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PHEMIE'S

TEMPTATION.

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A Novel.

Mrs Mary Virginia (Howes) Terhune

BY

MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF

"ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "NEMESIS," "MOSS SIDE," "MIRIAM," "HUSKS,"
"HELEN GARDNER," "SUNNYBANK," "HUSBANDS AND HOMES,"
"RUBY'S HUSBAND," ETC.



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PHEMIE'S TEMPTATION.



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CHAPTER I.

“MISS ROWLAND!”

MISS ROWLAND! The book-keeper glanced up from the long lines of figures she was computing. She was young—just three-and-twenty—and a remarkable-looking girl. It was not that her eyes were brown and bright; that the mouth, which might else have been objected to as large, was redly ripe as a June cherry, and held a wealth of perfect teeth; that her brunette complexion was clear and warm, and just now flushed to brilliancy by the heat of the store. These attractions might have been massed in another face, and not have challenged the second and more prolonged gaze most observers were constrained to bestow upon hers. Her dark hair was parted on the left side, and, sweeping across the brow, made it square as well as broad, an effect heightened by the breadth

of the under jaw, and the firm, cleft chin. The short bow of the upper lip bespoke decision and spirit; the passionate pout of the lower was that of a petted and loving child. There were no unfinished curves, no lax lines in contour or in feature, and the expression of the whole was power—of feeling, as of thought. Her dress was simple in the extreme, and unsuited to the season. It was buff Nankeen, trimmed with black, and had evidently seen much use and several washings. Her only ornament was a small, old-fashioned brooch, containing a lock of gray hair, and confining a plain linen collar about the round, smooth throat. She sat upon a high stool at a desk, with a low railing around the top, set within a recess of the wall midway between the front door of the fashionable fancy store and the great mirror at the farther end.

“What is it?” she asked, briefly.

“Take twenty-six fifty out of that!” answered the saleswoman who had interrupted her, tendering two bank-notes.

The book-keeper inspected one more closely than she did the other.

“That \$20 is a counterfeit!” she pronounced in her abrupt fashion.

“Are you sure?”

“If I were not, I should not make the assertion. It is a counterfeit—and a poor one. Take it back to the person who offered it, and say so.”

The other hung back.

“I don't like to!” she objected, in a lower tone.

"I shall offend her mortally, if I do. She is very rich and fashionable, and there is a gentleman with her. I can't tell her she has given me a bad note."

"You take the responsibility of exchanging it, then?" pulling open the money-drawer, as she said it.

"Don't be a fool, Phemie Rowland! I have not twenty dollars in the world."

"Get Mr. Arnold to break the news you are afraid to carry, if the customer is so valuable," suggested Phemie, impatiently. "I haven't time to waste in discussing the matter."

"He isn't in, and he would send me off with a flea in my ear, if I were to go to him with such a request."

"Stay here by my desk, then, and I will settle the difficulty!" starting up, with the air of one whose forbearance was waxing low. "Where is your rich and fashionable sensitive plant?"

"That is she! in the cashmere shawl and blue hat—talking with the tall gentleman by the left-hand counter."

Phemie Rowland stepped from the dais that held her desk and stool, and walked down the aisle between the counters, the doubtful bill in her hand. Her gait was what might have been expected, after a sight of her square face and ripe, resolute mouth—firm, but elastic—steady, yet graceful as the motion of a royal yacht through calm water. The gentleman conversing with the lady-customer had seen her, in the full glare of the central skylight, as she descended from the platform, and watched her approach, his eye and smile so abstracted from the

subject of which his companion was speaking, that she would have turned to see what had diverted his notice from her, had he not interrupted her to say in a hasty "aside"—

"Look at this young lady as she passes us! She is superb!"

Looking around in ready and piqued curiosity, his fair friend met the cashier face to face, with a start and blush he mistook for confusion at seeing the object of remark so near them, but which Phemie knew was unwilling recognition. Her eyes were as quick, her memory as faithful when the features under the blue bonnet were revealed to her view, her self-command more perfect. She accosted the lady with grave civility.

"I beg your pardon—but did you not buy three and a half yards of Valenciennes lace just now, for twenty-six dollars fifty cents, and offer two notes—a \$10 and a \$20, in payment?"

"I did!" haughtily.

"I regret to say that this note is a counterfeit!" continued Phemie, involuntarily imitating the other's manner. "It was brought to me, and I, as the cashier and book-keeper of the establishment, declined to receive it."

The customer crimsoned furiously to the roots of her blonde frizettes.

"There is some mistake!" she protested, yet more loftily. "I had the bill, not ten minutes since, from the cashier at Wylie's. His judgment is surely worth as much as yours."

"I am accountable to Mr. Arnold for my action in these matters," was the answer. "If the bill is good, the cashier at Wylie's will certainly give you another for it, if you insist upon it. If I am right and he is wrong, you can compel him to do this."

"Allow me," said the cavalier in attendance upon the irate customer, touching his hat, as he took the note from Miss Rowland's hand. "I am a tolerable critic of currency. And while I examine this, please give me your opinion of *that!*" presenting a bill for the same amount as that he had received.

"It is a good one!" Phemie decided, with none of the pretty airs other girls of her class would have been likely to put on in conversation with a young, handsome, and affable gentleman.

"Oblige me, then, by accepting it as a substitute for this apple of discord!" he said, bowing to both ladies, as he put the condemned bill into his wallet and snapped to the clasp.

His companion began a low protest, or what Phemie judged to be such from the accent, as the cashier moved away; but the relief expressed in her countenance was not to be mistaken, and wrought in the minds of the lookers-on the conviction that her dilemma would have been serious, but for the gallant intervention of her escort; that she had not the means of paying for the lace which had been cut off, if the bill she had offered were rejected. It was an embarrassing position, and Phemie had the magnanimity to pity her, as she reflected upon it; to wish that she could have spared her the mortifica-

tion, or made it less public. She despatched the change due the purchaser by Lucy Harris, the girl who had sold the lace, and plunged anew into the column of figures.

“You have offended Miss Mallory, Phemie!” the saleswoman was so ungrateful as to remark by and by, in passing. “She was as red in the face as a boiled lobster, and her eyes snapped like a pair of percussion caps when I handed her the change and told her how sorry I was she had been troubled about the note, but that you had the name of being over-particular in such matters. ‘I shall be careful not to subject myself to the chance of similar annoyances in future,’ she remarked, meaning, of course, that she would steer clear of the store after this.”

Phemie made no reply. Her pen was slowly traversing the length of the page, at an elevation of a quarter of an inch above the paper, her eyes following the course of the nib, as if it were the index of a patent computer.

“Mr. Arnold will be mad as a March hare, if the affair gets to his ears,” persisted the intruder, who seemed to be affluent in comparisons. “I had rather be in my place than yours, when he comes to inquire about it.”

The same silence and apparent deafness on the part of the person attacked; but Lucy was not easily rebuffed.

“I don't wonder she was fretted!” hitching herself on to the corner of the railing by one elbow and fumbling with the pen-rack, in an irritating style

that made Phemie tighten her fingers upon page and pen. "I shouldn't relish being taken to task for passing bad money when *my* beau was by."

Here, to the listener's great relief, she had to obey a call "forward," but not without an audible mutter relative to "people who held themselves so almighty high and stiff!"

Phemie pinned her thoughts, with her eyes, down to the routine of her appointed labor, through all the winter afternoon. If she were more taciturn and unsmiling than usual, nobody noticed it. She was never merry or conversational in business hours. The frivolous gossips of the clerical sisterhood employed by Arnold & Co. were not tempted to hang about her desk on dull days, or during spare minutes on busy ones. She lived as essentially apart from them as if her sex and employment had not been the same as theirs. "An automaton in Nankeen!" they called her, in derisive allusion to the material of her every-day garb, and they had an uncomfortable and very positive impression that she despised them rather more than they could her. Her fitness for her post was incontrovertible. She had gained it over the heads of a crowd of other applicants, and discharged the manifold and onerous duties pertaining to it with industry and exactness that were absolutely unimpeachable. She wrote a rapid, legible hand, computed with swift correctness, was ever self-possessed and on the alert for the interests of her employer, and never squandered a second of the time he had bought, upon the pursuits to which

the other "young ladies" were, without an exception, addicted. No surreptitious novel, or equally contraband needlework ever nestled in her drawer or pocket, to be produced when the overlooker's back was turned, and only such regards were upon the delinquent as were hoodwinked by the kindness of a fellow-feeling. She never munched bon-bons, or nibbled slyly at sandwiches at unlawful seasons; was never flurried, or pert, or insolent.

"In short"—Mr. Arnold had been heard by jealous eaves-droppers to declare, in humble and loyal imitation of the heads of certain great departments of a certain magnificent Government, whose employment of women as clerks is an honor to their economical instincts, if not to their hearts—"she does her work as well—if not better than any man I could engage for double what I pay her. If she has a feminine foible, I don't know it. There should be more avenues of honorable labor opened to women, sir, and I am doing my best as a—ah—sort of pioneer in this respect."

Phemie had been very busy through all this day. The weather had been fine in the forenoon, and the store was thronged until near sunset. She was the last to quit the place, with the exception of the porter, who eyed her sourly, as she bent over her ledger when the rest had hurried on cloaks and hoods, with an immense deal of cackling, and giggling, and loud talking, and departed to their homes and suppers.

"Most through?" he said, breaking into a tedious

calculation that had engrossed her for ten minutes, and which must be recommenced, if she gave him a thought at this juncture.

She did not reply until she had written the total at the foot of the page: "Give me a moment more, please, James! Or, if you will leave the keys with me, I will see that everything is locked up, and deliver them at your house on my way home."

The man growled, dissentingly. "On your way home! You'll have to go six blocks out of your way to leave 'em! It's too late and dark for young girls to be gadding about the streets alone, at any rate. The devil's around like a roaring lion at night more than at any other time. If you were my child, you should be in by sundown."

"Necessity knows no law, James!" with a smile, at once amused and sad; "I thank you, though!"

She did not say for what. Only, when her task was accomplished—her cloak, a sacque of rough cloth, like a man's dreadnaught, buttoned across her bust, and her gray beaver hat tied under her cleft chin—she spoke again, and in a milder voice.

"You were kind to wait upon me—very prudent to advise me to go home earlier. You are a good father, I am sure, and your daughters must love you dearly. Good-night!"

"Half-past seven!" she said to herself, glancing into a watchmaker's window. "I *am* behind time. It is going to rain, too!"

Until seven o'clock of the next morning her time was her own—she belonged to herself. The first use

she made of her liberty was to think and to say, half aloud: "Clara Mallory pretended not to know me!"

She had beaten back the haunting thought a hundred times during the busy afternoon; had reminded herself that wounded pride and affection were private weaknesses that would clog thought and retard action in Mr. Arnold's behalf. But she had it out with these and Memory, in her two-mile walk through the damp, chilly streets.

Clara Mallory had been her desk-mate at Madame Tourbillon's seminary; the most intimate associate of her out-of-school hours, five years ago. Mr. Rowland, if less wealthy, even then, than Clara's father, occupied a higher position in society by virtue of his superior education and refinement, and lived in equal style. His daughters' dresses at home and at school were as expensive as Clara's, and in far better taste, while their advanced grade of scholarship gave them precedence of Miss Mallory with teachers and pupils, as did their breeding and personal advantages in the world outside the schoolroom. Euphemia Rowland, in the pride of her budding beauty and acknowledged talents, might have selected a more brilliant and appreciative friend than the merely pretty and lively girl whom she elevated to the place of confidante, but this her generous affection forbade her to do. She learned to love Clara because they lived near one another, and shared the same form during lesson hours; because, being impulsive and warm-hearted, she must love somebody, and could not live unless she were beloved in return, and Clara's professions

of boundless attachment allayed the latter craving. They had no secrets, therefore, that were not common property, and exchanged keepsakes as freely, if not as frequently, as they did thoughts, and lived on in happy, loving carelessness of sorrow or change, until both overtook Phemie, and swept her, with the rush of an avalanche, out of sight and ken of the prosperous Mallorys.

Mr. Rowland died suddenly, leaving his worldly affairs in a terribly involved condition. After a deal of trouble on the part of the executors, the state of these was communicated to the family. They were penniless; worse than that; for the entire assets of the deceased failed to meet his liabilities, and the altered demeanor of fair-weather friends was justified in the popular judgment, and, to a limited extent, in that of the bereaved relatives by the fact that others beside themselves—many of them creditors who could ill bear the loss—were sufferers by their calamity. The eldest daughter, Emily—a comely, but by no means intellectual woman—had married, a few months prior to her father's death, a young and prosperous merchant, who, albeit, not inclined by nature or habit to acts of disinterested benevolence, could not do less than advance the first quarter's rent of a small house in an unfashionable part of the city. To this the widow removed, while her weeds were yet fresh, with her four unmarried children—Charlotte, Euphemia, Olive, and Albert. The eldest of these was twenty at the date of their reverses, the youngest but ten. Then commenced a struggle for

life that merited the name. For a while, the mother and daughters took in plain sewing; stabbed themselves from dawn until midnight with their needles to buy food for their mouths; cheap clothing for their backs; fuel to warm them, and to pay the rent of the house that sheltered their fallen heads. I need not recapitulate the various stages of the unsuccessful experiment. Nor is it necessary to state that they found themselves, at the end of the trial year, worse in health and spirits than at the beginning, and so backward in pecuniary matters that Mr. Mandell, the son-in-law, was compelled to step forward with a grudging loan that should square the accounts of the past twelve months, and with a quantity of gratuitous advice relative to the future.

He bestirred himself in good earnest, moreover, to prevent a recurrence of this disaster. He obtained for Charlotte a situation as instructress in the primary department of a ward school, in which women received most equitable salaries — averaging, all around, very nearly half the sum paid to men who did the same work, only not quite as well. For Phemie, he got a place as teacher of a country district school, and he would have bound the fifteen-year-old Olive apprentice to a driving dressmaker, but for the obstinate representations of the other sisters that their mother was too delicate to undertake general housework, and required the assistance, if not the company, of one of her daughters. Albert went to a public school, clothed partially by Emily from her husband's cast-off garments. The Mandells

considered that they "had done well by their poor relations," and Mrs. Rowland, who was apt to take her cue from her first-born, was lavish of expressions of gratitude. That Charlotte and Euphemia did not echo these was a symptom of depraved and thankless natures over which the exemplary brother-in-law sighed privately to his wife—which sighs of a generous heart were retailed faithfully by her to the distressed parent.

Phemie was the most grievous thorn in the worthy man's side. "She reminds me of the stick that was too crooked to lie still?" he said, plaintively, to the wife of his bosom. "There is no such thing as managing her. She has altogether too much will and too much head for a woman. Her sentiments and language border upon incendiarism!"

This objurgation was called forth by her second change of avocations after he had established her, as he stated the case, "most respectably." She resigned the charge of the district school at the end of the session, although the trustees expressed themselves as entirely satisfied with her, and requested her to stay with them another term. She had discovered that the salary they gave her, being graduated by the same equitable scale as fixed her sister Charlotte's, did not equal by one-half that which they had paid her predecessor—a very youthful Sophomore, in need of funds to enable him to prosecute his studies. Her conduct of the school was confessed by all—trustees and patrons—to be superior to his.

“And if I can do a man's work, I should have a man's wages!” said the ardent and ignorant child.

This being out of the question—opposed to the genius of all masculine institutions—and the legal institutions of all countries are masculine—she threw up the situation and came home. She had husbanded every penny of her earnings, and pouring them into her mother's lap in the midst of her pathetic rehash of Mr. Mandell's prophecies of the ills to be expected from her—Phemie's—“outrageous and suicidal step”—went out to seek for work.

She found it in less than three days, at a desk in the State Treasury Department. She had solicited it in person, and the Chief, discovering, in the course of conversation, that her father had been an old friend of his, ventured upon the innovation of giving her the post upon terms that approximated honesty. She worked diligently and contentedly under his eye for eighteen months, and Mr. Mandell, appreciative of the lifting of the strain upon his pocket, condescended to breathe a hope that “things might eventuate less disastrously than he had feared when Euphemia rushed so madly upon a course that was positively unprecedented, and which, he still thought, was a hazardous venture for a young lady, particularly one whose personal appearance was so conspicuous.” Then a new Governor was elected, who knew not the chief, nor any of his party, and he made clean work in the Treasury Office, from the High Secretary down to the boy who swept the floors and fed the fires.

Phemie had to march with the rest. She spent one afternoon and evening at home, the recipient of Charlotte's sympathy, Olive's kindly offices in the culinary line, and her mother's lamentations and second-hand prognostications. The Mandells looked in, after tea, the following evening, and were astounded to learn that, after a long day's tramp, Phemie had engaged employment as a saleswoman in the store of "Arnold & Co., Importers and Manufacturers of Ladies' Trimmings, Ribbons, Laces, etc."

"The compensation is pitiful—a dollar a day!" said Euphemia, the indomitable, sipping the milk and eating the stale biscuit that served her as a supper, after her protracted fast. "But it is better than nothing. I only take the place as a stepping-stone to something better."

"It will pay the rent," calculated Mr. Mandell. "And Charlotte gets three hundred more. That ought to supply your table. You should live quite comfortably upon that, with what your mother and Olive make by their needlework."

"A hundred more at the utmost!" computed Phemie to herself. "Items to be provided out of this—fuel, clothing, lights, and sundries. That will never do! I must strike higher!"

She did, at the end of six months, by applying for, and proving her ability to fill the post of book-keeper and cashier in Mr. Arnold's establishment, which then chanced to fall vacant. When she entered upon the duties of her advanced position, at a

salary of six hundred dollars a year, Mr. Mandell felt himself called upon to offer exceedingly guarded congratulations.

“You should begin to lay aside something against a rainy day—at least, two hundred a year,” he said. “I can help you to some excellent investments for small sums. Above all things, don't let your extraordinary success betray you into extravagance.”

The incorrigible spendthrift was thinking, at that very minute, in happy deafness to his prudential saws—“*Now*, Lottie shall take cod-liver oil, and next vacation a trip to the sea-shore. Now, mother shall have flannel vests, and poor, dear Olly, at least one new dress; a serviceable merino, or all-wool delaine. Now, Bertie shall go to school a year longer. I *hated* the idea of his becoming an errand boy in Seth Mandell's store. He shall have a thorough education, if I have to spend every dollar upon him that I can save from household expenses.”

But prices took a rise before she had occupied her high stool a single quarter, and the end of the year brought consternation in the discovery that six hundred nowadays went no further than four hundred used to do. The leaven that had sent everything else up with yeasty rapidity had not operated upon salaries. These are regarded by Church, State, and private corporations as strictly non-inflatable substances. When the rest of the universe is buoyant, they lie prone and impassive in a state that, as Gail Hamilton says of her transplanted beetlings, gives to the word “flatness” a new meaning. This is all

right, of course, or it wouldn't be so. Irrational, undisciplined Phemie had "incendiary" notions on this subject also. I am ashamed to tell it; but she was only deterred from asking Mr. Arnold for an increase of wages by the earnest entreaties of her sisters and mother, and the almost tearful protestations of Mr. Mandell that she would thereby write her own discharge.

"And situations are frightfully scarce just now," he added.

"That is true!" assented Phemie, candidly. "Ah, well! I won't let this bird out of my hand until I have secured his fellows in the bush."

These were no nearer capture now than when she made the promise. Prices were still up, and salaries still emulated the withered beetlings. There were a dozen applications for every vacant situation, and Phemie, not being a fool, held fast to her bird in the hand, however lean he might grow.

The struggle for a livelihood is seldom compatible with a fight for a foothold in society. The Rowlands had not attempted the feat. They had no time to pay visits to the now remote quarter of the city in which they had formerly resided, and it is to be presumed that their then acquaintances were troubled with a like poverty of the precious commodity, since they did not seek them out. When misfortune pricks one of the rainbow bubbles that float on the whirlpool of fashionable existence, who ever saw the rest stop to inquire into, or to bemoan its vanishment? Phemie had set all this in array before herself as

many times as the recollection of her early intimates had crossed her mind. Mr. Mallory had lost money by Mr. Rowland's failure, and being a vindictive man, it was to be expected that he should sunder Clara from her friend. Phemie had shed her last tears over the parting, four years ago. Time had blunted this sorrow, as he does all others. But that Clara should deliberately refuse to recognize her, should address her as a stranger not of her caste, was a surprise, and a severe one.

"I could have existed without this lesson in human nature!" said the girl, in bitter sarcasm, trudging along in the rain that began to fall before half of her journey was accomplished.

She did not mind bad weather, generally, but the effect of this soaking mist was singularly dispiriting. It sent her thoughts, by some inexplicable association of ideas, back to the bright and sheltered days of yore; the winter evenings, glad with mirth and music, and the pleasant converse of the fireside; when it was easy to obey the injunction, "Take no thought for the morrow,"—the morrow crowned with hope, as to-day was with fruition. The solitary ring she wore had been a Christmas present from Clara on the last holiday they had passed together. Miss Mallory must have seen it upon the hand that held the disputed bank-note. It was not an ordinary pattern; a garnet heart set heavily in chased gold, relieved by lines of black enamel. Phemie plucked off her wet glove with the intention of removing the *gage d'amour* that was such no longer, but

changed her purpose, while her fingers were upon the circlet.

“I will not throw it away! People in our circumstances cannot afford to be wasteful! I'll give it to Bertie, and let him sell it. It will help buy the Greek dictionary he is pining for. Where is the use of being in trade if one doesn't learn to be mercenary? Seth would commend this disposition of a school-girl's keepsake. It is quite in his line. Poor old ring! you have given me some happy moments in the past.”

She kissed it before she re-covered her hand. Her brother-in-law might well consider her “a queer mixture.”

“If she had not recollected me, I should not have wondered. I have altered very much since we used to walk to school, arm-in-arm. My dress is a disguise in itself. Our smart housemaid of those times would have been ashamed to wear one like it when she opened the door for the postman. But Clara knew me! I am too familiar with her countenance to doubt that. I might add too used to the reception of cuts direct, not to understand the features of such. She knew me on the instant; and dreaded lest I should proclaim our former acquaintanceship before her *distingué* cavalier. He behaved handsomely; extricated us from our awkward situation very cleverly. So, she is to marry him—if Lucy Harris's tattle is worthy of credit. I hope she will be happy!”

The vision of a home cosily luxurious; a loving

husband, who accounted it a pleasure to foresee and supply every want of her he had wooed and won, of social pleasures and intellectual repasts, such as the wealthy command, and the poor in all but heart and brains vainly crave, what was this to the high-souled, great-hearted girl, who paid by her daily toil for the humble abode that barely held her mother's household; who had never had a lover whose mental qualifications she did not despise, and whose person was not disagreeable to her; whose friends could be told upon the fingers of one hand, and whose one "evening out" during the present season had been spent in hearing a scientific lecture from an eminent scholar and orator—a treat for which she paid a dollar, and went gloveless to church for a month afterward lest her conscience should accuse her of selfish extravagance?

She met the contrast, vividly outlined by imagination, between her situation and that of her whilom confidante, with a brave show of the dauntless spirit which was her characteristic.

"Never mind! My turn will come, I dare say. If I do feel, occasionally, as did the poor fellow who called out, when the ballad-singer was trolling 'There's a good time coming, boys,'—'I say, mister, you couldn't name the day, could you?'—the fault is in my courage or faith—maybe in both. I find this state of intense humidity unfavorable to the development of these. Home at last! and lights in the parlor. An invasion of relatives, I fear!"

She entered the lower door, and groped her way

through a small, dark hall into the front basement, which served the double purpose of kitchen and dining-room. The only other apartment on this floor was a mere closet in the rear, used as a pantry. The furniture was plain and scanty; the one kerosene lamp lighted the place indifferently, but the small grate of the cooking-stove was warm and glowing. Phemie knelt upon the floor before it, and held her benumbed fingers close to the hot bars.

"I'm a dripping glacier, Olive!" she said, to her younger sister, when she offered to unfasten her hat and cloak. "My toggery would have been spoiled, if it could have been injured at all. As it is, it will look as well to-morrow as it has done for these two years past."

"You should have taken an umbrella, this morning, as I begged you to do," rejoined Olive, an apple-cheeked, round-eyed maiden of twenty, wiping the felt hat dry with a soft cloth.

"Take care! you'll rub the nap off!" cautioned Phemie, comically. "That would be an irreparable injury. I cannot endure an umbrella; I prefer a thorough wetting any day to the trouble of carrying one of the lumbering nuisances. And nothing shall induce me to burden myself with it when it only threatens to storm. The most ludicrously pitiable object I meet in my walks abroad is the man or woman who lugs about, in unexpected sunshine, a whalebone and gingham incumbrance that stamps him or her as a cowardly false prophet."

“That does well enough for you to say,” said Olive. “But the real reason why you don’t carry an umbrella is that you leave one for Charlotte, because she is delicate; one for mother or me, because we must go to market; one for Bertie, lest he should catch a wetting and a sore throat, and there is none left for you. You should buy one for your own use, Phemie. I said so to Charlotte, to-night, when it began to rain. It is wrong to expose yourself as you do. Your life and health are worth too much to be risked so thoughtlessly.”

“Nonsense!” said Phemie, good-humoredly, getting up from the floor. “Half the illness in the world is brought on by over-caution. You have kept my supper warm for me, I see. That was kind in you. I am quite ready for it, I can assure you.”

It was frugal as an anchorite’s fare—three baked potatoes, a glass of milk, a half loaf of brown bread and a slice of butter.

“It looks so dry!” mourned Olive, setting it upon the table. “There was nothing I could keep warm except the potatoes. I wish you would eat meat once a day, Phemie! You work so hard!”

“I eat what suits me best, you carnivorous little animal! that which renews the tissues and supplies phosphates.”

“Meat is nourishing, isn’t it?” queried commonplace Olive.

“To disease—yes! I don’t seek to convert you, Olly. So long as you tolerate my eccentricities, I

am content—or should be. Who is upstairs?” as a louder hum of voices penetrated the ceiling.

“Seth and Emily, and” — with perceptible hesitation—“Joe Bonney.”

“Interesting!”

“I wish you would tell me one thing, Phemie,” said Olive, still hesitating, with a wistful look upon her rosy face and in her round eyes.

“I will, if I can, Olly—as many things as you want to know.”

“Why do you dislike Joe Bonney? He fairly adores you.”

“You have answered your own question—partially. He persists in letting everybody see that he adores me in his lumpish way, until the sight of him is a rank offence to my visual organs. An hour of his society is a phase of spiritual mortification that should atone for a multitude of sins.”

“That’s what I can’t understand!” continued practical and puzzled Olive. “He is rather good-looking, and has one of the kindest hearts in the world. His principles are excellent; he is doing well in his business, and he is sensible enough. I am often amazed at remarks he makes when you are not by. You overawe him, somehow.”

“I have no doubt he is very well in his way, but his way doesn’t happen to be mine,” returned Phemie. “He is narrow-minded, weak and obtuse. I am the more inclined to think well of him from your advocacy of him than from any merit I have ever discovered in the sapient youth. There is one

deplorable counterpoise to this, however. He is Seth Mandell's cousin, and enjoys the esteem of our incomparable brother-in-law. Furthermore, Seth and Emily mean that I shall marry him. Finally, my dear sister, *I don't mean to do it!*"

Olive would have appealed from this decision but for the entrance of their mother. She was a fragile woman, who had been pretty, and who could never look otherwise than ladylike. Her manner was undecided, at times deprecating, always more or less martyrlike. One would as soon have hunted for eaglets in a dove's nest as imagined that she was Phemie's parent.

"I am relieved that you are at home, my child!" she said, when she had kissed Phemie, mournfully. "I have been sadly anxious about you. It is really imprudent for you to be out so late without an escort. Mr. Bonney has been very restless ever since he came and heard that you were not in. He would have gone to meet you, but Charlotte was certain he would miss you on the way. My advice was that he should make the attempt, but Charlotte is very headstrong, and he preferred to obey her. Now, dear, you must change your dress right away, and come up to our friends. A little lively company will cheer you up. It grieves me that you will be such a recluse."

"Is it really essential that I should make an elaborate toilet, mother? I thought this irreproachable. My dress is quite dry now, and my collar is clean, isn't it?"

"They are barely admissible for the morning—

utterly unsuitable for evening wear," said Mrs. Rowland, firmly. Like a majority of weak women, she prided herself upon "taking a stand."

"Which shall it be?" asked Phemie, resignedly, lighting a candle. "The purple velvet, or the crimson satin?"

"I have nothing to say when you employ that tone toward me, Euphemia!" The stand was taken very strongly. "If you can reconcile it with your sense of the duty and respect you owe me and our friends to scoff at my suggestions, and absent yourself from their society, whenever the whim seizes you, I am dumb. But I *should* have hoped that the recollection that I am your mother, and what are your obligations to your brother-in-law and your sister might have some weight. I have been long aware, however, that my ideas are obsolete according to your code. I am behind the age in which you live, and—excuse me for saying that I do not regret this."

"You may notice it when you will"—Mrs. Rowland had boasted repeatedly to her other daughters—"strong as Euphemia's will is, she invariably gives way when I assert my authority. Your poor father did just the same."

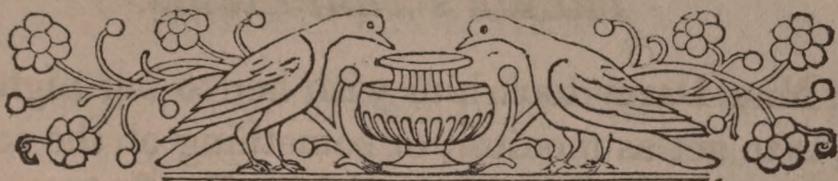
The present instance bore her out in the declaration that she could master the stubborn spirit of her third daughter.

"I shall be in the parlor in a few minutes, mother," she observed, quietly. She looked back over her shoulder, in quitting the room, to inquire, "Where is Bertie, Olive?"

“Miss Darcy took him with her to her night-class. He is to act as monitor, or something of the sort.”

Phemie's eyes sparkled. “Miss Darcy is more than kind! The time will come when we shall be very proud of our brother, Olive!”





CHAPTER II.

IF Phemie's eyes had brightened at Miss Darcy's name, Mr. Mandell's had grown severe, when he heard it mentioned. His were not expressive eyes as a usual thing, being slaty-gray in hue, and protuberant in shape, although small; very like in color, size, and general appearance, to a couple of new and cheap marbles—not the more choice agate and porcelain “alley taws.”

Emily Rowland was reckoned by her mother and the wise ones of her acquaintance, to have done well in her marriage. She certainly had not been led into the connection by the desire of the eye. Her Seth was tall and angular; sallow in complexion; with high shoulders and cheek-bones, and joints that played too loosely for grace when he moved or walked. Business was the chief idea of his life; common sense was his foible. Whatever did not subserve the interests of the first and tally with the requirements of the latter, was swept into the unconsidered background of “stuff and folly.” The world is overstocked with these zealous scavengers, who

descried mould and rot in everything that is not brick, stone, or metal.

“Miss Darcy has taken to patronizing Albert, too, has she?” he said, when Mrs. Rowland accounted for the boy's absence from the family group, as Olive had done to her sister. “I had hoped she would expend her energies in that line upon Euphemia. It is not my province to interfere in your domestic arrangements, Mrs. Rowland, but you will excuse me for doubting the beneficial effects of this strong-minded woman's influence over either of your children. She is a fanatical radical. Perhaps you may not be aware that she advocates the equality of the sexes. That is her latest crotchet.”

“I lament Euphemia's intimacy with her as much as you can, Seth,” sighed the mother. “It can lead to no good end. But I cannot hinder it.”

“Miss Darcy has been very kind to Phemie—to us all!”

Charlotte broke off her conversation with Joe Bonney, who was straining his ears to catch some portion of the talk between his cousin and the lady of the house, the sound of Euphemia's name having reached them across the room. The eldest single sister was a woman of twenty-five, of sickly aspect, who might easily have been mistaken for thirty. Two years in the harness of a ward school had robbed her of good looks and spirits. She was a paid drudge in the vineyard of tender minds and young ideas, and had no hope of ever being anything more. Being conscientious, she did her utmost to satisfy her em-

ployers. Not being ambitious, she did as she was told; walked meekly in the treadmill, living by the day in a round where one day was like all the rest—in term time. Being only flesh and blood, and that not of the stoutest quality, she broke down in health with unfailing regularity by the beginning of every vacation, and was good for nothing for two months. Being a woman, she must have an object of worship, and she made an idol of Euphemia. Therefore, it was her gentle voice that interrupted her mother in defence of Phemie's friend.

“I shall never forget her goodness to me, last summer,” she continued. “I think I should have died, had she not taken me with her to her native place—one of the nicest old-fashioned farm-houses in the world—and kept me there four weeks. She would have preferred Phemie as a companion, I know, but she never intimated as much to me by word or look.”

“I'll guarantee you were a less profitable boarder, even in the country, than Euphemia would have been,” said Seth, with the wooden chuckle that was his nearest approach to a laugh. “Her keep would have cost next to nothing where milk, apple-sauce, vegetables, brown bread and butter are plenty, as they are on a farm.”

“I wasn't a boarder!” replied Charlotte, flushing slightly. “I was Miss Darcy's guest, and she was her brother's. They all loved her dearly at the homestead. They could not help it. Miss Darcy is always busy helping others and making them happy.”

“She would make *me* happier if she would dress

more like other people," said Joe Bonney, lamely facetious, whereat his cousins applauded, and Mrs. Rowland was encouraged to renew her complaints.

"I often say as much to Euphemia, Mr. Bonney. Miss Darcy has estimable traits, as we all allow, but her peculiarities are really very offensive to a refined taste. What a young, and—I may be allowed to say in present company—not unattractive girl like our dear Euphemia can find in her to admire and imitate, I cannot divine. I have always been instructed to consider dress a criterion of character. I appeal to every person of judgment to know whether a woman who wears garments of such material and make as Miss Darcy's, *can* be supposed to possess a well-regulated mind."

"She is a fine scholar, and the most interesting talker I ever listened to. Everybody acknowledges her abilities," said Charlotte. "And"—suggestively *at* Mr. Bonney—"whoever would keep in favor with Phemie had better not find fault with her favorite."

Joe was crestfallen. The exultation that had warmed him in the consciousness of having said a witty thing, sank into abject dread lest Charlotte should report his attempt to cast ridicule upon her friend, to her sister. He had not revived when Phemie came in. Her evening toilet was a black alpaca, linen collar and cuffs, and a knot of cherry ribbon at her throat. Her abundant hair had been rebrushed; her cheeks were like nectarines, and her eyes were twin-stars. Poor Joe caught a strangling breath in the intoxication that straightway overtook

him; sheepishness ensuing as an inevitable consequence. She could not have looked more queenly in the fictitious purple velvet. If Joe could have had his way—this was the tenor, not the wording of his reverie, as he sat in his corner and watched her—the dingy little parlor, with six cane-seat chairs, one clumsy sofa, two tables, and the piano—relic of their departed state, that made the rest of the furniture look poorer and meaner than it would have done in its absence—the shabby carpet and muslin window-shades—all her unbecoming surroundings should know her no more, save as a visitor.

In place of them she should have a pretty house in a pleasant street, two parlors and a dining-room, with a hall on the first floor; two chambers and a bathroom above, with a snug attic bedroom for the servant; three marble steps outside the front door, cleaned every morning by said servant; and inside, graceful, yet substantial furniture, and no end of books. He had pictured it to himself a thousand times, together with the two silk, two merino, one grenadine, one poplin, and two lawn dresses she should have per annum, not to mention delaines and calicoes for common wear. He was the junior partner in a retail dry-goods store, and had opportunities of becoming acquainted with woman's needs in the matter of outer garments. The habit he had contracted of falling into long and deep reveries over sheeny amber, or garnet silks, warm brown and maroon cashmeres, diaphanous muslins, where clear white was relieved by a bunch of golden and green

wheat, or a moss rosebud, or a scarlet geranium, was attributable solely to his consuming passion for the brunette beauty. He had manœuvred a whole month to discover the number of Phemie's gloves, and sent her, on Valentine's-day, which fell on the Tuesday preceding this call, a neat box, white and gilt, containing six pairs of gloves, selected with a judicious eye to her complexion. The gift being anonymous, it might or might not be spoken of during his present visit, and this uncertainty added to his perturbation. He was in an agony lest she should pass over the incident in disdainful silence, in which event he would be morally sure she suspected who the donor was, and meant that he should comprehend the import of the slight. On the other hand, he confessed to himself that he should be ready to expire in the torments of bashfulness at the remotest approach on her part to the acknowledgment of his generosity. An inconsistent, yet altogether natural frame of mind, and one with which young ladies who have timid, but adoring lovers, have frequently to deal.

Phemie's greeting to her married sister was kindly. "There is no harm in Em," she was wont to say to Charlotte, "and very little of anything else. She is Seth's echo, and, as such, makes herself disagreeable at times; but Em proper means well enough. Her staples of conversation, when she leaves Seth's lead, are slightly tiresome, but innocent. One wearies, at the dozenth hearing, of being told how much she paid for her last dress, hat, and cloak; how

Sethy tumbled down stairs before he was a year old, and Mamie swallowed a pin last week, and how Rowley cut stomach and eye teeth at the same time; but she never guesses this, so no harm is done."

"Well, Em!" she said, walking first up to her at her entrance.

"How are you, Phemie?" answered Mrs. Mandell, and the conventional kiss was exchanged—a caress gone through with by the younger mainly because her mother was by, and would have deplored the omission of it.

Phemie next put four passive fingers into her brother-in-law's hand, that felt like that of a kid doll—as non-pulsative and as stiff in the knuckles.

"Good-evening, Seth!"

Then she bowed to Mr. Bonney—a curious courtesy, that carried her further away from, not toward him. She looked civilly bored by the whole operation, and Emily remarked upon this by the time she was seated in a straight-backed chair, her hands in her lap, as well-trained children are taught to bestow themselves "in company."

"You seem to be tired, Phemie! How happened you to be so late getting home? We were afraid something had happened."

"Something did happen!" In her acute sense of the ridiculous, Phemie could not help emphasizing the convenient word. "We have had a busy day in the store, and I stayed awhile after the rest had gone to straighten up my books."

“You shouldn't let them get crooked,” said the oracular Seth. “Keep ahead of your work. Drive it, and it will never drive you. Those are two capital rules—rules that will effectually do away with the necessity of working in over hours. Unless”—as a prudent after-thought—“you are paid extra for so doing. That alters the case entirely.”

“Mr. Arnold ought to remunerate you for labor done after the store is closed,” remarked Emily.

“That is what I tell her, my love,” said Mrs. Rowland, plaintively. “But Phemie turns a deaf ear to my persuasions. I was never conversant with business affairs until lately, but my common sense—and I believe even my daughters admit that I *have* common sense—assures me that it is unjust for Phemie to stay in that store, for an hour or more, alone, figuring away at Mr. Arnold's accounts, without receiving some compensation for it. And now, my child, you hear that your brother Seth corroborates your silly mother's decision.”

Seth changed his base. “I wouldn't advise you to demand it,” he said wisely. “You are fortunate in being able to retain your place at all, while so many are out of work. Employers have the whip-hand in these times. Eh, Joe?” with a complacent sense of not being an employé.

“That's so!” responded Joe, reddening to the roots of his sandy hair, his sheepishness and the effort to conceal it giving a swaggering stress to his affirmation he never intended should distinguish it.

Phemie looked at him fixedly for perhaps thirty

seconds, during which purgatorial infliction his skin passed from the shade of a blush to that of a cabbage-rose, and his bony fingers intertwined like straggling grape-vines. If he had read Mrs. Partington's sayings, he would have recalled, and appreciated to the full, her dolorously comic lament that she "never opened her mouth without putting her foot into it." He had said something awkward, maybe wrong; at all events, something that did not accord with his divinity's ideas of the correct and gentlemanly. He had a horrible impression that she had reckoned him up and written a deficit at the bottom of the column, when she quietly withdrew her laming eyes from him, and rested them upon her demure hands, without answer to any of the four observations last recorded.

"She has such a way of finishing a fellow up!" Joe had said, the previous Sunday evening, to his cousin-in-law Emily, who played the part of mother-confessor to his *penchant* for her sister. "She puts me off without saying a word—well, a hundred million miles is a circumstance to the gulf her eyes dig between us." He mentally multiplied the distance by ten, after the above luckless speech and her grave survey of him. Emily saw his embarrassment, ignorant of what had caused it. She was one of the tactless people who are forever "doing their best" to rectify mistakes and set uncomfortable people at their ease.

"Mamie sent her love to you, Phemie," she hastened to say. "She and Rowley told me not to

forget to tell you about their valentines. They each got one. Did you girls receive any?"

"I did not!" answered Charlotte, carelessly.

"Don't offend us by asking such a question," added Phemie. "With sensible, grown-up people, the custom of sending valentines has fallen into disuse. Very properly, too—but it does well enough for children!"

"Some very sensible people keep it up." Emily was not quite put down.

"Ah!" Phemie smiled, languidly. "I don't happen to know of any such instances of puerility among that class. I thought the practice was confined entirely to the nursery and the kitchen. I remember well the prevalent features of those exchanged by Patrick and Bridget. I used to ferret them out of the dresser-drawers when I was a little girl. There were Cupids, and hearts, and roses, and altar fires done in red and pink; and tunics and ribbons, and quivers, and forget-me-nots done in blue—all plentifully begreased by the time they fell into my clutches. These were upon the outer page, and upon the inner were transcribed, in very ill penmanship and worse spelling, the orthodox:—

"The fourteenth day of February,
It was my lot for to be merry,
Lots we cast, *and* lots we drew,
Sweet'—

pronounced in the reading, 'swate.'

'Fortune said it must be you.'

Emily gave up the attempt to win for her client's votive offering the compensation of a pleased or grateful word from the recipient, while Joe, in alternate hot and chill fits of shivering, would unquestionably have disclaimed the deed had it been charged upon him. It was evident to Emily that her mother had not been apprised of the arrival of the gloves, also, that Charlotte had. The signs of the times were unpropitious to the success of Joe's suit. Was Phemie an arrant simpleton?

"After the sacrifices Seth and I are willing to make to insure her happiness!" meditated Joe's ally, in grieved resentment.

The pattern pair had arranged the affair in their conjugal conferences, and agreed that it could not be done in superior style by the most diplomatic of match-makers. Phemie would never have a more eligible offer than Joe's. He was a shrewd man of business, industrious, economical, and amiable. There was a reasonable chance of his becoming a man of wealth in a decade or two. At least, he would be a safe and permanent investment, which was more than could be said for her clerkship. Phemie had some absurd ideas about learned women and intellectual affinities, but she would drop them when she knew more of the world. She must be made to see that she could not look higher socially. Men of means and education did not marry girls who stood behind counters and cast up accounts for a living. If she married Joe, she must take Olive to live with her. Then, they would not need to

keep a servant, Olive being strong, capable, and an adept in all descriptions of house-work. If Joe doubted his ability to maintain both sisters, Olive could take in sewing privately, and Phemie save him many a dollar by her skill in writing up books. There were always odd jobs of that kind to be had. Mrs. Rowland was to come to the Mandells.

"She would help me famously about the children and with my sewing. I shouldn't hire a seamstress either fall or spring then," said Emily.

Albert would board with them and pay for food and lodgings by his services in Seth's store. Charlotte was already earning enough to meet her expenses in a cheap lodging-house. Could anything be more neatly laid out?

"It would be better and safer for me, in the long run," Seth determined. "They are getting along comfortably enough just now, but I live in constant dread lest they should come back upon my hands. I have never approved of their keeping house. These joint stock family companies are risky ventures. If Joe wants Phemie, he must divide the burden with me."

"That is fair, I am sure!" acquiesced his wife.

She was sincere in saying it, and it was hard that their benevolent designs should be frustrated by the insubordinate Phemie.

"I should like to know what she will do with the gloves," thought the thrifty woman. "They are too large for Charlotte and too small for Olive. She can't give them to her sisters, and if she wears them,

she encourages Joe. I shall watch to see how she will get out of the scrape."

Phemie had disposed of the matter by tucking the box of gloves into a drawer she seldom used, with a vehement asseveration that she would never look at them with a thought of using them. She had recognized Joe Bonney's handwriting in the superscription upon the wrapper, and resented the lovely attention.

"I am poor, but not mean enough to accept a pin's worth of wearing-apparel from a man whom I would not marry to save myself from the almshouse!" she said to Charlotte, who had met the bearer of the valentine at the door, and taken the box directed to her sister. "He noticed my ungloved hands the cold Sabbath he walked with us from church. I saw him look at them when I unwrapped my shawl from about them, that I might take out my pass-key. This is his delicate manner of expressing his appreciation of my inability to buy a new pair. His next essay will be a silk hat and feathers, or a pair of new shoes. My Balmoral boots are getting shockingly shabby at the toes."

Her self-respect was stung smartly. Had modest, doting Joe slapped her in the face, the insult would not have seemed more dire. It was, as she interpreted it, the initial step to the purchase she saw was determined upon by the Mandells and their kinsman; a transaction akin to the custom of paying down a small sum as soon as a bargain is concluded upon, to clench the contract. She had rubbed

against some sharp angles in life since her nineteenth year, but the friction had stimulated, not chastened her. Too proud to be vain, she had yet a fair estimate of her mental powers and her personal advantages. Experience had taught her independence of will and energy in action, and rather more confidence in herself than would have beseemed one who had not proved her armor. She looked down upon her suitor as the eaglet, referred to some pages back, would upon a barn-yard cockerel, and I am not prepared to say that she erred in this, even taking into account the circumstance that his was the lordlier sex.

Seth, irritated at what he inwardly condemned as "ungrateful effrontery," yet dubious as to the expediency of pushing further in a direction in which his wife had been signally routed, tried another mode of annoying Phemie—punishing her, as he called it.

"What is the nature of the entertainment to which your friend, Miss Darcy, has invited Albert?" he asked. "He is young to attend evening parties."

"I was not at home when the invitation arrived," answered Phemie, indifferently. "Charlotte can tell you more about the matter than I can."

Charlotte, whose sweet temper was proof even against Seth's worrying inquiries and officious protection, explained readily and patiently that Miss Darcy, with some other philanthropic persons—both ladies and gentlemen—had established an evening class of young people, chiefly members of the senior classes and graduates of the public schools, who de-

sired more extensive information upon certain scientific subjects than they could obtain at these institutions. A large room had been hired and fitted up with seats for the pupils and a platform for the lecturer, and in this there were delivered, three times a week, familiar discourses upon Astronomy, Geology, Natural Philosophy and Chemistry, illustrated by diagrams and experiments.

“Albert has been studying chemistry with Miss Darcy and Phemie for more than a year,” said the proud sister, “and has made such progress that Miss Darcy called for him this evening to act as her assistant in the experiments that are to illustrate her lesson.”

The last word was judiciously chosen, but it did not divert Seth from the scent of a fresh abomination to nostrils refined after the pattern of his forefathers.

“You don't mean to say that she teaches the motley crowd of males and females herself—makes a speech from the platform?”

“She teaches the class when her night comes around,” was Charlotte's amendment, uttered rather nervously.

“Are there other females who do the same?”

“Most of the lecturers are gentlemen, I believe. Few women are competent to give instruction on the topics which are chosen on these occasions.”

“I am glad to hear it—very glad!” ejaculated Seth, thrusting one hand into his breeches pocket and stretching his legs very far out on the carpet, leaving a triangular space between his spine and the

back and seat of his chair, in which a good-sized pillow could have been inserted.

This was his oratorical attitude, and Phemie's fingers pinched one another very tightly in anticipation of a harangue.

"It is a comfort to learn," he pursued, "that the females of America are still true to their sex; still cherish some symptoms of virtuous modesty; still cultivate domestic habits and principles, and shrink from public life; from scenes in which their morals must be corrupted, their manners masculinized"—

"The latter result *would* be a degradation!" interpolated Phemie, with a politely-suppressed yawn. "That is, if your reference is to the human species. You did not state expressly what kind of males and females you were talking about. The terms are very indefinite. As to Miss Darcy, she can take care of herself—and she does it."

"Come! come!" said Emily, alarmed lest Joe should be frightened from the chase by the "gamey" propensities of his quarry, and aware that Seth would come off second-best in a wordy war. Not that he did not carry the heaviest guns, but Phemie was *so* quick and audacious!

"You two are always sparring!" she said, lightly. "Suppose you talk of something more interesting to the rest of us than Miss Darcy and her pranks."

"She doesn't play pranks, and you could hardly find a theme more interesting to me than the story of her brave and good deeds," returned Phemie. "But I don't want to talk about her just now."

The words were on her lips when the door-bell rang violently once, and yet again, before Olive could ascend the basement steps. Seth answered the peremptory summons, Olive halting at the other end of the passage, and Mrs. Rowland following her son-in-law to the threshold of the parlor to discover the cause of the commotion.

Two gentlemen were there, supporting between them a lad whose face was bloody and besmirched with soot or smoke, a white handkerchief binding his eyes, while behind them on the porch, before them when they entered the hall, pressed a figure well known to the terrified family.

“It was an accident, Mrs. Rowland—an explosion—and he had just bent over the vessel to make sure all was right. His face is scorched—that is all. He bears it like a hero. I brought a doctor along. I knew you would wish it,” said Miss Darcy, in less time than any other woman could have said the same number of words, yet without bustle or apparent agitation. “If you will be so kind as to clear the room, friends, it will be better for him,” she continued, ushering the gentlemen and their charge into the parlor. “No, my dear lady!” when Mrs. Rowland would have rushed toward her son with hysterical effusion. “That is the worst thing you could do. Olive! Charlotte! take care of your mother! Euphemia! I want you!”

She rid the room of useless attendants by a sweeping gesture of her resolute arm, before which Joe, Seth, and Emily vanished as though they had not

been, and shut the door. Albert was laid upon the sofa. He had not groaned or spoken since his arrival at home, until the surgeon removed the handkerchief from his eyes. Then, an exclamation escaped him, so fraught with pain that his sister trembled violently as she stood at his head.

“Be a woman, Phemie!” ordered her friend, tersely. “You were the first person he thought of.”

The gentleman who had withdrawn to the rear of the group about the sofa, eyed the girl curiously at this speech. She controlled herself marvellously, even to the lips that had quivered the instant before, but the eyes were dark and dilate, the cheeks ashy, when the boy's groping fingers caught her dress and he tried to speak cheerfully.

“Never mind, Phemie, darling! I'll come around all right, presently. Stay with me! I won't play the baby again!”

He was a handsome youth of sixteen, very like Euphemia in feature, but fairer in complexion, and differing likewise from her in the slenderness and fragility which had resulted from his rapid growth. His forehead was burned, but not deeply; the lower part of his face was begrimed with smoke; there was a cut in his cheek from which the doctor extracted a piece of glass—slight injuries all, that hardly required surgical care. The eyes had suffered most. The lashes were scorched off; the lids, puffed and raw, shrank from the light pressure of the fingers that yet forced them open.

"It must be done, my boy!" accompanied the act.

The lad clung to his sister's hand while the examination went on, mute and unresisting, but the force of the grasp was an index to her of what he was enduring; her varying color and strained gaze upon the surgeon's movements proof to the two lookers-on of her knowledge of and sympathy with his anguish. The work was quickly done; cooling fomentations and more skilfully-adjusted bandages applied to the wounded parts, and the doctor was ready to depart.

Careless or forgetful of the presence of others, Phemie knelt beside the couch as the surgeon left it, slipping her arm under the pillow, as Albert drew her face down to his.

"Dear old girl!" he said caressingly. "The thing I liked my eyes best for was that they were like yours. They don't look much like them now!"

"They will be bright as ever soon!" she comforted him and herself by saying, stroking his unwounded cheek.

The surgeon, behind her back, telegraphed a mournful contradiction to Miss Darcy and her companion. He had a minute's talk with them upon the steps as the gentlemen were leaving. Miss Darcy meant to stay all night. "That sister is the main support of the family, you say?" he interrogated, with unprofessional interest.

"She is. She educates this, the only brother, also."

"He will have to finish his course at an asylum

for the blind, I fear, if he receive any further schooling. There is scarcely a possibility that he will ever see again. The sight of one eye has gone—probably that of the other.”





CHAPTER III.



WEEK had passed since Albert received his hurt. Phemie, coming home a few minutes later than was her custom, found him already impatient for her arrival. Intense pain and inflammation, and the remedies used to lessen these, had changed him greatly in seven days. He lay on the bed in his mother's chamber, wrapped in a many-flowered dressing-gown which had been Charlotte's in their opulent days—a wadded silk affair, used now at such seasons only as whoever chanced to be the invalid of the household lay in state, and these were brief periods where each one had her living to earn.

“How fine we are, to-night!” said Phemie, laying her cold fingers upon the scarred forehead, and stooping to kiss him. “You look like a young Bashaw with—let me see how many tails!” pretending to count the attenuated palm-leaves curling over the fabric, like lean caterpillars intent upon biting their own spines.

The boy's wan visage brightened momentarily

into a laugh, but subsided quickly into the sad wistfulness it was beginning to wear habitually—a look it cut Phemie's heart to see. She had noted it many times as inseparable from the countenances of the blind.

“I weary more and more for you, Phemie, dear! The day seems terribly, insupportably long without you. Mother and Olive are kindness itself, but Olly is busy all day with other matters, and mother is so low-spirited about me that her conversation depresses, rather than cheers me. Lottie is home by five o'clock, and does her part nobly—too well—for she is hoarse as a raven and quite spent in breath by the time school is out, and I don't like to ask her to read, much less talk to me. So, I lie here and think, think, think! until my brain whirls.”

“Poor brain!” Phemie had tossed off her sack and hat, and drawn the tired head to her shoulder, running her fingers through his hair, and chafing his temples. “It ought to take a holiday. It has done good work in its day—not a long day, either.”

The boy caught her up, quickly and pathetically. “And *now*—now the night cometh, in which no man can work—a night of years, Phemie! It had better be the darkness of the grave; I should burden nobody there. Oh!”—sobs breaking up the manly tone he would have used throughout the review of his condition—“It was my fondest hope to make for myself a name in the world and a home for you. Now, I can never repay you for what you have done for me—must hang, a dead weight upon your hands

—you, a woman, and I a man! I wish my brains had been blown out along with my eyes!”

“Bertie! my treasure! you shall not talk of such dreadful things! Should your sight never be restored—and mind! I am not at all convinced that it may not be! should the worst come to the worst, there are many avenues of learning and usefulness open to the blind. I have fancied often that the mind works better in the dark. You have noticed this yourself, dear. Let us leave the future to our Heavenly Father. He will do what is best for us.”

Albert writhed fretfully. “Not that tack, Phemie! I broke out upon mother, to-day, with a touch of the feeling I have expressed to you, and she talked to me for an hour about the judgments sent upon people for their sins, and about the fire that never dieth, and other enlivening topics that are only fit to comfort people who have never suffered, when they bemoan their neighbor’s misfortunes. I ought to be thankful for the loss of my eyes, I suppose, as she says, but I am not!”

