

Thomas Wingfold, Curate V2

George MacDonald

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Charles Franks, Charles Aldarondo, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team.

CHAPTER I. RACHEL AND HER UNCLE.

It was nearly dark when they arrived again at the lodge. Rachel opened the gate for them. Without even a THANK YOU, they rode out. She stood for a moment gazing after them through the dusk, then turned with a sigh, and went into the kitchen, where her uncle sat by the fire with a book in his hand.

"How I should like to be as well made as Miss Lingard!" she said, seating herself by the lamp that stood on the deal-table. "It MUST be a fine thing to be strong and tall, and able to look this way and that without turning all your body along with your head, like the old man that gathers the leeches in Wordsworth's poem. And what it must be to sit on a horse as she does! You should have seen her go flying like the very wind across the park! You would have thought she and her horse were cut out of the same piece. I'm dreadfully envious, uncle."

"No, my child; I know you better than you do yourself. There is a great difference between *I WISH I WAS* and *I SHOULD LIKE TO BE*—as much as between a grumble and a prayer. To be content is not to be satisfied. No one ought to be satisfied with the imperfect. It is God's will that we should bear, and contentedly—because in hope, looking for the redemption of the body. And we know he has a ready servant who will one day set us free."

"Yes, uncle; I understand. You know I enjoy life: how could I help it and you with me? But I don't think I ever go through the churchyard without feeling a sort of triumph. 'There's for you!' I say sometimes to the little crooked shadow that creeps along by my side across the graves. 'You'll soon be caught and put inside!'—But how am I to tell I mayn't be crooked in the next world as well as this? That's what troubles me at times. There might be some necessity for it, you know."

"Then will there be patience to bear it there also; that you may be sure of. But I do not fear. It were more likely that those who have not thanked God, but prided themselves that they were beautiful in this world, should be crooked in the next. It would be like Dives and Lazarus, you know. But God does what is best for them as well as for us. We shall find one day that beauty and riches were the best thing for those to whom they were given, as deformity and poverty were the best for us."

"I wonder what sort of person I should have been if I had had a straight spine!" said Rachel laughing.

"Hardly one so dear to your deformed uncle," said her companion in ugliness.

"Then I'm glad I am as I am," rejoined Rachel.

"This conscious individuality of ours," said Polwarth, after a thoughtful silence, "is to me an awful thing—the one thing that seems in humanity like the onliness of God. Mine terrifies me sometimes—looking a stranger to me—a limiting of myself—a breaking in upon my existence—like a volcanic outburst into the blue Sicilian air. When it thus manifests itself, I find no refuge but the offering of it back to him who thought it worth making. I say to him: 'Lord, it is thine, not mine;—see to it, Lord. Thou and thy eternity are mine, Father of Jesus Christ.'"

He covered his eyes with his hands, and his lips grew white, and trembled. Thought had turned into prayer, and both were silent for a space. Rachel was the first to speak.

"I think I understand, uncle," she said. "I don't mind being God's dwarf. But I would rather be made after his own image; this can't be it. I should like to be made over again."

"And if the hope we are saved by be no mockery, if St. Paul was not the fool of his own radiant imaginings, you will be, my child.—But now let us forget our miserable bodies. Come up to my room, and I will read you a few lines that came to me this morning in the park."

"Won't you wait for Mr. Wingfold, uncle? He will be here yet, I think. It can't be ten o'clock. He always looks in on Saturdays as he goes home from his walk. I should like you to read them to him too. They will do him good, I know."

"I would, my dear, willingly, if I thought he would care for them. But I don't think he would. They are not good enough verses. He has been brought up on Horace, and, I fear, counts the best poetry the neatest."

"I think you must be mistaken there, uncle; I have heard him talk delightfully about poetry."

"You must excuse me if I am shy of reading my poor work to any but yourself, Rachel. My heart was wo much in it, and the subject is so sacred—"

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"I am sorry you should think your pearls too good to cast before Mr. Wingfold, uncle," said Rachel, with a touch of disappointed temper.

"Nay, nay, child," returned Polwarth, "that was not a good thing to say. What gives me concern is, that there is so much of the rough dirty shell sticking about them, that to show them would be to wrong the truth in them."

