

Dr. Dale



nia



BY MARION HARLAND &
ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Dr. Dale

DR. DALE

A Story without a Moral

By

Marion Harland

and

Albert Payson Terhune



New York
Dodd, Mead and Company
1900

DR. DALE

A Story without a Moral

Copyright, 1900

BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

All rights reserved

UNIVERSITY PRESS · JOHN WILSON
AND SON · CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE TWO PARSONS	I
II. 'TWINX FIRE AND FLOOD	11
III. IN THE DOCTOR'S SANCTUM	17
IV. THE MIDDLE MISS MEAGLEY	30
V. MYRTLE BELL	42
VI. "AFTER ALL THESE BLACK YEARS"	52
VII. REV. C. MATHER WELSH	66
VIII. "OUR LADY OF PEACE"	82
IX. SANDY McALPIN	94
X. "LENORE"	106
XI. THE MEAGLEYS AT HOME	123
XII. "THE SOUL OF A MAN"	138
XIII. AT THE MOATED WELL	149
XIV. "THE RUTH" SPEAKS	162
XV. AT DINNER WITH THE FOLGERS	170
XVI. SOCIALISM AND SONG	181
XVII. A BRACE OF SURPRISES	193
XVIII. "SO HELP ME, GOD!"	205
XIX. "LOVE! MY LOVE!"	215
XX. THE WOMAN IN BLACK	230
XXI. THE ELECTRIC STORM	244

2229035

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII. "THE RUTH" AT MIDNIGHT	255
XXIII. THE PASSING OF RALPH FOLGER	267
XXIV. IN THE LIBRARY	279
XXV. UNDER THE SNOW	289
XXVI. CORONER KRUGER	301
XXVII. DOGBERRY IN THE CHAIR	312
XXVIII. MRS. BOWERSOX TAKES THE STAND	324
XXIX. THE COMMITTAL	339
XXX. THE "PREFERRED" PRISONER	348
XXXI. AGAINST ORDERS	358
XXXII. MR. WELSH PAYS HIS DEBT	370
XXXIII. A SHEAF OF MEMORIES	382
XXXIV. OBITER DICTA	392

DR. DALE

CHAPTER I

THE TWO PARSONS

“Argument, as usually managed, is the worst sort of conversation, as it is generally in books the worst sort of reading.”

SIX years before the January night that marks the beginning of this story, the scene of it was a prosperous farming district, pleasant, and not lacking in picturesqueness. The nearest railway was three miles from the heart of the township; a creek, not more than a hundred feet wide at any point, when not swollen by winter rains, wound leisurely between low hills covered with wheat and corn fields. From the top of this range one saw on every hand the substantial homes and well-tilled acres of “Pennsylvania Dutch” farmers. Gray stone houses with hip-roofs were flanked by big red barns, clustering straw-stacks, and thrifty apple-orchards. Each farm had its belt or square or parallelogram of woodland; clumps of elms, maples, and water-willows darkened the pools and checkered the sunny shallows of the creek. Peace, with modest abundance, was the presiding spirit of the whole. Blue undulations upon the southeastern horizon were the outposts of the mountains guarding the happy valley from the invasion of Eastern progress.

In the “hard winter” of the year upon which we are about to enter, snow had overlapped snow from

month to month. Since New Year's Day the ice-fringe of the eaves had not dripped; all hauling to and from town was done by ox and mule sleds; the surface of the creek was like black marble.

At nine o'clock on the evening of the sixth of January, a man, alighting from the caboose of a freight-train at the Pitvale station, was greeted by the station-agent with —

"Another rip-snorter, Mr. Bell! Four below! 'T will be ten by morning."

"Maybe not, Mr. Hopper. Always hope for the best! Good-night!"

The "Good-night" was called back over his shoulder. He had not broken the stride that had landed him on the platform. The smart strokes of his heels upon the boards of the sidewalk were like the ring of metal upon metal. The planks were heaved from the level by the frost into choppy ridges; here and there one was missing. Heeding the gaps which endangered unwary passengers, the pedestrian reflected that there would be more and wider holes before anybody found time to mend them. The spur of railway laid from the main line three miles away to the newly born town was, like everything else pertaining to the *un*-settlement aforesaid, hastily constructed, a makeshift in the emergency thrust upon men consumed by one overmastering passion, — the lust for sudden riches.

Station and freight-house were huge sheds; the rows of buildings facing the streets crooking away from the railway terminus at every conceivable angle, were, in that part of the town, little better than hovels, one story high, knocked together like so many wooden boxes. The rudely paved streets, seamed by wheels and broken by hoofs, showed darkly by contrast with the heaps and walls of snow fencing the sidewalks.

Upon the rising ground beyond the body of the town, and up and down the creek in all directions, arose what might have been mistaken in the moonlight for the masts of a mighty fleet, so numerous and so closely crowded together were the derricks advertising the reason of the town's being, and the fountains of wealth unsealed to those who had flocked thither since the first well was sunk, a scant six years ago, in the most humdrum district within an area of five hundred miles.

They told the whole story — punctuating the valley with hundreds of exclamation-points, startling in their number and in their hideousness, obstructing the view of the heavens when one looked up, blackening the reeking soil where the snow refused to lie, and where grass and grain would never grow again. Crude oil was the freight of the big-bellied cylinders loading long lines of cars lumbering over the badly ballasted railway; iron veins, above and below the oozing soil, pulsed with thick greenish-yellow fluid to be transmuted in distant refineries into gold for the coffers of well-owners and into living light for a continent.

The tall pedestrian met few other wayfarers as he forged along the lower streets. Business offices were closed for the night, and nobody braved the intense cold who could stay in-doors. "Well-work" in Pitvale was over with the going down of the sun. This was not mercy, but expediency. The Great Product was too hasty of temper to be tempted by lamp and torch. Over-hours had come to be associated in the minds of owners and operatives with expensive accidents.

At a sharp turn of the thoroughfare the scene became more animated. Board walks were wider and more substantial; houses of two and three stories took the place of the hovels. The ground

floor of each was a shop, a restaurant, a drinking-saloon, or some place of alleged amusement. The two sides of the way on every block suggested to a quick imagination a double row of irregular teeth, here a stump, there a gap, then a group of artificial incisors, bicuspid or molars, upright and glaring, fresh from the dentist's hands. Street lamps, dusky red in the moonbeams, burned at the corners and over and behind shop-fronts. Gaudy placards, illustrating the attractions of a hippodrome, covered a twenty-foot board fence separating two shop-fronts; a show of "canned goods" in a grocer's window was in the shape of a derrick, surmounted by a kerosene lamp and labelled THE WELL THAT NEVER FAILS. A seventh-rate blood-and-thunder melodrama was on at THE ONE AND ONLY PITVALE OPERA HOUSE, duly puffed by crimson and black head-lines a foot long, and life-size purple and green human figures on the posters papering the outer walls.

A brick building, broader and taller than its neighbours, was gorgeous with coloured lights projecting from the window-sills of the first and second stories. The lunette over the front door was filled by a "transparency," brilliantly illuminated. In the background a derrick arose blackly against a bloody sunset. In the foreground Boniface, in white and gold doublet, cap and plume, offered a long-necked goblet brimming with magenta wine to a working-man in grimy shirt and trousers. Beneath, COME AS YOU ARE, DIRTY OR CLEAN! flamed in scarlet. Upon a plate-glass window of the ground floor was lettered, in gilt, THE OILMAN'S REST. A red curtain was drawn across the lower sash. Relieved by this, the legend glowed like fire, each letter being heavily gilded in outline, leaving a hollow space to be filled by the scarlet of the curtain. The conceit was ingenious, the effect striking.

Our pedestrian was abreast of the window when he espied something unusual out of the tail of his eye, and wheeled to face it. Across the word REST was a wide chalk-mark; below it was printed in bold capitals, "CURSE!!!"

With a mutter of impatient disgust, John Bell whipped his handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed out the chalked letters.

"You're consistent, at any rate!"

The snarl sounded from under Bell's elbow. He turned to face a man who was eying the besmeared sign with strong disfavour.

Seen in the glare of the illuminated window, the speaker was a trifle over five feet tall and looked shorter. The two upper buttons were missing from a shabby overcoat, revealing a strait-breasted waistcoat and a white wisp of a cravat. His face was narrow and keen, nor did the sandy side-whiskers relieve its ferret-like look. His sharp nose was blue with cold; above it pale eyes glowered waterily.

"Good-evening, Mr. Welsh," said Bell, civilly. "Did you speak to me?"

"As you are the only living being besides myself on this block, you may suppose that I did," answered the little man. "And I was commenting on your consistency in rubbing out a word that might deter some weak brother from entering this den of iniquity."

"Whoever chalked that word there," Bell urged patiently, "was defacing another man's property. He had no right—moral or legal—to do it. I rubbed it off just as I should expect you or any one else to remove an unsightly nuisance from my own window, or—"

"Or from a window of The Bachelors' Club," finished the Rev. C. Mather Welsh, ranging himself alongside of the larger man as the latter moved on up the street.

“Or from a window of The Bachelors’ Club,” assented Bell, in perfect gravity.

“And why not?” went on Welsh, galled at failing to arouse the other to argument. “After all, you were only doing what one saloon-keeper might be expected to do for another.”

“Saloon-keeper?” with a surprised intonation,

“I mean it! I know that The Bachelors’ Club goes by another name, and that you and Dr. Dale dispense liquor under the guise of philanthropy. To a plain man like myself it is hard to discriminate between —”

The rest of the sentence was lost in a babel of voices. Both clergymen stopped and glanced back. The door of The Oilman’s Rest was burst open, and four men, locked in a drunken grapple, reeled out upon the sidewalk, slipped over the edge, and fell, a squirming, bellicose, blasphemous heap, into the frozen slush of the street.

“Between The Oilman’s Rest and The Bachelors’ Club, you were going to say?” suggested Bell, walking on.

Welsh glared upward in silence at the rough-ulstered shoulder, swinging back and forth, fully three inches above his head. He swallowed twice audibly before attempting to reply.

“Sophistry can never triumph in the long run, Brother Bell,” he said, at last, with a stiff effort at dignity. “Your Club may not have scenes of that sort. If I am rightly informed, there are rules and regulations that maintain an appearance of order. One is, nevertheless, as corrupt as the other.”

Bell smiled with the amused tolerance of a calm big dog for an angry poodle, — a smile that irritated Welsh as a blow would not have done.

“You may laugh as you please!” he gurgled. “It is no laughing matter to me, or to such as I. I have

laboured diligently in this vineyard — rightly named Pitvale — for over three years. I have borne the heat and the burden of the day. I have battled with the demon Rum — as — as Hermes of old with the Python — ”

“ Pardon me ! Hercules, I think it was ? With the Hydra ? Mythology gives it nine heads. The middle head was immortal. Intemperance has fifty heads. Your figure is just, Mr. Welsh. Your work is zealous and noble. Your energy is untiring — ”

“ And what has been my reward ? ” Welsh’s dog-trot kept him up with Bell’s strides. As he harangued he laid his head perkily upon his shoulder to train his eyes upon the other’s face. “ As I was on the point of crushing out rum-shops and gin-mills with an iron hand, cutting off the monster’s head with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, you and your Dr. Dale induce the young millionaire you have infatuated with your arts to build this so-called Bachelors’ Club where beer is actually kept on tap — ”

His wind went out in a snort.

“ It is very good beer, Mr. Welsh, — the purest money can buy. ”

“ It is the drink of perdition, sir ! ” snapped Welsh. “ It steals men’s brains ; it damns men’s souls ! ”

“ So will black coffee and strong tea, if drunk to excess. You should have heard Dr. Dale’s lecture to our operatives’ wives in the Club Hall last week, upon tea-topers, ” interposed Bell, obstinately good-humoured.

Welsh’s snap was a splutter ; he stamped as he walked.

“ Have a care, Brother Bell ! oh, have a care what you say and do ! It is a grave matter for a minister of the everlasting Gospel to set a stumbling-block in the way of helpless souls. The very men I hoped to

convert have joined your Club. They go further. They attend your church on Sabbath morning and take part in your so-called 'service of song' in the Club Hall on Sabbath evening, passing my church-door on their way. And what do you give them in place of the bread of life? Music by the band — an infidel at the organ — a pretty little sermon upon cleanliness — ”

“ In heart and in life ! ” interjected Bell.

The orator fumed on, as if he had not spoken.

“ You lure them to drown soul and body in that devil's broth — beer ! Beware, I say, my young brother ! ‘ Them that were entering in ye hindered ! ’ ‘ Woe unto him by whom the offence cometh ! ’ ‘ Woe unto him that putteth the cup to his neighbour's lips ! ’ ‘ Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion ; that prophesy smooth things ! ’ ”

“ There is another text,” put in Bell, as a gust of wind, swirling around the corner, bearing in its eddies a thousand icy needles, dashed into Welsh's face, choking him with his own volley of Scriptural quotations, — “ one that strikes me as almost as pertinent, just here, as any you have cited. It has to do with judging another's deeds and motives. You may recall it ? ”

“ Heaven forbid that I should judge any man ! ” Welsh's watery eyes were turned upward in humility none the less ludicrous because utterly sincere. “ Far be it from me to judge you, or even one whom I firmly believe to be your tempter in the downward road. To his own Master let him stand or fall. I do not forget that Michael the archangel brought no railing accusation against that Master. I come to you — as one who would not bear the sword in vain — to remonstrate in a spirit of truth and love against this mistaken idea of yours ; this device that leads young men to ruin, that fills drunkards' graves,

that desolates happy homes. You meet my well-meant appeal with flippant sophistry!" The little man's voice broke in something like a sob. "I have borne testimony against this abominable thing which my soul hates. I have nothing more to say."

"But *I* have!" said Bell, seriously and kindly. "Much more. I give you full credit, Mr. Welsh, for what you have done, for what you are doing, for the poor, the ignorant, the stupid, and the vicious in our community. I may not agree with you as to methods, but I believe yours are well-meant. Can't you have the same faith in mine? You have picked up a lot of unfounded rumours about our Club and accept them as true. Won't you judge of us for yourself? I am on my way there now. Come with me, and see things without prejudice. You shall go through restaurant, halls, kitchen, bath-rooms, and cellar. You shall see who are there, and just what they are saying and doing. I promise you a cordial welcome. Have a look at our library, our music-room, our gymnasium —"

"And at your billiard-room and bar, I suppose?"

"Certainly!" assented Bell, in all good faith. "A billiard-room where there is no betting. A bar — although we don't call it that — where nothing stronger is kept than beer that has passed an honest inspector; where not a drop is sold to any man who is under the influence of liquor, or whose record — kept in our ledgers — shows that he is disposed to take more than his head can bear. You will find a quiet, orderly, contented crowd, seated in the outer room, chatting over pipes and beer, playing backgammon or draughts or chess. We will have a cup of the best coffee made in Pitvale — our cook is capital! I don't drink beer, but I should like to have you taste it and —"

“How dare you!” gasped Welsh, stopping short, his high, thin voice rising into a treble squeal, his whole body quivering with rage. “How dare you! I had looked for indifference — for — disregard of my solemn appeal. But a deliberate insult like this!”

He turned on his heel and stamped away, the frozen boards squeaking and crackling under his furious tread.

John Bell stood staring after him for a moment in open-mouthed amazement.

“What, in the name of common-sense, have I done now?” he said, aloud. “I thought we were getting on famously!”

He squared his shoulders and gave his stalwart frame the impatient shake by which a Newfoundland frees his coat of clinging drops after a dip in muddy water, then swung himself at a quicker gait up the street.

CHAPTER II

'TWINX FIRE AND FLOOD

“ Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell ;
Then shrieked the timid and stood still the brave ;
Then some leaped overboard with dreadful yell,
As eager to anticipate their grave.”

THE infant oil-industry of Pitvale had just passed its second summer when the first black cross was set over against one of the as yet few pages of its history. The Jaynesville dam, built across the creek about four miles “ up the country,” broke after a fortnight of heavy November rains. A solid wall of water toppled over upon the lowlands, filling the valley half-way up to the rim of the girdling hills with turbid, yeasty waves.

Before the terrified inhabitants of the growing town could appreciate the gravity of the disaster already upon them, it was followed by a second and a more frightful. Chasing the racing current in the bed of the creek ran a sinuous belt of fire, leaping, licking, lashing, like fiery whips, at the floating objects jumbled together by the rush of the flood. Cottages wrenched from their foundations, the roofs and beams of larger buildings, — some of them covered with clinging human forms, — hayricks, waggons, bodies of drowned horses, cows, sheep, and calves — all seen with horrible distinctness by the flare of the burning oil, were swept past the spectators on the banks, themselves powerless to aid the sufferers. The sky was hidden by volumes of pitchy smoke, the stench of the liberated gas and the hot petroleum was stifling. The screams of

those who cried vainly for help, the weeping of those who could not give it, the shrieks of women and the shouts of men, arose above the hoarse roar of flood and flame. Rescue-parties in small boats were caught in the swirling torrent, or driven back to shore by smoke and heat; two boats were capsized and all on board drowned. Men swam ashore to die in the arms that dragged them out, suffocated by crude oil, or charred by the fire; women and children were burned alive almost within reach of land.

Ralph Folger, the richest well-owner in the district, had had built for his own use, and sent to Pitvale, but two days before the freshet, a large row-boat, sheathed with copper. It lay upon the slope of the meadows just above the reach of the water, awaiting the orders of the absent owner. John Bell had been for three years the popular pastor of the venerable stone church now within the town limits. When he called to four men who had kept enough of their senses to comprehend an order, to help him launch the craft, he was obeyed with alacrity. When he leaped into the boat, seized a pair of oars, and asked for volunteers in the work of rescuing the struggling wretches in mid-stream, but one came forward. This was a Scotchman of herculean build, whose sturdy attachment to "the *Dominie*" would not let him lag behind his chief.

"Ah, McAlpin!" said Bell, cheerily, as the giant walked to the stern, apparently as unperturbed as if engaged for a summer sail, "I was counting upon you. We'll try it alone if nobody else will go."

A third man — a stranger to all there — disengaged himself from the agitated crowd.

"Will you let me go with you?" he said composedly. "I am a fair oarsman, to say nothing of having little to lose."

It was not a moment for explanation or ceremony. The three men pulled straight for the channel where human figures, singly and in groups, were struggling like drowning ants, catching wildly at planks, logs, the bodies of dead beasts — whatever promised the chance of escape, however slender.

One, two, three, were overtaken by the rowers and dragged into the boat, — a man who held a woman's head above the yellow viscosity of the oil; a boy who was sinking for the third time; a child that wailed feebly from the bottom of the boat as the rescuers pushed on. Next, two men and a girl clinging desperately to the slatted sides of a corn-crib.

Then, like the trump of the archangel above a world on fire, John Bell's shout pealed above the hellish clamour of screams, curses, and rushing surges, "Shut your eyes and hold your breath!"

The three rowers bent as one man to the level of the rowlocks; there was a second of hissing steam and of flying spray and stifling fumes, and they had shot right through the heart of the fiery serpent, twisting and belching in the current; tongues of liquid flame reached over the gunwale for the trembling creatures prostrate among the ribs of the gallant boat, and spit angrily at the bow as it cleft the tide.

When the passengers cleared their eyes from the blinding dash of oil and water, they saw a double-leaved barn-door, lifted by the flood from the hinges, the two sides still held together by the great bolts in the middle, pitching toward the irregular streak of ignited oil. Two women were upon it. One, on her knees, clung with both hands to a bolt; her scream for "Help!" pierced the ears of the beholders. The other woman lay doubled up oddly, face downward, in the middle of the raft. A sudden swell lifted it

against the boat with a shock that loosened the grasp of the kneeling figure. Before her agonised shriek was lost in the general tumult, the stranger who had "little to lose" threw himself almost at half-length over the guards of the boat and clutched her hair. With a word to McAlpin, John Bell jumped overboard, and swam for the float cast astern by the recoil of the collision, and now twenty feet away in the very jaws of the flames. One foot of the woman was wedged in between the leaves of the door. At the wrench that tore them apart to liberate her, she cried out faintly. She seemed to be quite dead when the swimmer passed her up to his comrades. She was limp and lifeless in the arms of those who bore her up the bank from the boat and laid her upon a cot in the nearest house.

John Bell and his unknown helper had carried her between them. As the stranger raised her head that the air might reach her face, Bell recognised Ruth Folger, the sister of the owner of the boat which had rescued her. He knew, afterward, that she had gone to visit a school-fellow in the country the day before the breaking of the dam, and been detained there by the storm. Driven from their house by the invading waters, the family took refuge in the barn, which stood upon higher ground. They were barely under shelter when a tremendous wave bore down upon it. Neither of the saved girls had any distinct recollection of what happened next or afterwards, until the raft struck the boat.

John Bell's memory was as much at fault up to date with regard to the interval separating the disembarkation of the dozen rescued people and the removal of Miss Folger and her friend to a place where they could be properly cared for, from the moment when, struggling out of a queer stupor that numbed limbs, brain, and tongue, he found that he

was lying in his own bed. McAlpin was on one side of him, chafing his right hand. The left was held by a man whose face was vaguely familiar, but whose name he could not recall. At the foot of the bed stood his hostess and parishioner, Mrs. Sarepta Bowersox, her cheeks streaked with tears, her eyes fixed mournfully upon her lodger's face.

He was swathed in blankets from head to foot; a powerful odour of whiskey and singed hair permeated the air; his hands and forehead stung and burned as if from scalding water; lips and tongue were blistered; his throat was dry and sore; he breathed with difficulty. He tried to smile at Mrs. Bowersox, and effected a grimace instead, seeing which, her tears started anew. Then he turned his gaze full upon the stranger attendant.

"I am Dr. Dale," said singularly rich and mellow tones that were yet somewhat muffled to the patient's hearing, as if his ears were stuffed with cotton. "I came to Pitvale yesterday afternoon. I was in the boat with you, and have been kept pretty busy ever since."

In speaking, he fastened his eyes upon John's, and articulated carefully. John's honest gray eyes cleared and brightened under the scrutiny; his wits rallied into line.

"I suppose," he observed, his tongue slow and stiff, "that it is your eyebrows and lashes and hair that I smell. I see they are badly scorched. I hope you were not hurt in coming to my help, and that your hair will grow out again soon."

The smell of singeing overpowered that of whiskey. To his hazy perceptions the loss of the doctor's eyebrows and lashes seemed a serious matter.

McAlpin choked down a snicker; Mrs. Bowersox moved aside out of sight. Dr. Dale smiled in the friendliest way imaginable, putting the hand he held

back under the coverlet. John knew now that he had been counting his pulse.

"It will, I think," he said easily. "And yours too. We were in the same boat in more senses than one. You are doing well. So is everybody who was with us."

John stirred restlessly.

"Ralph Folger should be sent for. He ought to know that his sister is hurt. She is not—dead—is she?"

"She is alive—and better—and in her own house. And we have telegraphed for her brother," in the same pleasant way, never taking his eyes from the dilated pupils under his gaze. "Is there anything else you would like to know before you go to sleep? I want to put your mind entirely at ease."

This was what John Bell was living over as he finished his tramp from the station to the Bachelors' Club House, built by Ralph Folger as a memorial of the service rendered to him and his by the two friends. Egbert Dale and John Bell had lived and wrought together,—been "in the same boat," as they had a habit of reminding one another,—one in heart and soul and purpose, for three years.

All was still well with them and with everybody who was with them that awful night.

"I shall be nearer the other side of the dark river but once," soliloquised Bell, soberly, mounting the stone steps of the largest edifice in Pitvale. "Then—I shall cross it!"

CHAPTER III

IN THE DOCTOR'S SANCTUM

“ Who has not felt how sadly sweet
The dream of Home, the dream of Home,
Steals o'er the heart, too soon to fleet,
When far o'er land or sea we roam ? ”

THE office of Egbert Dale, M.D. was upon a quieter street than the main thoroughfare on which was situated The Bachelors' Club. Neat cottage residences were rising about the modest story-and-a-half building, buff with white trimmings and dark-gray roof. There were three rooms, all spacious, on the first floor, besides a central hall. To the right of the front door was a general office, where patients waited until the doctor was ready to admit them to the inner room for examination, advice, and, if need were, for treatment. Across the hall was the physician's especial snugger, comfortably and tastefully furnished, and lined with book-shelves. A steam-radiator in one corner supplied a background of heat; an open grate added the semblance to the reality of cheer and comfort. The master loved heat as a tropical flower the humid warmth of the conservatory. He was no more a Sybarite than he was a dandy, but his ideas on the subject of personal cleanliness were a proverb with patients and townspeople. The landlord of The Oilman's Rest aimed at these in the significant inscription, "Come as you are, dirty or clean." The poorest operative, drunk or sober, was welcome to a meal in the restaurant of The Bachelors' Club, if hungry, whether he could pay for it or not. He could have neither bite nor sup until he had taken a bath in one

of the white-tiled wash-rooms of the establishment, and exchanged his filthy clothes for the long-sleeved overalls of white duck worn at meals by such of the members of the Club as had not time to make an entire change in their clothing before sitting down to dinner or supper. Each member had his locker in a dressing-room where he might leave his "working clothes" before going home at night to his boarding-house, and where he might put them on again the next morning. This was one of the devices hit upon by the founders of the organisation for making homeless oilmen desirable boarders in the better class of dwelling-houses in the neighbourhood. Dutch cleanliness revolted at sight of the oily grime inseparable from well-labour, and the pungent reek of crude petroleum was literally a stench in the housewife's nostrils.

But for regulations sneered at as "finical" by the rougher element of the incongruous population sucked toward a common centre by this one of Mammon's whirlpools, any gathering of clubmen would have polluted the atmosphere of their quarters. As it was, the great building at the head of Main Street was a refining influence in all the region. Every member of the Club was a stockholder in the corporation to the extent of at least one share, and had a personal interest in its prosperity. They had their own band, composed principally of Germans, and the concerts given by them were patronised by the élite of town and country.

"The whole thing is unique in the history of mining corporations," said one of a visiting party of distinguished politicians from Harrisburg, after making the round of the building. "Who is entitled to the credit of it?"

Sandy McAlpin scratched his stubbly chin and pushed his Glengarry cap toward his left ear, before giving his decision with a true Gaelic burr,—

"I'm thinkin' the Dominie and Dr. Dale might take three-fourths of it. They furnished the *brains!* Mr. Folger put up the money."

Dr. Dale had drawn his adjustable lounging-chair up to the fire in his sanctum, at half-past ten o'clock on the evening of John Bell's return from a week's visit to New York. The grate was piled with red-hot coals; some sprays of mignonette in a vase on the table behind him scented the warmed air delicately. The wind hummed in the chimney; through the frozen stillness of the streets the shout of a stray reveller in the lower town, the hoarse "pouff! pouff!" of a hard-pressed locomotive, the grind and rumble of a loaded train a mile away, accentuated the restful seclusion of a man whose day's work was done and himself free to enjoy fireside ease. The doctor lowered the chair-back that he might stretch legs and spine more at length, joined his finger-tips, and hoped devoutly that he had had his last office-patient for the night.

Professional rivals — for mushroom civic growth attracts doctors as decay draws scavenger-insects — more than intimated that he owed his large practice to personal gifts rather than to skill. He and his friends could afford to let the aspersion pass. His treatment of the half-drowned, asphyxiated, and scorched victims of the great flood laid the foundation of a reputation which subsequent experience had built up solidly.

Had not the celebrated Philadelphia surgeon brought out in a special train by Ralph Folger to attend his sister, spoken most handsomely of the country practitioner's management of Miss Folger's case, particularly commending his discretion in not amputating her crushed foot until the great man's arrival? A neat job the latter had made of it, the fame of which was noised abroad by city papers in connection with the story of "the dual calamity that

had stricken the community, sparing neither millionaire nor miner."

Ralph Folger had drawn his check for four thousand dollars, payable to the celebrated carver's order, adding with a mighty oath that he would have paid ten times the sum to have the poor little foot saved. Nor had he scrupled to declare, afterwards and repeatedly, his conviction that if Dr. Dale had not been interfered with by a blanked specialist, he would have left the pretty foot where it was and mended it up to be as good as new.

The dignity of conscious power and of energy intelligently controlled was in this man's countenance and bearing. His features had the mould and the finish of a Grecian statue; the clear pallor of his complexion was set off by dark eyebrows and eyes; the always clean-shaven face looked the younger because his closely trimmed hair was iron-gray. Judged by his features, he was under thirty years of age. He had the repose and calm authority that belong to fifty. His address was direct, sometimes positive, never discourteous, because he kept humours and tempers well in hand. In his intercourse with the few intimate friends he had made in Pitvale his manner was singularly winning and cordial. Few who met him could resist the fascination, exerted at will, of the occult influence we classify stupidly as "personal magnetism," defined more aptly by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps as "that mystical charm which comes not of striving, or of prayer, or of education, — the power of an elect personality."

He had less colour than usual to-night; the lines of his figure were lax, the face was pensive to moodiness. His mail had lain unopened on the table until office-hours were over. Two letters were there now. A heap of gray tinder, fluttering over the live coals in the grate, represented the rest. In his reverie he

seemed to count the risings and fallings of the waifs. When one flake, larger than the others, regular in form, and some inches square, the lines of writing faintly visible upon it, dropped upon the hearth, he picked it up and threw it back into the fire. Method and neatness were innate and unconquerable with him.

The inert figure straightened into alertness as an approaching footstep detached itself from other night sounds without. By the time a pass-key rattled in the outer door, he was in the hall, his eager hand on the bolt.

"Ha! I thought I could not be mistaken!" he cried, as a familiar form filled the doorway. "I should know your step in the Great Libyan Desert or in Siberia!" shivering in shutting out the keen wind. "Where did you drop from? You always were an unexpected sort of chap. Come in! I've been keeping this fire and the big chair for you ever since you left."

He followed Bell into the study, and helped him off with the rough ulster.

"The opening of a chestnut burr!" he quoted laughingly, laying the heavy garment upon the sofa. "What time did you get in?"

The visitor stooped to spread his strong, shapely hands to the fire.

"An hour ago. I came over in the caboose of a freight train. I stopped at the Club for a cup of coffee and a look at the boys, then came straight here."

He faced Dale in saying it, and they shook hands again by a mutual impulse. Cordial pleasure at the meeting was in the eyes of each.

Bell was taller by two inches than his friend and co-worker. His hair and full, close-curling beard were of the glossy brown of the chestnut to which Dale had likened him; gray, well-opened eyes, with

thick, long lashes, were his best feature. The rest of the face was strong, kindly, honest, but not handsome. Superb specimen of physical manhood though he was, he was almost too massive for grace beside the supple elegance of Dale's figure and limbs. His voice was powerful and deep of tone, with carrying qualities that made him an effective public speaker. He looked the pioneer, Dale the artist to whom should be committed the task of finishing and polishing.

"Why did n't you telegraph that you were coming?" continued the doctor, as they seated themselves. "I'd have gone down to meet you."

"Thanks, all the same! But I did n't arrive wholly unwelcomed. Your friend Welsh fell in with me on Main Street, walked a dozen blocks at my side, and gave me divers words of counsel. I wish I could get more into touch with that man. I know we two could do much good if we could only work in unison. But he invariably rubs me the wrong way, and somehow I contrive to offend him without the least intention of doing it. Why, only to-night —"

He went on to tell of the Rev. C. Mather Welsh's refusal to accept the hospitality of The Bachelors' Club, and his own perplexity at the passion into which the proposition to adjourn the discussion to the restaurant had thrown the small evangelist.

Dale stared, wide-eyed, at the speaker as the story was developed. When it was ended, he threw himself back and broke into a shout of hearty boyish laughter.

Bell stared in his turn, and in unfeigned bewilderment. Dr. Dale was not given to violent mirth.

"What's the joke? I can't see the point. I've made a brother-man and brother-minister angry. That's not wildly amusing, to my notion. How I did it I can't guess."

"Of course you can't, you big, straightforward, honest schoolboy of six-feet-three! When will you be grown up, I wonder? All you did was to ask a rabid teetotaller to step into a bar and have a drink. You invited a temperance orator to pass judgment on the quality of the Club beer. That was all! Strange that the little man took it amiss, was n't it?"

Bell listened, open-mouthed; a gleam that was not all regret nor yet wholly amused dawned in his eyes.

"I — suppose — I — really did all that!" he enunciated at last. "But you see I really meant —"

"Of course I see that you did; but Welsh does n't see it, and what's more, he never will. A man like that covets a valid excuse for disliking and downing everybody who does n't agree with his views. I fell under his ban long ago in a dozen different ways. One offence came through his throwing out of a window a bottle of French brandy I had left for a man on the verge of coma after typhoid fever. I had ordered a tablespoonful to be given every half-hour as long as he could swallow it, or until I came back. When I paid the next call, I found Welsh on his knees praying into a dying man's ear, after throwing bottle, brandy, and all away. I waited for him outside and told him, coolly, that if he ever interfered with my practice again, I would throw him after the bottle. Now he's your mortal enemy too. Ah, well! I don't fancy he'll be able to bother us much. At any rate, he is n't worth talking about now. Tell me about yourself."

"But if I apologise to him and —"

"And make matters ten times worse. No! no! Drop it! It's best that way. Now, what about your trip? The matches are on the table behind you, and there's some reputed tobacco in that jar

on the mantel. Or would you rather have a cigar? You wrote that Miss Bell had arrived safely after a pleasant voyage. Did you find her much changed?"

"Only that her skirts have gone down and her hair has gone up during the past four years. For the rest she is pretty much the same. By the way, she's coming here a week from Thursday."

"Here! to Pitvale! Not to live?"

"For a visit of some months, at any rate. It's time I had some good of her. She is all I have in the world."

"That will be rather a violent change for her," remarked Dale. "Four years in Europe with her uncle and aunt, spent in sight-seeing and society, is a far cry from slack-baked Pitvale with little company except her big brother."

"Oh! we'll give her a rattling good time!" confidently. "She'll stay with me, of course. I have thought it all over. I'll get Mrs. Bowersox to 'make over to us j'intly,' as Captain Cuttle says, one of the 'pair of parlours' she keeps shut up except when there is a funeral or wedding on hand — and she has had neither in ten years. The front room will be the better of the two. It is exactly opposite my study, you know. Myrtle will make another place of it by walking through it twice. She has a genius for home-making and all that. It will be like the dear old days when we were all in all to each other. We will renew our youth. She isn't a bit spoiled by her four years of travel. She's just the same sweet, unaffected, jolly little sister she was when I played the big brother, and she was my humble, adoring slave who could yet twist me round the least of her fingers. She looked up to me as her superior in rank. Somehow our positions seem rather reversed now. And I say, old man, you'll drop in upon us every evening, and as often as you can

besides, and consider yourself one of the family, won't you? I count you in for every good time I promise myself. Oh, but it is *grand* to think of having a real home again after a century or two of boarding-house life!"

Dr. Dale did not answer at once. He seemed not to have heard the appeal to himself. Chin on hand, he sat looking into the fire. Tiny flames were reflected in his eyes; the flickering gleams brought out lines in his face that were not there awhile ago. He looked haggard and worn; the eyes that were brown when he smiled were black and tired, and there were dark shadows under them. The man had aged within an hour.

Bell, happy in planning for the new life, took no heed of the other's abstraction until Dale said curtly:

"It must be!"

"What must be?" asked the puzzled brother, arrested in his castle-building.

"It must be good, as you say, to have a home of one's very own."

Something hopeless yet wistful in his accent made Bell look more closely at him.

"Where was your early home, Dale?" he said tentatively.

"I never had one!" was the quiet rejoinder.

A woman would have offered verbal, probably tangible, sympathy. Being a man, a strong man and a friend, Bell made no reply.

Dr. Dale seldom cared to talk of himself. His familiar acquaintances, and even John Bell, his one intimate associate, knew next to nothing of his past. Always ready to hear and to allay the perplexities of others, he was by habit, and perhaps by nature, reticent in all that concerned him personally.

It came as a surprise to Bell, therefore, when after a pause Dale went on:

"No! I never had a home. I—I have been—virtually alone almost ever since I can recollect being at all. There was no one to care if I rose or if I sank, if I went or came, if I were well or ill. That sort of thing is bad enough when one is a child. A boy minds it less. When a fellow grows older he misses the memory of a restraining hand, of some one who once loved him, of a place in the household that was his very own and from which he would be missed. All these things go to make up home for a boy. I had none of them."

There was no bitterness, and still less of complaint, in the cold monotone. It was as if he set forth an impersonal fact.

Again Bell had no word of sympathy, and the two men sat silent, looking into the throbbing scarlet deeps of the fire. The wind without was almost a gale; the shutters strained and creaked dismally. Little eddies of gray and white ash were stirred up and danced and hovered over the coals, as a wandering blast swept down the chimney.

Dale was blowing rings of smoke into the air, critically inspecting each floating bluish circle, as if thinking to read some vital secret framed therein.

"Yes," he resumed after a while, the monotone softening into dreamy cadences, "I missed all that. I think I never quite knew what I had missed until," pausing until the circling smoke leaving his lips broke and dispersed, "until I ran across a real home once."

"Here?"

"No. In the Tennessee mountains. It was a composite mansion of mud, boards, and stone. There were, I believe, five rooms in all. One was what New England people call a 'lean-to,' built of unpainted pine clapboards. It had not been lathed or plastered or ceiled. An old woman who had

been bedridden for years, and her daughter, lived in the house. The daughter was nurse, housekeeper, and hostess, all in one. The furniture of the five rooms might have cost twenty-five dollars when new, if it ever was new. All the same, the poor place was a Home, with a capital H."

"I did not know you had ever lived in Tennessee."

"I did n't live there. I suffered and nearly died there. I was passing through the State, and happened upon a mining-camp away up in the Cumberland Mountains. Just at that time one of the mines caved in. A lot of men were about a hundred feet below the surface when the alarm was given. Nobody dared to take the cage down for them. At last one fellow volunteered for the job. He made four trips and saved the whole gang. On the last journey the car got stuck somehow on the way up and careened suddenly. The fellow tumbled out and got pretty well smashed to pieces. I happened to be in the mine at the time —"

"And you happen to be trying to lie to me now, and a preciously awkward business you are making of it!" broke in Bell. "What's the use of saying you 'happened' to be there? You were the man who took the cage down for the poor fellows and saved them. Confess it!"

"There was no one else to do it," with the air of a man caught red-handed in a felony. "Somebody had to, you know," he added apologetically. "Well, I was badly hurt, and I lay there in the dark at the bottom of the shaft all night. The shoring over my head bulged more and more every hour. I could see it against the lighter sky above. I knew it would give way, sooner or later, and let down a few thousand tons of dirt and rock upon me. I was lying helpless, and could n't even roll to one side."

"Well!" said John, impatiently.

The narrator had begun to blow rings again, as if he had finished the tale of adventure.

"Well, there was an old-fashioned thunder-storm that night, and the reverberations shook the walls of the shaft, and bits of gravel and earth kept tumbling down on my face and body from between the boards of the shoring, and the boards seemed to bulge and sag a little more after each thunder-crash. It was n't nice to lie there like that."

"But how — ?" for there was another tantalising break in the story.

"Oh, they hauled me out next morning, and that blessed shoring did n't give way, after all. But I was a human wreck, and my hair was n't black any more. It had n't exactly grown

'white
In a single night,
As men's have done from sudden fears,'

but it was as gray as you see it now."

"And they let you lie there all night, in danger, — the men you had saved!"

"I have never found my fellow-man a particularly grateful beast, certainly not that sort of him that lives near to nature's heart. But I was telling you of that Home."

"With the capital H?"

"With the capital H! Nobody wanted to take in an injured stranger who did n't look very prosperous. At last a girl came forward and said she'd take care of me in her mother's house. It was the house I told you of. She was a born nurse — that girl! I verily believe she saved my life. They were poor, but they would n't hear of my paying them a cent for what was done for me. I lay all summer — three mortal months — on a cot in that lean-to, before I could travel. They treated me like one of their own

family. I mended fast when I was able to hobble to the door and lie on the grass under the trees and fill my lungs with the mountain air. I thought it was Heaven at the time; I see now it was only Home."

"The two words are not far from being synonymes," observed Bell.

"I've thought sometimes," continued the doctor, musingly, "that maybe I'd go back there some day. You see, the girl —"

He brought himself up testily.

"What an ass I am to bore you with all this stuff! An egotistical ass!"

"You don't bore me — and you *are* talking stuff now! Do you ever hear from them, the mother and the daughter?"

Dale nodded, reaching backward to the table for a fresh cigar.

"I could scarcely drop them after all they did for me, you know. I'm not quite a brute. And now, if you are warmed through, there are some Club matters I'd like to talk over with you."

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDDLE MISS MEAGLEY

"*Olivia.* But we will draw the curtain and show you the picture. . . . Is't not well done?"

"*Viola.* Excellently done, if God did all . . . I see you what you are: you are too proud! But, if you were the devil, you are fair!"

MRS. BOWERSOX was cleaning house. When you have heard that Mrs. Bowersox was the offspring of well-to-do Hollanders who had settled in Pennsylvania early in life; that Sarepta, their only daughter, was trained in all housewifely godliness by her mother, and lived to be forty-five years of age before she wedded Joachim Bowersox, — you will comprehend, although afar off, what this especial rite meant to her, if not what it imparted to her assistants.

There were three of these unfortunates on this particular day, — Gretchen, "the second girl;" Cornelius (otherwise "Case") Van Wagenen, a farm-hand in summer, a general-utility man in winter, and last, and least as to weight and consequence, the nominal head of the house. The corps was noisily supplemented by Master Thomas Jefferson Bowersox, an urchin of five summers, with hair like a tangle of gold-coloured floss, eyes as blue as Lake Como, the face of a stainless and unstainable cherub, and a temper as bland as refined oil in the absence of provocation — otherwise, matches.

Jeff had prepared for the crusade against impalpable dust, imaginary fluff, and inconceivable vermin

by enduing his plump person with white cotton overalls made after the Club pattern. His mother had cut them out and run them up on the sewing-machine yesterday, as the one and only means of securing a measurable degree of household quiet. Jeff had arisen at a ghastly hour of the as yet unsunned day to get into the garment, then stolen into the kitchen at six o'clock, while Anneke, the cook, was skimming milk in the buttery, climbed upon a table and raised himself on tiptoe to put the hands of the tall old clock that had been his grandfather's forward one hour and thirteen minutes.

"And Anneke, poor thing! never misgiving what he had done, hurried up the breakfast so that the bell rang while Dr. Dale was shaving and woke poor, dear Mr. Bell out of a sound sleep, and he up at all hours of the night in his study! As I was just telling Jeff, if they had n't two of the sweetest tempers ever made, there's no saying what might have happened to a naughty little boy who is everlastingly mortifying his poor mother."

While the mortified parent discoursed, she was scrubbing the carvings of the high mantel with a brush dipped in soft soap of her own making and two years old. Uncontrite Jeff was going through the like motions upon the window-sill with his unsuspecting father's tooth-brush feloniously abstracted from his wash-stand. The juvenile toiler's head was cocked smartly to the right; a small red tongue wagged over his chin in the energy of bodily exercise so engrossing that he paid no attention to the indictment brought against him.

The confidante of the latest evidence of original and inbred sin sat, composed and idle, in the easiest chair of the parlour "set," regardless of the hostess's warning that she would be "all over dust."

"It passes me how dust gets *into* a room that is

shut up all the time!" she plained. "To say nothing of the furniture being sheeted and pinned up until you'd think not a grain of dirt could get at it. Just two weeks ago yesterday I and Gretchen, poor thing! went over every inch of this room upon our bended knees. I'm not likely to forget it when that very afternoon Jeff — poor dear! — backed over a pail and sat down in the dirty suds, and but for the mercy of its having stood so long that the heat was off, there's no saying what might have happened."

The young lady in the easy-chair laughed carelessly.

"Come here, Jeff, and let me see how many scars you've got since I saw you last."

The child laid aside the brush and advanced in all seriousness.

"That's one!" he lisped, lowering his head to show a bloody scratch on the roll of fat at the back of his neck. "Kitty did that 'cause I was carrying her kittens off in my apron. There's one on *this* knee — that makes two — where I felled off the horse-block, and 'nother on *this*. That's free! That was the cellar steps. I can't show them to you, all on account of the overalls, you know. But there's a bully place on my head. 'Most well, you see," — parting the sunshiny curls. "That was a-coasting down the hill. Sled banged 'gainst a tree. Dr. Dale thoughted first he would have to sew it up. But he just shaved the hair off and stick-plastered it. There ain't but four of 'em in all."

"You'll be the death of me, you funny boy!" shrieked the visitor, holding her sides in a ladylike way. "You keep Dr. Dale busy, don't you?"

"You bet!"

The cherubic infant was back at his work, head awry and tongue lolling. Time was too precious for anything but monosyllables.

The Middle Miss Meagley 33

The mother's sly, proud glance would have been absurd had it been less natural and loving. She affected to frown, and put an edge upon her amiable drawl.

"Kate Meagley! you're as bad as any of them! I see nothing to laugh at in a boy that keeps his poor mother uneasy every single hour he's awake, with his capers and his hurts. Some day he'll break his neck, and what then?"

"Dr. Dale will mend it!" retorted Jeff, rubbing the wet sill so dry with the sleeve of his overalls that his palpitating tongue overhung the dimple in his chin.

Miss Meagley clapped her hands. The mother beamed broadly.

"He really believes it! And others think as much, if they don't say it. But speaking of—" a jerk of the head in the direction of the apparently inattentive subject doing discreet duty for his name—"he's more and more a surprise every day he lives. It's always been next to impossible for me to realise him anyhow, coming so late in life as he did, and so extraordinary in every way. Lately he's getting clean beyond me. He wants a man's hand on the bridle, that's what he wants!"

"I should n't think there was a lack of that sort of thing in this house," said Miss Meagley, artlessly. And yet more demurely, "There's Uncle Joachim, to begin with."

"Don't be a goose, Kate Meagley! You know as well's I do that he could n't bridle a flea!"

They spoke as freely as if Joachim were out of the room, when he was putting the last extreme of polish upon the panes of a window not five feet distant, using for the purpose a ball of crushed newspaper.

"Mr. Bell says some fleas can fire cannons, and canary-birds too," interpolated Jeff, in such wadded

accents that his mother pounced upon him in a fright.

"Bless my soul, child! what have you got in your mouth?"

Exploring it with a hooked forefinger, in spite of his teeth, she produced a dab of wet gray matter.

"I was going to shine the other window!" spluttered the defrauded assistant.

"Newspaper!" ejaculated his parent. "Don't you know printer's ink is a rank poison?"

"Not when taken that way," said Miss Meagley, hiding a yawn with her hand. "Jeff! if you will sit quietly on this chair by me for five minutes, I will give you five peppermint drops. I want to talk to your mother. She cannot listen or think, if you will keep scaring her every other breath. There's my man!" as the cherub bestowed himself upon the designated seat. "Aunt Sarepta! I came over to-day, for one thing, to leave a message for Dr. Dale. He is n't at his office. I stopped there on my way up town. Will he be in at dinner-time?"

"Maybe so, maybe not. There's no counting upon his going-outs and coming-ins any more than there is upon death."

"If he should be, will you ask him to call sometime this afternoon or evening? Ruth has a cold, and I don't like to let it run on. We can't take risks with her."

"It's just beautiful, the care you take of her!" said Mrs. Bowersox, feelingly. "'Seems-if going through so much together as you two did, that dreadful time, had j'ined you for life, poor dear cre'turs! It's like 'for better, for worse,' as I was saying to Mr. Bell only last night. You ought to count it a privilege that you can make up to the poor afflicted dear for what she's lost. Dear! dear! When you think of what she was and what she is, it is enough to break your heart."

"You'd like to have Dr. Dale mend your heart, if 't was broked, would n't you?" queried the terrible infant, squirming so abruptly to stare into his cousin's face that she plucked him from his perch and deposited him upon the floor with needless energy. He did not remit his stare.

"What makes your face so red? I should n't wonder if you have a scarlet fever, or maybe a measles," he hazarded solemnly, standing stock-still where she had dumped him.

Gretchen tittered; the utility-man chuckled over the sofa he was trundling from one side of the room to the other; the one eye out of which Joachim looked over his shoulder at his son and heir twinkled; Mrs. Bowersox with difficulty narrowed her ample cheeks to an expression of rebukeful indignation.

"Tut! tut! sonny! that's no way to speak to a lady! She's been walking in the wind, and it has given her a fine colour. If you don't learn not to stare at people and make remarks, there's no saying what will happen now we're going to have a young lady of our own in the house."

"Mr. Bell was telling us about his sister last night." Miss Meagley welcomed the change of topics. "Is n't it funny for a society girl to be coming to Pitvale — away from New York! in the depth of winter?"

"Just what I was saying to Mr. Bell!" responded her aunt. "There's precious little in Pitvale to please a young lady that's been all over the world, and is accomplished, no doubt, and speaking, maybe, as many as a dozen languages, and used, as you say, to gay society and every luxury. I had a real purpletation of the heart at the thought that I had n't, so to speak, cleaned house since November. She'll be here a-Thursday, and there's oceans of work to be done between now and then. They're to have

this for their private sitting-room. I ought, by rights, to have the carpet lifted and beaten, but Mr. Bell, poor, thoughtful dear! set his foot down on that."

"On the carpet?" slipped in the guest, with kittenish drollery, wasted upon the literal housewife.

"He actually remembered the very day it was put down in November. And says he, 'I shall be really displeased and hurt if you put yourself to unnecessary trouble for my sister, Mrs. Bowersox. She has n't seen such a spick-and-span house as yours in ten years,' he says. 'All you need to do is to have her bed made and water and towels in her room, and a good fire in her parlour, — a wood-fire, please! I'll pay for it. And room in there where she can put a few books and gimcracks she has brought for me.' That's all a man knows about housekeeping! I declare I had to laugh in his face!"

Miss Meagley listened so attentively as to be unaware that Jeff, stationed a little in the rear of her chair, was laboriously quilting a fold of her skirt with a pin into the stuffed back.

"Is she much younger than Mr. Bell?" she inquired. "He talks of her as if she were hardly out of her teens."

"She is just twenty, so he told me. But a well-grown, fine-looking young lady, judging from her picture. Just wait a minute! Gretchen, if you've finished the paint, do you and Case take the chairs, one by one, into the hall, and brush every speck of dust out of the seats and backs, 'specially where the buttons are."

She tiptoed briskly from the room. For a woman of fifty-three who brought down the scales at one hundred and ninety-five, her movements were remarkably agile, her step light. She was neither flat-footed nor lumbering. In a minute she was back, bringing a framed picture in both careful hands.

"She brought it to him from Flowerence," she said, steadying it upon her niece's knee. "He keeps it on his desk right before his eyes, poor fellow! Ain't she a beauty?"

Kate Meagley was not sentimental or romantic, although she tried with all her might to look both. She believed to the end of her days that the quail which pumped the colour from her lips and the blood from her heart until her feet were clay-cold and the fingers holding the frame were so tremulous that she had to steady her arm on the elbow of the chair to get a full look at the pictured face, was a presentiment.

Her mother considered her the beauty, *par éminence*, among her five daughters. She was unquestionably the clever one of the family. Her figure mother and sisters called "willowy," her manners "fascinating." The "baby stare" of the bluish-gray eyes they thought bewitchingly appealing. The bow of the short upper lip rested so lightly upon the lower and fuller that she seemed always on the point of speaking. Lawless Ralph Folger said of his sister's companion that "her mouth was forever at half-cock." The perfect arch of her eyebrows followed the round of her raised lids, as she talked.

Two sisters had preceded her into the world, and two had come after her. One of the sayings that gained her a household reputation as a wit was her designation of herself as "the Middle Miss Meagley." Her father was a prosperous farmer and gristmill owner when she was old enough to "take an education." She was sent to a fashionable boarding-school in Philadelphia, where Fate did her a kind turn in assigning her as a room-mate to Ruth Folger.

The Folgers were even then the richest people of the section. When oil was struck at fifty points on their large farm, they became forthwith millionaires.

The Meagleys were ruined by the same "boom." The father, hitherto the most phlegmatic man in the conservative Dutch neighbourhood, dashed into speculation, as a roadster becomes a runaway at an unexpected minute, and, like the roadster, he ran with both eyes shut. He would sink wells at his own charges, locating them according to a secret system of his own devising. Money was raised for the wild ventures by mortgaging his ancestral acres when the savings of years were exhausted by bills for tubing, drills, derricks, and gangs of high-priced labourers. Out of twelve wells sunk in formerly productive fields but two yielded a drop of oil, and these, it was proved within a month, were merely shallow "pockets," soon and utterly pumped dry. He was at the last gasp of hope when the fatal freshet that quenched the light of twenty human lives descended upon his homestead, levelling it to the soil which had of late been so obdurate to his desires. He and his family barely escaped with their lives.

Katharine Meagley and Ruth Folger were snatched by the heroic rescuing party from imminent death. The elder Folger had died six months before, after a widowhood of ten years. His son and daughter were the wealthiest of the scores of speculators who had drawn prizes in the oil-lottery. When the scattered Meagleys found one another after the flood, they found also the dawn of better days. The Folger brother and sister paid off their mortgages, and settled upon Mr. Meagley a sum sufficient to rebuild his houses and restock his farm.

The ravening for drill, pump, and derrick awoke mightily within him at sight of the money. He "plunged" with the madness of a stock-gambler on a rising market. Guided by a hazel-wand, cut at the full of the moon at midnight by himself, with incantations known to none else, he sank ten other wells as

barren as the first twelve. His last dollar went into a hole in a hill-top which, as we shall see later on in our story, furnished a never-stale joke to oil-prospectors throughout the land.

Excitement and failures, the reproaches of the family he had ruined, and lastly, the ridicule of a heartless public, were too much for a never-strong brain. At sixty, the victim of the petroleum craze was a semi-imbecile, to be looked after like a peevish child by those who were unable to support themselves. Ambitious and false hopes had made his children useless and supercilious until aspiration and expectation flickered into darkness. They were shabby-genteel pensioners upon more fortunate neighbours and the relatives they had despised in the "better days" continually upon their tongues.

Joachim Bowersox, whose sister Timothy Meagley had married, made over to her a house and garden in Pitvale which had been part of their father's estate. It was one of the mercies for which Mrs. Bowersox returned thanks without ceasing that nobody had ever suspected the presence of what she termed, with unintentional alliteration, 'that orful oil,' upon the property owned by her, and, before her, by steady, sensible folk who feared God and eschewed such evils as digging in good farm lands for what the Almighty had seen fit to bury out of sight. Nevertheless it was she who suggested the deed of gift to her unfortunate sister-in-law, and not a syllable ever escaped her voluble lips in conversation with any member of the humbled family which could remind her of the father's folly.

Between the Folgers and the Bowersoxes, the women and their hapless burden were housed, clothed, and fed, — bounty accepted by the beneficiaries as part, and but a small part, of the world's debt to them. Ruth Folger had kept her old school-fellow

with her since the misfortune that crippled the heiress for life. The gossips, as a body, believed that Kate was provided for handsomely for the remainder of her natural existence, and were unanimous in the opinion that she had fallen squarely upon her feet the night that cost Ruth Folger one of hers.

It was not a satisfied, much less a happy woman whose skirt Jeff was fastening securely, with pins taken from the sheeted furniture, to the best brocade chair in his mother's front parlour. The wearer was absorbed in the study of Myrtle Bell's picture. It was painted upon ivory, and exquisite in execution, lifelike in expression.

"Looks-if it must be the very image of her," commented Mrs. Bowersox, going on with her scrubbing. "You can see the resemblance to her brother, particularly about the eyes; though, for that matter, you could n't tell about the mouth, his being covered by his beard."

"I should n't call her pretty, all the same," Kate could not help saying out of the strange pain that had clutched her heart. "Of course, it is beautifully done. The eyes have a sort of bold look,—something that says she is used to admiration and expects it. She has quite the air of a society girl. I'm afraid she'll find Pitvale awfully slow. I don't suppose there are ten families here she'd be willing to visit with."

She was talking against thought. Mrs. Bowersox did not surmise the effort it cost her to appear calmly critical when she would have liked to throw the presentment of the spirited, high-bred face upon the floor and dash her heel through it. The rich but simple costume was artistically indicated, not given in tawdry detail. A velvet corsage of dull Venetian red was softened by a scarf of old lace looped upon one shoulder by a single rose of darker red.

The effect of the whole was to show the critic to herself as a provincial dowdy. And this, despite the cashmere gown chosen because Dr. Dale had admired that particular shade of golden brown, and made up by a Philadelphia *modiste*. Her velvet toque of the same colour, the tawny pheasant's breast banding it shading into black, was in perfect taste. Ruth Folger had said so, and her judgment was indisputable. The costume would have become a warm brunette; a decided blonde of brilliant complexion might have carried it off successfully. The Middle Miss Meagley, belonging to the great majority of women who are neither brunette nor blonde, thus arrayed, was a picture done in poorly managed sepia washes.

The antique silver frame—an artistic treasure, although this she did not suspect—seemed to burn her fingers. She sickened in gazing at what it enclosed. She laid it down hastily upon a sofa near by.

“I must go now, Aunt Sarepta!” shaking off the queer possession and speaking in her usual tone. “You won't forget my message to the doctor? And I do hope Miss Bell won't put you to much more trouble! It seems a pity to have your house upset in this way in such disagreeable weather. Some travelled people are disgustingly full of foreign airs and graces, but maybe this one is n't.”

Starting to her feet, she raised the heavy chair with her. Result, a zigzag tear across the front breadth of the skirt whose colour Dr. Dale had commended, the unpaid bill for which she had received that morning.

CHAPTER V

MYRTLE BELL

“With breath of thyme and bees that hum,
Across the years you seem to come ;
Across the years, with nymph-like head,
And wind-blown brows unfileted,
A girlish form that slips the bud,
In lines of unspoiled symmetry,
A girlish form that stirs the blood
With pulse of Spring — Autinoë !”

MYRTLE BELL stood at the front window of her sitting-room, looking down upon Pitvale and, across it, to the environing hills. The January sunlight made cruel disclosures of the peculiarly unlovely features of the view. Roads and houses in the collieries of England and Wales were as grimy and as mean as the shabbiest sheds crowding upon one another in the lower levels of the town. The pitchy smoke vomited by towering chimneys and pipes belonged to every manufacturing village. The forest of spidery derricks bewildered her.

“It was too dark to see them last night,” she had said to her brother at breakfast. “You may imagine the effect produced upon me when I drew up the window-shade this morning. For an instant my head went around like a top. It was as if a tidal wave had huddled all the windmills in Holland and Lombardy into an area of six square miles. Only, your giants are armless. They have an incomplete look that worries me. It is like ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”

“That’s true hereabouts a great many times !” sighed the hostess, shaking a mournful head at the coffee-pot she was tilting over Joachim’s third cup.

Myrtle looked inquiringly at John.

"I supposed that oil was one of the sure staples of commerce?"

John's reply had added distrust to the disfavour with which she now regarded the hideous structures.

"Success would be their only excuse for being," she was saying to herself. "I wish I had not heard how many ruined fortunes and miserable people they stand for!"

She was glad the Bowersox farmhouse stood upon a hill and well away from the town. Mrs. Bowersox had explained eagerly how seldom the smell of raw petroleum and the reek of the engines was really disagreeable to her household.

"Never, you may say, unless the wind is due east and brings it right over to us. And most of our winds are north, south, and west. Otherwise I don't know what would happen to us. They do say the smell is healthy, especially for weak lungs. When they first began to bring oil out of the flinty rock, as the Bible says, it was used mostly as an eyement for rheumatics and sprains and such. There were those what physicked with it internal — poor, ignorant dears! It was peddled through the country as a nat'ral cure for pretty nigh everything. For my part, after all is said and done, I've wished ten thousand times we had stuck to whales and never found out that the nasty-smelly stuff would burn in lamps."

"I never dreamed that kerosene could be interesting," said Myrtle, raising a sunny face to her brother when he joined her at the window. "I mean to cultivate its acquaintance in all its branches. One thing puzzles me. An old guide said to 'Adirondack Murray,' that 'folks was gittin' so thick in the woods a feller'd have to chalk his legs to make sure they was n't somebody else's.' How do the people know their own wells from their neighbours'? I see

no fences or barriers of any kind. It must be worse than the danger of milking other people's cows in a grazing country."

Bell put his arm about her, and she leaned her head against him. The very sound of the fresh young voice, the cultivated modulations reviving memories of home and Lang Syne — was inexpressibly sweet. It was impossible not to stoop to kiss the laughing mouth.

"I've got to make up for lost time!" he pleaded. "I had n't kissed a woman in three years until I met you on the steamer, the other day."

"Poor boy! Don't apologise! I like it!" returned the sister, frankly. "And I like being here, Jack! It's all so different from anything else I ever saw. I am revelling in anticipation of the larks we are going to have together — if, as I hope, it is n't really necessary for me to know one mutilated windmill from another in order to become popular with your parishioners."

"My parishioners — or the bulk of them — are operatives, not well-owners, although there are rich men in our congregation. They are a motley crew that came to me instead of my going to look for them. My church — you can see the spire peeping over the hill to your left — was in the heart of an agricultural region when I was called to it six years ago. The first well was sunk that year. After that, if not the deluge, speculators came in upon us like a flood, and all our pleasant places were laid waste. I had planned different things for myself, but my work was cut out for me. I could not shirk it."

A soft hand stole up to his cheek.

"Of course you could n't! Go on!" said a gentle voice.

"It is a hand-to-hand fight with such evils as the country parson I expected to be would never have

encountered had he lived to be as old as Adam. The wisdom of the serpent is at a higher premium in Pitvale than the harmlessness of the dove. Do you see a flag flying over a peaked roof over there? That is The Bachelors' Club. You heard my battle over it with Dr. Hartley in New York, the evening he dined with us. I won't weary you by going over the ground again. I could n't make him see the subject from my standpoint, and there are many, many others like him. Not being here, he cannot comprehend that we must adapt our missionary methods in some measure to the conditions we encounter.

"I should not be afraid to take you through the Club at any hour of the day or night. We look up decent homes for unmarried men; we visit them when they are hurt or sick; we hob-nob with them over the billiard-table, in the gymnasium, the reading-room, and in what my worthy but disapproving brother the Rev. Cotton Mather Welsh calls our 'saloon.' If they are in trouble, we help them out to the best of our ability; if they fall, we pick them up and encourage them to stand —

"I have broken my word to you! You should n't have said, 'Go on!'"

"I am glad I did! If I am to help you, I must be taken into your confidence. Jack!" her eyes shining with enthusiasm. "Do you know, I think all this is *grand*? And that it came into my mind while you and Dr. Hartley were talking, the other night, how fault was found with One who associated with publicans and sinners, eating what they ate, and drinking what they drank, and enduring patiently all sorts of vulgar and repulsive sinners — because He loved them! I recollect" — in a lighter tone — "something our dear mother said to a woman who would not allow her maids to have what she called 'followers' in her kitchen. Our mother answered, 'If we don't

provide places where they can have respectable visitors at proper hours, they will find for themselves disreputable places and improper company at unlawful hours, being only human beings like ourselves! 'It is easy to see where you got your sound common-sense and independent thought.'

"I have n't a monopoly of them," returned the brother, stroking the pretty head nestling in his breast. "Now that my sermonising is over, — for the present, — let me do the errand that brought me across the hall."

"I hoped you came because you could n't live another minute without seeing me!"

"It goes without saying that *that* affection is chronic. But my special object was to ask what I can do for you this forenoon to make you more comfortable. Don't you want me to move furniture — and things? Or to unstrap trunks, or lift boxes?" His survey of the premises was a comical mixture of complacency and deprecation. "A man is such a helpless duffer in these affairs! Honestly, do things look to you tolerable, on the whole, — anything like ship-shape, you know?"

"Seaworthy, taut, and trim?" mocked the girl. "I shall like the *tout ensemble* better when you sit down in that chair and your little sister sits upon her big brother's knee. *Now!*" settling herself with an audible sigh of satisfaction, "that is more ship-shape! Presently, after you have listened to my merry prattle as long as you can bear it, and have betaken yourself to your study, or to pastoral visitations, or to The Bachelors' Club — what a deliciously dissipated sound that has! — I shall unpack the two big boxes over there, hang up photographs and etchings, spread a bit of oriental embroidery on that marble-topped table — a marble slab looks so blank without an inscription! — dispose my books and a vase

or two wherever they will look their best, pull the six stuffed chairs away from the wall to which they are sticking closer than half-a-dozen brothers, throw a few cushions of many colours into the sharp corners of that enchanting old mahogany sofa, and" — checking the breathless flow of words — "would Mrs. Bowersox object, do you suppose?"

"Object! The room is yours as long as you will glorify it by your abiding. That blessed woman objects to nothing that will add even a unit to the sum of human happiness. Mrs. Sarepta Bowersox is, to quote Chadband, 'to me a gem. She is to me a jewel!'"

"A Koh-i-noor!" suggested Myrtle, roguishly.

"If you will. A mountain of light in several senses. The gossips say she manages her husband. He would not be an apology for an entity but for her. He drank hard before his marriage. She makes him so comfortable that he does not feel the need of liquor. There is no harm in him, and very little of anything else. An old neighbour told me that 'Sarepty married Jo'chim out o' pity. He was sech a meachin' cre'tur! that miserable that not even a dog would foller him.' I can believe it. She can't see any creature in distress without trying to help it—"

"Poor, dear thing!" interpolated Myrtle; and both laughed in sheer light-heartedness.

It was *good* to be together again, and rattling on "in the old, sweet way!"

"That just covers the ground for her," said Bell. "To be 'poor' is to be 'dear' to her big, deep, warm heart. Have you had much talk with her yet?"

"A full hour — which was also a good hour — after breakfast. She came in here, after the manner of another poor dear" — pinching her brother's ear — "to make sure I was comfortable. She told me

several dozen things in sixty minutes, none of them unkind; among others, that she 'had never realised Jeff, and never expected to.'"

John shouted with laughter. Myrtle eyed him quizzically, her head upon one side, like a meditative mocking bird.

"He *is* a mystery! I can compare him to nothing but witch-hazel, the starry tufts that bloom out upon bare branches in November when all the leaves are dead and gone, and wintry old age seems to have set in. If I had had the naming of him, he would be 'Hazel.' Such a winsome baby as he is! I am looking forward to great times with Jeff. His mother told me, too, that he was 'born to accidents as the sparks fly upward.'"

"Dale says he marks that day with a white stone in which he is not called upon to stanch, to stick, or to splinter," remarked the diverted listener.

"That reminds me to ask when your paragon is likely to materialise for my benefit. If he could guess how wildly curious I am to see him, common humanity would drag him to the light. I have been here fourteen — fifteen — hours, and never a glimpse of His Serene Highness have I had."

"Poor dear!" returned John. "I may say it seriously of him. He was called into the country yesterday afternoon to see a child who had convulsions. At eight o'clock last evening a messenger came in hot haste to know where he could be found. A man was dying — Come in!"

A knock at the door was the precursor of the — to Myrtle — amazing apparition of a smart coloured footman. He presented a large flat box to the young lady with a flourishing bow.

"Miss Folger's compliments to Miss Bell, and she hopes Miss Bell are feeling quite rested after her journey."

Before Miss Bell, who had risen from her brother's knee, could speak, John answered for her.

"Good-morning, Arthur! Please say to Miss Folger that Miss Bell and I thank her for the flowers, and that Miss Bell is well, and will do herself the pleasure of calling very soon."

"Jack!" ejaculated his sister, gazing after the august figure as the closing door took it from her sight. "This in Pitvale! I am transfixed!"

"Let me break the spell by opening the box!" undoing the string and removing the wrappings.

He handed her the card laid upon the inner layer of tissue paper, then drew back to let her reveal the treasures for herself.

"*'Miss Folger,'*" read Myrtle. '*With a cordial welcome to Pitvale.*' Oh-h-h! Smell the roses!"