“Hush, darling! you are speaking irreverently of awful themes!” He could not see the solemn light in her eyes, but the inflections of her voice checked his reckless murmurs. “Our dear mother is a good woman, a humble Christian, but her piety is tinged with the melancholy which is her favorite state of mind. I verily believed, when I was a child, that the Almighty was not only indifferent, but even averse to my salvation. I think mother has never grown from under the shadow of that idea. Whereas, the

truth—if His Word is to be believed—is that He is not willing that any should perish. His loving ‘Come!’ is to all who will hear and accept. Don’t fall into the habit of suspecting His love and goodness, dearest! You can have no worse preparation for the battle of Life than doubts of your Leader, no better than the persuasion that he chastens reluctantly; that, if he conducts you through rough paths, it is because they are safest; that in the bright hereafter, you shall know the purpose and bearing of every step you have taken. Else, the word ‘Father’ would be a misnomer. I am a wayward, erring child, Bertie, but in all my wanderings, I try to remember this. It is my creed—a meagre one, maybe, but it helps me. Having finished my sermon, I mean to take you down stairs and give you your supper, like a gentleman of high degree. Will your Bashawship be pleased to lean upon my shoulder, and accept the additional support of my unworthy arm about your august waist?”

“You are better than any preacher!” said the boy, between a smile and a sigh. “If you were always with me, I should never complain, I think.”

“I will never leave you, dear, until you can take care of yourself—except when duty calls me from you for a few hours,” Phemie engaged, promptly. “Our home shall always be the same. Here we are, at the top of the stairs. Do not be afraid to step. I will not let you fall.”

“Neither Mr. Hart nor Miss Darcy has called, or sent to inquire about me, to-day,” said Albert, when

he had eaten his supper, served up by Phemie while the others ate theirs in the dining-room.

“That is not because they have not thought of you or do not like you,” was the response. “They have been most attentive; the kindest of the many friends this accident has developed. You should be very proud and glad that such a host of people are interested in you, Bertie. I am, for your sake. Our matchless Miss Darcy has outdone herself. Did I tell you that she and I have had our first quarrel over her determination to charge herself with the expenses of your education? She will have it that she was, in some sort, to blame for the accident.” *Jess so.*

“She was not!” interrupted Albert. “It was my impatience. She put her hand on my shoulder to pull me back when I stooped to look into the crucible; I felt it, and she said her say: ‘Take care!’”

“I know! I told her there was no need of her assistance in this case, and I mean to have my way. But she has a great, warm heart, hasn't she? And I am exceedingly desirous to see and thank your Mr. Hart for his visits and gifts.”

“I wish you could!” She had foreseen that the remark would enliven him. “You will like one another at sight. It is strange you did not notice him the night I was hurt.”

“I had eyes only for you, my precious boy!”

Phemie was lavish of caresses to no one except her brother. She fed him upon them and fond words now whenever he was left to her nursing.

“He is one of Miss Darcy's committee, you know,”

said Albert. "His voice was the first I heard when I came to my senses. He said: 'My brave lad!' instead of what everybody else was groaning and sighing, 'Poor boy!' Afterward he called me, 'My man,' and 'My noble fellow!' I detest patronage; and he and Miss Darcy were the only persons about me who did not play the condescending patrons from the moment I was knocked down to that in which I was put into the carriage. And when he comes to see me now, he talks as if he were one man and I another. The fruits and ices he has sent have been accompanied by his card, as if he considered me his equal. He is going to drop in some day when I am better and read to me."

"Maybe, then, you don't care to hear me read awhile now, instead of tiring yourself talking," said Phemie, playfully. "Your tongue is apt to run too fast when Mr. Hart is your theme. I shall grow jealous, soon, if you do not moderate your transports. To show that I am not, just yet, I am going to entertain you with one of his books. It is a fine thing to have a friend who is a book-merchant, is it not? I wonder if he needs a bookkeeper. I shall apply for the post when he does. Here is my creed set forth in verse, and so beautifully as to shame my halting prose," she went on to say, dropping her bantering tone as she found the poem she was seeking.

The volume was one of Whittier's, and her selection was his noble "Psalm." Her voice was a mellow contralto, her enunciation roundly distinct, her emphasis just and earnest. Albert, absorbed in

listening, as she was in reading, heard no more than did she the slight bustle in the entry that should have notified them of the approach of intruders. It was Olive who unclosed the parlor door, and would have interrupted her sister, had not a beseeching gesture from her companion stayed her. Phemie's profile was toward them, and her accents were slow and devout as she read:—

“ ‘ All as God wills who wisely heeds
To give, or to withhold,
And knoweth more of human needs
Than all my prayers have told!

“ ‘ Enough that blessings undeserved
Have marked my erring track;—
That wheresoe'er my feet have swerved
His chastening turned me back.' ”

Practical Olly, if she had “noticed particularly,” could have discerned some difference in Phemie's manner of rendering these and her reading the penultimate verse of the poem. But, somewhat impatient at her detention in the gusty passage, and embarrassed at the silent halt upon the parlor-threshold, she was not “noticing,” only wishing “Phemie would hurry up and get through.” Olive's own private belief was that the visitor hesitated to enter because he fancied the brother and sister were engaged in their evening devotions, of which this hymn was a part. However this might be, the gentleman did “notice,” and wonder at the liquid melody of the tones that dwelt lovingly upon each word:—

“That all the jarring notes of life
Seem blending in a psalm,
And all the angles of its strife
Slow rounding into calm.”

“That is delicious, Bertie!” said Phemie, repeating the last line, softly and musingly.

“*That* is not poetry, at any rate,” thought Olive. “Thank gracious she has finished the tiresome thing!” and she pushed the door widely open.

Phemie arose—not in confused haste—but in quiet self-possession, her book closed upon her finger, and beheld the stranger who had acted as Clara Mallory’s escort at the meeting of the estranged school-fellows.

“My sister Euphemia, Mr. Hart!” uttered Olive, formally, and straightway disappeared, glad of the opportunity.

The guest, having at his first visit to the house recognized in the sister of his *protégé* the “superb” bookkeeper who had won his admiration in the fancy store, was not surprised at the encounter, and Phemie, who was, was helped to conceal this by his easy, cordial salutation of her as the principal nurse of his young favorite. “Who is looking better to-night!” he said, taking the eager hand stretched toward him from the sofa. “A judicious course of Whittier is a capital tonic, Miss Rowland.”

In five minutes they were talking together like old friends, Albert enjoying the meeting quite as much, if not more than he had expected to do.

Whittier’s “Psalm” inevitably suggested Longfellow’s “Psalm of Life,” and this led to a critical

discussion of the merits of the two. Mr. Hart, as an admirer of the Quaker poet, must, perforce in his zeal to establish his merits, take the volume from the young lady and read divers choice passages. Phe-mie thought she had seldom heard finer reading—
—a trifle theatrical, perhaps, to an ear unaccustomed to parlor elocutionists, but very pleasing and striking, nevertheless. They were at no loss for topics of common interest, when this one was dismissed. Of course, as she said to herself afterward, it was not a notable occurrence with him to meet with a tolerably intelligent girl who loved poetry and eloquence, and had a smattering of certain sciences. The interview was, to him, one of many. To her, it was an event. Her intellect thirsted for such oftentimes. One class of her mental powers did the work of her daily life, and this was the more ignoble. Her longings after loftier attainments in knowledge, her love of the beautiful in Nature, Art, and Literature, were nourished secretly and so scantily she feared, sometimes, they would perish utterly.

Mr. Hart was unfeignedly interested in the new acquaintance brought thus oddly to his notice. He had known scores of pretty women in his time, and dozens of brilliant talkers who were seldom pretty. He had never before, if his memory served him aright, met one so handsome and sprightly as this daughter of the working-classes. She doubtless owed both sense and beauty to the circumstance of her father's having been a gentleman, and herself having been born in a different sphere from that which she

now occupied, but marvellous shares of resolution and genuine love of learning must have combined to urge her to the acquisition of that which she had evidently mastered—not dipped into. Ardent, without being hasty, thorough, yet not dull, the workings of her mind interested him and incited him to bring forth the best treasures of his. If these matched hers only as paste simulates the gleam of the diamond, Phemie did not detect it. She had early been bound down by mean and harassing cares, the what to drink, to eat, and to wear, or, more truly, how to procure the money that represented these, had been set for her consideration when other girls were studying, with a lively sense of practical importance, the phases of masculine character presented to them in society. Her sketches of human nature were made in a totally different school from that to which this hero of Albert's belonged. The cant of trade was familiar to her as her alphabet, and recalling her father's oft-reiterated prognostications of ruin and ceaseless desires for wealth during the latter months of his life, she believed that all men talked it. Mr. Hart, who lived among books, and knew live authors, and talked about books of travel, history, biography, and poetry, as Mr. Arnold did of laces, ribbons, velvets, and profits—was a new revelation.

Mrs. Rowland had a headache; Charlotte was wearied by her day's work, and had gone to bed; Olive was busy, to-morrow being baking day. The trio in the parlor were, therefore, uninterrupted by the introduction of incongruous elements into their

harmonious councils, and time flew faster than any of them had any idea of.

Mr. Hart, as was proper, was the first to bethink himself that his call might be unreasonably long. His start of dismay, when the nearest church-clock tolled the hour of ten, was unfeigned, but it made Phemie smile, and was, moreover, very subtle flattery to her colloquial talents.

“Try to forgive me, Albert!” begged the delinquent. “If you have a relapse, I shall find it more difficult to get my own pardon for my thoughtlessness—my disregard of your comfort and health. Why didn’t you send me away an hour and a half ago, Miss Rowland?”

While Albert replied with hospitable warmth that the visit had seemed to him short as it was delightful, and that he should be the better, not the worse for it, Phemie took a good look at the tall figure, bending toward the recumbent invalid. He was not regularly handsome, although she had thought him so, at the earliest glance. In stature, he was commanding, and he carried himself well; his hair was nearly, if not quite, black; his forehead high, but somewhat narrow across the temples; his eyes dark-gray; and bright or languishing as the lashes lifted or drooped; his mouth was small—too small for manly beauty, and overhung by a neatly-trimmed moustache, while the unfortunate effect of his retreating chin was skilfully lessened by the sweeping beard, which, it was easy to see, was his favorite vanity. His long white fingers caressed it when he listened

and when he laughed; pulled at it when he was perplexed or deeply thoughtful. If his portrait only had been exhibited to Phemie, she would have criticized sharply the defects of his physiognomy. Seen in the light of his kindly downward smile upon the suffering boy, the weariness of whose darkened hours he had solaced by sympathy and genial companionship, and while the recollection of his agreeable converse was fresh in her memory, she decided anew that he was better than handsome; that he had the unmistakable air of a well-bred and highly-cultivated gentleman, and that he was all he appeared to be—and more.

“If you are not injured by my selfish indiscretion of to-night, you will let me come again, will you not?” he said, in bidding Albert “Good-night.” “I shall please myself by sending you ‘Calaynos’ to-morrow, Miss Rowland. I don’t ask you to read it aloud to your brother, but I am grievously mistaken if you do not find, here and there, passages you will be unwilling to enjoy alone. For your especial delectation, Albert, I shall slip into the package of books a volume of essays—Christopher North’s. They will help you get rid of the long evenings. If I can steal an hour or two per week, I want to read certain of these papers to you myself. I shall mark them in the book.”

“Isn’t he splendid?” Albert broke forth, when he had gone.

“He is very pleasant.” Phemie was ashamed when she had used the tame phrase. Since she had

taken real and lively pleasure in the society of their new acquaintance, why shouldn't she say as much? Mr. Hart was no more to her than an entertaining man, and a man was a being to be discussed as freely as any other specimen of animated nature—that was—by a sensible woman. She said out her next thought openly, as an *amende* for her disingenuousness. “It would be nice to have him for a frequent visitor, wouldn't it, dear? We should derive improvement as well as enjoyment from the association.” She withheld the swift after-reflection. “But that is a thing we have no right to expect. He comes now out of pity for Albert. The probability is that we shall see nothing more of him after his next visit—if, indeed, he should remember to call again. Heigh-ho! this evening's episode has been a green and gladsome spot in a dry and thirsty land where little water is!”

Albert, too, was silent for a minute. “Phemie, darling!” he said, then. “What have you on, to-night?”

“The old Nankeen, Bertie! the Inevitable, you know!” She strove to say it gayly, but the striving was palpable. She had not thought once of her attire while Mr. Hart stayed, but the sense of its homeliness—its positive shabbiness and unsuitableness to the season, fell suddenly upon her at her brother's query, together with the impression of elegant neatness her late visitor's dress conveyed to all who saw him. The boy's mouth changed from its musing smile. “Why do you ask?” his sister

resumed, not without hope that his answer would contradict her uncomfortable misgivings.

"Oh, I merely wanted to picture to myself how you look. You are beautiful in any dress, let it be ermine, velvet, or calico. You are always my Queen of Love and Beauty. And Mr. Hart has too much good sense to care for fine clothes."

Phemie seemed to arouse herself from a bewitching dream. "He is a man of the world, Bertie, and it is of no consequence to him what I wear—I—a girl so far removed from the circle of his intimates, that the assumption of their manners and dress would be ridiculous. While we retain our self-respect, we are sure of not being despised by him. As a means to gaining this end, we must bear in mind that he is a wealthy gentleman, and we working-people—day-laborers."

"Labor is honorable!" asserted Albert, quickly.

"Very true, dear! But the comprehensions of many are not sufficiently enlightened to appreciate the importance of that truth. And prejudice is mighty, even in enlightened minds."

"I don't comprehend what you are hinting at!" said the boy, with an uneasy twist upon his pillow.

"No? I do not myself—very clearly. Perhaps at the prejudices of doctors and nurses in favor of early hours and obedience to their regimen on the part of their patients," was Phemie's laughing reply.

Kate, G. Sherman



CHAPTER IV.

MISS DARCY was hard at work in her office on a blustering March day. She was a woman forty years of age, tall and spare, after the generally received type of middle-aged maiden ladies, and in the peculiar costume she had adopted, she looked taller and thinner than she really was. Her dress was a mixed gray worsted material, the waist made up without trimming or padding; the skirt gored—it was before the trim “Gabrielle” came into vogue, and she claimed the patent—and hoopless, when every woman in town, who had the slightest regard for her appearance, wore hoops nine feet in circumference. Her gray hair—still soft and abundant—was brushed back *à la Chinoise*, a style affected at that date by few excepting very pretty young girls whose faces could bear any style of *coiffure*, and twisted into a hard “club” at the back of her head, that would not come down until such time as she should be ready for bed. One hairdressing sufficed for her day. She had no time to waste upon trivial

pursuits, for Miss Darcy was a woman of business. True to her habits of system and order, her apparel and every part of her room were clean and neatly arranged. Not an atom of dust; no straggling ends of ribbon or tape; no littering papers were visible about her person or floor, or table, and shelves. All were tight and tidy, that her work might progress without let or hindrance, after it had fairly commenced. At the same time there was an utter destitution of ornament in her surroundings, seldom seen in men's offices and counting-rooms. Her books—and these were numerous—were in plain, serviceable bindings, and packed in solid rows upon shelves of unpainted wood, lining three sides of the room, and protected by glass sliding-doors, like window-sashes. An oil-cloth covered the floor; the chairs were of yellow wood—backs and seats—even the revolving office-chair in which she sat at an oaken desk of the sternest and most uncompromising pattern, if we except one higher and narrower, set between the windows, at which Miss Darcy stood to write when she was tired of sitting.

A tyro in Lavater's art could not have mistaken her for a genius, after a study of her visage. The keen blue eye; rounded forehead, ridged only, and that not strongly, by the swelling of the perceptive organs; the straight nose and somewhat prominent mouth told of fair intellectual abilities; of great quickness of observation and vivacity of thought, and upon every feature was stamped her pre-eminent trait, energy—indomitable, not spasmodic, coupled

with sanguine courage that feared and faltered at nothing.

She had begun her career in life with the resolve to be, and to accomplish something for herself, outside the beaten track allotted by custom to woman-kind. Circumstances favoring the development of her original design, she had worked her way up to a creditable position in the eyes of those who honored mental industry and pure philanthropy, and earned, for herself, with the masses, the title of "a strong-minded woman"—"female," Seth Mandell, as one of said masses, designated her. She was emphatically a humanitarian, and having a bias for reforms, she had been a woman of war from her youth up. There was no warmer or larger heart under the silken bodice of the gentlest mother in the land than throbbed in her corsetless bosom; no more fervent prayer reached the ear of the All-Father, whom she worshipped with the hearty guilelessness of a child, than ascended, in ever-burning incense, from her soul, for the happiness of her kind. To accomplish this—her chief aim in life—she spent and was spent. To succor the poor and needy; to convince the erring of misdeed, and lead him to the light; to right the wronged, and uproot the evil that had wrought his ruin; in a word, to live out, in its full and glorious significance, the Rule of rules, which—if all endeavored to obey it as she did—would do away with the need of other statutes and statute-books; this was her purpose, high and fixed, the mission to which she deemed herself solemnly set apart by signs

not to be misread, and she wrought at it mightily, and, as was her nature, hopefully.

I am not affirming that it was other than a rank and superfluous offshoot of a principle in itself worthy of all commendation, that made Miss Darcy an advocate of the equal rights of her sex with man. I do admit that she was led by her zeal—mistaken or legitimate—into injudicious declarations on this head; that many of her schemes were proven to be Utopian and Quixotic, and her positions to be untenable, unless at a cost prudent people would hesitate to pay—namely, a tearing-down, melting over, and making up again into an entirely new shape, the structure of the laws and society of the present day. I must regret, furthermore, as a candid historian, that her energy and philanthropy combined to war against her adoption of the time-honored and certainly safe maxim, “*Festina lente.*” Nor do I deny that if she had looked before she leaped into the arena of public conflict, she might have remembered another valuable scrap of common sense, to the effect that, as a general rule, the best way to convert even so hard-hearted a wretch as a confirmed and masculine man is not to begin by knocking him down. Again, dealing still in generalities, I may suggest that most men are not fond of being knocked down, and that, unless in very exceptional cases, a reformer does not ingratiate himself into their confidence and good-will by a tremendous display of this sort of moral pugilism.

Maybe Miss Darcy had not looked. It is certain

she had leaped. And she did it with a spring and vehemence that sent the feeble-minded scattering to the right and left, like flocks of affrighted and affronted geese, and rallied the valorous custodians of ancient usages and landmarks into a phalanx of resistance to new measures and pestilent radicals. Especially, women's rights radicals. With the bachelor of Tarsus as their fugleman—an honorable gentleman, by the way, whose few remarks touching the expediency of women's learning of their husbands at home (presupposing, mark you! that their husbands knew enough to teach them), their wearing their hair long, and submitting themselves to their Christian lords (and such are worthy of all deference and honor), whose three or four brief deliverances on this subject, I say, have been handled and twisted in a style he little anticipated when he penned them, with these mottoes upon their banners, they assembled on their side overwhelming odds of respectability and piety. Secure in numbers and the prestige of honored customs, they hurled defiance at the aggressor—defiance which would have been both irrational and insolent, had those who employed this means of warfare been less sensible and respectable.

If, in the name of industrious wives with starving children and drunken husbands; of widows, who, their lords having died intestate, saw their ample dowries parcelled out among rapacious and unfriendly relatives-in-law, our reformer assailed the property-laws of her native State, and of most other States, for that matter, as oppressive and iniquitous,

her opponents inquired, sometimes piously, sometimes profanely, what under heaven was left for a woman to desire, if she were once enriched by the possession of a husband? Of course, all that she had and all she was, became, absolutely, and beyond recall, his; from the hour, when, in words of man's making, he vowed at the altar to endow her with all his worldly goods. As Saxe wickedly and wittily remarks:—

“Once born in Boston, need no second birth.”

So, once married, women need no other wealth.

If—and upon this section of her bill of rights Miss Darcy was “terrific”—said the aforesaid weak and strong, in chorus—if she demanded other avenues of honorable labor for women than the crowded lanes in which they were beaten down by competition, until the weary day was too short in which to earn the pittance that was to buy bread for crying babes and superannuated parents; if she pealed a war-cry that shot a thrill to the heart of the teacher, as she bowed her contracted chest, curved spine, and dimming eyes over the pyramid of copy-books and exercises left upon her desk at the close of her day's labor among classes men had not the patience or tact to instruct; that quickened the numbed feet of the saleswoman, forbidden to rest these, or lessen the sickening pain in her back by sitting down for one instant for six, or it might be twelve hours, on a stretch; that nerved the cramped fingers of the copyist, whose chirography was pro-

nounced legible as a man's, and more rapid; if employers frowned and stormed, and operatives dared be glad at sound of her fearless, "MEN'S WAGES FOR MEN'S WORK!" her antagonists were also ready and undaunted. "Nobody asked women to do men's work. If they *would* overstep the modest bounds appointed by Providence (!) as the sphere of their labors and aspirations, they must take what they received for the rash undertaking, and be thankful they were not hustled with ignominy from the forbidden ground. Let women stay at home—had not St. Paul said this, over and over?—and mend their husbands' stockings, or their brothers', if they were husbandless—or those of their nearest masculine relative, if brother and husband were both wanting—and rock their babies' cradles, or their sisters' babies' cradles, if they had none of their own, and keep the pot boiling, let the contents be turtle-soup or oat-meal porridge, or husks and water. Nobody would find fault with them while thus meekly fulfilling the duties of their vocation, and, since every rule works both ways, they would have no cause of complaint against any one else."

These were the stock arguments of the opposition—these, and the yet more telling weapon of ridicule, fancy sketches of society under the proposed *régime*, when every woman should be forty years old, with grizzled tresses drawn back from their sharp features, and should dress in gray and discard crinoline; when wives should go to Congress and

their spouses stay at home to tend the baby; when the acme of praise applied to one of the *ci-devant* stronger sex should be to call him a dutiful husband, and wives should smile proud patronage upon the pattern partners who relieved them of household cares, at hearing that Rev. Mrs. So-and-so, or the Hon. Mrs. Blank, had declared them, the model help-meets, to be "wonderfully well-informed—almost as clever as women."

Any one of which retorts, as may be seen by a woman with half an eye, and by a man with no eyes at all, is more than an answer to a volume of statistics setting forth the abuses of masculine authority over the weaker—and softer—sex. Miss Darcy might feign to sweep these "clinchers" aside as cobwebs of sophistry and special pleading. They were cobwebs that caught many flies, and some honest-minded bees, and the hum and buzz of these sometimes drowned her battle-cry. Her profession—that by which she got her daily bread and the means of helping others—was that of literary hack. She was the acknowledged Editor—not proprietor—of one magazine, and, unsuspected by the readers, wrote many editorial articles for other periodicals. Her style was epigrammatic; she had an exhaustless store of general information, in technical phrase, was "well booked up" in history, solid literature, and the sciences; she could do all sorts of odd literary jobs upon short notice, except such as were unfair and unclean, and her pen was seldom idle. Those who did not know her, save by com-

mon report, hated the sound of her name; her beneficiaries—those to whom she had ministered in mind, body, or estate, revered her as a saint, and the few friends who had the opportunity of reading the clear pages of the beautiful soul concealed by her homely guise and blunt manner, loved as much as they respected her, and that was sincerely and earnestly.

She was driving her pen diligently this morning, sitting very erect, without, as I have hinted, the support of a corset-board, when a knock at the door brought two monosyllables from her lips without withdrawing her eyes from the paper under her fingers. Her “office” was the front of a pair of rooms she rented in a second-class boarding-house, and was open to callers at all hours of the day, after half-past eight A. M. “Come in!” she said, in a pleasant, even voice, that was always a surprise to fresh acquaintances, being neither sharp nor loud.

“Good morning!” said the visitor, pausing at the door. “Am I intruding? I can come again, if you will appoint an hour when you will be less busy.”

“Ah, Hart! Good morning!” Miss Darcy arose and gave him her hand. Her address might have been more ceremonious, and in terms more respectful, but, while I do not urge it in extenuation of the improprieties manifest in this, I may remark, *en passant*, that the character of her dealings with most so-called gentlemen, or their dealings with her, had not been such as to impress her with veneration, or an extraordinary degree of respect at their approach.

She was entirely consistent, moreover, and would have been content had he called her "Darcy" in return. "I am glad to see you," she added. "Take a seat! My work can stand still for a little while without hurt to it or to myself."

Mr. Hart helped himself to one of the hard chairs, and set his hat upon another. "It is a bitter wind to-day!" he observed, stroking his redundant beard into its accustomed graceful fall. "You are wise to stay within doors."

"I stay in because I am busy. I like this weather. The wind gives one something to do when he walks, and stirs the blood healthily. I have to walk three miles, this afternoon."

"Indeed! I do not envy you!" raising his shoulders, with a slight laugh.

He would have envied her less had he known that her mission was to one of the worst wards in the city, in which she meant to watch, all night, with a fever-patient. It was not her way to mention these things.

"I came in on a little matter of business," resumed Mr. Hart. "We want to bring out a compendium of Chemistry—a text-book, suitable for schools, while it shall yet be interesting reading for the private student, or family circle. We have daily calls for such, and there is not in the market one which we can honestly recommend. Mallory leaves all matters pertaining to book-writing and book-writers to me, and I know of nobody more competent to meet my wishes in this regard than yourself. Will you undertake the task?"

Miss Darcy shook her head in a decided negative. "I cannot! I could not touch it for six months to come, and your part of the work—plates, etc.—would take at least three months more. I should like to oblige you, and I should enjoy the work better than I do that which will prevent my compliance with your wish, but I never make an engagement unless there is a reasonable probability that I can fulfil it."

"I am disappointed!" said the young publisher, sincerely. "And baffled. You cannot recommend some one else to me who is fit to prepare the volume, can you?"

Miss Darcy mused. "Yes!" she said, at length, her eyes lighting up with the pure pleasure of doing a benevolent deed. "I know who can do it as well—better than I can—better because she holds a more facile pen than my blunt nib. Euphemia Rowland can get up your compend to your satisfaction. Whether she will or not, I cannot say. If you choose to make her an offer upon my recommendation, you can do so."

Mr. Hart looked interested. "You surprise me! I had no idea—I would say that I have conversed with the young lady, during two or three of my visits to her brother, and found her more than agreeable—exceedingly intelligent and sprightly. Of her proficiency in other branches of study than belles-lettres, I have, of course, had no means of judging. I was under the impression, however, that, of late years, she had been engrossed by other occupations to the exclusion of such pursuits."

The charger snuffed the wind from the battle-field, and was on her mettle immediately. "That is, you had an idea that a girl who works for a living must necessarily be sordid, and incapable of love of learning for learning's sake. In this instance, at least, your acumen is at fault. Euphemia has been an enthusiastic student of other and grander mysteries than the multiplication table and double entry, and I can answer for her that, up to this hour, not a thought has crossed her mind that she may make money by the exercise of her memory and talents in this line. I overhauled a portfolio of hers, a month ago, and disinterred from its depths more good things than one meets in nine out of ten magazines that people subscribe to, and praise. I brought three or four home with me, to read at my leisure, I told her. You will see one of these in my next number. She will be surprised when it meets her eyes—perhaps disposed to be offended. I don't care if she is. There is rare metal in her mind, and it ought to be worked. But don't take my word for her attainments in chemistry. Contrive an opportunity for examining her yourself. You can easily invent a pretext."

Mr. Hart laughed again, less easily than before. "A pretty catechist I should be! If she is thorough, as you say, she would have me out of my depth in five minutes. You know, Miss Darcy—so I need not try to conceal from you what I don't care to proclaim from the house-top—to wit, that thoroughness is not my *forte*. What I know I have picked

up for myself, in so many fields, I have not had time to glean any clean. I am interested in what you say of Miss Rowland. You will do me a service by approaching her on this subject. You can do it better than I. Tell her what will be required of her, should she undertake the job, and say that she shall receive whatever remuneration you and she deem just and liberal. I would not say as much to most women, but I can trust your judgment and honor."

"You could trust many more, without being robbed!" observed the champion of her sex. "The majority of women, poor souls! are underpaid to such a degree that they wouldn't know how to set an exorbitant price upon their work. I thank you heartily for this offer to Euphemia. She will like the work—chemistry being a favorite pursuit with her—and she needs the money. She has had much to try her spirits lately, and this, by giving her pleasant occupation in the evenings, will prevent her from dwelling upon her discomforts."

"Her brother's state must weigh heavily upon her mind," remarked Mr. Hart, too polite to give verbal expression to the curiosity begotten by his companion's reference to a plurality of trials.

"Yes. Her main wish in his behalf may be gratified through your instrumentality. She wants to enter him as a pupil in the State Asylum for the blind. The fees are not high. I shall force her to let me bear a portion of the expense. I cannot divest myself of the idea that I was, in some sense, responsible for the accident that cost him his eyesight.

I think I see the way in which she is to earn her proportion of the needful sum," smiling approval upon her visitor, a benignant beam that clothed her marked features with real beauty. "But," she continued, "Phemie is proud, and, hide it as she may, too sensitive for the rough handling of the everyday world. She chafes grievously under a reprimand, administered, the other day, by her employer—a purse-proud dolt—who is yet wise enough to know that he is defrauding her by keeping her in his store upon a salary which a half-witted hod-carrier, who happens to have been born a man, would scorn to accept. I have been meaning to tell you the incident as I had it from Charlotte. Euphemia has never alluded to it in my hearing. It has occurred to me that you might be able to cast some light upon the transaction, since your partner's sister was one of the principals in it. Some time last month, Miss Mallory offered a bill at Arnold's in payment for certain articles she had bought, and Phemie pronounced it to be a counterfeit. Some discussion ensued, and the affair was settled by the presentation of a good bill of the same amount, by a gentleman who had accompanied Miss Mallory to the store. There the story should end. Miss Mallory thought differently. She was deeply offended at Euphemia's conduct in the case, and took occasion to express her resentment to those who carried the tale, with amplifications, to Mr. Arnold. He was displeased and alarmed to learn that a young lady of wealth and fashion had stated publicly her determination never to enter his establishment again

while he retained his present book-keeper; adding that it was unsafe for an unprotected woman to deal at his counters, enforcing her declaration by recounting her unfortunate experience. Whereupon, Euphemia, being a poor girl, dependent for her livelihood upon her industry and unblemished character, and Miss Mallory being raised far above such vulgar considerations, our noble-minded merchant summoned to his private office the subordinate whose offence had consisted in zeal for his interests, and cautioned her stringently against a repetition of the insult to his customers.

“ ‘You should not have pressed the objection when Miss Mallory persisted in her belief that the note was good,’ he said. ‘If it had deceived her, you could readily have passed it off to some one else. At least,’ as Euphemia looked her amazement at this remarkable bit of morality, ‘you should have made every effort to secure Miss Mallory’s good-will. The loss of her custom, and that of those who may be influenced by her story, will be greater than ten times the amount of the doubtful note. You are too abrupt, Miss Rowland—too regardless—I may say, rudely neglectful of the feelings of your associates, and of my patrons. You must cultivate a more insinuating manner and study policy, if you expect to remain in my employ. I may as well be plain with you.’ ”

“She should have resigned her situation on the spot!” exclaimed Mr. Hart. “I cannot understand how any woman of spirit could submit to such an affront. And she has a spirited face and manner.”

“Spirit is an admirable commodity, but expensive!” rejoined Miss Darcy, dryly. “Too expensive for the use of a young girl whose mother, sister, and blind brother are dependent upon her labor. Situations are difficult to get, in these times, as probably Mr. Arnold reflected when he rebuked his servant for performing her duty. If she had taken the note, he is quite capable of requiring her to palm it off upon some other ignoramus like her who tendered it, or to assume the loss herself.”

“Come! now you are too hard upon your natural enemies!” objected the other, good-humoredly. “Give even a man his due.”

“Woe be to most of them if I did!” was the answer, uttered as good-humoredly. “But seriously, I could cite dozens of cases in which the latter course has been pursued. And why not? It makes employées careful to use their eyes and wits well. There is a law against passing or receiving counterfeit money, and upon what class can it be more safely enforced than upon shop-girls, whose brothers and fathers, when they have them, are too poor to go to law, and who would be worsted to a dead certainty, if they were to resort to this measure? To return to the subject of Mr. Arnold’s reprimand. Phemie has never been accused of a want of spirit, but she is also sensible and prudent, so she pocketed the insult. Women in her position put more of that sort of thing into their pockets than anything else. It has galled and depressed her unspeakably, Charlotte says, but she has no redress. I have seriously

meditated an appeal to Miss Mallory. She is a stranger to me, but I have thought if the matter were set fairly before her, she might recall her resolution of deliberate injury to one who was her associate in former days."

"Hey! What did you say? Of whom are you speaking?" asked her auditor, in genuine surprise.

"Clara Mallory was the bosom friend of Phemie Rowland when the Rowlands were somebodies. As nobodies—and worse than nobodies—now they cannot expect her to recollect the unimportant fact of their existence. Miss Clara may, or may not, have recognized her old school-fellow after a five years' separation. We will give her the benefit of the doubt. But she knows that she has no adequate cause for her unwomanly persecution of her neglected school-fellow."

"*Is it unwomanly?*" Mr. Hart could not avoid saying. "Are not your sex harder upon each other than men are—taking men at their worst?"

"I am afraid there is much truth in what you say," returned Miss Darcy, unabashed. "The worst master in the world is a lately emancipated slave, or one who, while in bondage himself, is suffered to control others. He understands so well how it is done, you see. As to my poor Phemie, she must take Life as it comes to her. God help her and pity us all!"

"A little human help may not be unacceptable, nevertheless!" Mr. Hart smiled to himself in taking out his pocket-book.

“She wouldn't accept money from you, or from any one else, while she can hold up her head or move her fingers!” cried Miss Darcy, red with generous indignation, and not a little mortified at what she imagined was the result of the interview. “I would not have been so amazed at many other men, Hart! But you should know better and do better than to fall into the popular fallacy of most well-to-do-people—the belief that bank-bills are an infallible plaster for all the ills that the honest poor are subject to. Euphemia Rowland is a lady as truly as you are a gentleman, more truly, if you insult me by suspecting that this frank talk of mine was a trap set to catch your alms!”

The man of books laughed until he could scarcely extract from an inner pocket of his wallet a folded paper. “Oblige me by looking at that!” he said, still shaking with merriment.

Miss Darcy complied, carelessly at first, being still warm with resentment of the insult offered her favorite. Then, something in the appearance of the bill catching her eye, she scrutinized it warily. “It is spurious! How came you by it?”

“I had it from Miss Rowland's own hand, although she has not identified me with Miss Mallory's escort on the day of their fracas. It is a counterfeit, as you say, and wretchedly executed. Miss Mallory and I were on our way to an exhibition of paintings, and took Arnold's in our route, she being in perishing need of some divine lace she had heard of as procurable at that emporium. As a *gentleman*”—mischiev-

ously emphatic—"I could not do less than extricate her from her disagreeable situation in the manner you have related. Her impression, while conversing with Miss Rowland, was that she had received the note at Wylie's. Of this she became doubtful, upon mature deliberation, and the upshot of the matter was that I have set down the \$20 to profit and loss, and begged her never to think of it again. As a gentleman, having heard your story, I cannot now do less—I wish I could do more—than show this apple of discord to Mr. Arnold, and exonerate Miss Rowland from all blame in the affair. As the partner of Miss Mallory's brother, and an eye-witness of the proffer and rejection of the note, I am the fittest person to interfere for the justification of your friend."

"I beg your pardon!" Miss Darcy extended her hand, and the keen blue eyes were overcast into softness as she said it. "I did you foul injustice, and I am sorry for it. Your heart is in the right place, if it is buttoned in by a broadcloth waistcoat."

"Thank you!" he arose. "If you will excuse the threadbare pun, I may remark that I fear *this* Hart has been in the wrong place for the last ten minutes. I have trespassed too long upon your valuable time. When you have communicated my offer to Miss Rowland, and had her reply, please let me know. Good-day!"

Miss Darcy did not jestingly construe the latter sentence into a double entendre. Such ideas were not in her line of thought or action. And she was assuredly the last person Mr. Hart, or any other gentle

man who only met her in business hours, would have selected as the bearer of any offer more sentimental than one pertaining to dollars and cents. The steady gleam returned to the bright eyes, and the expression of settled purpose and energy to her features and figure, as she bent again over her manuscript, ere the echo of the visitor's footsteps ceased to resound in the hall. True, he had left her much to think of, but this was not the time for doing it.





CHAPTER V.

IN the afternoon of the March day, the morning of which Mr. Hart had selected for his call upon Miss Darcy—an afternoon more blustering, after the wont of March weather, than the morning had been, Phemie Rowland sat at her high desk, seemingly intent upon her books, but, in reality, with not enough to do, in the way of business, to occupy her thoughts, although she might and did keep her fingers in motion. Customers had been scarce all day, and diminished in numbers as the wind gained fury and persistence. From her seat she could see columns of dust moving down the street; the rocking trees; awnings billowing in the gale, or torn into ribbons, and the jealously-closed glass doors were insufficient to exclude the finer particles of the offensive cloud from the interior of the store. They settled upon her paper in gritty powder that clogged her ink and set her teeth on edge as it ground into the hand resting upon the page. The sky was pale and hard; the sunshine raw, and devoid of warmth, and not a leaf-bud had

had the temerity to put forth. The day was more drearily depressing than one of fog and storm would have been, and the knots of girls, huddled in convenient nooks behind counters, and about the front windows, yawned and talked in low, languid tones, of the stupid weather and the dulness of everything else.

Euphemia was left to herself. She had never encouraged those who were her comrades in name alone to cluster around her desk, and they manifested less inclination to do this now that it was commonly understood she was under the ban of Mr. Arnold's magnificent displeasure. He had never censured her prior to her encounter with Miss Mallory, although he was not famed for regard for the feelings of the young ladies in his employ. In consequence of this immunity from criticism she had comported herself, whispered her envious associates, as if she were above the reach of fault finding. "Now that her comb was cut, she might carry her head less loftily," they hoped. Phemie knew all they felt and said as if she had heard every ill-natured remark. She was thinking it over sadly, while she feigned to be busy.

She had not courted their ill-will, but her mind had been full of other things—engaged with themes of which they were profoundly ignorant. She lived in a different world from that in which they sailed their little round. They had found it out, and it was not in them to forgive the presumption. Who, and what was she, that her regards should never descend to the pleased contemplation of their pleasures,

or her ear hearken sympathizingly to the story of their troubles—their contrivances to appear like ladies of high degree, upon salaries that were exceeded by the wages of a plain cook, and cast into the shade by the pay of a washerwoman; their anxious manœuvres to draw the notice of beauish clerks and thriving mechanics; their complaints and combinations against the common enemy and master? It was *too* good—so tittered the amiable sisterhood—that she should be taught her true place; be made to understand of how little avail was all her ostentatious and hypocritical show of devotion to his interests. She might better have had a jolly time with the others; evaded rules, and shirked work whenever she could. For their part they meant to do just as much as they were paid for, and not a jot more, unless forced to it. They didn't pretend to be learned in books, but they *did* hope they knew how to take care of themselves.

Phemie did not resent this ungenerous exultation over her humiliation. She had not deserved it, but they believed that she had. Mr. Arnold was correct in saying that she was deficient in polite complaisance to the whims and weaknesses of others. She could not fawn or wheedle, and she had not time to spend in cultivating people who were not worth cultivating. She had yet to learn that if we do not seek to win smiles, frowns will be bestowed gratuitously. There was enough in her own home to bow the spirit without the addition of unkindness from without. A consultation of physicians had de-

cided, three days before, that Albert's blindness was incurable. Charlotte had had another hemorrhage—very slight, but alarming, inasmuch as it showed the foe, consumption, to be lurking on the outposts of her constitution—and prices were rising. Between those she loved best and the black bread of penury—the blacker, more distasteful crusts of charity, was her single hand, and her recent experience of Mr. Arnold's humors had revealed to her the slenderness of this barrier. She was not prone to borrow care, but a continuous weight will, in time, bend springs of the finest metal and best temper. It is a strain that tries the stoutest will to keep one's face turned constantly to the light when a stiff gale of discouragements is as constantly tending to twist it in the opposite direction. Phemie wrestled bravely, yet even she was tired, to-day.

“I begin to enter into Olive's meaning when she says, every other Saturday, that she is ready to sit down until the unfinished work mounts to her chin—then get upon the table,” she said to herself, a faint smile touching her lips—not her eyes—at the droll conceit. “Only, with me, the table is wanting. Then, again, if I go down, I drag others with me. Oh, my weak, burdened hands! If I could but stretch them once toward the free heavens, in the knowledge that my helpless darlings were provided for, and that I might cross my aching wrists for one hour of reposeful gratitude! Will the day ever come? and how? Father! forgive Thine impatient child! Strengthen her in this season of weak dis-

may! ТНΟΥ, who didst bear the sore burden of humanity, help me to support my cross!"

The most devout prayers are not always those uttered upon the knees in churches and oratories. No veiled nun, weeping before the crucifix in her stone cell, could sob petitions fraught with deeper humility, more passionate earnestness, than was this voiceless appeal to the Hearer of all prayer, the God of all sanctuaries, the Saviour of the tempted and the sinking.

A gentleman passed up the store, so close to her desk she could have touched his sleeve, but the bowed head was not lifted. Shut in from the outer scene by her thronging thoughts, she did not hear the buzz succeeding the silence of respect or civility that had reigned during his transit from the front door to Mr. Arnold's private office. On a busy day he might have come and gone a dozen times without attracting so much attention. On this windy afternoon events were at a premium, and when it was whispered from one to another that this distinguished-looking personage was Miss Mallory's *fiancé*, and how queer it was that he should want to see Mr. Arnold, and could it be that the counterfeit bill affair was not settled yet? his appearance became an event, and one of considerable magnitude. A portentous one, when, five minutes thereafter, Mr. Arnold looked out of his office-door and beckoned a messenger, who forthwith notified Miss Rowland that she was wanted.

She started and changed color visibly—all agreed

in observing—when the message was delivered, and most of the spectators were properly scandalized at the pretence of equanimity she immediately recovered—actually wiping her pen, laying it upon the rack; closing her inkstand and shutting up her day-book, the blotting-paper carefully adjusted between the leaves, before she stepped from her dais, with her queenly step and carriage, and walked up the empty aisle, unmindful, or disdainful of the fact that every eye was upon her.

“Ah! Miss Rowland! Here you are!” nodded Mr. Arnold, patronizingly, from his elbow-chair, as she presented herself in the counting-room.

His companion had his back to the door, and springing up at this announcement, showed Phemie Mr. Hart's features, surprised, apologetic, and more embarrassed than the occasion seemed to demand. He set a chair for her, and she declined it with a silent bow, looking to Mr. Arnold for an explanation of the message that had brought her hither.

“Zenobia in chains!” mentally ejaculated Mr. Hart, at sight of her unintentional *pose*; the haughty humility of her erect head and respectful attitude, in the presence of her superior officer; the attentive, inquiring eyes, and the pressure of the short upper lip upon its fuller fellow.

“Yes; take a seat!” said Mr. Arnold, graciously. “I took the liberty of sending for her, Mr. Hart, without asking your—ah—permission, because I like to rectify a mistake fully and—ah—handsomely while I am about it, and lest this should slip my mind—we

gentlemen of business have so many things to think of that one crowds out another, as I need not say to *you*, Mr. Hart—I—ah—thought it expedient to attend to this little affair at once and without delay. Mr. Hart, Miss Rowland, has kindly stepped in to say that having learned incidentally—as I—ah—am glad to understand, Miss Rowland—I should have been seriously displeased and mortified had he gained his information from any person, in my employ, Miss Rowland, regarding it—ah—as a point of sacred honor that my employées should not divulge the private affairs of this establishment—having learned, as I remarked, incidentally and accidentally, that censure has been—ah—cast upon you, Miss Rowland, on account of your summary—ah—declinature of a certain bank-note tendered by Miss Mallory, upon a certain day in last month, he—Mr. Hart—has generously put himself to the trouble of coming in to—ah—exculpate you from the charge of improper or unladylike conduct upon that occasion. I am gratified to hear, Miss Rowland, that your behavior to Miss Mallory was respectful and your language less objectionable than I was, at first, given to understand”—

“Excuse me!” interposed Mr. Hart, whose varying expression from the beginning of the harangue to this clause would have been a diverting study to an impartial bystander. “Since Miss Rowland is here, allow me to repeat briefly in her hearing the statement I made to yourself!”

Phemie had not availed herself of her employer's permission to sit down, and Mr. Hart likewise re-

mained standing. He faced her, now, bending his head deferentially, while his look and tone were deprecating.

“It has reached my ears, indirectly, as Mr. Arnold has stated, that he had received a garbled account of the transaction to which he refers. Considering myself, in some sort, bound to set him right, since I was a participant in the affair, I dropped in to assure him that no offence had been given or taken. The note, which I retain, is undeniably spurious, and you would have been called purblind had you not detected this at a glance. How the impression got abroad that Miss Mallory was wounded by anything that passed here at the time mentioned, I cannot imagine. All was fair, business-like, and polite. It never entered my head”—with his ready, pleasant laugh—“to make so formal a matter of a trifle as to request your attendance during this interview. Had I surmised that Mr. Arnold had sent for you, I should have protested strenuously against troubling you.”

“Oh! that is of no consequence, I assure you, my good sir!” Mr. Arnold hastened to say, with an oily smile.

He was a fat man, who held his head very far back and his chest very far forward, and had a way of joining his finger-tips when he talked, and who loved to hear the rumble of his own swelling periods better than any other sound, except the chink of gold and the rustle of crisp treasury notes. “Miss Rowland is used to the discipline of a well-ordered

establishment, and I take pleasure in saying, Mr. Hart, that—ah—in the main, I may say uniformly—her manner of discharging the duties of her place is—ah—exemplary. I had no doubt, even while I questioned the expediency of her action with regard to Miss Mallory—or rather whether her manner had been—ah—altogether judicious—I had no doubt, meanwhile, that she meant well. But, as I had occasion to remind her, when I—ah—gently reprovèd her for her brusqueness—such I conceived her fault or indiscretion to have been—as I said to her, sir—manner goes as far in this world as principle.”

“I should be loath to admit that,” said Mr. Hart. “Although, were it true, Miss Rowland would have as little to apprehend as any one I know. Miss Mallory, I wish you both to understand, will sustain me in this assertion. Your brother is better, your friend Miss Darcy tells me,” he subjoined to Phemie, in a more familiar, but still very respectful tone.

“He is!” Phemie could not have articulated another syllable without relaxing the iron rein she held over herself.

A pause ensued, awkward as the rest of the scene had been to two of those engaged in it.

Phemie concentrated her forces. “Have you anything more to say to me, sir?” she queried of Mr. Arnold, as a drilled butler might ask his orders for the day.

“I believe not, Miss Rowland. I think she comprehends us now, Mr. Hart! I do not regret—ah—upon the whole, that this trivial misunderstanding

has arisen. It may—it will, I trust, be a lesson, a—ah—moral guide-board to you for the future. You can return to your desk, Miss Rowland.”

Phemie grew an inch taller in turning to Mr. Hart. “I thank you for your kindness, sir!”

She would have departed, then, with a bow to both, but the latter gentleman laid his hand upon the door. “I cannot let you go without gainsaying the idea that you are under any obligation to Miss Mallory or myself. I have performed a simple act of justice. You, or any other conscientious person, would do the like for me. I am heartily ashamed of having said so much about a trifle—a mere nothing. The only reparation you can make us for the regret we feel at having unwittingly caused you annoyance is to forget the whole transaction as fast as you can. Good-afternoon!” He unclosed the door, and bowed her out.

When she had had time to regain her position at her desk, he followed in her footsteps, raising his hat in passing her, although her eyes were bent upon her reopened book. One of the bolder of her fellow-workwomen—the young lady who had shirked the task of enlightening Miss Mallory with respect to the character of the \$20 bill—presently sidled up to her, her curiosity boiling over.

“What did he want with you?”

“Who?” Phemie raised her eyes. They were heavy-lidded, but they stared the catechist full in the face.

“Mr. Hart!”

"He didn't want me."

"Who did, then? Who sent for you?"

"Mr. Arnold."

"Oh! But Mr. Hart was in there, all the time, wasn't he?"

"There was a gentleman in the office who called to see Mr. Arnold, I believe."

"You didn't know him, then? He is Mr. Hart, the publisher—firm of Mallory & Hart. He is going to marry Miss Clara Mallory. That was him with her the day you got into that fuss with her. It's funny you didn't remember him. We had a notion—Amy Jaynes and I—that he called to talk to Mr. Arnold about that, and that you were catching it again. The story has got abroad all over town. Did you ever know so much ado about nothing, as that conceited minx has made over what she had ought to be ashamed to speak of? If I was caught passing counterfeit money, I wouldn't be the one to trumpet it everywhere. People wouldn't judge poor girls like us as charitably as they do her, neither. You say Mr. Hart didn't come to take up her quarrel?"

"He did not."

"He is a handsome fellow, and they say making money fast, besides being very smart, very learned, and intelligent. *She* isn't over-stocked with brains, I should judge from her face. She is going to do well. They are to be married this fall. She has begun to get her wedding outfit already."

Phemie turned a leaf, and took another penful of ink.

"Lucy Harris!" called one of her companions, impatient to learn the result of her investigations, and the bookkeeper was left in her former isolation.

The wind had not abated when the store was closed, and Phemie started for home. The sharp flint-dust torn up from the pavements made her eyes smart and her face tingle; the roistering gale twisted her skirts about her feet until she could hardly stagger onward, and fought with her for the possession of her shawl. Miss Darcy should have chosen the evening for a promenade, if she liked weather that gave one something to do while he was walking. Phemie's frame of mind was the reverse of enjoyment. She had spirit, as her friend had stated, yet she was seldom irritable. When her temper exploded, it was under great provocation, and it went off with a concussion that made clean work of all that stood in the way, whereas, your irritable man, or "nervous" woman, spits, and fizzes, and sighs, like a train of wet gunpowder. She was not up to the going-off point, to-night. She had been very angry—dangerously near speaking out her mind fully and strongly, while the sluggish channel of Mr. Arnold's talk meandered among such rocks as "improper and unladylike conduct," and affirmations that her demeanor to Clara Mallory had been "respectful" and her language "not objectionable." Her tongue ached to tell him that she was disgusted with the whole subject, and above all other things pertaining to it, with himself. That Clara Mallory had as slender claims to the name of lady as he had to that

of a gentleman, with much more that was unseasoned and unseasonable. Mr. Hart's tact and kindness had saved her from the pitfall opening at her feet. She had time, during his address, to peer down into its depths, and to recoil from the vision of the ills she had nearly brought upon her home-circle. For herself, she said, desperately, she did not care. She would as soon sink as swim, since floating was such weary, weary work. A cynical fatalism had paralyzed Faith, as repeated discouragements had stifled Hope.

“One gains so little by struggling!” she was saying, as she turned the corner of a street in which the winds from every quarter and of every name seemed to have been poured. *Æolus's* bag turned upside down, in fact, so fiercely did they tear, and shriek, and rave up and down, and across from either side of the broad thoroughfare, given up, for the time, to its nocturnal revels.

She stopped under a lamp-post to get the breath which had been snatched from her lungs by the first gust, and just at that instant a carriage passed. She had a glimpse of Clara Mallory on the back seat, with flowers in her hair and a white opera-cloak over her shoulders, then a gentleman leaned past her to draw up the glass. It was Mr. Hart. She recognized the oval face and the sweeping beard as quickly and truly as if they had belonged to her lover, and not to another woman's.

Her lover! Pshaw! What business had she with such a thought? Like the rest of Heaven's

choice gifts, love and lovers were the portion of the rich and indolent; the favorites of the Fates, those who had but to sit still and let blessings be rained into their laps. When the poor married, it was that they might be less poor—in their accepted phrase, “better themselves.” It would be a sorry change, indeed, that did not better her!

Astronomical calculations, if one were so foolish or so knowledge-mad as to attempt them that evening, would have been prosecuted under very disadvantageous circumstances, the visible heavens looking as if all the dust hurled upward during the day had lodged there, and the housewifely habits of the old woman who was tossed up in a blanket, had met with no imitators in the upper circle. The planets blinked fast and hard, like eyes with cinders in them, and like them, too, occasionally shut up altogether for a minute or two, while the lesser lights only emitted a struggling ray every four or five minutes. But there is excellent reason for believing that, for this one hour at least, Joe Bonney's lucky star was in the ascendant, and that it was this propitious influence which brought him around the corner at such an angle that he had a view of Phemie's face while the lamp-rays were upon it.

“Miss Phemie!” he ejaculated, in mingled delight at the meeting, and concern at her probable discomfort. “This is a very disagreeable night for a lady to be out. I was just going up to your house. May I walk along with you?”

“If you like,” said Phemie, laconically. “The

wind *is* very disagreeable!" she was constrained to add, as a tremendous buffet upon her shoulders made her stop a second time to recover her equilibrium.

"Won't you take my arm? *Do!*" entreated Joe, backing up manfully against the squall.

It would be less ludicrous than staggering along separately and jostling each other, at every third step, Phemie concluded, and she accepted his offer. Joe was of slender build, and no athlete, but he sustained the shocks of the blast, after this conjunction of forces, in a manner that shed credit upon his will and his ability to take his own part and that of his companion against the adverse winds of March or Fortune. He was a muscular Gibraltar in resisting odds that nearly swept Phemie away.

"Suppose we turn up that cross street!" she suggested, at length. "It is narrower, and more sheltered than the one we are in. We ought to be able to walk with comparative comfort under the lee of those tall houses."

Joe assented. "Not that I mind the wind a bit," he said, more gayly than he was accustomed to speak in her hearing. "But, as you say, those buildings ought to keep off some of it."

"You breast the storm well!" Phemie next remarked, for the sake of saying something. He was very considerate and attentive, and she was not in the mood to be ungracious to anything that liked her, or showed her kindness. So she aroused herself a little to entertain him. The fight with the wind had bereft her of the remnant of strength and viva-

city left after the day's strife and duties. She was languid and tremulous when they gained the lee of the long row of lofty houses, quite willing to walk slowly, and making more use of Joe's arm than she was aware of.

"Do I?" he replied to her careless compliment. He was tremulous, too—with delight. "It is easy to bear any storm when I am with you!"

The telling first step was taken, the plunge over, after which the most icy shower-bath is nothing, or next to nothing.

He went on very fast. "I should be a very different person—stronger, better, happier, if this could always be, Phemie. Don't draw your hand away. I must talk to you about it. I know I am not your equal. I never saw the man—or woman, either, for that matter—who was. I have loved you for four years as I never loved anybody else, as I don't believe anybody else will, or can love you. It's worship, out and out. That's what it is! I don't expect you to feel the same for me. It isn't in the nature of things that you should. But if you would only tell me that I might keep on loving you, and let me serve you besides—live for you and take care of you and Albert and your mother! I can see you are working yourself to death, and it pretty nearly kills me to know it. Let me help you, Phemie! I can do it easily. I am not rich, but I am getting on well in business. I can give you a nice little home, now, and maybe, by and by, a handsome one, and you shall live like the real lady you are. I am not a

scholar or a student, and you are; but you shall have all the books you want, and plenty of time to study them. The more of that sort of thing you do, the prouder I shall be of you. I won't tease you for an answer now. I am afraid I know what it would be, if you were to give it, without considering what I have said. For my part, I have thought of it, day and night, until I have dared to hope that, if you ever could be brought to understand how much I love you, and how near your happiness lies to my heart, you might learn to like me. It does seem to me that something ought to be accomplished by love so strong as mine, and love that has lasted so long!"