Rachel seldom took long to repent. She came slowly to her uncle, where he stood with the lamp in his hand, looking in his face with a heavenly contrition, and saying nothing. When she reached him, she dropped on her knees, and kissed the hand that hung by his side. Her temper was poor Rachel's one sore-felt trouble.

Polwarth stooped and kissed her on the forehead, raised her, and leading her to the stair, stood aside to let her go first. But when she had been naughty Rachel would never go before her uncle, and she drew back. With a smile of intelligence he yielded and led the way. But ere they had climbed to the top, Rachel heard Mr. Wingfold's step, and went down again to receive him.

CHAPTER II. A DREAM.

Invited to ascend, Wingfold followed Rachel to her uncle's room, and there, whether guided by her or not, the conversation presently took such a turn that at length, of his own motion, Polwarth offered to read his verses. From the drawer of his table he took a scratched and scored halfsheet, and—not in the most melodious of voices, yet in one whose harshness and weakness could not cover a certain refinement of spiritual tenderness—read as follows:

Lord, hear my discontent: All blank I stand,
A mirror polished by thy hand;
Thy sun's beams flash and flame from me—
I cannot help it: here I stand, there he;
To one of them I cannot say—
Go, and on yonder water play.
Nor one poor ragged daisy can I fashion—
I do not make the words of this my limping passion.
If I should say: Now I will think a thought,
Lo! I must wait, unknowing,
What thought in me is growing,
Until the thing to birth is brought;
Nor know I then what next will come
From out the gulf of silence dumb.
I am the door the thing did find
To pass into the general mind;
I cannot say I think—
I only stand upon the thought—well's brink;
From darkness to the sun the water bubbles up—
I lift it in my cup.
Thou only thinkest—I am thought;
Me and my thought thou thinkest. Nought
Am I but as a fountain spout
From which thy water welleteth out.
Thou art the only One, the All in all.
—Yet when my soul on thee doth call
And thou dost answer out of everywhere,
I in thy allness have my perfect share.

While he read Rachel crept to his knee, knelt down, and laid her head upon it.

If we are but the creatures of a day, yet surely were the shadow—joys of this miserable pair not merely nobler in their essence, but finer to the soul's palate than the shadow—joys of young Hercules Bascombe—Helen and horses and all! Poor Helen I cannot use for comparison, for she had no joy, save indeed the very divine, though at present unblossoming one of sisterly love. Still, and notwithstanding, if the facts of life are those of George Bascombe's endorsing—AND HE CAN PROVE IT—let us by all means learn and accept them, be they the worst possible. Meantime there are truths that ought to be facts, and until he has proved that there is no God, some of us will go feeling after him if haply we may find him, and in him the truths we long to find true. Some of us perhaps think we have seen him from afar, but we only know the better that in the mood wherein such as Bascombe are, they will never find him—which would no doubt be to them a comfort were it not for a laughter. And if he be such as their idea of what we think him, they ARE better without him. If, on the contrary, he be what some of us really think him, their not seeking him will not perhaps prevent him from finding them.

From likeness of nature, community of feeling, constant intercourse, and perfect confidence, Rachel understood her uncle's verses with sufficient ease to enjoy them at once in part, and, for the rest, to go on thinking in the direction in which they would carry her; but Wingfold, in whom honesty of disposition had blossomed at last into honesty of action, after fitting pause, during which no word was spoken, said:—

"Mr. Polwarth, where verse is concerned, I am simply stupid: when read I cannot follow it. I did not understand the half of that poem. I never have been a student of English verse, and indeed that part of my nature which has to do with poetry, has been a good deal neglected. Will you let me take those verses home with me?"

"I cannot do that, for they are not legible; but I will copy them out for you."

"Will you give me them to-morrow? Shall you be at church?"

"That shall be just as you please: would you rather have me there or not?"

"A thousand times rather," answered the curate. "To have one man there who knows what I mean better than I can say it, is to have a double soul and double courage.—But I came to-night mainly to tell you that I have been much puzzled this last week to know how I ought to regard the Bible—I mean as to its inspiration. What am I to say about it?"

"Those are two distinct things. Why think of saying about it, before you have anything to say? For yourself, however, let me ask if you have not already found in the book the highest means of spiritual education and development you have yet met with? If so, may not that suffice for the present? It is the man Christ Jesus we have to know, and the Bible we have to use to that end—not for theory or dogma.—I will tell you a strange dream I had once, not long ago."

