

BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.

BY

LISETTE EARLE.



But, though a veil of shadow hangs between
That hidden life, and what we see and hear,
Let us revere the power of the Unseen,
And know a world of mystery is near.

A. A. PROCTER.

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NOW READY. SECOND EDITION REVISED.

GADDINGS WITH A PRIMITIVE PEOPLE,

By W. A. Baillie Grohman, Author of "Tyrol and the Tyrolese."

2 Vols., Cloth, 10/6.

"Mr. Baillie Grohman, apparently, is half German by blood, and he is certainly more than half Tyrolese by taste as well as domestication. He lives among the people and knows them intimately. He lies out among the hills for days together in pursuit of sport; he cooks his own very simple meals in solitary huts on the Alps and among the glaciers. He makes himself at home in the rude village inns or in the cottages of hospitable keepers and farmers. He attends their rifle matches attired in the local costume, and seems to talk the provincial *patois* fluently, being even a master of the rough and stinging 'chaff' which is the regular small change of conversation in those mountain valleys. And in the course of his 'Gaddings' he takes us to the shooting matches; to the Passion and Paradise plays; to the Confessional, Church ceremonies, and wedding festivities. We visit the *Sennhütten*, where solitary shepherdesses superintend the dairies and see to the flocks among the clouds and Alpine flower gardens, through the short summer season; and the peasant-baths, which are considered sovereign for the indigestion that must often wait upon voracious appetites. It is seldom indeed that a stranger of birth and education acquaints himself so thoroughly with those habits of the humbler classes in a most interesting country at which the mere tourist can only glance in passing. Mr. Grohman has done for the Tyrolese peasantry what Mr. Rose has done for the Spanish lower orders in his *Untrodden Spain*. Not the least romantic passage in his volumes is that where he tells how he became master of the Schloss Matzen, from which he dates his preface."

SATURDAY REVIEW.

"Mr. Baillie Grohman, to whom we are already indebted for an interesting and spirited description of Tyrol and the Tyrolese, has done well, in his present volumes, to seize upon some of the little known aspects of peasant life in the remoter villages, and to bring them vividly before us ere yet they have lost their peculiar charm. At the end of his book Mr. Grohman reverts for a short time to his favourite sport of chamois-hunting, of which he has before written so pleasantly; and as he tells us in his preface that many volumes would be required to do justice to all that is quaint and strange in the old-world nooks of Tyrol, we may perhaps hope at some future time for a few more of his characteristic pictures."

SPECTATOR.

"These two volumes give a series of sketches of life and manners among the Tyrolese peasantry. The pictures could hardly be better chosen or better drawn. The writer has not only a thorough knowledge of the world he describes, but the power, too, which is very commonly wanting in the authors of such books, of knowing what to take and what to leave. A pleasanter or more entertaining book we have not seen for a long while. It will refresh many happy recollections in the minds of those who know the world which Mr. Grohman describes, and will certainly, in the case of those who do not, go as far to supply the place of personal knowledge as any book can possibly do."

EXAMINER.

"Mr. Grohman's long residence in the Tyrol gives him a right to speak with authority of the people and of their ways. Some two years ago he published a very interesting volume entitled 'Tyrol and the Tyrolese,' which were in many respects so exhaustive and so full of detail that one may well feel surprised that he has found matter for this second work. . . . But Mr. Grohman is so familiar with his subject, and he writes so well, that it would be almost impossible for him, on this subject, to be anything but interesting. . . . Mr. Grohman's volumes have many bits of eloquent description, and his sketch of the Paradise Play of the Tyrol exhibits the most grotesque mixture of heathen, Roman, and modern ideas it is possible to conceive."

BRITISH QUARTERLY REVIEW.

"It is not often that a book has equal claims to the attention of the scientist and the general reader. Such, however, is the case with Mr. Grohman's 'Gaddings with a Primitive People.' Mr. Grohman has already produced one very valuable and readable work on the Tyrol and its people. The one now before us may be considered as a continuation of it. Mr. Grohman has lived many years in the Tyrol, and associated on terms of the most intimate familiarity with all classes of the population. Consequently his descriptions and observations may be accepted as authoritative, and many of them are exceedingly minute and curious. . . . The book is brightly and pleasantly written."

SCOTSMAN.

"Very amusingly has Mr. Grohman sketched for us the series of quaint characters, and described the curious customs which are to be found in the remote districts of the Tyrolese Alps, with which he is so thoroughly acquainted. The village schoolmaster, the parish priest and his curate, the innkeeper, the mountain belle and her stalwart bridegroom, wedding ceremonies and wedding festivities, the Kirchtag and rifle match, the miracle plays and mountain bath-house all come in for lively notice, and combine to form a readable and chatty volume."

MORNING POST.

REMINGTON & Co., 5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.



BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.

ESTHER WOODVILLE'S STORY.

"It is only with renunciation that life, properly speaking, can be said to begin."

"Light dawns upon me ; there is in man a higher than love of happiness ; he can do without happiness, and instead thereof find blessedness."

THOS. CARLYLE.

PROLOGUE.

IT is a long time since I, Esther Woodville, was a girl, and lived by the quiet seashore. So far back it seems, that for long periods it passes out of my memory that I ever had a childhood. These two or three days past I have been trying to solve the problem, why the contents of an old portfolio, which I accidentally turned over in the twilight of an autumn evening, should

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have so seriously disturbed my equanimity and have revived in me so vividly memories of years long past, stirring up feelings in me so strangely at variance with the calm that has settled down on me in the last few years. Looking at and handling the quaint old sketches, I am carried back to the days of my childhood, and once more I am surrounded by all the familiar things of my youth, which speak to me with voices, that, old as I am (and life's winter is drawing on apace), cause my heart to beat faster, my hand to tremble, and the hot tears to start to my eyes.

This bit of sea view, with its bright and sparkling water, and its pebbly beach, where I often filled my tiny basket with shells and seaweed ; this old piece of cliff, under the shade of which I would set and arrange my treasures ; then the Hermitage, the dear old house (every stone of which is dear to me still), with its queer old gables, the swallows and their nests, its rude porch and half open door, excite in me feelings that I thought were dead long, long ago. Now as I pore over these sketches, drawn by a hand that long since grew cold in death, I live over again the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, of those by gone days.

Years ago I said to myself, "Esther, thou hast a very unfortunate habit of looking back on the past, cherishing and keeping alive old memories, a morbid pleasure in repining over lost joys, and weeping for dead loves, regretting lost opportunities, and lamenting the past generally. Thou hast an inclination to wish thy life over again, and art possessed with a weak idea that thou could'st set so many things right, repair others, cut and prune, make the crooked places straight, in fact remodel thyself, and live a practical common-sense life. There is just a grain of ambition, too, in thy composition that sometimes springs into life again, and causes thee to wish that time would turn backwards a few years, that it might plant itself in suitable soil, and bring forth fruit after its kind.

"Esther, thou wer't ever a dreamer. Dreams! dreams! Listen, thy hopes and thy loves alike are dead, buried, as thou had'st better bury thy ambition, with the old portfolio in yonder chest. Take this advice, linger no longer around the scenes of thy past life, rake out the embers from thy memory, quench them, put away for ever the joyous and the sad, the disappointments and the gains, the mysterious and the unex-

plained. Who art thou that thou should'st hope to fathom the mystery of life? Thou art but one in the great tide of humanity, flowing ever to the mighty ocean, that has engulfed so many of thy loved ones, and will ere long whirl thee onward like some leaf or straw swept away to make room for another, who shall be wiser than thou, and who shall fulfil life's duties better, live a nobler life, and leave a deeper impression on the minds of men than thou could'st have done had'st thou lived a hundred years. Put away the portfolio, Esther, thou hast nought to do now but to set thy house in order, fold thy hands, and wait until the great mystery shall open up to thee, even death."

"Wait!" the word fell like a death-knell on my heart. It was not death I feared, but the waiting. Had I not been waiting? Had it not been a life-time of waiting? True, I had had gleams of sunshine, and my heart had been warmed for short seasons, but the winter of waiting had come again all too soon; yet, obey my stern monitor I knew I must, and did, inasmuch as I hid away the dear old treasure in the bottom of the chest, and I thought I had succeeded in bidding my heart be quiet and at rest, and forget all; but

the accident of turning up the old prize has stirred my feelings, and awakened voices, which, like a great life-wave have swept away and carried before them all my resolves. I cannot heed the voice that again bids me put it away until we have talked together awhile.

Come, dear old friend, let us turn over life's pages together, and while you talk I will write. Perchance there may be some drops of honey left in the dry comb yet, some sweet morsel among the husks. And when my manuscript is finished you shall have company in the old chest. I will put you carefully away out of my sight ; you two shall sleep together, and my hands shall disturb you no more. You shall rest, and I will wait with what patience I may, for the long sleep that will soon come to me. You shall rest, unless that wiser one that shall fill my place chance to disturb you in your hiding place, and reading you, with a light upon the page that I lack, he may in the indefinite future solve some of your strange stories, and explain, to a generation to come, the mystery of my life ; but if, in his superior wisdom, he shall consign you to the flames as worthless, you will but share the fate that flesh is heir to, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Having entered into this compact with my long lost treasures, I closed the portfolio and put it away for the night, and resolved to forget in sleep the memories it had called up ; but sleep would not come at my bidding. I was thrown so completely back into the past that struggle as I would I could not regain my usual composure. Worn out at last, I fell into a fitful slumber, a kind of waking sleep or trance, in which the panorama of life still kept moving, and the sketches in the old portfolio seemed suddenly to assume life and action. I felt impelled to take up one, and looked at the—





FIRST PICTURE,



LITTLE sketch of a country homestead by the seacoast. In the foreground stands a little girl, some three or four years old, a nervous, half-frightened looking little thing. Her eyes are full of a strange wonderment as she gazes on the wide green landscape about her. Her head is slightly turned, as though her ear has caught the low deep roll of the sea upon the rock-girt shore. At her feet crouches a brown retriever dog, which is looking up into the child's face with large pathetic eyes, full of watery sympathy that would fain express itself in words, and claim a right to protect her.

Under the shadow of the house, and half hidden by the trees, are two other figures. One is an elderly man leaning against a rustic seat, and watching the child's movements with a sad, yet anxious solicitude. In one

hand he holds a child's sun bonnet, and the other is resting on the shoulder of his companion, a rather small, yet robust-looking woman, with bright brown eyes, and crisp curly hair. There is a flush of health upon her cheek, and an appearance of strength and vigour in the hand and arm, which is bare to the elbow. Her bright coloured chintz dress is caught up at the side, and held by a stout girdle. In her hand is a basket of fresh gathered fruit, suggestive of preserves and home-made wine. There is an air of good nature and bustle about her, in strange contrast to the man's dreamy absent look.

The child wears a black dress, and one can easily divine that she is an orphan, and has been just brought to a new home.

I lay the sketch down and let my thoughts drift backwards.

My mother had died when I was little more than one year old, and two years afterwards my father, who had never recovered the shock, died also.

My grandmother had been summoned to his sick bed in the great city, and when she had closed the eyes of the dead and seen the grave close over all that remained of him, who had been the life and pride of her house,

she returned home, taking me with her. It is but a rough sketch, and Time has obliterated parts of it; yet, there, in the open doorway of the house, I can see my grandfather standing ready to receive us—a tall, big man, reaching out his arms to take me from my nurse, a faithful and tender-hearted girl, who would not leave me, and to whom I now clung, half afraid of the strange eager-looking man, and half unwilling to enter the new home to which they had brought me.

I was too young to understand all my dear grandfather felt the day he took me in his arms for the first time; the orphan child of his only son, from whom he had parted in anger, and whom he had never seen again, though I knew afterwards all the grief that weighed upon his spirit for many long years.

The days of photography had not then come; yet, in looking back through the years, as I can remember him, my grandfather was a man somewhat above the middle height. Exceedingly tall and stern he seemed to me in those days, when my child's heart would not be comforted for the loss of my own beloved father, the only parent I had ever known. By degrees I began to turn to him, and with anxious eyes to trace in his features

the likeness to my lost father, and in a short time the one became merged in the other, and so not lost to me at all. How I wish I could have painted his face then; the broad smooth forehead, on which Time had left but few traces; the stately head, from which the rather long hair fell in thick masses about his neck; the clear grey eyes, with an earnest look in them (almost eagle-like at times in their searching gaze), dimmed sometimes by a passing thought that must have been painful, though never a look but of kindness for me.

His large powerful frame showed as yet no signs of decay; the only marks that the years had left upon him were the lines that were deepening about his mouth, and a slightly drooping attitude, observable as he walked. In his younger days he must have been a handsome man; to my child's eye he was the embodiment of all that was noble, good and true. I was never tired of gazing in his face, and though others thought him a grave, cold man, with a will that was law in his own small circle, to me it was a delight to obey. He was my master and companion; my lessons over, the fields, the hills, the seashore and the rocks were our favourite resorts. There we sought for and found various and

curious specimens of shells, spar, seaweed and flowers. A lover of flowers (wild ones, especially), I see him now; how tenderly he handles the pretty things, examining their petals and almost caressing their leaves; a botanist, a man in love with all Nature, who looked at the tender grass and the simple wayside flowers, reading in them lessons that his fellows never thought to look for; and the flowers, having a language of their own, spake to his heart things others heard not, causing the tears of tenderness to fall upon their leaves, while a grateful prayer would ascend to Nature's God; and his heart, elevated and refreshed by these lessons among the hills, would go into the world of men and unburden itself in generous acts and noble deeds. Often alone with Nature and Nature's God, the greensward and blue sky his only sanctuary, a temple without walls, would he worship in spirit, and I, a happy child playing about his knees, would fan his brow, pass my fingers through his hair and playfully gem his head to please my fancy. Oft-times I have been suddenly arrested by the look that came into his face. A holy calm spread itself over his features, a reverence, too deep for words, filled his heart, and a joy, that had something

of Heaven in it, beamed from his eye, and then I knew that he held a deep and sacred communion with the Invisible.

Our lives became so interwoven that his joy was mine, his pain equally mine ; I loved him with a devotion that to me was sacred. He was my world then, and I think I was his ; he taught me to read, write and draw. Was ever master so patient ? Was ever pupil so diligent ? Were ever days so bright ? Were ever hearts so knit together ?

Keep back, forbidden tear, while I gaze again on the dear image so deeply graven on my memory.





SECOND PICTURE.

"To persons whose pursuits are isolated from the common business of life—who are either in advance of mankind or apart from it—there often comes a sensation of moral cold that makes the spirit shiver as if it had reached the frozen solitudes around the pole."

N. HAWTHORNE.



DINGY crumpled leaf, grown yellow with age, painted for the most part in shadow, with here and there a lurid gleam across the cloudy sky. In the centre stands a quaint odd-looking old house, just discernible in the twilight; an ancient weatherbeaten old mansion, with a sloping thatched roof, and I do not know how many gables. When built, or what its original appearance might have been, nobody in that generation could tell; it had stood through the storms and blasts of unnumbered years; altered, often repaired, and patched year by year, till perhaps not many of its original

stones were left. Still it was a substantial building, and had a rustic beauty, all its own.

Ever bright and cosy inside, whether the summer sun shone through its small latticed casement, or the winter logs blazed and crackled on the large open hearthstones.

Oddly enough must its exterior have looked to the passer-by, if he could have taken a good view of it; but the fine old trees had been spared, and the shrubbery surrounding it was dense. An old mulberry tree and one or two of its companions entirely screened one side of the house, and looked as though they might have been planted ages ago, and had been yielding their luscious fruit year by year for many generations. It was only by entering the small gate (there in the corner), and going to a turn in the pathway, that the inquisitive stranger could get a full view of it, and then it would have puzzled him to say whether its style of architecture was Gothic, Norman, or Elizabethan. Perhaps a combination of the three would have been the conclusion he would have arrived at. For want of a better name, it was called the Hermitage.

A strange fascination held me while I looked at the rude sketch; a spell was upon me, and in imagination I again wandered,

hand-in-hand with the loved and lost, through the old domain, shaded by the moss-covered ruins at the back, made my way through the thick mass of creeping foliage, where the honeysuckle and woodbine strove together, covering the jutting points of the old masonry, and forming grotesque bowers here and there over curious carved stonework, where the faces of a few saints, broken and begrimed, peered out still.

I wander on farther beyond the Hermitage to the hills, cross the stile at the top of the lane, and recall the wonder and delight with which I gazed for the first time on the sea rolling beneath. A grand, yet awful sight! A kind of dread steals over my spirit even now when I think of the great volume of moving water, never at rest, and the thousands entombed in its almost fathomless depth.

Taking a last look at the old Hermitage, we discover a girl of twelve, seated upon a rustic bench near the open door. She has drawn up her feet, and is leaning back, apparently listening to the monotonous moaning of the waves as they roll over the shingly beach, or just touch the rocks, and recede. The sea-gulls are flying inland, and the sky looks ominous. A book is lying in the girl's

lap, but she is not reading ; her eyes, large and dreamy, are fixed as in deep thought. A plain, yet singular face is hers ; an unusually large head, and a diminutive figure ; her smooth, short hair and brown dress give her a quaint old-fashioned appearance. The only thing about her person approaching to ornament is a string of large and rare coral beads, from which a gold locket is suspended, and one small hand is grasping it nervously. There is no other child to be seen in the picture, no other human being, and she looks sad and alone ; a strange expression is on that young countenance, unlike others of her age. There is no girlish vivacity in the face, or youthful sparkle in the eye ; only a studious, thoughtful look, as though great and deep problems were revolving through the undeveloped brain. And looking at the large mournful eyes, from which the tears seem ready to start, a feeling of pity rises in my own breast even now, and I can scarcely recognise myself in the little solemn woman sitting there in the twilight.

Here my hand trembled violently, for the sketch seemed to quiver with life as I grasped it tighter. I saw, in imagination, the girl rise, listen for a moment at the open window

to voices within, and I glided in again, "as I did that night long ago," to stand in the shadow of the room and hear a voice speak in a peremptory tone—

"Robert, I must have your attention ; this child's case is becoming serious."

It was my grandmother's voice addressing my grandfather, who was deep in the pages of some old lore. He started, looked bewildered, turned his head from side to side, and not seeing me, said—

"Well, Martha, is the child ill?"

"Worse than that," said she, giving him, at the same time, a very significant look.

6. "My dear, I don't understand," he began, apologetically.

"Then, Robert, you must listen to me, and try to understand," said she, sternly.

After an effort or two to shake off the dust of the old volume from his brain, he slowly marked the page he was reading, shut the book, and prepared to listen as he was bid.

My grandmother, like her name-sake of old, was generally cumbered about many things, and from the few words I had heard, I perceived she had added me as a serious item to the list.

"Esther is growing up a strange child,"

she commenced. "Her dreamy, abstracted manner alarms me, and I can no longer put it from me that there is something decidedly wrong about the child. If it were illness I could cope with it, but this waking sleep that the child seems to be in, half her time, I cannot deal with it. Why, only yesterday," continued she, growing warm with the subject, and clicking her knitting needles energetically, "I found her in the orchard sitting in the shade, with a half-open book on her knee. Her eyes were fixed with a far-off look in them. Her lips were slightly parted, and her whole face was lit up with a bright smile. She sat perfectly still, and moved not as I approached her. It was several seconds before I could induce her to listen to me, for, like one in a dream, she did not seem to see me."

"Overcome by the heat, and fallen asleep, perhaps," suggested my grandfather.

"My dear Robert, allow me to be the judge," said she, bristling up, while a slight tinge of colour rose to her cheeks, and, letting a few stitches drop in her excitement, "my eyes are as good as ever they were (a foible of my grandmother's), and I say her eyes were open, and that she was smiling."

"Well, Martha, she was smiling. That, at least, was satisfactory."

"On the contrary," argued she, very unsatisfactory. "Whom and what was she smiling at?"

"Why not have asked her?" said he. "Esther is truthful."

"Wait a moment, Robert, wait; Esther is truthful, and that makes it the more perplexing. I spoke her name once, twice; no answer. Apparently she neither saw nor heard me. Taking her hand, I said, for the third time, 'Esther, what are you looking at?' With a start she sprang up, and, oh, Robert! what do you think she answered? 'At the angels, grandma', and now you have frightened them away.' And now, Robert, what is to be done? That is the question I have been asking myself all day until I am afraid to sleep another night, unless I can assure myself that this will not occur again."

"Afraid of Esther, my dear, or the angels; which?" asked he smiling.

"Robert, Robert," cried she excitedly, "how can you treat it so lightly? What, if some evil spell should be on the child—I have heard of such things—what will be the consequence?"

“Well, Martha, if the consequences are only smiling faces and angels, we shall not suffer, and we had better entertain them.”

My grandmother could suppress her feelings no longer, and with a hot flush of anger on her face, she rose, and laying her hand on his shoulder, said—

“I know not whether there was ever insanity in your family. I am sure there never was in mine, and I hope I shall keep my common sense, whoever else in the house goes wrong.”

He laughed a little quiet laugh at this, and said—

“No, Martha, we are not insane; a little peculiar I’ll allow, but not insane. You take this matter so seriously. The child has told me of some dreams she has had lately, which are certainly remarkable, but as they are of a very pure, and somewhat symbolical character, I have been rather interested in them than otherwise, and have taken notes of them. Perhaps, some day, they may explain themselves.”

“Robert,” cried she, giving his arm a vigorous shake, “we have pulled together through life, so far, without any serious differences, brought up children to conduct

themselves as other children do ; but, if Esther is to be allowed to sleep with her eyes open, and talk with angels in the middle of the day, then, on your head be the consequences. But I hope you will have the good sense to forbid this ; for what with your experiments in chemistry, your collections of queer specimens, your strange books, and your secret studies, the people in the village are already beginning to look upon the Hermitage with suspicious eyes. Think of my being stared at by the villagers, and perhaps shunned as I walk through the streets, and Esther taken for something uncanny. Think, I say, Robert, and put a stop to these strange proceedings. A rumour, too, has reached me (here my grandfather shewed signs of weariness, and a desire to resume his reading, but was compelled to listen) that one of the villagers, passing the house a few nights back, observed a singular appearance in one of the windows in the left hand gable. Joe's own account is, that riding his pony home late one dark night, just as they were crossing the large brook opposite our house, a window in the left gable suddenly opened and shut again with a bang, that startled him, and struck the poor beast with terror ;

for he stood stock still in the middle of the water, and refused to move. Instantly the room was lit up with a bluish light, revealing a tall figure standing at the window, mixing up something in a curious shaped vessel. He wore a black skull cap on his head, a long red cloak reached to his feet, a black girdle was about his waist, from which (to use Joe's own words) hung a number of spears, darts, forks, and such like deadly weapons. About the head of the figure played red, yellow, and green flames, intermingled with smoke and sparks that ascended, filling the room. But the thing that struck horror to the heart of Joe was the large goggle eyes that glared at him in the darkness. The lights disappeared as suddenly as they came, and Sluggard stood still in the middle of the brook. The poor man finding himself in similar circumstances to Balaam and his ass, bethought himself what to do, and vowed that had it been an angel in his path he would have stood his ground, but the arch-fiend from the bottomless pit, working his spells, he could not face. So he flung the halter on Sluggard's neck, cleared the brook, and ran. Finding Sluggard in his stall next morning, the man avowed that the poor

brute looked at him with a reproachfulness in his eyes that he will remember to the day of his death."

My grandmother added, with a groan, that she "feared the spells were working, and that the instinct of some animals was wonderful."

So long I had stood in the shadow listening. As my grandmother talked my heart palpitated, and my face flushed; a vague sense of guilt took possession of me, and I began to question myself. What mischief was I unconsciously working? True, the story of the gable window had nothing to do with me, yet I felt as though I should be considered the moving spring of all the evil that might occur at the Hermitage. I had felt unable to speak or stir. I was like one struck dumb, and I had held my breath to listen. I had been unconscious of any serious difference between myself and others. I knew I was plain and shy, yet my days glided by calmly and peacefully. I had lived in the days as they came, and had never looked at the future. These strange visions of angels had been some of my happiest experiences. Had I been living in a dream all this time, and was this the awakening?

Heaven was my witness, that I would have died, rather than have brought reproach upon my dear relatives, and yet, what dreadful things had I heard ; I could never forget them.

Happy childhood ! had it fled so soon ? In the last half-hour all was changed. What was in the future for me, and must I look at it ? A heavy weight had fallen upon my heart ; I had often heard myself called short and odd looking, unlike other girls, plain in every feature except my eyes, and they had well-nigh frightened my grandmother.

I stood on tiptoe and looked at myself in a mirror that hung opposite. Was I plain ? I had not cared until now. Yes, I had a strange face, large frightened-looking eyes, straight hair, and what a colour ! My cheeks, my lips ; a bluish hue was creeping over my whole face.

What words had I heard ? "Uncanny," what does that mean ? Ghostly, unearthly ! Oh God, have mercy. I was afraid of my own face, and, with one piercing shriek, I sank upon the floor. I could bear no more.

I could hear my grandfather exclaiming, as they became aware of my presence—

"Martha, you have killed her !"

I could distinguish my grandmother's voice making lamentations, and accusing herself for her thoughtlessness in not observing me. I felt their caresses on my brow and lips for a few moments, and then I remembered no more until next morning I awoke as from sleep, and found myself on my own bed.

A pale, anxious face was gazing into mine, and the question, "Is my little woman better?" brought back all the scene of the previous evening, and, with a shudder and a sigh I could not suppress, I murmured—

"Let me die, I can never be happy again!"

"Esther, my child," said he, forcing a smile, "art tired of thy sober old grandfather, and in haste to go to thy angel friends?" Then, laying his hand on my head, and tenderly stroking my hair, he continued, "My little woman, thou art very dear to me, in spite of thy plain face and old-fashioned ways. Thou art very precious to me, and liest very near my heart. I could ill spare thee, Esther. Do not talk of dying, or let such sad thoughts trouble thy wise little head."

"But what is the trouble that is coming to us, and what is it that haunts our house at

night?" said I looking anxiously into his face, and feeling that I was in some way the unconscious cause of all the horrors that had suddenly come around us.

A comical expression crept over his face, and his eyes twinkled with suppressed humour, while he explained to me the mystery of the haunted window.

He had, on that particular night, as was his frequent custom, divested himself of his outer garment, and thrown on his dressing-gown, and, with a black skull cap, coloured spectacles, and sundry little implements fastened to his belt, had gone into this room, which served him for a laboratory as well as many other purposes, shut down the window, and proceeded to try some experiments in chemistry, which he had been studying during the day, and which was the spectacle poor Joe had taken for the devil.

"Truly," said my grandfather, "the likeness might have been complete when the fumes and coloured lights flared about me, causing that poor simpleton to risk the breaking of his own neck, and leave his poor pony to the tender mercies of the evil one."

This ignorance and absurdity overcame my grandfather's usual gravity, and he laughed

outright. But the rumour had gone forth, and, as the years passed, gained ground in the minds of these superstitious and ignorant villagers, that the Hermitage had an evil visitant, and men began to shun the house. The spell was working, and was already thrown over Miss Esther, they said. I began to feel myself avoided by the young people, and eyed curiously by the old. Even in my visits among the sick and poor, as the bearer of my grandmother's bounty, though my hands were often laden with her gifts and charities, yet I fancied that the rheumatic old women deemed me dangerous, and hinted that my presence might have something to do with the sickness among the babies.

A few treated me kindly, but the greater portion of them regarded me, the house, and my grandfather, as things to be avoided at any cost, for, in spite of our caution, the fact of his continued visits to the room in the gable, and the strange trance-like state into which I sometimes passed, would out, and frighten these estimable people.

Sluggard had died, and carried his secret with him to the grave, but Joe still affirmed there was that in Sluggard's eye, that, if only the gift of speech had been given to him,

as to the animal of old, he would have unfolded a tale respecting that night's work at the Hermitage that would have been matter for history for all time ; but Sluggard died and made no sign.

These rumours sometimes reached my ears, and, shy and sensitive as I was at all times, they depressed me beyond measure. I could not defend myself, nor offer any explanation that would have satisfied these simple people ; indeed, I was becoming a mystery to myself, for a succession of visions and strange experiences followed the shock that had caused me to swoon.

Sometimes during the day, all natural objects would fade away, and scenes of another kind, "yet quite as real, apparently, in another realm," would pass before me, held up to me in imagery, it is true, but in which I could not fail to see, as clearly as if I read them in the pages of a book, events far in the future, and which my unsophisticated mind took in as facts that would happen. And, forsooth, they did happen.

One vision I could not then, nor afterwards, ever fully decide whether it was merely a dream, or my spirit forsook its tenement for that period of time, or what

brought about the vision ; but so vivid were the scenes, and so deep the impressions on my mind, that I never doubted the fact that I did, in some mysterious manner, hear and see what I afterwards described.

After the first painful feelings connected with my fainting ceased, I lost all consciousness of my earthly surroundings, and seemed to have been suddenly borne away to another clime ; a sensation of freedom came to me, as though my spirit had escaped from a prison, and had thrown off its fetters and was free. The atmosphere was full of lightness and life. How large my heart felt ; I had to put a restraint on myself. An inclination to run forward seized me ; I felt as though some other spirit was seeking mine. I looked around ; I stood in the midst of a garden surpassingly beautiful. How cool and refreshing the foliage was about my face, how rich and abundant the flowers, the branches entwining lovingly, and spreading overhead, forming avenues by their embraces, until they looked like one magnificent bower, sweet with perfumes, and rich with intermingled shades and colours, delighting the eye without dazzling it.

Like a thirsty plant suddenly transplanted

to a rich and fertile soil, I was drinking in all the sweetness and life that flowed around me, when I suddenly became aware of a presence moving near me, and, turning my head, I saw, close to my shoulder, the form of a lovely woman, looking at me with beaming, earnest eyes.

She was clad in a simple white robe, which fell in graceful folds about her slight figure; her long hair, the shade and beauty of which I cannot describe, hung loosely about her shoulders, and was held back from her forehead by a plain gold band. Her right hand was held out to receive mine, and in the left, she held a small white rosebud.

She spoke no word, and I had not one to utter, and yet, by an unerring law (the sympathy of souls) I knew her to be my mother—my girl mother, who had left me a poor little white bud upon earth years ago, but who I felt had been watching over me, and now, in my first real trouble, had called me to rest awhile on her pure white bosom, upon which I now fell with all the confidence of a beloved child, while our hearts beat and throbbed with intense delight, and we drank deep draughts of joy, which only hearts in such union as ours can know.

By-and-by, with her arms still wound around me, we seated ourselves on a grassy mound rich in lilies and sweet scented flowers, when she conversed with me in a language that my heart understood, though I am unable to bring it into earthly words. She talked of the past, and was thankful for my sake of the future, my future, which, unlike her own, would be protracted on the earth, she said.

She bade me love and reverence my Maker, and live to serve others, especially my grandfather, my best earthly friend; to be forgetful of self, to seek out the wretched and sinful, and, by all the means that were given me, to help and comfort all those who were distressed. This would, she said, bring me the truest comfort when the shadows should fall upon my own path, for fall they would; and, if I had to taste a bitter cup, I must remember who had drunk it before me to its very dregs.

She spoke of my father, and when I expressed a desire to speak with him, she bade me be patient; it might be granted me, but not now. Then, telling me to look on the left side of me, I saw a kind of panorama of living pictures, passages of my own life, some

that had already passed, and some that were to come. She shewed me dark pictures, bitter trials, which I seemed to be left alone to battle with as best I could ; scenes in which I was bowed down with grief and anguish. Despair had seized me with an iron grip, threatening to tear my heart in twain, and I was powerless, cut off from all human aid and sympathy, apparently left by heaven and earth.

Feeling me shudder in every nerve, she told me to look higher on the picture, when, suddenly, upon the dark, shadowy scenes, there fell a light which brightened every path of it ; a sweet sunshine gladdened the whole, and chased away the clouds and gloom from my path, and anon joyous and happy scenes were enacted, in all of which I was the principal actor, and, in the midst of all the gladness, for one moment I saw my father's face.

A sense of peace and security pervaded my whole being, and, overcome even to tears, I asked—

“ And does God permit this ? ”

She spake me back again—

“ Let this be thy consolation, my darling, under all bitter trials, that thou art never

forsaken ; for, are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who are in need ? ”

With that I felt her arms relax, the flowers lost their perfume, a cloud overshadowed us, the rich colours faded, fear and disappointment took hold on me. My heart grew heavy, and my head ached ; old recollections came back, and wrung from me the words, “ Let me die.”