He choked up here, and shook from head to foot, as he had not quivered in the rudest gusts they had encountered in the wider street they had left.

Phemie was dumb. Astonishment at his vehemence was primarily tinged with anger at his presumption, but before he finished his confession, both feelings gave way before a gush of pity and softness she might well hesitate to betray. His was love—ardent, honest, and tried. She believed him when he named it worship; believed, without the uprising of contempt she had expressed to Olive, who had always stood his friend. Perhaps her sister was nearer right than herself in her estimate of his character. She would be just to him so far as to reverence his generous readiness to assume the support of her mother and helpless brother. Their welfare—a home and comfortable subsistence would be secured by her marriage with Joe Bonney, and what

had she to live for besides the hope of caring for them? She believed her suitor, furthermore, when he promised her the leisure and means for prosecuting the studies she loved, and which she could not now pursue. Had she not decided, awhile ago, that the privations of the poor meant more than physical needs? that those who were destined to walk the pavements alone, after dark, on stormy, as on fine nights, while others, no younger and no fairer, rolled by in luxurious chariots guarded by love against the chance of discomfort or alarm, must, in the very consistency of appointed dispensations, forego other delights which were the prerogatives of carriage beauties? The worker on the pavement would like to have a surplus of money, fine clothes, and a beautiful home. Since these were not hers, philosophy and religion joined in bidding her content herself with such things as she had. Was not the principle applicable, likewise, to the formation of matrimonial ties?

This man was many removes—how many she would not trust herself to remember—from her ideal lord and master. But the ideal was not attainable; perchance had never had a being, except in a girl's lush fancy. If he were a resident of the next block to her own, the probability was that he would never vouchsafe her a glance or thought, whereas, she was Joe's divinity, and there was a spice of comfort in the thought that she was anybody's divinity, after the slights and indignities, and, most offensive of all, the patronage to which she had been subjected of late.

They had walked several blocks while these fancies and arguments tore through her mind with the speed and force of the wind. It was a crisis in her existence, and she knew it. It had overtaken her at a moment when she was incompetent to decide any question rationally, and she did not lose sight of this. Everything conspired to sway her in one direction. The chill and loneliness of the night; hunger and fatigue; her solicitude respecting Charlotte; Albert's hopeless blindness; the uncertain tenure by which she felt she held her situation; even the glimpse she had had of her former friend and her *fiancé*—tended to enhance the attractions of the snug home offered her, and the release from labors which were both servile and poorly compensated.

They were beyond the sheltering buildings, and again in a broad thoroughfare much frequented by night, as well as by day, when the weather was tolerable. Phemie must speak. Civility required it, if she were not prompted by regard for her wooer's feelings, the desire to lessen the weight of his suspense.

"I was totally unprepared for this," she began, in a tone so husky and strained that she paused to change the key.

At that instant a woman came down the sidewalk toward them, and they swerved to let her pass. She eyed them openly and curiously, as they met, and Phemie could not avoid seeing her distinctly. She wore a gay velvet hat, with a flaunting feather;

a silk dress that trailed upon the pavement, a light cloak, fitting tightly to a full bust and slender waist. Her eyes were bold as her walk, which was something between a strut and a slide, and her mouth was set in a smile, false and fixed as were the roses on her hollow cheeks.

Womanhood, unperverted by worldly or vicious teachings, is a safe and ready guide, and Phemie's was prompt with her lesson.

"Where would be the difference between her and the unloving wife, bought with the lure of a home and an easy livelihood?" interrogated the Mentor. "Is it virtue, or an empty prejudice of society, that distinguishes the one from the other? Honest poverty—legalized infamy—these are your alternatives."

Phemie held up her head, as she could never have lifted it as Joe Bonney's perjured wife. "Do not think me ungrateful for your generous kindness; for the honor done me by your love; for your unselfish forgetfulness of the weight of the burdens you are ready to assume for my sake. But I cannot marry you. I will be frank as yourself. Nothing but misery could result from a union where there was not love on both sides. And I do not love you. The probability is that I shall never marry. I have long accustomed myself to believe this. If we would be friends for the future, this subject had better not be referred to again by either of us. I should be sorry to know that you could ever be anything less than my friend. You can never be more."

Joe had pulled his hat forward upon his eyebrows,

and Phemie felt the rise and fall of his chest against the wrist resting within his arm; heard a queer sound, like a strangled "cluck," in his throat.

It is undignified and babyish for a man to cry because his love is refused. Yet no one calls those weak tears that escape the father's eyes beside the grave of his first-born. Joe was burying his love in hot haste, because Phemie had commanded it—as who had a better right to do? She ruled him in this as in everything else. Had she married him, she would have become the keeper of his conscience—of the archives of thought and feeling, as well as the arbiter of his actions. We need no seer to point out the numerous train of ills that would have ensued from this unnatural state of things, this total reverse of the laws that should obtain in well-ordered households. Phemie was a truer friend to Joe than the love-blinded youth ever supposed—a benefactress, who saved him, by her timely negative, from an ignominious fate. The proverbial ingratitude of shortsighted mortals is the only explanation of the circumstance that he suffered intensely under the kindly operation, and was disposed, after the fashion of weak-minded swains, to curse his stars, and wish, firstly, that he had never been born; secondly, that he had stayed at home on this particular night, the influence of his natal planet to the contrary notwithstanding; thirdly and lastly, and chiefly—that he were dead. That was—if he could only expire quietly in some retired street, and be buried without a coroner's inquest or newspaper notice, so that

Phemie should not hear what had become of him, or accuse herself of having hurried him to his untimely end.

Mark! he did not wish for the fifteen-millionth part of a second that he had never known and loved her. Still less did he desire that she might endure one pang like the least of those that were riving his heart. In these respects he proved himself to be yet more feeble of intellect and abject in spirit than he had done by sobbing over her calm and kindly rejection of his suit.

They reached the foot of Mrs. Rowland's steps. They were a wooden flight, and Joe recollected, with a despairing thrill, the three snowy marble ones conducting to the also snow-white portal of his two-story-brick in the air. The end of their uncomfortable walk was here, and this miserable business must be wound up for good (or bad) and all.

"I might have foreseen what was to be the end of all my foolish hopes," said he, as Phemie withdrew her hand from his arm. "You couldn't have acted differently. I can see it all now, plain enough. You needn't be afraid of my bothering you ever again about the matter. I don't want that you should come to dislike me, outright. I'll not speak to you of love after this, but as to stopping caring for you, you musn't ask that. Unless I was to stop breathing! which"—with a pathos of pain that touched Phemie strangely—"would be the best and most comfortable thing all around for me to do in the circumstances!"

"You shall not say that!" Phemie fingers slid into

his in unthinking and sisterly compassion. "You have a work to do in life, and you will be very useful and happy some day."

"Maybe so. If I ever have a chance to do anything to make you happy, I may grow to be contented. I won't keep you standing in the cold. Let me ring the bell for you! Good-night! I am not fit to meet any of them, just yet. Don't fret over what you have done. You've been kind and honorable. I respect you more than I ever did before. Good-by!"

Phemie sent a pitying look after him. He was like his cousin Seth—tall and angular. The speciality of the family, physically, seemed to be angles, as many and as sharp as the human frame was capable of displaying. Joe "clumped" in his gait; his coat did not fit his figure, and it was not the tailor's fault that it hung in ungraceful folds. Phemie could not imagine him arrayed in chain armor, or steel-plated corslet and greaves, visor down, clasping his steed with his mailed knees and careering like a whirlwind against his opponent, to establish her claim as Queen of Love and Beauty, on the day of the Tournament, but she said, within her aching heart, while her eyes filled with tears, that not many of the world's knighted heroes carried within their bosoms such wealth of true and gentle chivalry.





CHAPTER VI.

“That Care and Trial seem at last,
Through Mem’ry’s sunset air,
Like mountain-ranges overpast,
In purple distance fair.

That all the jarring notes of Life
Seem blending in a psalm ;
And all the angles of its strife
Slow rounding into calm.

And so the shadows fall apart,
And so the west winds play ;
And all the windows of my heart
I open to the day.”

THUS recited Phemie Rowland, sitting upon a gray rock, carpeted with lichens and brambles, and forming the rugged front of a hill that overlooked the country surrounding the Darcy homestead.

The farm-house was full, that sunny August. Phemie had engaged board there for Charlotte, and Miss Darcy for Albert, from the middle of July to the first of September. Charlotte’s scruples to this arrangement were overcome by the representations of her sister and her friend, setting forth the neces-

sity that Albert should have an attendant, and the impossibility of Phemie's obtaining a furlough from her desk duties of sufficient length for her to undertake the office of custodian. Thither, too, came Miss Darcy, early in August, and, in response to her invitation, while resolutely insisting upon entering herself as a paid boarder, Phemie joined the circle, a fortnight later.

Mr. Arnold allowed each of his employées a vacation in the dull season—average duration one week; but, “in consideration of Miss Rowland's zealous application to business during the past twelve months,” and the fact that the season was unusually quiet—it might be said to be fast asleep—he granted her leave of absence for ten days. Mrs. Rowland had been out of town since June, visiting relatives of her own and some of her husband's, in her native State. She was not needed at home while the family was so small; she argued, and she grew younger and stronger, more forgetful of the sorrows of her widowhood, more tenderly alive to the memories of her happy youth, each day of her sojourn among the scenes of her early life. In her decent, well-kept weeds, she looked and felt the lady in her association with acquaintances who had not witnessed the meanness of her home; were not privy to the secrets of the pinching, saving, and turning that entered into the method of her existence there. The Seth Mandells were also rustivating in a village connected with the town by rail, and near enough to allow the husband and father to keep an eye upon his fleshly treasures.

It was Seth Junior's second summer, and the season was a trying one for babies. Hence their Hegira.

Phemie and Olive were not lonely or idle during the heated term. Mr. Arnold trumpeted, with infinite pomp and circumstance, the humanity that impelled him to set the example of closing his establishment at seven o'clock on the long, hot afternoons, when nobody came to buy; when his stock boasted nothing but styles three months old, if buyers had been numerous, and when the useless consumption of gas through the evening would have been worse than a dead loss. Without stopping to question or to praise his motives for the measure, Phemie rejoiced in the leisure it afforded her for the work she had undertaken at Miss Darcy's instance. She would hurry home through the summer sunsets to the supper punctual Olive had ready by the time she could lay aside her hat, and, indifferent to the inviting influences of star-lit heavens and cool night breezes, settle herself at her desk before the twilight changed from purple to gray.

Olive had her associates and her pleasures. Moonlight excursions by land and upon the water were in vogue that year, and she never said "Nay," when her young friends solicited her attendance upon these. Phemie was too happy at her work to miss her, and there was no sense in moping at home when one might be enjoying herself abroad.

Phemie yielded a hearty assent to this proposition. She was easier in mind when Olive was off, walking, riding, and boating, in company that might not be

particularly refined; which was the reverse of aristocratic, but which was merry, perfectly respectable, and decorous. She could give herself up to her studies, then, with no remorseful fears lest her sister might be *ennuyée* by her silence and abstraction. Her conversational treatise progressed famously. She worked at it with a will that was soon delight. When finished, she dared hope it would satisfy her publishers, and almost herself.

The first call Mr. Hart paid after Albert's restoration to comparative health had reference to this, and it furnished the ample apology for many more. There were other treatises and text-books to be consulted in the preparation of hers, and these he supplied as fast as she required them—faster—for he often brought volumes of which she had never heard, upon the remote possibility that she might cull a fact, an experiment, or theory from their pages. Professional interest in her undertaking may have been the basis of his anxiety lest incessant application should injure her health. He imagined that her color was fading—that her form was less full—and he expressed something of this solicitude to the object of it. She met his fears with a laugh, the glad ring of which did not allay his fears, and he cast about for means of relieving the strain upon mind and body.

Upon two balmy evenings, when the air was steeped in perfume and moonbeams, a carriage drew up to the door, with a note from Mr. Hart requesting the sisters to use it as if it were their own, and,

a week later, he came in person to invite them to share a long drive with him. More than once, more than thrice, the publisher had persuaded his interesting employeé to walk with him for an hour before the evening's labor commenced—their saunter lying beside the swift river, or in the spacious public parks, where the murmur of fountains mingled with the laughter of children, and where both forgot the unfinished MS. and talked less of chemistry than of poetry.

Perhaps, however, their pleasantest interviews were in the small back parlor, now used by Phemie as a library and study, and furnished with extreme simplicity. The floor was covered with straw matting; there was an old easy chair draped with white dimity; a cherry-wood writing-desk, and, against the wall at one end, an ancient book-case, overflowing with the remnants of a once noble library; a high chair on which Phemie sat to write, and a darkly-purple heliotrope in the solitary window. Over this last Olive had trained morning-glories and Madeira vines, and there was always, after nightfall, a breeze from the river to set these to whispering and dancing. The publisher liked luxury, and not even a hermit could have objected to the appointments of this tiny sanctum as luxurious; yet when he—the publisher, not the eremite—leaned back lazily in the old elbow-chair, and surveyed the grand creature opposite him, her neat print-dress setting off her beauty, as the plainest setting often best reveals the glory of the gem; heard her round, pure tones in

earnest debate, animated description, or, dreamily thoughtful, blending with the song of the leaves, he was entranced into a midsummer-night's dream that left no place in his thoughts for imaginings of other enjoyments. It was a dangerous fascination, as he discovered when Miss Darcy rushed up to the city in response to the incautious intimation in one of his letters to the effect that "our friend, Miss Euphemia, is overwrought, I fear. She is hardly so plump and rosy as when you left us."

The indomitable spinster stayed not after this to parley with him or any one else, but carried off her prize a hundred miles back into the country, and left him to review at his leisure the charming dialogues that had been the staple of his joys for the last month.

If there had likewise been peril to Phemie in this intimacy, she was not aware of it as yet. Olive had invited a lively young friend to stay with her until her mother's return; Charlotte was improving in health and strength; Albert was robust from the bountiful supply of rural delicacies that loaded Dame Darcy's board, and his four weeks' life in the open air, and cheerful beyond what had been Phemie's most sanguine expectations. Her MS. had been completed the day before she left home, and placed in Mr. Hart's hands, and, encircled by Miss Darcy's loving care, as by a wall that kept off baleful airs from the outer world, the girl "crossed her tired wrists," and rested.

Rested and dreamed—fancies bright, rare, and

sweet, that made fair day the fairer, and filled the fragrant nights with music! She ripened in the August sunshine like the richest peach that hung, a globe of crimson and gold, from the loaded boughs of the farmer's orchard. If excess of thought and pen-labor had diminished in any degree her vitality, now that the weight was removed, her whole nature came up with a bound. She was better than a forest full of thrushes for music, the farmer affirmed; bright as the first sunbeam of the morning, and fleet-footed as a hare. Before she had been a week in his house she knew every nook of his farm as well as he did; she could milk, churn, row, and fish, and was the favorite of everything on the place, from the farmer and his help-meet to the Juno-eyed oxen, which she pampered with bunches of clover-hay while they were ploughing, and the month-old ducklings who ran, piping their shrill "queek" at her heels whenever she crossed the lawn.

On this afternoon she was one of a berrying-party, and had wandered away from the rest to the brow of Graytop Hill, the highest eminence in the neighborhood, and a landmark for many miles around. Her basket of berries was upon the ground beside her; her straw hat upon her knee; her dress of buff chintz harmonized well with the russet and gray mosses and the deep-green runners of the creepers trailing over her seat. Her color was glowing; her eyes were softly luminous, and, alone and unseen as she believed herself to be, there was about her figure the indescribable, but marked pride and grace which

were the expression of conscious strength—force of resolve and mind that was always ready, never rampant, unconquerable, but never belligerent.

As she repeated aloud the concluding stanzas of her “psalm,” the tangled branches of a thicket twenty feet to the right were carefully parted, and a face looked through—at first laughingly, then, as she relapsed into a silent, happy reverie, earnestly to wistfulness.

Had the west winds no voice for him? Did no unseen warder of the woodside temple bar the intruder from profaning her retreat with hasty footstep or passionate speech? Would he not do well to hold counsel with his conscience touching the wisdom and mercy of breaking up, or diverting a stream so calmly bright as were her maiden musings, by the outpourings of a love that had scattered to the winds the ramparts of worldly policy and prejudice, behind which he had believed his heart secure from the seductions of charms he confessed, from the date of their first interview, he had never seen surpassed? For Robert Hart had come to this sequestered farmhouse with the design of making this avowal. His primal emotion; upon discovering that Miss Darcy had borne off his gay spirits and his peace of mind, when she separated him from Phemie, had been one of surpriseful consternation. He was angry with himself for his short-sightedness and imprudence in having risked his affections carelessly, while he deluded cautious Reason with tales of disinterested pity and the desire to encourage modest genius. He was more angry that he had lost these valuable affec-

tions irretrievably to a girl whose rank was lower than his own, and whose beauty, talent, and intrinsic nobility of character would not be accepted by his world as an offset to the glaring ineligibilities of the alliance. His face burned and his self-love withered at thought of the comments that would follow the announcement of his entanglement; of the sneers and shrugs, and covert gibes and indignant sarcasms which his most esteemed friends would direct at them both. He easily convinced himself that the blush and wince were for Phemie's sake. Had he the right—would it be manly, or just, or kind, to expose her to these?

He fought Love and Longing with Common Sense and Policy, thus, every day, from sunrise to dusk, and the return of each evening found him as very a slave to his new and master emotion as had the preceding, ready to barter the esteem of his peers; to brave the insults of a city full, a continent full of such, for one look into Phemie's starry eyes; one love-word from her lips; one hour of communion with her—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot"—in the study with the vine-draped window. A week of struggle and doubt, and his choice was made. He might not be quite comfortable should he win this woman. He would be utterly wretched without her. There might be thorns upon the stem of this royal rose, but he must have it. When he should wear it in his bosom, perhaps its loveliness and sweetness would beguile him into forgetfulness of prick and smart.

He came, accordingly, and arriving at the homestead soon after the departure of the berry-seekers, was directed to follow in their route. The flutter of Phemie's dress caught his eye, as he halted in bewilderment at the foot of the hill, and he climbed it by a shorter and steeper path than that which she had taken.

"Shall I be accounted a shadow, I wonder?" he said, emerging from his covert, and approaching her.

He had his answer in the flash of ingenuous transport that brightened her eyes to dazzling; in the impulsive start toward him and the warm flood that bathed her face.

"Is it really yourself?" she exclaimed, when he pressed her hands between his, and would have thanked her for her welcome. "It is very kind in you to turn aside from the main line of travel to look in upon us in our seclusion. Have you seen Miss Darcy, or Albert? How did you know we were abroad among the hills?"

"I have seen nobody since I left the stage, except the good folk at the farm—and yourself," he added, leading her back to her seat. "If I had had my wish in the matter, our meeting should have been here and thus, in preference to all other places and circumstances. I came all the way from the city to see you, Phemie!"

Her color flickered, and she looked alarmed.

"What is the matter? Didn't the manuscript please you? Is it a failure?"

"Nothing you do can be anything less than a

success," rejoined Robert, vexed, nevertheless, that her thoughts had taken this practical and professional turn. "The manuscript is all right, and already in the printer's hands. The business that brought me hither is of a different character, and very much more important—to me, at least."

She looked directly into his grave, and, it must be allowed, slightly embarrassed visage. "If it is anything in which I can render you the least service, you cannot doubt my willingness to help you. My sympathy and good wishes you have already."

Her *naïveté* and the total absence of suspicion of his real meaning apparent in her words and demeanor, nettled the wooer unreasonably. Women were generally over-ready to scent a proposal—not prone to receive the preface to one so coolly. He refreshed his resolution to declare himself in full by another gaze at her beauty before he recommenced.

He took care to speak very plainly, now, and she understood him. There was not a drop of blood in her cheeks or lips as his meaning became clear to her, and the amazed incredulity of her eyes moved him to more positive protestations. Then, she covered her face with her hands and bowed them upon her knees, the swift scarlet dyeing neck and temples. She was trembling violently when he tried to lift her head, and pleaded for one word that should allay his suspense. But her only reply being a silent shudder, a new fear entered his soul.

"Phemie!" he said, in a different tone—the accent of a wronged and disappointed man. "Can it

be that I am mistaken in my hope that the knowledge of my love is not disagreeable to you? Do you despise and reject it?"

She showed him a countenance, strangely livid now, whereas it had been only pallid when he last beheld it. "Reject your love!" she said, mournfully. "If I were to tell you that the hearing of it was like the surprise one knows in finding, unexpectedly, a well of cool, sweet waters in a desert, I should convey very feebly to your mind the truth of what your story has been to me. But if it is rapture to see the living waters, it is madness for the thirsting wretch to look upon them and feel that he can never taste them. Oh! why did you tell me this? Why was I suffered to meet, and to know you? My Father! this is very hard! very bitter! And I was almost happy—quite peaceful!"

She sobbed aloud—wild weeping that confounded, while it moved the observer to tenderest pity. By degrees, as the paroxysm died into long sighs that threatened to bring out the life with them from the tortured heart, he expressed his inability to fathom the reasons of her distress; declared that her language was as enigmatical as it was painful to him.

"You admit that the tale of my love is not unwelcome, yet in the same breath you say you cannot accept it—wish you had never known me!" he said, deeply aggrieved. "I am at a loss to comprehend these contradictions. Either you love me, or you do not. I beg you to deal candidly and explicitly with me."

Phemie dried her eyes, and the resolute curves bent her lips into their wonted firmness. "I believe you when you say that you love me. But I never suspected it until this hour. How should I? I bowed to you in heart and spirit as to a noble, good man who had befriended me in more ways than I could number; who had brought light and freshness into my lowly life, but who thought of me only as benefactors do of those they have helped and comforted. I was glad I had met you; proud and grateful because you seemed to like me and approved of what I thought, and said, and wrote. But, long ago, I put thoughts of marriage away from me. I was one of the world's workers. The idle and the fortunate alone had the right to dream of love and home, and a sheltered life passed in pleasant service, voluntarily assumed for love's sake. I have tried to be contented—tried steadily and diligently as I have striven to do other work well. Latterly, I have flattered myself that I was satisfied, and that the wider field you and Miss Darcy had opened for the exercise of my few talents would leave me no room for repining. I said to myself that the useful were always the happy, and that my sphere of usefulness was large enough to fill the measure of my energies and desires. It was not an exalted ambition, but it was the brightest I had a right to indulge. The hope and the enjoyment of it seem far enough from me, now, but my duty remains unaltered. The support of my mother, and one of my sisters; the education, and, for several

years to come, the maintenance of my brother are cares God has laid upon me, and I may not put them aside."

"Has it occurred to you that, as my wife, you would still be able to help them?" interrupted her companion, in tender reproach.

"With your money? Their honest pride would not let them receive alms from you. My sense of what was due to you would hinder me from tendering such relief."

"They allow you to maintain them out of your wages."

"Because they are of the same blood, and we labor together as one family, each contributing her share to the common store. I owe them much. You owe them nothing. I could never meet your eye without a blush of shame, were I to burden you with my relatives as pensioners."

"It is unfair! It is monstrous!" Mr. Hart ground his heel into the mossy earth and clenched his teeth. "You are to be sacrificed—youth, health, happiness—to their exactions and your perverted views of duty! I plead for you, while I entreat you for my sake, to reconsider your mistaken decision. Reflect well, Phemie, before you recommit yourself to this bondage. Other mothers and sisters live who have no daughter and sister, gifted, like yourself, with talent and energy to earn for them a comfortable support. If they were consulted, they would release you from this unnatural obligation. From the hour in which you promise to marry me, I charge myself with Al-

bert's education, and in his vacations your—*our* home, dearest—shall be his. I love the boy for his own estimable qualities, and because it was through him I first knew you. Your mother can find a home with Mrs. Mandell, or, should you and she desire it, she shall live with us. Charlotte is already independent of aid from others. There is left only Olive—*younger and as strong as yourself—fully as able to take care of one person as you are to maintain four.* Look at the case fairly, my darling! Judge it as if it were another's—and” passing from the argumentative strain he had compelled himself to adopt, into persuasive gentleness—fond coaxing, a thousand-fold harder to withstand; “come to me, my love, my beauty, my bird! Fold the tired wings, stretched so bravely and so long, upon my breast! Let me love and care for you, Phemie! *I want you!* you cannot guess how sorely!”

He drew the beautiful head to his bosom, and it lay there for one moment. “I could not help it!” she sobbed, the tears pressing from the hold of the closed lids when he stooped to kiss her. “I shall never forget that you have offered me this rest—Albert and my mother a home. It is worth the battle and the anguish, to know this one instant of belief in your love, and to feel what a high-souled, generous man you are. Yet it makes the parting harder.”

“You talk of parting still!” interposed Robert, trying to lay the head back upon the pillow it had left. “You can think of our separation when you

are mine, all mine! Do you then dream, for a second, that, having drawn from you the dear confession of your love, I can give you up? You shall never leave me, Phemie!”

“I must! If I belonged to myself, you should not ask twice for so poor a gift as my hand. I understand better than you do what I am giving up. But I also remember—and this helps me to stand firmly—that you would resign much were you to marry me. When the popular story was that you meant to make Clara Mallory your wife, not a disapproving voice was heard. All classes united in declaring the union suitable, and in prophesying happiness for both of you. If it were noised abroad that you had engaged yourself to the daughter of a bankrupt—a girl who had sewed, and copied law papers, and sold papers of pins and needles for a living, and whose meagre trousseau was bought with the proceeds of her labor as Mr. Arnold’s bookkeeper, the outcry would be instant and loud against your throwing yourself away. You are so noble as to forget this. It is all the more needful, therefore, that I should not lose sight of it.”

There was enough truth in this speech to renew the tingling sensation the suitor’s self-love had experienced when he would have weighed impartially the worldly disadvantages of the meditated union, and the annoyance produced by this, added to that one always feels when another repeats as his, a sentiment he more than suspects is contemptible, goaded him to retort more harshly than affectionately.

“This is rank folly, Phemie! I am accountable

to no one for my actions. I am my own master—free to choose a wife for myself, and independent of what others may say. Had you the same degree of moral courage, you would spare us both much useless misery.”

“Do not be angry with me!”

The brown eyes pleaded so meekly against his wrath he could not but kiss them shut.

“*Could* I let you go, if I were not sure I was obeying the voice of Duty? You would not respect me—and love without respect is very short-lived—if I were to condemn my mother to a life of dependence upon aliens in blood, if not in feeling, my sister to servitude as a chambermaid or seamstress—she is qualified for no higher position,—and cast my helpless brother upon your bounty, when I can keep them all together under one roof, above want and above charity. It is not pride that holds me fast to this purpose. It is common honesty and natural affection.”

“And is this to go on for ever, Phemie? Are you to live and die a bond-slave?”

“God knows!” She folded her hands, and her head drooped in patient submission. “He knows, too, what is best for me. In Him is my only hope that my cross will not be too heavy for me to bear.”

“I cannot resign my fondest hope in life so easily!” Robert said, petulantly. He might have said that he liked his own way too well to resign the hope of having it whenever the accomplishment of his plans seemed feasible. “You think to fill your heart with

other affections—your life with other aims. The disappointment is to me a foretaste of Death—it leaves me so little to live for.”

“You do not intend a sarcasm.” Phemie’s sad smile had in it a wondrously plaintive meaning. “But your words sound like one. You will look back to this hour, some day, and understand me.”

“You talk in puzzles, to-day! I never had any trouble in comprehending you before. It may be that I am not in the frame of mind to discern readily the drift of riddles.” He could hardly admit the possibility of his rejection, so stunning and unforeseen was this sequel to his confident wooing. He was honest in showing the misguided girl that she was casting away her fairest chance of happiness. He resumed, after a slight pause, more quietly, but still in the tone of one who felt his injuries to be great:—

“But one thing is apparent. The suit I have argued—perhaps too warmly—is negatived by you. Should you ever see cause to regret your hasty decision, I stand ready to renew it. Time cannot change me. Having once known and loved you, I must always love you. My life was lonely before. It will be desolate now. Remember this when your chosen career ceases to satisfy you. I can bide my time.”

“I know what I have chosen. It is not a question of satisfaction, but of endurance,” replied Phemie, gently and sadly. “That I shall not lose my reward, I must hope, for I believe the promise of the

Father to those who endure hardness as good soldiers. But the hardness is hardness still, and existence a warfare, and the prize is not given until the race is won."

Mr. Hart looked down at her, his anger subdued by her humility and Christian patience. "You are a brave, a grand, a good woman, Phemie!" he exclaimed, impetuously. "And I have met your heroism with unmanly petulance. Forgive me, darling! I submit to your decision, not because I acknowledge its justice to yourself or to me, but because I would not make your sacrifice more difficult. I thank you for telling me, in your own frank way, that it is a sacrifice. In this, as in many respects, your behavior has been unlike that of most women. One kiss, love! and I will trouble you no longer. If Miss Darcy hears that I have been here, tell her what you please—what will pain you least."

"I shall tell no one what has passed between us. I could not!"

Nothing more was spoken; but Mr. Hart felt that her eyes followed his course down the hill when their reluctant hands had parted, the last glance been exchanged, appreciated better than he had confessed to her, the truth that, heavy and sore as was his heart, it was light in comparison with the aching one he left behind him.

And thus the shadows closed again, and in the darkened chambers of her soul the woman bowed herself together in mourning over her buried youth, and the beautiful hope her own hand had slain.

Oh! when one reflects upon the million altars of sacrifice raised by hands, feeble in all but love for those given by Heaven to their care, and faith in the Helper of the sorrowing and heavy-laden,—altars, upon which the victims are the living hearts of the builders, and the burning incense, loves, hopes, and joys, innocent in themselves, and that are often the best treasures of the devotees, one marvels that the earth puts forth any green or lovely thing—that the bending skies ever smile.

6*





CHAPTER VII.

“**F**IRST a shadow—then a sorrow.”

No one guessed how often Phemie said the words over to herself during the fall and winter that succeeded the brief brightness of her week in the country. Charlotte had been one of the berrying-party, and, becoming over-tired or overheated, she was seized during the night with a chill, that was the prelude to a hemorrhage more copious and protracted than any that had preceded it. So soon as she was able to bear the journey, they took her back to the city. She never left the house again alive. Throughout the autumn and the early winter, her longest journey was from her chamber to Phemie's on the same floor. Before Christmas she was bedridden, and required the constant attendance of Mrs. Rowland or Olive. One of these, or Miss Darcy, who devoted two nights each week to the pious charity, likewise watched from bedtime until daybreak, at the sufferer's bedside. Charlotte, usually yielding to a fault, was

resolute in forbidding Phemie to undertake the whole vigil. The others could snatch an hour's sleep during the day. Phemie's time was not her own. It pleased Charlotte to have her best-beloved sister near her in the evening, although the busy, driven pen allowed them no opportunity for conversation. The golden hours of the twenty-four were those when the broad brow with the banded hair oversweeping it; the great, thoughtful eyes and firmly-closed lips bent in the invalid's admiring sight over the paper she was preparing for Miss Darcy's magazine.

Phemie was a regular contributor to this now. The public were beginning to watch for her articles, and the principal editor to congratulate himself in place of regretting that he had obliged Miss Darcy by paying a new and unknown author. According to his theory and practice she should have been contented, for a year or so, with seeing herself in print in his columns, and, in the event of her future celebrity, hold herself forever indebted to him for having furnished the stepping-stone to success. Phemie wrote nowhere except in Charlotte's chamber, and all she wrote she read aloud to this one partial critic.

"It is the next best thing to being an author myself," said the latter, one snowy December night, as Phemie folded and enveloped her sketch preparatory to delivering it at the magazine office in the morning.

She would save the postage by setting out early enough to call at Miss Darcy's on her way down

town, and this was a consideration when prices were still on the rise and salaries *in statu quo*.

"I wish I could tell you how proud I am of you, my precious sister!" was the addendum to the sick girl's comment upon the story to which she had been listening.

"I wish you had more cause to be proud of me, Lottie, dear!" responded Phemie, setting her desk aside and turning down the gas.

They could talk as well in a dimly-lighted room, and Charlotte liked to watch the play of the street light from below upon the wall. The speaker chafed her right wrist—what wearied penman does not recall the peculiar and sickening aching that led to the gesture?—and stretched out the fingers, cramped with their clench upon the barrel of a penholder for thirteen hours, with the intervals of two half hours for meals.

"You have not coughed so much to-night," she continued, perching herself upon the bed, and lifting her sister to a sitting posture by supporting her against her shoulder.

"Haven't I? I am glad! I dread coughing, because it must disturb you."

"Only as it gives you pain, my poor, unselfish child! If I could do half, or all of it for you, I should not mind it at all. I should approve highly of that kind of division of labor."

"You are very tired!" said Charlotte, anxiously, detecting the false note in the accent the other would have made playful.

“Pshaw! a little fagged, and slightly hoarse—nothing more!” was the rejoinder. “And this is my style of resting myself. I could not ask a better.”

“That is because you do not know what rest is!” pursued Charlotte, with increasing uneasiness. “I have many sorrowful thoughts about you as I lie here. You seem to me, all the while, like one under the goad—or wound up to too great speed—as if you dared not stop a moment, for fear you might sink down helpless.”

“Like Mr. Pickwick’s cab-horse,” interrupted Phemie, laughing. “‘He always falls down, when he’s took out of his cab,’ said the driver, ‘but when he’s in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short, so’s he can’t werry well fall down, and we’ve got a pair of precious large wheels on; so ven he *does* move, they run after him, and he must go on—he can’t help it.’ Have no fears for me, Lottie! I like work; I enjoy nothing else so much. I was thinking, as I put up that packet just now, how thankful I am that I have enough to do.”

“That is not a natural feeling for a young girl. It is the consolation of one who dares not look back, and who has nothing to expect.”

“It is the true philosophy—to live by the day,” returned Phemie. “And I have much to live for. My hourly prayer is that I may remember *how* much.”

The fitful play of the street lamp on the wall seemed to catch Charlotte’s eye, and she watched it

for a few moments. The sleet tapped at the rattling window, and the streets were silent with the hush of approaching midnight. Besides themselves, there was no other waking creature in the house.

“I wish I dared ask you a question,” said the sick sister, hesitating between the words. “I have thought over many things since I have lain here, and more of you than all things else. Is it only my illness and the added care and responsibility this has entailed upon you, with the almost certain knowledge of what the end must be, that has oppressed you all this winter—ever since the night I was taken sick in the country? Others perceive no change in you. Mother, Olive, and Emily were saying to-day, how well you bear your increased labors; how cheerful and strong you are. But I feel that you are not the same. You are grateful now where you used to be glad; steady, where you were formerly buoyant. What is the matter, Phemie?”

“Am I changed? It must be because I have so much to do and to think of, and I am growing old, little one. I shall be twenty-four next month. Don't fret yourself about me, I repeat. I am getting along well—famously! I mean to write a book next year that shall take the critics by storm and make all our fortunes.”

“I shall not be here to read it,” said the elder, simply; and Phemie's overwrought composure failed her.

Her tears dropped on the head resting upon her shoulder. “I have tried to deceive you, Charlotte.

I have had a great sorrow. I promised not to tell even you about it. But it has taken the spring out of my life. Stay with me, dearest sister! Help me to live!”

“I knew it!” The thin hand pulled down the wet cheek to the wan one. “But you will be happy yet, dear. And my going will help on this end. I see it all!”

Before Phemie could utter the expostulation upon her tongue, Olive entered. She had been taking tea with Emily, and her hood was pushed back from a very ruddy face. Absorbed as the sisters were in other and sadder concerns, both remarked something singular in her look and manner, as she kissed them, with many apologies for staying out so late. It was her night to take care of Charlotte, and her mother had retired two hours before.

“I didn't mean to keep you up, Phemie,” she said, fidgeting from the bureau to the closet, turning up the gas, and then putting it out altogether in her haste to lower it. “But Emily had some sewing for me to do, and Seth was out until ten o'clock at the store, or somewhere, and Emily was obliged to stay in the nursery with little Joe, who was not quite well”—

“Little *Seth*, you mean—don't you?” corrected Charlotte.

“I said so—didn't I?” Olive hurried on at a great rate, unhooking her dress, and taking down a wrapper from the closet. “So when Joe—Seth, I would say—came in—”

“Really, Olly, I think you had better wait to recover your breath—or your wits,” interposed Phemie, smiling at her frantic blunders, despite her own weary-heartedness.

“It’s no use!” Good-natured, honest Olive threw herself upon her sister’s bed, and laughed and cried together. “I’ve got Joe into my head, and he slips off my tongue with every other word. For he spent the evening at Emily’s, and we had the parlor all to ourselves, and he walked home with me besides, and he asked me to marry him, and he has liked me this great while, and I like him, and I have promised to marry him if mother can spare me, and if you—Charlotte and Phemie—don’t object. Seth and Em know all about it, and they say I could not get a better husband.”

“You could not, indeed!” answered Phemie, emphatically. “They may well say that. You have chosen wisely, and so has he. You will make him a good wife, and he you an excellent husband. Nobody can dream of objecting to the match, or of throwing a straw in your way. I congratulate you with all my heart.”

“And I!” said Charlotte, rather faintly. “But you have taken us—or me, at least, by surprise.”

“You thought he was in love with Phemie,” said the candid *fiancée*. “And you were right. He did love her—for years and years—even after she had told him it was useless to hope for any other answer than ‘No.’ I liked him all the while. I used to be angry with her for her indifference to him, and the

fun she made of him—but I forgive you now, Phemie. He fancied me first on account of my resemblance to you, which I fancy nobody else will ever discover," laughing in the fulness of her happiness. "He wasn't brilliant or handsome enough for you, Phemie, I suppose you thought, but he couldn't please me better if he had been made to order."

"I never objected to his want of brilliancy or lack of good looks, as he will tell you," returned her sister. "I only assured him that I should never marry. If I had loved him never so truly, my answer must have been the same."

"Then, perhaps—not now!" whispered Charlotte, pressing Phemie's fingers to her lips. "Child! child! what a martyr we have made of you!" she said, aloud, in a passion of regret and veneration.

"Ridiculous!" Phemie could bear no more. "It is we who are martyring you—talking you to death! I will give you your soothing draught now, and then you must sleep, without letting our betrothed maiden speak ten words more, even in the praise of her worthy Joe. He *is* worthy of all your love and respect, Olly, as you may possibly find out for yourself in time, if you are moderately discerning."

As she arranged Charlotte's pillows for the night, the emaciated arms suddenly clasped her neck, and, looking steadfastly into her eyes, the sick girl said, in earnest, thrilling tones: "I know thy works, and charity, and faith, and thy patience, and *the last to*

be more than the first!' God bless you, darling, for the best, strongest, most faithful woman that ever lived!"

"She was sleeping sweetly after a restless night," said Olive, when Phemie relieved her watch at dawn, and she did not awake while the latter remained at home. She was due at the store at eight o'clock, and the walk through the streets slippery with ice and slush would consume an hour. She peeped into Charlotte's room on her way out, but seeing her face tinted with a delicate flush, too clear and lovely for that of health, and giving her an aspect of youthful beauty she did not wear when awake—still lying with closed eyes upon the pillow, she kissed her mother, who was watching her, a silent "Good-by," and went out to her day's work.

She was almost hopeful this morning. She had heard from Albert the previous day. His homesickness had yielded to the kindly-judicious treatment of the attendants at the Institute in which he was now a pupil, while his progress in his studies and irreproachable behavior were commented upon favorably by his teachers. Olive was to be married, and Joe Bonney was consoled; she was more pleased than usual with her latest literary effort, and Charlotte was better. Rays of light—all of these—which would have made broad day in a heart unshadowed by a brooding sorrow that ever held its place, let other troubles thicken, or disperse. It was not a busy day at the store, and between the entries and calculations that made up the routine of her labors,

she found leisure to think out the outline of a new article for Miss Darcy.

“If Lottie is comfortable, to-night, I will begin it forthwith,” she was resolving, when a dirty errand-boy, evidently snatched up for the purpose from one of the back streets near her home, laid on her desk a note from her sister Emily.

“*Charlotte is dying. Come home!*”

How she got into Mr. Arnold's presence she did not know, nor how she made known her business. But she did feel, in every impatient pulse, the measured accents that repeated her announcement and remarked upon it.

“Your sister is dying, and you want to go home, immediately, I—ah—understood you to say, Miss Rowland? So—so!” scraping his dewlap of a chin with his cleanly pared nails. “Um—m! If the summons be correct, I suppose there is reason in your request. By whom was it sent?”

“My sister wrote to me, sir. It is certainly true,” moving a step toward the door.

“Your sister! Then she can hardly be dying! Is she not a—ah—trifle hypochondriacal?”

Poor Phemie was ready to believe that he took a ghoulis pleasure in reiterating the dread phrase that had driven her beside herself. “Another sister!” she explained, laconically.

“Oh! Ah! I see! There is no alternative, then, Miss Rowland. I shall have to let you go, inconvenient and unbusiness-like as such a proceeding is. I hope, however”—the fat slave of routine had it

in his slow brain to say, "that the like will not occur again"—but some lingerings of propriety exchanged that formula for, "that you will discover this to be—ah—a false alarm."

She was off like the wind, when he recalled her.

"Miss Rowland!"

Could nothing hasten the fall of his oily periods?

"Miss Rowland! When may we look for you at your post again? This is a busy season, you recollect. The claims of grief should—ah—in every well-ordered mind, yield, succumb, give way to the more weighty considerations of the public good. You have excellent judgment, Miss Rowland, and must see this."

"I shall be back at my desk to-morrow, unless my sister is still living in the morning!" Phemie engaged, her great eyes set upon his with an expression he understood no more than he would have done a dissertation upon the subtler humanities that distinguish the man from the boor.

"Very prompt! a laudable zeal, Miss Rowland! Your response is entirely regular and professional. Afflictions are, of course—ah—unpleasant items in the bill of life, but they are expenses that must be met—notes which—ah—must be honored, Miss Rowland. I will not detain you. I hope you will find your relative better. Should anything—ah—occur to change your intentions concerning your return, please apprise me."

He let her go at last! She put on her cloak and hat as she passed swiftly through the store, and had

just cleared the outer door when she espied an empty carriage coming up the street. In her haste to signal it, she slipped upon the sodden snow, and would have fallen, but for the friendly arm of a gentleman who was passing. "Phemie!" he cried, surprised at the encounter, and shocked at her agitated countenance. "What is it? Where are you going?"

"Home! home! Oh! stop that carriage! I have not time to walk!"

Mr. Hart shouted to the inattentive driver; led her to the vehicle, seated her, and got in himself. "You must let me see you home. You are unfit to go alone. What has happened, my poor child?"

She put Emily's note into his hand, and covered her face. He did not speak at once. He may have waited for her to recover her self-command. He may have been at a loss for fitting language. When he accosted her, it was with words of hope he did not feel, nor she believe, but she accounted his motive to be a kind one, and was grateful.

"It is quite true! There is no mistake. My heart tells me this," she said chokingly. "I should have known it last night and this morning. But I was foolish and blind. My gentle sister!"

Mr. Hart's reply was to take her hand and hold it closely until they reached her mother's door. There were strength and comfort in the clasp, and Phemie looked up, brave and tranquil in seeming, when he said, "We are at home! I shall wait down stairs to hear how she is."

He waited half an hour in the parlor—not the

study, which could not be warmed in winter, but in the larger room, also cheerless and cold to-day, and the scantiness and cheapness of the furniture the more glaring on this account. Mr. Hart sympathized warmly with the woman he loved in her distress, but his mind was busier with other things, as he wandered up and down the narrow limits, stroking his flowing beard, and appearing to study the indistinct arabesques of the ingrain carpet. This was the home she had refused to desert that she might share his; this life of pinching poverty and heart-breaking sorrow she would not resign at his prayer, although she loved him. Would Charlotte's death weaken this resolution? Hardly. It would, it was more likely, increase her burden, since this sister was one of the money-makers of the family. He sighed heavily and repeatedly, in contemplating this possibility. Once he muttered audibly:—

“I wish I could forget the girl altogether! I can see no turning to this lane. It looks longer and more unpromising every day.”

Olive came down after a while. Her eyes were red with crying; her nose and lips inflamed and swollen. It would have puzzled Joe himself to trace any likeness in her, as she then appeared, to her beautiful sister.

Charlotte had been dead an hour.

“She had lain in a sort of stupor we mistook for sleep, since seven o'clock,” said Olive, “until at noon she opened her eyes and asked for Phemie. Emily was in at the time, and she saw directly that she

was dying. The worst of it all was to see Phemie go up and kiss the poor, cold lips when she came home. I feel really very uneasy about her. She hasn't shed a tear—yet she loved Charlotte better than she did anything else in the world. She is stunned—that is what is the matter—and I dread the reaction. She told me to thank you, Mr. Hart, for your kindness in bringing her home. You'll excuse her not coming down, I am sure.”

Olive was always painfully precise in the company of her sister's friend. He was “not her sort,” she used to say privately to Emily and Charlotte, “and she couldn't feel easy with him.”

Mr. Hart said a phrase of polite acquiescence; another of condolence, and turned to go, when the door opened to admit a tall, sandy-haired young man, his by-no-means-handsome face full of genuine concern, and Olive forgot her awe of the *distingué* publisher.

“O Joe!” she screamed, running forward to throw herself into his arms. “I knew you'd come right away. She's gone, Joe, dear! she's gone!”

Mr. Hart slipped out, unobserved. But the light in his eye, as he softly closed the front door, did not belong to a house of mourning.

He sat in his bachelor parlor the next evening, handsome and comfortable in his dressing-gown and slippers; a cigar between his lips, a new novel in his hand, and a decanter of sherry within reach on the beaufet, when a lady was announced.

“Don't throw away your cigar, Hart,” said Miss

Darcy's even, pleasant voice, close behind the servant. "It is only I. And don't blame the servant for admitting me. I told him you would see me."

"With the greatest pleasure," returned the gentleman, bringing forward a seat—a low, lounging Grecian chair, with a soft, yet most elastic back and seat.

Miss Darcy set it aside, and helped herself to an upright one, with the decided, "I prefer this—thank you."

"I ought not to offer you a cigar, I suppose," continued Mr. Hart, smiling. "But let me pour out a glass of wine for you, after your walk in the wet."

Her aqua scutum suit was splashed with mud and rain. "I should as soon think of smoking as drinking," was the rejoinder. "I never take cold from exposure to the weather. Then, again, inward heat is good for keeping off chilliness. I am boiling over to-night."

Mr. Hart was attentive. "Nothing unpleasant has occurred, I trust?"

"Would I fume over a pleasant occurrence?" asked the other, curtly. "I was in at Mrs. Rowland's this afternoon, and learned that Phemie had been at the desk all day, in Arnold's store, while her sister lay dead at home."

"No!" interjected the listener.

"Yes! What is more, Arnold knew she meant to be there, and, so far from preventing her, he commended her intention—accepted the act as his due."

“He is an unfeeling brute!”

“He is a man!” was Miss Darcy’s amendment. “Having power, he likes to use it. What right has a working-girl to nurse her private woes at his expense? She is better off, as it is, than hundreds of other women, for her health is good, and she earns enough to keep the wolf, Want, from her household. I could tell you of mothers who have kept their dead babes in the cradles in which they died for a week, before they could, by making heavy pantaloons at eighteen cents a pair, scrape together the money to buy pine coffins and graves in the corner of a crowded people’s cemetery. Phemie Rowland has acquired the means of procuring Charlotte’s medicines and paying the doctor’s bills by writing stories and essays for our magazine. These were penned—every one of them—at her sister’s bedside. They could not afford to keep up more than two fires. There must be one in the kitchen. The other was in Charlotte’s room. Phemie divided her time between the bed and the desk, the elder sister stifling her deadly cough whenever she could, lest sympathy with her suffering should break the other’s train of thought. For these articles—spicy and popular as they are acknowledged to be—my Superior, Bundlecome, pays her one dollar per MS. page—foolscap and compactly written. This specimen of masculine liberality brings us back to Mr. Arnold. Charlotte is to be buried on Friday. Phemie is bent upon going back to her post to-morrow. Arnold deigned to inquire to-day how her sister was, and after replying, she stated her desire

that he would obtain a substitute for her on the day of her funeral. Whereupon he 'supposed he must,' but 'feared he should find it difficult to procure one who would act for one day only.' My business here is to ask from you a line recommending me to this high-minded gentleman as a person competent to keep his books for twelve hours. I would go to-morrow, too, but office-work prevents. I understand book-keeping, not so well as if I were a man, of course"—grimly sardonic; "but I have taught the art. Phemie Rowland had no other instructor. Several of my pupils—boys—occupy desks in the counting-rooms of prominent merchants in this city. I knew that you were acquainted with this Arnold, and were interested in the Rowlands, and conceived the idea of applying to you."

"I will recommend you, certainly—without hesitation," answered Mr. Hart. "But I fancy I can do better for our friend than by adopting your suggestion entire. I will supply her place, not only on Friday, but to-morrow and Saturday, and as much longer as she may wish to be relieved from business cares. Her substitute shall be a clerk of our own—a good accountant, an obliging fellow, and quite competent to the duties of the place. I will see Arnold about the matter to-night. He lives on the next block."

Miss Darcy's eyes twinkled. "You have a way of cheating me into playing the baby in my old age," she said, brusquely. "You are an honor, and an exception, to your sex!"

Mr. Hart bowed low. "Please credit my sex with

the circumstance that there are exceptions to the inglorious whole! Pray believe me, furthermore, when I assert that there are not fifty men in the city, professing to be respectable, who would not, if they were made acquainted with the facts you have stated, condemn Arnold's course as I do, and endeavor, by every means at their command, to soften the rigor of Miss Rowland's lot."

"I am too much obliged to you to controvert your proposition," returned Miss Darcy. "But if I were not gagged by gratitude, I could bring to bear upon the point some other facts—they are my only arguments—that might compel you to change your base. I thank you, sincerely, in the name of the family, and in my own, for your timely assistance. And"—awkwardly, for one so frank as it was her habit to be—"please send the substitute to me for his pay. I act, in this case, as Phemie's banker."

The other looked hurt. "That neutralizes the effect of the kind things you have been saying of me. I will attend to all that, if you will allow me the privilege. Do not intimate to the family that I have had anything to do in the affair. Arnold shall write a note, stating that Miss Rowland's place is supplied until such time as she shall choose to resume it. How is she, by the way? Miss Olive described her yesterday as apparently stunned by the shock of her sister's death. I was fearful that the reaction of violent grief, succeeding her unnatural calmness, would be injurious."

He said it so carelessly as to be clumsy in phrase

and manner, looking away from his companion, at some object across the room. Miss Darcy was unsuspecting, and, moreover, absorbed in her compassionate thoughts of the afflicted family.

“Reactions are not common to minds like hers,” she said, half proudly. “She has met this sorrow as she has all other reverses—with fortitude; with no complaint of her own pain; with tenderest love and pity for those who suffer with her. Yet the loss is peculiarly hers. Charlotte was the one member of her family who thoroughly appreciated her, and loved her as she should be loved. Mrs. Rowland idolizes her own miseries, and is too much engaged in offering up to these the tribute of tears and sighs, and in parading her stock of first-class woes for the mournful admiration of her friends, to spare many thoughts to her daughters. Olive is a good-tempered, industrious little dumpling, but her sphere is the kitchen. All her ideas, outside of this, centre upon the man she is to marry, who is likewise good-tempered and industrious.”

“I saw him yesterday, I believe,” said Mr. Hart, yet more carelessly. “I judged them to be a pair of betrothed lovers from their meeting.”

“I think the household will be broken up, now,” continued Miss Darcy. “Mrs. Rowland was dilating to me, to-day, upon the excellent offer made to her by her widower brother, whom she visited last summer. He is older than she, and his children are all married. He wants her to live with him and take charge of his house. The neighborhood is pleasant, and the climate

agrees admirably with her health, and she has almost resolved to go, so soon as Olive marries. In that event, Phemie will, they think, reside with one of her wedded sisters. I think she will prefer, for reasons I do not care to state, to engage rooms in the same house with me. I shall propose the plan."

Her host was spinning a globular paper-weight on the table—intent, it would seem, upon making it describe its evolutions upon the smallest possible pivot. He looked gravely complacent at his dexterity, when he picked up his toy, and fell to balancing it upon the tip of his middle finger. "That is your plan—is it?"

Miss Darcy stared at him hard before answering. "It is," she said, with a perplexed air. There was something in his manner beyond her comprehension. "Can you think of a better? A young, handsome woman like her would be talked about if she lived alone. I don't mind gossip, where I am the theme, but I am sensitive for Phemie. Men call me a dragon, sometimes. I may be able to protect her the better because of that reputation."

"I flatter myself that I can propose a more convenient, and, to some of the parties concerned, a pleasanter arrangement." Mr. Hart recovered the toppling globe with the first and third fingers, and replaced it upon the table. "I mean to marry her myself."

Miss Darcy shoved her chair back at least a foot, stood bolt upright, and surveyed him with a kind of angry astonishment he found very diverting, for he laughed his gay, light-hearted laugh in asking:—

“Why not, my excellent friend?”

“I should as soon have thought of your marrying me!”

He laughed more heartily. “I shouldn’t.”

He told her then, with grave, real feeling, very becoming to him, of the rise and course of his love, of his proposal, of her rejection, and the cause of it. Miss Darcy listened, but her features did not relax from their settled uneasiness. She shook her head, when he had finished, resolutely as when he began, and Miss Darcy’s negative nod was something worth seeing by the lovers of decided measures.

“It won’t do!” She need not have said it in words, but she did. “You are a good soul in some respects, Hart, but you are not Phemie Rowland’s peer in intellect, or elevation of character and principle. You have too many masculine foibles and weaknesses. When she finds these out she will tire of lying at your feet and chanting your godlike perfections. I have noticed, ever since she first met you, that she overrated you, and she cannot help learning this for herself in time. You cannot wear stilts forever, and you are not the right height for her without them. A wife must not overtop her husband, if she would be happy with him. All the flimsy, gilt-edged manuals of Courtship and Marriage will tell you that much. The more his stature exceeds hers, the better, according to the rules that now control society. You believe in, and are governed by these rules. You would not allow the truth of Phemie’s equality with your princely self, if you were put upon

your oath. All this stereotyped cant about angelhood and superangelic perfections is a patent drug invented by the Father of lies (note the masculine gender, please!), to cozen women out of their common sense, their birthright of brains and individuality. In this age a woman ignores her possession of these last when she marries, unless her husband is one out of a million. And you are one *of* not a million, but several hundred millions. In too many instances, the second party to the marriage contract having been set to work, by the time she could lisp that she was a 'little girl,' to poison, stifle, and uproot the offensive weed, Individuality, does not suffer intensely when she is forced to part with the slender remains of it. Phemie's characteristics are strong, and have been defined distinctly by her peculiar experience. She has a work to do in the world, and you would hinder her from doing it by making her the appendage to your social distinction and wealth."

"Your candor is oppressive!" Her auditor bit his lip, and his slender, white fingers closed upon the glass globe with a tenacity that looked cruel and dangerous. "It is fortunate for me that Miss Rowland may have formed a more charitable opinion of my character, and may hold different views respecting her lot in life."

