellar, which must be underneath the chapel in the west wing. This was the charnel-house of the Merediths. But I could not stay to look at the gaping vaults of my husband's ancestors; I turned faint, and hurried back to the warmth and sunshine of my own room. I fastened the panel, and, before I slept that night, I

bade Parnell draw up before it my heavy writing-table, so that I should be sure of no one entering through it without hearing them, at least.

I slept, and dreamt as usual of my dear one, and in my sleep my spirit once more explored the windings of that secret panel.

In my dream I had traversed once more the passage, and descended the steps, and boldly faced the mouldering tombstones and groups of effigies which lay around me, some recumbent, others kneeling in supplication; one, a mere torso, I stumbled over. Grimy suits of ancient armour, thrown pell-mell upon the tombs, gave the place a resemblance to a deserted battle-field, where ousted warriors, in their mail, lay down, their swords still rusting by their sides.

Speeding along through the *débris*, I suddenly saw beyond a table whereon gleamed two wax lights, much after the manner of a Catholic altar, with an alabaster cross suspended above. Approaching this table, I seized one of the wax lights and bore it away to examine the vault by its aid.

I had proceeded in my investigation some moments, when a gust of wind blew down from an opposite direction to the one I had entered, and steps—living, heavy steps — I heard. Crouching behind a tall tombstone I stood waiting, listening, with the taper still in my hand, forgetting that the light would betray my presence. Oh, heavens! I surely heard

my husband's voice, repeating, as to some familiar spirit, his rapturous poetry of intensest feeling. Nearer and nearer he came; but, alas! so much fear and dread possessed me now, that I, womanly, fainted, or, rather, awoke to find myself in bed, safely beyond the power of imaginary friend or foe.

The darkness had fled, the trembling sunbeams streamed through the windows. The morning beamed, but not with joy for me. I watched the land-birds flying past, as, chasing each other swiftly, and circling higher and higher, they greeted the King of Day in noisy warblings.

For *them* the sun shone. In vain I prayed the darkness to come back, for what was light to me without my love? Oh! that I knew he loved me still, as in my dream I deemed! How cold he is—how lifeless! And yet, oh, God! to send me such a dream! Oh, dream, oh, sweetest dream!

Parnell stood by my side with a tempting cup of coffee.

"It is very late, Parnell, is it not?"

"Yes, ma'am. You slept so soundly, too. I hope you feel refreshed?"

"I shall be better presently. Have you brought the letters up?"

"Yes, ma'am; here they are," she said, giving me the messages from the outer world.

One was from mamma, containing an injunction to

be sure and keep Christmas royally, for she and my father should spend it with me. My father was coming to stay a few weeks in the new year. Yes, I would keep Christmas royally, for their sakes. The holly should twine, the mistletoe wreathe; but Christmas, in my heart, would it ever come again?

CHAPTER XLII.

THREE days before Christmas Eve they came. "I did not expect you quite so soon," I said, embracing them by turns.

"We have so much to say to you that we thought we had better steal a few days more before Christmas," my father said, patting my cheek fondly.

"If it is a plain woman's question, what have you got to tell me?" I asked.

"It is a woman's plain question, but it must wait for an answer, at least until we have had something to eat. These mountain breezes are so exhilarating. Come, spread your Welsh rarebits."

"I shall know in good time," I thought, as I busied myself in administering to their comfort.

But Christmas came and went, and the new year dawned with its new interests before I was enlightened. Cold and icy January nearly froze us as we sat before the fire; the mountains were clothed in thick-piled snow, the sea was angry, and sent huge boulders of ice bang against the rocky foundations of the castle. It was the season for hospitality and social warmth indoors, but we were a very quiet

home circle. Though the conventional year of mourning had passed, I was no nearer finding consolation from outer sources.

I soon discovered that mamma had told my father of my confessions to herself. Practical man of business though he was, he kindly refrained reproving me, and questioned me more particularly of my fancies.