After that day, I treasured up these things in my own heart, seldom speaking of them ; but I lived with the conviction that my beloved parents were near me, and watched my life ; and this new faith gave me strength to bear the strange and suspicious eyes that were now being constantly turned upon me, or to hear the whisper go round that I was a Haunted Child.





THIRD PICTURE.

"The spirit has its risings and settings of sun and moon, its clouds and stars, its seasons, its solstices, its tides, its winds, its storms, its earthquakes—infinite vitality in endless fluctuation."

G. MACDONALD.

THE hours passed, and still my dream went on. My hands moved nervously among the quaint old sketches, picking them up one by one, and as suddenly dropping again all those that had been drawn during five years. Some of these as they fell from my hands I saw were sombre, gloomy, even weird looking pictures; the skies were leaden coloured, and heavy with coming tempest, dark grey backgrounds, out of which the hills and woods peered like spectres upon a solitary girl, whose dreamy face, and thoughtful mien, seemed in sad harmony with all the rest.

It is true, that in a few of these dreary scenes, the clouds broke a little overhead,

and a ray of sunlight, now and again resting on the girl's face, gave the beholder a transient idea of the great peace and rest that occasionally filled the inner life of her, who outwardly walked in shadow.

Death had visited us during these five years, laying his icy hand on my two best loved friends. The dear cheery face of him who had been the earthly sun to which I had always turned for warmth and encouragement, had ceased to smile on me. The energetic, bustling, order loving presence of her, who had kept all our wordly matters straight, was no longer moving among us. A solemn calm had crept over the old house, the tomb had enshrined the mortal remains of both my dear grandparents, and I was left the sole occupier of the Hermitage. I had made few friends; the impression that some subtle influence lurked about me, throwing me into trances, and bringing me into contact with strange visitants from an unknown bourne, still found favour in the minds of the superstitious, and so I walked comparatively alone, little understood by my fellows, and as little understanding them; for, at this period, my companionship was not with this world.

Now and then some kindly disposed matron would take pity on my loneliness, and invite me to a family ball at her mansion, but such was my innate obstinacy, or want of appreciation of the value of such advantages, that I could seldom be induced to do more than whirl round in one giddy dance, but into which for the time I threw my whole soul, and in those moments, I think I drank up all the bliss that came to my portion for the rest of the evening, for soon after I found myself moralizing on the before and after, the why and wherefore, of human existence, subjects that had no place whatever in a ball-room. In these first days of my loneliness, when sleep forsook me, and the intense stillness about me became too heavy to be borne, turning from side to side, with a weary yearning for sympathy, how weird and cold the life before me looked, a life without love. My heart indeed was desolate, and crying out for my lost ones. I have risen, and in the silent night hours sought the old laboratory, that if perchance the spirit of him who had so lately left might still linger about the so-called haunted room, but though oft-times I felt a strange pleasure in sorting or handling these miscellaneous relics, and treasured

them as sacred things, yet no vision of the kind familiar face came to me at that time. Oh, they were five lonely, weary years, and from my nerveless fingers I let the pictures fall.

Presently my hand came in contact with one that caused a thrill of joy to vibrate through my whole being. Years had passed, and every sketch I had hitherto touched, had shown signs of age. Gloomy as they were, time had thrown them into deeper shadow still, and memory had failed to recognise some of their darkest details. But this, that my fingers closed upon tightly, this that I held to my heart while I quivered with a rapturous wild delight, this had kept all its original beauty. Its tints were unaltered, its colours unchanged; the perfect harmony of the whole lay before me as vividly as on the day it was painted.

A clear blue sky, without a cloud, save its drapings of fleecy white. The hills lay bathed in sunlight, and beyond the cliffs the sea glittered and sparkled in the noon-tide light. It was the glad summer time. The village in the distance surrounded by rich pasturage, looked peaceful, and the little fishing town to the left seemed astir as with

life, and busy as of yore. To the right lay the common, kept fresh and green by the bright little rivulet of sparkling water that crossed and recrossed it. A group of girls were resting on the greensward. So well do I remember those country maidens; very picturesque they looked with bare arms, short skirts, and coarse woollen stockings. Shouldering their brown stone pitchers, they would sally forth in little groups to the beck (as they named it) for their drinking water, where, if neighbour Brown's speckled cow chanced to arrive first to cool her feet and wash her nose in the sparkling water, she had only to be persuaded to move on, and the good natured brook soon cleared itself again.

And there in the midst stands the Hermitage, the golden sun lighting up its rough gables and its patched roof, with a glory that lends a charm and beauty to its defects, making the old house look enchanting in the sunlight. But the soul and centre of the picture is the figure of a man of middle age, leaning over the little gate, a fine manly form; there is a symmetry and suppleness about him that bespeaks cultivation, an ease and a nameless grace that commends itself

to the eye, and compels one to look and admire the faultless form. He has laid aside his hat, and his face is turned to the breeze, which has blown his fair hair backwards from off a high white forehead. His hands are carelessly thrown behind him, in one of which he holds a sketch book. His face is not what men would call handsome; the features can hardly be said to be perfect; large and not too finely chiselled, scarcely classical enough to please the critical eye; yet there is an undefinable something in the cast of countenance that fixes the attention, and speaks him no ordinary man. An electric light sparkles in his clear hazel eye, and an expression of truth and candour rests on his full round mouth, a warmth and a glow quivers on the whole face, as though the soul of the man was fully awake, and was struggling, either to express itself in words, or to take in fresh inspiration from the scene around.

By his side stands a girl of eighteen, who is looking up into his face with a timid, yet admiring gaze. She has already figured in these sketches, yet I almost fail to recognise in the bright animated face before me the once sober, dreamy, Esther Woodville. The sun is falling in a flood of golden rays

about her head and face, and perhaps by its light I may discover the secret spring of this new happiness. Turning my gaze inward to my own heart, I can still read the cause of my joyous face on that day. The first time I had met this stranger was on the hills, whither I had gone in search of a deeper solitude, where I could pour out my heart's anguish unheard, save by the winds and the waves. I had lost the dear protecting love that had shielded me so long, and I now stood in the world alone. I felt that a crisis in my life had come; the poetry of my childhood, with the flowers and the woods, the sea and the hills, had gone; my girlhood had passed, and I was merging into real life. What were the coming years fraught with? Joy, or sorrow? How should I endure life, now I had none left to live for? I thought of my strange experiences, and how isolated from my fellows I stood in consequence. I felt my heart begin to beat violently (as it often did now) and my head to throb with pain. My eyes were running with tears that I could not keep back. I was worn and tired, for I had walked far and fast. Taking my hat off, and hanging it on my arm, I turned my face upwards to the breeze,

drew in the cool sea air, and inwardly breathed a prayer to heaven that I might be sustained in the coming years. I walked on absorbed in these thoughts, and allowing the wind to play all kinds of fantastic vagaries with my hair, when I suddenly felt, rather than heard, a presence behind me. I shook the hair out of my eyes, and turning quickly round stood face to face with a stranger.

I think there must have been something wild and startling in my appearance, for he gazed on me for a second or two without speaking, ran his eye over my face, looked into my eyes, and down my dress, which, by the way, was a loose white muslin one, held in at the waist by a crimson scarf, which I had hastily tied on in the morning. My shoes were low, and strapped round the ankles, and fastened with large buckles. I believe I wore a necklet of large pink corals, the gift of my grandmother when I was six years old, who, when she lived, would as soon have seen me without my shoes as without my corals. Having apparently convinced himself of my sanity, and found I was not the demented creature he had at first taken me to be, he suddenly apologised for startling me out of my reverie, and enquired the

nearest way to the little fishing village of Selton.

He walked by my side for some distance, and we gradually glided into easy conversation, the charming scenery around affording us a theme on which we both entered, forgetting for the time that we were strangers. I soon discovered that he was an artist, and was on a tour through the neighbourhood in search of subjects for pictures. He carried in his hand a pencil, and an unfinished sketch of a sea view, which took in a piece of the cliff, with a jutting rock that hung over the water, whereon I had stood and looked far out to sea on many a wild night in the past. Occasionally he paused, looked at me, and made a few strokes with his pencil; and by the time we had reached the last of the range of hills, and were about to part, he presented the picture to me for my acceptance. Rising out of the water, just beneath the jutting rock, was a wild looking uncombed mermaid, with the figure and face of myself, corals and all. In one hand she held a mass of streaming seaweed, and the other was stretched out as though beckoning a form, which was indistinct on the hill above. It is years ago now, but that moment is pre-

sent with me still. He stood at the foot of the hill, hat in hand, watching my face, with a comical and amused expression on his own, as I turned the strange little picture round and round. Inspired with a new interest, I looked up into his face, puzzled to understand how I, so awkward and shy with strangers generally, had for the last half hour been so at my ease with this one. He returned my earnest gaze with a smile that I think must have mingled itself with the sun's rays that just then fell aslant across us both, and in some mysterious manner, there and then, without human aid or will, photographed the image of this stranger in some hitherto unknown recess of my being ; for in some subtle, indescribable way, his face and features became suddenly engraved on my memory and heart, and there they remain to this day.

That night I sat in my own room alone, watching the sun sink behind the hills, and in a glory of purple and gold, bury itself in the blue waters, while the stars came out one by one, studding the heavens with brilliants and lighting up the firmament with a glory that fills the soul with wonder and awe. Anon the moon rose, shedding her pale

silvery light on all the lovely landscape, and streaming in at my windows, its pure white rays reached to my feet. Far into the night I sat gazing at the starlit sky, and listening to the even rise and fall of the waves on the seashore, and wondering whether Leo Satella felt the same rapturous delight, or the same sweet, yet awe-sticken bewilderment in contemplating Nature, in her various moods, as I did.

I held in my hand the grotesque little sketch he had given me, and in the fitful uncertain moonlight, to my imagination, the picture altered often, the landscape changed, and the mermaid assumed new characters. Another land, lovely, verdant, and fruitful, rose before my mental vision, a gorgeous sunset behind mountains that towered far up beyond the English hills of our own little island. In the foreground rose the domes of many cathedrals, mingled with antique ruins of architectural beauty and magnificence; here the mermaid, clothed in mortal apparel, walked with slow and solemn step through these consecrated aisles, and gazed with silent wonder on the new world she had entered.

Changed again, the scene lay on the outskirts of an Italian town; all the view was

studded with white stone mansions, or pretty picturesque looking villas ; in the centre lay a magnificent lake, sparkling, bright, and beautiful. Here again the mermaid changed, threw off her stateliness, and revelled in the clear water of the lake as in her natural element, and in every scene there stood the artist of the sketch, my new friend of the morning. Suddenly the moon passed under a cloud, and I woke up to the absurdity of allowing my feelings and imaginations to run riot, playing tricks with my reason, and keeping me awake at night. Why was I thinking of this picture or the artist ? What was Leo Satella to me ? What a change had come over me in a few hours ! I, who had been so indifferent to all men, had encouraged a growing contempt for young men, and thought there was not in reality a man of worth in the world save my grandfather ; I who had so many strange experiences, so many subjects to speculate upon, and had been, ever since I was a child, moralizing on all things, a little inclined to say of love and marriage, and of earthly happiness generally, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity ;" what was I drifting into that I should allow the first stranger that came across my path to

engross my thoughts to the exclusion of all other subjects? I must shake off this infatuation and forget him. Doubtless he was destined for another sphere than mine, a life of ease, and pleasure ; mine was to be a life of self-sacrifice, and devotion to others ; that would bring the truest happiness, so the vision had told me, and I had accepted it years ago. Should I be unfaithful to the trust, and dream of happiness for myself here? No ; I would be true, and forget that I had ever met him. The moon came out again from under the cloud, a sudden gust of wind came in at the open window, a sea squall was at hand. I rose and looked out ; the clouds were being driven hither and thither by the rising wind ; the sea and the rocks assumed a wild grandeur ; the little fishing craft had taken alarm, and were hurrying into the bay ; and through a break in the hills I could see the white crested billows, as they angrily rose and fell upon the pebbly beach, dashing the snow-white foam into a thousand fragments, deafening mortals and making sport for mermen. It was a wild, weird scene, not a human soul in sight. Stay ! one on the summit of the hills yonder, unsheltered, exposed, and alone. I started and trembled ; a

thrill of terror ran through my frame, for out of the cloud overhead came a lightning flash and revealed to me the face of Leo Satella.

The next moment the wind sent the blinding rain into my eyes, and when I looked again all was dark. Surely a fate pursued me. Had I not just put this stranger out of my thoughts, consigned him to forgetfulness and oblivion? But here the storm had thrown him up before me, and the lightning flash had shown me once again the never-to-be-forgotten features. He, too, loved solitude, and could stay alone with Nature, even in her wildest moods, and contemplate the heavens and the earth with the same mingled awe and admiration that filled my own breast. Surely some great change had come over me since yesterday ; the cold dreariness of life had fled.

I felt no longer alone in the world. My spirit had suddenly freed itself from the presence of surrounding conditions, and was already exulting in its new-found liberty. My breast was filled with wild anticipations. All the capabilities of my nature were at that instant revealed to me. I knew that I was created to love, and to be loved. I knew that my other

self, my soul's counterpart, lived, and that our spirits would not long linger apart. All fear, gloom, and despondency fled before the gushing stream of this new love that had been so suddenly born in my soul. I staggered as with a great weight of happiness. I paused not to ask would my love be responded to; I knew by some eternal spiritual law then revealed to me that it must be, and I was content: I asked not when or where.

Three months had passed since my encounter with Leo Satella on the hills. The summer had gone and the early autumn had crept imperceptibly upon us. The fields were waving with ripe golden grain, which the labourers were already beginning to gather in. Nature had been bounteous, and plenty crowned the year. The hedges were laden with the ruddy haws, golden crabs, and scarlet hips, and the woodland glades were ablaze with the gorgeous colours of autumn crimson poppies, pink and yellow seathrift, and golden graceful lovestrife, with a thousand others, all striving to dazzle the eye with their brilliancy, and overwhelm the heart with the richness and ripeness that lay all around. And over all this gorgeousness swept the genial west wind, whispering peace and con-

tentment, tranquillizing the soul, and seeking to lull to rest, with its gentle murmurs, the turbid, restless, passions of the human breast, and to throw a spell over the spirit within. Sweet, lovely, peaceful autumn ! When my spirit shall be released and pass away to a higher realm, let it be in the autumn.

Leo Satella had lingered on, letting the summer months go. A combination of circumstances had thrown us together, without, apparently, either one seeking the other, until it became an habitual thing for us to meet in the morning, and walk, or read, or draw together for the greater portion of the day ; and so it came to pass that this portfolio was filled. The Hermitage had been painted ; separate views of the ruins, the valley, and the hills had all been sketched ; and from them we had rambled on to the seashore and the cliffs. I was a child again. I had been Leo's model, and figured in almost every picture he had drawn. I had dressed in various costumes to please his artistic eye, often in white, my hair loose, or adorned with water lilies, with bare feet poised upon the stepping stones of the brook, or bathing my hands in the cool water beneath. Later on, when my face and arms were browned with the sun, he

would change me into a Goddess of Plenty, filling my arms and lap with the purple and golden fruit of the season, my head crowned with poppies and corn-ears. Oh, the delicious dream of that glorious summer time ! Shall I ever forget what life was to me in those few months, the deep draughts of happiness I quaffed, the spring of delight that was constantly brimming over within my heart, shedding a radiance over my face, and lighting my eyes with a joy that caused me to stare with surprise if I caught the reflection of myself in the clear water of the brook ? I was on the boundaries of a new world, and my imagination was already running riot in it. I had never paused to reflect the whole of the summer. If a thought of the wisdom of my proceedings ever intruded itself upon me, I bade it depart. I had entered upon a new life in which the earth had suddenly changed to heaven. Why should I not be free, and bask my soul in the sunshine of his presence ? The heavenly, happy days, how fast they sped, to be succeeded by dreams at night, in which my unfettered spirit soared to realms still higher, into regions of infinite space and unspeakable grandeur, when, without speech or idea, only one great amazement, I gazed on all the surrounding wonders with a calm sensa-

tion of being supported by a sympathy and love that could not let me fall, and from which I awoke, heart and head swimming with delight. If I had reasoned—but I could not reason; I had in the beginning quaffed an elixir that held a potent spell over me, and which I had no power or wish to break. I loved him, and had grown so accustomed to his presence that if he had said, “Esther, I love you, and can never know happiness again without you,” I should have felt no surprise, but if he had said, “I am weary of you, Esther, and must go,” I think my heart-strings would have broken, they were so interwoven with his own; but he spoke no word of love, though I knew that he loved me; by every glance of his clear deep eyes, his soul spoke to mine, our spirits had recognised each other. Formed in God’s eternal purpose in some region far above our own, and entrusted with a mission to earth, in the infinitude of space how had our souls been sundered, my own, like the solitary dove on the wide waste of waters, finding no place of rest until now it had found its ark on his breast! So the days glided by like a summer dream, and I thought of no disturbance in my resting place, but dreamed my dream out, and then I awoke.



FOURTH PICTURE.

"O Love! no habitant of earth thou art—
An unseen seraph, we believe in thee—
A faith whose martyrs are the broken heart."

BYRON.

IT is a winter scene. A wild, stormy wind is blowing, raising the dust in thick white clouds, and whirling the dead crisp leaves around the feet of a group of people who are slowly wending their way up a rising ground, in the direction of a little cemetery on the hill yonder.

A few peasants, dressed in picturesque attire, are loitering about, keeping a respectful distance, watching the small *cortège* as it solemnly passes along.

It is a funeral procession—a coffin borne by eight men, and followed by a single mourner.

On the coffin lie a large wreath and some other designs curiously worked in *immortelles*.

A pretty Italian villa stands at the foot of the hill, out of which the mournful group has just issued.

In the front is a piece of ornamental water, over which a few disconsolate-looking waterfowls, with ruffled plumage, are heroically making their way to a shelter on the little island in the centre.

A boat turned bottom upwards, with one broken oar lying beside it, is moored to the bank.

The house stands in a lovely valley, and under a summer sky one can imagine the landscape to look enchanting. To-day there is a mistiness on all the eye rests on, a trouble and confusion in the whole scene.

A gloomy picture, and we turn from it with a sense of weariness and pain.

This was one of the darkest days of my life. The mourner was myself. I had been a wife one year, and now I was a widow. Three years had passed since I awoke from my love dream to the consciousness of real life and plain duty.

The balmy winds and soft autumn sunshine of three years ago, like all other autumn suns that had preceded it, gave place to a keener air and a more chilly atmosphere, and

I awoke one morning to discover that the first frost had come.

The grass was covered with small sparkling morsels, and the hoar frost hung upon the drooping flowers; here and there a leaf, tenderer than its fellows, and more sensitive than the rest, fell silently upon the crisp pathway, while the sun made futile efforts to struggle through the rime and mist.

A little robin, under the holly-tree, was holding up one foot and looking sad and disconsolate.

As I ran downstairs that morning, in answer to the breakfast bell, I shivered, as I met the keen, sharp air, and an unusual fit of depression seized me. When I looked on the changed face of Nature, it was as though she had withdrawn her friendliness, and had woke up in a sterner mood than usual, disposed to chide her children; her warmth and tenderness had vanished, and only a cold, veiled face was visible.

As I stood and gazed on the scene without I mechanically drew my fingers across the frosted window-pane, and wrote the word "Forsaken." The next instant I started back with a nameless dread, as the letters stared me in the face.

“Forsaken.” What had forsaken me? The sunshine and the flowers. “Forsaken.” There it stood, clear and distinct as though Fate had written it.

I gazed in utter bewilderment, scarcely recognizing my own hand as the instrument that had written it; while a hundred voices seemed to whisper about my ears, carrying the sound from ceiling to floor, and a dull wail at my own heart echoed it back.

“Forsaken.” I turned round, and in dumb confusion, and with benumbed fingers, took from the table a letter addressed to myself. I had no need to read it to assure myself that Leo Satella had gone. By one of those odd convictions which had so often conveyed the truth, pleasant or otherwise, to my heart, I knew that I was alone again.

Recognizing the handwriting, I thrust the letter hastily into my bosom without reading it. I think I uttered one piercing cry as the iron entered my soul, and tore it with a new agony, which must have penetrated to the back regions of the house, for the next minute my faithful old Norah stood by my side—she who had been my nurse in childhood, and had all through borne with my peculiarities, and of late years had listened

with unexampled patience to the many strange experiences which so perplexed me, and which I had not the courage to relate to others.

Dear Norah, with her warm Irish heart, and her strong belief in the supernatural, looked upon me, I verily believe, as a paragon of wisdom, a channel through which beings of a higher order could convey their wishes to earth, a creature born to carry out some divine mission or purpose in the world; and she was, in consequence, jealous of anything that distracted my thoughts from these abnormal experiences.

“And is it so?” exclaimed the faithful woman, as, seeing me tremble and ready to fall, she caught me in her arms and placed me in a chair. “And for shame, Miss Esther, that you be breaking your heart for the likes of a worthless man; and couldn’t I see this long time past that my darling was missing her way, when she turned her back on the angels, and began loving this false-hearted stranger, and never a word or a look has she ever had for honest Stephen Rycroft, though he is all these years dying of love for her! Ah, it was an ill luck that brought the stranger this way, with his handsome face, and his polished ways, to steal the heart of

my child, to rob her of heaven's smiles, to take all the sunshine away, and leave her this blessed morning with only the frost at her heart; for didn't I see the London coach drive away with the traitor two good hours ago?"

"Norah, Norah," cried I, in anger, "I command you to be quiet, and utter no word of reproach, either now or ever, against Leo Satella."

Poor Norah looked hurt at my harsh tone and words, and murmuring something about "ungratefulness" and "eighteen years," she turned and busied herself with little things for my comfort, and we spoke no more on the subject, though I saw she was boiling with rage against this "traitor," as she styled him.

* * * * *

The winter came on apace, cold and cheerless. The landscape looked barren, where so lately all had been lovely, bright and fruitful.

Colder and colder grew my heart; for a short period I had lived, now I was as one dead.

The gates of a new paradise had opened, and I had dared to approach, but they had

suddenly closed against me. How old I felt! My eighteenth birthday went by unheeded and forgotten, but if I looked back on the strange mental states through which I had passed, my years seemed eighty.

From this dull stupor I awoke with bitter and rebellious feelings at my heart, not against Leo—for him the great love that had been so suddenly born in my soul remained unchanged—a rebellion against fate, or some unseen power that had tried my nature to its very depth, only, as I then thought, to mock me.

I turned my face from heaven, and I almost hated earth.

Months had gone by. It was early spring again. I had carried Leo Satella's letter in my bosom all the winter unread. Why should I read it? He had gone from me, did it matter why, or where? I grew hard and unfeeling to those about me. I shut myself up with my books, and studied hard all the winter, occasionally taking long and lonely walks. One morning I arose before sunrise; a peculiar restless, eager feeling was in my heart; I longed for some change from the dull routine of my life. The house was oppressive, and I made my way to the beach; there, on

the wild seashore, in the dim morning light, I found myself standing beneath the jutting crag that had figured in the odd little sketch that had wrought such a change in my feelings and life. A fresh breeze was blowing, breaking up the clouds, and dispelling the darkness, and the first streak of dawn appeared. I looked around on the great waste of waters before me, at the mass of rock above my head, and at heaven's blue dome above all, and I trembled as in the presence of a great power. How wonderful are Thy works, O Lord, in wisdom hast Thou created them all. The grandeur and wonder of the scene appalled me. What was I, that I dared utter a complaint against His profound wisdom? His mighty power over-ruled all things, and filled not only the heavens, but the earth. Heaven is His throne, and earth is His footstool, I murmured, as I bowed my head, with the fearful wonder that had come over me. I felt humbled and abashed. Was it not enough for me that I lived, that I had immortality and eternal life? What if the present life remained a mystery to me, had I not eternity to solve it in? Poor erring mortal, was not that sufficient for me? At that moment I felt that it was.

The morning broke bright and fair. That glorious orb, that shines alike upon the evil and the good, soon encircled the hills, took in the cliffs in his embrace, and lighted up the honest faces of the bronzed and sturdy fishermen, who after a night's toil came labouring on shore, with their loaded boats, pulling towards a group of women, who, with bare arms, and heads adorned with coloured kerchiefs, stood ready to receive, and help to pack their bright and glistening cargo. As I stood a little apart, watching them deposit their silvery freight upon the fresh washed stones, all the old delight in nature, in her many and varied forms, returned again; the hardness and icyness melted away from my heart with the first rays of the rising sun. My spirit rejoiced again; everything around had a charm for me; my heart was filled with admiration, even for the unsightly and awkward shellfish, that were making ugly and grotesque endeavours to escape from their captors back to their natural element again.

With wondrous delight I drew in long and deep breaths of the new morning air; listened to the lark as he carolled forth his morning lay, until my heart grew light and

happy, and I murmured to myself—"What a glorious thing is life, what a sacred thing is life, can any life be in vain?" I rested a little in the fullness of the peace that was upon me; then I read my letter.

It was a long letter; page after page was filled with closely written matter, kind, considerate, and frank. Leo spoke of the many delightful weeks he had spent on our English coast; how dear the old Hermitage and all its surroundings had become to him; how like enchanted ground the whole neighbourhood had been since he had known the old homestead and me; and how great a trial it had been to him to tear himself away from it I might judge, when he deemed it wiser to say farewell by letter, than to risk a personal interview, lest he should betray a weakness that he would fain have concealed even from himself. His life hitherto had been one of many changes, and great disappointments; these three months he should remember as long as memory lasted, a time to look back upon as one of the resting places in life's weary journey, an oasis in the desert. This mysterious sympathy that had arisen between us, and had drawn our spirits so closely together, he should hold as a sacred thing.

Should we really part, could earth or seas divide two hearts united in such mystical bonds? He had thought over many subjects lately, and he was gradually imbibing a new faith. True love was of the spirit eternal, never dying. Souls formed for each other would ultimately claim their right. We were but yet as newly born, and in this stage of our developement, we stumble amid the confusion of things, and blindly miss our way. We rashly utter vows, we take responsibilities, and duty binds us, justice demands her due, and lifetimes are wasted in fruitless efforts to find our way back to the right path. These thoughts had come to him since our friendship had commenced, were generated, he thought, in the mental atmosphere we had breathed these three months past.

These three months, how like a dream they had passed ; a dream in which the voice of duty and stern necessity had never reached him ; but now conscience and duty alike urged it. He was going home to marry his cousin, the Signorina Lene, to whom he had been betrothed some two years. Their marriage had been fixed at a date six months back, but the lady, with a fickleness that was unaccountable, had at the last postponed it

indefinitely ; he in the meantime had come to England, and waiting the Signorina's pleasure, she had now summoned him, anxious herself to hasten the preparations for their union. He finished by commending me to the care of those invisible guardians who had watched me since childhood, urged me to cultivate kindly and social feelings for my neighbours and friends, and he would ever pray that my life might be peaceful and happy. "Farewell, sweet, gentle friend ; in this life we may never meet again, but if our lives are directed by a higher and a just guidance, then in an immortal realm our spirits shall again recognise each other."

When I had finished reading, I wept a long time ; quietly my tears fell like rain, my heart was softened, there was no one to blame, and what had I to regret ? True I had wandered a little out of my way, but I had had a new experience. Lost for a time in the sweet labyrinth leading to love's paradise, I had culled a few buds, which in a more congenial atmosphere would blossom into full beauty and enduring perfection. I rose, folded my letter, and returned home with new resolves in my heart. I should have to walk through life alone ; perhaps it was best.

What character I possessed would develop and strengthen, now I had to fight the world's battles single handed. For myself I was content, but would Leo be happy? A momentary feeling of coldness and fear came over me, and then I breathed a silent prayer that he might, and put the thought away.

Two years passed away with very little alteration in our life at the Hermitage; my old servants had staid with me, feeling themselves as much a part of the old house as the gables that supported the roof. There had been one death, a dear, dumb, faithful companion, my old dog Hector. We buried him among the old ruins, where he and I had so often in our fashion moralized together on so many subjects, and had each drawn our own conclusions accordingly. At the foot of an ivy-covered archway we threw up a huge piece of granite to his memory, where, after his faithful services, I doubt not that he rests in peace. I had striven hard to adapt myself to the society of my neighbours, and succeeded in gathering around me a few congenial friends, and I resolved to make the best of the fate that had settled upon me. Norah's eyes opened wide one day with pleasure, when I expressed my willingness to accept

an invitation to a picnic at our nearest neighbour's, farmer Rycroft. "And is it the haymaking picnic that my young lady is going to?" said Norah with honest pleasure beaming in her eyes, "and won't Stephen be glad to see us there, the brave fellow and true that he is, and not his like to be found in all the country side." Dear old Norah! she had taken the notion into her wise old head, some long time ago, to make Stephen lord of the Hermitage, and never let an opportunity pass in my presence without reiterating, and perhaps exaggerating, the many good qualities of her favourite.

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Before that summer was fairly gone the dear scheming brain was at rest, and the warmest heart that ever beat lay cold and still. Norah died suddenly in the night. I was in a deep sleep, and dreamt that I saw Norah in the middle of a large lake, without boat or oar. Alarmed, I reached out my hands in a fruitless effort to rescue her. She waved me back, and the current bore her swiftly, yet safely, to the opposite side. There, as she stood on the bank of the beautiful water, with the glory of the opening day about her

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head, she was no longer the plain, worn woman of yesterday; she was my own Norah still, but changed, beautified, and clothed with light. A sudden noise in the room awoke me; it was a summons to Norah's bed. When I reached it she was gone. The faithful soul had entered into her rest.

* * * *

It was the night after Norah's funeral. I had been sitting alone some hours, occupied with many sad thoughts, and some regrets; tears blinded my eyes many times. I wondered whether I had done all I could to relieve life's burden for her, or whether, pre-occupied myself, I had neglected her, or set less value on her many good qualities than they deserved; dear, busy, bustling Norah. How could I bear to live in the old house without her, the faithful heart. It would be home no longer. I pondered long, and resolved to shut up the Hermitage, and travel. Henceforth, all places would be alike to me; I would see the world, the world of paintings, sculpture, literature and art, that world of which I had heard Leo Satella talk while I had sat like one entranced, listening to the music of his voice; that world outside of my own, but in

which he now lived. And here my fancy carried me away to an imaginary palace, where Leo, with his rich and beautiful bride, the centre of a fashionable circle, might possibly, at this moment, be scanning the contents of our old portfolio. I almost thought I heard the lady's voice remarking on the queer old house, and saying of the country girl in the porch—"That girl's name is Esther." I started to my feet. Surely I had heard my name spoken. I had been sitting so long wrapped in this reverie, that I had not observed how low the sun had sunk, how the shadows had fallen, and that the room was nearly dark. Neither had I perceived that the room door had been opened until I started, and faced either Leo Satella or his ghost. In the confusion of the moment I thought I looked upon the spirit of my friend, and not the bodily presence of him whom I had never, in this life, expected to see again. "Esther," repeated the voice, that I could no longer mistake. He came towards me, holding out both hands in his eager greeting.

"Esther, I have returned, like a wanderer to his rest. Is there still a place in your heart left for me?"

What could I answer him, when I knew

he possessed my whole heart and soul? And I think he knew it, too; for the next moment his arms were thrown around me. He pressed me closely to his breast, while I murmured I know not what. A wild rapture was in my heart—an intense happiness. Such moments as these come but once in one's lifetime, and in the stillness that followed I remember nothing, save the ticking of the little timepiece on the mantel-shelf, as it struck off the moments sharp and clear. Presently the little dial gave the warning note which awoke me to practical thought, and disengaging myself from him, I began, very awkwardly, and with a great effort, to make enquiries for his wife, the Signorina Lene.

With an odd, little smile, he answered me—"Upon that hangs a tale, *mia cara*."

We talked a long, long time. The sun sank, and the moon rose, filling the room with a soft silvery light, lending an additional charm to the hour. How hushed and still it was! The day had gone to rest, all labour had stopped, all except the spiders'. They, upon the terrace outside, were busily yet silently spinning their long webs, stretching them from casement to bough, all unconscious of the destruction that awaited them when the

day should again wake up to life and action. Now and then the cooing of the dove fell upon one's ears as she answered her mate lovingly, and sank to rest again.

Leo had no wife. His cousin had again, at the last hour, shown her unwillingness to marry, and he then discovered that she loved another, one far below her in rank and worldly position. He at once released her from her promise, and their union was dissolved.

