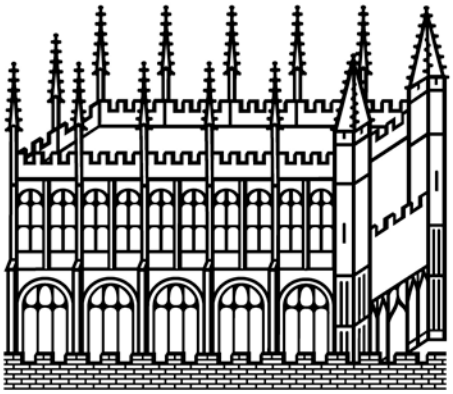

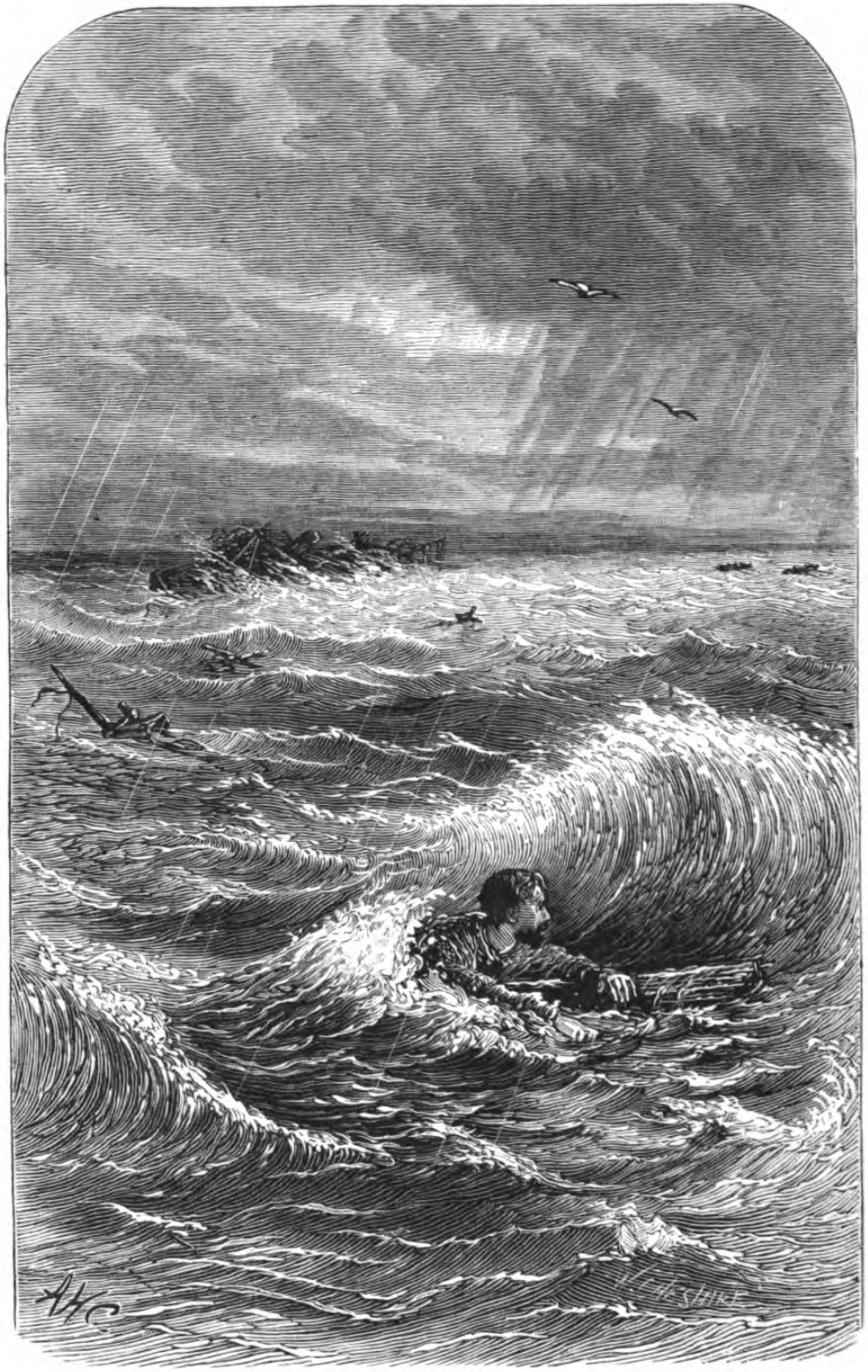

THE SHIPWRECK.—*Page* 188.

FOR CONSCIENCE' SAKE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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FOR CONSCIENCE' SAKE.

CHAPTER I.

SOUTHWELL AND ITS PEOPLE.

TWENTY years ago, a quiet little village nestled amongst some green hills not very far from London. It was so out of the way of ordinary traffic, and so shut in by heathy uplands, that hardly any murmur from the great ocean of human life which seethed and surged within a few miles distance of its ivy-clad church, disturbed its placid inhabitants by uneasy suggestions of an existence outside their small hamlet, so full of teeming energies for good and evil that either influence vibrated to the very ends of the earth.

London was at that time almost an unknown world to its tiny neighbour. No railway had as yet invaded the peaceful solitutes of Southwell; and as it did not lie in the track of the stage coaches which were then plying between the metropolis and the southern watering places, it possessed no means of access to the former, save by the private conveyances of one or two well-to-do farmers, whose old fashioned gigs, on marvellously rare occasions, might have been seen plodding along Piccadilly, or getting hopelessly jammed in Cheapside, to the extreme wrath and confusion of their owners. It was, however, a cosy and pleasant, if somewhat sleepy, little village. Nobody was very poor, and nobody—except perhaps the lord of the manor—was very rich, though as a matter of course, society divided itself into very distinct grades there, as elsewhere. The aristocracy was worthily, if sparingly, represented by the squire, the lawyer, the clergyman, and the doctor; who, with their families, constituted the *crême de la crême* of Southwellian "high life."

The rather more numerous middle class, was composed almost exclusively of the neighbouring agriculturists, whose rich acres enclosed the village

on every side, and who held themselves entirely aloof from the trading part of the community, which latter were, by common consent, put on a level with the better sort of working-people.

Truth to say, the retail dealers of Southwell could not be called an enlightened or refined body, taking them as a whole. Two little shops supplied tea, sugar, coffee, and other grocery articles. One ambitious proprietor rejoiced in being chemist, draper, tailor, and shoemaker, in his own individual person; and three days in the week a few joints of meat were ostentatiously displayed in a certain cottage window known as "Butcher Bennett's"; the said Bennett being the special plague of the unfortunate people who were obliged to depend on him for their daily beef and mutton, in consequence of a perverse disposition on his part, to confuse the orders he received, and send wrong joints to every house. Many sins of temper, both in mistresses and maids, had the unconscious Bennett to answer for; and ludicrous were the scenes which often took place in his small shop, when three or four of his ill-used customers met together, and in righteous indignation poured the vials of their wrath on his head! But words break no bones, and Bennett bore his scoldings

with such meek complacency—seeming rather to enjoy them in fact—that the angry women generally left him with a half-ashamed conviction that after all he knew his own business better than they did, and that if they were not satisfied with his selection of joints to which each had a special antipathy, it was because something was amiss with themselves, and not with the meat, or his judgment.

All this was twenty years ago. I dare say there are plate-glass windows in the picturesque winding street now, and the latest fashions, and the most *recherché* novelties in bonnets and in vegetables, in jewelry and jupons, displayed from behind mahogany counters by well-trained and experienced young persons of either sex. The sweet silent nook must have been drawn from its retirement ere this time, and become a straggling suburb of insatiate London, a partaker in its pleasures and resources, and, perchance, abominations. I do not wish to see this transformation even if it has taken place. I have no desire to mar the picture which was left on my memory twenty years ago—the picture of a cool, fresh, verdant, sheltered corner of this huge world, where life glided on harmoniously, in unison

with quiet pastoral scenes, with singing of birds, and bleating of lambs, and soft surging of ripe corn bending its head towards the reaper's sickle. I have a sense of rest, of infinite repose, whilst recalling Southwell to my mind, as it was in the days when I knew it.

"Life's endless toil and endeavour," give place for a moment, to the golden idleness of the early morning, before manhood's heritage of labour had wrinkled the brow, or saddened the heart, or whispered with low, ceaseless iteration—"This is not thy rest."

Nor should it be. Fair as was that morning scene, sweet as it is to look back upon, there is yet higher pleasure in scaling the meridian heights, barren though they be of flower, or tree, than in resting in youth's sunlit valley; for to the Christian traveller, every step which leads away from the glittering past, leads onwards to the more glorious future, and cheers the toil-worn climber with nearer glimpses of that "Vision of Peace," which *is* his "rest" and dwelling-place for ever!

So I would not live over again these old Southwell times. I have learned to love the city streets, nay, its darker ways, its lanes, and courts, and

alleys, better, in one sense, than green fields and shady woods. There is more music to my ear in the rush and roar of its living tide, than in "the sound of waves low-lapping on the shore." It is exquisite to be "alone with nature," doubtless—but at rare intervals. To riot in her summer beauty, and drink in health and gladness with every breath, is the best of all tonics for languid bodies and over-taxed brains—but to be enjoyed as a holiday, *not* as an end. The *end* of our short, solemn transit through a world travailing in tears and anguish to a holier birth, should surely have in it something nobler than the purest of mere earthly pleasures. And though, even in Christ's eyes, the lilies of the field, outvied in regal beauty the kingliest king that ever lived, those other creatures of his hand, round whom no beauty lingered, won from Him, not words of admiration truly, but his poured-out life. And so I think that many who love their Lord, would be well-content to live, as He did for the greater part, in the very midst of the sin-stricken multitudes, and for his sake would gladly bear a part of their bitter burden, if so they could give rest to the weary, and hope to the hopeless.

Southwell knew but little of that weary hope-

lessness which is so familiar to the half-famished denizens of every great town. The very poorest, the farm labourers and humble cottage-folk, had a rough abundance, utterly unknown to the artisan of Clerkenwell, or the weaver of Spitalfields. Nor did this favoured spot know anything of the *spiritual* destitution which too often goes hand-in-hand with physical wretchedness. An energetic, devoted, Christian man, filled the pulpit of its ancient church, and so diligently cultivated his peculiar plot, that the tares had almost disappeared from its surface, and a flourishing crop of true grain rewarded his exertions. In every cottage, he and his wife were welcome visitants; always ready either to rejoice at a birth, or sorrow over a bereavement, or give wise, kindly counsel in perplexing circumstances.

They were identified with their people in all the chances and changes of this mortal life, and received accordingly, from old and young, the loving reverence which was their due. The doors of every substantial farm-house opened wide to the "parson," and the best of cheer, from dairy and poultry-yard, was crowded on the tables with that profuse hospitality which is characteristic of the British yeoman when entertaining a guest whom he

delights to honour. This profusion was so great, in fact, that on his first introduction to the amenities of rural society, the rigidly abstemious clergyman, looked with a little dismay, and a shade of condemnation, on the stupendous feasts which were spread for his own, and his wife's delectation; he had, however, the tact and good feeling to refrain from any expression of disapprobation, and even so far to conform to the spirit of these demonstrations, as seriously to impair his digestive powers, by compelling them to exercise their functions on a variety of rich viands to which they were totally unaccustomed. The choice lying between a severe bilious attack, and the possibility of wounding the susceptibilities of his new parishioners, by an inadequate recognition of their efforts to treat him worthily, he unhesitatingly accepted the former alternative, and subjected his stomach to a martyrdom which eventually roused that suffering organ into the most furious rebellion. By-and-by, he made them understand that he went in and out amongst them, seeking not their's, but them; and more yearningly anxious to make them partakers of his unperishing riches, then they were to load him with tangible proofs of good-will. In the end,

his strong, quiet influence, laid its grasp upon man, woman, and child; though it was less quickly perceptible amongst the contented, well-fed portion of his flock, than amongst the village poor, to whom he had come with a message of such divine sweetness and love, that—believing it—their low, sordid lives, took on a sudden glory and became, as it were, transfigured.

There was, however, one refractory spirit over whom the vicar of Southwell often mourned. This was Langton Benham, the gay, good humoured, hospitable, master of the Manor House, and landlord of many homesteads. Very much addicted to fox-hunting, pheasant-shooting, and the like country-gentleman's diversions, and perhaps just a little too much inclined to the less innocent delights of the table—of the world, worldly—loving and beloved of his own—he turned a deaf ear to Mr. Gordon's public ministrations and private entreaties, maintaining that such religion as the latter preached and practised, was, no doubt, the right sort of thing for men of his cloth, but that generally adopted, it would turn the world upside down.

"So it would, my friend," was once the reply to an observation of this kind, "and to further

such a consummation, I am content to labour in season and out of season, by night and by day."

"And a fine mess you'll make of matters, if you get your own will! Where will the sowing, and the reaping, and the gathering into barns be, if all men and women go about preaching and praying, as you would have them do? We are not clothed like the lilies, nor fed like the ravens, in this dispensation, as you parsons call it, and must needs take thought for our bodily wants, until it shall please providence to relieve us of that necessity."

"Assuredly we must. I think you will remember an old saying which is to be found amongst many other wise common-sense utterances in an old book, to the effect that if a man will not labour, neither shall he eat. There is a record, too, of one who spent his life in preaching and praying, and yet whose own hands ministered to the wants of himself and his friends. Nay, I think there is little doubt but that the 'greatest One who e'er wore earth about Him,' wrought continuously during his early life at the lowly trade of a carpenter. 'Is not this the carpenter?' was the contemptuous question of his adversaries, implying that He habitually followed such occu-

pation. Who, then, would dare dissever honest, lawful work from the Christian calling? Not I, most certainly; only I would keep it in its right place—compel it to be my servant, not my master. These earthly tabernacles want a good deal of looking after, I admit; but there is a tenant within them that wants more, and even you must acknowledge that it is a senseless thing to honour the mansion above its lord."

"Why, yes, in the way you put it," answered the squire, with rather bad grace; "but we are not heathens, if we *don't* quite come up to your mark—we all go to church every Sunday morning, and the young ones say their prayers and read good books, and all that sort of thing; and you draw whatever sums you like from my pocket for your schools, and charities, and blankets, and the rest of it—really, I don't see that we are much to be found fault with," winding up his speech with re-assured confidence.

"Fault!" exclaimed the clergyman, laying his white, scholarly hand on the shoulder of his friend. "Fault! why, I am only trying to make you see that you are heir—or might be—to possessions so vast, so glorious, that your thousands of broad acres are not worth a comparison beside them.

It is my exceeding fear lest you should cast all this away from you, that makes me thus earnest in reminding you of its existence."

"Well, you are a good fellow, I know," said the easily-pacified squire, "and some day or other I'll have a long talk with you about these things; but, just now, you see, my bailiff is waiting for instructions about one of the farms, and when he is dismissed there are others to come, so you won't mind my asking you to step into the house and have a few words with my wife and Lucy, whilst I transact these mundane matters. I shall see you at lunch, of course; the women won't let you off without staying for that."

"Many thanks to you and them, but I have barely time to ask Mrs. Benham how she is. It is one of my class-mornings, you know, and I must be at my post by twelve o'clock. Go off to your work," continued Mr. Gordon, holding out his hand with a smile, which ended in a sigh, "and I will go to mine, after a minute's chat with your wife."

"Good-bye, then; but come again soon. Little Lucy declares you are the best man alive, and even her old father thinks she isn't far wrong in her estimate; so don't take it wrong if I contradict you now and then."

"Not very likely," was the laughing reply; and then Mr. Gordon pushed open the house-door, and found his way unannounced to the little morning-room, where Mrs. Benham and her eldest daughter were usually to be found at that time of the day. He greeted them with his clear, pleasant, kindly voice, that always sounded like a benediction, and asked if he could do anything for either of them down in the village, "If you'll trust me with any orders, I will deliver them faithfully; my memory is excellent."

"Oh, yes, we have proved that many times! It is astonishing to me how you *can* burden yourself with the insignificant affairs of so many of us. I do believe, if we asked it, you would make it a regular part of your day's work, to call here, and at the Laurels, and at Dr. Meredith's, and convey 'orders' to the village people. But we won't impose additional duties on you to-day, at all events, especially as you seem in such a hurry to be gone. Let Lucy bring you a glass of sherry. The lads can wait whilst you drink that, surely, even if you won't stay to lunch."

"They could, and would; but don't move, Lucy, you shall give me the sherry another time. My boys must be taught punctuality by deed as well

as word, and I must go, after I have had a look at your drawing, my dear. What a clever little sketch! take care my wife does not deprive you of it; she raves about our fine old church, and this is the very best view that I have seen of it."

Lucy lifted up her pretty young face to the one that was bending over her, and answered, with a smile, that the sketch was not worth Mrs. Gordon's acceptance, but that she was heartily welcome to it, if she cared to have it, only in that case, she must not see a similar one which Minnie Grey had just finished, or *her* poor attempt would be irremediably disgraced."

"Not quite that, Lucy, though Minnie has wondrous skill with her palette and brushes, I confess; but this pretty little thing would do credit even to her; so I accept it gratefully, my dear, in my wife's name, and when you want to see it again you must pay a visit to my study, where you shall find it hung in a most honourable place, I promise."

He carefully rolled up the drawing, and shook hands gleefully with the young artist, who was hardly prepared for such a sudden raid upon her work, but who yet blushed with delight at his admiration of it, and felt that she loved him a little better

than before, if that were possible. For we did love him—all of us. He had taken us all by storm, ten years before this little episode occurred, with his kindly, tender, lowly ways, and forced us to love him as our brother and our friend, even whilst we devoutly believed him to be the best and greatest who had ever walked the earth since Apostolic days.

There are only two other inhabitants of Southwell with whom we have any concern. Mrs. Grey and her daughter, about whom there are a few things to tell before we come to that point in our story when Mr. Gordon stole the sketch. The next chapter will show them to us. Mrs. Grey and our dear Minnie, who loved, and suffered, and conquered, "For conscience' sake."

CHAPTER II.

MINNIE.

THE Manor House, the ancient home of the Benham family, stood in a very fair domain, about one mile distant from the village.

Round about it on all sides, stretched a lovely undulating park, filled with grand old timber, here and there grouped into dense woodlands, in and out of which wound broad, mossy pathways, soft to the foot, and pleasant to the eye. Large herds of deer grazed at ease on the short, fine grass of the verdant slopes; wild flowers grew in rare beauty and profusion everywhere; the woods were rife with musical bird and insect life; and from several gentle eminences extensive views were obtainable of the fertile country outside the park boundaries. Nature had done much, and

art a little, to make up the sum of all this loveliness, their joint results being so admirably combined, that it was impossible to say where the one began and the other ended; except, perhaps, in one little spot where it was evident that some controlling power had subdued and directed the wild luxuriance of undisciplined mother earth. This was a small rustic cottage, and wide-spreading garden, standing about midway between the House and the southern side of the park, and perfectly idyllic in its soft, dreamlike repose. Hidden from observation by the character of the grounds, it burst suddenly upon the view, at a bend in one of the side paths, like some unreal, poetic vision.

I see it all before me—the little rose-covered, thatch-roofed cottage, with its sparkling diamond-paned windows, glinting through the woodbine and blush roses—the ivy-covered porch, the miniature paradise of wood and water, and green velvety turf, broken up into patches of resplendent bloom—the solemn shade of stately tree—the fair open glade, stealing away towards the covert of the distant woods—the sunshine, and the ineffable odours, and hum of rapturous insect life, and all the rampant joyousness of June!

Originally it had been the home of the head

gardener, but, in course of time, its six rooms became insufficient to accommodate his rapidly increasing family, and he removed to a larger and less picturesque abode in the village. For a year or two after this, it remained tenantless, and might eventually have fallen into utter dilapidation, had not an old dependant of the Benhams come back to her native place, widowed and poor, and thankful to accept the shelter of its walls for herself and one little child.

Mrs. Grey was the daughter of Mr. Benham's bailiff, or land-steward as he might more accurately have been called; though the squire professed to act in the latter capacity himself, and with amiable self-delusion, nourished the idea that he was thereby setting an example of personal activity and economy, to other landed proprietors. When poor Norton fell ill and died, however, his master found how much of a sinecure this self-imposed office had been, and what an enormous amount of real hard work had rested on the shoulders of his faithful follower, whose value he only learned when the grave had closed over his head.

To befriend the only child of one who had served him with such zeal and fidelity, was a

simple matter of justice; and the warm-hearted squire eagerly seized the chance which Mrs. Grey's widowhood afforded, of putting her at once in easy circumstances, and thus in some measure discharging the debt owing to her dead father. Though she was not quite penniless, and in that primitive community could have lived on her own small income, without trenching on the generosity of her friends at the great house. The hint which she had ventured to throw out on the subject, was, however, so promptly repelled, that fearing to offend by pressing her point, Mrs. Grey at length acquiesced in the arrangement which put her in possession of the cottage in the park, rent-free, and a full supply of all her material wants from the home-farm and dairy.

Mrs. Benham had followed up her husband's liberality, by furnishing the tiny dwelling throughout, with such refined simplicity, that many a lordly mansion would have looked vulgar by comparison, and a flush of surprise and pleasure, lighted up the widow's sad face, as she led her daughter from room to room, pointing out their several advantages.

"See, this is surely meant for your own little room, Minnie! why it is cosy as a linnet's nest!

Here are books and pictures, and flowers—and a great wide closet for all your boxes and general lumber. What would we have given for such a closet in our London lodgings! I think it is nearly as large and as light as the place we were accustomed to call your bed-room at Islington—child what is the matter?" she suddenly asked, for a great choking sob fell upon her ear, and on turning round, she saw with consternation, that big tears were rolling down the little girl's cheeks.

"My darling, what is the matter?" she repeated, "don't you like this place?"

"Like it! oh, mamma! it is wonderful—it is just what I have fancied heaven must be. I don't know what made me cry, except the surprise, and oh, the delight!" she said, with a vain attempt to stifle her sobs.

"Is that all? My dear Minnie, you are so odd. Whatever will Mrs. Benham think, if you begin to cry in this way before her? She'll think you very strange and ungrateful."

"Oh, no, she shall not mamma. I shall get over my foolishness directly; but do look at these roses, and smell the woodbine! and we are to live here always—always?" asked the child

with an almost passionate longing in her voice and eyes.

"If we like to do so," replied her mother; "they are very good to give us such a home. God has sent other friends to care for us, since it has pleased Him to take dear papa. We must thank *Him* first of all."

"Yes, mamma," said Minnie, softly and reverently.

She was a pale, slight, slip of a girl, with one of those unformed faces which may either develop into exceeding beauty, or its extreme opposite. Her eyes were the only noticeable feature at present: large, dark, and luminous—full of depth and tenderness to those who could interpret their unspoken language. Her mother was not one of those so gifted, however. Dearly as she loved her child, Mrs. Grey sometimes felt, with a vague sense of injury, that she had no power to read the riddle of her daughter's mind. That fair page was covered with strange hieroglyphs, to which she possessed no key.

Minnie's fits of abstraction; her indifference to ordinary amusements and companions; her intense sympathies with certain things and people, and equally intense dislike to others; her love of solitude and reading, "unnatural in a child of nine

years old;" her shy, sensitive shrinking from either praise or blame;—were all so many dark problems to the poor mother, who passed many anxious hours in striving to account satisfactorily for Minnie's "odd ways." "I'm sure she never got them from me," would be the conclusion, "nobody ever thought *me* different to other children, that ever I heard of."

Which was pure matter of fact, for our Minnie, when she first came amongst us Southwell people, was a "little original," whose like is not often seen; whilst her good mother was of a type that is sown broad-cast, east and west, north and south.