What a comfort I found it to talk with him of the departed. He would go to the ruined wall with me, listen patiently while I showed him the displaced stones, even listened to my foolish dream of exploring the passage behind the panel in my boudoir, nay, opened the sliding door himself, and penetrated into the darkness, returning with a seriously interested expression, and an affirmation that "something" would be "turning up" out of all this mystery.

"Mamma," I said, "I hope papa does not think I am going crazy over these signs and wonders. You are both smiling at me for grasping at shadows."

"Your papa is seeking to satisfy himself," she said, gravely.

"He need not take the trouble. I am not afraid of my own dreams. If Stanley had only died peacefully, and I could have been assured of his safe entrance into heaven, I should be content to wait."

"My dear," she said, tenderly, "Stanley is happy, believe me, though he is not in heaven."

"Oh, God of Heaven!" I gasped. "Why do

you say so? Though I dream of him lost and unforgiven, oh, do not torture me by positively saying that he must be in—"

"I did not say so, Minnie," she gravely reproved me.

"Where can he be, then?" I laughed, hysterically. "Is he like Mahomet's coffin, suspended betwixt heaven and earth?"

"No," papa said, mysteriously. "You may rest satisfied on one point, Minnie,—that Stanley is happy."

"How do you know that?" I questioned, eagerly. "You are not superstitious. You do not believe in visions or revelations?"

"I believe in God's goodness, my dear; and through His merciful kindness I am well assured that Stanley is—

He said no more, and I could only look at my father in bewilderment.

"Will you get up early in the morning, Minnie," my father said in a few moments, "and show us the way to the temple on the mountain?"

"To the temple!" I repeated. "What do you know of it? Who told you of such a place?"

"A little bird," he said, glancing at mamma. "We will all go there to-morrow. I am very wishful to see the place."

"I will go with you," I said, wearily. "I can find the way; but how unfortunate that I have no key to open its treasures to you."

"Love laughs at locksmiths, you know," mamma said. "We shall find an entrance if we only get there."

"I don't know; the gold key, small as it was, did not fit an easy lock."

"Never mind," my father said. "The key is a wonderful little traveller. It will be turning up again, though it were cast into the sea, believe me."

"I think you wish me to believe in all sorts of foolish things just now," I said, more and more puzzled by their remarks.

"We do indeed, Minnie," mamma said, looking as happy as possible. "So dream away to-night of the most impossible things becoming possible; do not curb your imagination one jot, and you will see what pleasure the morrow may bring forth."

CHAPTER XLIII.

EARLY in the morning we set out, a quiet, but not unhappy trio, with our faces set for the temple, like pilgrims paying their earnest tribute.

Though so many years had passed since my first and only visit to that charmed place, I hesitated not in choosing the right paths.

Through the two forests we journeyed, disturbing the chirping robins, and treading the crisp, snow-covered leaves of last autumn's fall.

The path narrowed; it grew steeper; the broad bosom of the sea glistened white and cold in the winter sunshine. I must have been too languidly indifferent to notice that my companions evinced little surprise at the exquisite glimpses the various turns of the mountain path afforded us.

"There it stands," I said, the first to pause at the end of the last ravine, and pointing to the temple which I called Beautiful.

There it gleamed in the morning sun, as fair and perfect as when first I saw it.

My companions were breathless with exertion or astonishment. They glanced at each other, then satisfied me by their exclamations of rapture.

"If we only had the key!" I murmured; "if we only had the key! It is so beautiful inside!"

We approached it.

"Why, there is a key in the door!" mamma said, standing in front of the steps of lapis-lazuli.

"You do not say so!" I exclaimed, hastening to her, and running up the steps. "It is—it must be—my gold key!—the very one I lost!" I said, touching it, turning it, and taking it out of the lock, to cover it with kisses.

"You must let us see inside, now," my father said, smiling. "Unlock the door. But it is not fastened," he said, as the door yielded to his touch, and flew open. "Enter, enter, ladies fair; all ye who enter here, abandon grief and mute despair. Enter; I bid ye welcome."