With the removal of the coverings a slow wave of perfume diffused itself through the room. Layers of half-blown roses of the choicest varieties, long-stemmed, glossy-leaved, and dewy, filled the box. In silence and with light loving touches, the girl lifted and laid upon the centre-table, first, Jacqueminots, then, American Beauties, next, La France, Katherine Mermets, finally, a glorious mass of Gloire de Dijons.

She sank again to John's knee, clasped her hands like one faint with ecstasy, and devoured them with her eyes.

"Jack!" in a half-whisper. "It reminds me of an altar, all alight with fire from heaven! Who is *she?*"

John's face was gravely tender; his eyes shone softly as when they had rested upon the little sister in the earlier months of their orphanhood.

"Do you recollect writing to ask me about an account you had seen in an American paper of the damage done in Pitvale by water and by fire?"

“Can I ever forget it? And what you did on that dreadful day? And how you left me to find it out from the papers and other people’s letters?”

“Why should I distress you when the danger was over? Miss Folger was seriously injured at that time. She was caught in the floating *débris*. One foot was amputated” — compressing his lips and tightening his fist at the recollection. “There was some hurt to the other leg — to the muscles and nerves. She has not walked a step since.”

“Deformed! and a woman! How terrible!”

“You will take that word back when you see her. She is the happiest person I know, and one of the most useful. You heard me promise that you would call soon. I shall be disappointed if you and she are not friends. We — Dale and I — owe her more than I can tell you. Her brother built the clubhouse, and she furnished it. The instruments of the band were her gift. The first concert was in honour of her birthday, and in her grounds. It was the prettiest affair! Dale and Ralph Folger managed everything. The members of the Club were there in their best clothes, every taint of oil scoured and soaked out of them. Hundreds of other operatives came with their wives and children. It was like an Old World *fête*. Set Mrs. Bowersox going upon that tack some day. She’ll be crying before she gets through. She was doing that most of the time during what she calls ‘the musical picnic.’”

“Why can’t we go to see Miss Folger this very afternoon?” asked Myrtle, impulsively. “Will she think that I am presuming upon her kindness?”

“Presuming! my dear girl! —”

An imperious rattle of the door-knob broke off the sentence.

“That is your witch-hazel!” said Bell, laughing. And without changing his position or his sister’s, he

called, "Try, try again, my man! Don't give up the ship!"

A firmer grasp turned the knob, then the owner of the helping hand stepped back as Jeff launched himself into the room, arms wide dispread, every hair of his many curls flying loosely abroad in the electric excitement which shrilled his voice and mixed up proper names upon his tongue,—

"Oh, Mr. Bale! Dr. Dell has the beautifullest dawg you ever saw! And he won't bite, either!"

CHAPTER VI

"AFTER ALL THESE BLACK YEARS"

"Oh, let the solid ground
Not fail beneath my feet
Before my life has found
What some have found so sweet!
Then, let come what may!
What matter if I go mad?
I shall have had my day."

DR. DALE had had a trying night. The preceding evening he set his face homeward upon leaving his office, worn out by a heavy day's work which had stretched from a heart-failure case at six A.M. to a professional call upon Miss Folger at five-thirty in the afternoon.

Upon the porch of the Bowersox house he was met by a peremptory summons which dragged him three miles into the country to visit a dying child. From her death-bed he was hurried back to Pitvale to pass the rest of the night in another death-chamber, under circumstances yet more harrowing to the sensibilities.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the morning when he got home after the sleepless toil of twenty-seven hours. He was used to these happenings. Another man would have felt like a limp rag. The effect of the continuous strain upon him was to give him a feeling of utter desolation, weariness, and hopelessness. He could see no future, he could recall no past, that was not spent in a joyless routine of overwork, in tragically unsympathetic environment unrelieved by any recreative or home joys.

Passionately domestic in temperament, he had no home; the deep, loving heart beneath the impassive exterior found no outlet save in his friendship for John Bell. And to a jaded, overwrought man the friendly regard of one of his own sex leaves something to be desired.

These reflections strayed languidly and depressingly through the wearied physician's mind as he bathed, made his toilet, and ate a perfunctory breakfast, the hostess, conversant with his moods, kindly refraining from talking while she waited upon him. His coffee was fresh, hot, clear, and black, the toast he preferred to muffin or roll, delicately crisped, the rasher a translucent curl of savouriness. To tempt the appetite and so build up the inner and outer man, was the Bowersox method of expressing sympathy.

Aware of this, Dale said, "You are very good to me, and I thank you!" in leaving the dining-room.

He would go to his chamber for a few hours of sorely needed sleep before setting the treadmill going for another day. He knew that when he awoke the clouds raised by weariness of body would have rolled from his brain, and he would return to his life-work with a new heart. He had marvellous recuperative powers.

Just now that heart, as he tramped through the dim, chill hall-way leading from the dining-room in the rear extension of the rambling old farmstead to the main staircase, was as heavy as lead. Engrossed in his gloomy musings, he almost trod upon a tiny busy figure working with both hands at the knob of the front parlour door.

Dale heard John Bell's encouraging call to Jeff's efforts, and turned back from the stair-foot. Loosening the baby's tight grip, he gave the knob a twist, pushed the door open, and would have passed on

when his eye was caught by a wave of red light. He halted, breathless and amazed, staring out of the dusk into the room before him.

The first glimpse showed him nothing but a rioting, pulsing carnival of colour and radiance. Little by little, the scene took definite form.

The long-disused parlour was flooded by morning sunlight reflected in a ruddy glow from the red paper of the walls, sinking into and bringing out richly the shaded crimsons of the carpet. A roaring fire of logs was in the chimney-place, blending with the stream of sunlit warmth that surged out through the open door.

In the centre of the apartment, giving the key-note of the whole wonderful colour-scheme, was the mass of roses upon the table.

Beside them stood a girl.

A broad band of sunlight revelled in the brown hair piled loosely upon her head, changing it into a saint's aureole, and enhanced the vivid colour of her cardinal-red morning gown.

So perhaps on Dante, shivering between the high gray walls of the narrow Florentine street in the chill of the winter morning, flashed the vision of Beatrice on her way to early Mass, her "dress of a most noble colour, a subdued and becoming crimson," lighting up the dusky little thoroughfare and diffusing immortal life and warmth into the boy-lover's being.

The girl faced the door, one hand sunk lightly in the glory of the roses.

The tableau lasted for the quarter of a second, but long enough to stamp itself for all time upon the heart and memory of the toil-beaten man hesitating in the cold passage-way. Around him was frosty gloom. Behind him was the recollection of dying groans and the hoarse screams of delirium. Before him were a passion of sunshine and leaping firelight,

“After all these Black Years” 55

the perfume of roses, the sweetest face his eyes had ever beheld — warmth, colour, beauty — Home!

The scurry and patter of feet upon the oilcloth covering the hall floor dispelled the glamour of the vision.

Something brushed by Dale and bounded into the room.

It was a big setter dog. His tawny coat shone like burnished copper in the sunlight, ears and tail were erect. Pausing for an instant to take in the “situation,” the canine mind was made up and acted. He writhed ecstatically across the floor, twisting his body into an animated interrogation-point, out of pure joy taking a hundred superfluous pattering steps in his progress, as is the wont of very happy dogs. He made straight for Myrtle Bell, his silky ears standing out at the side of his head like quivering fans, the white ruffled shirt-front on his chest prominent as that of Beau Brummell.

“Oh! beautiful!” cried the girl, dropping to her knees and clasping both arms about the furry neck, while the dog made frantically vain attempts to lick her face. “Beautiful! beautiful! Whose is he? Yours, Jeff?”

Thomas Jefferson shook his head vehemently, waving aside the honour with one arm, and crooking his right thumb backward in the direction of the hall.

“Dr. Dale’s — he is! I telled you that before,” in mild reproof.

Myrtle arose to her feet. John called heartily, —

“Is that you, old man? What are you standing out there for? Come into the sunshine!”

“Yes,” answered Dale, speaking and moving as one who fears to awake from a beautiful dream. “I — I beg pardon! Yes! I will come into the sunshine!”

He stepped across the threshold.

Before Bell could speak her name Myrtle had advanced, her hand outstretched, her face alight with cordial friendliness.

"You and I must not meet as strangers, Dr. Dale! John has told me so much about you I feel that we are already friends."

The warm, firm clasp of her fingers thrilled through every nerve and fibre of his frame. Up to this moment he had not known how utterly weary and worn he was. The frank hand-grasp revealed to him his fatigue of body and soul, his loneliness, the pale monotone of his life, as nothing else in years had made him feel it all. He had an insane impulse to lay his face upon the firm little hand and tell the stranger his pain, his worries, his need.

In the next breath the strong man pulled himself together with an inward sneer at the momentary aberration of intellect, the wavering of will, and replied in commonplace, somewhat formal fashion to Miss Bell's greeting.

"You look half frozen, Dale," said John, kindly, "and tired to death. Take that big chair by the fire, and thaw yourself out."

Dale walked over to the fireplace. Myrtle half unconsciously noticed the freedom from embarrassment in look and action, as she had the peculiar sweetness and richness of his voice, and, as a moment later, she made note of the instinctive courtesy with which he waited for her to sit down before he sank wearily into the chair John had pointed out to him.

Before coming to Pitvale she had made a mental picture of her brother's friend. He was, she had imagined, a simple-minded country practitioner, somewhat shy in the presence of women, and a trifle unpolished, but honest of heart and altogether worthy of the affection Jack bestowed upon him.

It was a shock to have to tear down this portrait from the wall of her mental gallery, and to substitute the grave, classic visage, prematurely gray hair, and quietly self-assured manner of the man before her.

Something of this perplexity crept into her expression; and Dale, seeing without interpreting it, turned the talk from himself.

“My dog owes you an apology,” he said, “for bursting in upon you so unconventionally. You’ll overlook it, won’t you? When I’ve had him longer I’ll teach him to wait until he is invited before entering a room. At present, he seems to lack repose of manner.”

“He owes me no apology at all,” Myrtle made haste to protest. “He’s the dearest, friendliest dog I ever saw. Look! He has æsthetic tastes, too.”

The setter was standing in a patch of sunshine by the table, his head raised, sniffing placidly at a huge red rose that overhung the edge. Satisfied as to the quality and quantity of its perfume, he marched with dignity to the rug and curled himself upon it with a complacent sigh, resting his nose between his paws and blinking contentedly at the flaming logs.

“What lovely eyes he has!” went on Myrtle. “Their deep brown harmonises perfectly with his golden-red coat. His hair is true auburn.”

“It reminds me a little of Miss Kate Meagley’s new dress,” suggested Dale, turning to John, “the one that got so badly torn last week.”

The namesake of the Father of Democracy, at mention of the mishap, gazed abstractedly at the ceiling as one who having ears heareth not, then recalled a pressing engagement elsewhere and departed after the manner of a very small, very white snow-squall.

“Personalities never please Thomas Jefferson,” laughed Dale, crossing the room to close the door the snow-squall had left open. “There is no surer

way of sending him about his business than by alluding to his misdeeds."

"Where did the dog come from?" queried Bell. "You speak very grandly of 'my dog' and 'when I've had him longer.' I suppose you want to impress my sister with the idea that the possession of a thoroughbred setter is no novelty to you. But you must make some allowances for my curiosity. Is he another testimonial from a G. P.?"

"What *is* a G. P.?" asked Myrtle. "Is that another oil-region technical term?"

Dale answered with affected gravity, —

"It is 'short' for Grateful Patient. You see, when an invalid gets well, the delusion sometimes lingers in his mind that he owes his recovery to the doctor who attended him, and he pays off the debt of gratitude with a plaster cast of 'Checkers at the Old Farm,' or, if the late patient be a woman, by a pair of misfit slippers worked in gray moss-roses and scarlet violets. Such offerings embody all the gratitude the G. P. is capable of feeling. It does n't extend to the sordid lengths of paying doctor's bills."

"And is this beautiful dog a G. P. offering?"

"Not of that kind exactly," replied the doctor, now in real earnest. "A poor chap died last night. I had attended him in his illness. He had no money, — not a penny to bury him with. Just before he became unconscious he thanked me for the little I had been able to do for him, and asked me to take his dog in payment, and, incidentally, to give the poor brute a good home."

"Who was he?" inquired John, with interest.

"Svensen."

"He has gone, then? Poor fellow!"

"Yes, I was there all night. He died at sunrise."

"That man," said John to his sister, "might serve as a fair example of the need in a certain class of

such work as is done by The Bachelors' Club. He was a Swede, a day-labourer, a good worker, but fond of liquor. Some of our fellows tried hard to get him into the Club, but he 'had heard we had rules there, and he liked his liberty.' In other words he preferred to guzzle bad whiskey in dirty clothes at The Oilman's Rest to cleanliness and pure beer at the Club-House. Mr. Welsh looked upon him as a highly promising convert, a year ago, but when threats of eternal punishment ceased to frighten him, he took to drink again."

"Jack! that is the first bitter thing I have heard you say," remonstrated Myrtle.

"God forgive me for it, dear! Welsh is a good man, but he will not understand that 'con-vert' means to turn about, and that we must follow up the convert, hold him by the shoulders, and keep him in the new path. It is a work of time and endless patience, 'here a little and there a little, line upon line and precept upon precept.' Svensen got into a fight at The Oilman's Rest, a local saloon, about a week ago. He was drunk at the time. He got a stab in the lungs from an Italian's knife. Pneumonia set in a day or so later. This is the end!"

The sincere mournfulness in the young preacher's voice and manner kept the others mute for a minute.

Then Dale remarked quietly: "Welsh was with him to the last. I wish I could bring myself to like that little man!"

"He is a good man," reiterated Bell, in a tone of profound conviction, "a man who would go to the stake for his faith."

"Or his prejudices!" subjoined the doctor. "He nursed Svensen as tenderly as a woman could. It was in language alone that he was harsh. I ventured to suggest to him last night that words of hope and comfort might ease a parting soul more than his

promises of the fate that awaits evil-doers. He wheeled upon me with a text beginning, 'Except ye repent' —"

"'Ye shall all likewise perish,'" supplied John, in reverent sadness.

"That is it. I had n't the heart to be angry with him. He was so terribly in earnest. All this must be stupid talk to you, Miss Bell?"

"Anything but that!" asserted the girl, warmly. "I am interested in every detail of the work you and my brother are carrying on so nobly."

A slight flush crossed Dale's face at the frank avowal.

"It is he, not I, who does the 'noble' part of the work," he said quickly. "It falls to my share to patch up such parts of the machinery as get out of repair."

"Nonsense!" interjected Bell. "Why, Myrtle, these poor people fairly worship him. He slaves for them, night and day. Only last week —"

"Are those flowers Pitvale products, or did they, too, come from New York to brighten up the oil-lands?" asked Dale, abruptly, shutting off his friend's encomiums.

"They were sent to me by Miss Folger," replied Myrtle. "John says she is always doing things to make life pleasant for others."

"He is right. She does it by stealth generally. For example, when I called there yesterday —"

John took him up.

"You were there yesterday! Was anything the matter?"

"Nothing serious. Miss Meagley sent for me to prescribe for Miss Folger's headache which went off before I got there."

"Folger!" repeated Myrtle, thoughtfully. "I met a man in Venice last year who spelled his name in the same way. We pronounced it Foalger."

“It may have been her brother!” exclaimed John. “He was in Italy last winter. What manner of man was he?”

Myrtle laughed.

“A jolly, good-natured, whimsical fellow, who spent money in ways that made sleepy Italians open their eyes. He was infatuated by gondolas and gondoliers, and bought one. He would row it himself, and invited every American he met to go out with him. He learned to handle the long oar as well as a native-born gondolier, and to shout ‘*Stali!*’ and ‘*Premi!*’ and ‘*Gia-é!*’ at the right turnings. At the end of a week he gave the gondola to a beggar he met in the Piazza San Marco. I asked him why he selected that particular beggar, and he said, ‘Because he’s the only man in four continents whose hair is the precise colour of mine. The coincidence deserves notice.’”

A burst of laughter from her auditors greeted the anecdote.

“That is Ralph Folger, among a million!” cried John. “His hair was —?”

“Very, *very* red! And his name *was* Ralph! What a little world we live in!”

“The hair settles the question,” concluded John. “Ralph is very proud of the colour. He calls it ‘Schenectady hair,’ because, as he says, ‘it is twenty miles from Auburn.’ The gondola prank is on a par with his performance at the Joseph Gurney Hotel in Philadelphia. It is one of the very swellest hotels in the country. Folger went there to call upon a friend. He told a bell-boy to take up his card. The boy was busy and impertinent. Ralph hunted up the proprietor and demanded the boy’s discharge. The proprietor refused, and Folger lost his temper.

“‘What price do you want for this joint, any-

way' ? he said. 'Name a sum and I'll buy you out !'

"The proprietor thought he was dealing with a crazy man until he heard his name. Then he was all apologies. But Ralph's blood was up. To make a long story short, he leased the hotel for a week. The first thing he did was to discharge the offending bell-boy, and to pay the other boys five dollars apiece to chase him down Chestnut Street with sticks. Lastly, he paid five hundred dollars to the boy's parents not to bring suit, setting the sum himself."

"Did he make money out of the hotel?"

"Make money! You may judge for yourself. All meals were free, and the bar was open to all comers. The only requisite for guests was the presentation of an engraved visiting-card. Folger held that nobody who is not more or less respectable has an engraved card. This barred out the tough element for a while."

"How did the experiment end?"

"The story goes that within three days there wasn't a guest in another hotel for miles around; neighbouring saloons put up their shutters out of sheer lack of custom, and ten firms were working over time to turn out engraved visiting-cards. There was a line of people half a mile long standing in the street, night and day, awaiting admission to the Joseph Gurney Hotel. At the end of the week Ralph came back to Pitvale, nearly one hundred thousand dollars out of pocket. But he said he had had the time of his life. He gave each employee fifty dollars as a farewell gift."

"Your story may be wanting in the elements of probability," said Myrtle. "It has the merit of completeness. In absurdity, it is 'round, and perfect as a star.'"

While the Bells chatted, Dale leaned back with half-shut eyes, yet regardful of the picture before him. The fire was thawing his chilled blood, even as the home-like scene was drawing the frosts of years from his heart.

“Into the sunshine!” he kept repeating mechanically to himself as the voices and laughter of happy brother and sister chimed like joy-bells in his ears, and the flames sang and danced up the chimney. “Have I come into the sunshine — at last?”

The dog, too, was thawed out, and began to think he had remained long enough in the background. Getting up, he walked over to Myrtle, and laid one white paw gravely on her lap. She stooped again to pat him.

“Good old — What did you say his name is, Dr. Dale?”

“I didn’t say! I refrained studiously from saying. I can’t pronounce it. Svensen said it over several times, but it sounded to me like the trademark on a box of safety matches. Won’t you re-christen him?”

“I!”

“Yes — and — I wonder if you will do me a great favour, Miss Bell?”

“Certainly! if I can. What is it?”

“I am so busy and so seldom at home that I could never be sure the dog was well cared for. Besides, he is frigidly distant in his manner to me. It is evident that we are not what the Italians call *simpatica*, — he and I. He was as evidently your devoted slave at first sight. Won’t you, please, let me transfer him to your kind keeping? It will be a *great* kindness, believe me, both to me and to him!”

“A capital notion!” cried John, before Myrtle could decide whether to accept or decline this

slightly unconventional offer. "He'll be lots of company for you, little girl, and I know how you love dogs."

"The sensible animal has decided for you, Miss Bell," urged Dale. "Let him be nominally mine or yours, I foresee he will be at your heels all the time, and forsake me for you on all occasions. So save yourself the pain of alienating a dog from his owner by becoming yourself his lawful possessor."

"Thank you ever and ever so much, Dr. Dale!" responded the girl, after an instant's reflection. Her glance was cloudless, her accent cordial. She extended her hand to seal the transfer, looking him frankly in the eyes. "I shall always recollect," she continued, pointing to the flowers while one hand rested on the dog's silky head, "the two beautiful gifts that welcomed my arrival in Pitvale."

"And you will name him — now?" persisted Dale, interrupting her thanks.

"Of course, if I can think of a name good enough for him."

"*Please*," entreated John, "don't call him Rover, or Carlo, or Fido, or Duke, or Towser, or Sport, or Bose!"

"Or Hector, Cæsar, or Brutus," supplemented Dale, in the same tone.

"Indeed I shall not do anything so hackneyed. Ah!" clapping her hands, "the name has come to me like an inspiration, the name of all others that just fits him, and the only one. 'Beautiful!' look at me! And will you look at *him*? Could anything fit him better?"

"It is uncommon, at all events," said John, dubiously.

"It is a stroke of genius!" declared Dale. "As she says, it is an inspiration. It was the first word she said to him when he rushed into the room and

“After all these Black Years” 65

claimed her as his prospective owner. But don't call his name too often, Miss Bell. You've made him quite egotistical already, as it is."

A rap at the door checked the nonsense as delicious to one of the participants as it was novel. Mrs. Bowersox's ample person followed the knock.

"Oh, you are here, Dr. Dale! I've been up to your room looking for you. And I hated to do it, too, for I says to myself, 'He needs sleep more than he does the consolation of religion, so to speak, poor dear gentleman!' But there's a man over at Villard's well that's caught his arm in a chain, poor dear! and it's crushed to a jelly, poor thing! and they've sent in a hurry for you to come right off. For, says the hand who came for you, 'we won't have that butchering Kruger, if we have to wait all day.'"

Dale was on his feet, every trace of lassitude gone, his senses all quick with life.

"Certainly, Mrs. Bowersox! Send word that I will be there in ten minutes. Will you tell Case to harness my horse at once?"

Myrtle looked in vain for any shade of unwillingness or ill-humour in the physician's tired face at the call which compelled him to forego sleep for a new "case." She read in his eyes nothing but professional zeal and pity for the injured man.

As Dale ran down the front steps to jump into the carriage waiting at the bottom, he brushed against the Rev. Cotton Mather Welsh, who was coming slowly up. The doctor passed him with a silent nod, curt but civil, not seeing or caring that the other frowned darkly upon him.

Again he was saying to his warmed heart: "I am in the sunshine! After all these black years! And," with the dogged will-power of a resolute soul, "there I shall stay, Fate willing, while life lasts!"

CHAPTER VII

REV. C. MATHER WELSH

"A fellow that makes no figure in company and has a mind as narrow as the neck of a vinegar cruet."

MRS. BOWERSOX'S "second girl" was cursed by nature with a fatal facility for blundering, and, as her mistress put it, for "getting under foot of somebody from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same."

As she knocked at the door of Miss Bell's parlour with one hand, she turned the knob with the other, and pushed the door open with her foot.

John was unstrapping a great trunk in the middle of the room.

"There's one to see you, sir," drawled a voice behind him.

Glancing under his elbow, he espied a figure in the hall. A stride took him out of the room. As he passed through the door, he shut it.

"Ah! Mr. Welsh! Good-morning!" With all his good-will, he could not keep the surprised accent out of his greeting. "I did not expect to see you! Walk into my study, please!"

He led the way across the hall, and flung the door wide, ushering the visitor into a room of fair size, fitted up with desk, bookcases, lounge, and chairs.

"Please take a seat, and excuse me for a minute! Make yourself at home. I shall be back directly."

Left to himself, Mr. Welsh gazed hypercritically about him. His eyes, small and sharp as a ferret's,

had already taken in every detail of the appointments and actors in the room of which he had had a fleeting glimpse when Gretchen blundered into it. The home-missionary whose parish is the slums soon develops detective genius if he has any aptitude for his business, unless he be exceptionally stupid. Cotton Mather Welsh might not see the field as John Bell and Egbert Dale saw it, but he was the reverse of dull, and he was born with a retriever's scent for slaughtered game. Added to this was the readiness of the provincial bigot to credit the worst that can be conceived of his fellow-creatures. Believing that the natural man does evil, and that alone, and continually, he was a pious pessimist of the most pronounced type. The microscope was never out of his hand, and the lenses had a yellow tinge.

The flush of flame colour thrown athwart the sober drab of the hall oil-cloth by the opening door, the whiff of rose-scent that flowed outward with the colour, the interior of a parlour that looked sinfully luxurious, were no more lost upon him than they had been upon Dale an hour ago. He even had a view, brief but clear, of the cardinal-red peignoir embroidered with white, and the wearer, lissome and laughing, standing over the young minister, one hand on his curly head. A flash of associative ideas conjured up the Woman "arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls," at sight of whom the Seer of Patmos "wondered with great admiration."

C. Mather Welsh had never before entered the Bowersox house. The exterior was respectable enough. He had doubts of his own, therefore well grounded, as to the propriety of professing Christians living in a square two-storied brick mansion, with a cupola on the roof, when thousands of the

Lord's poor had but one garret-room apiece. But he was not the keeper of his neighbour's conscience in every instance, and he knew Mrs. Bowersox to be one whom, as Bunyan said of Mercy and Christiana, "the backs and the bellies of the poor blessed." These things might be counted to her as righteousness. With the Almighty all things were possible.

The cream of Christian charity curdled within him, as new milk in a thunder-shower or under the dropping of noxious dews, at the conviction which smote him that he had penetrated to a den of gilded infamy.

He had striven — hard and prayerfully, with strong crying and tears, for there was something wondrously winning about the boy — to believe, against reason and conscience, that John Bell might be unsound on the temperance question, yet be one of those to be saved so as by fire, when the wood of heterodoxy, the hay of levity, the stubble of worldly conformity, should be burned away. Now he groaned in spirit.

The room into which he had been hurriedly thrust — that was his way of putting it — was fitted up neatly with the solid, substantial furniture of a former generation. Two sides were lined with books; the immense desk, of modern make, had a rolling-top. This was open and showed a multiplicity of pigeon-holes, bursting with papers, a double row of drawers. Upon the top was an easel, upon the easel a framed picture of a woman. He moved nearer to inspect it. Again a red gown! In his ignorance, he called it "scarlet" also. Above the velvet and the lace and the flaunting flower, the face of Delilah! No second look was needed to convince a man who knew the depravity of the carnal mind, of the dawning truth.

His lips moved. If he had been a Roman Catholic, he would have crossed himself. From the force of habit the whisper was from Holy Writ, —

“ Her lips drop as a honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil. Her feet go down to death: her steps take hold on death.”

He did not offer to stir at the click of the bolt in the door. His face was as grim as iron.

“ You are looking at my sister’s picture,” said Bell’s heartsome tones. “ She arrived last night on a visit to me. I hope to keep her for a long time. Sit down!” wheeling an arm-chair to the front of the fire. “ You will excuse me for keeping you waiting,” with his happy laugh. “ To be frank, I had to unstrap and unlock a couple of trunks for her. It’s nice to be able to wait upon her again. We have been separated for almost four years. The cold weather holds on hard, does n’t it? Lay off your overcoat, or you won’t feel it when you go out. Let me help you!”

Without waiting for permission, he laid hold of a cuff with one hand, the collar with the other, and stripped the shabby outer garment from the spare frame as he would peel a banana. Feeling how light it was because threadbare, he laid it respectfully over a chair-back.

Ousted abruptly from the rôle of accusing angel, Welsh looked his discomfiture so unequivocally that Bell led on in the talk upon general subjects to give him time to regain his mental equilibrium.

“ I do not recollect another winter as severe since I came to Western Pennsylvania. We manage to keep comfortable here. The walls are very thick, having been built when labour was cheap and bricks abundant.”

Receiving no reply, he changed his tack.

“ You had a trying experience last night, Dr. Dale tells me. I suppose it is with you as it is with me. We never get used to seeing illness and death.”

“ I am here to speak of last night’s affair,” said

Welsh in a rasping falsetto, the intonations hard and dry.

He stared straight forward, past his companion's head, through the window at the inclement blue of the wintry sky.

"I had expected — naturally, it seems to me — that the funeral exercises would devolve upon me. The comrades — I cannot call them his 'friends' — of the deceased have taken charge of the matter. Miss Folger wrote to me, in answer to a note I left at her door at sunrise this morning, that she would defray the expenses of the burial. She says, and with truth, that this is only just, seeing the man was once in the employ of the Folger Oil Company. He had worked nowhere for two months. He had degenerated into a hopeless loafer and sot. I found these, his companions in vice, in possession upon my return to the low boarding-house in which he died. When I gave them Miss Folger's message, informing them, moreover, that, according to her custom in such cases, she would send one of her carriages to convey the pall-bearers and officiating minister to the grave, I was told that I would not be allowed to take the service unless I would pledge myself not to say a word derogatory to the deceased. 'Nothing ag'in him,' were the precise words used."

He stopped to wet his lips with his tongue. His eyes were withdrawn, it seemed painfully, from the cold fierceness of the sky and fastened upon a spot on the papered wall back of John, who was listening with an expression of sincere sympathy and grave concern. The paper had a blue ground. A curly-cue pattern of a darker shade tied itself up in hopeless knots three times in each breadth. John wondered if the ferrety eyes, red in the rims and fringed by scanty lashes, that blinked violently at most unexpected intervals, were trying to undo the snarls.

He had nearly assured him that it would be of no use, when the tense falsetto began again:—

“Of course, with my principles, I could promise nothing of the kind. I hold—being an ambassador in bonds, not of my making, but my Master’s—that it is my bounden duty to improve occasions like the present, to the good of the living. If the lost wretch who passed into Eternity last night could speak to me, I believe it would be in some such words as Dives addressed to Abraham, *‘Testify unto them lest they also come into this place of torment.’*”

“I said this—and much more—to these men of Belial. I told them I had in mind, as a suitable text for the funeral sermon, *‘He that being often re-proved and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.’* I said: ‘While this man lived I laboured and prayed with and for him. I sat beside him for two days and a night, wrestling for his soul and ministering to his bodily needs, when you were drowning thought in liquid damnation. My work for him is done. My business is now with those who are left in the land of the living. Whether men will heed or whether they will forbear, I must deliver my message. I have to answer at the Last Day at the bar of Him from whom I received my commission, for the manner in which my duty is done.’”

“This sounds like empty talk to you, Mr. Bell!” shifting his gaze swiftly to John’s compassionate face.

“Anything but that, Mr. Welsh!” the sonorous voice full, round, and sweet after the wiry vibrations of the long monologue. “I respect you and your motives too truly to feel otherwise than grieved by what you have told me. If there is anything I can do—”

“You are to do everything!” The small blue

eyes blinked rapidly and long at the stuffed white owl on the mantel, a present to "the Dominie" from an admiring parishioner. "The ringleader of the party who waited upon me broke off the conference with an oath — a blasphemous oath, sir! to the face of a minister of the Gospel! — and declared they would not fool any longer with a 'brimstone fireman. Dominie Bell was too square a man to kick a fellow when he was down. You would n't catch *him* spitting in a dead man's face!"

He said it with a certain gusto in rehearsing the exact phrases that was alike unaccountable and revolting to the hearer. It may have been part and parcel of the haircloth shirt he had elected to wear. Or was there salve for wounded self-love in the reflection that here was persecution for righteousness' sake?

"Horrible!" ejaculated Bell, in strong indignation. "The fellow was probably drunk. All the same the insult was abominable. He shall apologise to you —"

The gesture with which the little minister checked him was almost majestic.

"By no manner of means, Mr. Bell! Do you imagine that such an one as he can wound me, much less the Cause I represent? But to our business! The spokesman went on to say that 'if Dominie Bell did n't give Svensen a through ticket, all right, he'd hold his tongue about him, seeing Svensen was n't in a condition to answer back. He'd just put the poor fellow away decent and in order, and no questions asked.' I said that he might be right, for all I knew. He probably knew the Rev. Mr. Bell better than I did."

John turned upon him, his lips parted for a retort. The white light from the window brought out ridges and creases in the speaker's face the observer had never seen there before. The lean hands that chafed

one another nervously were rough and blue; the shrunken veins crawled feebly over bones and tendons; the prominent ears were bloodless; the features were pinched. The aspect of the man was that of one not merely chilled to the bone, but starved. He reminded Bell of a hungry tramp dog shivering at a bleak street corner.

"I must beg you to excuse me again for a moment," said John, courteously and very kindly. "There is a little matter I have to speak to my sister about, while I think of it. Then we will talk further of our business."

When he had gone, Welsh let go of himself and leaned back in the warmed recess of the cushioned chair. It was roomy and comfortable. The elastic fluffiness fitted gratefully into tired angles and braced the aching muscles. The racking vigil of the last night, fasting, and mental stress combined with the sense of humiliating failure to overcome his physical forces. For the next few minutes he might be off guard.

When Bell returned, the snap of the bolt into the socket and jar of the closing door did not arouse his visitor. Doubled together in a loose bunch of shabby clothes, huddled limbs, and hanging head, the doughty warrior for the right slumbered in the shine of the anthracite fire, cradled peacefully in the big arm-chair.

John drew down the window-shades noiselessly, and seated himself. It seemed a sin to be well and vigorous, well-fed, well-lodged, so content with his world, so happy in his work as he was, while he looked at that pitiful shape.

Welsh's shoes were patched, worn down at the heel, rubbed and rusty on the sides; the cuffs of the gray flannel shirt were soiled and frayed; the wrinkles on the back of the neck exposed by the

drooping head were laid out in a diagonal criss-cross pattern, deep and regular; the nails of the chapped hands were broken and dirty; the chin bristled with a two days' beard, sandy and gray. The strait-breasted black coat and vest, worn as a duty to his sacred calling, were whitened at the seams and napless all over. Two buttons were gone from the vest; the pantaloons bagged at the knees, and the bags were worn thin.

"What right have I to be warmed and clothed," mused honest John, "to wear clean linen, to take time to bathe, to eat, and to sleep, while he lives in a wretched shanty with just enough creature-comforts to hold body and soul together? Are we not soldiers in one and the same army?"

He took up a book,—not to read, but in case Welsh should awake unexpectedly and catch him staring at him, if he had no other occupation for his eyes. The book chanced to be Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*. The title kept John's thoughts in the channel dug for them by the missionary's visit and story. There were many pleasanter themes he might have chosen for that half-hour's meditations.

It was a very sober face which Welsh saw, as it were in a dream, for an instant, upon awaking with a guilty start from his nap.

When he would have struggled to his feet, a stammer of apology upon his tongue, John stayed him peremptorily.

"I am ever so much obliged to you for the compliment you have paid to my Sleepy Hollow chair," he said lightly. "I invariably fall asleep in it, and even Dale, who suffers from insomnia, can never resist it. Now," as the door was unclosed from without, "I am going to ask you to join me in the twelve o'clock luncheon my good housemother

always sends in to me when she knows I shall not be in to dinner."

Gretchen set a great tray upon a table Bell rolled away from the wall and nearer to the fire. The aromatic breath of steaming coffee greeted Welsh's nostrils, and, as the maid removed a shining cover from a steak, juicy, brown, and smoking hot, the water gathering in his mouth smothered his attempted refusal.

It was like a continued dream to find himself seated opposite the man he disapproved of with all his might, and sharing in the goods provided for that man's fleshly enjoyment.

Bell was not hungry, but pretended to be to make the half-famished man tolerant of the hunger he tried to hide. The host did all the talking, seasoning his cheerful chat with second helps of coffee, steak, and hot biscuits.

"Nobody else makes such bread and biscuits as Mrs. Bowersox," he ran on. "She will be pleased to know that you like these. I never stop short of three. As for Jeff,—do you know that jolly little kid? I am afraid to say how many he can stand up to, when he is put upon his mettle. I was a stranger when I came to what is now Pitvale. The dear lady took me in, after her own generous fashion, and has been like a mother to me ever since. She knows that when I say at breakfast, 'Don't wait dinner for me,' I mean all-day business. She may not see me again until night. For fear I should faint and fall by the way she fills me up with such provender as this. I may not really need it. I eat as much as I can to spare her feelings."

"I am quite ashamed of myself for being so greedy," Welsh found words to say, as he pushed his chair away from the table, and John rang for Gretchen to remove the tray. "But I forgot to eat my break-

fast. Having so much on my mind, you know. I had no idea how hungry I was until I smelled the coffee. I am very dependent upon my coffee."

Inwardly he was quaking with dread lest Bell should offer him a cigar, in which case he would be compelled to testify against the filthy vice. And testimony would not be smooth sailing, even with C. Mather, when his stomach was so nobly replenished by the hospitality of the offender.

Some good people are never satisfied with the degree of sensitiveness their consciences are naturally endowed with, and what they have gained through the ordinary processes of gracious cultivation. They keep up a constant attrition of the surface by self-examination and all manner of uncharitableness with their own deeds, words, and thoughts.

Welsh may be said to have sand-papered his conscience to a tenderness that made a touch agony, that shrank and quivered at a breath. Already he felt the smart consequent upon the weak yielding to carnal appetite. This plausible heretic had taken advantage of his forlorn state and laid him under obligation to deal gently with his faults. The watchman had, literally and figuratively, slept upon his post.

He girded up the loins of his spirit for the assault that was to reinstate him in his self-respect. He had no hope of making his opponent yield one inch.

"You are not smoking, Brother Bell. I supposed that you could not enjoy eating without it."

"On the contrary, I do not smoke, sometimes, for days together, — never when I am likely to go into a sick-room. Sometimes, when my mind is full of other things, I forget my cigar."

"Forget it! Can your right hand forget its cunning?"

"Such things have been," rejoined Bell, smiling. "But about this sad affair, the business to which I owe the pleasure of your visit. Before dismissing what is a painful subject to us both, let me say that I will go directly to the house in which Svensen died, and see those men. They are a rough set, and, as you say, hardly responsible for what they did this morning."

"I said nothing of the kind!" The sparse sandy locks fairly bristled in the heat of the denial. "Every man is responsible at all times for the deeds done in the body. If he wilfully deprive himself for the time being of his sober senses, his sin is the greater, not less. The law of man does not excuse homicide when committed by a drunken person. The law of God bars the drunkard out of heaven. I am not your equal in education, Brother Bell, nor in worldly wealth and social consequence. I am your senior in years, and I warn you where the responsibility rests for much of the debauchery that makes this place like unto the mouth of hell. It rests upon you and your godless, mocking coadjutor, Dr. Dale. I could wish from my soul — God knows I lie not in saying it! — that I could lay most of the blame upon him. He is, if I am rightly informed, not a believer. Is this so?"

The answer was prompt and temperate.

"I must ask that, in Dr. Dale's absence, you confine yourself to the strictures conscience constrains you to pass upon my conduct, and, so far as you can appreciate them, upon my motives. When you have finished, I shall ask further that you listen to my defence as patiently as I have heard your attack."

"Have you never asked *your* conscience, in connection with the joint work of yourself and Dr. Dale, 'What concord hath Christ with Belial?'" interrogated Welsh.

Bell's mustache quivered above a passing smile; then he spoke seriously, —

“It is safe to say that the text has never occurred to me in this connection. And you will excuse me for adding that there is, to my mind, a savour of irreverence in the profuse application of Scripture to whatever jumps with our individual views and moods.”

Welsh passed by the hint in word. That he was touched in a sore place was apparent in the increase of heat in his rejoinder, —

“Nor, when the hell-defying crew who frequent The Bachelors' Club six nights in the week fill the galleries of your church on Sunday, bring their babies to be sprinkled by your hands, and on Sunday evenings crowd your music-hall, your theatre, your dance-house, or whatever you please to call it, to be led in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs — oh, the blasphemy of it all! — by the band of this unbeliever's organising, and, if I am rightly informed, with him at the organ!

“Don't interrupt me, Brother Bell! The blood of Svensen, the blood of other souls, cries unto Heaven for vengeance. ‘God is not mocked! Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.’ You are sowing unto the flesh. You shall reap as you have sowed, you shall gather as you have strewed. Listen to me!”

He was on his feet, pacing the floor with uneven strides, sawing the air with both hands while he harangued, stopping at the most strenuous passages to shake a clenched fist in John Bell's face.

“I met you one night ten days ago, in front of The Oilman's Rest. I had written the word ‘Curse’ in place of ‘Rest’ upon the window. I was led to the act, I verily believe, my spirit being moved by holy indignation. You may recollect the talk we had.

When I parted with you, I turned back to the place where we had seen the men fighting, for I bethought me of the priest and the Levite. I found Svensen weltering in his blood. He died last night. What have you to say as to your complicity in his murder?"

John Bell, too, had risen as the arraignment went on. Resting one arm on the mantel, he eyed the excited speaker with calm intentness. At the last sentence he took a step forward, and raised his hand imperatively, — the gesture, although this Welsh did not know, which had ere this, once and again, quelled insubordination and compelled respect from a drunken mob.

"I am glad to have the chance to say what I have tried several times to state to you dispassionately, Mr. Welsh.

"The average operative," speaking deliberately and with dignity, "be he mill-hand, oilman, miner, mechanic, or day-labourer, will have either a tonic or a stimulant to brace him for his work, or to invigorate him when he is tired by work. If I had the making of the operative from the beginning and of his forebears, he should be a water-drinker. He comes to me ready-made. His appetites, his will, and, God help him! his temptations, — are full-grown. Most of our men are Dutch and Germans. In their own country beer and tobacco are to them what tea and coffee are to us, simple necessities of daily living. If I were to tell them that to drink beer is a sin and to smoke a vice, they would set me down as a fanatic or a fool. Their Christian forefathers drank beer, smoked tobacco, lived honestly and temperately, and went to heaven, they would say. I cannot deny it. I should stultify myself if I were to attempt to argue the matter with them. Here lies the case: since I have not virgin ore to work upon, I must suit my

methods to such material as I have. As a result, I win them to sobriety and to decency. They come willingly to religious services, the more interesting to them because they have a part in them. When I visit the married men in their homes, they listen attentively to my teachings. They send their children to our week-day and Sunday schools.

"As I said to you the other night, I should not hesitate to take you, at any time and unannounced, into any part of our Club-House. My boys would justify my faith in them.

"I have taken up my work after much thought and prayer. I ask the blessing of God upon it continually. He knows how well I mean,—how earnestly I long to be a tool in His hands, if by any means I may save some. As you must know, it is not all plain sailing. My discouragements are many and trying. If I had less faith in the honesty of my purpose, if I were less certain that I am doing God's work and in the way that seems to me right, I should lay it down to-morrow. If I meet my operative with a doubled fist, I antagonise him. When he has laid his hand in mine, I may draw him. Not invariably, but oftener than if I began my mission by knocking him down.

"I have nothing more to say to you now or ever again in vindication of my boys or my motives and methods. Dr. Dale is able to take care of himself."

C. Mather Welsh had snatched up his broad-brimmed hat, and was twisting it round and round upon his threadbare sleeve. He trembled from head to foot as with cold; his eyes were bloodshot; he brought out his words with queer corresponding movements of the head, as if they hurt the back of his throat in passing.

"And I have had my last say, Mr. Bell! You are

young, hasty, headstrong, wise in your own conceit. You have been inoculated with the virus of worldly conformity, of temporising with sin. You are fighting hellfire with a jug of cream. I had dared to hope that you might be led to see the evil of your ways; that, under your apparent worldliness and levity, there might be some seeds of saving grace. I was mistaken. Because I have eaten of your food and drunk of your cup is no reason why I should use smooth words with you. I wash my hands of you and yours. 'Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone!'

"You may still recollect enough of your mother's Bible, as she read it before the day of higher criticism and beer-soaked Christianity, to know what must be the doom of 'idolaters and sorcerers and whoremongers and *murderers*, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie!'"

"And then,"—finished John, in telling the story to his sister, "he jerked out of my hands the overcoat I would have helped him put on, and, like Naaman the Syrian, he went away in a rage. There were tears in his eyes, for all that. He hates me and abjures my works, but he is a good man."

CHAPTER VIII

“OUR LADY OF PEACE”

“She doeth little kindnesses
Which most leave undone or despise,
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness or peace,
Is low-esteemèd in her eyes.”

“**J**ANUARY roses and spruce footman hardly prepared me for *this!*” Myrtle Bell breathed to her brother as they crossed the tiled floor of the Folger mansion.

The house was of solid gray stone, colonial in style, with a wing on each side of the main building, and a columned veranda crossing the front. The grounds were spacious and laid out tastefully. With rare good sense the owners had resisted the arguments of the Philadelphia landscape-gardener who would have felled a dozen trees of native growth that interfered with his design. A giant walnut was on one side of the entrance; a spreading oak upon the other. Thrifty arbor-vitæ hedged the avenue winding to the massive iron gates. Glass-houses were partially screened by clumps of spruce and pine.

Within-doors the air was as balmy as June. Oriental rugs were scattered over the tiles; divans of satin and damask, heaped with cushions, were against the walls; easy-chairs of divers patterns stood invitingly about the hall; vases of cut flowers and plants in pots were upon tables and mantel; a fire of logs burned behind brass fender and antique fire-dogs.

Myrtle had time for a hasty glance at fine engravings and etchings hung in good lights, and to see that folding-doors connected the hall with drawing-rooms and library, before the stately footman who preceded them with measured, soundless tread, unclosed a door at the back of the hall, and bowed them into the presence of his mistress.

Miss Bell's unspoken exclamation was that neither affluence of rose-bloom nor the tales she had heard of the heiress's generosity could have conjured up the apparition that now met her sight.

The walls of the large room were pearl-gray; upon the blended gray-and-white shades of the velvet carpet were cast white fur rugs; chairs, sofas, and ottomans were covered with white-and-silver stuffs combined with softest gray and pearly tints; white tiles framed the fireplace and formed the hearth; curtains of white silk and lace tempered the glare of the snowy lawn lying under four long windows.

All the colour in the wonderful spaciousness came from the leaping fire in the wide chimney, and the face of her whose lounging-chair was in full view of the door and the coming guests.

This face it was which, catching Myrtle's eye, left her no thought for anything else. But for the fine chiselling of the features which does not go with extreme youth, she might have been not a day over sixteen. She was, really, twenty-six. Her hair was of that uncommon and least describable colour known to the French as *blond cendrée*. Although perfectly straight, it lay in fluffy masses about her head and rolled back loosely from a face as pale as wax, yet not sickly. Out of the clear fairness looked dark-gray eyes so intensely alive that Myrtle was fairly startled by their full gaze.

The smile with which she held out both hands to her visitor was glad and sweet,

"I am very, *very* happy to see you! It is good in you to come to me on your first day in your new home," she said, brightly.

Moved by irresistible emotion, Myrtle stooped and kissed her forehead mutely, then, still holding her hand, sank into the low chair set ready for her beside the *chaise longue*, and gazed at her for a half-minute before she got senses and words in order.

"Oh-h-h!" she sighed then, just as she had over the wealth of roses that morning. "I never thought you were like *this!*"

The words may not have been flattering. Tone and look were unequivocal. Ruth laughed, — a low ripple of pleasure that told her appreciation of the tribute. John took hold of his sister's shoulders.

"Steady, little woman! Be explicit! 'Like' what?"

"Like an annunciation lily, when I expected to see a wind-flower. The *livest* creature I ever saw, when I was full of sympathy for an invalid!"

The soft ripple answered her again, —

"I do not call myself an invalid any longer. I am never ill, — seldom ailing, except when I think I ought to humour Kate. Miss Bell! let me introduce my friend, Miss Meagley."

The companion advanced from the background, where, in the shadow of a screen, she had escaped the stranger's notice. John had seen and bowed to her while his sister was absorbed in contemplation of Miss Folger.

Myrtle arose with a graceful apology for the oversight, and the two shook hands.

By a mutual and, to one of them, an inexplicable impulse, each met the other's eyes straight and searchingly.

"I know I shall hate her!" was Kate's mental conviction.

Myrtle said inly; “Here is a false note in the symphony of Our Lady of Peace!”

Her eyes returned gratefully to Ruth, as to a picture that would certainly reward the student.

The heiress’s white gown was of fine woolen stuff, sweeping over her feet in large, easy folds. It was trimmed around the bottom of the skirt, at the wrists, and at the throat with swan’s down, her beautifully moulded neck rising from the fleecy bands like the white stem upholding a lily-cup.

John had not sat down.

“Will you let me leave my sister with you for an hour?” he was saying to Ruth. “I am particularly busy to-day, and cannot indulge myself by staying. I will call for her about sunset.”

A shadow deepened the eyes uplifted to him as he towered above her.

“Ah!” with instant comprehension of the nature of some of his engagements. “I heard of that poor Swede’s death, and supposed you might be sent for, or — that you would be likely to go, in any case. I had a note from Mr. Welsh this morning, and answered it. As he said, the man had a claim upon us. You will let me know if I can be of any use? There is no wife or child, I believe?”

“None. He had no relatives in America.”

“That is good! I hope he has neither mother nor sister at home!” wistful tenderness in voice and look. “I shall be more than happy to have Miss Bell stay with me for as many hours as you can spare her, as long as she can content herself in our quiet nook.”

“‘Content’ is not a word to be used here and now,” said Myrtle, nestling into her chair with the air of one who has an assured pleasure in anticipation. “I enter now, if never before, into the heart of the meaning of Tennyson’s

‘There is no joy but calm.’

I read in an old book popular in my mother's girlhood — one of Miss Bremer's novels, *The Neighbours* — of a room in a homestead known as 'The Innermost.' It was occupied by a real, not a nominal invalid," smiling at her hostess, "and all family perplexities and joys and sorrows were brought to her to be set right or sympathised with. It was a study of perspective, you see. Being out of the rushing world, she could judge of rights and wrongs better than those who were in it. I am sure this is The Innermost of this house. It is like Percival's 'coral-grove.' You recollect that

'The winds and waves are absent there.'

And the coral is all white."

The speaking eyes were flooded with serene light.

"When I was a real invalid," — with an arch gleam shot at Miss Meagley, — "a confusion of colours was torture to eyes and nerves. White and gray quieted me. That was the way I fell into the fancy of having nothing else about me. Then I got 'set in my notions,' like other spinsters —"

Myrtle interposed with merry petulance.

"*That* was another reason for my ridiculous behaviour when I first saw you. I had got into my stupid head the idea that you were an elderly lady — as estimable as elderly — nice and good, oh, *so* good! — a cappy and a happy Lady Bountiful of uncertain age and certain virtues. As Jeemes Yellow-plush says, 'Phansy my pheelinx' when I saw you — as you are! Do you wonder the crash of my ideal about my ears took away my wits and manners for an instant?"

"From whom could you have got such an extraordinary impression?"

Beyond the prim pronunciation of Miss Bell's

name as she was introduced to her, Miss Meagley had not spoken since the visitor's entrance until now.

She sat by a window, quite withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the others, her hands busied in pulling threads out of a square of linen preparatory to a bit of elaborate “drawn work,” her eyes apparently intent upon it. Myrtle was, nevertheless, positive, when her smooth accents slid into the conversation, that she had not lost a word or glance that had passed.

The rejoinder was studiously careless and lightly uttered.

“Oh, I don't know. It ‘just growed,’ I think, from such beginnings as sundry allusions to Miss Folger's many charitable deeds, and the respect with which she is always named. My volatile fancy is accountable for the rest. I may be grateful to it, too, for an enchanting surprise.”

“I thought it strange” — as creamily as before — “that Mr. Bell should convey such an impression. He never flatters, as everybody knows. But the image of a starched old maid in cap and spectacles is a little *too* preposterous!”

This with a laugh that sugared the cream.

Generous heat crept up to Myrtle's cheeks. She fitted a curb upon the check-rein of civil discretion.

“My brother would be the first person to see the absurdity if he were to hear it. Especially as the little he said of Miss Folger's *personelle* ought to have led me to the opposite conclusion. He told me she was the happiest person he had ever seen. Then, too, I was so much surprised to learn that Mr. Ralph Folger is her brother that I took too many other things for granted.”

Against will and judgment she was nettled into prolonging the explanation by the slow smile enlarging the “baby-stare” and lifting the short upper lip.

Miss Meagley was looking directly at her, and expectantly, from a safe position slightly out of the range of Ruth's observation.

Myrtle addressed herself pointedly to her hostess.

"I met Mr. Ralph Folger in Venice last winter, and again at Rome in Holy Week."

Ruth's eyes lighted up gloriously.

"Is it possible? And he never spoke of it in any of his letters! He is a notoriously unsatisfactory correspondent at all times. When he is abroad his epistles are usually in the form of cable-despatches. 'I am well! How are you? Answer,' is the sum and substance of most of them. Yet it is odd he did not tell me he had met you, if only because of his friendship with Mr. Bell," she subjoined with instinctive delicacy.

Myrtle was quick to answer and avoid the chance of embarrassment. The sister must not imagine, her companion must not believe, that she was irked at the brother's indifference to herself.

"Our talk did not run much upon personalities. I was travelling with a party, and we had few opportunities of speaking of anything except sight-seeing and incidents of travel. I did not even know that he was from Pitvale. He did not suspect that John is my brother. You know how much there is abroad to keep eyes and tongues busy."

"Miss Folger has never been abroad," remarked the Middle Miss Meagley, with a return to the formality that had stiffened her reception of the stranger.

In saying it she leaned further back, and pointed an admonitory finger at the swathed feet supported by the foot-rest of the lounging-chair. Her arched eyebrows emphasised the caution. Both convicted the unwary speaker of treading tactlessly upon delicate ground.

Myrtle bit her lip in vexation manifest to the cool green eyes and a satisfaction to the soul behind them. Here were sensitive nerves and a thin moral cuticle.

Kate Meagley had never read Edmond About's *Le Roi des Montagnes*, but she understood as well as the old bandit chief what torture could be inflicted by plucking out one hair at a time.

Ruth, unobservant of the by-play, was musing happily, her hands, perfect in contour and white as magnolia petals, laid together upon the Canton crêpe shawl thrown over her lap and lower limbs; her eyes were deep and dreamful.

“He is the most unexpected of human creatures,” she said, smilingly. “I can never guess within a thousand miles of his whereabouts. When I fancy him cooling his hot head (he says his hair keeps up the supply of caloric), cooling his head in Norway, he is as likely as not to be crossing the line on the way to Cape Town. His rooms are always ready for him. Sometimes he makes me supremely happy by occupying them for a month; oftener he alights, like a humming-bird, for a sip of home-made honey, and is off again before I am really sure I have seen him. But,” tenderly, “he is a dear brother always. His goodness to me is past finding out. There is no uncertainty *there*.”

“A good brother, like yours and mine, is one of Heaven's perfect gifts,” said Myrtle, again at her ease. “In the course of our short acquaintance, I had several proofs of Mr. Folger's kindness of heart. By the way, we miscalled him ‘Folger’ over there. That was one reason I did n't find out sooner who he was. He spoiled beggars and flower-sellers by scattering *lire* instead of *soldi* among them. I am afraid the next party of tourists paid the penalty of his liberality.”

“You have seen comparatively little of *your* brother

since you were a child, I believe, Miss Bell," observed Miss Meagley, in a resolved-to-make-conversation tone. "It must be like getting acquainted over again, now that you are living together at last."

The tweak was futile. Myrtle's light laugh was jocular and confident.

"Oh, no! Jack and I have kept in touch. He is very fortunate in having so pleasant a home," addressing herself again to Ruth, and so decidedly as to present the coldest of cold shoulders to the third person present. "Which reminds me that Mrs. Bowersox desired to be respectfully remembered to you."

"Thank you! and her! I have the sincerest regard for Mrs. Bowersox. And my little favourite, Jeff! What is his latest escapade?"

"He is watching the going off of an old nail, and the coming on of a new, upon the thumb he hammered out of shape last week. He explained the process to me in full to-day. If there is enough of him left to take an education, he will be the great surgeon of his day when he grows up. I never saw another child who had such an intimate acquaintance with his own anatomy."

"The dear little monkey! I wish you had brought him with you. With all his pranks he is sweet and affectionate, and a little gentleman at heart."

"He charged me with a message to you," Myrtle now recalled. "He 'would have come to call, but he was afraid Beautiful might be lonesome if he left him before he was used to home-folks.' Beautiful is an Irish setter Dr. Dale brought home this morning, a legacy from the poor Swede who died last night."

"Beautiful! what a silly name!" The interjection was, of course, Miss Meagley's. "And for a Swedish dog! Of course Dr. Dale will change it."

Something in Myrtle's face, perhaps a slight rise of the ever-ready colour, made Miss Folger demur.

“Now, I like it!” she said. “It is uncommon, and if the dog is as handsome as the better members of his breed, it is expressive. Kate, here, does not care for dogs, while I love them. When Ralph is at home, he gives them the run of the house. He has half a dozen thoroughbreds in the kennels back of the garden. I wish he were here to introduce them to you.”

“I shall beg for the pleasure of introducing myself to them before long. A thoroughbred, intelligent dog is the best substitute I know of for a human friend. Who is it that tells of the epitaph placed over the grave of one who perished while trying to save his master's life? *‘He died to save his friend. He knew no better. He was only a dog!’*”

“Has Dr. Dale given the dog with the ridiculous name to Jeff?” queried the Middle Miss Meagley, suspending her fingers in air, in the act of drawing a thread, and rounding her eyes at Miss Bell.

“Jeff is the self-appointed custodian of the beauty,” replied Myrtle, indifferently, “who, by the way, is a connoisseur in roses, Miss Folger. I wish you could have seen him inspect a superb jacqueminot to-day, and then sniff his approval. My uncle had an Irish setter, Duke by name, who had fine taste in the matter of scenery, sunsets, and moonlight. I shall never love another dog as I loved Duke.”

“You may change your mind if Beautiful should ever become your property,” said Miss Meagley, blandly.

“What is it, little woman?” asked John Bell, as he and his sister walked down the hill capped by the Folger house.

“What is *what*?”

“Don't try that on at this late day, Miss Pert! As

if I did n't know that something is out of gear when your heels strike sparks and your chin is on the high level! What happened up there to stir you up? I can answer for Miss Folger, but Miss Meagley is a trifle peculiar sometimes."

"You put it mildly!" said Myrtle, sarcastically. Then she broke forth with: "How that nettle and that lily can dwell together in unity passes my comprehension!"

John's eyes twinkled.

"Millennial?" he suggested teasingly. "I admit the lily, and all the name implies. But are n't you rather hard upon the — other? It is one of Dale's pet theories that every human being is capable of any degree of meanness or crime if confronted, when off guard, by the temptation to which he is most vulnerable. He maintains that there is such an one lurking in wait for each of us somewhere."

"I don't believe it," uttered the girl, indignantly. "I would trust you in any and every circumstance of trial — which means temptation."

"I would n't trust myself. 'Call no man *good* till he dies.' But Miss Kate Meagley's temptations are manifold. She is poor, yet surrounded by luxury and wealth that belong to other people. She is proud, and when you have seen her family you will comprehend how bitter her mortifications must be. While Miss Folger does her best to lessen her sense of dependence, her position is really that of a paid companion who does not earn one tenth of her salary, and who would be homeless and penniless were she to lose her friend or her friend's favour. Ralph Folger has a positive antipathy to her." Here John almost laughed. "He never hints this to his sister, but Miss Kate is sharp-witted enough to know all about it. She would like to be admired and loved. So far as I know, nobody admires her

except her family, who toady her. Besides her mother and Miss Folger, few love her. She is not popular. Even Mrs. Bowersox says confidentially of her husband's niece, 'Kate — poor, dear thing! — means well enough, but she has a way of stepping upon folks' corns.'

“I should be more sorry for the poor dear thing if she had not stamped upon mine a dozen times this afternoon, and with no provocation whatever that I could see,” retorted Myrtle, unappeased by her brother's charitable discourse. “She cannot be beset by an overmastering temptation to be disagreeable to me. I am not likely to rob her of fortune, friend, — or lover.”

CHAPTER IX

SANDY MCALPIN

“Then followed them a later, madder race,
Who scoff at gentler arts, and pride of birth;
Who blacken Mother Nature’s smiling face,
And rip God’s hidden treasures from the earth.”

THE interior of the vast Power-house which drove the Folger wells was lit up redly on the side faced by the open door of the furnace. The shadows, beaten into back corners by the flare, were darkly crimson in the reflected light. Looking into the mouth of the furnace, one saw into the depths of the pulsing heart of the fire. Blue and white serpents ran quivering over and through it, like arterial life; the continuous roar of the draught was as the mighty voicings of a cataract.

Right in front of the open door, never blinking at the glare or shrinking from the heat, Sandy McAlpin, Power-man, — gigantic in build, bushy of hair, and with a skin of the colour and texture of saddle leather, — descanted upon the glories of his darling, the prodigies she had performed, the greater deeds of which she was capable; —

“For, mark ye! she’s fed by coal now as a regular diet. With naught but coal in her maw, she runs twenty wells at once. A belt for this one, a belt for that one, a matter of three belts for Jumbo — she’s the big well that’s yielding one hunder’ barrels every hour of the day, and has been doing it this two year. Say I want Her to run thretty wells. Lean away from the fire a bit — and look!”

He touched a faucet.

A cyclone of flame struck the palpitating heart; the cataract roar became deafening; blood-red zigzags, like angry lightning, darted athwart the fiery mass and shot out of the door.

“*That’s* what She does when I give Her a taste of the ile!” said the showman, turning the cock back. “If I were let to give Her that all the time, She’d beat the faith that removes mountains, all hollow. She’d tear the earth out by the roots. Here’s a pretty expairimint!”

To the top of what looked like an upright iron rod set in the floor, were attached four transverse arms. At the touch of Sandy’s finger to a screw, jets of bluish flame rushed from the tip of each, then burned steadily upward.

“Natural gas! ginerrated by the riservoirs of ile which, in my opeenion, fill the centre of this globe which fools think is solid rock and earth, built upon foundations that cannot be moved. In my humble opeenion, moreover, there’s enough of this gas”—pronouncing the *a* more broadly than written letters can express—“if ’twas rightly worrked, to light every ceety in Ameriky. An’ I’m not so sure it might n’t be carried under seas, like the Atlantic cable, and give light to all nations. I’ve many thoughts on these subjicks, setting here by the hour, with none to convairse with except Her, and meditating upon the wonders I’ve seen with my own eyes in this region since the firrst well was sunk, six year agone.

“Says I to Mr. Folger when he was here last, ‘We’re but at the beginning o’ mairrvels, sir! The next thing you’ll build will be natural gas riservoir and tanks and pipes, sir, if you’ll heed my words, in place of the clumsy coal-gas affair that’s giving poor light to Pitvale now. Natural gas-works, sir—

clean and convenient, and drawing supplies from Mother Earth herself, Mr. Folger!

"And, says he, 'When I build them worrks, it's you that'll be Power-man and supply-pipes and riser-voir, all in one, McAlpin.'

"He's ever ready with his joke, Mr. Folger is. Come weal, come woe, he'll get his laugh out of it."

"So much weal has fallen to his share that he can afford to laugh," said Myrtle Bell. "I find a great deal in Pitvale to make me thoughtful."

She sat upon a chair which McAlpin had wiped with the sleeve of his shirt before offering it to her. By her side crouched Beautiful, his muzzle upon his forepaws, his eyes—topazes with iridescent lights in them, like the fire in the opal's heart—wide and watchful.

His mistress had already announced to her brother and Dr. Dale her belief that Beautiful had been a French marquis of the *ancien régime* in a former incarnation. Such perfection of breeding and delicate gallantry could have no meaner origin. The gravity with which he accepted the guardianship of his new owner, the punctilious service he rendered her, and his profound gratification in the performance of the high duty were in hourly proof of the theory.

The present expedition was not to his taste, but he bowed to the inevitable. If it suited his lady's humour to visit The Inferno and to colloque with big men in corduroy breeches and over-obvious waist-coats, rolled shirt-sleeves showing hairy arms begrimed with oil and coal-dust, the traditions of the marquis incarnation forbade open protest from the humblest of her servants. When told to "down charge" upon the greasy stone floor, he obeyed with a sigh of much bewilderment. Other sighs, as meek

and profound, heaved his sides at civil intervals. An occasional sniff, daintily disdainful, indicated the sufferings of refined nostrils which could not exclude the odour of the crude product.

Partially divining the cause of his uneasiness, Myrtle dropped her hand to his back and let it lie there. She was "doing" Pitvale systematically under her brother's guidance. She was genuinely interested in Sandy McAlpin, John's unlicensed deacon and virtual lieutenant, in whose care she had been left for what remained of the afternoon while John went "to look up a man." Oil-soaked flooring and the pungent reek that hung low in the air that windless day, were matters of less moment to her than to her dog.

She stroked him soothingly while she continued:

"I find more to be sorry for than to laugh at in the stories told me hereabouts. What could be sadder, for example, than the experiences of the Meagleys? My brother saw Mr. Meagley yesterday in his back-yard, trying to drill a hole with a crowbar in the frozen ground. He had neither hat nor overcoat on. My brother went to the front door and told Mrs. Meagley where he was and what he was doing. The poor old man was very angry at being interrupted. He was sure he would have struck oil in a day or two. It is pitiful! pitiful!"

"Jim!" said McAlpin to a stoker, lounging within earshot. "Run over to No. 13, and say to Mr. Finch I'd like to have him take my place here for an hour or so, while I'm showing Miss Bell around."

As the messenger departed, McAlpin turned to the young lady, a broad grin showing his teeth and making twinkling slits of his eyes.

"There's an anecdote I don't like to tell in the hearing of them who might fling it into the faces of the unfortunate, it being the *nature* of the young to

be eendiscreet. Especially when there's a good joke in the case.

"Happen you've never heard the story of 'Meagley's Last Chance'? No? Then,"—setting his legs further apart and throwing his weight well back upon his heels, preparatory to the treat of telling his best yarn to a new listener—"it was this way. Meagley had dropped every dollar he could rake and scrape, earn or borrow, in wells sunk in onloikely places. One of the onscrupulous sharks that always swarm in waters where there's a chance of finding gudgeons, conveyed the poor man that he ought to drell in a certain hill on the very edge of the farm Meagley had the name of owning, though 't was covered from line-fence to line-fence with mortgages. And drell he did! worrkng with his own hands all day, as long as the light lasted, and at it by sunrise next morning, and letting crops go to rack and ruin.

"One summer day, all on a suddint, the tools dropped ten feet! The hole was not down to the firrst sand, ye comprehend, and to strrike ile in such a circumstance was nothing short of a mairacle. He loosened the tension on his rope, and let down the tools grradually.

"There was no meestake. They sunk lower and lower into a ready-made pit. He drew them up. They were wet with yellow stuff like refined ile.

"Poor old Meagley gave a shout that brought fifty men running up the hill. There was the drepping tools! and there was the hole with the hollow at the bottom. One lang-headed fellow—I'll wager he was a Scotchman!—minded himself that, if seeing's believing, tasting and smelling is *knowing*. With that, he gives a leeck to the bar, and yells out, 'Holy Moses! it's *beer!*' Quicker than I could tell it, they hauled a sand-pump up the hill and ran it down. As sure

as you're sitting there, it sucked up beer! Of good quality, too! By this time there war a hundred men on th' spot and old Meagley was fair demented with joy and wonder.

"'It's the Promised Land!' he was bawling at the top of his cracked lungs, a-worrrking the pump with all his might, and the men filling pans and buckets with the stuff, foamy and cool, and onmeestakeable beer.

"'A Land flowing with milk and honey!' says he. 'And corn and wine! And why not beer?'

"Why not, indeed! There was the beer to speak for itself, and speaking most satisfactory, as all agreed. The crowd increased every minute, for the worrd run like lighted petroleum down a steep grade.

"Presently a man broke through the crowd. He had run up-hill with all his might. He puffed like an engine. He was hot. He was streaming with sweat. He was a German. He was mad as a hatter.

"'Gott in Himmel!' he yelled as soon as he got breath. 'You was been proke mit mein vault!'

"He was a brewer. He had tunnelled the hill from the other side, as he had a right to do, having bought the land, and built a beer-vault where his stuff would be cool and safe. The tools had run plump into a tun of his best beer!"¹

He broke off laugh and speech as the opening door let in a rush of cold air and a streak of white daylight.

"Miss Bell!" said Dr. Dale. "Behold in me your deliverer! I heard McAlpin's voice, and I am here to save you from the rest of his thousand-and-one Pitvalian Tales. Your brother told me you were making a tour of the Folger wells. May I go along, McAlpin?" turning upon the brawny Scot the magic of the sudden, brilliant smile none could resist. "I

¹ Fact.

promise not to contradict a word you say. He knows more about rock oil in one minute, Miss Bell, than I shall learn in a lifetime."