"That is what I fear!" replied Miss Darcy, more and more disturbed, and as observant of his displeasure as an elephant would be of the buzzing of a fly upon the extremity of his tusk. "She has not awakened yet to the consciousness of her own powers. Her

wings are just growing. She would be a true helpmate to a great scholar, or a man who had it in him to achieve eminence in any department of letters. You will hardly distinguish yourself in anything really worthy the trouble of intellectual effort. The city is full of men like you—highly respectable, intelligent enough for the demands of general society, 'well up' in dilettanteism when the fine arts and books are the subject of talk, and liberal *patrons* of rising genius. The world could not spare you. You fill a niche seemingly more important than many pedestals in the Temple of Fame. But you are only the sons of men, after all, and when you wed with women of genius it is the story of the 'Loves of the Angels,' with a difference in the sex of the higher intelligence. I am talking too plainly, maybe," the idea suddenly presenting itself to her straightforward apprehension. "But while my chief solicitude is for Phemie's happiness, I am considering yours also. You admire her beauty, her grace, her rare fascination of manner and conversation, and you deceive yourself with the notion that you have read her through to the last leaf. Whereas you have only inspected the binding and the title-page. If she were your wife, you would continue to regard her with the same feeling in kind, although not in degree, as that which excites you to animation when you examine one of your finest Elzevirs. You will either dwarf her, or she will outgrow you so far that people will perceive and remark upon it, and by-and-by you will suspect it yourself. Then you will never see another

happy hour—either of you. Superiority on the part of a wife is an unpardonable sin, unforgivable by the husband, pitied by the world with a sneering compassion that is more galling than obloquy. Good heavens!” the strong-minded woman interrupted herself to say, rising in the intensity of her emotion and walking very fast to and fro through the spacious room. “Are not the biographies of gifted women so many blood-red beacons, telling how loving hearts split and went down upon the reef of popular prejudice, or ran a-foul of unmanly envy—so called—(I should say it was essentially manly, myself!) or were pierced through and through by hatred that once went by the name of affection;—affection changed to wrath and rancor by the knowledge that what should have remained the weaker vessel, was, in reality, the nobler, more sea-worthy barque of the two! Don't marry this girl, Hart. If you crush her, she will cease to respect you, and be miserable beyond your powers of conception. If she should outshine you, you will hate her. I am rough of speech, but mine are the words of truth and soberness. Nobody else will ever warn you as I have done—and done in sincere kindness and good-will.”

“I hope not, indeed!” The dark-gray eyes were murky, and the lips contorted by a cold sneer. “When you are more sane, Miss Darcy, you will bear me witness that this attack was unprovoked by me. You may—you will, doubtless, try the effect of your eloquence upon Miss Rowland as you have done upon me—probably with more signal effect. As I am, un-

fortunately for me, a gentleman, I cannot recriminate upon a woman. It should be a cause of continual rejoicing with you and your sisters that our accursed sex has not this privilege."

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Miss Darcy, in amazement, "the man is angry with me! I had not a thought of wounding or displeasing you. If I have been rude, I beg your pardon a thousand times. I told you, at the outset, that I liked you. I have said, it is true, that you were not Phemie's equal, but you repeated that twice during your narrative of how you happened to fall in love with her. I added that a man should be his wife's peer in something beside physical stature and strength. You cannot deny that. I assumed that your design in marrying was to increase your happiness, and I thought it was but friendly to state my conviction that you were not likely to do this by carrying out your present scheme. But as to saying a word to Phemie derogatory of you, or interfering with the success of your suit, that would be taking a base advantage of your confidence. I will go now. Maybe, when you come to think over what has passed, you will do my motives justice, if you cannot subscribe to the truth of my language. I cannot say that I wish you may win Phemie, for, in my judgment, you would be better apart. Nevertheless I shall offer no obstacle to your wooing; and, if you should marry her, I hope from the bottom of my heart that you may be very happy, and that you will cherish her as she should be loved and treasured."



CHAPTER VIII.



T was Tuesday morning in Joe Bonney's neat two-story tenement in Violet Street.

Tuesday morning—I may explain for the enlightenment of those who hold dignified and indolent court over a staff of well-appointed servants in brown-stone four-story mansions in purlieus where there are remote suggestions—in green door-yards and walled inclosures, gardens by courtesy, forty by twenty-four, with a fountain in the middle and a tree on each side of the same—that violets may once have been plucked there—Tuesday morning, I take leave to state to those whose incomes are *immoderate*, is but one remove from the whirl and chaos and general upsidedownity of Monday, to people living upon moderate incomes in two-floored “bricks” in unfashionable precincts. By what human ordinance or Providential intimation it was originally appointed unto womankind to lay hold of the log of the week by the heaviest and most knobby end, I never expect to know. It is one of the institutions

that remain because they *are* institutions. It is--and it has been from time immemorial, and it will be until the end of this reeling old globe of ours--the law of thrifty housewives that eyes anointed by the blessed sleep of Sabbath night shall be unsealed by cock-crow to smart and water in the smoke of boiling suds; that the hands lately folded in prayer and crossed in sacred decency through the hallowed hours, shall rub, and redden, and roughen over the bleached ridges of wooden wash-boards, or the luckless laborer lose temper and cuticle together as the knuckles abrade against the treacherous grooves of metal "patents;" that, what with lifting boilers and tubs, and wringing, and starching, and hanging out, and folding down, the priestess of that unblest day in the calendar, and her co-workers shall be, by night, separated from Sunday quiet and Sunday thoughts by such an abyss of unsavory odors and sweltering heats; by such backaches and headaches, and armaches and legaches, that the recollection is like a dream of doubtful authenticity, and the hope that the like will ever recur is frightfully counterbalanced by the reflection that if it should, it would be the day before Monday.

Tuesday is one remove from this woful period, as I have remarked less dolorously than in alluding to the soapy age in the hebdomadal formation. The deluge of fetid suds has dried from off the domestic world, but the bravest dove that ever flew would not alight upon the *débris* it has left. The dainty appetites which revolted yesterday at the "pick-up" break-

fast, dinner, and supper, will derive little stay on this day from the stale loaf unsupported by muffins, gridle-cakes, or biscuit that typifies the staff of life at the morning meal, or the two dishes of vegetables that flank the hurriedly-prepared steak at dinner, or the staler loaf and chipped beef forming the Thanksgiving feast after the family linen is once more gotten up. The kitchen is hot as it was on Monday, with the difference that the atmosphere reminds one to-day of a lime-kiln more than of a vapor-bath. The haste and labor are the same in extent, but have a character of their own arising from the pervading and overwhelming sense of dryness and the smell of the heated irons, calling to the imagination the fable of the torture chamber which had a furnace in the cellar, while the walls were composed of metal plates.

It was still early—just nine o'clock A. M. on this particular March Tuesday—but Mrs. Bonney's one servant, a brisk mulatto, was plying one of the uncouth truncated triangles, aptly denominated sad-irons, and Olive herself was busy at another table compounding a veal scallop for dinner. They had had a breast of veal hot on Sunday—Joe liked a good dinner on that day; and because Joe did *not* like cold meat at noon, his wife had steamed it for him on Monday by setting a cullender, closely covered, over a pot of boiling water. To-day, the ingenious and indefatigable economist would serve it up to him in a still different shape, which, if he had a choice, he preferred to any other. A layer of the meat, finely-minced, was put in the bottom of a baking-dish, a little salt

and pepper sprinkled over it, a few bits of butter added, then a layer of bread-crumbs, and another of meat, proceeding in the same order until the dish was full, the upper stratum to be bread-crumbs moistened plentifully with milk, in which an egg had been beaten. Before this crust went on, however, she put in gravy enough to keep the lower strata from insipid dryness—and behold a dish that, with mashed potatoes, and stewed tomatoes, and half a mince-pie left over from Monday—it took the three two days to dispatch a pie—would make a dinner fit for the relishful discussion of a richer man, and one more epicurean in his tastes than honest, easy Joe Bonney.

Olive looked contented and happy as she went nimbly on with her work, chatting the while with her domestic more familiarly than most mistresses would do. But “Jane was a perfect treasure,” she never failed to disclose when she talked “house” with other matrons. “One of the kind who never presumes, you know. She is really a deal of company for me, and so handy and willing!” Jane might have echoed the last encomium and applied it to her mistress. Olive was an admirable housekeeper, and dearly enjoyed the business in all its departments.

“Yes, we are all married, now,” she answered a query relative to her family. “That is, all of us girls. My wedding-day is next Friday, and I should like to celebrate it by a family gathering, only we are so scattered. Mother is four hundred miles away, and my sister Euphemia, Mrs. Hart, who was married a month later than I was, is nearer four thousand. She

went abroad three weeks after her marriage, and they have been travelling ever since."

"Her husband must be very rich," remarked the servant, taking a hot iron from the range.

"He is—and very liberal with his money. Both my sisters married richer men than I did, but I never minded that a bit. I couldn't be happier than I am—not if I had a gold mine. Nobody in the world has a better husband than mine."

"Mr. Bonney is a very nice man," assented Jane, "and a real generous provider. I've seen millionaires that stinted in their kitchens."

"That is true!" said Olive, heartily. "He never lets me want for a thing which he can buy. We are well enough off for young people. I wasn't cut out for a fashionable lady. Mrs. Mandell has more taste for that sort of show than I have, and she is able to gratify it. Mrs. Hart is the handsomest of us all. She was born stylish. She always looked like a queen, even when she had on a calico wrapper, and she is very smart."

"About work?" inquired the mulatto, to whom the word had but one meaning.

"Yes. She could do anything she chose to turn her hand to; but she was particularly clever about books and writing, and all that, you know. I suppose that was one reason why she married a bookseller."

"Does she help him make the books?"

"Why, no! What an idea! Not that she couldn't if she wanted to, but he is so wealthy she need not

lift a finger, if she doesn't wish it. He has taken her to see all sorts of wonderful things while they have been travelling, but she writes that she is longing for a home in America. I don't wonder at it. I should be tired to death running about, living in hotels and the like for twelve months. Give me a quiet dwelling in my native place and plenty to do in it. That is my idea of comfort! Mercy!"

She jumped back at the peal of a bell projecting on a spring from the wall above the table. "I shall never get used to that! It always takes me by surprise. It's lucky it didn't wake baby! Step to the door, will you, Jane? It can't be a call. It's too early."

Notwithstanding her self-gratulation upon the baby's unimpaired slumber, she deemed it safest to step into the adjoining dining-room where his cradle stood, to be quite sure of what she had stated. All was right, and, returning to the kitchen, her greasy hands held out before her in the stiff manner common to cooks who do not think it necessary to wash their fingers for every trivial interruption in their work, she espied behind Jane, whose countenance was a mixture of perplexity and curiosity, the figure of a lady. She had her back to the window, and the style of her hat and cut of her cloak being strange to Olive, she recoiled, with a faint exclamation of dismay.

"Why, Olly! don't you know me?" said an unchanged voice; and Olive forgot her objectionable digits, her kitchen-apron and ironing day, and sprang forward to greet her sister.

“Phemie! this can't be you!”

“It is nobody else, at any rate, Olly! How well you look! I am glad I caught you in the kitchen. You would not be so completely the dear old Olive anywhere else. Don't let me retard your work! I will sit down here until you are through.”

She was the old Phemie in ease and self-possession, in her faculty of saying the right thing in the right time and in few words. Even Jane recognized this quality of manner, as she had seen, at a glance, that her dress, although she wore a plain black reps, a black cloth cloak, and a shirred silk hat, without flowers, feathers, or, more tawdry than either, bugles, had a style of its own, far more elegant, and altogether unlike the costumes of the generality of Mrs. Bonney's visitors.

“This is Jane!” Olive said, wiping off the tears that had overtaken her at the unlooked-for meeting. “Jane, this is my sister, Mrs. Hart. We were just talking about you, Phemie. Wasn't it queer?”

Phemie bowed smilingly to the woman, and thereby completed her conquest. “How do you do, Jane? Mrs. Bonney has written to me of her good fortune in securing your services. What are you making, Olly? One of your famous scallops, I declare! How deliciously familiar it looks! I recollect the savory odor as well as if I had seen it smoking on the table yesterday. How is Mr. Bonney? And the baby? I heard of his arrival just before we left Europe. He is two months old, now, isn't he?”

“And four days,” said the proud mother. “Come and see him!”

“But the scallop?”

“It can wait. I’ll just set it into the back kitchen to keep cool, and finish it by and by. It requires only three-quarters of an hour to bake, you know,” said Olive, naïvely.

She carried it into the back room; washed her hands at the kitchen sink, and drawing her sleeves over her plump wrists, led the way to a neat dining-room, furnished for use rather than show. There, Master Joseph Mandell Bonney was discovered lying in state in a walnut cradle, muffled up to the chin in comfortable, sensible blankets, capped by a patchwork quilt that might have been, for its many colors, the skirt of Joseph’s coat.

“Isn’t he splendid?” whispered the mother, as her sister bent over the pink face and touched lightly, with a blending of reverence and wistfulness, that impressed Olive as odd, but beautiful and “somehow sorrowful”—the closed hand lying on the outside of the coverlet.

“He is a treasure above rubies,” was the answer. “You have everything to make you happy, Olive.”

“Haven’t I? Sit down!” said Olive, eagerly. “I was saying the same thing to Jane, not ten minutes ago. I am afraid I am too contented, Phemie. You can have no idea of what a husband Joe is. He isn’t literary, of course, or I shouldn’t know how to talk to him; but he has such excellent judgment and sound sense! and as for his temper, I couldn’t say

enough in praise of *it*, if I were to talk all day. Sick or well—and he does have shocking bilious turns, once in a while—he is always the same; ready with a smile, or a kind word; and you wouldn't believe what care he takes of me. After baby was born, he spent every minute he could spare from the store with me, and I could not have had a better nurse. He gave me my meals with his own hands, and was forever bringing me nice things to eat—fruit, and the like. My nurse said she had never seen such another man. Last Saturday he brought me home the prettiest black silk dress, 'to pay me for the boy,' he said. Wasn't it sweet and delicate in him? He's getting on nicely with his business, too. I was brought up to economical habits, you know, but if he does as well in future as he is doing now, we shall be quite rich in ten years. Emily—have you seen Emily?"

"No. We only arrived last night. I came to you directly I had my breakfast."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Lacroix Hotel. What about Emily?"

"I was going to say that Emily told me, the other day, that Seth says there is not a man in town, who has been in business so short a time as Joe has, whose name is more respected. I was so proud and happy when I heard that, I could have cried heartily. It is such a delight to be able to look up to one's husband, you know, Phemie?"

"You are a good wife!" Phemie laid her hand affectionately upon her sister's. "I like to

hear you talk of yourself and your household treasures. Baby is large of his age, isn't he? I don't know much about babies, but he seems to me a marvellously fine specimen for two months old."

"Large! I should think so!" Delighted Olive caught her up. "He weighed ten pounds when he was born. Nurse said she hadn't seen another like him in five years. And he is the best little thing! He hardly ever cries except when he has the colic. All healthy babies have that, you know. He recognizes his father already. Whenever Joe comes in, Baby turns his eyes towards him, and twice he has laughed right out when his father had him in his arms. I have no trouble with him when papa is in the house. He tends him beautifully. One night, when he had the colic *awfully*, the blessed man walked the floor with him three hours without stopping. Yet he was quite angry the next day, when Jane said what a pity it was Baby had been so cross and broken his—Joe's rest. 'Cross!' said Joe, more fiercely than I had ever heard him speak before. 'There's not another child in the country that wouldn't have cried twice as much with the same pain. He is never cross; and as to my rest, I had rather walk with him than sleep, any night!'"

"You have named him for his father, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes! Mother wrote that we must call him 'Rowland,' and dear Joe was for naming him Oliver after me. Miss Darcy said something witty about Rowland and Oliver. Joe can tell it to you exactly, but I always spoil a joke when I try to repeat it.

But no, I said, he should be his father's ownty-townty boy, and have his papa's name, so he should." She cooed the last sentence in the ear of the fat baby, stooping to lift him as he stretched out his dumpy arms and unclosed his pink lids. "Come to its mother, beauty, and show Aunt Phemie that he has his papa's eyes."

The paternal orbs being a light blue-gray, and so prominent as to convey the impression of distressing near-sightedness, the pulchritude of the scion was not enhanced by the revelation of the amazing likeness between the two pairs; but Phemie was in no humor for smiling, as she took the helpless little being into her arms and kissed its forehead.

"I wish you had one of your own, dear!" said Olive, fervently, moved by this appreciation of her darling to increased warmth of affection for the long-absent relative.

"I would not leave you childless, even to have one for myself," returned her sister. "You were always a great baby-lover, Olly. Nobody deserves better to have him than you do—unless it be Joe. When did you hear from mother?"

A family talk ensued in which Phemie questioned, and Olive answered so diffusively and so much to her own satisfaction, that she was amazed when her sister arose to depart, with the announcement that it was eleven o'clock.

"I have to see Emily and then pay Miss Darcy a visit before our one o'clock luncheon," she added, in apology for her haste.

“Stay and dine with us!” urged Olive. “Or come back when you have been to Emily’s. Joe will be delighted to see you. He thinks you the first of living women still, although he loves me best. That is because I suit him better than you would have done. But he has the highest regard for you.”

“Not more than I have for him. I cannot stay, however, much as I want to meet him. It is possible that Mr. Hart may be in to luncheon, and if he should, he will expect to see me.”

“I haven’t had time to ask you about him!” ejaculated Mrs. Bonney, conscience-smitten at her delinquency. “How is he? The fact is, Phemie, I have never been able to think of you two as one. I never associate him with you in my mind.”

“That is easily explained. You have seen so little of us since we were married,” rejoined Phemie, quietly. “He is well, thank you, and I suppose very busy. He has been away from home long enough to find a mountain of work accumulated against his return.”

“I know! Seth and Joe were talking about that last Sunday night. They were wondering how he could be spared for so many months at a time. Seth said he wouldn’t trust any partner out of his sight for almost a year. I suppose, though, that Mr. Mallory is a reliable man, and that Mr. Hart understands his own business best. That’s what Joe remarked when Seth and Emily had gone home. He holds that everything connected with you should be perfect.”

“He is very kind!” responded Phemie. “Mr. Hart has entire confidence in Mr. Mallory. They have been friends for years.”

“Do you always call him ‘Mr. Hart?’ How formal it sounds!” said Olive, curiously.

“I call him ‘Robert’ when I speak to him, unless there are others by. I have fallen into the address you speak of, because we have been surrounded by strangers so long.”

“And you won’t stay to dinner?” Olive expostulated, attending her guest to the upper hall. “You don’t eat scallop, I know, nor mince pie; but I will have potatoes, and milk, and brown biscuit. Joe always eats Graham bread.”

“Oh, I am not a strict vegetarian now; I found it inconvenient while we were abroad. A taste for meat is one of the foreign habits I have brought home with me. But I cannot stay to-day. I shall call again soon.”

“Joe and I may run in to see you this evening,” suggested Mrs. Bonney. “He will be wild to meet you, when he hears you are back. These are my parlors. Walk in!”

With housewifely pride she opened a shutter, and let in the light upon the Brussels carpet, with its sprawling wreaths of stupendous flowers, unlike any floral fleaks displayed by Nature since the birth of Adam; the hair-cloth, sofa-backed and bottomed chairs and lounges; the bright mahogany centre-table and quartette of spiral-legged stands; the embroidered ottomans and mantel ornaments of very

mock Parian. For the last gems of art, Olive had bartered a huge bagful of cast-off clothing, including two pairs of Joe's pantaloons, a coat, and a vest, so neglected before his marriage that his thrifty spouse sorrowfully pronounced them irreparable, and considered the groups of the sleeping shepherdess and sleepless fawn; the two gentlemen in cocked hats, full-bottomed wigs and knee-buckles, playing chess, and the more touching tableau of the youth with powdered curls and rapier, holding fast to the waist of the lady, in stomacher, farthingale, and high-heeled slippers—so much clear gain. She called her sister's attention to these, after allowing her time for a cursory survey of the apartments.

“I suppose you saw a great deal of this species of work abroad. We consider these very neatly-executed—really spirited casts.”

She was astonished at her own command of art-phrases. It must have been the inspiration of the marbles. (?)

“We saw many celebrated statues,” rejoined the other. “Olly! I should have known who was the mistress of this house if I had entered it accidentally. You are the same neat busy-bee as ever. Tell Joe from me that his wife is a jewel—something better, for jewels have no intrinsic worth. Good-by, dear! Cannot you spare a morning to me before long? My rooms are Nos. 20 and 22. Come directly to them. You will always find me there between nine and twelve, unless I am here or at Emily's. I am not half talked out.”

Olive was slightly disconcerted in rehearsing this one of their confabulations to her husband, to find how indifferent was her recollection of what Phemie had related concerning herself. She had arrived the preceding evening, and was staying, for the present, at the Lacroix, Nos. 20 and 22. Mr. Hart was well and busy, and might be in at luncheon-time, therefore she must return to the hotel, *malgré* the temptation of the scallop, and Joe's company, and the baby's, to whom "she took wonderfully," the mother related.

"That was not surprising," said Joe, who had the blessed infant upon his knees, trotting him gently over the boundaries dividing the waking from the sleeping world.

"Of course not, but Phemie isn't given to extravaganzas, and the way she looked at and handled him really gratified me."

"How is she looking?"

"Very well. Handsomer than ever. But she has a more settled air about her, and there is a little difference in her manner of talking. She speaks lower and in a kind of 'even-on' way, you understand? She isn't so bright and lively in her words and her way of bringing them out as she was when a girl. You used to think her sharp, and she was sometimes awfully satirical. It was her great fault. I am glad she has corrected it. One thing I didn't like altogether, she has lightened her mourning more than Em and I have. Her hat was shirred black silk without a speck of crape about it, and she had on white under-sleeves and collar. I had not thought she

would be in a hurry to lay off mourning for poor Charlotte. They were so fond of one another. I do hope and pray that Phemie may not be growing into a heartless woman of the world!"

Mrs. Hart's luncheon and dinner toilets were utterly devoid of the insignia of woe. Mr. Hart did not make his appearance at the former meal, and his wife exchanged the brown silk she had worn then for one more costly and showy as the evening drew on. The tint was that of a deeply glowing ruby, the cut and finish were Parisian, and her ornaments were diamonds. After many trials of the coiffeur's skill, she had failed to discover a method of dressing her abundant hair that became her as did the old sweep from left to right across her broad forehead. It was a trifle *outré*, her husband complained, but he acknowledged that it looked well on her, that she was not herself in appearance without the banded crown. Completing her costume by throwing about her superb shoulders a point-lace shawl, she took from a drawer of her dressing-cabinet a book and a letter—a sealed envelope—and passed into the adjacent parlor to await her husband's coming. She was restless and fluttered by anxiety or expectancy, as was manifested by her laying the book and envelope, first upon the mantel, then on the table in the downward glare of the chandelier, next on the piano at the back of the apartment, and finally shutting up both in her writing desk, which she locked with a golden key suspended to her watch-chain. This disposed of, she was no more tranquil in feature or movement. She roam-

ed from window to window, ran her fingers lightly over the keys of the piano-forte, picked up a book as she paused by the centre-table and turned the leaves abstractedly, and, standing upon the rug, the rich wine-color of her dress ruddying the polished marble of the mantel, interlaced her fingers nervously and gazed down into the fire, rapt in deep or perplexing thought.

“If he should disapprove after all! And yet—how can he? It was a great venture for me. It seems to my unpractised eyes a great victory. It will be but an incident, and not an important one in his wider experience of literary experiments and successes. But he must be gratified! He will accord me sympathy and approbation. Dear Miss Darcy! Her congratulations gave me the faint foretaste of the reward I shall know in his praises!”

The agitated murmur was hushed long before he came. It was fifteen minutes past the dinner hour when he appeared. He was not looking better for his year of travel. His complexion was less clear, his eye less pleasant, and to-night there was a jaded frown on his face that added years, not months, to his apparent age.

“Why did you wait for me?” he asked, as his wife received his hasty kiss. “I have been driven like a dog all day. You didn’t expect me to luncheon, of course. I told you I should not be able to come.”

“I am sorry you have had a fatiguing day!” Phemie’s manner was unruffled now, her tone studiously gentle. “Can I help you dress?”

“If you are in a hurry, you had better go down without me. Don't stay here on my account, I beg. It drives me crazy to know you are waiting for me!”

“I am in no haste whatever. We can get our dinner as comfortably half an hour hence as now. I prefer entering the dining-room after the rush of hungry guests is over.”

“You say that because I am late,” rejoined the husband, from the threshold of the bedroom. “I am obliged to you for your considerate ingenuity, but I do not acknowledge the need of apologies for my tardiness. I came as soon as I could, and, as I have had occasion to remark several times before, I will not be schooled like a child; be called to account for my movements by you or any one else.”

Phemie had seated herself by the table facing the grate. Her eyes did not glisten nor her cheek pale at this pettish ebullition of her lord's uncertain temper. He rarely threw her off her guard after a glance at his countenance had apprised her that fitful weather might be apprehended. Something had crossed him to-day, and he was tired and hungry. She had not lived with him eleven months and not learned how sufficient was any one of these causes to disturb his equanimity. She had not learned, however, that while the humor possessed him, her composure was fuel to the kindling flame, and that his sensations in reviewing his unquiet turns would have been more agreeable, or less unpleasant, had he succeeded in striking from the flint of her temper an answering spark.

His bath and toilet had begun the work of renovation upon the inner man also when he rejoined her. She laid down the book she had caught up at haphazard that she might not be accused of sulky moping, and looked up with a smile at his approach.

“I know you are worn out waiting for me, my dear,” he said, mollified to patronage by the ameliorating influences just named; “but you must not lose sight, hereafter, of the fact that our holiday is over; I cannot be your shadow here as when we were abroad. Now, shall we go down?”

He was in a sunny mood by the time dinner was over. He was not, strictly speaking, effeminate, but he loved the good things of life—cheering wines, delicate and savory viands, handsome rooms, warm and light in winter, shaded to coolness in summer. A fine cigar or a chibouque of Turkish tobacco was welcome to his judicious palate and olfactories, and gently soothing to his soul. He liked sweet music, the sound of a well-modulated feminine voice, and he was very proud of his wife. Once back in their parlor, he held her off at arm's length, that he might feast his eyes, and told her how surpassingly beautiful she was.

“It would be too bad were all this magnificence wasted upon me,” he said, gayly. “I should not be surprised if Mallory were to look in, by and by. He hinted at some such design. I shall be most happy to introduce you to him. His wife is a mere parcel of faded affectations, done up like a gaudy fashion-plate, when compared to you. You get handsomer

every day, and, by Jove! I believe you know it, you vixen! I am a fool to please you by telling you of it!" pinching her cheek.

"Indeed, I never cared for my good looks, Robert, except as they make you love me better and give you pleasure. I am glad you like me as I am to-night, for I have a confession to make, and I want to bribe you to indulgent judgment. Sit down, and let me fill and light your pet meerschaum."

The day had been, and not long before her marriage, when the smell of tobacco was odious to her, but she had conquered the repugnance, because he was a true lover of the weed. She produced the favorite pipe from its case, filled it and gave the amber stem into his hand, then kindled an allumette at the chandelier, he watching, the while, the effect of the vivid falling light upon her upraised face, the graceful curve of her arm, from which the lace sleeve had slipped aside as she lifted it, and the harmony of her striking attire with her brunette beauty. It was a comfortable thing to have a picture like that before his eyes every evening, and to know that it was his—all his—and his alone. He had his mannerisms, like the rest of the human race, and one of these was to talk largely of his love for the æsthetic. He said to himself, now, that he had proved his taste in this regard triumphantly in his selection of a wife. He wished a dozen of the best judges of anatomy, contour, and coloring in town were likely to drop in during the evening instead of Mallory, who had not a particle of taste for pictures and statuary.

Phemie lighted his meerschaum, was repaid for the service by a kiss flavored with tobacco-smoke, and seated herself beside her sultan.

“You will hear me through before pronouncing the verdict, however unpromising the preamble may be?” she stipulated, and Robert engaged, between two whiffs of Latakia, to do as she wished.





CHAPTER IX.

AT the time of our marriage," began Phemie, "you insisted upon bearing the sole expense of Albert's education at the Institute for the Blind, and carried your point in spite of my remonstrances."

"There was no one else to pay the boy's way, my child," interrupted the husband, a *soupçon* of contempt touching his patronizing indulgence. "Your estimable brothers-in-law are not given to devising liberal things, and I knew it would distress you greatly if your brother were withdrawn from school. I could not do less than to offer to maintain him there. I have never regretted the action. I grudge you no gratification that money can procure."

"I know it well—too well!" said Phemie, hastily. "You are the soul of generosity. But it did not seem just to me that you should be burdened with the support of one not of your blood or kind, and Albert shared my feeling to the utmost. Before I parted from him, I assured him that his debt should be to me, and not to you. A sister has the right to

assist a brother until he can take care of himself. Through a friend, I secured the place of foreign correspondent to the *Weekly Post*, of this city, and while abroad I sent home letters for this with tolerable regularity. They were nothing in themselves—were gossiping notes of what I saw and heard in those strange countries, but they met with favor on this side of the water, and I was paid well for them. The money was given to a person whom I had empowered to receive it, and appropriated to the payment of Albert's board and tuition bills. The sum you left in bank for that purpose lies there still, untouched. Don't speak yet, Robert! Let me tell you why I acted thus. I have accepted all you have done for me personally, without objection or diffidence. But I had said to you when you asked me to marry you, that my relatives should never be clogs upon you. Albert is sensitive—foolishly proud, perhaps—but I was unwilling to add to the hardships of his condition the oppressive sense of obligation to one upon whom he had no legal claim. You are liberal to a fault, and appreciating this as we both do, it seemed the less expedient that we should avail ourselves of your noble offer. You are as truly Albert's benefactor as if he had lived upon your bounty for the year which is past, and you have enjoyed the blessing of giving—the sweet consciousness that you had spared from your abundance the means to succor the needy. My plan has, all along, been this—to confess what I had done, to you, on our return, and propose myself as your almoner in the work of distributing the money

intended for my brother among several needy families of which I have knowledge—whom I used to aid in such ways as my limited means would allow. I do not insult or pain you, by refunding the amount. I only divert it into other channels of benevolence.

“Please do not answer me yet!” with the pretty, appealing gesture she had used before to ward off the storm threatened by the lowering brow and parting lips. “You promised to hear me through. These letters were dashed off at odd moments, and I still had a superabundance of leisure upon my hands in the lazy, pleasant life we led abroad. One day it occurred to me to write a book. There was much in my mind and heart that I wanted to say. I longed to do my full work in the world, instead of living for my selfish gratification. If God had given me strength, it seemed to me that I should help the weak. If courage, I ought to cheer the desponding. If knowledge were mine, it should be shared with those who were now ignorant. Sometimes, when I was alone and thoughtful, the strong necessity of expression bore upon me with *terrible* weight. I dared not keep silence. The yearning over the weary-hearted, the poor in spirit, the afflicted of my kind, was to me like the inspiration of my guardian angel. I wrote it all down—or all that I could set down in written words—and sent it, through a friend, to Mr. Mallory. He had no intimation that I was the author. He does not suspect it yet, but his reader approved of the manuscript, and the book was published two months ago. He wrote to you about it, and the mystery at-

tending the authorship. The critics have dealt very leniently with it, and the reading public take to it kindly. Here it is!" She brought it forward, and bent her knee in playful homage, as she presented it. "I ordered that one copy should be bound in your favorite style, as a gift to you—my husband!"

She stood before him, with wistful eyes and palpitating heart, while he unclosed the elegant volume. The sealed envelope dropped from between the leaves, and several slips of printed paper, apparently clipped from newspapers. He opened the former first. It contained four checks, he recollected to have given his wife at different times, to be forwarded to Mr. Mandell, or whomsoever she might select as the fittest person to receive and pay Albert's quarterly bills.

An angry flash went over his countenance, as he recognized them. He examined each to assure himself that it was genuine; laid them evenly together, tore the four through the middle at one spasm of finger-fury, and tossed the fragments into the grate. Phemie uttered an exclamation, as of one who had been struck sharply across the face; put her hands before her eyes and sat down, without another sound, her fingers still pressed hard upon her lids to drive back the tears, or shut out the sight of his white, mute wrath. She heard the rustle of the printed extracts, as he unfolded them. They were critical notices of her work, from papers for which she knew he had great respect, all complimentary of the style, aim, and plot of the anonymous volume, and pro-

phetic of a brilliant and useful career to the author. Mr. Hart glanced them over, laying each aside as he finished it, with very much the same action as that which had committed the checks to the flames.

“You would like to keep these, I suppose,” he said, dryly, when the last was huddled with the others into a little heap, and pushed to the opposite side of the centre-table. “If you were familiar as I am with the machinery of critic-making, you might not treasure them so carefully. Mallory was talking to me about this book to-day. He has expended a ridiculously large sum in advertising, which includes puffing. We have a first-class puffer connected with our establishment. These were undoubtedly paid for by the firm at so much per line.”

He waited for an answer, but none came. Phemie sat, still and silent, looking into the fire, where the charred papers were changing into gray gossamer the inky characters still blackly distinct upon them. Mr. Hart collected his thoughts and words while relighting the pipe he had let go out in listening to his wife's story.

“I will not do your understanding injustice by imagining for a moment, Phemie, that you hoped to give me pleasure by the course you have pursued with reference to Albert, and in your literary enterprise. You must have foreseen, from the beginning of your clandestine operations, that the knowledge of them could bring me nothing but pain and mortification. They are fresh and more decided developments of your wilful purpose to live and act independently

of me—to assert this independence, and, in time, your sovereignty. Without suspecting what was your occupation at those hours which I was compelled to pass out of your society—certainly with no misgivings that you were abusing the confidence I reposed in you by preparing a plan for my discomfiture, I have yet felt, for many months, that our lives were being sundered, instead of united, by every day we lived together. Your interests, views, sympathies, tastes—have become more and more unlike mine from the day of our marriage until now. In the pride of intellect, which is your besetting sin, you have learned to look down upon your husband as a being of a lower sphere; have panted for distinction and popular applause; have, according to your own confession, found the course of your married life tame and insipid; its duties and enjoyments inadequate to fill the measure of your cravings—‘your spirit-needs,’ I believe that is the accepted phrase. Most women ask no happier and higher lot than to make their homes happy to the men of their choice; find their mission in the ‘queendom of a simple wife.’ You once dreamed, or told me you dreamed that it would be the same with you. There was no talk about the ‘strong necessity’ of a wider field of action then!”

The pipe needed very hard puffing to rekindle it, just here. He resumed, when this was achieved:

“That you are dissatisfied and ambitious is not my fault. I have nothing with which to charge myself in the failure of your expectations. I say it in no vainglorious spirit, but in sheer self-justification

against the accusations implied by your discontent ; but not many husbands have striven more zealously and constantly than I to secure the happiness of a wife. I have given you foreign travel ; access to works of art you had never dared hope to see ; money and refined society in place of a life of toil and isolation from all elevating influences. I required in return only your affection and your contentment with the destiny I had brought you. If your love equalled mine for you, the longings you describe would never have beset you. If you had rightly understood and valued my devotion, you would not have insulted me by hurling back upon me my well-meant gift to your brother, with the arrogant declaration that you could provide for those of your own blood, and asked no favors at the hands of an alien."

"Oh, Robert !" Phemie made an impetuous movement toward him.

He stopped her by a magisterial wave of the hand. "May I ask the same degree of indulgence from you that you demanded from me while you made your address ? I have not your command of language, but I will try to make myself intelligible. You decline, as does your brother, your pupil and confidant, to receive pecuniary assistance from your husband. You let me go on, pleasing myself with the notion that I have benefited him and made him happy by so doing for twelve months, you, meanwhile, laughing in your sleeve at the idiotic complacency of your dupe. Your accredited agent in the pious fraud practised upon the husband who loved and trusted you, was, doubt-

less, your bosom friend and trainer, Miss Darcy. The project reveals the parentage at the first blush."

Phemie looked up as if to speak, but recollected the injunction to silence.

"I have made no secret to you of my opinion of that woman. I may observe here, parenthetically, that from you I have had *no* reserves. I have repeated to you the glaring insult she offered me in exchange for my confidence when I told her of my love for you. She taunted me with my inferiority to you, and warned me that this would become more manifest the longer we lived together—that simple love, the offering up of a whole nature and existence to your service, would not content your aspiring spirit. Tell her from me, as I doubt not you have already done for yourself in action, if not in words, that she was a true prophetess; that the seed she scattered in your mind fell upon good soil and bids fair to bring forth fruit to her delight, to your glory, and my confusion. In this book you have ventilated the principles with which she has indoctrinated you. Mallory tells me it has taken tremendously with strong-minded females and radicals, and your editorial critics mean the same thing when they laud your 'enlarged views,' your 'breadth and vigor of thought,' and your 'earnest philanthropy.' You have written a readable book—one that will increase the amount of your private hoard and enable you to befriend as many more relations as you please to help. But you have unsexed yourself, and built a wall of distrust between yourself and me. Hereafter—or so soon as the real name of

the now anonymous novelist is known—we shall be enrolled before the public as ‘Mrs. Hart *and husband.*’ The title sounds agreeably in your ears, I suppose. It is a matter of no consequence how it impresses me. I should forget my loss of manliness, as the husbands of other distinguished Mesdames Jellyby have to do, while their spouses honor them by living under the same roof with them—by sunning myself in the reflection of your fame.”

In his exasperation at the picture he had drawn he resigned his pipe altogether and stood up, rearing his fine figure to its full height, stamping the left boot-heel, then the right, upon the velvet rug, and plucking, in an irritated way, at his beard, assertive of physical manliness if his intellectual supremacy *were* menaced by his subordinate’s audacity.

Still Phemie was mute, and did not alter her position. There were dreary depths in her brown eyes he did not see, and which he could not have fathomed if he had. If he had looked closely he would have noted the quiver of the nostril and the squarer outline of the lower jaw, within which the locked teeth kept the tongue a prisoner; but he thought her callous or defiant. A turn through the room brought him back to the hearth-rug, where he assumed another eminently masculine attitude, planting himself in the centre, his back to the fire, his hands crossed under his coat-skirts, and his legs well apart.

“I know more of literary women than you do. It is politic for a man in my business to treat them with a certain degree of respect and politeness. But I

detest the class. They are the most arrant and obtrusive set of egotists under heaven. They write their own lives over and over, until the public taste revolts, and then they make capital of their friends. The best of them are wretched copyists—and the best are few in number. Their loves, their hates, their griefs, are so much available capital to be served up in strongly italicized manuscript at whatever they can get per page. They are mercenary to a proverb—grasping and grinding, with all their talk of doing good, helping the weak and the like bosh. They write for money! money! and the only way to quench their genius is not to pay them. The ‘strong necessity of expression’ deserts them forthwith when said expression brings no return in current bank-notes.”

He stamped again, shaking each foot as if his knees had suddenly grown too big for his pantaloons.

Phemie raised her eyes after a minute.

“May I speak now?”

“Don’t affect any slavish airs, Phemie! I have not tried to gag you!” he said, roughly, nettled by the calm courtesy of the request.

She had him at a disadvantage already.

“With regard to the provision for my brother’s tuition, I can only reiterate my assertion that I was actuated by no unworthy motives in undertaking the task. Excepting Albert and myself, my brother-in-law, Mr. Bonney, is the only person who knows that your design was not carried into effect. Mr. Bonney is the friend of whom I spoke as authorized by me to receive and pay out the proceeds of my contributions

to the *Post*. He has never spoken of it, even to his wife."

"This accomplished gentleman was hardly the sponsor of your published volume, I take it," sneered Robert. "If he was, the negotiations must have been of an original character."

"He was not. I transmitted the MS. to Miss Darcy because I had no other literary acquaintance whom I could trouble with it. She knew it was intended as an agreeable surprise to you. She shall never hear through me that I have been disappointed in my hope. If I had surmised that you would be displeased with me for attempting authorship, I would never have penned a line. You encouraged me to study and write before our marriage"—

"As a means of procuring your livelihood!" he interrupted. "As my wife, you are raised above such necessity."

Phemie did not retort upon him with his invective against those who rode Pegasus for the plate he might win. She bent her head, instead, with proud humility, in replying.

"I am—and I thank you for it! I have no ambition to acquire wealth, or even a moderate competence by my own labor. I have stated my reasons for writing. Not the least incentive that urged me to the work was the anticipation of your approval. You had often expressed your pride in my quickness of intellect, and I longed to justify it. I sincerely believed that whatever applause I might win from competent judges of such productions would be as

much and more to you than to me. I could not see how it could be otherwise."

"Thank you!" with an ironical bow, "I do not care to soar upon borrowed pinions—least of all, when my wife is the lender."

"I can say no more!" said Phemie, in patient despair. "I have made a great mistake. If I could correct it—undo what I have done—unsay what I have said, I would leave you no room for complaint."

"I have not complained. I do not seek to abridge your liberty. If you are emulous of martyrdom, you will not receive it from me. The fault is not in what you have done, but in the feeling that prompted the act. It would be no reparation to me were you to hold your hands in enforced idleness, while your spirit chafed at the bonds laid upon you by my wishes. I have failed utterly and ignominiously in filling the desires of your heart and mind. Miss Darcy said it would be so—that she knew you better than I did. She spoke sound and sober truth for once. I wish I had believed her then!"

"Robert! are you sorry that you married me?"

"That question is the prompting of your own misgivings, not a legitimate inference from anything I have said," returned the ill-used husband, majestically. "I submit it to your consciousness whether I have ever come so far short of my duty as to justify you in asking it."

"I do not in the least comprehend how we reached this point," said Phemie, in piteous bewilderment. "I have displeased and wounded you, and I would

make amends. Cannot I withdraw this book from circulation?" eying it with a look of abhorrence. "It shall never be known that I wrote it, come what may; but I would have it die out of the public mind entirely."

"There it is! Trust a woman to rush to extremes when her slightest wish is thwarted! Tell her she is a little lower than the angels, and she perversely declares she is worse than the devils! Who said anything about suppressing the work? It is readable, according to the critics, and is selling tolerably well. You took sweet delight, found divine comfort in the miseries of your association with an uncongenial partner in writing it. Keep your bantling! It is nothing to me. If you write no more, it will be an incessant reproach to my cruelty—a fine text for Miss Darcy in her next lecture upon woman's wrongs. You have chosen your path; I shall not seek to divert your feet from it."

At this juncture of the dialogue a rap was heard at the door, and Phemie escaped to her chamber, forgetting the hapless gift-volume left lying upon the table. She heard the hearty salutation exchanged in the other room, and, foreseeing that she would presently be summoned to appear, had instant recourse to her usual expedient for checking hysterical emotion—to wit—bathing her face, eyes, temples, and wrists freely in cold water. She had hardly dried the evidences of the bath that had served her in lieu of that prime resort of suffering femininity—"a good cry"—when Robert came in.

"Mallory is in the parlor, and wants to see you. Will you come in?"

His cold, injured tone was not inviting, but Phemie's response was ready. "With pleasure!" she said, and followed him into the presence of his friend.

"I believe I had the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Hart slightly in her early youth," said the suave partner, bowing over the lady's hand. "My sisters remember you well and affectionately. Clara would have accompanied me to-night, had she not been prevented by a prior engagement. Mrs. Mallory desired me to present her regrets that a severe headache kept her at home, when she would gladly have been among the earliest to welcome you back to America."

Not one word of which Euphemia believed, as she scanned his cunning eyes and bland mouth, each giving the lie positive and direct to the other. The introduction was barely over, when there was a fresh importation of guests—Mr. and Mrs. Bonney. Phemie went forward to greet them without outward tokens of perturbation, but with a mind distraught and a failing heart. Her relatives could not have chosen a more inopportune season for their visit. Her reception of them was affectionate, although she felt the import of Olive's start and stare at sight of her gay attire, and the dignified reproach she tried to infuse into her address. "Ah, Phemie! I did not know you when we came in."

With an ostentatious flirt of her mourning veil, and a lugubrious demeanor, she passed the delinquent to speak to her brother-in-law. If Phemie's transgres-

sion was levity, Mr. Hart should have atoned for it by his saturnine smile and frigid civility. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bonney were well-enough people in their walk of life, but they were the antipodes of fashionable, and Mallory would carry home to his wife and sisters, who were fashionists, a truthful description of the pair. By the time it was Joe's turn to salute his host, the latter might have been a galvanized iron statue, or anything else grim and forbidding, so insufficient was his courtesy to the demands of the trying occasion. They all sat down, when reception and introduction were through; Mr. Hart, stately and cross; Joe abashed; Olive slowly recovering from the slight put upon "poor, dear Charlotte," by Phemie's ruby silk; Mr. Mallory politely reserved until the greetings of the kinspeople should be accomplished, and Phemie desperate.

"How is the little man to-night?" she interrogated her sister. "He is too young to pay evening calls, I suppose?"

"He is very well, thank you!" rejoined Olive, with extreme gravity. "Or, I should not be here," accompanied by a glance intended to convey the self-gratulation,—“I know what is due to *my* family; have some remnants of affection for them—thank Heaven!”

It was not lost upon Phemie, but she turned to Joe with undiminished cordiality. "He is very like you, Mr. Bonney."

"What airs!" said Olive's *retroussé* nose. "She won't call him 'Joe,' because there are two grand

gentlemen by. Thank Heaven!" (again), "I am not ashamed of *my* relatives!"

"Do you think so?" simpered Joe, in reply to his sister-in-law.

Not being able, in the rebuking presence of his wife, and under the shadow of the hostly iceberg, to think of anything else to say, he looked like a fool.

In compassion to his sheepishness, Phemie returned to Olive. "I saw Emily to-day. She is not looking very well, I think. I am afraid her health is less firm than it used to be."

"Emily is very domestic," Olive stated, her eyes upon the point-lace shawl. "She never neglects her home duties or allows anything to take the place of her family in her mind. Perhaps she does look a little worn out. She has never been quite herself since poor Charlotte's death. There are some hearts"—studying the pattern of Phemie's diamond brooch—"that cherish the memory of a friend longer than others."

Joe colored and looked down. Mr. Hart's lip twitched contemptuously. Phemie appeared not to feel the lash that curled about her lace-veiled shoulders. Perhaps, upon the principle that obtains in regions infested by mosquitoes and gad-flies, where the process of acclimation is to be stung all over, the most impudent of the minute tormentors never presenting his bill where one of his brethren has previously settled.

"How cold it has grown since morning!" Phemie essayed a general, and, she hoped, a perfectly safe topic.

“Do you think so?” answered the unappeased Olive. “Now, I was saying to Joe, as we came along, that the weather was unusually mild for the season. But we American ladies adapt our dress to the climate. I suppose you have thoroughly adopted the fashions and become accustomed to the air of Paris. Most travelled ladies can live nowhere else.”

A gay exclamation from Mr. Mallory interrupted the uncomfortable scene. “Proved!” he cried, holding up the presentation volume he had taken from the table. “This is the copy which was prepared at the request of the author. I have confirmation strong of what my sister Clara has affirmed from the first. In our anxiety to discover the name of the author of the most popular novel of the day, we divided a portion of the MS. after the book was issued, into separate sheets, and showed them to a number of friends, mostly literati, hoping to identify the Nameless by means of her chirography. My sister, chancing to see one of these, declared it to be your handwriting, Mrs. Hart, and so closely did it correspond with that of certain notes, received by her in her school days, that my own suspicions were excited by the circumstance. I caused search to be made for the MS. of a little volume—a compendium of chemistry, which we published for you, two years or more since, but it could not be found. I sounded Hart, here, dexterously upon the subject to-day, but was soon convinced that he knew nothing of the matter—less even than did I—or that he had become a proficient in diplomatic concealment under your tutelage.”

His laughing exultation faded perceptibly, as he glanced from the clouded face of the husband to the impassive one of the wife.

“I beg your pardon, if I have made an incautious revelation, but I supposed as there were only friends here”—his eye passing to the astounded Bonneys—“that I might congratulate you upon the eminent success of your work, and the skill with which you have heretofore maintained your incognita. I pledge myself for the company present that there shall be no violation of this in general gossip, or in print, should you object to the disclosure. It would be a grand card for our house, though, Hart—the story that one of our firm could get up a book like this.”

“Hardly one of the firm,” replied the other, coolly. “It is a private venture of Mrs. Hart’s. I had no idea that she was infected with the *cacoethes scribendi*, until this evening, when she exhibited the proof in Russia antique, bevelled edges and cream-tinted paper. I could not have been more amazed had she chosen to appear in full Bloomer costume.”

Olive tittered, and Joe opened his mouth with such an effort, one could have fancied that his jaws creaked. “It is called a fine thing, I believe,” he said, pointedly, to Mr. Mallory. “Everybody who has read it speaks well of it. I have never enjoyed a book more, although I didn’t know who wrote it. I am not much of a reader, and no critic, but I like what goes to my heart and makes me feel better and happier. You have done a great deal of good, Phemie, and you ought to be proud of it. My

thanks are worth as little, maybe, as my opinion, but I do thank you for the pleasure and profit I have derived from your work. I hope you will live to write a hundred more as good and interesting."

There were dew and fire in Phemie's eyes, and the faint tremble of a smile about her mouth as she bowed her gratitude. "You are kind to tell me so! It is I who should thank you."

While she said it, a thought smote her like a stiletto. "Has it then come to this, that Joe Bonney is my champion against my husband?"

Mr. Mallory was acute enough, and sufficiently versed in his partner's weaknesses to take in the situation, and enjoyed it maliciously. "Mr. Bonney is a truthful exponent of popular opinion," he said, shedding his bland smile lavishly over Joe. "And as for you, Hart, you are an ungrateful dog not to be overjoyed at your wife's glory. Genius is always modest, but there is no rule that calls for shamefacedness on your part, unless it be that yours is the natural diffidence of the moon when the sun is by."

"You have hit it exactly," Robert roused himself to say, with a grating laugh. "The suddenness of the eclipse has taken my breath away—that is all."

The Bonneys had little encouragement in the geniality of the company to prolong their stay.

"I had not patience to sit a minute longer!" said Olive to her spouse, during their homeward walk. "To see her bedizened like a queen or—or—an ac-

tress, in that flaming red silk and flimsy white shawl—the two together cost as much as her year's salary used to be—and proud as a peacock of her fine clothes and elegant rooms, and the compliments you men were loading her with about her new book! I declare, it was enough to make the hair stand up on one's head, when poor, dear Charlotte hasn't been in her grave sixteen months, and the very least decency requires of the near relatives is to wear crape and bombazine for two full years. And she to dress up in black when she came to call on me, to deceive me into the idea that she was in mourning still! Did you ever hear of such hypocrisy?"

"I don't think Phemie is a hypocrite, my dear," objected Joe, mildly. "I have no doubt she took off black for some good reason—probably to please her husband. He is just the sort of man to be unreasonable in such matters, and she is the kind of woman to give up her own tastes and feelings to gratify him. I am afraid he does not appreciate her. He was always a conceited fellow, and to me, now, he is unbearable. We shall always be glad to see Phemie in our house, Olly. Don't be hasty in your judgment of what you don't understand and don't like about her. If there is any change, it is of *his* making, not hers. As I said, she shall always be welcome in our house, but don't ask me to go there again when Hart is at home. I won't do it!"

When Mr. Mallory took his leave, his partner volunteered to accompany him a few blocks on his way. Phemie, left alone, gathered up her book and the

newspaper notices, and crept away with them to her room, where she locked them out of sight in the bottom of her trunk, and knelt beside it to pray, her arm embracing it and her head laid upon it, as painters portray mourners over fresh graves.





CHAPTER X.

MRS. HART was the belle of that year and the next in town and at watering-places. The *eclat* of her beauty and conversational talents was heightened by the flattering reputation she had gained by her book, especially when the gay world discovered that she was “not a bit of a blue”—quite as accessible as a woman who could not spell ten consecutive words correctly, and with no more nonsense about her than characterized the sweet creatures who did not know the difference between writing a book and publishing one, and who lisped behind her back “how queer it was that the first people should have taken her up so! Wasn’t she a printer, or an author, or something else low?”

Mr. Hart had hired a handsome house the spring of his return, furnished it, and thrown open his doors to his former friends and such new ones as were attracted by his hospitality, his wife’s renown as a hostess and a charming woman, and the delightful reunions for which his abode had become celebrated.

Lest I should seem remiss in crediting with a just share of exclusiveness the circle that had embraced him as a member in his bachelor days, I remark that the "gates on golden hinges turning" gave reluctant entrance for a time to the handsome and gifted, but "so obscure" person he had endowed with his name and fortune. There were horrible whispers in circulation about her former station and calling, and patrician noses sniffed the taint of her vulgar antecedents with keenness worthy of the owners of pedigrees a generation and a half old. She lived through it and lived it down, partly by her innate ladyhood, principally by means of her husband's reputed wealth, his assured social standing, and the facilities afforded for flirtations, dancing, music, and elegant suppers by his resolve to place himself and his wife in the foremost rank of the fashionable world. He moved forward to the accomplishment of this end without consultation with his co-worker. If she had her ambition, he had his. He believed the more readily that she courted popularity as an end, not as a means, because he was aware how far the desire to acquit himself gallantly in the sight of his fellows, to be noticed and praised and imitated, entered into his philanthropic and social schemes. Self-conceit with him often took a more pleasing guise than the commoner manifestations of puppy-like vanity and straining after theatrical effect.

He cultivated a gracious and graceful *bonhomie* to all classes, and disdained the responsive tribute of applause and good-will from none. Mallory was

generally known to be the shrewder and more sordid man of the two, but Hart's *rôle* in the business was prominent and important. He had the gift of ingratiating himself with otherwise unmanageable parties; of conciliating the irate, and, as his partner expressed it, "doing the universally popular." In this line his fine personal appearance, his easy, pleasant laugh, and his love of playing the munificent patron worked up to advantage, and brought him in large returns of the coin he liked best—flattering notice wherever he went; made of him a man of mark in his orbit.

We have seen how his love for Phemie Rowland broke in upon his bright, smooth life like the burst of a mountain torrent; tearing up the foundations of conventional prejudice; carrying before it reason, expediency—everything that should have dissuaded him from the mad course toward which he found himself impelled. He loved popular approval, but he loved his own ease and happiness better—better than he did the woman he professed to adore. She intoxicated his senses; took his imagination captive; and when senses and fancy were sobered by possession, he began slowly—at first, unwillingly—to acknowledge to himself that he had not acted wisely—for Robert Hart—in marrying out of his sphere. So long as she rendered him the unquestioning devotion of a grateful underling—fed his self-love with her deferential admiration, he was ready, in turn, to account her faultless. But when a few unguarded phrases indicative of extreme selfishness and puerile pettishness had

fallen from him, and the upward regards of her beautiful eyes changed to calm self-restraint; when she learned to be cautious of exciting his ill-humor, and, in her sincerity, was less demonstrative of expressions of unbounded confidence in his judgment; less enthusiastic in her avowals of affection; the work of mutual disenchantment progressed with lamentable rapidity. She had overrated him—his character and his mental powers. His was not the heart or the comprehension to appreciate rightly that which was most noble in her.