We entered as my father bowed—mamma first, I second, my father following close behind, and affectionately supporting me with his arm.

A thousand memories surged through my brain as we paused in the exquisite entrance. A warm, fragrant odour of tropical plants saluted us; flowers, bright and radiant, were growing in every niche, showering down upon us their loveliness, as if in their native element.

"Who can possibly have been at the trouble to bring all these flowers, to keep them living here?" I wondered, my eyes seeking the explanation my tongue refused to utter.

"You did not know how many kind friends you had who were striving to please you with a joyful surprise," my father said, placing me in one of the massive oaken chairs in the vestibule.

"Indeed I did not; and I never gave permission to any one to enter this place."

Mamma here suddenly disappeared through the door leading into the inner room.

As the door closed upon her, I fancied for a moment that she spoke to some one as she entered.

"Did mamma speak?" I asked, quickly, turning to my father.

"Yes, she did; she was speaking to—"

He paused abruptly, and I impatiently said,—

"I cannot understand you at all. The temple seems to have been visited by some one before us, and you do not seem surprised; and these paintings, too," I said, pointing to several which hung around the entrance; "I never saw these when I came here before. It seems very strange."

"You are not dreaming, Minnie, wild improbabilities," my father said, more mysteriously than ever. "Come and examine the paintings; they are deeply interesting."

"It strikes me that you have seen them before," I said. Just then mamma returned to us, smiling, as though she had seen something that pleased her vastly. "And mamma, too," I said, puzzled still more, "mamma, too, goes about as though the place

were quite familiar to her. What does it all mean?"

"It is a little surprise that has been planned for you," mamma said. "Can you not bear a joyful surprise to-day?"

"Oh, yes," I said, suddenly thinking that they, in their kindness, had prepared some little treat to surprise me, and determining to appear sensible of it to please their kind hearts.

"Then first drink this," mamma said, giving me a goblet of wine. "The good genie who lives here has sent it for you."

"Thanks."

I drank the wine, and then my father led me to one of the paintings.

"You did not know that you had an artist at the temple?" he said.

"I did not. Who is he?"

"Look first on this picture," my father said.

"And then on that," mamma said, pointing to its companion.

I looked at the first, which represented a storm at sea,—a brave ship struggling like a living being with the angry waves, while on the deck I descried a group of excited faces. Foremost among them was one bearing the likeness I knew so well—my husband himself, his eyes fixed on the blackened waters, his hands thrown out wildly, as he strove to throw himself into the midst of the fearful billows, while

the strong, tawny sailors held him firmly, restraining him from self-destruction.

I was fascinated by this scene. Those eyes of wild, unearthly passion, that writhing form, reminded me only too forcibly of the last time I had seen my husband on that fearful night of delirium.

I could have gazed upon it for an indefinite period, but my father gently led me to the next.

This was in glowing contrast to the first. A tropical coast, with palms uprising here and there to shade the wayfarer. Underneath one of these palms reclined a figure—my husband's form and features again. Around him were groups of many-nationed sailors, while in the distance, on a calm blue sea, a British merchant ship swung in the harbour—the same vessel, apparently, as in the first picture.

What struck me in this was the beautiful, fervent expression of the central figure. His eyes shone with zeal, as from a pure mind; he seemed to be telling those around him of that inward peace and joy that he himself possessed.

There was a device entwined in the gold frame of this picture. I easily caught the signification :—

> **"Perhaps I shall see thee and know thee again**
> **When the sea gives up her dead."**

"Words of promise," I said; and I trust in them fervently.

"Now for the third scene," mamma said, drawing me away from the second.

The third was larger, and, if possible, more beautiful than its companions.

Here I saw an idealized portrait of myself, rendered by the painter's art beautiful indeed, sleeping on a couch in my own room at the castle, a smile on my lips, while bending over me in the darkened space one so bright himself—in darkness visible—my husband again, shadow or myth, was depicted, watching me lovingly, hovering over me like a spirit of dreamland. In his hand he held a small gold key, which he had seemingly detached from my neck as I slept.