A world of feeling and imagination, united to a power of loving and suffering, almost awful in intensity, existed already in the young shut-up heart, like the luscious fragrance of the rose in its hard green bud. A town-bred child, accustomed only to the dull prosaic aspect of a poor street in Islington, and to the society of two simple, loving, but totally uncomprehending natures, she had hitherto found no outlet for the pent-up life within her; its restless movements had oppressed her; its dim gropings after light had all been baffled, and filled her with a brooding melancholy. She

pondered many things in her childish, premature wisdom, and the end of it all was an indefinite idea, that life—as she knew it—was a mistake.

Why were so many men and women created for the sole purpose of earning enough to keep themselves in this world from one day to another? For this seemed the object of all whom she met—a dreary, drudging round of toil, for a poor unworthy aim! Of course she knew that there was another life for which this was supposed to be but a preparation; and her own father and mother seemed to have some real pleasure in the anticipation of it. Arguing, however, from the known to the unknown, this small philosopher in petticoats, deduced very little comfort from the thought of passing eternity in circumstances which, from all she could gather, were but a modified form of the dull routine of earthly pursuits—a kind of walking up and down hard, shining streets, singing psalms for ever—which seemed to Minnie a monotonous and profitless occupation for immortal spirits.

"Mamma," she inquired one day, "can you tell me what people do in heaven?"

"What does your Bible say about it, my dear?" replied Mrs. Grey, rather dismayed by the question.

"Not much, except in Revelations, and I don't understand that book so well as the others, though I like it best of all. It says there, that they rest not day or night, but keep on singing the same words always. I think that must be rather tiresome."

Mrs. Grey looked up from her work, excessively shocked. "How dare you utter such dreadful thoughts, Minnie? What can be more blessed employment than praising our Saviour continually? I am grieved beyond measure to hear you speak so irreverently."

"Don't be angry, Mamma, dear," said the child submissively, "it will all be very good I dare say, only as I don't care so very much for music, I would rather not be obliged to listen to it always. If I might only *do* something for Jesus, wouldn't it please Him as much as playing on a golden harp always?"

"My dear, you must not try to discover what God has not revealed. It is enough for you to know that in heaven you will be very good, and never have naughty thoughts or tempers, and of course you will be happy. Who can be otherwise in the New Jerusalem?"

"But what is it *like*, mamma? I want to know so much."

"But I cannot tell you, Minnie, nor can anyone. I must beg, my dear, that you will not give way to sinful curiosity on such a subject."

And this was how Mrs. Grey invariably stifled the child's eager yearnings for a little light in the thick darkness. A sincere and humble Christian herself, though of a somewhat narrow and rigid school, it never for a moment occurred to her to reason on what she read, or to start embarassing questionings on any point not clearly revealed. It was enough for her, that eternal life was to be the portion of all true believers in Jesus, and that this life would be something very blessed and glorious. Of its actual character she had formed no conceptions whatever; in fact, any attempt to penetrate its solemn mysteries, seemed to her, as she said to Minnie, the height of sinful curiosity.

So her little daughter was thrown back upon her own imaginations; which became very painful, torturing doubts, when at length her father left her, to go forth into that unknown darkness from which her spirit shrank with awful, nameless dread.

He had died with a smile on his face, and the word "Jesus" on his lip, and had seemed quite fearless himself; but for all that, she thought of

him with fear and trembling, and pictured him standing before some strange severe Presence, on a great white throne, unapproachable and unloveable.

"Oh, my dear, dear father," sobbed the child many a time when her mother supposed her to be sleeping soundly in her bed, "if I might only go to you and put my arms round you, and kiss you, and tell you that *we* love you still, perhaps you would not feel so sad."

But God was about to teach His troubled little Minnie in his own pitiful way, that she had no need to mourn for her father. Accidentally, Mrs. Grey turned into a strange church one Sunday, and the sermon touched on the subject which weighed so heavily on the child's heart. Only a few words were spoken, suggestive rather than dogmatic, as words on such a theme must ever be, but they dissipated for ever that painful vision of a long, straight, golden street, with a throne at the end of it, and pale white-robed figures pacing to and fro, keeping time to their own footsteps with a low melancholy chant. Henceforth, Minnie's ideas of heavenly bliss were tinctured with more of light and love. A faint imperfect vision of "The Plains of Heaven," somewhat as our great painter

saw them, replaced the glittering city which her imagination had constructed from the symbolic language of Revelations; and the artist-soul of the child revelled in supplying such details to the mental picture, as she could glean from her varied reading. For she could only see the beauty, even of this world, through the medium of books. Her eyes were constrained to dwell, from year to year, on the depressing ugliness of the neighbourhood where, for economy's sake, her parents had chosen to reside. At long intervals she caught a glimpse of the West-end parks, or of Hampstead Heath, but these peeps at trees and flowers were brief and seldom, for the Greys were too poor to afford many holidays, and her father, intent on making some provision for those whom his failing health might soon oblige him to leave, did not suffer himself to waste many precious hours in mere pleasure-taking. And thus, but for her books of travels and poetry, Minnie would have grown up in almost as much ignorance of this world as of the other. Even with all this preparedness, the first actual contact with scenes of which she had only dreamed up to that moment, overpowered her with an ecstacy of surprise. All that wealth of colour, the freshness, the purity, the subtile incense

of the flowers, appealed to unrecognized but powerful instincts, and filled her with an almost solemn rapture, bringing a gush of tears instead of the delighted exclamations her mother was expecting to hear.

"It was Minnie's odd way again," she thought, with a sigh, as she lay down to rest on the night of their arrival at the cottage; "what a pity that she never could take pleasure or pain like a reasonable child! The Benhams would think that she had been very badly brought up, and yet these eccentricities had been unsparingly rebuked, and every possible effort made to train up the child in the way wherein she would *not* walk."

Poor Mrs. Grey vexed her conscientious soul with these reflections, until she gradually sank into temporary oblivion both of Minnie's shortcomings and her own imperfect educational success.

She was a little comforted next day, however, by Mrs. Benham's undisguised admiration of the *naive* delight with which the child contemplated some of her own water-colour drawings, that were hung up in the little sitting-room, and which had been overlooked in the excitement of their first coming in.

She had come down to the cottage early on the following morning, for the double purpose of letting Mrs. Grey feel at ease in her new home, and of making acquaintance with Minnie, whom she had never seen.

"If she's at all presentable, she shall have lessons at the Manor House," said the lady to herself, "for it would be rather cruel to deprive the poor child of a useful education, and she could not gain it elsewhere, as we have brought her away from the good, cheap schools that abound in London."

Accordingly, after a warm welcome, and a long chat over old times with Mrs. Grey, Mrs. Benham desired to be introduced to Minnie, who was out in the garden whilst the interview between her mother and their benefactress was going on. With some trepidation Mrs. Grey went to look for her daughter, and returned in a few minutes, leading her by the hand up to Mrs. Benham, who sat patiently waiting to receive her. Minnie's unlucky star caused her at this moment to raise her eyes, when just above their visitor's head, she recognized a sketch of their own little cottage. Quickly drawing her hand from her mother's, and forgetting everything but the picture, she ran up

to it, scrambled on a chair, and fairly clapped her hands in her surprise and joy.

"Look, look, mamma! There's your window and mine, and the roses, and the woodbine, and the ivy all over the porch, and every little thing just exactly as it is! Oh, I wish I could do something like it!"

"Oh, dear, what is to be done with her?" said Mrs. Grey, in an access of despair; "Minnie, I am ashamed of you; don't you see who is in the room?"

The child turned instantly, and slid from her chair looking so conscience-stricken that Mrs. Benham held out her hand with a good-tempered laugh—

"Don't scold her, Mary; she has paid me a very great compliment. Come here, little one, and tell me why you like paintings so much?"

"I don't know, ma'am," she answered shyly; all her natural timidity returning in full force.

"But would you like to learn how to paint and draw?"

"Oh, beyond everything!" the reply burst out now with eager boldness, for the question had surprised the one secret of Minnie's life. From earliest childhood it had been a cherished wish to

be able "to make pictures;" and the one pleasure of her solitary existence had been to look in at the windows of print-shops, and scan every engraving until she knew each one almost line by line.

"Then I don't see why you should be disappointed. We must not let her run wild, you know," said Mrs. Benham, turning to Mrs. Grey, "I have been planning about her studies already. If you cannot think of anything better, suppose that for a time at least, she comes up regularly to the House, and has her lessons with my girls? Miss Scott will suit her instructions to Minnie's eapacity, and if there *is* any peculiar aptitude for drawing, we must put her under Saville's directions; he comes to us three times a week."

"You are too good," faltered Mrs. Grey, "but would such familiar association with your own children be quite right?"

"Oh, yes, for the present at all events. They have so few friends in this deserted little village—and children always get on better when they have others to work and play with. Let us do the best we can to make our young ones happy, and trust that none of them will be the worse for being together a few hours in the day."

In after years Mrs. Benham admitted to her-

self that she had not been quite wise in insisting on this arrangement, and that but for Minnie's own good sense, the consequences of it might have become embarrassing. It was carried out, however, to the great delight of the little folks at the Manor House, and to Minnie's solid advantage. She was an enthusiast at her books, as at everything, and was soon ahead of Lucy Benham (who was one year older) in all their mutual studies except music, where Lucy had the superiority. The park and gardens were Minnie's favourite school however. In them she spent hours of positive rapture, searching for wild flowers and ferns, which she soon began to classify, with the help of a few elementary botanical lessons from Miss Scott.

Her acute perception of the beauty of form and colour was gratified to its utmost bent by these pursuits, and Mrs. Benham quickly called in Mr. Saville's aid towards the full development of what was evidently a great natural gift; and Minnie toiled through the first difficulties with unflagging energy, soon producing spirited little pencil sketches, and truthful water-colour representations of flowers and fruit.

Meanwhile her spiritual education was pro-

gressing under Mr. Gordon's guidance, to an extent which surprised and delighted that single-hearted pastor beyond measure.

He was himself almost a stranger at Southwell when the Greys took up their residence in the cottage, but he quickly won the confidence of Mrs. Grey, who imparted to him with a feeling of relief in thus dividing her responsibilities and cares, all the anxieties she suffered on account of her daughter's "uncanny" ways and perverse derelictions from that straight path of juvenile propriety, in which it was the desire of her mother's heart to see her walk.

Mr. Gordon listened with quiet attention until the widow's tale was fairly told, and then lifted a smiling, comforting face from the hand on which it had rested whilst Mrs. Grey was speaking, and astonished her by declaring that she had portrayed a character of unusual promise.

"This vine outside your window is somewhat difficult to confine within formal limits, Mrs. Grey; but what lovely, clasping tendrils it throws out everywhere, and what rich purple clusters it will bear by and by! I think that future years will show some analogy between Minnie and the tree."

"I will try to hope so, sir, since you think it possible; but I can assure you it is a great cross to see her so different in many things, from what a well-instructed child should be," answered Mrs. Grey despondingly.

"Sometimes we create our own crosses," returned Mr. Gordon calmly; "will you let me see what influence I can gain over this unmanageable child?"

"Certainly. Minnie shall be at your command whenever you are kindly disposed to have a few words with her."

"Where is she now then? I never like to miss present opportunities."

"Somewhere in the garden I believe, sir, or rambling about the park. Shall I send Jane for her?"

"No thank you, Mrs. Grey. I will find her myself on my way home; we shall be the best of friends I can foresee. These wild, enthusiastic natures are after my own heart; if I may venture to say so without sinking in your estimation," said Mr. Gordon, kindly shaking hands with Minnie's mother, before going on his quest for her daughter.

He had not far to seek. Just outside the

garden he caught sight of her, kneeling by the mossy trunk of a huge tree, and diligently searching for something; what, he could not at that distance see.

A few quick steps brought him to her side.

"What are you looking for my child?" he asked, gently laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Ferns, sir. I am learning their names and all about them from Miss Scott, and I want to take a few specimens with me when I go to the House to-morrow. There is one here that I have not seen before, perhaps you can tell me what it is, sir," said Minnie, so anxious to know the particular place which her new fern occupied amongst its brethren, that she forgot to be shy and afraid of the clergyman.

"Yes, it's an old favourite of mine. Come and sit down by me here, and I will tell you all I know about it."

Mr. Gordon told Minnie many things, not only concerning her fern, but also about the weeds, and grasses, and wild flowers; gathering handfuls of each as he spoke, to explain and enforce his lesson.

The child's large eyes were fixed upon him all

the time with a steady, wondering gaze of intensest interest.

"Thank you, sir," she said, when at last he paused in his explanations. "How much you know! and how beautiful everything is!—everything!" she repeated, emphatically.

"Did you always think so, Minnie?"

Her face changed in a moment.

"No," she said, sadly, "I did not think anything good or beautiful once. I must have been very wicked. I thought the world such a sad, ugly place, and that God could not be very kind or he would not have made it so. I know better now. How sinful it was to think God was not good, just because I did not *see* his goodness!"

"A mistake, my dear, that was all," replied Mr. Gordon, so cheerfully, that the brimming eyes restrained their tears; "we all make blunders in our ignorance of the truth sometimes; which our Father is not extreme to mark, otherwise we should never dare to approach Him. But how is it that you 'know better now'?"

"Oh, because the world is not ugly or sad. It's a glorious, glorious place! I am so happy all day long that I don't know what to do. I lie here sometimes and cry for very joy. And I

love God now. I am glad papa is with Him. Heaven *must* be full of delights when earth has so many. If I were not so very, very happy, I could almost wish to go to heaven, too."

"And leave your mother here to grieve?"

"I had not thought of that. That would be very selfish and cruel. I'm afraid I never shall be *quite* good, like those children mamma tells me about. But is it not right to love God and wish to be with Him?"

"Yes, my child," said Mr. Gordon, looking tenderly at the wistful face, "only let us be sure that we love Him for Himself, and not for his gifts alone. Tell me, Minnie, could you live as joyfully and thankfully in your old Islington lodgings, as you do here?"

"No," said the child, slowly, and with a perceptible shudder, "I cannot bear those long dul streets, and the small, dark rooms where we used to live."

"My poor little sensitive plant! beauty and light are vital needs to you, no doubt. Yet the time will come, Minnie, when your eyes will open to a grander beauty than that of these outside shows, and you would even be content to spend your whole life, as *He* spent his, in lighting up

the dark places of the earth with faint reflections of his perfect light. But this time has not come yet. You do well to rejoice in the fair works of his hand that cover the earth at every step, for those who have eyes to see. It is a good thing to see *his* impress on the butterfly's wing, and on the commonest weed that grows. Yes, it is a good thing to have fellowship with Him in joy, and gratitude, and praise! But there is a still holier fellowship given to some—a fellowship of suffering and self-sacrifice, which is a very drinking of the cup that He drank of, and being baptized with his own baptism. Therefore, my child, if in the years to come, the brightness dies out of your life for a time, remember that it is only God's way of bidding you 'come up higher,' and cling a little more closely to Him, and lean more heavily on his arm. Now go and play: we will talk of these things another day. I must hurry away and see young Leslie before he leaves for Australia. Good-bye, little friend, I shall have many things to say to you as we become better acquainted."

"I shall always like to hear them, sir," said Minnie, wondering in herself how it was that she felt so completely at ease with this good, nice,

clever man, and how she seemed to understand, not only his words, but his thoughts, better than she could those of her own mother.

"I suppose it is just because he *is* so very good," she said to herself, as she slowly retraced her steps to the cottage. "He was not angry with me for having been bad and miserable once, as mamma used to be. And he does not think it strange that I love the fields and woods, even though he did say that there were better things to be done than seeking flowers and ferns all day—at least, if he didn't quite say that, he meant it, and I daresay he's right. But then he seemed to think that I might go on being happy in my own way, for a long time yet. How good he is to take so much trouble with a child like me! and how dearly I will love him!"

CHAPTER III.

FAREWELLS.

WHILST Minnie took her leisurely way home, Mr. Gordon walked rapidly through the park, down the village, and onwards, to a farm-house that lay about a mile beyond it; his thoughts meanwhile dwelling with singular persistency on his young parishioner.

"She is no ordinary child, assuredly," was his inward comment; "that ardent, loving soul is marked out for more than usual suffering, I fear. It must be so in a world like this. I must accustom her to look on trial as the discipline of love, or when trouble comes, she will regard it as a destroying angel, and lose all trust in the God whom she rejoices in as the author of *all joy*. I wish her mother were a better ally; she knows no more of her child's heart than of an old Hebrew

manuscript. Ah, Frank, is that you? I was on my way to see you."

"Then for once we were moved by a common impulse, for I was on *my* way to see you; but I'm very willing to turn back. Let me help you up the hill."

Mr. Gordon put his arm through Frank Leslie's, as the latter turned and walked by his side, leaning a little on the younger and stronger man, as they ascended the gentle rise to the house, for he had been working all through the hot July day, and was feeling spent and worn, and not quite in the mood for giving such a cheering adieu as he could have wished to the young adventurer who was about to risk his fortunes in Australia.

It was an unheard of thing for an old Southwell family to send one of its members out to the distant colonies; but the Leslies were a little in advance of their neighbours in many things.

Frank had been educated in London, and afterwards studied for the medical profession, in order to gratify a whim of his father's, who insisted that the lad was exactly cut out for driving about in a carriage and gracefully accepting guinea fees, which was the sum total of a doctor's duties in Mr. Leslie's idea. Frank, however, had the

English love of free, roving life too strong within him, to brook the slow, plodding existence which he knew was generally the first stage in a young practitioner's progress; and after obtaining his diploma, and thus proving that he had at least given the practice of physic some attention, he made up his mind to abandon it altogether, and turn his early knowledge of farming into a profitable investment on the other side of the globe.

His father's consent to the scheme was obtained without much difficulty, but it was long ere his mother could be brought to sanction the wilful exile of her youngest born.

"*Why* would you leave us, Frank?" was her constant answer to his persuasions, "there is enough and to spare for Harry and you too, even though you give up your profession entirely. Stay at home my boy; the mere thought of your taking this long voyage, is like death itself; how shall I bear the reality?" And Mrs. Leslie would push the thick brown curls away from her son's broad forehead, with fond, trembling fingers, and look at him appealingly through a mist of tears.

"Dear mother, you make it such a hard matter for me to do what is simply right, that I have scarcely courage to persevere. Yet what am I to

do? idleness would be the death of me as you know; so would the career of a medical man. Harry, as a matter of course and right, will succeed my father on the farm, and if another is taken for me, it would most likely be at a distance which would separate me from you almost as effectually as if I were in Australia. Why I'm the very model of a successful settler! With these long legs, and this broad chest, and an ingrained knowledge of all farming matters, and the smattering of medical science that I have picked up, I am equipped at all points. Let me go, mother dear, and in ten years I will come back, tired of roving, and rich as a Jew, and ready to stay with you to the end of my days, and to be god-father to all Harry's brats in a becoming old bachelor fashion."

"Ten years, Frank, and I am fifty, and your father five years older! We shall never see your face again, if you persist in going to this strange, dreadful country."

"The finest in the world when properly colonised by enterprising individuals like your son; come, be like your own unselfish self, and send me away with a blessing, for you know that I cannot go without it."

So Mrs. Leslie, who loved this brown-haired handsome lad a thousand times better than her own life or happiness, seeing at last that his heart was set upon going, withdrew all opposition, and when the matter was irrevocably settled, resolutely put aside her own grief lest his last hours at home should be embittered by witnessing it.

All was prepared, and he was to sail from Liverpool in a week from the evening when he and Mr. Gordon met. The two walked slowly on towards the Grange, Frank's eye resting lovingly on the picture of homely abundance which the large, comfortable old house, with its well-kept garden, orchard, and large barns and ricks, presented.

"I shall think of the old place a good many times, Mr. Gordon," he said, "and still more frequently of the dear old mother. You won't let her break her heart about me, will you? I shall expect you will be her special comfort when I am gone. My father and Harry won't know what to say; men never *do* know how to sympathise with women's troubles, at least very few do; but you seem able to look down into everybody's heart, and I know my mother will always have a comforter when you are at hand."

"And a far better one than I, Frank, at all times," said the clergyman softly, "but I will do my best, my boy; I can't blame you for going away, and yet we old people suffer sadly through the whims of you young ones. However you must fulfil your destiny, I suppose, and your mother will get used to it in time, especially if you let her hear from you at every opportunity. Though you must count upon your letters being almost public property; Southwell feels its honour so largely implicated in the success of your venture, that it will claim to be kept well informed thereupon."

"Southwell shall be proud of its distinguished son," replied Frank, laughing; "I intend to multiply the five hundred pounds which my father has been good enough to risk on my undertaking, by ten in no time, and come back nothing less than a millionaire."

"We hope even better things of you than that," said Mr. Gordon, gently; and tired as he was, he went on to tell the young man what those better hopes were, in few but weighty words, not very much regarded at the time, but deeply remembered in after years.

At the house all was confusion, for the whole

family were to accompany Frank to Liverpool the next day, intending not to lose sight of him until the very last moment of the ship's being in dock. Mr. Gordon, therefore made his visit a very brief one, especially as Frank insisted on walking back with him across the park.

"And on my way back, I can call and say good-bye to Mrs. Grey. She was forgotten in the general leave-taking this morning, and I should not like her to feel slighted; especially as my mother has taken a fancy to that elfish child of hers, and will no doubt often come down to the cottage to see her favourite and talk about me, so I must leave a good impression on Mrs. Grey's memory that she may be the better able to sympathize with my poor mother's sorrow."

"This love for your mother is the best thing in you yet, Frank. Never let it die out, my boy; or be overpowered by a different passion."

Frank looked quickly at Mr. Gordon, as if to be sure that he understood him.

"My mother is the dearest and best in the world," he said; "to love her less than I do would be simply impossible. I don't think I shall ever love any woman *but* my mother."

Mr. Gordon smiled, but gave no direct answer.

They were close to the cottage, and he only stayed to press the boy's hand and whisper an earnest prayer for his safety until they might meet again, and then hurried away to plead in secret for Divine protection over the strong young heart, that was about to cleave a path for itself through rough ways or smooth, in dauntless reliance on its own energy alone.

Frank trusted in the strength of his own right arm, deeming it sufficient for all his needs; and because of this blind presumption, the heart of his faithful friend yearned over him, like the heart of a mother over a helpless infant alone in the midst of a stormy sea, and followed him continually with prayers, which were doubtless a fence about him wherever he went.

Frank tapped at the cottage door, and introduced himself to Mrs. Grey, who sat knitting in the twilight. He did not notice Minnie who was in a dark corner of the room.

"Mrs. Grey, I am come to say good-bye. We start early in the morning for Liverpool, so I have come down to shake hands with you and Minnie, and ask you to wish me God-speed."

"There is little need to *ask* that, Mr. Frank. Nobody in Southwell will pray for it more heartily

than I shall, for your mother's sake; I can't bear to think of her grief! She is sure to break down when you are fairly gone, and sorrow, at her time of life, often helps to shorten one's days. What a pity it seems that you couldn't be persuaded to stay at home."

Mrs. Grey's sympathy was generally of a desponding kind, and had a tendency to make the recipient ungratefully willing to dispense with it; which was the case in the present instance.

The thought of bringing his mother to a premature grave by his obstinacy, did not lighten Frank's heart, already sore enough, and for a moment he very heartily repented the courteous impulse which had induced him to bend his steps to the cottage that evening. Only for a moment, however; the next, he laughed in his old good-humoured way, and said that his mother, and Mrs. Grey, too, would be in the very prime of their days when he came back, and that in the meantime he should expect Minnie to fill his place at the Grange so worthily, that even his mother would look on the exchange as a blessing.

Minnie had hitherto been a silent listener, but she now emerged from her corner and looked steadily up into Frank Leslie's face.

"You don't quite mean what you say," was her grave response, "I cannot fill your place in any way; but I can go and see Mrs. Leslie every day, and talk about you all the time."

"Thank you Minnie. You are the wisest little woman that ever I met with! Solomon himself could not have hit on a more effectual method of drying my mother's tears" (but you are a dreadful child for all that, and have an embarrassing precocity in the detection of humbug, he mentally added).