When they were outside of the Power-house, he glanced at Myrtle's feet.

"You have thick shoes, I hope? The walking is rough."

"Jack warned me what I might expect in that line and from oil-puddles." She put out a trim foot shod with a stout boot. "The thickness of my soles and the brevity of my Alpine skirt rather shocked Mrs. Bowersox. She thought them sensible. But 'most people around here wear skirts that touch the ground, and she is afraid folks may talk.'"

"I hope the talk will not be fatal," said Dale, dryly. "Here begins the test!"

Down the hill six women paraded, two and two, toward them. All were in their best afternoon dresses and Sunday hats. Every skirt swept the board sidewalk. Each pair of hands was smoothly gloved and neatly trussed upon the pit of the wearer's stomach.

Dr. Dale lifted his hat in taking to the gutter to give the procession leeway; McAlpin followed suit. Myrtle bowed from the inside of the walk, recognising four of the Meagley sisters and the faces of the other and younger women as two she had seen at church. The Meagley sisters were costumed as when they called upon her last week. Miss Julia walked in purple pomp and silk attire. Miss Emmeline was in dark-green merino, gown and cloak to match; Miss Levina had on a navy-blue "suit" of the same material; Miss Harriet sported a stunning gown and jacket of sage-green plush, that swore at the rest of the family outfit, and more blasphemously yet at her opaque skin and dull yellow hair.

"'Minds a fellow mostly of a walking rainbow!" muttered Sandy in the doctor's ear.

The silent six inclined solemn heads in answer to the salutations they received; six pairs of lips remained tightly folded; twelve eyes stared at the frankly visible boots of the Dominie's sister. After they had passed her, each glanced over her shoulder, as if worked by an electric button, to make sure her sight had not played her false.

Happily unconscious of the ill-bred retrospection, Myrtle climbed the rising ground, on the highest point of which towered the "Jumbo" derrick. The first steel tank built in Pitvale was close by, — a long, low structure with slanting sides. At one end was a flight of iron steps shining with the oil which seemed to exude from the pores of the solid steel.

McAlpin went up first, wheeling at the top and spreading out his hands ruefully.

"I dare n't offer to help her, on account of the blamed ile!" to Dr. Dale. "You'll see to her?"

"He may catch me if I fall!" answered Myrtle, brightly. "My boot-soles were roughened for walking on ice and standing in other slippery places."

She was at the guide's side as she said it, and, forgetful for the moment of what she was there to see, exclaimed at the extent of the view.

The amphitheatre of hills of which the town was the centre arose into the majesty of mountains toward the south, and in that direction the forest of derricks parted into a vista lost in misty blue peaks. Reaches of winter-wheat were greening the outlying farm-lands, intersected by belts of pines and the rich browns and grays of leafless coppices. In the lee of these and on the unsunned side of stone fences, snow-drifts were leaking away their life. The silver ribbon of the creek joined another beyond the meeting shoulders of the nearer hills, and the two formed a river winding seaward.

"I can imagine it as lovely in summer," said the

girl, "always excepting the derricks and the chimneys. Beautiful agrees with me in disliking them, — don't you, old fellow?"

He had tripped up the steps delicately, and, still a-tiptoe, pressed close to her, gazing abroad as she gazed, ears pointed, and tail in abeyance, his whole attitude one of dignified non-committal.

"If 't were n't for derricks and chimneys, where'd the millions be that's been made in this valley?" retorted the Power-man. "Look in there! won't ye? Ain't that worth all the landscape 'twixt here and Novy Scotiay?"

He lifted a trap-door. Iron pipes were laid along the top of the tank, a foot or more from the surface, curving where the ends entered the immense receptacle. The opened trap revealed a thick, yellowish-green stream flowing from the mouth of a pipe into the almost brimming tank. It gurgled viscidly in falling, and made slow wrinkles upon the sullen pool. The odour of the rising gas was stifling.

"It don't smell fine, and it don't look pretty," said Sandy, bending gloatingly over the aperture. "But it might be molten gold when you consider what it's worth. D'ye mark that train down there at the end of the valley, with a hunderd big tanks aboard? By this time to-morrow, them tanks 'll be chockfull of *this*" — tapping the tank with his boot — "and off to the refinery. This tank holds three thousand barrels, and she's drawn off through them pipes and pumped underground down to the station-vats every day. Say it clears but a dollar a barrel — what does that sound like to you by the year, Dr. Dale?"

"You've done the sum often enough to know," rejoined the doctor, good-humouredly. "A good many of the thousands are sinking into the ground over there!" pointing to a neighbouring eminence where a prostrate derrick lifted its forlorn legs into the air

like the skeleton of a prehistoric monster. "When a well goes dry, is there any use in trying to sink another in the same place? What are your views as to re-opening 'The Ruth'?"

Sandy was oracular and portentous.

"As for that matter, there's what may be said to be all sorts and condections of opeenions. I said to Mr. Folger when he did me the honour to ask my opeenion on the subjick, 'The Ruth's been a brow well in her day, sir,' says I. 'I mind when she did her hunderd an hour without hurrying her. Then she fell to seventy-five, and then to fifty, then to fifteen — and then to nothing — dry as a last year's bone. Fill her up, sir!' says I. 'Put a tombstone over her, for the sake of the name, if you like, and for what she's done in the past, and to tell how she died game, as you may say. But it's flinging good money after bad to dreell through that bed-rock, Mr. Folger. Since you've asked me, I maun speak the truth.'

"And, says he, with that easy-going laugh of his that would make a body grin if he had the toothache, 'That's all right, Sandy, me lad,' says he. 'But I've made up my mind to keep on boring till the sand-pump brings up tea-leaves. Then I'll know I've struck China — if not oil.'

"It's all the talk now that the car-load of dynamite stored two miles out of town is going to be used in blarsting the bed-rock."

"Dynamite! That's a new departure!"

"True, sir! And a new danger. Ah! ah! weel sayeth the Good Book, 'Woe unto them that make haste to be reech!'"

With one last fond look at the ill-smelling, greenish-black depths, he let the trap fall.

"For all his moralising he would be the craziest of speculators but for Scotch caution and John Bell,"

observed Dale, when, their round of inspection concluded, they parted with McAlpin at the Powerhouse door and turned their faces homeward. "Nor is he the only man by many whom that magnificent brother of yours has saved from temporal, if not from everlasting destruction."

Myrtle's eyes sparkled.

"He *is* a glorious fellow, is n't he? I used to think, with the rest of the family, that he was throwing himself away in staying here. I understand him better now, and can see why you two should stand in your lot and do the work of heroes in what Mr. Welsh calls 'this God-forsaken corner of the world.' I never guessed, even from Jack's letters, how much of sin and suffering there is in this fast-growing hubbub of a place until yesterday. I spent the day with Miss Folger, you know.

"Who, let me say here, reminds me more and more of a 'pearl of purest ray serene,' every time I see her. She took me into the secret of what she calls her 'Inasmuch Library.' You have heard of it, so I am not betraying her confidence in speaking of it.

"One book—and this struck me as appropriate, although I did not say it to her—is bound in black, and lettered 'MR. WELSH.' Another has a red cover and has your name on it. A third is lettered 'MR. BELL.' That is blue. They are bound in heavy morocco and look like ledgers. Those she showed to me are dated this year. She has been keeping these books for three years. In them is registered, in her own hand, every case of distress and want reported to her by you three. She knows every poor family in town; the number of children in each, their names and ages; the amount of the husbands' and sons' wages; whether men and women drink or are sober; who belong to The Bachelors'

Club; who attend church and schools—in short, every particular of their lives and characters that can be of use to her in her work of helping and uplifting.

“Think of it!” her eyes shining with generous dew. “This woman, who cannot leave her chair except when she is carried in men’s arms,—whose life, one might suppose, would be bounded by the walls of her own house,—is really in touch with every household in Pitvale and the suburbs, acquainted with the griefs of those who weep, rejoicing with those who do rejoice. I am ashamed of my petty, selfish, commonplace existence when I compare it with hers. She has gained ten talents for her one talent. I have hidden my five in a poor little napkin,—a flimsy, embroidered doyley!”

They were passing the Club-House. As the last energetic sentence left her lips, the front door was flung open with a resonant bang, and a man ran down the steps.

CHAPTER X

"LENORE"

"The setting sun and music at the close."

REACHING the street, the impetuous stranger swung abruptly to the right and almost collided with Dr. Dale.

"Pardon!" he began, raising his hat.

His eyes fell upon Myrtle's face, and he stopped, stock-still, hat in air, mouth and eyes wide open, staring stupidly at the girl.

The sunset kindled his red hair into a fiery glow and shed a radiance over his freckled face. Every feature—from the slightly uptilted nose to the pale gray-green eyes—was instinct with delighted astonishment.

"Oh-h!" gasped he at last.

"Mr. Folger!" smiled Myrtle, offering her hand.

"Yes! Certainly! Oh yes! certainly!" speaking jerkily and seizing the proffered hand as though it were a safety-rope. "It knocked me off my feet a bit to see you, Miss Bell. You don't know how glad I am to see you. Do you know I hunted over half of Europe, looking for you? I mean for your party, you know.

"Don't stand here in the cold! Let me walk on with you and your friend— Why, it's Dale, to be sure!" holding out his left hand to him. "Beg pardon, old man! I'm a bit rattled, you see. Half over the Continent, upon my honour, Miss Bell! That dago porter forgot to wake me the morning you left Venice, although he had the strictest orders to do so in the most villainous Italian. He had the

worst face I ever saw—that porter! When I got to your hotel, I found you had been gone an hour. The people didn't know on what train—or pretended they didn't—or what way. I telegraphed to nine cities; paid my red-headed beggar—the one I gave the gondola to, you know?—fifty *lire* to thrash that rascally porter who forgot to wake me, and then started off in the next train for Paris.

“All good Americans bring up in Paris, first or last. But it was no use. Sometimes I came on your trail, but could never find you. Sort of Continental Gabriel and Evangeline, was n't it?”

“Both were so young, and one so beautiful!”

you know. No! no! that's Byron—is n't it? It was n't what I meant to quote, any way.

“But who would have expected to find you here? *Here*—of all places! Oh! pardon me! I did n't notice—”

The plea was evoked by Myrtle's withdrawal of the long-suffering hand Ralph Folger had been shaking vehemently as they strolled up the street, ludicrously unaware of the awkwardness of the situation.

“I am staying here with my brother,” began the girl, unable to control her risibles.

“Your brother! You don't mean to say that old John Bell—the Dominie—is your brother! And he never told me—the close-mouthed traitor! Why, Bell is one of the best friends I've got on earth. I hope you're staying here a long time? But you'll find—”

“Now *please* don't say I'll find Pitvale a great change after life on the Continent!” begged Myrtle. “Every one says that. People seem to think that four years of travel have made me unfit to live in my own country.”

"They talk in the same way to me!" pulling off his hat to bow to a passing carriage. "But it *is* a great change."

"A very pleasant change. And nobody has done more to make it pleasant than Miss Folger."

"Ah! you have met Ruth? Dear girl, Ruth! She and I are awfully fond of one another. She lets me turn the place upside-down, and have the dogs all over the house.—How do you do, Rhynders?" to a man in oily overalls, whose grimy face was one grin of pleased recognition. "Glad to see you! Dale, I congratulate you on the way the Club is booming. I've just been looking through it, and I find —"

"How long have you been in town?" interrupted Dale, as Myrtle surmised, to avert the impending compliment to his management.

Folger's frank heartiness robbed his disjointed rattle of the freshness and flippancy that might otherwise have flavoured it. The two hearers, versed in his ways, had waited patiently for his exuberance to expend itself.

"I got in an hour ago. I struck New York yesterday—from Hamburg—and came on as soon as I could. I went straight home, and found Ruth in the thick of a tea-fight. Why, every Meagley that ever came down the pike—except the two old people—was there, and two other women with them. There were five of a kind,—Kate and all her sisters. Five whole ones. A full hand of Meagleys! Think what a scene for a wanderer to come home to! They were all going to stay to supper. I could n't stand that. So I told Ruth I had business at the Club and would n't be home till late. I went to the Club—just to square myself with the Recording Angel, you know. I am always aware that I have a conscience when I am dealing with Ruth.

Behold my reward! Where are you staying? Not at a hotel, I hope?”

“No. At Mrs. Bowersox’s, with John. We are on our way home. Won’t you—”

“Indeed I will! with a heart and a half! Do you know it’s a Coincidence— nothing less? I was just going there too. I couldn’t dine at home, so I thought I’d run over and ask Mrs. Bowersox to let me take pot-luck with your brother.”

“How are you going to square yourself with the Recording Angel for that speech? Or have you parted company with your conscience?” asked Dale, looking down at the boy with friendly indulgence in eye and accent.

The young fellow laughed.

“I am acting upon the principle that the end justifies the means. May I take supper with you, Miss Bell?”

The three filled the sidewalk, which was growing steep. Dale held his place at Myrtle’s side, and Folger, ranging himself at the doctor’s other hand, talked across him. Every few yards, Ralph fell back to let some one coming the other way pass him. Most of those they met were workmen going home to supper, and it was pleasant to watch the greetings between them and the returned traveller, whom they all knew. Every hand flew up to the owner’s hat, every face beamed; now and then a hat went off with a flourish that meant “Hurrah!”

“How does it feel to have everybody so happy to see you?” said Myrtle, regardless of the last question in her interest in the side-scene.

Ralph jerked off his own hat and said, “Good-day!” to a fat Dutchwoman who carried a full laundress’s basket and dropped a low courtesy in spite of her burden.

“It feels like Home!” he said simply and earnestly.

A silent minute passed before he resumed in his former tone, —

“Honestly, I do want to see the Dominie upon business. I want to get at the facts in the case of poor Svensen’s death. Somebody ought to be held up for that affair. It was murder, out and out, yet the Italian vagabond was allowed to get away without arrest.”

“Manslaughter, at the utmost,” said Dale, gravely. “Svensen had his knife, too. Cut and thrust mean no more in such circumstances than ‘You did!’ and ‘I did n’t!’ Hot blood and bad whiskey did the rest.”

“You are dead right there! But there are lots of other things I must talk over with Bell. Ruth never lets her left hand — that’s ME, Miss Bell! — know what her right hand does; so I must trust to the Dominie to put me next to facts where her charities are concerned. I’ll find him at home this time of day, I suppose?”

“I’m sure you will. He left me some time ago in Sandy McAlpin’s care at the Power-house. He had a call to make. He will be charmed to see you. We were talking of you this morning.”

“You had n’t entirely forgotten me then?” The eager tone was lost in a deprecatory laugh as he went on: “Confess, Miss Bell! You recollected me more by my hair than by anything else? You need n’t try to deny it. The moment I met you your eyes travelled reminiscently to my head. Think what it must be to a sensitive man to know he is recalled mainly because his head is the only one of its kind in all this wide, colourless world! Now, if it were only a rich brown like yours, or even an interesting iron-gray like Dale’s! But no kind deity formed *my* head for the delectation of an æsthetic cult. Only for —”

“How about the divinity that shapes our ends?” queried Dale. “Don’t be ungrateful. Take the goods the gods provide, and don’t quarrel over the colour.”

Ralph was off upon another tack.

“There’s the dear old farmhouse!” he ejaculated at a turn that changed the street into a road.

John Bell had named it “Presto Corner,” so abrupt was the transition from town to country. The board walk gave place to a raised foot-path with pebbled sides that kept it passable in wet weather; a lane, leafy in summer and merry with bird-songs, led up to a gate the rough stone posts of which were set in a privet hedge five feet high, and nearly as thick with the growth of fifty years. The carriage road, entering this, enclosed a circle of turf dotted with old-fashioned shrubs, in sweeping around to the hospitable doors.

“It is the one landmark Oil has not touched,” pursued Ralph, sentimentally. “I make it a pious duty to come here whenever I visit Pitvale to convince myself that I am one and the same with the boy who used to eat bread-and-honey under the maples at the back-door. Ah! there is Bell!”

John had opened both halves of the Dutch door with promptness that showed he had been on the look-out. He greeted the traveller warmly. Myrtle saw at a glance the loving admiration in which Ralph held her brother, and liked her eccentric acquaintance better from that instant.

“May we come into your parlour, Myrtle?” asked John, as they passed into the house. “It is more cosey than the other room, and my study is all cluttered up.”

“Certainly! You need not ask the question,” eying him closely.

There was an air of suppressed excitement about

him that puzzled her, a sort of joyous flurry she felt could not be wholly attributable to Ralph Folger's home-coming.

"Oh, Miss Bell!" cried Jeff, emerging from his mother's chamber on the other side of the hall, a wild vision of pink and gold and white, not unlike a sweet pea "a-tiptoe for a flight,"—"how do you like your—"

"Thomas Jefferson!" thundered John, in mock wrath.

"I fought she'd seen it!" protested the culprit. "I helped the men—"

Bell picked up the wriggling white-robed figure, deposited it inside of the nursery door, and shut it in, disregarding the staccato appeals of the offender.

"What is all this mystery? Tell me!" commanded Myrtle, her voice shaken by laughter.

John's answer was to throw wide the front parlour-door.

She glanced into the lighted room, and flung both arms about her brother's neck.

"Jack! Jack! a piano!" Her tone hinted at what would have been hysterics in a weaker woman. "John Bell! you are the dearest brother in the universe! The one thing I needed to make me perfectly happy!"

John held her away from him to look at the radiant face, his eyes gleaming suspiciously. The big fellow had the heart of a child in all pertaining to the little sister.

"And you like it?"

"*Like* it! What a beggarly word! And you were lamenting this very morning that I could n't play for you at twilight as I used to do in the dear old times! What a finished hypocrite you are! And you a clergyman! A monster of duplicity!"

"I ordered it from Philadelphia the day after you

came. I have n't had a chance to make you a present worth talking about in years and years. We arranged to have it brought up from the station while you were out this afternoon, and had a piano-tuner here to put it into shape. That's why I left you at the Power-house. I sent Dale back to make sure you did n't get home before everything was in order, the curtain ready to go up, and all that," continued John, with the enraptured simplicity of a school-boy. "He was in the plot, too!"

"'Blesséd art thou among brothers!'" sighed the girl, running her fingers over the keys.

Beautiful, who had scampered upstairs upon business of his own as soon as the party entered the house, now stood stiffly by the piano, nose in air, scrutinising the strange object with the air of a connoisseur. Myrtle put an arm about him and drew his cheek to hers.

"*You* approve of it, don't you, dear? It is the only thing upon earth that could make me forget you for a second."

"What a splendid dog!" said Ralph, as Beautiful writhed ecstatically out of his mistress's embrace, rushed to a distant corner, then galloped back. "He's almost the same colour on top that I am. What has he got in his mouth?"

"Only one of my slippers!" laughed the girl, taking the little shoe from the jaws that held it lightly. "He must have run upstairs for it. He has original ideas as to the proper way of welcoming the coming guest. Whenever I come home, he rushes around and picks up something—usually the thing that comes handiest—and brings it to me. He evidently means it for a votive offering."

"It does n't matter what the offering is, either," chimed in Bell. "Some ladies were calling upon my sister yesterday—very swell visitors, if you please—

and Beautiful snatched up Mrs. Bowersox's best bonnet from the bed where she had laid it a minute before, tore downstairs with it, and laid it at Miss Florence Vandergrift's feet."

"With Mrs. Bowersox a good second in the race?" inquired Ralph.

"No. She took it very kindly — after she found the bonnet was n't hurt. She said she supposed it was the poor dear's dumb way of being polite."

"Won't you christen the piano, Miss Bell, by playing for us?" said Dale. "Remember how long we have been a piano-less household. It is your mission to bring us out of darkness and silence."

The girl stood for a moment, irresolute. She was all woman, and while her brother and his confrère might overlook soiled boots and short cloth skirt, Ralph Folger would contrast them with the correct evening toilettes she had worn in Venice and Rome. There was not a taint of the flirt of commerce in her nature, yet, knowing that Ralph had admired her abroad, she wished him to find her none the less attractive here.

"If you will postpone the ceremony until I can lay off my hat and change my shoes," she said, and ran off to her room.

"Already!" smiled her brother when she reappeared in the parlour, where the three men stood on the hearth-rug deep in chat. "You must have a lightning-express patent for toilettes."

He looked the admiration the others felt. Her attire was not out of place in the Bowersox farmhouse. It would not have been shamed by the full-dress of a Philadelphia belle. A soft black silk, — she had a fancy for fabrics that lent themselves readily to pliant, drooping folds, — cut *en Princesse*, fitted her perfectly. The V-shaped front of the corsage was filled with white tulle; the trained skirt made her

look taller and more slender than she really was; a bunch of blood-red roses took away the effect of plainness from the rounded bust. Her eyes shone with happiness; she owed the richer bloom of her complexion to the long walk in the frosty air and excitement over her brother's gift.

“Twelve minutes by my watch!” she returned gaily. “Isn't that in keeping with lightning-express rules, — ‘ten minutes for refreshments’?”

She went directly to the piano, as to a longed-for luxury, sat down and improvised a prelude, while waiting for suggestions from her audience.

“Do you recollect the little starlight thing you sang for us the night we all went out in my gondola,” broke in Ralph, “the time I nearly upset the boat because the other gondolas would go the wrong way? Sing it, please! It will bring back old times.”

“You mean ‘Adrift’?”

“Yes! that's the name. Won't you sing it?”

The aimless prelude gathered meaning; the idly struck chords formed themselves into an air, and the girl sang.

Her voice was not of the grand opera order. It was not even highly cultivated. It was true, sympathetic, and sweet as a thrush's vespers. The song, as she gave it, adapted itself to the mood of the little red-haired man, who watched her with the alert devotion with which a fox-terrier eyes his owner.

Dale had sunk into his favourite chair by the fire. John Bell, leaning against the mantel, looked down with ineffable pride upon the little sister.

Adrift upon a starlit sea,
Beneath a starlit sky,
In some far, old-world Arcady,
We floated, you and I.
With one clear song, the night along,
Of love that cannot die.

Forgot was time's unceasing flight;
Forgot the noisy shore.
Together, 'neath the stars' dim light,
We floated evermore.
And aye again, our song's refrain
That same sweet burden bore.

Heart of my heart! the years have flown,
And lost is Arcady;
But oftentimes, as I dream alone,
The Past comes back to me:
The skies above, our song of love,
The starlight, — and the Sea!

Dale's gaze strayed from the glowing embers to Ralph Folger's face. In it he read — or thought he read — silent adoration oddly out of keeping with the almost grotesque features.

The sight sent a queer pang to the physician's heart, — pain that confounded him.

After all, what affair was it of his? What right had he to care how Folger looked, or how Folger felt? If the multi-millionaire — a capital little chap in his way — loved the girl, why should Egbert Dale, an obscure country doctor, concern himself about it? The man was rich, true as steel to his friends, benevolent, and honest. The girl was pretty and poor. What could be more suitable?

Having argued himself into this attitude of judicial complacency, Egbert Dale in the next breath cursed himself for a hypocrite.

No affair of his? Why, it was all the world to him. And now he saw, for the first time, that it had been his world ever since the bitterly cold morning when a half-open door had given him a glimpse of Paradise.

Moved by some occult force, Ralph Folger's eyes met his. Each man looked away instantly, yet not before each had guessed the other's secret.

"That's very pretty, dear," said unobservant John,

as the song was ended. “But do you know I’d rather hear the old songs you used to sing? They mean more to me. ‘The Last Rose of Summer,’ and ‘Scenes that are Brightest,’ and ‘Then You’ll Remember Me,’ and others of the same sort. Have you forgotten them?”

“No, dear!” returning his glance with one as eloquent of love and memory. “We don’t forget such songs. You shall have them whenever you like. Shall I begin now?”

“After supper — one and all. If you are not too tired. Ralph and I have some matters to settle that will take us into my study. We’ll be all through by supper-time.”

He moved toward the door.

“I hope it will not disturb your ‘matters’ if I strum on the piano” — without looking around. “You can shut both doors, if you like.”

Dale arose with the others, but lingered when they had gone.

“Would you mind very much if I were to stay here and listen while you are playing?” he asked, with diffidence foreign to his usual manner.

She answered readily and kindly, —

“If you won’t mind my being wretchedly out of practice. I have n’t touched a piano in months. It’s a godsend to be able to play again.”

While she spoke her fingers were awakening little trickles and gushes of music, as a brook sings when the ice yields to spring sunshine. She had not turned her head, and seemed not to know that they were left to themselves. The sun had set; the winter twilight was fading; the shaded lamp in one corner of the large room was outshone by the fire.

Dale seated himself again in the chair by the hearth; his pale, classic face brought out by the blaze into striking relief against the dark cushions. At his

feet slumbered Beautiful, pursuing in his dreams some ever-elusive quarry, as was shown by the convulsive twitchings of his forelegs and an occasional strangled growl from between his shining white fangs.

Myrtle was in the shadow, her face alone dimly visible in the half-light. She seemed to Dale like the St. Cecilia of an age-darkened painting by an old master.

She played a few bars tentatively, as though trying to recall an air.

Dale raised his head.

"Is n't that from the march in Raff's 'Lenore'?"

"Why," in surprised accents, "do *you* know—"

"Yes, I know it," he finished lightly, as she checked the query. "You've no idea how many fine chances a general practitioner in the backwoods has of hearing classic music. Seriously, I do know it, and I have longed, a hundred times, to hear it again. Please go on with it."

She obeyed wonderingly. While her touch proved her to be a more accomplished pianist than vocalist, she gave to the music the same tender, sympathetic quality that had marked her song.

The strains of the most moving march ever written ebbed and flowed through the silent house.

Ralph Folger, deep in the important business "matters" across the hall, heard it, answered questions at random, and made irrelevant inquiries that amazed his interlocutor.

Mrs. Bowersox, busied with maternal cares in the more distant nursery, paused in the all-important task of imbedding the ubiquitous Thomas Jefferson, and listened.

"I don't set much store by pièces with no tune to them," she told Myrtle next day. "But the one you were playing before supper last night made me feel queer and choked up right here," indicating her

ample throat. “Kind of’s if I was expecting to hear bad news—or,” with a bold swoop of fancy, “’s if I was listening to a love-story—or else a powerful moving sermon.”

Dale sat as if carved in marble. His eyes never left the glowing caverns and changing phantasms the true fire-worshipper traces in the recesses of living wood-coals. The march rolled on, now hushed and awed, as the voice of one bowed in the presence of the Great Dead; now rising into a wail, as of many women weeping over a common loss; now swelling forth, ominous, defiant, re-echoing, and dying away into a distant murmur, to soar again into a volume of sound in the finale.

As the closing chords clashed out and sank, a great silence fell between the man and the girl, so profound that the breathing of the sleeping dog, the tinkle of dropping ashes, were audible.

“I should never play that!” said Myrtle, at last, shivering slightly. “It takes too much out of me.”

“What does it mean?” mused Dale, aloud. “Something ominous and despairing runs through it. It is the death-song of a soul that has battled like a hero against overwhelming odds and has failed,—one who has dared to defy Destiny itself, and who has lost all. A soul not without stain, perhaps, but without fear. The soul of a MAN!”

“Still there is a note of hope underlying it,” urged Myrtle,—“despairing, forlorn hope, if you will, but hope! And there is, as you say, defiance, the song of the conquered whose courage is still unconquered,—a will baffled, not crushed.”

“Strange that it should strike you so too!” Dale turned toward her and spoke animatedly. “I never knew of any one else who felt as I do about that march. I heard it, for the first time, many years ago. I was at—” He hesitated, then went on

reluctantly, protesting at heart against the sentiment that seemed to force itself into words through no volition of his. "It's a silly fancy, of course. I was younger then, and indulged a fancy sometimes. But the 'Lenore' march seemed to tell me of my own life,—my future struggles, my own fate!" he ended, sinking his voice to a whisper, low but clear. "Absurd notion, was n't it?" the rich tones grating like a file, and a mirthless laugh rising to the set lips. "The thoughts of youth, you know! I suppose the dusk, the firelight, and the music brought it back to me and loosened my tongue. Sentimentality is not much in my line."

The girl had wheeled the piano-stool around, and sat, leaning forward, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes, glowing and mystic in the gloom, fixed upon him. She looked like a sibyl charged with a message she was constrained to deliver. The spell of the hour and the music had wrought in her a strange exaltation of spirit.

"Don't call it absurd!" she entreated. "Because—because, somehow—I feel the same thing!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I feel it about you, Dr. Dale. That march *sang* itself in my brain, as you sat there by the fire the first morning I met you. I could n't have told you why it came to my mind then. I can't tell now. It seemed your *motif*."

"Don't you know how, in the Wagner operas, each character is connected with some strain of music which is his 'motive,'—that is, typical of him and of his life?"

"It is strange!" mused Dale, falling, like Mrytle, under the spell of unconventionality bred by the hour and its influences. "I wonder if our both feeling so has any meaning, or if it is only telepathy—or coincidence!"

“All three, perhaps,” answered the girl. “But that was why I was startled when you asked me to play it. Does music bring pictures to your mind, — living pictures, more real when you have your eyes shut and your mind filled with music than anything you ever see when your eyes are open?”

“Sometimes I think one of the most beautiful things about music is that the same air can conjure up a different picture for every one who hears it. Does the ‘Lenore’ march bring one to you?”

“Yes!” lowly and emphatically. “Always the same!”

“Tell me what it is.”

His accent was not dictatorial, but neither did it express the faintest doubt of her compliance.

She had turned back to the piano, and was playing over softly the opening bars of the overture. When she spoke, her voice was as subdued as the music that accompanied it, and fraught with dreamy reminiscence, as if the speaker were trying to recall some half-forgotten scene, or were spelling out shadowy words in the dim light.

“When I play this,” she said, “I seem to see a narrow, tortuous Italian street, flanked by high gray walls. The summer sun pours down on it, making it glaringly bright, and hot in places, while at other turns the high walls keep off the rays and throw that part of the street into cool gray gloom.

“Crowds of people line the roadway. Along the middle of it a band of Brothers of the *Misericordia* is marching to a burial. They wear black robes and masked hoods. On their shoulders they carry a bier. The face of the man on the bier is turned upward toward the sun. It is deathly pale, but a certain radiance seems to shine from it, and there is a look of calm and triumph and hope on the worn features. It is like the face of a sleeping god. It

bears the marks of struggle and of pain. But both are lost in victory,— the victory of death.

“The bearers carry great torches from which black smoke rises in clouds against the sun. In front is a line of buglers, their trumpets screeching and moaning, and the sound is echoed back deafeningly from the walls until the whole street vibrates with it. In the pauses of the music, as the cortège winds through the gloomier turnings of the street, the air is filled with the loud weeping of a host of broken-hearted women and strong men.

“The wail of the music and the weeping of the crowd seem to answer each other. Everything is Despair, except the bright calm of that one face on the bier.

“There!” she said in her usual tone, whirling around on the piano-stool and facing the listener, “is that absurd, too?”

“No!” he answered, almost roughly, “you know it is not!”

CHAPTER XI

THE MEAGLEYS AT HOME

“A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man.”

A QUARTETTE of the Meagleys had called upon Miss Bell in state established by Pitvale precedent, and embellished according to hints of customs prevailing in the outer and larger world, sections of which were brought to the valley by the oil-boom.

Reminiscent of the pomp and circumstance of the visit, Myrtle donned a Parisian costume when she returned it. Lest the foreign smack of the phrase should mislead the reader into dazzling visions, we hasten to add that the gown was of fine black cloth, borrowing distinction from cut and fit and the bordering of sable upon skirt and waist. A sealskin sacque was trimmed with the same costly fur, and there was a narrow band of it about the round velvet hat set lightly upon the well-formed head.

The way to the Meagley house led Myrtle directly by Dr. Dale's office.

The physician raised his head from his desk just as she passed by on the other side of the street. When opposite she glanced at his windows, as she would have looked over the way in the expectation of catching a glimpse of her brother. Something in the casual action sent a tingle of pain through the heart of the unseen spectator.

The ease of the girl's bearing was a continual revelation to him. Most of the young women he knew — notably the Meagleys and their set — would have

walked on in feigned unconsciousness of the possibility that he might be in his office, while every movement showed they were on exhibition, — a stage effect of playing to the galleries that deceived nobody. A lower grade of damsels would have loitered purposely, stared broadly, nudged one another, and giggled offensively, to attract the notice of the handsomest man in Pitvale.

Myrtle's swift ingenuous eyes swept the front of the modest building, then looked forward in the direction in which she was going.

"It is nothing to her whether I am here or not!" thought Dale, bitterly. "I might as well be watching a star climb the sky!"

When she passed beyond the field of observation covered by that particular outlook, he got up, and crossed the hall to the end window of his private office. From this he could see the lithe black figure all the way up the street until she turned in at the Meagleys' gate.

The fallen family lived in a substantial brick house, separated from the sidewalk by a neat paling and a strip of front-yard. The building was old-fashioned but comfortable. Myrtle had heard the history of the new porch over the front door, and smiled to herself in mounting the steps.

As everybody in Pitvale knew, the Bowersoxes had given Mrs. Meagley the house, and the munificent salary received by Kate for her services as Miss Folger's companion was delicately designed to cover the running expenses of her mother's household as well as to clothe the middle daughter. When the roof of the old porch sagged and the floor trembled under every step, Mrs. Bowersox, after waiting vainly for some weeks in the hope that Kate would have it repaired, sent a carpenter to pull it down and put up a new one.

Not one of the inmates of the building whose portal was barricaded for ten days by scaffolding, timber, and workmen, gave the least sign of consciousness of what was going on. The shutters of the front windows had to be kept closed lest the men hammering upon floor, pillars, and roof should look into the chaste interior; the family went in and out of the back door on street-errands and to church, passing the litter on the sidewalk with the same unconcern they displayed to the din of hammer and saw. The porch was finished and the rubbish cleared away one Saturday afternoon. On Sunday morning the front door was unlocked and Mrs. Meagley, with her four daughters, issued therefrom at church-time, walked composedly over the firm flooring and down the broad steps, glossy with new paint, never once glancing at the "improvement." Never then or thereafter, as John Bell assured his sister, had any one of the party so far forgotten what was due to her own and the family dignity as to intimate by word or look her knowledge of the liberty taken with the residence they had honoured their plain but worthy kinswoman-in-law by accepting and occupying.

It was a representative anecdote which John enjoyed hugely, but which he was discreetly wary in relating.

Myrtle had time to think it over exhaustively while she awaited the reply to her ring. A third pull at the stiff — and she began to fear, the useless — wire was answered by a slatternly child of thirteen or fourteen. "Bound girl" was stamped all over her, from frowzled elf-locks and dirty calico frock to ragged shoes. Second-class smartness marked the gaudy oil-cloth of the entry-floor, the tapestry Brussels carpet of the parlour, the "set" of figured plush furniture, hard-red in colour, such as brings to the initiated imagination the associative odour of bilge-water, dead-

and-gone lodging-house dinners, and the sooty stuffiness of sleeping-cars. Chromos instead of engravings, an ornamental air-tight stove in place of the generous cheer of the open chimney, and a profusion of tidies pinned upon backs and arms of chairs and sofa brought to the quick-witted observer the conviction that the Middle Miss Meagley had not cared to recast the family tastes according to what she must have learned while living in the elegant luxury of her benefactress's home.

"She is very different from the others," thought Myrtle, and in a second thought queried, "After all, is she?"

The chill of the frozen fixed air of a room that had not been ventilated for days went to her bones. She tucked her hands well into her muff, and set her teeth to keep them from chattering.

It was an ugly room, — ugly with the vulgarity of Nottingham lace curtains; marble-topped tables; a gray cast of "Coming to the Parson" upon an undraped stand between the two front windows; on the mantel a French clock under a bell-glass that emitted frosty little ticks, and a clump of lilies in wax-work under another bell-glass and trailing over a round looking-glass, upon a ghastly bare slab of marble set beneath a lean mirror in a gilt frame. The carpet was made up of brick-red roses and yellow tulips, garlanded in the most natural manner possible, upon an azure ground.

There was no door of communication with the adjoining room, but Myrtle caught the sound of scurrying feet, the sharp sibilations of command and reply, the trundling of furniture, — the indubitable indications of clearing up and tucking away incident upon getting ready for company.

At last — an at last fifteen minutes long — a door opened and shut, footsteps and a voice were heard in the passage.

Carolling as artlessly as a blackbird in spring-time, Miss Harriet Meagley, in a grass-green delaine and scarlet neck-ribbon, strayed casually into the Arctic zone of her well-appointed abode, and came to a tragic dead stop at sight of the figure stranded upon the red-plush sofa.

“Miss B-e-l-l-l!” If the cry and clasping hands had been less artistic, the discount upon her amazement would have been lighter. “When *did* you come? How long *have* you been here? This is some more of that wretched girl’s work, I am sure. And never to let us know that you were here! I declare she has let the fire go out, too!” laying a tentative palm upon the shining stove. “I *do* hope you have not taken cold! Won’t you come *right* into the sitting-room? Mother and the girls will be *charmed* to see you. You’ll excuse all want of ceremony, I hope? I positively can’t leave you to freeze!”

In passing through the hall, she snatched at a card lying on the table; her tongue clicked smartly against the roof of her mouth.

“To think of that miserable creature leaving your card there, instead of bringing it in to us? That’s the trouble of young servants!”

The shifting of the scene to the sitting-room introduced the rest of the cast, *en tableau*.

Mrs. Meagley was darning stockings; Miss Julia was crocheting a purse; Miss Levina was hemstitching a ruffle; Miss Emmeline was reading aloud such an interesting story in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* that none of them noticed the opening of the door or looked around until Miss Harriet spoke, —

“Mother dear! Here is Miss Bell! Do you know, that wretched Nelly,” etc., etc., et cetera.

Amid the clamour of exclamations, apologies, hopes that she had taken no harm from exposure, and objurgations of the small sinner who had let her

in for it all, Myrtle kept her head cool enough to reflect amusedly that these people had probably never been to the theatre half-a-dozen times in their united lives.

Mrs. Meagley's thin whine separated itself from the tangle presently. She was also the first to rally from her surprise sufficiently to be able to resume her work. The skilled needle was diving under and over the knitted meshes while she prosed, her glasses so near the tip of her nose that Myrtle forced her eyes away from watching for their fall. She knew she should scream or laugh when this happened, so unnerved was she by cold and suppressed fun. And here and now, if ever, she must be upon her good behaviour.

"Miss Bell can't hardly understand, I presume, how impossible it is to procure competent help in this benighted place," said the mother of five, in her best English, the hankering after polysyllables, common to the pretentious illiterate, strong within her. "In the days of our prosperity we was enabled to command a superior quality of domestic assistance. In our reversed condition we must content ourselves with what Providence assignates to us."

Even the mongrel word did not move the listener to a smile. In a rush of thought she compared the present with the past of the fallen household, and an excess of toleration got hold of her.

"Please don't apologize for the little mistake that has brought me into your pleasant living-room," she said, gently winning in look and manner. "We shall get acquainted ever so much sooner here than in the drawing-room," her eyes wandering to the sunny windows, the sills of which were filled with potted plants, and ignoring the sewing-machine, the basket of work, covered with a towel, standing beside it, the dingy stove, and dingier furniture. "And won't you

please me by going on with your pretty fancy-work?" to Julia and Levina. "Mrs. Bowersox was showing me some exquisite work one of you — I think she said it was Miss Levina — did upon a frock Jeff has outgrown. She keeps it laid away in lavender in her drawer. Jeff says she is keeping it for his little sister."

Her laugh was not echoed. Miss Emmeline looked down upon the paper in her lap, and rubbed the backs of her bony hands together bashfully, as if the circulation were suddenly stopped. Miss Harriet, guileless, uncertain as to the visitor's meaning, looked the perplexity she did not articulate. Miss Levina blushed muddily. Like her sister Kate, she prided herself upon retaining the power to blush upon seasonable occasions. Miss Julia glanced timidly at her mother.

That exemplary matron arose to the relief of her innocent offspring. Stern as Judith, relentless as Jael, she jabbed the long needle into the heel of the sock distended by her darning-egg.

"Sarepty Bowersox has lost what modesty she ever possessed, residing so long — and, as one might say, unprotected — in that big house with all those men, and others coming and going continual, and no female present to restrain the licentiousness of her conversation. I have with my very own ears" — the emphasis conveying the impression that she hired another pair for every-day use — "heard her laugh at what any delicate-minded individual, especially of the female sex, would blush to have her child say. And I *will* say, as I have said times and places without number, to my husband's sister's face, that it is not decent for her to allow that boy — spoiled as he is — to make allusions like the allusion you have just alluded to, Miss Bell. As I have told my girls, oncet and again, and they'll bear me witness, I'm that nervous when either Mr. Bell or Dr. Dale are present,

and *that* child begins to run on, that I don't know which way to look. It's nowadays proper, from any p'int of view. I can't sleep o' nights for thinking what's said and allowed for to be said when there's nobody there to act as a constraint upon them two. As I said to my brother Jo'chim, years ago, — 't was just after Dr. Dale come, — ' If you 've got one iotom of infl'ence with that wife o' yourn, you'll insist upon her having one of my girls to keep her company. There's Leviny that's got "Sarepty" for her middle name,' says I, 'out of compliment to *her*, and it's little has ever come of it,' says I. But there! Jo'chim Bowersox dassent call his soul his own in that house, three times as big as they need, — and we a-squeezed into this rat-hole, as you may say!"

The colour had not left Miss Levina's pure but experienced cheek, inured to the inevitable aggregate of blushes attendant upon a thirty years' pilgrimage in the Vale of Spinsterhood. But she espied a glint in Miss Bell's eyes that was not all amusement or kindness; a sparkle, as when flint meets steel, shot across the soft brown, usually so clear.

"Ma!" interposed the more politic daughter. "You're disposed to be hard upon Aunt Sarepta. People that talk as much as she does must say outlandish things sometimes. Of course it's rather shocking, the way she talks about not being able to realise Jeff, and lets him run on about —" the blush was back with reinforcements — "about remote improbabilities, — but Miss Bell would n't notice it as much as we do, after living abroad so long. The English don't mind what they say, I've heard, and that their conversation sounds real coarse to refined American ears."

"It's all of a piece with their indecent short skirts and big feet and thick shoes," opined Miss Harriet.

The spark had lit a steady glow by now. Our

heroine was having her first experience of association upon terms of enforced equality with people innately vulgar, yet presuming, — people whom circumstances forbade her to treat as their insolence deserved.

Incidentally, and not irrelevantly, she registered a vow, before she spoke, that nothing should coerce her into marrying a politician, or beguile her into marrying a clergyman. Altogether relevantly she pitied her brother's wife *in posse*.

"I am not a fair judge, perhaps, since my English friends belong to the better classes of society," she rejoined, with admirable self-possession. "I have never met people more refined in word and in deed than they. I must have expressed myself very awkwardly if I gave you the idea that Mrs. Bowersox is ever indelicate in any way. I am ashamed to use the word in connection with her. As to dear little Jeff, I confess that I am at a loss to see what was wrong in the saying I repeated."

"Everything depends upon the way a person is raised." Judith's frown was a furrow. Jael was a rock. "In our properous days, when the thought of poverty never entered our thoughts, I paid much attention to the forming of my children's moral manners. They was trained to avoid the appearances of evil, and to put impure thoughts far behind them and to set watches before the door of their lips. My sainted mother was one of the salts of the earth.

"Poor mother! little did she dream what reverses was in store for me! She always used to say to us, her daughters — there being five of us as there 's five of mine, and never a son to my name, without it was a still-borner, which is n't supposed to count in the family Bible. It does seem, sometimes, 's if Providence entertained a gredge against some of His children, while others — no better, not to say not so good — flourishes like green bay-trees.

"My sainted mother — Julia is called after her — she used to lay down law and gospel to us —"

"He *won't* stay in the kitchen, Mis' Meagley!"

The frightened pipe of the bound girl, not unlike the squeal of a hurt rabbit, drew all eyes to the door.

The father of the five brotherless girls shambled past his foiled guardian, and made for the stove — a big Stanley, and red-hot, — chafing his gnarled fingers, and drawing wheezing breaths between his few remaining teeth.

"The fire's 'most out there, Lizy Ann," he said huskily. "And you know Dr. Dale told you, last time he was here, that I mus' be kep' warm, whatever happened. The cold starts up my rheumatiz lively. — How do ye do, ma'am?"

Seeing the stranger at this point of his complaint, he shuffled toward her, and held out his hand.

"Mr. Meagley, Miss Bell! Miss Bell, Mr. Meagley!" said his wife, after the manner of her youth, when people took pains to make strangers acquainted with one another's names. "He's an invaleed, and we're obleeged to take the uttermost care of him, on account of the rheumatics being liable to mount to his head. When it does mount he's very flighty. But harmless! quite harmless! Pa! you'd better set down in the corner away from the draughts, if you *will* stay in here."

But Pa's eyes were fixed upon the face smiling gracious warmth into his numbed heart. He held the gray-gloved hand in both of his — wrinkled, veinous, and trembling — working it up and down with the action but not the regularity of a pump-handle, mumbling and mouthing his greetings meanwhile.

"Glad to see you, ma'am! glad to see you in my house! Know your brother, ma'am. In p'int of fact, I'm a member in good 'n' reg'lar standin' in his church — the old Oak Hill church. Only, as my

wife says, I ain't allowed to attend in the winter, all on account o' my rheumatiz. But she's all off 'bout that head-business. It's the j'int's and the back what suffers, an' there's danger of its flyin' to the heart, if I'm not took good care of, or if I'm contradicted.

"Head's all right! You ask Dominie Bell what *he* thinks of Timothy Meagley's headpiece. Similar, ask Dr. Dale. What you say, Lizy Ann? 'Set in that chimbly cornder?' Not if I know it! I'm a-go'n' to keep Miss Bell's comp'ny for a few minutes, if she'll let me."

He made a long, backward arm to drag up a chair, and eased his creaking bones down into it.

"I shall be happy to talk with you for a little while," said Myrtle, cordially and respectfully. "I must be going home soon. The night comes early now."

"And it is n't considered the proper thing for a young lady to be out alone after sundown in Pitvale," observed Miss Julia, eager to clip the thread of her father's talk. "There are so many doubtful characters abroad in the evening, now that the town is growing so."

The imbecile was chewing the mysterious cud of senility; his gaze still drinking in the graciousness of the fair young face. While he munched, he winked slowly, like a drowsy cat in the firelight. There were livid, pendulous pockets under his eyes. He polished the knobby knuckles of his left hand with the palm of the right, working them round and round with a grinding motion. His shabby clothes were too big for the thin body; his bald head and scraggy neck projected from between the bent shoulders like a turtle's.

Myrtle fought down the growing sickness of heart and body.

"You are very wise to stay in the house and keep

warm in this bleak weather," trying to speak as to a normal old man. "I did not expect to find the winters in Pennsylvania so severe."

It was harder not to shrink from the crooked yellow finger reached out to stroke her muff.

"Pa!" ordered his wife, tartly. "Quit that! Miss Bell will think you have n't no manners what's'ever!"

He desisted chucklingly.

"I'm an old man, ma'am! an old man! and you must n't mind my ways. A pre-mat-urely old man, I may say. Ten year ago I was a well-off farmer, livin' on my own land. In the house my gran'ther built. Not so good a house as this—" the bleared eyes sweeping the room.

"Pa! Pa!" this from three daughters in one breath. "How you do run on! It was a great deal larger and handsomer than this ever *thought* of being!"

"So you women say! so you women say!" a cunning leer creasing a face like rumped parchment in hue and grain. "I say it was a decent Pennsylvania farmhouse, no better than my neighbours lived in. It's down now. So am I. Water and ile together—they done it all! But," poking the muff impressively with two dreadful fingers, "if I could lay these hands onto ten thousand dollars, I'd be a richer man inside of two months than both the Folgers put together. You don't happen to know where I could put my hand onto ten thousand dollars, do you?"

"I am afraid not!" returned Myrtle, regretfully, civil to the last.

Unable to bear the scene any longer, and sincerely pitying the distress of wife and daughters, she arose to take her leave.

"*Please* don't go!"

Without making her intention too apparent she stepped back beyond the reach of the hand that

clutched at her sleeve. The quavering tones thinned into a whimper, —

“I won’t say another word about ile if you’ll stay. They’ll scold me awful, soon’s you’re gone. Dr. Dale, he told me t’other day, I’d better not let my thoughts run too much to ile.

“But,” sinking his voice to a squeaking whisper, and approaching the cunning old face nearer to hers, “I’ll be a rich man yet! See if I ain’t! I asked the doctor if he could n’t lend me the ten thousand. Said he could n’t on such short notice. I knowed, from the way he smiled, what he meant. He’s makin’ money, the doctor is. And I’ll get that money soon’s he marries my daughter Kate, what’s livin’ now off of rich Ruth Folger, and —”

“PA!”

The mixed wail and screech drowned the rest of the revelation. The wife from one side, two daughters from the other, laid violent hands upon him, and fairly hauled him out of his chair and to his tottering feet. Mrs. Meagley’s company manners and dictionary English went to pieces in the tempest of righteous wrath.

“You ain’t fitten to stay with decent folks!” she protested, pushing him through the door held open by pale and tearful Levina, and disappearing with him into the kitchen.

Miss Harriet made a forlorn effort to settle her ruffled plumage.

“Pa is subject to these queer attacks in cold weather,” she began falteringly.

She collapsed miserably at sight of the genuine womanly compassion in Myrtle’s eyes. Throwing herself into a chair, the humbled daughter buried her face in her hands and cried passionately.

Miss Julia scolded her for “giving way;” Miss Emmeline wrung her hands helplessly; Miss Levina

poured out a glass of water and held it ungently to the weeper's lips.

"It's nothing but nervousness!" she explained perfunctorily, to the pitying visitor. "She's often so! It's too bad we should all have disgraced ourselves before you to-day. I know just what Aunt Sarepta will say. And as for Kate!"

A despairing gesture finished the sentence.

Myrtle was leaning over hysterical Harriet, trying to soothe her by gentle entreaty and soothing words. She lifted her serious face; her accents and her eyes were full of tender sympathy.

"Don't trouble yourself about that! I shall never speak to anybody of what has given you so much annoyance. It was nothing, after all. We know that invalids must be humoured. Nobody attaches any importance to their talk. Please say this to Mrs. Meagley, and that I left my regards for her. Good-afternoon! I shall hope to see you again soon."

A dog leaped so high in the air that all four feet left the porch-floor as Miss Levina let the caller out of the front door. Forgetful of everything else in the joyful surprise of meeting a true, honest creature who meant all he expressed, Myrtle caught his fore-paws and carried them to her shoulders, laying her cheek upon the white star between the loving eyes.

"O Beautiful! my darling! They promised that you should not follow me! But I am glad you got away from them!"

At Miss Levina's call, her sisters ran into the front parlour, and huddled together at a window to watch mistress and dog through the tawdry sheerness of the Nottingham lace curtains.

"Such a fuss as she made over him!" repeated Levina. "Dr. Dale must have given him to her, then! Kate told me to find out if he had."

"She holds herself too straight to be graceful," criticised Julia, who affected the obsolete "Grecian bend" in her own carriage.

"She carries her head up, and steps out exactly like a man," was Miss Levina's stricture. "It may be style, and foreign, but it ain't modest Pennsylvania ways."

Miss Harriet, her face blubbered with crying, had a weightier matter in mind.

"What we've got to prepare for is the rumpus Kate will kick up when she hears what Pa said."

"Maybe she won't hear it. *She* promised not to tell," suggested an optimistic sister.

"Don't be a fool, Emmeline Meagley! Her brother will hear it all before he eats his supper. Dr. Dale will have it before he goes to bed. That vile tease of a Ralph Folger will get hold of it to-morrow. You may be sure he'll work it for all it's worth. If you want to make anything out of Kate in the next year, you got to be quick about it."

Four gloomy faces neared one another over the Stanley stove, after the distrusted stranger and her dog were out of sight. Four noses were blued by the frozen fixed air of the best room; four pairs of eyes were troubled by the same dreads.

Off company duty, they discarded frills of sentiment and language.

"Kate had better be on the look-out for herself," said Julia. "If that girl sets her cap at Dale, he's a gone case. If ever I saw a born flirt, she's one."

CHAPTER XII

"THE SOUL OF A MAN"

"Though I never may reach the glowing rose
That clammers atop the rough-cast wall,
Yet even for me a warm south wind blows,
And petals all flushing with passion throws,
And I kiss them as they fall.
Each hour I spend where your dear eyes shine
Some leaf of the flower of Love is mine."

RALPH FOLGER'S return and his expressed intention of staying at home for a month, at least, made a stir in every grade of Pitvale society.

Speculators and operators were awake to the lively possibilities of what he might do next. That he would do something, and that his "nexts" were sure to be sensational, was an axiom in business circles. Tradespeople furbished up their premises to court the commendation of the townsman who could buy out both sides of Main Street and every crossway without feeling the outlay, and who was known to have a natural interest in the rapid upspringing of the place he had done so much to make.

Tenants waited upon him, singly and in family groups, to ask for repairs and privileges.

As Sandy McAlpin told John Bell, "There was n't a mule in town that was n't better fed and cleaned because the head boss was around, with both eyes open."

The best circles — for such there were in Pitvale, a segregation of the families of resident well-owners, real-estate dealers, four or five doctors, and as many lawyers, with half-a-dozen gentlemanly managers of wells and agents of lands belonging to Eastern

capitalists — claimed the returned native phenomenon for their own. The social pool formed by these elements was moved to its depths by functions in his honour.

The hall-mark of Pitvalian gentility was the late dinner, whereat *décolleté* gowns and swallow-tail coats carried out the scheme of high life; where blue points and salmon, *entrées* and game, met together, sauterne and claret, sherry and champagne kissed each other. In ten houses where butlers were kept (or hired by the night) that number of “course-dinners” was given in a fortnight to the citizen regained; six receptions were enlivened by his sorrel-red poll and conversational pyrotechnics.

At the end of that time Myrtle Bell remarked to her brother in Ralph’s hearing that she might as well be spending the winter in New York as in this so-called country-town. Society in one place was very much the same as in the other with a few unpicturesque variations. The concert given by the Bachelors’ Club Band in the Club music-room for the benefit of the families of men killed in an explosion of gas in a pump-house, was a refreshing novelty. Her poor people in Pig’s Alley and Bankrupts’ Lane were far more entertaining than the regulation diner-out in society uniform.

Ralph, who was pretending to talk with Dr. Dale at the other side of the fireplace, dipped in his oar here, —

“I thought you enjoyed people! I do! All sorts, all classes, all colours of my fellow-creatures. When they don’t get a rise out of me, I get one out of them.”

“That is fair play, if you make people and puppets interchangeable terms, and cut and thrust the essence of neighbourly duty,” retorted the girl. “Sometimes you talk for the sake of seeing what Mr. Ralph Fol-

ger can make of a bad cause. This is one of the times."

Bell and Dale applauded softly.

John added, "Hear! hear!"

It was the evening of the day on which Myrtle had called upon the Meagleys. He guessed, from her reticence as to the particulars of the visit, that there had been a scene of some sort she felt herself bound in honour to withhold even from him. He guessed, too, that the peculiarities of this set of puppets were in her mind. With all her discretion she was a transparent scroll to the big, wise brother.

She was thoughtful to-night, and somewhat less rosy than was her wont. Ralph had "happened in" to supper, having had a telepathic revelation that Mrs. Bowersox would have waffles and white clover honey to top off the bounteous meal. He always thought of her and honey in the same breath; he wondered why.

When he had done full justice in appetite and speech to the delicacies, the four friends adjourned to the Bells' parlour. Myrtle sat down by her work-table, fitted on her thimble, and took up a slip she was trimming with narrow lace, as a christening-gift for a baby who was to be taken to church next Sunday and receive the name of "Myrtle."

"The mother thinks it 'just too sweet for anything,'" remarked the seamstress, in referring to the compliment paid her. "It is a family name with us. It was my grandmother's, in the first place. Then my favourite aunt had it and passed it on to me. She died a few years ago. For her sake, I like it. Not that I think it suits me. In fact, I am not sure I know just what myrtle is."

"You're certainly not like the stuff that runs all over graves," said Ralph, "except, perhaps, as it kills out grass and weeds, and is the only thing that will."

“That is periwinkle.”

The correction was so sober and apparently so sincere that Ralph exclaimed in discomfiture, —

“And I thought I was getting off such a neat thing! A real impromptu! I appeal to the company at large if anything could have been more neatly turned.”

“No lathe could have done it better,” said Dale. “Have you ever seen the crêpe myrtle, Miss Bell? It is a graceful shrub, with dark-green leaves and crinkly flowers of an exquisite shade of pink.”

Everybody laughed. Miss Bell chanced to wear this evening an India silk, — one of her favourite pliant fabrics, — dark green, plain in the skirt, and lighted in the corsage by a full front of pink chiffon. She laughed with the others, her rising colour paling the pink billows below her chin.

“Next?” she said, looking at her brother.

“The classic myrtle was very fragrant,” he answered readily. “It was sacred to Venus, but useful, all the same. Flowers, leaves, and berries were used by perfumers. Wood-turners made various articles from the wood, which was firm, prettily variegated, and susceptible of a beautiful polish.”

The applause came now from Ralph and Dale, the former ejaculating, “And she says the name does n’t suit her!”

“It seems impossible to keep the turning-lathe out of sight,” was Myrtle’s comment upon the play of compliment.

She addressed herself demurely to her sewing, while John talked in sub-tones of a parish matter, and Dale and Ralph fell into the like semi-confidential chat on their side of the room.

Neither of the pair lost a look or gesture of the needlewoman upon whom sedateness sat with such bewitching effect. Dale was in the shadow of the

jutting chimney, his arm upon a projection of the mantel, his hand overarching his eyes.

To dwell in Dreamland for a season — longer or shorter, as the Fates are benignant or malevolent — is the birthright of every man, he had convinced himself weeks before. In defiance of Fate, he had stepped audaciously into the sunshine. In fierce obstinacy, he elected to stay there. A soldier of fortune, so familiar with defeat that victory surprised without elating him, he had mastered the lesson of living by and for the day. He was, as he had schooled himself to believe, a man without a future. There was all the more reason why he should enjoy the present.

Courteously impassive in manner, he replied to Ralph at the right time, and pertinently, hearing, as a rippling accompaniment to the jerky periods, the mingled absurdity, and sound sense of the little man's disquisitions, the murmur of Myrtle's voice, and watching the rhythmic play of the hand that plied the needle; feasting sight upon her mobile features, the turns of the spirited head that looked coquettish and were as natural as breathing to the dainty thoroughbred.

"Thoroughbred!" That was the word oftenest in his mind when with her. Generations of gentlefolk lay behind her. Refinement was instinct, not a study.

Ralph used his eyes and ears with ingenuous freedom. When he saw an opportunity to take a hand in what interested him more than a dialogue with Egbert Dale, — fine fellow as he was, — he seized it, as we have seen, and held it, despite the rebuff that met his opening remark.

"Give me credit for the good taste of preferring to hear you talk to listening to myself," he said magnanimously, "and for good sense in agreeing with you in being bored by parties — and things. I had

about made up my mind to call a halt before you said that you hated the sight of a dress-coat.”

“I beg your pardon! On the contrary, I hold the dress-coat to be the crucial test of gentlemanhood. It is a social shibboleth. It is worth while to try each of one’s acquaintances by it, at least once.”

“Right you are, as always! And righter than usual here. I took my first lesson in that line at a New Year’s ball I attended in my Sophomore year —

“Does that tilt of the eyebrows mean that you had never suspected me to be a college man? But I am. Or, rather, I was for two years. They dropped me in Columbia (oh, yes! I would be metropolitan, or nothing!) at the beginning of the Junior year. If I recollect rightly, I had forty-three conditions. The prejudiced old fogies who ran the musty knowledge factory thought that amounted to an unconditional failure.

“I dropped easy, — not wisely, but too well. I was as sick of them as they were of me.

“But that ball! I had n’t been on deck five minutes when a lady asked me to bring her a glass of water. I did n’t catch on to her blunder at once. I saw no reason why a gentleman should n’t fetch a glass of water, or any other non-intoxicant, for a thirsty woman in party clothes. But when another did the same thing, and a chaperon said, ‘Here, my man! Bring me one, won’t you?’ the confounded truth burst upon me like a hand-grenade.

“I took refuge in a corner of the back-hall while I blew off steam in a few well-selected soliloquial comments. Then I had my innings. I got hold of a napkin, threw it over my arm, found tray, glasses, and water in the dining-room, and, equipped with a rich Irish brogue, I played *Aquarius* for half an hour, pressing this one to ‘take a glass, sure, mem,’ and

assuring that one that he 'looked *thot* dhry,' making myself a conspicuous nuisance, until a classmate recognised me and threatened to split on me if I did n't drop the curtain.

"As you say — I believe you *did* say that? — a gentleman never looks so much like a gentleman as when he sports a claw-hammer, and the other kind — Oh, Lord, why, *that's* what I must be!"

A burst of kindly amusement testified to the listener's appreciation of the quandary. The self-convicted blunderer lifted the jaw he had dropped in comic dismay, and went on briskly, —

"The rule holds good, all the same. The Dominie, there, looks like a United States Senator from Massachusetts when he gets himself into evening toggery, and Dale would be taken for a prince of the blood anywhere. I'm not sure just what that means, but you're IT, old man!" clapping his friend on the shoulder. "Patrician to the backbone! I suppose you've got your pedigree down fine? I have n't one of my own. Maybe that's why I have such an insane reverence for people who had great-greater-greatest grandfathers."

"The founder of my family was a horticulturist, who lost his estate through an unfortunate investment in fruit," said the doctor, with perfect gravity. "Another ancestor was an eminent navigator who afterward came down in the world and became a vine-dresser. I do not know from which of these grandees I inherit the becomingness of my dress-coat. I fancy," slowly, "not from the first of the line."

Ralph stared stupidly from his serious countenance to the laughing faces of the others.

"What's the gag? Names and dates of the respectable parties aforesaid, if you please!" he demanded of Dale.

"Adam, Prince of Eden, and Noah, Duke of

Ararat,” rejoined the doctor, without a smile. “Dates somewhat uncertain.”

He pulled himself to his feet by the hand that clutched the projection of the mantel. The lamp-light shone clear upon him, standing at his full, erect height, — upon the clean, fine lines of his face, the perfect proportions of figure and limbs. His bearing was distinguished; his intonations were those of the educated citizen of the world. In quality his voice had the mellowness of the born Southerner; in accent and inflection, not a trace of the provincial.

With the quickening of spontaneous admiration with which the woman opposite him took in these details, came an odd sensation, a disagreeable reflection she knew to be the evolution of the nameless discomfort which had haunted her since the call of the afternoon.

“Could there be a germ of truth in what that old man said of Dr. Dale and Kate Meagley? I cannot match them in my mind. I should be sorry! On John’s account and on *his*. Of course, for no other reason.”

Yet from that instant she was conscious of regarding him from a new standpoint. They were already excellent friends. She met the smile with which he turned to her now with one as cordial and free from embarrassment.

“If I were my own master, I should delight in sitting here and swapping — or chopping — genealogies with you for three hours to come, Ralph. Miss Bell does n’t know it yet, but she is about to put by that baptismal robe, and play, first, my favourite march, then sing my favourite song before I go forth into the great, cruel, wicked, frozen world outside of the Bowersox garden-fence.”

“Definite!” cried Ralph. “If she were to tackle all my best-loved marches and songs, I would n’t

go home 'till daylight doth appear.' Not that I'd mind it!" as if struck by a tempting idea. "I'm more comfortable at this particular instant than I shall be until I find myself again in this identical chair, before that identical fire, with the Dominie to help me listen to the music. I tell you, Arcady was a down-town business street by comparison."

Dale had opened the piano silently. As silently Myrtle seated herself, and began the selection from "Lenore" each had translated for the other the first time she played it for him.

Strangely enough, it was his interpretation that filled the performer's mind as the music mourned and exulted.

"The death-song of a soul that has battled against overwhelming odds and has failed! A soul that has dared to defy Destiny itself and has lost all. A soul not without stain, but without fear. The Soul of a MAN!"

As was her habit when playing familiar music in a half-light or in the dark, she shut her eyes, while her fingers evoked the latent harmonies.

"The death-song of a soul!" She said it over and over, until a weird fancy possessed her. The soul not without stain, but without fear, freed from mortal trammels, seemed to be beside hers, to speak to her in pealing chords and wooing numbers,— to claim kinship, even ownership, in her thoughts, her aspirations, her inmost life. And her yielding to the spell was joy, not regret.

"You never played that better, little girl!" said her brother's voice from the fire.

She opened her eyes with a start that shook an alarmed discord from the keys.

Egbert Dale stood at the end of the instrument, in partial shadow, out of which his eyes shone down upon her.

The story was finished then? and with so little volition of hers that she had not known when she passed from one movement to another!

“Brava!” cried Ralph, beating his palms together. “Bis! encore! Out of sight! Arcady be dished!”

Myrtle arose with a fluttering laugh.

“I’m afraid there is n’t enough left of me for your song, Dr. Dale. As I told you once, that march takes hold of me as no other music ever did. I feel as if I had been hypnotised by the composer.”

“Try a change of treatment,” suggested Ralph, cheerfully. “Cut Dale adrift and let *me* stand there while you send ‘one clear song the night along.’”

Dale’s gesture kept Folger aloof.

“She shall not sing a note against her will,” he said quietly. And in a lower tone, meant for her ear alone, and yet more gently, “I thank you! — and I beg your pardon. Good-night!”

That night Myrtle asked her brother for the first time, —

“What do you know of Dr. Dale’s antecedents, John?”

“Next to nothing so far as particulars go. He told me once — without my asking, of course — that his mother died when he was a mere baby, and that he lost his father the same year. Also, that his mother was an Englishwoman, and that he had no blood relatives in America. He mentioned, at another time, that one of his ancestors, presumably neither Adam nor Noah,” laughing, “was an Italian.”

“That may account for his passion for music. It certainly does for his clear olive complexion. Where did he learn to play on the organ?”

“He says he ‘picked it up.’ He certainly did not pick up his university education. I infer — more from what he does *not* say than from anything he ever told me — that he had hard lines in his boyhood, and,

for the most part, a piteously lonely life altogether. I am satisfied, for my part, with what he *is*, without inquiring how mind and character were built up."

Myrtle stitched away silently for some minutes; then, with indifference that seemed sincere, she asked,—

"Have you ever heard his name connected with Miss Kate Meagley's?"

John's eyes gleamed quizzically.

"Put the question in a different form. I have heard his name 'connected' with that of every marriageable woman in our 'best circles,' as, I dare say, he has heard mine. If you mean to ask if he has any intention of offering his fine person and growing income to the Middle Miss Meagley, I can answer decidedly, 'No.' Not that he has ever alluded to the subject. I doubt if the thought ever crossed his mind. Besides—"

If the rest of the sentence framed in his brain had been worded, it would have been, "I have reasons for believing there is another woman in the case."

"'Besides'?" prompted his sister, inquiringly.

"Nothing worth speaking of. A fancy of my own weaving it would be silly to mention. There's no discount on Dale. He is a remarkable man in every way. A thoroughly good fellow, and worthy of the trust all who know him must put in him. As for me," trying, as the manner of men is, to hide by feigned levity the rising emotion that threatened eyes and articulation, "my 'soul is knit with the soul of Egbert Dale, and I love him as my own soul.'"

The matter lapsed out of their talk, and not a word had been said of the girl in the Cumberland Mountains who had plucked the wounded stranger from the jaws of death and nursed him back to life and health.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE MOATED WELL

“The die is cast! Pray for a miracle!”

LIKE the fall of an untimely frost upon peach-blossoms, or of mildew upon bearding grain, the announcement that Mr. Folger declined all social engagements for the present descended upon the *haut ton* of Pitvale, and “shook all their buds of hope from blowing.”