From the unfortunate evening, the main event of which was chronicled in our last chapter, the subject of her literary labors was not mentioned between them. This reserve did not imply absolute estrangement. Love, the Healer, has a faculty, all and beautifully his own, of salving over heart-wounds, however deep and gaping, so long as inconstancy had no part in producing them. There may be in the breast, both of husband and wife, many closed chambers, sealed with the signet "Nevermore," and Love still reign, undisputed, although not glad sovereign of the whole. It was a curious, and soon a recognized fact among those who met the Harts habitually, that homage paid to Phemie's beauty, manners, and dress was acceptable to her lord, as praise of her intellectual gifts was distasteful. He would survey her with a delighted smile that won for him the reputation of uxorious fondness, as she sailed down the dance, or moved slowly through a crowd of pleasure-seekers, scattering smiles and light words as

she went, and leaving after her a wake of admiring glances and whispered compliments to her imperial loveliness. He never doubted, at such moments, that he loved her, never questioned the propriety of the step that had made him the owner of this glorious accessory to his importance and reputation as a man of fashion and taste. She was his wife, and none could name her without remembering whose property she was ; at whose pleasure she sparkled, or was withdrawn from the visible firmament of belles.

His control over her in these respects was absolute. With her, when he said "Shine!" it was literally as the heathen centurion—whose faith stands the rebuking monument to doubting believers—described the stern discipline to which he had been bred—"Do this, and it was done." Done ; but, if without hesitation, also without joyousness. She never cavilled at his will, but she never applauded his mandates. A cunning woman would have added to the power her charms gave her over him, the more subtle influence of flattery of his caprices, indulgence of his humors. Phemie was too honest for cajolery. She could obey an unreasonable behest, but she would not aver that it was the acme of wisdom, or even act as if obedience were a delight. She walked through the routine of gayety and hospitality appointed by him with painstaking fidelity—the tranquil mien and immovable perseverance that had distinguished her discharge of the duties incumbent upon her as Mr. Arnold's book-keeper. If she felt the separation from her friend, Miss Darcy, and the gradual widening of the distance

dividing her sisters' lives of homely domesticity from hers, she never breathed it. To whom should she vent her regret? She rarely saw Miss Darcy. She could not be a welcome guest in Robert's house, and she never came to it. Albert, whom Phemie often had with her, was Robert's beneficiary, and blissfully ignorant of the sunken rocks beneath a sea that smiled so fair, while Emily and Olive plainly and not amiably resented her superior wealth and degree, and condemned unsparingly what they termed her "foreign follies."

If the celebrity attendant upon Mr. Mallory's proclamation of her authorship were dust and ashes between her husband's teeth, it was to her a cup of wormwood, continually presented to her lips less by the untimely, or well-turned praises of strangers and officious acquaintances, than by the averted look, the cold word, or colder silence which were some of Robert's methods of expressing his disrelish of the topic. She had schooled herself to repress the exhibition of her loathing of what was meant to please and to reward; had studied the set phrase of dignified acceptance; of modest disclaim; the gentle smile that thanks the appreciative critic; the dexterous play of words that repays compliment with compliment, and changes the grateful giver into the gratified recipient. There were few who excelled her in these arts. Her husband, looking on grimly at the hollow show, pricked his wounded vanity into sullen fury at the spectacle. He disdained to interfere. He had given his views in full on this head,

at the outset of her "independent" career. By every smile and word that met the fulsome flatteries of what should be her sorrow, not her glory, she laid another stone of the wall rising between them. If, with her eyes open to this consequence of her insane aspirations, she was so unwomanly as to aspire to heights he could not climb, the work was hers, and the alienation not of his choosing.

Toward the close of the third year of their wedded life, she noted a new phase of conduct in him—one, not attributable, so far as she knew, to any fresh indiscretion or misdemeanor of hers. His moody fits were chronic—when they were not in company—impenetrable, and incurable by any means of which she had knowledge. Yet that she was, in some way, mixed up in his causes of discontent she was led to believe by his increasing surliness; by the gloomy stare she often found bent upon her, during his long seasons of sulky revery, and the circumstance that his brow cleared at the entrance of a chance visitor, while in general society he was lively to hilariousness. She asked no explanation of this singular behavior, or of the long absences, extending deep into each night of the week, except upon such evenings as they passed together abroad, or received their friends at home. Before she had been six months his wife, she was taught that husbands were irresponsible beings, with respect to their movements when out of sight of the partners of their bosoms. During the many evenings she had spent alone, in their foreign tour, she had employed herself in

writing; forgotten loneliness, and shut her eyes to Robert's neglect of her, in a strange land, by peopling her solitude with the creatures of her fancy, and making them, in the true artistic spirit, likewise the children of her love. She had not this solace now. She had kept her word to her husband, although he had rejected the sacrifice with scorn. Publishers lured with golden offers, and editors prayed in vain for sketch, serial, and essay. She wrote nothing save notes of ceremony, and orders to tradespeople. Her music served to while away a couple of hours a day, and she read for a couple more. Then, as she detested fancy-work, and domestic duties, with their small family and corps of able servants, would have been a work of supererogation, time not only hung heavily upon her hands, but seemed, to her loathing imagination, to corrupt into an abomination. In all the prosaic hardships of her early womanhood, she had known none comparable to this life of elegant and fashionable leisure. Balls, concerts, operas were stale, vapid, hateful. The senseless chit-chat of her associates interested her as the cawing of a flock of magpies would have done, and she wearied to soul-
nausea of their petty jealousies, their scandals, and their shams. The Arab mare—albeit her stable roof has been the open heavens, and her bed the desert sands; though in her wild life she has known hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, will yet chafe, then droop, then die of a broken heart and homesickness, if her proud neck be bowed beneath the weight of gilded caparisons, and arched by the iron curb, while she is

tutored to fantastic curvettings to the accompaniment of slow music upon the sawdust floor and in the stifling atmosphere of the hippodrome. It was not in Phemie to work, to love, or to suffer like women of a lower range of intellect and duller sensibilities. Nor was it in her when the energies of her active mind were denied their rightful exercise; when doubt and disappointment racked love to faintness and the lagging days were so many degrees of anguish, to make her moan in mortal ears, much less make known her bitterness and desolation of spirit through such channels as Robert had described as surcharged with the private woes and spites of woman authors. Had she written for the press at this era of her life, the world at large would have learned as little of her individual griefs as did he, and the veriest stranger who bowed to her in passing could hardly have recked less than Robert Hart of what went on behind the handsome mask he knew as his wife's face.

It was very handsome, on his birthnight, the twenty-fourth of February, when she was dressed to preside at the head of the table at which he proposed to entertain a party of gentlemen in honor of the anniversary. He had bidden her procure a new dress for the occasion, and named the material. Her robe was black velvet, with a sweeping train; a narrow edging of lace softening the contrast of the sable robe against her neck and arms, a ruby brooch and a broad band of chased gold, with a ruby clasp, being her only ornaments. When her toilet was completed, she dis-

missed her maid, and stood before the tall glass in her dressing-room, gazing at the regal figure therein reflected. Her eye gleamed, and her lip curled presently, but in superb disdain—not vanity—at what she saw.

“There are times,” she said, low and hissingly, “when I could rend all comeliness from my face with my own hands, crave disfigurement and deformity as Heaven’s best boon to one who is valued for naught else; who has failed to awaken anything but the lowest type of love—sensuous admiration of that which delights the eye. And for this—*this*—I have given all—all! Heaven help me! Given all—and lost it!”

She turned from the mirror with a shudder of disgust, and went down stairs. The parlors were in perfect order, and the tasteful luxury of their appointments was perceptible in the dim, half-illumination of the hour preceding the arrival of the guests. The mistress’ old habits of punctuality clung to her still. If they were going out to dinner, she usually dressed before Mr. Hart returned home at evening, and the visitor who, ignorant of her engagements, should drop in on a ball-night, was pretty sure to find her in full costume, sitting at her piano, or with a book, or, as to-night, pacing slowly up and down the long rooms at a time when other ladies were beginning the important business of robing for the festive scene. She walked now until the fever in glance and veins began to subside, then sat down in an alcoved window at the extremity of the back parlor, and looked out into

the stormy moonlight flashing from the icy boughs of the two dwarfish elms guarding the fountain in the paved court.

The window-seat was full of exotics in pots, and among them the florist, commissioned by Mr. Hart to decorate the rooms, had placed a moss basket set thickly with heliotropes and white rose-buds. Mechanically Phemie took up one of the purple sprays. It all came back to her with the inhalation of the vanilla odor—the homely little study, the vine-curtained window, the one plant upon the sill with its tufts of royal bloom—and he—her king, her dream-lover—his head thrown slightly back against the white cover of the old chair, his hand toying with his luxuriant beard, the very picture of a debonair knight, his deep gray eyes looking lovingly upon her. She had handled and smelled heliotrope a hundred times since that summer. What lent this tiny cluster the power to reproduce the tender grace of that dead season? He had loved her then! There was chivalric disregard of the world's frown in his passionate prayer that she would share his home and life; large-hearted liberality in his offer to maintain her brother; constancy, the guerdon of which should have been happiness, in his renewal of his suit after she had rejected it. And in the troubled course of their wedded life he had denied her nothing. At least—as he was too fond of saying—nothing that money could purchase. He was lavish with his means—she used to fear extravagant, but her intimation to that effect had met with a repulse she was not likely to forget, coupled

as it was with an allusion to her "severely practical views of money-making and money-spending." He had never rid himself of the idea that she was disposed to be penurious; that her experience in earning her living had made her grasping and narrow-minded upon certain points. For himself, he would declare, he valued wealth only for the good it would do, the happiness one could procure by its use.

"These are matters of which you know nothing, my dear," was the phrase that answered her scruples as to the propriety of this or that outlay. "If you please, I shall do as I deem best in the circumstances."

A truly generous man would hardly have reminded her in so many ways that he had found her poor and made her rich, but Phemie hastened away now from a thought that had often brought the spark to her eye and flush to her temples. She dismissed, also, a suspicion yet more galling—an impression that was, at times, a conviction—that his liberality toward her was but another form of selfish enjoyment in making the most of what reflected credit upon himself. She pondered, instead, upon the loving words and acts of their brief courtship and honeymoon; upon the gushes of tenderness that had intermitted his injustice, his coldness, his anger, even during the miserably unsatisfactory period of their residence in their present home.

In rehearsing these, the figure in the old chair regained his manliness; the gray eyes were once more wells of feeling and thought; the voice had the musical ring that distinguished it for her from

all other tones that ever sounded through the shabby little house, and she sat again at his feet—an humble worshipper. What had been her part in bringing about their estrangement? She had been distrusted, misunderstood—yes! taunted with what she would else have esteemed an honor; been schooled and repressed until her goaded spirit had almost broken out into madness—and her reply had ever been temperate and guarded. Should it not have been loving as well? Did not other wives bow their pride to sue for a rekindling of waning affection? bear reproach, harshness, infidelity—in the might of a devotion that death alone could weaken? Was it only passive duty that she had promised at the altar?

“My Father! forgive me this, my sin!”

The words were a groan, and the proud forehead bent low, as this broke the stillness of the vacant rooms. Ere the echo died away, the front parlor-door opened and a head was thrust in. Unkempt, wild-eyed, haggard as it was, she knew her husband, and hurried forward to greet him, calling his name lest he might overlook her in her obscure nook.

“Robert! I am here! Are you looking for me?”

“Why the deuce should I be looking for you?” he returned, roughly, without awaiting her approach.

He was half-way up the stairs by the time she reached the hall. She followed him, afraid to take counsel with Pride or Reason as to the expediency of so doing.

“Well! what is it?” he queried, as she entered

his dressing-room. He had torn off his cravat and collar, and was strapping his razor furiously.

"Nothing. I only came in to see how you were to-night, and to ask if I could help you in any way."

"Which means that I am late, by way of variety! As to my health, why should it not be good as usual? What has come over you? Who has been talking to you that you should interest yourself upon so unimportant a subject?"

Phemie held the spray of heliotrope very tightly. "I have fancied that you were not looking very well, lately. I am afraid you work too hard, Robert. This is a wearisome life we are leading. And we see very little of one another."

He made no reply for several moments, but scraped away busily at his upper lip, the only portion of his face ever visited by the razor. As he wiped it, and drove it back into the case, he turned to look at her. "Whose fault is that? I learned, ages ago, that the less you had of my company, the better pleased you were. I thought I was gratifying you by staying away, and leaving you to more congenial pursuits and companions."

"I am sorry I ever gave you cause to imagine that," Phemie replied, going up to him and laying her hands on his shoulders, while she gazed into his pale and gloomy countenance. "We have both made some sad mistakes in times past, love. Let us put away the memory of these, and begin—dating from this, your birthday—a new and happier life!"

"That is easier said than done!" He put her

hands aside, and went on with his toilet, his brow darkening with each word. "It is too late to mend matters now, Phemie. And I don't want to talk of mistakes that cannot be rectified. Those fellows will be coming in directly, and I need to keep my senses about me, to-night. If you really wish to help me, pour me out a glass of brandy and water. You will find the decanter in the closet over there."

She dreaded to give it to him. His eyes were already blood-shot; his hands unsteady, and his breath told the tale of previous potations. But she concocted the draught and put the glass into his hand. He tasted it, and instantly threw the liquor into the grate, where it proved the strength of the preparation by blazing up into a column of blue and white flame.

"Slops!" he interjected, filling the goblet two-thirds full with the raw spirits, and swallowing it. "What has set you upon the stool of repentance?" he interrogated, then, laughing bitterly. "Do you think I am going to die, that you have grown remorseful, or do you want to ask a favor of me!"

"I hope you may live for many years to prove the sincerity of my repentance." Phemie smiled, but the fingers holding the flower were cold and tremulous. "But I *have* a favor to ask at your hands. If, in days gone by, I have seemed aught but affectionate and dutiful; if, when I might have lessened your cares, I have increased them instead, or failed to discern your need of help and cheer; if I have appeared forgetful of the generous love that overlooked disparity of rank, poverty, wilfulness, unworthy pride—all the

blemishes that have marred my character as girl and wife; if for the signal benefits you rendered me and mine, I have seemed—indeed it was only in seeming, dear—to come short of the gratitude due you, I beg your forgiveness; entreat you to believe me when I say that from the hour that saw me your wife, your happiness and your wishes have been my first thought. I may have erred in the manner of my attempt to advance these, but I have striven faithfully and prayerfully to act as you would have me do; to make myself what you would have me be.”

“I have imposed no strictures, enacted no laws for your control,” rejoined her husband, as she paused. “I would have made you happy in my way. You preferred to be miserable in yours. When I discovered this, I ceased to oppose you. To the world we have long been two in sentiment, in feeling, and in aim. The time when concession on your side—a softening of your self-will and pride of opinion would have united us, has passed. You should never have married a man you could afterwards bring yourself to despise. *My* error was in fancying that Love would temper your asperities and curb your ambition. We had better dismiss the subject of these unfortunate and irreconcilable differences. The marriage yoke has galled you fearfully. I meant that it should be light and pleasant as it is to other wives. It shall not be my fault if it oppresses you in future. As to your vaunted obedience and fidelity, your conscience must decide whether these have been exemplified in your conduct. While you have avoided—with an offen-

sive punctiliousness more displeasing than rebellion—open resistance to my few expressed wishes, you have wrought against me with all the sullen strength of your will. You have not coarsely sullied your reputation nor mine, but the world has, doubtless, had its say about a woman who wearies of the society of her husband, and seeks her chief enjoyment in association with literary men of dubious morality. These Platonic loves are apt to be misconstrued.”

She stopped him there peremptorily. “Robert! take that back! You do not know what you are saying!”

“I retract nothing! I could say much more!” His red eyes met her with a hardihood that looked like brutality, when one considered her appeal and the provocation that led to it.

She turned away. “I needed only that! I have made my last effort to right myself and to save you! Henceforward, you shall not be troubled by opposition from me to your moods and your pleasures!” She laid a significant emphasis on the last word, and left the room as it was uttered.

He was not quite dressed when a servant brought him a letter. “From Mrs. Hart, sir!”

It was a blank envelope, containing a note superscribed by his hand with the name of a popular ballet dancer. Beneath the address, Phemie had written three lines. “This was sent to me a year ago, in revenge, the person to whom it was written stated, for your desertion of her for a prettier comrade. You should never have seen it again but for your crowning insult. I, too, have something to forgive—and I forgive it.”



CHAPTER XI.

RHEMIE awoke on the morning succeeding the birthnight party with a throbbing headache and a dull sense of misery that were the reaction of the overstrained nerves and mind during the ordeal of that trying evening. She made no effort to rise after the first movement of her head from the pillow had been attended with blinding pain and giddiness, but lay still, thinking over all that had passed since the last sunset. She had thrown her last card, and lost everything upon the venture. Even the pretence of amity was gone, now.

Robert Hart was esteemed an amiable, easy-tempered gentleman by those who only met him abroad. His wife knew him to be implacable when he conceived that he had met with a direct affront. He had never forgiven Miss Darcy's injudicious candor before his marriage. Rhemie was certain that she had sinned beyond the possibility of pardon in confronting him with the evidence of his unfaithfulness

to his marriage-vow, and his subsequent falsehood in boasting of his constancy. She had acted rashly under the spur of the womanly indignation that surged up within her at the groundless slur upon her purity of thought and conduct; had thrown down the gauntlet of open warfare; crushed the feeble germ just born in her breast—the hope of a return to something like the peace and love of other days. “She did not care!” she said to herself, in her half stupor. She cared for nothing now! She had long known herself to be a wronged wife; that her husband sought in companionship with the basest of her sex the entertainment he failed to derive from her society. He had told her once that it rested him to talk with a silly woman, after standing on tip-toe, trying to catch a sight of her meaning.

“Mont Blanc is a grand object,” he had said, at another time in jest, that had for her a bitter flavor of earnest. “But it tires one’s neck to be always staring at the summit. You are a moral and mental Mont Blanc.”

This had been her fault—that she lacked the power to belittle herself to the stature he had decided was the maximum of intellectual altitude in the woman who was to call him lord. She had avoided topics in which he took no interest; never “bored” him with flights of fancy she knew he would consider “mere moonshine,” and refrained, after one or two attempts, to induce him to read and study with her.

“*Cui bono?*” he used to say, yawningly; “I don’t see that the pursuit of such questions will make you

a more sprightly conversationalist, or me a more popular man. To let you into a secret worth knowing, Phemie, the majority of people don't like you to be wiser than themselves. I hate especially to be talked down to by a woman."

These sayings of his kindly moods were confirmed and intensified by the gibes and gloomy accusations of his graver turns. If he had a forte, it was strong superficiality. His content in being, in the apt phrase of a caustic writer, "well-smattered," was supreme, and a quietus to higher, and, in his estimation, profitless aspirations. With the fine sense of honor and charity that distinguishes true-hearted wifeliness, Phemie had never let her thoughts rest upon the glaring flaws in what she had once thought was almost perfection. The unworthy catalogue of his foibles and vices was spread out before her now, and she conned it as a duty essential to the correct survey of her position. She had demeaned herself to ask pardon when she had done no wilful wrong, but she would do so no more. Was his love, or, to be more frank with herself, his toleration, then, the only thing worth living for? She had shut her eyes obstinately, all along, to the fact that she was the nobler and stronger creature of the two; that his assumption of lordliness on the score of the accident of his sex was but another proof of a petty and ignoble nature; that the true man would have joyed to find her standing upon the higher level of thought and knowledge trodden by few; delighted, with the world, to do her abundant honor; would have stimu-

lated her to put forth her full powers, and himself been foremost in perceiving and applauding the tokens of spiritual and mental growth.

“Life was bleak, yesterday. It is nothing, to-day!” she muttered, finally, closing her eyes in a feverish doze, that teemed with the images of desolation and dread which had beset her while waking.

Robert generally slept late on the day after a party. Wine had flowed more freely than water at his board overnight. When he and his boon-companions sought Phemie in the drawing-room, there were not three of the fifteen assembled to do honor to the host's natal-day who were not visibly affected by the potency of his famed vintages. He had laughed loudest; talked fastest of all. When Phemie, weary and disgusted, stole away through a side door, only four or five noticed her retreat, and he was not one of those. Her last glimpse of him showed her his tall form supported by the mantel as he stood with his back to it, both elbows resting upon the marble shelf, one hand stroking his beard, and a vacant smile upon his face.

His wife was therefore surprised at the answer returned by the maid for whom she rang at nine o'clock, bidding her “present her compliments to Mr. Hart, and ask him to breakfast without her, since she was suffering with a headache.”

“Mr. Hart has gone down town, ma'am. He had a cup of coffee and a slice of toast at eight o'clock. He ordered it last night.”

“Indeed! Did he leave no message?”

“None, ma'am!” There was curiosity verging

upon impertinence in the girl's eye. For some reason this unprecedented industry on the master's part had been the theme of the kitchen cabal, and Phemie would not furnish another item.

"Very well. I am glad he did not disturb me. My head is better for my long nap. But I shall take my chocolate in my dressing-room. And should any one call this forenoon, say that I am not well, and cannot see company."

A tedious forenoon it was, as she spent it—lying upon the sofa in her darkened boudoir, unable to read, to sew, to sleep, or to think for the intolerable pain tugging at every nerve in scalp and brain, and, over all, the dull weight of misery that deprived her of will and power to resist the physical malady.

It was four o'clock of the pale, wintry afternoon, the inclement frown of the heavens casting twilight shadows into the corners of the room, even after the shutters were opened, when the same curious-eyed maid tapped at the door with the information that, "Mrs. Mandell and Mrs. Bonney wanted to see her *particularly*."

Phemie knitted her brows at the tone and wording of the message. "I shall see my sisters whenever they call. I have told you that before," I think, she said firmly. "Show them up."

Emily was foremost—a buxom matron in plum-colored silk, a fur cloak, and plum-colored satin hat—her best walking-attire, although the weather was threatening. As she told Olive, before setting out upon their mission, "There was never any certainty

that one would not find a houseful of company at Phemie's, and, if it rained, they could call a carriage."

Olive, prudent and less weak fashionward, appeared in a green reps, in which, with her brown cloth cloak and black hat, her dumpling figure reminded the observer of an unripe acorn, a bit of the black stem sticking to the russet cap. She followed Emily's lead so closely that Phemie did not have to replace her heavy head upon the pillow between their kisses.

"I am sorry I cannot get up," she said, as it sank back with a wild beat of added anguish that closed her eyes and deadened her hearing for an instant. "But my head aches dreadfully, to-day. I have lain here ever since I left my bed this morning."

"I was saying to Emily, as we came along, that I had no doubt we should find you completely prostrated," commenced Olive, with pigeon-like dignity. "But you should bear up. None of us can expect to be entirely exempt from trouble, you know. I said to Joe, to-day, at dinner, 'Phemie has always had things her own way,' so I remarked, 'until I am afraid she has begun to imagine that she is never to have a cross.'"

"Poor, dear Charlotte often observed that each of us must bear our cross at some time," Emily said, impressively original. "You have a great deal of fortitude naturally, Euphemia. Of course, the life you have led of late years has enervated you to a certain extent, but you really must not give way at the first breath of trouble. Recollect the Christian patience with which our beloved mother met trials

far more severe than what you are now passing through."

Phemie pressed her bounding temples between her palms, and stared, in bewilderment, first at one, then the other, as childless, houseless, penniless Job might have glared at Eliphaz when he " essayed to commune with him " upon the unreasonableness of his sorrow.

" A cross! I do not understand! I have a headache, a bad headache! But I do not regard that as an affliction."

" You never used to have headaches," Emily took up the word, without getting the meaning of the faintly-gasped sentences. " While your habits of life were frugal, regular, active, your health was excellent. Rely upon it, Phemie, prosperity is not the best school for many people. Excuse me for doubting whether it has not been injurious to you in many ways. Perhaps the change in your condition—"

She hesitated, seeing the white cheeks redden into a burning blush.

Olive was prompt to cover the pause. " I said to Emily, not ten minutes ago, that adversity was a wholesome discipline; I am sure I shall always be grateful to a kind Providence that I learned so much in my youth that is useful to me now. I was telling Jane, last night, when she said how Mr. Bonney enjoyed the hot muffins I surprised him with for tea, that I was glad I could cater for my husband, be a help instead of a hindrance to him. You never took to housekeeping, Phemie, and, as mother and I concluded when she was on here last spring, you have

paid no more attention to your domestic affairs since you were married than if you were a boarder, instead of the mistress of the house. I said to mother, then, that things were going on in the most frightfully wasteful style. Three women and a man to do the work for two people, and the mistress never looking into the closets or pantries, or broken meat-basket, or coal-cellar—and, for the matter of that, never lending a hand's turn in the kitchen. 'Nothing but speedy ruin can come of it,' I said, and I reminded Joe, this very day, that I did say it, and he sitting at the table with mother and me when I uttered it!"

"Not quite so bad as that, Olive!" Phemie said, not very steadily, for the beating in her temples sounded in her ears loud as the tick of an eight-day clock, and moved her to nausea. "I have kept my household accounts carefully, and exercised a general supervision of the establishment. There was no need for me to do more."

Her calmer, usual self would not have entered upon a defence, but she was sick, confused, and very weak. It troubled her to hear the patter of their whining tones, and she wanted to check it without offending them.

"There was your greatest mistake!" It was Emily's turn. "It is the invariable mistake of literary women to think that they can leave the work of their households to servants, while they cultivate their higher talents. A woman should not marry unless she can make up her mind to sacrifice all thought of pursuing the bent of her own mind and taste—to

conform herself to her husband's notions in everything; to study his interests in every imaginable way; to consider nothing menial that can add to his comfort; to live in and for him alone. He has a right to demand this. If more of our sex—especially the stronger-minded portion of it—rightly understood this cardinal principle of the married state, we should hear less of the unhappy lives of learned ladies.”

Olive's fixed, bead-like eyes said, “Hear! hear!” to this faithful repetition of Seth's dogmas.

Phemie chafed her clammy hands against each other. The cold sweat stood upon her brow, while her lips were burning with fever. “I am not a literary woman, Emily. I have written nothing for two years. I shall never publish another line.”

“Don't say that!” objected Emily, gravely. “Seth thinks it is possible you may be able to turn your talent to account at last. Unless—as *I* fear—you have acquired such a distaste for labor of all kinds as to shrink from the idea of working, even to aid your husband. It will be a sad blow to your pride, no doubt, but you must remember that the humiliation to *him* is the point to be considered most. It is an awful stroke to a proud man to have his wife obliged to work to help support his family. I always pity such a one from the bottom of my heart. And Seth says this failure is a complete crash—although nothing worse than he has anticipated for a year and more.”

Phemie sat upright, her face colorless, putting back the heavy hair from her forehead with both

shaking hands. "Failure! What did you say? Am I dreaming! Who has failed?"

"She doesn't know it!" ejaculated Olive, in real pity, while the self-righteous Emily quailed before the questioning eyes of the deceived wife.

"Can it be that Mr. Hart has not told you?" began the latter, in painful embarrassment, then stopped.

"He has told me nothing. He has had no opportunity. We had company last night, and I have not seen him to-day! If you ever loved me, Emily, speak out!"

"Mallory and Hart have failed. Their notes went to protest to-day. It is all over town, and everybody says it is the worst failure we have had here in years," said Emily, with none of the pharisaical satisfaction she had evinced in her lecture upon the genius of the state matrimonial.

Phemie lay back upon her cushions, with closed eyes and clasped hands. The furrow was gone from between her brows, and in its stead there was enthroned a solemnity, the serenity of which the shallower hearts of her sisters could not comprehend. She lay thus for some moments, during which they, awed and uncertain how to act, exchanged glances akin to dismay.

"Thank you for telling me!" Phemie broke the to them awkward silence by saying; "I see now that I should have suspected it before. Much is clear to me that was before dark. I am glad it is nothing worse. We know enough of poverty to be assured that it is

the least of really formidable evils. I think I can get up, now. The shock has started my headache into a retreat. When Robert comes he must not see me drooping. Poor fellow! What is my suffering compared with his?"

She had thrust her feet into slippers, and, still standing, made an effort to shake down her hair before the mirror. She staggered, and turned paler in the attempt.

"You had better lie down again," suggested Emily, uneasily.

"Oh, no! I shall be better directly. I have barely time to get myself ready and go down to meet him. He is often home by five."

"In that case, we must go!" said Olive, bridling at what she considered a hint.

Emily arose with her. "You must not take it hard that we came here this afternoon," she said, feeling very uncomfortable. "But Seth and Joe brought the news home at dinner-time, and Olive ran around to see me about it, and we agreed that, as your sisters, it was but right that we should give you our sympathy and advice—and I am sure, Phemie, if there is anything we can do to help you, we shall be happy to offer our services. We are really very sorry for you!"

"You are good to say that!" Phemie gave her a cold hand, then went on binding up her luxuriant hair in nervous haste. "Instead of being wounded by your coming, I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for preparing me to meet my husband as I should; for sparing him the pain of telling me the

sad news. It is sad to him. He has never been poor."

"*She* will find poverty a different thing now that she has had a taste of wealth," said Olive, when she and Emily were in the street. "What a careless, indifferent wife she must have been, never to have suspected how things stood! Why, if Joe has the least cloud upon his face when he comes in, I give him no rest until I find out what it is. But Phemie was always queer—always wrapped up in her own wild fancies and projects. After all, Em"—straightening her roley-poley figure, and walking more like a pigeon than before—"it is a man's wife who makes or mars him. And"—meditatively—"I was particularly struck with your remark, that prosperity is hurtful to some people. I *do* hope that poor Phemie will lay it to heart."

Instead of occupying herself with this, or cognate scraps of morality, the spoiled child of prosperity sat at her front parlor window, watching for her husband, forgetful of pain, of faintness, of his coldness and infidelity; remembering only how she had loved him, and longing from the overflowing, aching depths of that love, to comfort him in the great trouble that had befallen him. At the stern blast of Adversity, the weaknesses, vanities, and failings that had gathered about his better self, had, for her, fallen away, and, dignified by sorrow, he stood forth, once more, a man to whom she owed both duty and affection, and who should have them from her without stint. She had not dreamed so happily since the night she

had laid her book upon his knee, saying, "A gift for you, my husband!" as she now did within the hour in which she had been told that he was a bankrupt.

They were young and strong. The world was before them, and they would work together. He would let her help him, now, if not by writing tales and essays, in some more modest way. She could keep books, or copy deeds, or be his saleswoman behind the counter of some unpretending little shop, with a back parlor, where they could sit in the evening and read, or talk, or write, in company, and three snug chambers overhead. She had seen such dozens of times, and known people who were very happy in them. After the smart of mortification was over, she could win Robert around to her way of viewing this.

If he would but come! She pictured him to herself lagging homeward, his hat slouched over his brows, frenzied by defeat, and shrinking from communication with his late associates—fearing most of all the task of unfolding his story to her. Her heart bled until she sobbed outright at thought of the suppressed agony—suppressed lest she should suffer while it was yet in his power to shield her from knowing the worst—that had impelled him to affect harshness the night before. She struck her breast hard with her clenched hand in recalling her mad recrimination—her unwomanly revenge.

If he would but come! She longed to kneel to him, and pray for forgiveness; to make of her affection a bulwark that should break the force of the

assaults he must sustain from the rebuffs of fickle friends; the ingratitude of those whose benefactor he had been; the mean triumph of those who had envied him in his palmy days. She could show him how utterly beneath his regard were these reptiles; how impotent to mar the quiet beauty of their new life and their first real home. She would tell him more—tell him all her hopes for the future and for that home—and her cheek glowed with bride-like roses at thought of the well of consolation of which she held the key.

If he would but come! The inclement heavens had glowered at sunset with a dull red that was fierceness, not promise, and quickly burned itself out into dingy gray. The pavements were still icy in patches after the sleet of yesterday, and there would be more by to-morrow. The moon was not up, yet, or the low-hanging clouds would not grow dark so fast, yet few street-lamps were lighted. She rejoiced when the one nearest their door flamed up—a clear, steady jet that showed her distinctly the figure of every passer-by. Through the boding hush of the near storm, the tramp of coming and going feet was like the fall of heavy rain-drops, but they tantalized, instead of lulling the listener. Men and women, arm-in-arm, beggar-children with baskets, merry boys that whistled as they strolled, and rattled sticks along area-rails, the solitary figure of a woman, stealing close to the same rails, her slip-shod shoes flapping upon the side-walk, and her thin shawl wrapped tightly about her, vain protection against the wind

that fluttered her scanty garments; then more men—short, tall, and middle-sized—and still no sign of the one for whom those eager eyes were strained.

At length an organ-grinder, in a last endeavor to retrieve an unlucky day, or tired of carrying his square music-machine, and desirous, like a sharp practitioner, to make his enforced rest a means of profit, or beguiled by the sight of the figure outlined against the damask curtains into the belief that he had found a tractable listener, halted just beneath her and began to play. The instrument was shrill and wheezy; the high notes were wiry, and the low ones a husky grunt, and the time was execrable, but the air rang in her ears like the lament of her yearning spirit; haunted her for years afterwards. "*Robert! Robert! toi que j'aime! toi que j'aime!*" She had sung it to him the evening of their betrothal—because he asked it. She raised the window, flung the man some money, and ordered him in pantomime to go. What chance sent him hither with that wailing strain? Was not waiting already anguish? Would he never come? An alert figure passed under the window, ran up the steps and rang the bell. The servant, also on the alert, opened the door, received a letter from the messenger, and brought it to his mistress.

She tore it open beneath the chandelier in the back parlor. That in the front room had remained unlighted, that she might see who came and went in the outer darkness.

“When you read this,” said the letter, “I shall be upon the ocean. I knew this when I promised you, last night, not to clog your progress in time to come. It was a settled purpose before you sent me the billet you had treasured for a year to hurl at me when I should be most defenceless—most at your mercy. It may lessen your compunction to learn this, should you ever feel remorseful. Ere this, you may have heard that I am a ruined man. Like many a wiser and richer man, I have trusted too much to another, and he has abused my confidence. Mallory is a villain, and I have told him so, but this will not restore a tarnished name, or bring back lost wealth. I do not take you with me in my flight from a land that is now odious to me, for two reasons. The first is, I have interpreted correctly the signs that indicate your weariness of the bond that unites our names—not our hearts. The second is that I have no longer money and position to offer you, and, without these, I am not worth your acceptance. Bear me witness, that you have had—while it was mine to give—the price for which you sold your liberty and your person. Heart and mind were never mine.

“You are free once more. I trust you will soon be independent pecuniarily, also. Your publisher, Mr. Mallory, ought to have a considerable sum in his hands, accruing from the sale of your works. I have never questioned him as to sales and profits, supposing that you would resent my interference in your affairs. He should have secured this to you, unless you have drawn the amount, which is very possible.

If I could provide for your maintenance, I would do it. As it is, I have not a dollar I can call my own. I do not caution you against useless regrets at my departure. You are too sensible to waste time in lamentations over what cannot be helped; nor do I flatter myself that you would hinder my going if you could.

“Again, you are free! I am sorry I ever enslaved you—put even a temporary check upon your individuality. The world will say that I have fled the country because I dared not face my furious creditors. *You* will know that the fear of their wrath is but a minor thong in the whip that has driven me into exile.

“ROBERT HART.”

“My child!” Phemie looked up from the page that had changed her to stone. She saw eyes that would have been keen but for the tears that brimmed them, a plain, elderly visage, motherly in earnest love and compassion, arms that were outstretched to support her as she tottered forward.

“My only friend!” she said, and, for the first and only time in her life, fainted.





CHAPTER XII.



SENT for you, Mr. Bonney," said Miss Darcy, meeting Joe on the threshold of her office with a grave, but hearty shake of the hand, "because I knew I should attract the attention of your clerks and partner if I went to your store, and perhaps interfere with the routine of your business. If I had gone to your house, you would have been subjected to perplexing inquiries, and my errand to you is confidential. I hope I have not put you to serious inconvenience by my request."

"Not at all," answered Joe, accepting the chair she pointed out to him, as he would have obeyed a gentlemanly dentist's wave into "that seat, if you please, my dear sir. Now, we will soon have that very troublesome tooth out." Joe was horribly afraid of Miss Darcy, and widely at sea as to the nature of her business with him. He hoped forlornly it was nothing worse than to solicit a subscription for an "Indigent, Respectable Aged Woman's Home," to be located at Fezzan, or a Magdalen Asylum in Beloochistan. He had tucked a fifty dollar bill into his pocket-book

prior to leaving the store, and was prepared to surrender it at, or without discretion. It was worth seeing the alteration in his manner and countenance at her next words.

“I want to talk with you about Phemie.”

Joe ceased his restless manipulation of his hat-brim, and his eyes, retiring perceptibly into their sockets, steadied themselves upon Miss Darcy's. Phemie's name was a touchstone that brought him out always in his best colors.

“Before we enter regularly upon the subject I wish to consult you about,” continued Miss Darcy, “let me exculpate her from the charge of ungraciousness in that she declined the invitations of her sisters to spend some days with each of them.”

The good woman could not restrain a slight emphasis upon the term named for the visit, and Joe, already tender on this head, noted it.

“She is welcome to a home in my house as long as she lives!” he said, stoutly. “It is only fair. Didn't she support the whole family for five years? We can't do too much for her.”

“Well said!” Miss Darcy nodded approval. “She knows how kindly are your feelings toward her. But the independence that led her to work in her early life forbids her now to live upon the charity of others—even her relatives. She asked me, the evening after the failure, before her sisters had heard that she was deserted—to hire her a room in this house. I did it the next day. She believed then, and I hoped that there would be some meagre provision for her out of

the wreck. I have insisted upon an examination of Hart's affairs, and paid a lawyer to institute this. I could have saved the fee and learned what I wanted to know, in half the time, by inspecting the accounts of the firm myself—but of course, a great, noble lord of creation, like Mallory, would not allow a woman to lay her profaning fingers upon his ledgers and bank-books. The upshot of the matter is"—seeing Joe finger his hat-brim and look uneasy at this fulmination of a strong-minded woman's indignation—"that, what with Hart's extravagance and Mallory's speculations and settlements upon his wife—to say nothing of the neat sum which, the senior partner says, was carried off by the junior when he absconded—between the two worthies, Phemie is as poor in pocket as when she married, and poorer in everything else excepting Christian patience and heroism. She has not a baubee to show for the books published by the precious concern. She never put forward any claim for her share of the profits of the second of these, although a fair percentage was promised by the contract to the author under her assumed name. I looked to that when I arranged for the publication of the volume. Her husband disapproved of her presumption in writing a book that showed to the world how much more sense she had than was possessed by him, and she was withheld by fear of his displeasure, from inquiring into the pecuniary result of the venture. This is her version of the affair—only I have put it more strongly than she does. She finds excuses for Hart at every turn.

“Between you and me, Mr. Bonney, the partners pocketed a pretty little fortune from the sale of the book, and shared it between them. Mallory says it went into the general business, and the business went to destruction. I know who ought to be sent after it—but there is no use in flying into a passion, even over such barefaced villany as this.”

“But,” interrupted Joe, eagerly, “the firm has assets. We can sue for the amount due her, and possibly recover something. I’ll pay the costs of the suit twice over rather than they should not be prosecuted, and this shameful business made public. And there was a contract, you say?”

“Yes—one party to which is represented by a fictitious name. To be sure, it has been expressly stated that a certain percentage upon each copy sold is to be paid to the author, whose signature is ‘Epsilon,’ and I could testify that Euphemia Hart is that person. But”—eyes bright and nostrils dilating—“whom does she prosecute? Her husband, as one of the firm who defrauded her. And, if he were not concerned in any manner in the iniquitous transaction, she could not sue the authors of the injury. The prosecution must originate with him. In this Christian land of light and liberty, a married woman owns nothing unless it is secured to her by a marriage contract, or bequeathed to her by will—and then it must be put into the hands of trustees to use for her—poor idiot! or settled upon her by her legal custodian. Except in these cases, all that she has and all she earns belongs absolutely and entirely to her

husband. She may go out washing by the day, and bring home a dollar at night to buy bread for her children, and he—the glorious creature, who has lain upon the floor all day befuddling his god-like comprehension with drink—may knock her down, and take the dollar away, further to befuddle his manly senses—and all the law in the country can't prevent the robbery. Can't prevent it! Wouldn't prevent it, I should say, for men make the laws. Mr. Hart should bring a suit against those who have ploughed with his heifer, and kept back her hire from his lordly palm; but when the unrighteous husbandmen are the respectable firm of Mallory & Hart, the complication is more than discouraging. It is simply and ludicrously hopeless!”

“Good gracious!” ejaculated Joe, rubbing *his* palms together with an air the reverse of lordly.

As this overwhelming woman stated the case, it sounded like an enormity that nearly stunned him. While he listened, he was so ashamed of being a man, that he seriously meditated an apology for a circumstance he thought he might truthfully imply was entirely beyond his control.

“Therefore”—Miss Darcy told off the steps of her narrative by successive taps of her long forefinger upon the oaken desk—“Phemie has no property beyond her personal effects, namely, her wardrobe and her jewelry. Even the plate—including the few articles of silver given by her uncles and brothers-in-law at her marriage, and which are marked ‘Hart,’ like the rest, must go to pay the debts of Mallory &

Hart. Hart was very fond of presenting her with solid silver *épergnes*, coffee-urns, and the like, from which he could regale his friends at their carousals—but he was careful to exact her thanks for these, and equally careful that they should not be marked with her name. ‘Hart’ has a more aristocratic, oligarchical sound—and the married state is an absolute monarchy. Excuse me again. My tongue and temper are yoked together to-day, and occasionally jerk the reins away from my judgment.

“Phemie, then, is without property and without expectations, excepting the humble expectation of those who wait upon the Lord, and do not put their trust in man. Her wardrobe is valuable—that is, it cost an absurd sum. Hart was fastidious about his wife’s dress, as he was about his plate and furniture. But what dealer in second-hand clothing will give a tenth of its real value? I happen to know a reasonably honest Jewess who is in that business. I became acquainted with her several years ago, when she was much poorer than she is now, and had typhoid fever in her family. She has a heart, and she is overgrateful for the trifling services I rendered her at that time. She will dispose of Phemie’s useless dresses and the like. Now comes the question of the jewelry. I have an excellent memory, Mr. Bonney, and it is surprising how useful I find bits of information I have picked up and treasured from time to time, without an idea how they could ever be of service to me or my friends. I recollect you said once in my hearing, that Waddell, the jeweller, was your uncle

by marriage. Will he, do you think, appraise such articles as Euphemia wishes to dispose of, and tell us how and where we ought to offer them for sale?"

"I will ask him. I am sure he will do it. He is one of the kindest men in the world," returned Joe. "And—and—I don't mean to be officious—but my wife has often told me that her sister had a quantity of elegant laces—more than she could ever wear. I was thinking, if she has any that can be ironed out, that are not soiled, or that can be fixed up by these French women that do such things, you know, I'll put them into my store and sell them for her at such a price as she couldn't get in a second-hand establishment."

"A good idea!" Miss Darcy nodded again, with the compunctious admission to herself that even a weak man might say a sensible thing once in a lifetime. "I'll mention it to Phemie. The suggestion is a valuable one, for every dollar is worth fully a hundred cents to her just now. This brings me"—checking off another section of the desk-lid—"to the main proposal I have to offer for your consideration. The book trade and magazine writing are stagnant at present. Everything has risen in market value except brains. Booksellers and the proprietors of periodicals—even those that pay expenses—are afraid of taking on more sail. Moreover Phemie must get to work immediately, or her means will be exhausted. Can she obtain a set of books to write up—account-books, I mean, or copying of any kind—do you think? There are reasons"—the practical woman colored, in

approaching a delicate subject—"why she should not take a regular situation in a store for some months to come. I mention this in strict confidence, Mr. Bonney. You are a family man, and I can speak freely to you of what nobody besides Phemie and myself knows."

Joe was a bashful man, but he did not blush. His sanguine complexion faded into a bluish-white; his hat fell from his hold, and he did not stoop to pick it up as it rolled away on the floor. "You don't tell me so!" he said, in a whisper of horror and pity. "Poor Phemie! poor girl!"

Then his head went down upon his hands, and Miss Darcy was more conscience-smitten than ever at thought of her former valuation of the warm-hearted, right-minded brother-in-law. She looked over a pile of letters on her desk, while he recovered himself; but it is to be questioned whether her eyes were much clearer than those that had a red binding about their lids, when Joe raised his face and cleared his throat.

"I suppose you despise me!" he said, deprecatingly, "but you took me all aback by what you said. When I think of my own baby, and how much she has always loved him, and how she would love one of her own, and how I am wrapped up in mine, I can't help grieving over her; and if that rascally runaway were here, I would break his head for him, so I would!" thumping his knee, with a gleam of the light eyes that was quite ferocious, and which greatly increased Miss Darcy's new-born respect for him.

“I believe you would. Both feelings do you honor!” she said, heartily. “I only wish he were here long enough for you to carry your excellent intentions into execution. Since he is not, we must do the next best thing, and help his deserted wife. When the warm weather comes, I shall take her to my brother’s farm, and keep her there until—after September. Meanwhile, the kindest office we can render is to procure work for her.”

“I can give her a job of writing right off—a set of accounts of my own,” said Joe. “I have an interest in another business outside of my store—a secretaryship—and I have been in the habit of writing out my reports in full in the evening. I shall be glad to get rid of the bother, and more glad to give her a start. It isn’t much, but it may do for a beginning. I will be on the lookout for more, too, you know. And her room rent, Miss Darcy? By the way, what sort of a room has she got?”

“A very comfortable one.”

“But not what she has been used to, eh?”

“She could not obtain that in a boarding-house of this class,” said Miss Darcy, gravely.

She did not intimate that the nominal rent to Phemie was lower than other apartments of the same size and situation in the establishment brought, and that this difference in favor of the new lodger was the consequence of a private arrangement between herself—Miss Darcy—and the landlady.

“True! It is comfortable, you say?”

“It is, and of fair dimensions.”

“I'll be responsible for the rent—will send it to her, anonymously,” said Joe, forgetful, in his affectionate zeal, of the ill fate of a former anonymous gift. “Don't let her ever suspect who it is from, please. She is proud—and I don't know anybody who has more to be proud of. Where is she to-day?”

“Gone to finish her packing at the house. The auction comes off to-morrow. I offered to help her, but she preferred to be alone. It must be a sad task, and there is no one beside herself on the place. The servants were dismissed a fortnight ago—the day after the failure, in fact. Phemie had money enough by her to pay their wages and ten dollars over. Before I knew of it, she had sold a ruby pin and bracelet to get more for her first month's board here.”

Joe went several blocks aside from his direct route back to the store, that he might pass the house lately inhabited by the Harts. He had some vague notion of protecting the solitary inmate by so doing; a prompting to hover near her unseen, and avert possible hurt or alarm, which the fairest of guardian angels need not have been ashamed to nurse in his bosom. The shutters were closed on the first floor, those of the upper front chamber open. He pictured her in there, bending tearfully over drawers, and trunks, and jewel-cases, and longed, with a strange, pathetic heartache for the power and right to say to her, “Select whatever you want, Phemie, as a keepsake from your devoted brother!”

“It's worship, that's what it is!” he had said to her, years before, on the blustering night in which he

confessed his love. His wife was very dear to him—much better suited to his mental and physical needs than was Phemie, but his feeling for the latter partook of the exaltation and fervor of worship still. Great hearts and great minds are not always encased in the same mortal tenement. It may be well for the feeble-minded that the blessed doctrine of compensations prevails in this, as in most Divine ordinances.

Had great-hearted Joe looked with his bodily eyes into that upper room, he would have seen his beloved wife—the keeper of his affections, if not of his thoughts—seated in a luxuriously low chair, her dumpy feet crossed upon a hassock (she was easily fatigued, just now), her bonnet-strings loosened, and her eyes round with enjoyment of the survey of her sister's occupation. Wardrobes, drawers, and closets were open; the bed, chairs, bureau, and carpet strewed with their late contents. Miss Darcy had said truly that Phemie's was a costly collection of wearing apparel. One large box was intended for the dealer in cast-off clothing, and this Olive watched most intently. By a system of ratiocination which the industrious Olly, the grateful dependent upon her sister's earnings, would have scorned to pursue, but which the wife of the well-to-do tradesman considered perfectly justifiable, and, indeed, commendable as an evidence of shrewdness, she had arrived at the conclusion that the articles committed to this must be intended as a gift to herself and Emily. They would be exceedingly inappropriate for Phemie's wear after all that had happened. Good taste—and Phemie's taste was irre-

proachable—demanded that her dress should conform to her altered circumstances. As the deserted wife of a dishonored bankrupt she could no longer sport velvets, satins, lace, and diamonds without outraging the moral decency of the community. Nor was it likely that she would lay these away in the hope of brighter days. They would be injured by packing, and grow old-fashioned and useless. What was more natural than to assume that they were to be offered for her sisters' acceptance? the sisters who had been first to call upon her in her affliction, with proffers of service and counsel?

By way of making the tender and the reception of the presents less awkward, Olive praised everything lavishly. "It beats all, the care you have taken of your dresses!" she exclaimed, as Phemie spread a ruby silk upon the bed, preparatory to folding the skirt. "That is the very one you wore the evening Joe and I called upon you at the Lacroix, three—no, two years since. How long ago it seems! How little any of us thought then what was before us! I was telling Jane, the other night, about that dress, trying to describe the color and the way it was made. It was very becoming to you. Any shade of red suits you and me. Emily, now, looks well in blue, and purple, and mauve, she is so fair. Joe always insists that you and I are alike. I'm so glad I happened to stop this morning as I was going by! It flashed across me, when I noticed the open shutters, that I might find you here, so I rang the bell. It would have been doleful for you to overhaul all those

drawers and closets alone. You would have got to thinking—and thinking is the worst thing you could do, just now. Emily was saying, yesterday, that the wisest course for you to pursue would be to begin to live for other people—to forget your own sorrows in making them happy. I am sure—if it will comfort you to hear me say so—we have felt more like sisters toward you—more, as we did in the dear old times—since you have been in trouble, than we have done for two years before. It was Mr. Hart's influence, no doubt, but you seemed to hold yourself aloof from us; to feel so much grander than we poor, modest people, that we were quite overawed. Mr. Hart was a very supercilious man."

"I cannot bear to hear my husband blamed, Olive," said Phemie, gently. "I have never felt otherwise than affectionately toward you and Emily, whatever my manner has been."

"Oh, we know that! and I don't want to wound you by talking about Mr. Hart. I told Joe, three days ago, that *he* was a subject we should all study to avoid. Albert is dreadfully cast down about this affair. It's lucky he was made assistant tutor in the Institute just in time to begin to support himself. That was one good deed of Mr. Hart's, helping to educate him."

"He did many kind deeds," answered the wife, in patient mournfulness.

"Yes, he didn't mind spending his money while he had it," assented Olive, amiably. "He kept you like a queen, Phemie. There is no denying that. That's

that *heavenly* amber silk, with the square corsage. I always did say it was the loveliest thing ever made. And that black silk mantle! It is a pity to lay that away. Those heavy corded silks cut so badly in the folds. I remember meeting you in the street with that on, the first time you ever wore it. When I went home, I said to Jane that I had seen you with the handsomest mantle on I ever beheld. And, said she, 'Your turn will come one day, Mrs. Bonney!' 'No!' said I. 'I know what my husband can afford, Jane. I should like to dress elegantly, but he needs most of his money for carrying on his business, and my wants must be moderate until his ship comes in.'"

"I believed that my husband could afford to dress me as he liked," said Phemie, yet more patiently; "and so thought he. His failure was not his fault."

Olive pursed up her mouth tightly, and looked unutterable wise things. But she was too politic to provoke Phemie to retraction of her generous intuitions; for Phemie *was* generous! Witness not only her years of service in behalf of her family, but the handsome presents she had made little Joe since her return. She had left little for the parents to do for him in the way of clothing, toys, and trinkets.

"My!" exclaimed the spectator, as Phemie took from a box the black velvet robe she had worn to the dinner party. "That is magnificent! When did you get it?"

"I bought it a few weeks since. It has been worn only once."

"Are you going to crowd it in with the rest?"

“Won’t you injure the pile?” asked Olive, solicitous for the welfare of a garment so easily convertible into the cloak she had “pined for” for two winters. And there was lace enough on it to trim the cloak handsomely! But what if it was intended for Emily? Emily, who had a span new fur cloak, and whose husband could buy Joe out three times over! She made a bold push to end her suspense.

“Phemie, dear! you won’t have occasion to wear that for years to come.”

“I shall never put it on again.”

“That was what I was saying to myself; and it will be ruined if you lay it by. I tell you what I will do! I want a velvet cloak. I never wanted anything so badly before. It is the height of my ambition in dress. I could have one made out of that with a little contriving. I’ll buy it of you, rather than have it spoiled by being crushed into a trunk with other things. I cannot afford it very well, it is true, but I must try and manage it.”

“If you want it, you shall have it certainly, Olive. I do not know what I ought to charge for it, but you can inquire of some one versed in such things. I am obliged to dispose of all these dresses, etc.; and if there is any article to which you have taken a fancy, you may as well have it as somebody else.”

She was very busy disentangling something from the black lace surrounding the sleeve, and did not mark the fall of the listener’s countenance. The “something” was a faded spray of heliotrope, caught in the heavy pattern of the lace-work. She had car-

ried it there unobserved by herself from the time it had dropped from her fingers in Robert's dressing-room on the birth-night. Turning her back to Olive, she took a small box from the bureau, put the dried flower within it, and set it aside with such things as she had reserved for her own use.

Olive was "unprepared to make any direct offer for the dress. She must talk the matter over with Joe. She never did anything without consulting him. She had made up her mind when she married, and at sundry times, and in divers places, informed her mother, sister, husband, and the incomparable Jane, of her praiseworthy resolution, never to take any decided step—not even to purchase a paper of pins, unless she were sure of her dear husband's approval. She thought, nay, she was positive, that was one reason of his uniform success in life. She worked with, not against him. She had her reward in his unvarying kindness and indulgence. He would give her anything it was prudent to buy for her. What he couldn't afford, he had repeatedly said, he had no right to give. She had heard him remark a thousand times, that a man ought to be just before he was generous."

He seemed to consider it both just and generous that she should have the dress she coveted, when she told him the story at night of Phemie's cupidity and her disappointment.

"I wouldn't have believed that she could have grown so stingy," she said, regretfully, over her sister's deterioration in generous virtues. "Why, I

remember the time when she would go without a new dress or hat a whole winter to let me have one instead. That is the misfortune of being rich even for a few years. It hardens and closes one's heart. I am not rich, but I wouldn't be so mean as to offer to sell my own sister a dress I had no use for. And there were at least a dozen white wrappers—nainsook, and cambric, and linen-lawn, all trimmed with lace and muslin embroidery, yards upon yards of it, and, although she might know how beautifully they would make over for an infant's outfit, and I took pains to drop a hint that Joey had worn his long dresses so much that I must get new ones for the next, she never offered me one."

"From all I can hear, she will be obliged to sell everything she can spare in order to live," said Joe, apologetically for parsimonious Phemie. "But you shall have whatever you want, Olive—anything of hers, I mean. I intended to give you a velvet cloak before long. If Phemie is disposed to part with the dress you speak of, you can offer her a hundred dollars for it, or as much more as it is worth. You are a good, economical wife, and deserve a present. You had better take your pick of the silk dresses, too. And you said something about a black silk mantle, didn't you? As to the white wrappers, I wouldn't speak to her about them. No. 2 shall have all he, or she, wants out of the store. Don't buy second-hand goods for that purpose."