Minnie subsided amongst her books again, and Mrs. Grey, not quite comprehending the little passage of words which had just taken place, returned to the safe ground of inquiries after Frank's future movements. How long would he be detained in Liverpool before the ship sailed? What sort of a captain was on board? Did he know exactly where he was going, and what he meant to do on arriving at his destination? Were they black savages, or only olive natives who would be his future friends? To these and similar interrogatives, Frank returned brief, laughing answers, and then took up his hat and held out his hand a second time.

"Well, it *must* be good-bye now, Mrs. Grey,

for I have no more time to spare. I hope you will be looking just as young and well when I see you again, as you do now; and Minnie,"—he would have added some random hope, that in ten years time he might see that young lady a happy wife and mother, but the dark solemn eyes were fixed on his face with deliberate scrutiny, and he wisely abstained from taking another downward step in her estimation.—"And Minnie," he continued, after a momentary pause, during which he had the wit to change his concluding sentence, "you will remember your promise touching daily visits to the Grange?"

"Yes, I will remember," said she, gravely.

Then he shook hands with them both, and went away. Looking back when he had gone about fifty yards he saw that the child had come out of the house, and was standing just outside the porch. Wondering what strange impulse had moved her to come and look after him, he waved his hand as a final farewell; but she ran swiftly up to the spot where he stood, holding out a great handful of splendid forget-me-nots.

"Will you take these, Mr. Frank? They will be a sign to you that we do not forget!"

"Thank you, Minnie," he answered, carefully

suppressing all indications of the amusement which her earnestness provoked. "I will take them, and keep them, and bring them back to you some day. Shall I?"

"I hope so. I shall be glad to see you back again," and Minnie disappeared as rapidly as she had come. Frank stood watching her, until she entered the porch, when she turned and waved her hand.

He never forgot the scene. The slight angular little figure in a short black frock, with thin white arms, and a pale thin face; and two great, Eastern eyes, shining out from beneath straight black eyebrows, and thick dark hair hanging down to her waist in long plaits. Altogether, a quaint, severe little morsel of humanity; out of keeping, Frank thought, with the rich sensuous summer life that palpitated all around her; yet marked with a certain definite individuality which left an impress on the mind, deep, clear, and ineffaceable.

"I wonder what she'll grow into," he pondered, as he strode through the park on his way home. "One of these dreadful women I should say that it is the fashion to call 'strong-minded,' who write books and smoke cigarettes, and are unmitigated nuisances. A nice companion for my

mother, truly!" And this was all the gratitude that poor Minnie's forget-me-nots evoked.

In the morning the Leslie family were early on the road to Liverpool; and in a few days Frank was afloat, sailing over smooth waters, with fair winds and a buoyant heart, to the "new haven where he would be."

And his mother—sad and patient—returned to her homely household duties, and took up again the thread of her quiet life, with a meek endurance, which was characteristic of her strong, gentle nature. Whatever might be Mrs. Leslie's own troubles, they were never suffered to interfere with the comforts of others, and she now bore her silent sorrow so uncomplainingly, that even her husband and son, imagined the parting with Frank to have been more painful in anticipation, than in reality.

"You are cheering up capitally, mother," said Harry, one day soon after the ship had sailed, "and beginning to calculate about his coming back already. That's right—the few years will slip away before any of us know where we are; and we shall get used to do without him for a bit. It is not as if he were *never* coming back, you know; even I could not have stood that."

Mrs. Leslie smiled, but her voice was low and tremulous, as she replied, "You are a good lad, Harry! you will give my boy a brother's welcome when he comes back—whether he be rich or poor —young or old?"

"Why of course I shall," answered her son, his round blue eyes expressing no small measure of surprise, at his mother's questioning tone, "of course old Frank and I shall be brothers and friends as long as we breathe."

His mother suddenly bent and kissed his forehead, then moved away to another part of the house, that he might not see the heavy tears gathering in her eyes, or guess how his well-meant attempt at comfort, had jarred on her aching heart.

"Get used to do without him!" she murmured, "can *I* ever, in this world, get used to miss his face, his voice—his touch?" And she went to a drawer and took out a miniature ivory portrait, which Frank had had painted for her, just before he went away—and kissed the bright, youthful face, with the passionate fondness that only mothers feel.

But Mr. Gordon was often by her side in these first days of separation; and little Minnie, too, came bravely to the rescue. She possessed

the power of throwing herself, heart and soul, into the joys and sorrows of her friends, and, young as she was, had an instinctive tact in the display of her sympathy, which made her the best of little comforters.

She presented herself at the Grange, the very day after Frank had sailed, and just as the little family group had returned downcast and spiritless to the home where *he* was not. Gliding up to Mrs. Leslie, who was sitting at an open window, her hands resting idly in her lap, and her eyes wearily gazing into the far distance, she put both arms round her neck, and whispered softly,

"Take me on your knee—I have come to talk about him. I promised that I would see you every day until he came back. He thought you would like me to come."

"So I shall, my darling," said Mrs. Leslie, straining the child to her breast, "and just at this time most of all: he used to be so fond of lying on this sofa when the others had gone out after tea, and telling me merry stories of his student life! my dear, loving Frank!" And the poor mother's lip quivered as her eye rested on the empty couch. Minnie crept a little closer.

"I have some books about Australia. May I come and read them here?"

"Yes, dear, as often as you will. I shall be glad to hear all your books can tell about it."

And so day by day Mrs. Leslie and Minnie read and talked together of Frank and his strange wild life, as it seemed to them; and time sped as usual, until it brought at last a long, amusing letter from him, describing the incidents of the voyage, and the first difficulties he encountered in settling himself in the new country, with a comical quaintness that made even his mother smile through her tears. As years rolled on, and the boyish exuberance of twenty-one toned down into the more quiet, measured expressions of mature manhood, the letters became simpler and briefer, but not less frequent, or less charged with thoughtful tender remembrance of the old farm amongst the hills, and the waiting mother, whose one hope was that she might see his face again.

Harry was married in due course; and lived with his wife and children, not far from the old Grange. Mr. Leslie resigned the active management of the farm into his son's hands, contenting himself with riding over his fields every day, and

attending markets, and otherwise keeping up a pretence of doing something. All things went on prosperously at home, and though Frank was never forgotten, it yet almost seemed as if Harry's words were coming true, and that the gap which his absence had at first caused in the family circle, was being filled up, and they were getting "used to do without him,"—all but his mother.

These were halcyon years to Minnie. Every faculty of her expanding heart and mind found fitting nourishment, and "grew by what it fed on."

She and her mother being the connecting link between first and second class society at Southwell, were equally popular at the Manor House and the Grange Farm. Her childish intimacy with the young Benhams, had ripened into a friendship too pleasant to be relinquished when they were no longer children, though it sometimes occasioned a momentary uneasiness to Mrs. Benham, whose knowledge of the world made her foresee that a close attachment between young people of very unequal birth, was not likely to be attended with pleasurable consequences to either. As she had been the first cause of it, however, and

really liked Minnie exceedingly, she was content to let the intimacy exist, trusting that in the natural course of events it would die out without the necessity arising for her interference. Besides the relationship in which she stood towards the family at the Manor House was so clearly understood by Minnie herself, and the position accepted so frankly and simply, that whilst loving them all, and especially Lucy, with a love approaching to enthusiasm, she never for a moment forgot the difference in social standing between well-born county people, and the daughter of a poor clerk in a public bank. She was too truly "well-bred," too jealously sensitive of any wound to her own self-respect, to overstep by a hair's-breadth, the natural boundary between herself and her benefactress.

She and Lucy had ridden the same ponies, and driven the same little carriage, as children; but as they grew towards womanhood, no entreaties could induce her to join her friend in these amusements, or to dine at the house on "company days," or in any way to assume an equality which did not exist in fact. Lucy rebelled against this line of conduct with all her might. There was nobody she liked so much as Minnie—nobody so good,

and graceful, and clever; and she waged unceasing war with her on this subject of social equality.

"You *will* dine with us on Wednesday? There are some people staying with the Merediths that I want you to know! they will be here; and just our old set—the parson, and the doctor, and the lawyer. Let us have a little variety for pity's sake; all these good folks must be tired of looking at one another. It would be an act of charity to introduce a novelty in the shape of a face like yours amongst them."

"But they know it so very well already," answered Minnie, laughing, "that your charitable scheme falls to the ground! What "novelty" would there be in the appearance of such a familiar guest at your dinner-table?"

"That is the very place where you are *not* a familiar presence; I want them to see you in all the glory of white muslin and short sleeves."

"In all the ridicule of being in a wrong place, you mean."

Lucy looked up half vexed, half amused.

"Minnie, Minnie! I don't believe anybody in the world would give you credit for so much disagreeable obstinacy! You are the veriest hypocrite! making people believe that you are yielding as the

weakest willow, whereas the most venerable oak in the park would be easier to bend. But it's pride Miss Grey, and of the worst kind in my opinion. However I know by experience that argument and reproaches are alike thrown away. Will you come in time to do my hair then, since you prefer being my maid?"

"I will be anything to you, except that which is impossible—your equal in certain matters. You shall look so charming on Wednesday that the 'old set,' as you call them, will have a prettier novelty to admire than any they could see in my white muslin; so kiss and be friends, my darling," said Minnie, bending down her smiling face, and kissing Lucy's pouting red lips.

Mrs. Benham, who was often present at little contests like this, considered that Minnie behaved with rare judgment; and judiciously allowed her to infer as much, by an increased cordiality of manner after every such skirmish with her daughter. She would have felt it such an ungracious task to have to impose any restrictions on the intercourse of the two girls, that she was really grateful to Minnie for her quiet resistance of Lucy's wishes, and dignified understanding of the limits to their friendship.

"For she *is* such a superior girl," said Mrs. Benham to herself, "that it would be pardonable if she forgot class distinctions sometimes, and allowed herself to be put on a level with my foolish little Lucy, whom I cannot convince of the impropriety of such a thing! Yet it would be awkward to introduce the grand-daughter of her father's bailiff as her friend and equal."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. GREY'S PERPLEXITIES.

MEANWHILE, Mr. Gordon and Minnie had become bound to each other by that close, holy tie which unites the spiritual father to the child. He had taken the young plastic soul and moulded it prayerfully, year by year, until it became a vessel sanctified and fit for the Master's use. He had descended to her love for all that was purely beautiful in this world, in order that he might the more entirely subjugate her heart to a sense of that higher moral beauty which it was his mission to unfold.

Slowly the veil lifted from the girl's mind. Not with a great burst of light, as happens to some, but gradually, like the dawn of day, came the knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus the Lord; and then all nature became glorified,

and symbolic of Divine love. Not only did the majestic heavens declare his glory, but the wayside flower, the breath of evening, the linnet's song, spake to her in a language she was apt to translate, of profound wisdom, care, and love. Her life was all praise and adoring gratitude. It seemed as if sorrow could never touch her radiant soul. She felt herself moored in a safe harbour, secure from the waves and storms of this troublesome world; for what could separate her from Christ? and having Him, did she not possess all things? Poor child! she forgot that here the Church is militant, not triumphant, and that only through much tribulation can we truly enter the kingdom.

Mrs. Grey neither understood nor felt quite satisfied with her daughter's religion, and frequently laid her doubts before Mr. Gordon, whom she looked upon as in some degree responsible for Minnie's imperfect conversion, seeing that it was through his instrumentality the change, such as it was, had been wrought.

"You see, sir," she would remark, "I don't see any signs of the new birth, and without that, all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

"Undoubtedly," Mr. Gordon replied, "but what 'signs' are lacking in Minnie?"

"Well, I can't observe in her any fruits of the Spirit."

"What are these fruits then, Mrs. Grey, according to your view?"

"Oh, repentance for sin, and assurance of salvation."

"There are others mentioned too, I think, but we won't say anything about them just now. I want to know first, why you should question the fact of Minnie's heartfelt and sincere repentance?"

"Because I have never seen her under any deep spiritual distress. Religion seems to have come *too easy*. I fear she is but one of the stony-ground hearers," answered Mrs. Grey, with a mournful shake of the head.

"But what is repentance? Is it not simply a turning back? That is to say: under the true guidance of the Holy Spirit, a really penitent soul, instead of resolutely walking *from* God, turns and faces Him, and walks evermore towards Him. Have you seen anything like this in Minnie? I mean, have you noticed any leaning towards God; any true delight in the things pertaining to holiness?"

"Why yes, in a certain way; but then it is such a different way to mine. As to assurance

now—Minnie never seems to have any fears, and yet she never can name any particular moment at which she was conscious of a saving change, or any particular passage that was ever brought home to her with power; and it is this that troubles me; she is so confident, and I cannot make out clear grounds for her confidence. *I* remember, though it is thirty years ago, the very words that gave peace to me, after a long period of darkness; but Minnie never seems to have had any peculiar impressions of this sort. *All* the promises seem alike to be believed."

"And should they not? Are they not all equally the word of Him who cannot lie? If Minnie trusts them all, is she not of stronger faith than you who trust but one? I think your difficulty lies here, my good friend. You do not see that *without* any special 'impression,' as you term it, God has been pleased to let our dear Minnie recognise his own word in every page of his own book, and she rejoices in the *whole* of it, and in the great fact that Jesus died, *her* substitute. And thus, with peace flowing like a river, and a heart brimful of gratitude, she has no need of special revelations, and no room for disquieting doubts; her faith, standing on the *promise of God*,

—not on her own feelings concerning that promise —is built on a sure foundation which nothing can overthrow."

"Well, it may be so, and I'm sure I trust that it is," said Mrs. Grey, in a very unconvinced tone; "but surely, sir, if there's a *right* faith we shall see the fruit of it in the life."

"Most certainly. Do we not in this instance?"

Mrs. Grey sighed. "It's not fault-finding that I'd be," she said, "she's a dear, good child so far as I am concerned; there couldn't be a better; but she seems to have no call to good works, such as teaching in your school, sir; and with the education she has had, she's as fit to teach as Miss Benham herself; or visiting the poor village people when they are sick—though you certainly do that well enough yourself—or getting up a Dorcas society, as I wanted her to do; or in short, anything of this kind."

"Just because she is not quite fit for any of them. Clever as she is, she has no talent for *imparting* knowledge, so she would not do much good in my Sunday-school; and as to visiting the sick folks, her youth, and inexperience either of sickness or poverty, would be insurmountable

obstacles to any good she might do *them*. The Dorcas society is rather too absurd! Only fancy a child of sixteen issuing invitations for such an afternoon party! My dear Mrs. Grey, don't put your or my old head on Minnie's young shoulders! Depend upon it, God in his own good time will give her enough both to do and to endure for his sake. Let Him train up his young disciple in the school that his infinite wisdom sees to be best for her. Our clumsy efforts will only mar his teaching."

"But surely," still objected Mrs. Grey, "every Christian, young or old, has some special gift whereby they can glorify God, and prove the reality of their own faith! Has Minnie *any* such vocation?"

"Yes, I think so," said the clergyman gently. "'Whoso giveth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me.' It is Minnie's work to give her God this honour. Her whole life is a thanksgiving hymn at present. Poor child," he murmured in half soliloquy, "the day may come when praise must needs give place to prayer."

These arguments generally left Mrs. Grey in precisely the same mental condition as that in which they found her. She had made up her

mind with sorrowful decision, that the root of the matter was not in her daughter, and, with the obstinacy of weakness, clung all the more resolutely to her opinion the more strongly it was assailed by Mr. Gordon.

She even ventured in her innermost heart, to question the "soundness" of the vicar himself, after the admission of his indifference to what she called "inward evidences." At all events it was plain to her that he stood on a very low platform of spiritual experience, and could be no certain guide in matters connected with a high state of experience. She almost wished for Minnie's sake, that they could go back to London, and place themselves under the teaching of the Reverend Sampson Brown, who had been a shining light in Pentonville when she dwelt at Islington; and who would soon have driven poor Minnie from any false refuges of lies, which the vicar, in his own ignorance, might have helped her to build up. But living at Southwell cost absolutely nothing, whilst in London their small income of one hundred pounds per annum (which was now accumulating into a nice little fortune for Minnie) would hardly suffice to pay the necessary expenses of the most inferior lodging, consequently

Mrs. Grey resigned herself to the inevitable necessity of putting up with Mr. Gordon's ministrations; though not without many a sorrowful reference to the loss which she sustained thereby.

CHAPTER V.

TIDINGS FROM OVER THE SEA.

WHEN Minnie was about eighteen there came a sad epoch in her joyous life.

The Benhams broke up their establishment at the Manor House, and prepared for a long residence on the Continent. The second daughter, Fanny, showed symptoms of a consumptive tendency, and Dr. Meredith advised a lengthened sojourn in the south of Europe, as the most effectual remedy for the malady in its earlier stages.

Lucy, with all a young girl's love of travel and adventure, eagerly caught at the proposal; and it was finally settled that Mr. and Mrs. Benham, Lucy, Fanny, and one or two of the servants, should make a long leisurely tour through France and Italy, the boys meanwhile

being left to complete their education in England.

It was a sad day for all Southwell when the carriages rolled through its long narrow street, piled high with packing-cases outside, and crowded within with the familiar faces of the well-loved family who were to be absent so many months, or even years! There were not many dry eyes in the village, but none had shed so many tears as those of poor Minnie. She had been at the house entirely during the last week, helping everybody, and bravely keeping down her grief, that Lucy's delight might not be checked by the thought of her sorrow; but when the Park gates were closed behind the last of the two carriages, and the sound of the horses' hoofs had died in the distance, she turned from the hall steps into the deserted rooms, and felt very lonely and desolate indeed.

She and Lucy had grown into such close and dear companionship that the bond was hard to break; especially as she saw, with her clear common sense (that supplied the place of much worldly wisdom), how impossible it was that their old dear friendship could ever be renewed. When Lucy returned she would be a different Lucy to the warm-hearted girl who had kissed her so fondly

that morning. New scenes, possibly new ties, would spring up about her; she might never come back to her father's house at all as Lucy Benham, but as some great lady with a stately lord and huge retinue of servants. And Minnie wept afresh at this possibility, and then was angry with her own selfishness; and smiled with loving pride, thinking how sweet and good Lucy was, and how well her young brow would become a wedding wreath.

The pain of parting was largely shared at first by Lucy herself.

"I wish, oh! how I wish she was going with us, mamma," she said, as she leaned out of the carriage to wave a last adieu to her friend.

"That could not be, my dear. Minnie would neither have been our friend nor servant, and the position would have been uncomfortable to us all. You need not forget her, you know; you can send as many letters and little presents as you like, and tell her all about our travels."

"Ah, yes! that *will* be rather a consolation."

So Lucy was comforted, and for a time her great pleasure was to sit down apart from everybody, and recount, with a little youthful exaggeration, every incident, amusing or otherwise, which

befel them in their journeyings; whilst at every halt on their way, some small souvenir was purchased and put carefully aside until an opportunity arrived for transmitting it to Minnie. But Lucy was only twenty, and the fair foreign lands were full of wonder and charm; and ere long they met with some agreeable fellow-countrymen; one of whom, Sir Walter Mortlake, attached himself so pertinaciously to Lucy, that she really had not time for writing many letters. And in the autumn there was a wedding near a lovely Swiss lake; after which the letters to Southwell ceased altogether, and Minnie only heard of the absentees through the housekeeper who was left in charge at the Manor. It was rather hard to bear, but it was only what might have been expected, and when Mrs. Grey hinted at unkindness and neglect, her daughter gently reminded her that for many years they had received more than their share of good things, and must not murmur if they had no more than others for the future.

"But, consider what a great deal you have been with them, Minnie. Surely you must be more to them than the farmer's daughters round about, who never went near the house!"

"Perhaps I am; but Lucy is Lady Mortlake,

and I am just your own Minnie, to have and to hold for ever and a day. Can't we be very happy together, mamma."

"Oh yes, my dear, I'm sure I don't want Lady Mortlake, or anybody else to come between us."

Nevertheless Mrs. Grey did feel a little sore at the way in which her daughter seemed to have been dropped out of the circle of her great acquaintances, having secretly indulged some rather foolish notions that Minnie's known intimacy with Miss Benham might have an advantageous influence on her settlement in life; for there is a certain class of good people who can be very rigid on doctrinal points, and very worldly minded on merely practical questions.

Mrs. Grey was one of these. She had cherished a confused sort of expectation that Lucy's chosen friend might marry into a sphere equal to that of the squire's daughter—a good man of course—perhaps a clergyman like the vicar, only a great deal richer, and with views more assimilating to her own—in which case Mrs. Grey felt that she could go down to the grave in peace, since both the temporal and spiritual welfare of her child would be secured. For this one only

daughter was very nearly betraying poor Mrs. Grey into the sin of idolatry, spite of the tears which she yet shed over her "odd ways." But she was so wondrously beautiful, and winning, and clever; she moved about the house with such easy, tender grace; she was so full of love and gentleness, and bright looks, and silvery laughter; that motherly pride and love, threatened to become overwhelming. All these gifts and graces too, seemed so many pledges of her future greatness. They would not have been bestowed, Mrs. Grey argued, unless some exalted destiny were before her, and she did her part to aid this supposed predestined nobility, by refusing to let Minnie participate in any household labour that would soil her soft white hand, and thus render it unfit for "lady's" work.

"No, my dear," she constantly replied in answer to the girl's frequent expostulations on the subject, "leave the furniture polishing and cooking to me—I'm used to it, and like it; just as Mary is used to cleaning stoves, and scrubbing floors; it's natural and easy work to us both, and we can keep the rooms clean without your help. What could you do, indeed, except hinder us? Go on with your drawing, and reading, and prac-

tising; and you may look after the flowers both outside and in the house, if you'll only remember to wear garden gloves; but leave everything else to me."

"Oh dear, was ever a girl so helpless in this world! what will you make of me in the end, mamma?"

"You are not helpless, my dear. Mr. Gordon says that we all have different talents — I'm beginning to think he may be right in *that* at least—and your's seems to be to paint flowers, and trees, and things, and read good books, as you are always doing. I should think there are not many in Mr. Gordon's study that we have not had here. All this is your work now, and if you ever become rich, you will know how to spend your time like other ladies. What good would knowing how to rub furniture be to you then."

Minnie burst into one of her clear, ringing laughs, "My *dear* mother, are you really trying to educate me for a lady then? Give it up. It will be such a melancholy failure that you will be ashamed of your work. And as to being rich! Why as nobody at Southwell appreciates my pictures, I don't exactly see how I am to attain either fame or fortune, unless the London picture-

dealers are more discriminating than our country friends, and give me "orders" on my own terms.

"Sell your paintings! work for your living!" exclaimed her mother indignantly; then suddenly recollecting that she was not edifying her daughter by an exhibition of wordly pride, she added in a more subdued tone, "I don't mean to say there is anything to be ashamed of in a young woman trying to earn her own living, if circumstances oblige her to do it. But your dear father always said that there were too many temptations in such a life for him ever to let *you* down to it. He worried himself into his grave in working beyond his strength, to save enough for us to live on, when he should be taken away. And with what he left, and what I have since saved, there is near three thousand pounds in the bank now. Of course this will go on increasing as long as I live—since our expenses are scarcely anything here—so there never can be a *necessity* for you to go against his strongest wish, and you surely would not do it without."

"Why, mother dearest, of course I should not. I never thought of such a thing in earnest. But when you began to talk of future riches, I

began *then* to wonder if my daubs were to turn into gold."

"You might marry well, Minnie," said Mrs. Grey, hesitatingly, for matrimony was a subject never canvassed between the mother and daughter, and the former felt she was treading on dangerous ground in alluding to it as a possible means of rising in the world. She was not quite prepared, however, for the quick, almost angry flush that spread over Minnie's cheek at her words, nor for the grave imperative dismissal of the subject, which her simple "we will not talk of that, mamma," conveyed.

"She is odd at times, even yet," thought Mrs. Grey, "if I had said anything to insult her, she could not have looked more annoyed."