Other beaux there were—some of them rather desirable *partis*, and dancing men not a few, to make existence supportable to the dwellers in the villas that had shot up like mushrooms upon the hills to the south of the town. There were twenty of these hybrid constructions where there was one two years ago, and a dozen more in building. The domes of graperies and conservatories winked at the sun like so many huge glass eyes in the face of the landscape. Oil-reek and coal-smoke were mild inflictions to the denizens of the fashionable precinct; nuisances tempered to refined olfactories by prevailing winds that carried smell and smoke in other directions.

Oil-hunters had, in sporting parlance, drawn the coverts to the southward blank, and here Society bloomed like a rose and disported itself like a youthful hart or roe, remote from derrick and furnace shaft. New York gave up her fashions in clothing and equipages, and Philadelphia kept not back the choicest products of her celebrated markets. Parties of the

Pitvalian *élite* fluttered over seas every summer and brought back curios, Parisian toilettes, Dresden china, Venetian laces, and English accents.

Myrtle Bell, prudently reserving the wickedest things she thought and said for her brother's ears, catechised him as to the probability that the panting, puffing, sweating town might be the predicted child who should be born a hundred years old, — so ripe was it in worldly wisdom, so gray in sin.

But to the travelled lion, returned to his native jungle of derricks and wells, who abruptly turned his back upon complimentary convivialities, and would none of his fellows' festivities. To quote his own words, he had "settled down to the stride of business, and needed all his time and wits for the perfection of a scheme that would open the eyes of Pitvale so wide it would not get them shut again this century."

Hitherto whatsoever he had laid his hand unto had prospered. At his lavish best he could not spend money one tenth as fast as it came into his coffers. *He* had drawn no coverts blank, nor — to change the figure and keep the phrase — had he drawn one blank in the mighty lottery, the flanges of whose wheel were typified by the gaunt arms shot heavenward from hill and plain. People began to think that success had made him mad when it was known that the scheme now in hand was nothing more and nothing less than pushing on the drilling into the bed-rock that had stopped the flow of the well named for his only sister.

What maggot had the fellow got into the busy brain thatched by his red shock of hair? While "Jumbo," the biggest thing yet sunk, was averaging two thousand barrels per day, why waste tens of thousands of dollars upon a venture so unlikely that the parade of sounding and drilling and pump-

ing made him the song of the drunkard in the streets his money was paving?

The song waxed into a howl of derision from drunk and sober, when a hundred imported labourers were marched to the hill topped by the extinct well, and set to digging an immense trench half-way up the declivity.

“To hold the bulk of the stuff when it begins to flow,” said the oil-struck proprietor. “I don’t want to swamp all of Pitvale. I’m making arrangements to shut in the well as soon as possible after the rush sets in. But all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, with a weight of ten-thousand-pound tools on top of all, won’t be able to do this at once. This is not a secret find, gentlemen, but just now nobody is in it but myself. On February fourteenth — St. Valentine’s Day — I shall take in a partner. One hundred and fifty quarts of nitro-glycerine will be in it. I’m inviting every man from every well and every house for ten miles around to come that day and see the fun.”

On the afternoon of the thirteenth he drove his sister, Miss Bell, and, at Ruth’s private entreaty, Kate Meagley, in his victoria to inspect his completed preparations.

The day was as bland as April; a faint violet haze slept in the dips of the rolling lands; the smoke mounted in straight black columns from chimney-tops; the bank of the northern bend of the creek was edged with ochreous tufts of water willows, — those sensitive thermometers of spring, faithful sap-levels which are always the first to remind us that no winter, whether of nature or of soul, can be eternal.

Wrapped in her ermine cloak, Ruth Folger lay back in the padded corner of the smoothly rolling carriage, her lily face as serene as the day, smiling into open cottage-doors and windows, waving her

hand to children who laughed back in return as she was borne past; exchanging salutations with begrimed labourers, shirt-sleeved hucksters, and teamsters in overalls.

“Ruth’s constituents!” said Ralph to Myrtle, in tender teasing. “You know they would have run her for mayor last year, but for fear of hurting my feelings, I being her senior. I would n’t take the office, knowing how the case stood. I would n’t hurt Ruthie’s feelings for all the mayoralties extant, and I knew that at heart she hankered after the office. She is the only person in the universe who believes in me. She is as positive that everything is going off well to-morrow as — I am!”

His sister’s trustful smile was beautiful to see; a flicker of colour wavered across her face.

“Why should n’t I be positive? You have never deceived me yet. And since all this work and bustle please you, I enjoy it. If I *do* suspect, very far down in my soul, that ‘The Ruth’ would have been left high and dry but for its name, I don’t think the less of you for that.”

“She will feel it more than you, if all should not go right to-morrow,” said Myrtle, guardedly, feigning to be intent upon the spirited horses who curveted at a passing truck laden with barrels.

She was upon the box-seat with Ralph, her back to the others, and, bent upon enjoying the excursion, tried not to feel Kate Meagley’s eyes boring into her shoulders and spine.

“Do you suppose I would have risked *that* if I had n’t been sure what I was doing?” in the same key. “She begged me — sweet, white dove that she is! — to let her put money into the affair. Just to make me think she had faith in it, and to ease the loss a little if loss should come —

“Pshaw!” with a whizzing snap of his whip that

made the off horse plunge violently. "There are things a fellow cannot trust himself to talk about in broad daylight, even to *you!*"

She was silent; her face wore the expression of large, cordial friendliness it always had for the brother of the woman she had learned to love very fondly in these weeks of intimate companionship, — a look that barred every approach to gallantry more surely than coldness could have done.

Ruth had engaged her companion in conversation, a continuous murmur that made a *tête-à-tête* practicable. Ralph's courage rose.

"Sometime," he pursued, his attitude one of laziest nonchalance to the observers behind him, "when the fire has burned down to a bed of living coals and the lamp is in the corner, and you have been singing the song I love the best —"

Myrtle laughed saucily into his very eyes, as carelessly as a child of one third her age would look at him, —

"You must first decide what that is among the dozen you always ask for. You are catholic in your tastes."

"In songs, perhaps, yes! In people — no!"

"Excuse me! but surely there are Jack and Dr. Dale!" interposed Myrtle, animatedly. "Standing by that — what is it? It looks like a levee with a moat beyond. Have you fortified 'The Ruth'? Those square constructions — I suppose they are tanks — might pass for the tops of casements or bomb-proofs. Are you seeing it all, Ruth dear?"

The carriage-road wound about the base of the artificial terrace. John Bell and Dr. Dale hastened down a flight of steps cut in the bank, to assist the ladies to alight. Two men were in waiting with a sedan-chair for Miss Folger. Bell put one foot on the carriage-step and lifted her out with no apparent

effort. As dexterously he seated her in the sedan-chair and motioned the would-be bearers to stand back.

"If you will grant Dr. Dale and myself the honour," he said in his simple direct way, "we will guarantee you a safe and easy journey. It was a capital notion of Ralph's to provide for your seeing what wonderful things he has been doing for your name-sake."

"I'm afraid you'll find me heavy by the time you have climbed the steps!" deprecated Ruth.

"A butterfly *is* a heavy weight!" returned her brother.

He placed himself directly behind the chair,—a hand ready to steady it, should it careen to either side. Nothing ever diverted his watchful devotion from her. Myrtle forgot, for the moment, at whose side she was walking, in the sincerity of her esteem for one she refused to regard in the light of an admirer.

"He is a model brother!" she said in honest warmth.

"That is certainly one recommendation," rejoined the Middle Miss Meagley, smoothly, offensively, and unanswerably.

She was past-mistress of the combination.

"She could not be more disagreeable if I had broken my promise to her sisters!" thought Myrtle, irefully. "She tempts me to wish I had!"

She ran up the steps, brushing by sedan and bearers, and was ready to greet the party from the edge of the moat when the chair was set down.

"You can't think what a picture you all made as I looked down upon you," she cried. "I thought of St. Catharine, borne up cloudy steeps by angels, and Pilgrim's Progress, and going up the crater of Vesuvius, and a dozen other divinely incongruous

things. Now Mr. Folger is going to play Mr. Interpreter, and tell us what everything means. I think this must be the Hill Difficulty."

She would not be put down by Kate Meagley or any other—being only human and very feminine, she said "Cat!" plainly to herself.

There was much to tell, and Ralph was only too happy to be spokesman. The moat was a trench, twenty feet deep and as wide, lined on the sides and bottom with thick planks, joined so closely as not to show a seam. It encompassed the hill, which was graded down from the summit to the inner side of the moat.

"To give the oil an easy fall into it," said the projector. "I wish now that I had made it fifty feet deep and forty wide. It will be running over by to-morrow night, although I have piped it down to that tank you see below, and chartered two trains to take it away as fast as the portable tanks on the cars can be filled.

"You see my calculations are based upon a certainty. 'The Ruth' is a two-storied concern. We found everything O. K. in the first well we struck. When that was dry, I drilled through a second series, bed-rock, first and second sand, and then came to what the fools about here called 'bed-rock' again. It is third sand! but in the shape of pebble-rock, the hardest we ever struck, like pudding-rock; a sort of conglomerate packed hard by some kind of a rumpus of the lower powers, maybe a million years ago. Under that I *know* there is oil! To-morrow everybody else will know it!"

He rushed it off in a torrent of energy that took his breath with it and silenced the auditors.

Ruth gazed at him with love-full eyes; the warm pallor of her complexion enhanced by the red of the parted lips.

John Bell walked away a few steps, and seemed to look down into the moat.

"It *hurts* me to see her!" he said, aside to Dr. Dale. "This is sheer madness, but the bursting of the bubble will almost break her heart. I don't see what has got into the fellow lately!"

Dale's answer was a mute shake of the head. In his heart he thought that he knew. The age of derring-do was not over. Ralph Folger was a Knight of To-day.

The knight had removed his hat while he declaimed, now pacing the edge of the embankment, now crossing to the thither side on one of the slight bridges spanning the moat in several places.

"Just like a little red ant!" Kate Meagley told her family afterwards.

Had the simile occurred to any other member of the party, Ruth excepted, the aptness of it would not have been denied.

"I have sunk fifty thousand dollars in this hill since She went dry," the dreamer declared. "Inside of a week fifty thousand barrels of oil will repay me principal and interest, and leave a fair profit. It's like tapping the Bank of England!"

At which precise juncture Kate Meagley sat down suddenly upon a convenient stone she had already seen was clean and dry and not jagged, and sank her face upon her knees with a heart-rending moan.

Ruth partly raised herself from her chair and gave a little cry. Her hands were outstretched toward the weeping daughter thus confronted by her family skeleton; her trembling lips and suffused eyes bespoke divinest pity.

"Hang it all!" muttered Ralph, gnawing the side of his thumb. "When sensibilities are like that, people ought to use cocaine!"

Myrtle and Dale, being nearest to him, turned aside

simultaneously to hide their smiles. John Bell went straight up to Miss Meagley, and inquired, like a humane Christian, if he could do anything to help her.

She rallied with praiseworthy heroism at his voice. A couple of strenuous swallows downed the hysterics; a couple of mops with her handkerchief removed the tear-marks. She staggered in regaining her feet, and John took an honest, businesslike hold of her arm.

"Oh, *thank* you!" appropriately humble. "I am terribly ashamed of my weakness. But it came over me in a rush and surprised me. I am not often so foolish. *Dear Ruth!*" a dry sob escaping her, as she knelt by the sedan-chair, "*you* will forgive me, I know!"

The unwilling spectators moved away in different directions by a common impulse not to intrude upon the scene which was imminent. Ralph grasped John's elbow and walked him off around an angle of the hill. Dr. Dale and Myrtle strayed, purposelessly, out of ear-shot, and, still without purpose, stopped to stare down into the yawning trench.

It was an awkward moment. Delicacy forbade discussion of what had just happened. It would be in bad taste to speak out the growing conviction in the mind of each that, of all the mad freaks of prospectors, speculators, and money-makers generally, which this small quarter of the globe had seen of late years, what they were now looking upon was the most insane. For the afternoon they were the fanatic's guests. He was their friend, and Ruth Folger's brother.

The scent of freshly planed lumber, clean, sweet, and cool, overcame, for the time, the volatile pungency of crude oil.

Myrtle inhaled it gratefully.

"It is like a message from the woods," she said. "I could shut my eyes and believe myself in the Adirondacks or in a Maine logging-camp."

"I *hate* it!" said Dale, passionately.

The girl glanced at him in amazement. His face was literally darkened; his eyes flamed; the lower lip was caught under teeth that bit it white. He threw his arms out in a gesture of abhorrence or defiance, or both.

"Great Heavens! how I hate it!" he repeated hoarsely.

Turning on his heel, he walked past the angle where John and Ralph had disappeared.

Myrtle stood, confounded, where he had left her. Her sheltered life, under the guardianship of an indulgent, amiable uncle, and of the brother who would have bitten his tongue in two sooner than speak roughly to a woman, had given her little opportunity of knowing anything practically of the savage element dominant or rampant in every man. She had spoken flippantly of Vesuvius just now. Had the crater gaped at her feet, she could not have been more astounded. It swam through her mind, hazily, that John had said something of this man's Italian ancestry. Did that account for the outbreak?

"Will you let me beg your pardon, Miss Bell?"

He was by her, again master of himself and gravely courteous,—the graver for regret that he had offended her. More courteous he could not be.

"It is asking great things of you. I cannot complain if you never speak to me again. Apology is not worth much when explanation does not go with it; and I cannot explain what made me forget myself and what is due to you. I can but say that I am sorry; sorrier than I have ever made myself before since I have known you."

Myrtle's displeasure, however righteous, never out-

lived the first breath of penitence. The warmth of her ungloved palm was upon his half-extended hand before he ceased to speak; the sunshine of her cordial eyes was shed into his soul.

"Don't say anything more about it!" she said heartily. "I have too many tender spots in my own memory not to sympathise with other people when they wince at a chance touch.

"Ah, Jack!" forestalling the possibility of misinterpretation of her attitude as he and Ralph came around the corner, "Dr. Dale and I are shaking hands upon a compact we don't mean to confide to anybody else just now. Don't you think we would better be going? The sun is setting."

Ralph was quiet, for him, in the homeward drive, and his companion on the box seat did not obtrude herself upon his thoughtful mood.

An odd depression bore down her own spirits. She had had a jar that jostled her thoughts out of plumb and unstrung her nerves. Laugh the incident off as she might, in recollection it was an event of moment; the revelation of a man swept beyond the hold of self-control by the veriest trifle. She did not respect him less, but she felt less acquainted with him.

"The Ruth" and "Jumbo" were upon sister-eminences to the north of Pitvale proper. The Folgers had macadamised the direct route leading from these wells to the lower town, and thence diverging to the railway, a mile away. After bowling briskly along this main road for fifteen minutes, the carriage turned into an avenue, skilfully graded, as smooth as a floor, and lined with young elms. It led to the gate of the Folger grounds, and had been constructed with express reference to Ruth's infirmity.

She had told Myrtle, in one of their confidential talks, that she never drove over it without thinking

how much Ralph's tender care of her was like that of the angels who will not let one of the Father's children "touch his foot against a pebble."

"Mr. Bell says that is the correct reading of the text in the original," she added.

A groom stood at the horses' heads while the master of the lordly house sprang down to lift his sister out.

Before she let him take her, she leaned forward to kiss Myrtle, —

"We will call by for you at ten o'clock to-morrow, dear. The blast is to be at eleven. And you will not forget that you are all three to dine with us in the evening to make merry over Ralph's triumph."

Myrtle put her arms about her impulsively, —

"We forget nothing that concerns you, dear Ruth! Good-by! Don't let to-morrow's excitement keep you awake to-night. You must be in your best looks as the Queen of the day."

Kate Meagley had her farewell word, uttered while Ralph carried his sister up the steps and into the hall with ease that told the strength of his wiry frame.

So grateful for your tact and your forbearance, this afternoon!" she cooed, the baby-stare piteous and insolent. "It was so delicate and sweet in you to lure all the men out of sight! None of them would have understood just how I felt, except, perhaps, Dr. Dale. His intuitions are really womanly, when he is at liberty to exercise them. I can always depend upon him. *Good-by!*"

She went up the steps of the veranda as Ralph ran down.

He had skirted the business streets and was driving into the country-road toward the Bowersox house before he faced Myrtle to ask, —

"Would you mind telling me what you are thinking about at this precise instant?"

The girl flushed scarlet.

“I can't think of anything I should mind more!” she said bluntly.

At that precise instant she was saying to the confidential, *déshabillé* self with whom one never assumes prudish airs, —

“The very nastiest creature in all God's universe of nature is a spiteful woman!”

“May I guess?” persisted Ralph, scanning the blushing face with merciless eyes. “Will you tell me if I am right?”

She laughed outright at the suggestion.

“I will — honestly!”

“Then,” slowly, never removing his gaze from the amused countenance, “you are thinking of the wager you and Dr. Dale were shaking hands upon, this afternoon, — the bet as to the outcome of tomorrow's experiment.”

“Mr. Folger!” her face ablaze with indignation, “how dare you say such a thing? How can you think it? Whatever may be your opinion of me, you might know that Dr. Dale is incapable of making light of what means so much to you — and to Ruth. Have you *no* faith in your friends?”

“I trust you!” He lifted his hat, and bowed profoundly. “Try to forgive me! I'm afraid all this fuss and fury *has* rattled me a bit, after all. Forget what I thought, please. I'll never imagine another thing of you that is n't four-square, white, and super-angelic. And I say, Miss Bell!” speaking fast, for they were at the gate, and reddening furiously over face and neck, “would you mind saying one little prayer — just a little one for a cent, you know — to-night for ‘The Ruth’ and — incidentally, you know — for Me?”

CHAPTER XIV

"THE RUTH" SPEAKS

"Enslaved, illogical, elate,
He greets th' embarrassed gods ; nor fears
To grasp the iron hand of Fate,
And match with Destiny for beers."

THE great day, big with fate for Ralph Folger and "The Ruth," dawned fair and dry.

By sunrise the handsome flag given by Ruth Folger to The Bachelors' Club floated straight out in a southerly wind, and trails of bunting were looped from window to window across the façade of the building.

From the tall flagstaff in the grounds of the Folger house a graceful pennon streamed above the Stars and Stripes, in answering salute to the Club ensign. Up and down the main street of the town, that looked like a city to-day, shops and dwellings bourgeoned with the national colours. Folger Court, a *cul de sac* at the end of a side-street, was composed of model cottages, built by Ruth Folger, and rented at low rates to families where there were children. "No childless couples need apply," was the inflexible law, according to Ralph's story. An excess of olive-plants was recommendation, not objection.

The Court occupied a space equal to nine city blocks, three on each of the three sides. A small park faced by the houses had a fountain in the centre. Each cottage had its own front and back yard. At this season the windows were bright with house-plants. To-day an American flag flew from each

porch; some of the picket-fences were wreathed with evergreens.

At the junction of the boulevard, leading from the Folger place, with the principal highway, the operatives in the wells owned by brother and sister had constructed, over-night, as a surprise to their employers, a triumphal arch of evergreens. Upon the keystone the initials *R. & R.* were emblazoned in gilt.

By eight o'clock every thoroughfare was alive with men, women, and children, in holiday attire. When two of the Folger carriages—the first containing Ruth, Myrtle Bell, Kate Meagley, and, by Ralph's especial invitation, Mrs. Bowersox and Jeff, Beautiful sitting upon the box by the coachman; the second driven by the master, John Bell and Dr. Dale on the back seat—passed The Bachelors' Club, and so by way of the lower town in the direction of the twin northern hills, sidewalks, windows, and even roofs were packed with people who cheered lustily for Ralph, for Ruth, for the Dominie and the Doctor.

"Three cheers an' a toiger for Misthress Folger as is to be!" vociferated a burly Irishman from a block in the shadow of the arch. "An' before iver we open another big well, may there be another letther alongside o' thim two!" pointing to the intertwined initials. "Hip! hip! hurrah!"

Myrtle had chosen to ride with her back to the horses. Innocently unaware of the meaning made apparent to her companions by tossing handkerchiefs, hands, caps, and laughing stares directed at the ladies' carriage, she nodded smilingly at her brother just as Ralph arose to his feet, the reins in the hook of his arm, and swung his hat right and left, his head like a danger beacon in the sunlight, his face one beam of gratification.

"If you persist in looking so enticing, Miss Bell,

we shall have them taking the horses out and dragging us the rest of the way by men-power," remarked Kate Meagley, honeyedly. "Dear Ruth! I should think you would not envy the Queen her Jubilee!"

"I do not, when I think what a tribute all this is to *him!*"

She looked serenely and supremely contented, calm of nerve and of heart.

"The impersonation of perfect faith that casteth out fear," thought Myrtle, with a heart-ache. She was armoured by disinterested solicitude for her friend against Miss Meagley's pointed innuendo. "Could I believe as implicitly in any man's judgment? Her love dignifies even him."

A cordon of amateur policemen fenced the multitude within safe bounds when the scene of prospective action was reached. For a radius of many rods about the base of the moated hill, the ground was cleared of every living creature except the workmen, who had their orders to retire when a cannon should be fired from a platform erected near the "Jumbo" derrick.

Throwing the reins to a groom, Ralph sprang to the ground, bowed cheerily to the ladies in the other carriage, and, the crowd parting respectfully to let them pass, set off, attended by Bell and Dr. Dale, for a last and rapid round of the works.

"It's tempting Providence!" sighed Mrs. Bowersox, clutching Jeff, who was standing on the seat for a better view, while with the other hand she pointed to the top of the new steel tank, where two tall figures and one short were silhouetted blackly against the pale sky. "Suppose that hundred — or was it a thousand gallons of nitry-glycerine — or is it dynamite? — should go off while they are there, there's no saying what would happen to them, poor dears!"

Myrtle shuddered involuntarily. Kate Meagley

said, "Don't talk nonsense, Aunt Sarepta!" Ruth smiled, and patted the dear woman's knee.

"It can't go off until Ralph gives the word, you know. He has looked to everything himself, even the most minute details. The new tank will not be injured by the explosion. It is not near enough to the well that is to be opened. Ralph is to fire the cannon with his own hand.

"There! he is shaking hands with the others! That means he is sending them away and they are wishing him good luck. Now—the workmen are running down the hill. Sandy McAlpin, John Crosby, Carl Nolting, and three other men will stay with him. Sandy has asked to be allowed to shut in the well with his own hands. If you will take my field-glass, Mrs. Bowersox, you will see the cap and the weighted tools lying, all ready, on the ground near the cannon platform. Nothing has been forgotten."

Her breath was quicker; the hand holding the glass shook slightly, but her eyes were cloudless, her smile was unchanged. Her excitement was born of suspense, not anxiety.

An awful stillness descended upon the crowds standing close as wheat-stalks in a field, in road, in common, and on house-tops. Boys had climbed trees and posts; men balanced themselves upon fences. All eyes were directed to one spot; hundreds held their breath as one man, when a solitary figure, bareheaded, appeared upon the platform, raised one arm skyward, as if in invocation, then touched the cannon.

Quick upon flash and thunder followed an explosion that shook the earth. A jet of water, perhaps twenty feet in height, was thrown up from the mouth of the well, and sank back, and there was a great calm.

Blank dismay nobody had words or disposition to express, sat upon every countenance.

A boy cried out, "Hi! is that all there is of it?" and the man next to him struck him on the mouth.

Then Jeff Bowersox, having mounted to the box-seat where the coachman anchored him by a grip upon the seat of his trousers, — Beautiful, sitting upright from his haunches, bracing him on the other side, — remarked in his most agreeably patronising tone, glancing around for sympathy and approval, —

"How *very* amooosing!"

A woman of the town, in soiled finery, who had pushed herself to the side of the carriage quite under Ruth's elbow, set up a cracked laugh at the child's words, repeating them shrilly.

The laugh caught and spread like the detonations of a pack of damp fire-crackers, until the throng was rocking and reeling in a convulsive roar.

Above it rang out a voice all knew for that of the man who stood erect upon the seat of Ralph Folger's drag, his eyes blazing upon them, his hand raised threateningly.

"For shame! Shame upon you all!" shouted John Bell with the full strength of his mighty lungs; and Egbert Dale at his side, like a trumpet blare, —

"You are a pack of ungrateful hounds!"

All this in less time than it would take one to write three lines of this true happening.

Then a second column shot through the floor of the derrick, half-way to the top, black as tar, — mud, sand, stones, the fragments of dynamite cans, — through the pitchy column, a lurid greenish stream that reached the apex of the tower, — and, before the spectators could exclaim, like seven thunders uttering their voices, a tremendous volume of gas, imprisoned from the foundation of the world, tore its way upward, enveloping derrick and tank, and hiding the light of day from the eyes of the awestricken beholders below the hill.

Another minute, and it had cleared away, revealing a perpendicular shaft that glowed like burnished gold in the sun. Eighty feet high it mounted, curling, as it struck the crown-pulley at the top of the derrick, and shivering into amber spray, raining down upon the slopes on every side of the well. With the shout of a mountain-torrent it rushed up, a solid pillar of rock-oil, to break and flow — Pactolus swollen into Amazon — into the prepared moat.

The commotion that ensued is not to be described in written language. The air was darkened by hats, caps, handkerchiefs, canes, and shawls tossed high above the heads of men and women in the intoxication of delight. The bellow from human throats arose above the shout of the geyser. Men cast themselves upon one another's necks, weeping and laughing; the piercing hurrahs of women's and boys' voices cut the body of sound like knives; terrified babies screamed; a cordon of police wedged itself between the base of the hill and the excited masses that tried to press nearer to the moat. Beyond all, the graded eminence arose like a gilded dome, so continuous and lustrous was the rush of oil into the vast trench prepared to receive it.

A lusty groom clung to the nose of each of the plunging horses attached to Miss Folger's carriage; the coachman let go of Jeff to haul upon his reins; the boy lurched backward, grazed Kate Meagley's bonnet in his descent, and landed, upside down, in his mother's lap.

"Very neatly done!" said Dr. Dale, from the carriage-step, seizing the flourishing heels, and dexterously righting their proprietor. "Could n't have been better!"

John Bell was at the other side of the carriage, shaking hands with Ruth, his face aglow with congratulation, his eyes shining moistly.

"Your trust in him is justified," he said in her ear. "It is the most magnificent thing I ever saw. And he is a genius!"

Her composure was sublime; her eyes were wells of light; pure joy and devout gratitude made her face as it were the face of an angel.

"Thank you!" with a low, happy laugh. "Would it be possible to send a message to him?"

"I will take it! I promised to go up to him as soon as the work was done. What shall I give him beside your love?"

"Say that he would not let me share the expense, but he cannot keep me from having nine tenths of the triumph; that I was never so happy before, and can never be happier again, and that I said, God bless him, now and forever! That is all. Take care of yourself. The crowd is frightful!"

"Dale will stay with you. Not that there is any danger to you, or to anybody else. People are too happy to be troublesome."

He had held her hand all this time, and pressed it as he let it go, after a last long look into her face. He carried the luminous purity of it in his mind all the way to the platform where the field-piece was posted.

It was not a time there for the delivery of love-messages. Sandy McAlpin and six picked men had waded knee-deep in the rolling tide up the slope to the derrick of "The Ruth." John noted, with the double set of senses developed by intense excitement, that the immense flag hoisted early in the day upon the top of the derrick drooped against the staff, darkly saturated with oil-spray.

Ralph was issuing orders from the platform, as to a storming party, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands. Excess of vitality and the hill-breeze lifted his hair into a ludicrous likeness to the dummy-head

stuck upon the pole of a battery in a lecture-room to illustrate the effect of the electric current. The conceit tickled John's fancy. When he put his hand on the dummy's shoulder, he almost expected to receive a shock.

"Bravo! old man!" he began, — when Ralph jumped a foot into the air; his shout was a groan, —

"By Jove! he's down! It's that infernal gas!"

CHAPTER XV

AT DINNER WITH THE FOLGERS

“When Love is a Game of Three,
One heart can win but pain ;
While two between them share the joy
That all had hoped to gain.
And one, in its bitter sadness,
Smiles on, lest the others see ;
But two, in their new-found gladness,
Forget 't is a Game of Three.”

RALPH FOLGER read the sequel of the morning's work in the Extra Evening Edition of *The Pitvale Olio*, while he awaited the coming of his guests that evening.

Well groomed and natty in his dinner-jacket, — preferred to a dress-coat because, he said, it “made him look less like a Delmonico waiter,” — he stood, straight as a pin, in a pair of irreproachable patent-leather shoes, one hand in his pocket, and read the “story” to his sister.

He handled the sheet gingerly with the tips of his fingers. The printer's ink was damp; the paper smelled of oil-gas. So did all Pitvale on that memorable day. Even the patrician colony on the southern hills was fain to close windows and doors, and breathe shallowly to abate the nuisance until the worst of it should be over.

As the man who was richer by many thousands of dollars than he had been ten hours earlier, read, he interpolated at will and at length, —

“‘The Power-house, a mile-and-a-half down the creek, presided over by Mr. Alexander McAlpine, —

At Dinner with the Folgers 171

affectionately known through the length and breadth of the valley as "Big Sandy" — has been compelled to extinguish its fires for the afternoon and night on account of the gas generated by what is literally a deluge of oil.

"Mr. McAlpin, to whom was assigned the proud duty of putting the cap of "The Ruth" in place, nearly paid for his temerity with his life. Endeavouring to get the tools into the well, he was overcome by the gas, and fell under the bull-wheels. He was rescued immediately by his brave companions, Messrs. John Crosby and Carl Notting, and Drs. Dale and Kruger —'

("Much that ass Kruger had to do with him after Dale got there! Sandy hates Kruger like poison. Says he was the death of Sandy's old mother, year before last. Treated her for colic when she had pneumonia.)

"Drs. Dale and Kruger were summoned. He was taken to The Bachelors' Club, of which he is a prominent member, in Mr. Folger's trap, which was in waiting for that gentleman, and remained unconscious for two hours, but subsequently recovered fully, and insisted upon returning to the scene of action.'

("Maybe Sandy was n't as mad as a fellow can get, and hope to save his soul, when he heard what doings he had missed! He's a game one, is Sandy! Scotch woodcock!")

"After Mr. McAlpin was removed from the neighbourhood of "The Ruth," several other plucky fellows volunteered to undertake the herculean job of shutting in the largest well ever struck in the oil-region.'

("Or that ever will be struck while grass grows and water — and oil — run!")

"The packer for the oil-saver was tied on the bull-wheel shaft, the tools were placed over the hole,

and run in. But the pressure of the solid stream of oil' —

(“Solid! I should say so! Solid as adamant!)

“— against it prevented it from going lower, even with the suspended weight of the two-thousand-pound tools.’

(“That’s as near as these newspaper fools ever get to the truth! There were three thousand pounds for the first trial.)

“‘One thousand pounds’ additional weight were added before the cap was fitted and the well closed. A casing-connection and tubing-lines connect “The Ruth” with immense tanks at the railway depot. It is said that these tanks are already filled, and the gigantic reservoir is still but half emptied. But for the prophetic foresight’ —

(“There’s tautology for you!)

— “‘and superhuman energy of Pitvale’s most multi-millionaire, in providing for this incredible volume of petroleum, this fair valley would ere now have been inundated, and one of the most thriving towns in Pennsylvania destroyed by the very agency that called her into being.

“‘It is roughly estimated that the production will be ten thousand barrels the first twenty-four hours.

“‘Thus ended the grandest scene ever witnessed in Oildom. When the barren rock, as if smitten by the rod of Moses, poured forth its torrent of oil, it was such a magnificent and awful sight that no painter’s brush or poet’s pen could do it justice.’”¹

Ralph Folger let the Extra drop from his fingertips into the fire, and watched it writhe in the flame for a second, then take a flying leap up the chimney, before he faced his sister.

“With all its buncombe and bosh, there is a grain of truth in that account. There’s more than a grain

¹ See J. J. McLaurin’s *Sketches in Crude Oil*.

At Dinner with the Folgers 173

of satisfaction in having demonstrated that I am not as big a fool as I look, and as my neighbours took me to be."

He threw himself into a chair by Ruth, and put a hand — almost as small as hers, but hairy and freckled where hers was satin-smooth and white — against the cheek that met it lovingly.

"Now we won't have another syllable of shoppy-talk to-night, Ruthie. I have *wallowed* in oil until I am sick, body and soul. Or, maybe it's my heart that's nauseated. Anyhow I taste and smell and exhale — and think — Oil! I took a borax and rosewater bath, then a Turkish bath, an hour ago, and thought of you — and another glorious woman — all the time, and I can't get rid of the reek!"

"It is the reaction, darling boy! You will be all right to-morrow. But you shall not be worried by what Myrtle calls 'oleaginous technicalities' any more this evening. I'll conceal my pride in you, and let you suspect the love alone.

"It is the old story of Bruce bursting into tears at the source of the Nile, and saying, 'Is this all?' Still, if Mrs. Hemans does moralise over his depression, which was n't really disappointment, but a trick of the nerves, and if we *are* given to quoting

'O Happiness! how far we flee
Thine own sweet paths in search of thee!'

the truth remains that Bruce would n't have torn out that page of experience from his life if he could, and that you will never regret your splendid enterprise.

"To-morrow we'll talk of some of the beautiful things you can do with money. *Now!*"

A pretty flourish of the hands dismissed the subject.

Ralph captured both of them, and kissed, first one, then the other, with brotherly fervour.

The Bells and Dr. Dale, entering from the hall, and Kate Meagley from the conservatory, saw the action and paused instinctively.

"Come in! come in!" called Ralph, jumping up. "If I've done anything to be sorry for, I'm glad of it! If a fellow can't kiss his own sister, what fellow's sister can he kiss, I'd like to know?"

"That remains to be proved!" said John Bell, naively.

His paternal attitude toward his sister was consistent, even to his obtuseness to other men's admiration of, and possible designs upon her.

A throaty gurgle, full of meaning, came from Kate Meagley. In greeting the guests she gave her hand first to Myrtle, still quivering all over with suppressed merriment.

"Excuse me!" she said, under cover of salutations which Ralph made voluble. "But the simplicity of the average brother is *too* delicious! I am almost reconciled to the fact that I never had one!"

Myrtle felt the colour beat hotly in her cheeks.

"It is well to reconcile oneself to the inevitable," she answered audibly, sweeping on to the seat vacated by Ralph in her favour.

The slightly contemptuous cadence and hardly perceptible backward motion of her head made Ralph eye her keenly, then glance at Kate with shrewd divination of the by-play that would have amazed the actors. Miss Meagley was as shrewd as he, but neither suspected to what he owed the increased graciousness of the smile with which his arm was accepted when dinner was served, or that Miss Bell inclined a more indulgent ear to his table-talk because of the hot sting to maidenly delicacy inflicted by the woman she began to dislike more than anything else in the world.

By an ingenious contrivance of a folding-leaf pro-

At Dinner with the Folgers 175

jecting over her knees, Ruth was able to preside at her own table. John Bell was at her right hand, Kate Meagley at her left, where Dr. Dale should naturally have been placed had not Ralph's wishes controlled his sister's arrangements. She knew that he did not affect her companion's society, and that he was fond of Dr. Dale. Thus it came about that Myrtle sat next to a man who, she knew, admired her, and opposite one whose interest in her she could not ignore.

A greater contrast to the tumult of the forenoon than was presented at the evening meal could not be imagined. The light of wax candles, grouped in silver candelabra, was tempered by pink shades; a bank of palest pink roses filled the centre of the table, exactly matching the shade of Myrtle's *crépon* gown.

"Was it an inspiration?" queried Ralph, directing notice to the coincidence.

"If so, it was Ruth's, not mine! She asked me to wear it. I am thankful not to have introduced a discord into the *opus*."

"If the roses had been *crêpe myrtle*, we should have had unison instead of harmony," remarked Dr. Dale, in quiet significance lost upon Kate Meagley, while it sent a wave of deeper rose to the cheeks of his *vis-à-vis*.

She was looking her best to-night. Her shoulders rose, fair and firm, from her pink corsage; the finely moulded arms were partially veiled to the elbows by a fall of cobwebby lace. The sophisticated host could have told the cost of the filmy stuff to a guinea. Kate Meagley's envious calculation undershot the figure.

The Middle Miss Meagley was not looking amiss in blue silk, — a recent birthday gift from Ruth. The deep satisfaction of sitting next the man she loved the

more because she loved herself so well, mitigated her stare, cleared and coloured her skin, unbent her lips, and almost lowered the arch of her eyebrows. When Dr. Dale inclined his fine head to catch her rounded tones and his eyes answered hers in mirthful and in earnest glance, she could afford to let the obnoxious foreigner play what cards she chose for the great catch of Northwestern Pennsylvania. She detested Ralph Folger as much as she feared him. He was not a marrying man. There was, therefore, no real danger lest the vigorous flirtation he was carrying on with John Bell's sister under the reverend gentleman's unseeing eyes would bring forth other fruit than temporary diversion for him and chagrin for the lady.

Kate saw, in the vivacity of the battledore and shuttlecock compliment and repartee that kept their end of the board lively, the pastime of an idle hour on his side. She was maliciously willing to have the other party to the game work out the punishment of her presumption.

John Bell's full tones and the responses of Ruth's gentle voice in carrying on such personal talk as is practicable in a small company where each couple has an individual interest in the topic that engages thought and tongue, established the even balance of masculine and feminine voices. Butler and footman, shod in shoes of silence, glided behind the chairs of hosts and guests, changing plates, handing dishes, and replenishing glasses with never a clink or tinkle.

Myrtle Bell loved luxury every whit as well as Miss Folger's paid dependant, and had a truer appreciation of the beautiful and artistic. She also had a sober knowledge of the gay and wicked world the provincial schemer had not had an opportunity to acquire. After making prudent and liberal allowances for the deceptive ways of men in general, and

rich young men in particular, she was aware that she had but to hold out the taper third finger of her left hand to have the most costly diamond ring money could buy fitted to it as the precursor of the plain gold band that would seal her ownership of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

She was not tempted in spirit, however fondly imagination may have hovered above the suggestion.

"Nice, if unencumbered!" said the judicial subjective nature whose mission, psychologists tell us, is to preserve each of us from himself or from herself.

Queerly interjected athwart her musings was the vision of old Meagley, wrinkled and palsied, the bleared eyes lustful for his neighbour's goods.

"Ile done it!"

She caught, affrighted, at the words before they quite left her lips. Had the gas she had seen rush up — a monstrous afrite — from the lower deeps, that day, to spread through the upper world, affected her brain?

She glanced nervously around the table.

John was bending toward Ruth, eyes, ears, and thoughts engrossed by that marvel of white radiance. Kate Meagley was talking low and rapidly to Dr. Dale, whose eyes were fixed upon a flushed rose he had picked up from the cloth. He was listening so intently that he spared no thought for aught beside what the other said. It was not a social pretence, but genuine absorption of interest which awoke the man all along the line of nerve and action.

With an unaccountable qualm, Myrtle's startled eyes left the animated speaker and rapt listener, for the little man whom Oil had made great, and was making greater each minute while he feasted with his friends.

His hair was absurdly red in the faint rose-light; his face was unbecomingly florid, although he had

not touched one of the white, amber, and ruby glasses flanking his plate; he was talking fast and flippantly. With all her liking for him, her hearty appreciation of his worth and abilities; in the face of her womanly hankering after the thousand solid goods wealth can buy, and nothing else can procure, her head was cool enough to reckon up pros and cons and strike a balance.

“A princely estate, but the master would be an encumbrance,” thought this sapient young person. “I will put the whole matter out of my mind. He liked me in Italy, but he let me pass out of his life for a whole year. He will soon get over this more serious fancy. For Ruth’s sake, I must see that it goes no further.”

In comfortable ignorance of the fact that his fate had been decided, Ralph led the way to the smoking-room when the ladies had left the table.

It was fitted up after his own whim, like a large tent, or pavilion. Hangings of Persian stuffs fell from cornice to floor, rounded the corners, and were shirred to the centre of the ceiling. The pavilion was lighted by a hanging lamp of wrought twisted iron from Siena; low tables and lounging-chairs were clustered near the fireplace. Not a picture or book was to be seen.

“I don’t admit so much as a newspaper,” said the auburn-haired sybarite, when the three had settled themselves to their satisfaction. “A smoke should be a sedative, — Latin root, *sedatio*, “the act of calming.” I looked it up in the dictionary. Hence this spurt of erudition. There are lots of other synonyms, but that is enough for me. I take refuge in my tent for the one, only, and express purpose of being calmed.

“As his pal said of Dick Fanshawe, I ‘will have peace if I have to lick every damned galoot in the

At Dinner with the Folgers 179

valley to get it!' Newspapers are exciting and provocative of profanity. Books that are calming are stupid reading, and stupid things irritate me. Pictures set me to thinking when they are worth having, and what good comes of thinking when the day's work is done? What does it all amount to?

"I say, Dale, you quoted some verses to me, when we were mooning here one night, that have plagued me ever since. They swim through my head just when I want to think of something else — or not to think at all, which is a deuced sight better. Something about a 'moving row'?"

Dale took his cigar from his lips to recite the lines.

"We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with this sun-illuminated lantern held
In midnight, by the Master of the show.

"Impotent pieces of the game He plays,
Upon this checker-board of nights and days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.

"The ball no question makes of ayes or noes,
But right or left, as strikes the player, goes;
And HE that tossed you down into the field,
HE knows about it all — HE knows — HE knows!"

The syllables slipped slowly and musically from the speaker's tongue. He seemed to caress each as it passed. The beautiful iron-gray head was nobly defined against the leaf-brown satin of the chair-back; the lids were lowered over the slumbrous eyes. He raised his cigar again to his mouth, and there was reposeful stillness in the luxurious retreat. From the remote music-room an occasional bar of dreamy music melted into the silence.

Then John Bell's deep voice thrilled out, sweet, solemn, confident, —

"Yes! HE knows! Blessed be His holy Name for this one hope of a suffering world! The 'moving row' marches at His orders."

"And when one of the 'impotent pieces' is left to itself?" said Dale, suggestively.

He looked too indolent for argument, but John took up the gauntlet.

"It is never 'left.' Sometimes it mutinies. Then it must take the consequences of its transgression. Even then the rescuing hand is never far away; the Father-heart yearns over the wanderer.

'I know not where His islands lift
Their froned palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.'

That is the best sedative, Ralph! As much better than not thinking as immortality is better than annihilation."

"When a fellow has it, Dominic! What's that?" turning his head sharply toward the door.

A muffled scraping and shuffling was going on in the hall; a thud jarred the panels, as if a heavy body were pushed against them.

Ralph walked across the room and pulled the door open. Arthur, the decorous, pitched heavily over the threshold. Apparently he had been barring the intruder's entrance with his determined body.

As he dropped, the Rev. C. Mather Welsh stepped over him, planting one heel upon the tail of the footman's dress-coat, the other upon a lappel. Before the fallen picket could turn, or try to rise, the shrunken figure of old Meagley followed his leader, caught his toe in Arthur's watch-chain, and measured his inconsiderable length upon the carpet.

CHAPTER XVI

SOCIALISM AND SONG

"I am told thou callest thyself a King. Know, if thou art one, that the poor have rights; and Power, in all its pride, is less than Justice."

JOHAN BELL and Dr. Dale sprang forward together to lift the fallen man. The shock had driven the breath out of his lungs. The young men put him into a chair, where he lay, choking and coughing, stretching out twitching hands like one drowning.

"Get a glass of brandy for him, Arthur!" ordered the master of the house from his post of observation on the hearth-rug.

"No! no! fellow! not brandy, in God's name!" interposed Welsh, crossing the servant's path to the door.

"I have none of that brand," rejoined Ralph, "being opposed to profanity in any form. A nip of Cognac or old Monongahela would bring him around sooner than anything else. But I don't insist upon a waste of good liquor."

He knotted his hands behind his back, and eyed the process of restoration with calm unconcern. After beckoning up the footman, and enjoining him not to let the ladies know that the two men were in the house, he kept the rôle of an observer who had neither part nor lot in the matter.

When Mr. Meagley's eyes ceased to bulge, his trembling hands no longer plucked agonisedly at his throat, and his respiration became nearly normal, Welsh took a chair by him, depositing his hat upon the floor.

“Ah! beg pardon!” said Ralph, coolly, “I was taken aback by your unexpected appearance, and the manner thereof, and it did not occur to me to invite you to sit down. If you can state the object of your visit more comfortably—and, ah—compactly—sitting than you could standing up, or stepping over, you are welcome to a chair.

“I had given my servant—whom, by the way, I never call ‘fellow’ in any circumstances—orders not to admit any one this evening, being engaged with friends of my own choosing. Naturally I was not prepared, any more than he was, for your pushing yourself into society. Perhaps, as my time is valuable, you would not mind proceeding at once to business.”

The careless tone was exchanged in the last sentence for the curt speech of a man of affairs. He meant business, and had done with badinage.

The plucky parson met him upon the prepared ground.

“I am as little disposed to squander time as you can be, sir. I am here on behalf of an unfortunate man whose claims upon this community are every whit as strong as your own. Mr. Meagley sank wells, and got no oil; you sank the same number of wells, and found oil in such quantities that it promises to make you the richest man in the State. He is old and infirm; you are young and strong. He is poor; you are rich and increased in goods. He has worked harder than you, his morals are unimpeachable; he has been economical where you have been extravagant; he has a large family to support; you are a bachelor, whose only sister is wealthy in her own right. By what law, human or divine, do you claim to be the better man of the two?”

“The comparison is of your own making,” retorted Ralph. “Answer the question to suit yourself.”

The reply was brushed aside as if it were a gnat.

"Mr. Meagley, sir, has heard of the great increase of wealth likely to accrue to the Folger estate from the events of to-day. He came to me to-night, secretly, for fear of opposition from his family, and asked me to draw up a paper, setting forth what I have just said, and memorialising you to allow him a reasonable percentage upon every gallon of oil drawn from the well reopened this forenoon. He waives his claims upon the proceeds of other wells. It is not right, in the sight of the Maker of heaven and earth, that one man should have an income far exceeding his needs, while his brother starves. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. It belongs to one of His creatures as much as to another.

"I said when we had conversed awhile, 'Go with me to Mr. Folger's house, and plead your righteous cause with him, face to face, as man with his fellowman. I am well acquainted with Ruth Folger —'"

"Drop that!" cut in Ralph, sharply. "Don't mention her again! Stick to business!"

"As you will! My proposition, as I have stated, is that you should make some amends to a worthy, industrious, upright, high-minded gentleman —"

"Meaning *him*?" Ralph nodded toward the absent figure, wiping his eyes with a blue cotton handkerchief, and snivelling appreciation of the eloquence of his counsel.

"I refer, sir, to Timothy Meagley, Esq.! He is, I repeat, an honourable, upright Christian gentleman. If justice were meted out to him by his fellow-citizens and the laws they make, he would to-night be living in as fine a house as this, and have an income equal to yours. Who hath made you to differ?"

"If that's a conundrum, I may remark that levity is out of place in such transactions," said Ralph.

As before, the gnat was unnoticed. C. Mather Welsh's hobby had the bit between his teeth. He was more hortatory with each period.

"Allow me to say just here, Mr. Folger, that he represents hundreds of others who have sunk their earthly all in what has enriched you. I take leave, moreover, to point out to you the obvious propriety, the sacred duty, of dividing with these your brethren according to the flesh—your brothers in all but good fortune—the surplus riches you cannot spend, even in such riotous living as I see illustrated here,"—describing an expressive arc with a rhetorical hand. "For bear in mind, sir, that you have gotten this great wealth, not by right, nor by might, but by —"

Ralph gesticulated in his turn, —

"I *do* hope," deprecatingly, "that you are not going to make more profane allusions! I really have scruples on that point. And my friend, Mr. Bell, as a clergyman shares my views."

John stepped forward.

"Don't you think we have had enough of this, Ralph?" he said with dignity. "You will confer a favour upon me by listening quietly to Mr. Welsh until he has said all he came to say.

"Before you go on, however, Mr. Welsh," turning to the orator, who was on his feet, stuttering inarticulately, "it is but right for me to remind you of what you must have heard, and more than once. Mr. Folger has already done all that could be done, in reason and humanity, for Mr. Meagley and his family. Mrs. Meagley and her daughters would have hindered him from making this application, because they know what are his obligations to Mr. and to Miss Folger. Ask them yourself, if you doubt my word!"

Old Meagley shuffled between the two clergymen,

kneading the blue handkerchief with both hands, grimacing and shivering.

"Don't you do nothing o' the kind, Mr. Welsh!" he piped anxiously. "They've all been sot ag'inst me by this man what's got rich by stealing my ideas and putting of 'em to his own wicked uses. As to what he's allowed me in part payment of what he's made out of me, what's one hundred dollars a month? What's two hundred dollars a month, especially when it comes through the women's hands? What's even three hundred dollars a month, to what ought to be mine this minute? Hard cash, in my own hands, to do what I please with, every cent of it!

"Ask Dr. Dale, there, if I did n't tell him, last week, that Ralph Folger ought to give me ten thousand dollars, cash down, to start me again in the world? Talk about your Ruths and your Jumbos! I'd show you a trick worth two of both of them, if I could lay my hand on that cool ten thousand. Dr. Dale as good as said he'd let me have it, — but for circumstances. He's like a son to me, — Dr. Dale is.

"Don't be scared, doctor!" showing discoloured fangs and bluish gums in a grin, meaningless to the lookers-on. "I ain't going to give you away" — for Dale had him by the arm and was looking sternly into his eyes. "You need n't be afraid I'll let the cat out o' th' bag."

"I am afraid of nothing!" said Dale, calmly impressive, "except that you will be ill to-morrow after all this excitement. Mr. Folger will order a carriage to take you home. I am going with you. Mrs. Meagley will miss you, and be uneasy. I can slip you in at the back-door without letting her know that you have been out. We will set Mr. Welsh down at his door on the way. I take it, he has nothing more to say to Mr. Folger.

"Mr. Folger! the ladies will be wondering where

we are all this time. Will you and Mr. Bell go to the drawing-room, and say that I am called out upon professional business? I will stay with these gentlemen, one of whom is my patient, until the carriage is ready."

"Do you imagine, for the fraction of a second, sir, that I would so far demean myself as to accept a seat in any conveyance belonging to that Extortioner, that Robber-of-Widows' Houses!" burst out the poor man's friend, fairly frothing at the mouth and shaking his fist at Ralph, as he turned from the door where he was giving an order to Arthur. "I shall go as I came! I shake the dust of my feet off upon this wicked house —"

Bell pulled Ralph away with him before the fulmination was finished, shutting the door as they went.

"That poor devil of a Meagley ought to be put into an asylum," said Ralph in the hall. "He'll do mischief some day, if his family don't look out. The poor duffer would be welcome to twice ten thousand dollars, if it would put his brains back where they belong."

As they entered the drawing-room they heard the front door close with a concussion that shook the windows.

Fifteen minutes later, a close carriage drew up at a side-entrance, and Dr. Dale, leading his patient, — now whimpering out his dread lest Lizy Ann should discover his delinquency, — got into it with him.

Kate Meagley looked up brightly, when he reappeared in the drawing-room, less than an hour after his excuse was delivered.

She was having a stupid interlude to what had promised to be a brilliant evening. John Bell was talking with Ruth, presumably upon matters connected with the blue "Inasmuch" book lying unopened at her side.

Myrtle and Ralph were seated by a table covered with foreign photographs, mainly of places they had visited together. They had invited Kate, civilly, to join them.

"Thanks!" she said sweetly. "I do not need any more temptations than I now have to break the Tenth Commandment. I and my work-basket will keep one another company."

The basket—a wicker-stand, beruffled and beribboned—was set where Dr. Dale must halt or stumble over it on his way through the room. She added to her glance of welcome a touch to a chair near by.

"I will detain you but a minute," *sotto voce*. "I have recalled something else that may interest you."

Myrtle saw neither glance nor gesture. She did see that the confidential relations of the dinner-table were resumed, apparently as much to the gratification of one as of the other. She could not raise her eyes from the photographs without seeing reflected in the mirror opposite a *tableau vivant* singularly unpleasing to her. Kate's work lay neglected upon her lap; as she talked, she leaned over the gay little work-stand, the gold thimble tipping one white finger a glancing spark of light in the energy of her narrative. Dr. Dale's face was not a foot away from hers. His dark eyes questioned; hers, wide and earnest, replied.

Ralph may have fancied that his companion was wearying of travel-talk. He may have bethought himself that Dale was having more than his due share of Meagleys for one evening. He accosted him without apology for the interruption, —

"Dale! is it moulting-season?"

"That depends upon the species," rejoined the other, nonchalantly, with no symptom of surprise at the query.

"Genus, human. Species, Dale," said Ralph, as readily. "I have n't heard you sing since I got home. Are you waiting for a bluebird accompaniment?"

"Does he sing?" exclaimed Myrtle, unthinkingly.

She set her teeth in the tip of the incautious tongue, as Kate took up the word, —

"Is it possible that you have never heard him in all the weeks you have been in the same house? I supposed, now you have a piano, you had music every evening."

"We do!" replied Dale, quietly emphatic. "That is the reason I have not offered to sing."

"*We* don't!" said ungallant Ralph, oblivious of Miss Meagley's much practising, to which he could not have shut his ears on the evenings he passed with his sister. "That's the reason you are going to sing now."

The music-room opened, through a curtained alcove, into the larger apartment in which they were sitting. Piano and performer were plainly visible to the group that drew nearer together as the keys awoke under a prelude played by powerful practised fingers. It was simple, a few rich chords linked by snatches of a plaintive melody that found full expression in a song not one of the auditors had ever heard, —

The stagnant pool lies dark and still
Beneath the inky cloud;
The night-fogs settle, dark and chill,
About me like a shroud.
The wind wails low, the witch-fires glow
Athwart the black lagoon;
From sedge-choked glen and lowland fen
Rank vapours blur the moon.

I crawl 'mid slime and rotting ooze,
In marshy brakes I hide;
But one dread Face I cannot lose,
One Ghost creeps at my side.

Weird night-birds fly with eerie cry,
Circling around my head,
While onward glides, nor quits my side,
The Memory of the Dead.

The black bat flits through branches bare,
Against the starless skies,
Through swamp-reek, on the fetid air
The frogs' rough croakings rise.
By witch-fires' light throughout the night,
I roam the marshy shore ;
While creeps with me that Memory
To leave me — Nevermore !

The words were perhaps turgid rather than tragic, but the air — wild, at times almost discordant, breathing fear of death, dread of the unearthly, — lent the song a fascination not its own. The pure articulation and apt emphasis rendered the meaning forcefully.

For a moment after the last chord died away, nobody spoke. The flexible voice and marvellous technique impressed the listeners even less than did the dramatic, sympathetic quality that underlay it. It was not a song for a drawing-room, or for the casual auditor of parlour music. A mail-clad Visigoth at a village prayer-meeting would have been as much in keeping with his environment. To applaud would be a solecism. No one thought of conventional compliment. The musician was as mute as the auditors. Without rising, he passed his fingers so lightly over the keys as to awaken but faint breaths of sound, like almost spent echoes.

Ralph Folger broke the weird spell, drawing in his breath between his teeth as one who dives into cold water, —

“I say, old chap! don't do that sort of thing again! It gives one the horrors!”

“You didn't like it, then?” Dale arose and

sauntered back through the arch. Strange light — one might have thought of triumph — shone in the deep eyes, but he spoke carelessly. "I'm sorry you were not amused by my well-meant efforts."

"Amused! Heavens, man! Is that your idea of amusement? One might as well be amused by a thunderstorm in the Alps, or moved to giggle by a small-pox epidemic. Ugh! I can feel the damp, and smell the marsh-vapours yet. If you *must* warble malarial songs, I wish you'd follow them up with an ode to quinine or hot whiskey. It might stave off mental chills and fever. I once heard of a musical fellow who said it always gave him a headache to compose drinking-songs, until a friend suggested he should compose a bromo-seltzer with each one."

Ralph's ancient anecdote called forth a feeble laugh, and the tension relaxed somewhat. John asked Kate Meagley a question about a book she had been reading aloud to Miss Folger, and Ralph, who had heard one chapter of it, had a well-digested criticism ready that provoked a real laugh.

Dale stood by Myrtle's chair, his hand on the tall back. She looked up at him.

"Where did you get that song? Words and music are new to me. I never heard anything just like it — out of tragic opera."

His half-smile was one with the light lingering in his eyes. When he answered, she had the sense of a sub-thought that abstracted his attention from what he was saying:

"It is a free translation of verses written in Italian by a man named Barretti. He was an Italian nobleman who was banished from his own country for some political offence. His home, after that, was

in New Orleans. He — he killed a woman, — a woman he loved. Then he fled to the bayous and hid from justice for several months. A sheriff's posse surrounded him in a swamp, and called on him to surrender. He laughed in their faces, and blew out his brains. When his body was searched the verses of that song were found scrawled in pencil on the back of some envelopes in his pocket, and on blank pages of the letters the score of the music."

"What a strange, awfully sad story! Where were the verses printed?"

"They were never printed. They came into my possession in a roundabout way, years ago. The papers were passed over to Barretti's son. I suspect he had little besides from the father. When he grew up, he translated the doggerel and put the music into shape. I knew him fairly well at one time. I had the story, the song, and the music from him, poor fellow!"

Ralph was on the war-path again. As Dale uttered the last words, the restless little man laid a hand upon the doctor's arm, —

"Now you're *not* harping upon that blasted ballad of ague, nightmare, and murder still, are you? You're morbid, old man!"

"On the contrary, I was never less morbid in my life than at the present moment," giving his friend the benefit of his brightest smile. "What can I do to prove it?"

"Sing a normal, up-to-date love song, to wash the swamp-mud out of our imaginations. Something tender and thrilling —"

"And trashy?" subjoined Dale, still smiling, as he went back to the music-room.

A dashing, tripping air, as tuneful and as shallow as the carol of a cage-bred canary, trilled through the rooms; then the up-to-date song, —

I said her face so fair,
With its crown of sun-kissed hair
 Golden-brown,
Far eclipsed the light of day
When the quick'ning sun of May
 Flashes down ;

That her eyes of tender blue
Would outshine the heavens' hue
 In their light.
But she would n't understand,
Vowed my praise was second-hand,
 And *so* trite !

Yet across the sunset skies
Roseate flushes seemed to rise,
 All astir
With the joy the heavens shared
That their light could be compared
 Thus to her !

“That's something like !” cried Ralph, leading the applause.

And Kate Meagley, as Dr. Dale helped her collect the rolling spools from the wicker work-stand, tipped over by an incautious movement right across his track as he approached her, —

“Your versatility is a continual surprise, even to me, who ought to know you ‘fairly well’ by this time.”

From which sugary speech he guessed, whether she meant him to do it or not, that she had overheard part of the story of song, author, and translator.

CHAPTER XVII

A BRACE OF SURPRISES

“Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.”

THE morning sunshine lay in a broad band across the floor of Dr. Dale's inner office. In the centre of the golden track sat Egbert Dale.

The lines about his eyes and mouth were wondrously softened, and the light on his face was not all from the sun. It was one of the rare moments when the soul of a dreamer — ingenuous, sanguine, loving — looked from the eyes of the reserved man of the world. In his hand he held a tiny square of sheer cambric, turning it over with tender touches. The light striking through it showed a monogram in one corner, — *M. B.*, wrought in delicate embroidery.

A knock at the door brought him to his feet with a guilty start. He thrust the handkerchief into an inner breast-pocket, and strode through the outer office to the front entrance.

It was the impersonal, dignified physician of office hours who stood face to face with Kate Meagley upon the threshold.

The very calm of his impenetrable visage sent a queer pang through the girl as she returned his greeting, and passed, at his request, into the general office. Dale stood aside to let her enter, then followed. She had broken in upon his reverie, and he was vaguely resentful.

“I hope Miss Folger is no worse for yesterday's excitement?” he said.

“Not at all!” briskly and brightly. “Indeed, she does not admit that she *was* excited. I never saw such self-possession. My nerves felt the strain, dear Aunt Sarepta was quite overcome, and one might almost have fancied that Miss Bell’s own future prospects were concerned in the success of the blast, from the intense way she kept her eyes fixed upon Mr. Raph. She has *such* a sympathetic temperament!” she made haste to add, the doctor’s impassive demeanour discouraging further particulars.

“I am glad Miss Folger was n’t overtired,” a trifle stiffly. “I was afraid, when I saw you, that she might not be as well as she promised last night to be. But —”

“But” — taking the word from his mouth — “you are wondering, in that case, why I am breaking in upon your precious time. Now confess! Are n’t you?”

Her tone was laboriously playful. It “took” with the Pitvalian masculinity of a certain type. She had tried it before, with lamentable ill-success, upon Dr. Dale. Man at large (represented by a provincial’s experience) she looked upon as a Marriageable Animal whose heart was an organ. Upon this instrument any mistress of the fine arts of coquetry and so-called badinage could play if she kept a steady head. Dr. Dale responded to none of her tests thus far. She had begun by seeing in him a rising physician who might prove an excellent match for the middle daughter of the house of Meagley. With this idea she had opened her campaign, marshalling her forces according to tactics learned from novels and other women’s love stories.

Failing to secure even a second glance from the eyes that looked so tranquil and were so deep, she fell to studying the unimpressionable being more closely. Then she saw that he was unlike any

man she had heretofore known. He met every requirement set up by her novel-trained brain for a young girl's ideal, and added several new and bewilderingly fascinating qualities to the model. His face and form she likened to the much-abused Greek god's; his voice was rich music; he talked well and oftentimes wittily; his presence carried force. He mastered men and was admired by women. His indifference to herself first angered, then enthralled her.

In brief, Kate Meagley had grown to love Egbert Dale as only a narrow, self-centred woman can love.

It frightened as well as puzzled her, — this unique passion. It was so utterly foreign to the rest of her nature. The force of it would long since have swept her off her feet but for the utter unconsciousness of the object of her devotion. As it was, she held adoration in check by an effort that irritated and at last wore her out. Her pride revolted at the cheap pretexts she made use of to secure even five minutes of Dale's society. She was not strong enough to resist the temptation.

"Confess!" she repeated, with a pitiful effort at raillery. "You wonder what should bring me here when Ruth does not need your services, and I have nothing new to report of her. Well! I'll put you out of your suspense. I came here to consult you about a much less interesting person. I mean myself."

"You are not ill, I hope? You're looking very well."

The professional visor was closed; the professional armour had no open joint. What she chose to tell he would hear. He would not question without a clue.

"It's my heart, I think." Her embarrassment was natural, but not becoming. "It runs in the family, — heart-trouble does. Some months ago I went to a

specialist in Philadelphia. Ruth would make me see him. He said there was 'functional irregularity,' whatever that may mean," trying to laugh. "I suppose you, being a doctor, can translate his terms. He said I must be careful about running upstairs, and things like that, you know. But lately it's been worse. I don't like to worry Ruth by talk of my grievances and bad feelings. So I came here on the sly. Perhaps you wouldn't mind listening to my heart and telling me if there really is anything serious the matter with it?"

"Let me feel your pulse, first, please!" said the doctor, gravely.

The firm touch of his fingers thrilled her like a slight electric shock. Her pulse was wiry, rapid, irregular. It puzzled Dale, who, being the least conceited of mortals, had not the faintest suspicion as to the true cause of the arterial eccentricity.

"I would better listen to the heart," he said. "If you will step into the inner office —"

Kate had told the truth concerning her visit to the Philadelphia specialist. He was fatherly; he was bald-headed and red-faced. She had felt little or no embarrassment in undergoing the cardiac examination. Dr. Dale, though equally impersonal, with the same machine-like professionalism, was a different creature altogether. She blushed redly at the suggested auscultation. Then she steeled herself for the ordeal. It was a step gained to have him interested in her case.

Without a word, she inclined her head slightly and went into the other room. Dr. Dale followed her some minutes later. She had had time to make the needful preparations. She had had time, also, to grow intensely nervous.

"Now, if you are ready, Miss Meagley," said Dale, carelessly.

Approaching her, as he might an automaton, he put his left arm around her, the hand resting beneath her left shoulder-blade. "Stand perfectly still, and breathe normally, if you please," he went on, his ear applied, now to the centre of her bared chest, now pressed above the auricular valves, then over the apex of the heart.

In a tremor of bashfulness Kate Meagley glanced downward.

The broad band of sunshine touched Dale's bowed head, making lustrous the stippling of silver in his dark hair, and bringing out the sculptured outlines of the beautiful head into clear relief. The light, strong hold of the arm about her waist, the occasional touch of his cheek or hair, were as strong wine to the girl's love-touched brain.

And then Kate Meagley did what she was never to forget or to forgive herself for, — something she could never explain in long vigils of anguished self-contempt, during which she rehearsed to her writhing soul every detail of the horror and the shame.

A tense chord snapped in her brain. The flood-gates were down.

With one convulsive motion she gathered the bent head in her arms, crushing it with unnatural force in a wild embrace and gasping, —

"Oh, I love you! I *love* you! My king! I adore you!"

It was over in a second.

Dale had shaken his head free, and stood, gazing wide-eyed, in amazed disgust, at the trembling girl. Her face was buried in her hands, and her slender form was shaken by a storm of dry sobs.

They stood thus for perhaps half a minute, the band of sunshine lying like a bar of gold between them.

"Oh, how could I! Oh the shame — the *shame* of it!" she moaned, at last, brokenly.

Dale turned on his heel and walked into the outer office, leaving her to readjust her bodice. When she appeared in the doorway, downcast and shaken, he did not look at her; his tone was frigid.

"I think," he said, "you would better consult the Philadelphia specialist again. I shall not be able to take charge of the case."

The dispassionate formula fell upon her horror-stricken spirit like vitriol. She opened her dry lips to utter protest or plea, but before she could speak, a knock sounded upon the outer door.

Dale answered it, and the Rev. C. Mather Welsh pushed, uninvited, past him into the office.

"You'll excuse my haste!" he said curtly. "I'm in a great hurry this morning, and have only a moment to spare."

"May I suggest," remarked the doctor, "that you might have spared that moment to advantage in asking if I were disengaged?"

Kate Meagley had retreated to the inner room at the knock, and a glimpse of her red, tear-stained face in a mirror made her shrink into a corner. Welsh must not see her like this.

The clergyman glanced around the office, as if to make sure there was no one else there.

"I came to speak to you about old Mrs. Belden in Elm Street, No. 59," he began. "I went there this morning, and found she had had a stroke of paralysis. Her daughter begged me to go at once for Dr. Dale; that is why I am here; that is why I did not stop to ask if you were disengaged. I am too busy in the Master's service to observe all the niceties of social forms observed by you —"

"And some millions of other decent people!" interpolated the physician, cuttingly.

Welsh was his *bête noir* at all times, and his temper just now was excoriated by the recent incident.

As a valiant member of the church militant, Welsh struck back, and instantly, —

“And which you have been taught to expect by such tutors as Mr. Bell and the woman he is passing off as his sister —”

“*What!*” thundered Dale, quivering with rage and advancing toward the speaker.

The little figure in soiled threadbare black did not flinch. The watery, red-rimmed eyes did not quail before the blazing orbs that challenged him; he even smiled acridly.

“This show of indignation does you credit, Dr. Dale!” he sneered, “or it would if it were at all sincere. I suppose what men of your stamp call ‘honour’ obliges you to defend her, and as long as Bell is not jealous, it is no affair of mine.”

“Go!” whispered Dale.

His face was grayish-white and perfectly calm, but he seemed to have lost the power of speech. His lips did not move as the monosyllable left them. He pointed to the door with a steady hand.

Kate Meagley, whose very existence he had forgotten in this new crisis, looked on from the inner room. For the time she worshipped the man who had forced her to disgrace herself.

“He’d strike the little fool dead if ’t was n’t for his clerical coat,” she thought. “He is *magnificent!*”

Welsh had expected an onslaught of some sort, and braced himself to bear it like a Christian martyr who dares to suffer for the truth. Dale’s seeming apathy was a problem. He had heard that men of the world were different from this. He felt a certain relieved contempt for the doctor.

“Yes,” he replied sardonically, “I will go. I do not wonder that you were disposed to resent my honest words concerning your coadjutor’s mis—”

The speech ended in a gurgle.