Rachel's face brightened. She rose, got a little stool, and setting it down close by the chair on which her uncle was perched, seated herself at his feet, with her eyes on the ground, to listen.

"About two years ago," said Polwarth, "a friend sent me Tauchnitz's edition of the English New Testament, which has the different readings of the three oldest known manuscripts translated at the foot of the page. The edition was prepared chiefly for the sake of showing the results of the collation of the Sinaitic manuscript, the oldest of all, so named because it was found—a few years ago, by Tischendorf—in a monastery on Mount Sinai—nowhere else than there! I received it with such exultation as brought on an attack of asthma, and I could scarce open it for a week, but lay with it under my pillow. When I did come to look at it, my main wonder was to find the differences from the common version so few and small. Still there were some such as gave rise to a feeling far above mere interest—one in particular, the absence of a word that had troubled me, not seeming like a word of our Lord, or consonant with his teaching. I am unaware whether the passage has ever given rise to controversy."

"May I ask what word it was?" interrupted Wingfold, eagerly.

"I will not say," returned Polwarth. "Not having troubled you, you would probably only wonder why it should have troubled me. For my purpose in mentioning the matter, it is enough to say that I had turned with eagerness to the passage wherein it occurs, as given in two of the gospels in our version. Judge my delight in discovering that in the one gospel the whole passage was omitted by the two oldest manuscripts, and in the other just the one word that had troubled me, by the same two. I would not have you suppose me foolish enough to imagine that the oldest manuscript must be the most correct; but you will at once understand the sense of room and air which the discovery gave me notwithstanding, and I mention it because it goes both to account for the dream that followed and to enforce its truth. Pray do not however imagine me a believer in dreams more than in any other source of mental impressions. If a dream reveal a principle, that principle is a revelation, and the dream is neither more NOR LESS valuable than a waking thought that does the same. The truth conveyed is the revelation. I do not deny that facts have been learned in dreams, but I would never call the communication of a mere fact a revelation. Truth alone, beheld as such by the soul, is worthy of the name. Facts, however, may themselves be the instruments of such revelation."

"The dream I am now going to tell you was clearly enough led up to by my waking thoughts. For I had been saying to myself ere I fell asleep: 'On the very Mount Sinai, that once burned with heavenly fire, and resounded with the thunder of a visible Presence, now old and cold, and swathed in the mists of legend and doubt, was discovered the most reverend, because most ancient record of the new dispensation which dethroned that mountain, and silenced the thunders of the pedagogue law! Is it not possible that yet, in some ancient convent, insignificant to the eye of the traveller as modern Nazareth would be but for its ancient story, some one of the

original gospel—manuscripts may lie, truthful and unblotted from the hand of the very evangelist?—Oh lovely parchment! I thought—'if eye of man might but see thee! if lips of man might kiss thee!' and my heart swelled like the heart of a lover at the thought of such a boon.—Now, as you know, I live in a sort of live coffin here," continued the little man, striking his pigeon—breast, "with a barrel—organ of discords in it, constantly out of order in one way or another; and hence it comes that my sleep is so imperfect, and my dreams run more than is usual, as I believe, on in the direction of my last waking thoughts. Well, that night, I dreamed thus: I was in a desert. It was neither day nor night to me. I saw neither sun, moon, nor stars. A heavy, yet half—luminous cloud hung over the visible earth. My heart was beating fast and high, for I was journeying towards a certain Armenian convent, where I had good ground for hoping I should find the original manuscript of the fourth gospel, the very handwriting of the apostle John. That the old man did not write it himself, I never thought of that in my dream.