About a year after the Benhams left Southwell, it had to sustain a still more grievous loss. The vicar resigned his living to a younger man, and at the urgent appeal of an old friend who was labouring almost alone in a densely populated parish in London, consented to take a part of the work, though he would not consent to share the very moderate stipend of his over-worked brother. He had neither son nor daughter, and his own small private income supplied his wife and himself with

all they needed, besides leaving a good surplus wherewith to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked.

"Remember, my child," he said to Minnie, as she sat beside him on the evening before his departure, her hands clasped in his, and her wistful eyes fixed on his face—a dry tearless sorrow in them more touching than tears—"remember that whilst I live you will never want a father, whose ear and heart will be ever open to you. Don't make a trouble of our going to London. It is so near at hand that you can come and stay with us when we have settled ourselves down, and help my wife with her parish work."

"I don't know anything about parish work," said Minnie, hoarsely and abruptly, "I should only be in the way. I can do no good to anybody."

"You can pray for us, my child," said Mr. Gordon softly. "I would rather have your prayers than much of this world's wealth and wisdom. Will you give them to me?"

"Oh! Mr. Gordon," the rigid expression faded out of Minnie's kindling face as she spoke, "such poor prayers as they are! but you shall have them every day."

"Thank you, my dear child, I shall be glad to be so remembered by you. It is no small pain to leave you, but I must go where the Master sends me. Minnie," he added, with some emotion, "you are the brightest jewel in the crown that I hope to cast at our dear Lord's feet some day! Never do aught to dim its lustre."

"I will try not," she whispered reverently; and he laid his hand tenderly on her head, blessing her like a father; then led her to the gate which opened from his garden into the park.

"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee! The Lord make his face to shine upon thee."

They were his last words, and followed her with their sweet solemn music along the woodland walk which led to her mother's cottage, seeming to fill the still evening air with holy blessing. The golden sunset was like the radiance of the Eternal city. The grass and flowers beneath her feet were not flowers only, they were types of something rarer and lovelier, growing in that other land! They were—

"Shadows of yet richer things,
Born beside immortal springs,
Into fuller glory wrought,
Kindled by surpassing thought."

She knelt down—crushing out sweet thymy odours from the fragrant woodland growth—and gathered a handful of wild flowers. "Oh! it was such a loving thought to give us flowers," she murmured, "the sweet, pure things! Who could long be sad, in a world where *Thou* art everywhere, watching the lilies as they grow? I wonder if Mr. Gordon would like to have some sent to London every week for his sick people? He shall have them at all events, and if they die, they die."

And all through that autumn and winter, Minnie coaxed Mr. Leslie to let one of his men take a small box of healthy plants to the nearest post town, and despatch it by coach to London; and many a little dying face, brightened at the sight of its own little flower-pot, containing the only bright thing in the squalid room. So even Minnie found something at last, to do for the Lord she loved.

During all these years her visits to the Grange had been of almost daily occurrence. Regularly, in all weathers, she ran up the familiar by-paths through the park, and made her way by the apple-orchard, and round the quaint old garden into a favourite room of Mrs. Leslie's, that looked out upon the green hills, and the pleasant country lanes. One summer's day, about ten months

after Mr. Gordon had left Southwell, she went up as was her custom, intending to have a longer chat than usual with her old friend. It was a grand baking-day at the cottage, and her mother had requested her not to come home until after tea, as she wished to have the small kitchen to herself, undisturbed by her daughter's frequent inroads.

"I *do* want the cakes to be good to-day, my dear, and you often come in and take off my attention just at the moment when they want turning, and so they get burnt on one side, and not enough done at the other; it will save me some trouble if you'll stay with Mrs. Leslie until about eight o'clock."

"Very well, mamma, I'll go, since you are so anxious to get rid of me; but it's not polite," said Minnie, laughing, "to send me off as if I were a naughty child! Why won't you trust me with the cakes? You have no idea what remarkable specimens I should turn out."

"I can't say that I've any wish to see. Now go at once, like a good girl, and let me get them into the oven." Whereupon Minnie kissed her mother and did as she was told.

Not finding Mrs. Leslie in her own little

sitting-room, she went upstairs and knocked lightly at the bed-room door; but this room also was empty, and in some surprise at an absence which was unusual, she proceeded to the next, and so on, until she came to the very last in the long gallery, which had formerly been Frank's. Here at last she found Mrs. Leslie, on her knees before an open trunk, turning over old books, and other left-behind property of her absent son. She was so intent on her occupation that she did not hear Minnie's light steps across the floor, or look up until the latter had knelt by her side and turned her face round to her own.

"What has happened? Surely no bad news has come across the sea?" Minnie cried in alarm; for the face that she looked upon was colourless as marble.

"Oh! no, no! but does not joy sometimes kill as well as grief? Minnie, he is coming back —coming directly—and I shall see him again, again; if I can only bear it."

Minnie put her arms round her, as she had done on the night when he went away, and the warm loving touch unlocked the mother's tears, which hitherto the very intensity of her joy had forbidden to flow.

"Oh! my darling, to think that we should see him again," she said, after the first burst of emotion.

"Yes! now tell me all about it; it does seem almost too good to be true."

"Oh no, you must not say that! It *is* true. I should have sent for you as soon as his letter came this morning, only I have been expecting you to come in every moment. When he wrote, everything was done. All his business matters wound up; his passage taken; and the ship ready to sail almost directly, so that he expected to follow his letter in two or three weeks. He says, in his old way, that we are all to make much of him, since he is coming home as he predicted, "a prosperous gentleman."

"I have been in his room all the morning turning over the things he left. It is a pleasure to do it now; I could not bear to look at them, while it was yet uncertain whether or not I should ever see him again. I wonder if he is much altered? he was only a boy when he went away, and so many years of hard bush life must have changed him sadly; but that won't make any difference to us, will it, Minnie? Do you remember what he was like, my dear, when he left us?"

"Oh yes, I remember," said Minnie, laughing, "a tall, straight, handsome fellow, looking down with condescending kindness on poor little me! *I* wonder if he has kept my forget-me-nots! he promised to bring them back with him, you know. But what are we to do with this room? It looks very dingy; we must at least have it papered and painted, and fresh carpeted before he comes back. I dare say his 'appointments' in the bush have been most luxurious; all bachelors know how to take care of their creature comforts. We must not look despicable in his eyes, or suffer the old country to lose by comparison."

"No, my dear!" said Mrs. Leslie, brightening up at once, with the pleasure which all women feel, at *doing* something for their beloved; "Harrison shall come in to-morrow. Have you any idea what sort of a paper and other things, Frank would like?"

"Not the least. But I know what *I* should like, and Mr. Frank must be content to put up with my selection. Yes, we'll see about it to-morrow, for there is a month's work before us. I should like him to find every place looking pleasant when he comes back to it."

"So should I, though I don't suppose his

bush life has made him very fastidious, spite of what you say about luxuries, Minnie. He never cared for roughing things, even from a boy."

"All the more reason then, why he deserves to rest and be taken care of now. But let us lock up all these dusty treasures again, and go down to tea. The thought of all we shall have to do is making me hungry, and Jane has got her cakes in the oven already; I can tell that by the appetising odour that comes up from the kitchen. Won't Frank appreciate these cakes, after his miserable 'dampers.'"

"Poor boy! I dare say he has had many such contrasts to remind him of home; but he seems to have enjoyed his free, outdoor life, notwithstanding all its drawbacks. How thankful I am that he is coming to make our old age happy!"

The excitement was great in Southwell when it was known that Frank Leslie had fulfilled his pledge, and was on his way home with his pockets well-lined with gold. Success in any enterprise makes a man a hero at once; and even our simple village folk, had a discriminating appreciation of the man who had proved himself able to amass a fortune, and bring it home, in a few short years.

Frank might have been ten times more heroic than he was, and yet not have commanded one tenth of the admiration which was ready to be laid at his feet on his return, if his virtues had not transformed themselves into those heavy bills of exchange on the London Banks, which lay snugly in his pocket-book. They were tangible proofs, intelligible to the meanest capacity, of his "pluck" and energy and business capability; and the happy father and mother were overwhelmed with congratulations on the fortunate issue of their son's venture.

The painting and papering got on famously under Minnie's directions, and the clean, pretty, country room—fresh, fragrant with lavender, and full of old-fashioned, restful appliances for comfort—looked just the spot where a sea-worn voyager might long to lay his head.

Minnie stood one evening when all was finished, contemplating the effect of her alterations with a well-satisfied expression in her face, when Mrs. Leslie joined her.

"I don't know how to thank you, my dear, for all the trouble you have had, in helping me to get the place ready for him; it wouldn't have looked half so well, if you had not made Harrison

carry out your plans instead of his own. I should have left all to him, thinking he would know best about his own business; but that favourite paper of his, with the great red and yellow roses, would not have looked so nice as this soft pearl grey. I think the walls looks rather bare though. Could you spare one or two of your pictures to hang up? You have so many, that you would not miss two or three, and you could pick out the worst. I dare say Frank won't know good from bad any better than I do; but whatever they were, they would make the room look more lively."

Minnie burst into a ringing laugh.

"Oh, Mrs. Leslie! you are a shockingly truthful person! I am tempted to ask after the manner of King Richard, 'Was ever artist in this manner wooed, was ever artist in this manner won?' How dare you thus undervalue the productions of genius? No, no, Frank must content himself with something less original than my sketches. I have sent an order to London, for some good prints, which will look far better than anything of mine. And they will be all your own gift too, for of course that magnificent cheque of Mr. Leslie's, covers all our extravagances—including the prints; and Frank will care more for his

mother's pictures than for anybody else's in the wide world."

"How can they be mine, when you have ordered them and Mr. Leslie pays for them?"

"Nonsense! just as if the cheque wasn't yours every bit as much as your husband's; and the *idea* was all yours. I never should have thought of pictures, if you had not said one day that Frank liked to see them all over a house."

"You always remember little things that nobody else would, Minnie. I wish Harry's wife were like you; we often say that you are more like a daughter to us than she is."

"Then you must not say so any more, because that is somewhat hard upon poor Lizzie. But good night, for mamma is alone, and doing nothing that I can particularly interfere with, so she will expect me home in good time. Only one week to wait now," said Minnie, kissing the sweet, gentle, motherly forehead, with its smooth bands of silvery hair, and thinking how beautiful some old people were.

"Bless her," was Mrs. Leslie's remark to her husband, as together they watched the gliding figure until it was no longer visible; "what a surprise it will be for Frank to see the lovely crea-

ture she has become! I only hope he'll see her with my eyes."

"What, match-making at sixty?" said Mr. Leslie, laughing; "the little lass bewitches you, Mary."

CHAPTER VI.

FRANK'S RETURN.

THE next day was a busy day at the cottage. Mrs. Grey was preserving apricots; and again intimated her desire to be left in solitary possession of the kitchen until dinner-time, when the fruit would be safely in the jars, and she could suffer her attention to wander to less important concerns.

"Can't you find something to do in the garden, Minnie? There is always a bit of weeding necessary, if nothing else wants looking after. Just put all tidy outside, my dear, whilst I get the boiling done. You may help me to tie over the jars if you like afterwards."

"Very well, mamma, I'll go and rake the weeds up then. But if I get my hands blistered

in this hot sun, it is your fault remember," answered Minnie, shaking her head solemnly.

"Of course you must put on gloves, and a sun-hat; and give up at once if you find the heat oppressive. I thought you *always* liked gardening."

"So I do, beyond everything, almost; and you are the dearest, and yet the most provoking of mothers, to give me all the pleasant work in this world, and take all the unpleasant to yourself! That troubles me sometimes, more than hard work could do. But don't look worried, mamma dear. I'll do as you wish until you find out that I really am good for something," and with a half sigh Minnie reached down her garden hat and gloves, and holding both in one hand, stepped out into the porch, just as a brown and bearded stranger was about to stoop his tall head under it, and knock at the cottage door. For an instant she drew back in surprise, the next she sprang towards the visitor with a cry of delight, and letting fall her hat and gloves, drew him with both hands into the house.

"Mamma, mamma, come here directly! Here is Frank himself! Oh, how glad I am to see you. What have they said at the Grange? Why did

you let us think that it would be a week yet before you could arrive?"

She was almost breathless with excitement and delight—the pure pale cheek glowing like the heart of a crimson shell—the large liquid eyes shining like stars through happy tears. Frank was a little bewildered; he had not expected quite such a greeting, and would, in fact, have been better pleased if it had been of a less demonstrative character; its sisterly frankness disturbed some long cherished hopes, which his mother's letters had first implanted, and his isolated life had tended to confirm. He did not lose an atom of self-possession, however; quietly, almost coldly, he replied to his eager questioner, by telling her that the ship had made a specially quick passage, and that he had arrived at the Grange within an hour of her leaving it on the previous night, "And now I have come to thank you, Miss Grey—if words can do it—for all the comfort you have been to my dear mother during these long years. It has been the theme of every letter I can assure you."

"Oh, I want no thanks," said Minnie, in her free pleasant voice, "I have only pleased myself in going up to the Grange. Who would not like to

be with Mrs. Leslie? Besides, did I not solemnly promise that I would keep her from longing after you *too* greatly? Where are those forget-me-nots which were the outward seal of that sacred covenant? Oh! faithless knight! I can see by that guilty look where they are *not*. But never mind, we'll let by-gones *be* by-gones. Only you must not call me Miss Grey. You are always Frank to me. Let me be little Minnie still to you."

Frank's brown cheek slightly flushed, but he answered calmly.

"You are very good! It is a great happiness to find that I have been so well remembered. But may I not see Mrs. Grey?"

"Certainly you may and shall. Mamma dear, *will* you let the apricots take care of themselves for a minute, and come here?"

"I was only taking off my apron, Minnie," said Mrs. Grey, emerging from the kitchen. "Mr. Frank, I'm delighted to see you indeed; for it's almost more than I ever expected that you'd come back alive; what with black men and fevers, and crossing the sea, it seems a miracle that you've been preserved through perils by land and water. And, dear me, you are altered, certainly! I don't think I should have known you."

"Nevertheless, I am my very self," said Frank, smiling. "It is this which gives me an outlandish appearance, I suppose," touching his long silky moustache. "I ought to have shaved before venturing amongst old friends; but that is one of the troubles of civilized life which I shall evade, if possible. The first gash upon my chin would set me longing for my old, unfettered existence in the bush."

He addressed himself exclusively to Mrs. Grey, never even looking at Minnie; but she was thinking so much of him, and so little of herself, that she never noticed it.

"Oh! it must have been a wonderful life," she broke in, before Mrs. Grey had time to think whether a moustache was permissible at Southwell, or not. "Oh, I sometimes wish that I were a man myself, and could go roving about the world as I listed! No wonder that you chose such a life. It was a good thing to go away, but," she added gently, "it was a far better to come back. We are very proud of you, Southwell, and your mother, and I."

He bowed almost stiffly, and turned to Mrs. Grey. "This is only a five minutes' call; just to show myself. You can imagine how I shall

have to subdivide my time to-day, and will not wonder at this hurry. I shall see you again very soon, of course?" and he gave a quick glance at Minnie this time.

But Mrs. Grey was prompt in her reply for once.

"Oh, yes. I am always at home, and if Minnie is not here, she's at the Grange, so you will have many opportunities of relating your adventures to us. I'm sure we shall have much pleasure in hearing them."

"Thank you. Good morning then; good morning, Miss Grey."

Minnie looked a little startled. He was so coldly formal and polite—he only touched her hand at parting, instead of holding it in a warm cordial clasp, as she had done with his in the first impulse of their meeting—he was *not* their dear, warm-hearted Frank, her childhood's friend and brother—he was older, and browner, and—well, perhaps, handsomer,—but lacking all the charm which had surrounded the original of the ivory miniature at the Grange. And she didn't think she should like him half so well. She was standing in the porch, watching him as he went up the hill, whilst these reflections were passing through

her mind, and he suddenly turned, on the very spot where he had turned ten years before. Was it indeed the little pale, solemn-looking child whom he had left? A beautiful face looked towards him now. A face, fair and pale, and, in repose, colourless still, save for the deep crimson lips—but rounded into a matchless oval, and crowned with heavy plaits of shining hair. The dark green ivy made a frame round this spiritual face, and the lithe undulating figure, clad in floating folds of summer muslin. It was a companion picture, that hung for ever in Frank's memory, side by side with that of the little girl.

He walked rapidly back to the Grange and into his mother's room.

"Have you seen them, Frank? Was not Minnie at home? you have come back so soon!"

"Mother," he said, without heeding these inquiries, "why did you not tell me that she had grown into the most beautiful woman in England?"

"I wanted you to find it out for yourself," said Mrs. Leslie, smiling, and well pleased.

"But I am just like a brother to her—she would have kissed me if I would have let her."

"Frank!" exclaimed his mother, with a pain-

ful flush rising to her brow, "such a thought is not worthy of my son!"

"But she would," he persisted. "I am just simply your son, and her brother—very much beloved in both relations, evidently. But I have not kept my forget-me-nots all these years for a sister's kiss. How could you keep alive that foolish notion of brotherly and sisterly love, mother?" he asked, with a touch of irritation, that made Mrs. Leslie smile. "Here, you have been sending me letters, literally by scores, filled almost to the last line with descriptions of her sweetness, her goodness, her devotion to yourself —of everything about her, except her beauty—and I have been saying to myself, every day, 'the woman that my mother loves so well must be a prize worth winning,' and after all this, is it likely that I shall be put off with only a brother's love?"

His mother laughed as she brushed the hair from his forehead, in her old caressing way.

"You are so impetuous, Frank; wait a while, and all will come right. You wouldn't have had me make love to Minnie for you? She is indeed worth winning, and I shall pray for a blessing on your wooing, my boy."

"Thank you, mother," he answered, kissing

her; "I believe in good women's prayers, and there isn't much else that I do believe in. Nay, don't look so horrified! I'm not an infidel by any means, and have notions about these matters which serve me well enough, though they might not quite coincide with those of our old friend Mr. Gordon."

"You have not ceased to believe in God, Frank?" asked his mother, under her breath—his words had come like a blow, and she scarcely dared ask for a confirmation of her fears.

"Why, no, of course not," he replied, seeing how shocked she was, and trying to reassure her. "I have seen too many of his mighty works to be capable of such madness. It is only a few unmeaning dogmas that I have got rid of. Don't let us talk about them just now, mother. I want to hear so much, and to tell you so much; we are to have all this morning to ourselves, you know, as my father and Harry have gone to the market. How jolly it is to be on this sofa, and you by my side again," and stretching his "lordly length" upon the couch, Frank poured forth a running stream of questions, broken by racy anecdotes of his Australian life: he told her, too, how he had struggled with early difficulties, and fought with

discouragements, until all were conquered, and he had come home, in the prime of his manhood, to invest his well-earned wealth in some honourable career in the old world, where his disciplined powers of body and mind could have full scope.

"I studied engineering out in the bush sometimes, when I was weeks without any friends, save the books I had brought with me. And more than once I have thought of turning my mind steadily in that direction, when I was once again in England. But the very first thing I shall insist on, is a long holiday for you and me, and all of us. Could you persuade Mrs. Grey and Minnie to go with us? We might go to the Lakes, or Scotland, as no earthly power would make my father set foot outside Great Britain. When can you be ready, mother? The days will begin to shorten soon."

"Will you never be tired of wandering, Frank? But I should like such an outing, vastly, and so would Minnie, I daresay. I'll go and see what I can make of Mrs. Grey this evening, if Minnie does not come up during the day, and you must settle all the rest with your father and Harry."

"You are the best of women! I'll take you

down to the park after tea, supposing we see nothing of Minnie in the meantime. And we'll have the day fixed for our starting before night comes. But mother, don't say much about me, when you are at the cottage. Leave me to fight my own battles now."

"You seem quite able to do so, Frank," said his mother, looking fondly up at the handsome brown face, with its winning smile, and resolute eyes and mouth—the face of a man who could both do and dare, but whose strength would be ever on the side of the helpless and weak—a brave, honest, gentle face, such as women love.

Mrs. Leslie's proposal took Mrs. Grey by surprise, but she was soon won over to think that it would be a very nice change for her, and a great delight to Minnie, who had long wanted to see the English lakes; and she gave her hearty consent to the excursion. Her daughter was more unmanageable, however. Frank had a little overdone his part in the morning, and she had brooded over his altered manner, until her shy, womanly sensitiveness had taken alarm lest he should have put a wrong construction on the warmth of her welcome. In some things she

was as much a child as the unsophisticated little maiden who had thrust her forget-me-nots into his hand ten years before—every emotion of her truthful nature rushed to her lips without hindrance or disguise, and she could no more have restrained her joy at Frank Leslie's appearance, than she could have helped being glad at any other event which had brought happiness to her dearest friends —she was so simply pure in every thought, that Frank read her rightly when he said she would have kissed him. It would have seemed to her the most natural thing in the world, had he taken her in his arms in the porch and kissed her in all brotherly kindness. They had left off at the point of childlike dependence on her part, and good-natured, protecting affection on his, and she had seen no reason why they should not begin afresh on precisely the same footing. At first she attributed his changed manner to the necessary effects of time and travel, and long solitary years. But then his letters? How could these thoughtful, loving letters, which she had read with almost as much pride in the unspoiled heart of the writer, as the mother herself, have proceeded from any but their own old Frank, unchanged and unchangeable?

"If the fault was not with him, it must lie in herself," she concluded, and slowly a thought rose, that dyed her forehead crimson, and made her very fingers flush and tingle; "I am always forgetting that I am a woman. Perhaps—perhaps, he did not expect me to be so free. And I ought not. What degradation if he should think——"

Tears of bitter vexation filled her eyes, and it was long before she could soothe her wounded dignity, by recollecting that in actual fact, she was as guiltless of wrong as an infant, and that she could scrupulously guard against possible misconstructions for the future.

When, therefore, Mrs. Leslie, after obtaining her mother's sanction to the travelling party, went to seek her in the garden, and unfolded the scheme which was to give them all so much pleasure, Minnie drew back, shyly but determinately, and insisted on being left to keep house whilst the rest took their holiday. Mrs. Leslie argued, persuaded, entreated, but without effect, until at last she was fain to call in Mrs. Grey's authority to her side.

"Do come and help me," she called to the latter, who was, with her knitting as usual, sitting

at the open window, "this perverse child does not want to go."

"Not want to go! Why Minnie, how many times I have heard you say that to go to Westmoreland would be almost as good as going to Switzerland, and that you longed to see some mountain scenery! Why should you refuse such a chance as this?"

"Don't say any more mamma, please," she answered in a pained voice; "I think I *ought* not to go."

Mrs. Leslie looked keenly at the troubled face, and almost divined the truth.

"You shall not then, love," she said, soothingly; "but in that case I shall certainly stay at home myself, for of course your mother will not care to go without you; and what pleasure would an old woman like me have in wandering about alone, whilst the young folks and my husband, who is as active as any of them, were clambering up the hills like so many wild goats? We three will stay at home then, though poor Frank does count on my going."

"Oh no, no, that never would do," said Minnie, in real distress, "I cannot let you break up the party on my account. If you will just let

me do as I like—stay with you and sketch instead of risking my neck on the precipices—I will go since you wish it so much; but somehow, I don't feel as if any good would come of it."

"Why, Minnie! I never knew you give way to previsions in my life! What *should* come of it, my dear child, but a very pleasant time for us all? Come, Mrs. Grey, tell me when you can be ready. We want to settle the day for our journey this evening, that Mr. Leslie and Harry may be able to leave all their affairs in order."

"Let me see! This is Friday; suppose we say next Tuesday, all being well. Will that do?"

"I dare say it will. And now I must go and tell them that all is arranged, so far as we are concerned. Don't get your hat, Minnie. Some of them are sure to come and meet me."

Interpreting the "some of them" to mean Frank, Minnie resigned her intention at once, and suffered Mrs. Leslie to depart unattended, not even looking after her. Had she done so, she might have seen the object of her thoughts lying at full length on the grass, about a hundred yards from the little wicket gate which opened into the park; his curly brown head resting on one arm for a pillow, and about his whole attitude a

certain easy grace which told of long familiarity with a similar resting-place.