Some months afterwards she married the man her heart had chosen, much to the annoyance of all her family, who discarded her forthwith. Almost immediately Leo left home again, and had been travelling ever since, without any definite object, and always with the same longing to return to the old Hermitage, and to me.

A week ago to-night he had been awakened by something that sounded like a cry of distress, and the voice was strangely like my own. Without more hesitation he had hastened to seek me, and found that on that night Nora had died. The great shock that had so unnerved me for the time, had, by the mysterious law of sympathy, been at the same moment communicated to him, and had brought him to my side.

“And why should we part again, Esther?” he whispered, as he held both my hands in his. “Why should we ever part again?”

I had no reason why, so I consented to unite my fate with his until death should part us. I wondered whether the spirit of dear old Norah hovered near, and was cognisant of our betrothal; whether from a superior condition she looked down and approved, or whether the dear old head still held its former views and prejudices.

* * * * *

It was some ten days after this that I put my hand in Leo's, and we took our way across the fields to the moss-covered little church with the broken tower, by the side of which, among the clustered ivy I had so lately chosen the resting place for my dear friend and nurse. It was an autumn morning; one of those rare days, the beauty of which no artist's pencil could fully describe, for his colours would fade and grow dim in the rich mellow light that gladdened the face of Nature that day; a day when Heaven and earth seemed to blend in a warm mazy glow. Balmy, soft, and calm, the wind just stirred

the leaves, and kept the tall grass moving. There was a subdued gladness in the air ; a sweet song was borne upon the breeze, a hum of joy everywhere. I had no wedding adornments, no bridesmaids, no orange wreath, but I wore a simple white dress, and for bridal flowers carried a wreath of *immortelles*, intermingled with our own wild flowers which Leo had helped me to select, and which Norah, in life, had loved so well. This we laid upon her grave, and then we entered the quiet sanctuary, where so many vows had been taken, and so many hands joined in solemn pledge, to love and honour till death should part them. A perfect stillness reigned within, broken only by our footfalls as we passed on to the altar, where a little group of our old servants, and our nearest neighbours, the Rycrofts, were waiting for us.

Strange thoughts and feelings stirred my breast as I knelt. It was as though the spirits of all those I had loved and lost were hovering around me that day. The warmth of their presence and the smile of their approval seemed to shed a halo around the whole space we occupied. The living and the dead became so intermingled that hour,

that, looking up in my Leo's face, it seemed to me adorned with a spiritual beauty, such as I had never witnessed on it before. "Until death do us part." I grasped his hand; the minister's voice sounded harsh, and the words jarred on me. But what if it should be all a vision, and pass away. Was I dreaming again in the middle of the day? Suddenly a ray of natural sunlight struggled through the ivy-covered window, shot down over the minister's head, and rested on our joined hands. Blessed ray—"The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you and give you peace," said the old minister. "Amen."

"I was weary, very weary; but when
I leaned against the Pyramids,
They gave me strength."

KIOSCIELSKI.

I was a wife one year and two months, fourteen months of perfect earthly happiness, unbroken by regret or marred by mistrust. We travelled, visited every place of note on the Continent; what a strange, wonderful world it was to me. We revelled in the halls of literature and art. I often stood in amazement and bowed in reverence before the works of the old masters, great and noble

spirits that had passed on to a higher eminence still.

We wintered in Rome, and in the early spring returned to our villa, near Florence, to the lovely vale and the bright blue lake. Here we resumed our old friendship with Nature, and added to our portfolio. Here, by the banks of our beautiful water, we read together, and I was happy and blind, so blind that I perceived not the change that was taking place in my Leo day by day, nor noticed the wasting form, the slow and feeble stroke with the oars, as he paddled our tiny bark. After many days the truth flashed upon me. He already knew it. A severe cold, taken some months before, had settled on his lungs; nothing could save him. Leo was dying. Then I lost faith in Heaven, and hardened my heart against God.

A few weeks longer, and the end drew near; we had each schooled ourselves to speak of it with comparative calmness, though our hearts were bleeding. As I leaned over his couch and arranged his pillows, he would speak cheerfully, and endeavour to encourage me, and strengthen me to bear our short separation, as he termed it.

“It was one of the mysterious dealings of

a higher, yet All-wise Power," he said, and I listened in a kind of dumb acquiescence, in which my heart gave no response.

It was close upon winter now ; yet the day had been unusually bright, and my dear invalid had been gazing for hours on the beautiful prospect from our windows. We had talked all day, between the paroxysms of coughing ; we had talked for the last time, though I knew it not then. His perfect faith in our future reunion, in a realm where the mystery of this life should be fully explained, had somewhat calmed me, though I could not feel resigned. Evening drew on, and we were watching the sunset. A glory flooded the western hills ; streaks of purple and gold were stretched across the heavens as far as the eye could reach, while the opposite chain of mountains seemed ablaze with light and beauty.

The splendour and gorgeousness of the scene impressed me deeply, and inspired Leo with his old enthusiasm for his art, and fanned the expiring embers of a life's passion into a flame again, that gave him for a time almost superhuman strength.

" Esther ! " he cried, raising himself.
" Esther, my love, quick, my pencils ; let me

catch this glory. It will be my last picture!" he added.

I drew up the easel, mixed his colours, and supported him, while for one hour he worked with an unnatural energy. He held the pencil with a firm grasp, his hand seemed rigid, his eyes shone with a new brilliancy, and upon his face there came a radiancy that looked divine. I stood transfixed with wonder, while I watched how marvellously the picture developed under his hand, and what magical strokes he made; it was as though some invisible agency assisted the feeble hand to throw into this last work all his wild love of earth's beauty, and fling upon the canvas the last sparks of his genius. Soon the glory began to fade, lower and lower the sun sank, Leo's hand relaxed, a pallor came over his face, and he fell back in a violent paroxysm of coughing. A few more strokes would have finished the picture, but the sun went down, and he lay motionless. My sun also had set in darkness. Leo was dead.

"A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate;
I have seen the last look of his heavenly eyes;
I have heard the last sound of his beloved voice;
I have seen his fair form from my sight depart—
My doom is closed."

COUNT BASIL.

I had buried him. After that, for a long time, I know not how my days passed. I think I ate, drank and slept sometimes. I walked in gloom. No ray of light pierced the density that had fallen upon me. I haunted the tomb. Every morning and evening found me beside his grave. There was no power left in me to battle with my fate, and I, who had had my inward vision opened so many times to perceive the bliss into which the released soul enters when freed from its earthly bonds, now sat blind and dumbfounded beside the empty shell from which the living spirit had flown. All faith in the eternal love of an Infinite Father had forsaken me, and I sat upon the stone, stupidly nursing my grief for many days.

One morning, earlier than was my wont, as soon as the mist had cleared a little from the valley, I sought my usual place by the grave. It was a chilly morning, and I paced up and down for some time, watching a little bird gather his morning meal. Presently the little creature rose upon the wing, took several wild circles round and above my head, whirling, dipping, and tumbling as in the abandonment of a great joy; a few more graceful curves, and he finally settled upon the head-

stone of my love's tomb. Poising himself, he shook his plumage, threw up his tiny head towards heaven, and from the full joy of his little life, poured forth one of the richest strains of song I have ever listened to.

The music thrilled me, and awoke the echo somewhere among the ruins of my dead hopes.

"And shall not He who cares for the sparrow remember thee also?" said a sweet, gentle voice in my ear. "Oh, thou of little faith, wherefore did'st thou doubt?"

I turned in the direction of the voice, and close beside me stood a veiled figure, in the dress of a nun.

"I am come to offer thee the consolation of our church," she said, removing at the same time a portion of her veil, and disclosing one of the most lovely faces I have ever seen on earth; young, pure, angelic in the expression of yearning pity that lighted up the beautiful eyes, and kept the sweet mouth trembling, while she spoke the heavenly message to my soul that morning. A love that must have been divine in its origin shone on her face, and was in the words she uttered. She held a charm which drew my poor shivering spirit within the pure circle of sympathy emanating from her own warm heart, broke

upon the gloom that surrounded me, and struck a sympathetic chord in my own nature.

Sinking down upon the tomb and struggling still with conflicting feelings, I faltered—

“You have not known my sorrow ; I have lost one who was dearer to me than life, and I have no life apart from him who lies buried here.”

She knelt down, drew my cold hands within her own soft, delicate fingers, chafing them tenderly, as a mother would her infant's, talking the while in a low musical tone.

“Sister,” she said, still quoting from the holy book, “he whom thou mournest is not here ; he is risen. Thy great grief hath blinded thee, and thou cans't not see the light in which the ransomed from earth's pain and sorrow dwell. Hark,” she cried, suddenly, and turning her head to listen, “'tis the convent bell. Come with me, dear sister ; it is the hour for prayer and meditation. Come to the loving arms of our blessed mother, and let the shadow of the cross fall on thy poor bruised spirit ; thou shalt find a precious balm within the consecrated walls of our house, and thy weary soul shall rest beside the altar of the Holy One.”

I looked full in her sweet, earnest face, and

a strange overshadowing sense of the presence of my dear, youthful mother, as I had once felt when I had seen her in vision, came over me.

“And can it be a message from her,” I thought, “sent by the mouth of this gentle sister? If so, I will obey.”

Opposite the tomb on which I was sitting stood the Convent of the Holy Mount, the home of this good nun; the grounds were adjoining the cemetery, and from there these devoted sisters had watched me keep my lonely vigils, had pitied my desolation and the sorrow that had befallen upon my youth, and this morning sister Louise had ventured out with such consolation as her faith and her church had to offer.

For many years I associated with these pious women; in time the convent became as much my home as my own villa. I never adopted their dress, or fully embraced their faith. I could not bow my knee to the worship of their saints, or confess my failings to an erring man, or put my trust in an arm of flesh, or believe in the consecrated wafer, but I did learn to love and honour these good nuns for their total abnegation of self, their charity and their devotedness, their yearning

pity for the poor and miserable, and for their unceasing efforts to alleviate the sickness, wretchedness, and poverty that abounded in the district. Wherever the fever raged, or the sick poor were to be found, there also might be seen, gliding in and out of their wretched hovels, these good sisters, ministering angels in human form. Their sanctuary did, indeed, become a haven of rest to me; the faith, the purity and love that prevailed amongst them encircled me. Here I regained my faith in the loving care of the Infinite Father, and a deeper conviction that the discipline of life is but the development of the spiritual nature, fitting the soul for a more exalted condition. Here my spiritual sight was reopened, and the visions of my childhood returned to me. I had glimpses of the land that lies beyond the veil, the superior life into which my beloved had entered, and I had no doubts. In these years I lived on the borders of his Paradise, and for the rest I was content.

Once during this time I visited the Hermitage. In the course of events Stephen Rycroft, my old admirer, had become its possessor. The old place had changed. Many of the trees had been cut down, and

the house modernised. Stephen's heart had not broken, but he had consoled himself by taking for his wife bright, rosy-faced Fanny Seawell, a brown-eyed, sparkling girl, who was now the mother of four healthy, happy children, who played at hide-and-seek in the old ruins, and desecrated with their mirth and glee every place that my girlish fancy had held sacred—blessed, gleeful children! I felt glad, too, as the little forms of life flitted about me, for I had learned to love children.

The sisters Louise and Agnes had often brought me stray waifs, sick with fever and pinched with hunger. I had nursed them back to life and health, to have them returned on my hands some months later; so by nursing and feeding these neglected ones, I had learned to love all children—a new sense was awakened in my breast.

In after years this love and care was returned to me four-fold, in the affection and devotion of my *protogées*. At times my silent villa became the merriest house in the vale, whenever my numerous family came to make holiday, or my little friends chose to hold their *fête* days in the valley.

These peaceful years passed away—

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changes came. The current of Time carried me away to town life and other scenes ; my spirit soon again became obscured ; and for long periods I stumbled along my lonely way through doubt, and fear, and mental strife, until the clouds cleared once more, and the face of my beloved again bent over me, cheering me on my way. So have I walked between the lights, understanding but little of the mystery of the life around me, and less of that life into which I shall soon enter.

Yet, through the dark, and in the light, I have held on to the belief that our times are in the hands of a wise and tender Parent, who, having endowed His children with immortality, is ever seeking to perfect His work in them, leaving them awhile to battle with the vicissitudes of life, or to pass through the fire, if needs be, that in the end the purified spirit may be found worthy to enter into its real inheritance, its home above, where the severed links of the relationship shall be again united.

For He who hath His throne in the heaven, and holds the reins of government on earth shall not He give justice, with mercy, to every soul of man ?

As I close the old portfolio, and put this manuscript away with it, a strange sense of the nearness of the invisible world creeps over me; the shadow of the mystery is upon me; the light of this world recedes; yet, just above the horizon breaks the new day. I see a glimmer of the coming glory, and through the intervening darkness I hear the voice of my beloved calling me. The time is short; I am content to wait a little longer
BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.





THE HERMIT.

CHAPTER I.

"Come, gentle friend, wilt sit by me?
And be as thou wert wont to be,
Ere we were disunited."

SHELLEY.

"**M**AMMA," said my little son Eric,
"Mamma, what's a hermit? Please
tell me a story about a hermit."

Eric is a delicate boy, with an active imagination, and is, perhaps, a little too thoughtful for his five years.

He has two engrossing ideas, talents, his papa designates them, whose pride and love for an only child lead him to conclude that the boy will become a great artist some day.

At present Eric's two absorbing notions

are—one to furnish me with suggestions for stories, threads to hang a tale upon, he calls them ; the other to make strange and grotesque pencil drawings—*facsimiles* of the various characters we are compelled to introduce into our stories. And thus, during the dull winter days have numbers of imaginary volumes and unwritten romances been amply illustrated after his own childish fashion.

Whether great men usually develope out of such little geniuses as these I know not ; but the child's request—"Mamma, tell me a story about a hermit," awakened a strange memory within my breast, and thoughts of one whom the world had long forgotten rose, as it were, from the grave, and stood before me.

I gave Eric a simple explanation of what hermit meant, and telling him I had no story to relate that he could understand, I placed him in his little bed and bade my boy good-night, silently praying, as I passed my hand over his young brow, that it might never be furrowed by any unnatural sorrow, and that the canker of disappointed hope might never enter the bright and sanguine heart, but that he might realize in his matured years all the bright visions of his

childhood, and, folding him in a closer embrace than usual, I consigned him to the guardianship of those angels who wait on sleep, and left him.

Later, as I sat by the library fire, waiting for Eric's papa, who had been away from us some days, and who was to-night on his homeward journey, my thoughts still pursued the same track, and old recollections kept persistently forcing themselves upon me.

The wind howled without, whirring through the leafless branches of the old elms in the home park, and made dismal sounds among the stack of chimneys that crowned our time-worn mansion ; while the shadows on the walls took fantastic shapes, and faces and scenes belonging to a somewhat earlier period of my life wove themselves into a kind of living web, that expanded before my mental vision, shutting out for the time all the sweet quiet and peaceful harmony of my present life ; and ere long the room became peopled with the quickened forms of those whom once on earth I had known and loved.

Shading my eyes from the glare of the fire, I watched the magic web, as new threads and fresh lines crossed and recrossed each

other, while through this strange network the dear, familiar faces gazed upon me with eyes as tender as of yore.

Some years previous to the birth of little Eric, and before I had entered the dear house that I now call my own, I resided with two maiden aunts, my father's sisters, who, on the sudden death of my parents, had adopted me when I was very young.

My aunts, Hannah and Judith Seagrave, lived on a little estate of their own, near to a village on the South Coast, and but a few miles from a pretty seaport town called Cliffsville.

Hillsbrow was a large, straggling village, composed for the most part of small, primitive-looking dwellings scattered about without form or order. The principal street consisted of some thirty or forty plain, red bricked houses, interspersed with a few shops that took no particular character, though usually well filled with a miscellaneous assortment of useful articles, and sufficient for the modest requirements of the simply-living inhabitants.

Our house, a little removed from the village, stood in more picturesque surroundings. A charming piece of undulating landscape of

some half mile in extent lay in the front, bordered by a deep ravine, where all the year round the gushing water kept up an incessant tumult amongst the loose stones beneath. Beyond that rose a range of hills covered in summer with dark green foliage and with almost every variety of wild flowers.

And beyond that a thick wood stretched far away, almost reaching to the seashore ; and here from the highest point we occasionally caught a glance of the white crested billows as they sported in the sunlight, or dashed in fury against the foam-covered rocks.

My aunts were retiring, reserved women having few acquaintances, and those few of a strictly religious order, and from the first they strove to impress upon me the importance of a close adherence to all religious duties and ceremonies.

Kind and indulgent as these good meaning women were, my life was somewhat dull in those days ; I had no playfellow of my own age, and was consequently thrown upon my own resources for amusement or interest to fill up my vacant hours, and, child as I was, I soon fell into a quiet musing with my own thoughts, apparently holding converse with

an imaginary, or at least an invisible, somebody or something.

I contracted a habit of moralizing on almost everything that transpired around me, on religion, and the state of the world generally.

Soon by the help of this second self I had arranged a set of theories for myself, and already held some notions that would have greatly shocked poor Aunt Judith, could she have divined how far from the old well-beaten orthodox way, in which her forefathers trod, her brother's child was drifting.

In these girl days, I used frequently to absent myself from the, to me, monotonous round of praying and psalm singing that occupied the greater portion of the summer's evenings in my aunt's house, and escape to the hillside, uttering my simple prayers in Nature's temple, as I sped swiftly along through the open fields.

There was one spot in particular I usually chose for resting, a high bank commanding an extensive view of the country and sea.

Here I could ensconce my small self among the tall grasses that grew on either side, and confer with my "familiar," undisturbed by either friend or foe.

From this point I could discern a quaint looking old house standing alone on the outskirts of a wood, called Riversdale Wood.

It was a quaint looking place, half-hidden by the trees and foliage, apparently built of wood, and that going to decay; with odd little windows projecting from under a peaked roof, which the bronzed green moss, and a species of house leek, were doing their best to cover; yet, as I watched the curling smoke ascending through the trees from the dilapidated chimney, a fascination for the old place gradually stole over me, and I thought that some day, when I grew older, I would make a sketch of the romantic old hut.

My interest in this house became stronger from one evening observing an old man issuing from the half-choked up doorway. It was growing twilight, yet I could perceive that his was a shrivelled, wasted figure with a faltering feeble gait.

It was curious to watch the old man's movements. He made one or two turns round the house, halted, and took one long look out at sea, glanced for a moment towards the town, then with a quick jerky motion of the head, looked for a second in every direction; next, with his hands crossed

over his breast, he gazed up at the heavens in a timid hesitating manner for a short time, and then, with a disturbed nervous movement, sought his door again and disappeared within. I was too young to venture further from my own home, and stood too much in awe of this singular being to make nearer acquaintance with him; though there was a fascination about him, and his hut home, that drew me out frequently in the summer twilight to watch his strange movements; and many a weird dream has been the result of my evening's vigils.

Hitherto this old man's existence had been unknown to me; afterwards I learned from the people that he was called infidel, wizard, and various other evil names. My aunts cherished a superstitious dislike for him, and forbade my going near the ungodly man.

By-and-by my school days began at Cliffs-ville, and soon afterwards I formed a friendship with a lovely girl about my own age and after my own heart.

These were happy days; a new phase of life opened for me. I gave up day dreaming, reluctantly at first, but I soon lost my invisible companion or my other self, in the congenial society of my new friend; forgot, too, for a

time the old man, and his queer home, the woods and many other things connected with my child's life.

The years glided swiftly by ; reading, studying and working with my new friend, we heeded not how time fled on ward. Keeping much apart from others, we formed a world of our own, in which we had many views in common ; discussing various topics, grave and gay, social and religious, in such manner as only girls of seventeen know how to mingle so charmingly.

Ah ! those early girl friendships, how precious they are ; how closely young hearts are drawn together, bound in the sweetest, healthiest bonds, while they leave us for after years memories always pure, and fresh, untainted by selfishness.





CHAPTER II.

"Then the pied windflowers and the tulip tall,
And narcissi, the fairest among them all,
Who gaze on their eyes in the stream's recess,
Till they die of their own dear loveliness."

SHELLEY.

ABOUT a mile and a half from Hillsbrow, and half way between my aunts' house and Cliffsville, in a pleasant vale formed by two hills, stood some pretty villas, residences that were chiefly occupied by retired naval officers and coast-guardsmen.

This place, with its cluster of pretty houses, its sheltered position, south aspect, and bright sandy soil, was called Silversand Vale.

And bright and cheery indeed was the sight of Silversand Vale to me, breaking the distance as I trudged along to my daily lessons. I could never pass in the morning without slackening my pace and admiring the

little gardens, so tastefully laid out, and so scrupulously tended; a little too square and formal, perhaps, yet kept with a neatness and exactness that spoke of hands constantly striving to keep in check the eagerness of the flowers and foliage from running riot. Limited and circumscribed by the hills, there was no room for rampant growth or wild luxuriance, yet I thought I saw peace and contentment resting upon the little squares and circles, an outgrowth of the lives of those within, perhaps, so I moralized for the rest of my walk. Here the old weather-beaten sailor, with his hard hand, and his scarred forehead, after a wild life of reckless turmoil, of fierce battles, and fiercer passions, could reflect.

Time had laid his hand on him, age and matured reason had come to check the fire of his brain, and death would, ere long, appear to settle a life's account.

The diligent and faithful old coastguardsmen, who, from a sense of duty to his King and country, had ever, with glass at eye, been seeking to magnify the sins of his fellows, and bringing the hapless smuggler to justice, and who had, perhaps, forgotten the beam in his own eye, had now leisure and opportunity

to make his peace with both his Maker and his fellowmen.

And truly, as I returned in the evening, the snatches of songs that reached my ear, and the calm and sustained manner in which they walked among their plants, watering-pot in hand, nourishing and cherishing the thirsty flowers, while a quiet content rested upon the faces of their good dames as they sat in the door-way plying their knitting needles, or shelling peas for next day dinner, gave me the consoling idea that they were progressing favourably towards that desired end.

It was here in this beautiful vale that my new friend and companion, Kathleen Brooks, lived. I had frequently seen her in the evenings pacing the garden with an elderly gentleman, who still wore the uniform of the service, and who, I heard afterwards, was her uncle. She had lost her mother, and her father held a foreign appointment, and her home had been, since then, with her only relatives.

From the first I had felt irresistibly drawn to the girl; partly from her lovely face and graceful form, and also from a mystic sense of spiritual relationship that I felt existed

between us, though, as yet, we were apart. I longed for a fresh young heart to commune with, and oft and anon, as I passed, sent some utterance of thought that had grown too large for my own heart, on the wings of the wind across to where she bent over her flowers, and doubted not but ere long it would find a response in her heart.

She was a fair and beautiful girl, yet her beauty was of that kind which affects the beholder as belonging to another sphere, reminding one of the white and pure orchid that can only live in tempered heat, and away from the gross and chilly breath of our natural atmosphere. So was Kathleen; the pure sensitive soul shrank from too close contact with earth, oppressed oft-times by the tainted influences surrounding it; the spirit struggled to be free of its frail tenement, and escape to a more congenial clime.

I soon discovered that Kathleen, though shrinking from society, had an absorbing love of Nature, and spent hours in the summer in the meadows and woods.

After a few years of close application, her health failed; she gave up study, and oftener roamed the woods and valleys than I did,

and became acquainted with every species of wild flowers to be found in the dells.

A perfect child of Nature was Kathleen. She grew more ethereal still, and a strange kind of spiritual light came into her eyes at times, and caused me to pause and ask what it meant.

Coming upon her suddenly one morning in the early summer, near Riversdale Wood, I was startled to behold the perfect beauty of her face. Her countenance was radiant with joy; and, almost covered with wild flowers, she looked, indeed, like the daughter of Spring.

The woods were now all abloom with the wild hyacinth, the tiny harebell, late violets, and wood anemone; and the thrush and other warblers were carolling their songs in our ears.

"How charming," exclaimed Kathleen. "I love this wood more every year; here I experience a delight that I find nowhere else; turn aside and see a spot I have been sketching."

The spot was, indeed, lovely and picturesque; above and around hung the fresh green boughs forming a leafy bower, a very fairy palace for loveliness. In front was an avenue of fine old elms, and at the far end gleamed the sea.

Clouds and water mingled in the sunlight, while over the trunk of a fallen tree, upon which we rested, the moss and ground-ivy had, together, formed a complete covering for the rude bark.

"Yes, this wood is delightful," I exclaimed, "One cannot help feeling happy here. There is peace and quiet in the air, only broken by the songs of the birds, and the rippling of the brook. Look at that robin yonder, his throat swollen with song; his tiny frame is not large enough to contain his joy. How all Nature seems to rejoice to-day."

"The flowers are at their best now," cried Kathleen, holding up a specimen of daffodil.

And then followed a simple lecture on botany, and I listened while she dilated on the modest snow-white bells of the lilies of the valley, on the showy narcissus, with a beauty of its own, and a rich fragrance that we could ill spare, and on the tiny and graceful harebell. "Was ever anything so simple and yet so lovely?" she cried. After a pause, she said, "Mildred, I often wonder whether there really are flowers in Heaven?"

"Well, I cannot fancy a Heaven without flowers," I answered.

"I have lately been reading the Bible to

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“Well, I cannot fancy a Heaven without flowers,” I answered.

“I have lately been reading the Bible to

my uncle," said Kathleen, "and I have grown very much perplexed in trying to form an idea of what Heaven is. There are streets of gold they say, and gates of pearl; but were I able to chose, I would have my heaven paved with the greensward and abundant in flowers."

"And so shall it be, my sweet sister," I cried, with a sudden inspiration upon me. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you, and the pure loves of your life shall garnish it."

"But," said she, looking rather alarmed, "is not Heaven already prepared for such as shall be found worthy of it?"

"Ah, Kathleen, I have had strange thoughts lately about the Bible and Heaven, and one is, that there is no Heaven for any until it is developed in our own spiritual nature."

While we had been conversing I noticed that Kathleen had plucked a few large leaves, and with the aid of some long grasses had sewn them together, thus forming an exquisite little basket, which she now lined with moss and filled with the choicest of the flowers she had previously gathered; she then put it carefully on one side, observing—

"As we return I will leave it on the

window sill of the old man's cottage at the further end of the wood."

"Geoffrey Monkton?" I cried, "he that is called hermit and wizard?" remembering at the same time my childish fascination for the tumble-down old hut, and for the singular individual who inhabited it.

"The same," said Kathleen, "I think his must be a dreary life, and I pity him."

"Have you ever seen him?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, "but not to speak with him. He shuns me; yet I have left him flowers many times on his window sill, and have waited until I have seen a hand draw them in, and have left with the feeling that they gave him some pleasure."

"I doubt whether he will thank you for intruding upon him," I replied. "I have heard Aunt Judith say that Geoffrey Monkton is a godless, thankless man, and of late years has grown more sour and crabbed than ever."

"Nevertheless," she answered, "he is human, and I have thought much about the desolate old man as I passed his home this summer; my heart aches for him."

"I wonder if he has any object in life? And—"

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While we had been conversing I noticed that Kathleen had plucked a few large leaves, and with the aid of some long grasses had woven them together, thus forming an exquisite basket, which she now lined with moss and filled with the choicest of the flowers she had just gathered: she then put the basket on the table, and observing—
"at we return I will leave you."

the sill of the old man's cottage at the end of the wood."

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"The same," said Kathleen. "I have had a dreary life, and I am old."

"Have you ever seen him?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered, "once I saw him. He shuns me; yet I have seen him many times on his way to the river."

"Waited until I have seen a man, and have left with the feeling that he gave him some pleasure."

"I doubt whether he will ever be coming upon him," I said.

"And Aunt Judith says that Monkton is a godless, wicked man."

"Years has grown not at all in ever."

"Nevertheless," she said, "I have seen a man, and I have seen a lonely old man."

"A lonely old man," she said, "I have seen a man, and I have seen a lonely old man."

"Hush," said Kathleen, "there he is."

Looking up I observed an old man not far from us, shuffling along with slow and uncertain steps. His long white hair and heavy beard were stirred every now and then by the breeze.

He wore a rusty black cloak which reached almost to his heels, and which, by its ancient appearance, must have done him good service; a much worn beaver hat covered his head, and was drawn well over his eyes. He looked feeble and occasionally stooped, leaning heavily upon a stout staff that he carried, and drew his cloak closer around him, as though even the mild May wind chilled him.

Presently he was startled from a kind of reverie into which he had sunk. A thrush above his head burst forth into a thrilling song. He moved on and came close upon where we were sitting, without perceiving us. Suddenly looking at us, he made a nervous frightened gesture, and would have beat a hasty retreat had not Kathleen, rising quickly, and picking up the basket of leaves, offered it to him with one of her sweetest smiles.

For a moment or two he looked full into her face, with a steady penetrating gaze, as though he recognized in her a likeness to

some lost one ; and his whole frame quivered as the resemblance seemed to call into life some image that had laid cold and dead in the grave of his heart for many long years. Then a ghastly smile spread over his face, and making an effort to put the flowers from him, the word "Ruth" escaped his lips, and "Don't mock me," he murmured.

"Oh, Mr. Monkton!" cried Kathleen, "you are tired and ill ; indeed, we do not mock you ; sit here and rest."

"No, no, child," he said, in a grave low voice, "I am an old man, what have I to do with youth, and beauty, and flowers ? I am like the fallen leaves at your feet, which next year's sun will find more withered and dried still ; flowers are not for me ; let me go ; the grave awaits me."

"Nay," I urged, "stay with us while the sun shines, and the birds sing so joyously."

"That bird's song is too loud," returned the old man, "and there is no warmth in the sun to-day ; it may serve to keep the young blood circulating through your veins ; it takes little to keep the heart of youth palpitating. Mine is cold, frozen ; no sun can warm it."

While the old man had been uttering this, he had sunk down upon a log of wood that lay

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opposite to us, not from any willingness to stay, but from sheer exhaustion ; his figure collapsed, and, as he bowed his head, he drooped, resting upon his staff.

“I am afraid,” said Kathleen, “you take a wrong view of life ; the earth is full of beauty. Look around at this wood, the fine trees, the glorious sun shedding his rays through all the branches, penetrating to our very feet. This beautiful brushwood, a shelter for the thousand little warblers that fill it with song. This lovely carpet of green-sward, patterned and embellished with its hundred species of wild flowers. That sweet rippling brook yonder that keeps up its low murmur to the cooing of the doves. Oh !” cried she, growing warm with delight at the scene around her, “If I were a poet or an artist I would erect a tent here and stay the live long day.”

“And it would be wise,” said the old man, looking up, “never to go beyond it ; build your house in the very centre and never go out of it.”

“Is the outside world, then, so much to be dreaded ?” enquired she.

“The world,” said the Hermit, “is base and hollow, cold and cruel ; have nought to do

with it. It will freeze up the young warm blood and leave thee, like myself, a dry and withered thing, with a hard cold heart."

"Perhaps," said she, "you have cut yourself off from human sympathies, and your heart has grown cold for lack of exercise?"

"Nay! my child, nay!" cried he, "it was society that did it. The world is a two-faced monster, and its heart is hollow; do not anticipate happiness in it."

Looking anxiously again into the girl's face he caught sight of the tears that were fast filling her eyes, and which she had been for the last few minutes trying to keep back.

Suddenly he rose and held out his hand to her—

"Forgive me, if I have said anything to throw a shadow over thy path and a cloud over thy bright face. I was but speaking my thoughts aloud. Forgive me."

The hand which he thrust out from under the old cloak I observed was white, and beautifully shaped, and on the fourth finger glittered a gem of rare brilliancy, set in a ring of curious workmanship. Seeing me look at it, he as quickly withdrew his hand, and stooping to pick up Kathleen's basket of flowers, he turned to go. She was at his side

in an instant, but, apparently absorbed in some thought that the ring had conjured up, he walked on in silence and without noticing her.

Every now and then he halted, and pressed his hand to his side, as though sudden pain struck him, and it was with extreme difficulty he kept the path.

We left him at his door, and some minutes afterwards, looking back, saw him dismissing from the hut a lame boy, one of the villagers, named Mike Morris, the only attendant he had, and the only person he permitted to enter within his castle.

"I cannot believe," said Kathleen, "that Geoffrey Monkton's heart has grown as hard and callous as he represents it to be. See how tenderly he lays his hand on that crippled boy's head, as though he sympathised with his affliction."