Dale had put out one hand, seized him by the throat, crushing the dirty clerical collar into the unshaven neck, and had swung him clear of the floor. With the open palm of the other hand he struck Welsh's distorted face once — twice — thrice! Then, shaking him on the way until the lean arms and legs wobbled like those of a badly strung marionette, he bore the wriggling victim to the front porch and dropped him gently down the short flight of steps leading to the street.

Turning about without waiting to note the effect of the fall, he closed the door behind him, re-entered his office, went at once to a screened-off corner of the room, and washed his hands vigorously.

This done, he picked up his hat and a black satchel, preparatory to visiting paralytic Mrs. Belden.

He was half-way to the stricken woman's house before his head cleared, and he recollected that he had left Kate Meagley in his inner office.

The Middle Miss Meagley — her momentary excitement over the medico-clerical controversy giving place once more to the gnawing shame that devoured her — walked, as in a dream, from the deserted rooms and bent her steps mechanically toward the Folger house.

At any other time a scene such as she had witnessed between the two men would have sent her, hot-foot, through the town, beginning with her mother and sisters, regaling them and other choice spirits with the story, and shining in reflected glory as the sole spectator of the fray.

No better idea of her present state of mind could be given than by saying that the quarrel and Dale's attack had left her thoughts utterly. Those same thoughts were stretched upon the most terrible torture-apparatus known in all the annals of Pain, — the rack of Self-loathing.

That she, Kate Meagley, — most fastidious of five ultra-modest sisters; model (self-constituted) of Pit-vale femininity; Propriety's doughty champion — that *she* should have been guilty of an action which now luridly recurred to her as though it were the deed of an absolute and most objectionable stranger, — was an awful Horror.

It is natural, in moments of extreme self-contempt, to put out desperate hands and drag the nearest outsider down into the depths with us. Happy those of us who can go so far as to leave the hapless fallen vicarious sufferer writhing there, and ourselves rise to the brink, thence to glare down in disgust — or better still, in hatred — at him. If we can trace to him, by any tortuous course of logic, some part or lot in our misfortune, we are trebly comforted. Then loathing has another object, and no longer turns inward upon ourselves.

Kate Meagley, from solitary self-contempt, began, unconsciously at first, to shift the blame upon Egbert Dale. But for him this unspeakable Thing would not have been. He could have averted it — or when it happened could have given a different complexion to the incident, swollen in the retrospect into a calamity. He must have guessed in part — he must have foreseen!

What a brute he was — what a *cur* — to permit her thus to degrade herself! All the traditions of home and family mustered to the aid of the rising belief in herself as the prey of a wicked man's arts.

Lighter grew her self-hatred; fiercer burned the glow of malevolence toward the witness — and the cause — of her humiliation. She dug her nails into her palms as she walked; the murmur that broke from her tormented soul was a hiss, —

“Oh, to get even with him! to humble him as he has humbled me!”

Beautiful was lonely.

His mistress was writing letters, and for some occult reason objected to being kissed and having perfectly clean paws laid upon her lap while thus engaged.

John Bell, the next most desirable comrade, was out on pastoral visits, and had inexcusably forgotten to invite Beautiful to go with him. Dr. Dale, too, was absent. As a jack-at-a-pinch, the sedate physician was not amiss. Thomas Jefferson, under Mrs. Bowersox's ponderous guidance, was climbing the ladder of learning by means of a wretched little volume, entitled *Reading without Tears*, the blistered pages giving the name the lie direct. Mrs. Bowersox had mildly but firmly banished Beautiful from the nursery during this penitential hour, precedent having taught her that the versatile Jeff's mind would otherwise bend toward natural history rather than toward the book with the lying title.

Beautiful, temporarily robbed of human society, was thrown upon his own resources for entertainment. At first this did not seem such an evil case. He had espied in the garden a cat—a friendly cat with whom he was usually upon comfortable terms—and dashed at her melodramatically, barking with reverberant ferocity, ruffling up the golden-red hair all along his spine, as was his custom when on murder bent.

Pussy had bided his coming valorously, in the middle of a grassy plat, had scratched his nose with virulence utterly uncalled for, and then fled, in simulated dread and with bloated tail, up a tree, from the branches of which she peered down upon the irate dog in hypocritical and surpriseful reproach.

Balked of his natural sport, Beautiful, after barking as long as the occasion seemed to demand, wandered off in quest of fresh adventures.

He feigned for a while to see lurking dangers in outhouses and shrubbery, walking past them on the tips of his toes, back bristling and tail rigidly horizontal, the while emitting deep, threatening growls for the benefit of theoretical hidden marauders.

This diversion palling upon him, he went back to the front porch, where he flung himself weariedly on the door-mat. From this vantage-ground his eyes could sweep the road as far as Presto Corner, and up and down the hill into the town.

Suddenly his feathery tail arose and struck the porch-floor with a resounding thump, repeated several times with emphasis. His ears were cocked; the light of welcome shone in his big topaz eyes. Along the road, evidently bound for the farmhouse, plodded a woman in a fawn-coloured costume. Beautiful did not wholly approve of the Middle Miss Meagley. He was far from numbering her among his nearest and dearest. Still a visit from any one was a boon to a bored dog.

He writhed down the steps to meet her as she entered the grounds. Then the instinct of hospitality asserted itself. He had neglected to get his customary votive offering. A rapid and dismayed survey of the premises failed to provide stick or stone of convenient size, or so much as an eligible dead leaf. He sped back into the hallway, through the door which was ajar, in quest of an overshoe or a hat. The place was as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard. He was on the brink of despair, when he saw the corner of a yellow envelope projecting over the edge of the hall table. Springing up, he caught it in his mouth and rushed out in time to intercept Miss Meagley in the gravel walk.

The girl paid scant heed to the greeting of the transmogrified Marquis. She glanced listlessly at him, said dully "Good dog!" and was passing on,

when the envelope in his mouth arrested her eyes. It looked like a telegram. She stooped to disengage it from Beautiful's jaws.

"A telegram, and not opened!" she said, half aloud. "It must have been left in the hall by one of those careless messenger boys. I'll put it back."

The envelope was slightly torn by the jerk that had wrested it from the dog's teeth. Kate read the address: "*Dr. Egbert Dale.*"

She glanced furtively around. Nobody was in sight. Screened by a clump of evergreens, she pulled the folded message through the tear in the envelope. She was in no haste. She had come on an errand from Ruth Folger to Mrs. Bowersox — unwillingly — but she dared not provoke remark by refusing. There was no risk of finding Dr. Dale at home in the middle of the afternoon. She would have a look at the despatch, tuck it back through the rent, and throw the blame where it belonged, upon the meddlesome, spoiled household pet.

She read the message. When she reached the signature, her jaw dropped from sheer amazement. Then it closed with a sharp click; an odd light gleamed in her eyes.

"I'll keep this!" she said deliberately, thrusting envelope and despatch into the bosom of her gown.

CHAPTER XVIII

“SO HELP ME, GOD!”

“And a little child shall lead them.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON was under suspicion.

His mother had discovered, at breakfast time, that Dr. Dale had not had a telegram she had laid on the hall table at three o'clock of the preceding afternoon. Since neither Anneke nor Gretchen had touched it, it “stood to reason,” according to the maternal logic, that Jeff had made away with it.

Without intermitting his breakfast, the small sinner hearkened to accusation and exhortation in stolid composure, until Myrtle Bell offered a disclaimer:

“The wind may have blown it to the floor and out of the door, Mrs. Bowersox; I *don't* think Jeff would say he had not taken it if he had!”

“I wish I could think so, Miss Bell! But children are not always as careful to speak the truth as they should be, poor little dears! Nor, for that matter, are some grown people. I have said, a thousand times, if I've said it once, that if there is one sin I dread as I do rank poison, it is lying, or trifling the leastest little bit with the truth.”

“Think, Jeff!” said Myrtle, persuasively, to her *protégé*. “Did you play with any papers — any letters or envelopes — yesterday? What were you doing after you finished your afternoon reading, until you were called in to your supper?”

The child's great blue eyes were introspective; a look of intensest solemnity stole into them and over

his cherubic visage. He put his hands into his lap and under the table as he had been trained to do when grace was said.

"I fink," he enunciated slowly, — "I 'most fink I must have burned it up when I 'sploded my Wufe well in the garden. That was when I burned my fingers," holding up a pink thumb and forefinger, each tipped with a round white blister.

"Jeff!" His mother elevated holy hands of horror. "How often must I tell you never to touch a letter that does n't belong to you? And none of them ever do! And how naughty it is for little boys, poor dears! to play with matches? And do you know it is *awfully* wrong to burn a telegram? There's no telling what may happen to Dr. Dale because of your meddling. Some poor, dear woman, or, for all you know, a poor dear little boy no bigger than you, may be badly burned with oil, or very sick, or something; and they could n't get the doctor when they sent for him, and poor, dear Dr. Dale not knowing anything about it, because a naughty boy took the telegram off the table where his poor mother laid it, never dreaming, poor thing! that her son would n't mind what he had been told.

"I declare," to the party at large, "it is harder every day I live for me to realise that child! I don't see where he gets his meddlesome tricks from!"

Jeff's lip quivered; he swallowed hard to get the upper hand of a nasty knot in his windpipe. He must choose between a cry and a swagger.

He swaggered.

"Oh, well!" in the most mannish tone he could manufacture, one that broke at the end in spite of his pluck, "I fink, maybe, they 'll send another telegrand. I would n't wowwy if I was you, Dr. Dale. Mamma, may I please have one more cake? With a good deal of syrup on it?"

“Imperturbability?” queried John, of the two diverted listeners.

“Bluff!” answered Dr. Dale, laconically.

And Myrtle, — “The shower is not far off. Change the subject, or lift language above his comprehension. Is it likely that serious inconvenience will result from the transgression?”

Dale shook his head.

“Perhaps yes; perhaps no! The juvenile philosopher may be right in supposing that the message will be duplicated. If nothing reaches me by noon, I will call at the telegraph office and ask for a copy. I have not time to see to it this morning; I am fearfully rushed with work. Will you excuse me, Mrs. Bowersox?”

“I’ll go to the office for you,” said John.

In rising from table the doctor patted his friend’s shoulder gratefully.

“No, thank you, old man! It is probably of more consequence to the sender than to me, so he’ll try again. And a doctor’s telegrams are sometimes confidential. Don’t expect me to dinner, Mrs. Bowersox. Good-morning to you all!”

The sun was down, and Mrs. Bowersox was lighting the hall-lamp when a latch-key clicked in the door, and Dr. Dale appeared. As he took off his hat she saw that he was pale and evidently weary, but his smile was pleasant; he spoke cheerfully.

“Good-evening!” he said. “Has Jeff gone to bed? And in how many pieces?”

“He’s been in bed this half-hour, doctor. You’re very kind to ask after him. I’ve kept his sin well before him all day. There’s no telling what would have happened to him if Miss Bell had n’t taken his part and begged me — when he was n’t by, of course — to let up on him. You may depend upon his not touching any more of your telegrams.”

A queer something that was neither shadow nor gleam flitted over the doctor's face. He moved toward the nursery door at the back of the hall.

"May I look in upon him and speak to him if he is not asleep?"

"Surely!"

Myrtle had heard Mrs. Bowersox leave the nursery and go off in the direction of the kitchen after Jeff was put to bed. Then she seized the opportunity to pay him one of the surreptitious visits in which both delighted. She had discovered, long ago, that the boy often lay awake in the dark for an hour or more after the word had gone forth that he must "go to sleep like a good boy, and not think."

The thinking was what kept the large brain active when lumpish urchins of his age were snoring. Myrtle had found him, once and again, staring into gloom peopled for him with fantastic shapes, his feet and hands cold, his head hot.

The scenes attendant upon the reopening of the oil-well were still vivid in his mind. He had dreams of his own, based upon what he had seen and heard, and, as he had let slip under the weight of the accusation brought against him at breakfast-time, had begun operations that might lead on to fortune and such fame as was awarded to Mr. Folger by the hurraing multitude.

He "had not meant to burn Dr. Dale's telegrand," he now confessed to Myrtle. "I s'pose I must have been finking of somefing else when I tooked it off the table, for I don't 'member it at all. But I did start the fire to make b'lieve 'splode the Wufe with a piece of yellow paper, 'most like a letter. I hope Dr. Dale won't be angry with me for *vevvy* long. I *like* Dr. Dale!"

A long-drawn sigh said how much.

"He is not angry at all," responded the comforter.

"He is too good and too kind to be angry at what he knows was an accident. He knows you did not mean to do wrong. You can show him that you are really sorry by being more careful another time.

"Now — what do you say to getting into my lap and letting me sing to you for a little while?"

Thus it came about that Egbert Dale, on the threshold of the nursery, his hand upon the door which was unbolted, and yielded slightly to his touch, heard a soft voice singing within, and paused until the hymn was done.

"Safe in the Hollow of Thy Hand,
I lay me down to sleep :
The Hand that sifts the stars like sand,
And measures out the deep.

"In darkest folds the night may fall,
The wind and rain may beat ;
My Father's Hand is in them all :
My slumber shall be sweet.

"Should haunting dreams my soul affright,
A grim and evil band,
These words shall put their hosts to flight, —
'The Hollow of His Hand.'

"Father! through all my nights and days,
At home, on sea, or land,
Thee will I trust, this be my praise, —
The Hollow of Thy Hand."

The man stood without the door, his head bowed reverently, the light of a great peace upon his face. As the singing ceased, he pressed his hand hard against his eyes. When he had knocked he entered the room with lifted head and light step.

"I thought it was Jack, when I called out, 'Come in!' so gayly," said Myrtle, glancing around.

She sat in a low rocker before the fire, Jeff,

muffled in a crimson shawl Dale knew to be hers, in her arms, the flossy curls rumpled against her shoulder, the round cheek laid to hers.

"Would you have said, 'Stay out!' or only spoken 'Come in,' sadly?" smiled Dale. "Now that I am in — if upon false pretences — may I sit down while I say something to our little friend here?"

He moved a chair to her side and swept Jeff's face with a gentle finger. Caress and tone were alike soothing.

"I looked in to tell you, my boy, that your burning the telegram yesterday did no harm. I had another to-day from the same person that straightened everything out. I wouldn't make a business of burning letters if I were you. But it's all right about this one, so we'll say no more about it. Shake hands!"

Jeff thrust a chubby fist from the crimson depths of the shawl, and heaved a satisfied sigh.

"Then there wasn't anybody sick or dead you could have helped if you had got it sooner?"

"There wasn't anybody sick or dead I could have helped if I had got it sooner!" repeating the words as the child had said them, and with increasing gentleness.

"*She*" — Jeff raised loving eyes to the face above him — "said you were too good and kind to be angry with anybody. I fought so, too!"

A burning billow of colour leaped to Myrtle's cheeks; her eyes sank under the sudden fire darted into them from orbs that met them in the surprise of the unguarded instant. For that instant she was speechless, and deaf to everything but the alarm of her heart.

Jeff complicated matters.

"Your heart goes bumpety-bump!" showing his pretty teeth in a laugh and pressing his ear more

closely to her chest. “Dr. Dale showed me where my heart is. One day, when I tumbled off a hay-wagon and cwacked my collar’s bone. He listened at my heart.”

Had the averted eyes been raised just then, Myrtle would have been chilled and repelled at the expression that transformed the visage but just now so warm and bright. The spasm of disgustful memory passed as swiftly as it had come.

“I am glad she thinks so well of me,” kindly and naturally. Then, in a different tone “I do not deserve it. Nevertheless, I am grateful — and proud! Don’t lift him!” as the girl moved to lay her burden down.

He took the boy in his strong arms, and put him into the crib without removing the shawl. When he raised himself Myrtle saw that the fringe was tangled about one of his cuff-buttons and started forward impulsively to disengage it. Before either of them could anticipate his intention, Jeff put an arm about the neck of each, and drew them down to him, kissing first one, then the other.

“You are *awful* good to me, Dr. Dale!” Releasing the doctor as he said it, he clasped Myrtle more fondly.

“Oh, Miss Bell! you are the sweetest, prettiest lady in the whole world! Don’t *you* love her, Dr. Dale?”

The answer was prompt, serious, fervent.

“Yes, my boy! Now, good-night, and no dreams!” He patted the curly head, and went out without word or look for the third person present.

Myrtle lingered in the nursery until she was positive that Dr. Dale had gone up to his room, then coming out, saw him standing at the hall window near the foot of the staircase, his hands behind him, looking out into the night.

Softly as she tried to flit by him, he heard her and turned.

"May I speak to you for a few minutes?"

She bent her head in silent acquiescence, and he followed her into the Bells' parlour.

Lamp and fire let him see the downdropped eyes, the pulsing carmine of her cheeks, the sweet gravity of her mouth. She was as much superior to coquetry as he to idle gallantry, at this, the supreme moment of their lives. When he took her hand she did not resist.

"I am here to answer Jeff's question more fully and strongly," he began without preamble. "I do love you with all my heart and soul and strength. Better than my life — better than my soul! So help me, GOD!"

Her hand lay passively in his, the scent of the knot of purple violets in her belt, drooping in the fire-heat, mingled with the breath of the roses in the bowl on a table near by; the room was as still as a death-chamber but for the faint crackling of the fire, while one could have counted thirty.

Then the downdropped lids flew wide; a flood of laughing, loving light — radiance, as from the opening heavens — was poured into his eyes and soul.

"The truth — the whole truth — and nothing but the truth?" asked the girl, archly.

"So help me, GOD!" was the solemn iteration.

"Nevertheless" — she was saying saucily, when they had waited a good forty-five minutes for "dear old Jack" to come in — "all this is horribly unconventional, and diametrically opposed to articles and by-laws of the Etiquette of Courtship. To address a well-bred young lady of quality — and I am *that*, although you may not believe it! — anywhere but under the roof of her parents or guardian — Bless

me!” in comic dismay, “Jack *is* my legal guardian, isn’t he?”

“Give me credit for bearing that fact in mind,” rejoined Dale, with admirable sedateness. “I hope *your* mind is easier now that you know the proprieties have been conserved?”

“No!” rallying bravely. “This is Mrs. Bowersox’s house. Everything that has been said and done in the last hour is null and void, and will have to be done and said over again at a proper time and place.”

“With all my heart! but when and where? I thought you said to-day that your uncle and aunt are *en route* for California. When they get back, they will go to a New York hotel. Complications are on the increase.

“As I said, I am more than willing to go all over the ground again. Suppose I begin by rehearsing it to John? I hear his step on the porch.”

Myrtle sprang up in a panic.

“Go and meet him!” she panted. “Take him into his study — or to your room — or anywhere! and tell him whatever you like! Mind! if Jack should object —”

“Well?” Dale paused, his hand on the lock of the door, a laugh in eyes that were no longer pensive or wistful. “Should Jack object — He is taking off his overshoes in the hall. Speak quickly or I cannot intercept him!”

“Then — I shall have no appetite for supper!” and she fairly pushed him out.

John Bell heard this threat when the rest of the story had been told, and the supper-bell tinkled in the hall.

He laughed — a little. He had worn a sober but not an unsympathetic countenance throughout the relation which Dale condensed into fewer

phrases than would have sufficed most men in the circumstances.

"I have no inclination to 'object,'" John said sincerely. "It is late in the day for me to begin to tell you what I think of you, and how I feel toward you, my dear fellow. You also know, as well as any outsider can, what my only sister is to me. Frankly, there is but one shadow of doubt upon my mind. I never ask questions as to another man's business. But you have made this mine, because it is my sister's. You spoke once—less than two months ago—of some girl in Tennessee."

The big fellow was blushing and stammering as if the secret were his, avoiding the other's eyes as he tried to put the objection into words at once delicate and direct.

Dale laid an arm over the broad shoulders; his voice was never more sonorous and musical.

"John Bell! my dearest friend! Could I look you in the eyes if I could not offer your sister a clean hand and an undivided heart?"

"That was a sick man's blunder. This!—give me a chance to prove what a sane man's love is!"

CHAPTER XIX

“LOVE! MY LOVE!”

“Dear Heart! the cruel road was long,
And endless gloomed the night,
Till you merged sorrow into song,
Till your eyes brought me light.
Ah! dear, dear eyes to guide me on! Touch of a tender hand!
Shadow of Rock! and Cool of Stream! in a dry and thirsty land.”

THE reopening of “The Ruth” turned a new and garish page in the history of the oil industry.

As the winds from all quarters of the heavens rush into the vacuum made by flame, the wildfire excitement of that memorable day brought a flight of adventurers from every point of the compass into the valley where oil flowed as a river. Town-lots were sold at gilt-edged prices; architects and contractors laboured, day and night, upon specifications; new gin-mills flew the devil’s flag at a dozen corners; blacklegs and chemical blondes drove their accursed trades with the gullible and the vicious, whose left hands speedily squandered the money made by the right. The money-making fever rioted in the veins of the tramp population until all sense of honesty and decency went to the dogs, and usually the victims of the craze followed it.

Ralph Folger was, of course, the hero of the day. Bushels of cards entreating the honour of personal interviews, and barrels of letters begging for money in sums varying from five dollars to five thousand, kept servants and secretaries busy. Ralph would not look at one of them. Firm as granite and cool

as snow, he reserved to himself the right of doing what he would with his own; took counsel with neither speculator nor lawyer as to the manner of increasing and dispensing his riches.

A dozen lots owned by the Folgers in the heart of the town were to be thrown into a public park; another Club House was to be erected near the railway station in one of the worst of the bad neighbourhoods of Pitvale. More could hardly be said in dispraise of the locality. Ruth's pet scheme of a day-nursery was to be carried out with as little delay as was compatible with stability; a whole row of tenement-shanties was swept away in a week to make room for another block of model cottages. A line of electric street cars was projected, and Sandy McAlpin's dream of substituting natural gas for that manufactured from coal was made a practical possibility by the formation of a Natural Gas Company, Ralph Folger, President.

A cheque for five thousand dollars was sent to Rev. Cotton Mather Welsh by Ralph and Ruth Folger, with the request that it might be used in finishing and furnishing the barn-like Mission Chapel going up in the immediate vicinity of The Oilman's Rest.

The cheque was enclosed in a gracious note from Ruth, expressive of her brother's interest and hers in the Mission. It was acknowledged in as few words as would inform Miss R. Folger that every cent of the donation would be appropriated to the purpose specified in Miss F.'s communication.

John Bell was with Ruth when Mr. Welsh's letter was brought to her. She read it over twice, — once silently, then aloud to her friend.

"I can't understand why he should take such a tone!" she said, raising puzzled, sorrowful eyes to John. "We meant so well!"

John took the letter from her, read it, and creased it into small folds while he talked.

“Don’t lay it to heart!” he counselled. “The small crusader belongs to the not-small number of human things who squirm under a sense of personal obligation. It galls him to receive a favour, and he deludes himself into the fancy that he cancels it by ignoring it.”

“But I *told* him Ralph and I felt it to be a privilege to give to such a cause!”

“Of course you did!” as he might console a grieving child. “If he do not choose to believe the truth, what does it matter? The motive in giving and the manner of it are the main thing. If we get no return from those for whom we work, the duty of working and giving remains unaltered.”

He was preaching to himself more than to his parishioner. The plait between his level brows was oftener and longer there than Myrtle or Ruth liked to see. He was away from home a great deal nowadays, and frequently out late at night. Sometimes Sandy McAlpin or Carl Nolting accompanied him. Sometimes, but more rarely, Dr. Dale or Ralph Folger shared his beat or vigil. Generally he walked alone, fearlessly, although known by his height and figure to every rough who had been two days in town. He had been seen to enter The Oilman’s Rest at one o’clock in the morning and to come out, half carrying, half leading a man who could not walk. He beat up recruits for the baseball nine; for the newly organized Choral Union; for the Bachelors’ Club; for Sunday-school and The Men’s Bible Class taught by himself. He visited drunken husbands, and talked with wives driven desperate by the cruelty of husbands; he and his co-workers gathered homeless children and vagrant women from the streets and gave them shelter

and food and a chance to get back to safety and friends.

Sandy McAlpin told Ruth Folger, in one of the conferences over the "Inasmuch Library," to which she summoned him now oftener than of yore, that "one line of a hymn was aye singing itself in his head whenever he spied the Dominie making his rounds, —

"Seeking to save! seeking to save!"

In outward seeming Egbert Dale and Myrtle Bell were in the heart of the maelstrom of strife, of warring evil and valiant good, of the lowest and the holiest passions mortality has experience of in this sphere.

Dr. Dale had never been so busy before, had never thrown himself with such energy into the work crowded hard upon his hands. Myrtle, under her brother's direction, and as Ruth Folger's agent, was a ministering angel in many an abode of misery, a willing helper in charitable enterprises maintained by the women of church and community. Her ready tact, her gay spirits, her fulness of sympathy and the winsomeness of manner and speech that were a peculiar and gracious gift, cleared a path for her wherever she went. Poor women confided in her; little children flocked about her; the rudest of the men she met in her walks and visits paid her the tribute of a respectful demeanour and address.

"What have Una and her lion been about to-day?" asked Dale one evening in the *tête-à-tête* which they kept up the pleasant fiction of calling "waiting for Jack to come in."

Poor Jack! whose comings and goings were now as uncertain as they had once been methodical. The chances were even that they would have to go into supper without him, although Mrs. Bowersox

would hold back the meal as long as she dared run the risk of culinary ruin.

“As for Miss Bell and the doctor, it was a miracle that the poor dears were not starved every night — waiting sometimes until half-past eight without a mouthful — they were *that* loath to sit down to table without Mr. Bell — poor man!”

The brace of poor dears meanwhile, fed as upon heavenly manna, recked not of the lateness of the hour, of over-done meats, over-boiled coffee, and fallen muffins. Whether they were apart or together, the catholicon of Love, like a viewless atmosphere, was around them. The overwrought physician had grown ten years younger in ten days; the girl who had been comely with freshness of youth and high spirits, was beautiful in other eyes as well as in those feasting themselves this evening upon her brilliant bloom, the spirited play of feature and expression, the tender light shining through all from a heart aglow with love and happiness.

By common consent John was their only confidant. The expediency of secrecy was obvious.

“That much,” Myrtle had said decidedly, “is due to the proprieties which Egbert takes to himself credit for ‘conserving.’ (The phrase is his patent.) If the gossips get hold of the truth, I shall be obliged to leave the house — or he will. By all means let us go on with our ‘conservation,’ which must not be confounded with conservatism. *That* is not in this little affair! I shall go northward in April, when uncle and aunt come back to the East. Dr. Dale will follow me, and after a few days return to Pitvale, the poorer for the purchase of a modest diamond ring, as befits his moderate means, and the sisterhood of gossips, with the Meagleys as faglewomen, will ‘take up the wondrous tale.’”

“*Voilà* the triumph of conservation! As Dickens says of Mrs. Fielding’s gloves, worn while she was eating, ‘Let us be genteel, or die!’”

Among the countless subjects upon which she and her lover were a unit in opinion was that they were far happier for keeping their beautiful secret to themselves. Mrs. Bowersox, albeit aunt-in-law to five notorious scandalmongers, and sister-in-law to their disappointed, acrimonious mother, had mastered the art of minding her own business. She talked a great deal, and apparently aimlessly. In reality, her prattle was as guileless as that of a yearling baby.

“Artfully artless!” Kate Meagley had said of it to her sisters, after doing some vigorous and ineffectual pumping. “That woman pushes truth-telling to a vice, yet you cannot draw what she does not choose to tell out of her with a corkscrew.”

The thumbscrew could not have forced the worthy soul to equivocate, nor the rack wrung from her what she thought belonged rightfully to another. If she had suspicions and hopes of her own relative to the handsome pair whose behaviour in her sight was as frankly unembarrassed as it had been within a week after their first meeting, she veiled these under a motherly regard for their physical comfort and grateful appreciation of their goodness to her boy. As for her husband, he did not count. He was one of the men who are thrown into society, as expletives into conversation that would be quite as strong and more elegant without them. Looking at Joachim’s nothing-in-particular face, and hearkening to his insipid platitudes, one entered into the difficulty his spouse had in “realising Jeff.”

The plighted pair made much, in these halcyon days, of the cherub who had enacted the *Deus ex machinâ* in Egbert’s wooing. The doctor took him

along in fine weather when he drove into the country or about town upon professional calls; Jeff and Beautiful accompanied Miss Bell in her walks. The little fellow was very dear to both of them. They appreciated his mother's discretion, and were grateful for Joachim's obtuseness, and were happy with all their might.

“There is all the difference between an announced engagement and — ours! that there is between the hard gloss of a nectarine and the down of a ripe peach,” Myrtle had said, earlier in the waiting hour, “or the same peach when washed and scrubbed. I am glad we can enjoy our fruit *au naturel* yet awhile —

“My dear boy! *you* will be a kiln-dried peach if you stay there any longer!”

Dale had thrown himself upon the tiger-skin rug that had been one of her gifts to her brother. He was in the hottest glow of the fire; his head was against the elbow of her chair, one arm lay across her lap.

“I was frozen stiff this afternoon, and will need an hour's baking at least to take the frost out of my bones. I am never too hot. I have Southern blood in my veins, you know.”

“Jack told me that your parents were English, but that a remote ancestor was Italian. There are Greek lines in your face — some of the best lines there —” tracing his profile playfully with one finger. “Your eyes have the softness, the depth, sometimes the fire of the Italian. Your manner to most people — not to me — is that of the high-bred Englishman. Some day, when you are in the humour for story-telling, you will give me the romance of your life.”

“Do you recollect the needy knife-grinder and his ‘Story? Lord bless you, sir! I have none!’” said

Dale, lazily. "I am too comfortable just now to set about doing anything. I am altogether content

'Not to be doing, but to *be!*'

I want to be talked to, not to talk."

And then he put the question, "What have Una and her lion been about to-day?"

"The lion—look at him, Egbert! He actually knows we are talking of him! If he goes on increasing in intelligence, it will not be safe to talk where he is," cried Myrtle, in pretended alarm.

Beautiful had raised his bronze-red body from the floor, on the other side of his mistress, and laid his muzzle upon her knee, his eyes, golden in the fire-gleam, winking lovingly at her.

Dale turned his lazy head to find the dog's within two inches of it, and laughed.

"A study in comparative physiognomy for you," he said, pulling one of the silky ears, "and, I shrewdly suspect, not to my advantage. But I am not jealous of you yet, old boy! She has n't said that you have a Greek profile, nor called you a 'peach;' that is, not in my hearing. There's no telling what flatteries she may heap upon you in the long days when I am off putting broken bodies together, and saving lives that are of no value to the owners—or to anybody else.

"It's a comfort to know that the lion goes 'pad! pad! pad!' at Una's side in Pig Alley and in back streets that ought to have worse names."

Raising himself to his knees, he took the dog's face between his hands and studied the splendid eyes, eloquent with the dumb agony of wistfulness it makes a man's heart ache to see.

"You will take care of her for me—won't you, Beautiful? You deserve your name, if ever a dog did. Being a dog, you can be charitable to creat-

ures that are not as honest and straightforward and single-minded and faithful as you. Tell her—for she says she can guess what you are thinking of—tell her that men are a bad lot, and that I have been no exception to the rest. That her sweet, clean imagination (that's one thing dogs haven't got—imagination!) cannot know how bad I could and would be, but for the hope of having her for my very own some day. Tell her that she can make and keep me good,—she, and nothing else. And when she is quite sure of all that—you will know it by her eyes, I always do!—say that before that blessed 'some day'—some time when she has eight or ten hours to spare, and a whole heartful of sympathy, and a tank as big as the moat around 'The Ruth,' brimming with womanly charity, at call—I shall tell her the whole history of my life (but there was no romance in it until I saw her!) from A to Z, with an Amperzand thrown in for good measure.

“Why, Beautiful! that's a tear on my hand, and from an angel's eyes!”

With a gesture of passionate adoration he raised both arms and drew the face, shining through a rain of happy tears, down to his.

The blissful silence was broken by a diversion at once startling and absurd.

Beautiful, seeing himself swept aside as a forfeited pawn from a chess-board, withdrew from rug and fire, the offended hauteur of his earlier incarnation in full possession, and stalked majestically to a distant window in the most dismal part of the room. There, regardless of the fact that the outer shutters were closed, he arose upon his hind legs, his forepaws on the sill, and feigned to stare intently into the garden, until such time as he considered the love-making ought to be over. Becoming impatient at the variance of opinions on this head, he elevated his nose

vertically, and emitted a blended whine and howl, so shrill of pitch, so doleful in meaning, that Myrtle clapped her hands to her ears and Dale looked around, half laughing, half angry.

“For heaven’s sake, stop that! Come here, sir!”

As the dog obeyed, reluctant and melancholy, the doctor drew him toward him gently by the ears.

“His eyes are positively green with jealousy!” he cried. “With dangerous red lights in them! See here, old fellow! be philosophical and submit to the inevitable. You look as if you would like to do me an ill turn. Don’t you know a friend when you see him? What do you take me for? A kidnapper? or a sneak thief?”

Myrtle interposed, —

“Give him time! The Marquis has antiquated ideas as to *les convenances*, — notions of his own as to the conservation of proprieties. There! dear!” kissing the beauty spot between the imploring eyes, “I love you just as much as ever — and a little more!

“Did I ever tell you” — beginning to laugh at the recollection — “of the fright he cost me the week after you gave him to me? You know he has what Jack calls ‘his cat-er-war-ling yell’ because it is never used unless he sees a cat. It is something terrific, — a grand, intolerable combination of screech-owl, panther, and hyæna. I had never heard it, — no cats happening to be about, — when, about dusk on the evening of that day, I was sitting here, feeling a bit lonely for Jack. I did n’t know you well enough then to suspect that I might be missing you too. There came a tap at the door. ‘Come in!’ said I, without moving, for I supposed it was Mrs. Bowersox, when enter Miss Kate Meagley, come to pay her first call.

“Beautiful gave his ear-splitting caterwaul, and sprang at her. I caught him by the collar just in

time to hold him back from her throat, and had to box his ears hard before he would be quiet. Miss Kate nearly fainted upon the chair nearest the door. She thought me ‘very brave to keep such a creature about, but I impressed her as a person of phenomenal nerve.’ Beautiful does n’t like to hear me talk of that afternoon,” stroking the abashed head he sank upon his paws. “He knows now how foolish it was to mistake a nice young lady in a silk-and-cloth ‘costume’ and white gloves stitched with lavender, for a sleek, sly, treacherous feline *animal*. If I were to pronounce *cat* in that energetic tone, he would be up and at the door to look out for one of his natural enemies.”

“Good dog! sensible dog!” said Dale, heartily. “Give us your paw! The Marquis is an authority upon metempsychosis. A fascinating study that! but not without danger to the unguarded learner.”

“Egbert—” hesitatingly.

“Say on, my darling!”

“We—you and I—don’t gossip, you know—”

“Never! Allah be praised!”

“But would you mind telling me why Ruth Folger does n’t see through that woman? The one is all frankness, purity, and goodness; the other—”

“Don’t try to put it into words, love! I know her better than you do. Miss Folger may know her better than both of us put together. I incline to think, however, that she has faith in Miss Meagley’s professions of devotion to herself, and will not dwell upon faults she cannot help seeing. You may not know that both of them fell into my hands the night they were rescued from the raft? Miss Folger was frightfully injured; Miss Meagley very slightly, although she was prostrated by the shock and by the almost certainty that the rest of her family were drowned. At daybreak Miss Folger begged to see

her. I was afraid the excitement would be too much for her, and said so. She insisted, and we brought Miss Meagley to her bedside. I could not leave my patient for fear she would sink without continual care, and I had to witness the interview. Then and there Miss Folger promised that the orphan should have a home with her, and a sister's loving care so long as they both should live — or so long as Miss Meagley could be happy with her.

“You know how Miss Folger keeps her pledges, and with all her faults and foibles, I believe Miss Meagley to be sincerely attached to her benefactress.”

Something in his tone — a cadence of reserve, slight, but impassive — dissuaded further catechising.

Myrtle's hesitation in continuing the discussion verged upon timidity so foreign to her temperament and habit that she shook it off impatiently.

“Do you know,” glancing brightly at his grave face, “I was mortally jealous of Kate Meagley once?”

His smile was incredulous; the slight shake of the head declined to admit the possibility. He raised one little hand to his lips and held it there for an instant.

“I was!” persisted Myrtle. “The night we dined with the Folgers after what Jeff calls the ‘Splosion of the Wufe.’ You two were so confidential at table, and later in the evening in the drawing-room, that I had a most disagreeable sensation in the region of the heart. I had never seen a symptom of the flirt in you before, and the experience was n't pleasant. Neither you nor the Middle Miss Meagley had eyes or ears for anybody else — for me, least of all — or so I fancied —

“Oh, Egbert! don't look so solemn! You frighten me!”

He was holding her hands fast and reading her eyes with his; every feature was earnest and fixed.

“Dear!” he said, presently, tenderly and seriously. “Am I demanding too much of you when I say that you must trust me through and through, however appearances may set against me? This is but one of many instances when you may see and hear things to puzzle you, and which I cannot explain at once to your satisfaction. Some of them I may never be able to explain. But I am—I shall be faithful to you through all, and in spite of everything.”

She had slipped one hand from his grasp and now laid it over his mouth. Her cheeks glowed; her eyes were bright.

“As if I *could* doubt you! Not another syllable—or we may quarrel in dead earnest. All the Kate Meagleys that ever lived are not worth one sad thought or word of yours—or mine.

“Now I shall go to the piano, and charm away the dark spirit.”

“It is already exorcised—and forever! But your music is always a joy.

“The rose-leaf upon the full cup,” he subjoined, passing a fond hand over her head, when she was seated at the piano. “The figure is trite. The reality is a glorious novelty—to me!”

He went back to the arm-chair set for him every evening at the corner of the hearth.

Just so he had sat and listened to her playing on the bleak evening—could it be only two months ago?—when the piano was brought home.

Just so—in seeming! A slow smile of ineffable content, of fulness of joy he could not have uttered, illumined his face; delicious languor, that had in it naught of weariness, stole over him. These were the green pastures, these the still waters of the Eden he had never thought to enter. The rippling music was like the flow of the River of Life.

They had had other twilight hours together, when

she had played and he had listened, and the two had dreamed silently and aloud. Something set this apart for them, even then, as the perfect pearl of calm delight, — a season that was to be wrought into the pattern of their lives, to become an integral part of themselves.

“Sing!” murmured Dale, by and by, “‘Between the Lights.’”

It was an especial favourite with Myrtle. But, as she told him the first time he heard it, she chose her audience carefully when she sang it. She had not let him hear it until they were betrothed. She had never rendered it with such exquisite tenderness, such a passion of pathos, as she breathed into it to-night: —

“Love! my Love! the sunset splendour
Left the world an hour ago;
The maiden moon, all shy and slender,
Swooning in the fervid glow.
'Neath curtains drawn, the earth is listing
The wooing sibilants of the sea;
O'er land and wave, to keep our trysting,
Your constant spirit speeds to me.

“Love! my Love! at twilight musing,
Apart and lone, save for your dream,
Memory Past and Present fusing
Into one swift, shining stream:
Leagues by hundreds numbered parted
From eyes wan with watching vain;
You, O leal and single-hearted!
Answer, throb for throb, my pain.

“Love! my Love! weird fancies thronging, —
As the south winds crisp the sea; —
Hope and dreading, joy and longing,
Have their minor tone for me.
Yours may be GOD'S calm Forever,
Safe from touch or jar of Fate,
Far as star-sown depths can sever
From me who expect and wait.

“Love! my Love! in purple drifting,
Summer dusk the valley fills;
To the bending skies uplifting
Reverent brows, rise altared hills.
By the meaning hush of even,
By the mirrored deep in deep —
Be your bourn or earth or heaven,
I know our promised tryst you keep!”

Before Dale knew that the singer had left the piano-stool she had stolen noiselessly behind him and dropped a kiss upon his hair.

“Love! my Love!” she whispered.

CHAPTER XX

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

“Alas! how easily things go wrong!
A word unsung in a lover’s song,
And there comes a mist and a blinding rain,
And life is never the same again.”

UNA and her lion fared forth, bright and early, next morning.

A house had been engaged as a temporary day-nursery, pending the erection of the substantial building planned by Ruth Folger. A canvass of districts wherein women lived who made the family living or eked out their husband’s wages by “going out for the day,” to wash, clean, or sew, was arranged by the working sisterhood of John Bell’s church. Certain streets and byways on the skirts of the town, where rents were cheaper than in thickly settled neighbourhoods, were assigned, at her own request, to the pastor’s sister.

“I am fond of walking,” she said. “The distance is a recommendation, not an objection, and the women who live there are just the sort who need the benefits of the nursery. My laundress is one of them, and there are several others who, I know, come regularly into Pitvale to work. They must leave their babies at home with neighbours, or with older children. I shall be glad to have the privilege of telling them that the little things will be better cared for if they let us have them.”

There had been heavy rains up the valley, and a sudden rise of temperature had melted the mountain

snows. The creek — usually a tame, tortuous affair that took its time in attending to its regular business, and never concerned itself with the affairs of others — looked like a convulsed yellow serpent, as it tore between high banks, overflowed low shores, and bit wickedly at fences and houses built incautiously near its normal limits. The meadows were black with wet, the soaked hills were sullen under a bluish-slaty sky, crossed at languid intervals by gray wreaths of cloud.

As Myrtle paused on the top of a hill to the north of the town to note effects that suggested a world in second mourning, she saw that, by some peculiar law of refraction, the motley-hued clump of villas beyond the intervening depression seemed to be less than half their real distance from her. The main town was wrapped in dreary shadows; the flags upon the Club House and in the grounds of the Folger mansion clung sluggishly to the poles; the red, white, and blue were sharp dashes of colour in the general dulness of tint. The odour of oil was all-pervasive and pungent; the shriek of a locomotive two miles away was as clearly audible as the rumble of traffic in the streets below, and the puffing of the hundred engines drawing oil from the bosom of the sullen hills.

While the young lady was remarking the variations from the ordinary aspect of the landscape, she heard a shrill shout behind her that presently divided itself into her own name.

“Miss Bell! *Me-e-ess Bel-l-l!*”

A diminutive figure was racing toward her from a side-street, followed by a woman who made frantic dives to seize the flying coat-skirts.

Beautiful bounded off to meet the new-comers, snatching a votive wisp of hay from the roadside in his rapid transit. Myrtle awaited his return with his convoy of Jeff and Gretchen.

The maid had been into town on a marketing expedition, taking the child along "for a walk." Catching sight of Miss Bell and her dog from the bottom of the hill, the young master had "fair run the feet off of" his nominal guardian in the effort to overtake them.

"You can go on, Gretchen," said Myrtle. "I will see that he gets home all right. I thought of taking him with me, this morning, but was afraid I was going too far."

"I walked two whole miles oncet!" retorted the pained infant. "Dr. Dale tooked me to visit everan-eversomany sick folks, and he said it was all of two miles. My legs are awful strong. I have n't never broked any of *them!*"

"Good!" encouragingly, "some day we will walk two whole miles together, — you and I."

Jeff cast a side-ray at her — oblique and suspicious.

"You won't never forget it, will you?"

"Jeff! have I ever forgotten anything I promised to do for you?"

"No-o-o!" conceded the immature pessimist. "But there is them that does! There's Uncle Meagley, now! He promised me honest-truly, blackan-bluelly, he'd give me fifty cents as soon as he got ten thousand dollars, and he did n't do it. No, madam! not a cent of it!"

"Because he has not got the ten thousand dollars. I would forget all about it if I were you."

"Ten thousand! You bet he's got as much as ten *hundred* in the bank this minute! He's just too stingy to pay his debts. Anneke says Uncle Meagley's 'a bit dotty.' What does 'dotty' mean, Miss Bell?"

Before the amused listener could reply she felt a touch on her shoulder, and a voice said in her very ear, so close to her that she shrank from the breath that carried the words, —

"Will you please, ma'am, tell me where Dr. Dale lives?"

The speaker was a woman dressed plainly in black. From her speech and appearance it was easy to see that she was from the country, even without the evidence of a large carpet-bag, swollen with packages of divers shapes and tied about with a rope, which she held in her left hand. Her black straw hat was trimmed with crape, and a touzled crape veil hung on one side to her shoulder. She was scrawny of figure, and sallow of complexion, with deep-set black eyes as round, and seemingly as hard, as beads. A black woollen glove was on the hand that carried the carpet-bag. The other, with which she had touched the young lady, was bare, roughened by labour and chapped by the cold.

Made keenly observant by the surprise of the encounter, Myrtle took in these details at a glance, divining immediately that this was a country patient, or that she wished to secure medical attendance for some one else. Dr. Dale's was a potent name to conjure with in an area of fifty miles up and down the valley.

"If you will walk on with us, I will point out his office to you in a few minutes," she answered with ready friendliness. "If you are a stranger in the place, I should hardly be able to direct you in any other way."

"Thank ye, ma'am! I've never been here before. I come in on the cars that got to the deepo at ten o'clock. I've been walking ever since."

"You have come a good deal out of your way. Almost any one at the station or on the street could have showed you a more direct route to Dr. Dale's office. Everybody knows him."

"I was 'fraid to ask. You never know what tricks folks may play on a person when they see she's from

the country. But seeing you with the little boy and hearing him talk so free to you, I thought you were respectable — and you looked real kind-like.”

She stole a furtive glance at the clear, bright face smiling upon her.

“I hope I am respectable, and I try to be kind.” Myrtle struggled with her perception of the humour of the situation. “But I don’t think anybody in Pitvale would have given you the wrong direction to a doctor’s office. There are kind people everywhere, — a great many good, kind people in Pitvale.”

The board sidewalk was hardly wide enough for the three to walk abreast comfortably, particularly as the carpet-bag was broader than the bearer, who fell to the rear in going down the hill. Jeff, holding tightly to Miss Bell’s hand, kept twisting his head around to scrutinise the stranger, scraping his toes on the warping boards, and once catching his foot in a crack, and swinging quite around, only keeping his balance by clutching at Myrtle’s gown.

“Jeff! dear boy! look where you are going!” she admonished him. “Good walkers always do.” And in a sub-tone, “Don’t stare, dear! It is not polite!”

Half-way down the hill they met the Folger T-cart coming up, — a smart affair, drawn by a powerful roan horse. The panels shone, the plated harness glittered; the big horse carried his head up and stepped high. Kate Meagley, in a spruce blue gown braided with red, a sailor hat with a red wing on one side, perched atop of her bebagged hair, was driving. She sat bolt upright, holding her whip in coachman-like style. Harriet was in the seat behind her sister, a natty groom was on the back rundle.

Kate nodded superciliously from her elevation to the party on the sidewalk.

“Sorry you’re going the wrong way! I’d give you a lift!” she called out airily.

The countrywoman stopped short and stared after the equipage; her beady eyes were sharply suspicious.

"You're *sure* you know where Dr. Dale lives?" she queried abruptly of her conductor.

"Certainly!" amazed at the accent and look. "We shall be in sight of the office in a minute."

The other fell back, muttering something that sounded like "A person can't be too careful," pronouncing the last word "keerful."

A light dawned upon the guide.

"She has doubts of my respectability!" she reflected gleefully. "She probably never saw a T-cart before, or a woman playing smart coachman, and a groom in livery holding on behind. She judges me by my acquaintances. It is n't an adventure I'd care to speak of to Egbert, but Jack and I will have a jolly laugh over it. What *would* Kate Meagley say?"

Her face was alight with the fun of the idea when she turned to say to the woman in black, —

"Do you see that buff-coloured house down there, on the left-hand side of the street? The house with a large elm-tree before it? When you get to it, you will see Dr. Dale's name on the door-plate. I think you will have no trouble in finding the place. Good-morning!"

"I'm mightily obleeged to you," was the reply.

The dubious look had not passed away; her eyes ran curiously over the lithe figure, passing to the child and then to the dog. Beautiful, aware that he was an object of distrust, assumed his grandest air, and gazed with fine unconcern at a derrick in the middle distance.

"Maybe you know him?" interrogated the stranger, the round black eyes returning to Miss Bell.

"Dr. Dale? There are few people in Pitvale who do not know him — by sight, at least. Good-day, again. Come, Jeff!"

She walked on more briskly than before, her chin level, a glint in her eyes the provincial stranger did not see. It was one thing to direct a patient to a physician; it was quite another thing to discuss her betrothed with a person with whom she could have nothing in common.

Jeff, as usual, had a diversion of the best quality on tap.

"How do you s'pose that lady broked her finger off?" he asked, looking backward, as one fascinated by what he had seen.

"Was her finger broken off? I did not notice it."

"Broked off. Or cut off with a knife. Or, maybe, a *naxe*. I should n't be s'prised if it was bited off. By a lion, I fink. Like this!" designating the final joint of his little finger. "The last end of it was clean gone. 'T was her hand that had n't any glove on it. Likely she's got the piece in her pocket, and is going to get Dr. Dale to sew it on again. 'T was n't a bit bloody, though. It looked all mended over. I 'spect she did it week before last, maybe."

The subject was too nearly involved with thoughts of his own many misadventures for him to get away from it easily. He twisted his head about again, as he trotted at his companion's side.

"She's gone straight into the office! I'm going to ask Dr. Dale all about her to-night."

"Indeed you must not!" returned Myrtle, emphatically. "Never talk to doctors about people who go to them to be cured — or mended. It is not right for a doctor to tell who has been sick and who has been hurt. People don't like to have such things told."

"I don't care who knows about me!" in modest pride.

"All people are not like you. So, dear, we will not say a word to Dr. Dale of the lady we saw just now."

The silenced, if unconvinced, Jeff was not tempted to disobey the injunction that day. Dr. Dale did not appear at dinner-time, nor had he been heard from when John Bell granted himself the rare treat of a ride with his sister in the afternoon.

Ruth Folger had put a saddle-horse at Myrtle's disposal as soon as the rigour of the winter abated somewhat, and Ralph urged John to exercise a blooded mare her master was fabled to keep for his especial pleasure, —

“When, in point of fact, I have mounted her but three times in a month. I should n't have done it then if Miss Bell hadn't been kind enough to go with me. The creature is as gentle as a robin, and as swift as a swallow when you want to go. You'll do me a favour if you keep her from getting stale or skittish, standing in the stable.”

“I'm sorry Egbert did not come home to dinner,” said Myrtle, regretfully, as they walked their horses out of the Bowersox gate. “Ruth has written to ask me to dine and spend the evening with her. Her brother is in Philadelphia, and Kate Meagley will be at her father's. I so seldom have Ruth all to myself for a whole evening that I have promised to go. Egbert intends to look in upon the Choral Union rehearsal to-night, I know, but he will be in to supper, I suppose, and will expect to see me.”

“We'll ride by his office and post him up as to your plans,” proposed John. “He'll be glad to have even a glimpse of you. He ought to be thankful for the privilege. You are always at your best and prettiest in the saddle.”

“I may return the compliment with interest,” retorted the sister, eyeing the superb figure beside her in loving pride. “I can't recollect the time when I did not wish that Heaven had made me such a man.”

"You have done better for yourself, pet. Dale is a better-looking and a far more brilliant man than your brother can ever hope to be. Every day proves to me how well suited you are to one another."

Myrtle turned her face aside. Not even Jack must see the rise of the sweet, warm moisture through which she saw road, trees, and houses as through a prism.

Was ever another woman so blest in the double devotion of brother and lover? Where, in all the wide, beautiful world, was there another girl whose every desire was so abundantly satisfied?

The world, that afternoon, was not beautiful to eyes unanointed with the oil of gladness. The blue-grays that had predominated in the morning were now a baleful purple. The breeze had swooned into a calm that oppressed the lungs and the senses. Sounds that were painfully distinct in the earlier hours of the day were mixed and dulled into a troubled murmur, — a groaning together of labour and traffic; the air was strangely sultry for mid-March, yet not humid.

John pointed out to his sister a flock of crows hovering evilly over the muddied, tawny waters of the swollen creek.

"That looks as if the freshet had done harm to stock up the country," he said. "I have not seen the creek out so far since the dam broke. That gave me a new conception of the meaning of the phrase, 'the letting out of waters.'"

They were still talking of the casualty when they drew rein at Dr. Dale's door. John alighted, handed his bridle to Myrtle, and went in. The doctor met him in the hall. They exchanged a few words, and came out together, Dale without his hat.

Myrtle leaned from the saddle to speak to her betrothed, her brother lingering discreetly on the steps.

As John had said, she was at her prettiest on horse-

back. Heat and exercise had brought the rich blood to her cheeks ; the eyes bent upon the man of her heart shone softly ; her smile was happy and loving. The dark brown habit fitted perfectly ; the jaunty silk hat became her rarely.

A shadow fell upon the sparkling face as she looked more closely at her lover.

"You are pale and tired!" she said in tender reproach. "I don't believe you have had a mouthful to eat since breakfast — naughty boy! You are working yourself to death!"

"I telephoned for a luncheon-tray from the Club."

His voice was unresonant, his eyes were dreary. She could have believed that they had sunken more deeply under the brows since she had looked into them, seven hours before. He looked past her in speaking.

"I have had a hard day and a hard headache. That accounts for much. And I cannot get home until late to-night. That accounts for more" — meeting her eyes now, and smiling faintly.

"It will mean less to me because I shall not be there myself until ten o'clock, or maybe later," Myrtle began her explanation by saying.

He listened attentively, nodding his satisfaction as she concluded.

"That's all right! I saw Miss Folger this morning, and she told me she had invited you. Have a cosy evening with her, and don't fret your sweet soul over my nasty headache and more hateful pre-occupation. I'm not worth it! I hope you'll have a pleasant ride. Don't get overheated! This is most unseasonable weather. Good-by!"

He took the bridle of John's horse from her, and passed it to her brother, stepping back to the sidewalk to do it, without offering to touch her hand.

She knew why when she saw, over the clouded wire

blind filling the lower sash of the window in the private office, the face of the woman she had directed to him in the forenoon.

The black hat and veil had been laid aside; the hair, strained back tightly from her face, showed a narrow forehead and hollowed temples. The beady eyes surveyed the group without as sharply as they had looked from T-cart and occupants to Myrtle. Egbert was the last man in the world to parade an intimacy before a curious spectator.

"*Au revoir!*" cried the girl, gaily, waving her whip as they struck into a lively canter.

"Dale looks fagged!" observed John, solicitously. "And what wonder! He has enough laid upon him to break down six ordinary men. Fortunately, he is not an ordinary man, in any sense of the word."

When the Middle Miss Meagley elected to pass an evening in the bosom of her family, they sat in the front parlour, where a fire was kindled in her honour. As she was not backward in reminding her nearest of kin, but for her they would all be in the poorhouse.

"Since I have got to pay for the coal, I don't mean to be cooped up in that wretched hole of a back-room," she gave them to understand, "with Pa making a fool of himself before my eyes, and nothing to be seen from the windows but the back-yard and clothes-lines, and the backs of common peoples' houses — and a cat or two on the fence."

Her consequence was fully recognised by her beneficiaries. They toadied her, served her, and obeyed her slavishly. She was to them the embodied essence of victuals and drink, home and clothes. In her and by her and through her they stood. Without her they would fall, and exist no more as reputable householders, who they supposed that other people supposed "lived on their money."

The despot had expressed her intention to Harriet that forenoon of supping with "mother and the girls," and passing the evening with them. The monthly accounts were to be audited by her, and other items of business attended to by the head of the family, and neighbourhood affairs to be set to rights generally. "Mother and the girls" were "dressed up" to receive her; everything was in apple-pie order; there would be waffles for supper, compounded according to the celebrated Bowersox formula, with broiled chicken, fried potatoes, and three kinds of cake, not counting crullers.

The vanity of the Middle Miss Meagley, confounded by her with her virgin affections, had had a blow recently. She had a wild disposition to trample upon somebody or somebodies while the smart was fresh in her mind. The instinct of the wounded bully to choose the most defenceless victims he can think of upon which to wreak his wrath, directed her to the parental abode.

She was set down at the porch paid for with Mrs. Bowersox's money, at half-past three, alighting from the carriage with the assured grace of the owner of the handsome turnout. When her wraps were removed, she was inducted into the softest of the figured plush chairs; a cushion supported feet encased in such boots as none of her sisters could afford to wear. She looked luxurious, and she felt cruel. The chair was set at an easy angle of incidence to the front window. Five votaries were gathered about her, ready to catch crumbs, or crusts, or mayhap cuffs.

The French clock under the bell-glass on the mantel sounded four feeble strokes as the Bells passed on horseback, neither of them, as Levina cynically remarked, "taking the trouble to look toward the house."

"The talk is that she will catch Ralph Folger yet," said Mrs. Meagley, sourly. "D'ye think it looks some like it, Katey dear?"

Kate's eyebrows were half-hoops; her upper lip was shortened in a sneer.

"It won't be her fault if she don't! He's cut his eye teeth, to be sure, but it's always on the cards that any man may make a fool of himself. She's the fastest sort of a flirt. She'll get her comeuppance some day, if she has rope enough."

The rest of the domestic circle were in drill uniform as to speech and behaviour. Miss Katharine was in fatigue undress.

"Ain't them two of the Folger horses?" was the mother's next inquiry.

"Those *are* two of the Folger horses!" with monitory emphasis.

"Seems-to-me she's gettin' very thick with Ruth, too. I do hope and pray she won't cut you out there!" the tactless mother was left to herself to say.

Kate smiled lofty and superior to the clumsily worded fear.

"That *would* be awkward for some folks I could name!" cuttingly. "But we're wasting time gossiping! Before it gets dark, I'll look over those bills."

The bills had been examined, criticised and dismissed with cautions against future extravagances, and the censor lay back upon her throne, taking no pains to conceal her ennui, when Harriet's exclamation and rush window-ward drew the others after her like a flock of pigeons at the scattering of a handful of corn.

Between the sunflowers and daisies on the Nottingham lace curtains were peep-holes of figureless net, through which the coterie took observations of Dr.

Dale walking up the street past their house, with a woman none of them had ever seen before.

A woman clad in a black alpaca skirt and jacket, — a skirt that, as all agreed, was “miles too short and hung anyhow,” while the jacket “might have been made by a blacksmith.”

“Actually a *round* hat with a crape veil!” tittered Miss Julia. “Where do you suppose the creature came from?”

“And however did she happen to be with *him*?” chimed in Harriet, who, next to Kate, had the largest peep-hole. “My! but don’t he look high and mighty alongside of her! And she’s crying, as sure’s you live! See her wiping her eyes and blowing her nose! Who can she be?”

“Some countrified thing who is taking him to see a sick person, and telling the symptoms on the way — faugh!” ejaculated magisterial Kate. “It’s the same woman Myrtle Bell had in tow this morning. She was taking her to Dale then. She’s forever hunting up that sort of case. It’s one of her ways of making herself solid with rich men and so-called charitable doctors. It’s a dodge that pays well.”

“Can it be only five o’clock?” as the debilitated bell overhead said its little say.

She consulted her watch.

“I declare that contemptible clock is right for once! How long the days are getting! Somehow the time drags more slowly in this house than it does anywhere else upon the habitable globe!”

CHAPTER XXI

THE ELECTRIC STORM

'I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen
Th' ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam.

But never till to-night — never till now,
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,
Or else mankind, too heedless of the gods,
Incenses them to send destruction."

THE *tête-à-tête* dinner was over, and the two friends were back in Ruth's sitting-room. "The Chamber that is called 'Peace,' " Myrtle had named it. The aptness of the title appealed to her imagination to-night, when in the half-light of shaded electric burners the white fluffiness of curtains and rugs and the cool grays of walls and furniture suggested the plumage of a dove, — rest and tranquillity brooding, like a holy presence, over the figures in the alcoved window. It overlooked, as from a safe and downy nest, the lights of the town, and, beyond these, the hills surmounted by the twin derricks covering the "big wells."

"Ralph calls this the 'nookiest corner of the house,'" said his sister, reaching out an arm to loosen the lace draperies behind them from their loopings.

They fell slowly into straight folds, shutting down like moonlit mists between them and the rest of the room.

Ruth's movement was so active and so unexpected that Myrtle had not time to forestall it.

"Oh, take care!" she ejaculated, "Why did n't you ask me to do that? You might have hurt yourself!"

In the dim light she could see the beautiful smile upon the other's face.

"I am practising such feats nowadays," said Ruth, tranquilly. "For — this is a secret for a little while longer, dear! I am getting so much stronger and less helpless that I begin to hope — Dr. Dale says I may expect to be able to walk one day, Myrtle darling."

Myrtle was kneeling by her, kissing her hands, her cheeks, her forehead, laughing and crying together, like a wild thing transported with joy.

"O my sweet! my lily! my wounded dove! I am so glad — so grateful for you — and for all of us! It is too blessed — too beautiful to be true!"

"So I thought for a long time," went on the even tones. "Sit down on this cushion, close by me, and let me tell you how it happened.

"Three months ago the foot and leg we thought were paralyzed began to get 'fidgety.' I have n't any other word that will describe the feeling. I had pricks and tinglings, such as I had never known before, running up and down it and along the spine. The *masseuse* Ralph ordered to be sent to me from Paris before Christmas has treated me three times a week ever since. She may have begun the good work. She has much natural magnetism, or electricity, or whatever the gift of healing may be called. For a long time I said nothing to anybody except to her of these odd new sensations that grew more active every day. I did not want to excite hopes that might never be fulfilled.

"Then — and this is the wonder of wonders — on the fourteenth of February, as I was sitting in the carriage, looking up the hill — when, for a moment, it seemed as if Ralph had made a mistake in think-

ing the well was not extinct — and the people laughed that horrid laugh — something like an electric shock went all through me, then another, and another, stronger and stronger, when the great explosion came. It was like what the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple must have felt when his feet and ankle-bones received strength. Only — the thrill and the strength went all down that side of me.

“I could hardly keep from calling out to Dr. Dale when he came to the carriage, and your brother must have seen that I was labouring under strong excitement.

“When we got home I told Kate. She was almost beside herself with joy, and could hardly wait until evening to take Dr. Dale into our confidence. You may recollect that they had a great deal to say to one another at table that night and afterward. I did not trust myself to look at them lest I should betray my consciousness of our great secret.”

Myrtle pressed the slender hands, her eyes flashing intelligent sympathy, her lips apart and quivering with smiles.

“I see it all now!” she breathed excitedly. To her heart she added: “O, my love! my honourable darling! This was what you could not speak of, even to me!”

“For secret I insisted it must be until the wonderful change was proved to be a certainty,” Ruth went on to say. “Dr. Dale came by appointment the next afternoon, when I knew Ralph would be out of the way. I made an errand that would take poor Kate out of the house. She was quite unstrung by the prospect of the examination and what the verdict might be. No one was with me when the doctor came except the *masseuse*. She helped

him. They have consulted every day since. Yesterday afternoon he called Ralph in and told him we might hope for the best.

"The dear boy was completely overcome. I thought I had known all along how much he loved me. When he took me in his arms and fairly sobbed, I felt that even I had never quite understood him until that minute. He rushed off to Philadelphia by the midnight train to see a maker of artificial limbs, and to order a skilled workman to be sent to Pitvale to measure me for a new foot."

She stopped to laugh, and Myrtle joined in. It was a relief to touch upon the comic side of the subject.

"He will be back to-night," continued Ruth, "and may bring the man with him. You know Ralph's energetic ways. I walked across the room yesterday afternoon, leaning upon him on one side, upon Dr. Dale on the other. It was like a miracle! When they put me back in my chair, Dr. Dale kissed my hand, in the graceful, half-foreign manner he has at times, and I saw tears in his eyes.

" 'She may never be able to run races,' he said. 'There is no reason that I can see why she should not walk comfortably by the help of a cane, or a steady arm.'

"And poor Ralph's voice broke as he said, 'My arm will be at her service as long as I am above ground, doctor!'

"How good they were to me! Everybody has been good to me always. The Father's goodness and mercy have followed me all my days. The cry of my heart is continually, 'What shall I render unto Him for all His benefits toward me?'"

The listener could not speak. She laid her wet cheek upon the soft palm she was holding, and tears did duty for language. Ruth stroked the bowed

head with her free hand, murmuring endearing phrases until the wave of feeling spent itself.

"What a weak baby I am! what an unsatisfactory creature altogether!" cried Myrtle, petulantly, dashing the clinging drops from her eyelashes, and sitting upright resolutely. "But the surprise was so sudden, and so passing sweet! and we are all going to be so happy together! Pshaw! there I go again. Now — I will be sensible!"

"Not yet, please, dear!" With gentle force Ruth pressed her confidante's head down again. "I have more to say, and something harder to say than I thought it would be. Something Kate does not dream of, something I could not tell Ralph unless he were well prepared beforehand. I cannot say it to you if you look at me —

"Myrtle darling! has your brother ever told you —"

It was a tremulous whisper, and the answer was scarcely louder, —

"No, dear! But I have guessed it."

As Ralph had done, she gathered the slight figure in her strong young arms. Brown and fair heads lay close together in the sisterly embrace.

Ruth found words first. The marvellous self-control studied through years of suffering came to her aid. She spoke low but clearly, and hesitated no longer, —

"We found it out, two years ago. He had saved my life from the freshet and the fire at the risk of his own. One day I was driving out and the coachman fell from the box in a fit. The horses ran away. Mr. Bell was walking toward us and saw what had happened. He dashed into the middle of the road, seized the horses by the head and clung to them until they stopped. You know how strong he is. They dragged him some distance, and I called

to him to let them go, — that his life was more precious than mine. Kate was with me. She lay in a dead faint in the carriage when he lifted me out and carried me to a grassy bank. I told him to go back for her. He would not. He had no thought for anybody but me. Both of us said things in the excitement of the minute we could not recall.

“The next day we talked it all over, solemnly and calmly. He would have taken me as I was, a helpless log. *That* was not what had kept him silent” — laughing low and merrily at the thought. “It seems absurd that he should have been afraid of me as an heiress. But he was! I showed him that while the money was less than nothing in my estimation, I loved him too well — I did not mind saying that when I knew what must be! — I loved him too well to tie a clog about his neck. That I had long ago accepted the truth that what other women prized most dearly, could never be mine. That I would be his best and dearest friend as long as he was single — and his true friend forever. That is the way the matter has stood ever since.

“Once — just before you came, he disobeyed orders and said, ‘You are no longer an invalid. My feelings are unchanged. There is but one woman in the world for me.’

“I stopped him there.

“‘There is but one man in the world for me,’ I said. ‘I think too much of him and of his work to hamper him. His wife should be a helper, not a burden.’ When he would have said more, I would not listen.

“Myrtle! Sister!” relaxing her hold upon herself for an instant. “Do you wonder that I went mad with joy at the idea of standing upright upon the earth once more — of walking at his side? Was it wicked that, when Dr. Dale spoke of a steady arm,

and Ralph — dear old fellow! — said I should have his, I thought of another — so steady! so strong!

“Ah, dear Lord!” lifting her clasped hands. “To think all this should come to *me*! Sometimes it seems that I must die with the happiness of it!”

“Live for the happiness of it, sweet sister! How lovely that sounds! I always wanted a sister. I never dared hope for such a one as you. It was not for nothing that I fell in love with you at sight, and have gone on loving you more and better every day since. Dear Jack! how brave and constant — how delicate and tactful he has been! And to think of your walking about with the best of us — going everywhere upon your own dear little feet!

“I suppose,” in whimsical perplexity, “it would n’t be *quite* the thing for a minister’s bride to dance at her own wedding?”

The ringing laughter that followed the transition from the sentimental to the ridiculous startled whispering echoes in the strange stillness that enveloped them like a tangible atmosphere.

Without, the blue-black murk had grown so dense that the lights of the town were dim specks; night-sounds were muffled, as by falling snow; the air was more sultry with each minute, until respiration was an effort.

“If it were summer, I should say we were going to have a thunderstorm,” remarked Myrtle, a vague uneasiness creeping over her as she observed phenomena overlooked in the intense interest of the conversation. “Do you often have such warm weather at this season?”

“I don’t recollect ever sitting with windows open at night as early as March fourteenth, —” began Ruth.

A blaze of purplish lightning illuminated trees, lawn, and fences, the town in the hollow, and the hills beyond the town. Before the startled girls

could exclaim, a crash shook the heavens and the earth.