He was erect in an instant at the sound of his mother's footsteps, and immediately went to meet her when she had closed the gate.

"Well," he said, drawing her hand through his arm, "how has your errand sped, mother?"

"Successfully at last; but I had hard work to make Minnie consent. It was only by expressing an intention—a real one too—of abandoning the journey myself unless she went with us, that I at length induced her to go. It seemed to me that she was a little vexed or disappointed about you, Frank; you must be cautious not to injure your own cause."

"Trust me for that. Did she mention me?"

"Never once; but I thought she seemed a little uncomfortable once or twice when you *were* mentioned. Frank, dear, you must be *very* gentle. I would not have my darling grieved on any account."

"Nor I for all the world, when once I have convinced her that I don't care for her in the least—as a brother."

And as Frank spoke he pressed his mother's hand affectionately to his side, and lifted his head

with a gesture which was characteristic of his proud, self-reliant nature.

He had determined that Minnie should love him with her whole heart and soul, and was as sure of his triumph, as if the fragrant lips had already murmured the words he would one day compel them to utter. Why should she not love him? He was rich, honest, ready to lay at her feet the whole of his true heart! He was her equal in all things, but beauty and goodness, womanly attributes which could not be expected in a man! What had he to fear therefore? In all his life, whatever he had willed to do, he had done, and as it was his fixed determined "will" to win this sweet, fair woman for his wife, *what* should hinder him?

Nothing, perhaps, except her will, and God's will; which if they should work in unison, would oppose a barrier that not all the strong man's efforts could break down. But Frank never thought of the Deity in connection with his love affair, and was consequently untroubled by any apprehensions of his interferenee with it. He was not a heathen as he had said, but he would never have thought of invoking at his marriage feast, the presence of that wedding Guest, whose

glory put forth its first rays in blessing holy wedded love. He had read and studied much during his lonely sojourns in the bush; but there was one kind of love of which he was profoundly ignorant. He had learned to know somewhat of the stars in their courses, and of the winds which blew as they listed; he had questioned nature with the eager curiosity of a strong, inquiring intellect, and had marvelled at her answers. He understood many of her grand secrets, and comprehended in some degree her heights and depths of sublimity; but there was one thing—the key to all the rest—which he had never studied—his Father's heart.

CHAPTER VII.

A VIEW OF WINDERMERE.

MINNIE was industriously sketching a view of the lake. Mrs. Leslie was crocheting baby socks, sitting by her side. Mrs. Grey was pursuing her vocation amongst the poor of a neighbouring hamlet, feeling—good woman that she was—that even in holiday times there might be found or made, occasions for dropping a word in season to one that was weary; or drying the tear on a mourner's cheek; or otherwise carrying on the work which was given her to do. All the rest were away excursionising for the day; so Minnie and Mrs. Leslie sat together in perfect, placid content, saying a few words to each other now and then, but for the most part working on in a silence, which was a little unusual to either of them, though very peaceful and sweet.

They had been a month in Westmoreland, and under Frank's leadership had explored its beauties thoroughly. Whatever was worth seeing, they had seen; the weather had been fine, and Minnie's love of nature had been stimulated almost to a passion by the sunsets, and the mountains, and the lakes. Nothing had occurred to mar her delight. With quiet tact, Frank had always contrived to leave her under his mother's wing, diplomatically devoting himself to Mrs. Grey, who began to entertain a very high idea of colonial manners, from the careful attention she received. Even Mr. Leslie remarked that his son seemed to have a greater liking for being with the old folks than with the young ones; and wondered why it was always a matter of course, that he and Mrs. Grey should monopolise Frank, whilst Minnie and Mrs. Leslie were dependent on Harry, or rather on each other, since Harry's wife claimed her legitimate right to his arm on all occasions.

However, the old farmer was too glad of an arrangement which gave him more of Frank's society than he otherwise would have had, to quarrel with it; and like all the rest, he was perfectly satisfied to take any place that Frank assigned him. But though Minnie and Mrs.

Leslie had always been together, they had never actually been alone with each other until this particular morning. Somehow they had invariably been included in all the drives and walks and picnics. Minnie could not tell how this had been brought about. She only felt that it could not be helped, and that it would have interfered with the general harmony had she refused to share in these things. Besides, there was no reason why she should make such sacrifices. Frank never obtruded himself upon her, and yet she had a certain consciousness that she was in all his thoughts. In some quiet way he made it evident to herself, that *her* comfort and pleasure were the main objects he had in view. This thoughtful, watchful, reverent interest, hovering about her all day long, yet scarcely ever taking tangible shape, making itself felt in a thousand trifling words, and looks, and actions, so slight in themselves that they drew no comment from others, yet perfectly intelligible *to her*, was very sweet to a girl like Minnie—sensitive, yet passionate-hearted, claiming for her womanhood its proud privilege of being wooed, and not unsought, being won; but full of all womanly longing to rest on a strength greater than her own. She began to value this silent,

ceaseless homage, and to think it worth more than the open affection she had at first expected from him. It seemed to imply that he held her in too high esteem to exact anything on the score of her childish friendship; and that whatever place he might hereafter occupy in his relation to her, should be manfully won, with the full consent of her riper judgment. She thought it was very good of him to take so much trouble to gain her goodwill; and life was inexpressibly sweet, she could not quite tell why. But as she sketched on by his mother's side, filled with the vague blessedness which springs from the knowledge that we love and are loved, the light in her eyes was wonderful to see.

At length Mrs. Leslie rolled up her work and looked at her watch.

"It is four o'clock, love. They will be back soon, I should think. Can you leave your drawing now, and finish to-morrow; or must we stay half an hour longer?"

"I should like to put in a few more touches," said Minnie, "but do not wait for me. Go back to the hotel, and I will be with you before they come."

Mrs. Leslie obeyed, and Minnie forgot how the minutes were passing, until she heard a quick step

approach the place where she sat, and Frank's voice immediately afterwards.

"Miss Grey, I am sent to tell you that the tea is getting cold; and we are all very much in need of it after our toils; under these urgent circumstances we trust that you will come at once, even at the risk of spoiling your sketch."

"However could I be so selfish as to keep you waiting," said Minnie, rising instantly, and gathering up her drawing materials, of which Frank took possession.

"Would you like to come back after tea? There will be an hour's daylight—just time enough to complete the outlines. And as we are going out to-morrow, you won't be able to touch a pencil until Saturday, which may be wet. It will be a kindness to me if you will come, for I am in no mood to lose this exquisite evening indoors, and the others are all too tired to stir another step." Farnk's tone was quite cool and unembarrassed, but he waited her reply with the keenest suspense. It was the first time that he had asked her to go out with him alone, and he was not yet quite sure how she would take it.

But Minnie's thoughts just then were of her sketch.

"I should like to finish it very much," she said, eagerly, "will there be time after tea do you think?"

"Decidedly, if we make haste now, and get tea out of the way quickly."

They were soon at the hotel, and Minnie drank a cup of tea standing, whilst Frank explained that they were in haste to return to the lake for half an hour, where they could be found if any one chose to join them, but as daylight was waning they must hurry back without waiting for the rest.

"Don't waste time in apologies, pray, Frank," said his mother, smiling, "you can go when you have set down your empty cups, and perhaps we shall come out by and by and look for you.

They walked rapidly to the place which Minnie had chosen for her point of view, and Frank adjusted the camp-stool, and spread out the drawing implements; and when the sketch was being proceeded with, he threw himself down in his favourite position on the grass, resting one elbow on the ground, and supporting his head with his hand in such a way that he could watch the progress of the drawing, without disturbing the artist, who was a little in advance of him.

Minnie was working so industriously that she

was hardly aware how long they had thus continued in unbroken silence, until the increasing twilight obliged her to look up.

"Oh dear, I cannot see any longer. Why, we must have been here nearly an hour." She was about to get up, but Frank put out his hand deprecatingly.

"Just a few minutes longer; you must confess that I have been very patient. Can you guess what this packet contains?" he asked, extending a tiny parcel towards her.

She glanced at his hand and shook her head.

"How should I be able to guess what kind of treasure a gentleman chooses to carry in his waistcoat pocket," she said laughing.

"You have named it rightly, however. It *is* a treasure, carefully hoarded for many a long year. May I show it you?"

"If you will," said Minnie, without looking at him. She was aware of a change in his voice and manner. The quiet, assured tone in which he generally addressed her, had given place to a low pleading whisper, as if he were going to say what might need forgiveness. Her heart beat very rapidly as he broke the seal of the little packet, and laid before her, her own withered forget-me-

nots. She had asked him lightly about them a month ago; now she could only look and tremble with a nervous anticipation of what was coming. Frank saw she could not speak.

"I have kept them as I promised," he murmured, bending over her, "say that you are not angry."

"No."

"Minnie?" Her own name at last! So gently breathed! With such beseeching tenderness! She put her hands over her face and burst into tears.

His arm was round her in an instant.

"My darling! I have loved you so long. My mother's letters taught me how. I came home to woo and win you if it were possible. Let me look in your eyes, and see that I am forgiven."

He drew her hands gently from her tearful, blushing face, and looked steadily into the deep tender orbs, that gave one shy startled glance back to him, and then hid themselves beneath the white lids. But that one brief glance was enough.

"My darling, say 'I love you.'"

"I love you, Frank," she whispered, yielding to the passionate entreaty in his voice.

He gave a quick look around; they were quite alone; not a sound broke the soft stillness of the autumn evening. He drew her a little closer to him.

"There is no one near us; lift up your face, my dearest." She turned, and he pressed a long lover's kiss on the sweet lips that had just confessed her love for him. "My own!" he said, raising his head with the slightly imperious gesture which was so familiar to him, a proud fond smile lighting up his handsome face. "My own to love and cherish till death us shall part."

A shuddering cry burst from Minnie, and she started from his clasp. His words had broken the spell that had been over her for the last few weeks, and she saw, as by a lightning flash, the great gulf that yawned between them.

"Oh! I forgot, I forgot," she cried—"Till death us shall part.—Yes, death *would* part us, Frank. How could I let you tell me all this? It can never, never be! There would be only utter wretchedness for us both! Oh! don't look thus. I cannot bear it!" For he had turned quite white with surprise and pain. The sharp anguish she betrayed helped him to recover his self-command, however. Since she loved

him thus, nothing on earth should separate them!

Sitting down quietly by her side, he said tenderly, "What strange fancy troubles you, dearest? When we love each other, why should a marriage between us, bring nothing but wretchedness?"

"Because two cannot walk together unless they be agreed," she answered, in a strained, almost agonized tone, as if pronouncing her own death-warrant, and his.

"But we *are* agreed, Minnie. That is to say, you have but to propose anything, and I will agree to it at once."

"You know what I mean," she said, "and we shall only pain each other by discussing such a question. Let us forget the few words that have just passed. Be again the dear brother you were once, and I will be your sister always."

"Never, as long as I live!" was the energetic reply. "Minnie, don't you know that when a man loves as I love—not a boy's foolish passion, but the deep strong love of riper life—he can no more subdue it within the narrow channels of brotherly affection, than he could compress the Atlantic into the bed of a river? My darling, don't ask

for impossibilities; but tell me what dreadful fear hinders you from trusting me with your life's happiness, when you have already trusted me with your love? I would cherish it so loyally!"

Looking up into his honest eyes, Minnie knew that he would indeed be loyal, to the last breath of life.

She clasped her hands as if in positive, physical torture. It was so cruelly hard to give pain to any living thing, most of all to him! Yet she *dared* not rivet the chains on the fatal error into which she had glided—almost without knowing whither her steps were tending; for whilst suffering herself to love Frank, she had never thought of marrying him, or of any definite result whatever. With one of her quick, childlike impulses, she rose from her seat, and before he could prevent her, knelt at his feet, taking both his hands in hers.

"No, let me stay here," she said, in a low, quivering voice as he tried to raise her; "and listen, dear! try to understand me if you can. Don't be very hard. I am suffering so much! But, from a little child, I have loved One far beyond all earthly things, who loved *me* unto death.

There is not a thought I have wished to hide from Him. There is not a single blessing He has ever denied to me. Until this last half hour, I knew not the world contained aught which it would have cost me a single struggle to resign for his sake. I thought I loved Him so entirely that no earthly love *could* have endangered my truth to Him. Ah! He has taught me my weakness! But I may not add sin to sin. My God is not your God, Frank; my home can never be your home!"

"It both can and shall," he answered, with almost fierce determination, though he put her by his side again, as gently as a mother would move a sleeping infant; "sit down, and let us reason the matter out; why should you think that I am an unbeliever, Minnie?"

"Not quite that, Frank," she said, shuddering, "I know you believe in and reverence *a* God; but is He the God of the Bible—the God of your own salvation? And if not, what accord is there between us? Would not our lives be in constant collision? This world, its wealth, ambition, honours, would be the objects of your seeking; and I—Oh! Frank, I should lose the light in my own soul by striving after companionship with you,

even though it were in the thick darkness! Be generous—you are so much stronger than I; put this temptation away from me with your own hand."

He would not trust himself to look at her pleading face, neither would he endure the thought of giving her up. "Dearest," he said after a long pause, and with strange humility, "I am not worthy to ask you to be my wife. I know that; but could you not make me better? Minnie, if you send me away from you, I shall grow bad, desperate, reckless. If you will come to me, I solemnly declare that I will strive to the utmost to be all you wish."

"Oh, God help me!" she sighed; and help came in an increase of strength, wherewith to sustain the unequal conflict.

"I *dare* not let you persuade me," she said, "no good would come of such a marriage to *you*—inexpressible misery to me. God is love. If He *could* have blessed such unions, He would; but they are emphatically forbidden, 'Be not unequally yoked,' is as much a command as any in the Decalogue. How could I dare expect his blessing, when rushing with wide-open eyes into open rebellion against Him? And Frank, dear," she added, timidly laying her hand on his, "I should

wither, even in your arms, without the smile of God."

He sat for a few minutes in silent, but bitter rebellion himself, almost hating the Divine rival, who had hardened against him the heart of the woman he loved. When he spoke, his voice had lost all its rich low music, and was hard, and stern, and cruel.

"Either I am a monster, or this God of your adoration is one, Minnie! What have I done that his mandates should be specially launched against me? You know my life. I took care that it should be fully recorded in my letters home, all of which you saw. I have done wrong to no man. The few thousands I have accumulated have been got together by honest work, and were laid up for your enjoyment, far more than for any other purpose. You might give every shilling of them away, if you liked, and I would begin the world again penniless; aye, and still win wealth and comfort for you! Am I false, or cruel, or vicious?"

"No," she answered, faintly; "you are the very soul of honour, and truth, and generous kindness."

"My darling," he replied, eagerly, "if *you*

think this, may not God? According to your own faith, He is more pitiful than man. Is it not possible that these very imperfections which seem to you so great, may appear to Him but as the honest efforts of a finite creature, seeking to do right according to the conscience that has been given to him? He could not surely be a God of justice, much less one of love, to exact more than this from any of us; and if I am doing my best to walk uprightly, why should He hurl his anathemas against a marriage which would help me to climb nearer to Himself?"

"Oh! I am sorely tempted," thought poor Minnie. "Help me, Thou who knowest *all* temptation!"

"Frank, dear," she said, meekly, and with a faint, sad smile, "you know I am neither clever, nor wise. I have only faith, and feeling, to oppose to your reasoning. Faith bids me follow God's Word—his plain, clear, unmistakable Word, even when it goes most sorely against my own wishes; and feeling tells me, that unless my husband's soul and spirit, were blent with mine in everlasting union, the earthly tie would only be productive of intolerable fear and pain. And oh, love, every word that you have spoken has only served to

show how far apart we stand. The Deity you have created for yourself only chills and repels a weak soul like mine. I do not want—I could not love a God who must be propitiated by painful efforts to produce a life which shall meet the demands of his justice, and claim heaven from Him as a right. I know that in such a case, heaven would never be mine at all. I want a *Saviour*—one who will come and lift me out of the mire, rejoicing over me with exceeding joy. I want one who will be afflicted in all my affliction; who, when I am sorrowful, will weep with me; when I am glad, will rejoice with me; when I am sinking under a sense of guilt and frailty, will hold me up with his wounded hands! Just *such* a one as Jesus of Nazareth, whom sinful women, like myself, loved with all their souls. And I love Him, too—so well, that not even for your sake will I grieve Him."

Her voice rose clear and unfaltering as she uttered the last words; her eyes beamed with holy light; her face was as the face of an angel, with its rapt, adoring, upward gaze.

Frank started up, throwing aside her hand, with an exclamation of bitter anger.

"You think nothing then of sending me to

perdition, ruining me body and soul, in order to carry out some celestial theory of your own imagination! It must be right to *do* right, and I have been trying to do right all my life. Yet you tell me, virtually, that I am as one of those Pagan wretches, steeped to the lips in all vile abominations, against whom St. Paul warned his Christian converts! Minnie," he said, with a sudden softening in his harsh tones, "I declare to you, that if I could look back upon one action unworthy of the man who seeks to be your husband, I would not dare ask you to be my wife. God will put no ban upon our marriage, dearest. *He* knows that a good woman can raise a man to any height she lists. Try me. Surely it were more like the Christ of the Bible to help a striving soul, than to thrust it down to unfathomable abysses of sin!"

He had been standing, looking upwards, almost as if appealing to heaven itself, for the truth of what he said, and now turned abruptly to note the effect of his words on Minnie. She was deadly pale; all the quivering rapture had died out of her beautiful face, and left it white, drawn and rigid, like that of one in mortal pain.

"I think it were more easy to die than to

suffer thus," she gasped, "but I cannot—I dare not do evil that good may come." And thus for the present the strife ended, for she had fainted.

In great alarm, Frank caught her as she was falling, and with almost frantic remorse strove to bring her again to consciousness, but for a long time his efforts were fruitless; the long black fringe of lashes rested on the marble cheek, motionless as those of the dead.

Suddenly he remembered that his pocket-flask, half filled with brandy, had been put in his coat by Harry that morning, who always took care of the inner man in their little excursions. He poured a few drops into her mouth, and with a sigh and shudder, she slowly unclosed her eyes upon the anxious watcher.

"Thank God," he said fervently, "drink a few drops, my darling. If you don't revive soon my punishment will be greater than I can bear. There! that will do. Now let me help you to rise, and we will go back. I could carry you easily if you'd let me," he continued, looking at her doubtfully, for she staggered, and would have fallen if he had not held her.

"Oh no, that would never do—how frightened they would be—your arm will do."

"Lean on me then, darling, as heavily as you can; I will not annoy you again by word or sign."

She looked at him gratefully, and with a pitiful lovingness that made his heart swell painfully, but neither of them spoke until they reached the hotel.

"How must I account for your illness?" he then asked.

"Only say that I am not very well, and ask mamma to leave me undisturbed till morning."

He waited until she had ascended the stairs leading to her own bed-room, and then went in to the others. They were all in the sitting-room together. Harry reading a newspaper, and the rest half dozing in their several chairs.

"Are you alone, Frank?" asked Mrs. Leslie, rousing up. "What has become of Minnie?"

"She has gone to lie down; she is not quite well. I was to ask Mrs. Grey not to disturb her until morning."

"Oh, dear! but I must go and see what is the matter directly! Minnie is never ill. It must be a fever that is coming on."

Frank looked appealingly at his mother, who put out her hands to intercept Mrs. Grey's retreat to the door.

"It is no fever at all; just do as she wishes. She has been sketching too long and has got a headache. Her room is next to mine, and I will look in as I pass, and see that she is sleeping soundly before I go to bed."

"Well, if it's only a headache, it may go off before the morning. But how did it come on, Mr. Frank."

"Quite suddenly, and we came back directly," he answered, taking up the paper which Harry had laid down, and stubbornly fixing his eyes upon its columns.

He *would* not answer further questions, and Mrs. Leslie saw that he had only ensconced himself behind the paper to avoid doing so. A nameless fear came upon her that something had gone irretrievably wrong with his suit to Minnie, and when in about ten minutes he threw down the paper, and walked out of the room, she followed him. He was only a few steps in advance of her, and had hardly reached his own room, before his mother tapped at the door.

"May I come in, Frank?" she said, suiting the action to the word. "Tell me what is amiss with Minnie?"

"A sudden shock to her nervous system, I

presume," he replied, with a cynical hardness which cut into his mother's heart like the keen edge of a sword.

"My boy, tell me what it is," she murmured, drawing his head to her loving breast. "It is *not* possible that Minnie does not love you. I have watched her every day that we have been here, and have seen how surely you were gaining ground in her affection. She is so transparently truthful, that to one who understands her, her loves and likings are easy to read as an open book! What *has* she said?"

"I scarcely know what either of us said. I think I was half mad at last, and frightened her into a fainting fit with my violence. You have read my fair saint right, mother, and yet she won't marry me," he said, looking up to Mrs. Leslie with the ghost of his old smile.

"But why, Frank? tell me *why?*"

"She thinks I am not one of the 'elect.' Confound them! Mother, I beg your pardon. You will be fainting next. She and you *are* amongst this mystic community, I know, and this is enough to assure me that a few honest souls are included with a whole army of canting hypocrites; but it is past a man's patience to see

his whole life's happiness trampled on for the gratification of a morbid piety; or rather in obedience to a bigoted, and uncharitable creed! If I had been a drunkard, or a gambler, or an idiot, or a rake, I could have understood a good, pure girl rejecting me with scorn. But to give me up because I'm not of the Elect!"

Frank upset his chair in his wrath, and began to pace the room with long rapid strides, whilst Mrs. Leslie stood pale and troubled, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Did she tell you this, Frank?"

"No, not in my rough words. She talked like an angel, bless her!" said poor Frank, his eyes getting dim with unaccustomed tears; "but it was the same thing at last. She was like a rock—I think the early martyrs must have been made of such stuff. I believe in all sincerity that she would lay down her dear life for me if needs were, but I equally believe that she would let that life die out in torture sooner than marry me!"

"What are we to do?"

"I must go away again. It would be cruelty to stay at Southwell, keeping up the soreness of her grief by my presence. She must learn to forget me, and comfort herself by an access of

devotion," he answered with returning bitterness. "She thinks, poor child! that it would be easy enough to go back to our old early friendship. As if she and I could ever meet again in this world as we met this morning."

"Is there no other alternative?" said Mrs. Leslie, white and trembling; "oh, Frank, how can *I* bear another parting?" He paused in his rapid march, and put his arm round her affectionately.

"Dear mother! it *is* hard for you, who never saw a fault in your graceless son! But what else can I do?"

"May we not hope that you might some time learn to think as she does—as I do? There would be no hindrance to your marriage then!"

He shook his head with gloomy denial. "It never can be mother. I could not be a hypocrite for her sake even; and my reason will never put itself under such a yoke as you women bear. It is the voice of God to me, and if I do nothing contrary to its dictates, what have I to fear?"

"My poor Frank! I did not dream that you had gone so far astray! What did the boasted reason of the great Greek people do for them? What is our reason before the cross?"

"Don't preach to me, mother, please; I've had enough of it for one night. Let me alone to think what will be best for us all. I will come down to you by and by. Dear mother, good or bad, I shall be your son at least to the end of my days, and that is something!" He kissed her, as she went out, gently closing the door behind her. The tears were streaming in torrents from his mother's eyes, as, after a moment's hesitation she turned towards Minnie's room and softly entered. The full September moon shone into the apartment, making it almost light as day, and Mrs. Leslie glided up to the kneeling figure by the bedside, and laid her hand on Minnie's head.

"My child, do not sob so; you have done well, far better than I. You were both so dear, and I longed for it so much, and I did not know that he had wandered so far from the old paths! You have done right, dearest, and our Father blesses the right sooner or later. Take comfort, darling! he may come to his right mind at last!"

Minnie rose up from her knees with a great sobbing sigh, looking wan and white in the moonlight, as she threw herself into Mrs. Leslie's arms.

"Yes! I must live upon that hope henceforth,

but it may be so many years; and it is so hard—so hard, for he has made me love him very dearly," and a hot blush kindled on the pale cheek that rested on his mother's breast.