"It impresses me," I answered, "that he is still capable of very strong feelings, and that there lurks within his breast a tenderness of which he himself is scarcely conscious, crusted over, perhaps, by too close a contact with the baseness and hypocrisy that is in the world. His is a sensitive nature, and lacks the love of revenge. Disgusted with life,

he shuts himself in and tries to shut the world out."

"Ah!" said Kathleen, with a sigh, "evidently a blight has fallen upon his life. Did it not strike you, Mildred, that he has been handsome, despite his shaggy beard and unkempt hair?"

"Yes," I replied, "a gentleman and a scholar, perhaps. I should not be surprised to learn that he writes. If he will not converse with his fellows, his heart will speak sometimes, and perhaps it does so on paper."

"Oh!" exclaimed she, "if we could induce him to lend us some of his papers."

"I am afraid," said I, "they would be of a gloomy nature. Geoffrey Monkton can only write as he feels."

"That being so," she answered, "we might get some original thoughts. In these days when persons are writing for either fame or money, they readily pander to the public taste, keeping their real sentiments in the background. I wish they may be poems," said she, musing.

"Well, truly," laughed I, "if we go further we shall find ourselves criticising the old man's manuscripts before we know that any exist."

“Shall we risk his displeasure, beard the lion in his den, and try to find whether he has any?” cried she.

“With all my heart,” I replied. I was beginning to entertain the notion that some kind of crude writings were in the old hut, and the prospect of a little adventure was by no means unpleasant to me.

So we agreed to go next day on our exploring expedition, and parted.





CHAPTER III.

" Silence and twilight here twin sisters keep
Their noonday watch and sail among the shades,
Like vaporous shapes unseen."

SHELLEY.

THE next day, as by appointment, we started in search of the Hermit.

Some half-hour's walk by the bridle-path through the meadows, crossing stiles, and leaping brooks, brought us within sight of his secluded abode.

There was no sign of life about the dwelling. The windows and the doors were closed, although the day was bright and warm. Had not the gate leading to the front door stood ajar, having one hinge broken, we might even then have failed of gaining admittance.

On entering the gate we came into a small wilderness of sweet briar, honeysuckle, jasmine, and a variety of other scented shrubs, all in wild confusion, planted years ago,

when, perhaps, this old house was the abode of young and loving hearts, a fostering place for social intercourse and home affections, but now uncared for, allowed to run wild in every possible direction.

A mass of such-like tangled foliage lay across the path leading to the house, out of which sprang a startled leveret, as Kathleen stepped over it. There was a strange wonder in the eyes of the timid creature, as, for a moment, it regarded us as intruders on its private domains ere it sought refuge again in the brushwood.

For wildness and stillness the place might have been without a single human occupant.

“What shall we do—knock or enter without ceremony?” said Kathleen.

I looked at the rustic, time-worn old door for a second or two; then, summoning all my courage, knocked and lifted the latch at the same moment.

The door grated on its hinges, and opened into a narrow passage.

By the light admitted as we entered could be seen another door at the end of the passage.

Hurrying along, we were endeavouring to

open this, when a voice, weak and querulous, cried out—

“Don’t disturb me; I told you to keep away until I called you.”

Finding that he had mistaken us for the boy who waited on him, I gave the door a vigorous push, which sent it back with a jerk, and said—

“We trust not to disturb you, Mr. Monkton; will you go with us to the woods to-day?”

The old man looked round, perfectly aghast, and was some time before he spoke. Turning his gaze from one to the other, he seemed slowly to comprehend who we were, and appeared to hesitate whether to receive us graciously or to be angry at the intrusion.

He turned his face away for an instant; then, waving his hand with an impatient gesture, he cried—

“Children, go away; children, go away. I will not be intruded upon; I don’t like the wood, neither do I want company to-day.”

“But,” said Kathleen, going boldly up to him, “we are come to see if we can be of any help to you; and see,” offering him some

rare flowers she had in her hand ; “ they are not wild ones to-day, but some that I have watered and watched, and plucked on purpose for you.”

“ Then you have taken a deal of unnecessary trouble,” rejoined the old man, peevishly ; “ I have no pleasure in them.”

Kathleen looked dismayed at the mood that was upon him, and I think would have turned to go, had not her eyes rested at that moment on a number of books and loose papers that were on the table.

Fearlessly, sitting by his side, she began to talk of books and literature ; then of the papers on the table, coaxing him to tell her whether he wrote them ; and finally, ended by begging him to lend her an old manuscript lying at his elbow.

“ You know not what you ask,” said the Hermit. “ These are but the sour effusions of a sourer heart ; there is time enough for you to find the bitter side of life.”

Nevertheless, Kathleen persisted in having the papers.

“ Well, well,” cried he, impatiently, “ take them away and don’t return them ; I never wish to see them again.”

While Kathleen had been engaging the old

recluse in this conversation, I had time to observe the apartment in which we were.

It was a medium-sized square room, but badly lighted. For the first few moments I was unable to discern any object distinctly ; but as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light I observed a window partly hidden by the shrubs and the brushwood without, and screened on the inside by a faded green curtain, through which the sun's rays were struggling to penetrate the gloom within.

The walls of the room were unpapered, and from long lack of either water or white-wash, had assumed the colour of the logs that were burning in the low hearth.

A few chairs and the table at which the old man was seated, and which was drawn up close to the hearth, were the principal articles of furniture. One entire side of the room was covered with shelves, rudely constructed, but well filled with books ; strange, musty-looking old volumes. A few had the appearance of being well worn and much used, and others of having the accumulated dust of years upon them.

In one corner stood a huge telescope ; above and around it, covering the side of the wall, were a number of strange devices,

heads of animals, astronomical signs, Latin sentences, and many figures and emblems that were enigmas to me.

A broken harp and a pile of music lay in another corner, together with a half-finished painting in oil.

A bust of a lady, some fossils, shells, old coins, and a variety of other things, were thrown together in wretched confusion and melancholy disorder.

A feeling of depression and chilliness began to creep over me, as I stood among this old man's broken idols. If the next state of existence and outward surroundings shall be the reflex of our inward condition, then what would this man's be? What a wrecked life was his. Everything in this wretched hovel spoke of a former refinement, of elegance and learning; but, how had the spoiler spoiled, and whose hand had done this, there was nothing to show, save that amongst the shattered idols lay the bust of a beautiful woman, and opposite me hung a frame, with the portrait turned to the wall.

How long my thoughts would have dwelled on these things, or what romance I should have woven out of this miscellaneous heap I know not, had not the hermit shown signs of

weariness ; and, Kathleen giving her hand to the old man, we turned to go.

We had scarcely reached the door when he called us back, and was endeavouring to rise from his chair, but, either from weakness or agitation, he sank down again and held out a hand to each of us.

“Forgive me, children, forgive me, if I have said aught to vex you, or have oppressed you with my own gloom. Go, enjoy the woods, be happy as long as you can. Thank you, my children ; and now, give me the paper back again,” said he, looking anxiously at Kathleen, “and get you into the sunshine.”

“No, no,” said she, laughing, and hiding it. “I will return it when I have read it.”

He bowed his head, and lifting her hand, pressed it to his lips for a moment, let it fall again, and waved us away.

When we came again into the light and the sun, I could see that tears were in the girl’s eyes.

“How sad his life is,” she murmured ; “I wish he would allow us to stay with him ; what depression and gloom !”

“Oh, it will not last long,” I said. “Did you not see how very ill he is ? He is drawing near to death, I think.”

“And what comes after death for such as he?” said she, musing.

I could not answer the question, and we seated ourselves and proceeded to read the Hermit’s paper, which was written in a clear, delicate handwriting, and entitled “Stray Thoughts.”

STRAY THOUGHTS.

“Sorrow preys upon
Its solitude, and nothing more diverts it
From its sad visions of the other world
Than calling it at moments back to this.
The busy have no time for tears.”

BYRON.

“Passed by—unnoticed—forgotten by all, I am disgusted. I’ll watch no longer. I will retreat again into the deepest recess of my own cell. Why should I look upon the world, and the things of the world? There is no pleasure in them.

“There is a canker in the heart of every rose, eating out and destroying its beauty. There is a viper concealed beneath every green leaf. Don’t touch the rose, it will fall to pieces. Forsake your study of botany, for I tell you there is a viper there, though the leaf be green and its form be perfect. Leave

it alone ; there is a blight on everything, and the birds mock me with their song.

“The boy, chasing that beautiful moth from flower to flower, as it dances and sports in the sunshine, will clutch it presently, tear its wings asunder, and leave it in pain.

“The sun blinds, or else the frost bites ; everything is out of joint, and there is no harmony. Do you see that bird on yonder bough ? Poor innocent, sing your little song and die ! I can see the hawk if you cannot. Foolish little warbler, you will soon fall, and your song will be lost.

“Go to, young man, you are a fool, you will grow wiser some day. You will pluck that fruit which looks so tempting and so golden, and it shall be as bitter ashes to your taste.

“Eat and drink, for to-morrow you die.

“But stay, I will show you something ; take your fill of pleasure afterwards, but look. Behold the ocean, broad, wide, smooth, and blue. It is false—as hell ! Look yonder—what is her name ? ‘Enterprise.’ She is freighted with a cargo—some three hundred souls on board. The decks are white, and her sails are spread ; the wind is fair, and the water is beautiful. Such a glorious land is there over the wide water, such fortunes to

be made, such hopes to be realised. How their hearts beat! They are going to be rich, and come back again to—what? To perfect ease and enjoyment.

“A pretty sight, is it not? There is music on board, and their merry feet go round and round in the dance; the time will soon pass.

“See you that old man there, with his wrinkled face and grey hair? What has tempted him? Is it gold? No. Ah, now you will believe me! There is a canker gnawing at the root. Disappointments meet you at every step. Sitting apart from the gay and merry throng, the old man has but one thought, one desire; he has lost all here, buried them one by one; but there is his boy—his firstborn that left him many years ago, and he pants and longs, his whole heart aches, for one more sight of him. Will he realise it? It is very little to ask, just to see his son once more; only to hold him in his arms; to say, ‘It is enough; now let me die. I have seen my son.’ Will he realise it? We shall see.

“I told you the water was treacherous, and there was nothing to trust in—no happiness anywhere. Stay, you can eat, and drink, and be merry afterwards—stay.

“It is very dark, there is not a star to be seen, and the moon, ashamed, has hidden. Lend your ears and hear, for there is a shriek that rends the air. The ship is on fire !

“He that sought to be rich, to gratify his own ambition, and he that fled from poverty to seek a living ; he that broke from the hand of the law, risking the voyage to save his life, and the innocent child that went because its mother went, with the old man that went to save his heart from breaking ; all, all will share the same fate ! Their shrieks will all mingle together, and, in the morning, when the old routine of things comes round, this beautiful, bright, and treacherous sea will have engulfed them all, and look as smiling still.

“I will give you another picture, if you like to come in ; or will you pass on ? Oh, he prefers to pass on—let him go.

“These are the experiences of my life. I never come to my cell door and look abroad, but my heart is pained, or my disgust is excited, and I retire again.

“It is Sunday morning. I will take another look. Perhaps the aspect of things will be better on this day. No fear of my being noticed. I am an old man, ill-fed and ill-

clothed, and retired from the world years ago. I am called eccentric and a hermit—very good.

“I like the sun, though, after all. I like him, and there is no fear of my being noticed, for I object to being seen; yet I will risk it, because it is Sunday morning, and I like to know how the world goes on a Sunday.

“Oh, stop those bells! What do they ring for? Cannot they go to pray without telling all the world? I wish the bells would cease their terrific clamour.

“I will speak to this little boy. I am growing bold, you see.

“‘Come here, child, and tell me what you go to church for. There, don’t be frightened, but tell me why you go to church?’

“‘Because the parson says I shall go to a very bad place if I don’t.’

“‘Do not believe it, my boy. There is no worse place than this.’

“Here comes the squire. I’ll draw back a little. I wonder what he is going to church for? Oh, he has got a pew there, with red curtains around. It is right and proper that it should be occupied on Sundays. That pew is an ornament to the church, and he is an ornament to the pew.

"I think the days of my youth are come back, for I feel inclined to indulge myself this morning with a little secret mirth in watching these church-goers.

"We will leave the squire to enter his pew, the poor of the village falling back to let him pass, while we try to ascertain what this lady goes for. She is a widow, and her black weeds cling mournfully about her. There is a pained expression on her face, an eager watchful look in the eye, an expression of patient waiting about her whole figure. I will follow her, in imagination, and ascertain what the watching eager look may mean.

"It means this—that she has been going to church for five years regularly, waiting and watching for something from the lips of the minister that would satisfy her about the state after death; where the souls go, and especially the soul of her husband. But, somehow, though the minister may be very good in his way, he never comes to the point, never gives the woman what she desires, and she comes back empty as she went. I know all this, because I have noted her face as she returned many, many times. Ah, I will look once more, and then return.

"Another comes! He is late to church,

finishing his toilet as he walks along, giving the last touches to his hair, and settling his necktie. He has been at work until the last moment, in a little apartment where he was not seen. He did not want to go to church; indeed, he wanted the money he would have earned; he is very poor. He will have to sit at night and work when others sleep. He has a sick wife and several children, and they cannot quite starve. He works for the parson, and he works for the squire, making their black cloth look shapeable and proper to go to church in. He must go, or else they would starve him quite; that is why he goes to church.

“If I walked abroad as other men do, I don’t think I should go to church after that.

“It is all husk, all vanity and vexation of spirit wherever I look; and I turn from it, and shut my door and window close, and ask what I was created for. To be made sport of? mocked at every turn? I shall lay me down to die. I wish I could stay this cry in my heart, ‘What comes after death? Will existence go on—and where and what will it be?’”

“Morning, noon, and night, does this cry go out from my heart. I cannot still it, or keep

it back. Do I wish to live? I wish I could say no; I ought to say no—yet I cannot. Shall I go on feeding on husks? If not, what is it?”

“I lie abstracted and hear beautiful tales of things,
And the reasons of things.
They are so beautiful that I nudge myself to listen.”

WALT. WHITMAN.

“O, I see now that life cannot exhibit all to me as the day cannot,
I see that I am to wait for what will be exhibited by death.”

WALT. WHITMAN.

Some four or five days after our raid upon the Hermit, we were surprised early one morning by a visit from Kathleen.

With the first glance I could see something had disturbed her.

Her face was unusually pale and thoughtful, her eyes had a wistful, anxious look in them, and her whole manner was changed from the gay and sparkling girl of a few days before.

“What is it, *ma cher amie*?” I said, cheerfully looking into her face, and forcing a smile. “Have you encountered the wraith of one of your ancestors, or have you dreamed of treasure-trove buried deep under the steep grey cliff where you love to wander lonesomely?”

She took my arm hurriedly, and led me back into my own room.

"Do not jest, Mildred," she said. "I have indeed heard, thought, and felt what I shall never forget."

"A dream, Kathleen?" I questioned. "Surely you have nothing worse to tell than some weird dream?"

"Perhaps it was a dream," she murmured, "and yet I was not asleep."

"Tell me, Kathleen; I am all anxiety to know."

"Mildred, I am not superstitious, and attach but little importance to dreams; yet last night, a little past midnight, I was awakened by a gentle tapping at my casement. I listened, comparing the sounds to a bird's beak striking the glass. Thinking it might be a little fledgling fallen from its resting-place in the eaves, I hastened to open the window, and, by the moonlight, sought for it all around, but could not find anything, and so returned to my bed again. Presently the same low tapping began again; this time there seemed a friendliness in the little raps, and, falling as they did upon the glass, a ring in them that sounded like notes from a musical instrument.

"Soon the sweet little sounds died away,

and perfect stillness reigned within and without ; not a breath of wind stirred the leaves, and a quiet as of death fell upon me. I listened for my own breathing, but could perceive no sound. And yet it was not sleep ; I was awake, and my senses were acute as I lay listening, for I knew not what. In a second or two I heard the tones of a voice, at first in murmurs and at a distance, coming, as it were, from over the hills ; then nearer, in my room, by my side, clearly and distinctly ; it was the voice of Geoffrey Monkton, and on my ears fell these words :—

“How long the night seems ! I am waiting for the morning. How dark the night seems, and so cold !

“What is the matter with me ? I have had a long sleep ; an unusually long night this has been, and I am waiting for the morning. Oh, it is cold, and I am chill as though I had lost something ; yet what have I to lose ?

“I look for the morning. What has morning to do with me, or I with the morning ? Shall I go and warm myself in the sun of to-morrow when it comes ? No, I will not. Why should I suffer pain, or voluntarily look upon pain ? I know it is so, and I have resolved to look upon it no longer. Yet I am waiting for the morning.

“What strange sensations pass over me. Surely it is better to be in the dark, if the sun throws light, and forces me to see suffering and pain.

“It is coming. I feel it is coming. A great light is coming, and I fear it. I am like a blind man going under the operation of having his eyes opened. Am I prepared?

“There is the first star! I am glad it does not break all at once upon me. I can put it from me no longer; friend or foe, messenger of mercy, or monster of evil, the thing that men call Death confronts me. I am slipping away! Where, oh, where?

“I am growing nervous. A childish feeling of fear comes upon me. Am I afraid to die? For years and years I have walked alone, asking no advice, taking no help, refusing to mix with my fellows. Having never seen the image of God reflected as I desired, I lived without Him, and lived in my own world; strong enough to do without aid. Now I find myself in this dark hour before the new morning, putting forth my hand in the darkness for help, asking to be guided. I have a contempt for myself. I despise this weakness, and yet—oh, how shall I guide me?

“Hark, a voice! Strange word to my ears! Strange sound, yet I listen for it again. There it is—it sounds from afar, but I hear it. ‘Friend!’ I wonder if he is sincere? I called no man friend. I never believed in friend-

ship; yet it sounds pleasant, and there is a ring in it that seems truthful.

“‘Fear not, oh, my friend. Slowly thou art coming to the light. Fear not this breaking of the morning. Put out thy hand; I will guide thee.’

“So, like a blind child, I submit, and turn me to the sound. The voice comes nearer to me.

“The sky is studded with stars, and the sun is rising. The night of my death is passed, and I am beginning to live. Oh, for what?

“I will talk with this friend, and ask him who he is, for my eyes are bandaged. I just feel that the morning is breaking, and the sun is rising, but I see not, for this bandage shuts out and hides me from all that is fair to look upon. Yes, he is my friend. He shall be my counsellor and my guide. He has known me, and I have never recognised him. Self-appointed, sympathising with, and understanding me better than I understood myself and the world; filled with compassion for the torture I inflicted upon myself; his heart burning with a desire to tear the scales from my eyes, and show me things as they are, and not as they seem; so has he followed and watched me all my way. Driven back oft-times by the blindness and dense darkness that I allowed to gather round, and form itself into a barrier that would not let him show me the

light; sometimes turning aside to weep at my refusal of the comfort he brought; yet ever has he followed on, clinging to that part of my nature that sometimes, yea, oft-times, yearned for the good and true. He took hold of me in moments when my hungry soul went out for something satisfying, yet not knowing where to find it; so shutting up again and again these channels whence might have come to me this knowledge of the spiritual and the heavenly.

“‘Oh, poor, blind humanity, would that you knew the help that is at hand; would that you could see the light above, and feel the hands that are outstretched to save.’

“‘Oh, friend, friend, did’st thou not weary in those days, and grow tired of the stupid pupil thou hadst taken upon thee to instruct?’—‘No!’

“‘Did’st thou not wonder at my darkness and stupidity?’—‘Yes!’

“‘Did’st thou never reproach me for my irreligious life, and my vacant place in church?’—‘No.’

“‘Did’st thou follow me into my chamber, and look upon the mental anguish I endured, and hear the great cry that welled up in my heart: Where is God?’—‘Yes.’

“‘Did’st thou note the secret tear that would, in spite of myself, moisten my eye, and cause the wail to go out from me—Oh suffering humanity?’—‘Yes.’

“ ‘Did’st thou hear me, when other moods came on me, scoff at the church going, and mock at the so-called piety that passes current in our land? Did’st thou upbraid me then?’ — ‘No.’

“ ‘Then what hast thou to say to me of all these matters?’

“ ‘Thou wert born into darkness and ignorance. Thou wert trained falsely, told that thou must believe such and such creed on pain of being excommunicated from the favour of God, and eternally doomed to misery and despair. The divinity that was within thee, the spark of intelligence that would have guided thee aright, had’st thou been left alone, was pressed down, driven back from thy life, compelled to hide itself deep in thy inner soul. Thou wert driven on to live falsely, to profess a belief in that which thou could’st not understand, and which in freedom thou would’st most certainly have rejected. I pitied thee then, and resolved to be thy guide. Then came thy trials, thy disappointments, making thy heart sore. Thy eyes opened wide to all that was false, to all the misery and wrong doing that was in the world. Thy mind became warped, thou sawest nothing but husks. Oh, poor brother, could I have reached thee then, just before that great disgust seized upon thee for all things and all men, I might have saved thee many bitter pangs; but thou wert a little too wayward, choosing thy own

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gloomy way, and so ended thy life in darkness; but thou art come to the light now. Thy friend always—more thy friend to-night than ever. I keep my place at thy side, to walk with thee, to talk with thee; gradually, by slow and safe degrees, to unloose this bandage from thine eyes, and give thee, not bright visions, but glorious realities; not to close thine eyes to evils that are in thy way, but to show thee the remedy; not to throw a covering over vice, but to show thee how thou canst help in uprooting and destroying these noisome weeds that so offend thine eyes. I will tell thee how thou mayest put on the harness with us, and help to remove this crust of ignorance and evil, that is so crushing and so heavy on the earth. Little by little shalt thou be taught, as thou art able to bear it, until gradually thine eyes shall become strong enough to see by this new light, and look upon the beauty of things around thee. So will thy heart become delighted with the harmony that prevails. Here the rose blossoms without the fear of evil to destroy it, and here thine hands may press the green and tender leaf without fear of harm.

“Thou must be patient, for thine eyes are tender yet, and thou canst not bear it. Rest awhile. Be a hermit still, and conceal thyself as thou pleasest. Let this that has been given thee to-night be something for thee to

reflect upon, until it shall work in thee not only the desire, but the strength to do that which has been accumulating for years, while thou hast wasted thy life in a hermit's cell.

“‘ I forbear to carry thee further, and will leave thee for the present.

“‘ There is no curse upon thy head, no angry God to meet, no eternal torment to fear. There are no wolves of the desert, no beasts of prey, for here the people love righteousness, and here the lion lieth down with the lamb, and thou art secure. Then rest brother, rest. I will call thee ‘hermit’ still, until thou art ashamed of the name and ask for another.’ ”





CHAPTER IV.

"The mighty power that formed the mind,
One mould for every two designed,
Then blessed the happy pair.
This be a match for this he said,
Then down he sent the souls he made,
To seek their bodies here.
But parting from their warm abode,
They lost their fellows on the road
And never joined their hands.
Oh, cruel chance and crossing fates,
Our heaven-born souls have lost their mates
On earth's cold barren sands."

BY the time Kathleen had finished, I had fallen into almost as dazed a condition as herself. I had not a clear idea, and could not account for this strange waking dream on any ground whatever, or what had caused this exalted nervous condition in the girl.

That Kathleen's was a highly sensitive and a delicate organisation, I knew; but this was a new phase of spiritual experience that hitherto we had been unacquainted with.

What would it result in? Could anything have befallen the old Hermit? We had had no tidings for days; was he ill or in need of help? With this reflection came the resolve that we would start at once on another visit to the hut.

Crossing the first meadow that divides our house from the woods, we saw the lame boy, Mike, leaving the cottage and coming towards us with a letter in his hand. As he approached nearer I could discern traces of grief upon the poor boy's face. The recent tears had made little rills through the dirt and dust all down his cheeks. The boy held out the letter to Kathleen, and said with a great sob—

“He is dead, Miss, and that letter is for you.”

She took the letter and read the address.

“RUTH HATHEWAY,
“40, Bellerose Square,
“London, W.”

“Where did you get this letter from, Mike?” she asked, “You have made a mistake; it is not for me.”

“No, Miss,” said the boy, “there is no mistake; that's the letter my dead master

showed me a few days ago, and said 'Mike, if some morning when you come here, you find me dead, do not be alarmed, but look for this letter, which you will find under my pillow, take it to Miss Brooks, and ask her to post it herself, I think she will do it for me;' and I promised him," added the boy, while the tears again widened the dirty rills on his cheeks, and he sobbed, "He was a good master to me, though they call him wizard and infidel, and worse."

"When did he die?" asked Kathleen, much affected, I could see, but not at all surprised.

"I found him dead this morning, Miss, with this letter clutched in his cold stiff hand."

"And who is in the cottage now?"

"Nobody;" said the boy, "doctor's been and gone again, and I hold the key until that letter brings somebody."

"And when the somebody comes let me know," said Kathleen, kindly.

"Mildred," said she, as we walked on to the post office, "Who was it who spoke to me last night? Was it the spirit of Geoffrey Monkton, and was he conscious of my being made acquainted with his condition?"

"Dear Kathleen," I cried, "I am more and more amazed; this is a new study for us, and a deep one."

"And a consoling one," she added. "If the souls of the dear departed are indeed around us, our dull senses must sometimes be awakened to hear and see them; henceforth this new faith will destroy for me the sting of death, and remove the dark shadow from the tomb. He is not here, he is risen."

True to his word Mike some days afterwards informed Kathleen that a lady had arrived at the cottage, and had taken all the responsibility of Geoffrey Monkton's funeral and affairs. She also learned that the lady had enquired where Kathleen could be found.

Having this for an introduction, I accompanied her to the old house.

The low sweet voice of a woman bade us come in, and we entered the room where a few days ago Kathleen and I had said farewell to the old Hermit, when he waved us away into the sunshine.

On a low bier stood the coffin, by the side of a table filled with papers and assorted letters. A lady sat at the table. She rose when we entered, and holding out her hand to Kathleen said "Miss Brooks." "Ruth

Hatheway," answered Kathleen, taking her hand.

"That is my name," she replied. "Allow me, in the name of my dead friend, to thank you for your kindness to him."

The woman regarded the girl attentively for a moment or two, and then stooped, and softly kissed her forehead.

"We are come to see if we can be of any further use, or assist you in any way," said Kathleen.

"No, I thank you, there is little left to do. He himself has arranged all. I have only to bury him," she added, with a sigh.

"When does that take place?" said Kathleen.

"To-morrow," she answered, "—and then—I shall return by the way I came."

"I was about to offer you the humble hospitality of our home," said Kathleen.

She smiled gratefully, shook her head, and said—

"Thank you; but important duties await me at home. I am matron of an orphan's home, and have a large family depending on my care, and I have no others on earth now but them. I must hasten back when my sad work here is finished."

“Have you known Geoffrey Monkton long?” I ventured.

A painful expression crossed her face, and she said, sorrowfully—

“Yes, nearly all my life, but I have not seen him for many years. Through misunderstandings, and the treachery of another, we parted, and he disappeared. Some years after I learned that he had settled the greater portion of his fortune on an orphan asylum, leaving himself a mere pittance. After a time I succeeded in gaining the appointment as matron to that asylum, but it was only last year that I discovered where my former friend had hidden himself.”

“You were a very near friend of his?” said Kathleen, looking at her.

I saw her lips tremble, and the moisture came into her eyes, but, with a great effort, she controlled herself, and replied—

“I once thought I was, but we misunderstood each other, and parted.”

She turned away, and I knew that was all she would say concerning it.

Ruth Hatheway was a tall, fair woman, and though not young, still kept the traces of a former loveliness; and as soon as I saw her I was struck with the resemblance she bore

to Kathleen. Her long fair hair, though faded now, must once have been beautiful, and the large blue eyes might, in youth, have been orbs of brightness, although the light in them had diminished long ago. Her manner was quiet and subdued, and she impressed one as a lady of high and gentle birth.

Her dress of violet cashmere hung gracefully about her slight figure.

She had a lovely hand, and on one delicate finger sparkled the same ring that the Hermit had worn; evidently it was some souvenir of days gone by, and she had now again transferred it to her own hand.

Turning her attention again to the papers on the table, she said to Kathleen—

“There is nothing here that I shall take, save this packet of letters. That parcel there (pointing to a huge pile of manuscripts) Geoffrey Monkton, in his letter, desired me to offer to you. If you refuse them I am to burn them. Which shall it be?”

“Oh, give them to me,” cried Kathleen, eagerly. “I am very grateful to him for remembering me.”

I turned to the coffin, and asked whether I might take a last look of her dead friend.

She tenderly, almost reverently, drew the coverlet aside, and a tremor ran through her frame as she caught sight of the face.

The eyes had opened wide since she had looked last.

Strange thoughts will sometimes force themselves upon one standing face to face with death, and I think that Ruth, for a moment, thought that her presence had had some powerful effect upon the cold clay, and that, though in life he had shrunk from seeing her, in death the man had turned to look for her, and would yet have some last word to say ; but the hope died as suddenly as it came ; the man was dead.

There was a peaceful, almost happy look upon his countenance, and as we gazed, Kathleen murmured—

“ Poor famished heart, thou art now drinking at the well-spring of life, and thy spirit is renewing its youth in that immortal clime to which thou hast just risen.”

Ruth Hatheway started, turned her face round, brightened up now with a sudden joy, and exclaimed—

“ Then you had faith in him enough to believe he is more blessed in death than in life ? ”

“ Yes,” answered the girl ; “ he lost the

path that leads to happiness in this life, but will find it in the life beyond."

"Heaven bless you for that," she cried, and pressed her lips to Kathleen's cheeks, in a warm kiss, which spoke more of her love for him than words could have done. Then covering up the face of her dead, she resumed her work at the table.

Seeing that we could be of no further use to her, and might be intruding on her privacy, we bade her farewell. Kathleen gathered up Geoffrey Monkton's legacy, and we left the old house.

We found the papers very curious specimens of literature, some of them abstruse scientific experiments and psychological experiences, far beyond our comprehension, and much in advance of the age, the reason, doubtless, why they were never published; but Kathleen took a deep interest in them, and for the few years she lived never ceased to study the old man's manuscripts, and spoke of him always with a kind of reverence, assuring me oft-times that she perceived the presence of the Hermit to be near, assisting her in her study, and making clear to her understanding much that was mysterious to others. In her last hours on

earth she spoke of the pleasure she anticipated in meeting him again, and died in confident belief of still pursuing under happier auspices all the studies she had begun here.

Some of these papers were sad, and read like the outburst of the deep mental suffering of a disappointed heart seeking to disburden itself of a load it could no longer bear.

Reading them caused me to speculate much on these two lives lived apart.

That Ruth Hatheway's life had been one of sacrifice, and that her love had out-lived all other emotions was obvious ; and that Geoffrey had never forgotten her, but had relied on her help, and had claimed it when he could no longer help himself, was evident too.

Then what had kept them apart ?

Poor starved hearts ! The treachery of others, envy, jealousy, and, perhaps, their own pride had severed them, turning the currents of their lives, and sending them drifting amid the rocks and quicksands of life. Thank God, one had found harbour ; and the other, tossed a little longer, perhaps, yet, when her life of loving sacrifice shall end, will enter the same haven of rest, and these two hearts, so long estranged, shall, in the

light and warmth of a holier atmosphere, meet and find the true life which had been denied them here.

Whatever was the real cause, Ruth's lips were as silent as the grave that would soon close over all that remained here of him she had loved and lost.

* * * * *

It was a misty morning. A fog had suddenly risen on the sea, and the wind was driving it inland, over the meadows and into the village; and the vapoury mist hung in grey clouds about the cottage windows, and over the running brooks; the gloom, struggling with the faint rays of the sun, sent a chill through the frame, although it was summer.

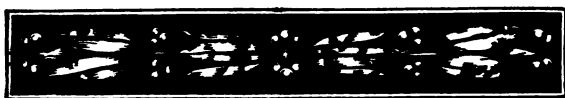
Returning from a walk and looking along a path on my right, I could discern, through the vapour, the figures of a tall woman and a boy limping behind her. The boy carried a small portmanteau, and I soon recognised them to be Ruth Hatheway and the boy Mike going in the direction of the crossways where the London coach stopped to take up its passengers. Ruth was taking the boy away with her.

The funeral was over; her work here was done, and as the lonely woman took her soli-

tary way back to the life she had chosen, my heart involuntarily sent up a prayer to heaven that she might be sustained in her labour of love, and reap a rich harvest of affection from the hearts of the motherless among whom she lived.