"Oh, father!" I said; "what does it all mean? Who could have painted these scenes so vividly?"

"You are sure you have no idea who would be likely to have so great a knowledge of these things?"

"Not the least in the world. I know of no such occurrences in the life of Stanley as are here represented," I said, indicating the first two pictures.

"We have still another picture, Minnie," mamma said, throwing open the door leading to the inner room beneath the many-coloured dome.

She stood on one side to usher me in.

"Shall I be expected to laugh or to cry?" I asked, shrinking from the entrance, an undefined fear possessing me.

"Nay, you said you never felt afraid even of spirits and ghosts," mamma said, smiling. "You will

become a capital medium shortly, Minnie, with your communications with—"

"If I see *one* spirit I shall not be afraid; but I could not promise to encounter calmly a legion."

Mamma went into the room. She drew back the next moment, and whispered, "Go in, my dear; there is only one apparition, and that is not a very formidable one."

"You do torment me so," I said, feeling their jesting remarks sadly out of place.

"Do you go yourself. Seeing is believing."

With feelings strangely perplexed, I entered the room,—that little room so warm and bright. Still brighter and warmer it appeared as I softly entered it. There was the writing-table, there the two pretty couches, and upon one of the couches there was—

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE very shadow of the man I loved was so dear to me that I only trembled and hesitated lest this shadow, this likeness, should disappear ere I reached it.

The face was turned from me, but the contour, the never-to-be-forgotten outline of that dear form was unmistakably before me.

I looked back, to reassure my father that I was not frightened. But the door had closed after me, neither of them had followed me into the room.

My heart beat loud and fast, but I would not be afraid. I approached the couch, and stood beside the figure. I touched it, fully expecting it to dissolve and melt away into thin air; but it did not vanish; it gave a human shiver, and slowly—slowly turned to confront me with human eyes enough, and glowing with earthly emotion.

"Dearest!" I said, finding my voice after repeated efforts to break the silence, and still keeping my hand on his shoulder, though my knees smote and I thought I should faint. Yet never a word spake the shadow.

I sat down on the couch beside that apparition.

"Dearest Stanley," I said, "I know that it is you, your very self." I twined my arm in his, and felt so happy.

"My Minnie, I was waiting for you," I was answered, and folded in a quick embrace to a beating heart by warm, living hands.

"Can the sea give up her dead?" I asked, clinging to him, fearing lest it might only be a most joyful dream from which I should be suddenly awakened.

"All things are possible with God," I heard a voice say that had a ring of pathos and reverence in its tones which I had never known before.

"Yes, oh, yes; but, Stanley, you are a *living man?*" I exclaimed, incoherently, yet looking steadfastly on his features.

"My faithful Minnie, as you are a living woman, and by the curiosity which I can see is already shining in those dear eyes, 'let me tell you an ower true tale.'"

A flood of hope and life seemed to overflow my very soul.

"You are warm, you breathe, you speak, you smile—"

"You are right. You believed me dead, and so I was, Minnie—dead in sin and to all good things, as I am now alive and a new man."

"But that night you left me?"

"That night I was a madman—raging."

"Oh, hush!" I said, the terror of the scene coming back to me.

"I was mad—a raging lunatic, whom you would have done well to have consigned to Bedlam. Was I not mad when I dashed into the waves? It is yet incomprehensible that I was not dashed into eternity through my rashness; but, God be thanked, I was most mercifully preserved."

"How, when, and where?" I asked, excitedly, feeling certain now of possessing my own dear husband again.

"I will tell you. How long I was in the water I cannot say, but when I opened my eyes again I found myself on board a merchant ship, among a pandemonium of mutinous sailors who had outraged their captain, and were raging and tearing each other to pieces for jealous advancement.

"Truly I believed that I had crossed the Styx and reached the shades of hell. I flung an oath to one for clothing and warming my chilled body; to another I raged as he poured a flagon of fire-water in my mouth. I frightened them at last—awed them. They stood around me listening to my fierce denunciations, which I uttered in a strange mixture of Welsh and English. They even fetched their captain and the first mate, whom they had bound, to question me by their superior skill.