"My Minnie, you know what pitiful voice it was which spake of the spirit being willing though the flesh was weak. He *knows* it is hard. If he were here you might shed these tears at His feet, and I think—I think, perhaps, He would wipe them away with His own loving hand, and tell you to trust Him with this wayward heart, and that when he has brought it closer to Himself, and you, He will give it back into your guardianship. Go to rest, dearest, relying on that sure love which makes all things work for good. We will talk more to-morrow." She kissed the weary eyes tenderly, and watched by the pillow until at last they closed in quiet sleep, and then she left her.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAST DOWN, BUT NOT FORSAKEN.

SO that pleasant journey to the North had a very doleful ending. It was useless trying to conceal what had occurred. Minnie's pale face, and Frank's clouded brow at breakfast next morning, were sufficient indication that something out of the common way had happened.

After one or two attempts to draw his son into their usually lively chit-chat, Mr. Leslie began to be conscious that his wife was handing him a cup of coffee with a look which said plainly, "Let him alone." Obedient to the signal, though very much mystified as to its meaning, he subsided into quietness. Mrs. Grey with quicker instinct than the old farmer, nearly guessed the truth, as she remarked her daughter's start, when Frank, very much later than usual, took his seat

next her at the breakfast-table, and gravely hoped the headache was gone.

"Yes, thank you," said Minnie, and they spoke no more to each other until the meal was concluded.

"By Jove, a lover's quarrel," thought Harry, whose courting days were not so very far off, but that he could recollect such things between himself and Lizzie; "I hope poor old Frank hasn't come back to be a rejected lover! But that can hardly be! No girl in her senses would refuse such a good-looking fellow, with such lots of tin! They'll be billing and cooing before the day's out," with which philosophical conclusion, Harry dismissed the subject from his thoughts, and applied himself to the business of breakfast. It was a relief to them both that the little picnic which had been previously arranged, would prevent their being thrown together during the day; for Minnie's bruised spirit was aching with the conflict it had nobly borne; and Frank was devising in his own mind, the easiest plan of reconciling his father and mother to his second departure.

In the evening, after their return, he explained how matters stood in a few brief sentences to his

father and Harry, and intimated his intention of returning to Australia for a year or two.

"Stay at Southwell, or even in England, I can't. It would be torture to her and me. My old home will suit me best for a time. I left one or two good fellows behind, who will be glad enough to let me lounge from one to the other, as I choose, until I see what I'm still good for. It will take some time to pick up my shattered resolutions, and piece them into a worthy future," he said sorrowfully.

The prosperous edifice that he had reared with ten years of toil, had shivered into atoms at the touch of a girl's weak hand—was it worth while to raise another? His reverie was broken by a storm of indignant wrath from his father. That *his* son should have been refused by a girl like Minnie, a poor girl in comparison, who had neither money nor friends to boast of, filled him with astonishment; his morning's cogitations had only led him so far as to assume that there was something up with Frank, but what it was, he had not been able to discover. Mrs. Leslie had said, "Don't tease him to-day; if he wants to be quiet, let him. I will tell you all to-night;" and thinking it was a matter of no consequence, he

had made no further inquiries. Easy both in temper and circumstances, he had never coveted a rich wife for either of his sons; nevertheless there was deep down in his nature a fibre of pride, which revolted against the idea of his favourite Frank being rejected by one in every way his inferior, as he considered. His indignation knew no bounds, and he heaped so much wrath upon poor Minnie, that Frank turned upon him at last with stern rebuke.

"You forget that I can let no man speak of her thus in my presence, father. She cannot force her conscience any more than I can my own. She is the noblest woman in the world, and my mother's dearest friend; you will not surely do anything to separate them."

"I don't know," growled his father, "she must be such a fool," and he thrust his hands into his pockets, and went to hear what his wife had to say on behalf of her spoiled, conceited, stuck-up favourite.

Mrs. Leslie had not much to say. She was very sick at heart herself, and could comprehend, though she did not share her husband's anger, for she too was shrinking in dismay from the thought of her boy's second banishment; wondering how

she could endure it; praying against it; struggling against it, yet fully justifying Minnie all the time, and only wishing that it were not so hard to flesh and blood to cut off the right hand, as experience proved it to be; her own marriage had, however, afforded a practical comment on the discomfort arising from unequal unions, and now that Frank had openly declared his rationalistic opinions, she felt there was nothing for Minnie, but the course she had adopted. Meanwhile the poor girl herself was undergoing an ordeal, almost as trying as the one she had just endured. Mrs. Grey was putting forth all her influence to reverse her daughter's decision. Frank was just the husband she would have chosen for her, failing the mythical personage who was to have raised Minnie to the upper ranks. He was rich, respectably connected, energetic, and talented enough to push his way still further upward—kind and generous, passionately devoted to Minnie as it now appeared, and most amiably attentive to herself. There might certainly be one thing lacking, though Mrs. Grey would not admit that so much moral excellence could proceed from any but the highest source.

"I think you have acted both unwisely, and

uncharitably," she said severely; "Frank Leslie is one of the most admirable young men that it is possible to meet with, and we are expressly forbidden to judge another; men don't speak of religion in precisely the same way that we do, but they may be quite as sincere for all that. It is a sin to be 'righteous over much,' and in condemning Frank, you may be as far wrong as was the Pharisee with regard to the publican."

"Oh, mamma, I did not think *you* would have misunderstood me," answered Minnie, almost in despair. She had been at least sure of her mother's sympathy, and the want of it seemed more than she could bear.

"I know you meant to do right, my dear, but your judgment may err like that of all people, and I say again that I believe you are mistaken about Frank, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' What good thing is wanting in him? And as it is not in human nature to produce aught but evil, it surely must be by the grace of God that Frank is *what* he is. We must not limit the operations of the blessed Spirit. He does not mould every soul after the same pattern. Even you and I differ on many minor points (they had not once appeared in that light to Mrs. Grey), why then

should you expect to find an exact reflection of your own convictions in Frank?"

"Oh, mother spare me, I cannot argue on such a subject."

"But my dear, I should be wanting in duty and affection if I did *not* try to persuade you out of this unjust prejudice against one of the best men that ever lived: and I'm sure his proposal seemed a direct answer to my own prayers, for I have been very anxious about your future of late, Minnie; no good can come of flying in the face of Providence."

"It cannot be doing that, resolutely to follow the precepts of His own word in opposition to any of our strongest desires. I would not undo what has been done, were it even in my power. But, dear mother, your disappointment is almost as bad to bear as was his; have pity on me; can you not see that I am suffering greatly?"

"Cease to suffer then, my dear, and let us all be happy; is it likely that *I* would advise you wrongly? That fatal obstinacy of yours has been a failing all your life; from a child you never would see anything as I wished you," said Mrs. Grey, in a deeply injured tone.

"My head aches so much! Do leave me for a

little while, mamma," said Minnie faintly, and she looked so ill that Mrs. Grey forbore further persecution, and hoping that she would think differently after a night's reflection, got up and left the room.

"How shall I endure? Oh, how shall I endure?" groaned the girl, as she tossed restlessly on her sleepless pillow.

But there was an ally at hand in Frank himself: he had a very clear perception of Mrs. Grey's small inconsistencies, and was tolerably certain that she would visit on Minnie's head, her own vexation in being deprived of a desirable son-in-law.

"The balance at my banker's would have outweighed all my spiritual short-comings," he reasoned, "and my poor Minnie will have to bear the brunt of her annoyance unless I can manage to turn it aside? These pious women are so frightfully cruel to one another—all except my mother and *her*."

When Mrs. Grey issued from her daughter's room, she found Frank pacing slowly up and down the long gallery like an unquiet spirit.

"I have been waiting for you," he said, offering his arm with his usual courtesy. "Minnie has told you all, I presume?"

"Yes; and I am so grieved."

She did not like to say more, not knowing precisely what attitude it would be expedient to take. If he were irremediably offended, it would be useless to lower her dignity by admitting her desire for the marriage. If, on the contrary, he still wished to prosecute his suit, she was heartily willing to make him sure of her co-operation.

"I am a little more than grieved, I think, Mrs. Grey; but she was kind to leave no false hopes. The first pain is the least. She has been all sweetness and goodness! It is my misery that my conscience is as unbending as her own, and that I cannot profess to be what I am not, even for the happiness of being her husband. I know that we are separate and apart, in that way, for ever; but, Mrs. Grey, that does not alter the fact, that had I been more worthy, she *would* have been my wife, and you, my mother. You must give me a right to watch over you both even as it is, and turn to me in any necessity just as you would have done, had my love been more happy. Whilst I have an arm to work, she shall never know a care from which I can shield her."

"Oh, Frank, you are too good," cried Mrs.

Grey, bursting into tears. "It is not likely we shall ever want such help as that. We have a safe and sufficient income, and when I'm gone Minnie will have more than enough for all her wants; but still, how good of you to think of us thus! Oh! why didn't she love you?"

"Oh! she did, God bless her! and it makes this severance so much the more bitter; but she was right. I am no fitting mate for one like her. So, Mrs. Grey, you must give her a double measure of motherly kindness, to make up for that which she was obliged to put away. And you will remember that whatever I have is hers and yours. We none of us know what may happen. Now, for her sake, let us make the best of our troubles. We will go home on Monday, and in a few weeks I shall be on the sea again. And she will forget me, partly, and resume her peaceful life amongst her birds and flowers. I shall take care to make my will before I sail, and leave it in my mother's hands; so that in case of shipwreck or other disaster, my darling will be as well provided for as if she had been my wife. I tell you this, that you may have no anxiety about the future."

"I wish Minnie could hear you! I wish she

could see you with my eyes!" said poor Mrs. Grey, really touched to the heart.

"Ah! but she can't," answered Frank, with a rueful smile, "so we won't talk any more about it. Only try to make her happy, and I shall be content."

They were all glad to be at Southwell again. In spite of Frank's chivalrous efforts to smooth the way for her, life just then was a rough road to Minnie, and she trod it with bleeding feet. Mr. Leslie looked coldly upon her; her own mother, sadly and reproachfully; Harry and his wife avoided her; Mrs. Leslie clung to her more tenderly than ever, but her eyes were always filling with tears; and worse to bear than all the rest, was the sight of Frank's worn, uncomplaining face.

"Oh, why was I born to give them such cruel pain?" she sobbed. "Oh, it is hard *now* to feel that all things are in love; and yet, oh! Father, give me grace to trust Thee, though Thou slay me!" And He did; the word of his truth took such hold of the bleeding, wounded, fainting spirit, that it was strengthened with his own might through all that fierce temptation.

In a very short time Frank was ready for his second wanderings. He walked down again to

the little cottage, which looked more lovely than ever, clad in the changing autumn foliage, and said "good-bye" to Mrs. Grey as he had done so long ago. Minnie was not in the house. She had found it impossible to sit still, and had gone for a long walk in the park.

"I must see her once again. In what direction shall I go?"

"Up to the hazel copse. She is sure to be somewhere near there."

He wrung Mrs. Grey's hand in a last pressure, and hurriedly sought the little wood which was Minnie's favourite resort at all times.

She was slowly sauntering along one of the broad walks, already carpeted with brown October leaves, when he drew near and joined her.

"My darling," he said, drawing her to his breast, "I shall only stay a few minutes, and we may never meet again, but before I go, I must say something to you, and it is rather hard to get out. There are bad rumours afloat about Calthorp's bank. I fear it will go with a crash some day, and all your mother's income with it. My own Minnie, when this happens, will you remember that my one solitary joy in life will

henceforth be to avert any sorrow of this kind from you? My mother is provided with the necessary legal forms, to apply the money I leave in England for your benefit, if needs be. Stop, love, don't speak yet; there is another thing to say. You are so young—" he paused, striving to banish all trembling from his voice, "you are so young, and years of absence will deaden the feelings which are so strong to-day. You cannot go on loving all your life a man whom you will never see. Dearest, if a better love should come to you by and by, let no thought of me come between it and you."

She did not answer, but only clung to his breast, and looked into his eyes with a long fixed gaze, as if she were engraving his likeness on her heart.

"Speak, darling; tell me you understand."

"Bend down your head." He bowed his face to a level with her own, and she put her arms round his neck, and kissed him. A long, solemn, fervid kiss, like that with which we seal our love to the dead. "Do you want any other answer?" she said, "you know me better than to think that I would let that kiss be taken from my lips by any other living man. I may not be your wife, but I *may*

love you to the last, and I will; and if some time —no matter how many years hence—you come back to God and me, be sure, that whatever else may have changed, He and I will not. Oh! Frank, be very sure, that to Him and me you are now, and ever will be, dear beyond all telling. Kiss me once more, and leave me to pray for you."

He strained her to him in a close embrace, murmured a few words of blessing, and walked rapidly away. Turning on the brow of the hill from whence he had twice surveyed the scene, he saw, for the third time, a vision in the porch. Minnie had reached the cottage, and was standing looking after him; but she did not run up with a handful of blue flowers, as she had done before. She only lifted her white clasped hands, and he knew that her very soul was going out in prayer.

CHAPTER IX.

DEEP WATERS.

THOSE who have gone through "a great fight of afflictions," do not need to be told that, whilst the fight continued, the throbbing agony of a heart wounded to the core, was not so acutely felt as in the days that followed; whilst victory was yet doubtful, and the battle raging fiercely, the roused and quickened spirit, scarcely heeded the blows which fell upon it. Afterwards, however, when the conflict had ceased, the maimed, and bruised, and shattered Christian warrior, became conscious that he had left half his life upon the battle-field; and sometimes it takes months, or years before "leaves from the tree of healing" can restore these exhausted energies, or staunch those bleeding wounds.

After Frank's departure, Minnie woke slowly

up to the fact that the worst part of her trial had yet to come. Whilst it was necessary to resist him and her own heart's pleadings, she had strength "to wrestle, and fight, and pray;" but when all was over—when she was left triumphant, but *alone*—she began to realize at what a cost that triumph had been achieved. Her loving, joyous nature, with its instinctive artist-cravings for inward and outward harmony, shrank with sick pain from the altered looks, the sadness, the reproach, that met her on all sides. She had ventured once to go to the Grange, but Mr. Leslie had turned on his heel and walked out of the house without speaking to her, and Mrs. Leslie's grief-worn face had quivered all over with suppressed emotion, as she folded her in her arms, and told her that, until her husband had got over his disappointment, it would be better to avoid the chance of meeting him.

"I will go away at once," replied poor Minnie, too wretched to shed a tear. "I ought to have known that the sight of me would be unbearable to him."

She felt utterly broken down. There seemed no pity for *her* anywhere—no care for the cloud that had come over her golden morning—no sym-

pathy for the struggle, bitter as death, through which she was passing. She went on wearily through the chill November fog, thinking how differently all things had looked on the glowing August day, when he met her in the porch.

And so the dull weeks rolled on; Christmas came and went, gloomily. All out-door occupations were gone with the summer and the flowers. There was, that winter, neither snow nor frost, only a drizzling rain, or cheerless haze over the park, that blotted out all its beauties. Minnie had worked at the Windermere sketch, filling in all the details with zealous minuteness, and when this memorial of her brightest joy and cruellest pain was finished, and laid aside, her work in the world seemed over. She had no sick to visit, no poor to provide for, no dying souls to feed with the Bread of Life; such ministrations were uncalled for amongst the godly, well-fed, industrious villagers. Nobody seemed to want her, and in her morbid melancholy she often wondered why she was suffered to cumber the ground. Her old delight in the Bible had all vanished. She was like a sick child, who is impatient even with the tones of its mother's love. Dull inaction, tame endurance, were torture to

her quick, sensitive, highly-wrought temperament. She groaned under a sense of her own weakness, and yet her pained heart ached from morning until night, and from night until morning.

In the years of her undisciplined gladness, she had thought that if ever suffering befell her for Christ's sake, she could not merely bear it, but glory in it! She had pictured to herself almost every conceivable form of trial, and felt, with a rush of exultation, that she could delight in them all, for love of him who had so loved her. There had, however, in all these imaginary conflicts, been something of heroism, and of the grandeur of self-sacrifice, for a grand purpose. *No* purpose seemed to be attained by this dull, wearing trouble —this sapping of the springs of life—this pouring out the wine of her existence on arid sands, which it could neither fructify nor brighten! No living soul was the better for what she had done; but many were made desolate, and one—the noblest—almost blasted in its prime. Had she, indeed, mistaken her way? Was her mother right after all? Had she been in truth "righteous overmuch," and driven into grosser darkness, a truthful, earnest heart, only needing the help of human love, to lead it up to the Divine? Perhaps she

herself was astray altogether. She had never known that special illumination on which her mother so strongly insisted as *the* mark of true conversion. It might be that she was still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, outside the covenant of grace, and walking in the light of the sparks which her own imagination had kindled. If it were not so, the consolations of religion would surely abound at this time of all others, instead of which, faith and hope seemed utterly dead.

For many weeks the poor girl tossed on a sea of bewildering doubts, unable to find rest or comfort. Like Christian, in his contest with Apollyon, she let the "Word fly out of her hand," and began to despair even of life. One day she determined to write to Mr. Gordon, and tell him all she could. Had he still been at Southwell he would have known all from the beginning: she would have whispered a few broken words and he would have understood everything—the love—the renunciation—the hopeless grief—and he would have made the right so clear, that no hideous doubts could have overwhelmed her. But he was in London, and hitherto it had been impossible to tell her sorrow even to him, by writing—she shrank from seeing it all written down in straight

black lines; but at last, driven to it by sheer misery, she told him, as best she could, what she had done for conscience' sake, and the uncertainties into which she had since been plunged. She scribbled the word, "Confidential" on a corner of the envelope, and without giving herself time to reflect, posted the letter, and waited, nervously, for a reply.

A whole week elapsed, and then came a brief note, surrounded with a deep black margin, and her own unopened letter inside.

Mr. Gordon was dead. He had been struck down by a severe attack of bronchitis, brought on by incessant labour amongst his houseless, starving poor. He had died, therefore, as he had always longed to die, with helmet on head, and sword in hand, warring a good warfare to the very last breath. And after the first shock, Minnie did not mourn for him; but she mourned intensely for herself; for where now could she look for help? Some old familiar words stole into her remembrance, as with a sharp cry of pain, she asked herself this question, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden." A gracious pitiful face seemed looking down upon her from between the cloud racks of the wintry sky—a tender human hand

seemed laid upon her head. All the darkness rolled away. She *felt* the clasp of her Father's hand, and knew that all was well. It was like life from the dead, when faith could again lay hold of *every* promise and feed upon it, just as the need occurred. It was wonderful too, how in this deeper life of suffering, the life of Christ grew luminous, and fraught with richest meanings. That poor, unlettered, lowly life, of common toil, amongst common people, united itself to her own. She understood why it became Him to have been made perfect through suffering. How else could he have succoured the suffering millions whom He came to save? She knew that he must needs plunge into the lowest depths of shame and pain, so that his sublime sympathy might embrace the lowliest, the poorest, the shamefullest of all the sons of men. The Psalms of David—especially those prophetic of the sufferings of Christ—were peculiarly precious to her; she marvelled to see how He had drained to its very dregs, the cup of trembling, which He had but permitted her to taste. She began to comprehend what Mr. Gordon had said to her many times, that there was an exceeding sweetness in being one with Him, even in Gethsemane. And thus the barbed

arrow was robbed of its poison; and the burden which had bowed her to the dust, only made her lean more lovingly on the arm that could sustain both it and her; and the clear eyes regained their calm serene lustre; for there was a holy communion between her soul and its Redeemer, though it was a communion of prayer, rather than of praise.

The little cottage began to put on anew its vesture of spring greenery, when another letter came from London, bringing with it tidings of great loss and possible penury. The bank in which poor Grey had invested his small savings, had suddenly collapsed, involving in its ruin hundreds of helpless people, whose all had been entrusted to its keeping. The shock was terrible to Mrs. Grey, who had relied on its stability so assuredly, that her income was, in her belief, as secure as a government pension, and every penny that she had laid by, since coming to Southwell, had been expended in additional shares in it; consequently she and Minnie were absolutely without resources, except a few pounds in cash which had been reserved from her last dividend. They could still go on living at the cottage, almost without

money, it was true, but what was to become of Minnie, should her mother die? The poor woman, who had very little natural strength of character, was completely prostrated by the calamity, and refused to hear either her daughter or Mrs. Leslie, who had come to them in compliance with a hasty line from Minnie, very soon after the arrival of the news.

"It is dreadful, dreadful!" she said, rocking helplessly to and fro. "The savings of more than twenty years to go like this! Oh, that I should live to become a beggar!"

"My dear mother, you never shall be that; I will try to get something to do—work is just what I want. Neither the cottage, nor furniture are ours, so we cannot be turned out of our little home: and you shall stay here amongst your old friends, whilst I get a situation as governess in London."

"Live in London, alone!" almost shrieked Mrs. Grey, who knew better than her daughter the perils which might accompany such a life; "what can you be thinking of? If you go, I must go; and you never can earn enough to keep us there, where everything is so dear. Oh, we shall surely come to starvation, or the workhouse!"

"You forget what I have in my possession,"

said Mrs. Leslie; "my poor Frank foresaw all this, and took care to provide against it. Minnie, you will not be so unkind as to refuse *his* help?"

Minnie turned very pale, but she answered, resolutely,

"Dear Mrs. Leslie, I *could* not take his money, when I was obliged to refuse his love. Do not fear for us. I will write to Mr. Saville, and ask him to look out two or three engagements for me amongst his own connexion. We can live very economically in quiet lodgings, and come to see this dear old place in summer time, and be very well content. Nay, I cannot hear you, my dear friend," she continued, placing her hand on Mrs. Leslie's lips. "I could not promise to accept *this* from him, when he asked it himself."

Mrs. Leslie, however, did speak, and urge every constraining motive she could think of, to shake Minnie's purpose, but seeing, at last, that such attempts only distressed her, she abstained, on condition, that if the London scheme were a failure, she should then be permitted to carry out her son's intentions. Minnie consented to this without a scruple. She had all the confidence of youth and inexperience, and scorned the idea of not being able to earn her own living. There

was even something exhilarating in the bare idea of movement, after the stagnant life of the past months. And when Mr. Saville wrote to say that at his recommendation, several ladies would be glad to secure her services for the instruction of their daughters, she imagined that all difficulty was at an end. She roused Mrs. Grey from her despondency, commissioned Mr. Saville to take lodgings for them, as near the scene of her future labours as possible; packed up her paintings, and other things which might be useful to them in London; said good-bye to her friends in the village, and was ready at the end of a week, to start in the lumbering old conveyance which had been hired to convey the luggage and themselves to a small town at three miles distance, from whence they would travel by coach to London.

She put off going to the Grange until the very last—knowing what a sad parting there would be. Mrs. Leslie could not be brought to sanction their leaving Southwell—*she* did not know how the girl was longing to try her unknown powers, nor that a vague, delicious hope had lately begun to pervade all her dreams. It might be, Minnie thought, that God had entrusted her with one of his most glorious gifts—genius—and that

in London she would have the opportunity of so cultivating her half-dormant capabilities, as really to become an artist worthy of the name; and when Frank came back, as he would some day—for was not this the unceasing burden of her prayer?—he would find her crowned with the honour which genius lays upon her children, but oh! so glad to lay this honour at *his* feet, and be a thousand times more loving and lowly-hearted because of the halo around her brow.

In after years, she often thought of these visions with a smile of pity for her own ignorance; but they gave her the cheerful courage she stood in need of now. Her only trouble was, that she could not impart them either to her mother or Mrs. Leslie, neither of whom would have understood the rapture with which she looked for their fulfilment, or, in their matter-of-fact good-sense, have encouraged her to hope for it.

It was with a half sense of concealment therefore, that at last she found herself returning Mrs. Leslie's farewell kiss, and promising to write full descriptions of all that was likely to interest her. "I will try to tell you everything, indeed, but I shall have to work hard incessantly, and may be tired and sleepy sometimes. You will not

frighten yourself foolishly, if my letters are stupid now and then?" she asked smilingly.