"You dear, blessed husband!" Olive actually blubbered, in kissing her rapturous thanks. "But, my

precious, how can you afford to give me all these lovely things? You must have had a streak of good fortune—made a lucky investment lately?”

“I have!” said Joe.





CHAPTER XIII.

PHEMIE went to the Darcy farm-house early in August, to be served and tended with exceeding care and love by the farmer and his dame, and there, one mid September day, her babe opened great brown eyes, very like her mother's, upon the world that had dealt so hardly by that parent.

“Poor, fatherless lamb!” was the whisper following the blessing breathed over her by the deserted wife, with her first kiss upon the velvet cheek.

A sad welcome—but a welcome, nevertheless, and from the hour in which the child was laid within her arms, Phemie began to recover heart and strength; to think, not hopefully, but courageously, of the future and its labors, now that she had something for which to plan and work.

“You call her ‘Ruth.’ For whom?” asked Albert, as he sat one day with her in the quiet sitting-room devoted to her use by her considerate hosts.

He had passed several weeks of his August vacation at the farm, and had now come down from the

Institute to stay from Friday until Monday, with the sister he loved more truly than ever since the darkness of adversity had overtaken her. Phemie sat by the open window looking out toward Graytop Hill, the bald brow of which was surrounded by an aureole of autumnal foliage, crimson and yellow, while the stubble-fields between it and the homestead were steeped in October sunshine. Her month-old baby lay upon her lap asleep, and the dreary longing of the gaze that had lingered upon the spot where Robert Hart had broken upon her maiden musings with his love-story, melted into a tender smile, as it passed to the little face resting upon her arm.

“It is Miss Darcy’s name. She claims ownership in her,” she replied, softly. “I could give her no more loving god-mother. I named her out of pure gratitude and affection, and was hardly prepared for the emotion Miss Darcy displayed when she heard of it. I have seen the tears in her eyes many times as she fondled baby, and I believe she loves her better already than she does anything else in the world.”

“I can hardly imagine Miss Darcy in the character of baby-spoiler,” laughed Albert. “She really handles the wee lassie—did you say?”

“Most tenderly. She was not very skilful for a day or two, but she is apt at nursery-work as in everything else, and baby appreciates the improvement. She was called up to town by telegraph, day before yesterday, and if her namesake has not missed her, mamma has,” drawing the tips of her fingers lightly down the pink forehead. “It isn’t every little

girl that has two mothers!" She sighed when she had said it—a suppressed breath, that yet caught the blind youth's ear. He asked no more questions for awhile, but presently exchanged his seat for his sister's footstool, laying his head beside Ruth's upon her knee.

"I should not murmur," resumed Phemie, more softly still, her hand wandering from her infant's brow to Albert's dark curls. There was a wondrous variety of expressions in her mute caresses; in the silent touch of her fingers—the clinging stroke that swept the forehead or cheek of the beloved one. If she were not a true woman, those who enjoy a monopoly of sweetness, softness, and lovingness in the estimation of their respective circles of admiration, might earn a larger meed of love and applause by studying certain of her arts.

"I ought not to murmur!" she repeated, exerting herself to a livelier accent, "when I have two such children!"

Albert seized her hand and covered it with kisses. "I cannot endure it, Phemie!" with a gasp that was almost a sob. "You told me once that the Father ordered everything in mercy to those who love Him; but your experience of sorrow has come near to making an infidel of me. You worked with all your might; denied yourself everything but the bare necessities of existence, that you might maintain those who now, in their prosperity, overlook, or worse—patronize you. Emily and Olive—yes! my own mother, make me blush for human nature and woman-

hood! Your life has been a continuous sacrifice, and where is your reward? I—for whom you have done more than for all the rest—am powerless to help or comfort you! I am a blind clog, dragging at your heels, instead of a man, strong to take your part against the world; to supply your needs; give you a home, and to revenge your wrongs upon him who has brought this latest misery of poverty and desolation upon you! Don't talk to me of the wisdom and mercy of the Divine economy! It is mockery when I think of you—your toils, your patience, and your suffering!”

“If this life were all!” said Phemie's gentlest tones in his ear, as he shook from head to foot with blended rage and compassion, and the sense of the impotence of either to right or console her. “‘If in this life only we have hope, then are we of all men most miserable.’ I do not know what meaning theologians attach to that text, but it often abides with me, with teachings that do my heart good. I needed discipline, Bertie, and if it be the Father's will that I should be ripened in heat that has blasted all my leaves and the buds in which I took most pleasure, let that will be done! He gives me strength for the day of trial and submission to its fires. Perhaps the light will come at evening-time. If not—the night will bring me rest.”

She was playing with baby Ruth's hand, doubling the fingers about one of hers, and anon stroking them lightly. The baby slept on, and Albert was quiet again for a longer space than before.

“You have never heard from *him* since he left you?” he said, finally, with an effort.

Phemie kissed the soft fingers twice, quickly and passionately before she answered. Yet her voice was composed. "I have not. He took passage for Australia, Mr. Mallory says."

The boy reared his head suddenly. "I am in my twentieth year, Phemie! I am paying my own way now, with my carvings, and teaching, and music. In five years more I shall be able to support you and your child. Then you must live with me. I shall never marry, of course, and, by that time, should your—should Hart not return, the law will release you from all obligation to him—free you from his very name, should you desire it. Ours shall be a happy home, and the past be as if it had never been."

Phemie leaned over Ruth to kiss the sightless face, glowing with anticipation of the paradise pictured by his loving imagination. "There is no harm in dreaming that our home may one day be the same, Bertie dear. If your ability to help me were commensurate with your will, I should begin, from this hour, a life of ladylike indolence. But there comes a glimpse of the Divine love and wisdom again, brother! I ought not to have leisure for brooding and idling. I was put into the hive to work, not dream. I remember when I used to envy those who had time for castle-building; for the indulgence of sweet, unprofitable musings. I have tried this life, and I have no desire to repeat the experiment. As for the latter part of your scheme, do not be hurt, Bertie, when I tell you plainly that it is impracticable; I owe duty to my husband while I live. No quibble of man's law can

free me from my marriage vow. I will be very frank with you. Whatever home I have is Robert's as well, should he wish to share it. I have a presentiment that he will come back to me. It may not be for many years, but he will come. I do not know whether Sorrow will drive him, or late, repentant Love move him to seek the wife who loves him, and whom he once loved—for he did love me very dearly; but return he must, and I have thought lately"—stopping to hold the tiny fingers to her mouth in a pressure that left their white imprint upon the red of the full lower lip—"I have hoped until I believe, that when he has once looked into his baby's eyes, he cannot leave us again. If I could send him word of her coming, he might the sooner be given back to me. There was much good in him, Bertie. You—Miss Darcy—all my friends, are hard upon him. He and I misunderstood one another. This was the cause of great unhappiness. When he left me, he was scarcely sane. My constant prayer is that he may be restored to his right mind, and I be granted the opportunity of atoning for my many mistakes by a life of patient love and duty."

Albert sat, his elbow on his knee, his face averted to hide from the speaker the pity and incredulity with which he had listened to her plea for her sinning husband, and prophecy of his return. She could forgive because she loved him, but in her brother's breast hatred surged up hotly whenever he thought of the insult put upon her by Hart's ignominious flight; of her destitution and the wearying labor by which she

had provided the means of subsistence during her term of worse than widowhood. One of Phemie's ancient characteristics remained in full force—her strength of will, where will was sustained by the belief that she had right on her side. She would not believe in her husband's total depravity, nor would she listen to a word defamatory of him. Miss Darcy had learned this on that first terrible evening, when news of the failure and flight having reached her, she had repaired with haste to a house, the threshold of which she had not crossed for more than a year, and found the abandoned wife alone in her horror and despair. Phemie had not heard Robert's name in many months until Albert mentioned it on this afternoon, and, although it thrilled her with a pang like that of the earliest moments of bereavement, there was still relief in openly averring her hope that he would be reclaimed; her faith in the omnipotence of love—the love she was persuaded he still had for her, as well as hers for him. Her child—and his—was to her a tangible pledge of her reunion. After years of longing, the heaven-sent gift had raised the sluiceways of mother-love, and she accepted the answer to this prayer as an earnest that her later petition would be answered as graciously.

The quiet of the room was interrupted by the sound of wheels and voices under the window. Mr. Darcy had driven over to the *dépôt* for his sister and brought her back with him. She did not wait to shake off the dust of travel before coming into Phemie's parlor to see how her charges fared. Baby

awoke as her mother arose to greet her friend, and stretched her eyes in a stare and smile that were decided by the exultant parent to be unequivocal recognition. Miss Darcy took her in her arms, without speaking, and bent her face upon the plump, vague visage. When Phemie received her babe again, a single drop of warm water glistened among the rings of pale brown hair. But Miss Darcy was voluble with questions as to how she had passed the time of her absence; when Albert had come; how baby had slept, etc., and kept Phemie too busy answering them to allow time for speculations as to the cause of her sudden overflow of emotion. They kept early hours at the farm-house—all but baby, who had developed a genius for lying awake and blinking at the candle, that augured ill—if it augured anything—for her regular habits in later life.

The evening was chilly with October frostiness, and a bright wood-fire had been kindled upon the hearth in Phemie's room. She sat before it, wakeful and mute as the child upon her knees, when Miss Darcy knocked at the door.

"I hoped I should find you up," she said. "Nine o'clock bedtime agrees with me excellently as a recuperative measure during two months of the year; but I can't sleep to-night. Moreover, I am restless, and I have come in to you to be quieted."

"To me!" smiled Phemie, in sad wonderment.

"Yes! to somebody who has loved and suffered long and patiently. Child! since I parted from you, day before yesterday, I have been helping to

open a grave I covered in five-and-twenty years ago."

There was vehemence in her manner, passion in her voice and words that amazed and alarmed her auditor.

"If I can comfort you, it is surely my right to do so," rejoined the latter, affectionately, "for you have been my best earthly comforter."

"Next to baby," said Miss Darcy, with an instant softening of tone.

She knelt to kiss the wide-awake bantling, then bestowed herself in a rocking-chair. She was wont, not three months since, to class these seats among the social nuisances of America. Having arranged her lap in a very nursely manner, she held out her hands. "Let me hold her! I can talk better of what is on my mind while I have her."

Phemie thought how the unconscious twining of the baby fingers about hers had strengthened her during the dialogue of the afternoon, and resigned her treasure. Miss Darcy appeared to forget that she had a communication to make when her wish had been granted. She smoothed the flossy hair, curling crisply with the warmth of the room, nestled the round chin in the hollow of her palm, and studied the lights and shadows of the brown eyes. She could not talk baby talk. It was, to her notion, a nursery abomination, not to be tolerated in this rational age; but there escaped her lips, more than once, inarticulate sounds of tenderness that would have arranged themselves into the reprobated jargon had she known enough of the dialect to copy it.

“Twenty-five years ago,” she began, abruptly, when a quarter of an hour had been thus consumed, “I was sitting by this fire on a cold evening in October. It was later in the month than this, for we had been nutting that afternoon, and I was measuring those we had gathered. I had a large basket of chestnuts beside me on the floor, and was kneeling by them, filling a quart cup and pouring them out into another basket. ‘Five, six,’ I had counted, when somebody came in behind me and took the tin measure from my hand. It was Reuben Stilton, the son of a neighbor. I had been engaged to be married to him for two years. I was twenty-two, he twenty-four, and he was studying medicine in the city. I had not heard that he was at his father’s, and was surprised to see him. The journey to town was made by stage, not railroad, then. He laughed at my start and scream; and, after he had kissed me, and I had said how rejoiced I was at his coming, he set the basket of chestnuts into a far corner of the room—just over there. ‘I can finish them in three minutes,’ I said. ‘I promised the boys I would measure them by the time they had studied their lessons.’” The boys were my nephews, and the nuts were chiefly their spoils. I knew they counted upon boasting of the quantity they had gathered when they should go to school on Monday morning, and this was Saturday night.

“‘Always putting the wishes and conveniences of others before mine!’ he said, roughly. ‘I am tired of this thing, Ruth. When I asked you to be my wife, I did not bargain to marry everybody’s slave.’”

“I was hurt, yet I could not believe that he was in earnest—this was so unlike his usual manner of speaking. ‘Oh, Reuben!’ I answered, ‘when did I ever put the pleasure of another before yours?’

“‘When?’ He spoke savagely, now. ‘You would teach this confounded district-school, although your brother offered to support you like a lady here at home, and you are for ever working for somebody when I come to see you. And when I begged you last winter to marry me then, and end this tiresome probation, you took your brother’s advice instead of listening to me, and sent me off to the city, where I am subjected to all descriptions of evil and temptation, while you are fast growing into a prim country school teacher, losing your health and good looks, and wearing out my heart and patience!’

“He snatched the poker as he finished, and struck the fire a blow that broke the back-log and sent the coals flying all over the hearth. I had time, while I swept them up, to arrange my thoughts, and determined to reply kindly. He was evidently greatly excited, and I must not lose my temper. So I made the mistake of trying to reason with him.

“‘As to the school,’ I said, ‘I could not reconcile it with my sense of right and honor to be a burden upon my brother, who has a large family to support, when I know he is obliged to work hard to finish paying for the farm, and to provide for his household. I must do something in order to get a living; and I had rather teach than sew, or spin, or weave. I make myself useful to my sister-in-law when school

hours are over, but she does not require it. I am fond of her and of the children, and I am not fond of idleness. I refused to marry you last winter out of love and consideration for yourself. I could not have done you a more unfriendly turn than by yielding to your wishes in this respect. I should have doubled your expenses, and been a hindrance instead of a help to you. If the thought of my love—the knowledge that I think of, and pray for you every hour, does not guard you against temptation to evil, I am afraid my presence would not. I cannot judge as to the effect that school teaching has upon my looks, but it has not injured my health or spirits. We have only to be patient and hopeful, Reuben—true to God, to ourselves, and each other, and happiness will come in the end. This probation may be useful to us both. What has happened to trouble you?’

“‘I am tired!’ he said, throwing himself into a chair and frowning at the fire. ‘Tired of work and waiting! Tired of everything!’

“‘Not tired of me, I hope!’ I returned, laughing in the hope of changing the tide of his thoughts.

“He answered never a word, only pushed his hands deep into his pockets and continued to frown at the fire. Like the unsuspecting fool I was, I put my arm about his neck—we had been children together, you must remember, and I had promised, two years before, to become his wife when he should be ready to marry—I put my arm about his neck, kneeling on the floor to do this, and smiled up into his face—not his eyes. They never left the fire.

“‘Not tired of me, are you, Reuben?’ I repeated.

“It might be the reflection of the blaze that made his eyes red and sullen, but they had a hard, defiant look that sent a chill to my heart—a fear that I had offended him. I had no thought still that he could ever be unfaithful. Even then he did not reply, and I pulled his face around until I brought his sight to bear upon mine. Then I said, for the third time:—

“‘Do you hear me, Reuben? I asked if you were growing tired of me?’

“I have been ashamed of my girlish fondness on that occasion a thousand times since that evening, have felt the blood rush to my face with a force and suddenness that made it ache as well as glow, when I recalled the simplicity of my trust in his love and fealty. I do not feel shame, but gladness and pride to-night in the recollection. If I had been less pure in thought, less single-hearted, I should have taken alarm sooner. It is a comfort to feel that I was once guileless in trust and affection. He did not resist when I would have compelled him to look at me. But his gaze was cold as dark.

“‘I don’t know, Ruth!’ was all he said.

“I released him, and went back to my chair. His eyes returned to the hearth. ‘Reuben!’ I said, when the shock let me articulate, ‘is this jest or earnest? What have I done that you should treat me so unkindly?’

“‘Nothing!’ The words came very slowly. ‘If you had offended me in any way, been one whit less deserving of the love of a better man than I can

ever be, I could understand my feelings, could more easily forgive my wandering affections.'

"The fire crackled and roared with cruel merriment as I watched the blaze and sparks leap up the chimney—waiting until my whirling brain should be still, my heart stop its stifled crying. I dared not speak yet; if I did, he would see how I was suffering, and, for the first time in our intercourse, a thought of pride came between us. He had cast me off, and I believed I should die from the effects of the blow, but nobody should guess what had killed me. Awhile later I could reflect that his punishment would be the heavier for his knowledge of my great woe, and I would not increase its severity, but I did not think of this at first.

"We sat thus at opposite sides of the hearth, and seemed to study the wood fire. I do not know whether he saw it or not, but I did, for the words, 'Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward,' kept rolling over and over in my mind, and then the thought, 'If man? what of woman? accursed from the day of the fall—doubly accursed.' I understood in that hour, clearly and positively, what had never entered my brain before—that, if we parted—and part we must—the loss would all be mine; that even if he loved me as I must ever love him, he would yet be able to drive out the memory and need of me by other hopes, pursuits, and ambition. While I must, for the remainder of my blighted life, take up Jacob's lament, and cry in emptiness of heart and exceeding bitterness of spirit, 'If I be bereaved, I am

bereaved!' Life could nevermore be the same to me; would bear the same likeness to my late happy, busy existence, as the dead ashes on the hearth to-morrow morning would to the living tree before it was felled and cast into the fire. We think fast and strongly in moments like these. I was soon composed enough to look at him again. I could meet his eyes better than he could mine.

“ ‘When did this begin?’ I asked. ‘You should have told me of the change so soon as you noticed it.’

“ ‘I did not like to acknowledge that there was a change.’ He paused to wet his lips before he went on. They were dry and stiff. ‘I fought against the conviction while I could. For days and weeks together I would feel the same toward you as of old. It cost me no effort to write lovingly, and the thought of our marriage was pleasant. Then, without apparent cause, everything would be reversed. If I wrote, every endearing epithet was forced and heartless, and I shrank from anticipating the day of our union. I can’t say how it came about. I used to condemn myself as base and fickle; but lately, I have questioned whether the fault were not in our premature engagement.’ His words flowed more smoothly, now, as he entered upon his self-justification.

“ ‘We had never been tried, Ruth. We were ignorant of the world and its ways; and of the real state of our feelings. This gradual estrangement is the frequent consequence of precipitate action in these matters. The selection of a partner for life is a very important step, and a man’s ideas and habits,

and his feelings with them, undergo great modifications when he enters a different circle from that in which he was reared.'

"He stopped again. I think he was abashed at the sound of his own excuses. Uttered in this room, where we had plighted our troth, they must have sounded unlike the plausible arguments he had arranged among other scenes—the scenes and associations that had weaned him from me.

"'You are quite right!' I returned, as he ceased. I hope I said it calmly. I tried not to say it bitterly. 'Consistency should be the rule of a man's life. His wife should not be so unlike his chosen companions as to make him ashamed of her. I can foresee that you would be heartily ashamed of me. When I promised to marry you, it was in the hope that you would be happier with than without me. Now, when that hope has gone, I should do you and myself a harm, were I to regard the letter of our compact as anything but a hollow husk. We will throw it away, Reuben. I hope—I say it in solemn sincerity—that God will bless and prosper you. We will shake hands and say 'Good-by,' as friends, not lovers, do.' He threw his arms around me, as I stood up and offered him my hand.

"'I believe that I love you after all, Ruthy! No other woman can ever make me so happy as you can. Try me again, won't you?'

"'Never!' I said. 'That is all over now!'

"Then he called me obdurate and vindictive, and warned me, that if he went to perdition without the

guarding influences of my love, his blood would be upon my soul. There have been times when that has haunted me, too! I wish, to-night, that he had spared me the threat.

“Well, he went, and I stayed! That is the common story, Phemie! so common, people are apt to forget how mournful it is. To go, is to forget chagrin, and wounded love, and perished hopes, in the whirl of the dizzy, busy world, that defies one to stand still long enough to think or to regret. To stay, is to be left to monotony and memory. I fought against both with indifferent success, until Reuben's sister, who had been my bosom friend, came to me with the news that he was engaged to a beautiful girl in the city. Her father was wealthy, and she highly accomplished. That gave me the clue to all that he had not explained. There was no need, his sister said, that *their* marriage should be deferred until he had completed his medical course. It was to take place almost immediately, so soon as the wedding outfit could be procured. If I had believed that I was cured of my liking for him, I was undeceived by this news. I had just received the offer of a situation as governess in a family who lived two hundred miles away from my native place. The compensation was fair—or seemed so to my inexperience—and I made this the excuse for accepting the place without demur. I did not come home for a year. When I did, I learned that, in consequence of some disagreement between the wealthy citizen and his son-in-law expectant, the engagement had been

broken off almost upon the eve of the marriage. The bride's father was reputed to be ill-natured and arbitrary, and close upon the story of the rupture crept hints that the action of the parent was justified by the dissipation of the intended bridegroom. His family maintained that he was plunged into evil habits by the mortification and disappointment attendant upon this affair, and when it became notorious that he had fallen from respectability as well as from virtue, they persisted in casting all the blame upon the author of this one misfortune.

“For ten years I heard nothing of him—ten years of work for myself and for others. I had gained a little reputation and laid aside a little money, and, I fancied, had learned how to forget. I was in a hospital one night, nursing a factory-girl who had been caught in the machinery of the mill and badly hurt. I was known to the physician in charge, and he granted me permission to watch with her until morning. She was under the influence of opium, and, seated by her bed as she slept, I had time to look about me. At nine o'clock a man was brought in, who had been picked up in the streets apparently dying. His clothes were soaked with rain and the mud of the gutter; his hair and beard were a filthy mass; but there are some things I cannot speak of! I went to him at the call of the physician, the regular ward-nurse chancing to be engaged. The sick man was delirious—with fever, as we then thought. We found afterward that he had been partially insane for some months, and was well known

in the lowest haunts of pickpockets and gamblers. I need not tell you who he was, nor how I recognized him, little by little, when I had cleansed his face and combed and cut his hair. Had the identification been instant, I might have lost my own senses. As it was, I had everything arranged by the time he was convalescent in body. In mind, he was less sound than before his illness. His parents and sisters were dead. The property bequeathed him by the former was squandered. He was an insane pauper. I put him into a lunatic asylum, and kept him there until his death. My relatives knew nothing of it. The friendly doctor kept my secret. The asylum authorities recognized me as the agent of the patient's friends. Twice a year I went to see him, but he never remembered me, except dimly as the hospital nurse. Sometimes, when I called, I could not see him. His paroxysms were often violent, and no visitor was admitted to his cell while they prevailed. When I received this answer, I went back to my work and waited until notified that the madness had subsided. He was well treated. I assured myself of this by vigilant espionage and by gifts to his keepers. His clothing was good and whole; his food excellent, and whatever pleasures were compatible with the rules of the institution were freely granted him.

“These are homely details, but they have had much to do with my inner life for fifteen years. Two days ago I had a telegraphic dispatch from the head physician of the asylum to the effect that ‘Reuben

Stilton was supposed to be dying.' He lived two hours after I reached him. He suffered little, physically, and his reason was beclouded to the last."

She made a busy pretence of tucking the blanket about baby, who had fallen asleep.

"Let me lay her down!" said Phemie, pityingly.

"Not yet! I am almost through. I had long lived upon the fond fancy that he would know me when the end came. I had heard and read how the breath of the Death-angel often dispelled the gloom that rested upon the intellect of others similarly afflicted. It was a wild, blind desire. God knows best. If a gleam of intelligence had revisited the distracted brain, he could not have recognized in me the blooming girl he had known in his and my better days. I appreciated the force of this when I took a final look at the white face, with its sharpened features and silver hair, before the coffin-lid was closed. I remembered, too, your favorite watchword, and, 'thanking God, took courage.'"

Phemie was weeping silently, but she smiled at this. "May I remind you of another old favorite of us both, dear?" she asked, drawing nearer her friend.

"Death is but a covered way
Which opens into light;
Wherein no blinded child can stray
Beyond the Father's sight."

Miss Darcy rocked baby Ruth to and fro, her countenance, meanwhile, regaining its usual expression of tranquil decision. "I am spoiling her, I sup-

pose!" she said presently, abruptly. "She ought to be in her cradle. I wouldn't rock her, though, unless she should stir. The motion is injurious to the brain—so say modern doctors. But doctors—ancient and modern—are humbugs, I think!"





CHAPTER XIV.

THE result of Reuben Stilton's death had not been thought of by Phemie when she sought to console the solitary mourner over his tomb—the woman whose life had carried within it, for a quarter of a century, a romance of love, sorrow, and fidelity, that put to shame the pretentious sentiments and griefs blazoned upon the surface of petty and querulous hearts. A large proportion of Miss Darcy's income had been appropriated to the support of her faithless lover. With this she could now make a home for herself and family, to wit, Phemie and her baby.

When these last returned to the city, it was to take possession of a quaint little house of many gables and angles, which, being part of a contested estate, was rented at a low rate, provided the tenant would keep it in repair. Miss Darcy complied with the stipulation by having it thoroughly cleaned and whitewashed within, and seeing that doors and windows were well hung. "Ventilation was a prime consideration in a house where there was a baby." For the same reason,

she had an open, freely-burning grate put into Phemie's sitting-room, which was also the nursery. "A nursery should be the lightest, warmest, most airy chamber in the building." There was a tiny yard in front of the cottage, which stood upon a corner of two moderately wide streets, and in the rear a paved court, surrounded by a narrow border of mould, where flowers had once grown. Miss Darcy meditated a vari-colored fringe of blossoms on the inside of the old brick wall, when spring and summer should arrive. "Children were always fond of flowers." A sturdy linden—not tall, but bushy—stood on one side of the court, and would furnish grateful shade when in leaf, in which baby could play. In fine, this queer old-fashioned edifice, which people with architectural tastes condemned as a blot upon a neat neighborhood—its gray walls, sloping roof, and irregular rows of casements contrasting offensively, in their eyes, with the trim rectangular blocks of "genteel private residences," stretching away up and down the streets in double lines—was a very pearl of cottages in Miss Darcy's opinion, and must have been planned with express reference to the needs and delights of babydom.

She installed her "family" by putting Phemie and baby in the two best chambers, and a middle-aged colored widow in the kitchen, and, taking the back parlor for her own study, removed thither the well-worn floor oil-cloth; the oaken desks and uncompromising chairs; the book-shelves and the books from her old office, and slid, with a will, into the groove

of "business." It was a busy winter with Phemie, likewise. Little Ruth, after the manner of small ladies who have been pampered in the beginning, had a decided perception of her rights, and manifested a determination to secure these that interfered sadly, for a time, with the play of her mother's pen or needle. She liked to be dandled and noticed as well as if she had been born to a spacious nursery, a rose-wood crib with lace curtains, a silver pap-boat, and a French or Swiss *bonne*. Phemie did not rebel at her demands upon her time and strength until she discovered that she was earning only half as much as she had done during the summer, and that her health was suffering from late hours and overwork. Then she held a consultation with her better judgment, and decreed that lady Ruth must be reared as are the children of the industrious poor, and consigned her to a blanket and pillow upon the floor instead of being "cuddled" upon her lap; gave her a rattle and a string of spools in lieu of making faces for her amusement, and dancing her upon her hand. It was a hard lesson for baby; harder for Miss Darcy; hardest of all for the mother. Morning after morning she bent over her accounts or copying, pity and grief tugging at her heart-strings in one mighty strain of maternal anguish, as the angry scream, and anon, the piteous wail of the neglected child pierced her ears. She worked slowly, thus situated, but she performed her task mechanically well by dint of determined abstraction of her mind—she could not control her sympathies—from what was going on about her.

Baby was quick-tempered, but forgiving, and always forgot the maltreatment of the day in the bath, and romp, and caresses that prepared her for bed, and compensated the mother, in some measure, for the violence she had done her own feelings in carrying out the discipline prescribed by Duty and Necessity.

She had no society outside the house. Emily and Olive called, perhaps once a month, to see how she was getting along, and to apologize for not coming oftener. Each had a young child of her own, upon whose fat shoulders the parents' shortcomings in sisterly affection were laid.

"You know for yourself, Phemie, how impossible it is to get out when one has a child upon her hands—and think of my five!" Emily would exclaim, pathetically.

"And my two! babies, both of them!" Olive would supplement her, and then they would tap Ruthy's head and say they were "detaining mamma from her writing," and vanish for another four or five weeks. Joe, more considerate, as he was more constant, spent an hour with his sister-in-law every Sabbath afternoon or evening, and he was the only gentleman beside her Uncle Albert with whom baby was acquainted. She would testify rapture at sight of either, ere the winter was over, associating both as she did with playthings and bonbons. "Sweets" were interdicted by mamma and "auntie," but they were lenient respecting the delicate comfits and sugar gingerbread brought into their presence in Joe's pockets. They might confiscate the dainties when

he had gone, but baby was allowed to devour them in moderation while he remained.

Under these genial influences baby grew in stature, and when she had conquered her aversion to taking care of herself—in grace and sweetness of disposition. To the lonely and toiling women, she was the “well-spring” in an otherwise bleak waste; resting them in their weariness; diverting melancholy musings into a healthier channel, and bringing such solace to their sore and yearning hearts as only little children and God’s angels are commissioned to bear. It was a hard year with them, pecuniarily. Both had had heavy expenses about the time of baby’s advent, and the “dull seasons” which recurred at the end of every three years with a regularity that was confirmatory of Doctor Sampson’s theory of “universal periodeecity,” strained, as they ever do, the employed more severely than the capitalist.

“Literature,” said one who deserves, for the saying, to be enrolled among the wise ones of his generation, “is a good staff, but a poor crutch.” Of its merits in the former capacity, let those who have stayed their weary frames upon it in the toilsome march of life, speak in warm gratitude. But the maimed or cripple had better creep on all fours than trust his whole weight to the polished and brittle support.

When spring opened, and baby could roll about the floor, the one servant was dismissed, and the drudgery of housework added to the labors of the two friends. They achieved these as they did the rest—by patient and systematic diligence. Work was to each

a panacea, and their aims were the same. Their wants were few; their habits simple, and they were strong in their faith in the Father; in their love for each other and for baby. So the year passed, and with the opening of the next, their prospects brightened. Phemie had written a new book. A publisher of known benevolence—when benevolence tallied with his self-interest—had given it to the public, and the reading public—also benevolent—had condescended to express itself as gratified by the perusal. It was not a great success, “going off” by the ten thousand, faster than the printing-presses and binderies could supply the demands of ravenous readers, and the proceeds did not enable the author to set up her coach-and-four, and recline for the rest of her existence upon a satin couch, fanned by peacocks’ feathers—her heaviest duty being the exertion attendant upon the utterance of peremptory “Noes!” to importunate editors and publishers. Nor did this second book bring in the returns she would have received as the queen of fashion and the wife of the popular merchant. I am sorry to be obliged to add that it would have sold better had scandal been more busy with her name than with her husband’s; if she had run away from him and not he deserted her; if, instead of living in a shabby little house, working for her daily bread, and seeing nobody, she had inhabited a handsome suite of rooms at the expense of some “gallant, gay Lothario” about town, and her volume had been advertised as an autobiography. There was nothing autobiographical about it, decided those who were familiar with

the leading events of her life, and even the philanthropic publisher hinted that he had expected "something more sensational, more taking, knowing what materials must be in her possession, and that truth was stranger than fiction"—a quotation, which every one who essays to convey truth through the medium of parables has heard until he is ready to wish that the man who said it first had been decapitated before it quite escaped his tongue.

But the book had a steady sale, being interpenetrated with the writer's hearty love of truth; her sympathy with the lowly and oppressed, and her charity for the erring; her earnest desire to do good, and to lead the hearts of all—the wrong-doer and the wronged; the lofty and the humbled; the wise and the weak—to the Author of Goodness, Strength, and Love. When the knowledge dawned upon her that the mission of her waif was, in some degree, accomplished, she "thanked God and took courage." There was many an Appii Forum in her pilgrimage.

They had spent two Christmases in the corner house, and the eve of the third had come. There were extraordinary preparations in the small establishment for the anniversary. Albert was to spend it with them as he had done the two former, and Uncle Joe had signified his intention of bringing around little Joe, and maybe Oliver, on Christmas afternoon to play with Ruth. Auntie had taken great pains to enlighten Ruth as to the being and business of Santa Claus, and her stockings were to be hung by the sitting-room mantel before she was put to bed that night.

Phemie had worked hard since sunrise, upon an article she had engaged should be in the printer's hands by six o'clock P. M. It was a Christmas story for a sprightly little Daily, and she would be well paid for it. Like Miss Darcy, she did "piece-work," but only occasionally. Thus far, her reputation as an author was of a higher grade than her friend's. Her services were sought with greater eagerness, and her contributions commanded better prices.

"You will never sink into a literary pack-horse," the elder lady would say in unselfish gratification. "But while pack-horses can be useful, I do not repine."

Baby had been preternaturally good for several days. She was in perfect training by this time, or as perfect as an only child could be, who was the idol of two loving women. Yet there was something plaintive in the quietude that fell upon her whenever mamma's desk was wheeled up to the window; in the docility with which she would betake herself to her play-corner, and turn over picture books; build block houses, or nurse her doll, whispering her baby prattle all the while, lest she should disturb the writer. "Baby been dood, auntie! Baby didn't 'peak a word to-day!" was her usual report to Miss Darcy, when the summons to dinner unloosed her tongue; a naïve description of her unbabylike habits it always saddened the mother's heart to hear.

In compassion to both, Miss Darcy would, whenever her own work was not pressing, beg that she might go with her down to the "Office," and her vi-

sitors were, long since, used to the pretty picture of the child ensconced under the tall desk keeping baby-house, or entrenching herself behind laboriously-constructed ramparts of severe-looking volumes that appeared miserably stiff and ill at ease under her chubby hands. But auntie had been busy this week as well as mamma—so busy that Ruth had not had one race over the defaced oil-cloth, and the dry tomes dozed unmolested upon the shelves, save when one was jerked out and fluttered hurriedly as the owner sought a passage bearing upon the subject she had in hand. Altogether, baby had a stupid time of it until mamma took a long buff envelope from a table drawer, and smiled across the room at the little watcher, who had exhausted the resources of toys and pictures, and sat, half asleep, upon a cushion, her hands clasped over her apron—a comical, yet lovely, impersonation of patience. Ruth knew what the envelope meant as well as her mother did, and laughed out in her glee.

“Most done, mamma?” she cried, jumping up and trotting over to her as fast as the fat legs could carry her.

“Yes, my darling! Now mamma will call Sylvia and let her play with you here for awhile. Mamma is going out to see Santa Claus, and tell him about baby’s stockings.”

Sylvia was the half-grown daughter of a seamstress formerly employed by Mrs. Hart, at Miss Darcy’s recommendation, and had been recently received into the family as maid-of-a-little-of-all-work. She was a cleanly, good-tempered girl, and was often intrusted

with the guardianship of the little one when the mother was obliged to leave her.

The evening was bright, but very cold. The stars overhead and the twinkling of multitudinous lamps on the earth could not win the pedestrian to obliviousness of the stinging air that changed her breath to fine snow-flakes, and pricked into her face like a shower of cambric needles. She had a long walk before her, and was rather glad that the intense cold compelled her to move rapidly, gave her something to think of beside the ghosts of other holidays that trooped about her at sight of the illuminated windows, the noisy, happy throng that filled the sidewalk, and the family groups within the gayly-decorated shops. The Christmases of her childhood, the more modest celebrations of the day in the humble home of her widowed mother, where every gift was purchased by self-denial, and was the dearer to the recipient, more blessed to the donor that this was so; the Christmas after Charlotte's death when Robert Hart had written to her, renewing his suit, and the world had suddenly glowed with radiance, as did the fields of Bethlehem under the brightness of the angelic cohort; the Christmas in Merry England that succeeded their marriage, the two gayest, most unhappy of all she had passed in the mansion of which she was nominally mistress, each craved a thought and a sigh.

It seemed so long since the latest of these! Robert had expressed his intention of dining at his own table, "*en famille*," he said, with a sneer that was to the childless wife a reproach to her loneliness. But she

had hailed his wish as a sign of returning love for home and her, declined all other invitations for the day and evening, and in the afternoon dressed herself with uncommon care, and sat in the parlor awaiting his coming until the elegant dinner she had ordered was spoiled by the delay, and she was faint to sickness with inanition and suspense. At eleven o'clock she had gone to her room for the night, but it was nearly one before he came in. She never asked what had kept him away, and he did not allude to the matter. He had either forgotten his voluntary engagement, or been tempted by more attractive society to break it, and did not deign to account to her for his whims. The fear of being ruled by her was always dominant in his mind.

"Poor Robert! how little he knew me!" she muttered, still holding on her rapid way up the steep street whereon was the office of the lively Daily. "Where is he now? Do they keep Christmas in Australia, I wonder? Perhaps he is no longer there."

She had not heard once from him since she read his cruel farewell letter. Mr. Mallory had told Miss Darcy that he had tracked him to an English steamer, and, subsequently, had reliable information to the effect that he had sailed from England for Australia. There, all trace ceased. There was no incentive to continue the investigation—at least on the part of his late associate in business. He had wound up the affairs of the concern by a sharp compromise with the creditors, and, having aired his rather unsavory commercial reputation by six months of foreign travel

with his wife and children, had returned to give his sister Clara in marriage to an elderly millionaire; established himself in another branch of trade, and was reputed to be making money. The question in the minds of many as to whether he had ever lost any, in no wise hindered the success of the new enterprise. Phemie never met him, or any of his family—rarely thought of them. She was too busy to waste reflection upon unprofitable subjects. But the memory of her husband was with her continually. She could as soon have forgotten her existence as ceased to think of and to pray for him. Purified by sorrow, reconciled by the pain of separation and tender recollections of what she had been to him, he would be given back to her in the Father's good time. It was less a hope than a conviction with her that this must be—a belief wrought by the faith whose "I will not let Thee go!" must prevail in the end. She did not, in her most despondent moments, sit down and weep that her life had been a failure. She had done her best. The result had been as GOD willed.

The editor was in his sanctum, and the cheer of Christmas Eve was in his lank visage as he commended her promptitude; paid her for her article, with the hope that she would be able to favor him with another very soon, and offered her, in advance, the compliments of the season.

The wind was colder than ever when she again dared the outer air. She stopped, with an audible shudder, at the foot of the office steps, and tied her scarf more closely about her throat. The side-walk

was narrow, and a man, wrapped in a shawl, with a comforter over his chin, stepped off the curb-stone into the gutter, in brushing past her, grumbling something that might have been either an apology or an execration. Whatever it was, she bent her head slightly, in token that she put the more charitable construction upon his abruptness, and pressed toward the thronged thoroughfare at the lower end of the steep cross-street. She was obliged to walk more slowly when she gained it, and, despite her sadness, was interested and diverted by the motley crowd, the snatches of conversation that fell upon her ear from one and another of the merry groups, the excited gazers through the plate-glass that screened the confectioner's and toy-seller's wares from lawless fingers, and the universal good-humor animating the moving and meeting masses. She, too, had her purchases to make—a few trifles for Ruth and the little Bonneys, who had sent, through their father, presents of considerable value to their cousin. She was standing as near the counter of a toy merchant as she could get, awaiting her turn to be served, and whiling away the time by scanning the various phases of infantine delight and parental indulgence that were the principal features of the lively scene, when, chancing to glance toward the window, she met the fixed stare of a pair of dark eyes fastened, not upon the attractive contents of the shop, but upon herself. They were gone with the visible start that betrayed her consciousness of their scrutiny, and she had time, before the salesman could attend to her, to reason herself into disbelief

of the reality of the apparition, to quiet the thrill—partly apprehension, partly recognition, that had set pulses and thoughts flying dizzily.

“My fancies are shaped by my wishes, to-night,” she said, inwardly, with a smile of self-pity. “I have imagined the same thing a hundred times before, and nothing came of it.”

Her parcels were bulky, although not heavy, and required so much of her attention for the rest of her walk that she paid no heed to casual encounters. Albert answered her ring at the door. He had arrived since she went out, and, familiar with her step, hastened into the hall from the dining-room on the first floor. “Your face is like ice!” he exclaimed, as he kissed her. “It is piercing cold, isn’t it?”

“Yes; but a glorious night!” Phemie cast a parting glance at the dark-blue vault above her, brave in its Christmas jewels.

Albert could not see these, but he heard what she could not—the momentary halt of a footstep at the little gate. Then it passed on. “Who is that, Phemie?” he whispered, resisting her motion to shut the door.

“Who? Where?”

“The man that went by just now. Can you see him?”

“He has just turned the corner. I can see his hat above the fence. Why do you want to know?”

“I thought it might be an acquaintance,” he returned, evasively. “But the house is filling with the frosty air, and Bonnie Ruthie is wild with impatience to see you.”

She sat upon Miss Darcy's knee before the blazing grate in the dining-room, her eyes dancing, her cheeks and lips vivid with rosy excitement. Auntie was in the midst of the fiftieth repetition of that never-to-be-worn-out nursery classic, "'Twas the night before Christmas."

"I wonder that you lend your countenance to such idle fables!" said Albert, relieving his sister of her bundles, and, after forcing her down into an arm-chair, untying her bonnet, unpinning her shawl, and rubbing her benumbed fingers.

He was the only person who ever petted her now, and, viewing her as his earthly all, he bestowed upon her love and caresses in bountiful measure.

Miss Darcy laughed good-humoredly. "Don't hit a fellow when he is down, Bertie. You are as great a slave as I am, and you can't deny it."

"I don't want to. I glory in my thralldom." He had drawn his sister's head to his shoulder as he sat beside her, and she smiled wearily, but happily, up into his face. "First the mother, then the daughter have led me in silken chains until I have forgotten how it feels to be my own master."

Phemie put up her hand to clasp his, and Miss Darcy resumed her recitation.

"As I drew in my head and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound."

"Good Heavens!"

She had put the child down and stood, facing the

window, with a look that terrified Phemie, knowing, as she did, her friend's strength of nerve and habit of self-control. She turned in the same direction, but saw nothing except the blank panes of the upper sash, and, across the lower, the wire blind that protected the interior of the room from the gaze of passers-by. "What did you see?" she inquired. "There is nothing there now."

"I thought I saw a face peering in above the blind—a man's face!" replied the other. "It startled me! Yet I am not easily frightened. The shutters should have been closed at dark, but I had a foolish notion about letting the light of happy fire-sides shine into the darker world without. I did not like to cheat any poor homeless wretch out of the glimpse of a Christmas blaze."

She rallied from her fright, and spoke in a mock dramatic tone, as ridiculing her bit of sentimentalism. "I will close them now," said Phemie, rising. "Your man's face probably belonged to some mischievous boy who clambered upon the window-sill. The streets are alive with them."

Miss Darcy held her back. "You shall do no such thing. I will attend to it. The young scaramouch may be lurking there still, ready to spring at whomsoever may look out. He won't terrify *me* into hysterics."

She undid and removed the wire blind, raised the sash, and took a deliberate survey of the premises. The gas lights were bright, the pavement and yard empty.

“All right!” she said. “He is, I suppose, like Chevy Slyme, waiting around the corner, concocting some other brilliant scheme.”

She finished her story to Ruthie, put the lumps of coal together in the grate, wondered why Sylvia did not bring in supper, and left the room, ostensibly to hurry her movements. In the hall she turned toward the front door instead of the kitchen, unbolted it noiselessly, and went out down the steps to the gate. A tall man, wrapped in a shawl, was walking slowly up the street. His back was toward her, and his gait was deliberate and natural, but she could have been sure that he had just left the shadow of the wall inclosing her little garden. He stooped slightly, and wore a slouched hat, and it might have been a freak of her excited imagination that detected something strangely familiar in his height and carriage. While she leaned upon the gate and watched him a policeman came up.

“Anything wrong, Miss Darcy?”

He knew and respected her, as did most of the so-called lower classes, and put the query with an honest desire to serve her.

“Not that I know of, Johnson.”

But her evident indecision made him stay to hear more. If she had been wrong in her impression that the face at the window was not that of a stranger, if the impertinent Paul Pry should prove to be a burglar, misinformed as to the value of the booty to be obtained by effecting an entrance into the lowly dwelling, who should return in the dead of night to carry out his de-

signs, would she not blame the absurd scruples that had hindered her from putting the officer on his guard?

"I imagined that I saw a man hanging around the house this evening," she said; "I may have been mistaken, but you had better keep an eye upon us when it grows late enough for honest people to be in bed."

"I will, madam. These are ticklish times."

They exchanged a friendly "Good-night," and Miss Darcy returned to her tea-table and her family. The meal was merry with baby's playfulness and precocious sayings; Albert's enjoyment of his holiday, and Phemie's delight in "her children." The melancholy thoughts of an hour before had fled before the reviving effect of the meeting with her brother; the cheer and warmth of home, and the happiness of "Bonnie Ruthie." She proved her right to the nickname her uncle had bestowed, to him, as to those who could watch her winsome beauty.

"Let her sit up!" he pleaded, when Phemie dismounted the tricksy sprite from his shoulder, with the information that it was bedtime. "It is Christmas—remember!"

"Only Christmas Eve," was the reply. "To-morrow night, Joey and Oliver will take supper with us. She may sit up an hour later than usual, then. No, no, uncle! 'Early to bed and early to rise!' And I prophesy a—to us—lamentably early unsealing of those bright eyes, in the morning. Now, auntie, uncle—the solemn ceremony of hanging up the stockings will be performed up-stairs. Will you assist?"

The cavalcade moved in due order—auntie leading

the way, with baby in her arms. The stockings were suspended by baby's fingers, that trembled while they did it. Then she said her prayers at mamma's knee, the others standing by, in rapt attention upon the lisped petitions—after which uncle and auntie kissed her red, wet lips, still apart with smiles; said, in one breath, "God bless her!" and left her to be undressed and put to bed by her mother.

The crooked stairway ran in a demented manner, close down to the front door, and Miss Darcy and her guest were upon the lowest step, when they paused at sound of angry tones without. A brisk altercation was going on in the yard, and while Albert's face took on the ashy hue of rage or fear, as one of the speakers raised his voice in an oath that was distinctly audible to those within, Miss Darcy unlocked the door and threw it open. The policeman, Johnson, was there, with a tall man, whose shawl had been plucked or had fallen back from his shoulders, and whose eyes gleamed fury from the shadow of his slouched hat.

"What does this mean?" said Miss Darcy, authoritatively.

"I leave you to say, madam, what it does mean!" answered the policeman, warmly. "When a man as calls himself a gentleman and a visitor to your fam'ly, first tries the back gate, then tiptoes to look over the garden wall, and then sneaks in at the front gate, and is about to peek in between the slats of the kitchen-blinds, and when I steps up and requests him, in a polite way, to move on, flies out and cusses me—you know, yourself, Miss Darcy, he's up to no good! You

told me, not two hours ago, to keep an eye on him."

The stranger tore off his comforter and bared his head.

"Can you determine, by this light, whether I am the person you wish to arrest, Miss Darcy?" he demanded, in haughty petulance.

The gesture and accent were enough, had she not seen his face.

"There is some mistake here, Johnson!" was her response, uttered with a certain desolate tremulousness that checked the man's inclination to comment further upon the behavior of her acquaintance. "I know this gentleman. He has friends living with me. Mr. Hart, will you walk in? It is very cold out here."

Johnson touched his hat in sulky respect to the lady, and Robert followed his hostess into the house. Albert had retreated to the supper-room, and still very pale, stood, with compressed mouth and frowning forehead, in the middle of the floor, his hands behind him. Robert bent a searching, fiery look upon him in entering.

They had not met in three years, and the boy had shot up into a man. He was nearly six feet in height, with marked, handsome features, and a dark moustache, that, with the pensive cast of countenance common to the sightless, and the dignity acquired in the lecture-room, made him look fully five years older than he was. In her perturbation the idea that the senior brother-in-law would not recognize the other

did not occur to Miss Darcy until Hart wheeled angrily upon her, with—"May I trouble you to introduce this gentleman to me, madam. Unless I am mistaken, my business with him should be settled first of all."

He had his hand in his bosom, and his malignant sneer stilled the blood at Miss Darcy's heart.

"It is Albert Rowland!" she said hastily. "I supposed that you had recognized him, or I should have told you who he was."

"Is it possible?" the menacing look passed through the degrees of incredulity and conviction into an embarrassed attempt at a smile. "I was near making an awkward blunder," he said, ungraciously. "It is well for you, young man, that I found out my mistake in time. Well! have you no welcome for your sister's husband after his three years of absence?"

"I shall be better able to answer your question when I have heard your apology for your desertion of her, and your silence during those three years," retorted Albert, without changing his position except by rearing his head defiantly.

He resembled his sister so strongly, as he did this, that Miss Darcy involuntarily glanced at Hart to note the effect of the likeness upon him. It did not soften him, for he turned from the boy with a short, disagreeable laugh.

"Since I am likely to wait some time for a brotherly greeting from one who was formerly a pensioner upon my bounty, may I ask you, Miss Darcy, to notify Mrs. Hart—if she still owns the name—that I

am here? I put no force upon her inclinations. She need not see me if she does not wish it. If her requisitions are the same as those of this, her doughty knight, she had better excuse herself from coming down." He threw himself upon a chair, his back toward Albert.

"Mrs. Hart will be glad to see you," Miss Darcy controlled herself to say. "She has always found excuses for your going, and your prolonged absence."

Justice to Phemie would not let her say less. The intolerable heart-faintness that seized her, prevented her from saying more. She went out into the hall; up the zigzag staircase, and pushed open the door of the snug sitting-room, where Phemie sat in the dusky glow of the firelight, crooning the sweetest of cradle-songs to her babe.

"Gently rest! the night-stars gleam;
Soft thy slumbers, sweet thy dream;
Fear no harm, for I will keep
Watch with Love, while thou'rt asleep.
Oh, hush thee, now, in slumbers mild,
While watch I keep, oh, sleep, my child!"





CHAPTER XV.

ROBERT HART had never been to Australia. His wife even doubted, from stray hints that escaped him, from time to time, whether he had ever left the American Continent. He had been “knocking about the world,” he told her, cavalierly, “and he wouldn’t be bored with questions as to how he had spent his time.” He did not reciprocate the forbearance he exacted from her in this regard. He required a succinct account of her mode of life and occupations while left to her own resources, and so far from exhibiting repentance at learning how she had struggled to secure her present footing of comparative comfort, concealed but poorly his gratification that she had found the task of self-support no easy one.

“Almost as irksome as dependence upon a husband for a livelihood, wasn’t it?” he said, tweaking her ear, as she finished her story. “Ah, little one, men may be great fools, but women are greater!”

The blood mounted to Phemie’s temples, but she said nothing.

The ideal Robert, set in the subdued light of misfortune and unjust obloquy; touched and retouched by her fond fancy, had borne the symmetrical proportions and noble lineaments of her early love. For him she had longed, and looked, and waited; him she was prepared to receive into the arms of her wifely affection; to serve and to obey for the remainder of their united lives. The return of the real Robert broke the charm. She did not know the shabby-genteel loafer who presented himself as a claimant for her loving duty—a man prematurely old; broken in health, and with the unmistakable taint of profligacy stamped upon his features, his bearing, and his language. He had deteriorated fearfully since the date of his disappearance below the horizon of fashionable life. Never inherently strong, when he was once thrown upon a downward grade, there were no brakes ready to his hand to keep him from rushing to ruin with headlong speed. Whatever money he had carried away with him, he had brought none back. Drawn by some strange fascination to the scene of his former prosperity and subsequent humiliation, he had tossed about on the turbulent tide of Bohemian life for two days, unrecognized by a single old acquaintance, until he ran against his wife at the door of the printing-office. He knew her on the instant, and dogged her home. It was his face which Miss Darcy had espied gazing in upon the happy family group.

Phemie recoiled, with a cry of virtuous horror—a swift upspringing of righteous anger and womanly

revulsion of feeling against the author of the insult, when he told her he had not known Albert, and believed she had married a second time, thinking he would never return, and that the child in Miss Darcy's lap was the offspring of the iniquitous union.

"Sit still!" ordered her husband, laughing immoderately at her blanched face, blazing eyes, and frantic effort to free herself from the embrace that held her down upon his knee. "The mistake was a very natural one," he pursued, when he could speak. "Other women have comforted themselves with new loves in a shorter time than you had for consolation. And, recollecting Miss Darcy's partiality for *isms*, how was I to know that you and she had not imbibed Free Love notions, and carried them into practice? By the way, that brother of yours is a handsome puppy, but a confoundedly insolent one."

Phemie ceased to struggle. "Is this Robert Hart?" she said, in scornful incredulity. "Can this man, who laughs over the confession of his doubts of his wife's honor; who ascribes to her principles and actions of which pure women, who love their lawful husbands, cannot hear without shame and sorrow; who couples with his mention of these the name of his and her child; who defames the brother to whom he was once a generous benefactor—can this be he whom I used to love and respect as the noblest of his kind? Let me go, Robert! You said once—many times—long ago, that we could never understand one another. I believe it now!" *a fool*

"As you like!" Robert released her, and eyed

her contemptuously, as she walked from him to the window to conceal her emotion. "You have not out-lived your taste for sham heroics, I perceive. They won't go down with me, Phemie, any more than they used to. I came home, determining that it should not be my fault if we did not live together peaceably. And here you are in a tantrum"—an oath—"before I have been with you twenty-four hours. I call this deuced unhandsome behavior! And all because, when—moved by a desire to ascertain if the coast is clear, before introducing myself to your presence—I peep in at the window, and seeing a good-looking buck of a fellow, with his arm about your waist, I am disposed to be jealous of him, and doubtful of your constancy."

"We will drop the subject, if you please!" said Phemie, without turning around.

"Agreed! Start your own topics. I am complaisant—only remarking, as a finale to this chapter, that public characters—especially public women—are usually less squeamish."

They were in Phemie's sitting-room, and it was Christmas afternoon. Ruth, worn out with play and excitement, was asleep in the next room. Joe Bonney had come in after dinner, to take Albert to see Emily. If one had looked into the "office," he would have seen Miss Darcy at her desk, her head bent upon her crossed arms, in an attitude of deep dejection; her heart racked with fears for the welfare of her treasures, now that the husband and father had assumed the guardianship of them. Had she surmised the

import of the dialogue going on between the two upstairs, she could not have foreseen more distinctly the results of the prodigal's return.

"While I think of it," resumed Hart, presently, seeing that his wife made no motion to continue the conversation, "let me inquire who is the head of this concern."

"I do not understand you," said Phemie, distantly.

"This house—this Cottage Queer! Who supplies most capital—you, or Miss Darcy?"

"We share the expense. Mine is heavier than hers, of course, as I have two to support."

"Who pays the rent?"

"We divide it equally."

Phemie did not shirk the cross-examination. He was her legal proprietor, and had the right to know everything pertaining to her affairs.

"What possessed you to go into business with her, beside the wish to affront me by consorting with a woman who, you know, was more obnoxious to me than any other person alive?"

"I did not seek her. She came to me with help and sympathy when everybody else forsook me. She was mother and sister to me when my own mother and sisters looked askance at me. She has cherished me and my child with a love surpassing that of parent or friend. She would have maintained us entirely, if I would have permitted it."

"It is a pity you did not. I have no doubt the connection has been creditable and profitable to her.