"After I had walked on for a long, anything but weary time, I saw the level horizon line before me broken by a rock, as it seemed, rising from the plain of the desert. I knew it was the monastery. It was many miles away, and as I journeyed on it grew and grew, until it swelled huge as a hill against the sky. At length I came up to the door, iron—clamped, deep—set in a low thick wall. It stood wide open. I entered, crossed a court, reached the door of the monastery itself, and again entered. Every door to which I came stood open, but priest nor guide came to meet me, and I saw no man, and at length looked for none, but used my best judgment to get deeper and deeper into the building, for I scarce doubted that in its inmost penetralia I should find the treasure I sought. At last I stood before a door hung with a curtain of rich workmanship, torn in the middle from top to bottom. Through the rent I passed into a stone cell. In the cell stood a table. On the table was a closed book. Oh how my heart beat! Never but then have I known the feeling of utter preciousness in a thing possessed. What doubts and fears would not this one lovely, oh unutterably beloved volume, lay at rest for ever! How my eyes would dwell upon every stroke of every letter the hand of the dearest disciple had formed! Nearly eighteen hundred years—and there it lay!—and there WAS a man who DID hear the Master say the words, and did set them down! I stood motionless, and my soul seemed to wind itself among the leaves, while my body stood like a pillar of salt, lost in its own gaze. At last, with sudden daring, I made a step towards the table, and, bending with awe, stretched out my hand to lay it upon the book. But ere my hand reached it, another hand, from the opposite side of the table, appeared upon it—an old, blue—veined, but powerful hand. I looked up. There stood the beloved disciple! His countenance was as a mirror which shone back the face of the Master. Slowly he lifted the book, and turned away. Then first I saw behind him as it were an altar whereon a fire of wood was burning, and a pang of dismay shot to my heart, for I knew what he was about to do. He laid the book on the burning wood, and regarded it with a smile as it shrunk and shrivelled and smouldered to ashes. Then he turned to me and said, while a perfect heaven of peace shone in his eyes: 'Son of man, the Word of God liveth and abideth for ever, not in the volume of the book, but in the heart of the man that in love obeyeth him. And therewith I awoke weeping, but with the lesson of my dream.'

A deep silence fell on the little company. Then said Wingfold,

"I trust I have the lesson too."

He rose, shook hands with them, and, without another word, went home.

CHAPTER III. ANOTHER SERMON.

It often seems to those in earnest about the right as if all things conspired to prevent their progress. This of course is but an appearance, arising in part from this, that the pilgrim must be headed back from the side paths into which he is constantly wandering. To Wingfold, however, it seemed that all things fell in to further his quest, which will not be so surprising if we remember that his was no intermittent repentant seeking, but the struggle of his whole energy. And there are those who, in their very first seeking of it, are nearer to the kingdom of heaven than many who have for years believed themselves of it.

In the former there is more of the mind of Jesus, and when he calls them they recognize him at once and go after him; while the others examine him from head to foot, and, finding him not sufficiently like the Jesus of their conception, turn their backs, and go to church, or chapel, or chamber, to kneel before a vague form mingled of tradition and fancy. But the first shall be last, and the last first; and there are from whom, be it penny or be it pound, what they have must be taken away because with them it lies useless.

For Wingfold, he soon found that his nature was being stirred to depths unsuspected before. Hitherto nothing had ever roused him to genuine activity: his history not very happy; his life not very interesting, his work not congenial, and paying itself in no satisfaction, his pleasures of a cold and common intellectual sort,—he had dragged along, sustained, without the sense of its sustentation, by the germ within him of a slowly developing honesty. But now that Conscience had got up into the guard's seat, and Will had taken the reins, he found all his intellectual faculties in full play, keeping well together, heads up and traces tight, while the outrider Imagination, with his spotted dog Fancy, was always far ahead, but never beyond the sound of the guard's horn; and ever as they went, object after object hitherto beyond the radius of his interest, rose on the horizon of question, and began to glimmer in the dawn of human relation.

His first sermon is enough to show that he had begun to have thoughts of his own—a very different thing from the entertaining of the thoughts of others, however well we may feed and lodge them—thoughts which came to him not as things which sought an entrance, but as things that sought an exit—cried for forms of embodiment that they might pass out of the infinite, and by incarnation become communicable.

The news of that strange first sermon had of course spread through the town, and the people came to church the next Sunday in crowds—twice as many as the usual assembly—some who went seldom, some who went nowhere, some who belonged to other congregations and communities—mostly bent on witnessing whatever eccentricity the very peculiar young man might be guilty of next, but having a few among them who were sympathetically interested in seeing how far his call, if call it was, would lead him.