"No, dear, if I can help it—and his letters Minnie?"

"Oh! let me see them always," she cried quickly, the tears rushing to her eyes. "Why should I not? But don't let him be unhappy about us. Dear Mrs. Leslie, tell him always that his happiness is the very thing to make *me* happy —until he comes back."

His mother sighed, but promised—and they parted with more hope than either of them had dared to expect. About three months afterwards, came a short letter from Frank, announcing his safe arrival at Melbourne; and saying that as he was preparing for a long visit to a friend, at an out-of-the-way station, far in the country, they need not be surprised if his letters were irregular. There was one line in a postcript, "Tell her the forget-me-nots are still with me."

This letter was duly sent to London. Then came a long, long silence—so long that the sickness of hope deferred stole over the patient, waiting mother, and she ceased praying for her boy's return, and only asked that he might come to her "on the other side."

CHAPTER X.

HARD TIMES.

THE engagements which Mr. Saville had obtained for his old pupil, lay amongst a few good families in Belgravia; and he succeeded in establishing her and Mrs. Grey in tolerably comfortable rooms, at no great distance from the Square, in the neighbourhood of Pimlico. They settled down immediately to the new life, which was not so novel to Mrs. Grey as to her daughter, who found all her enthusiasm needful to bear her up against its privations. She had not calculated on the extreme toil of teaching, nor on the tax which it imposed on her physical strength.

The languor which overpowered her every evening made her utterly unable to prosecute the severe professional training which she had con-

templated for her own benefit, and, by degrees, her bright hopes of becoming a painter, died slowly into the conviction that all she must look for was painful drudgery at the mere rudiments of art. But she worked patiently on. She was doing her duty, and using to the best of her ability the talent that had been committed to her, and as to other hopes—well, God knew best.

Mrs. Grey fretted more than her daughter over the change in their circumstances. Lodgings were unbearable, after having been queen in her own little kitchen so many years. The slipshod habits of the grubby maid-of-all-work were a source of chronic irritation. The blueness of the milk, the toughness of the meat, the staleness of the eggs, the dearness of everything, were all so many causes of dissatisfaction.

"Here it is again, Minnie," she said one evening as they were sitting down to tea, "if this isn't the very same blue milk, with the same two flies in it, that I told Eliza to throw away this morning! That girl is really the most trying person! Just look at these spoons. There is some egg sticking to every one of them. I talk to her until I am hoarse, and not the least good does it do. How can her mistress put up with

her? But these lodging-house keepers are as bad as their servants. The tea will be cold whilst I am washing the spoons, and sending her for fresh milk, and you look as if you wanted it so much, my dear!"

"Never mind, mamma; waiting a few minutes longer won't distress me. Shall we take the spoons into our own care, and so far be independent of Eliza? It will be very little trouble to keep them clean."

"Yes, and the next thing we shall be expected to do will be to sweep the rooms, and polish the grates! You have no idea how ready these people are to encroach on kindness. Fortunately you knew nothing of the trouble I had when you were young, in guarding against the impositions of landladies. It's all for the best, of course, but it *is* hard to have to go through the same struggle at the end of life, and after so many years of comfort!"

"Yes, mamma," said Minnie, kissing her, "we won't forget these many happy years, and the wealth of precious memories they have bequeathed to us. God has been very gracious to us."

"I'm not saying to the contrary, I'm sure,

Minnie," said Mrs. Grey, reproachfully. "It is easier for you to bear such changes than for me. You like painting, and it must be nice to do nothing but what you like all day long, whilst I find time hang heavy without my usual house duties; and with no money to give away, I can't take to district visiting either, so I can't help being lonely when you are away. But it's our duty to be patient in tribulation, and I try hard enough."

"Poor mamma," said Minnie, pitifully, "it is hard for you, and I don't see how I can alter it. If I don't go out and work we must starve; and I have *something* to put up with too. Painting for one's own amusement, and teaching others to paint, are two different matters. But you might go into some of the lanes about, and do a little of your old work surely. We can afford to give a trifle now, and when I can command better terms, we shall be able to give more."

"The money I brought with me is going so fast," replied Mrs. Grey doubtfully; "and your earnings will not amount to one hundred pounds this year. I don't know that it would be right to give away what we are sure to want for our own necessities. We must try if possible to save a

little for my old age; since—since, you won't have any help from Mrs. Leslie."

Minnie drank her tea in silence, hoping thus to escape a discussion which would leave an aching smart in her mind for days. But Mrs. Grey was in an unusually depressed mood that evening, and only "improved the occasion" of her daughter's silence by restating her old arguments in favour of recalling Frank, and letting the past be forgotten.

There are some well-meaning people, who seem to lack entirely that fine, inner sense of what others think and feel, which is an essential feature in higher mental organizations. They tear open half-healed wounds, and trample on outraged sensibilities, and knock down the most cherished standards of right and wrong in the minds of others, with the most disinterested kindness in the world. Mrs. Grey was of this stamp. She wrung harsh discords from every chord in her daughter's heart, whilst sincerely desirous of producing only the most melodious music. It was shame and humiliation to Minnie to have her love—hallowed and sacred in her own eyes—brought up constantly as some common thing, which might be as freely canvassed as the colour

of a dress or the shape of a bonnet. It was torture to hear the *advantages* of a marriage with Frank descanted upon—her own noble Frank, whose money had been flung at her feet so lavishly!

Mrs. Grey was not intentionally cruel, but she had a vivid realization of the horrors of that absolute poverty into which they must drift, should Minnie's health give way; and an equally vivid appreciation of the comfort of a good standing in this world. Besides, she had always felt that Minnie was born to have the rule over a handsome establishment, and plenty of servants, and to wear elegant dresses. All these things associated themselves naturally with her refined air of good-breeding. It was a duty, therefore, to rise to the sphere which it was evidently intended she should occupy; and not sink of her own free choice into a poor teacher of drawing.

Again and again had Minnie to submit with what patience she might, to remonstrances such as these; again and again did she simply reiterate that her conscience bound her to accept the word of God literally, and abide by it at any cost. As time crept on and their prospects became more gloomy, Mrs. Grey returned to the charge more

pertinaciously than ever, until weary in body, and harassed in mind, the poor girl almost wished that instead of fainting in Frank's arms, she had died outright on the shores of the lovely lake, and never known how much misery a human heart could suffer before it broke.

Everything was against her. The gloomy winter weather, the long cold walks through sloppy streets, and the uncongenial work; for she discovered too quickly, that whatever her vocation in life might be, it certainly was not teaching drawing. She could no more impart her own skilful touch to her pupils' fingers, than she could transfer to their brains the glowing pictures of her creative imagination. They made no progress, and after a few months' trial, her services were quietly declined by almost all of those to whom Mr. Saville had recommended her; who was consequently disappointed, and afraid to introduce her to other houses, lest his own prestige should be affected.

So when the new year dawned, cold, cheerless, and wretched, they were absolutely without any visible means of support, after the few pounds were expended which Minnie had in hand of the last quarter's earnings. The workhouse again loomed menacingly on Mrs. Grey's horizon. She saw no

possible escape from it now, and dwelt on its horrors with a morbid persistency that was not the least of her daughter's trials.

"Mamma dear, if you could but *trust!* There must be a way of escape from too great temptation, otherwise God's word fails."

"How do we know what is *too* great temptation? Perhaps this may be the very discipline which your foolish pride requires. For it is pride, Minnie, that prevents your making our necessities known to Mrs. Leslie."

"We are not in necessity yet, mamma; when we are, I will hold out no longer, for your sake; but oh! surely it will not come to that, when I am so willing to work, if I only knew how, and have been trying to do right."

"If you are doing right, why are we so tried?"

"I cannot tell," said Minnie gently; "I only know that all—yes *all*—the paths of our God are mercy and truth; and the right way is not always the easiest; it is generally very hard. Was it not so to the Apostles? Was it not so to Christ Himself? Let us be patient, dear mamma, until the light shines through this darkness."

A few weeks passed on without any signs

of better times. The little hoard of sovereigns was rapidly diminishing, and Minnie concluded that it would at least be wise to reduce their rate of expenditure by seeking cheaper lodgings in a more economical quarter of London. Accordingly, she induced Mrs. Grey, who knew the northern suburbs well, to explore Islington one day, and in that unfashionable locality they had not much difficulty in securing two cheap little rooms at a much lower rent than what they had been paying in Pimlico. They took possession of their apartments about the end of January: with many misgivings as to how long they might be able to afford even that poor shelter. But Minnie's clinging faith, still twined itself round every word of comfort or promise that shone out of her Father's word, in her daily reading: and taking that special word, whatever it might chance to be, as a staff in her hand, for that one short step in her pilgrimage—never stumbling—never fearing—but receiving daily strength for daily needs, she went on her narrow way, erect, cheerful, and uncomplaining.

"I can't think how you can be so unmindful of our position, Minnie," said her mother. "We

are sinking into absolute want; and you look as unconcerned as if we had a thousand a year coming in."

"It is because I know whose are the silver and the gold, and that He could shower it upon us to-morrow, if it were well to do so."

"It will never come in showers, or any other way, I fear. There are to be poor people in this world to the end of time, and perhaps we are to be amongst them, while we are in it. I'm sure I always pitied poverty, and did my best to relieve it, but I never knew how terrible a thing it was, till now."

"Nor did I. At least we have learned one grand lesson by our troubles—to 'weep with some that weep'—learned it as *He* did, by actual experience of their sorrow," she murmured in her sweet, reverent tones.

The sovereigns dwindled down to two, and still no help appeared. Minnie answered advertisements every day, offering herself as companion, daily governess—nursemaid even—but no single reply ever reached her. And one day at the end of March, Mrs. Grey laid her empty purse on the table, and turned to her daughter with the resignation of despair.

"It has come at last. We *are* penniless, and there is only the workhouse for us!"

"There is *not* the workhouse for us—'The righteous shall never be forsaken, nor his seed beg their bread.'—My father and yourself can claim that promise at least. I had forgotten my old Southwell drawings; they may be worth more than I fancied—at all events I will go and try to sell them. Kiss me, dear mother—you will see that we are not forsaken when I come back."

She chose a few of her best water-colour drawings; and hastily walked to a shop in the High Street, where she had occasionally noticed coloured landscapes amongst the prints. Quite simply explaining her errand, she placed her drawings before the critical eye of the print-seller, and silently waited whilst he examined them. The man was touched with her grace and beauty, and the pathos of her faltering voice.

"I will try to sell them for you, if you will trust me with them for a few days," he said; "they are not exactly what I can buy for my own trade, but some of them are very good, and might please one or two people I know, who like these things. Will you set your own price upon them,

or leave me to make the best bargain that I can?"

"I have no idea what they are worth. Anything will satisfy me, and I am most grateful for your kindness. When shall I call again?"

"At the latter end of the week, about Friday—that will give me time to show them. I hope I shall do well with them," he said kindly. Minnie thanked him again, and left the shop. There were three days to live through before Friday came, and they had not a penny in the world. Wondering how she should manage to get over these three days, without running into debt, a thought struck her, which sent the hot blood over neck and brow. She had heard or read of people pledging their very clothes for food; but it had always seemed to her the very last resource of desperate misery, linked with infinite disgrace and pain. She faced the question resolutely now, however, and at last, with a burning sense of degradation, turned her steps towards a pawnbroker's shop, intending to leave her watch until Friday; but as she was about to put her foot on the step, an irresistible impulse of shame, made her turn suddenly, and literally run from the door. "Oh! surely this is a sorrow, which even Thou

canst not comprehend," she almost moaned aloud. "I hid not my face from shame and spitting," seemed the immediate reply. She was rebuked and strengthened by the memory of what her Lord had meekly borne, and instantly retraced her steps; in returning to the shop, however, she crossed the road at a slightly different angle from that which she had taken previously, and in going out of her way to avoid a heap of mud that was swept to one side of the pavement, she noticed just under her foot the glimmer of gold; the coin or trinket, or whatever it might be, was so deeply imbedded in the soft mud, that it was with some difficulty she extracted it, and found that she held in her hand a good new Victoria sovereign. "What am I to do with it?" she asked of a policeman, who had seen her stoop to pick it up.

"Why, keep it, Miss, of course;" answered the man, half laughing; "it's been lying there long enough, or it wouldn't have got wedged in so fast. You'll have some trouble to find the right owner, I guess."

With a swelling sense of thankfulness, Minnie hurried back to her mother, and told how her paintings were in good hands, and her watch saved from the profanation of the pawn-shop, and

a sovereign picked out of the mud, for the supply of their present needs. When Minnie had told her story, Mrs. Grey's fears were swallowed up in faith for that day at least.

On Friday morning she presented herself at the printseller's, and ascertained that three out of the half dozen sketches were sold. "I could only get you this for them," said he, putting a ten-pound note into her hand; "they were worth more, and by keeping them I might have got a higher price, but I thought it better not to miss the first offer. We may do better with the others if you can spare them a little longer."

"I shall be very thankful to let them remain with you," she answered. "But will you not allow me to offer you something by way of commission? Is it not usual?" she asked, blushing and hesitating, half afraid that she might be insulting the doer of a generous action, by attempting to pay for it. The man saw her dilemma and liked her the better for it.

"Yes, it is generally done in trade," he said frankly; "and if you and I establish a regular business in this way, why, of course, I shall put my own profit on each transaction. But I am

selling these as a mere experiment. If the style is liked by my connection, I shall be glad to take as many sketches as you can supply me with. The price I shall give will be as good or better than you could obtain elsewhere, and I will take all the risk of selling them on myself. When you come next week, if the other three have sold well, we must arrange a proper partnership."

The drawings proved so saleable that Minnie had an unlimited commission from her new friend, and was kept to her easel from morning to night all through the long summer days.

The dream of being a great artist had long since vanished, but she was able to earn enough for her mother's comfort, and that was all she cared for now. The fond, proud hopes of meeting Frank in triumph and honour, had given place to a sinking dread lest she should never see him again. He had been gone nearly two years, and with the exception of one short note, no token of his welfare had reached them. Mrs. Leslie, in her letters, betrayed her own increasing anxiety, and Minnie, bending over her painting with unwearied diligence, yet grew thinner, paler, more hollow-eyed, as the autumn melted into winter,

and winter into spring, and still the restless pulsings of her heart received no answer to their ever-recurring question,

"Where are you? where are you? my love, my love!"

CHAPTER XI.

A SHIPWRECK.

WEARILY wandering over the great Australian wilds; roaming hither and thither from station to station, without other aim than that of "killing time"; feeling that life was too poor a thing to set much value on, and that the sooner its "fitful fever" ended the better; Frank Leslie buried himself and his disappointed hope in the heart of the untrodden "bush," which stretched hundreds of miles round the rude homesteads of the early settlers. He had provided himself with a horse—a strong, wiry animal—able, like its master, to endure a good deal of "roughing"; and with his dog, his gun, a small knapsack filled with a few requisites for sustaining life in the wilderness, he would venture fearlessly into its untravelled depths, sometimes absenting

himself for a month or two from the station of the friend who was supposed to be his host for the time, and with whom was left the light baggage which he had brought with him from England. He wrote to his mother sometimes, but the letters never fell into her hands. At that time postal communication with the outlying stations was of a very intermittent character. Frank himself only received one out of the many home letters which had been sent out after him; whilst his own epistles, after changing hands several times, finally disappeared, nobody knew how. Concluding that all was well, he made no very vigorous efforts to revive a correspondence which was fraught with pain. When he had thoroughly mastered his grief, he would go home again; until that time it was better to shut himself away from home memories. So with his dog and gun, and much-enduring Bob, he gave himself up to a half-savage life, escaping many dangers from unfriendly natives and other perils to which his rash courage exposed him. He saw afterwards that Minnie and his mother had made a hedge about him with their prayers.

He had been away rather longer than usual on

one of these expeditions, when one evening he rode up leisurely to his friend's door, and presented himself, in a ragged and Esau-like condition, before the astonished eyes of that individual.

"Well, I did think you were done for this time, old fellow, and no mistake! I was just meditating on the propriety of becoming your executor, and treating myself to a regular good outfit from that big chest of yours. See how your eccentric movements interfere with one's praiseworthy intentions! But never mind! I'll do without the shirts so long as you have come back safe and sound. Dismount, and we'll have a jolly night."

Frank got off his horse, and was beginning to narrate his adventures, when his friend interrupted him.

"By Jove! I'd nearly forgotten to tell you that a letter has been in my pocket almost two months, directed to you. Tom Jones brought it up with him from Melbourne just after you were off. I hope it isn't worn out. No; you see the envelope isn't even torn," said Mr. Edward Lawrence, producing an extremely dirty-looking letter from the depths of his jacket-pocket, and handing it to Frank.

It was from his mother, and dated six months back. It told him of the many times that she had written without having had a line in reply, and that she then addressed him almost without hope. "I know my letters have never reached you, or, after what has befallen the Greys, you would have written or come; you *could* not stay in Australia, knowing that Minnie is working for her bread in a poor London lodging, and, like myself, beginning to mourn for you as dead."

As he read on, Frank's very lips grew white. His gentle Minnie! His fragrant, pure-souled, flower of love! His fair white lily! only just fit to bloom in such a sacred home-paradise as it was once his dream to have created for her. Had *she* been sucked into the hideous stream of that black river of poverty, which bore so many broken lilies on its evil current to death or worse destruction? His face became ghastly as he thought of her gracious beauty, and to what it might expose her. He started up, clenching the letter in his hand. "I must go, Ned! Give me one of your freshest horses, and take Bob in exchange. You are welcome to all I leave behind. I can get what I want for the voyage in Melbourne. Don't stand staring, my good fellow. I must ride thirty miles

to-night, and then push on until I reach the port, and take the first ship for England. The dearest friend I have in the world is in difficulty and trouble; I must travel night and day; and even then it will be five months or more before I can arrive, and who knows what may have happened!"

Men don't waste much sympathy in words generally. All that Edward Lawrence said was, "Poor old Frank!" And then he went out and gave orders for his best horse to be brought up at once, and in less than an hour Frank was in the saddle again, riding as for life across the country to Melbourne. He was fortunately in time to get on board a home-bound steamer, which left the dock a few hours after he had safely bestowed a few articles in his cabin, and made the needful arrangements for the long voyage. There were not many cabin passengers besides himself, and those few were of such an uninteresting description, that the monotony of a long sea-passage threatened to be more than usually wearisome. Day by day Frank paced the deck like an imprisoned wild animal—anxious, restless, utterly miserable, and chafing against what appeared to his impatience the intolerable slowness of the

ship's progress, with an irritability which drew upon him some coolly philosophic remarks from the captain, and the rather unpleasant curiosity of his fellow-passengers, who began to whisper amongst themselves that this eager desire to arrive in England was so intense as to be suspicious; and matters were altogether in an uncomfortable position, when a little incident occurred which changed their appearance somewhat to Frank himself.

In his perambulations on deck one day, he noticed a delicate-looking lad come from the steerage, and feebly place himself in an out of the way corner, amongst some coils of rope.

"That can't be a very comfortable seat for you, my lad," said Frank, kindly.

"Not very, sir; but I'm in nobody's way here, and I can feel the sun;" was the answer, with a smile that was very pleasant to see on such a wan, worn face.

Anything like suffering or weakness was an irresistible appeal to all that was best and manliest in Frank's nature. He went forthwith to his own cabin, and returned in a few minutes with a thick woollen rug.

"Let me make a couch for you; you don't

look very strong," he said; skilfully arranging the rug in the coils of rope, so as to make it form a kind of sofa, the boy looking at him all the time in grateful surprise; his blue glittering eyes—that fatal glitter, which is so soon quenched in darkness—shining through large tears.

"Thank you, sir; please don't take so much trouble, I am used to do everything for myself."

"To be sure—when you are well; but that does not seem to be the case just now. Where are your friends?"

"At home; up in the north of England, sir."

"You surely don't mean to say that a boy like you has been sent out to Australia alone?"

"Only for the sake of the voyage, sir. I haven't landed at all, but just changed from one ship to another, when the one I came out with arrived at Melbourne. They thought—the doctors I mean—that perhaps eight or nine months at sea might cure my cough. I knew myself that it was no use," he continued, simply; "but my mother had set her heart on it, and I could not bear to contradict her."

"Why shouldn't it be of use?" answered Frank, cheerfully. "In another three months or thereabouts, we shall be in England."

"You will, sir, I hope; I shall not."

"Where, then?"

"In heaven." The answer was quite sure and calm: but it disconcerted Frank a good deal, and he scarcely knew how to reply to it.

"What makes you entertain such sad presentiments?" he asked at length.

"Sad!" said the boy, with a look of surprise, and then—a smile like a sunbeam spreading all over the wasted features—"there is no 'sadness' in our Father's house."

"But you are so young to talk of death in this way. Has life been bitter to you, too, that you are so willing to lay it down?"

"I have never had any trouble but this illness; that troubled me at first, because of my mother; she is a widow, and I am the eldest of four, and could have helped her soon. Poor mother! I wish you could have had my grave to look at;" and slowly a few big tears rolled down his cheek, and were quietly wiped away. Frank was strangely touched.

"Tell me your name," he said, with a little huskiness in his own voice.

"Willie Ramsay."

"Is there anything that you want and have

not got at your end of the ship? The steward and I are good friends; you shall have whatever you can fancy if you'll let me know." The boy's eyes shone like stars.

"How kind you are, sir; how very kind! how I wish my mother knew! But I only care for grapes, and oranges, and things of that sort, and I don't suppose they are to be had on board; at least not for us in the steerage."

"We'll see," said Frank, disappearing. He returned in a few minutes with a plentiful supply of fruit, which the lad ate with feverish zest.

"Oh, thank you, sir! it was delicious! I am always thirsty, and the water isn't very nice."

"I'll bring you some every day then; it will be something to do, and keep me from being quite so much of a nuisance to the other folks; so we shall be quits, Willy. I shall owe you as much as you owe me," Frank said, smiling.

They had a great deal to do with each other after this. The boy grew rapidly weaker, and Frank unwillingly admitted that, near as they were to England, the mother would never look on her son again. There was one little cabin, next his own, empty; and he had Willie removed from

his close berth in the steerage, to the clean, breezy room where he could be always near him. He laid the ship's resources under contribution to their utmost, to minister to the boy's comfort; he watched him day and night with unremitting care, but all was unavailing. When they were within a fortnight's sail of home, the feeble flame was flickering down—down so low that sometimes it was hardly to be seen. It shot up brightly one evening, however. There had been rough weather all day, and Frank, unable to keep his footing on deck, had been sitting some hours in the cabin by Willie's side. The boy had been telling him all about his home, and his mother, and Frank had promised to convey to her, with his own hands, a lock of hair, and a little packet which lay on the bed.

"I am so glad to think you will see her, Mr. Leslie; and tell her all you can remember about me, please; I have not had strength to write much, but I couldn't die without telling her something of what you have done for me. Oh," he said, clasping Frank's hand in his wasted fingers, "I think I shall long for *you*, even in heaven!"

"Willie, what makes you so very sure of going to heaven?" Frank said, in a low, ques-

tioning voice. The boy's assured faith was a problem which he could not solve. Willie gazed at him with the old wondering look for a moment, and then pointing to the Bible at his side, answered slowly, "My Father's word."

"Yes, of course; the Bible tells us that God is gracious, and your young life has known no sin. You may well have no fear, Willie!"

Willie started from his pillow, his eyes brighter than a diamond, his wan cheek dyed with crimson, "It is not that, it is not that. Oh! Mr. Leslie, I have often told you, but I am too weak now," and he fell back on the pillow; "it is there—all there in the Bible. 'He was bruised for our iniquities; He was wounded for our transgressions,'" the words faltered on his lip, but there was a triumphant light in the dying face. A strange kind of awe crept over Frank. Go where he would, this unquenchable faith in a crucified God met him, and almost proved its divine origin, by its powerful working. In one case, it had nerved the woman who loved him better than her own life to offer up that love on the altar of Christian duty; in this other, it was carrying a soul up to the very gate of Paradise, before the breath left the body.