Rely upon it, she has made money out of it. Have you kept any account of your expenditures?"

"I have."

"I shall examine them, and see that you have not been cheated. If this copartnership is to continue, you must have a written contract. I have no confidence in that sly old maid."

Phemie was silent, but it was not the silence of submission, such as her husband was accustomed to read in her face. He was nettled to push her further.

"Moreover, unless she comports herself with great circumspection, she will have to clear out. She can't lord it over me as she has over you, as I shall take an early opportunity of showing her. We may as well come to an understanding early as late." He got up and shook out one leg, then the other, with the old assertion of masculinity she remembered so well. "Do you happen to have any change about you?" he asked, nonchalantly. "I want some cigars, and I am going to take a walk. Does that she-dragon of yours allow smoking upon her premises?"

"You can smoke in this room whenever you like. How much money do you want?" Phemie produced her pocket-book.

"None! if it is to be doled out to me in that style. You can keep your precious lucre. When I held the purse-strings, I never asked you how much or how little you needed. I gave freely to you of my wealth while it lasted. But this is a fair specimen of the gratitude of your sex." He caught up his hat in real or affected indignation, and moved toward the door.

“One moment!” said Phemie, calmly. “I received thirty dollars last night for a story upon which I had worked a week. I spent five on my way home. The rest you will find in here. The law gives it to you, if you choose to take it. If it did not, I should still regard it, and all the rest of my earnings as due to you, in consideration of what you have done for me in the past. There is no difference of opinion between us on *that* subject, at any rate.”

She put the pocket-book into his hand. With a murmur of “refunding the loan very soon,” he took it and departed.

The change which his coming produced in the late quiet and orderly household, however offensive it may have been to Miss Darcy, did not provoke her to any manifestation of disapproval. She submitted to the delayed breakfast; the five o'clock dinner; the fumes of tobacco and hot punch that pervaded the halls and staircase whenever he spent the evening in his wife's sitting-room; to his supercilious notice of herself and criticism of her bills of fare, with a placid good-breeding that astonished Phemie, conversant as she was with the strong-minded woman's powers of self-control. Her admiration and affection for her friend would have risen into veneration had she divined how much severer was the test applied to her forbearance by Hart's tone to his wife and his slight regard for their child.

He was “on the look-out for a situation,” he condescended to inform his vassal, and to this look-out, wherever it was, he repaired each forenoon, when

the weather was moderately fine. His wont was to lounge into the breakfast-room two hours after Miss Darcy had dispatched hers and settled herself in the office; eat the toast or muffins, and drink the strong coffee his wife had kept hot for him; discuss the egg she had boiled, the ham or fish she had broiled to tempt his slender appetite—mute and surly, or crossly quarrelsome. Baby was banished to the kitchen, if auntie were too busy to have her in the office, for her prattle offended her father's nerves. It was eleven o'clock before he was ready to quit the house, and until then, Phemie was kept in constant attendance. He was one of the men who act like a small whirlwind upon whatever household they enter. Had this boasted seven servants instead of half a one, he would have kept them all on the jump with his demands for personal service. Ignoring what was no secret to him, namely, that Sylvia's labors were confined to the kitchen, and that, even there, she required the assistance of one of her mistresses at certain seasons, he expected to have his meals at whatever hours he designated; coffee or chocolate in his chamber, when he was not disposed to come to the dining-room; his boots polished and his coat brushed with the same degree of nicety he would have required from an accomplished valet; hot water at all times of the day or night; fires in bed-room and parlor, and freedom from Ruth's company except upon such rare occasions as he chose to amuse himself with her pranks, as he would have laughed at the gambols of a tame monkey. Her name was a

source of dire displeasure to him. It never passed his lips, and Phemie feared, sometimes, that he disliked the child because she bore it. Without exchanging a syllable with Miss Darcy on the subject, she acknowledged to herself that his indifference and often ill-humor toward her babe were, as in the elder lady's case, the greatest trial she had to endure. The combined offices of shoe-black, valet, cook, and waiter were a draught upon her time she could not sustain without serious inconvenience. His capricious fondness for herself, with the alternation of coldness and unkindness, wearied Patience and wore out Love. But these were as nothing compared with the disappointment of her cherished hope that their infant was to be the instrument of the father's regeneration. She had looked forward to this with a secure faith that was almost sublime; had lived upon the anticipation until, when the hope was dashed, she felt, for the first time in her toilsome, strangely-crossed existence, that there was nothing left for which to toil and live; wished, in apathetic abasement of spirit, that God would let her die.

Yet there was stringent need for exertion. The expenses of the family were doubled by the late addition to their number, and she would have worked herself into her grave before she would have let Miss Darcy be the poorer for it. It was sore labor—this call upon the brain for matter fresh, new, and attractive, when the body was weary and the heart aching. She could not conceal from herself the truth that what was penned in these circumstances con-

tributed nothing to, if it did not really detract from her reputation; but she must go forward in the face of discouragements from within and from without. Her husband grumbled incessantly at her absorption in her profession; was unsparing in his complaints that she grudged him the little time she devoted to his comfort and amusement; drove him from her and home by her neglect to provide for his entertainment as did other wives who cared more for their husbands than for literature. It was less easy for her to support these imputations patiently, as month after month passed and his position upon the "look-out" seemed destined to become the only permanent one he was to obtain, and the task of maintaining him in the expensive habits of gentleman at large, strained every energy to the utmost. Despite Miss Darcy's ingenuity in relieving her of whatever burden she could, by any stretch of imagination and conscience, assert ought to devolve upon her, she was forced to apply again for book-keeping and copying in order to eke out the income derived from her regular contributions to magazines and newspapers. Not even Miss Darcy knew how often, that winter and spring, she sat up all night, writing until the pen seemed to cleave to her fingers, and the agony of the swollen wrist was tempered within the bounds of endurance by wet bandages, often renewed, as they steamed from the heat of the red and burning flesh. If Robert were aware of all this, he never signified his appreciation of her toils in his behalf. What more reasonable than that she, who was inured to labor,

she was as much of a fool

should desire to work for one whom he pitied so sincerely, loved so fondly as he did himself? Not that he was such a brute as to allow her to help him if he could help himself. While he had means, he had shared them with her without stint, and joyed that he could do this; had positively and repeatedly prohibited her working. It galled him to see her obliged to do it now—was one of the chief elements in the depression that unfitted him for providing for his own wants. He let slip no opportunity of lamenting his evil case; chided her that she did not testify a more lively sympathy with the sufferings induced by this reflection. What more would she have? Instead of reproaches—silent though they were—compassion should be his portion—compassion and delicate consideration, such as the just and tender-hearted award to the misfortunes of him whose merits should have purchased success.

Phemie did pity him, but it was commiseration that flourished upon the decay of respect. She never said to him that, were she in his place, she would dig in the public culverts; sweep the streets; hold horses at a hotel; or black boots at a crossing, sooner than be dependent for the bread she ate upon the earnings of an overtasked woman. But she *felt* it, and the more keenly that he received this support as his right; recognized no obligation to her that it was rendered.

At the end of six months the crisis came. It was a hot July afternoon, when Mr. Bonney, now the head partner of the house in which he had received his commercial training, and promoted to the dignity

of a private box, yept an office, at the further end of the long store, was interrupted in the middle of a business letter by the intelligence—"A lady wants to see you, sir!"

It was Phemie. Joe hastened to set a chair for her, and offered her a glass of ice-water and a fan. "You look very tired!" he said, kindly. "I am afraid you are not strong."

"I am neither strong nor well, this summer," she rejoined. "And just now, I am half wild! I never thought to come to you on such an errand, Joe—but can you lend me two hundred dollars? Stay!" He had put his hand upon his check-book. "I have made up my mind to tell you why I need it. I owe a quarter's rent and two or three small bills. I never had bills until lately, but I knew there would be about three hundred dollars coming to me, when my half-yearly copyright account was made up at my publisher's. I went to receive this to-day, and was informed that Mr. Hart had drawn every dollar due me a week since—my publisher supposed, by my directions. I have nothing to say against this. A husband has unlimited control over his wife's wages. But if I do not pay the rent, Miss Darcy must. We do this upon alternate quarters. Thus far, the increase of my family has not entailed heavier expenses upon her, and it must not, if I can help it. If you can lend me the sum I have named, I will work it out for you. I cannot promise to pay it in any other way. To-day's experience has taught me that I must not anticipate my earnings."

Joe wrote out a check, signed "J. M. Bonney," in his round, clerkly hand, and gave it to her. "Pay me when it is perfectly convenient. Ten years hence will suit me first-rate. And, I say, Phemie, when you would like more, you can have it on the same terms. I don't want a better investment."

The lower lip—no longer full and red—quivered so violently that she could only bow her head in thanks. Joe fidgeted to the window, then to his desk; blew his nose behind the raised lid, and emerged from its shadow in a profuse perspiration, especially about the eyes. "It is the hottest day I ever felt!" he said, so very naturally that embarrassment would have served his turn better. "It's a tender subject, I know, Phemie, but you must really take care of yourself. This sort of thing, now, isn't fair—in point of fact, it is beastly and diabolical, you see—and it must not happen again. You must leave orders with people who owe you money not to pay it except to you, or your written order."

"It would do no good, Joe." The lip was still, now, and the upper laid a short, hard curve upon it. "I am powerless. All women are, I think."

"So much the more reason why men should be honest, and give them their rights!" said illogical Joe. "I never could see any reason why they shouldn't pull evenly together in harness, instead of quarrelling all the time. But this taking your hard-earned money, Phemie, is an ugly dodge that shall be looked into."

Phemie shook her head and arose to go. "Better

let it alone! The sore is too deep and wide for your powers of healing, and I am but one of many sufferers. I wish I could thank you, brother, but I cannot."

As she turned the corner of the street on which her house stood, she heard a child's shrill shrieks of terror or pain, and quickening her pace, distinguished, as she gained the front gate, her husband's voice, loud in dispute with some one upon the lower floor. Applying her pass-key, she followed the direction of the tumult, and entered Miss Darcy's office. That lady stood by the desk, enfolding in a close embrace baby Ruth, whose arms were tightened about her neck in a convulsion of alarm. Robert was between them and the door. He had a thin, flat ruler in his hand, which he had picked up from the desk, and his face was black with rage.

"I have borne your prying and interfering and tampering with me and mine as long as I mean to!" were the first words to which Phemie listened. "It is not enough that my wife is your obedient puppet, but you would teach my child to defy my authority. I will have no more trifling. I give you two minutes to put her down and leave her to me. If it is not done in that time, I shall take her. If I tear her limb from limb, the responsibility rests with you—not me!"

Phemie went straight to the child, took her in her arms, and bade her be quiet. The little creature obeyed instantly, hiding her eyes and smothering her sobs upon her mother's bosom. When she was quite

composed, Phemie carried her up-stairs, and consigned her to Sylvia's care. Then she returned to the study, where the late combatants awaited her coming in ominous silence.

"Now, I will hear the explanation of this scene!" she said, in a passionless tone, one would hardly have expected from an affectionate parent, after what had passed.

It was given at length, and excitedly, by Mr. Hart: briefly, and with constrained moderation, by Miss Darcy. Bonnie Ruthie had been playing in the hall when her father opened the front door. He had called her to come to him, and she, in perversity, according to his account, in frolic, according to Miss Darcy's, had scampered away from him, and hidden under the tall desk. He had pursued her, still commanding her to come to him, and she replied by a saucy laugh, peeping at him from behind the leg of the desk. When, however, he seized her by the arm and dragged her out, she perceived that he was in angry earnest, and tried to free herself, screaming to "Auntie" to help her. Whereupon he had caught up the ruler and commenced a chastisement, which Miss Darcy had checked at the third blow, by disengaging the child from his grasp and sheltering her, as we have seen.

"If she had deserved correction, and it had been administered in a proper manner, I should have remained a passive looker-on," said Ruthie's defender, in conclusion. "But she was in danger of serious injury, and I saw that Mr. Hart had forgotten how

heavy a man's hand is, and how tender is the flesh, how soft are the bones of a little child."

Phemie paled at the simple sentence that set forth the peril her baby had escaped, and her husband, seeing this, broke in tauntingly:—

"Ay! believe her, and not me! Believe and trust her who has been the bane of our peace! the false friend who has beguiled you from the path of duty and respectability! The time has come when you must make your choice between us. Either she leaves this house to-night, and forever, or I do! You must bid one of us a final farewell, here and now!"

"She shall not decide! I will go," exclaimed Miss Darcy, with generous impetuosity. "She can bear me witness that I have never put forward any claim to her duty, her time, or her affection, that could conflict with yours. Phemie, dear! we will get this parting over quickly and bravely; your first duty is to your husband."

"I deny it!" Phemie laid her hand upon her friend's arm. "I promised to be a wife—not a slave. I reject this arbitrary test. This is your home—not mine. If you desert me, I have no home but the street. My husband has not left me the means wherewith to pay for a night's lodgings for myself and child. The Lord judge between me and him. I have made my choice."

I am not writing a story with a moral. If I were, I should narrate how the wife elected to follow the husband's wanderings, and how her death with her babe, of starvation in a garret, resulted in his refor-

mation and conversion to decency and piety. I am describing things that have been, and that are. I would guard this point carefully. I concede, cheerfully, the fact that Phemie was neither a perfect woman nor a model wife. I would leave the judgment of my readers unbiassed. If her errors were great, her sufferings were not light. If her final decision was a sin against God and man, she did not go unpunished.

True to his word, Robert Hart shook off the dust of his feet upon the steps of the corner cottage that very night. It was not until after he had gone that Phemie found a scrap of paper upon her desk, addressed to her, and bearing these words—

“You may not know that, if you persist in your refusal to live with me as my wife, I can apply for the custody of my child, when she shall reach the age of five or six years.”

Under the shadow of this threat, the mother lived and labored for two years longer. Spurred by it, and the entreaties of her friends, she, at the end of that term, took the preliminary steps toward a divorce upon the ground of desertion and failure to provide for her support.

“I cannot advise you to proceed in this matter yet awhile, madam,” was the caution of the wary lawyer whom she consulted. “Should Mr. Hart see fit to contest the suit, the fact that after a two years’ absence you received him gladly and lived under the same roof with him for six months, would operate seriously against your success. I should recommend a compromise.”

Phemie went back to her child and her work, and abode in the shadow of the menace, two years longer—years of dread and darkness which had their record in the wild glance that, through all her after-life, would leap to her eyes at the approach of a stealthy footstep; at the rattling of a casement at midnight; at the receipt of a letter, the superscription of which was lawyerly and unfamiliar; at many a simple incident that would have passed unnoticed by the happy and fortunate, but which recalled for her the long-drawn agony of that waiting for the day of her child's safety—years of doubting and fearing, which stole the nectarine flush from her cheeks, and left white marks among her brown hair, like the streakings of phantom fingers.

Three times, during this period, her husband wrote to her for money, which was forwarded to him with terrified punctuality; twice she was informed by her men of business that they had honored Mr. Hart's drafts upon them to the amount of several hundred dollars—each time, just after the publication of a new volume from her pen—a circumstance that showed how vigilant was his watch upon her, and intensified her apprehension of his sudden descent upon her folded lamb. The aforesaid men of business had “not thought it expedient to refuse to pay the money to the claimant, lest they should become involved in a law-suit,” in which event they were sagacious enough to understand that the chances were as a hundred to one against the nominal owner of the copyright.

And then the hour of deliverance arrived.

“But Phemie was greatly mistaken if she imagined that she would be happier after she got her divorce,” said Olive to Emily, on the latter’s return from a summer tour. “I was saying to Joe, yesterday, that she was the very picture of a broken-hearted woman. She seems to take no interest in anything but her child and her everlasting writing. Miss Darcy has taken her off into the country for a month, and Albert is with them. They mean to hire a house near the Institute, and all live together. You know Albert is a professor there, now. They say he lectures splendidly, and he is invited to deliver lectures all over the country. I *do* hope they will determine to move out of town, if it is only a little way. People talk so about Phemie’s domestic troubles, and we cannot deny that she and her husband could not live together—and if she didn’t drive him from home twice—what did? I asked Joe that plain question only this morning at breakfast. But I have to be careful what I say to him about her. He really flew out at me when I said that, and nearly swore at Mr. Hart, for a pompous, selfish, thieving humbug. That isn’t a beginning of what he called him. He never could abide him, and he is ridiculously partial to Phemie. Albert is just as bad. He will have it that she is a persecuted saint. But for all that, Em, you and I may thank our stars, as I said to Jane, the other day, when she was repeating some of the shameful things people say of the divorce—we ought to return thanks every day we live that we never had any temptation to become strong-minded women.”

“If I had, I hope I should have had grace given me to resist it,” said proper and pious Emily. “This disposition to abandon the walk of life in which Providence intended women to remain, is a great and growing evil—a most dangerous snare to the young girls of the present day. Phemie’s career and present condition are to me a striking proof of the punishment that, even in this world, waits upon such a flagrant violation of natural laws.”

—So, thanks to Seth and his mouth-piece, my story has a moral after all.

Pretty Good

THE END.

Approved, masterly



CHARYBDIS.

CHAPTER I.

“**I**T is always a thankless office to give advice in these matters,” said Mrs. Charles Romaine, discreetly. “Your brother and I have decided not to attempt to influence you in any way, Constance; not to bias your judgment in favor of, or against Mr. Withers. You, as the one most nearly interested in the consequences of your acceptance or refusal of his offer, should surely be able to make up your mind how to treat it and him.”

“I should be, as you say,” responded the sister-in-law. “But I cannot.”

She was a handsome woman, in the prime of early maturity, whose face seldom wore, in the sight of others, the perturbed expression that now begloomed it.

“That does not affect the fact of your duty,” answered Mrs. Romaine, with considerable severity. “There are times and circumstances in which vacillation is folly—criminal weakness. You have known Mr. Withers long enough to form a correct estimate of his character. In means and in reputation he is all that could be desired, your brother says. Either you like him well enough to marry him, or you do not. Your situation in life will be bettered by an alliance with him, or it will not. These are the questions for your consideration. And, excuse me for saying, that a woman of your age should not be at a loss in weighing these.”

Again, Constance had nothing ready except a weak phrase of reluctant acquiescence. “I feel the weight of your reasoning, Margaret. You cannot despise me more than I do myself for my childish hesitancy. Mr. Withers—any sensible and honorable man deserves different treatment. If I could see the way clear before me, I would walk in it. But, indeed, I am in a sore dilemma.”

She turned away, as her voice shook on the last sentence, and affected to be busy with some papers upon a stand.

Mrs. Romaine was just in all her dealings with her husband’s sister, and meant, in her way, to be kind. Constance respected her for her excellent sense, her honesty of purpose and action—but she was the last of her friends whom she would have selected, of her free will, as the *confidante* of such joys and sorrows as shrink from the touch of hard natures; refuse to be

confessed to unsympathizing ears. Her heart and eyes were very full now, but she would strangle sooner than drop a tear while those cold, light orbs were upon her.

In consideration of the weakness and ridiculous sensitiveness of her companion, Mrs. Romaine forbore to speak the disdain she felt at the irresolution and distress she could not comprehend. "Is Mr. Withers personally disagreeable to you?" she demanded, in her strong contralto voice.

"I liked him tolerably well—very well, in fact, until he told me what brought him here so regularly," Constance stammered. "Now, I am embarrassed in his presence—so uneasy that I wish, sometimes, I could never see or hear of him again."

"Mere shyness!" said Mrs. Romaine. "Such as would be pardonable in a girl of seventeen. In a woman of seven-and-twenty, it is absurd. Mr. Withers is highly esteemed by all who know him. Your disrelish of his society is caprice, unless"—the marble-gray eyes more searching—"unless you have a prior attachment?"

Constance smiled drearily. "I have never been in love in my life, that I know of."

"You are none the worse for having escaped an infatuation that has wrecked more women for time and for eternity than all other delusions combined. A rational marriage—founded upon mutual esteem and the belief that the social and moral condition of the parties to the contract would be promoted thereby, is the only safe union. The young—inexperienced and

headstrong — repudiate this principle. The mature in age know it to be true. But, as I have said, it is not my intention to direct your judgment. This is a momentous era in your life. I can only hope and pray that you may be guided aright in your decision.”

Left to herself to digest this morsel of pious encouragement, Constance drew a low seat to the hearth-register ; clasped her hands upon her knees, and tried, for the hundredth time that day, to weigh the facts of her position, fairly and impartially.

She had been an orphan for eight years, and a resident in the house of her eldest brother. Her senior by more than a dozen years, and in the exciting swing of successful mercantile life, he had little leisure for the study of his sister's tastes and traits, when she first became his ward, and conceived the task to be an unnecessary one, now that she was a fixture in his family, and appeared to get on smoothly with his wife. In truth, it never occurred to him to lay a disturbing finger upon the tiniest wheel of the domestic machinery. His respect for his spouse's executive and administrative abilities was exceeded only by her confidence in her own powers. She was never irascible, but he knew that she would have borne down calmly and energetically any attempt at interference in her operations as minister of the interior—the ruler of the establishment he, by a much-abused figure of speech, called his home. A snug and elegant abode she made of it; and beholding Constance well-dressed and well-fed, habitually cheerful, and never rebellious, he may be forgiven for not spending

a thought upon her for hours together, and when he did remember her, for dwelling the rather upon his disinterested kindness to a helpless dependent than speculating upon her possible and unappeased spiritual appetites.

For these, and for other whimsies, Mrs. Romaine had little thought and no charity. Life, with her, was a fabric made up of duties, various and many, but all double-twisted into hempen strength, and woven too closely for a shine of fancy or romance to strike through. She had coincided readily in her husband's plan to take charge of his young sister when her parents died. "Her brother's house is the fittest asylum for her," she had said. "I shall do my best to render her comfortable and contented."

She kept her word. Constance's wardrobe was ample and handsome; her room elegantly furnished, and she entered society under the chaperonage of her sister-in-law. The servants were trained to respect her; the children to regard her as their elder sister. What more could a penniless orphan require? Mrs. Romaine was not afraid to ask the question of her conscience and of Heaven. Her "best" was no empty profession. It was lucky for her self-complacency that she never suspected what years of barrenness and longing these eight were to her *protégée*.

Constance was not a genius—therefore she never breathed even to herself—"I feel like a seed in the cold earth, quickening at heart, and longing for the air." Her temperament was not melancholic, nor did her taste run after poetry and martyrdom. She

was simply a young, pretty, and moderately well-educated woman, too sensible not to perceive that her temporal needs were conscientiously supplied, and too affectionate to be satisfied with the meagre allowance of nourishment dealt out for her heart and sympathies. While the memory of her father's proud affection and her mother's caresses were fresh upon her, she had long and frequent spells of lonely weeping; was wont to resign herself in the seclusion of her chamber to passionate lamentations over her orphanage and isolation of spirit. Routine was Mrs. Romaine's watchword, and in bodily exercise Constance conformed to her quiet despotism; visited, studied, worked and took recreation by rule. The system wrought upon her beneficially so far as her *physique* was concerned. She grew, from a slender, pale girl, into ripe and healthy womanhood; was more comely at twenty-seven than at twenty-one.

But all this time she was an hungered. She would cheerfully have refunded to her brother two-thirds of her liberal allowance of pocket-money, if he had granted to her with its quarterly payment, a sentence of fraternal fondness, a token, verbal or looked, that he remembered whose child she was, and that the same mother-love had guarded their infancy. Her sister-in-law would have been welcome to withhold many of her gifts of wearing-apparel and jewelry, had she bethought herself, now and then, how gratefully kisses fall upon young lips, and that youthful heads are often sadly weary for the lack of a friendly shoulder, or a loving bosom on which to rest. She

did not accuse her relatives of wilful unkindness because these were withheld. They interchanged no such unremunerative demonstrations among themselves. Husband and wife were courteous in their demeanor, the one to the other; their children were demure models of filial duty at home and industry at school; the training in both places being severe enough to quench what feeble glimmer of individuality may have been born with the offspring of the methodical and practical parents. Constance found them extremely uninteresting, notwithstanding the natural love for children which led her to court their companionship during the earlier weeks of her domestication in their house. It was next to a miracle that she did not stiffen in this atmosphere into a buckram image of feminine propriety—a prodigy of starch and virtue, such as would have brought calm delight to the well-regulated mind of her exemplar, and effectually chased all thoughts of matrimony from those of masculine beholders. Had her discontent with her allotted sphere been less active, the result would have been certain and deplorable. She was, instead, popular among her acquaintances of both sexes, and had many friends, if few lovers. This latter deficiency had given her no concern until within two years. At twenty-five, she opened her eyes in wide amaze upon the thinning ranks of her virgin associates, and began seriously to ponder the causes that had left her unsought, save by two very silly and utterly ineligible swains, whose overtures were, in her esteem, presumption that was only too ridiculous

to be insulting. Her quick wit and knowledge of the world helped her to a solution of the problem. "I am poor and dependent upon my brother's charity," she concluded, with a new and stifling uprising of dissatisfaction with her condition. "Men rarely fall in love with such—more rarely woo them." She never spoke the thought aloud, but it grew and strengthened until it received a startling blow from Mr. Withers' proposal of marriage.

He was a wealthy banker from a neighboring city, whom business relations with Mr. Romaine drew to his house and into his sister's company. His courtship was all Mrs. Romaine could desire. His visits were not too frequent, and were paid at stated intervals, as befitted his habits of order and punctuality. His manner to the lady honored by his preference was replete with stately respect, that was the antipodes of servile devotion, while his partiality for her society and admiration for her person were unmistakable. He paid his addresses through Mr. Romaine as his fair one's guardian, offering voluntarily to give her whatever time for deliberation upon the proposal she might desire.

"You had better think it over for a week," advised her brother, when he had laid the case duly before Constance. "It is too serious a matter to be settled out of hand."

After that, neither he nor his wife obtruded their counsel upon her until the afternoon of the seventh day. Then Mrs. Romaine, going to her sister's chamber to communicate the substance of a telegram just

received by her husband, to the effect that Mr. Withers would call that evening at eight o'clock, was moved to grave remonstrance by the discovery that she whom he came to woo had no answer prepared for him. Constance was no nearer ready after the conversation recorded some pages back.

"I cannot afford to be romantic," she had reminded herself several times. "And who knows but this irrational repugnance may pass away when I have once made up my mind to accept him? This may be—in all likelihood it is my last chance of achieving an independent position. It has been a long time coming, and my charms will be on the wane soon. True, a marriage with Elnathan Withers is not the destiny of which I have dreamed, but then dreams are but foolish vagaries after all. Life is real and earnest."

She had kept her heart alive upon nothing else for eight years—dreams of home, and love, and appreciation; of liberty to speak out what she had never lispied since her mother died, and of being once again, joyously and without reserve, *herself*. There are no harder spectres to lay than these same dreams. Memories, however dear and sacred, are more easily forgotten or dismissed, or smothered by the growth of later ones. If she bade them farewell now, it was for a lifetime.

"A lifetime!" she repeated, shivering with a sick chill, and crouching lower over the register. "Maybe ten, maybe twenty, who knows but forty years! It is a tedious slumber of one's heart, and a loveless

marriage is a loathsome sepulchre for one's better and real self. A lifetime! and I can have but one! But *one!* If this step should be ruin and misery, there can be no redemption this side of the grave. *His* grave, perhaps—just as probably mine!”

To-night, this very hour, she must resist the glittering temptation to forswear her womanhood, or murder, with her own hand, the dear visions that had come to be more to her than reality. The winter twilight had fallen early. It was the season best loved by her dream visitors. She had not lied in declaring to her inquisitor that she had never been in love, but she confessed that she had equivocated as the shadowy figure of her ideal lover stood beside her in the friendly gloom. Mrs. Romaine would have questioned her sanity had she guessed how the girl had sobbed her griefs into quiet upon his bosom, how talked lowly but audibly to him of her love and the comfort his presence brought. She had never looked into his face, but she should know him in an instant should they two ever meet in the flesh, as they did now daily in spirit. Somewhere in the dim and blessed future he was waiting for her, and she had borrowed patience from the hope. She was to be his wife—the mother of children as unlike the prodigies of repression that lined two sides of her brother's table as cherubs to puppets. She welcomed them to her arms in these twilight trances. They lolled upon her knees, slept in her embrace, strained eager arms about her neck, dappled her cheek with their kisses. Unsubstantial possessions these, but

cherished as types of good things to come. Other women had such riches—women with faces less fair, and affections less ardent than hers. If the Great Father was good and merciful, and the Rewarder of them who put their trust in Him, a true and loving parent, who rejoiced in the happiness of His creatures—all these must be hers at last. If she resigned them now, it was a final separation.

“And I can have but one lifetime,” she moaned again. Thwarted and fruitless thus far, but still all she had.

The one idea recurred to her with the persistency of a presentiment. The life which God had given, the heart He had endowed!

“If some one, stronger and wiser than I, would only take the responsibility of decision from my soul, would hedge me in on the right and left, I would go forward. As it is, I dare not! I dare not!” She sobbed and wrung her hands in the agonies of irresolution.

“You told Constance about the telegram?” It was her brother speaking in the library below. The sound arose plainly through the open register.

“I did. But I regret to say that she is not yet in the frame of mind we could wish her to carry to the interview with Mr. Withers,” said Mrs. Romaine. She always expressed herself with deliberate precision even in conjugal *têtes-à-tête*.

“No?” Constance heard the rustle of the evening paper as Charles laid it down, and the creak of his chair as he confronted his wife. “What is the matter?”

“Some overstrained ideas of the beauty and propriety of reciprocal devotion, I believe. She looks for a hero in a husband, and Mr. Withers has nothing heroic in his appearance or composition.”

“He is worth more than half a million, all accumulated by his own talents and industry,” returned Mr. Romaine. “Constance cannot be such an egregious simpleton as not to perceive the manifest advantages of this connection to her. I have never complained of the burden of her maintenance, but I have often wondered her own sense of justice and expediency did not urge her to put forth some effort at self-support. There is but one way in which she can do this. She is not sufficiently thorough in any branch of literature or any accomplishment to become a successful teacher. In the event of my death or failure in business she would be driven to the humiliating resource of taking in sewing for a livelihood, or to seek the more degrading position of a saleswoman in a store. Her future has been a source of much and anxious thought with me. This marriage would, I hoped, quiet my apprehensions by settling her handsomely in life. If she refuse Withers, I shall be both angry and disappointed. She is old enough to leave off school-girl sentimentality.”

The listener put out her foot and shut the register noiselessly. She had had a surfeit of disagreeable truth for that time.

Yet it was truth, every word of it. She was a mean-spirited hanger-on to her brother. She was incapable of earning a livelihood by other means than

those he had named. Her mode of life from her infancy had unfitted her for toil and privation, such as must be hers were her plain-spoken benefactor to die to-morrow. Nor had she the moral nerve to defy public opinion, to debar herself from accustomed associations and pleasures by entering the ranks of paid laborers. Hesitation was at an end. The wish that had been almost a prayer in solemn sincerity was answered fearfully soon, and she would offer no appeal. Her destiny was taken out of her hands. There was no more responsibility, no more struggling. Hedges to the right and to the left bristled with thorns, sharp and thick as porcupine quills. But one path lay open to her feet—a short and straight course that conducted her to Elnathan Withers' arms.





CHAPTER II.

“**N**ALF-PAST five! I wrote to Harriet to have dinner ready at six. We shall be just in time,” said Mr. Withers, as he took his seat in the carriage that was to convey him with his bride from the depot to their home.

Constance was jaded by her fortnight's travel, and dispirited almost beyond her power of concealment, but she had learned already that her lord disliked to have whatever observation he was pleased to make go unanswered. “She is your housekeeper, I suppose?” she replied, languidly.

“No—that is—she does not occupy the position of a salaried inferior in my establishment. I must surely have spoken to you of my cousin, Harriet Field?”

“Not that I recollect. I am very sure that I never heard the name until now.”

“Her mother,” continued Mr. Withers, in a pompous narrative-tone, “was my father's sister. Left a widow, ten years prior to her decease, she accepted my invitation to take charge of my house. She

brought with her her only child, the Harriet of whom I speak, and the two remained with me until our family group was broken in upon by death. Harriet would then have sought a situation as governess, but for my objections. She is a woman of thirty-five, or thereabouts, and I prevailed over her scruples touching the propriety of her continued residence under my roof, by representing that her mature age, even more than our relationship, placed her beyond the reach of scandal. For eighteen months she has superintended my domestic affairs to my entire satisfaction. That I have not alluded directly to her before during our acquaintanceship, is only to be accounted for by the circumstance that we have had so many other and more engrossing topics of conversation."

He raised her gloved hand to his lips in stiff gallantry, and Constance smiled, constrainedly, in reply.

His endearments, albeit he was less profuse of them than a younger and more ardent bridegroom would have been, were yet frequent enough to keep his wife in unfailing remembrance of his claims and her duties. He was, apparently, content with her passive submission to these, seemed to see in her forced complaisance evidence of her pleasure in their reception. He was too sedate, as well as too gentlemanly to be openly conceited, but his appreciation of his own importance in society and in business circles was too profound to admit a doubt of the supreme bliss of the woman he had selected to share his elevated position. Without being puppyish, he was pragmatistical; with-

out being ill-tempered, he was tenacious, in the extreme, of his dignity and the respect he considered due to this. Had her mood been lighter, Constance would have been tempted to smile at the allusion to his cousin's age, his own exceeding it by three years, as she had accidentally learned through the indiscretion of a common acquaintance. He was sensitive upon this point, she had likewise been informed. She had yet to discover upon how many others.

Most young wives would not have relished the idea of finding this invaluable relative installed as prime manager in her new abode. It mattered little to her, Constance said, still languidly, who ruled and who obeyed. She had given up so much within three months past, that resignation had become a habit; sacrifice was no longer an effort. Having nothing to hope for, she could sustain no further loss. How long this nightmare of apathy would continue was a question that did not present itself in her gray musings. Having once conquered Nature, and held Inclination under the heel of Resolve, until life seemed extinct, she anticipated no resurrection. She did not know that no single battle, however long and bloody, constitutes a campaign; that length of days and many sorrows are needed to rob youth of elasticity; that the guest who lingers longest in the human heart, clinging to the shattered shelter from which all other joys have flown, is Hope. It is doubtful if she thought with any distinctness at this period. She was certainly less actively miserable than in that which immediately preceded her en-

gagement. That was amputation, this reactionary weariness. How she would fare, by and by, when the wound had become a scar, she thought of least of all.

It was a handsome carriage in which she rode at the master's right hand. A pair of fine horses pranced before it, and a liveried coachman sat on the box. She had, sometimes, envied other women the possession of like state. She ought to derive delight from these outward symbols of her elevation in the world. It was an imposing mansion, too, before which the equipage presently paused, and a tall footman opened the front door, and ran briskly down to the sidewalk to assist the travellers in alighting. None of her associates, married or single, lived in equal style, she reflected with a stir of exultation, as she stepped out, between her husband and his lackey.

Mr. Withers' address dampened the rising glow.

"This is our home, my dear. You will find no cause of discontent with it, I hope," he said, in benign patronage, handing her up the noble flight of stone steps.

"Thank you," she replied coldly. "It is a part of the price for which I sold myself," she was meditating. "I must not quarrel with my bargain."

Miss Field met them in the hall—a wasp-like figure, surmounted by a small head. Her neck was bare and crane-like; her face very oval, her skin opaque and chalky; her hair black and shining; the forelock in long ringlets, her eyes jet beads, that rolled and twinkled incessantly.

“My *dear* cousin!” she cried, effusively, embracing her patron’s hand, and winking back an officious tear. “It is like sunshine to have you home again. *How* are you?”

“Well—thank you, Harriet! or, I should say, in tolerable health,” returned Mr. Withers, magnificently condescending. “Allow me to introduce my wife, Mrs. Withers!”

Miss Field swept a flourishing courtesy. Constance, as the truer lady of the two, offered her hand. It was grasped very slightly, and instantly relinquished.

“Charmed to have the honor—I am sure!” murmured Miss Field. “I trust I see Mrs. Withers quite well? But you, cousin—did I understand you to intimate that you were indisposed,” with strained solicitude.

“A trifling attack of indigestion, not worth mentioning to any ears excepting yours, my good nurse.”

Miss Field smiled sweetly at this concession to her anxiety, and Constance, who now heard of the “indisposition” for the first time, looked from one to the other in surprised silence.

“Perhaps Mrs. Withers would like to go directly to her apartments?” pursued Harriet, primly, with another courtesy.

“By all means,” Mr. Withers replied for her. “As it is, I fear your dinner will have to wait for her, if, as I presume is the case, you are punctual as is your custom.”

“*Could* I fail in promptitude upon this day of all

others?" queried Harriet, sentimentally arch, and preceded the bride upstairs.

"Perhaps it would be better for me not to change my dress, if I am likely to infringe upon the dinner hour," said Constance, at her chamber door.

"Oh, I do not think my cousin would approve of *that!*" exclaimed her emphatic conductress. Then she amended her inadvertence. "Of course, Mrs. Withers is the proper judge of her own actions, and I would not appear to dictate, but my cousin is punctilious on some points, and the matter of ladies' attire is one of these. I have known him so long that I am conversant with all his amiable peculiarities. I am confident he would be pleased to see Mrs. Withers assume the head of her table in full dinner toilet. But, as I remarked, I do not presume to dictate, to advise, or even suggest. Mrs. Withers is undisputed empress here."

Having run trippingly through this speech, she inflicted a third remarkable courtesy upon the novice, and vanished.

"She is underbred, and a meddler," decided Constance, while she made a rapid toilet. "I hate to be addressed in the third person. I thought it a form of speech confined, in this country, to kitchen-maids and haberdasher's clerks."

Before she could invest herself in the dinner-dress that lay uppermost in her trunk, the bell rang to summon her to the evening meal, and three minutes thereafter, the footman knocked at her door with the message that Mr. Withers had sent for her.

"I shall be down directly. Tell him not to wait for me," she said, hurriedly.

She did not expect to be taken at her word, but upon her descent to the dining-room, she beheld her husband seated at the foot of the board, and Miss Field at the head. The latter laid down the soup-ladle, and jumped up, fussily.

"Here she is, now! I resign my chair to one who will fill it more worthily than I have ever done."

"Keep your place, Harriet!" ordered her kinsman. "Mrs. Withers will waive her claims on this occasion, since she is late," designating a chair at his left as that intended for Constance's occupancy. "We would have waited for you, Constance, had I been less faint and weary. My physician has repeatedly warned me that protracted abstinence is detrimental to my digestion. Harriet, here, understands my constitution so well that I am seldom, when at home, a sufferer from the twinges of dyspepsia, that have afflicted me in my absence."

"Those horrible public tables," cried Harriet. "I assure you, I never sat down to a meal when you were away without sighing over your evil plight in being subjected to the abominable cookery and intolerable hours of hotels."

"I did not know you were a dyspeptic," observed Constance. "You seemed to enjoy good health during our tour."

"That was because Mrs. Withers does not yet comprehend your marvellous patience—the courage with which you bear pain, and the unselfishness that

leads you to conceal its ravages from the eyes of others," explained Miss Field, ogling the interesting sufferer, who was discussing a plate of excellent white soup with a solemnly conscious air. "Now, that you are safe under your own roof, we will soon undo the mischief that has been done. You do not know what a prize you have won, Mrs. Withers, until you have seen him in the retiracy of home. His virtues are such as flourish in perfection in the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree; shed their sweetest perfume upon the domestic hearth."

"As you perceive, my good cousin's partiality for me tempts her to become poetically extravagant in her expressions," Mr. Withers said to his wife, in pretended apology, looking well pleased, nevertheless.

"I could not have a more patient auditor than Mrs. Withers, I am sure," rejoined Harriet. "Mrs. Withers will never take exception to my honest enthusiasm."

Constance answered by her stereotyped languid smile, wondering inly at the complacency with which a man of her spouse's years and shrewdness hearkened to the bold flattery of his parasite.

The exhibition ceased to astonish her before she had lived in the same house with the cousins for a month. Within the same period, she was gradually reduced to the position of a cipher in the management of the establishment. After that first day, Miss Field had not offered to abdicate the seat at the

head of the table, except at the only dinner-party they had given. Then, the handsome Mrs. Withers appeared in pearl-colored satin and diamonds as the mistress of ceremonies to a dozen substantial citizens and their expensively attired wives, endured the two hours spent at table, and the two duller ones in the great parlors, where the small company seemed lost, and everybody talked as if afraid of his own voice. She was no gayer than the rest by the time the entertainment was half over. The atmosphere of respectable stupidity was infectious, and this pervaded every nook of her new home. In her brother's house she had had young visitors, and there was, at the dullest, the hope of release to console her. Now she was "settled in life," could sit down with idle hands, and spend her days in contemplation of her grandeur. She had married well. Nobody looked askance at her when old maids were the subjects of pity or ridicule. The most censorious could not couple her name with the dread word—dependence. She had no household cares. Mr. Withers and Miss Field relieved her of all such.

And the mistress of the mansion was left to her own devices? By no means. If her husband was fastidious, he was also tyrannical. He dictated not only what dress his wife should appear in daily, but also what laces and ornaments she should sport; at what hours she should take the air; whom she must visit and whom invite; what songs she should sing to him when he asked for music in the evening, and when the day should close—the day so wearisome in

its similitude to all that had preceded and those which should follow it.

“My cousin is a man with aspirations above the frivolities of fashionable life, and excitement is injurious to his health,” Miss Field notified the bride, the day after her home-bringing. “I fear Mrs. Withers will tire of the even tenor of our way?”

“I like quiet,” Constance replied.

But she did not mean stagnation. She was married in April, and on the first of July the trio removed to Mr. Withers’ country-seat. Here Constance was to find that the dead level of her existence had yet a lower plain of dulness. There was not a neighbor within four miles, hardly a farm-house in sight.

“We recruit here after the dissipation of the winter,” Miss Field said, enjoyingly. “The solitude is enrapturing. One can sleep all day long, if she likes.”

This proved to be her favorite method of recuperating her exhausted energies. Mr. Withers, too, liked a post-prandial siesta, “prescribed by his physician as eminently conducive to digestion.” Constance was not more lonely when they slept than when they were awake. The horrible sterility of her life was not to be ameliorated by their society. If commonplaceness be a crime, Mr. Withers and his cousin were offenders of an aggravated type. Harriet’s affectations and Elnathan’s platitudes were to the tortured senses of the third person of the party less endurable than the cicada’s shrill monotone through the hot summer day, and the katydid’s endless refrain at night. Her

chains, which had hitherto paralyzed her by their weight, began to gall and fret into her spirit. She grew unequal in temper, nervous, and restless under the restrictions imposed by her spouse. An insane impulse beset her to defy his authority, and set at naught his counsels; to rush into some outrageous freak that should shock him out of his propriety, and provoke the prudish toad-eater to natural speech and action.

This madness was never stronger than on one August afternoon when she escaped from the house, leaving the cousins to the enjoyment of their recuperative naps in their respective chambers, and took her way to the mountain back of the villa. She had never explored it, tempting as was the shade of the hemlocks and pines that grew up to the summit, and the walls of gray rock revealed through the rifts of the foliage. A current of fragrance, the odor of the resinous woods, flowed down to greet her ere she reached the outskirts of the forest, and the lulling murmur of the wind in the evergreen boughs was like the sound of many and wooing waters. The tender green tassels of the larches tapped her head as she bowed beneath their low branches, and the wide hemlocks were spread in benediction above her. She was alone with nature—free for one short hour to think her own thoughts and act out her desires. She laughed as a bushy cedar knocked off her hat at the instant that she tore her dress upon a bramble.

“They are leagued with my legal proprietor in the commendable business of repressing the lawless vaga-

ries of those who cannot get their fill of natural beauties through the windows of a state-chariot. But I shall have my frolic all the same."

Another and a higher peak tempted her when she had sat for a while upon a boulder crowning the first, revelling in the view of valley and hill, including the basin in which nestled the house, and the plain opening eastward toward the sea and civilization. The second height was precipitous, in some places almost perpendicular. From treading fearlessly and rapidly from crag to crag, she came to pulling herself up gravelly banks by catching at the stout underbrush, and steadying herself among rolling stones by tufts of wiry grass. But she kept on, and forgot aching feet, scant breath, and blistered hands when she stood finally upon a broad plateau hundreds of feet above the house that had dwindled into a toy cottage and the environing plantations of young trees like patches in a herb-garden.

"This is life!" she cried out in a sudden transport, and sat her down upon a cushion of gray moss in the shadow of a cedar, to gaze, and wonder, and rejoice.

She made a discovery presently. A spring, clear and impetuous, burst from between two overhanging rocks, and chose the shortest route to the valley, babbling with all its little might. It was joined, before it had gone many feet, by other rivulets, and from a point midway in the descent, where the cliffs were steepest, came up the shout of a waterfall. This, and the tireless murmur of the evergreens, made up the music of

this upper sanctuary, until Constance's voice arose from the rocky table, sweet, full, exultant.

“ The wild streams leap with headlong sweep
 In their curbless course o'er the mountain steep;
 All fresh and strong they foam along,
 Waking the rocks with their cataract song.
 My eye bears a glance like the beam on a lance
 As I watch the waters dash and dance.
 I burn with glee, for I love to see
 The path of anything that's free.
 I love—I love—oh, I love the free!
 I love—I love—I *love* the free!

“ The skylark springs with dew on his wings,
 And up in the arch of heaven he sings—
 ‘Tra-la-tra-la!’ Oh, sweeter far
 Than the notes that come through a golden bar.
 The thrall and the state of the palace gate
 Are what my spirit has learned to hate”—

The strain ceased abruptly, and, in place of the rapt musician, borne above the power of earthly woes to crush, and petty vexations to sting, a woman grovelled upon the mossy cushion, weeping hot, fast tears, and beating against the rough rock with a child's folly of desperation the white hand that wore the badge of her servitude.

What was she but a caged bird, bidden to preen its feathers and warble the notes its master dictated, between golden bars? A slave to whom state and thrall meant one and the same abhorrent thing? What had she to do, henceforward, with dreams of beauty and freedom—she, who had signed away her liberty of

spirit and person, voluntarily accepting in their stead the most foul captivity a pure and upright woman can know? She felt herself to be utterly vile—plague-spotted in soul and flesh in the lonely sublimity of this mountain-temple—a leper, condemned and incurable, constrained to cry out at the approach of every passer-by, “Unclean! unclean!” It would have been better for her to beg her bread upon the doorsteps of the wealthy, and failing that, to die by the wayside, with starvation and cold, than to live the life of nominal respectability and abundance, of real degradation and poverty which were now hers.

The tears were dried, but she still sat on the gray carpet, clutching angrily at it and the wild-flowers peeping through the crevices of the rock, rending them as passion had torn her; her bosom heaving with the unspent waves of excitement and a mutinous pout upon her lips, when a crackling among the brushwood thrilled her with an uncomfortable sensation of alarm.

Before she could regain her feet or concert her scheme of defence or flight, the nearest cedar boughs were pushed aside, and a man stepped into the area fenced in by the hardy mountain evergreens. With subsiding fears as her quick eye inventoried the various particulars of his neat travelling-suit, gentlemanly bearing, pleasant countenance, and deferential aspect toward herself, Constance arose, visibly embarrassed, but dignified, and awaited his pleasure. The stranger betrayed neither surprise nor confusion. Walking directly up to her, he removed his hat, bowing low, with a bright, cordial smile.

“Unless I am greatly mistaken, I have the pleasure of seeing my brother’s wife. And you are more familiar with my name and my handwriting than with my face. I am Edward Withers!”





CHAPTER III.

“ DON'T understand how you happened to cross that rough mountain in your route from the dépôt,” said the elder brother, when the family assembled that evening for what Miss Field always denominated a “sociable, old-fashioned tea,” which, in the country, was served at the town dinner hour. “Could you obtain no conveyance at the station?”

“None—unless I chose to wait several hours. Surmising, at once, that my letter had not arrived in season to notify you of my coming, I left my baggage in charge of the station-master, and set out on foot. I pleased myself when I was here, two years ago, with surveying an air-line between your house and the nearest point of the railroad. If one does not mind some pretty steep hills, he can save at least two miles by availing himself of my topographical skill. It was a pleasant variety to me, after six hours in a narrow car-seat, to stretch my limbs over the rocky pass and breathe the fresh air of the wildwoods instead of smoke and cinders.”

“The mystery to *me* is how and where you met Mrs. Withers!” chirped vivacious Harriet. “Do explain! I was never so astonished in my life as when I saw you two walking up the avenue, talking together like old friends.”

“As we are,” smiled Edward at his sister-in-law. “She was sitting at the foot of a cedar near my projected road, enjoying the prospect beneath her. I recognized her from her resemblance to the photograph you sent me while I was abroad, Elnathan; walked up to her, like the impertinent fellow some people think I am; introduced myself, and offered to escort her home.”

“You should have taken a servant with you, Constance,” said her husband, magisterially. “It is not safe or proper for a lady to ramble alone in this thinly-settled neighborhood.”

“There are charcoal-burners in the mountains!” Miss Harriet interjected, shudderingly. “The most ferocious-looking creatures, with long beards and black faces. I saw one once when we were driving out. And there used to be bears, when the country was first settled”—

“And wolves, and catamounts, and red Indians, with no beards at all!” finished the younger Withers, warningly. “Mrs. Withers, let me advise you to take me along whenever you stir beyond the garden fence. I saw a Rocky Mountain savage once, and last year was one of a party that went out on a bear-hunt, in Norway. We saw nothing of Bruin, it is true, but my instructions how to act in case he crossed

my path were so minute, that I am confident I should prove a valiant protector in time of need."

The invitation thus playfully given was renewed in earnest on the following day. The brother and sister-in-law were excellent friends from the moment of their meeting. The travelled member of the eminent banking-firm of "Withers Brothers" was about thirty years of age, and attractive in person, rather from a certain grace and elegance of bearing, and a frank, intelligent expression, than from regularity of feature. He had read much, and seen many lands, and knew how to use the knowledge thus gained for the entertainment of his companions. A passionate lover of music, he was not slow in discovering Constance's kindred tastes. His coming gave a different complexion to life in the secluded country-house. There were horse-back rides before breakfast, and diligent practice with voice and instruments—piano, flute, and violin, besides a couple of hours' reading in the forenoon; then came the after-dinner walk, seldom ending until sunset. In the evening, Elnathan Withers dozed in his stuffed chair, while he tried to beat time to the duet going on at the other end of the room, and Harriet, bolt upright in the middle of a sofa, did wondrous things with a spool of cotton or silk and a crochet-needle—and took observations with her beady eyes.

She was discreet as to the result of these. For aught that could be gathered from her words or conduct, she approved entirely of the growing intimacy between the married lady and the agreeable bachelor. Elnathan was not a man of fine feelings and strong

affections. He had made up his mind to marry because a stylish wife would add to his individual consequence, and adorn his already princely establishment. Constance Romaine pleased his critical eye, and captivated whatever of fancy dwelt in his practical nature. Yet, having wedded, he trusted her. She offended him sometimes. He often wished that she were interpenetrated with something of Harriet's reverence for himself; that she would put forth more effort to anticipate his wishes, and conform herself in all respects to his ideas of fitness in demeanor and conversation. He was never harsh in his treatment of these deficiencies, but his pertinacious schooling, his curbing and dictating, the portentous shake of his head and solemn curvature of the brows, irritated her to the extreme of forbearance.

Edward had not been twelve hours in the house before he perceived this endeavor on his brother's side to mould a mature woman into the likeness of his prim ideal, and the effect wrought by it. He had suspected it in the course of his initial interview with his brother's wife upon the mountain. He never told her that, attracted by her singing, he had stealthily neared the spot where she sat, and, unseen by her, been a witness of the tearful struggle between her real self and Fate. He had pitied her heartily then, while comparatively ignorant of the reason for her seditious emotion. His compassion was more profound as he better understood the relations between the ill-matched pair. Had his personal liking for his new sister been less decided, he would have pronounced her unhappi-

ness to be the righteous punishment of her crime and folly in having linked her destiny with that of a man whom she did not love. He had known dozens of other women who did the same, at the bidding of similar motives, and his sympathies had lain dormant. But this one had heart and intellect, and both were famishing.

I have said that Mr. Withers' sensibilities were not lively, nor his loves intense. But of all people living this, his only brother, had most hold upon his heart, most influence upon his judgment. He made much of him after his formal style; listened with obvious respect and secret pride to his opinions, and conceived the notion that his wife was highly honored when Edward singled her out as the object of his marked attentions, and did not disguise the pleasure he, the lion of many brilliant circles, took in her society. This fulness of confidence in them both, and his unselfish regard for his nearest living relative, might have begotten softer and kindlier sentiments toward him in Constance's breast but for the palpable fact that he encouraged the association, not because it brought her enjoyment, but as a means of prolonging Edward's stay with them.

"You seem to amuse my brother," he said to his wife, one morning, as she was arraying herself for her ride. "His admiration of you is highly complimentary. I trust you will leave no means untried to induce him to remain with us some weeks longer. It gratifies me to see how amicably you get on together, and the friendship is especially creditable to Edward,

inasmuch as he was universally regarded as my heir prior to my marriage."

"In that case, he deserves all the courtesy I can show him," mused Constance, going thoughtfully down to her steed and cavalier. "I do not know many men who would be so complaisant to a stumbling-block in the path to worldly advancement."

This conversation would have thrown her off her guard had she ever considered it prudent to be wary in an association at once so natural and innocent. She had always liked Edward, and was growing to like him better every hour. They were near the same age, and, being of harmonious temperaments, they usually enjoyed the same things. He was good, kind, and sprightly; amused and interested as much as Mr. Withers and Harriet wearied her. This was the reason why the sun shone more brightly; the breeze was more odorous; her favorite exercise more inspiring on that early midsummer morn than these had ever been before.

"I can hardly believe that I enter, to-day, upon the third week of my sojourn in this region," said Edward, when the steeply-rising ground compelled them to slacken their speed.

"Is it possible?" The exclamation was not a polite and meaningless formula, as Constance brought her startled eyes around to his. "It seems a very little while ago that you came to us. You do not think of leaving us soon, I hope?"

"I cannot say positively how long I shall stay. This visit is a welcome exchange for my long wander-

ings. This—my brother's home—is the only one I have in America. Yet I was dissatisfied with it last year. Elnathan was often absent—you know best upon what business”—smiling, meaningly, “and, to be candid with you, our Cousin Harriet is not the person whom I should voluntarily select as my only companion in a desert. But for my gun and fishing-rod, I should have committed suicide, or run away and left her to the tender mercies of the Hibernian domestics and the bears. I would not be so communicative touching her to any but a member of the family. But she is one of my *bêtes noires*. I never liked her.”

“Nor I!” answered Constance, energetically.

“Then, my little sister, you and I should unite our forces to counteract her influence with my brother. His disposition is, in some respects, singularly guileless. He believes that Harriet's officious regard for his comfort, and deference to his wishes and opinions, have their root in sincere attachment for himself. We know better—know her to be as mercenary as she thinks herself cunning, and that she clings to him as the leech does to him whose blood is fattening it. I lose all patience with her fawning and flatteries, when I recollect that these are the tricks by which she hopes to earn her living, and, at his decease, a comfortable legacy.”