His second sermon was to the same purport as the first. Preposing no text, he spoke to the following effect, and indeed the following are of the very words he uttered:

"The church wherein you now listen, my hearers, the pulpit wherein I now speak, stand here from of old in the name of Christianity. What is Christianity? I know but one definition, the analysis of which, if the thing in question be a truth, must be the joyous labour of every devout heart to all eternity. For Christianity does not mean what you think or what I think concerning Christ, but what IS OF Christ. My Christianity, if ever I come to have any, will be what of Christ is in me; your Christianity now is what of Christ is in you. Last Sunday I showed you our Lord's very words—that he, and no other, was his disciple who did what he told him,—and said therefore that I dared not call myself a disciple. I say the same thing in saying now that I dare not call myself a Christian, lest I should offend him with my 'Lord, Lord!' Still it is, and I cannot now help it, in the name of Christianity that I here stand. I have, alas, with blameful and appalling thoughtlessness I subscribed my name, as a believer, to the Articles of the Church of England, with no better reason than that I was unaware of any dissent therefrom, and have been ordained one of her ministers. The relations into which this has brought me I do not feel justified in severing at once, lest I should therein seem to deny that which its own illumination may yet show me to be true, and I desire therefore a little respite and room for thought and resolve. But meantime it remains my business, as an honest man in the employment of the church, to do my best towards the setting forth of the claims of him upon

whom that church is founded, and in whose name she exists. As one standing on the outskirts of a listening Galilean crowd, a word comes now and then to my hungry ears and hungrier heart: I turn and tell it again to you—not that ye have not heard it also, but that I may stir you up to ask yourselves: 'Do I then obey this word? Have I ever, have I once sought to obey it? Am I a pupil of Jesus? Am I a Christian?' Hear then of his words. For me, they fill my heart with doubt and dismay.

"The Lord says: Love your enemies. Sayest thou, It is impossible? Then dost thou mock the word of him who said, I am the Truth, and has no part in him. Sayest thou, Alas, I cannot? Thou sayest true, I doubt not. But hast thou tried whether he who made will not increase the strength put forth to obey him?

"The Lord says: Be ye perfect. Dost thou then aim after perfection, or dost thou excuse thy wilful short-comings, and say, To err is human—nor hopest that it may also be found human to grow divine? Then ask thyself, for thou hast good cause, whether thou hast any part in him.

"The Lord said, Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth. My part is not now to preach against the love of money, but to ask you: Are you laying up for yourselves treasures on earth? As to what the command means, the honest heart and the dishonest must each settle in his own way; but if your heart condemn you, what I have to say is, Call not yourselves Christians, but consider whether you ought not to become disciples indeed. No doubt you can instance this, that, and the other man who does as you do, and of whom yet no man dreams of questioning the Christianity: it matters not a hair; all that goes but to say that you are pagans together. Do not mistake me: I judge you not. I but ask you, as mouthpiece most unworthy of that Christianity in the name of which this building stands and we are met therein, to judge your own selves by the words of its founder.

"The Lord said: Take no thought for your life. Take no thought for the morrow. Explain it as you may or can—but ask yourselves—Do I take no thought for my life? Do I take no thought for the morrow? and answer to yourselves whether or no ye are Christians.

"The Lord says: Judge not. Didst thou judge thy neighbour yesterday? Wilt thou judge him again to-morrow? Art thou judging him now in the very heart that within thy bosom sits hearing the words Judge not? Or wilt thou ask yet again—Who is my neighbour? How then canst thou look to be of those that shall enter through the gates into the city? I tell thee not, for I profess not yet to know anything, but doth not thy own profession of Christianity counsel thee to fall upon thy face, and cry to him whom thou mockest, 'I am a sinful man, O Lord'?

"The Lord said: All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. Ye that buy and sell, do you obey this law? Examine yourselves and see. Ye would that men should deal fairly by you; do you deal fairly by them as ye would count fairness in them to you?—If conscience makes you hang the head inwardly, however you sit with it erect in the pew, dare you add to your crime against the law and the prophets the insult to Christ of calling yourselves his disciples?

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. He will none but those who with him do the will of the Father."

CHAPTER IV. NURSING.

I have of course given but the spine and ribs, as it were, of the sermon. There is no place for more. It is enough however to show that he came to the point—and what can be better in preaching? Certainly he was making the best of the blunder that had led him up into that pulpit! And on the other hand, whatever might be the various judgments and opinions of his hearers in respect of the sermon—a thing about which the less any preacher allows himself to think the better—many of them did actually feel that he had been preaching to them, which is saying much. Even Mrs. Ramshorn was more silent than usual as they went home, and although—not having acquainted herself, amongst others, with the sermons of Latimer—she was profoundly convinced that such preaching was altogether contrary to the tradition, usage, and tone of the English Church, of which her departed dean remained to her the unimpeachable embodiment and type, the sole remark she made was, that Mr. Wingfold took quite too much pains to prove himself a pagan. Mr. Bascombe was in the same mind as before.