The electric storm had broken, and they were in the heart of it.

Simultaneously — or so it seemed — a pillar of flame darted skyward from one of the twin hills.

“The Ruth!” cried the girls in one breath.

A wild sweep of rain and wind blurred the awful conflagration for a few minutes. Through the floods that deluged the window-panes, they saw, as it were, a universe on fire. The lurid glare dyed the clouds crimson, and rolled blood-red surges over the face of the earth.

A babel of shouts and alarm-bells, the shriek of fire-engines, the whistling of steam-pumps arose upon the blast. As the brief passion of the tempest abated, every feature of the scene became fearfully distinct. The monster beacon light had not wavered for gust or rain. It mounted, straight and strong, shedding baleful gleams upon mountains fifty miles away.

Ruth’s maid and the *masseuse* had flown to her at the first alarm. Half-a-dozen other servants pressed into the room,—the women hysterical, the men asking for orders.

The young mistress recovered outward composure at sight of their disorder. Her clear voice and the sight of her peaceful face stilled their clamour.

“The new steel tank has been struck by lightning,” she said. “You can do nothing until Mr. Folger gets back.

“The judgment of Heaven?” as a weeping maid sobbed the question. “By no means! God has a right to do as He pleases with His own.”

A bustle about the entrance sent the terrified crew flying in different directions, as they heard their master’s voice.

The rain ran in rivulets from his shoulders and hair; his face was as sunny as a May morning.

"I ran home for a minute to make sure you were not scared, Ruthie," he began, by the time he was in the room. "You here, Miss Bell! That's first-rate! Could n't be better! If I'd known that, I need n't have been uneasy about this little girl."

He stooped to kiss the face looking lovingly at him — flushed rosily, as was her white gown, by the ruddy flare from the hilltop.

"How's that for a bonfire?" he ran on, shaking hands with Myrtle, and motioning toward the window. "By George! I can think of nothing but 'hell with the lid off.' That's what Jim Parton said of a big blast furnace in Pittsburg. 'The Ruth' goes the whole figure every time. I'm proud of her as a patent burner of forty volcano power.

"Now, Ruth dear," in the gentle tone he always used to her, "I'm off to try an extinguisher of my own devising upon your lively namesake. Luckily, the cannon we used on February fourteenth has never been taken away. It is under a shed close to the Jumbo derrick. Big Sandy and some other fellows have gone up there to train it full and square upon the tank of 'The Ruth.' A few solid shot will tear a hole in the side that will let the oil run into the moat from the bottom of the tank, where it has not taken fire, and so exhaust the supply. When the lamp is empty it will go out. We were going to begin filling up the moat with earth to-morrow. It's well we had n't done it before. Good-by, and don't worry! Everything will come out straight."

He rattled it off between short breaths, gave his sister another hasty kiss, waved his hand gaily to Myrtle, and was off like a whirlwind.

Ruth dismissed her two attendants, after charging them with a message of reassurance to the servants.

Then she and Myrtle awaited, suspensefully, the result of the daring expedient. Towering columns of flame were capped by volumes of smoke, inky-black above, reddened fiercely underneath, spreading, as they rolled upward, into a canopy that hid the heavens. The hollow roaring of the burning filled the ears, and even at that distance the odour was rankly offensive.

The girls clasped each other's hands and gazed, oppressed and dumb with awe, at the stupendous sight.

Once Ruth said, "Heaven grant the heated plates may not burst before the shot is fired! The moat could not stop a river of fire."

"The cannonade seems a desperate expedient to me," ventured Myrtle.

"Ralph knows what he is doing!" in confidence nothing could shake.

It was but nine o'clock, and nobody was asleep in Pitvale. Thousands of eyes were fixed upon the group of men, blackly gigantic in the flaring blaze, collected at the base of the Jumbo derrick.

The excitement was too intense for much talking, but murmurs ran through the packed streets of what had been done upon the two hills one month ago, and of the marvel that the only thunderbolt of the storm so unseasonable and so terrific as to be accounted miraculous, had fallen just at that point, and done such execution.

One crank, an assistant in Mr. Welsh's Mission, mounted upon a barrel, and inveighed against the "outrageous iniquity of interfering with the doings of the Almighty.

"He has stored up oil in the bowels of the earth," he vociferated, "to burn the world and the inhabitants thereof at the last day, and woe! woe! woe! to the presumptuous worm of the dust who tries to

thwart His decrees! One woe is come, and six more will follow unless the wicked in high places repent and turn from their sins!"

One of the Folger well-men kicked the barrel from under the orator, and the crowd cheered hysterically as he pitched headforemost among them.

"There she goes!" yelled fifty voices.

A spurt of blue flame, sicklied by the glare of the burning tank, was the precursor of a burst of sound. Another, and still a third shot followed, as fast as the cannoneer could reload. Runners tore down the hill to announce that a big hole had been made in the lower plates of the tank, and that cold, unlighted oil was pouring by the hundred hogshead into the moat.

A bellow of applause went up from the multitude.

"Bully for Folger! Three cheers and a tiger for the smartest boss in America!"

The intrepid little millionaire had scored another and his greatest point.

By ten o'clock the mighty column of flame was but a flicker on the top of the tank.

At eleven Ralph paid a second visit to his sister's sitting-room. This time John Bell was with him.

"I met him as I was going out," reported the hero of the night. "He was at my side when I 'fired the shot heard round the world,' or a section of it.

"But I tell you that was a close call! There was enough oil in the tank to flood the town. And if it had all taken fire! ugh! it's an ugly idea! That cannon was what might be called a special Providence—eh, Dominie?"

CHAPTER XXII

"THE RUTH" AT MIDNIGHT

"Neither is it safe to count upon the weakness of any man's understanding who is thoroughly possessed of the spirit of revenge to sharpen his invention."

TRUE to her belief that the success of what Ralph set out to do was a foregone conclusion, Ruth Folger had ordered supper to be made ready for serving at the moment of his return home. The serene self-poise that made her ever mindful of the wants and wishes of those about her had also kept her from forgetting that Kate Meagley was to be sent for at ten o'clock.

The exemplary companion's agony of solicitude for the object of her fondest regards, the friend who must be undergoing untold tortures of anxiety and alarm, had nearly tempted her to walk home in the worst of the storm, — this she poured out to Ruth the moment she arrived, — but her family would not let her brave the danger of making her way on foot and unattended, through the crowds choking every street and byway.

Her gratitude to Heaven and to Miss Bell was feelingly rendered: —

"You are so cool-headed, so even of pulse, so ready to say and do the right thing in the nick of time, that you filled the place of comforter and adviser far better than I could have done," she sighed, pressing her hand to her palpitating heart and hanging over Ruth with an elaborate assiduity of fussiness,

tucking in the shawl around her shoulders, straightening her skirts, covering her feet, humming and cooing like a magnified mother pigeon, until Myrtle's even pulses plunged rebelliously under the repressed inclination to shake her into quietude.

Ruth's fulness of content held her above petty flurries. She soothed Kate's nerves and allayed her expressed dreads with a few affectionate sentences, then sat with folded hands and placid demeanour, waiting for what the next hour would bring, — giving personal audience to the relays of messengers sent every ten minutes by her ever-thoughtful brother, thanking each sweetly for his message, prophesying to all that "everything would come right soon."

That Ralph should be his own final messenger and confirm the tidings of his completed victory over adverse circumstance, was only what she had expected, The welcome in her luminous eyes, as John Bell took her hand, said that she had anticipated as confidently his coming.

It was in keeping with the daintiness of Ralph's personal habits that he made a thorough, if rapid, change of attire before sitting down to the meal he needed more than the rest of the little party. He had eaten nothing since noon, he confessed as an excuse for an excellent appetite. Fresh as to eyes and complexion, natty as to clothes, he took the foot of the board, asked John Bell to say grace, and characteristically tabooing the discussion of topics that "might jostle digestion," rushed into extravaganzas relative to his visit to Philadelphia. He always had adventures when he travelled by land or water, — adventures that were all blunders, making up a series of jokes of which he was the butt. There had been encounters of wits in which he was invariably worsted, the telling of which sent the spirits of the auditors up to the high level of his own. The fun became

general; every clever touch told; not a laugh hung fire. Even Kate Meagley laughed naturally and dealt no felted taps.

Looking back to that never-to-be-forgotten evening in after years, more than one of the quintet who partook of the late supper recalled the Scottish superstition that to be "fey" presages calamity. At the time the prevailing hilarity seemed but the rebound of overwrought feeling when the weight of a great impending danger was removed.

When Ruth gave the signal for leaving the table, Ralph ran around to her, picked her up in his sinewy arms and literally danced with her, to his own whistling of a popular air, across the hall into the white parlour, she protesting and pleading all the way, as well as she could for laughing.

As he put her into her chair, he said: "She will be waltzing upon her own blessed light fantastics before the year is out. God bless her! By the way, who has seen Dale lately? Queer he has n't turned up this evening—somewhere. I've seen every other man, three fourths of the women, and half the children in town, and not so much as a glimpse of the handsomest fellow in all Pitvale. Where is he hiding himself?"

Kate Meagley's dulcet word slipped in before any other was ready. It was politic not to avoid the mention of the once dear, now detested name. Smiling indifference was the best cloak for the memories gnawing at her vitals.

"I saw him at five o'clock this afternoon. He passed my father's house, walking toward Penn Boulevard. He was escorting a woman;" her smile a thought too wide to be quite spontaneous. "A very common-looking person dressed in black. Presumably a country patient. The same woman who was walking with you this morning, Miss Bell. We took

it for granted that you had recommended her to the doctor. She is probably one of your pensioners?"

Absurdly enough, Myrtle felt swift tongues of flame flash across her cheeks. She was preposterously angry, unaccountably confused. Ralph's nimble tongue saved her from the humiliation of an intemperate reply, —

"More likely one of the millions of halt, maimed, and blind Dale collects from the byways and hedges, and treats with oil and wine on the Jericho road. I never saw such a fellow! He will go further and fare harder for a pauper patient than for the richest man who ever 'struck ile.' There's no discount on him, however everything else in the way of 'human wariuous' stock may depreciate. If I knew where to find him, I'd 'phone him up. It is n't fair we should be having all the good times and he be off slaving for other people, or gnawing his nails in solitude."

John forbore to glance at his sister's kindling eyes as the honest tribute to her betrothed was spoken. He toyed with a spray of citronaloos taken from a vase near by, as he said, —

"He was at home for a while this evening. I took supper at the Club, and telephoned to his office without getting any answer. Then I rang up Mrs. Bowersox, for I wanted him to join me at supper. She answered that he had been in a little before seven o'clock, 'just in time to keep Jeff, poor dear! from bleeding to death, —'" laughing as he repeated the words.

Ruth and Myrtle exclaimed together. Jeff's many casualties had not steeled his friends against anxiety on his account.

John explained: "Case Van Wagenen had been mending the wheelbarrow, and left the wheel lying on the ground. Jeff took it into his head to make a bicycle of it; stole out of the back-door, having first

"The Ruth" at Midnight 259

got hold of Case's lantern, dragged the wheel into the wood-shed, rigged up a handle-bar, and mounted his machine. Naturally, he took a 'header,' and, as it happened, into the wood-shed window. Result,— a gash ever so many inches long and nobody knows how many deep, in his wrist and upward. As Providence would have it, Dr. Dale happened to come in in the very nick of time. He stopped the bleeding and plastered the boy together."

"Did she tell you all this by telephone?" laughed Ruth.

"I venture to say she did!" broke in Ralph. "Moreover, that there is no telling what would have happened if the doctor, poor dear! had n't been there. You don't say anything of the state of mind at the Central Office while the dialogue was going on! Though, for that matter, nobody ever loses patience with that best of women. So you didn't get Dale!"

"No. When the dear lady called the doctor to supper, he was not in his room. Gretchen 'believed he had had a call.' He was to be at the Choral Union this evening, but there was no meeting, of course."

Myrtle was on her feet, bidding Ruth "Good-night," and engaging to run in the next morning.

"She must be very weary," she observed to Ralph. "We have kept her up too late already. She has more nerve and spirit than any of the rest of us, but there are limits to human endurance."

"It won't take you five minutes to sing 'Adrift' for me before you go," he said unexpectedly. "And I shall sleep the better for it. Ruthie will, too. *That* ought to persuade you into pleasing me."

"I did not need that," returned Myrtle, gravely, pulling off the glove she had just drawn on, as she went with him to the music-room.

The drawing-room lay between it and the white parlour. The doors of the suite were open. Kate Meagley, who had strayed idly into the conservatory, John and Ruth, left together in Ruth's parlour, heard every note of the song, to which Ralph listened, spell-bound, standing behind the musician, arms folded and head bowed.

“‘ Heart of my heart! the years have flown,
And lost is Arcady!’ ”

he repeated, musingly, as she finished. “ How vividly it brings it all back to me! I saw it while you were singing, — the Lagoon, the glitter of the moonlight on the waves, — and you in your white dress, your guitar on your knee! You had taken off your hat. The moonlight was very clear.”

He put out a restraining hand as she would have moved toward the door.

“ It is odd how much more the picture means to me now than it did then — ”

She interrupted him; not brusquely, but with frank friendliness that signified more unequivocally the difference in their phases of thought and feeling, —

“ That is the glamour of Retrospect. It makes plain things beautiful, commonplace things romantic. We *did* have a pleasant visit to Venice, did n't we? I, too, remember it the more gratefully since I have known you better, and seen you and Ruth in your home.”

He bowed low in stepping back to let her pass through the curtained archway. She had saved his self-respect by reminding him that in his own house it would be ungenerous to urge his suit. Her tact and gracious candour were her own. She meant all that she implied in linking his name with his sister's. GOD bless her for a true woman; honourable and clement beyond the rank and file of her sex!

"The Ruth" at Midnight 261

The rest saw nothing unusual in their manner when they appeared in the white parlour. Myrtle kissed Ruth with unusual warmth. She had kept this friend, too, by her ingenuousness with the brother. She passed Kate Meagley with a mute inclination of the head. The nasty little nettle still rankled in her memory.

If Ralph remarked her stiffness and put his own construction upon it, he gave no sign. While John was wrestling with his dreadnaught in the hall, striking out right and left until both arms were in place, grappling the collar, and finally lunging his great frame into the recesses of the garment to make sure he had got it on, there was opportunity for the exchange of a sentence or two upon the doorstep.

Myrtle improved it.

"Ruth has told me the glorious news about herself. I congratulate you with all my heart!"

"I knew you would! GOD bless you!"

Ralph put her into the carriage in waiting; shook hands with John as he stepped in after her, slammed the door, and ordered the coachman to drive on.

He stood watching the carriage as it rolled down the avenue to the outer gates. The weather had changed within the hour. A strong north wind was clearing the lower heavens of smoke and oily reek. Here and there a stray star found its way between the drifting rack overhead. The turbulent town was stilling down; the smitten tank was darkly invisible. All danger was mercifully over, without the loss of one human life. Every precaution had been taken to avert further calamity. Trustworthy men were posted about the foot of the hill whereon stood the ruins of the derrick. There was no telling what mischievous boy or meddling tramp might not do if tempted by curiosity to visit the scene of the disaster. The master was too well versed in the caprices

and possibilities of Oil to take the remotest risk in dealing with it.

Luckily, a long train laden with empty tanks was at the railway station. Ralph had ordered the pipes connecting the moat with the tank near the station to be opened and the unlooked-for flow of oil to be drawn off as fast as was practicable, then transferred to the tubular tanks on the cars. Such a vast body of oil exposed to the air, and by day to the sun, would be too inflammable for public safety. He would begin rebuilding the burnt derrick to-morrow.

There was no reason why the master of millions, the saviour that night of thousands of dollars' worth of property and of hundreds of lives, should not take rest in sleep like the poorest of his operatives. There was absolutely nothing more for him to look after for ten hours to come.

He said it inly, standing bareheaded upon the marble steps of the mansion his money had built, the rising wind making a drowsy rustle in the laurestinus leaves about his ears, souging dreamily in the arbor-vitæ trees lining the drive.

After an irresolute minute he went back to his sister. Her maid and the *masseuse* were in waiting to roll her wheeled chair to her chamber. He put them aside, wound his arm about Ruth's waist, and supported her along a short passage to her bedroom in the wing of the house.

In letting her sink into an easy-chair, he kissed her fondly twice.

"I have faith to believe there are bright days ahead of both of us, sweet one!" And, as he had said to Myrtle, — "GOD bless you!"

He did not intimate his intention of going out again. He never spoke of anything that could cause her uneasiness when it could be avoided, and he knew she would say he ought to go to bed. She was far

more careful of his physical well-being than he ever thought of being. He knew how tough he was, how little sleep he needed, what a sedative and yet what a tonic action was to him.

He would have a look at the scene of the fire before turning in for the night. He was too restless to sleep, and he did not want to dwell upon certain obtrusive subjects — one in particular — which would be sure to settle upon his pillow if he laid his head down upon it.

To an incorrigible night-hawk like himself, it was a bagatelle that midnight was proclaimed by the cathedral chimes of the clock in the cupola of the Club House as he cleared the iron gates of the avenue. It was confirmed by feebler tongues from three church-spires.

He recollected, complacently, that he had ordered the clock-bell to be cast in Munich, and had John Bell's name engraved on the rim, and that it was known throughout the region as "the Dominie."

Smiling at the thought, he took out his repeater and rang it.

"The Dominie keeps tip-top time!" he said, aloud. "'Steady as a clock' means everything when you're talking of him — and of his!"

Walking faster than was his habit by day, he skirted the business portions of the lower town, crossed the creek on the boulevard bridge that led to his own place, and began more leisurely to climb the rising ground on the other side. All was quiet; few lights were to be seen, and these were at street corners. The district was sparsely settled, and badly lighted, even near the bridge. After a while the form of regular streets was abandoned. A vast common, dotted by a dozen huts, lay about the hills that were Ralph's destination.

He was challenged by, and answered two sentinels before they recognised him.

To the first he said: "All right, my lad! Glad to see you know your business!"

To the second he called gaily, in tramping by, "If anybody tries to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot!" — no matter what the spot is!"

The man told the story to his dying day.

Half-way around the base of "The Ruth" hill, the public road made an abrupt turn to the right. A country lane joined it here, and at the junction was a clump of dwarf cedars. Between their blackness and the lighter streak of the lane winding away from common and highway, Ralph's falcon eyes saw something that did not belong there. Without a moment's hesitation, he charged down the bank towards it.

A man who had been sitting, or lying upon the ground under the cedars, arose at the sound of his rapid advance, and moved down the lane.

"Halt there!" shouted Ralph. "Hold on, and give an account of yourself, my friend!"

"Don't be a fool if you can help it, Folger!" said cool, cutting accents.

"Dale! what in thunder are you doing here, this time of night?"

"Just what you are doing, I fancy, and what another friend of us both is doing, — going to and fro in this damnable earth, and walking up and down in it."

Folger gave his easy-going jolly laugh and locked his arm in Dale's.

"Do you — I know the other fellow you speak of *does n't* — object to company?"

"To-night? Yes! decidedly! I am going home. You, I take it, will be fooling around this unlucky hill until daybreak. I am dog-weary! Judging from your voice, you are as fresh as a daisy."

"Right you are, my boy! You thin-skinned

thoroughbreds are not in it with us cold-blooded roadsters. Go your way, and I'll go mine. I should be better company than you to-night, — a thing that never happened before. Judging from *your* voice — and your incivility — I know you are knocked to pieces. Good-night! Go home and go to bed!”

He had not tramped another hundred yards when he espied a second trespasser upon forbidden ground. This time the creature was in motion. Creeping up the lower slope of the hill directly toward the guarded moat, a bent figure was making its slow way. Now, seen in dim relief against the clouded sky, it might be a dog, or other brute animal; then it raised itself almost to a man's height, and seemed to pause for breath. Ralph gave silent chase, overtaking the predatory mystery on the very brink of the moat.

He was still fifty feet or more away when the light from a dark lantern, suddenly opened, shone out. A man knelt upon the top of the bank, undoing a bundle of slender sticks. The leap that landed Ralph upon him was too late to intercept the act of lighting the loosened faggot at the lamp within the lantern. The torches flamed fiercely as if they had been dipped in oil or pitch.

With a shout, Ralph seized the incendiary by the throat and pulled him backward. As they went down together, the burning sticks were tossed into the moat, still half full of crude oil.

“D—n you!” said a husky voice, as a red blaze rushed up, revealing the face of the assailant.

They had slipped upon the earth, soaked with water and oil. Up the saturated sides of the moat and over the edges roared the fiery surf, licking greedily the surface of the thousand barrels of oil, curling, flickering, flaming, as from a bottomless pit of wrath, streaming up the oil-soaked heights beyond, to tank and half-consumed derrick, — a mountain of living fire.

The watchmen, rushing to the place where the men had fallen, saw a tall figure rolling a smaller over and over on the wet ground to extinguish the fiery sheet enwrapping him.

At the bottom of the slope a third form writhed and screamed in a pool of liquid flame.

"Dr. Dale!" cried the first man to reach the fatal spot, recognising the taller of the two.

The next second he gave a shriek, taken up and echoed by his fellows, — a groan and yell of unspeakable horror and anguish.

"It *can't* be Mr. Folger!"

"It is!" said a voice, calmly authoritative even at this supreme moment. "One of you run for a carriage! Three of you help me carry him down!"

While he spoke, he was taking off his coat to wrap it about his friend.

"Somebody look after the other one, down there!" he ordered, as the four stooped to lift their precious burden.

When the "other one" was picked up, his burning clothing was stripped from him, somebody washed the mire and smoke from the face distorted by pain and crying, and bawled between disgust and contempt, —

"Blamed if 't ain't Old Meagley!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PASSING OF RALPH FOLGER

“Thus did this man die, leaving . . . the memory of his death for an example of virtue and fortitude.”

TWO o'clock tolled out, deep, sweet, mellow, from the Club House clock as John Bell and his sister alighted at the house they had left so cheerfully less than three hours ago.

The door flew open before they could ring. Arthur, ashy pale, with loose trembling lips that would not form a syllable, admitted them. A wave of his hand gave Myrtle to understand that she was to go to Ruth's room. John paced the hall in an agony of grief and pity, while waiting for a summons to the chamber of suffering.

Dr. Dale had finished dressing Ralph's burns. They had carried him to the white parlour at his request. He lay on a broad divan drawn into the middle of the floor. Perfectly conscious and collected in mind, he had ordered every light in the big room turned on.

“No darkened chamber and stereotyped death-bed scene for me!” he announced to physician and attendants. “If this thing finishes me, I'm going out in a blaze of glory. Eh, Dale?”

Dale, skilled in reading signs of pain, saw from the cruelly clenched jaw and the anguish behind the alert little eyes, what the dying man suffered. He honoured Folger for the flippant words wrung from lips white with agony.

The boy knew he was dangerously hurt; how badly he could not tell; but the only sign of torture or of fear he betrayed was in the unnaturally light speech that sought to mask the pain.

"Mr. Bell is here, sir!" whispered a frightened servant, who tapped timidly at the door.

"Say that I'm en—" began Dale, in the same guarded key.

Ralph had overheard, and cut in, —

"Go out and speak to him, old man! Don't mind about leaving me alone. My mind's a bit bewildered, and I want a few minutes of solitude to pull myself together in. Tell old John I'd like to see him after a while."

Dale made a few rapid preparations for the patient's comfort, crossed the room with noiseless tread, and slipped into the hall, drawing the door to behind him. The silence and awe of the impending Great Change already brooded over the house.

John checked his hurried walk and confronted the doctor.

"How is he?"

Dale shook his head, without speaking.

"Is it —"

"It is a question of a few hours at most. Besides the external burns, which would be fatal, he inhaled the flame. You know what that means. He cannot live until morning. He is perfectly conscious, but he is in horrible pain. He bears it splendidly. You'd better go to Miss Folger and break the news to her. You'll do it better than anybody else. Make her understand there's no hope, but tell her to meet him bravely and not to break down. That would but make it harder for him. I think she can be trusted to control herself. Poor girl!"

Passing of Ralph Folger 269

The professional voice shook slightly. He paused; then professionalism and assumed coldness were thrown to the winds.

"God knows I have done all I could! I'd gladly have laid down my own life for the boy! If I had got there a minute sooner, I might have prevented the fire. And he bears it like a hero. It shames me to see such pluck. He has everything to live for—and to hope for—and to work for! And now—"

He checked himself abruptly and strode to the open outer door, where he stood for a moment, his back to John, staring, with eyes that saw not, into the outer darkness.

His hands were knotted together behind his back. Bell could see that the knuckles were white with the convulsive pressure. The clergyman, albeit his closest friend, had never known him to be thus moved. John forbore to intrude upon the strong man's grief, either by word or gesture. In another minute Dale had returned to the other's side. His beautiful face was haggard, but marble in its profound calm. And now John for the first time, as Dale stepped nearer to him and the light from the hall chandelier fell full upon him, took note of the doctor's appearance.

He started back with an exclamation of alarm, —

"Egbert! you are badly hurt yourself! You must be in dreadful pain. Your hair and eyebrows are singed! the left side of your face is blistered! And look at your hands!" catching them in his and raising them to the light. "They are covered with burns—and your wrist! Your coat is torn—there is blood upon your shirt-front! You were in it all! And you need to be attended to—at once!"

"Yes?" answered Dale, nonchalantly. "It does hurt just a little. I'll have time enough to think

of all that later. Now I must go back to Folger. He must not be left alone longer. You would better tell his sister at once. Let her be ready to come to him at a moment's notice. Tell her the first coherent words he said, after we picked him up, were to beg that she should not be frightened. That was characteristic, too."

Ralph was lying very still when Dale re-entered the white parlour.

It was an odd picture—the spacious, brilliantly lighted room—associated in Dale's mind with peace, luxury, and the perfect love of the brother and sister who were so much to one another,—the solitary occupant huddled together on the broad couch, his form swathed in white bandages. His keen light eyes shone restlessly from above the face-cloths; patches of fiery hair bristled forth between the snowy head-coverings.

The bandaged figure, which even the majesty of approaching death could not wholly rob of a certain element of the grotesque, lay helpless amid sumptuous surroundings. The master of millions was in a plight for which his grimmest employé would not have exchanged his place. The man who had made and who ruled Pitvale was at this moment of less human account than the meanest loafer skulking in its slums.

Folger did not speak or move until Dr. Dale bent over him. Then he turned upon him restless eyes, into which solemnity, all new to them, had crept.

"I'm going out, old chap?" he asked.

"Yes!" the doctor answered very gently.

"And soon?"

Dale bent his head, mutely.

The boy was silent for a long minute, looking straight up at the ceiling frescoed with soft gray clouds, a few pale stars gleaming between them.

His eyes seemed to pass from one to another of these to where the silver sickle of the young moon shimmered through a veil of mist. There they rested until he spoke, —

“I’m pretty young to die, doctor!”

There was no self-pity, not a suspicion of complaint in his tone; only a sort of awe, tinged with faint regret. He paused, then went on in the same strain, —

“This is a jolly old world. I’ve had some first-rate times in it. It will seem queer to go out of it all! Did you ever think, Dale, what that means? To be absolutely *out* of the game, — with no way of communicating with those we love; to be shut out of their lives as utterly as if we’d never lived at all. It’s a queer thought. It’s hard to get used to it. To be no longer one of the ‘moving row’ we were speaking about the other night, but to be laid ‘back in the closet.’ Such a little while — such a *bright* while ago, it was that you, John, and I — were talking such things over!”

The deepening eyes were fixed upon the shadowy moon above him.

“The rest does n’t bother me — now. I’ve steered fairly straight, for the most part. But to be *out* of it all!”

“You’ll never go out of the lives of the Pitvale people, Folger,” answered the doctor. “They’ll remember you and love your memory as long as they live. If you’d seen some of them to-night, when they heard that you were hurt, you’d understand that.”

A happy smile lighted the drawn face.

“They *are* fond of me!” he murmured.

Articulation was increasingly difficult. Dale moistened his lips, and dropped, spoonful by spoonful, a cooling preparation between them.

"Don't try to talk!" he advised. "It only makes you suffer and exhausts your strength."

"That does n't matter — now! I like to believe that my fellows love me — and will miss me. I'm not given to talking about such things, you know. But I've always thought that some day or other we employers will be called on to give an account of our stewardship over the people who have worked for us. Ruth and I have had many a talk together about it. I'm pretty sure," smiling again, "that her recording angel has a duplicate set of the 'Inasmuch Library.' And I should n't care to be put to shame on that Day. When the books are opened, you know."

"You won't be!" came the curt response, in a husky, unnatural voice, as Dale arose to renew the bandages on the injured man's face.

"Thank you!" said Ralph, simply.

Then — "I have n't waited until to-day to make my peace with my Creator. Scrambling into glory on the last call is n't in my line. That does n't strike me as a square deal, exactly.

"But there are other things to be settled. And the time for earthly affairs is short. I've sent for Hendrickson. He does all the law business for the Folger wells since his father died. He ought to be here by now. I must make my will. Might I trouble you to see if he's come, and if he has, to send him in?"

The lawyer had been waiting five minutes in the hall, not daring to intrude.

"I've put you to lots of bother in my day, Hendrickson," was Ralph's greeting. "But I fancy this will be the last time. Dale! will you put him up to what he must do to start my vocal apparatus again when it gives out? And will you, before you go, give me a drink of something to brace

me up a bit, so that I can dictate all I want written down?"

As the doctor complied with both requests, the earnest eyes met his wistfully.

"Somehow I'm not as strong as I ought to be. Will you come back in about ten minutes, or so, and bring a couple of the servants with you to act as witnesses? Sorry to trouble you! Hendrickson will let you know when we've finished."

Dr. Dale sank down on a carved settee in the recessed hall-window.

His head ached. Reaction was setting in. His burns began to throb and smart. His left shoulder was wrenched, and shooting pains ran through it. He gave scarcely a thought to his injuries. His heart was heavy for the dying boy in the adjoining room. He was deeply stirred by Folger's brave gaiety in the face of death. The physician, inured to witnessing bodily distress, despair, all the horrible stages that lead to dissolution, shrank from what the next hour must bring to pass.

He sat there, elbows on knees, his face in his scorched hands, listening mechanically to the fitful monotone of Folger's voice dictating his will. Once, when the murmur failed entirely, professional instinct made the listener lift himself and strain his ears. When the sound began once more, he relapsed into his listless attitude.

Again, the voice was raised slightly. Without comprehending their import, Dale could make out one or two of the testator's words.

He got up and moved further from the door of the death-chamber, quite out of ear-shot.

At length the droning of the voice ceased. Hendrickson opened the door of the inner room and motioned that he was ready for the witnesses.

As Dale returned to the white parlour, butler and

housekeeper at his heels, he saw, at a glance, that the work of dictating the will had sorely drained Ralph's remaining strength. The eyes were sunken and glassy; the breath came in laboured gasps. The cooling draught had to be administered between every two or three words.

The doctor gave his whole attention to the task of reviving the patient, while the scared witnesses affixed their signatures beneath Ralph Folger's, and the lawyer pressed the blotter upon them, then folded it up and put it into his pocket.

Dale stepped aside, out of Ralph's sight, to whisper to the butler as the man was leaving, —

"Tell Mr. Bell to have Miss Folger brought in in about ten minutes."

To the housekeeper, a sensible elderly woman, he gave another low-voiced order.

Hendrickson left the room with the servants.

Dale moistened the bandages anew, set tumbler and spoon at Ralph's side ready for use, and held a glass to his lips.

"There! that will brace you!" he said, encouragingly, as it was swallowed slowly. "The strain has been too much for you."

"Would you mind —" Ralph began hesitatingly.

"That's all right! I've sent for Miss Folger. Bell will have her here in a few minutes."

"But —" the wistful eyes seeking his with an intensity of meaning.

"I've sent for *her*, too."

"God bless you for a good man and a true friend, Egbert Dale!" broke out Folger, impulsively. "And now I want a word with you before they come. It's an awkward thing to speak of. I —"

"Must it be said?" suggested the doctor, wetting the poor dry lips and tongue, as the voice died away.

Ralph rallied manfully.

"Yes! I shied at it a bit the first time, that's all. I'm not used to discussing such things. Men aren't, as a rule. But here—and now—is where it's got to be done."

"Go on, then!" assented Dale.

Spoon and glass in hand, he watched for the moment of need.

"Dale! old man! you're one of the best friends I ever had. I don't know your past. I don't want to know it. But I'm a fair judge of men, and I know you for one of the truest, whitest men I ever met. You're a gentleman and a man of honour. That's enough for me."

He paused. Not a muscle of Dale's face had moved.

"She loves you!" Ralph resumed brusquely, as if hurrying through a painful task. "She loves you! Even I can see that. You worship the ground she walks upon. You are proud as Lucifer. You won't ask her to marry a poor country doctor. That is foolish. She isn't the sort of girl to let such things matter. You thought once I had a chance there. Don't deny it! It was one night when she was playing for us. I saw it in your eyes. Just because I was rich. You knew I meant to ask her to marry *me*."

"Don't go on!" pleaded Dale, for the breath was short and hard.

"I must! Why, Dale! I knew that when you risked death to-night to save the life of a man you believed was your rival. With me out of the way you believed your course would be clear. Yet you followed me into that hell and dragged me out."

"Don't! don't speak of that!" said Dale, in strong agitation. "I had no such thought! What I did, any one of a hundred other men would have done gladly—and better!"

"Maybe so. That does n't alter the case as far as I can see. You risked everything for me!"

Another silence. The final rally of senses and strength had come. He was making the most of it.

When he spoke again, there was a new note in his voice, although it was a half-whisper. A smile lit up the bandaged face, almost glorifying it.

"I love her, too!" he said. "That's no news to you, of course. She cares nothing for me! How could she? I ought to have seen that, long ago. Now I'm clean out of the race, and I mean that you shall win. May I ask you one question? I don't want to know anything about your past life, except this, — apart from lack of money, is there any just impediment to your marrying?"

"Before Almighty GOD — NO!"

Dale arose to his feet; his voice rang out with strange fervour.

"Then — marry her!" panted Ralph, wrestling with a new spasm of pain and breathlessness, yet resolute as ever to finish the matter he had in hand. "I've left you half my estate. You will be the richest man in this section of the State by the time the sun is up.

"Don't start back! Can't you see, man, it's for *her* — not for you? I'm robbing no one. Ruth has already more than she can use. I've left a few other legacies. But most to you — and to *her*!"

"Ah! I think I hear her voice outside now — and Ruth's. Send them in — won't you?"

"And —" a gleam of the old humour leaping into the tortured eyes — "for the love of Heaven, steer the Meagley girl off! Give her my respectful adieux. But whatever you do, don't give her a chance to get in here and smooth the pillow of the dying saint. Good-luck, old chap!"

Egbert Dale took the swathed hand in both of his.

Passing of Ralph Folger 277

He tried to speak, but no voice came. There was a sharp, clicking sound in his throat, as he tenderly laid down the heavy hand and walked quickly from the room through another door than that by which John Bell entered, carrying Ruth Folger in his arms.

Dawn was creeping, slow and chill, over Pitvale.

The streets had been disquieted all night. Knots of men hung about tavern and saloon doors, or drank within them to drown the anxiety that possessed the town as the bosom of one individual. A common dread was in every soul; a common fear blanched faces made horribly distinct by the ominous glare of the burning hill, the funeral pyre of many hopes.

A pyramid of dark-red flame, bent this way and that by the rising wind, it flared at daybreak as it had rioted in the first hour after midnight, without let or molestation; as it would riot for many hours to come, until the oil was licked from the trench and the soaked sheathing of the moat consumed.

Even Ralph Folger would be at a loss for an expedient for arresting the conflagration, had he been up and doing. And Ralph Folger, as every child in Pitvale knew, lay a-dying in the great stone house on the hill, the gray walls of which showed ruddy by reflection from the consuming fire.

In one quarter — the peaceful, pretty quarter of the model cottages — lamps had burned all night; anxious faces pressed against the window-panes and peered from oft-opened doors, as men passed the end of the thoroughfare, or brought news direct from the great house.

At six o'clock a man ran down the middle of the street, — a man, panting, coatless, hatless, — his oil-stained overalls and soiled shirt streaked and

scorched. Like one distraught he ran, shouting brokenly a single sentence as he went by each house.

And from the whole quarter, when he had passed, arose a mingled clamour of the weeping of women and the strangled oaths of rough, sorrowing men.

For the runner was Sandy McAlpin, and the broken words he sobbed out were, —

"Ralph Folger's dead!"

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE LIBRARY

“ With thy true eyes on mine, dear heart,
As at the margin of the Sea
Which thee and me one day must part,
Forgive all that I would not be.
Assoil thou me, while I cast out
Dark fancies that have wrought me pain ;
Let love’s strong faith bear down weak doubt :
We shall not pass this way again.”

DR. DALE, calling at the Folger house on the afternoon of the second day after the electric storm, was admitted by Arthur, who had evidently been on the watch.

“ Miss Folger is sleeping very quiet, sir,” he said. “ And will you please walk into the liberrery? One of the ladies will be down directly.”

“ One of the ladies ” signified but one to the waiting visitor. Assured that the formal message was from her, the physician laid by hat and overcoat in the hall, and passing with the light, soundless step habitual to him, into the library, was met full by Kate Meagley.

Before she said so much as “ Good-afternoon,” she glided behind him and closed the door he had been too much surprised to shut.

There was not a vestige of colour in her face; there were dark crescents under her eyes; her lips were dry and livid. The cool-headed observer thought he had seldom seen a less attractive woman. For the first time since the beginning of their acquaintanceship, she had not cared to commend herself to his eyes in arranging the interview. She entered at once upon business.

"Ruth has been much more comfortable since you were here this morning," she said. "Mr. Bell saw her afterwards and thought her condition much improved. She fell into a natural sleep an hour ago — at two o'clock."

"Yet I found a message upon my office-slate at half-past two, asking me to call here at an early hour. Why was I sent for? and by whom?"

"Because I wanted to see you upon another matter altogether. I heard at two o'clock — I had known nothing of it before — being so much engrossed by Ruth — and all the sad preparations — that my father was on the hill, night before last. You may imagine the shock it was to me. My sister Harriet brought me the sad story. I asked her to leave the message at your office."

The corners of the listener's mouth twitched slightly.

A useless lie is always a blunder. He had left the house and walked down the avenue with Miss Julia Meagley at eleven o'clock, she descanting with tearful volubility upon dear Kate's distress at learning what had happened to "poor Pa" over-night.

Since, however, it suited the diplomatic daughter to receive him in the earliest transports of grief-full consternation, he would give her her head.

"She tells me" — the Middle Miss Meagley was saying — "that Sandy McAlpin has been to my mother to-day to say that her husband is responsible for what has happened. Sandy was in a fearful rage. He told her that if my father were in his right mind he would be dragged out of his bed, tarred and feathered, then hanged to a lamp-post. He warned her that 'the wretch' — those were his words — 'must be locked up in a mad-house as soon as he can be moved, or the boys will pay him off in their own fashion.'

“Dr. Dale! you know what my father is, — a feeble old man, broken by his unmerited misfortunes, and with the foolish ways and talk of his age and condition. It would kill him to be put into an asylum. It would be a lasting disgrace to his family. I am informed that you are the only person who knows just what happened before the fire broke out. My mother, my sisters, and myself were greatly excited by the storm, and the lightning-bolt, and the cannonading early in the evening. When the carriage came for me, my mother was unwilling to have me venture into the streets, filled as they were with all sorts of desperate characters. When I would come home to see how Ruth was bearing it all, her uneasiness and worry made her forget my father. She supposed him to be in bed until he was brought home with his clothes burned off his body.

“He was suffering too much to give any rational account of himself. The men who brought him told a confused story of having found him near the moat, which had somehow taken fire. We could not get you, as you were busy with Mr. Folger. Dr. Kruger was sent for. He put my father under the influence of morphine and ordered him to be kept perfectly quiet. Until McAlpin called, my mother did not know how he got his burns. You have seen McAlpin, of course, and heard his story?”

“He helped me bring Mr. Folger home.”

“He is naturally greatly excited. Mr. Folger was his liberal patron. His death may mean much to the man. He says you were actually on the spot, and that you know more about the awful affair than anybody else. Dr. Dale! you have a kind heart. You are a merciful man. Don't add to the miseries of an unfortunate family. I sent for you to beg — on my knees, if need be, for I am brought very low — my pride is utterly gone! — to beg you to hold back

anything that would set this lawless community against my father, or lessen Ruth Folger's regard for me — for us!"

Again the lines of the impassive visage before her were stirred. This time the gleam was touched with contempt. The last luckless slip of the tongue had betrayed her. The faint smile stung her like a lash.

She was standing before him, — for he had declined to sit down, — her hands clasped upon her breast, her eyes, wide and piteous, raised to his. She was a *poseuse*, despite the terrible sincerity of her petition. Her recoil was natural, the fling of her hands behind her effective, because unstudied.

"I know what you are thinking! You despise us as her pensioners. You have never believed in my friendship for her. You would like to have her cast us off because she has been brought to think that my father — an infirm, timid old man, — had something to do with her brother's death. That would strengthen your hold upon the Folger money, and the hold the Bells are getting upon Ruth."

"If you will kindly come to the point of this extraordinary attack, I shall be better able to answer you."

The chill scorn of countenance and tone were a withering black frost. She had spoiled all by letting heat get the better of her discretion for one minute. Stormy scenes with Julia and with Harriet had abraded her nerves and weakened self-control. Superadded to these was the passionate resentment boiling up within her at sight and hearing of the man who had humbled and infuriated her as no mortal ever had before, as no other ever could humiliate her again. She flung the reins upon the neck of the temper dreaded by her dependants, unsuspected by her superiors. There was nothing to lose with this man. He might be bullied, and to bully him would relieve the volume of pent-up fury.

Her hands clutched and pinched one another behind her back, as she met his gaze boldly, and dashed her words into his face, —

“The ‘point’ is just this: If you do know anything that happened night before last that would harm my father if it were told, I expect you to keep it to yourself. The fire was an accident. A careless workman or one of the guards may have dropped a coal from his pipe, or let a lighted match fall into the moat. Or, the lantern which people who did not see it insist was carried by my father, fell into the oil. *I* insist that the person who dropped the lantern was not my father, but some one else who got away unhurt. Mr. Folger said that he did not recognise the incendiary. He died without suspecting who it was. Would not he have known Mr. Meagley instantly? What I expect you to do is to keep these things in mind, and be very careful what you say.”

“Is that a threat?” eyeing her with tranquil curiosity, most exasperating because she could not resent it in words.

“It may, or it may not be.” She was regaining composure, although the fingers he could not see still scratched and tore at one another. “If I make a threat, you may be sure it will be carried out. We Meagleys have long memories.”

“Leaving generalities,” — each word a drop of caustic, — “let me say that I have already been called upon by six newspaper reporters, not to mention many other people — all upon the same errand. As soon as news of Mr. Folger’s death was telegraphed to other places, requests for particulars were poured into our telegraph and telephone offices. As the one man — as you have remarked — who was an eyewitness of the whole affair, I was applied to for these particulars.”

Kate Meagley felt herself growing sick and weak.

She sat down, and rested her forehead upon her hand. Dr. Dale remained standing; the hard coldness of accent and eye did not vary.

"I said to each caller, without invidious comment, that I was talking with Mr. Folger near the base of the hill a few minutes before I saw him turn from the road and begin to climb the hill. At the same instant I caught sight of the person he was pursuing. I followed him. When but a few rods away, I saw a light at the edge of the trench into which the oil from the broken tank had run. I distinctly saw a man lighting what looked like slender sticks, by a lamp or candle. As Mr. Folger reached him, the man threw the blazing sticks into the trench. The oil was ignited and rushed over the edge of the trench. I laid hold of Mr. Folger, and kicked the other man down the hill. The man, when picked up, proved to be Mr. Meagley."

As the merciless narrator went on, the girl's face was bluish-white; both hands were pressed hard upon her heart. The roaring in her ears, the oppression on her chest, were the sensations of one drowning.

"You are quite sure? May there not have been some mistake?" she faltered. "It was night, you know."

"I saw both men by the light of the blazing oil. When asked as to my opinion with regard to Mr. Meagley's presence there at such an hour, I said that he is a monomaniac, who considers himself ill-used by Mr. Folger and other successful men because they would not share their profits with him. That I had advised his family, as his physician, to keep a close watch upon his actions, since they would not take the wiser course of sending him to an insane asylum.

"This is the substance of what I have said to other people. It is all I have to say to you."

He bowed, walked to the door she had shut, and set it wide open.

No more emphatic indication of a desire to end an unpleasant interview can be given. The emphasis thus conveyed is usually an insult, and is designed to be construed as such.

A girl dressed in black was crossing the central hall on the way from the conservatory to the staircase. Her arms were full of Annunciation-lilies. At sight of the figure in the doorway of the library, the pale face was irradiated; a low cry of rapture escaped the lips. She flew as straight to Dale as a wind-driven bird to shelter, never observing that he was not alone.

“Love! my Love! I did not know that *you* were here!”

He took her in his arms, lilies and all, holding her as if he would never let her go.

There were two doors to the library. When Dale drew his betrothed into the room, there was no one there but themselves. He said never a word of the interview he had ended emphatically. The woman who had threatened him was unprincipled, and he had made her desperate. He dismissed all thought of her. He would have liked to open the window and change the air she had breathed before he let his darling enter.

Until this moment he had not seen Myrtle alone since the evening when, at his request, she had sung “Between the Lights;” had not looked into the dear eyes since they laughed back at him as she cantered away from his office-door, a gay “*Au revoir!*” upon her tongue.

Between that hour and this he had waded through the deeps of hell, had tasted the bitterness of death. But she was his—his alone! wedded to his soul for time and for eternity. Another man who

had loved her lay dead in the room above them. The lilies she had gathered to put upon the stilled heart were heaped, like perfumed sea-foam, upon the table beside them while they talked, and while he held her in fierce tenderness, defiant of death and the pains of hell.

"Mine! *mine!* MINE!" he uttered, over and over, in the semi-delirium of one who, perishing with thirst, stoops to the fountain.

Then, as he saw how wan were her cheeks when the flush of meeting had passed, how languid the eyes from much weeping and loss of sleep, his heart smote him for the selfish indulgence.

"It is cruel — barbarous — for me to talk of myself and my love while your heart is so heavy," he said. "Ralph was very dear to us both."

At Ralph's name the tears gushed afresh. He drew her head to his breast, and let her sob herself calm there. It was her resting-place, her home, her shield from this time and forevermore. Come what had come, come what might, she was his, wholly and always.

As soon as the poignancy of her grief should be over, when the friend "dear to them both" should be laid away in his last resting-place, and the needful legal formalities should be done with, he would tell her that there was no longer any bar to their immediate union, break to her the news of Ralph's magnificent bequest to them — to *her!*

When they had borne Ruth away from her brother's death-chamber, she had besought Myrtle to stay with her.

"He loved you so dearly!" she had cried, clinging to her friend's neck. "You are all I have left of him!"

"You must stay!" said John, and Dr. Dale had not gainsaid the verdict.

He said now, within himself, that they would live close to Ruth in the Future so blessedly near at hand. The stricken woman should have the comforter who, she fondly believed, would have been her sister had her idolised brother lived.

Ah, well! let her believe it, so long as his love, himself — and Ralph — knew better!

The snow had begun to fall when Myrtle quieted down into her normal self.

A great bay-window opened upon the garden, and they went over to sit in it and watch the fine, soft flakes. They powdered the evergreens, they lodged in the crotches of naked branches; they spread a light gray lacy web, then a carpet of pure wool, upon the faintly greening turf, the gravel-walks, the asphalt drive, the black mould of beds and borders made ready for spring flowers. The ghostly stillness of the outer world was in close touch with the death-hush within doors.

“We cannot be glad. It will be a long, long time before we can be light-hearted again,” whispered Myrtle, nestling into the firm embrace of her lover’s arm. “But we can be peaceful and thankful — as long as we are left to one another. Separation would be worse than bereavement, worse than death itself.

“You see,” touching her skirt, “I have put on a black gown. I felt like doing it, and I knew it would gratify Ruth, and I thought *he* would like to know it. You don’t mind it, do you?”

“I mind nothing that is a comfort and a satisfaction to you, my darling. And, as Ruth said, Ralph loved you very dearly.”

It cost him no effort to be generous. Was she not all his, — heart and soul, mind and body? his leaf of healing, his pearl of great price, his dove of peace?

He liked that simile best of all. Such peace and gratitude as were his, sitting in the summer warmth of the hushed room, seeing the snow cover everything of earthly soil out of sight — and what he had sworn was dearer to him than his soul's salvation, in his arms.

“‘Memory past and present fusing
Into one swift, shining stream,’

he quoted dreamily. “I wish ‘Present and Future’ would scan! ‘Forgetting the things that are behind,’ we live and love in one eternal Now.”

The carpet of white wool was a three-ply, many times multiplied, when a brougham, curtains down and glasses raised, drove under the window and down the avenue.

“There goes Kate Meagley!” said Myrtle. “She is very busy, and obliged to go out a great deal. I am thankful to be able to stay with Ruth in her absence. I am beginning to be ashamed of my harsh judgment of Kate. I don't think I can ever bring myself to like her — or to trust her. But I cannot help respecting her — somewhat — just now. She is marvellously efficient. Her gentleness to me is marked. She has not said one — feline — thing to me. Her behaviour to Ruth is beyond praise. Seeing all this is a lesson in charitable judgment.”

Dr. Dale held his peace.

CHAPTER XXV

UNDER THE SNOW

“So passed the strong, heroic soul away,
And when they buried him, the little port
Had seldom seen a costlier funeral.”

“For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed.”

THE snow-storm that had set in quietly on the afternoon of the sixteenth day of March, with no portent of violence, waxed, with the falling of the night, into a blizzard the like of which had never visited the hill-locked valley.

Railways were blocked by the close of the second day of windy storm and tempest; in the narrower streets the snow lay even with the sills of second-story windows; the whirling masses filled the blackened moat below the ruined well; cottagers were dug out of their hidden houses, as sheep out of drifts; drunkards, reeling homeward from saloons whither they had gone to be warmed and filled, sank down for their endless slumber under a fleecy coverlet, and were not found until March suns changed ice and snow to water.

Ruth Folger, awaiting patiently the postponed day of her brother's burial, scanned her "Inasmuch" books to judge who would be most seriously affected by the loss of work and by the fierce weather. New cases of distress were hourly added to the list by John Bell and Dr. Dale, reports rendered the more freely because each appreciated how salutary was the occupation thus rendered to the burdened mind. By her orders, gangs of men, shut off from well-

work and transporting oil to the station by the depth of the drifts, were set about clearing streets and roads, and carting the snow thus removed out of the town, receiving for their labour double the wages they would have drawn for their ordinary occupation. To each gang hot coffee was served from the Club House kitchen three times a day, a hot meal of meat and vegetables at noon.

"And I'm to tell ye, me lads, that it's from Mr. Ralph Folger, with his sister's love," Big Sandy, her accredited ambassador, made out to say the day the gangs began work. "Because, she says, it's what himself would have done if he were here the day."

After which stammering deliverance, they saw his face no more for a good hour.

On the twentieth of that fateful month the mightiest funeral procession the hill-country was ever to see set forth from the stone house on the South Side, for the cemetery that lay about "Dominie Bell's" church, in which five generations of Folgers had worshipped God according to the traditions of their rustic forbears.

From the oriel of the white parlour, the bereaved sister, whose house was left unto her desolate, saw the long black line wind through the hollow ways hewn in the snow as in solid marble. Every flag was at half-mast; the responsive tolling of bells thrilled the frosty air. The weather was still intensely cold from the vast bodies of snow burying the earth out of sight for fifty miles around, but there was no wind, and the sunshine was heartlessly bright.

Behind the carriages and horsemen walked hundreds of working-men, each decent coat-sleeve and hat banded with crape. The like badge of mourning fluttered from many a tenement-house window,

and drooped from cottage door-knobs. Back of closed windows, women, children, and old men crowded the panes to see, with tear-blurred eyes, the last of one all acknowledged as benefactor and friend. Under the limitless hollow of wintry blue there was no sound but the rhythmic beat of the bells, the creak and crunch of wheels in the polished ruts worn in the snow.

The forest of derricks arose, gaunt and black, from the dazzling surface; pumps were silent, and the tall chimneys smokeless. All Pitvale mourned as the heart of one man for the young, exuberant life so pitilessly quenched.

As John Bell read of the Resurrection and the Life in the crowded church, — summoning all the forces of his strong soul to command his voice and to stifle the pleadings of his brother-heart for the right to bow as a mourner beside the coffin, instead of standing as priest above it, — Myrtle knelt by Ruth's chair, and they comforted one another with the same divine words.

No one was present, besides themselves, while the low, girlish tones read the simple, beautiful service. No one interrupted them during the solemn hour that followed. The great common sorrow had knit their hearts very closely together in these last terrible days.

"I am selfish, I know," Ruth said, that evening, as John Bell was bidding her "Good-night." "But her going will take so much from me! If you *could* spare her to me a few days longer, it would be a great comfort."

John looked an inquiry which Ruth did not see.

"I will stay!" said Myrtle, promptly.

Ruth thanked them, without in the least suspecting the nature or degree of the sacrifice made for her "comfort."

It was no time for stories of love and betrothal. John repressed the longing, at times almost intolerable, to offer the bereaved woman the devotion of his tender, constant soul, to assert his right to stand nearest and dearest to her in her hour of supreme need. In the early transports of her grief, it would be indelicate, according to his chivalric code, to obtrude his claims. After a little while he might speak, and she might listen, and, he fondly hoped, find surcease of pain in the certainty of his love.

Dr. Dale came daily as physician and friend, and left directions with Miss Bell when the professional call was over. The grateful patient knew nothing of his changed relations to her friend. Therefore she could not guess at the thoughts which flew yearningly, during the quiet evenings in the white parlour, to the room deserted by both men in Myrtle's absence. The vision of the chilly gloom, brooding where warmth and heart-cheer had reigned for two idyllic months; the vacant arm-chair before the fireless hearth, the silent piano, the absence of the Presence that made it Home to the trio, — pained and oppressed her.

On three evenings of that week John took his sister's place as reader, companion, and custodian, and sent her off to walk under Dr. Dale's escort.

They were back within an hour each time, for it was a sickly season, fraught with coughs, colds, and consumption, the dregs of the hard winter that seemed endless. If Myrtle brought fresher roses and brightened eyes to her friend's room on her return, exercise and fresh air accounted for them.

Kate Meagley "found Miss Bell's visit such a blessing" at that particular juncture. Her father continued very ill, so shattered in mind and body as to demand continual care, and the whole family regarded the middle daughter as a mainstay. She

passed several hours of each day in the paternal abode, and more than once came home so worn out in nerve as to be compelled to go at once to her chamber and to bed. She was exquisitely sensitive, according to compassionate Ruth, and the part her unhappy parent had taken in the late tragedy told upon her sadly.

Then a rain-storm set in, converting the snow-wastes into gray slush, flooding the streets and making out-door exercise impracticable. It was a dreary, dreadful interval between a prolonged and a tardy season.

When the sun shone again, he was convoyed by bitter east winds that froze the slush into solid rock.

March was outdoing herself, making a record she would find it hard to break in years to come.

Upon the tenth day of Myrtle's sojourn in the Folger house, her brother brought Jeff to spend the afternoon with her. Ruth had given him a confidential commission to that effect, and smiled happily at the delighted surprise in her friend's countenance at sight of him.

The little fellow had been at a loss how to dispose of his superabundance of leisure and himself, with Miss Bell away all the time, Mr. Bell and Dr. Dale hardly ever at home, even at meal-times, and Beautiful a resident, with his mistress, of Miss Folger's house. Ruth was a prime favourite with Jeff; a visit to her a treat that nearly made him forget his mother's injunction to "move very quietly and speak softly," when with one whose brother "had just gone to heaven."

Myrtle caught him from John's hand, with a hug, and a kiss that gladdened his inmost soul.

"My boy! my dear, *dear* boy!" she said, her tones so heartsome that he clasped her neck in an ecstasy of relief.

"Oh-h!" he breathed in her ear. "I was afraid you'd be crying all the whole time!"

Myrtle lifted him to her knee, undid his wrappings, and laid her face to his,— cold, round, and rosy.

"How *good* it feels!" she said. "No, dear! we do not think our dear Mr. Folger would like us to be crying all the time, because he is so much happier than we could make him. He liked to have happy people about him, you know. Go to Miss Ruth now! She is waiting to speak to you."

Seated in a chair just his size, set at Miss Ruth's left hand, a new top, of a pattern hitherto unknown to him, in one hand, a gorgeous picture-book in the other, a seductive picture of bon-bons before the eyes of his fancy, — the important small person was not forsaken by all his wits.

"We meeted Dr. Dale in the street," he informed Myrtle, seriously conscientious. "He gived me a peticular message for you. He says you are going to walk me them — *those* — no! *these* two miles to-day that you promised. He says be sure to put on rubber shoes with roughed soles. 'Cause the walking is very slippy."

John Bell clapped his hands.

"Bravo! my man! Very well done! *Verbatim*, if not *literatim*! Allowances must be made for the medium of transmission. Miss Kate is at home to-day, pet, and you must follow the doctor's prescription. You will be better for the tramp after being storm-bound so long. The walking is more tolerable than might have been expected. What is left of the snow has settled into a hard crust."

He moved over to Ruth and looked down upon her with love-full eyes.

"Before the next snow flies we shall have this little lady ready for snow-shoes and skates."

The softest imaginable shade of pink, delicate as that which dashes the outer petals of a bride-rose, tinged Ruth's cheeks at this, the first allusion he had made to his knowledge of her precious secret, and what it might involve for them.

She put out her hand impulsively. It was enclosed in both of his.

Myrtle lifted Jeff to the floor.

"The very best place for spinning that top is the conservatory," she declared. "The floor there is all marble. Come!"

The conservatory was as warm and bright as June. A mocking-bird's cage hung in the branches of an orange-tree. The orange-tree was in bloom, and the bird was singing. Rows of stately lilies faced a bank of roses; orchids vibrated, like birds-of-paradise all a-flutter, in the wafts of sun-filled air rising to the domed roof.

After setting the top going, Myrtle strolled slowly up and down the aisle, basking in the light, inhaling the fragrant air, and thinking her own beautiful thoughts.

She was going "home" in two days more! Kate Meagley had been to her room that forenoon to thank her for her "great kindness," and to report her father as so far convalescent that he could be left to the care of his wife and four resident daughters. She had talked quietly, unaffectedly, and sadly of the event that had plunged two households into mourning. Her unhappy father would be sent to a private Retreat, as soon as he could be moved. It was best so. She did not say, but Myrtle surmised correctly, that the Retreat was an expensive shelter, and that Ruth Folger would defray the costs of the monomaniac's keeping.

In her heart Myrtle could not but honour the girl for the manner in which she had comported herself

of late. She had shielded Ruth from disturbances from without; directed the servants, received calls, and answered notes, yet continued to give part of each day to her distressed family, loyally resolute, it would seem, to show to a censorious public that she would stand by kith and kin, whatever happened. To a generous nature there is pure satisfaction in reversing an uncharitable opinion of a fellow-creature. Myrtle was glad to think kindly and compassionately of the Middle Miss Meagley.

"Egbert says it is only the untempted who have a show of right to judge harshly of the sinner," she thought. 'Put yourself in his place,' is his favourite motto. "I must put myself to school to him in the matter of Christian charity. Others preach it. He practises it."

The swift, shining stream of her musings did not dally long with Kate Meagley and abstract moralisings. Dearly as she loved Ruth, it was natural that her heart should be "light as it had wings," in anticipating the return to the fondly familiar round of every-day life at Mrs. Bowersox's. She had so much to say, and so much more to hear, that she could scarcely wait forty-eight hours longer.

Egbert was grievously shaken by Ralph Folger's death and the attendant circumstances. He could not refer to them without an exhibition of emotion that did not accord with his habitual self-control. He looked jaded and careworn, and, in reply to his fiancée's anxious inquiries, had confessed that his old enemy, insomnia, was in full possession of the hours that should bring rest in sleep.

He had told her that, on her first evening at home, they "must have a long business-talk," and at her solicitous exclamation had added, with the grave tender smile oftener upon his lips now than the flashing gleam that used to change his whole

visage, — that “there was nothing to make her uneasy. She must trust him yet a little while.”

Ignorant of the fact that Ralph Folger's will was that day admitted to probate, and that the singular provisions of the instrument were no secret to anybody in town except herself, — Ruth, by John's advice, having refrained from speaking of them to her or to Kate, — she had not the most shadowy idea of what the purport of the business-talk would be. Only that she must go on believing in Egbert.

“Trust him!” She said it aloud, looking through the bowery leafage and bloom to the sun shining in his strength. “To the death! As if anything could shake my faith!”

“Yes, Miss Bell?” responded Jeff, politely, from the marble floor and the humming-top.

“I did not speak to you, dear. Are you happy?”

“Very happy, thank you, Miss Bell!” primly, but heartily.

“So am I, in heart!” strolling to the far end of the flower-lined alley as she soliloquised, smiles upon lip and in the earnest, sensitive eyes. “Very peaceful and thankful. Such peace as even sorrow cannot take away.”

At three o'clock she and Jeff set out, in good heart, for the two-mile walk. The spring sun had melted the ice from the board sidewalks, leaving them so wet and sloppy that the pedestrians were glad to quit them as soon as they struck a path through a vacant lot, as a cross-cut to the open country.

The most nearly romantic walk Myrtle had explored in her many tramps in the environs of Pitvale lay along and across what was known to the country people as “The Glen,” an irregular ravine winding between steep banks fringed with bushes, down to a narrow strip of meadow-land washed by

the creek. A bustling little brook ran in the bottom of the gully and cut a crooked streak in the meadow in its impatience to throw itself into the full-grown water-course. One of the few belts of native forest that had once covered acres of farmland bounded the farther side of the glen.

Jeff gave his companion to understand that this was one of his stamping-grounds. He had been in those woods many and many a time. Leastways, Mr. Bell had walked him there oncet—or may 't was twicet. And Dr. Dale had rided him there one other day. In a buggy and a horse. There were ten millions of white flowers on the trees that day.

“Oh, Jeff dear! Ten millions?”

“Tenny rate, there were a hundred. Dr. Dale cutted off a big bunch for me. They did not have any smell, but they were nice. I fink he said they were dogwood. Or, perhaps, catwood. I don't just remember. I saw a squirrel. He ranned up a tree. And a rabbit with a funny stuck-up tail. He ranned away in the bushes. Never-an-never so fast. Dr. Dale said 'cause he could n't climb a tree. His feet were n't made right, you know. Would n't you like to get across the gully, Miss Bell? You just come down this way. I'll show you. Me and Dr. Dale went acrost it. He tied the buggy to a tree this side.”

Prattling as fast as his tongue could wag, he scampered on ahead. The ravine was choked with snow for some distance. The shrubs, thrusting dark tips through the crust, reminded Myrtle of black pins in a white cushion. She spoke of it to Jeff, and both laughed. The crisp, pure air had got into veins and head. She could have danced and sung as they broke their way through the bushes. A row of pines grew in the edge of the wood close to the brink of the gully. She stopped to listen

to the "hush! hush! hush!" of the wind in the plummy branches.

Pines sing the same song all around the world. She loved them and their music and their scent. Some day she would ask Egbert why he "hated" it.

When she was a little girl, she used to persuade John to swing her hammock between two tall pines upon the lawn of a farmhouse where they spent several summers. The long-drawn sighs always put her to sleep.

A plantation of scrub-pines filled up the shallow end of the ravine where it lost itself in the meadow.

Cones had doubtless fallen from the larger trees above, and taken root in the clayey soil. The lowlands were one glare of ice left by the receding freshet.

Myrtle called to Jeff to go carefully lest he should slip. Beautiful bounded down the hill to overtake him, warned by his mistress's accent that there was danger somewhere. Before she came up with them she heard the child's gleeful shout, and an odd sound as of a pickaxe striking upon ice. Jeff was capering with delight, and clapping his hands.

"Oh, Miss Bell! look at Beautiful! I do 'spect it's a rabbit — or maybe a squirrel — or maybe a woodchucker he's after!"

The dog was digging frantically with his forepaws into a heap of frozen snow lodged under the scrub-pines, fragments flying about him like a sleet-storm.

Myrtle pressed forward and seized him by the collar.

"Beautiful! no! no, sir! What do you want with a harmless little rabbit?"

The dog paid no heed. A large piece of snow-crust hit her in the face. She released the excited creature, and staggered back, clearing her smarting eyes with both hands.

Jeff's shriek was a different note from his scream of enjoyment in the dog's exploit.

"Oh! oh! oh! See what he's done!"

The digger had uncovered a woman's arm embedded in the snow-ice. The sleeve, revealed to the shoulder, was of black stuff. The bare hand, frozen into chalky whiteness, clutched a bunch of yellow willow twigs.

"Oh, Jeff! stand back! What is it?"

"I fink," — solemnly deliberative, "it must belong to the lady we sawed the other day. The end of her finger is broked off."

CHAPTER XXVI

CORONER KRUGER

"First Grave-digger. But is this law?

"Second Grave-digger. Ay, marry, is 't, crowner's quest law."

PITVALE justice, like Pitvale sanitary conditions, pavements, and schools, had by no means kept pace with the growth and wealth of the town.

The place was a rank mushroom, born of Oil, reared and nourished by Greed, Money, and Excitement. Something must be left unfinished. In this case there were numerous things.

The town was the county-seat, it is true, and boasted a two-storied stuccoed Court-house, which was also the City Hall and the local jail, part of which was the jailer's private residence.

The second floor of the Court-house consisted of one large room with three smaller at the right and left, used as clerks' offices and jury-room. In the central chamber every case, criminal or civil—from a "drunk and disorderly" up to a legal squabble over the ownership of a hundred thousand dollar oil-well—was adjudicated. Here public meetings were held,—municipal, political, philanthropic, and even religious.

The first floor was occupied by "Bat" Sydney, the jailer, his wife and their two children. It was roomy and comfortable, for "Bat" was a man of consequence, combining with that of jailer the offices of deputy county-clerk and deputy-sheriff.

In the basement were some eight or ten strong

cells. The collection was dignified by the name of "The Jail" proper.

Except in one instance, when an oilman had shot his opponent at cards, and another, when Mrs. Bowersox's wash had been painlessly extracted from the lines by a negro who was caught white-handed in the act and consigned to the jail (Mrs. Bowersox daily sending jelly and chicken and mince-pies to the "poor dear," until he was removed, at the end of thirty days, to the penitentiary), the lock-up, up to date, had been merely the depository, for brief periods, of certain inebriated oilmen and loafers in general, who were lodged there until they had slept off their quarrelsome fits and were ready to accumulate another "load."

Pitvale, albeit it had had enough sensations lately to sate a town ten times its size, arose ravenously to a bait the like of which had never been thrown to it before. Heretofore its misdeeds had been done in the open. There had never been a Murder mystery worthy of commemoration in inch-long capitals and flaring head-lines in metropolitan papers. The town, although horrified, was a trifle vain of the distinction.

Accordingly, on the morning set for the Inquest in the case of the dead woman who had been found on the bank of Ranken's Creek two days ago, the Court-room was packed to the very doors, and a throng of grease-grimed oilmen and inquisitive women hung about the stairways and the front porch. Little work was done at any well. Everybody took a day off. The streets were almost deserted and quieter than on Sunday. All Pitvale was at the Court-house. All who could squeeze in were in the Court-room.

Samuel Johnson Kruger, M.D., had run for Coroner the year before and got the appointment, an honour damaged on the way to him by the knowledge that Dr. Dale had positively refused to allow his

name to be mentioned in connection with the office. To-day Dr. Kruger felt himself, for the first time in his professional career, to be in his true element. He was, at last, the centre of public interest. He had been Pitvale's leading doctor in days when, as a country practitioner, he had gleaned a scanty livelihood in a sparsely settled district.