"The captain was a man who feared God upon the waters, and braved the wrath of man. He was calm. He resumed his post of command; the frightened sailors obeyed him. Under their joint ministrations

my diseased body was healed; my crazy oaths were calmed into a thoughtful sense of the dangers I had passed. The captain prayed aloud for my recovery, and I arose one morning sound in mind and restored in body.

"All this time the ship had been going like a house on fire, cutting her way over the waters, outward bound for China. I was forced to go with them, so many days elapsed after I had been picked up in which my incoherent ravings had given them no clue to my identification. But the captain soon drew a confession from me of my maddened attempt at self-destruction, which I remembered distinctly, strange though it may appear. He suggested that I should be put ashore at the Cape.

"I shall have a long life, probably, now to spend with you, Minnie. We shall often speak of this time of my life. It will take me years to tell you all I endured. I was left in the care of the good bishop of the colony. With him I remained until thoroughly re-established in health of body and mind, and the scales fell off mine eyes, and I was a freed man, no longer possessed by the power of Satan, nor suffering the bondage of a soul enslaved."

"And how did you come to the temple?"

"Many months elapsed before I could return home. Then I came *incognito* to Dolwyllyn, fairly puzzled how to put in an appearance before you and my household, who doubtless believed me dead. I

learned that *you* mourned me as dead; then I feared to show myself. Finally I came up here, and spent my time in devising means to gently awaken you to a knowledge of my existence. Like our old hero, Guy of Warwick, I felt that the former life which I had led needed ages of repentance."

"But did no one know of your existence?"

"Yes. I met old Cedric soon after entering the domains of the castle—met him, and he bravely encountered me, recognized me, and has aided me since I came here. Then your father knew. I wrote to him myself, and he came up here, unknown to you. And then our thoughtful friend, your dear mamma, kindly undertook to prepare you for our meeting. Is there anything else you wish to know, Minnie?"

"Many things there are," I said; "but first and foremost, I cannot, will not, believe that your dreadful self-accusations before were deserved. Why did you accuse yourself of killing Ginevra?"

My husband smiled. "Why! Indeed, I will tell you. My conscience was not free in a moral sense, for I had wished her dead more than once after I discovered her deception. We had quarrelled frequently; but as I say it before God and yourself, that day when the *dénoûment* took place, when I followed her to the balcony, and reproached her, she turned away from me defiantly, and hurled herself over the coping and disappeared into the waters. I

did not even touch her, but the sin of her death lay in my heart. I shall never believe myself wholly guiltless of her destruction."

"Let us kneel down and thank God for his mercies," I said, my heart full of praise and gratitude.

We knelt down, and my husband prayed with an understanding heart and reverent voice.

He was restored to me—doubly restored. A new and right spirit had been given to that beauteous form which I so dearly cherished.

* * * * *

I am now getting on in years. Youth and middle age have passed, but my husband has entered the last turn of earthly existence with me. He is still spared to write and I to read.

I find fresh gems of thought in his later compositions, which, old and feeble though I am, are more precious to me than those which were written in the glow of youth's early dream.

For now my husband is endued with a blessed sense of hope and trust in the future which tunes his harp to a sweeter song.

On looking over his earlier poems I seem to see through his wild aspirations, his fervent hopes, fixed though they were on the glitter of earth; and even in the poems written in the strength of his manhood, when the fiery hand of the tempter was upon him, and his songs broke forth in mad exultation, through

all and in all I see an indication, a yearning for that deeper, sweeter song which he sings now, even while his pulse grows fainter and his heart's first flush of youth is gone for ever.

Infinitely dearer is his poetry to me now, when his eyes, no longer fixed on the things of time, find the true simulacrum in the shadow of things to come, when his rapt soul is strengthened and refined as he sings looking upward, aspiring to the purer harmony of the heavenly spheres.

THE END.

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