"I like the fellow," he said. "He says what he means, fair and full, and no shilly-shallying. It's all great rubbish, of course!"

And the widow of the dean of blessed memory had not a word to say in defence of the sermon, but, for her, let it go as the great rubbish he called it. Indeed, not knowing the real mind of her nephew, she was nothing less than gratified to hear from him an opinion so comfortably hostile to that of this most uncomfortable of curates, whom you never could tell where to have, and whom never since he had confessed to wrong in the reading of his uncle's sermons, and thus unwittingly cast a reproach upon the memory of him who had departed from the harassed company of deans militant to the blessed company of deans triumphant, had she invited to share at her table of the good things left behind.

"Why don't you ask him home to dinner, aunt?" said Bascombe, after a pause unbroken by Mrs. Ramshorn.

"Why should I, George?" returned his aunt. "Has he not been abusing us all at a most ignorant and furious rate?"

"Oh! I didn't know," said the nephew, and held his peace. Nor did the aunt perceive the sarcasm for the sake of pointing which he was silent. But it was not lost, and George was paid in full by the flicker of a faint smile across Helen's face.

As for Helen, the sermon had indeed laid a sort of feebly electrical hold upon her, the mere nervous influence of honesty and earnestness. But she could not accuse herself of having ever made a prominent profession of Christianity, confirmation and communion notwithstanding; and besides, had she not now all but abjured the whole thing in her heart? so that, if every word of what he said was true, not a word of it could be applied to her! And what time had she to think about such far-away things as had happened eighteen centuries ago, when there was her one darling pining away with a black weight on his heart!

For, although Leopold was gradually recovering, a supreme dejection, for which his weakness was insufficient to account, prostrated his spirit, and at length drove Mr. Faber to ask Helen whether she knew of any disappointment or other source of mental suffering that could explain it. She told him of the habit he had formed, and asked whether his being deprived of the narcotic might not be the cause. He accepted the suggestion, and set himself, not without some success, to repair the injury the abuse had occasioned. Still, although his physical condition plainly improved, the dejection continued, and Mr. Faber was thrown back upon his former conjecture. Learning nothing, however, and yet finding that, as he advanced towards health, his dejection plainly deepened, he began at length to fear softening of the brain, but could discover no other symptom of such disease.

The earnestness of the doctor's quest after a cause for what anyone might observe, added greatly to Helen's uneasiness; and besides, the fact itself began to undermine the hope of his innocence which had again sprung up and almost grown to assurance in the absence of any fresh contradiction from without. Also, as his health returned, his sleep became more troubled; he dreamed more, and showed by his increased agitation in his dreams that they were more painful. In this respect his condition was at the worst always between two and three o'clock in the morning; and having perceived this fact, Helen would never allow anyone except herself to sit up with him the

first part of the night.

Increased anxiety and continued watching soon told upon her health yet more severely, and she lost appetite and complexion. Still she slept well during the latter part of the morning, and it was in vain that aunt and doctor and nurse all expostulated with her upon the excess of her ministrations: nothing should make her yield the post until her brother was himself again. Nor was she without her reward, and that a sufficing one—in the love and gratitude with which Leopold clung to her.

During the day also she spent every moment, except such as she passed in the open air, and at table with her aunt, by his bedside, reading and talking to him; but as yet not a single allusion had been made to the frightful secret.

At length he was so much better that there was no longer need for anyone to sit up with him; but then Helen had her bed put in the dressing-room, that at one o'clock she might be by his side, to sit there until three should be well over and gone.

Thus she gave up her whole life to him, and doubtless thereby gained much fresh interest in it for herself. But the weight of the secret, and the dread of the law, were too much for her, and were gradually undermining that strength of dissimulation in which she had trusted, and which, in respect of cheerfulness, she had to exercise towards her brother as well as her aunt. She struggled hard, for if those weak despairing eyes of his were to encounter weakness and despair in hers, madness itself would be at the door for both. She had come nearly to the point of discovering that the soul is not capable of generating its own requirements, that it needs to be supplied from a well whose springs lie deeper than its own soil, in the infinite All, namely, upon which that soil rests. Happy they who have found that those springs have an outlet in their hearts—on the hill of prayer.