Then had come the oil-boom, and the consequent influx of population. The village swelled into a town; the town promised to grow into a city. Samuel Kruger forecast a future of wealth and renown for himself. His lack of skill, and the address that often in his profession atones with the ignorant majority for deficiency in skill, resulting in more than one disastrous blunder, were for a time readily condoned in a rough-and-ready community, only too thankful to have a doctor of any sort within easy call.

He prospered, adding case to case, and dollar to dollar, until Dr. Dale appeared upon the small stage. Workingmen and adventurers are quick to size up a man, and Kruger suffered in the comparison. With growing hatred for the supplanter, he had to stand aside and see his patients, one after another, turn from him to this upstart; to see the few wealthy families of the place employ the specious new-comer; to note the difference between Dale's grave, easy manner and consummate skill, and his own bluster, his illiteracy, and ignorance of the subtler brands of his calling.

The consciousness of inferiority hurt him even more than the steady loss of practice.

The climax came in the form of a stray speech of Ralph Folger, retailed to Kruger by some kind well-wisher, —

“Dale has Manner: Kruger has n't even manners.”

Close upon this came Dale's nomination as Coroner; his prompt refusal of the office, and his sug-

gestion that the post be offered to his less fortunate rival. Kruger accepted the position, and cordially detested the man at whose motion it was given to him.

Now, however, for one bright, if brief day, he was the hero of an Occasion, and Dale was not even in court. It irked the official that his enemy should not be a witness of his triumph. Since Dale had become a millionaire (a fresh grievance), Kruger supposed sourly that he would feel little interest in Pitvale affairs. With all his elation, the Coroner was somewhat nervous. It was his maiden experience in an affair of such magnitude. Despite hard study of buff calfskin books over-night, he was not quite sure as to the law regarding inquests in the case of a possible homicide. Like many a wiser man, he resolved to rule arbitrarily upon doubtful points, carrying the matter with a high hand, and taking the chances that nobody in the motley throng before him was better posted than himself.

The initial steps of the Inquest were taken in comparative security. A fleeting smile from Hendrickson, the Folgers' lawyer, who, by virtue of his profession, sat just within the bench enclosure and let no stage of the proceedings escape him, warned Kruger now and then that he was skating upon thin ice, and he invariably glided over to the next point.

The task of impanelling a jury was plain sailing. Half of Pitvale was eager to serve. True, Barney Crogan refused to sit on the same jury with Elihu Maxwell, upon the ground that the latter had owed him four dollars for six months, and was therefore not a fit person to decide what was or was not a square trial.

Kruger frowned down the hilarity excited in the audience by the original objection, and hastened to overrule it by explaining in his best chest-tone and second-best legal phraseology, that the fact of the

said Maxwell's having owed the said Crogan the sum of four dollars no cents for six months, had no real bearing upon the case in point, and did not, *per se*, disqualify the said Elihu Maxwell from determining by what means the deceased woman — whom the Court (for the lack of a better name) would designate as Jane Doe — came to her death.

The last juror was at length sworn in, and Kruger, hiding a tremor under an access of bluster, opened the Inquest.

It is safe to say that up to this moment not ten people in the room felt the occasion to be solemn, much less momentous to any person or persons present. Curiosity had drawn them together, and they were wide awake to the element of the farcical already introduced into the proceedings by the squabble between the jurors and the overstrained dignity of the presiding officer.

“The investigation, Gentlemen of the Jury and fellow-citizens,” he began, his voice going flat, then abruptly scaling a whole octave, “in the case of Jane Doe will now begin. By virtue of my position as Coroner of this town, I will state briefly, that said Jane Doe, apparently thirty years of age, *habitat* unknown —”

Here Hendrickson smiled, and Kruger went on more loudly, —

“*Habitat* unknown, was found dead on the right bank of the stream known as Ranken's Creek, at a point about one-half mile below the Bradfield Road on last Monday afternoon, March twenty-six, at about four o'clock P. M. by Miss Myrtle Bell, sister of Reverend John Bell of this place. As coroner and physician, I examined the body of the deceased.

“She was five feet six inches in height and slightly built. The second joint of the little finger of right hand was missing. The injury was plainly of long

standing, as was shown by the cicatrized scar. Her hair was dark; her hands were those of a working-woman. Her clothing was of cheap material, but neat and whole. The underclothing was home-made. She wore knitted stockings, a black stuff gown, no gloves, stout shoes, and a black straw hat with a crape veil. There was no mark upon the handkerchief in her pocket, or upon any of her clothing, and no papers of any description upon the body. Her only ornament was a gold breastpin — or brooch — in the form of a bunch of grapes, the pin of which had been broken and fastened on with a bit of wire — a circumstance trifling in itself, but testifying that she was a countrywoman, and could not get at a jeweller in such an emergency."

Hendrickson raised his hand to smother a smile — or a yawn. The Coroner had read thus far from his note-book. He trusted to his professional memory for the next particulars: —

"The presumption that the said Jane Doe came to her death by violence at the hands of some person or persons unknown is made clear to the Court by the circumstance that there was a contusion and a scalp wound, as from a heavy blow with a blunt instrument, at the conjunction of the occipital and left parietal bones — of the cranium, I may explain, for the benefit of such of you as are not versed in technical terms. The blow upon the head was sufficient to have caused her death, and effectually disposes of the hypothesis of suicide."

The crowd had stilled down into respectful attention. The case was taking on a grave aspect. The Coroner's spirits rose, his voice with them, —

"But the further presumption is that the said Jane Doe, stunned or dead, as the case may be, was then thrown into the stream known among you as Ranken's Creek, there to meet her death by drowning.

“The murder occurred, no doubt, during the freshet two weeks ago. Otherwise the body could not have been carried so far down stream, and cast up with such force to the point referred to. We know the murder must have been committed fully a half-mile above this spot (probably on or near the North Bridge), for the aforesaid Jane Doe had grasped at some willow twigs as she fell into, or floated upon, the water, and the twigs were still in her clenched hand, stiff frozen, as was the rest of the body.

“*Now*, Gentlemen of the Jury and fellow-citizens!” rising portentously upon his toes to accentuate a telling point,—“the Court himself has examined the banks of the aforesaid Ranken’s Creek, *in propria personæ*, and there is n’t a willow farther down stream than about fifty yards below the aforesaid North Bridge, and on the opposite side of the creek from the place where the body was found. The current undoubtedly carried the deceased across to the other shore and landed her upon the bank.

“All this may be considered irregular testimony by sticklers for the jots and the tittles of legal formalities,” scowling in the direction of the urbane Hendrickson, “but as I saw the place myself and as I was the surgeon who examined the body, I’ll consider that I’m the first witness, and that I’ve been testifying in that capacity.”

Again Mr. Hendrickson’s politely puzzled face relaxed into a smile, and Kruger passed on hastily to the third stage of the inquiry.

“The next witness I shall call is Miss Katharine Meagley, who, I am credibly informed, saw the deceased on the day of her de—I would say, her death. Miss Katharine Jane Meagley will please take the stand.”

The Middle Miss Meagley had long filled the widowed Coroner’s mind as his ideal of a real refined,

tasty-looking, genteel young lady. His manner underwent a decided change for the gentler as he questioned her.

"Miss Meagley," he began as a leading query, "did you ever see the deceased Jane Doe prior to her death?"

"I did!"

Her voice was incisive, slightly metallic. Her kitenishness had vanished, leaving in its place a certain feline calm, an utter absence of agitation.

"State the circumstances of your seeing her, please!"

"I saw her twice," answered Kate, choosing her words carefully. "Both times were on March fourteenth. The first time was about half-past eleven in the morning. She was walking down Hill Street with Miss Bell and Mrs. Bowersox's little boy. She and Miss Bell were talking together and seemed on excellent terms. I supposed, from their manner, that they were old friends. As the woman was a stranger and rather peculiar in appearance, I looked more closely at her than I should have done otherwise."

"You have viewed the — ah — remains, Miss Meagley?"

A palpable shudder prefaced the reply.

"I have."

"And are convinced in your own mind that they are those of the person you saw on the aforesaid fourteenth day of March?"

"I am."

"Did you see where the deceased woman and Miss Bell went on that occasion?"

"Yes. I was driving, and stopped the horse at the top of the hill to let him breathe. Chancing to look back, I saw them stop at the corner of Williams Street. Miss Bell was pointing towards Dr. Dale's

office. They talked together for perhaps a minute. Then Miss Bell and the little boy walked on up Meade Street. The strange woman went down Williams Street and into Dr. Dale's office."

"You don't know how long she stayed there?"

"Naturally not!" with a perceptible stiffening of feature and form. "I could not have been so ill-bred as to stay and spy upon them. It was purely by chance that I turned to look after I had passed them."

"There is no doubt in your own mind as to the identity of the person who went into Dr. Dale's office with the aforesaid Jane Doe?" urged Kruger.

Again the artistic shudder.

"None whatever. I recognised her face and her dress. It was the same woman."

"You have said that you saw her twice on March fourteenth. Please state to the Court the time, place, and manner of your second meeting."

"It was not a meeting. I saw her from the parlour window of my father's house on Mulberry Street, — No. 140. It was at five o'clock in the afternoon. The clock struck just after they had gone by."

"She was not alone then? Was Miss Bell with her this time?"

"No, sir."

"Who was?"

Kate looked down; tapped her foot nervously on the floor, and shrank within herself effectively.

"Must I answer that question, doctor?"

The appeal came in a low voice that shook just a little.

"Certainly, Miss Meagley. I am sorry to force you to speak out against your will, but Justice demands the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, you know. Who, then, I ask, was with the aforesaid Jane Doe when you saw her from the

window of your father's house, 140 Mulberry Street, at five o'clock on the afternoon of March fourteenth?"

Five hundred heads bent forward to catch the reply. There was a hush throughout the room, that the lowest word should not be missed; but the answer, this time, was in a clear, steady tone that travelled to the utmost limits of the hall.

"Dr. Egbert Dale was with her."

A rustle—a confused sound, that was not gasp, murmur, or whisper, yet a blending of the three—ran through the assemblage.

The Coroner paused, pointedly, until it subsided into a felt stillness before demanding, from the depths of his capacious stomach,—

"Is Dr. Egbert Dale in Court?"

No answer.

"Clerk!" commanded Kruger. "Send a messenger at once to Dr. Dale's office, and request him, with the compliments of the Court, to step around to the Court House immediately. Tell him his testimony is needed. If he is not there, find out where he is, and produce him without delay.

"Now, Miss Meagley"—his voice again laboriously gentle—"please state to the Court if Dr. Dale and this woman appeared to be on amicable terms."

"She was wiping her eyes," began Kate, "and—"

"I object!"

Coroner, witness, and spectators turned toward the quarter whence the interruption had come.

Hendrickson, the lawyer, was upon his feet.

"Your Honour!" he said, bowing suavely to Kruger, who nodded uneasily in response, "I have hitherto offered no objection to the somewhat irregular mode in which this Inquest has been conducted. It was no affair of mine. It even amused me. But

when Dr. Dale's name is brought into the proceedings, I must object. Dr. Dale is my client. I have charge of the moneyed interests bequeathed to him by the late Mr. Ralph Folger, and am his regularly constituted legal adviser. In that capacity I shall represent him here and now. If, when he appears in Court, he declines to allow me to do this, I will apologise to the Court and withdraw my claim. In the mean time I demand that his name be omitted from the investigation until his arrival."

The lawyer sat down.

Kruger glowered, changed his weight from one leg to the other, and seemed at a loss how to proceed. Once or twice he glanced at the calfskin law-book at his elbow, as for advice.

A titter started in one corner of the hall.

"Good work, Hendrickson!" said a voice near the door.

"Order!" snarled Kruger, his yellow chin-whisker bristling with outraged dignity. "Since my legal brother fears that his client's interests may suffer from a little plain truth-telling, I suppose we must bow to the moneyed interests he represents, and not breathe the new-made millionaire's sacred name until he makes his appearance in person. Let us hope that Dr. Dale will not block the wheels of Justice very long. I could wish—"

"I am here!" answered a quiet voice from the entrance. "What is your wish?"

CHAPTER XXVII

DOGBERRY IN THE CHAIR

"*Dogb.* Pray thee, fellow, peace! I do not like thy look, I promise thee. . . . Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? . . . I am a wise fellow, and, what is more, an officer. . . . Bring him away! O, that I had been writ down an ass!"

"**W**HEN you address the Court, Dr. Dale, have the kindness to say 'Your Honour,'" commanded the Coroner. "Mr. Hendrickson, your lawyer, has taken up the cudgels in your behalf. Probably under your instructions as your representative. He has delayed the Inquest and wasted valuable time by his zeal."

"Mr. Hendrickson has not acted under my instructions," rejoined Dale, working his way through the crowd until he stood before the Coroner's raised desk; "for, not foreseeing that my testimony would be needed in the Inquest, I could not very well have given him any such authority. Still, I thank him for acting in my behalf, and I trust he will do me the honour to continue to do so."

Bowing slightly to the Bench, he crossed to where Hendrickson sat, shook hands with the lawyer, and took a place at his side.

"The investigation will *now* continue," announced the Coroner, in his most pompous tones. "Miss Meagley! the Court must apologise for the rudeness with which your most excellent testimony was interrupted. We will proceed. You said that, when you saw the deceased in company with Dr. Dale, she was wiping her eyes. Did Dr. Dale appear agitated also?"

"Not at all."

"I object!"

The witness and the lawyer had spoken in one breath.

"I object!" went on Hendrickson. "Your Honour," with the faintest tinge of irony, "is, presumably, after the facts in the case. You are not seeking, or should not be seeking, to learn what the witness's impressions of a man's mental attitude may be, as judged from his appearance."

"The Court needs no suggestions as to its duty from you, sir!" retorted Kruger.

After a moment's consideration he waived the question, asking, instead, —

"In what direction were Dr. Dale and the woman going when you met them, Miss Meagley? I take it, *that* is a matter of fact."

"Toward the North Bridge."

"Could you see from your window whether or not they actually turned in that direction after reaching the head of Mulberry Street?"

Kate had the grace to blush.

"They did," she answered in a low tone.

"And about what time of day did you say this was?"

"At five o'clock in the afternoon."

"Did Dr. Dale see you? I trust my legal friend will permit that question?" grinning sardonically.

"He did not look at the house."

"I object!" said Hendrickson, wearily.

"That is all, Miss Meagley. Thank you!" said the Coroner, ignoring the interruption. "Miss Harriet Meagley will please come forward!"

Miss Harriet, so sallow, even to her lips, with agitation as to look cadaverous in her sage-green costume, was led to the witness's chair by a Court attendant.

In answer to the Coroner's questions she corroborated her sister's testimony in every detail, but with half-dramatic, half-scared speech. It was like the sputtering flicker of a damp match following a clean lightning-flash.

"Is Miss Myrtle Bell in Court?" called Kruger.

Dale's black brows contracted at the coarse-mouthed shouting of her name. He seemed about to speak when John Bell's tall head arose above the throng about the door.

"Your Honour, is it absolutely necessary that Miss Bell should appear in this matter?" he asked respectfully.

"The interests of Justice demand it imperatively, Mr. Bell," answered the Coroner. "I regret, as much as you can, the necessity of bringing your sister's name into this very unpleasant case, but she is an important witness. I must send for her."

"I will go for her," replied John, after a glance at Hendrickson, and a nod from the latter.

"Not to lose time, the Court now summons the Reverend Cotton Mather Welsh," resumed Kruger.

A fresh murmur arose from the spectators, as the little minister, in his threadbare surtout and slovenly white necktie, stepped to the front.

"Do you swear—" began Kruger, holding out the shabby Court Bible.

Welsh pushed the Book aside.

"'Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay!'" he said sternly. "It is also written, 'Swear not at all!' I refuse to take an oath; I will affirm."

"That will do," assented the Coroner, after a hasty dip into the calfskin manual.

"Mr. Welsh," he went on, "did you ever see the deceased woman whose death the Court is, at present, investigating?"

"And whose funeral services I am to conduct to—"

morrow? Yes, sir, — both before and after her death.”

“State the circumstances, if you please.”

“I was returning from a pastoral visit to the family of Mr. Joseph Eddy on the Blackstone turnpike, about two miles from town, on the afternoon of March fourteenth. To shorten the distance I took a footpath across the fields and came home by way of the North Bridge.”

In his desire to abide by his affirmation the witness omitted no particular.

“I had crossed the bridge and was about half a mile this side of it — or it may have been three-quarters — when I met the deceased woman in company with Dr. Egbert Dale. They were talking earnestly; the woman seeming in great distress of mind, or perhaps of body. When they perceived me, both became silent, nor did they (so far as I could determine) speak again until I was out of earshot. They were walking towards the bridge. I watched them until a turn in the road hid them from my sight.”

“Did they seem in a hurry to arrive at their destination?”

“No. They walked slowly. The woman looked tired.”

“Did you see the woman again that day?”

“I did not.”

“Or Dr. Dale?”

“No.”

“About what time was it when you met them near the North Bridge?”

“At five forty-five P. M.”

“Can you speak positively as to the hour?”

“I heard the chimes in the cupola of the resort known as The Bachelors’ Club ring the quarters as I passed the man and the woman.”

"Those chimes are usually correct, I believe?"

"They are the only correct thing in that —"

"I object!" Hendrickson was on the alert. "Your Honour, the witness's ideas as to The Bachelors' Club have no place in this Inquest."

"Mr. Hendrickson, the Court will be obliged if you will attend solely to the interests of your client — which are likely to need all your time and care — and not interfere in other matters," snapped Kruger.

The lawyer smiled leisurely.

This smile was of a childlike and gentle strain, and drove the Coroner furious each time it lighted up Hendrickson's clean-shaven face.

"Dr. Egbert Dale!" he vociferated savagely. "You will take the stand!"

Again a hush fell upon the Court-room, as Dale, calm and gravely unconcerned, walked to the witness's stand, bowed to his rival and sat down.

Hendrickson followed him closely, and stood leaning lazily against the side of the Coroner's desk.

The combination aggravated Kruger's nervousness. Hendrickson smiled as he observed his perturbation, and the smile changed the Coroner's uneasiness to anger.

"I suppose I ought to apologise," he began, sneering openly into the witness's stern, faultless face, "for troubling a millionaire — a plutocrat — with so menial a task as answering my questions. But the law, Dr. Dale, is no respecter of persons; at least not in Pitvale, where men are honest and upright, even if they do earn their livelihood by the sweat of their brows."

If he had hoped to make a favourable impression upon the populace by this gallery-play, he was disappointed.

A low growl of dissent arose from the centre of

the room where sat a bunch of oilmen. Something very like a hiss was heard near the south windows.

"Order!" cried Kruger. "Dr. Dale! do these people insult the Court at your instigation? Do you recognise the great solemnity of the occasion? Are you informed who and what I am?"

As Hendrickson turned half-way on his heel to stare wonderingly into his face, the functionary lost his head and coherence of words.

"Answer me that!" he spluttered, bending over the desk and pointing a stubby forefinger into Dale's face. "*Are* you informed who and what I am?"

"I have had much useless information thrust upon me from time to time," answered Dale, drily, as Kruger paused for a reply.

A mighty guffaw, that ceased as abruptly as it had started, broke from the audience.

"ORDER!" screamed the Coroner, scarlet with fury. "Dr. Dale! are you aware that I can commit you for contempt of Court, and — and — and — for delaying and tampering with the ends of justice — in exciting this riot?"

"Your Honour!" broke in Hendrickson, peremptorily, and serious enough by now. "This is all beside the point. My client, not knowing that he would be called here to-day, could scarcely have instigated a 'riot,' as you term it, for the purpose of breaking in upon his testimony. Moreover, he is ready to answer any relevant question you may put to him. As he is a very busy man and has no time to waste, may I ask your Honour to begin his examination at once?"

For a whole minute lawyer and Coroner eyed each other in silence while the crowd whispered together. Then Kruger confronted Dale, and administered the oath.

"Dr. Dale," with forced composure, "three reput-

able witnesses have deposed to seeing you with the deceased Jane Doe on the afternoon of March fourteenth. You are believed to have been the last person seen with her alive. What answer have you to make to this charge?"

"If your Honour will question me more directly, I can answer more intelligently," replied Dale. "It is difficult to refute a charge that has not been made, and the nature of which I do not know."

"Did you, or did you not, see the deceased woman known here as Jane Doe on the afternoon of March fourteenth?"

"I did."

"Who was she?"

"She did not tell me. I did not ask."

"She was not a friend of yours, then?"

"She was not."

"Yet you were talking to her."

"I am talking to your Honour now."

Another mighty bob-tailed laugh jarred the windows.

Dale glanced appealingly at the spectators. In an instant the room was silent.

"You will gain nothing, sir, by impertinent replies," growled Kruger, whose mental epidermis Dale's last retort was just beginning to penetrate.

"If your Honour will confine yourself to pertinent questions, my client will do his best to answer in kind," suggested Hendrickson, smilingly.

"Will your client be good enough," Kruger went on, swallowing his wrath visibly, "to tell us the particulars of the interview — or interviews — with the deceased woman on the afternoon of March fourteenth? Or, to put it more pertinently, will he tell us what he knows of her doings on that particular day? In short, why she came to his office, how long she stayed there — and how long they were

together in all? The Court wants—and will have—categorical answers to these questions. And no gratuitous comments from witness or counsel.”

His self-esteem mounted gratifyingly. He had never done a handsomer thing.

“The woman in question” said Dale, amid a general hush above which his rich voice arose clear and calm—“came to my office about half-past eleven o’clock in the forenoon of March fourteenth. She told me she had just come to town. She was in search of her husband, who had practically deserted her. She had heard, she said, that he was earning good wages in Pitvale, and she had come here to live with him. My name had been mentioned in one of his letters as a prominent physician in the place, and she thought I might be able to tell her something about him.

“She had travelled all night, and was fatigued and faint from fasting. I made her lie down upon the lounge in my private office, and telephoned to The Bachelors’ Club for a substantial luncheon for her. This fact can be substantiated by the waiter who brought the luncheon.”

“Confine yourself to the line of evidence indicated by the Court, if you please!” interjected the Coroner, magisterially intolerant of side-issues.

“After she had eaten, she fell asleep upon the lounge,” Dale continued, unmoved by the rebuke. “It was perhaps half-past four when she awoke.”

“And you wish us to believe that, in all this time, she had not told you the name of her husband?” sneered the Coroner, incredulously.

“I did not say that. If your Honour had put the question, I should have answered that his name was the same as my own—Dale,” smiling slightly as he said it.

A big Irishman shot up in the heart of the crowd like a derrick.

"Begorra!" he cried, in a voice thickened by whiskey and excitement. "That would be Tom Dale that worrked wid meself for two mont' in the Landruss wells! A dhrunken blagguard he wor, an' skipped the town a week ago, owing iverybody as would thrust him for the price av a dhrink!"

"Order! Sit down, sir!" shouted Kruger, bringing his fist down upon the desk. "Now — Dr. Dale!" with elaborate civility, "will you go on with your story? Had you ever heard of this Tom Dale — let me ask, first of all?"

"Never, until this instant. I had heard that several oilmen who had come to Pitvale lately boarded at the Eddy farmhouse on the Blackstone turnpike. I knew that she could be comfortably lodged there, even if she did not find the man she was looking for among these new men. I offered to show her the way and to give her a note to Mrs. Eddy. We walked together as far as this end of the North Bridge. The chimneys of the Eddy house can be seen from there across the fields. I pointed it out to her, and left her. I went directly home."

"After leaving her, you did not see her again that day?"

"No."

Kruger pondered blankly, pursing up his mouth and tugging at his chin-whiskers.

"The Reverend Mr. Welsh has testified," he said at last, "that the woman's eyes were red. Had she been crying?"

"She had."

"For what reason?"

"She was tired, disheartened, and nervously excited. Then, too, she was afraid her husband would be angry with her for coming."

“Ah! she apprehended violence on his part? Did she say he had ever beaten or been unkind to her?”

Dale smiled again, very faintly. The questioner bored, yet amused him.

“On the contrary, she said he had always treated her kindly, while they lived together.”

“You went directly home after leaving her. To your office?”

“No, to Mr. Bowersox’s, where I am boarding.”

“About what time did you get there?”

“At six fifty-five. The supper-hour is seven.”

“You are sure as to the time?”

“I am. I looked at the kitchen clock as I entered.”

“You arrived there at six fifty-five, you say. Mr. Welsh has testified that he met you at five-forty-five. Allowing that you walked to the bridge in twenty minutes—for he says you walked slowly—and allowing ten minutes for your instructions to Jane Doe at this end of the bridge,—that would have given you forty-five minutes to cover the two miles back to Mr. Bowersox’s house. A long time, Dr. Dale, for a brisk walker like yourself. Are you sure you did not walk with her down the other side of the creek as far, let us say—as the willows grow?”

Hendrickson struck into the examination, thoroughly aroused by the Coroner’s palpable intention to trip up the witness and the broader intent of the concluding clause.

“Your Honour has said that the woman was evidently killed on the other side of the creek, and pointed out the probability that the current, which we all know swirls violently across stream just opposite the spot where she was found, carried her body to the mouth of the Glen. Suppose Dr. Dale walked over the bridge with her, they sauntering

along, as Mr. Welsh has testified. It is a measured three miles — not two, as your Honour has said inadvertently — from the willows you have spoken of below the North Bridge to the farmhouse of Mr. Joachim Bowersox on the south side of the town. Even so brisk a walker as Dr. Dale is reputed to be, would have been put to it to cover that distance in forty-five minutes. Without depreciating Dr. Dale as an athlete, I doubt if he could keep that up for three consecutive miles, up hill and down, without winding himself."

The picture of the dignified physician traversing the landscape at the rate of nine miles an hour brought a giggle from the feminine portion of the audience.

The men present did not smile. Kruger's evident desire to implicate the man they loved and trusted in the dark deed they were considering, left them too indignant for amusement, even if the Coroner had failed to make his point.

"You *say* you reached home at six fifty-five, by Mrs. Bowersox's kitchen clock," persisted Kruger, nettled to obstinacy by the laughter. "Can you prove it?"

"I can. Mrs. Bowersox called me into the kitchen the moment I reached the house. Her little son had cut his wrist with a piece of glass. She ran into the hall when I shut the front door and asked me to attend to him at once. He was in the kitchen. She said supper would be ready in five minutes, but hoped I would not mind waiting a little while. We both looked at the clock as she said it. It was six fifty-five."

"Clerk!" ordered the Coroner. "Send a messenger to Mrs. Bowersox and ask her to step here. Tell her it's an important matter. She must drop everything and come. That will do for the present,

Dogberry in the Chair 323

Dr. Dale. Stay in Court. I may have to recall you."

Dale left the stand and went back to where he and Hendrickson had been sitting before he was called upon to testify.

John Bell led his sister to the place they had just vacated.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. BOWERSOX TAKES THE STAND

“Examinations are formidable, even to the best prepared; for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer.”

“**M**ISS MYRTLE BELL!” called out Kruger, perfunctorily, as Dale’s eyes met those of the girl. “Please take the stand!”

Myrtle moved forward to the spot designated. Her brother put her into the chair and stood by her, his hand upon the back.

“Do you swear,” continued Kruger, his eyes roaming admiringly over the spirited face and simple yet elegant cloth gown, “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, to the best of your knowledge and belief—so help you, GOD?”

At his gesture, the clerk of the Court thrust the greasy Court Bible into the girl’s face.

For one rapt instant she forgot where she was. The words carried her back to the time when she had, in feigned playfulness, quoted part of the oath to Dale. Again she heard the love-shaken voice murmur, “So help me, GOD!” The breath of the warmed violets mingled with the roses in her fancy; she trembled under the ardent gaze of the deep, glorious eyes. A dreamy smile stole into her own eyes, while her lips were grave; she became, all at once, fearless and collected.

One of the hundreds who were gazing at her, saw and understood the love-light that came and was gone in a second, and worshipped her afar off.

The touch of the ill-smelling Bible, worn and em-

Mrs. Bowersox takes the Stand 325

bellished by contact with countless oil-grimed hands, recalled her rudely to the actual and the present. She bent her head and brushed the book lightly with her firm lips.

"Miss Bell," said the Coroner, raspingly, "Miss Katharine Meagley has testified to seeing the deceased Jane Doe in your company on the forenoon of March the fourteenth. Were you acquainted with the deceased woman?"

"I was not."

"How did you happen to be walking with her?"

"She asked the way to a certain house, and I walked a short distance to show her where it was. I never saw her before, nor do I know who she was."

"What was the 'certain house' to which you directed her?"

"Dr. Dale's office," replied the girl, the clear girlish voice forcing the words reluctantly. While the ingenuous eyes did not droop, her face flushed warmly.

"Why should she have applied to you for that information? Why should she suppose you were better able to direct her to Dr. Dale's office than any other of the many people she must have met in the streets of a strange city?"

"I object!" called Hendrickson. "That question is irrelevant, immaterial, and incompetent."

His quick eye had noted the witness's blush, and the spasm of anger that wrung Dale's features. He threw himself forward to guard both of them, with professional jealousy and friendly promptness.

Again Kruger, frightened by the long words, as a wolf is fire-scared from a camp, waived the question.

"Please tell us all you know of this woman."

Briefly and clearly Myrtle told how and where she had met the stranger, and then the story of finding the body in the snow. She was serious, self-possessed,

and modestly dignified. Her brother's eyes rested proudly upon her. In his far corner the lover lost not a word or look, and thought — what God and he knew.

Kruger made no attempt to shake her testimony.

"That will do, Miss Bell," he said patronisingly, as she finished. "Or, stay! When you mentioned afterwards to Dr. Dale that you had sent a lady to his office and — and maybe joked him a little about his mysterious visitor, what did he say? Did he appear confused? or give you an evasive answer? or what?"

Myrtle's honest eyes looked inquiringly into his.

"I beg your pardon?" she said tentatively.

"Why," explained Kruger, with elephantine playfulness, "you and Dr. Dale board in the same house, and are no doubt quite chummy and all that, you know. When he came home to supper that night, I suppose you teased him a little on the subject, did n't you? Just light table-talk, you know, such as any lady might engage in. Sort of breezy badinage — eh?"

"I'm afraid I hardly understand you," said the girl, slowly. "I should not think of questioning a physician about his patients."

"Oh, perhaps not! But he may have volunteered some remark about this one. That would be very natural for any man, talking over his day's work at the table. Did n't he?"

"Dr. Dale has never spoken of his professional work in my hearing. I have always understood that it is considered dishonourable for physicians to discuss their patients with outsiders."

Her eyes had not left his. She spoke as one who states a general principle, without temper and with cool civility.

"She can take care of herself!" said Hendrickson in Dale's ear. "Blood and breeding will tell!"

Mrs. Bowersox takes the Stand 327

Kruger looked stupidly at the witness, dimly suspecting he had received a rebuke, yet hazy as to the exact nature of it. He had tried to adapt himself to the vein of persiflage he supposed "society people" used. He felt that he had somehow failed.

"Oh!" he said again; then, "That is all at present, Miss Bell. Thank you!"

As Myrtle left the stand, the coroner addressed the clerk querulously,—

"Hasn't Mrs. Bowersox put in an appearance yet?"

"Here I am!" came in decided tones from the audience, and, people parting good-naturedly to let her thread the close ranks, Mrs. Bowersox made her way to the platform on which were the Coroner's desk and chair.

She had evidently obeyed the injunction to "drop everything and come." Her purple calico was the same she had worn at the breakfast-table, and, although clean and smooth, was indubitably a working-day gown. Her bonnet was askew, her cloak was buttoned crookedly. She had the air of a fat elderly woman overblown by exercise. She fanned her florid face with her folded handkerchief as she spoke, face to face, with the frowning official.

"What upon earth could you want of me, Sam Kruger? It beats me to know what put it into your head to think that I'd know anything about the poor dear that I never clapped eyes on, living or dead."

She was as nearly out of humour as her nature and her religion ever suffered her to be.

"Take the stand, Mrs. Bowersox!" commanded Kruger, loftily.

And, as the worthy soul established herself in the chair designated by a grinning attendant, amid a general ripple of merriment, and gazed up perplexedly at him—"In addressing me, please say

'Your Honour.' It is the custom in speaking to the presiding officer of the Court."

"Your Honour!" echoed Mrs. Bowersox, in genuine amazement, suspending her fanning. "For goodness' sake, Sam Kruger! I've known you, man and boy, these twenty-odd years. And your father,— poor dear man! before you. It's late in the day for you to be putting on frills with me, Sam!"

The laughing Hendrickson left his seat as Kruger tried in vain to silence a howl of delight from the spectators. The lawyer said a few words to the witness in a low tone, then turned to the Coroner.

"Your Honour! The witness did not understand the nature of your present office. I have explained it to her. I am certain that, if you will overlook her lack of legal experience, she will give you no further trouble."

"None at all! not a mite!" Mrs. Bowersox hastened to say agreeably. "I'm only too glad to be of any help to the law— gracious knows, Sam! I mean, Your Honour! I'll answer any questions you choose to put. Now I'm here, I'm in no hurry. If it *is* baking-day and —"

"Give me your attention, please!" said Kruger, lunging portentously upon each syllable. "Did you ever see or hear of the deceased Jane Doe before the finding of her body on the afternoon of March the twenty-sixth in the present year?"

"Of *who*?"

"The deceased Jane Doe— whose body was found day before yesterday."

"Oh-h! the poor dear who was froze to death! I didn't know, just at first, who you meant. And you've found out her name at last? Jane Doe! Well! well! well! I used to know a family of Does over Pittsburgh way, before I was married. I wonder if she was any relation to them?"

“Order!” yelled Kruger, as the audience shrieked anew.

“Mrs. Bowersox! The deceased is designated by the Court as Jane Doe, merely because her name is not yet known. It is a legal term.”

“Oh-h! you just call her that? I see! Seems to me you might have thought up a nicer name while you were about it. For instance —”

“You are wasting the time of the Court, Mrs. Bowersox!” reproved Kruger. “Please attend closely to my questions and answer as briefly as possible. Dr. Dale is a lodger in your house, I believe?”

“You know he is! Why, only last week, you —”

“Do you remember,” hurried on the Coroner, “at what hour he reached home on the evening of March fourteenth—the evening of the thunderstorm?”

“We always have supper at seven. And Dr. Dale is pretty prompt. That is, unless he’s kept out by some patient or other, poor dear gentleman! He’s got an awfully big practice, you know. And even then he sends word when he can—by telephone, you know —”

“I ask when he came home on the evening of March the fourteenth!” interposed Kruger, impatiently. “Did he or did he *not* come in to supper on that particular night?”

“Why, how should I know? It was all of a fortnight ago. You can’t expect me —”

“Let me refresh your memory — with his Honour’s permission, of course!” interrupted Hendrickson, who had remained near the desk. “Mrs. Bowersox! do you recollect the night your little boy cut his wrist so badly with a piece of glass?”

“I should say I did! Why, the poor dear would have bled to death if Dr. Dale had n’t happened to

come in, in the very nick of time, and plastered him up. There never was another such child for accidents. I always say that I can't realise Jeff at any time. But it passes me where he got his talent for getting into scrapes."

"At what time did Dr. Dale get home that evening?" The lawyer led her gently back to the point. "You are sure it was the fourteenth of March?"

"I ain't likely to forget it! Why, that was the night poor dear Ralph Folger died, and the steel tank was struck, and mercy knows what other awful things happened. I remember, because I had a lot of bother getting poor dear Jeff to sleep after his wrist was bandaged, and I just *couldn't* sing 'The Hollow of His Hand' to suit him, and Miss Bell not being at home, she could n't sing it for him, and he was just getting sort of quiet when the cannon went off—"

"Exactly!" assented Hendrickson, insinuatingly. "And that was the night of March fourteenth."

"Of course it was! Just as I was saying, Pitvale ain't likely to forget that date. If only because poor, dear Ralph Folger — as nice and friendly a boy —"

"Quite so! And you say Dr. Dale came in punctually to supper that night?"

"I know he did. At least —"

"At least what?" cut in the Coroner, sharply.

"At least, I'm *pretty* sure. I remember the kitchen clock began to strike seven just as Dr. Dale was dressing Jeff's poor dear wrist."

"Had you spoken of the time before that?" pursued Hendrickson, in his suavest tone.

"Now you mention it, of course I had! I had Jeff at the sink, running cold water on the cut, and he trying to be brave, as I will say for him he always tries to be, poor dear! and Anneke — that's my cook

Mrs. Bowersox takes the Stand 331

— says, 'There's Dr. Dale now!' and out I ran, and there he was hanging his hat on the rack in the hall. And he came straight into the kitchen — and as he took hold of poor dear Jeff's hand I recollected that he'd likely be in a hurry to get away after supper, and says I, looking at the clock, 'I'm afraid this will keep your supper waiting, doctor? It'll be ready at seven o'clock, and it's five minutes of now.' And says he, 'I'll have this all done before long.' He never wastes words — Dr. Dale does n't. He and I are alike in that. And as true's you live, as the clock struck seven, he put the first stitch in the bandage on the poor dear wrist."

A stir of deep satisfaction went through the room, like the rustle of leaves in a sudden breeze. People felt, and looked the feeling, that the persecution of a successful man by an unsuccessful rival was at an end. An alibi was established beyond the shadow of even an envious man's doubt.

Kruger was brutal in his instincts, and he had the bull-dog's tenacity of purpose and hold. He set his heavy jaw squarely; obstinacy gleamed redly in his narrowed eyes.

"Was that clock right?" he demanded harshly.

"It's always right. Been so for seventy-odd years. It belonged to Father — poor dear soul! and he always said —"

"You declare, upon your oath — you've taken an oath, recollect, Mrs. Bowersox! that your clock is always right?"

"It's always right, I tell you, Sam — your Honour! That is —" her passion for truth-telling getting the better of pride in the heirloom, "except, of course, the time my Jeff set it forward a whole hour, and got us all up at peep o' day, and made —"

"How do you know your son didn't set it back on March fourteenth?"

"I don't really *know*, of course. Only he never has been known to do the same naughty thing twice. Especially after what I said to —"

"You cannot swear he did n't?"

"No! but I'm pretty sure he would n't. And I had said to him —"

"You admit that he may have done it again?"

"He may have!" repeated the dazed mother, slowly, beginning, despite her better self, to believe in Jeff's turpitude after all this nagging iteration. "I'll ask him the very minute I get home. And if he did —"

"So you think it likely he *had* tampered with the clock?"

"I should n't really wonder, now you put it that way, if he had — the bad boy!"

The witness was getting bewildered. A motherly, home-staying hen, straying between the two opposing lines in the heat of battle, would not have felt more out of place.

One idea stuck fast in her mind in the maze: she must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Kruger followed up his advantage cleverly.

"I can understand, being a father myself, that you are grieved by the thought of your boy's disobedience. And he had, perhaps, promised not to touch the clock again."

"He had," chokingly; "and mischievous as he is, I never knew Jeff to tell a lie."

"I don't believe he did. Let us think the matter over coolly. Did n't it seem later than seven o'clock when Dr. Dale got home?"

"It certainly seemed very late!" agreed the witness, eagerly. "I said to Anneke while we were trying to stop the bleeding, 'This is the longest day I ever spent! Where can Dr. Dale be all this time?'"

I just said it because I was so impatient for him to come, I suppose. I said, 'This is the longest day I ever spent. Where can —'

"Would you be willing to swear that the clock struck seven after Dr. Dale came? Could it have been *eight*? Think of it carefully, Mrs. Bowersox, before you answer. Can you declare, before God and man, that it was not eight that struck? In your flurry and distress, and by lamplight, maybe you made a mistake when you looked at the clock. I know that faithful old timepiece well. But it stands in a rather dark corner when the sun is down. Can you swear the clock did not strike eight, and not seven?"

"Mercy sakes, no! I won't swear to any such thing! It would be a terrible sin if it happened that the clock did strike eight, and not seven. Yet I'm sure —"

"You are n't sure it was n't eight o'clock? As a matter of fact, it now seems to you as if it must have been eight, and not seven, does n't it? The day seeming so long, and the evening so dark?"

"I — don't — know, Sam! your Honour, I mean!" panted the badgered woman. "Maybe it was! Come to think of it —"

"Well!" sharply. "Speak out! you are wasting the time of the Court!"

This put to flight the last vestige of self-possession, dissipated the remnant of memory.

"I — I —" she began, then ended weakly, "Maybe 't was!"

"The more you think it over the more you are impressed by the idea that it *was* eight o'clock?" pursued Kruger.

"I don't know! That is — yes! I suppose it must have been!"

"That will do, Mrs. Bowersox!" announced her tormentor, leaning back in triumph.

Hendrickson came forward:—

“One moment if you please! Your Honour, I should like to cross-examine this witness in behalf of my client. You have tangled her ideas until she hardly knows what she is saying. Mrs. Bowersox,” gently and persuasively, “you said a few minutes ago, that you were sure the clock struck seven when Dr. Dale began dressing Jeff’s wrist. Isn’t that still your impression? Take time to think it over calmly. No one wants to force your convictions. We all know how conscientious you are, and will believe what you say when you are left to yourself.”

The relief came too late. Mrs. Bowersox’s flaccid brain was one mazy jumble whence came no assured knowledge.

“Oh, I don’t know! I don’t know!” she murmured distressfully. “The more I think of it—’seems to me, the more I don’t know! But ’seems to me, maybe ’t was eight!”

In her extremity, Mrs. Bowersox talked strangely as Jeff would talk in like circumstances.

“Much may depend on your answer,” went on Hendrickson, impressively. “Think again, please!”

“I can’t tell a lie about it, Mr. Hendrickson!” sobbed the witness, breaking down miserably under the protracted strain. “And the more I think of it now—after what Sam Kruger—his Honour Kruger, I mean—said—why the more it seems it must have been eight, and not seven.”

“That is all, Mrs. Bowersox,” said Hendrickson, seeing he could not hope to restore present order to the chaos the Coroner had created in her mind.

Mrs. Bowersox left the stand in tears. She stood, helpless and bewildered, for a moment, before the Bench, not knowing which way to turn.

Dr. Dale—his mask-like expression broken into one of infinite compassion for the poor old woman’s

plight — took her hand, and with words of whispered comfort led her to a seat beside Myrtle, who rose to receive her from his hands.

“Oh, Miss Bell! what did they ask me all those questions for?” whispered Mrs. Bowersox, chokingly. “What did all that have to do with that poor dear dead person?”

“I don’t know,” answered Myrtle. “I can’t at all comprehend what he’s trying to prove.”

Hendrickson stooped toward them, and spoke low:

“I will tell you, then. The ass hates Dale, and he’s doing his best to mix him up in the case, somehow, with a view to disgracing him.”

“And I helped him do it!” ejaculated Mrs. Bowersox, clambering to her feet by laying hold of the lawyer’s arm, tears giving way to indignation. “Sam Kruger! do you mean to —”

“ORDER!” shouted Kruger. “Deputy Sheriff! if that person interrupts the Inquest again, remove her from the room. Dr. Dale!” glancing at a slip of paper a boy had just laid on his desk. “Please take the stand once more.”

On the slip of paper was pencilled, —

“Ask Dr. Dale where and with whom he was in the habit of spending the hour between six and seven P. M. during the two months preceding the murder.”

“Ask him where and in whose company he was during that hour on the evening of the day before he was seen with the dead woman.”

“Ask him what is the nature of his relations with Miss Bell.”

No name was signed. The handwriting — although this Kruger did not know — was Kate Meagley’s.

“Dr. Dale,” said the Coroner, deliberately, as one feeling his way, step by step, “I must ask you to

give me true answers — *true*, direct answers — mind you! to the following questions.”

He consulted the paper while speaking, puzzled, yet intent upon following the new trail.

“If I give you any answers, they will be true ones,” answered Dale, impassively.

“I trust so!” said Kruger, accenting the verb ever so slightly, but with disagreeable significance. “Dr. Dale, you have sworn that between the hours of six and seven on the evening of March fourteenth you were on your way to Mrs. Bowersox’s house. Where were you, and with whom, between the same hours on the preceding evening?”

For the fraction of a second Dale seemed to hesitate. In that fraction of a second he saw a firelit room, a halo of flame-kissed hair bending above him, and half heard a voice that breathed, “Love! *my Love!*”

“I refuse to answer that question,” he said coldly. “It has no bearing upon the case.”

“No?” sneered Kruger. “I fancy we will prove otherwise presently.”

The anonymous hint was working to a charm and he was elate.

“Now, then!” he continued. “You refuse to answer, do you? On the ground that it has no bearing on the case in hand? When you have answered me, perhaps the Court can judge better than you what bearing it may have. I demand a reply!”

“I shall not give it.”

“We will come back to that later,” pursued Kruger. “Though you refuse to say where you were on that particular evening, you will hardly object to telling where and in whose company you were in the habit of spending that hour of the day during the two months preceding the murder.”

"I object!" interrupted Hendrickson, rising. "This surely cannot affect the case in hand."

"Sit down, sir!" thundered Kruger, springing to his feet. "And keep silent! Now, Dr. Dale! I ask you again, where and in whose company were you between six and seven o'clock on the night preceding that on which you were first seen with the deceased Jane Doe? Also, where and in whose company did you usually spend that hour during the two months preceding the murder?"

"I refuse to answer either question."

An expectant rustle ran over the crowd.

It encouraged the Coroner, as his master's voice urges on a tired horse. Still standing, and raising his right arm to add force to the words, he leaned toward Dale and said slowly, —

"I *demand* a straightforward reply! It may throw a new and interesting light upon this important case. Listen to me, if you please, and answer me truthfully, when I put another question!"

He paused for effect, and again five hundred necks were craned forward in breathless expectancy.

Kruger was by no means sure how his next question would affect the matter in hand, but the first two anonymous suggestions had borne fruit, and he had hope of the third.

"Dr. Dale!" portentously, bringing his face to a level with that of the man on the floor below the desk, "what are your relations with —"

Dale stepped close to him. His face went hideously white. His mouth was a mere line in the ashen face; the dark eyes glittered and glowed like a lightning-stroke that arrested the word upon the Coroner's lips.

"Speak that name" — he whispered so low that none but Kruger heard him — "and by — ! I will kill you where you stand."

For a moment the men — one white, calm, and deadly, the other florid and blustering — eyed each other.

Those who were nearest Kruger vowed afterward that they saw the florid face blanch, and the fear of sudden death creep into the round bulging eyes.

Then the Coroner dropped back into his chair, and waved his hand feebly.

"That is all — for the present — Dr. Dale!" he said.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE COMMITTAL

"The mob is a blind, unwieldy monster which, at first, rattles its heavy bones, threatening to swallow the high and low, the near and distant, with gaping jaws, and, at last, stumbles over a thread."

KRUGER leaned back in his seat and glowered vindictively at Dale as the latter left the stand and returned to the bench against the wall where Hendrickson sat. The Coroner did not go on at once with the Inquest, but sat peering from under his shaggy brows at the man who had defied him.

It is not pleasant to be cowed. When the cowing is public, the process is humiliating.

Myrtle Bell had slipped from the Court-room with Mrs. Bowersox after the examination of that worthy woman, and by alternate coaxing and reasoning had induced her to go home in the carriage that had brought the Bells into town. Then Miss Bell had returned to her brother's side in the hall. Kruger had noted how respectfully the crowd made way for her.

She had insulted him. He was not sure just how or to what extent. He would have to think the matter over and rehearse the dialogue before he could decide. But she had insulted him, and the Court in him. There was no doubt on that head. He wished he had forced Dale to answer that question as to his "relations" with her. Something lay back of, and under the query, — something that might cut the comb of the upstart who had taken so many loaves of daily bread out of his mouth.

"I suppose he thinks I am afraid of him!" mused the Court, wrathfully.

The sullen glow turned upon the six jurors. As was his prerogative, Kruger had chosen his jury from his own small circle of friends. A country coroner has that privilege. Most of the six were in his debt. All were under his thumb in one way or another. None chanced to belong to the Folger wells or to The Bachelors' Club.

"Gentlemen of the Jury!" began the Coroner, clearing his throat noisily and expectorating into a cuspidor below the desk, before sitting up stiff and straight as beseemed his office. "We have heard about all the testimony necessary, I guess.

"We have here a painful duty to perform, but a necessary one. A woman is found murdered. With whom did she spend the last day (presumably) of her mortal life? Who was she seen with last? Who has wilfully and deliberately misstated the hour of his return from his walk with this woman? Who has refused obstinately to say where he has been lately, spending his time between certain hours—the time during which the woman was killed (presumably)? In fact, to whom does the finger of guilt point with an unerring—an—an unerring finger?

"At Dr. Egbert Dale, Gentlemen of the Jury, and at no one else! I instruct you, Gentlemen of the Jury, to bring in a verdict to that effect.

"Here—" handing the open leather-bound book to the foreman—"on page 467, you will find the different forms of verdict. Retire, and come to a decision."

Solemnly the six functionaries filed into a side room, the foreman taking the law-book with him, another man carrying a pen and an ink-bottle, a third bearing two sheets of foolscap.

"What is all this?" exclaimed Myrtle, as they left the hall.

She had listened incredulously to Kruger's charge, and now turned wondering eyes upon her brother. He smiled reassuringly. He did not look worried, still less alarmed.

"Hush!" he whispered. "It is only a formality. Of course Kruger would injure Dale if he could. He hates him because he is successful and popular. In his position as Coroner, Kruger can annoy him. He knows as well as I do that no Grand Jury on earth would hold Egbert upon such flimsy evidence. But he hopes to degrade him and to profit by his degradation. He feels he has a long score to pay off. The attempt will harm nobody but himself. All we have to do is to be patient."

The body of spectators took a less philosophical view of Kruger's act. An ugly muttering ran through the room, gathering force where groups of oilmen sat together, and sharpening to a shrill, flustered whisper of indignation as it reached the women huddled in one corner. With every moment of waiting the murmur waxed louder and deeper. There lacked little to change it into a roar.

Again Kruger's florid complexion was a shade less ruddy. But a railing and his raised desk were between him and the malcontents; a door was behind him. And, despite his flinching before Dale's eyes, the bully was not a coward.

The Jury re-entered the Court-room. They had been gone four minutes. Just long enough for the foreman's unpractised hand to scrawl a verdict.

He handed the sheet of foolscap to the Coroner, then sat down, looking important.

Kruger cleared his voice anew, glanced over the paper, stood up, and read aloud:—

“We, the undersigned jurors, find that the deceased Jane Doe came to her death by a blow on the head at the hands of Dr. Egbert Dale.

Signed

JOHN HOOKER.
ASA BRINKERHOFF.
THOMAS SMITH.
WILHELM VAN WAGNEN.
JOHN F. POSTHANGER.
EDMUND DE HART, *Foreman.*”

The silence that followed the reading was more terrible than any outcry would have been. Dale had sat with folded arms and downcast eyes, his features absolutely immobile, since he resumed his seat.

Now he looked Kruger full in the face. The fury that had transformed him into an avenging spirit ten minutes ago, had given place to his wonted gravity; the eyes that met Kruger's no longer blazed. They were tranquil, and perhaps a shade contemptuous.

Kruger's gaze fell. Again he ransacked the pages of his law-book, turning them fast and nervously.

The stillness grew oppressive — ominous.

“Well!” drawled an oilman from the middle of the room. “What are you going to do about it?”

The tension snapped. There was a hoarse guffaw from all sides. Men looked shamefacedly at one another. They had actually been afraid, for a moment, that some harm threatened Dale. The interruption had restored their senses. They were again disposed to look on the whole affair of the Inquest as a farce.

The laughter brought Kruger to his feet with a bound.

“Order! Order!” he called. Then — “Dr. Egbert Dale! this intelligent Jury of your peers finds you

guilty of the deceased Jane Doe's death. In my capacity as Coroner, I must bind you over to a magistrate who will hold you to await the next sitting of the Grand Jury.

"Deputy Sheriff! send across to Squire Wortendyke and ask him to step here. He's the nearest Justice of the Peace."

The Coroner finished his speech without interruption. The ominous silence again gripped the tongues and dazed the senses of the crowd.

Myrtle made one convulsive movement toward her lover, hands clasped and a stifled exclamation of horror upon her lips. John checked her, and whispered reassuringly in her ear.

Dale had not moved a muscle. His only expression was one of weariness approaching boredom.

And still the bodeful silence hung, like a pall, over the throng for full twenty seconds.

Then the burly Irishman who had interrupted Dale's testimony, again uplifted his voice, —

"Is the man a starrk, starring fool? It's Tom Dale he should be afther — not an innocent man — and a gintleman!"

A figure shot up against the rear wall of the room, — long, lank, bronzed, and bearded.

Kruger recognised him as a former ranchman from Southern Arizona who had followed the oil-boom to Pitvale, bringing his wife with him. She had fallen ill, and Kruger was called in. Not until he had declared that she and her unborn child must both die, was Dale summoned in consultation by the frantic husband. Mother and child were saved. This was just after the second blasting of "The Ruth," and the tale of one physician's failure and the other's skill was fresh in men's minds.

Kruger frowned heavily, but the man merely waved his wide-brimmed hat airily in his direction

and to attract the notice of his audience, then began his speech.

"Gents!" he uttered sombrely. "Which the Boys would take this Kruger party, if we was back in Arizony, and they'd string him up a lot, on the business-end of a lariat, connected with the first tree that was n't otherwise engaged at the moment, fer compilin' of a verdick of thet natur'. If any gent within the sound of my voice will concoct a motion to thet effect, I'm here to say I'll shorely back his play up to the limit."

The odd diction did not provoke a smile. It served, however, to start again the sullen murmur which sprang up now from twenty points at once, with increasing vehemence.

"I'm in on that deal!" yelled a grimy oilman.

"String up the Coroner!" bawled a Tough, gleefully.

The cry went like wild-fire. Every man was on his feet. Every woman screamed who did not faint.

"Order!" shrieked Kruger, in an impotent effort to stem the torrent.

The only response was a general movement of the disorganised mass towards the railing separating the Coroner's enclosure from the rest of the room.

Kruger made a hasty backward step towards the little door behind his desk.

"He's gettin' away!" howled the Tough who had proposed stringing up the Coroner. "Rush him, boys!"

The rail snapped and splintered like kindling-wood before the onrush. Kruger dashed for the little door, recoiling from it as if the knob had burned him. It was locked!

A laugh—loud, harsh, exultant—rose from the crowd. There were no longer men among them,—

merely atoms in that unthinking, unhuman, pitiless Horror we call a Mob.

Already the first hand — the ranchman's — had clutched the skirt of Kruger's coat, when the assailant was sent spinning back among his fellows.

"Back!" commanded a voice that pierced the uproar like a bugle-call. "Back, men! Back, and listen to me!"

Changed as were the intonations, more than one hearer recognised the voice that had soothed a sick child to sleep, or spoken words of sympathy in squalid homes.

There was a perceptible check in the angry wave that had just now threatened to engulf the obnoxious Coroner. All eyes turned upward to where, on the dais at Kruger's side, stood Egbert Dale.

One arm was raised to enforce silence. The terrified Kruger clung, shuddering, to the other.

"What were you about to do?" demanded Dale, as the tumult subsided. "This man has done what he believed to be his duty. Would you hang him for *that*? Is there a man among you who would come forward, alone, and deliberately murder him? There is not one! Yet, if he is killed, every one of you will bear the curse of murder upon your souls. And for what good? At the worst, I shall be imprisoned for a few days. My arrest is nothing but a legal formality."

The mob, quieted for a moment, began to stir uneasily and to growl angrily. It was silenced, not appeased.

"For God's sake, men!" pleaded Dale, feeling throbbing in the deep voice, his soul in his eyes, "don't ruin by a single mad act the work John Bell and I have tried for years to do! We have worked hard to make you better, happier, more comfortable. Our best energies — our very lives, have been spent

in your service. Was it all for nothing? Is Pitvale still the lawless, drunken community of three years ago? Where is the improvement you prided yourselves — which *we* prided ourselves upon? In the presence of women — your wives and daughters — in the presence of a minister of the gospel of peace — would you murder an innocent man? You are angry with Dr. Kruger because you think he is committing me to jail unjustly.”

“He’d better not!” cried a voice.

“He can do nothing else, believing what he does. Are you going to commit a more grievous fault by killing him without trial? And you are the men I was proud to call my friends!”

A muttering — this time of doubt — swept through the Mob, and with the doubt it ceased to be a Mob.

“What do you want us to do, Doctor?” asked Sandy McAlpin, breasting the calmer waves to the front. “You’ve only to speak the word.”

Dale’s rare, winning smile lighted up his face.

“Thank you, Mr. McAlpin! I want you, one and all, as a favour to me and to Mr. Bell, to leave the Court-room quietly, and to take no further steps against Dr. Kruger. I beg every man who is my friend to obey both these requests. Go, please!”

He motioned toward the door, and bowed courteously.

For an instant the crowd gazed, undecided, at the commanding arm, the beautiful face gleaming with high resolve, the erect, fearless figure.

Then they turned, shuffled sheepishly from the hall, and trailed down the stairs.

John Bell, powerless to quell the riot, had caught up his sister in his arms, and stepped back into the Jury-room near at hand. Through the door, which he left ajar, they had witnessed the scene in the outer hall.

Behind them, unobserved by the Bells until the Court-room was cleared, were two other refugees from the human storm.

Myrtle recoiled, and John bowed stiffly, as they recognised Kate Meagley and the Rev. C. Mather Welsh. The latter buttoned up his coat defiantly, and marched past brother and sister without a word. Kate smiled superciliously.

"Quite dramatic, was it not? I had no idea Dr. Dale was such an orator. But he is, all the while, surprising us in one way or another. Mr. Welsh! if you are going home, I can offer you a seat in my brougham."

They left the Court House together.

CHAPTER XXX

THE "PREFERRED" PRISONER

"I know not whether Laws be right,
Or whether Laws be wrong,
All that we know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

"But this I know, that every Law
That men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life
And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan."

THE horror of the Select Circle of Pitvale at the detention of their popular physician in the common jail upon a charge so preposterous and abominable as the murder of an unknown vagrant, was surpassed by the indignation of the populace.

With his social equals Dr. Dale was dignified in deportment, independent in speech. The few men of his own age belonging to the Select Circle, who affected the airs of the *jeunesse dorée*, secretly resented, while they admired, a certain fine hauteur which is the born aristocrat's armour of proof. To the poor, the lowly, the suffering, to women and to little children, to prisoners and to captives, his gentleness was invincible. In attic, in cellar, in hut, his rich-toned voice was, as sorrowing women said, like that of an angel. The practised touch of the trained physician was joined in him to mesmeric finger-tips which, his grateful patients believed, had

The "Preferred" Prisoner 349

the gift of healing. He handled the human body reverently; he wrought in its upbuilding as upon a temple.

All this was said, in homelier and stronger phrase, at street-corners, in cottage-homes, in shop and pump-house, and most forcibly in the Club of the prisoner's founding.

A petition that was to be monstrous in proportions was circulated zealously, praying the municipal and county authorities to set Dr. Dale at liberty on bail, without awaiting the action of the Grand Jury, which would not meet in three weeks from the day of the Inquest. The committal, it was urged, was irregular and unjust, if not actually illegal.

John Bell checked the movement midway by representing to the bearers of the paper the uselessness of the appeal and the desire of the accused man to await the regular course of investigation.

Then he carried the document — sheet upon sheet of stout foolscap, pasted into a strip six yards long — to the prisoner.

Dale took it without a word, laid it upon the table, unrolling it gradually to read every one of the five hundred and six names already appended to it.

Many of the signers had made their marks against the names written for them by others, — sprawling crosses dug into or splashed upon the sheet. Here and there they meant it so much that the pen went through the paper. The signatures of Mrs. Theodorus Vandergrift of Vandergrift Hall, and those of her three daughters, in the strident characters fabled to have been imported from England for the express use of America's Upper Ten, loomed directly above the wavering scratches Bridget O'Leary and her sister Madonnas of the wash-tub and scrubbing-brush could hardly see to trace for hot and angry tears. Well-men had left the imprint of greasy

thumbs in the margin by which they had held the paper; their employers affixed their individual signatures, and added the style and address of their respective corporations, representing millions of dollars.

Dr. Dale uttered an inarticulate sound, more moved than mirthful, as he laid his finger upon the signature, in old-fashioned script, of "*Sarepta Bowersox.*" It was followed by the names of her husband and their three household employees, and then, in legible characters, was inscribed "*Thomas Jefferson Bowersox.*"

John smiled in answer to his friend's look.

"Yes! *she* guided his hand. He was bent upon signing it."

He walked to the hearth and poked the fire assiduously, that he might not see the prisoner bow to kiss Jeff's name.

"May I keep this?" asked Dale, when he had finished reading, and began to roll up the manuscript.

"Of course you may. I thought you would like to have it. The hearts of your people are with you, old man, and the farce will be played out within an hour after the Grand Jury comes together. The burlesque upon justice is all Kruger's work."

"And Cotton Mather Welsh's and the Middle Miss Meagley's," smiling cynically.

"They were dragged into it by the Coroner!" asserted John, earnestly. "Ruth tells me Miss Kate cried all night after the Inquest, and she has been pitiably unnerved ever since. Ruth thinks she is threatened with nervous prostration. Welsh went out of town the morning after the committal, and has not shown up since. Sandy McAlpin cannot be persuaded that he has n't run away to keep out of the boys' clutches. Mrs. Bowersox has a dreadful suspicion that he has committed suicide,

driven to it by remorse for having defamed an innocent man. I may mention, as the first known instance of its kind, that she did not say 'poor dear!' in speaking of him. In fact, she confided to Myrtle her fear that she 'almost hated that man, minister or no minister. She hoped hating was n't a mortal sin when a person just could n't help it.' "

"Sandy was here last night to say that the boys hold themselves ready to tear down the jail if I want to get out." The moved smile had returned to Dale's eyes. "I told him such a thing was not to be thought of, even if I could n't walk out of the front door, or get out through any one of four windows at any time, if I chose to do it. I said that I am taking the first vacation I have had in three years; that—and this is true—I am living on the fat of the land. Mrs. Sydney brought her sick baby in to me this morning, looking upon me as a resident physician.

"By the way, I am going to trouble you to bring me a medicine-case from the office. It stands in the closet of my private office, and is lettered 'No. 2.' Here is the closet-key."

"I look into the office every day," rejoined John, as he pocketed the key. "You will find everything in order when you get back."

Dale's eyes wandered wearily about the room.

"Mrs. Wilmerding sent a hamper of game yesterday and the orchids on the table. Mrs. Sydney baked waffles for my breakfast; I had oysters last night. As for flowers!" waving his hand toward the bouquets and baskets set wherever there was space for them. "It took me ten minutes to transfer my riches to the hall last night. Did you ever hear of the man whose wife poisoned him by filling his bedroom with his favourite hyacinths, and then shutting doors and windows while he slept? I

should be drugged with the balm of a thousand flowers if I were to sleep with all those in here, unless I were to shut myself up in what Mrs. Sydney dignifies as my bed-chamber. It has no window. Then I should be asphyxiated by carbonic acid gas. I should have the bed moved into this room, were it not that the Sydneys call the two 'a *soot* of rooms,' and are so artlessly proud of them."

It was the third day of his confinement. The apartment was part of the jailer's family residence — their guest-chamber, in fact, the largest and best in the house. Thick rugs that never belonged to the Sydneys were spread upon the ingrain carpet; a roller-top desk, a centre table with an embroidered cover, a lounge heaped with pillows; book-shelves, easy-chairs, and a handsome student's lamp had been sent down by Ruth Folger, and put into place by 'Bat' and his partner, with the royal disregard of prison-regulations that guided their joint administration. Books, magazines, and newspapers littered the tables; muslin curtains, also sent in by Ruth, draped the windows. Not a bar was to be seen in one of the four. A fire of noble hickory logs burned in the chimney.

"I am doing an excellent imitation of the pampered minion of fortune, you see," continued Dale, in the same strain of affected levity. "It's a pity Welsh has left town. He might get some new ideas as to the *modus operandi* of flourishing like a green bay-tree.

"And speaking of Welsh reminds me that Hendrickson opened his legal counsel to me the morning after I came here by advising me not to tell him even confidentially if there were anything 'shady' about my relations with the deceased woman."

"No?" interjected John, indignantly.

"Fact! he says he cannot do himself justice if he

has reason to suspect that his client is guilty. He prefers to base a hypothesis of defence upon the evidence given in open Court and to work up that. There's something in it. It took me somewhat aback, I confess. I had n't given the profession credit for that much squeamishness. It argues the existence of a legal conscience. I said to him that if he had put me in the confessional instead of warning me to hold my tongue, my answer would have been the same. I should have communicated nothing I had not said at the Inquest. Hendrickson is a good fellow, and the most honest member of his guild I know. By the way, again," hurrying over the sentences, "I made my will yesterday. Hendrickson has it. Whatever becomes of me, Ralph's intentions toward your sister will be carried out.

"Now, let us talk of pleasanter things. How does she stand affected, to-day, with regard to the decree that she is to keep away from — my present quarters, the Hotel Sydney?"

John shook his head dubiously.

"She is suspiciously tractable. For forty-eight hours she rebelled furiously, as I told you. Not until Ruth took our side, and begged her not to fly into the face of our opposition, did she yield one hair's breadth. She spends most of the day with Ruth. She is always at home in the evening to meet me. She is as true as steel — plucky beyond any other woman I ever saw — with perhaps one exception."

Dale sat in an arm-chair, resting his chin on his hand, gazing into the fire, — his most habitual attitude when thoughtful or weary. His hair had silvered perceptibly in the last fortnight. The clear olive of his complexion had grown delicately transparent; the classic contour of his features was refined, not

sharpened, by the ordeal he was undergoing. While courage had not flagged for an instant, it was easy to see that his pride bled inwardly under the ignominy of his position. To such a man to be accused of a crime was more galling than conviction and sentence would be to coarser spirits.

"I think the world does not hold two other women like them," he said lowly and fervently. "I write to Myrtle every day how welcome the sight of her would be to me, yet how inflexible is my conviction that it would be wrong for her to come here; that she must not be mixed up in this wretched business. At least one pair of eyes is watching her every movement. One person is ready to take cruel advantage of anything that could be used to annoy or hurt her."

John's broad shoulders were braced against the high wooden mantel; his hands were thrust deep into his pockets. From his superior height he surveyed his friend, an indulgent smile in the honest, loving eyes.

"Come now, old chap! you are getting morbid! There is n't a creature in all Pitvale this day — leaving out Kruger and his beggarly crew of toadies — who does n't wish you well out of this scrape. You don't hear them talk. *I do!*"

"The Meagleys, for instance?" a faintly bitter gleam crossing his face.

John snapped his fingers.

"Bah! *that* for the whole tribe! What influence has a set of notorious gossips, unpopular in themselves, and whose father — crazy or sane — caused Ralph Folger's death — upon public opinion? And why should they care to injure you, if they had the power? Which I deny!"

"Kate Meagley rules the 'tribe,' as you call it. Without going into particulars, let me tell you that she hates me — with or without cause — with perfect

hatred. Moreover, that she knows how matters stand between your sister and myself, and will not hesitate to use that knowledge, when the time comes, to the best advantage for her schemes, and the worst for us. I cannot say this to Myrtle; you cannot say it to Miss Folger unless you are prepared to bring proof of what you assert. And these proofs I cannot give. There are things a man does n't speak of to his best friend."

"I hope," resumed John, after a thoughtful pause, "that you judge the girl too harshly. She has behaved well about our engagement. There is not a symptom of jealousy or wounded feeling, although she knows now how long the affair has been going on. She said to me, in the most delicate and tactful manner, yesterday, that she means to go home to her mother when we are married. She has wished, for a long time, to have her sisters open a school for small children and become self-supporting. They were not willing to undertake it unless she would superintend everything. While she could be of service to Ruth, she would not speak of it to her. As matters now stand, she asked me to broach the subject to Ruth, and persuade her to give her up."

Dale lifted his head for a long stare at the speaker, and then laughed outright, as he had not laughed since Ralph Folger died.