Constance's face was averted, and screened from his view by her willow plume. Her voice was low, and had in it an inflexion of mournful charity for the assailed parasite, or an echo borrowed from some sor-

rowful reminiscence. "She is a woman, and poor!" she said. "A woman, too, whom society forbids, upon penalty of banishment from the circle in which she was born and bred, to seek a livelihood by manual labor. It is easy for men to talk of freedom of thought and action. The world is before them. To them, the bread of charity and dependence mean one and the same thing. The latter is the only nourishment of most women, from the cradle to the tomb. I wish the passage between the two were shorter—for their sake."

"I never looked at the subject in that light before," was Edward's remorseful reply. "Poor old Harriet! I see now how much more she merits pity than contempt."

"She is no worse off than thousands of her sisters," said Constance, in harsher judgment. "Content yourself with giving thanks that you were born a man!"

She had spoken out of the pain of a wrung spirit, with no thought of pleading her own cause. She was too proud to murmur, least of all to her husband's brother. But the conversation was a key that unlocked for her in his heart recesses of interest and sympathy which must else have remained forever barred against a woman who, whatever were her virtues and fascinations, had deliberately bartered her charms, and perjured herself in order to secure an eligible settlement.

"And, to do her justice, she is superior to the practice of the arts that make Harriet acceptable to my

brother, and odious to everybody else," he meditated. "She offers no profession of devotion to the man she has married, while she accords to him the respectful duty of a wife. Elnathan seems satisfied. Perhaps he craves nothing warmer. Pray Heaven he may never guess of how much fate has defrauded him, in withholding from him the free, glad affection of a true woman!"

If there were any change in his behavior to Constance after this, it was to be discerned in a gentler address, in unobtrusive regard for her wishes, expressed or surmised, and a prolongation of his stay in a house that held so few attractions for her. That this arrangement was highly satisfactory to his brother was not without effect in shaping his conduct. That Harriet plied him with solicitations to remain before his decision was announced, and was loudly voluble in her protestations of delight when the question was settled, had not a straw's weight with him. She annoyed him less than formerly, however, either, as he explained it to himself, because he had learned charity from Constance's defence of the lonely spinster's policy, or because she kept herself more in the background than was her wont. She seemed amiably disposed towards Constance, too, and he strove to credit her with kind intentions with regard to one whom most people in her situation would have hated as a usurper. She abetted whatever project of outdoor excursion or domestic recreation was proposed by him for Constance's diversion, offering herself as the wife's substitute in the sober phaeton-drive on

breezy afternoons, that Constance and Edward might act as outriders, and did not fail to call the husband's notice to her graceful horsemanship, and the brighter bloom planted in her cheeks by the exercise. Mr. Withers never tired of chess, and the indefatigable toad-eater apparently shared his zeal on this point. The board was produced nightly as the days became shorter and the evenings cooler, and music, reading, or conversation upon art and literature was carried on for hours by the remaining two of the quartette without interruption from the automata bent over the checkered surface.

For Harriet could be taciturn when need was—a very lay figure in dumbness as in starch. Whether she ever ceased to be watchful was another matter.

It was October before the family made a formal removal to town. One of the brothers, sometimes both, spent two or three days a week there in September, and, since the uncertain sunshine and cold rains of autumn confined the ladies for the most part to the house, they were ready to second the proposition to seek their winter quarters. Edward Withers was regularly installed as one of his brother's household, and under his auspices city life also put on a new face for Constance. He had a box at the opera, and Elnathan was foremost to suggest that Constance should accompany him thither.

“That is, when you are not engaged to escort single ladies,” added the senior, with a dry smile.

“Which will not happen often if I can have my sister's company instead,” replied the other, cordially.

“But cannot we make up a family party of four to-morrow night? I can promise you a treat.”

“Musical treats, when they are operatic, are thrown away upon me,” was the answer. “But I am anxious that Constance shall keep up her practising, and, to this end, desire her to have every opportunity of improving her taste and style. You and she can give home-concerts of the latest gems in this line for Harriet’s benefit and mine.”

Harriet applauded the idea to the echo, and was careful that he should not regret the young people’s absence on the evenings they spent abroad, playing chess with him for a couple of hours, and then reading aloud monetary or political articles selected by himself until he dropped into a doze. They were left thus to themselves more and more as the season advanced. Invitations to parties, concerts, and dinners rained in upon Mrs. and the Messrs. Withers, and to most of these Constance went, attended by Edward only. Mr. Withers had never been social from inclination, and he was only too glad to delegate his duties in this line to his wife, now that the protection of his brother rendered his attendance unnecessary.

Constance did not confess in words to herself how greatly her pleasure was augmented by the exchange of escorts. It was natural that a man of her husband’s age and disposition should prefer his own fire-side to dancing, and small-talk, and a wearisome feint of hearkening to harmonies that were unintelligible and without sweetness to him. She enjoyed gay scenes with an easier conscience that she did not

see his grave visage at every turn of the waltz or promenade, and was not haunted by the thought of her selfishness in having dragged him from his beloved retirement. How much this feeling of relief was intensified by the circumstance that her willing cavalier was the most delightful talker, one of the best dancers, and, assuredly, the most gracefully attentive to his fair charge in the *cordon* of beaux who frequented the fashionable resorts just named, did not enter into her complacent calculations. She was on excellent terms with herself and all about her at this juncture. The acquaintances who had carped at her reserve and want of animation in the few assemblies at which she had appeared as a bride, candidly avowed that nothing could be more charming than her affability and gay good-humor, and that she was far handsomer than they had supposed at first sight.

The more captious subjoined, *sub rosa*, that it was evident she appreciated (convenient word!) Mr. Edward Withers, and how fortunate she was in securing the services of an escort so unexceptionable in every particular, since her husband seemed to have renounced society just as she fairly entered it.

“But,” subjoined No. 2, audibly delivered, “people had different ways of looking at these things, and, so long as Mr. Withers lived happily with his wife, and countenanced her in all she did, whose business was it to hint at impropriety or misplaced confidence?”

That Mr. Withers did countenance his wife in her lively career was not to be denied. It gratified him

to see her, magnificently dressed, go forth to gatherings at which, as he was sure to hear afterwards, she was the object of general admiration for her beauty and vivacity. It tickled his vanity to have her do the honors of his mansion to a choice company of Edward's friends and hers—people in whose eyes he, the sedate millionaire, could never hope to be more than the respectable representative of his money-bags. They were glad to congregate in his stately saloon now, to partake of his fine old wines and excellent viands, and unite in laudations of the handsome woman who bore his name. Adulation did not spoil her, he was pleased to observe. She had never been mere deferential in her deportment to himself, more ready to consult and obey him than when the star of her popularity was highest and brightest. In this, she testified her good sense and feeling heart. To whom should she be grateful and dutiful, if not to her benefactor, the architect of her fortune and happiness? Association with him and with his brother had developed her finely. He took credit to himself for the penetration that had detected the germs of so much that was estimable and attractive when she was still in the obscurity of her brother's house.

“A happy family, a thoroughly well organized establishment,” remarked Charles Romaine to his wife, at the close of a visit they paid his sister in January. “Constance should be thankful to us all her days for opposing her absurd transcendentalism about congeniality and mutual attraction, and the like puerile nonsense. What a wreck she would have made

of her happiness had she been left to pursue the course dictated by her own caprices! I hope, Margaret, that we shall not have to combat the like errors in our daughters when they grow up."

"Constance had a fund of strong common sense in spite of her crudely extravagant theories upon certain subjects," rejoined Mrs. Romaine. "Thanks to it, and, as you justly observe, to our counsels, she has married better than any other young woman I know. Yes, I can ask no more enviable lot for our girls than one like hers."

According to these irrefragable authorities, then, our heroine had steered clear of the rock upon which so many of her age and sex have split; kept out of the current that would have stranded her, high and forlorn, upon the barren headlands of celibacy; had, virtuously eschewing "crude" instinct, and heart-promptings, and natural laws (fit only, in Mrs. Romaine's creed, for the guidance of beasts, and birds, and other irrational things), rendered just and graceful obedience to the equitable principle prescribed and practised by the autocrats of the "best circles." These burning and shining beacons cease not, night nor day, to warn off the impetuous young from the rigors and desolation of Scylla, and cast such illusive glare upon Charybdis as makes its seething rapids seem a Pacific of delicious calm.

Upon as smooth a current were Constance Withers' conscience and prudence rocked to sleep during the early months of that winter. Winter! Never had summer been so replete with light and warmth.

There is a divine delight in the slow sweep of the outer circles of the maelstrom ; the half consciousness of the awakening heart, like that of the babe, who, aroused from slumber by his mother's voice, smiles recognition of the dear music before his eyes are unsealed by her kisses, or his head is nestled upon her bosom.

That to every human heart such awakening comes, sooner or later, I hold and believe for certain. Deserts of salt and bitterness there are in the spiritual as in the material world ; but there was a time when the Creator, whose name is Love, pronounced them "very good," when as yet the flood, and the rain of fire and brimstone had not made havoc of all their pleasant things, nor the soft soil been hardened into flint and gravel by dearth and heat. And, to that garden of the Lord's planting there came a day—when, or of what duration HE knows, and perchance HE alone—when the south wind blew softly, and all the spices thereof flowed out—spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes. It may have been but for one glad hour—one moment of bewildering bliss, that the heart thus visited was transformed into a fountain of gardens ; a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. The next may have witnessed the rush of the deluge or the bursting of the pitchy clouds ; and behold ! in place of Eden, a lair of wild beasts, a house full of doleful creatures, meet for the dwelling of owls and the dance of satyrs.

Other visions than these images of woe and terror

abode with Constance ; formless fancies, fair as vague ; specious reveries in which she lived through coming years as she was doing now, surrounded by the same outward comforts ; her steps guarded by the same friend, whose mere presence meant contentment ; with whom the interchange of thought and feeling left nothing to be desired from human sympathy. It was a severe shock that showed her the precipice upon the flowery verge of which she lay dreaming.

The brothers were, one morning, discussing at breakfast the merits of a pair of horses that had been offered for sale to the elder. For a wonder, Edward displayed more caution in accepting the jockey's declaration of their fitness for family use than did his staid relative. Mr. Withers was very obstinate in his adherence to whatever principle or prejudice he believed that he had seen cause to adopt, and his eye had been captivated by the showy team ; his credulous hearing gained by the adroit tongue of the dealer. All that Edward's dissuasions could effect was acquiescence in his proposal that they should try the horses before the sleigh that afternoon, before deciding upon the purchase.

Harriet clapped her hands vivaciously. "And then you'll drive by and give us a turn behind the beauties ! I am sure they must be heavenly from what Cousin Elnathan says. I am wild to see them !"

"There is a look in the eye of one that bespeaks the spirit of another region," said Edward, apart to Constance.

"Don't ride after them !" she entreated quickly.

“Your brother will yield if you tell him plainly how unsafe you consider them.”

“Not unsafe for him and myself, perhaps; but hardly the creatures to be intrusted with your life and limb,” he rejoined. “Rest assured that I shall make a thorough test of them before consenting to the venture. I shall drive them myself, and speak out frankly the result of the trial. In whatever else we may differ, Elnathan and I are a unit in our care for your welfare. So, if we show ourselves and the heavenly span of quadrupeds at the door to-day, you need not fear to accept our invitation.”

The gentle and affectionate reassurance contrasted pleasantly with Mr. Withers' authoritative mandate. “Constance! you will hold yourself in readiness to drive out with us, this afternoon. We shall call for you at three o'clock. I wish you and Harriet to be entirely prepared for the ride when we come. Young horses do not like to stand in the cold.”

An impulse she did not stay to define drew Constance to the window as the two gentlemen descended the front steps, side by side. Mr. Withers was a trifle the taller of the two, but his figure was angular and unbending; Edward's supple and elegant, while scarcely a trace of family likeness existed between the swarthy visage of the elder, with its deep-set eyes, long upper lip, and high, narrow forehead, and the lively glance, clear complexion, and spirited mouth that made Edward's physiognomy a goodly sight to more eyes than those that met the parting smile he cast up at the parlor window, when he gained the

pavement. He lifted his hat at the same moment, whereas Mr. Withers stalked solemnly on, apparently forgetful already that he had a home and wife, now that his face was set office-ward.

“Shadow and sunshine!” reflected the gazer. “And they are not more unlike in countenance than in disposition, aims, and conduct—as dissimilar as two upright men can be.”

Harriet’s shallow treble sounded at her elbow like a repetition of the last thought. “No one would ever take them to be relatives,” she said. “Yet each is excellent in his way. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes,” answered Constance, moving away.

“Only their ways are *so* different!” persisted the cousin. “I like Elnathan best, of course, but Edward is the more popular man of the two, I believe—isn’t he?”

“I really do not know!” Constance left the room in uttering the falsehood.

Harriet had a trick of making her intensely uncomfortable whenever the talk between them turned upon the brothers.

“I hate comparisons!” she said to herself, when she reached her room. “And it is forward and indelicate in her to institute them in my hearing.”

Convinced that the sudden heat warming her heart and cheeks was excited by Harriet’s impertinence, she made it her business to stop thinking of the conversation and its origin so soon as she could dismiss it and turn her attention to pleasanter things. It was more innocent and agreeable work, for instance, to write

out Edward's part of a new duet upon a fair sheet of paper, which he could hold in his hand as he stood by her at the piano, the printed copy being so blurred as to try his eyes. He was very slightly near-sighted, although a casual acquaintance would not have suspected it. She copied music legibly and rapidly, and lately had hit upon this happy device of making him some poor return for the manifold services he had rendered her. "All that I can do leaves me deplorably in his debt," she reasoned. "I never knew what was the fulness and disinterestedness of a brother's love until I met him. But all brothers are not so considerate or so devoted as is he. I should understand that."

The conclusion was in her mind often enough every day of her life to become hackneyed, yet it always brought with it a strange, sweet thrill. Truly sisterly affection was a holy and a beautiful thing! She had read as much in moral philosophy, and likewise in poetry. Few feelings could compare with it in unselfish fervor and constancy. And, as she had said, Edward was one brother in ten thousand—and not to be compared with common men.

She began the preparations for the drive at half past two, pursuant to her husband's directions. Not that she expected to leave the house that afternoon. Edward's judgment being, in her estimation, but one remove from infallibility, she could not believe that the trial of the horses would result as Mr. Withers had predicted, but that they would be remanded to the stable and custody of the unreliable jockey with-

out approaching her door, or gladdening Harriet's eyes. Nevertheless, the order had gone forth that she should don her cloak, furs, hat, and gloves before three o'clock, and Mr. Withers would be displeased were he to return at five, and find her in a home dress. Harriet tapped at the door before she was half ready.

"Just to remind you, my dear madam," she said, sweetly, "of what my cousin said about keeping the horses standing." She was equipped *cap-à-pie* for the excursion, and Constance renewed her silent accusation of impertinent forwardness as she saw her trip down stairs to take her station at a front window, that "my cousin" might see, at the first glance, that she was ready and eager for the promised—and because promised by him—certain pleasure of the jaunt.

Constance was surprised, five minutes before the hour designated, to hear a bustle and men's voices in the lower hall. They had really come, then, in spite of her prognostications. Drawing on her gloves that she might not be accused of dilatoriness, she walked to the door of her chamber, when it was thrown wide against her by her maid.

"O ma'am!" she blubbered, her cheeks like ashes, and her eyes bulging from their sockets. "May all the blessed saints have mercy upon ye! There's been the dreadfulest accident! Them brutes of horses has run away, and Mr. Witherses and Mr. Edward is both killed dead! They're a-bringing them up stairs this blessed minit, and"—catching her mistress' skirt as she dashed past her—"you're not to be frightened,

ma'am, the doctor says! He sent me up for to tell you careful!"

Unhearing and unheeding, Constance wrested her dress from the girl's hold, and met upon the upper landing of the staircase four men bearing a senseless form. The head was sunk upon the breast, and the face hidden by the shoulders of those who carried him, but her eye fell instantly upon the right hand which hung loosely by his side. She recognized the fur gauntlet that covered it as one of a pair of riding-gloves she had given Edward Withers at Christmas, and which he had worn since whenever he drove or rode. She had seen him pocket them that morning before going out.

"Mrs. Withers! my dear lady! you really must not touch him yet!" said the attendant physician, preventing her when she would have thrown her arms about the injured man. He pulled her back by main force, that the body might be carried into the chamber she had just quitted.

"Let me go! Let me go! Do you hear me?" her voice rising into a shrill scream that chilled the veins and pained the hearts of all who heard it. "Dead or alive, he belongs to me, and to no one else! Man! how dare you hold me? You do not know how much I loved him—my darling! O my darling!"

The doctor was a muscular man, but, in her agony of despair, she was stronger than he, and bade fair to master him, as she wrestled to undo his grasp upon her arms.

"Is there no one in this place who can persuade

her to be calm?" he asked, imploringly, looking back down the stairs, upon which was huddled a throng of servants and curious spectators who had followed the sad *cortége* into the house.

There was a movement at the foot of the steps, then the crowd parted instantly and silently, unnoticed by the frantic woman. She was still struggling, threatening and praying to be released, when a pallid face, streaked with blood, confronted hers—a tender hand touched her arm.

"Constance, my dear sister, my poor girl, come with me! Will you not?" said compassionate tones.

"She has fainted. That is the best thing that could have happened," said the doctor, sustaining the dead weight of the sinking figure with more ease than he had held the writhing one.

They bore her across the hall to Edward's room as the most convenient retreat for her in her insensible state, and, while the maid-servants loosened her dress and applied restoratives, a more anxious group was gathered in her apartment about her husband. His visible injuries were severe, if not dangerous. His collar-bone and right arm were broken, but it was feared there was internal and more serious hurt. Just as a gasp and a hollow groan attested the return of consciousness, a message was brought to Edward from the opposite bed-room.

"She do call for you all the time, sir, or I would not have made so bold as to disturb ye," said the girl, who had beckoned him to the entrance. "She is a bit out of her head, poor lady!"

“Where is Miss Field? Why does she not attend to Mrs. Withers?” asked Edward, glancing reluctantly at his brother’s bed.

In after days he could smile at the recollection of the reply, uttered with contemptuous indifference: “Oh! she’s agoing into high-strikes on the back parlor sofy.”

At the time, he was only conscious of impatience at the call of pity that obliged him to leave his perhaps dying relative in the hands of comparative strangers. He ceased to regret his compliance when the tears that burst from Constance’s eyes at sight of him were not attended by the ravings which had terrified her attendants. He sat down upon the edge of the bed, and leaned over to kiss the sobbing lips. “My dear sister, precious child!” he said, as a mother might soothe an affrighted daughter, and she dropped her head upon his shoulder, to weep herself into silence, if not composure.

When she could listen, he gave the history of the misadventure in a few words. Mr. Withers had insisted upon handling the reins himself. This accounted to the auditor for his use of Edward’s gloves, as being thicker than his, although their owner made no mention of having lent them to him. The horses had behaved tolerably well until they were within three blocks of home, when they had shied violently at a passing omnibus, jerked the reins from the driver’s hands, and dashed down the street. The sleigh upset at the first corner, and both the occupants were thrown out; Mr. Withers striking forcibly against a

lamp-post, while Edward was partially stunned upon the curb-stone. They had been brought to their own door in a carriage, the younger brother reviving in time to alight, with a little assistance from a friendly bystander, and to superintend the other's removal to the house and up the stairs.

Constance heard him through without interruption or comment, voluntarily raised her head from its resting-place, and lay back upon her pillows, covering her face with her hands. One or two quiet tears made their way between her fingers ere she removed them, but her hysterical sobbing had ceased. "I am thankful for your safety," she said, so composedly, that it sounded coldly unfeeling. "Now go back to your brother. He needs you, and I do not. I shall be better soon, and then I must bear my part in nursing him. If he should ask for me, let me know without delay." She sent her servants out when he had gone, and locked her door on the inside.

"Who'd have thought that she and Mr. Edward would take it so hard?" said the cook, as exponent of the views of the kitchen cabinet. "If so be the mather shouldn't get over this, it will go nigh to killing her. I never knowed she were that fond of him. Ah, well! she ought to be, for it's her he'll lave well provided for, I'll be bound! Them as has heaps to lave has plenty to mourn for them."

An hour elapsed before Mr. Withers understood aright where he was and what had happened, and then his wife's face was the first object he recognized. It was almost as bloodless as his, yet she was collect-

ed and helpful, a more efficient coadjutor to the surgeons than was fidgety Harriet, whose buzzings and hoverings over the wounded man reminded Edward of a noisy and persistent gad-fly.

The moved gentleness of Constance's tone in answering the patient's inquiries was mistaken by the attendants for fondest commiseration, and the family physician's unspoken thought would have chimed in well with the servant's verdict. Mr. and Mrs. Withers were not reputed to be a loving couple, but, in moments of distress and danger, the truth generally came to light. No husband, however idolized, could be nursed more faithfully or have excited greater anguish of solicitude than spoke in her dry eyes and rigid features, even if her wild outbreak at first seeing him had not betrayed her real sentiments.

In her calmer review of the scene, Constance could feel grateful for the spectators' misconception which had shielded her from the consequences of her madness; could shudder at the thought of the ignominy she had narrowly escaped. But this was not the gulf from which she now recoiled with horror and self-loathing that led her to avoid meeting the eyes bent curiously or sympathizingly upon her, and to cling to the nerveless hand of him whose trust she had betrayed. To him, her husband, she had not given a thought when the dread tidings of disaster and death were brought to her. What to her was an empty marriage vow, what the world's reprobation, when she believed that Edward lay lifeless before her?

“Man! you do not know how I have loved him!”

she had said. She might have added, "I never knew it myself until now." And what was this love—coming when, and as it did—but a crime, a sin to be frowned upon by Heaven, and denounced by man? A blemish, which, if set upon her brow, as it was upon her soul, would condemn her to be ranked with the outcast of her sex, the creatures whom austere matronhood blasts with lightnings of indignant scorn, and pure virgins blush to name?





CHAPTER IV.

 HALL you be too much engaged at the office to-day, Edward, to drive out with Constance at noon?" questioned Mr. Withers, one morning, when his brother came to his room to inquire after his health, and to receive his commands for the business-day.

"Certainly not! Nothing would give me more pleasure!" As he said it, the respondent turned with a pleasant smile to his sister-in-law, who was pouring out her husband's chocolate at a stand set in front of his lounge.

She started perceptibly at the proposition, and her hand shook in replacing the silver pot upon the tray. "I could not think of it!" she said, hastily. "It is kind and thoughtful in you to suggest it, Elnathan, but, indeed, I greatly prefer to remain at home."

"It is *my* preference that you should go!" The invalid spoke decidedly, but less irascibly than he would have done to any one else who resisted his authority. "It is now four weeks since my accident, and you have scarcely left the house in all that time.

You are growing thin and pale from want of sleep and exercise."

"I practise calisthenics every day, as you and Doctor Weldon advised," rejoined Constance, timidly.

"But within doors. You need the fresh outdoor air, child. You have taken such good care of me, that I should be very remiss in my duty, were I to allow you to neglect your own health."

He had grown very fond of her within the period he had mentioned, and showed it, in his weakness, more openly than dignity would have permitted, had he been well. He put his hand upon her shoulder, as she sat upon a stool beside him, the cup of chocolate in her hand. "Recollect! I must get another nurse should your health fail. You see how selfish I am?"

A jest from him was noteworthy, for its rarity; but Constance could not form her lips into a smile. They trembled, instead, in replying. "I see how good and generous you are! I will drive, if you insist upon it, but there is not the slightest necessity for your brother's escort. John is very careful and attentive. Or, if you wish me to have company, I will call for Mrs. Mellen. She has no carriage, you know."

"Send yours for her whenever you like, by all means. But, until I am able to accompany you, it is my desire that Edward shall be with you in your drives, whenever this is practicable. My late adventure has made me fearful, I suppose. Call this a sick man's fancy, if you will, my dear, but indulge it. At twelve, then, Edward, the carriage will be ready. Ascertain for yourself before you set out, that the har-

ness is all right, and have an eye to the coachman's management of the horses."

Opposition was futile, but Constance's countenance was so downcast at the prospect of the excursion, that Edward made a pretext, before going out, to call her into the adjoining sitting-room.

"How have I forfeited my place in your good graces?" he began, in playfulness, that was lost in earnestness before he finished his speech. "I have tried to persuade myself that your cold avoidance of me, for weeks past, and your rejection of my services whenever it is possible for you to dispense with them, was, in part, an unfounded fancy of my own, and partly the result of your absorption in the dear duty that has demanded your time and thoughts. I have begun, lately, to have other fears—dreads lest I had unwittingly wounded or displeased you. Do me the justice to believe that, if this be so, the offence was unconscious."

"You have offered none—none whatever!" interposed Constance, with cold emphasis. "I am sorry my manner has given rise to such apprehensions."

"That is not spoken like the frank sister of a month ago," said Edward, retaining the hand she would have withdrawn. "I will not release you until you tell me what is the shadow upon the affection that was to me more dear than any other friendship, and which I dared hope was much to you. Be, for one instant, yourself, and tell me all."

She was very pale, but, in desperation, she tried to laugh. "You must not call me to account for my looks and actions nowadays, Edward. I think, some-

times, that I am not quite sane. I have gone through much suffering; been the prey of imaginings, that almost deprived me of reason, besides enduring the real and present trial. And Heaven knows how unready I was for it all!"

"One word, my dear girl, and my inquisition is over. Assure me honestly, and without fear of wounding me, have you ever, in your most secret thought, blamed me for the casualty which so nearly widowed you? I did try, as you can bear me witness, to dissuade him whom we both love from the experiment that cost him so dear. The idea that you may have doubted this has pained me inexpressibly."

"Dismiss the suspicion at once and forever!" Constance looked steadily into his face, and spoke calmly. "The thought has never entered my mind. I blame no one for my trouble—excepting myself!"

Before she could divine his purpose, Edward had put his arm over her shoulder and pressed his lips to hers. "Let bygones be bygones!" he said, brightly and fondly. "We have too much to live and to hope for to waste time in nursing unhealthy surmises and fears."

"*Oh!*" The sharp little interjection came from the threshold of the door leading into the hall, where Miss Field was discovered in a fine attitude of bashful apology, faintly flavored with prudish consternation. "I did not *dream* you were here. I was on my way to my cousin's room!" she continued, in a prodigious flutter of ringlets and shoulders. "I beg a million pardons, I am sure."

“You need not beg one!” said the undaunted Edward, without releasing Constance. “Connie and I have been settling a trivial misunderstanding in good boy-and-girl style—have just ‘kissed and made up,’ and we now mean to be better friends than ever.”

“He! he! you are excessively candid, to be sure!” tittered Harriet. “But”—shaking her black curls—“Mrs. Withers knows men and human nature too well to believe quite all you say. We must not forget, my dear madam, that men were deceivers ever.”

“You speak feelingly,” said Edward, carelessly, following Constance with his eye, as she moved silently toward her husband’s chamber. “I shall caution the lady of my love—should the gods ever bestow one upon me—not to sip of the bitter waters of your wisdom.”

Had he seen the glitter of the round, black orbs that pursued his retiring figure, he might have made a more thoughtful exit, his run down the stairs been less swift, the air he hummed, as he went, less gay.

He had a pleasant drive; Constance an hour of mingled sweet and bitterness. It was difficult to bear her part in the apparent renewal of the familiar intercourse of other days, without relaxing the severe guard she had set upon herself from the moment she discovered the true nature of the sentiment she entertained for her husband’s brother. She could not help delighting in his society, in the manifold proofs of loving concern for her comfort and happiness of which she was the recipient. Yet, underlying this

secret and fleeting joy, was the ever present shame that marked her remembrance of her guilty weakness, and the despairing knowledge that remorse, duty, and resolve had thus far availed nothing to conquer it.

She looked jaded, rather than refreshed, upon her return, although she had curtailed the ride in opposition to Edward's advice. Wild, rebellious thoughts fought for mastery within her all the while she was with him, the promptings of an insane familiar she could not cast out. "If I had met him, two years ago, instead of his brother, and he had wooed me, the love which is now my disgrace would have been my glory," she was tempted to repeat, again and again. "Yet my fitness to receive his affection and my need of him are the same to-day as they were then. Is he the less my companion soul, the mate God meant for me, because, led by other's counsels, I blundered into a loveless connection with another! Which is the criminal bond—that ordained by my Maker, or the compact which has had no blessing save the approval of cold-hearted and mercenary mortals? Outwardly we must remain as we are; but who is defrauded if I dream of what might have been? if I love him for what he is in himself, not for what he is to me?"

Then, shaking off the spell, she would loathe herself for the vile suggestions, and pray in a blind, heathenish way, to Him who had sent her pain, to sustain her under it, to keep her from falling into the fouler mire of open defiance of her husband's claims

upon her fealty in word and act, to hold her fast to the semblance of right and honor.

Parting from Edward at the outer entrance with a brief phrase of thanks for his kindness in accompanying her, she ran up to her husband's room and opened the door without knocking. A gentleman, whom she recognized as a prominent city lawyer, stood by the lounge with a paper in his hand. Two young men, apparently clerks, were withdrawn a little into the background, and a table bearing writing materials was between them and the others.

"You acknowledge this instrument to be your will and testament, and in token thereof, have set hereto your signature and seal?" the lawyer was saying as the door swung noiselessly ajar, and Constance stopped, unable to advance or retreat.

Mr. Withers glanced around when he had given assent. "Come in, my dear," he said, quietly. "We shall soon be through this little matter."

She dropped into a chair near the door, her heart palpitating with force that beat every drop of blood from her cheeks. Some sudden and awful change must have taken place while she was out, to call for the presence of these men. Her frame was chill as with the shadow of death, but the one overpowering thought that smote her, was that her husband's approaching decease was the direct answer of an angry Judge to her wicked outcry against her fate and longings to escape it. In this grisly shape was the freedom to appear for which she had panted. But she knew that when the cage was torn down she would

feel like a murderess. She never forgot the short-lived horror of that moment.

Mr. Withers dismissed his visitors when the witnesses had affixed their names to the will, and they bowed themselves out, each noting, more or less furtively, as he passed, the dilated eyes and colorless face of the wife, and drawing his own conclusions therefrom.

She got up and walked totteringly forward at her husband's gesture. He was no paler than when she had left him, and smiled more easily than was his habit, when he noticed the signs of her extreme alarm.

"I was afraid you would be frightened if I talked in your hearing of making my will," he said, encouragingly. "To avoid this, I arranged that Mr. Hall should wait upon me while you were driving. He was behind his time, and you were back earlier than I anticipated. I regret the meeting only for your sake. Perhaps it is as well, however, that I should acquaint you with some of the provisions of the instrument you saw in Mr. Hall's hand."

"Please do not! I cannot bear to hear or speak of it!" protested Constance, the tears starting to her eyes. "It all seems so dreadful!"

"It will not hasten my death one hour." Mr. Withers was not quite ready to pass over without rebuke an absurd superstition he considered unworthy a rational being, even though the offender was his wife. "You should know this. I made another will two years since, but circumstances have led me to regard it as injudicious, if not unfair. We business

men are superior to the dread of looking forward to the one certain event of mortality. We calculate the probable effect of our demise, as we do other changes in the mercantile and social world. By the terms of this will, as I was about to remark, my property, with the exception of a legacy to Harriet Field, is divided equally between yourself and Edward. And he is appointed sole executor. In the event of my death he will be your nearest connection and safest adviser. I wish you to remember this. It is hardly to be expected that you, although a fair judge of character, should be as conversant with the qualities that fit him to assume these responsibilities as I am, who have been his business partner ever since he was twenty-one."

He was astonished that his wife, instead of rendering a submissive verbal acquiescence to his spoken and written decree, began to weep so violently as to hinder herself from listening or replying to his speech. She had never conducted herself in this irrational fashion before in his sight, and he was naturally exceedingly perplexed. Aware that any attempt to soothe her would be awkward work to him, he lay quiet for a minute, hoping the emotion would expend itself without his interference. Finally, he adjudged it to be but reasonable that she should set the bounds of her grief at a point somewhat short of hysterics or convulsions, and addressed her with the most stringent appeal he could think of:—

"Really, Constance, your agitation is exciting me most unpleasantly. I fear I shall be feverish when the doctor calls, if this sort of thing is kept up."

He did not mean to be unkind or selfish. He believed his health to be of supreme importance in her esteem, and that the recollection of this would set her to rights. The experiment succeeded to a charm. The sobbing flow of briny drops was staunched on the instant.

“I beg your pardon,” stammered Constance, straightening herself up. “I will control myself better hereafter. It is time for your cordial. May I pour it out for you?”

It was inevitable that the confession she had meditated, while he told her of his arrangements for her future, betraying with a child's artlessness the perfectness of his trust in his brother and in herself, the full outflow of penitence, and deprecation, and entreaty for pardon, of which the tears were but the type and premonition, should be checked by the querulous reference to his personal discomfort. But the sudden and disagreeable reaction induced by it was hardly an excuse for the hardening of her heart and dulling of the sensibilities, just now so tender, which filled her mind with sullen resentment against him who had repelled her confidence. “He will never understand me. We are as antagonistic as oil and water,” she excused this by thinking. “The more closely I imitate his icy propriety the better matched we shall be. I was a fool to imagine anything else.” And thus slipped by the fairest chance of reconciliation and real union that was ever offered the ill-assorted pair.

With Mr. Withers' returning strength everything

seemed to fall back into the old train. Except that invitations were less frequent as the season waned, and that Edward and Constance passed fewer evenings abroad and more at home, that Mr. Withers rode to his office every morning and returned at noon, to spend the rest of the day upon the sofa in the library, exchanging this after dinner for an easy-chair in the parlor, the mode of life in the household varied in no important respect from what it had been prior to his accident.

It was early in March when Constance perceived, or fancied she perceived, a marked alteration in the demeanor of her brother-in-law. He was not less kind, and his fraternal attentions were rendered freely and cordially as ever, but he was less gay, and was addicted to fits of abstraction, profound, although apparently not sad, while his absence from the family circle, without apology, became so common that it ceased to provoke Harriet's frivolous wonder, and to disappoint Mr. Withers. Constance had never complained of or remarked upon this. But her mind was tossed night and day upon a tumultuous tide of conjectures, she would fain have termed apprehensions, rather than hopes. Up to this date she had believed her love and her misery to be unshared and unsuspected by him; had reiterated, in her flimsy self-deception, thanksgivings choked by tears that she was the only sufferer from her wretched folly. Did she grow suddenly cruel and base in the moment when the thought that the error was mutual awoke raptures, the remembrance of the suffering he must also

taste had not power to still? Was the salve to her self-respect supplied by the discovery that her divinity was a fallible man, impotent to resist the subtle temptation that had overcome her prudence and sense of right, worth the price paid for it? A new terror, more sweet than any joy she had ever known, soon laid hold of her. It was idle to ignore the fact that Edward furtively, but persistently, sought a private interview with her. She might disregard his beseeching glances, affect to misunderstand his signals and his uttered hints, might seek, in constant ministrations to her husband's wants and whims, to guard herself, and to forget these omens of a nearing crisis. But she comprehended his designs; marked with a thrill, that was the opposite of pain, his chagrin at his failure, and the augmented restlessness of his mien, betokening perplexity and desire. What was to be the end of this pursuit, and her evasion of it, when her own heart was the tempter's strongest ally? She dared not hear him say that she was dear to him as he had long been to her. Knowing, as she did, that she ought to spurn him from her at the remotest approach to this theme, she was never able to say with an honest purpose that she was likely to do it. If she doubted his intentions, she doubted herself yet more.

It was by no connivance of hers that he gained his point. She was taking her usual afternoon drive one day alone, when she was aroused from a reverie by the slower motion of the carriage, to observe that the coachman had turned into a business thoroughfare

instead of taking the most direct route homeward. "John," she called, through the front window, "where are you going? What brought you here?"

"Mr. Edward told me to call for him at four o'clock, ma'am. I thought he had spoken to you about it," was the respectful rejoinder.

There was no immediate reply, and he checked his horses to inquire: "Will I go back, ma'am?"

"No; go on."

She threw herself upon the back seat again, with throbbing pulses and a feeling that she had spoken the sentence which was to decide her fate for time and for eternity. "Heaven help me to stand fast!" the tongue essayed to say, the while the heart was melting into tenderness, and vibrating with expectation.

It lacked ten minutes of the appointed hour when they reached the office, but Edward stood upon the door-step, hat and gloves on.

"It is good in you to submit so quietly to my meddling," he began, by the time he was seated. "But I have something to say to you, a story to tell which I can keep no longer. You must have seen, although you have seemed not to do so, how I have dogged your steps for some weeks past, in the hope of stealing an opportunity for confession. I have sometimes ventured to believe that your woman's wit and woman's heart had penetrated my secret; that what entered so largely into my thoughts and motives, made up so much of my life, could not remain hidden from your eyes. I wanted to tell you

of it long ago, dear Connie, but the recollection of what was due to another withheld me, while I was yet uncertain that my love was returned. I had so little reason for hope, although hope has never flagged—mine is a sanguine nature, you know—that I hesitated to speak openly. Now that I can feel firm ground under my feet, my happiness is mixed with much alloy. I must either take from one who is a hopeless invalid the ablest and most lovely nurse that ever man had; condemn him, whose claim the world would declare to be superior to mine, to loneliness and sorrow, or consent to a season of dreary waiting before I can call my darling my own. Do you wonder that thoughts such as these have preyed upon my spirits; racked me with anxiety, even in the blessed hour of assurance that my devotion was not wasted?"

His rapid articulation had given Constance no time for reply, but her excitement equalled his, as she bent her veiled face upon her hands, and listened, in dumb alarm at the emotions rising to meet his avowal of love and longing. To her, what would have sounded incoherent to a third person, was explicit and fervent. He knew her as his mate, and would not give her up; asserted his rights with a master's authority, while his heart ached at thought of the woe in store for her nominal possessor.

"I have startled you by my vehemence," he continued, taking the hand that lay upon her lap. "I feared lest this announcement might seem abrupt, but the steamer sails at five o'clock, and I last night

obtained Evelyn's permission to bring you to see her off. She owes you a debt of gratitude for your sisterly care of my lonely and graceless self. She loves you dearly already, as you will her when you have had one glimpse of her face. You reminded me of her the first day of our meeting. I had travelled with her and her sick father for three months, and at parting more than hinted at my attachment. With candor that would have driven me to desperation, had it been less mournful, she declared her intention not to marry while her father lived. 'He needs my constant care,' she said. 'Without it he would die in a week. He will never be better. The kindest service you can do me, as the wisest you can do yourself, is to forget me.' I have been steadily disobedient to her advice. I told her as much when I found out by chance two months ago that she was in the city. She was very resolute, for a time, often refusing to see me when I called, and again begging me, even with tears, to dismiss all idea of making her my wife. It is now a fortnight since her father unexpectedly announced his determination to return to Europe, and, in the anticipation of our second parting, she acknowledged that my love was returned. Our engagement would be an unsatisfactory one to most people, but she is the earthly impersonation of the angel of patience, and I can surely wait a few months, or even years, for a gift so precious. Her father is afflicted by a complication of disorders, the most serious being an organic affection of the heart. She is his only living child. It would be sheer bar-

barity to separate them, and with an invalid's obstinacy he will not hear of taking up his abode in his daughter's house, should she marry. My poor Evelyn, my gentle love! She is a martyr, and I can do so little to lighten her burden!"

"It is very hard." He had paused, and Constance must speak.

Too preoccupied by his own reflections to note her thick articulation and studiously averted face, Edward took up the word warmly. "Hard! What could be harder for both of us?"

She interrupted him by an impetuous gesture. "You are talking wildly—wickedly! Think what you would suffer if you loved without hope of requital."

He absolutely laughed. "As if that could be. Affection, full and fervent as mine, holds a witch-hazel that never errs in pointing to the fount of answering love. Why, Connie, we were made for one another—Eva and I!"

Was no scalding drop of bitterness to be spared from her cup? Whose then was the fatal mistake which had opened the sluices of that other fountain, that was drowning her soul with cruel humiliation and anguish?

"Drive as near to the steamer as you can, John!" called Edward, from his window, and in the appreciation of the truth that the sharpest ordeal was yet before her, and fearfully near at hand, Constance submitted to be handed from the carriage to the wharf.

Through a bewildering haze she saw the noisy crowd, the smoke-stack of the monstrous vessel, stumbled along the gangway connecting it with the shore, yielding passively to the impetus of Edward's arm, and regained sight, hearing, and consciousness of pain when she stood in a handsome saloon, a small hand, warm as hers was icy, fluttering in her grasp, and a pair of dark, thoughtful eyes fixed upon her face.

"You were very good to come," said a low voice, fraught with emotion, yet steady. "Allow me to present my father, Mr. Pynsent. Mrs. Withers, father."

She looked and spoke the lady, and her father arose from his divan, supporting himself upon a cane, and saluted Mrs. Withers with stately politeness. Both were high bred, but it was not Evelyn's beauty that had won her lover. Her eyes and mouth were her only really good features. Constance knew herself to be the handsomer of the two, but the persuasion added to the hopelessness of her ill-fated love. The qualities that had knit to this girl's heart that of the man who had seen the beauties of two hemispheres, which had kept him true to her, and her alone, though opposed by absence, discouragement, and the wiles of scores of other women, lay beyond her power of analysis and counter-charms. She began to understand how it had come to pass, when she had commanded her wits so far as to talk five minutes with Edward's betrothed; owned, reluctantly, that had she met her, as new acquaintances generally

meet, she would have been irresistibly attracted by her winning ladyhood, and the countenance that united so much sweetness with sense and spirit.

There was time now for little beyond the kindly commonplaces suitable to their meeting in a public place and their prospective parting, and even these Constance abridged ostensibly, and the others deemed considerately, that the last precious moments with his affianced might be all Edward's. Without verbal pretext, she arose from her place beside Evelyn, and passed around to Mr. Pynsent's side, engaging him in conversation about his voyage and destination. The atmosphere was a degree less stifling there. If she moved, smiled, and talked mechanically, it mattered nothing now that the penetrating eyes she most dreaded never left their resting-place upon the visage of which they were taking a long farewell. There was little to be apprehended from the sick man's restless regards, which wandered incessantly from her to the betrothed couple, his gray eyebrows contracting with pain or mental disquiet as he did so. Had Evelyn been free to maintain her usual watch upon him, she would have taken alarm at these increasing symptoms of distress, and the livid hue settling upon his complexion. Constance did not notice these, until, simultaneously with the clanging of a bell overhead, and the rapid rush of feet toward the shore, he threw both hands outward, with the aimless clutch of a sightless man, and fell against her as she sat by him on the sofa.

The utmost confusion reigned in the saloon for a

few moments—exclamations, inquiries, and orders—loud, varied, and useless. Then Edward's strong voice recommended, in stringent terms, that the room be cleared of all except the immediate attendants of the sufferer, including a gentleman who had introduced himself as a physician. The spasm passed into a swoon, so deathly and protracted, that Constance was ready to believe the patient beyond the reach of earthly aid, notwithstanding the doctor's assertion that he would probably revive, and even Evelyn murmured once when Edward would have confirmed the cheering assurance: "It may be. I hope so; but I never saw him quite so ill before."

Finally life fought its way back, inch by inch, to the worn heart; the fingers relaxed from their rigid clinch, the lips were less purple, and the eyes were unclosed feebly upon the anxious group. When he could move, Edward and the physician supported him to his state-room, followed by Evelyn. Constance, left to herself, had leisure to observe what had not until now drawn her attention. The bustle of embarkation had ceased, but through the almost deserted saloon sounded the measured throb of the powerful engines, as they urged the boat through the water. She threw open a window and looked out. They were already far down the bay, the spires of the city lessening in the distance, and the vessel under full headway. She met Edward at the state-room door with the startling intelligence. For an instant he looked as aghast as herself, then recovered his self-possession with a smile. She must compose her-

self and trust him to extricate them both from the predicament in which his thoughtlessness had placed them. The worst that could befall them was a few hours' delay in returning home. He would see the captain forthwith, and request him to signal the first homeward bound pilot-boat, or other vessel they might espy.

Constance did as he bade her; resumed her seat, and seemed to await the result of the affair patiently. "I am afraid your brother may be alarmed at our continued absence," was her only remark.

"He will understand at once what has happened, when John goes home with the news that he drove us down to see the steamer off," replied Edward, confidently. "We shall have a merry laugh to-morrow at breakfast over our adventure. So long as you are not unhappy or angry with me, I am comfortable on the score of Elnathan's displeasure."





CHAPTER V.

“ILL you have the kindness to ring that bell again, Harriet, and inquire whether Mrs. Withers has returned?” fretted the convalescent. “It is after six o’clock, and I am faint for want of nourishment.”

The duteous dependent obeyed, then slipped from the room to push investigations upon a plan of her own. In a quarter of an hour she reappeared with an agitated, yet important countenance, that arrested her cousin’s regards.

“What is it? Where is she?” he demanded, impatiently. “You have heard something. Tell me at once what it is!”

Harriet collapsed as gracefully as her unpliant sinews and stays would allow, into a kneeling heap upon the floor at his feet. “My beloved cousin! My dear deceived angel! I have heard nothing that surprised me. I dared not speak of it to you before now, agonizing as was my solicitude. You would have driven me from you in anger had I whispered a

word of what has been the town gossip for months, to which you only were blinded by your noble, your generous, your superhuman confidence in your betrayers. I see that you are partially prepared for the blow," as he grew pale and tried without success to interrupt her. "Brace yourself for what you must know, my poor, ill-used darling! Your brother and your wife have eloped to Europe in company!"

For one second the husband staggered under the shock. His eyes closed suddenly, as at a flash of lightning, and his features were distorted, as in a wrench of mortal pain. Then all that was true and dignified in the man rallied to repel the insult to the two he had trusted and loved. "I do not believe it," he said, distinctly and with deliberate emphasis. "You are the dupe of some mischievous slanderer, my good woman. Edward Withers is the soul of integrity, and my wife's virtue is incorruptible. Who told you this absurd tale?"

"Mrs. Withers stated to you that she was going to drive alone this afternoon, did she not?" Harriet forgot the pathetic in malicious triumph, as she proceeded to prove her rival's guilt.

"You heard her say it," laconically, and still on the defensive.

"Yet John says she called by the office to take up Mr. Edward Withers, and that they drove in company to the wharf, where lay an ocean steamer. He saw them go on board, arm in arm, and, although he waited on the pier as long as the vessel was in sight, they did not return."

“I will see the man myself.” Crossing the room with a firmer step than had been his since his illness, Mr. Withers rang the bell and summoned the coachman. His evidence tallied exactly with Harriet’s report, and she flattered herself that the inquisitor’s manner was a shade less confident when the witness was dismissed. “You have said that this disappearance was not a matter of surprise to you, and added something about vulgar gossip. I wish a full explanation,” he said, still magisterially.

Thus bidden, Harriet told her tale. Before their return to the city in the autumn, she had seasons of anxiety relative to the intimacy between Mr. Edward Withers and his beautiful sister-in-law. Not, the unsuspecting virgin was careful to affirm, that she doubted then the good faith and right intentions of either, but she feared lest Mrs. Withers’ partiality for the younger brother might render her negligent of her husband’s happiness and comfort. The winter’s festivities had brought the two into a peculiarly unfortunate position for the growth of domestic virtues, and eminently conducive to the progress of the fatal attachment which was now beyond the possibility of a doubt. Although one of the family, and known to be wedded to their interests, she had not been able to deter busy-bodies from sly and overt mention of the scandal in her hearing. She had, on such occasions, taken the liberty of rebuking the offender, and maintaining, in her humble way, the honor of her benefactor’s name. But she could not silence a city full of tongues, and they had wagged fast and loudly of

the husband's indiscreet confidence in the guilty parties, and their shameless treachery.

He checked her when she would have dilated upon this division of her subject. "I will have no hearsay evidence. What have you *seen*?"

Harriet demurred, blushing, not, as it presently appeared, because she had seen so little, but so much. Duets, vocal and instrumental, had been the vehicles of loving intercourse—hand-squeezing, meaning sighs and whispers. Her blood had often boiled furiously in beholding the outrageous manœuvres practised in the very sight of their trusting victim. Her eyes, in passing from their smiles of evil import, their languishings and caresses to the serene face bent over the chess-board, or wrapt in innocent slumber, had alternately overflowed with tears and glowed with indignation.

"But all this was as nothing compared with my sensations on the morning of the day in which you made your will. Chancing to enter your dressing-room, on my way to your bedside, I surprised Mrs. Withers and Mr. Edward Withers standing together, her head upon his bosom, his arms upholding her, while he whispered loving words in her ear. He kissed her at the very moment of my silent entrance, with this remark—'We have too much to live and to hope for, to nurse unhealthy surmises and fears.' I could testify to the language in a court of justice, and am positive that his reference was to your possible recovery."

"No more!" The mischief-maker was scared out

of her gloomy exultation by the altered face turned toward her. "Please excuse me from going down to dinner to-day. I am very weary, and shall spend the evening alone," pursued Mr. Withers, with a pitiful show of his old and pompous style. He arose, as a further signal that she must go, when she threw herself before him and clasped his knees.

"Elnathan!" the beady eyes strained in excruciating appeal, "do not banish me from you in this your extremity! Who—who should be near you to sustain and weep with you, but your poor devoted Harriet—she whose life has but one end—the hope that she may serve and aid you; but one reward, your smile, and so much of your love as you may see fit to bestow upon so worthless an object?"

But in the honest sorrow that bowed the listener's proud spirit to breaking, her factitious transports met no response beyond weary impatience. The cajolery that had flattered the unworthy complacency of his prosperous days rang discordantly upon his present mood. He wanted pity from no one, he said to himself, and, in his rejection of hers, there was a touch of resentment, the consequence of her unsparing denunciation of Constance. He might come to hate her himself, soon. Just now he almost abhorred the one who had opened his eyes to his own shame. "You mean well, I dare say, Harriet," he said, in his harshest tone, "but you are injudicious, and your offers of sympathy are unwelcome. I am sure that I shall shortly receive a satisfactory explanation of this mysterious affair. As to your gossiping friends, I

can only regret that your associates have not been chosen more wisely. Now you can go."

She made no further resistance, but hers was one of the chamber-doors that unclosed stealthily when, at midnight, the rattle of a latch-key sounded through the front hall, and was followed by the entrance of the two supposed voyagers. There were more wakeful eyes under that roof that night than the master recked of, and a bevy of curious gazers peered from the obscurity of the third story into the entry, where Mr. Withers had ordered the gas to be kept burning all night.

"You see we are expected," said Edward, to his companion.

Mr. Withers met them at the head of the staircase, clad in dressing-gown and slippers. "Ah! here you are. How did you get back?"

"The obliging captain hailed a fishing yacht, and put us on board," answered his brother. "Have you been uneasy about us?"

"Only lest you might be carried some distance out before you fell in with a returning vessel. You look very tired, Constance. I shall not let her go with you again, Edward, unless you promise to take better care of her."

"Tell him just how it happened, Connie," laughed Edward, and the conference was over.

"They played their parts well all of them," muttered Harriet, stealing back to her sleepless pillow. "But they need not hope to gag people now that the scandal has taken wind; 'murder will out.'"

Her sagacity was proved by the appearance in the next day's issue of an extensively circulated journal of a conspicuous article, headed "*Scandal in high life!*" setting forth the elopement, per steamer to Europe, of the junior partner in a well-known banking house with the beautiful wife of his brother, the senior partner of the aforesaid firm. The intimacy of the fugitives, the chronicle went on to say, had been much talked of all winter in the brilliant circle to which they belonged. The deserted husband was a citizen whom all delighted to honor for his business talents, his probity in public life, and his private virtues. "This affliction falls upon him with the more crushing severity from the circumstance that he has been for some months an invalid. He has the sincere sympathy of the entire community."

The editor of the humane sheet, albeit not unused to eating his own words, never penned a more humble and explicit retraction of "the unlucky error into which, through no fault of ours, we have fallen," than graced his columns the following morning. He could hardly have expressed himself more forcibly had Edward Withers really horsewhipped him, instead of threatening to do it, and to bring an action for libel as well.

Constance breakfasted in bed, at her husband's request, on the day succeeding the Pynsents' departure. The popular daily, above referred to, lay as usual by Mr. Withers' plate when he went down stairs, folded with what was known to its constant readers as the naughty corner outermost. Harriet

was engaged in concocting her cousin's cup of foaming chocolate when he opened the sheet, but she both saw and heard the paper rustle like a poplar bough before a storm, then grow suddenly, unnaturally still. When Mr. Withers lowered it there was nothing in voice or expression to betray to his brother that aught was amiss. When the meal was over he repaired to his wife's room, taking with him the newspaper which he had not, as was his custom, offered to pass to Edward.

Without a word he spread it before the pale woman whose haggard countenance should have moved him to delay her accusation and sentence. One swift glance took in the import of the cruel article, and she buried her face in the pillow with a cry that destroyed what faint remnant of hope might have lingered in his bosom. "My sin has found me out!"

A heavy hand was laid upon her arm. "This is childish, Constance, and you have showed yourself to be no child in craft. Nothing short of your own confession would have persuaded me that much contained in this paragraph is true; that you have abused my confidence, sullied my name, and made me the object of universal contempt—you and—and—my brother!"

Constance looked up eagerly. "He has done nothing, has said nothing inconsistent with honor and what he owes you. The weakness is all mine; the folly, the madness, and the suffering. He never thought of me except as a sister. Surely his engagement proves this."

"What should your marriage have proved?" asked

her husband, sarcastically. "It may be as you say. If I believe it, it is not because you swear it is the truth. But I did not come here to waste time in reproaches. There is but one way to put this scandal down; namely, to conduct ourselves as if we had never heard it. Of course, as soon as can be done without exciting remark, Edward must seek another home. Our removal to the country will afford a convenient opportunity for effecting this change. As to your reputation, I charge myself with the care of it from this hour. My error has been undue indulgence."

Constance lifted her leaden eyes with a look of utter wretchedness. "If you would but suffer me to go away and hide myself from all who know my miserable story, I would ask nothing else at your hands. You would the sooner forget the unhappiness brought upon you by the sad farce of marriage in which we have been actors."

"On my part it has been no farce," replied the stern, metallic voice. "I have conscientiously fulfilled the duties made obligatory upon me by our contract. You entered into this voluntarily. For what you have termed your folly, you have only yourself to blame. You seem to have been tempted to your unhappy passion by an inherent love of wrong-doing. As to your proposal of flight and concealment, it is simply absurd. In the first place, you leave out of view the fact that my fair name would be tarnished by an open separation—the infamy you would hide be laid bare to the general gaze. Secondly, you have

no decent place of refuge. I know your brother sufficiently well to affirm that his doors would be closed against you were you to apply to him for shelter as a repudiated wife. And you have no private fortune. I shall never again of my own accord allude to this disagreeable subject. We understand each other and our mutual position."

He kept his word to the letter. But henceforward his every action and look, when she was by, reminded her she was in bonds, and he her jailer. Too broken-spirited to resist his will, or to cavil at the demands made upon her time and self-denial by his cold imperiousness, she marched at his chariot wheel, a slave in queenly attire, whose dreams were no more of freedom, to whom love meant remorse, and marriage pollution, the more hopeless and hateful that the law and the Gospel pronounced it honorable in all.

Propriety As Good.

THE END.

Resolved by the printer to print the book.

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