* * * * *

Some years have passed since then, and my life has changed; the tomb has enshrined many of those I knew and loved. New lives have replaced the old; new duties and fresh occupations fill up my days; yet, sometimes, when the day closes, and the wind howls without, and the fire casts fitful shadows on the library walls; while the dear partner of my joys and sorrows is by some sick bed in his capacity of physician, and little Eric sleeps peacefully on his pillow—then I draw around me a mystic circle; hear the rustle of Aunt Judith's dress as she hastens to serve her younger sister, Hannah; listen to the voice of the Hermit, who, in softened, mellowed tones, begs forgiveness of Ruth, who has joined him now; feel upon my brow the warm, sweet caresses of the gentle Kathleen, and see the beautiful faces of my beloved parents, and am strengthened in the conviction that ere long I shall find them all again.



REMINISCENCES OF FERNDALE.

CHAPTER I.

“He spoke as he thought, though he oft gave offence ;
But, however wanting, in whole or in part,
He was sound and all right when you came to his heart.”

LIZZIE DOTEN.

DURING the latter part of the summer and autumn of 18— I was visiting in the neighbourhood of a rather pretty village in the county of Somersetshire. I was fortunate in being able to take up my abode in a small, retired residence, situated a little way from the village, and commanding an extensive view of the beautiful country around.

A charming, picturesque little place was Ferndale, with its white-painted front, partly covered with trellis-work, over which the

clematis and passion flower were then climbing, mingling their purple and white blossoms in sweet profusion.

The family consisted of a gentleman and his two sisters ; one a maiden lady, about middle-age, and the other a widow, some years her senior.

After my return to town, and while one or two circumstances connected with my visit were fresh in my memory, and, moreover, because one, at least, of this family became a study to me, on account of some strange experiences she had had, and which, at the time, made a deep impression on me, I recorded them, placing them among some simple tales that at different times I had written, and which I thought might, in years to come, when I should have passed away, entertain and amuse my numerous nephews and nieces that were now growing up around me.

These notes were put away. Years have passed since then ; my thoughts and life became full of care, and my duties multiplied. The world, the flesh, and, perhaps, a subtler influence still, absorbed all my attention, and my simple friends were forgotten.

But now, amid the excitement of the pre-

sent day, when strange rumours respecting spirit-agency are afloat, and men say that the invisible world is close about us, and that the so-called dead live and move in our midst, though unseen by us, and we are continually being presented with various and marvellous psychological phenomena; with an increasing demand for more, I have recalled to my memory the strange experiences of my friend in that romantic district of Ferndale.

Ralph Woodford, the brother, and mine host, must have been nearly fifty years old, to judge from his appearance, a country gentleman, without profession, and with a moderate income.

The widowed sister, Anna Thornbury, had resided with her brother ever since the death of her husband, some fifteen years before. She was a tall, masculine-looking woman, hard-featured, and stern-faced, with a voice that had an unpleasant ring in it, and which was often used, either in admonishing or reproving her brother and sister for their frequent absence from church.

Ellen and Ralph had lately somewhat fallen away from the outward observance of the Sabbath, and had more than once betaken themselves to the fields on Sunday

mornings, or into the village on some mission of their own during the very hours appointed by the State for worship.

This, Anna Thornbury could not tolerate, for she was a strictly religious woman, and spent her time chiefly in prayers and in reading pious books, distributing tracts in the village, and dispensing charities (her brother's gifts) to the poor. She had a nervous fear of spending her own money. Although the fortune left her by the deceased Mr. Thornbury had considerably increased during fifteen years, yet the widow could never forget that she was a lone woman, with all the responsibilities of providing and taking care of herself and the fortune left to her.

Ralph Woodford was a hale, stalwart man, of the old English type. He had a robust constitution, and a bright, honest face, with a nature not too sensitive, nor a perception too acute. He was a happy man, with a word and a smile for every passer-by; and his face had a shine upon it, suggesting that somewhere between the broad shoulders and the ample chest lay a warm and generous heart. There was a heartiness in his greeting, and in the warm grasp of his hand, which

made the stranger feel at home at once in his house. He had rather a loud voice, it is true, and a good deal of bluster about him at times, when things went wrong, or he fancied they did ; a semblance of wrath in his speaking, with an occasional threat thrown out at the offenders, if it so chanced they were out of hearing.

This state of things would greatly ruffle and disturb the pious Mrs. Thornbury, and call forth a severe reproof from that lady, while the gentle Ellen would remark in her quiet way—

“Bless you, my dear, there’s nothing in it. It will end in his bringing us a present all round the next time he goes to town.”

And so it was ; the storm of imagined passion over, he would forget in a few minutes that he had ever been angry, and be planning a pleasant surprise for somebody. Then the old placid look and the genial smile would return, and Ralph was none the worse for the storm.

In looking at the happy, contented man, I used sometimes to speculate as to whether Ralph had ever been seriously in love with any one woman, or whether he had gone through life free and heart-whole. My con-

clusions were, that if the big warm heart had ever been pierced by Cupid's dart, the wound had closed up again, whole and sound, without shutting in one selfish love, and moreover, he had achieved the power of shedding a genial generous love broadcast, for his hand and heart were ever open to help and to bless all who came within his influence. The poor found him a never failing friend, and the villagers learned to pray that his life might long be spared to them. But it was in his own household that the warmth and affection of his nature gushed out freely and spontaneously; and well do I remember, as the chill autumn evenings came on, and we gathered round the blazing wood fire, how his kind face would brighten as he related the oft repeated tales of his boyhood and youth. Though told in his own homely style, they ever had a freshness in them, coming as they did from a memory and heart as pure and simple as the stories themselves.

Ah, dear, kind Ralph, I know not whether you still live in the old homestead that your presence brightened for so many years, loving and beloved; but I do hold a faith that, wherever you are, the seeds of love and kindness which you so plentifully scattered

here, will not fail to yield you a rich reward, when the harvest of your life shall be gathered in.

Ellen was the centre of attraction in that small household, and the magnet which from the first drew me, with some strange new interest, to gaze upon her face in the day, and watch her movements in the dusk. As I have said, her youth had passed, for thirty-five summers had gone over her head, with their lights and shadows; yet, time had dealt gently with her, touching her brow with a tenderness that had left no mark save a quiet thoughtful grace, and an earnest wistful expression that pervaded her countenance. She was a striking contrast to her sister; was scarcely the medium height, with a small oval face, and delicate features. Her fair hair was soft and long, and though perhaps a shade or two of its original brightness had departed with the years, the coil that was wound round the pretty head might have graced a queen.

There was a quiet grace and simplicity about all her movements, that soothed and calmed one. Sweet-voiced and low-speaking, she was a woman whom all the village children loved, and they greeted her with bright faces

and happy smiles whenever she made her appearance amongst them. But, added to all this natural charm, this soft and gentle grace, there was a strong magnetic power about her that affected one strangely, and soon I began to follow the sweet simple woman with my eyes, as she glided amongst us, and to marvel at the new and singular interest her presence inspired me with ; to study her face, and ponder still as I looked into the deep blue eyes—blue? were they blue? I never could tell the colour of those marvellous eyes, or divine whence came the electric light that flashed from them at times, a light that might be felt, and that spread itself over her face, illumining it with a spiritual beauty, until she became like one transfigured before us.

“ Look,” said Ralph to me one evening, “ Look at her face, Miss Maitland ; I have seen it before, once when our sister Amy died, and again—Well,” said the big, tender-hearted fellow, “ I am afraid when I see it lest she, too, should be caught up and be no more seen.”

Ellen had let her book fall, and was looking through the open window, those large indescribable eyes fixed on something that we

could not see. Her face was flushed with joy, and there was a beaming look of happiness in her eyes, and her whole countenance radiated with intense delight. She sat for some time in this wrapt repose, neither of us daring to speak or disturb her, when she gradually returned to her usual conscious state, and, on being questioned, gave us some evasive answer; so we were fain to be contented. Yet there would remain with her a certain presence and power which caused us to feel at such hours that she had held converse with beings of another sphere from which we ordinary mortals were excluded.

These singular day dreams puzzled and confused poor Ralph sadly, and caused his sister, Anna Thornbury, to shake her head and mutter a prayer to be preserved from evil influences, while to me also they were inexplicable. I had no explanation, and so waited and wondered. There was at times a sadness in Ellen's eyes, and a pathos in her voice, that induced my especial sympathy, and caused me to wonder whether her life held some little secret romance which she sedulously guarded even from her brother whom she loved so dearly.

Ellen and Ralph were my companions in

most of my excursions to the various places of interest that the neighbourhood afforded, and many a long ramble did we take across the moors and by the hill-side, sometimes on botanical discoveries, at others, to view the ruins of some old abbey or castle.

On one particular day, Ellen had been in an unusually happy mood. We had started early to view the ruins of an old castle that was some distance from our house. Our walk had been a pleasant one, for the day was glorious, the soft warm autumn sun shedding his golden rays on the hip covered hedges, lighting them up with an unusual brilliancy. A few late wild flowers lingered in the hedgerows, as though they would see just this one day before going to sleep for ever, and were now opening wide their bright petals to inhale the balmy air.

As we passed through the village, the cottage doors stood open to admit the pure breeze, while the little human flowers on the door-steps, bronzed-cheeked and curly-headed, turned their faces also to the sun, drinking in, the while, fresh health and happiness. And we, too, had been in harmony with the sun and the flowers. Ralph had been singing snatches of songs, while Ellen had laughed

him out of time, but not out of temper. Ralph rambled on in search of some rare fern, leaving us to enter the castle alone, and as we passed under the arch-way, I saw that Ellen became silent and somewhat depressed. Seating ourselves on the moss-covered stones of the castle wall, I became lost in admiration of the grand old ruin, and had not observed that Ellen had moved from my side, until I discovered her seated in a niche opposite. She had thrown herself back against the thick mass of ivy which clung so tenaciously to the old masonry, and sat gazing abstractedly before her, with a far-off look in those wonderful eyes, appearing unconscious of my presence.

"Ellen," I ventured at last, "is it earth or heaven you are contemplating, or are you trying to peer into the future of both?"

She started. "Oh, heaven, I think," she said; "only, God forgive me, I was turning back to find it instead of looking forward."

"Surely, dear Ellen," I returned, "you have faith in a better heaven to come than any you can have lived through in the past?"

"Yes, dear Edith," she sighed, "it was but an earthly paradise, and, if it had been pro-

longed, might, in the end, have broken up, leaving me without the hope of a heavenly one. But this is an indulgence," she continued, "that I grant myself at long intervals, to come here and call up a happy time, when my heart knew no care, and the life on earth seemed the only heaven I should ever desire."

"Ellen," I said, "I have thought sometimes that you were blessed above ordinary mortals, and, almost, if not entirely, without earthly care, resting in a contentedness that, at times, I have almost envied."

She replied in rather a sad tone—

"There is no life exempt from trials and disappointments, and mine is no exception; yet I cannot murmur, for life's burden has laid lightly, being, I believe, half borne for me by invisible hands."

"What!" I exclaimed, with a start, and looking round at the crumbling old walls, for a slight shiver ran through my frame, and, for the first time, I felt nervous in being alone with Ellen. "What! have you really intercourse with the dead?" I stammered.

"Do not be alarmed, dear Edith," cried Ellen, "I am not going to frighten you with ghost stories. I have never been affrighted

by ghosts myself, nor have I ever seen any, as people generally affirm they come."

Then I asked—

"What gift or power is it that you possess? And have you an additional sense by which you see or perceive things and forms which are invisible to others? Tell me, I pray, what is the strange subtle influence about you, which one feels so palpably, and yet cannot understand."

Ellen laughed merrily, and said—

"It is but a freak of your imagination. I am but a simple country woman, not aware of any peculiarity in myself. How can I tell? I have never been fifty miles beyond Ferndale, and have only heard of your great metropolis, and read some little of its learning and wisdom, while you, dear, were born in that great centre of intelligence and art. If I am a different being to my neighbours, tell me, I pray, in what I differ?"

"I cannot," I said, "yet I know you have something to tell me."

"I seldom speak of these things," said Ellen, rather seriously, "for few would hear me, and fewer still believe me; indeed, I am as much astonished at them myself as any of my friends can be."

“But surely, dear Ellen, you can have no scruples in speaking to me, for you know I have a certain faith in psychological experiences, and am seeking for fresh facts which may help to solve this great mystery which is just beginning to interest men.”

“Ah!” sighed Ellen, looking almost fondly at the old walls, “it was here that the last bright vision of an earthly paradise floated away, and left me for ever—and it was here,” she continued, speaking rather to herself than to me, “that the first spiritual vision opened to my astonished gaze.”





CHAPTER II.

"In her heart of hearts she knew it,
Love and sorrow, not complaining,
Only suffered all the deeper,
Only loved him all the more."

A. A. PROCTOR.

"**P**HILIP DALE was ten years older than I," said Ellen. "He was twenty-eight and I eighteen when we first met. Ralph had met him some years before at college, and a warm friendship had sprung up between them. After Ralph left college, he and Philip kept up a correspondence, and Ralph, from time to time, used to read Philip's letters to us, letters that were full of interesting descriptions of people and places that he was visiting on the continent; for Philip was a traveller and a scholar, and Ralph was always the same simple countryman you now see him, who never took much to study, and had an almost reverential admiration for Philip,

whose natural talents, education, and amount of general knowledge, made him, in the eyes of Ralph, a paragon of wisdom.

“To us girls, living, as we did, a homely, country life, with not many friends, and few books, his letters came like a new novel every month, and were read over and over by Amy and myself, and treasured like the memories of a dear friend; and when it was said he was going to visit us, we felt that a new era was about to open in our lives.

“He came—I see him now, the tall, slim figure coming across the meadow in the twilight, leaning on Ralph’s broad shoulder. Amy and I were standing by the window watching for them.

“As they drew nearer, and while they loitered a little at the gate to take a last look at the glorious sunset, I had time to observe our new friend.

“His face was singularly handsome. He had a broad, intellectual-looking forehead, a rather dark, but clear, complexion, a fine and beautifully shaped head, dark grey eyes, and a profusion of hair and beard which gave him the appearance of a man about thirty-five. I afterwards knew him to be younger.

“Before Philip came, and until this day,

Amy and I had talked freely about our brother's friend, had planned little excursions, and mutually devised means for entertaining our visitor, and we had both looked forward with equal pleasure to his coming; but almost as soon as the first greetings were exchanged, my sister became silent, gave little answer to my glowing words of admiration, scarcely mentioned his name, and avoided the subject that had been hitherto of so much interest to us both.

“After the first few weeks, I observed that Amy showed an unwillingness to accompany us in our walks, usually excusing herself on either a plea of indisposition, or of some little occupation of her own; so Philip and I were thrown much together. Oh, those days and weeks, how they fled all too swiftly! I was never fatigued with walking, or ever tired of hearing Philip's voice, for—why should I not confess it?—I loved him. Indeed, he had been in my thoughts by day, and in my dreams at night; his letters had impressed me deeply, and had given me a greater sensation of pleasure than anything else I had ever read or done. In the weeks we had spent together, there had grown a strange sympathy of soul between us, which I had taken for love, and,

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as the time went by, and he lingered with us, I foolishly thought that such love as mine must and would be responded to.

“Absorbed as I was in myself, and in the concealment of my love, dreaming dreams, and seeing visions of future bliss, a long life spent with Philip, I was blind—ah, how blind?—to the failing health and fading looks of my sweet sister.

“She was the youngest of us all, the pet and pearl of the whole family. Ralph was the first to notice this change in her, and to call our attention to it; and well do I remember the sudden flash of agitation that crossed her face when dear blundering Ralph said at breakfast one morning that he had noticed it ever since Philip had been here.

“Yes, truly Amy was ill, for when Philip’s eyes suddenly met hers, she rose from the table, tottered, and would have fallen, had he not caught her in his arms.

“Poor Ralph stared in amazement at the effect his words caused, and I—well, I gulped down the great sob that was rising in my throat, and, with a mighty effort, kept back the exclamation that had well-nigh escaped my lips, and mentally resolved that I would bury my own secret deeper in my

heart, and forbid its ever rising to disturb either her peace or Philip's.

"That day, as was my wont, whenever I was over-joyed or sad, I came to these ruins, and here, in this spot, safe from all intrusion, I sat for hours, my mind a blank, stunned with the blow which had so suddenly fallen upon me, and so ruthlessly torn my heart in twain; without feeling, without speech, a kind of dumbness upon me. By-and-by, the aching at my heart returned, and I began to wonder whether I was going to die, and to wish I might, since all my hopes were dashed to pieces. What was there to live for now? All my bright visions vanished, all interest ceased! How could I bear this dull hanging on to life? It was best to die.

"Whether in my agony I spoke aloud, I know not; but I was suddenly startled by a whisper near me—so close was the voice, that the words fell distinctly upon my ear—

"'No, not death. You will live, your presence on earth is needed, and your place in heaven is not ready. Shake off this mood, this weakness. Be strong; look a little ahead.'

"It was a lovely morning when I started from home," continued Ellen, "and I know not how many hours I had been sitting here.

The sun had passed the meridian, and the shadows were stealing along the grass and coming closer and closer to my feet. I shuddered a little, and felt awed by the strange whisper in my ear; but obeyed the voice that bade me look, and just there, Edith," said Ellen, "just behind where you are sitting, I beheld a dark mist, like a loose cloud, suspended some few feet from the earth, cone-shaped and large, and then I lost sight of all surrounding objects. I felt as though some spell was thrown over me; my eyes were rivetted. I had no power to look away from it. In another minute the mist cleared, the cone opened, and, to my astonished eyes, the interior of Amy's room appeared, and there, upon her own white curtained bed, lay the form of her who was so dear to us all. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing with difficulty, and upon her fair young brow lay the perspiration like dew-drops. Her auburn tresses, which had been her beauty and our pride, lay thrown about her pillow, loose and damp; a small crimson spot burnt on the thin white cheeks. Her lips, which had been so full and round, were slightly parted, and on the whole countenance was spread a faint sweet smile that seemed to speak of inward

peace and satisfaction. By her side sat Philip, holding one of her hands, his face buried in the pillow, while his slim frame was every now and then shaken by a convulsive sob, which pierced my heart and caused me to close my eyes.

“When I opened them again, I perceived the scene had changed. The room, the bed, and the bodily form of Amy had disappeared, and, in a flood of golden light, stood the spirit of my sister, like herself, yet so far surpassing her earthly beauty, that I sat wrapt in wonder and admiration. Above her head floated a number of beautiful girls, angelic in face and form, of various types of beauty, yet all bearing the same pure and holy expression that now rested on Amy’s face.

“‘Oh, Amy,’ I murmured, ‘why am I left?’ She turned and looked in my face, her own full of love, pity and encouragement; then, with outstretched arms, she leaned towards me, as though she would have clasped me to her, while the same whispering voice uttered the words again: ‘Live for others’ sakes, and you will find happiness.’

“Finally, she joined hands with the lovely band that hovered around her; they then rose higher and higher, floating away upwards.

Amy's raiment was blue, and soft as gossamer, and with as many shades of blue as are in the sky on a cloudless day. Higher and higher rose the beautiful vision out of my sight, leaving me alone, dazzled and bewildered by what I had seen.

"I knew all now. They loved each other, and though Amy might never be Philip's wedded wife in this life, she held his heart, and would carry it away with her, far out of my reach, and he would never be mine.

"But was Amy going to die? Then why did I linger here? Why had I spent so many hours here in morbid indulgence and moody despair?

"Amy die! the lovely and loving one, the light of our eyes, and joy of our home!

"'Heaven forgive me,' I murmured, 'and help me to forget myself, and strive to keep Amy here for Philip's sake. What will life hold for him if she goes? Why had I dared to covet a love that was already hers? I would dream of love no more.'

"I no longer wished to die, but hastened home, resolving to take a firm hold on life, to be cheerful and practical, trusting to a life of usefulness for my future happiness."

"And did you succeed, dear Ellen?" I

asked, as soon as I could speak, for my heart had been touched by the simple woman's story.

"Dear Edith," she replied, "in my idea of usefulness I fear I have failed; but in finding happiness I have succeeded, for, from that hour a new sense seemed to be awakened in me, and I have been made conscious of an interior development, and strange kinds of visions have from time to time been given me, and though from that day this world has felt less real than before, another realm, either of spirit or fantasy, has been opened to me, sometimes teeming with life and beauty, a realm of harmony and love. And it has been one of my odd fancies through life that the spirit of my gentle sister has never been far from me, but has imparted a sweetness to my life and shed a halo about my path, guiding me into the right, and strengthening my purposes for good, helping me to bear the disappointments of the present life, and giving me a firmer faith in that beyond.

"Amy gradually grew weaker, never complaining. Slowly the disease which so frequently assails the young, consumption, gained upon her naturally delicate frame, and by Christmas we all knew we must resign her.

“Philip stayed for some weeks after the little scene at the breakfast table; but Amy avoided him, and he left.

“He wrote constantly to Ralph, enquiring after Amy, and intimating that if we wished to see him he would come. During those days I watched assiduously for any sign, but could never discover any inclination on Amy’s part to see him, until she had taken to her bed, and knew that her end was near. Then she asked for him, and Ralph wrote.

“He came one night late. We were almost in despair lest he should be too late.

“Ralph and I left the room as he entered. I ventured to look up in his face as he wrung our hands. He was pale as marble and as mute, for he spoke not, and we left him.

“Half-an-hour afterwards he rang, and when the whole household, servants included, gathered round her bed, Philip withdrew, his face covered with his hands.

“As he passed me, I observed on the fourth finger of his left hand Amy’s ring, the only one she ever wore, and which had been with difficulty kept on the poor wasted hand, changed from finger to finger until it passed to his.

“What passed between them was known only to themselves. Whether Amy had per-

sistently avoided all love passages, knowing that they could never be united here, or whether she had discovered my secret, and so had forbidden him to speak until the last night, I know not, for he never spoke ; silent, crushed, and apparently hopeless, he stayed with us until after the funeral, and then left, with Amy's ring on his finger.

"He wrote to my brother once or twice every year for ten years, and then Ralph was summoned to his deathbed, just in time to witness the passing away of his spirit, to join hers in that sphere where all is understood."

By the time Ellen had finished her little history, the short autumn day was drawing to a close, the sun was already beginning to sink behind the western hills, and the brightness of the day had departed, although the gnats still carried on their wild sports in the air, and kept up an insane frolic in our faces, defying the gloom and the mist that had overtaken us. There was a chill in the air, and the old grey towers of the castle began to look ghostly in the twilight, and the rustling of the ivy, as the small birds sought their roosting places, caused me to start more than once, and I was considerably relieved on seeing Ralph's big form just then bearing down upon us.



CHAPTER III.

"The boughs overhead seemed shadowy with solemn thoughts as well as with rustling leaves.

"It was awful to reflect how many sermons had been written there."

N. HAWTHORNE.

I HAD now been some months with these dear people, and had grown so attached to them that it was with difficulty I could bring myself to think of returning home. Far away from the glare and excitement of the City life, the calm of their home-circle had settled upon my spirit, and the pure fresh air had brought me renewed health.

Ferndale was charming. I began to dream and sometimes imagine myself mistress of such a sweet home as this, and content with just such a kind, honest heart as Ralph's to trust in.

Ellen had a kind of fascination for me. Strolling over the moorland by day, or sitting

in the gloaming, she had told me many more of those marvellous visions which seemed to her more real than life itself. On our return our conversation generally drifted into spirit-land, and soon all the region round became for me enchanted ground. Now and then I was brought down to the common level. My cousin Maurice, in his letters, would sneeringly ask whether I intended to cast in my lot with a Somersetshire farmer, and devote the rest of my days to "suckle calves and chronicle small beer?"

"Ellen," said Ralph one morning, "this is Miss Maitland's last day, and we have not been over the Abbey ruins."

"Miss Maitland has already seen so many ruins," replied Ellen, "that she will carry away the impression that the whole country is a ruin, and perhaps she may feel a repugnance to walking among tombs."

But by this time I had grown familiar with all kinds of abnormal experiences, and declared myself ready to accompany them, and began to look forward with a morbid pleasure to walking over the graves of my forefathers; for, while I trod the dust of a defunct generation, I thought I could give my imagination wild play, and, perhaps, be able

to call up some of the ghosts of the long ago, and so settle the question to my own satisfaction for ever.

I thought from the first that Ellen showed an unwillingness to go; but seeing my enthusiastic state of feeling, she consented.

The Abbey stood but a little way from the village, and a short brisk walk soon brought us within sight of the gloomy, yet picturesque old ruin.

Parts of the walls, the gables, and an archway or two still stood, covered with thick masses of ivy, haunts for the bats and owls; and a raven occasionally paid a visit, croaking hideously just before a death—so some of the oldest of the inhabitants affirmed, for a good deal of superstition lurked in the minds of these villagers, and marvellous tales were afloat respecting the old Abbey, untenanted since the time of Queen Mary.

Here the Protestant fathers fled for secret refuge, and here, in the time of the monks, they avowed a cross was made from the wood on which our Saviour suffered, and that no fewer than thirteen persons were cured of blindness by it.

All this was said, and much more, such as that the shades of the good fathers were still

seen on moonlight nights, hovering round their former hiding-places ; also, that the night before Squire Cross died, who lived about a mile from the Abbey, and had Catholic proclivities, a monk was seen to issue from a supposed vault under one of the old archways, and take the road to Squire Cross's house, becoming invisible on the steps of the Squire's hall door.

Let us hope he came with good intent ; perhaps to absolve the Squire from that purgatory which had been the old man's bugbear for so many years.

Adjoining the Abbey was a moat, in which the fish had grown to an alarming size, the lord of the manor not often residing in the neighbourhood, and these villagers were honest people ; so the perch and pike had been allowed to show their fierce-looking heads, sometimes to the terror of the sun-burnt little urchins who played about its brink.

As we passed out of the sunlight into the shadows thrown out by the opposite walls and gables, Ellen shivered, and a sadder mood than usual came over her ; the gloom and some associations connected with the place seemed to depress her.

keness to my lost father, and in the one became merged in the other, lost to me at all. How I was disappointed his face then; the broad head, on which Time had left its mark; the stately head, from whose long hair fell in thick masses black; the clear grey eyes, with their searching gaze, dimmed somewhat by thought that must have been never a look but of kindness. His large powerful frame showed signs of decay; the only marks that upon him were the lines hanging about his mouth, and his gait, observable as in his younger days he must have been a man; to my child's eyes the monument of all that was noble. I was never tired of gazing at him, though others thought him a little old, with a will that was law to me. To me it was a delight to be in my master and commander's presence, the fields, the hills, the rocks were our favorite haunts, sought for and found.

It will be seen that the object of the story is to show the question of the relation of the two.

I thought that the best way to show the relation of the two was to show the relation of the two.

The story was for a little while a story, and a little while a story, and a little while a story, and a little while a story.

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Upon my remarking that her everyday mood had forsaken her, she replied that she never came under an old archway without feeling oppressed with a nameless dread, and that she never walked among these tombs without a conviction that the place was haunted by unhappy spirits.

I was in no mood to be easily depressed, and laughingly said that I feared that we were not likely to encounter a dead monk, nor to see the dust of our forefathers shape itself and rise in judgment against us for walking over their ashes, for high noon it was, and midnight is the hour "when graveyards gape, and ghosts do prowl."

"Oh, dear Edith," said Ellen, "it is not fear, but a strange, unhealthy magnetism seems to cling to these stones, which affects me, bringing me into sympathy with the sin and suffering that were experienced here."

"And I," I exclaimed, by way of lifting the gloom from her brow, "I can think of nothing but high mass and incense, and jewelled altar-cloths, of cardinals' robes, pious monks, white-veiled nuns, holy water, and all the gorgeous pomp of their show-days and festivals. Oh, fie on you, Ellen, not to associate yourself with all this glory

and holiness, instead of the sin and suffering."

"Nevertheless," said she, "the thought haunts me that if these walls could speak, they would startle us with their secrets."

We rambled on, through the gloom and shadows, stopping every now and then, and trying to decipher some inscriptions, which were now almost obliterated, on the old tombstones.

Soon we came to a flight of narrow stone steps which led (so our guide, a boy of twelve, told us) to what had once been a small room, and had been used either for a confessional or penance room.

So narrow and winding was it that there seemed scarcely space for the slim form of Ellen to pass, and Ralph preferred not to risk his portly person by trying to climb it, but chose rather to join a group of gipsies, who had at that moment strolled in at the gateway.

Ellen and I, with some difficulty, mounted the worn old steps, and found ourselves within the broken walls of the once dreaded chamber.

From this height we had an extensive view of the country round ; the fields and woods,

now bathed in sunlight, were enchanting; the rivers and lakes sparkled as with ten thousand gems. We had both sunk down upon the nearest block of stone, and were silently enjoying the lovely prospect.

"Ellen," I said, "will you not indulge a morbid fancy that has possessed me, and tell me another of your strange experiences? This seems the very place to talk on such subjects."

She directed my attention to a large old-fashioned mansion standing apart, at some distance from the village, and surrounded by high and massive walls. The house stood on low ground, looked unoccupied and neglected, and would have been hidden from view had not the leaves, which were now fast falling, left the trees comparatively bare.

"Is it a private mansion, or is it a hospital?" I enquired.

"No, it's a private mad-house," said Ellen, with a shudder.

"And are the patients there now?" I asked.

"No, they were removed some six months ago to a larger and healthier place. There had been some rumour concerning the death of a young lady, and the whisper went round that all was not fair and honest there. The

authorities were compelled to take the matter up, and it ended in the removing of the poor creatures to another locality. They were taken away during the night in covered vans and closed carriages, and, since then, the house and grounds have been sold to a speculating builder, who has no objection to visitors looking over it. Soon after it came into his hands I went."

"And what did you see or hear?" I exclaimed, impatiently, for I saw by her abstracted manner that she had something to tell.





CHAPTER IV.

"I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be,
When thou liest howling."

SHAKSPEARE.

"**I** HAD gone alone to the house early in the afternoon. After wandering about the grounds for some time I entered the mansion by a side door, which closed after me. I here confess that I felt a little nervous as I passed through the empty rooms and down the long corridors, which echoed to my footsteps, sending a slight tremor through my frame. Upbraiding myself for my weakness, and trying to shake off, as well as I could, the unearthly sensations that were stealing over me, I entered a small bedroom. In one corner stood a rough looking stool, the only thing approaching to furniture I had seen. I seated myself, for a singular feeling of numbness

had seized my limbs, and a drowsiness had stolen over my senses. I struggled against it as long as I could; but, at last, I yielded, and thought I slept.

“Soon I had a sensation of waking, and of being in my own room at home; then I seemed to be taken by the hand and led to the very house I was then in, only that it appeared to be inhabited by the poor wretches that had just left.

“As we entered the house I begged my guide to cover my eyes lest I should see what I thought would drive me mad too. Passing through many rooms, I stopped my ears lest I should hear anything, and I almost held my breath, for a feeling of horror had crept over me at the sight of this doomed place, or doomed people rather.

“My eyes were opened, and I found myself standing by the bed of an unhappy woman—a woman chained and fettered, upon a rude couch, and alone. No eyes were upon her, save my guide’s and mine, and that unseen eye that searches the heart and sees what is done in secret.

“Ah, it was a sight that might cause an angel to weep. How shall I describe it? My tears were blinding me. The woman

was mad—hopelessly mad—a raving maniac. I cannot picture to you the despair as I saw it revealed on her face; the result of fierce passion and resentment; of bitterness and disappointment, rage, and vain strugglings to be free.

“I read it by every wrinkle on the woman’s face. She had been young and fair once—a long while ago; she had forgotten that with many other things. She was proud and haughty; of a proud and noble family; she remembered that a long time, but had forgotten that, too.

“Her father and mother had their own plans, and made their own arrangements for her future. She knew it, and she resented it; but that was also forgotten. I read the traces of that resentment upon her brow. She became disobedient, she refused to form a contract for a brilliant marriage because she did not love the man.

“What an absurd notion! What an unheard of thing! to refuse to do that which she was bidden. ‘Foolish girl, you will have to pay dearly for this,’ said the father. ‘Did I ever dream that child of mine would be disobedient, and bring her foolish notions of love into the question?’

“Yes, she did dare, because she was a child of his. She had a will of her own.

“She was waking now, clutching at the air, and struggling to be free.

“I waited until she slept again, and then read another passage in her history.

“’Twas a convent, and her gaoler had received his orders. He, the natural father, could do nothing with her, so had turned her over to a spiritual father, who would understand the way to bring her to reason.

“She was at confession, and I heard she loved another, that was the secret, and that other was poor.