"O Nathanael without guile!" he cried, when he could use his voice. "If I could make others see you as I see you, you would be the greatest show on earth! John B. Gough defined a greenhorn as 'a man who is perfectly honest, and believes everybody else to be as honest as himself.' That is John Bell! out and out, and every time! Seriously, my dear fellow, I would chop off my right arm at the shoulder if, in losing it, I could gain your conscience, your faith in your fellow-man, and in women, who are so far from

being our fellows that not one of us ever really comprehends one of them.

“When the Meagley School for small children is opened, we will talk further of these things. Which is equivalent to dismissing the matter for good and all.”

“It does me good to hear you laugh, even at me!” rejoined John, imperturbably good-natured. “That I don’t see the point of the joke does n’t affect my enjoyment of your amusement.”

“‘Amusement!’” Dale had returned to his study of the coals; his face was dark to moroseness. “It has been many a long year since I was really amused. A learned philologist says, ‘Whatever amuses serves to kill time, to lull the faculties, and to banish reflection.’

“Time has hung, living and heavy, upon my hands all my life. My faculties have been too keenly alive to suffering of all sorts. Reflection upon these and other miseries has been, like the world Wordsworth saw, ‘too much with me.’ Time, the faculties, and reflection are having things all their own way with me nowadays. You may recollect how Hodge summed up the pleasures of church-going to his rector?

“‘I can just put me feet up an’ think o’ nothin’ by the hour.’

“I can sit here all day long and think of— everything!”

“I cannot say that he is unaccountably depressed,” said John Bell to his betrothed in describing the interview. “The inaction of prison life must be intolerable to a man of his habits and energy, to say nothing of the galling circumstances of his confinement. These things do not demoralise him in the sense of weakening courage and will. He would not show the white feather in the face of death itself. But he is embittered. And bitterness does not be-

The "Preferred" Prisoner 357

long to Dale's nature. He has the tenderest heart in the world under his impassiveness."

"As I have every reason to know!" returned Ruth, her sweet eyes glistening gratefully. "Do you know, Jack, if I were in Myrtle's place, I'd marry him out of hand to get the blessed privilege of staying with him and comforting him?"

"A girl she would a-wooing go,
Whether her lover would, or no!"

parodied John, in feigned liveliness. "Dale would never consent to the sacrifice. No true man would, were he in his place.

"There are heroes as well as heroines, pet," — with an arch smile into her troubled face, — "in this world of ours that seems so out of joint just now."

CHAPTER XXXI

AGAINST ORDERS

"I count men's words but idle breath,
Innocuous find their gall;
But o'er the lily of *thy* fame
I would not have it fall."

THE world looked hopelessly disjointed and black as a starless midnight to him who, in the late afternoon of a bleak, bright April day, a week after the interview related in the last chapter, gave up the attempt to interest himself in a volume of Emerson's Essays, and sat, listlessly watching a bar of red sunlight sliding up the wall opposite the western windows.

It was a whitewashed wall. The lime had been often renewed, and the consecutive coats were in evidence in sundry places. Some of the earlier deposits were gray, some embrowned by smoke. Traces of scribbling were visible upon several, offering chances of the discovery of a serial palimpsest to a curious idler. Where the outer coating had scaled away in one place, a space was exposed a foot square. Somebody — perhaps a former "preferred" prisoner — had left just there a barbarous charcoal sketch of a gallows and a man hanging from it. Beneath the sketch were scratched the words, "*My Family Tree.*" Subsequent applications of whitewash had dimmed the lines, but the red sunbeam brought them out for the listless eyes.

When the gleam travelled past it, the eyes reverted again and again to the barbarous etching.

The room was at the back of the house, and comparatively remote from street noises. The late spring was slow and sour. It was a March, not an April wind that shook the loose window-sashes and piped through the keyhole from the draughty passage.

Hendrickson had passed an hour with his client that afternoon. The lawyer's well-meant efforts to enliven the prisoner had depressed him instead.

"Vanity of vanities!" he sighed, in recalling the professional jokes to which he had lent fatigued ears, the adjuration to "keep up his courage and hope for the best as a certainty," that had made away tediously with sixty minutes of the leaden time.

At seven o'clock Mrs. Sydney would bring in his supper and talk of the baby's convalescence and the chances of a relapse, while he pretended to eat it. There would still remain two hours and a half before bedtime. Even under the milk-mild régime of kindly 'Bat' Sydney, visitors could not spend the evening with prisoners.

To-morrow would be just such another day — and the next — and the next — and so on until the middle of the month should bring the meeting of the Grand Jury.

"I wish it were to-morrow!" he muttered, rising to pace the floor, — ten strides from wall to wall, ten strides back again.

What if, in the inscrutable caprice of law and justice, twelve jurors, "good men and true," were to give the law the benefit of the doubt of his innocence and sentence him to fifteen years — twenty — a lifetime of this sort of existence?

He halted at the charcoal sketch.

"I'm not sure I should n't prefer that!" he said, aloud.

Already the sound of his own voice startled him.

Voluntary seclusion was one thing, compulsory solitude another.

The tense lines of the mouth softened as he checked his stride and laid his hand, in light caressing, on the shining key-board of an upright grand piano which was not there a week ago. He passed his fingers silently, almost reverently, over the keys.

Standing thus for nearly a minute, his half-shut eyes conjured up a vision that, from the look which stole over his face, must have been fraught with peace.

His hand went from the keyboard to his inner pocket. He drew forth a letter, worn by much reading, opened it and perused it as one who cons something he already knows by heart.

The note had come with the piano. It was brief.

“DEAR HEART, — They won't let me come to you! So I send my dearest possession in my place. Play on it in the twilight sometimes —”

“As if I could!” interpolated the reader, with an odd catch in his breath.

— “Play on it in the twilight sometimes; shut your eyes and imagine I am beside you. O my own! I am with you, at heart, always, *always!*”

Dale folded the note and slipped it back into his pocket. The light died from his face, leaving it very weary.

Loneliness again enwrapped him around. It was intangible, invisible, but terribly present. He breathed with difficulty in silence that might be touched were he to put out a hand.

A tap at the door must mean an uncovenanted call from Mrs. Sydney, with talk than which felt silence and solitude were more endurable.

He threw himself into a chair in saying, “Come in!” and leaned his forehead upon his hand.

An attitude that did not invite sociability might be some protection.

A light rustle of skirts, quite unlike the slow swing of Mrs. Sydney's brown merino, the sound of footsteps that skimmed the floor as a sea-bird the billow, and soft, warm hands were pressed upon his aching eyes; kiss after kiss, like showering rose-leaves, cooled his forehead.

Before he could start up, Myrtle Bell fluttered to a perch upon his knee and had his head between her hands; her face, rosy with exercise and sparkling with smiles, was close to his.

"My love! my love!" was all he could say.

Nothing but that, in every intonation love could inspire. And then, wildly, "Is it a dream? Have I gone mad at last?"

It was like the loving, volatile sprite to pinch his ears, to assure him of her identity. Like her, too, to divert a dangerous current by chat of common things. Her first sentence steadied his brain, —

"Mrs. Bowersox — poor dear! — brought me. We took a close carriage. To conserve the proprieties, you know! If I had my way — which I am not likely to get while you and Jack live — I should come every day, and bring you all your meals. Beautiful has my tea-basket here. He stood close to the door until he was wanted, like the well-bred chaperon he is. You can always count upon the Marquis to do the proper thing. Come here, old fellow, and pay your respects!"

She patted him in taking the basket from his jaws.

Beautiful paid his respects by rearing himself upon his hind-legs, putting his forepaws upon Dale's shoulders, and giving a genteel whine of sympathy before dropping on all-fours. His appreciation of the changed conditions of all three was so apparent

that Myrtle could have cried more easily than she laughed.

“Very neatly expressed, Monsieur le Marquis!” she cried approvingly. “Now lie down and make yourself comfortable and small, while I give Dr. Dale his supper. I have tea, cream, sugar, a spirit-lamp and kettle. And in this basket, which I brought, not caring to tempt the Marquis to mouth-watering by the odour thereof, — there are rolled sandwiches, thin as writing-paper, just as you like them, and some of the incomparable Bowersox cookies, fresh from the oven. I am going to make tea and help you to drink it. Mrs. Sydney’s mother was an old crony of Mrs. Bowersox’s, and Mrs. ‘Bat’ knows how to be discreet. You should have heard the dear soul tell her that ‘Dr. Dale and Miss Bell are great friends — almost like brother and sister,’ and that ‘we two —’ that is, Mrs. Bowersox and Mrs. Sydney — ‘will have a nice gossip here, while Miss Bell makes a cup of tea and some music for that poor lonely dear who never ought to be where he is — God forgive Sam Kruger!’

“It was fun alive!”

The tea was made, the dainty equipage that had come in the basket was set in order upon the table, and the lovers, facing one another over the teacups, had looked into each other’s eyes and chatted for a good half-hour before Dale could bring himself to utter what should have greeted the appearance of the unlooked-for guest, —

“You ought not to have done this, dear heart! You must not do it again!”

“So Jack has remarked repeatedly,” said Myrtle, composedly. “So Ruth says. She says most things that Jack says nowadays. I never promised to obey *them*. I meant, all the time, to come. And when Jack let slip, to-day, that he was ‘afraid confine-

ment was beginning to tell upon your spirits,' I determined to see for myself how you are. You can't scold me, now I'm here, no matter how hard you try."

"Scold you!" He grasped her hands, his face colourless with intensity of feeling. "Do you need to have me tell you that the sight of you is life to the perishing, food to the starving? That the room will have the chill and the gloom of the grave when you go? I have asked myself, times without number, since I have known you, if man could love woman more entirely, more madly than I love you. I know now no man ever did or could.

"But, dear child! that very love makes me say you must not come to me again. Whatever Hendrickson and others may think, I am sure the trial will come off. Jack calls me 'pessimistic.' Hendrickson will have it that my presentiment is superstition. I have it, by night and by day. They declare I have no enemies who would bestir themselves to do me harm. I know better. And I will not have you made the target for malice and impertinence. The money which he who has gone meant should make us happy will be a decoy to gossips, public and private. Your picture will figure in sensational newspaper reports; every item of your personal history will be worked up into 'copy.' Ah! the thought makes my blood boil! And I shall not only be powerless to stand by you, but I shall suffer the torments of the lost in knowing all this has come on you through me!"

"Don't! don't!" pleaded the girl, pressing a firm soft hand over his mouth. "Jack is right. All this horror you've been through has made you morbid. Why, darling! it isn't a bit like you to feel so. When you're free again, and the wind is in your face, and the spring sunshine in your eyes, you'll

laugh at the recollection of your gloom. You talk as if this miserable legal technicality were of real importance. Don't you know not a soul in Pitvale believes you to be anything but the hero — the honest, honourable man you are? Don't you know there is n't a shred of evidence against you? Why, the Grand Jury will free you within ten minutes after the case comes before them. Even the Philadelphia and Harrisburg papers say so, and that your arrest was a 'travesty on justice unworthy of a civilised age.' Be reasonable, dear!"

She spoke passionately; the hand that smoothed the care-lines from his forehead was magnetic, and carried mental healing in its touch.

A great burden seemed to drop from Dale's shoulders. In one flash of conviction he saw his case with her eyes. Freedom — life — love — Myrtle! — all were before him.

He caught the girl in his arms, laughing hysterically. It was such an irrational revulsion of feeling as can come to an intense nature alone, and to one all unused to happiness.

"What a fool I've been!" he laughed. "And what a sorceress you are, darling, to open my eyes to the truth! I don't know how you've done it. Certainly not by argument, for John has said all that to me a dozen times. I think it was your presence, your touch, your voice. You led me into the sunshine once before, dear love! I feel now that you will keep me there. You are the whole world to me, sweetheart. You've changed the face of the universe itself for my eyes.

"And here I am talking like a dime-novel swain, and feeling like a schoolboy the day before vacation, while the main facts remain unchanged."

"What facts?" asked Myrtle, demurely.

"That you should n't have come here. That you

mustn't come again. That you must go home at once."

"Three leading propositions! To the first I agree, if you say I must. To the second I consent," reluctantly, "if—if you insist. The third has neither rhyme nor reason. I won't go home at once!"

"You must, dear."

"Why, I should like to know!" returned the girl, with pretty wilfulness. "The danger you point out is in my being here at all. Now that I'm here, why should I hurry away? I won't have been here any the less because my stern tyrant orders me from his presence before my visit is half out. In very plain language, I'm not going to leave you, until, as Jeff says, 'I am good and ready.' And that won't be for an hour to come. You may as well make up your mind to that. Of course, if I bore you—"

He did not let her finish the sentence.

"There!" she rebuked, disengaging herself. "Will you have the goodness to look at my hair? When Mrs. Bowersox sees it, her ideas of our Platonic friendship will be shaken to their roots—poor things! I spent fifteen solid minutes—when I might have been improving my mind—in making my hair look nice for your benefit, and in fifteen seconds you've utterly wrecked it."

"It perished gloriously," consoled Dale. "Let it rest in peace. There's a glass over the fireplace. You can set the hair to rights before you go."

Myrtle walked to the window. Twilight was settling upon the jail-yard.

"Egbert!" dropping her light tone, and speaking under her breath, "let down the shades! "Don't light the lamp; the fire gives a better light. I'll play for you. It will be like home again."

Dale laid a couple of fresh logs on the fire, and lowered the shades. Myrtle had seated herself at the piano.

“ Shall I sing, or just play? ”

“ Play.”

Her hands wandered idly over the keys for a minute, then the first bars of the “ Siegfried Idyll,” breathing of peace and of forest life, far from the turmoil of man, rose through the red duskiness.

Dale laid a cushion upon the floor beside the piano-stool, sank happily down upon it, his head resting against Myrtle’s side, his eyes wandering, as of old, between the dancing firelight and the shadowy face above him.

The player knew his tastes in music. To-night she would play nothing that might jar upon his present mood of happy reaction and hope. As the “ Siegfried Idyll ” was ended, her hand slid down to his head and lay there in a mute caress. He drew it to his lips. Neither spoke.

Outside, the raw wind had risen to a blast that shook the windows and sent fitful puffs of smoke down the chimney.

Myrtle’s released hand went back to the keys. Dale shut his eyes that he might the better see the pictures music always painted for his mind.

“ Oh! I am very, *very* happy! ” he sighed in sheer content.

For the dear hands were playing Dvorak’s “ Hiawatha’s Wooing.” Dreamy, tender, restful, infinitely sweet, embodiment of utter contentment — the strains stole upon the prisoner’s nerves in placid benediction. In this music there was no strife, no baffled longing, no haunting omens that would not down. Nothing but calm, repose, Peace!

“ Why did Dvorak call it ‘ Hiawatha’s Wooing,’ I wonder,” mused the girl, aloud, as she played. “ There is no incertitude, no doubt, no passion in it. It were better called ‘ Hiawatha’s Betrothal.’ ”

Dale, with closed eyes, saw no love-scene. The

music to him called up a boundless stretch of prairie, clad in the pale verdure of early spring. A soft wind breathed across it, bending the short grass into gentle wavelets, with here and there an eddy. Spring flowers starred the prairie. Spring sunshine smiled down upon it. The air was full of spring. Not one human figure broke the beautiful monotony,—least of all, any hand-painted savage with primitive ideas on the subject of wooing.

The girl ceased playing; her hand slid again to Dale's head. She glanced down at him, and their eyes met.

“‘Lenore!’” he said.

She obeyed without speaking; the air throbbed with the opening measures of the march from Raff's great symphony.

A new note had been struck. The dreams called up by Wagner's “*Idyll*” and “*Hiawatha's Wooing*” vanished.

Again the listener saw the high-walled Italian street, the hot, palpitating sunlight, the black *cortège* bearing the dead hero whose face was bathed in a triumphant light that was not of this world. The dreamer heard alternately the low weeping of women, and the fierce, despairing scream of the trumpets, re-echoing from wall to wall.

“The death-song of a soul!” he repeated to himself. “Conquered, yet conquering; vanquished, yet victorious; sin-stained, but fearless. The soul of a MAN.”

A “drunk and disorderly” in one of the basement cells, who had been enlivening his enforced solitude by alternate song and profanity, paused in a musical exhortation (addressed to one Jennie, whom he adjured to “wait till the clouds rolled by!”) and hearkened, open-mouthed, to the distant notes of the piano. Mrs. Bowersox, discoursing with the jailer's wife, two

rooms off, felt her eyes fill with tears, and knew why.

A little black-clad man stopped short on the steps of the jail — the entrance being on a side street just below Dr. Dale's room — listened for a minute; then for some reason he could never explain, decided to postpone for another half-hour the visit he had come to make.

"Don't play any more!" whispered Dale, as the last chord of the march crashed out. "I want to carry the memory of that in my mind until we meet again."

He had her hand, holding it between both of his, his head against her side. The fingers of the other hand roamed lightly through his hair, stroking it back from his temples, soothing him as a woman's alone can do.

Thus they sat in silence, each reading an Arcadian future in the shifting gleam of the flames that leaped up the chimney. In silence that was not silence. Wordless, but speaking direct from heart to heart.

The clock on the mantel struck six. The mellow tones of the Club-house chimes tolled out the same number of strokes. The sound, remote but distinct, reached the lovers.

Dale rose and stretched out his arms to the girl. The hour of parting had come.

Despite her assurance that in a little over a week her betrothed would be free, Myrtle clung to his neck almost hysterically, her stout heart quailing for one dark moment. She could not trust her voice to speak. She felt his arms tighten about her slender body almost painfully, and comprehended that the causeless spirit of dread had entered into his heart from her own. Their lips met — then again, and yet again.

And after that the door closed and she was gone.

Left to himself, the momentary horror departed from the prisoner. His spirits rose to the level to which Myrtle's presence had buoyed them.

He sat down by the fire. While the half-light lingered, he could imagine Her still there.

After a time he heard footsteps in the passage leading to his room.

Unwilling to have Mrs. Sydney know that he and Myrtle had been sitting in the firelight, he sprang up, struck a match and lighted the lamp.

As the blaze flickered upward, the door opened. There had been no inquiring tap.

Dale turned.

The Rev. Cotton Mather Welsh stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER XXXII

MR. WELSH PAYS HIS DEBT

“For time, at last, makes all things even;
And, if we do but watch the hour,
There never yet was human power
That could evade, if unforgiven,
The patient search and vigil long
Of him who treasures up a wrong.”

DALE looked at the new-comer in surprised inquiry.

Welsh was surveying the room, taking in each detail as the rising lamplight made all distinct. His red-rimmed eyes swept from wood-fire to desk and revolving desk-chair; from curtains to book-case and lounge, and so on until they rested on the open piano, in growing wonder and disapproval. Last of all, his gaze fell on Dale. It was gloomily menacing.

He sat down without uttering a sound.

His manner irritated, yet amused the doctor.

“Mr. Welsh,” he said, after waiting in vain for the other to open the conversation, “it seems that when you visit prisoners and captives you enter as informally as when you last honoured my poor office with your presence. I trust you’ll not force me again to speed the parting guest, as I had to do then.”

“Luxury!” commented Welsh, his eyes again touring the apartment. “Godless luxury! ‘I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading—’”

“I am familiar with the quotation, thank you!” broke in Dale. “May I ask to what I am indebted for this call? Have you come to take holy joy in

the work you helped to do? Or have you so far fulfilled Scriptural commands as to forgive this particular enemy, and come here to set at liberty him who is bound?"

"Man!" cried Welsh, springing to his feet in a sudden rage, "Man of sin! Son of Belial! Do you add blasphemy to your other enormities? Do you dare make their sum greater by scoffing at Holy Writ?"

"If you'll kindly name a few of the enormities you refer to vaguely, it will be more to the point, and I'll understand you better. At present, I am somewhat in the dark."

"Their name is Legion: Godlessness; Perfidy; Hypocrisy; Perjury; and to crown all — *Murder!*"

"The Grand Jury will prove a better judge of that than you, my friend. Suppose we wait for its decree before indulging in such terms. What you have said is distinctly libellous, at present."

"What do I care for that?"

"Very little — judging from what I know of you. Others may care more."

"What others?" Welsh's sneer was ugly. "Yourself and —"

"Not I, for one!" remarked Dale. "If it amuses you to take advantage of your cloth and of my position, and shriek insults at me, why, keep it up, by all means. I only spoke for your own good, in advising you not to repeat the experiment in public. Some of the townspeople and oilmen may forget that you are a minister of the gospel of peace and love in recognising the fact that you are vilifying one of their friends. In which case the consequences may prove just a trifle unpleasant for you, you know. But do as you like, of course. I merely threw out the warning as a suggestion."

Welsh was mute. Dale looked for another out-

burst of wrath, and it seemed on the way. It changed suddenly to a smile. The brooding gleam did not look to the observer like a smile of Christian forgiveness. In spite of himself, it worried him. He was angry, too, that the aura of Myrtle's presence in his room should so soon be dispelled by a malignant influence. He felt the idyllic mood into which her visit had charmed him gradually changing into the intolerance and disgust which contact with the fierce little bigot always induced.

He had fancied for an instant that Welsh had come to pay him a pastoral visit, and had been half-ashamed of his own incivility. He was now sure the man was there to gloat over a worsted foe. The thought completed the wreck of his happier frame of mind.

"There are certain disadvantages in being a prisoner," he said, after a pause. "One advantage hitherto has been, that I need see no one I did not choose to see. May I ask how you got in here?"

"I called to see Richard Avery, who is incarcerated downstairs — in a *real* prison-cell. My visit to him could wait, so I stepped in here, instead of going down to the basement."

"While Sydney was looking the other way, I suppose? Well! well! Love laughs at locksmiths, they say. And true, earnest friendship, such as you feel for me, cannot be barred out by all the Bat Sydneys on earth. It really touches me to think how strong that friendship must be, when it leads a man of God to enter the jail under a lying pretext, and sneak into my room while my jailer's back is turned. Truly, greater love hath —"

"I did none of these things!" snorted Welsh, a puff of rage ruffling the fallow face. "I came to the jail to visit Richard Avery also. I shall —"

"I thought I recognised Dick Avery's voice!" interposed Dale, sarcastically. The impulse to prod the intruder out of his senses was gaining upon him. "It rises fitfully now and then from the cells. He was brought in last night. At first, if I might judge from sounds, he was indulging in a mild attack of the horrors. This morning, the D. T. changed into coherent and picturesque profanity. For the past few hours a melting mood has come upon him, and he has broken forth into song. You can hear him now, if you listen hard."

Dale had not sat down, although the visitor had resumed his chair. Standing on the other side of the table from Welsh, his hands behind him, a sneer in every feature, he looked like a handsome Mephistopheles despising the wretched thing before him, while he could not refrain from goading it.

"'Drunken Dick,' as the boys call him, is — if I mistake not — a parishioner of yours, Mr. Welsh," he pursued cruelly, as Welsh continued to stare at him, and to breathe stertorously as one whom wrath had bereft of speech. "Did n't I read in one of the Home Missionary papers an account of his conversion, signed by you?"

"Avery is a poor, weak vessel!" The last taunt restored to Welsh the use of his tongue. He forced himself to seem dignified. "A pitiable backslider, who, I still believe, is groping for the light."

Dale laughed.

"Oh, *that* is what he's doing — is it?" as a crash from below indicated that the jail furniture was having a lively bout with the merry prisoner.

Welsh's eyes flashed; his fist came down upon the table.

"At all events, Dr. Dale, he is not —" He choked.

"Not a member of the Bachelors' Club, you were

about to say? No! With all his faults he has escaped that den of iniquity."

"I was about to say nothing of the sort!" snapped Welsh. "Since you force me to speak out what I would have broken to you more gradually — Avery is an unwilling slave to drink, not a cold-blooded murderer."

"No?" queried Dale, flippantly. "But, then, he is young yet. Don't despair. Give him a chance. Hark! he is singing now! The rascal has a good voice. A little cracked by drink, at present, but of fair compass."

He laughed again.

The voice of the singer, maudlin but strong, arose through the floor.

Welsh caught a line of the song and reddened furiously.

"Really, Mr. Welsh," sneered Dale, "I can't compliment your convert on his choice of ditties."

"There are many ribald songs — worse than that — to be heard in Pitvale of late years," returned the other. "I have tried —"

"Are there? I must bow to your superior knowledge of such lyrics. Personally I have so little taste for that sort of thing that I have n't noticed the popular liking for them."

The subterranean song rose to a bellow that jarred the lamp; chimney and shade tinkled together. Dale put out a hand to steady them; his slight laugh was more disagreeable than ever.

"If Paul and Silas had such lungs, it is small wonder all the prisoners heard them," he continued, bent upon exasperating the unwelcome visitant into leaving the room. "I begin to understand why the prison-doors were burst open."

Before the ill-chosen taunt had left his lips, the man repented him of it and suffered in his self-

respect. Although not a church-member, he had a profound reverence for the Book of books. For a second he was inclined to apologise to the man he detested.

Welsh seemed not to have heard him. He was fumbling in his pocket, and presently fished up a yellow paper folded lengthwise. His manner was ominously judicial. He spoke so deliberately that he appeared to bite off each syllable clean, and then eject it.

“I came here to-day, Dr. Egbert Dale, in a spirit of fairness, to warn you, as a Christian minister should warn even a hardened sinner. You received me in what, were I a man of your class, I should call ‘an ungentlemanly manner.’ You have belittled my life-work; you have scoffed at my religion. I say nothing of the insults you have heaped upon my person. Those I account as less than nothing. I find you rolling in the lap of luxury, while a better man languishes in a dungeon beneath your feet, and is the butt of your sacrilegious gibes. All this shall not change my purpose.”

“You came to warn me, you say?” said Dale, indolently tranquil. “Very good of you, I’m sure. I shall be more intelligently grateful when I know of what I am warned.”

“Of your peril, Dr. Dale. If I were not bound by my religion to forgive and to pray for such as despitefully use me, I should account you my enemy, and treat you as such. You have reviled me, times without number. Once you threatened — almost in the presence of a dying man — to throw me out of a window. Once you raised your hand against me — against an ambassador of the King of kings, Dr. Dale! I let all that pass, and have come here on an errand of mercy, to warn you.”

Dale sighed, as one who has suffered long and would be patient, if the flesh were not weak.

"I have n't an idea what this mysterious preamble is leading to," he said. "Though I suppose if I let you go on talking long enough, I shall find out in the course of time. But let me say, here and now, that in spite of your professions of forgiveness, you are looking at me, at the present moment, with about the most unloving, unpardoning expression a meek and humble Christian can possibly summon up. I speak of it that you may keep face and words together better. That is all. Go on, please!"

For answer, Welsh thrust forward the folded yellow paper he had drawn from his pocket.

It was creased and dirty. Dale took it, and unfolded it gingerly.

As he glanced over it, the fastidious touch became a grip that almost tore the paper. The beautiful face did not lose one shade of its contemptuous calm.

In imperturbable silence he passed the paper back to Welsh, his black brows raised in polite inquiry. Instinctively, as it seemed, he drew a handkerchief from his breast-pocket and wiped his finger-tips.

"Miss Kate Meagley found this telegram — I am forced to conclude — providentially," said Welsh, now master of himself. "Your dog was playing with it in the garden and dropped it at her very feet. It was sealed, but the envelope was torn by the dog's teeth, and —"

"And she opened it, and read it, and filed it away for future reference," finished Dale. "An honourable lot, most women are! Providence must have made them to match men like you. So she brought it to you in the fulness of time, and between you, you have built up a story laden with the most delightful amount of sin. I'm sorry to disappoint you."

"Impudence and insult won't serve you now, Dr. Dale," said Welsh, almost sadly. "Your course of crime is run."

"Will you end this farce one way or the other?" demanded Dale, peremptorily. "Will you tell me, in as few words as possible — if you *can* be brief and direct! — what you are driving at?"

But Welsh was not a man of few and direct words. Nor was he minded to spoil, by haste, one iota of the dramatic effect he had planned. The sensational preacher would not be balked of his finest periods.

"Do you know —" more rhetorical with each word — "do you know, Dr. Egbert Dale, a woman by the name of Anastasia Collett?"

He peered keenly across the table into the impassive face. He read there nothing of surprise, of fear, of horror. Nothing but boredom, — intensest weariness of him and his subject. The black brows still questioned him in civil perplexity.

"She is in Pitvale!" pronounced Welsh, and made another rhetorical pause.

A faint flicker of the broad eyelids — or it may have been a shadow cast by the wavering flame of the lamp, as Dr. Dale returned his handkerchief to his pocket — was the only reward of a second scrutiny of his visage.

"She is in Pitvale." Welsh spoke more rapidly. "She is stopping with friends of mine. I shall not tell you where. You will hear from her soon enough. She arrived to-day. She came with me."

Another pause. Another fruitless scrutiny.

"Miss Meagley showed me that telegram, the day of the inquest," resumed Welsh. "We talked the matter over, and decided it was of weight. In the interests of justice, in the interests of truth, I felt it to be my duty to follow up the clue. Miss Meag-

ley agreed with me. She obtained some money for me —”

“From Miss Folger. Upon the pretext that you needed it in your mission — for secret deeds of mercy. Mr. Bell mentioned it to me,” interpolated Dale, quietly.

The satirical accent infuriated the listener. Was the fellow’s armour impervious?

“And was not that the truth?” he cried. “Was not the act one of mercy to the community at large? I used that money to pay my way to the place whence this telegram was dated. As soon as I got there I set about making inquiries. In a week I had the whole story. I used that money to pay Anastasia Collett’s expenses and mine back to Pitvale. Her testimony will be of weight with the Grand Jury.”

He waited for Dale’s answer. The beautiful face was a haughty mask.

“What have you to say to all this, Dr. Egbert Dale?” he asked magisterially.

Still there was no reply. Dale stood, as before, one hand behind him, the other resting lightly on the table. His great sombre eyes were fixed upon the little minister. His face was emotionless.

A pang of doubt as to the reality of his triumph stung Welsh.

“We are prepared to prove —” he began blusteringly.

The words crumbled under that sombre, unwavering gaze.

Twice Welsh essayed to speak. Twice he checked himself. Fear got hold upon him, — fear lest there might be, after all, a weak link in the chain of evidence he believed he had forged so cunningly.

“I see you are not minded to take my warning as I hoped,” he said, at last. “I am not one to stab a

man in the back. I have given you fair notice of what is coming. You are hardened in your sin. I wash my hands of you!"

He looked back from the door. Dale had not stirred. The dark eyes were still fixed upon the visitor. Fury at the failure of the dramatic scene arranged with such pains shook Welsh like a reed. Being a pious man, he mistook it for natural horror at seeing a criminal so stubbornly unrepentant.

"I will leave you in peace to your own devices!" he began. Then, lashed into frenzy by the sight of the immobile face, he shook his fist at it, purple and gurgling.

"Peace, did I say? 'There is no peace to the wicked,' saith the Lord. 'How art thou fallen, Lucifer! Son of the morning! Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming!'"

He tossed both arms above his head and stamped from the room. The door slammed heavily behind him.

Dr. Dale stood emotionless, expressionless, a graven image, for perhaps five minutes after Welsh's footsteps ceased to echo in the corridor.

Then he heard the clink of dishes. Mrs. Sydney was coming with his supper.

The clock struck seven. Just one hour had passed since Myrtle left him.

"I'm just on time, doctor!" chirruped the jailer's wife, sidling into the room with the tray. "I know you men don't like being kept waiting for your meals."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sydney," replied Dale, kindly. "But I've a bad headache to-night. I don't think I shall eat any supper."

"I'm awful sorry!" in motherly pity, at sight of the livid, haggard face. "Sha'n't I make you a cup of tea? I've brought chocolate. Can't you take something for your head?"

"I shall after a while."

The doctor was bending over the little medicine-chest he had set on a stand. Mrs. Sydney noted the label on the bottle he took out.

"Why, that's the anti — stuff Dr. Kruger gave Bat for his headaches before you came to town! You told me once it ought n't to be fooled with, because an overdose would stop the heart from beating, or make it work too hard, I forget which."

She lifted the rejected tray from the table, but lingered. She was a social creature and fond of her baby's doctor.

"Antipyrin is dangerous stuff to meddle with," rejoined Dale, holding the phial between him and the lamp. "But we doctors run risks we never let our patients take. It never seems to hurt us, somehow. If it does not relieve my head, I'll try your tea at breakfast time. Fasting is a good thing for most diseases."

He laid the phial on top of the medicine-chest, and began arranging writing materials on the centre table.

"I've some work to do," he said, his face averted from her, while he laid out paper, blotter, and pen. "Tell Bat that he must not mind if I sit up later than usual."

"Ought you to write when your head's so bad?" objected the lingering landlady. "Can't you wait till morning? A good night's sleep —"

"I must finish this writing to-night," answered Dale, still kindly, although his voice was hollow from pain. "I'll get a long sleep after it's done. Good-night! I'm glad the baby is better."

"Good-night, sir. Bat'll be in before he goes to bed, and see you're comfortable for the night. And if you should change your mind about the tea, I'd be only too glad to make it for you, if 't was at midnight!"

“You’re too good to me, Mrs. Sydney. Good-night again.”

He threw a fresh log on the fire, turned up the lamp, watched it a moment to see if it were going to smoke, and seated himself at the table.

All his motions were steady and mechanical.

He dipped the pen in the ink and wrote at the top of a large sheet of paper:—

“MYRTLE, — *The following is for your eyes alone. Destroy it when you have read it.*”

He laid down the pen, resting his head upon his hand for a long minute.

Arousing himself, he dashed off in feverish haste:—

“*The woman on account of whose death I was arrested was my wife.*

“*I murdered her.*”

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SHEAF OF MEMORIES

“Grief, envy, hate, were mine in fullest measure,
A shipwrecked seaman I, on Sorrow’s tide.
I dreamed of home and hours of tranquil pleasure,
When Fate first led my footsteps to your side.
Sweet! in your eyes I read a heavenly meaning,
With love unchangeable I saw them glow.
GOD bless thee, Love! It was but idle dreaming,
GOD bless thee, Love! Fate would not have it so.”

EGBERT DALE read the two sentences he had written, then read them over again. They seemed to hold some morbid fascination for him. In the second reading his eye took in Myrtle’s name at the top of the paper.

A strong shudder ran through him ; the pen fell from the convulsed fingers to the floor. The click of the fall aroused him. He picked it up leisurely, and began to write again.

For a few minutes he wrote slowly and with effort. A frown drew his brows together. He had trouble in choosing words. His sentences were short and jerky. As he went on, the frown passed, leaving his face expressionless and calm, like the death-mask of Augustus. His hand traversed the paper more and more rapidly. Brain and pen were at last in accord, the one transcribing, without conscious effort, the thoughts of the other: —

“I killed her. She was my wife. There is the whole story. She was my wife. She came back into my life when I believed her dead, to ruin the first happiness I ever knew. I killed her.

“Why am I writing this to you? I do not know. I am not given to putting my emotions down in black and white. Perhaps it is the egotism of a criminal. I am a criminal — a murderer. The man you love! I can write it without a tremor. I must not think of you while I write this. It is no confession for the world to gape at; for the papers to print under glaring head-lines. It is for your eyes alone. You alone will read it. You alone will know. You alone will judge me. I owe it to you. I shall seal and envelop it and send it to you to-night by Sydney. You will read it, and then destroy it. My name will never be tarnished. You will never be sneered at as the woman who loved a wife-murderer. I have arranged for that. You will understand how, soon enough.

“Do you recollect the night I said I would tell you the story of my life sometime when you had eight or ten hours to spare?

“What woman but you would have awaited that time without asking a hundred tactless questions, or imagining some senseless mystery?

“I keep my word. To-night I will tell you all I promised. I will tell it briefly, baldly. Why not? It is not a pleasant story, but one to be hurried over as quickly as possible. What a fool I am to shrink from coming to the actual facts! But bear with me. It’s very hard!

“I had pictured the time when I should tell you my history from first to last. I should feel your touch upon my hair and on my face. The strong, trusting clasp of your dear hands would help me over the darker passages. I should see the pity, the love, in your eyes, and that would save me. When it was all told, I should read pardon, infinite womanly forgiveness, in your face. I should arise from the confessional shriven, safe forever in the harbour of your love.

"I am writing this in a prison. You will read it far away from me. Instead of drawing us together, the confession will snap the last link that binds us the one to the other.

"If all this seems maudlin sentimentality, forgive it. I dread telling you the truth, though I have already told you the worst."

Dale paused: the frown gathered again between the gloomy eyes. There he shook his muscular frame impatiently, and bent him over his work.

"My name is not Dale. If I have any name at all, it is Barretti. That was the name my father bore. It had a '*di*' before it once. When my ancestors were counts of the Holy Roman Empire. My father was the last of the noble line. He was implicated in one of the premature *Italia libera* plots. That charlatan adventurer, Garibaldi, was his god. He incited Barretti to sing in public, '*Italia libera ancor non é.*' The song was the signal for a riot. My father was arrested the next day. He escaped imprisonment for life through family influence and fled the country. He passed a year in England, where he married.

"Then he came to America, and settled in New Orleans, where he supported himself and his English wife by giving music lessons, and later as a grand opera tenor. I remember him dimly, — a tall, handsome man, with the sweetest voice I ever heard at the South.

"When I was four years old, he killed the woman he loved, the wife who had shared his poverty and exile. She was my mother. I have no recollection whatever of her, though I used to lie awake at night, as a boy, straining my eyes into the darkness, trying to call up a vision of her. I was foolish enough to think that, if I could carry with me the memory of my dead mother's face, life would be easier, and I could have the thought that she was watching over

me. It was of no use. In those long nights I could see my father's face; sometimes a line of grotesque heads — some grinning at me, some dripping with blood — would pass before me. But no vestige of my beautiful mother.

“My father killed her in a fit of jealous fury. When his temper got the better of him, he was a madman.

“He killed her, then fled to the marshes and hid there. For weeks the police hunted for him. At last they tracked him down. He was a *poseur*, an Italian sensationalist. Who else would have made his own sin, his terrors, his flight, the subject of a song? Who else would have laughed in the face of the police and then blown his brains out?

“I told you the story once before. Do you recollect it? — that night at the Folgers; when we all dined there, and Ralph asked me to sing? It was not so *outré* as it may seem, — my singing my translation of Barretti's verses. For years, I had not trusted myself to think of him, or of the terrible heritage of poverty, unkindness, loneliness, and evil passions he had bequeathed to me. The memory was a black cloud over my life. Then, under your influence, I came into the sunshine. I sang that song, and gave you its history as a crucial test of my new state of mind. The test succeeded. Neither song nor story cast more than a fleeting shadow over my spirit. I was free from the horror of the murderer's memory.

“My father fled from justice, leaving me, a mere baby, to the mercy of strangers. I was sensitive, high-spirited, and finely strung, precocious to a fault, and as different as an elfin changeling from the stolid, tow-headed children of the planters in the neighbourhood to which I was taken. No one wanted me. Nobody understood me. I was not lovable. The neighbourhood verdict was that I must be sent to the New Orleans Orphan Asylum.

“Then a man who had known and admired my father offered to take care of me. He was a Dr. Dale, an eccentric, immensely wealthy physician. My father’s voice, his fanatical love for *Italia libera*, and his marked distinction from the slouch-hatted, tobacco-chewing Louisianians, interested Dale. He became a sort of Mæcenas to the struggling tenor.

“So, when my father died, Dr. Dale took me to his own home. I lived in his house from that time until I was twenty-five years old. He would not adopt me legally, although I was called by his name; nor would he give me a definite *status* in his household. By turns I delighted and annoyed him. He encouraged me to say so-called clever things. If they bored him, he called me ‘a beggar brat.’ If they pleased him, he would bring his heavy hand down on my shoulder with a shout of laughter, and perhaps give me a gold-piece. I sat by him at his wine suppers, and was plied with champagne and brandy for the amusement of his boisterous guests. I jabbered in English and Italian, racking my befuddled brain for funny things to say, knowing, child as I was, that I would be turned out of the room as soon as I ceased to be amusing, and be left to sleep off my potations wherever I chanced to fall.

“Mrs. Dale (a cold, feline woman, who hated me) kept her son, who was about my age, with her in their own apartments during these orgies. All the love and tender care that can come to an only child was lavished on him.

“Once, when I was six years old, I threw my arms about Mrs. Dale’s neck in a spasm of demonstrativeness. I had seen her son do it, and how she would gather him in her arms and kiss him and call him pet names. Perhaps, I reasoned, she would treat me in that way if I made the first advances. With a look of disgust, as if touched by a snake, she pushed me

away so violently that I fell and cut my head on the corner of a table. The scar is on my temple now.

"When a lad, I shared young Dale's tutors. His father explained to me that he was educating me that I might the better amuse him, and be a congenial companion for his leisure hours. I entered college with Dale, and learned the faster for having no social life there. Young Dale took pains to tell his mates that I was a dependent upon his father's charity, and was there partly that I might learn to support myself, partly as a sort of upper body-servant for him. He even hinted that my olive complexion was not due to Italian blood. This was the finishing touch. The quadron was shunned as though he were a leper.

"Dr. Dale's son and I took up the study of medicine together. I was wild with enthusiasm over it, and took extra courses. He was content to scrape through. When we were graduated, Dr. Dale set up his son and heir in an office of his own in Natchez with a liberal allowance, the fellow having a fancy for that city. I stayed in New Orleans as the father's assistant. I did this on his voluntary promise that he would leave me his practice and one hundred thousand dollars at his death.

"I worked as his unpaid partner until I was twenty-five. Then he died without a will. His wife was dead. His son came into his whole estate, returned to his native city, and claimed his father's practice. I was homeless and penniless.

"For the next three years I was a wanderer.

"I don't like to recall that time. Every good impulse seemed dead within me. I was embittered by disappointments, furious at the thought of how I had been cheated.

"One day, in Philadelphia, I met young Dale. He was at the North on his wedding-trip. I was gaunt and shabby, and he tossed a dollar to me in passing

me on the street. Something snapped in my brain. When I knew where I was, I was struggling with four policemen who held me away from the man I had struck down. Dale was ten weeks in hospital. The doctors said I had disfigured him for life.

"I was horrified at what I had done. Not on Dale's account, but because I recognised in it the murderous frenzy that had caused my mother's death. Since then I have fought my temper as no man ever fought visible adversary.

"Things went from bad to worse. I drifted from New York to Denver, from Minnesota to Alabama. Everything I touched was doomed to failure. I worked my way to Europe on a cattle-ship, meaning to cultivate my voice abroad and to earn a living on the opera stage. I had had a fair education in vocal and instrumental music. Dr. Dale used to make me sing for him until my throat burned, when the gout held him prisoner.

"A cold, caught at sea, proved obstinate, and ruined my musical hopes for the time. I came back to America poorer than I went.

"I heard of the mines in the Cumberland Mountains as a likely opening for a physician, and went there. The day of my arrival in the mining village of Crockett, Tennessee, there was an accident in the largest mine. I was badly hurt. (Ask John to tell you about it some day.)

"There was no hospital there, and but one doctor, and he a quack. I could not be removed to the nearest town. One guileless mountaineer suggested that 'they'd better send a load of buckshot through the stranger's head and put him out of his misery.' The merciful motion might have been carried through if a woman had not interfered, and, after scolding the men for their inhumanity, begged them to take me to her mother's house.

“I fainted from pain on the way, and then sank into delirium that lasted a month. When I came to myself, I was lying on a corn husk mattress in a lean-to opening into a farmhouse. The lean-to was newly built, for the fresh pine boards reeked with turpentine in the sun. They reeked, and they warped, leaving cracks through which I could see sky and trees. The odour of resinous woods always recalls that place and time for me.

“You may recollect my rudeness when we visited the moat Ralph Folger had built to receive the overflow from the reopened well, and where the smell of the pine boards was heavy in the air? For the moment I was not far from madness. For that stage of my miserable past had effectually barred me from a future I might have had, — a future which, even then, I longed for above all else, — a future with *you!*

“The cabin belonged to an old woman named Sperry. She was bedridden, and had two daughters. The elder, a shrewish, domineering creature, was married and lived about a mile farther up the mountain. The unmarried daughter, Mamie Sperry, had saved my life. She had nursed me through my long delirium, spending most of her scanty hoard of money to buy me comforts and medicines. I lay there, helpless, for nearly three months.

“It was the nearest approach to happiness I had ever known, — negative happiness, but I had had no taste of any other. Despite the physical anguish, those were ideal months. Mamie Sperry’s devotion to her mother, her care of me, the peaceful life led by them in the humble mountain cottage, appealed to me as they could appeal to no one but a vagrant who had never known home and domestic affections.

“One day, as I was growing better, something happened to change it all. I had been asleep, and

was awakened by the voice of the viragoish married sister in the adjoining room. She was scolding Mamie, whose sobs were audible through the thin partition.

“Your reputation’s ruined!’ I heard the married woman say. ‘You’ve made a fool of yourself by bringing him here and nursing him. Everybody’s talking about it, and folks won’t believe anything but the worst sort of things about you. You’ve disgraced yourself and your family.’

“Then Mamie choked back her sobs and said, ‘I love him so I just could n’t help it!’

“I did n’t hear anything more, for by now I was wide-awake, and buried my head in the pillows to shut out their voices.

“I lay awake all that night. In my weakness I was ready to believe that Mamie had innocently endangered her good name by her care of me. I had brought shame upon the only person who had ever befriended me. There was but one means of reparation in my power. After all, it mattered little what became of so useless, so ill-starred a being as myself.

“The next day a Methodist circuit-rider was sent for and made us man and wife.”

Dale laid down his pen, and stretched out his right arm. It was cramped by long and rapid writing. A little heap of written sheets lay in the middle of the table. The methodical pile of blank pages before him gleamed whitely in the lamp-glare.

The wick sputtered occasionally. He lifted the lamp to make sure there was oil enough to last until the task was done. From the cell below rose intermittingly the sound of drunken weeping. The noise seemed to bring disagreeable associations to the writer. He could not fix his mind upon his work. He looked about the room. Just within the radius

of the lamp-light he could make out the scrawl of the gallows-tree and its fruit. From memory he repeated aloud the satiric legend: "*My Family Tree.*"

The noise from the basement ceased. Again Dale took up the pen and pulled the blank paper nearer to him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

OBITER DICTA

“So this is the end! With my feet on the strand,
I glance back o’er the past barred with shadow and light,
A heap of dead rose-leaves, — a mark in the sand, —
And day shall but close as it opened — in night.
Then why should I weep for what some hold so dear?
I have lived without hope. I can die without fear.”

“**W**E were in a strange predicament,” wrote Dale. “Mamie could not leave her mother. I could find no means of livelihood in Crockett. I stayed there until I got back my strength. Then the old roving life began again. When I had work I sent my wife two-thirds of all I earned. I have done this ever since I parted from her, three years and a half ago.

“News drifted to me of the flourishing oil-wells in Pitvale. I was then in Kansas, and worked my way East. I arrived here during the terrible flood caused by the breaking of the Jaynesville dam. You know all about what followed.

“I yielded to your brother’s and Ralph Folger’s entreaties that I would settle here. There was an excellent chance for a doctor who knew his business. My coming to this place was the turning-point of my fortunes. I prospered as fully as I had heretofore failed. I saw daylight ahead of me at last. At the end of the first twelvemonth I wrote to my wife, asking her to join me in Pitvale. She answered that her mother was more helpless than ever, and there was nobody to take care of her if she left her. They

had a comfortable house in the village now, thanks to me, she said, and she must stay where she was.

“I never pretended to love my wife. But I tried to deal honourably with her. I was ready to own her before my new world, and to install her in a home of her own. We corresponded for two years with tolerable regularity. Her letters were affectionate—even grateful—for some months after she wrote that she must stay with her mother as long as the invalid needed her. A gradual change crept into them. I gathered from unguarded sentences that her sister was at her old trade of mischief-making, and in a village there was bound to be gossip. Mamie was made to believe that I had practically deserted her, that in my prosperity, of which she had boasted to her sister, I despised my country-bred wife. Each letter was more urgent than those that had gone before, in requests, then demands, for money. Each had more complaints of her hard lot in being a married woman, yet no wife, and each had less of the old-time affection. At length she never wrote except to ask for, or to acknowledge the receipt of money.

“By and by I suspected what was confirmed by a spiteful letter from her sister, after a quarrel between the two; namely, that another man was mixed up in the matter. A man of her own rank was very attentive to Mamie, the sister said, and that there was talk of a divorce. The spiteful letter warned me that wilful desertion for a period exceeding two years was valid cause in Tennessee for absolute divorce. If I cared to keep my wife, I would better come and look after her. I had been away from her then three years.

“About two months after the receipt of this letter—to which I paid no attention—I had one from my wife, that indicated a revival of her former love.

There were no reproaches and no demands. She spoke regretfully of our continued separation, hopefully of what the future might have in store, appreciatively of what she called my 'great goodness' to her mother and herself. I didn't understand it then. I don't now. It may have been written to quiet the suspicions raised by her sister's letter, of which she may have learned. It may have been one of the causeless impulses that lead women to most of their troubles.

"I read the letter. It recalled the memory of her tender nursing; her fondness for me; my utter friendlessness when she took me—a broken log—into her mother's house. I burned the letter, as I do nearly all I receive, and sat before my office-fire watching the gray tinder change to ashes, when John came in. He had been to New York to meet you. He told me of your expected visit to him.

"That meant nothing to me that night. Women were all alike, I thought, in disgust. All were mercenary; all were fickle. I had forgotten that you were coming, until—until the bitter January morning when I stopped—frozen, tired, discouraged—at the door of your parlour, and looked in! I stood upon the threshold of a new world.

"The temptation was upon me. For your sweet sake I was minded to flee from it. Yet, with open eyes and fully aware of the peril of my position, I stayed near you. Little sunshine had fallen into my life. I had not the courage to turn from it and deliberately choose darkness, now that at last it flooded my very soul. So I lived on—without looking forward—in a Fool's Paradise.

"Do you recollect the telegram for me, which Mrs. Bowersox accused Jeff of destroying? A second despatch came next day. I supposed it was a replica of the first. It read:

“*Mamie dead. Very sudden. Send money for funeral. Telegraphed yesterday.*”

“It was signed by Mamie’s sister.”

“It is trite to speak of the condemned man who is reprieved at the foot of the gallows; of the man who has grown old in prison, to whom Freedom suddenly stretches forth her arms.

“Yes! these are trite similes, and all too weak to express what I felt when I read that I was free. Free to live as other men live; to love as others love; to win for my own the woman without whom life were an idle mockery. I felt no grief for the dead. Only a passing regret for what she used to be. I had done my duty to her. I had never loved her. She had ceased to love me.

“That very night I told you I loved you. That night you changed this dreary old world into heaven for me by giving me love for love.

“I wonder if you can guess for a moment what that meant for me? To you it was the mere acceptance of the man who had won your love. To me — to *me* — it was all the difference between life and annihilation, between noonday and midnight. I had been lonely and unhappy from the earliest hour of my recollection. To me you were my youth, my better nature, my love, my good angel, — life from the dead!

“Myrtle! there is no one on this broad earth — or in heaven above, like you!”

The man had written fast, without pausing. He had reached the point where the pen replaces the tongue as exponent of the brain.

He raised his head and listened. The tramp of Bat Sydney’s feet sounded along the corridor. He passed Dr. Dale’s door, and went down the narrow stairs to the cells, to be met by a howl of entreaty from “Drunken Dick!”

The charm was broken. Dale glanced over the last dozen lines he had penned. Then he leaned back and laughed aloud, — laughed until the room rang; the bitter, mirthless laughter of a soul in pain.

“To think I wrote that rot!” he muttered, running the ink-laden pen through the love-words until they were illegible. “*I!* the man who has striven for years never to lose control of himself! *I!* a self-confessed murderer! I’m writing rhapsodies of love to the woman whose beautiful life is wrecked by my crime!”

Again the wild, meaningless laughter burst forth. When it died away the room seemed terribly still.

“My nerves are getting away with me!” murmured Dale. “Three months ago I’d have sworn I had none!”

He bent over the manuscript once more.

“You know how the time passed up to the day when you directed the strange woman to my office. Whatever fate I may meet hereafter, that time was an Eden to me that made up for all that went before and came after it.

“I had sent the money to Mamie’s sister — a liberal sum. I wrote three lines with it. I said, ‘I am sorry to hear of your loss. When you are somewhat at leisure, write particulars. First telegram was not received.’”

I had had no particulars. That did not surprise me. My sister-in-law and I were never on friendly terms.

“I was writing at my desk on the morning of March fourteenth, when the office-door opened and Mamie — my wife — came in. For a moment I thought my imagination had tricked me into a terrible delusion. She soon undeceived me. Her mother was dead. She had sent the first telegram

in her own name. Receiving no reply in twenty-four hours, her sister became impatient and telegraphed on her own responsibility. Lest I might not believe that the first despatch was sent in due form, Mamie had brought a copy. It ran thus:—

“Mama died to-day. Very sudden. Send money for expenses.”

“I saw at a glance that the telegraph-operator had mistaken ‘Mama’ for ‘Mamie.’ The blunder was natural — and fatal!

“As soon as the funeral was over, Mamie had made her preparations to come to me. She meant to take me by surprise. Her sister had advised this, as she was positive I was leading a double life. My wife was fatigued by the journey, confused and suspicious. She asked innumerable questions as to my home, my associates, my income, my plans. My answers did not satisfy her. She saw that I was shocked by her coming. I did not affect to be glad to see her. She ended her catechism by a fit of hysterics.

“I paid scant heed to it all. My brain was afire. Finally a plan shaped itself in my mind for immediate action, at least. She was mercenary. That I knew to my cost. She loved me no longer. I would induce her to divorce me, promising her handsome alimony. I was rich. I would make her rich. In the meantime — until I had persuaded and bribed her to return to Crockett — I would hide her somewhere under an assumed name; somewhere out-of-town, where she would not be likely to meet acquaintances of mine.

“I resolved to take her to the Eddy farmhouse. The only downright lie I told her was that I was a boarder there. I counted upon making that straight by a private talk with Mrs. Eddy, who considers

herself under obligations to me. So, when Mamie was rested and had eaten her luncheon, and asked me to take her home, I consented. She had a heavy carpet-bag, which I told her to leave. I would hire a man to take it out to her that evening. I fully intended to do this. I intended, too, to explain to her, on the way, how impossible it was for me to receive her as my wife, and to gain her consent to the divorce. That being done, I would go to you, confess all, and throw myself on your mercy.

"I had not calculated upon the strength of the poison her sister had infused into Mamie's mind. She had grown to look upon me as a monster, whose one aim in life was to slight and injure her. At the approach to the question of the divorce, with which, I reminded her, she had threatened me in the first place, she flared up and declared I was a brute, then broke into a torrent of hysterical tears. I had quieted her somewhat by the time we met Mr. Welsh, but her eyes were wet and inflamed, and I could see him stare inquisitively at her. Knowing him as I do, I wonder he did not stop us and ask her what was the matter.

"We walked on to the North Bridge and over it. I had, as I said at the inquest, pointed out the chimneys of the Eddys' house, across the meadows, before we were on the Bridge. The path runs for some distance parallel with the other side of the creek. We had gone on in silence for a while, and were in the clump of willows designated by the coroner as the scene of the murder, when Mamie stopped abruptly.

"'Egbert Dale!' she said, facing me angrily, 'you're lying to me, and you know it! You don't live out there at all! What should a doctor do living so far from his office? You're trying to fool

me, and you can't do it. You want to hide me away where your fine friends won't see me. I sha 'nt budge one step further. I'm going straight back and shout out to everybody I meet that I'm your wife, and that you deserted me. Sis said there was another woman. She was right. I know who it is, too. It's the woman I saw this morning; the one that came to your office-door on horseback this evening. I saw how she looked at you! I knew what she was the minute I set eyes on her to-day. I saw what kind of company she keeps, too. She's no better than she should be —'

"And then I killed her.

"I meant to do it from the instant she spoke of you. In those few seconds I planned it all. She had no right to disgrace me and to break your heart. And she should not! I had believed her dead, and had dared to be happy. She had come back to ruin me, to part me from you. I would strike her out of my path as I would any other hurtful creature that menaced your happiness. Would I hesitate to lop off my hand if it were caught in the gearing of a wheel that was drawing me on to certain death?

"My walking-stick is heavy. The handle is loaded with lead. I knew just where to strike.

"In my hour of detection and confession, I swear that I am not sorry I did it. I would do it again in the same circumstances.

"I had married her to save her good name and to repay her for her care of me. I had paid back the debt a hundred times. I had supported her whole family in luxury. She repaid me by trying to part me from the only woman I ever loved. She brought her fate upon herself.

"She fell into the water, clutching convulsively at the willows as she toppled off the bank. When

she struck the water, she bleated like a sheep, and died. The current caught at her and whirled her away.

"I had no further thought of her. Wrought up, as I was, to the extreme of passion, my mind was clear. I must establish an alibi. It was half-past six o'clock, and I was three miles from home. The evening was murky, and I chose unfrequented alleys and back roads. I ran as I never ran before. I reached the Bowersox house at five minutes of seven. How I did it I don't know, for the way was rough, and I was sadly out of training. But I was running for my life and our happiness.

"If Mrs. Bowersox had kept her presence of mind under Kruger's examination, she could have proved a satisfactory alibi by simply telling the truth. If Kruger had known more of law and disliked me less, I should not have been committed to jail. You and John called him 'Dogberry,' in talking over the trial. I thought of Dogberry all the while it was going on. I thought of what did not occur to either of you, — how Shakespeare's awkward, pompous fool brought the wrong-doers to justice by his obstinate foolishness. Had Kruger tracked me, step by step, he could not have hit the truth more directly.

"That night, after Jeff's wrist was dressed, I went out-of-doors and wandered away by myself along country lanes, straying at last without noticing where I was, to the neighbourhood of the embankment near the Ruth well. I went over the whole tragedy, as if the principal actor were another man. I could feel no remorse then. I feel none now.

"I once read *Eugene Aram* — Hood's poem, not Bulwer's novel. I used to wonder how the poet could define a murderer's sensations so accurately.

In my meditations that night, I felt contempt for Hood's knowledge of human nature. My sensation was one of utter relief. In an effort at self-torture I called up the incidents of the killing. All I could bring back clearly to my mind was that sheep-like bleat. It was a reflex action of the throat muscles and vocal cords.

"I weighed the case — myself the prisoner and the judge — and stood acquitted.

"I was out in the electric storm, scarcely hearing it, or the subsequent explosion and the cannonading. I was lying on the ground under a thicket of cedars, when Folger came along.

"You know the rest. All except one thing. When I saw Folger's life in danger I tried to save it, not so much for his sake, as to wipe out the sin of taking one human life by saving another. The same feeling moved me to stand between Kruger and the mob. If I have destroyed one life I have saved many in my time. That may go for nothing in the eyes of the world. It atones, in my eyes, for that particular crime.

"After you came to me this afternoon my troubles seemed over. I saw the future with your dear eyes. Just after you left Welsh called on me. He wished, he said, to warn me of my fate. Moved by a distorted sense of fairness, I suppose. Kate Meagley somehow got hold of the despatch Mamie sent to me, telling of her mother's death. It was signed in her provincial fashion, '*Mrs. Dale,*' and dated 'Crockett, Tennessee.' The day of the inquest the Meagley woman and Welsh put their heads together over it. Both hate me. The signature breathed of scandal. They were on the track of a mystery. Welsh went out to Crockett and made inquiries. He learned everything pertaining to the marriage, and that my wife had gone East to join me. He

brought Anastasia Collett, the married sister, back with him to witness against me. She will gladly swear my life away, by supplying the missing link in the chain of evidence — the motive for the deed. Without that the prosecution would have no case. Now, there is enough circumstantial evidence to hang almost any man.

“I am respected, here in Pitvale, and if my life were the only thing at stake, I would abide the issue and fight to the last, trusting to my past reputation, my almost perfect alibi, and to Hendrickson’s cleverness, to clear me. But conviction is the very least thing to be considered.

“I cannot — I *will* not live to see the love-look in your eyes change to horror. I will not have the Meagley woman (who, by some underhand means, has learned of our engagement) hold you up to the scorn of her sister-gossips, as the dupe of an adventurer and wife-murderer.

“Heart of my heart! what would bare life be worth to me, knowing you were put to shame and ridicule because of me? How could I live on, with the daily memory of all I have lost in losing you? Think of this, and let it soften your judgment of what I am about to do. GOD forbid that I should crawl to your feet at this time, and whine for pity or for sympathy! Yet try to remember that it is partly — nay, wholly — for your sake that I take the law into my own hands. To die on the scaffold for killing a woman who wrecked my career, would be degrading. To die of my own free will, to spare you humiliation, will be very sweet.

“The thought of death, by itself, has no terrors for me. I have watched by hundreds of death-beds, and one fact I have always noted: while some have longed to die, and while others have shrunk back in horror from the thought of death, yet when

it actually laid its hand upon them, the same look came to the faces of all. A look of utter peace, of content, of rest. No more horror, no more weariness, no shrinking from an enemy. Feverish longing for and glad hope of deliverance were supplanted by that ineffable peace. On some faces — oftenest on the faces of those whose earthly reward had been least — lingered a smile, — the smile of a tired, happy child.

“Now, the Power that brings that look to the face of saint and sinner alike, is surely not to be dreaded, but rather to be met as a tender friend, a loving deliverer.

“What lies beyond the gates of death, I do not know. If it were terrible, if it were an unwelcome change from this life, would the dead face of every one whose spirit is a new-comer in that Land wear the smile of perfect peace? Would the world-weary, harassed, sinning man smile as childhood smiles on earth?

“This is not orthodox. I am not a religious man. If I were, I should be comforting you at this moment with the sweet assurance that your white soul and that of the murderer in heart and in act, who has won your love here, will meet and be as one, some day, beyond the stars.

“That would be a lie! that specious promise which I have heard well-meaning sympathisers offer to those who weep over their dead. I loved you. I won you. I lost you. That was on earth. What cause have I for hope that in a state where the secrets of all hearts will be made known, where sin and purity will be even farther apart than they are here, I shall be able to claim you as my own?

“No, dear heart! we have met and have parted for the last time. For the last time I have looked

into your eyes, have felt your dear form in my arms, the pressure of your arms about my neck. For the last time — in this, or any other world — I have kissed you and heard you say, 'I love you!' That has passed and is gone.

"There is a future life. Who can doubt it? A world that sets this world right. But none where you and I can meet on the same plane; none where I can take your hands in mine, and say, 'You are mine again, at last! Nothing can part us now!'

"I have a notion that love (as mortals know it) is of this world alone, to use or to abuse as we see fit. In the world to come 'there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.'

"'The flower that once has bloomed, forever dies.'

"Personally, I am too much of a *man* to look forward with keen interest to an ethereal life out of the body. Nor do I concern myself greatly as to the future. *You* were my future, — my heaven, Myrtle! All I asked for from GOD or man. I staked all on you. I have lost you!

"I can imagine how the Reverend Cotton Mather Welsh — or even dear old John — would gasp at this somewhat eccentric theology. But you will understand. You always understand.

"If a year ago I had found myself in my present evil case, I should have escaped (escape would be ridiculously easy in this comic opera jail, in this town of true friends, eager to help me), and started life afresh somewhere else. Now it is not worth while. You would not be with me. Until I met you I had no desire to make the best of all that is in me. I had looked on life as something to be got through with as best one could. Not because it was worth doing, but because it was inevitable. Hope

and I had not then met. Death I looked upon as a friend to be greeted with calmness, not with fear.

"It was not such a bad philosophy. It kept my head above water for many years. At sight of you I entered fairyland,—Arcady. Yet why should men sneer at Arcadian dreams? Castles in the air are far pleasanter than dungeons in the same locality, and quite as profitable.

"I have written on — and on — and on, as fast as thought and pen can fly. Much that I have written is nonsense, I fear. This is the last time I shall ever address you, and I dread to say 'Good-by.'

"When I write that, I cut the last strand of the straining cord that binds me to life — to happiness — to you.

"I won't weary you with more sentimentality. You will forgive me for taking my life. In this way alone, can I silence Welsh, Anastasia Collett, and the others. The prosecution falls to the ground when there is no accused to meet it. Even Welsh's conscience and Anastasia's malevolence will not move them to testify against a dead man. They will not dare to do it in Pitvale.

"It is late — past eleven — more than five hours since I saw you — and I am very tired. I —"

"Workin' overtime to-night, ain't you, doctor?"

Dale had not heard the door open. The jailer's broad face beamed at him over the top of the lamp.

"Ah, Sydney! Good-evening!" he said pleasantly. "How's the sore throat?"

"Better, I guess. Wife said you'd be up late, and I stayed out, on a-purpose. Anything you'd like to have before I turn in?"

"I've been getting up a report I'd like very much to have put into Mr. Bell's hands to-night. But as it's late, perhaps it would trouble you —"

"Not a bit, doctor. I'll call in for it in half an

hour. I'm a regular owl, you know, and Mr. Bell keeps late hours, too. Sarah tells me you ain't well."

"Only a splitting headache. I'm going to knock it out with a stiff dose of antipyrin, as soon as this is done. Thank you, old man, for obliging me. Look in again in half an hour."

Sydney withdrew, and Dale opened the medicine-chest. He uncorked the antipyrin phial and shook several cylindrical pellets into his hollowed palm. With a quick, unfaltering motion of the hand, he tossed them into his mouth and took a swallow of water from a glass Mrs. Sydney had left on the table.

Then he took half-a-dozen turns up and down the room. At the piano he paused, sat down, and half unconsciously played the opening bars of the "Lenore" March, bringing out in masterly style the weird beauty and the despair of the music.

Midway he ceased; a crashing discord breaking off the march. He walked over to the table and began gathering up the written sheets. The music had started a new train of thought. He tried to banish the unsought idea by planning how to send the confession.

"I'll envelop and address it under cover to John," he thought. "That will keep Sydney from talking."

Still fighting with the unbidden thought born of the music, he wrote a few lines at the foot of the last page, knelt, and pressed his lips to the paper. Folding the many sheets, he made them into a compact parcel, and, still holding it, looked down at it, his brows knit angrily. The unwelcome suggestion warred fiercely with his preconceived resolution. He sought in his desk for a large envelope; threw it back into the drawer, and, the frown passing be-

fore a new look of stern resolve, he caught the folded manuscript in both powerful hands, tore it across, and yet across again, and flung the tattered papers into the fireplace.

The smouldering wood-ashes burst into a lively blaze, roaring up the chimney and dimming by the momentary glare the paler light of the lamp.

Egbert Dale did not see it. Kneeling at the table, his head upon his folded arms, he was crying as heart-broken children cry.

“It was my life! my very heart!” he sobbed. “She would have read it, and she would have understood! She would have understood all! Now she’ll never know! But neither can she remember me as a murderer. It’s better so! But, O GOD! I love her! and to leave her forever without a word of farewell! I love her so!”

The strong man’s body shook with horrible rending sobs such as strong men alone know; such as few — thank GOD! — can know more than once in a lifetime.

Dale was not weeping when, twenty-five minutes later, Sydney returned, true to his promise, to see if the report were ready for “the Dominic.” The jailer, with all his good-will toward the prisoner, was sleepy. It was sleepy weather — these early spring days with their high winds. He had “hooked up” his horse to the wagon to take him up to the Bowersox house. You wouldn’t catch him doing that for any other man in town at this time of night, he had told his wife.

Dr. Dale sat at the table, his head laid upon his folded arms. The room was very quiet and chilly. The fire had gone out, smothered by a great heap of fluffy gray ashes now lying still upon the dead embers. The smell of burnt paper was strong in the air.

"You'll catch your death of cold, doctor, sleeping here!" called Sydney, shaking the prisoner gently by the shoulder.

Dale's head fell slightly to one side, bringing his face into view. It was very pale, but ineffably peaceful.

About the beautiful mouth lingered a faint smile, — "the smile of a tired, happy child."

THE END.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

NON-RENEWABLE

REC'D LOI/RL

FEB 25 1991

APR 2 1991

TEL/BOR

DUE 2 WKS FROM DATE RECEIVED

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 051 474 5

Univ
So
L