If it should be true after all—this monkish story of substitution and the cross—he had sacrificed his Minnie's love, perhaps her life, to his stubborn unbelief! He sat pale, silent, deeply thinking, by Willie's side, too absorbed to notice the unwonted confusion on deck, or the increased roll of the vessel, or that it was in fact blowing a furious gale, until a tremendous blast tore along the open sea, with a roar like that of thunder. He was thrown from his chair by the violence of the leap with which the ship—"like a frightened living creature"—crested a huge wave, and then seemed to fall sheer down into the black abyss of waters. She rose again, but shivering in every plank; and in a few brief minutes it was evident to all on board that they were in appalling danger. With the utmost difficulty Frank made his way up the companion, just in time to distinguish the captain's voice issuing orders for the boats to be unslung. Turning instantly, he hurried back to Willie.

"My boy, there is a storm blowing, perhaps we may have to leave the ship. Let me wrap you up, I can carry you on deck," he said, bending anxiously over the frail, scarcely breathing form, lying stretched on the bed. The death-film cleared

from Willie's blue eyes, and a loving light shone in its place.

"Save yourself; don't wait for me."

"I cannot go without you! My dear lad, try to make one effort for your mother's sake. We may be saved and reach home yet."

"You will, I know," said the boy in short, quick gasps; "*my* home is just in sight, and I am not alone, *He* is with me. Mr. Leslie, you are perilling your life for my sake; is it a great thing to believe that Jesus gave his—own—for—yours?"

And Willie went "home" in glory and gladness, for with his last words he had saved a soul.

A fortnight afterwards the English papers contained the news of a shipwreck. Passengers and crew all saved except two of the former, who were missing when the boats were picked up, and were therefore supposed to have been washed off the ship. Their names were Frank Leslie, and Willie Ramsay.

Mrs. Grey saw this announcement in the "Times," and had read part of it aloud to Minnie, when the familiar name caught her eye; she

paused abruptly, and looking up to ascertain the reason of it, her daughter read some tale of horror in her mother's stony face, and wide open, glaring eyes. Before Mrs. Grey could interpose she had seized the paper, and read the paragraph from beginning to end, and without word or sign had dropped to the floor, white and cold as Willie Ramsay beneath the dark blue waters.

CHAPTER XII.

COME TO HIMSELF.

WHEN Frank had closed Willie's eyes, and strapped the little packet round his chest, and severed one thick lock of hair from the boy's head, he began to take thought for his own safety, and again scrambled on deck, and found, to his dismay, that he was the only living soul on board; he could clearly discern the boats heavily labouring through the surf at a little distance from the steamer; but he knew it would be a vain attempt to recall them. His voice could not have been heard, nor could they have put back for him, even had he succeeded in attracting their attention; after a moment's consideration, he looked about for a spar and some rope; both were providentially within reach, and lashing himself to the plank as

safely as he could, he cast himself from the sinking ship. And now, at last, in that supreme peril, the Divine Deliverer—whom, until that hour, he had rejected—stood out in the majesty of his superhuman grace.

The scales fell from Frank's eyes as he lay, hour after hour, tossing upon the stormy sea, and he recognized the glory of Christ, *the crucified,* and the amazing *strength,* which submitted to the weakness of death for the sake of the weak; his loveless rationalism seemed a dwarfed and wretched thing in comparison with the largeness, the grandeur, the length and breadth, the depth and height, of such unimaginable self-sacrifice. He floated on, getting weaker and weaker in body, but with a wonderful radiance flooding his soul—"Jesus of Nazareth, my Lord, and my God," he murmured, as consciousness at length forsook him.

Some hours afterwards, he was discovered by a passing vessel, and after a week of suffering and danger, was restored to health and safety. He arrived at Liverpool only the evening of the day preceding that on which the account of the catastrophe appeared in the public prints; and,

giving himself no time to write, travelled that same night down to Southwell, hoping thereby to forestall the newspapers, and save his mother the shock of seeing his name amongst the lost, for, in ignorance of the fate of the boats, he hardly dared hope that all had been rescued as well as himself.

He read the fatal paragraph to his mother himself, with his arm round her waist, and her head upon his shoulder, within two hours of his rapturous meeting with her, and having thus assured her of his safety, with scarcely an hour for rest or explanation, he went on to London; one of Harry's hunters having been brought down to the Grange for his use. The poor animal was flaked with foam as Frank rode him up to the Angel at Islington, and leaving him in charge of one of the stablemen, proceeded on foot in the direction of Canonbury. It was a long time before he found the street he was in search of, however; his own impatience defeating its ends by inducing him to take many "short cuts" which invariably proved long ones; but at last he was standing opposite the very house where his Minnie had lived two long years. A quiet, humble

little house it was, but redeemed from the commonplace air of its neighbours, by having small balconies laden with flowers before all the windows. His hands shook as he rang the bell; and when the door was opened by a tidy little maid-servant, he had scarce sufficient command of his voice to inquire if Mrs. Grey lived there?

"Yes, sir," said the girl; "but I don't think you can see her—Miss Grey is very ill; she was took with a fit this morning, about something in the paper, and has been dreadful bad ever since."

To push the astonished child aside, and spring half-way up the staircase at a bound, was the work of a second; turning suddenly to ask where he should find them, Frank came face to face with Mrs. Grey, who had been down to the kitchen for a glass of water—the only thing that Minnie had asked for. The glass dropped from her hand, as, with a shriek that rang through the house, and startled Minnie from the faint into which she was again sinking, Mrs. Grey threw herself upon his neck, laughing, crying, and clinging to him with hysterical violence.

"Oh! we thought you were drowned," she said, at last.

"Yes, I feared so. Only let me see Minnie, and you shall hear everything."

"Wait a moment," she said, releasing him, and calming her agitation; "I will go in and break it to her."

Minnie was sitting upon the couch where they had laid her three hours before, roused to a strained attention by her mother's loud scream. She was pale as her white wrapper; the deep, black eyes unnaturally dilated, and fixed upon the door, as if in expectancy of some new-coming horror.

"Minnie, my darling," said Mrs. Grey, trembling in every limb, and falling on her knees by her daughter's side, "could you bear to hope? That dreadful news *might* not be true; there are mistakes sometimes!"

Her excited manner revealed more than her words, and Minnie held out her arms with a wild, moaning cry, "Frank! Frank!" The next instant her head was on his breast, but she did not know any more for some time. Two such shocks in one morning were almost beyond her strength to sustain.

Happiness is a great life-preserver, however, as has been frequently said; and when, after an

interval of insensibility, she opened her eyes, and saw his face and heard his voice, and felt his arms about her, and knew that in very truth he was before her, the rapture and the thankfulness sent a thrill of fresh vigour through her whole frame. But still she could not speak—neither of them could, even when Mrs. Grey had softly closed the door, and left them to themselves. They could only look into each other's eyes, till at last Frank bent down and kissed her, as she had kissed him when they parted.

"My dear love! God *has* brought me back to Himself and you. Say the words you said on that September night three years ago; say, 'I love you, Frank.'"

"Ah! what need?" she murmured, nestling more closely to his breast; "what need *to say*, I love you? When, for an instant, have I not done so all these years?"

"And yet you would not have my help! Oh Minnie, I was half mad with grief and fear, when at last I learned that you were here in London. I have not rested an hour since my mother's letter reached me, I feared such horrible things! Thank God!" he added, reverently, and pressing her more closely to him; "there is nothing to

keep you from the shelter of my love now, Minnie. I learned from a little lad on board the ship that was wrecked, to believe in a love which transcends all reason. You need not fear to come to me now. Look up, and tell me that you *will* henceforth let my home be yours. I have never forgotten the words that rang like a death-knell. Unsay them, love, that I may get rid of their cruel memory for ever."

"They need give you no pain, Frank," she answered, smiling through great tears. "Love, wherever you go, to the ends of the earth, to the last day of my life, I will go with you. Is that enough?"

"Yes, even for me."

And then they sat silent in a great fulness of joy that was almost pain, and after a while Mrs. Grey came in.

"Can you come back with me to Southwell to-day?" Frank asked, compelling himself to turn to practical matters. "My mother is having fires in all the rooms at the cottage, and you will find all just as you left, she says. Will it be too much for you, dearest?"

"No; you must do just what you like henceforth," she said, with a bright, happy smile.

"Then, Mrs. Grey, will you be so very kind as to throw whatever you may consider needful into a carpet-bag, and we will lose no time in leaving this place. We shall soon get over the ground with a pair of horses. Could you be ready in a quarter of an hour?" he asked, with a dash of his old impetuosity.

"To Southwell—to the cottage so soon? Why, my dear Frank, it won't be fit for us to go to; the grates will be rusty, and the beds damp, and everything in disorder."

"It is all right, I assure you. My mother has amused herself by taking care of it. Where can we get a decent carriage? Perhaps that frightened little damsel, whom I nearly knocked over just now, will take this to the nearest livery stables," he said, scribbling a few lines on a card, and handing it to Mrs. Grey, who took it, half-bewildered at such energetic proceedings.

"I don't think you are the least bit altered. Nobody can have a will of their own if you choose to say nay. But I won't quarrel with you so soon, Frank," she said, and went out to give orders about the carriage, and pack up a few things that it would be absolutely necessary to take

with them; the rest could follow. When she had gone, Frank turned again to Minnie.

"Did you hear what your mother said, darling? Surely there is *one* will in the world stronger than mine at least. Who would believe that such a loving heart could be so resolute? I declare it is even a miracle to myself how you could toil on so long, without making one effort to bring me back, knowing, as you did so well, that, at any cost to myself, I would have stood between you and this rough contact with the world. You might have been my sister, or my cousin, or any other relation that you chose, so that you would but have suffered me to save you from *this*. How was it that you would not let my mother use the authority I had given her, to draw on my bankers to any extent that might be needful when this very emergency should arise?"

"I don't know, Frank; but it seemed that I could work until I died rather than do it. Forgive me, love; perhaps I was wrong. But you don't know what ambitious hopes have been animating me," she answered, with a silvery laugh. "I imagined that in London I could educate myself into a true artist, and that when you came back I should have some small guerdon of fame

to give you with myself. A very few months, however, dissipated all these visions, and you will see my paintings in Mr. Emerson's shop, instead of on the walls of the Royal Academy; and, what is more, I am not sorry that it is so. I love you well enough to be *glad* that I shall owe everything to you."

"My Minnie forgets what *I* owe to her," he said, in a low grave voice; "if you had not sent me away I never should have seen the boy whose dying words let in the light to my darkened understanding. I should never have been brought face to face with death myself, and have learned what a broken reed my poor philosophy was to lean upon in such an hour! Dearest, I am afraid the account between us shows a sad deficit on my side, especially when your own intrinsic value is added thereto. Is not the price of a good woman declared to be above that of rubies?"

"I know that humility is declared to be a shining grace," she said, with tears and smiles struggling for mastery; "and that I shall have very little of it left if I listen to you long! Oh Frank! is it not a blessed thing that we may give our whole lives to Him who has given us to each other and to Himself?"

"Yes," he replied, with a kindling light in his eyes, "it is like sunshine over a glorious landscape!"

For Frank had learned to know his Father's heart.

How sweet and restful it was to be rolling along the smooth, high road in the easy carriage with his hand in her's! How exquisite to be going back to the dear old home, all the sharp pain stilled for ever—all the hard life left behind—all the future bathed in the pure splendour of a love which many waters had not quenched!

Minnie hid her face on Frank's shoulder, and let the great tears fall unchecked. He understood, and let her weep, only stealing his arm round her, that the strong, tender clasp might be as a pledge of the sure guardianship that would be hers through life; and that mute assurance had something so sweet and comforting in it that, by the time the Grange was reached, Minnie's dark eyes were radiant, and her fair cheek glowing like a rose.

A wonderful night of love and reunion followed. Mr. Leslie's irritation against Minnie had all disappeared now that Frank had come home without

any intention of going away again, and he took her in his arms and gave her a daughter's welcome; Harry and his wife and their little ones were also there; so it was an unbroken family party which gathered round the well-spread tea-table, in the cosy room looking out upon the garden, and as Mrs. Leslie glanced from one well-beloved face to another, and saw that each one was brimful of life's sweetest joy, her own cup of blessing overflowed, and she said in her heart, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

In spite of repeated assertions to the contrary, Mrs. Grey was evidently uneasy about the habitable state of the cottage, and soon after tea she and Mrs. Leslie walked through the park together, leaving Frank and Minnie to follow when they chose; and as they had a great deal to say to each other, it was ten o'clock before they came in sight of the fairy place, that lay all bathed in moonlight and beauty at their feet. Minnie paused to look at it—at the clear, pure, holy sky—at her lover by her side. "I shall begin to cry again, Frank," she said, clinging very closely to his arm; "I feel as I did on the day

when I saw it first—its beauty overpowers me. How glad, how beyond measure thankful I am to see it again, and with you."

They stood together looking at it for a little time, and then Frank said, quietly, "How long shall we travel about, dearest? Would you like to come back here in time for Christmas?"

"Frank?"

"Well?"

"You don't mean that—that we are to be married before Christmas?"

"I certainly don't mean that we are to be married after. How many years have I waited already? Is my hair to turn grey before you take me? Oh Minnie! think of all I have endured for your sake, and make all the amends in your power."

"Am I not going to try for the rest of my life?"

"Then you'll promise, darling?"

"What, Frank?"

"That you'll marry me in a fortnight; as soon, that is, as I can get a license?"

"Yes, if you'll let me go in to mamma now."

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE ACADEMY.

SOUTHWELL had never seen a wedding like our Minnie's. Every one, high and low, was in a state of excitement about it. We were so proud of them both, and then we had all known them so many years, that they seemed to belong to us in a special manner.

The Benhams were still absent from the Manor House, but the Merediths and the Davenants took as much interest in the affair as if the marriage of one of their own daughters had been in question, and, indeed, a pretty girl from each house did act as bridesmaid.

Minnie looked queenly in her soft, white flowing bridal dress, and long veil, fastened to her head with a crown of orange-blossoms. She wore the veil to please Frank. He had sent to

London for it unknown to her, because a certain old aunt of his—the writer of this present history—had a fancy that it would give the finishing touch to her pure, ethereal beauty. And so it did. Frank himself was struck by it as she moved up the aisle, leaning on Dr. Meredith's arm, who was to give her away, and made one quick step forward as if forgetting all but her. Then he recovered himself, and took her hand with a grave gentleness becoming one who was about to accept an enormous trust, and in another minute they were kneeling side by side. There was a world of meaning in his voice as he repeated the words, "to love and to cherish till death us do part."

They went to Switzerland first, and then to Italy. Frank wanted his Minnie to see Rome, and Florence, and other places, where her favourite art had flourished, and was still beloved. So in these first sweet weeks of wedded love they wandered leisurely from city to city, marvelling much at the wealth of beauty with which even this lower world is stored.

"Is it in the world or in ourselves?" said Frank, one evening. "I think that had I seen all these fair sights three years ago alone, they would

have had little power to charm away the aching sense of pain that was in my heart *then.*"

Minnie was looking dreamily out upon the prospect before her, a Swiss lake, and the "everlasting hills" beyond, for they were on their way home now, and she did not answer for a minute or two.

"In ourselves," she said at last, softly. "Yes, darling, that is it; the reality within us gives reality to these wondrous 'shows of things.' I think that if we did not know we should love each other for ever and for ever, there would be an incompleteness in our present bliss that would rob it of its solid happiness. We should grudge each passing moment, knowing that there were the fewer left to enjoy; but, as it is, we may be prodigals of love and delight—you and I—and yet never diminish our riches. I think this must be the reason why there is such a fulness of satisfaction to us in looking at all lovely things; we are not afraid of their being transitory pleasures; they are only so many glimpses of greater ones yet to come. This is why I love all purely beautiful things, whether in art or nature, so dearly. They are imperishable in one sense, because they will be about us always,

like goodness, and truth, and all that is of God Himself."

"Go on, dearest, it is like listening to sweet music," said her husband. She was sitting on a low stool at his feet, her head resting on his knee, and his hand lightly laid upon her head. She drew it down to her lips as he spoke, and kissed it, laughing.

"Frank, Frank, how you try to spoil me! If I were not the very lowliest of womankind, I should tyrannize over you shamefully, and you would only have yourself to blame. Why are you looking so profoundly wise, pray?"

"I am thinking you have hit upon a great truth; it *is* only the lowliest, and therefore the noblest natures, that can be trusted with a vast amount of love, and not abuse it. Meaner souls, whether of man or woman, trample on the poured out wealth of a full heart; great ones, like my Minnie, hold it in more reverent keeping, just because it *is* poured out without stint or measure. I have no fear of your becoming a tyrant, love," and Frank's voice was very low and pleasant, as it always was when he was greatly moved. Minnie rose up gently, and put her arm round his neck, laying her soft cheek on his brown curls.

"It *would* be hard," she said, "when we have but one will between us, Frank."

For they had been married two months, and were lovers still; they have been married twenty years, and are far more loving now.

They got home in time for Christmas, alternating between the Grange and the Cottage for a few weeks, until a house was taken near London, in one of the pretty western suburbs, and so situated as to unite the advantages of country and town. When they were fairly established in housekeeping, Frank settled down to hard work, and read for a higher degree in his old profession. A physician has the power to relieve so much suffering, to comfort so much sorrow, to do good in so many quiet, unostentatious ways, that he finally determined to choose it for his future avocation, in preference to being a civil engineer. He did not care to make a source of profit out of it, for his private means were ample; but profit flowed in upon him unsought, and, spite of the gratuitous services which he lavished right and left, Frank is still a "prosperous gentleman" in the old world as in the new.

One day, when they had been married about ten years, Minnie was sitting in a room which

her husband's care had fitted up especially for her as a painting room. She had money and leisure now, and could command all that was needful to carry her a few steps higher towards the pinnacle of that perfection which it is the necessity of true genius to strive after.

She felt constrained by this necessity to improve to the utmost the talent which had been given her; and Frank was so lovingly proud of her ability, that she had a double motive for exertion; and ten years of patient labour had not been without its fruit. On this particular morning she and her eldest son were together—a boy about nine years old, with brown hair like his father's, and a smile that often made his mother kiss him for that father's sake.

"Frank," she said, rather mysteriously, "can you keep a secret?" The boy looked up surprised.

"I should think so! though," he added, laughing, "I haven't had much practice. Had we ever a secret amongst us before, mamma? What can this one be?"

"Something very serious. It is papa's birthday next week, you know, and you always ask me to choose your present for him. I want you to

buy one of my pictures this time, and say nothing to him about it until the day comes."

"Buy one of your pictures, mamma," said Frank, rather puzzled; "you don't care to take my money from me, do you? Besides aren't they worth more than I've got?"

"Never mind the price; you shall give me a kiss for it if you like; only we must take care that it is a *bona fide* transaction. See, dear, I've just had this letter telling me that a little picture which I sent to the Academy has been accepted. Now I want it to be hung with the red star attached, and then for you and me to take papa to the Exhibition on his birthday, and show him it as your present, and let him guess from whom you bought it."

"Mamma, have you really got a picture admitted?" inquired the boy, quite old enough to appreciate all which that fact conveyed, and forgetting his share in the secret, in his pride and delight at his mother's success; "how clever you must be!"

"Frank, Frank, you are as bad as your father!" said Minnie, laughing as she patted her boy's curly head; "but take care that you don't betray our plot, or you will ruin all."

"Oh! never fear, mamma! I wouldn't miss the fun for anything. Only fancy how papa will look when he sees one of your paintings at the Academy! Try to take his portrait with that very look, mamma."

"Portrait painting is not my gift, Frank, and if it were," she continued, her eyes filling with tears, "I could never take your father's likeness. No human hand could transfer to canvas all the truth, the goodness, which the Great Artist Himself has stamped upon your father's face. Will you and Willie grow like him, I wonder?" she said, the mother's hopes in her eyes.

"We can but try, mamma," said the boy, kissing her cheek; for there was fulness of harmony in that little household. Only one "will" reigned there still, though three young souls had been added to it—the two boys, and Frank's special pet, his little dark-eyed Minnie.

"Will you take us to see the paintings to-day, love? We have waited until your birthday that we may have a special treat on a specially happy day," said Minnie, with her hand on her boy's shoulder the while, that she might administer a

warning pressure, should his delight seem likely to overpower his discretion.

"To be sure I will," said Frank, in reply, "I must drive round to see two or three people, and will come for you at twelve, if that will do."

"Excellently; we will be ready."

"Now, Frank," she said to the lad, when his father had gone, "if you look at papa with that ridiculously important expression, he will guess that something unusual is the matter, and we shall have to confess before the right moment arrives, which will spoil my programme altogether. If your feelings become too much for you, look steadily out of the carriage-window all the way."

"They *are* getting rather uncomfortable, mamma," laughed the boy; "but I'll bring them into subjection when papa comes; he shall guess no more than he ought until you choose to tell him."

"There's my own boy! I do want to give him this little surprise," she said, with a colour on her cheek, and a light in her eyes, that made her look as fair as the bride of ten years ago.

They reached the Exhibition by one o'clock, and Minnie's heart beat so fast against her husband's arm, that he turned, and anxiously inquired if the heat were making her feel ill?

"No, not at all. I want you to come round this way, and look at a little picture that I think you will like," she answered, with such unusual agitation in her voice, that Frank's regards were fixed upon her instead of the paintings, and they were exactly opposite *the* one, when he was roused to some interest by hearing a gentleman exclaim—

"If that view of Windermere were not already sold, I would give a hundred guineas for it."

In a moment his eyes were rivetted on the picture, and he drew a long, deep breath of surprise and delight.

It was an exquisite copy in oils of that water-colour sketch which he knew so well.

"My darling, how heartily I congratulate you," he whispered; "why did you not tell me about it? but I know. Who can have bought it, I wonder! I must have it back, if possible, cost what it may."

"Oh! the purchaser will not be very hard upon you, dearest," she answered, in a glow of

love and gladness, "come here, Frank, and tell papa what you have bought for his birthday present." Frank came forward without delay.

"There, papa," he said, pointing to the view, and speaking very fast, "we thought you would like it better than anything, so I bought it of mamma, I did really; she said a kiss would do, but I thought that was not fair, and gave her all my money—one pound three and sixpence, but you see that isn't nearly as much as it's worth, for somebody has been saying he would give a hundred guineas for it, but mamma won't mind that; and don't you think it beautiful, and isn't she clever?"

He looked up exultingly in his father's face, but, child though he was, he read something there which made him instinctively slip away, and mingle with the crowd. "I suppose he would rather talk to mamma alone about it," he thought, and he was right. Frank's eyes were misty, and his voice lower and sweeter than it had been when first he breathed her name, whilst she drew the scene before him, as he pressed her hand, and whispered,

"It will be worth more to me than all in the world, except yourself and the children."

"Then I want no other glory, dearest."

When, in about ten minutes, Frank returned to them, he was a little disappointed to see his father and mother looking very quietly at his gift. The surprise had not turned out quite such fun as he had been expecting. He was too young to comprehend that when intense affection is stirred to its deepest depths, a certain solemnity is experienced; the heart silences the tongue, and its unutterable thoughts are translated by other signs than that of speech.

The boy made ample amends to himself next day, however, by going down to Southwell, and relating the story both at the Grange and at the Cottage, where, at each place, it was received with an enthusiasm that satisfied fully both his pride and love.

Soon after this Mrs. Leslie sank peacefully to rest, but Mrs. Grey still lives at the Cottage, active as in her younger days. She frequently reminds her daughter that from the very first *she* had always said that Frank was intended by Providence to be her husband. "And you see I was right, though you were so hard to convince of it at one time, my dear." And Minnie acquiesces, smiling at her husband, who smiles lovingly back

again. They are both gentle to all weakness, like the great Father Himself, who pitieth all his children—perhaps most of all the ignorant and foolish.

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