“That was the sin—his poverty. The priest tried to make the girl understand. He argued with her on this great sin—the man’s pretensions to love such as her, and her refusing to marry one who stood so high, and was so endowed with riches.

“I cannot go through that confession, it would not profit us if I did ; suffice it to say, that he, the spiritual father, knew her secret ; he had got to the heart of the disease, and now he began to apply his remedies, for a perfect cure was to be made, or she entered her father’s door no more.

“Poor heart, I knew it would break—I knew

it would. How she moaned just then ; perhaps, in her dreams, the heart-breaking of that time came back to her.

“ I suppose he (the priest) overdid it. He was a very zealous man. He knew that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; so he took strong measures to purify and purge this disobedient girl’s heart and thoughts ; but he carried them beyond the point of human endurance. I read that in the long line which went across her brow.

“ Her next home was the mad-house.

“ Here I waited until she awoke, and her features were in full play ; then I looked into the poor dimmed eyes and saw, by the lines about her mouth, what she had suffered.

“ Here a piercing shriek. ‘ Take your hands off ! I am the daughter of—and I am going to be married, and don’t stand in my way or——’ Ending in another shriek.

“ This had been her life for many years. Heart-broken and reason-dethroned, she had been battling with imaginary foes and enemies, making the place ring with her cries for help. Half her time they had kept her bound because she was ‘ dangerous,’ and was thus less trouble, and required no attendant.

“She was dying. She had fairly worn out the body before its time, rent and torn it; and was just ready to step out and be borne away by the angel who stood by her side.

“I watched them earnestly. It was not worth while to disturb the governor or the matron of the establishment. Let them sleep; it makes no difference, except that they will be some hundreds of pounds the poorer until her place is filled by another.

“‘Marion! Marion!’ she heard as I did, and a smile flitted across her poor worn face.

“‘Marion!’ There came a look of intelligence on her countenance. She knew the voice.

“‘Marion!’ The poor lips part with a smile. Ah, if she had had a nurse or a doctor then, they would have said that she died very quietly and calmly; and doubtless, in the letter which went to her friends, they described her peaceful end, but would not be able to account for it.

“I was not looking at the poor shell now, but at another face, which was emerging out of the crumpled piece of wrinkled skin—a face lighted up, as though a lamp shone upon it, with a surprised look, timid, and turning every way to catch the sound of that voice which spoke just now.

“ ‘ Foster ! ’ She spoke the name very low and it answered her again.

“ Bending over her tenderly and softly, he, whom she called Foster, tells her that her days of suffering and anguish are ended ; that what the world calls death, and dreads most, has proven her best friend ; that she has entered upon a new life, and that henceforth she is free !

“ Here she lost her hold on reason again and thought she was still in the convent cell, passing again through that dreadful time—when the deadly sin, as the priest called it, first began to dethrone her reason.

“ ‘ Don’t disturb me. I dare not listen to you. I have sinned—leave me alone to pray. I dreamed I heard his voice, and that I answered it. I spoke his name. I shall be punished, and must do penance for this. I must not listen to you. I have counted all my beads. Is there no forgiveness ? I will ask the priest—surely he will forgive me now. What is it I hear ? Free ! What does it mean ? Free to think, and to think of him.’

“ As her spiritual senses began slowly to awaken, she heard the familiar voice again, which sent a thrill of joy through her heart, and she answered it back with a feeling of

delight that was strange to her. Anon she was thrown back again into the convent cell, not quite able to keep a perfect control over her mind and thoughts, or disentangle herself from the earth's surroundings.

“Soon I beheld two angel women leaning over this newborn form. The soothing, healing, influences of these guardian angels assisted her in restoring the shattered mind, and in connecting the broken threads again, and gathering up lost associations, until when she again heard her name called, she fully understood that it was not the voice of her priest or goaler, but that of Foster and of love.

“‘Poor child ! thy sins be at the door of those who have so grievously sinned against thee. Thou art delivered, just awakening into life, and crossing the threshold of a new existence. Thy prison-house thou hast left for ever, and thou art come home, home !’

“These words had an effect like magic upon her, and she answered the angel woman—

“‘Home ! What does it mean ?’

“‘A place of safety where no harm can reach thee—where thou art watched over, and made to feel secure ; a place of rest, where thy spirit, wearied by thy hard and

painful journey, shall repose and gather in renewed strength.

“ Of a bitter cup hast thou been made to drink, but here in thy home shalt thou find rest and peace. Here shall the brightness of thy youth return, and here shalt thou be free to allow the gushings of that fervent love that rises up in thy heart.

“ I will tell thee something else—thy friend and lover Foster is near thee. Thou didst indeed hear his voice, and he is even now waiting, with beating heart and throbbing bosom, to tell thee how long he has waited and watched for thy coming. Therefore. banish for ever the thought of that convent cell, think no more of that horrid nightmare endured in the mad-house, from which thou art escaped, and shake off all fear, and come with us, for a circle of happy faces awaits thee.

“ Yonder a banquet is prepared for thee and much rejoicing awaits thy entrance to the home of thy love ! ’ ”

* * * * *

On descending from the tower we found Ralph waiting for us, with a troupe of gipsies at his heels. While Ellen and I had been in the clouds conversing on things abnormal

and mysterious, Ralph and the strollers had been most decidedly on the earthly plane. Having emptied the good-natured fellow's pockets of all his loose cash, they had in exchange informed him of a certain young lady, who had been very near him lately, whose hair was as black as the raven's wing, with eyes that were softer than they seemed, and softest when they rested on him, and the initial of whose name one of the gipsies would tell him if a certain piece of silver were to cross her hand, whereupon the said sum unreluctantly coming in contact with the brown palm, Ralph learned that the letters were E. M.

Whether he thought then, or whether at any future time, it ever dawned upon the good man's mind that E. M. were the initials of his guest, and that the gipsy knew it, I know not, for Ralph showed no sign.

I left next morning, and Edith Maitland remains Edith Maitland to this day.





AGNES HEATH.

CHAPTER I.

*"But she is mute, for her false mate
Hath fled and left her desolate."*

SHELLEY.

IT was a wild stormy night, the wind had been gradually rising since morning, and was blowing a gale now, and the rain, coming in sudden and fitful gusts during the day, beat in pitiless fury against the window panes of a lone and dilapidated cottage, standing on the outskirts of a bleak and barren common.

In this house on a November night in 1828, sat a woman alone.

The room in which she sat had a comfortable and cosy look, spite of the storm without. Though not richly furnished, it showed

a taste and elegance in the arrangements of the few pieces of furniture that it contained, and the various articles of needlework, specimens of art, drawings, books, etc., were grouped together in artistic form, as only the hand of an artist could have done.

These with the figure at the table were just made discernible by the light of a dimly burning lamp. Upon the table were a few books, and one or two half-open letters, yellow with age. They seemed to have been frequently read, and were worn with much handling. The fire in the grate, left unnoticed and unattended, had burnt its heart out, with only a few live coals left to show the hollow dark where the heat and brightness had been; yet the woman seemed invulnerable to all outward discomfort; her spirit wandered to scenes long ago enacted, and had withdrawn itself from all the objects surrounding her. She looked as though she waited for something that came not, as though the weariness of hope long deferred had isolated her from all human sympathies; even the raging elements had failed to arouse her.

The old house had been untenanted for many years until the last six months. Stand-

ing some distance from any other habitation, exposed to the sea, and unsheltered from the winds, it had been left in solitude, the sport of the two elements.

Cold and cheerless must have been the heart of the owner of this house, who had it erected on this wild waste ; a gloomy fanatic perhaps, who for some sin, real or imaginary, did a life-long penance by secluding himself within it.

Within sight of it, at the base of a range of hills, stood the pretty little village of Eaton, and there, sheltered homes stood in cheerful contrast to the dreary house on which the merciless storm now redoubled its fury. The tempest was rolling on ; far off from behind the mountains, grand and solemn peals of thunder were resounding from hill top to hill top, echoing terribly ; one moment thrilling the heart with a nameless dread, the next lifting it up with ecstasy and admiration of nature, so wild and fearful, so awfully grand !

Yet to her who sat in the cottage to-night there was no outward evidence of either fear or wonder. She might have been a corpse, so still, so motionless she sat.

And now, when that lightning flash has

passed, we will look at her, and between the thunder peals we will listen, if perchance she speaks.

Move your head a little, Agnes Heath, let us see your face, tell us why you are alone this fearful night, and why the storm has failed to rouse you from this morbid influence that holds you in its thrall.

Agnes Heath, though approaching middle age, still retains traces of the beauty of former years, and which, when she moved in the fashionable world, was so much admired. Her rich brown hair has escaped from the comb, and is falling about her shoulders in abundance. A few silver threads are beginning to shew themselves, which enhance, rather than otherwise, the beauty of that dark mass. Her large brown eyes have in them a well of tenderness and feeling, notwithstanding the sorrow that overshadows them. The mouth, delicate and sensitive, trembles a little as thought after thought chase through her brain, and as she lifts her small white hand to her throbbing brow, she utters a low moan, and murmurs something to herself. She seems aroused from her trance-like silence, and awakened to the danger that menaces her.

"Merciful heavens, how the storm rages,

and the sea, it is foaming, roaring, moaning, like some huge monster in its death throes, another peal of thunder shaking the cottage to its foundation, another blast which threatens the whole house with sudden destruction."

A slight shiver ran through her frame, and rising, she drew up the blind and sat down to contemplate the scene with a listlessness that bespoke an utter indifference to either life or death.

"God help the poor traveller, if such there be, on the moor to-night," she murmurs; "there's been no storm like this since seventeen years ago. Seventeen years ago to-night, there was just such a storm as this; and that night all happiness was swept out of my life! The hopes that had grown with my youth, and had been fostered and cherished in my heart from my childhood, were then torn up by ruthless fate! What is the thunder to me? I fear not the lightning's flash; what have I to dread?"

"Hope within me is dead, buried amid the wreck and the ruins of that night. The fire of ambition, that for awhile inflamed my brain and reconciled me to life, is quenched, and the ashes of a burnt-out passion for fame are bitterness to me now.

“My love, my poor love, so cruelly torn from me, has been left to die, uttering its cry fainter and fainter. What is earth to me now, but a dreary waste? And if to-night the ground should open and swallow me up, have I not prayed for death in any form, since life is a burden?”

She relapsed into silence again. Shall we enter the inner temple of her life and read there what it has been? Yes, my clairvoyant visions are brightening, and I behold a former scene.





CHAPTER II.

"The sky was blue as the summer sea,
The depths were cloudless over head,
The air was calm as it could be,
There was no sight or sound of dread."

SHELLEY.

"This fair day smiles to see
All those who love."

ON the banks of a beautiful river in the north of Devon, I see two children, a boy and a girl. The maiden is about thirteen years of age, and the boy somewhat older. It is late in the afternoon, the scene is a pleasant one, and I love to linger over it.

The soft September sun is hovering over the fair girl's head, rippling with golden lines her auburn hair, and lighting up the brilliant colour on her cheeks. The many tinted branches of the trees around them enhance the beauty of the scene. The grass at their feet is hidden amid the falling leaves that are

scattered about them. Save the lowing of the cattle in the distance, and the merry chirp of the cricket on the grass, there is no sound to disturb the quiet around them. The winding course of the river, intermingling with fine domains of wood and pasturage, excludes from view the village at the base of the hills. Only one house is visible to them, a pretty white stone building, simple in style, but beautiful in its simplicity. Climbing roses, honeysuckles, and a thousand other sweet flowers throw their delicious perfume to the air, and the gentle breeze wafts it where the boy and girl sit, and the softly flowing river kisses the flowers on its banks, and murmurs to the listening ears of the boy and girl tales of happiness to come.

The boy has been reading a poem, a little romance of love and constancy on the woman's part, but of faithlessness and neglect on that of her lover. Presently he throws the book away with an impatient gesture, exclaiming—

“There, Agnes, I have read the poem to please you, but I hate poetry.”

“Hate poetry?” cried the girl, turning her soft brown eyes upon him, which are now filled with tears, called up by the pathetic story the boy had read. “Oh, Walter, I

have been charmed with the music of the poem, and yet as you read I could not help my tears, it was so sad. Walter," says she, brushing away her tears, and looking timidly into the boy's face, "I mean to write poetry some day, and then I shall want you to like it; half the happiness of my life will consist in your reading it and liking it."

The boy laughs a satirical laugh, and is about to say something in derision, but seeing the earnest, yet distressed look on the beautiful face that is gazing into his, his mood suddenly changes, and seizing her hand with an impulsiveness that is for the time sincere, he kisses it warmly, protesting he will always love and protect her. He had no one in the wide world but her and her dear mother, and when he grew up to be a man, and if they two should be left alone, that mother, so good and kind to him now, should look down from heaven and see how brave and good he would be to the dear girl left in his care. How he would stand between her and all harm! He would study for her sake until he became a scholar; he would work for her that she might be rich. She should have costly raiment, and he would gem her hair with jewels, and she who had been his little sister

until her mother died, should one day be his wife and his queen. She should be a poetess if she wished. They would travel, see other lands, would leave the leaden skies of England, and walk beneath Italy's bright blue dome, and bask where the purple grapes hang pendant overhead, rest amid the fragrant golden fruit of the orange groves, and gaze upon the gemmed waters of the lakes, on to fair Venice, and the galleries of Florence and Rome; the whole world was theirs. Oh, yes, she should be a poetess, his pride and joy.

So did the enthusiastic boy, in the fulness of his pride and ambition, settle their future, while the girl listened with a timid pleasure to the musical tones of the boy's voice, and saw with trembling delight the glowing pride in his handsome face; and all the while the sanguine river gurgled and rippled, saying "amen" to their wildest anticipations.

Presently a shade came over the girl's face.

"Walter," said she, "how long is it since your mother died? Can you remember?"

"How can I ever forget?" said the boy. "But why do you ask, Agnes? have I not since then found a mother in yours?"

"Can you remember your mother's face?" asked the girl, tenderly.

“ Oh, yes,” replied Walter, perfectly, “ I used to think it the most beautiful face in the world, and that when I grew old enough, I would paint it, and hang the picture in my own room that it might be the first thing I looked at in the morning and the last at night. It was a pure and gentle face, pale and delicate, with the slightest tint of colour on it; her long curls clustered about her white throat, and hung upon her shoulders, and her voice, oh, so sweet and tender! Ah,” said the boy, overcome almost to tears, “ if I could hear it once again.”

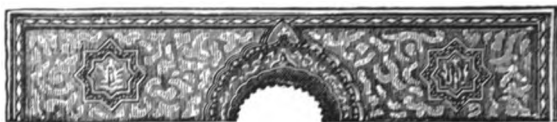
“ Walter,” said the girl, drawing nearer to him and speaking with subdued breath, “ I heard her last night, and I wanted to tell you.”

The boy looked amazed, and would have spoken, but Agnes continued—

“ I saw her face and heard her voice; she spoke to me about you; will you hear what she said to me, Walter?”

The boy gave a reluctant consent.





CHAPTER III.

"She turned to me and smiled,
That smile was paradise."

SHELLEY.

"**I** HAD gone to bed, and had put out my light, when I felt a peculiar calmness, a sensation of perfect peace and rest, not sleep, and the room became flooded with light. I looked, and above me, and gazing down upon me, was a face that surpassed anything I had ever seen in its purity and loveliness—a youthful, almost a girl's, but an angel's face. Presently I saw a small white hand, which held from above some half-dozen long rose sprays; trailing branches, something like ivy sprays, but studded with roses and rose buds; warm-tinted roses, flushed with many colours, beautiful and bright as the summer itself, and in marvellous abundance. These lovely roses seemed like a messenger of love to me,

from a hallowed sphere ; they encircled my brow, and were thrown about my bed. Afterwards, the extreme ends of those beautiful trailing boughs were caught up by other hands, and were crossed and interlaced until they formed a network above me, every shred of which I felt was held by an invisible hand. I was unable to take my eyes from the face that bent over mine. Underneath this canopy of love and roses, my heart expanded to the heavenly warmth that diffused itself around me ; my spirit was emancipated from its mortal form, and rejoiced in the joy that I think must be felt by the angels of God in the heavenly mansions. I was induced to speak, and I asked what it meant. Then I heard a voice, and, Walter, it was your mother's voice, and she uttered a prayer for you.

“ THE PRAYER.

“ ‘ Still with the ever-abiding love that only mothers feel, I watch thee on thy way. I try to inspire thee with thoughts and desires that shall elevate thee above things sensual ; and I pray to thy Father in heaven that He will be the guide of thy youth, shield thee from evil ways, enlighten thy understanding, that thou mayest perceive the things that are for

thy good, and give thee heavenly wisdom, to enable thee to choose the good, and refuse the evil. May thy heart be established in truth, so that, when temptation is strong upon thee, or disappointment or sorrow shall come, thou mayest endure with fortitude thine earthly lot. I pray that thy manhood may be fruitful in good works, that thou mayest be a ready and a willing servant of thy heavenly Master, that the spiritual gifts that are within thee, may be developed for the good of those around thee, that one desire shall possess thee, the elevation and the happiness of thy fellows; so that, if thy life reach to old age, thou mayest look back without regret, and forward with hope, thy spiritual vision being opened to see the faces that wait for thee, thine ears made ready to hear the music of the heavenly spheres, that the failing of thine earthly senses shall be the opening of the spiritual, and thou shalt stand on a higher and happier plain. Oh, Heavenly Father, bless my boy! Oh, guardian angels sustain and help him on his way, and as thou hast seen fit to take me from him on his earthly journey, let one stronger than I fill my place.'"

While the girl was speaking, her face and

head were turned upwards with a fixed and earnest gaze, as though she expected the vision to be repeated.

A holy light had come into her face, and her whole countenance shone with an unearthly lustre, which, to the boy's astonished senses, seemed to have transfigured her from the Agnes of yesterday into the likeness of some saint that might at any moment be wafted upwards to the heavenly sphere she had been talking about.

"Agnes," said the boy, half-affrighted, "do you see her now?"

"No, dear Walter, but I felt as though her presence were near me, and that impelled me to utter her prayer."

"It was but a dream, Agnes," said he, "and yet it was like her prayer; that is how she used to pray for me."

The girl suddenly threw her arms about his neck, and whispered—

"What does it mean, Walter? Will she come again?"

Here the ringing of a bell caused them both to start to their feet, exclaiming—

"That's the dinner bell. Mamma calls us," and they hastened on to the white house by the river, and I lost them.



CHAPTER IV.

"The very darkness shook as with the blast,
As if the sea, and sky, and earth
Rejoiced with new-born liberty."

THE white house by the river is no longer bathed in the warm September sunlight; the sky is a leaden colour, and there is a heavy hanging gloom in the atmosphere. The flowers that had been yielding their sweet perfumes all through the summer months, had exhausted themselves, and had been, for the last few weeks, one by one, slowly giving up the ghost. The trees were almost leafless. The river, the gentle river, flowed on still; but though I listen, I hear no tales of love to-night, but slowly, dumbly it steals along past the white house, for there are no children on its banks to-day to mingle the music of their voices with its murmurs of love and constancy. The only things outside the

house that tend to brighten the eye and cheer the heart, are a few late rosebuds struggling hard against the November gloom to open their soft white petals, and give out the last remnant of their sweetness on the cold dull air.

Generous, loving roses! there's a voice in your sweet breath that speaks to the heart in cheerful accents, bidding it fear not; for though the winter's frost may nip and chill, shrivel and wither this year's buds, yet shall the balmy spring bring renewed life, and fresh flowers for the new summer. With this promise we will look inside.

* * * * *

In a cheerful room, lighted up by a bright fire, sits a lady about fifty years of age. Her face is pale and worn with care, but is still sweet and beautiful, and her small and delicate hands are trembling, either from some mental emotion or physical weakness. A book has fallen from her grasp, and lies unheeded on her lap, and her eyes are gazing on a young lady who stands by the table; and who is looking with pleasurable excitement at a charming white dress, spread out for their mutual inspection.

the likeness to my lost father
time the one became merged
so not lost to me at all.
have painted his face the
forehead, on which Time
traces; the stately head
rather long hair fell in
his neck; the clear grey
look in them (almost equal
their searching gaze), did
a passing thought that might
though never a look but

His large powerful features
signs of decay; the only
had left upon him were
deepening about his mouth
drooping attitude, observed
In his younger days he had been
handsome man; to my eyes
embodiment of all that was
true. I was never tired
and though others thought of
man, with a will that
small circle, to me it was
He was my master and
lessons over, the fields,
and the rocks were our
There we sought for an

lighten the eyes and
 few late rosebuds
 the November gloom
 petals, and give out
 their sweetness on the

as! there's a voice in
 speaks to the heart in
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“Mamma,” said Agnes, for it is our Agnes of the river side, though grown almost beyond our recognition, “Mamma, is it not beautiful? I think Walter, despite his fastidious taste, must pronounce it perfect, and Walter’s taste is exquisite,” and, without waiting to be answered, the happy girl chatters on with flushed cheeks and beaming eyes. Our little Agnes has developed into a tall, handsome girl, and as she stands gazing on her bridal dress, with her rich brown hair flowing about her shoulders, with her pearly teeth, and a rich colour in her cheeks, she is a picture that an artist might have copied with pride.

Looking up at her mother’s colourless face, a tremulous fear comes over her. She sees the dear eyes filled with tears, and the white hands tremble with suppressed emotion, while the mother, looking at the girl so fondly, and yet so sadly, exclaims—

“God forgive me if I take no pleasure in this wedding. My heart is heavy to-night!”

“Oh, dear, dear mother,” cried Agnes, coming to her side, and letting her arms steal gently round her mother’s neck, “let not these tears fall upon our joy, and damp Walter’s happiness and mine; we shall not be

long apart. Has not Walter promised that you shall live the winter with us in London, and that we shall spend the summer months in this dear old home by the river? Cannot you spare me one three months for his sake?"

"Oh, my child, it is not the parting for so short a time that I dread. It is an ominous feeling of coming evil that I cannot describe."

"A what?" cries the girl, with pallid lips, "what is it, mother? Speak."

"Alas! alas!" gasps the poor mother, "I have no faith in Walter."

"Oh, mother, mother!" sobs the girl, lifting her arms above her head, and clasping her hands together, "this is cruel;" and for some moments she sobs aloud.

The mother, too much agitated for words, strokes the beautiful head with a trembling hand, while she presses the other to her side, as though a pain has struck her there, and the two mingle their sobs together.

"Mother," exclaims the girl at last, looking up, "I thought your faith in Walter was restored, as mine is; have not his last letters been all that we can desire? and has he not frankly acknowledged his errors, and deeply regretted all the pain he has caused us? O, why cannot you pardon him, and take him

to your heart as fondly as you did when his own mother died ? ”

“ My poor child,” replies the fond mother, “ it is not lack of love ; if I have yielded a consent against my better judgment to this marriage, it was for love of you. I have seen how completely your heart has been given to Walter, and the great faith you have always held in being able to guide him to a purer life, and to withhold him from making shipwreck of a noble nature. I know his weakness, and I know your strength. Heaven forgive me if I have erred in consenting to the sacrifice of your life.”

“ Sacrifice of my life,” replies Agnes rising in anger. “ I have no life apart from his. Say no more, my mother ; I am strong to bear with him whatever is in store for us, be it good or be it evil.”

The mother resumed her book, under pretence of reading, and the girl sat down, crossed her hands, and thought over and over again of the old days when they were children, and roamed the hills together ; of the river side when Walter promised to be so brave and true ; of the vision of his mother, and her prayer for him when they were so happy together, before he went away to the

great city, and fell so grievously into vice and sin ; and how when she should be his wife, she would help him to become yet the noble man he promised to be before the great temptation came. “ For he has always loved me, he has always loved me,” she repeated to herself ; “ but where can he be ?” she cried, starting up and looking at the timepiece. “ It’s past the hour.” Listening for footsteps, the only sounds that met her ear were the rising of the wind and the dashing of rain against the window shutter.

The girl went across to where her mother was sitting, took the two small trembling hands in hers, pressed her lips to her brow, kissed her pale worn cheek, and then quietly laid her head on her mother’s bosom and waited.

The storm raged without ; the wind had suddenly risen, and the dull leaden coloured sky, whose clouds had hung over the white house all day, were now driven hither and thither, from east to west without mercy. Round the gables, and through the trees, came unearthly shrieks, like human cries for help.

The fire, that had burnt so brightly and steadily awhile ago, now flared as with affright, while the flames leapt high up the

chimney, as though anxious to mingle in the roar and general havoc without. And the river, that harmless, noiseless river, had it been brooding all day, and would it turn treacherous now? Already it was beginning to show signs of discontent—fretting, bubbling, muttering, then hurrying on recklessly, rising, swelling, impatient of constraint; now touching the sides of the banks with a half-resolve to break through the restraint of years; rushing on again angrily, madly, breaking down and carrying away in its frenzy portions of its banks, small trees, shrubs, and all the tiny plants and flowers that in tenderer moods it had nourished and cherished; returning, boiling, foaming, feeling its own mighty power, and greedy now to glut itself to the full. On, on, it came in its mad haste, flooding the meadows; reached the gate of the white house; hesitated not, but without mercy swooped down the garden path, carrying the little white gate before it. Crash, and, "Great heavens," cried Agnes, "what was that?"

Another moment, and the affrighted servants were in the room; the weight of water had broken in the windows, and the lower stories were flooded.

Agnes stood aghast as the old servants described the scene below. She had no words for them; with parted lips and blanched cheeks she could only gasp—

“Walter! oh, God, is he safe?”

A faint sharp cry caused her to turn just in time to save her mother from falling. She had fainted, the old servant said, and was unconscious. Her breath came faint and quick, her lips were purple, and large drops of perspiration stood on her brow. Agnes called her by every endearing term, but there came no response.

Meanwhile the rage and fury of the storm without were unabated, and the water was rising and dashing against the window, and forcing itself into the room in which they were.

Cut off from all help, what should she do? Lifting her hands and eyes to Heaven she uttered one loud cry for help; then, with a strength that was new to her, she took up the almost lifeless form in her arms, bidding the half-dazed woman take the lamp and lead the way to the upper storey. Laying her precious burden on her own bed, Agnes, while the women wailed and lamented, tried every means in her power to restore consciousness but in vain. Fainter and fainter came the

breath. What should she do? She wrung her hands in agony. She could hear the rushing of water in the rooms below, the crash of glass, and of doors. Would it reach them, and would that night be their last? Walter, had he, too, been carried away by a cruel fate?

What judgment was abroad? Should they be separated now, when their happiness was so near to its completion?

“Oh, mother, oh, Walter!” moaned the poor girl, “why have I lived for this?”

So passed the hours, when towards morning the storm somewhat subsided. The wind had well nigh spent itself, and the clouds had emptied themselves into the river, and the water had risen to within a few feet of the room in which the four women were imprisoned.

With the first streak of dawn, Agnes ventured to look out on the waste of waters that lay all around; the sight was appalling; there was no help near. She closed the window with a shudder, and bent over her mother again, whose life was slowly ebbing away.

By-and-by a boat came along, and was at once despatched for necessary aid. A physician arrived, and with the messenger

came a letter for Agnes, directed in a well-known hand, and posted some days ago in London; it should have reached her sooner had not all communication with the White House been cut off.

Wrought up almost to frenzy, she tore open the letter, and by the dim morning light read—

“DEAR AGNES,—

“Let me write the dear name once more, though it be the last time. All is over between us. I am more involved, and have been weaker than you, with your trusting heart and loving nature, have ever dreamed of. I have sinned deeply against you and my own soul.

“A month ago I thought to free myself from my fetters, to wrench the self-made chains that bound me, and take the happiness that had been waiting for me since childhood. But, alas; I am too hopelessly entangled, too fatally bound, ever to free myself. I have disregarded my mother’s prayer and yours. I have been a fool and a knave.

“My debts have accumulated, and—how shall I write it?—I am bound in honour to marry another.

“I do not ask forgiveness, I dare not hope for any. I have lost faith and hope in myself; but I do ask, if ever you remember me, let it be in your prayers to Heaven, whose mercy I dare not seek.

“WALTER.”

* * * * *

The rain had ceased, and the wind had gone where it listed; there was a hush and a stillness in the air, and everywhere around; not a sound save the lapping of the water against the sides and corners of the house, as the current moved onwards. There was a quiet, too, in the room—a quiet that might be felt. The women had ceased to weep, held in awe by the physician, while he stood motionless counting the pulse of the patient. Slower and slower, fainter and fainter it became, until the last thread of life was snapped, and the spirit fled.

She was dead.

* * * * *

At the window stood Agnes. In one hand she held the open letter; the other was pressed hard against her temples. Her eyes were fixed on the moving water, on the surface of which now floated a number of miscel-

laneous articles—papers, letters, books, and pieces of furniture, her mother's treasures and hers.

But Agnes saw them not, and away they glided, far down the river.

Suddenly a startled look came into her face; something was gliding past the window, snowy white and pure, resembling somewhat the human form. Floating on the surface of the water, it lay with stretched-out arms apart, gliding onward and away in the dim light. To the girl's overwrought nerves and excited fancy it looked like a departing spirit, silently leaving the troubled scenes for a calmer shore.

Straining her eyeballs to keep the vision in view, and with every sense painfully acute, she seemed to hear a voice in the air, a wail, sighing mournfully—"Farewell joy, farewell hope, farewell to home and happiness, farewell to the White House, farewell."

Onward, still onward it glided with the current, far out of reach; and it was not till the physician touched her arm that she awoke to the consciousness that it was the bridal dress that the current had carried away to—where, oh, where?

She turned and saw that the spirit of her mother, too, had escaped.



CHAPTER V.

"Some say that gleams of a remoter world visit the soul in sleep."

THERE was silence and sorrow at the White House—a sorrow too deep for words.

The water was gradually disappearing, and the river was doing its best to look calm again. The funeral was over; it was a simple, quiet ceremony. A white silk pall covered a plain oak coffin, on which lay a single wreath of rare and beautiful flowers. Six men came from the village, and bore away the dear form on their shoulders to the little churchyard, half a mile down the lane—the lane where, in the happy spring-times that were now all past, Agnes had sought for the early violets and the pale primroses, and where she and her mother had walked in the cool summer evenings, and talked of her

future; past the little wood where she and another—

But that was all gone now, and as she followed the slow, measured steps of those who bore the dead along, she wondered why she did not weep and break out into loud lamentations; but there came no tears, and she thought that perhaps she had grown hard and unnatural, and that all feeling was dead within her.

Back again—into the now half-ruined house, that was now no longer a home for her, and which she resolved to leave for ever. And, to the amazement of her old servants, she calmly sorted, arranged, and disposed of all the household goods that the flood had left, reserving for herself only the books, clothes, and a few valuables. With these exceptions she gave up the whole to the two faithful women who had nursed her in her infancy, and whose hearts were now almost broken to leave her thus.

For she must go, she told herself, and go alone, but where she knew not. A strange force was about her, propelling her onwards. She could not stay to question it, nor to analyze her motives—she had no motives; it was as though she had lost all will-power

and was under the guidance of another, though that other was unseen.

Now and then, as she moved about among the old familiar things, arranging her books and packing her clothes, a few words in Walter's letter would present themselves—"My debts have accumulated, and I am deeply involved." And she thought, in a kind of hazy way, that perhaps she was going to relieve him; and yet she could not be, for she knew not where to find him; she could not see her way, she could not think, and so she mechanically went on until all was finished and her luggage packed.

It was the sixth night since her mother's death, and the last she would spend in the house that had been her childhood's home.

During these six days and nights she had eaten little and scarcely slept; an almost superhuman strength had been given her, and she had refused to rest.

But now that all need for exertion was over, the reaction came, and exhausted Nature claimed her due, and Agnes succumbed.

Half an hour before midnight her old nurse, looking into the room, found her in a deep sleep, and mentally thanked God that

the needed rest had come, kind Nature's sweet restorer—balmy sleep.

How long she slept she never knew; for that night her spirit seemed to leave her body and wander far, far away, among scenes that were new and strange to her.

Was it a dream? She thought she had fallen asleep on her mother's grave, that the grass was cold and damp—for the sods that covered the grave had been but lately cut from the river's bank—that she shivered with cold and fear, for Walter had left her there alone, and that the night was windy and dark; she despaired of ever reaching home again.

Apparently she had lain there some hours, when she was gently awakened by the spirit of Walter's mother, the same who in the lovely vision had appeared to her, and had thrown garlands of rosebuds about her head when she was a child. She opened her eyes, and beheld the beauteous form bending over her; instantly all sense of cold and fear vanished.

"Come with me," said a sweet, musical voice in her ear; "fear not; come, let us leave this dismal place, and rise above the cold earth plane into a realm of warmth and love, into the light of a higher intelligence, where we will discourse on the why and

wherefore of human suffering ; where, perchance, by the aid of an interior wisdom, we shall unravel the tangled skein of earthly existence, and, by the same guidance, you may look a little way into your own future, see the Divine purpose in life, and realize the hidden resources of your own being, and the undeveloped gifts that are in you, which shall awaken in your breast a true and righteous ambition to live your own life, give form and character to the noble aspirations of your soul, and so make life worth the turmoil and the strife."

They glided on in immeasurable space, where no footfalls resounded, and no earthly clouds impeded their progress, while her fair companion spoke with a touching pathos on the various causes of human ills and remedies, and strove, with an angel's eloquence, to inspire her with a true sympathy for suffering humanity—a sympathy that should lead her to cultivate and direct the latent powers that were within her to the noblest uses.

Agnes could never afterwards clearly give to others all the pure and beautiful lessons that were then so powerfully impressed upon her ; yet she became conscious of a new de-

velopment opening up in her own soul, evolving a strength that in after years became the great rock on which she leaned, keeping her firm to a right purpose, when the overwhelming floods of passion, love, ambition, hatred, revenge, fear, and despair hung over her head threatening to engulf her. They had been travelling all this time up a rocky ascent, difficult to walk on, and Agnes's feet slipped occasionally; she would fain have given it up, but encouraged by the spirit, whose hand she held, she kept on ascending. Gradually the way became smoother, and firm as marble to the feet, while the rocky substance that jutted out from the sides of the winding way was white as alabaster to the eye. Soon this beautiful whiteness became tinted with a rosy hue, and that, which had formerly looked so cold, was suddenly flushed with a golden sunlight and a warmth, which touched her feet and circulated through all her being. Her senses awakened, her vision was enlarged, and as she gazed on this loveliness she discovered strange and quaint inscriptions on every ledge of rock-lines, though in unknown characters, at every turn. There was a sweet rhythm ringing in her ears; there was poetry in the sun-light, and the whole air seemed

charged with living, breathing thought. Agnes, dumb with astonishment, turned mutely to her companion.

"This," said the fair spirit at her side, "is the world of mind; this is the path the poets tread; great and mighty intellects have climbed these heights, and have left a sense of their presence behind them. They have paved this way with their own thoughts and made it firm for our feet."

Finally, they arrived at a giddy height, and Agnes trembled, yet exulted, as her eye took in the wide range of spiritual wonders that were presented to her view; and, for the first time during this strange journey, she wondered whether she was dreaming.

"No, it was no dream," she assured herself. All was solid and substantial around her; her feet were firm. And what magnificent mansion was that which stood a little to their right?

They drew near, and her angel friend bade her look within. She stepped within the portal, and instantly her breast seemed filled with a new delight. She pressed her hands to her head, for her brain was moved with new thoughts, and an intense desire came upon her to speak out in song; she remem-

bered to have said once, when a child, that she would like to be a poetess, and now a hundred lyrics seemed rhyming in her head. She looked around ; there were long corridors of the same exquisite whiteness, but lit with a thousand glorious hues, and flushed with the same warm light.

The walls were filled with wondrous mottoes, odd lines, and, to her, secret inscriptions, for she had no language to interpret them, nor could she explain their mysteries.

These corridors soon became filled with individuals of lofty mien and noble presence. They wore robes of every shade and colour, from rich crimson to pale amber ; their countenances glowed with intellectual light and beauty. And as she gazed on these distinguished personages, Agnes knew that she looked, for the first time, on the perfected form of manhood.

Until now Agnes had been silent from wonder. A great amazement had kept her dumb, but now she knew that she was in the ante-room of the poets. She was filled with rapture ; her tongue was loosened ; and the old nurse, coming into the room to awaken her, was alarmed to hear the sleeping girl exclaim—

“Have the churchyards given up their dead? Has there been a general resurrection? What can it mean? The sight is too much for me. It is wondrous strange; a poet’s chamber. Oh, that I could read these marvellous inscriptions, or speak the language of the wonderful mottoes. These are living, breathing men. These are the poets of the past. These are the men that never die, though they be buried ten thousand fathoms deep. These are they who need no resurrection; who wait for no trumpet call, whom no coffin can enclose, no earthly weight or pressure can keep down.”

Here the nurse got alarmed, and tried to awaken her, but she continued—

“Not one unshapely form amongst them. The colours of their robes vary, but blend most harmoniously. It is enough to walk up and down amongst them, to touch their garments, to make myself doubly sure that these are living, breathing men.”

“Agnes, Agnes,” cried the anxious nurse, “awake!”

“Nay,” continued the girl, “I recognise the poets that we are familiar with. I had thought to tell you their names, to describe the particular expression on every face. I

have tried to dive down deep into their minds and reveal them to others ; to tell you what Shakspeare thinks, and what Milton feels, to penetrate the depth of that peace that pervades Cowper's soul, to catch the light from Shelley's eyes, and bring back with me the inspiration that is floating about me, enrapturing, entrancing, overwhelming, and leaving me helpless and incapable."

With this she awoke.





CHAPTER VI.

"And she walked about as one who knew
That sleep has sights as clear and true,
As any waking eyes can view."

SHELLEY.

FIVE years have elapsed since Agnes forsook the White House by the river. She had since then resided in the great city; had waded through the labyrinths of learned studies, had penetrated the chamber of her poetic nature, and had given to the world its wealth of jewels. Thoughts that had long lain dormant now burst into song, and the surcharged heart found refuge in sublimest strains.

All these years she had never paused to ask herself whether she was happy; she had not sought happiness. The current of life had been suddenly turned aside, and had carried her out of the narrow placid stream into a wide ocean, whose depths were constantly moving with new thoughts and in-

tense desires. Her own plan of a life's happiness had been rejected by that higher guidance that she felt was leading her on, and she submitted; for large fields of intellectual enterprise lay open before her. She had already drunk in deep draughts of a new delight from the fountain of knowledge, and they were in her soul as a well of water springing up, fresh, pure, and sweet continually. She had never forgotten the faithless Walter, but had sought for him with unceasing perseverance for the first year, feeling it, as her mission, to find him, and help him, but without success. She bore no anger towards him, and if at first a feeling of scorn had passed her heart, it had vanished long ago. Her great desire was to help him and his, wherever they might be, but that, for the present, was denied her; so there was nothing to do but to wait.

She published her first book under an assumed name, and critics gave their verdicts upon it. A few words from one of these caught her attention, words that had touched a sympathetic chord in her nature, expressions she had heard before; heard when Walter was sitting by her side with youth and health upon his handsome features. Could it be he

who had penned them? Had he read her book, and her heart in that book? Poor dear Walter; perhaps he was writing for a mere subsistence, and she so wealthy, so rich in creature comforts. How could she find him and help him in his trouble?

She grasped the paper more tightly as if to get some enlightenment from it, or some support, for her strength seemed failing her. She was passing into a kind of waking dream; she lost sight of the room, going in vision beyond the limits of the house in which she sat, far down the street, across another, turning down a back street some mile and a half from her home. All this distance her clairvoyant eye had turned from right to left, searching every dwelling until it reached a large dismal looking house in the middle of a narrow bye-street.

In the third storey of this sombre-looking house was a large room, dimly lighted, plainly and scantily furnished; a cold tremor ran through her frame as her eye wandered over the hard and almost worn-out furniture and carpetless room.

On one side of the room stood a bed, partly hidden by a screen; on the bed, asleep, lay a woman and a little girl. The woman was

young and dark ; heavy masses of black curls lay clustered about her throat and neck. On a chair by the bed lay a tawdry-looking, half-worn dress and a few neck ornaments. There was a bright colour in the woman's cheeks ; her complexion was clear, though dark ; her features were handsome, but the beauty of the face was marred by an expression of discontent and ill-humour. The brow was knit even in sleep, and the mouth was closed with a cold, stern expression.

Agnes looked with pitying eyes on the disappointed creature before her, and then sought the sleeping child ; a pure, innocent face, with the long eyelashes lying like silken fringe on the white cheek, beneath which a tear was trickling down the velvet skin. The child had evidently gone to bed with a small sorrow of its own, and sweet sleep had come to still the little throbbing bosom.

Her eye soon left the child, and wandered round the room to the fire ; a few embers were burning low in a neglected grate. On the mantel-piece lay slips from papers, a reporter's note-book, and some loose manuscripts. At a table sat a man writing rapidly. Presently he stopped for a moment, drew his hand through his rather fair long hair, leaned

his head back to relieve the swollen veins that were ready to burst in his forehead, then took off his necktie, undid his collar, drew one long breath, and resumed his work.

“Walter, dear Walter,” sobbed Agnes, “and is it thus I find you writing through the long hours of the night for daily bread?”

Yes; too plainly did this comfortless and unwholesome room speak of the hard life he was leading. There was the stamp of poverty on all she looked on; not starvation, but hard struggling poverty.

Another long spell of writing, and the weary man, startled by the striking of the church clock, leaned back again in his chair, and, with a heavy sigh, muttered—

“‘Twelve o’clock! and my work only half completed. And yet,” he murmured, “how gladly would I work, if I could only earn happiness, either for myself or others! I could, I think, be content now,” he continued, as his eye rested on his sleeping wife, “if I could see Floe happy, but to witness the continual reproach in her face, to know her longings for society, fashionable life and pleasure, heaven knows how gladly I would undo the past! Oh, that we had but one thought in common; my soul yearns for

sympathy. Poor Floe, I have spoilt your life, and shut myself out of happiness."

Agnes could look no longer; her heart was bursting with agony, and, with a great effort, she cried out—

"Walter, take courage. I am here to help you."

She saw him start to his feet, and look all round for the voice; then she saw no more. The effort to speak had brought her back to her normal condition, and she found herself sitting in her own room with the crushed paper in her hand.

As soon as she could sufficiently collect her thoughts, she drew a plan of the streets as they had been given to her in her clairvoyant vision. She slept little that night, calculating her expenditure, and what she could save from it for Walter and his family. She already saw, in imagination, the heavy weight of his toil diminished by her help, and the care swept from his brow, as his poor wife's face recovered its hue of health; and Agnes thought how bright and lovely the child would grow amid happier surroundings.

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“Get in the Way,” score 11.17

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CHAPTER VII.

"I could not choose but gaze ; a fascination drew
My fancy thither, and in expectation of what I knew not."

THE next day found Agnes anxiously plodding through the crowded streets. Now and then she referred to the sketch she had made after her vision. She hastened on, eager to bestow comfort to those needy ones, and feeling sure she should find them, and that God would not deprive her of that one remaining joy. She was right ; her angel guide had not deceived her. When spirit to spirit had spoken, the path of recognition had been clearly laid out, and, after a circuitous route, she at last found the object of her search. A little despair had now and then checked her in her path, a fear that her efforts would be fruitless, and rejected with scorn ; but her instinct was to go onwards to the end.

As she drew near, her heart beat wildly, and she was compelled to slacken her pace, and ask herself how she should meet him, what she should say, how account for thus intruding upon him; would he accept anything from her hands? She stood still in the street in hopeless perplexity; all was in vain, she could not humiliate him so; she had not thought of all this before. She was in despair; she felt her strength going, and leaned against the nearest door-way for support.

A dark-haired woman passed, with a gaudily trimmed dress, and a shawl tightly drawn around her, followed by a little girl; but Agnes saw them not. Her attention was rivetted on the third storey of the sombre-looking old house opposite, not daring to enter, now that she had found it.

Presently she felt her hand touched, and, looking down, she beheld the sweet face of a little girl peering into her own.

“May I kiss you?” asked the child, timidly.

Agnes started, and, for a moment, looked vacantly at the child; then, recovering herself, said—

“Why, my darling, do you wish to kiss me?”

“Because,” replied the child, “you are like my picture.”

"Like your picture, my sweet one?" she said, stooping and looking earnestly into the little face, which she now recognised as the one she had seen with the teardrop stealing down it. "And where did you get your picture?"

"Papa painted it for me," said the child. "It has large eyes, and soft brown hair, and a beautiful face like yours; papa named it Saint Agnes."

"What is your name, little one?" asked Agnes, tenderly.

"Ethel Lamotte," answered the child; "that is where we live," she said, pointing opposite. "Will you come and see my picture?"

"Not now, my darling," faltered Agnes. "Is your papa an artist?"

"Oh, no; papa writes, writes always," said little Ethel; but he painted Saint Agnes for me when I was ill, just after little Willie died. Willie is my little brother; he is in heaven now, and papa thinks that perhaps Saint Agnes is there, too, and takes care of Willie. But I think you are Saint Agnes, are you not?" enquired the child.

"No, my sweet one, I am not Saint Agnes."

“ Papa is right ; perhaps Saint Agnes is in heaven.”

“ Ethel, dear, is your papa’s name Willie?”

“ No, papa’s name is Walter ; and there is mamma !” cried the child.

Agnes caught up the sweet prattling thing and pressed her to her bosom, imprinted a kiss on the rosy lips, then hastily put her down and hurried away, just as the dark-haired unhappy-looking woman came down the steps of a neighbouring shop with a few purchases in her hand.





CHAPTER VIII.

QU an evening in spring, or just as the spring is merging into summer, and the new green leaves have all put forth their freshness, and the buds and flowers are bursting into sweetness and beauty, and renewed life is circulating through all Nature, we find ourselves journeying through a picturesque and lovely country. Avoiding the cities and towns, we pass through rich valleys, and under the shadow of the hills, over rude bridges, beneath which run sparkling rills of water. We leave the luring enchantment of vineyards, orchards, and groves behind us, led on by the distant roar of the sea. Coming in sight of a little fishing village on the coast of France (for it is there we discover we are wandering), we climb the hill, and gain the summit of the cliff. Taking breath and looking around we behold a lovely landscape, a perfect paradise

of hill and dale. Before us lies the broad blue ocean, calm, and almost still, beneath a gorgeous sunset. To the left is the fishing village, half way up the white cliffs, and on the plains between the hills are pretty rustic looking cottages, and charming white painted villas. At an open window in one of these pleasant homes sits a lady watching the setting sun ; on a table at her side lie some books, a few drawings, and a pile of manuscript papers. She holds a pencil in her hand, as though she had meant to sketch the prospect before her, but is too much enchanted to take her eyes off the glorious scene. She has sat at that window many times lately, watching the sun set over the sea. It is a glorious sight to see the great orb sinking lower and lower, and at last apparently burying itself in the blue waters. The lady's face is familiar to us, and though much changed we recognize it to be our Agnes.

Many years have passed since she parted with little Ethel in that bye street of London. She has been a great traveller, has visited every city and town of note on the Continent, has realised some of her childhood's dreams, has seen more than Walter's wildest flights of imagination ever pictured for them, has

walked (alone it is true) the galleries of Florence and Rome, has stood with a feeling of profound awe beneath the domes of mighty cathedrals, has gazed with wonder and admiration on the magnificent statuary in the sculpture galleries, and paused to contemplate with true artist eyes the glorious pictures of the old masters. Thence she had gone on to Egypt, and the Holy Land, and moved amid scenes fraught with interest to every reader of sacred history. These experiences had produced a powerful effect on her heart and mind, had rooted up many prejudices that were inherent in her nature, had given her broader views, more charity, and love for all humanity, of whatever colour or creed. She had set out hungering and thirsting after knowledge, had sought and found the Divine in all things, and in all these researches she had been conscious of another mysterious presence going with her, ever leading her thoughts into channels that were closed to those around her, helping her to draw instruction from the most insignificant object, so that her love of Nature had grown to an adoration. She saw—

Sermons in stones,
And good in everything.

Leaving at last, and almost with regret, the marvellous ruins, and all the gorgeous splendours of the East, she came back again to the cool lakes and enchanting mountain scenery of Switzerland, where after rambling beside the glorious cascades, with the rushing of waterfalls still in her ears, she would seek her room, and write through the long hours of the night, like one inspired, her heart glowing with warmth and love towards her fellows, and her soul burning with desire to help, to educate, and elevate the masses. For that end she had set aside a great portion of her fortune, leaving it in the hands of reliable agents in England; for Walter had refused it. She had communicated with him through her trustees, and by the same agency he had sent her one short, kind letter. He must bear his own burden, he wrote; he would not drag her into the vortex that had carried him so far down, past hope and happiness.

Later on, in the next year, he had applied for as much money as would enable him to take a delicate wife and two children to a warmer climate, where he thought his wife might regain health and strength, and where perhaps, he might find a fortune for himself.

Here, he said, an ill fate had pursued him with relentless hand; he had recklessly, wickedly, thrown away his own chance of happiness, and though he might never in this life find it again, yet in another land he might gain comfort for his wife and little ones.

Agnes' heart was wrung with anguish, yet she felt helpless to prevent this voyage, and though torn with grief, she offered no resistance, and soon afterwards they embarked for New Zealand. Then began Agnes' wandering life.

In these years she had written and published several books, and gained some little reputation as a poetess. She had made many acquaintances, and in every country had found friends, and not a few lovers. And—why should we conceal the fact?—there had been moments when her heart had yearned for its counterpart, and her woman's nature had cried out for some object to love and live for especially.

But Agnes could never forget her boy lover, and what the river told her on that autumn evening long ago. It is true it had proved a treacherous river, yet it was the river that was associated with all the happy innocence of her childhood, and she had for-

given it. All that was good and true and noble in Walter, had been preserved while he kept on its banks. And Walter, the bright handsome boy, her girl's ideal, always stood closer to her than all others. Through all these years the sea had been rolling between them ; a cruel fate had thrown them asunder, and kept them apart. Should they ever meet again ? She found herself growing weary of travelling, and a longing for rest and home, was stealing over her. She began to lose her zest for sight seeing ; grandeur oppressed her ; it was in vain she told herself that the world was her home, and that she had no other. She had parted from her travelling companions, and by accident found her way to the little fishing village. Here she determined on seeing a new phase of life, to live among these humble fishers, and study human Nature on a lower plane. Here, roaming over the white cliffs and along the sea shore, she sought to quiet the discontent that was beginning to rise in her breast. Nature, though dressed in her loveliest garb, was beginning to lose her charms for her. This unrest gained upon her ; a hand seemed beckoning her to England, and a voice said " Go ; " the old force was about her again, and she knew she must

obey. Even now, after she had crossed the channel, and was once more in London, the same hand held her, and the voice still said "Go."

She heard the distant roar of the sea in her ears by day, and dreams of the rolling waters at night would disturb her sleep ; a feverish excitement was upon her continually ; all her old love of the beautiful forsook her ; she could take no pleasure in outward things, and began to think herself forsaken both by heaven and earth. At last, giving herself up to the power that became too strong for her, be it angel or devil, she exclaimed in her frenzy, "I go where you lead," and it led her to the wild common and the wretched cottage in which we found her.





CHAPTER IX.

SIX months she had been waiting, for she knew not what. Without companions, a bleak flat country around her, and the ever restless sea in front, chained as it were to this desolate spot, she had asked a thousand times "Why?" and the only answer was "Wait." Here by the window where we found her, she had sat for hours on the very verge of despair; her lamp had gone out, but she heeded it not; the rain had ceased, and the moon that had been making war with the clouds for the last half-hour, had conquered the darkness somewhat. Look! Agnes has risen. There is a great commotion on the common. The villagers are running towards the beach with lights and ropes. The broken masts of a vessel in distress are to be seen above the rising surf, and Agnes can stay no longer. Throwing a cloak over her

head, without light or guide she plunges into the bog outside; struggles out again, making desperate efforts to reach the sands, on which are collected a large group of men and women. The violence of the waves had thrown the ship on to the sands, within sight, and almost within reach of the terror-stricken people who came to help them. There was great excitement and confusion; a few brave men had put out a boat and were trying to ride over the breakers, but the white foam of the surf was blinding them, throwing them back with violence, threatening to smash both men and boat. Agnes, who had been watching the frantic efforts of the men in the boat, had not observed a group of women, standing a little higher up, gathered round some object. Presently her attention was arrested by hearing the shrill voice of a woman say, "Loose his hands from the wreck or he will be dashed to pieces!" Her heart beat fast, and the thought rushed into her mind, "Can it be he? Is it for this I am sent here?" "Great God!" cried another, "that blow must have killed him!" "No, only stunned him," said the first voice; "struck him on the temples. Loose his hands! He looks like a gentleman. Who can he be?"

“Walter,” cried Agnes, now pushing her way through the crowd, and bringing the full height of her figure to bear upon them. “Make way, good people! I have been waiting here six months for him.”

The frightened women fell back, as the black cloaked figure loomed upon them, and they whispered mysteriously among themselves,

“It’s the strange lady from the cottage.”

“Ah, poor heart!” sighed one, “it’s most likely her husband, and her worst trouble is to come yet, she’ll find he’s dead.”

“It’s false, woman,” cried the now excited Agnes, “God will not mock me so.”

All the old calmness forsook her, and throwing off her cloak, and kneeling beside him, she cried—

“Walter, dear Walter, speak to me; I have waited for you. God has sent you back to me at last.” But there came no sign of life, and the pent up agony of months found vent, and, in that wild scene, she for some moments was the wildest.

They carried him to the house, and she calmed herself and prepared for the worst. There was a stir in the village that night. Some of the women staid behind and set them-

selves to work ; but Agnes forgot all save bringing Walter back to consciousness. And at last she succeeded, for, after some hours he opened his eyes and looked round in astonishment ; then closed them again, unable as yet to take in the whole truth. Time and a strong constitution at last achieved the battle of renewed life, and he began to realize his position under the loving care of Agnes. She had been moving about the room, and he had been following her with his eyes for some time.

“ Agnes,” said he, at last, “ do you still believe in the guardianship of angels ? ”

“ Yes, dear Walter, I do,” she answered, looking into his pallid face with one of her brightest smiles. She had strangely changed within the last few hours, a new happiness had been born within her. “ I do not doubt it, or why should I have been sent here unless to meet you ? ”

Walter hid his face in his hands for a few seconds, and groaned within himself. Shame, remorse, and the whole weight of a life's folly pressed upon him. She went to his side, kissed his pallid brow, and for a moment or two they wept together.

“ Where are your children, Walter ? ” asked Agnes tenderly.

"In heaven," he answered solemnly; "little Ethel died on the voyage out, and held her Saint Agnes' picture till the last. The others died one by one with fever, and then poor Floe, always delicate, and never happy, followed, and I have been alone for years. I never meant to return; broken in health and spirit, how could I present myself to you whom I have so cruelly wronged? Besides, I thought perhaps you might be another's, and I resolved to let the remembrance of those happy days of my boyhood die with me in a foreign land."

"Then what, dear Walter, determined you to return?"

"Because," said the now humbled man, "I have at this late hour accepted your faith, that there is an invisible agency about us, which sometimes controls our actions, and almost forces us into paths that we had determined to avoid; and because, dear, I was weary of earth, and turned my thoughts heavenwards. Then did I hear the voice that once reached your ears. In the waking hour of the night I have heard my mother's voice, and listened again to that prayer which might have saved me from ruin if I had heeded it then. I, too, have seen a vision of that blessed mother;

your mother, as you once saw mine. She pointed to the home of my childhood, and urged me to go, assuring me that I should still find a faithful heart waiting for me. Is it so, my beloved ? ”

“ It is so, Walter,” cried Agnes, extending her arms wide, and enfolding him in a long embrace. “ God has seen that we can no longer live apart ; our spirits were created one for the other ; and though we have been kept asunder these years past, it was that our love, through trials and disappointments, might be refined and become a divine love, our thoughts and ideas harmonizing, and our souls blended in perfect union for ever.”





THE HOLLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

"A man is flushed with success; he drives his bargain in the street, but it occurs that he also is bought and sold."

R. W. EMERSON.

THE Hollows was an old-fashioned, rambling place, lovely and romantic, and commanding a fine view over hills, valleys, and a spacious lake. The house and grounds had been formerly adorned with exquisite taste, and the rustic inhabitants around felt an honest pride in lauding it to strangers. But, since the death of its late owner, Sir W., it had been much neglected, and had become a gloomy-looking, moss-covered mansion, surrounded by a wilderness of uncultivated meadows and straggling trees.

Sir W. had been a man of mark in his day, courteous to his equals and superiors in rank, but haughty and tyrannical to those of inferior position in their worldly estates. His servants and dependants cast a mystery over the manner in which he had suddenly become rich, for many of them knew that, though he had always been proud, he had not always been wealthy.

But as all, more or less, stood in awe of the great man, these things were not publicly discussed. Even his equals said (only in secret parley) that they detected, under the bland smile and the scheming brain, a restless manner and cynical expression. But, as he kept up a grand *ménage*, contributed handsomely to public charities, and was constant in attendance at his church, it was nobody's business to pry into his secret affairs.

His wife, Lady W., was one of those exemplary women who had perfect faith in her husband's probity. Good, generous and true herself, she had little suspicion of others, especially of those whom she loved.

She was naturally of a meek and yielding nature, and her ideas since her marriage had been moulded by the will of her husband. Impressed with the notion of his superior

intellect and worth, she regarded him from her own views as a great man and a good Christian. In time, her individuality became lost in his ; he thought for her, and spoke for her, and she held his opinions as her own.

When he died, it was as if the corner-stone of her house had fallen, and the whole structure must, in consequence, follow.

Time might have brought with it a healing influence, and somewhat cheered her solitary life ; but, after committing to the tomb the idolised form, in the certain hope of a joyful resurrection, idle rumours began to circulate that the dead man was not at rest, and that he walked in every room in the house, except Lady W.'s.

She had never seen nor heard anything of that ghostly nature, but the whole household of servants were whispering it in her ears. The rumours, in time, disturbed her peace, and she let her mansion to pursue foreign travels.

* * * * *

Hugh Spencer, a retired city merchant, with one child, a lovely girl of sixteen summers, had for some time been in quest of

a country residence, removed from the noise and smoke of the metropolis.

He had commenced life poor, but with a strong will to combat all business difficulties. He had prospered, and, at forty years of age, he found himself in possession of ample wealth, with a wife to whom he was devotedly attached, and who as fervently reciprocated his love; and an only child, the beautiful Héloïse, just rising into womanhood. Of a healthy constitution, and a still vigorous mind, he had nothing wherewith to reproach either Providence or the world, and very little to desire, save the amassing of a few more thousands. He saw them hanging over the next year's balance of his accounts, "and thought it foolish not to cast out his net."

A year ago he had resolved to retire, and devote more time to his family; but the love of enterprise, and the desire to accumulate riches, had become a part of his nature, and the temptation to add another year's profits to his already great wealth, were too strong for him to withstand.

For the period of twenty years, commerce had claimed all his attention; the money-getting demon had held him firm in his grasp, promising each coming year to release him, but

binding faster and faster his fetters, until all social and family ties were absorbed in this passion of greed.

Ellinor, his patient wife, had been waiting all these long years, invoking the time when her husband should awaken to a higher aim than that of mere worldly gains, and to the sympathy matured for him in her own loving heart. She had never questioned his love for her, but their true natures were hidden from each other by the sordid pursuits of her husband.

Hugh had already begun to feel this, and resolved that when the next year arrived, he would give up his commercial mania, his city life, and retire with his wife and child to some lovely district in the country, and, rambling with them among hills and dales and mountain breezes, they would breathe health, and enjoy the large fortune he had already amassed.

Hugh Spencer promised himself this, after looking with satisfaction on his balance sheet one wintry day, and he began thinking of a suitable country residence in which his plans could be matured, and the home pleasures of his family enhanced.

At this moment he was interrupted by a

telegram which scattered all his beautiful visions into air. It asked him to send in his contract for a new railway that had to be opened abroad. It also involved a journey of some hundreds of miles, and he found that several weeks must necessarily elapse on the journey to and fro.

For the first time in his business career, Hugh faltered in his purpose. His heart throbbed between his household gods and his idol, mammon.

His thoughts had been throughout the day with his wife and child. He knew not how long his absence from them might be. He would give up the contract and rest satisfied with the wealth already obtained.

“Wist, Hugh!” said the gold fiend, who never left him long to reflections like these, “have you no ambition? Gold is strength, wealth is power. The poor are ever hidden in obscurity; when they die, their names die with them. You should make a reputation, become the foremost of the wealthiest of your class. For what other aim have you been scheming all your life? Throw the dice again! you have skill and steady grasp, and a firm will. You shall win, and hold up your easily-won thousands in the face

of your competitors, and laugh at their dismay."

This was indicative of the fiend, for he knew well the malice that lurked in his advice, and if Hugh had been quite himself, he would have known it too, and would have been led by nobler influences ; but his mind was off its balance, and a cynical smile came across his mouth as he fancied he heard the city ringing with his new success, and saw himself the envy of his brother merchants.





CHAPTER II.

" Oh, mother ! cease they to love and move and breathe,
and speak, who die ?"—BYRON.

SIX weeks had passed ; busy, anxious weeks. Hugh Spencer was not a man to treat matters lightly. Once resolved to embark in a new enterprise, he threw the whole force of his powerful will into it. On this new scheme he concentrated his whole thoughts, calling up all his energies to accomplish his object and to bring down the golden prize, until his brain grew dizzy with visions of glorious success.

The scheme had proved successful, and they were meditating the return journey.

Those contractors who had not been as fortunate, and were cooler in consequence, shook their heads on the night the journey was contemplated, and proposed waiting for a change in the temperature ; the late fall of

snow, they said, had made travelling dangerous, and probably the line was blocked. But Hugh, elated with success, and flushed with triumph, had for the time become mentally intoxicated, and he saw no danger; all was bright and golden to him.

The mail train had started, leaving behind a few of the cautious ones, but bearing away Hugh, his wife and daughter, with the additional wealth that fortune had, during the last few weeks, so lavishly showered upon them.

The first part of the journey was performed without difficulty, and at the usual speed, but, after some hours, the passengers became aware of a slower motion. Fog signals were heard at intervals; the carriages began to rock, jerk, sway—and, hark! “What was that? Great heavens!” cried Hugh, throwing out his arms to his wife and child. “All is over; we are lost!”

The train had run off the metals, and the whole line of carriages had gone over the embankments.

The scene that followed was indescribable, and must ever leave its mournful memories on the survivors who beheld it.

All that Héloïse remembered was her-

self clinging to the wheels of a broken carriage; she was almost paralysed with fear, but her mental anguish in anticipating the fate of her dear parents, was less endurable than her own imminent danger.

While in this fearful position, she saw her father dragged from under a mass of broken timbers, and with a piercing shriek, she would have taken a fearful leap had not a powerful arm at that moment restrained her.

"Be calm," said a voice in her ear; "hold fast to me. I will save you!"

"My mother! My father!" gasped the terror stricken girl. "What can I do?"

"Nothing," said the same voice in a tone of suppressed excitement; "we will reach them presently."

"God have mercy!" she exclaimed, and sank senseless in the arms of the stranger.

Her rescuer was a young man of about twenty-five; tall and slight, yet not wanting in strength, as shown by the manner of raising his insensible burden.

He had a fine, intellectual countenance, with a well-formed head. His hat had gone with the wreck, and his thick brown hair was in masses on his brow.

Slowly, but with difficulty he and others

sought among the *débris* of broken carriages for the mangled sufferers, and there, in helpless anguish, lay the poor bruised Hugh.

Héloise had escaped unhurt, save a slight scratch on her right hand.

“Thank God,” exclaimed the young man, when he reached a place of safety; “she is saved.”

She opened her eyes, and saw that her hand was profusely bleeding. The young man drew a handkerchief from his pocket, and tenderly bound it up.

“How shall I thank you?” stammered Héloise, “but, oh! my mother, what has become of her?” He pressed her hand, murmured something in her ear, and again plunged into the suffering dying mass of humanity.

When he returned he knew that the girl’s mother lay dead among the ruins.

Hugh recovered in time from his physical injuries, but all the old dominant will, all the former man, lay buried under the little grave in which they had laid Ellinor, his wife.

He went day by day to her tomb, and, in the stillness of the twilight, her presence seemed near him; a voice appeared to speak to him, recalling the happy days of their youth,

when love was untainted by worldly ambitions. He never returned to city life ; but, before he came to live at The Hollows, he paid a farewell visit to the tomb that lay under the steeple of the quaint old church ; and there Héloïse found him standing bare-headed and alone.

“Child !” exclaimed the stricken man, as she approached, “I have heard your mother’s voice ; it spoke to me, not from the tomb, but from some happy abode beyond the earth. I have been waiting beside this marble slab, as though her spirit was confined within it. To-day I am aroused to my folly ; her voice has spoken to my inner self. It has told me to waste no more time in vain regrets for the past, or in fruitless efforts to find happiness in the things of earth ; that there is a higher life to be obtained, a life of nobler aspirations, more exalted sentiments and wider charities ; a growth of the spirit, leading far away to higher regions, where soul can commune with soul.”

“O, Ellinor,” cried the broken-hearted man, “were you taken from me to teach me this ? Is this the price I have paid for my worldly pride ? Have I been such a worshipper of

mammon that nothing less than this would shatter my golden image?

“Come, Héloise,” said he, “let us no more seek for the living among the tombs of the dead; let us seek to behold that spiritual home where your mother now dwells. Let our love be worthy of our ministering angel’s care. Let our worldly wealth be spent in blessing others, as by spiritual wealth we are this day blessed.”

Since the death of her mother, Héloise had been subject to a mental depression. The horrors of the terrible wreck were with her by night and by day; they were present in her midnight dreams, and the dawning of the morn chased them not away from her sight.

The love that had matured her childhood, was only a thing of the past.

The sweet voice that had echoed its music in her ear was silent as the grave, and the songs of the tuneful birds made no music within her lonely heart.

She had not yet had the courage to offer sympathy to her father under the overwhelming sorrows that had prostrated his strength. Her heart was an iceberg that had

congealed into hardness by its weight of grief. But, now when he spoke to her of the invisible presence he had felt at the tomb, and of the sweet voice he had heard as in other days, the warmth of her heart returned, and new life sprang up from the stolid clay, as the spirit of her mother had awakened it in him.

With a new wild delight, she threw her arms around his neck ; and tears, that had hitherto found no vent, welled up from the fountain of her heart.

“ O, father ! ” she cried, “ let me love you. You are doubly dear to me now ; let me give you my heart’s fond love ; and give me yours, dear father, in return. Absorb yourself no longer in this grief that is eating away your life, but give me, your child, your love ! ”

“ My child, my child,” answered Hugh, as he pressed her to his heart ; “ thank God you are left to me.”

He placed his hand on her head, stood for some moments in silent prayer, and then suffered his daughter to lead him away.





CHAPTER III.

——— “ Nature had a robe of glory on
And the bright air o’er every shape did weave
Intenser hues.
Morn fled, noon came, evening, then night descended,
. . . . when suddenly was blended
With our repose a nameless sense of fear.

SHELLEY.

IT was a lovely morning, on the day that Héloïse and her father started for The Hollows. The summer had passed, and autumn’s mellow glow shone on the hawthorn hedges, and rested on the rich meadow lands around, while the fragrance of the newly-cut hay still pervaded the balmy air.

The train swept swiftly on its course, past wood and valley, river and stream, humble cottages, and palatial structures, spires of ancient churches and old abbey ruins telling of days when freedom was not in our land.

The woodland glades were gorgeous with wild flowers, and the towering trees were

waving aloft their yellow tints to the smiling sun.

Nature was offering her own thanksgiving to the glorious God who had given her life and beauty.

Over Hugh's face, as he lay back in the carriage, meditating on the lovely prospect which Nature yielded, there came a more peaceful expression than was wont. Héloïse noticed the happy change; a flush of delight came to her cheeks, and brighter light shone in her eyes.

The spectre that had haunted her dreams had fled; she saw no longer her mother's mangled form, but fixing her eyes on the far off horizon, while the noonday sun was streaming its glories over hill and vale, she became suddenly entranced with an inner joy.

She thought that, midway between heaven and earth, stood the spirit of her mother, happy and exalted, a calm, sweet peace resting on the clear fair brow. Her form was radiant with light and beauty; her eyes, soft and tender, as of old, were fixed on her child; and, with her hand, she pointed upwards.

So apparently real was the vision, that

Héloise had forgotten where she was, and, in her intensity of joy, she exclaimed aloud—

“Mother, dear mother! I will follow where you have led the way.”

Hugh, disturbed in his meditations, looked up at his daughter, thinking she had awakened from a dream, and marvelled at the strange beauty of her face, which he had never before observed. Héloise told him of the vision, and he mused on it the rest of the journey.

It was growing late when the train reached its destination. The sun had sunk in the west, and the golden splendour had vanished; the songs of the birds were hushed, and the woods looked sombre in the twilight; a mist hung over hill and dale, and, in the growing darkness, the country round seemed wild and dreary, as they approached The Hollows, surrounded by its spacious and solitary grounds.

As Héloise entered the house, a slight shiver ran through her frame, and she drew near to her father's side.

“My darling!” cried Hugh, as he led her to the fire, “you are cold.”

“No, not cold,” she answered; and her eyes wandered round the room, and back again towards the fire, with the tremor still

upon her; "not cold, but an unpleasant sensation crept over me as I thought what a dismal name is attached to the house, The Hollows."

"Oh, is that all, my darling?" said he, with a smile. "You are tired and nervous to-night, fatigued with your long journey." And, consigning her to the care of her maid, they parted for the night.

Alone, in her own room, she sat for some hours, ruminating on the fearful events of the past year. How changed was everything to her! A vivid picture of the fatal accident again presented itself to her mind, but, this time, taking another shape. It was the vision of a manly form rescuing her from imminent death. The same face, pale with emotion, the same earnest, wistful eyes, looked again into hers. A strange, unaccountable tremor ran through her frame as she thought of the pressure of his hand at parting, and heard the agitated whisper—

"I hope we shall meet again under happier auspices."

This face and form had, even in her saddest moments, often flitted before her mental vision.

He had saved her life and her father's

also, and her imagination endowed him with the attributes of a hero.

What did they not owe to him? But they had no clue to his whereabouts, and might never hear of him more.

She drew a small satchel towards her, and took from it the handkerchief that he had wrapped round her wounded hand on that fearful night. She had preserved it as a sacred thing; it had a name written on it which she had many times read over; and she had treasured a new feeling in her heart, an interest in the handsome stranger.

"Owen Alwyn" was the echo that answered her from the farther end of the room. It sounded like the tone of his own voice. For a moment she held her breath; it was but the echo.

She put away the handkerchief and retired to rest, to dream of green fields and of waving woods, of running beside pebbly streams, and inhaling the life-giving breezes from over the hills. She thought she was seated under the shadow of some sturdy oak, her feet buried in the mossy carpet. And anon she was floating down the river in a tiny bark in the stillness of the eventide; and always and ever by her side was Owen Alwyn.

We must now return to her father. He, too, was fatigued from his journey, and, after a hurried survey of the house, he sought his room for the night.

It was a large, old-fashioned chamber, with panelled walls. The furniture was handsome and costly, but heavy, and not of modern device ; but it was in character with the room and the house—of richly grand style and but dimly lighted. A lamp standing on a table within a recess threw a circle of light around it, leaving the rest of the room in shadow.

Hugh retired to bed, but not to sleep. A feeling of unrest came over him, an indescribable fear of he knew not what, and, like Héloïse, he shuddered with an unearthly chill. A terror of something ghostly had seized upon him. He tried to shake it off, endeavoured to account for these mysterious impressions, thought that late mournful events had unnerved his mind, and he reasoned thus with himself, but all to 'no purpose. His fears increased, until he fancied he heard movements in the room. Strange sounds came from the panelled walls, and a cold icy wind swept over his face.

Unable to bear this longer, he rose, minutely examined the room, tapped upon

the panels, spoke aloud, tried every means to elicit some explanation of this strange disturbance of his rest, but in vain; the sounds, if there had been any, had ceased, and all was quiet again.

After a time he grew comparatively calm, and at last fell into a troubled sleep, from which he seemed to pass into a region of shadow and death. Black clouds hung over head, and he thought he fled over a boggy moorland, pursued by an unhappy spirit, who cried to him for help.

In his eagerness to escape from the weird phantom, he stumbled and fell into a dismal swamp, and lay there for some time, making fruitless efforts to extricate himself.

In this state the phantom reached him and clung to his garments, regarding him with the look of deadly despair.

Fain would he have thrown the unearthly thing from him; but, with tenacious grasp, it held firmly for a while, and they struggled together in the darkness.

There came, like a dawning sunbeam, a stream of silvery light, and, looking up, he saw the beautiful spirit of his wife hovering over the scene. Instantly the spell was broken, and the phantom fled.

He awoke, to see the morning sun streaming in at the window, and the fair face of his daughter bending in affection over his own.





CHAPTER IV.

NEW Year's eve had come, a clear and frosty night. The snow that had fallen in the early morning glistened like diamonds as the keen north wind swept over the wintry scene, freezing up the pools and the rivulets which had lately rippled and murmured in the golden sunlight, and enhancing the beautiful scenery around The Hollows.

The full moon in the clear blue sky seemed to concentrate its gaze upon the solitary and cold looking mansion in which Hugh and his daughter had been for the last few months installed. The interior of the house had, since the day that Héloïse first entered it, undergone a material change. She had made successful efforts at renovating and giving a home appearance to the formerly dreary looking rooms, manifesting good taste in

selecting her furniture, and giving to the whole a lightness and a look of elegance combined with comfort. She had already found a circle of acquaintances in the neighbourhood, and, as an heiress and a beauty, she had been recognised by the families of distinction in the localities around.

On this New Year's eve, the room was unusually gay; a bright fire played in the old fashioned grate, while sprigs of holly berries, relieved the monotony of the dark panelled walls. The bells from the neighbouring churches were beginning to chime, echoing back their peals as they rang a welcome to the New Year that was appearing, and which was to be ushered into the old house with dainty things and all the good cheer of the festive season. Jovial souls sat around the board as a new visitor approached and was greeted with a hearty welcome.

After the separation of the festive party, this one guest, a favourite, remained. He had become a frequent visitor at The Hollows.

Looking at him as he crosses the room to where she is standing, apparently deeply interested in a number of choice drawings, but in reality listening for his returning footsteps, we are startled by the likeness he bears

to a face which Héloïse had seen amid death and desolation on the night that had left her motherless ; and indeed it was Owen Alwyn, the man who had saved her from an appalling death, and whose image, from that day, she had cherished in her memory.

As he approached, a shadow fell across his brow, and an expression of pain spread itself over his whole countenance.

“Owen,” said the girl, alarmed as she lifted her beautiful face, flushed a moment before with happiness, “Owen, what ails you, are you ill?”

“Nay, sweetest, dearest friend,” said the young man, forcing a smile ; “I have an unwelcome duty to perform—to say farewell to you and all the enchanting hours I have spent here. My father has obtained a foreign appointment for me, and I leave at once ; I have already lingered too long.”

For a few moments the girl stood mute, all the rich warm colour faded out of her cheeks. Her lips quivered, and the tears filled her beautiful eyes.

Owen turned away his head for a moment, battling with his own emotion.

Presently she murmured—

“And why should you go at all, Owen?”

T

“Héloise,” cried the young man, turning suddenly round; “I have no choice; I am a poor man, the youngest son; my father has no portion to give me but this appointment, and a month ago I looked forward to it with pride and pleasure; now all is changed. Ambition, riches, power, all! all! is light and valueless, weighed in the balance against the great love that fills my heart. I cannot ask your hand as a portionless son. But if I succeed, Héloise, my dearest love, may I not ask you to be my wife? Your image will ever be with me, and when distant lands separate us, let us still be united in that soul union that can never die. May it be so, dearest? or have I been too presumptuous in judging of your heart by my own? Can you—do you love me?”

The girl raised her frank happy face to his own, and with the soft light of her eyes she answered, and they both knew that their two hearts were one.

In those few moments the young man forgot his poverty and his appointment, and found himself uttering the endearing name of wife.

“You will not go, you must not leave me,” cried the girl. A cold smile came over the young man’s face.

"Héloise," he said, "you have forgotten your father—he will not give his daughter to a portionless man."

"My father loves you," said the girl.

"He loves his daughter better," said Owen, "and will not easily and rashly part with her."

"You saved my father's life and mine," said Héloise; "what would his riches avail had I not escaped that dreadful death? You know not my father, Owen, and how little value he sets on the world's wealth now. Come, let us go together, and ask him to sanction and bless our love."

Hugh had retired to his study. Though no longer despairing and melancholy, he had acquired the habit of thought, and chose to be often alone; unlooked-for incidents had occurred to perplex him, of a nature that could not be made public, and that were altogether foreign to his former experiences of life; only since he came to reside at The Hollows, had he known this new phase of it. A report that the house was haunted had not much affected him, for he was a practical man, and not given to the marvellous and traditionary superstitions.

But the frequent repetitions of the strange

sounds that assailed him on the first night of his instalment were now bordering on the serious, and called forth the exclamation—"Can the dead communicate with the living?" At the first, he strenuously opposed the idea, but, remembering the voice that had awakened hope within him but a few short months ago, he could not banish the subject from his mind, but pondered whether it could be his wife who wished to make some communication to his private ears.

While reflecting on the perplexing question, a knock at his study door startled him, and, this time it was no ghostly visitor imploring admission, for in answer to his summons, "Come in," there stood before him his daughter and his young friend. As his eye fell upon the graceful figure of his daughter, all the father's love and pride shone on his face. Owen caught the admiring gaze, and his late hope died within him. Was her father thinking how she would grace a brilliant marriage? Had he already provided a husband for her with wealth equal to her own? Such thoughts kept him for a moment silent.

He had long watched with anxious eyes the growing attachment of these two, which was ripening into the state that would ere

long demand his sanction and blessing. His mind had now become so independent of worldly gain, that the young man's want of patrimony was, in his mind, no obstacle to a love-union which he saw was established. He knew that in parting with his beloved child, his right hand would be taken from him; yet he also knew that, in the nature of things, such parental sacrifices were constantly called for, and that he must submit to the inevitable; and with a firm voice, he held out his hand to each and said—

“What is it you would ask of me, my children?”

“Father,” cried Héloise, throwing her arms about his neck, and bursting into tears, “Owen loves me!”

“Sir,” said the young man, stepping forward, “if I know my own heart aright, Héloise has so become a part of myself, that life would be joyless were I to lose her.”

“And you, my child?” said Hugh, raising her head from his shoulder, and gazing into the eyes that were so like her mother's; “And you, my darling?”

“I love him,” she said, blushing and weeping simultaneously.

“Then heaven's best blessing go with

mine," said Hugh; "your destiny is in God's hands; may He order it for your mental happiness and good."

"But," said the young man, in an agitated voice, "I have said I loved her. I cannot ask more. I am poor, and dare not ask you to give me your daughter until I have won a position worthy of her and you."

"Take her!" said Hugh, forcing a smile. "This old house is large enough, and God knows, dismal enough, too, to warrant the addition of another young stout heart, whose natural gaiety and vigour may, perchance, scare away the uncongenial influences that still hang over it."

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CHAPTER V.

"We are immortal ; and do not forget ;
To us the past is like the future present."

BYRON.

THE house was quiet. Owen had taken his departure with elastic steps and a brighter heart than he had known for many days.

Héloise had retired to her chamber, and the servants were asleep ; even the old dog, usually so vigilant and demonstrative, had retired to the warmest corner of his kennel, and was at rest for the night.

Hugh, left alone in his study, had turned again to the table, not with any intention of resuming his former train of thought, but to consider that which was of the most importance to him now ; his daughter's happiness.

Time was, when he would have rejected, and thought presumptuous, Owen's offer for her hand. But the influence of some guid-

ing angel had pervaded his nature, and lifted it beyond mercenary things to the lofty and the ideal. He sat ruminating a long time, lost to all outward things; when, rising from his reverie, he was about to cross the hall. Just then his attention was arrested by a white robed figure slowly descending the broad staircase opposite. He fell back against the study door, and watched the apparition, slowly and noiselessly gliding along.

A slight, fair, graceful figure—she made no sign, but came straight forward. Her white garments fluttered every now and then, stirred by the wind as it passed through the silent corridor.

Her silken hair, which fell in luxuriant masses around her face, nearly obscured her features, and her identity was lost in her ghost-like appearance, so that Hugh, for a few seconds, did not recognise his daughter.

She was as one in a dream, and approached nearer and nearer to his study door.

Startled and alarmed to see her thus, he was about to cry out, but struck with the unconscious gaze of her wide open eyes, and her measured footsteps, he restrained himself, and made way for her to pass. At length,

standing in the centre of the room, she hesitated for a moment, as though uncertain which way to turn.

It was midnight. The old year was expiring ; the chimes had again pealed forth ringing its death knell, while the old turret clock at The Hollows began slowly and solemnly to strike the hour, awakening the echoes, and sending a thrill of something like horror through the heart of Hugh as he gazed on the sleep-walking girl.

When the last stroke had died away, she crossed at once to the further corner of the room, touched a panel in the wall, which receded at her touch, revealing a roll of papers. The girl took them up, and in the same slow mechanical manner, returned to where her father stood, and held them to him.

He gently took them from her, and followed her as she retreated along the corridor into her own room. With the same cautious steps she sought her bed, unconscious of any one witnessing her somnambulic feat, unconscious that she herself had performed it.

The anxious father hung over her pillow, saw the cold fixed stare vanish from her eyes, and the lids close over them, noted the warm blood mantling her cheeks, and heard

the even breathing of a natural sleep; and then, satisfied that his child was safe, he once more returned to his study.

Strange feelings stirred his breast, as in the first hour of the new year he trimmed afresh his fire and lamp, and seated himself to peruse the papers which had been given to him as documents from the long closed volume of the dead.

The first that came to his hand were entries from the diary of a lady who had been governess in the family which had occupied The Hollows.

I give them verbatim, and leave my readers to solve the mystic problem indicated by their records.

FIRST ENTRY.

“March 24, 18—.

“My young people are out for a holiday, and I have spent the greater part of the day with Lady W.

“Poor lady, she is becoming more and more oppressed and nervous. These rumours that the house is haunted are making fearful ravages on her health.

“March 28th.—No lessons to-day; my pupils are little disposed to study, and as restless

and disturbed as their mamma. I think I, too, am growing morbid, and am allowing this strange secret connected with the invisible world to have an unhealthy influence upon me. I must shake it off, and use my influence to cheer the children and their mother.

“April 3rd.—I have tried in vain to forget my strange experience connected with Sir W.’s death. Though I never see nor hear the ghostly visitant who, the servants affirm, nightly frequents this house, yet an invisible presence seems to follow me constantly. And that paper, what can I do with it? I cannot give it to Lady W., and I dare not destroy it.

“May 16th.—We are to leave this house and go abroad. What can I do with my manuscripts? If I take them with me the strange restless spirit that haunts this house may follow us, and the thing we are flying from may still pursue us. I will hide them behind the moving panel in the study, and so rid myself of the unpleasant reminiscences.”

RACHEL SMYTH.

“Rachel Smyth’s statement of her ex-

periences on the night of the 30th of December, 18—

“It was the night after Sir W.’s death. I had gone to bed at my usual time, but could not sleep. I was weary, but restless. A sensation of oppression seized me ; a nervous faintness, a strange fear, not of the dead man lying in the next room, for I had been familiar with death from my childhood. I had seen my mother die, and, previous to that, had been present when my little sister and two brothers passed away. I had known these bereavements, and still mourned for my little relatives, for the void they left in my heart had never been supplanted. I had no fear of the little dead forms that seemed to speak to me from beyond this world. After the spirits had departed I had lingered about them, feeling almost jealous of other hands but my own coming in contact with the dear clay. I had arranged the flowers around the dear heads, and pressed my lips to the marble brows. Then why (I resume) this restlessness which ignores sleep?

“Hark! I hold my breath to listen. I fancied I heard footsteps! Impossible. Those poor stiffened limbs in the next room have lost the power to move, and the schem-

ing brain is at rest. The proud head is bowed low. The tree has fallen, and lies lifeless at the mercy of other hands.

“The old clock in the turret chimed; it wanted but half an hour to midnight. I listened again, and heard movements in the next room. Perhaps the watcher, in her lonely occupation, was growing weary, and would be glad of company. I arose, dressed myself, and went to her.

“The old woman demurred a little when I proposed to stay the night with her, giving my reason that I could not sleep. But very soon she settled down into her chair, and sank into a sound slumber.

“Then came a series of strange sights and sounds, the substance of which I was, by some invisible agency, compelled to record on paper, an abundance of which lay on the table by my hand.

“On one side of the room, and just above where the bed stood, hung a painting, a portrait, I heard, of one of Sir W.’s ancestors. I had been studying the picture for some minutes, seeking to trace a likeness to the man whose mortal remains lay on the bed underneath it, and, suddenly, I lost sight of it; and before me lay a vast space, a kind

of wilderness in which everything seemed out of shape, and strange, and weird.

"I knew my eyes were open, and to assure myself that I was awake, I essayed to move forward to examine some of the unseemly figures that were before me, but I found I could not move, and cried, 'Where am I?'

"On the border land of an interior state, the threshold of the great unknown!"

"I turned at the sound of the voice, and by my side stood a stranger, an elderly man, with an exceedingly grave face.

"If you would know more,' said he, 'wear this to-night,' holding out to me an ugly, ill-shapen cloak.

"I do not like it,' cried I; 'no matter which way you turn it, it is a horrid ill-fitting, scaly thing! Take it away. I will not wear it.'

"But he persisted, and even while I spoke, the detestable covering fell upon me, and I was entangled by some overwhelming power.

"My strange visitant then pressed his hand upon my head, and I seemed to hear by an intuitive sense, but so distinctly that I was able to record the words as they fell upon my ear.

"I was startled to hear a voice that I had

deemed stilled in death break the silence by the following sentences—

“ ‘ When shall I be sent for ? My patience is being tried to the quick. It is quite evident there is something wrong. Somebody is neglecting his duty. Stop, will you ? Not time to stop ! Here, you insolent fellow—knock at that gate for me, will you ? I find myself at an inconvenient distance from it. I suppose they knew I was coming. Impossible ; can it be that I should speak, and nobody answer ? I have my testimonials of introduction safe. Stay. Something is wrong. I have lost them ! I must consider now what is to be done. Something, or somebody, has been playing me false. Perhaps it is my memory ; I will try it. Yesterday, at noon, I remember the hour—twelve—I was not conscious of being so near to heaven, only that I heard the minister say, just after that I had partaken of the Sacrament, that matters were all settled, that the last religious rite was performed, and that I was consigned to the care of my Maker and of my Saviour. To my weeping wife and children, said the minister—There is music in Heaven to-day. Heaven’s arches will ring at the advent of a good Christian ; a firm believer of the faith

enters its portals! Yes, dear children, doubtless a safe entrance shall be given him into heaven, and he will find his way to the throne before you and me; so weep not. . . .

“Ah, there were my credentials—there my letters of introduction. What more could I want? I had been a good Christian, a firm believer in the Faith, and had stood by the mother church; I heard the minister declare it, and surely he was an authority. I expected to have been heralded in with sounds of trumpets and with much rejoicing. Twelve o’clock has struck again. I have been here twelve hours, and yet I wait, looking at that door just in front of me.

“I am induced to think that it can only be one of the outer gates of Heaven, but by some ill-luck on the part of the heralds and those who receive me, I am now standing without the power to reach the gates and knock for myself; and, having by some strange fatality lost my passport, I am at a loss to know what next to do. I will think again. I wonder whether I have bettered my condition. I was a man of influence, and very much looked up to, and very much bowed down to. So I had a right to be, for I was rich. Riches ought to command respect. I

had a handsome mansion that added to my dignity. I had many servants who all respected me, and knew their duty towards their master. They knew better than to disobey my orders. I did not join the church without consideration. I never allowed myself to take any important step in a hurry. I weighed the matter over well, and had many reasons for becoming a church-member. Oh ! There is nobody here to listen to my reasons. No, no one near. I am alone ! Perhaps the time will seem to pass more swiftly if I employ my thoughts. Every friend and acquaintance of mine, of any standing in society, was a church communicant. It being so, I risked my influence with these friends, if I had not become united to them by religious bonds. Besides, I had not settled in life at that period. I wished to settle, as very rich and very religious. That I considered one very good reason. I do not feel quite so comfortable now after thinking it over.

“ Ah, I thought I was alone ! Here is a stealthy friend listening to what I have been saying. Why, I know the man ; he used to sit in the pew next to me at church. I would not have met him here for all my gold ! But—he has fastened himself upon me !

W

“ ‘ I will not associate with you, you despicable, shriveled thing.’

“ ‘ Why ?’

“ ‘ You are a hypocrite ; you were a hypocrite in life.’

“ Echo.—‘ You were a hypocrite in life !’

“ ‘ You joined the church in order to become rich.’

“ Echo.—‘ You joined the church in order to become rich.’

“ ‘ That stings me. I need not speak my reasons further. They are known, it is evident. How am I to fly from this ? How am I to get rid of that man’s society ? You wear a religious cloak to cover your sins. What a grimace. What is he staring at ? Surprised ? I suppose I am awake ?

“ ‘ Yes, I am awake, and very uncomfortable. It seems to me that I shall have plenty of company presently.

“ ‘ I cannot bring myself to ask for help yet ; there seems less chance than ever of reaching that door. I am being surrounded. Where do they all come from ? Who are they, and what cursed fate has fixed me in the midst of them ? What a fool that parson was—he ought to have known better. Fifty. I have

counted them. They have each a mark upon their forehead; it is clearly and plainly to be read, and as clearly am I read.

“ ‘ Well it will be interesting to read their several histories. Here we sit—stare—stare—stare—at each other until my brain reels. If ever I had any reason, it is going now. I cannot comprehend. What is this? If you stare at me any longer I will curse you! If you remind me of that again, you shall feel my vengeance!

“ ‘ Don’t tell me of that, man. I know I robbed him, but then he was an imbecile old fool. Leaving his money to the poor, indeed! Was he not my wife’s uncle? And if I did alter the will, what is that to you? I can see a deed as dark as that on your face. Don’t hiss that into my ears again, woman! If my wife—poor soul—looked over my little eccentricities, what have you to do with them? You are a serpent! I tell you I will not hear you. It was a religious mania that caused him to leave his money to the church. Did I not give them half?

“ ‘ Partook at the Lord’s supper! Yes, so has every one of you, over and over again, until the infatuation grew upon you, and you thought the observance of that religious rite

would cover your multitude of sins. Why, you are every one of you hypocrites !

“ ‘ Oh ! horror ! don’t yell so ! Thrown back upon me from fifty false throats is the word hypocrite ? What can I do to free myself from this company ? Can I not call up my worldly position and put down some of these fools ?

“ ‘ I will teach them who I am. I will be myself again and put my foot upon their necks. How dare they insult and taunt me, who for twenty years kept a high place in society, was an honourable warden in the church, and revered as an honourable man ? Oh, that’s fiend’s laughter ! Spare me from that again. The kisses of a thousand vipers would be pleasanter to me than that mocking laugh ! I will curse them ! I will call for vengeance upon every one of them ! They ought to be in hell. Are you appointed instructor here, you ill-shapen fiend ? Don’t tell that again ! He persists in it—that this is hell.

“ ‘ I dare say he knows more about it, yet I cannot bring myself to ask of such as these.

“ ‘ I wonder whether there is any way back again ? The space in front of me is completely filled up. I am edged in by these black-

hearted and false-lipped men and women. There is no way to look but backward. I will look backward. I will shriek back again; perhaps my voice will be heard. I hear nothing but the echo of it. I see nothing save a solitary individual coming from the other world to have the scales taken from his eyes, and to lose in the dark deep waters through which he is passing, the cloak that covered him and his false passport into heaven. I will look again. Ah—what do I see? A grand solemn procession. The funeral ceremonies of the last mortal remains of—Sir W——. They already know me. It is a costly funeral. They could afford it. It is very black and very heavy. The match of my own state. There is that villain. I wish I could catch him and shake the book from his hand. He told me that my entrance into heaven would be grand and imposing. Ah! ha! ha! He is burying the body in sure and certain hope of resurrection. What a farce. I should like to undeceive him. I will try, in his study, to-night, to get near him. I would let him know, if I could, the nature of the real life after death. I should like his lips to tremble, and his heart to quake, when he utters false words, and gives false hopes to

the dying. I would seize his pen, if I could. I would trace the subject for his next discourse, and it should be—‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.’ Also—‘Nothing that defileth or maketh a lie, entereth into the gates of the city.’ ‘Without are hypocrites and scorners.’ O, how I could preach to that man, and to others through him, if I could reach him. He has been in office so long, presided over the Holy Sacrament so many times, read the prayers to the dying over and over again, until they fall from his lips as the motion of a machine. He takes no trouble to think. He is ordained to do his duty, and he supposes he does it.

“ ‘Shall I disturb my wife and family? Shall I present myself before her as I now am? Shall I tell her my condition?

“ ‘No I will not disturb her. I dare not, heaven will prevent me. She is a religious woman and sincere. She loves her church and her God. She has taken up the bread with clean hands, and drunk of the cup with pure lips. She, at least, is a Christian. She has fed the hungry and clothed the poor. Did so always, as far as she had means and power. She has endeavoured to train her children righteously and for heaven. She

has taught them to believe in God, walk uprightly and honestly, and to be in charity with all men. Will they obey her? I know not.

“ Parted, a great gulf has divided us. The sincere worshippers of God, and the hypocrite masking beneath a religious cloak his evil doing and his evil heart, walking side by side in church, are divided by mortal death, placing indeed the sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left.

“ ‘ Oh, God! I have taken Thy name in vain. I dare not ask Thee for mercy. I cannot pray. I am shut out from heaven—from purity and happiness, and I am shut in and encircled by beings as false as myself.

“ ‘ I refused the influences that would have guided me into a life of righteousness. I studied not to become pure in the sight of my Maker, but to hide from Him and the eyes of men also, my sordid self, enshrouding myself with religious rites and ceremonies, and daring to touch sacred things with unhallowed hands, ignoring all promptings to a better life, and quieting the warning voice within me. I rejected the elevating influences that would have moulded me into a different character. I shut up every channel

of spiritual advice, and ultimately I was left to myself, and became absorbed in my own sordid nature.

“‘I became proud and arrogant, thinking in my later days to purchase heaven by giving to the church that which afore-time I had unjustly taken from others, and thus securing for myself a good place on high. I had concealed my errors, and pardoned myself, and I thought I knew the way to be pardoned by God. Besides, nobody remembered my delinquencies, and many never knew of them, and thus, with this false passport, I have dared to present myself here, and am waiting outside a gate that I cannot approach. I know not my next step, I see not my way. I am blinded by the eternal stare of those around me. My brain is on fire with the thought that I am completely unmasked.’”

When Hugh Spencer had finished the paper, sleep had entirely forsaken him. He sat pondering over it perplexed as to its meaning. Could it be the spirit of this wretched man that was wandering within the gloomy rooms, and seeking to be recognized by some mortal who would participate in his

troubles, and aid him in overcoming them? Had he, by some spiritual means, caused this paper to be written? And was he still determined that something more should be done with it? But, perhaps Rachel Smyth had received some instructions what to do with it. He felt inclined to throw the paper into the fire, but his hand was restrained, withheld.

If the manuscript was given in the manner it purported to be, then the wandering spirit would never rest until it was published as a warning to others. But who would believe this statement? Where should he send it? He was himself incredulous as to its spiritual origin and nature.

Suddenly, he remembered that a society had been recently formed in London for the investigation of psychological phenomena. There he resolved to send the mysterious missive, and so rid himself of its responsibility.

To his daughter, who was ignorant of the part she had played in it, he determined to say nothing.

By the time he had folded, sealed, and addressed the parcel, he found it was morning and the house was astir. He carried it himself

to the post-office, making sure that no trace of it should be left in the house.

From this time, henceforth, The Hollows was rid of its nocturnal visitor.

* * * * *

It was spring again. Nature had woke up as from a long sleep, and was clothing herself in a new garb of delicate green. The pale spring flowers covered the meadows, and the violets bloomed in the hedgerows.

Among the apple blossoms and beneath the eaves, twitted and sang a thousand little warblers, perhaps in joyous anticipations of certain small forms of life that should ere long give additional interest to their short span of existence. Signs of life and beauty were everywhere apparent.

On the lawn of The Hollows stands a group of three, the bright May sun shining upon their animated faces. They are discussing the question of certain alterations and improvements.

Hugh remarks that the old place stands in danger of losing its original character for gloom, and is likely to be transformed into sunlight.

“And, when it is completed, dear father,” said Héloïse, “Owen proposes a new name for it. No longer to be called The Hollows, but ‘The Oasis.’”

“And so may it be,” said the father, laying a hand on each of their heads, “a resting place for my children, and for my children’s children.”

THE END.