It was very difficult to lay her hands on reading that suited him. Gifted with a glowing yet delicate eastern imagination, pampered and all but ruined, he was impatient of narratives of common life, whose current bore him to a reservoir and no sea; while, on the other hand, some tales that seemed to Helen poverty-stricken flats of nonsense, or jumbles of false invention, would in her brother wake an interest she could not understand, appearing to afford him outlooks into regions to her unknown. But from the moral element in any story he shrunk visibly. She tried the German tales collected by the brothers Grimm, so popular with children of all ages; but on the very first attempt she blundered into an awful one of murder and vengeance, in which, if the drawing was untrue, the colour was strong, and had to blunder clumsily out of it again, with a hot face and a cold heart. At length she betook herself to the *Thousand and One Nights*, which she had never read, and found very dull, but which with Leopold served for what book could do.

In the rest of the house things went on much the same. Old friends and their daughters called on Mrs. Ramshorn, and inquired after the invalid, and George Bascombe came almost every Saturday, and stayed till Monday. But the moment the tide of her trouble began again to rise, Helen found herself less desirous of meeting one from whom she could hope neither help nor cheer. It might be that future generations of the death-doomed might pass their poor life a little more comfortably that she had not been a bad woman, and she might be privileged to pass away from the world, as George taught her, without earning the curses of those that came after her; but there was her precious brother lying before her with a horrible worm gnawing at his heart, and what to her were a thousand generations unborn! Rather with Macbeth she might well "wish the estate o' the world were now undone"—most of all when, in the silent watches of the night, as she sat by the bedside of her beloved and he slept, his voice would come murmuring out of a dream, sounding so far away that it seemed as if his spirit only and not his lips had spoken the words, "Oh Helen, darling, give me my knife. Why will you not let me die?"

CHAPTER V. GLASTON AND THE CURATE.

Outside, the sun rose and set, never a crimson thread the less in the garment of his glory that the spirit of one of the children of the earth was stained with blood—guiltiness; the moon came up and knew nothing of the matter; the stars minded their own business; and the people of Glaston were talking about their curate's sermons. Alas, it was about his sermons, and not the subject of them, that men talked, their interest mainly roused by their PECULIARITY, and what some called the oddity of the preacher.

What had come to him? He was not in the least like that for months after his appointment, and the change came all at once! Yes—it began with those extravagant notions about honesty in writing his own sermons! It might have been a sunstroke, but it took him far too early in the year for that! Softening of the brain it might be, poor fellow! Was not excessive vanity sometimes a symptom?—Poor fellow!

So said some. But others said he was a clever fellow, and long-headed enough to know that that sort of thing attracted attention, and might open the way to a benefice, or at least an engagement in London, where eloquence was of more account than in a dead—and—alive country place like Glaston, from which the tide of grace had ebbed, leaving that great ship of the church, the Abbey, high and dry on the shore.

Others again judged him a fanatic—a dangerous man. Such did not all venture to assert that he had erred from the way, but what man was more dangerous than he who went too far? Possibly these forgot that the narrow way can hardly be one to sit down in comfortably, or indeed to be entered at all save by him who tries the gate with the intent of going all the way—even should it lead up to the perfection of the Father in heaven. "But," they would in effect have argued, "is not a fanatic dangerous? and is not an enthusiast always in peril of becoming a fanatic?—Be his enthusiasm for what it may—for Jesus Christ, for God himself, such a man is dangerous— most dangerous! There are so many things, comfortably settled like Presumption's tubs upon their own bottoms, which such men would, if they could, at once upset and empty!"

Others suspected a Romanizing drift in the whole affair. "Wait until he gathers influence," they said, "and a handful of followers, and then you'll see! They'll be all back to Rome together in a month!"

As the wind took by the tail St. Peter's cock on the church spire and whirled it about, so did the wind of words in Glaston rudely seize and flack hither and thither the spiritual reputation of Thomas Wingfold, curate. And all the time, the young man was wrestling, his life in his hand, with his own unbelief; while upon his horizon ever and anon rose the glimmer of a great aurora, or the glimpse of a boundless main—if only he could have been sure they were no mirage of his own parched heart and hungry eye—that they were thoughts in the mind of the Eternal, and THEREFORE had appeared in his, even as the Word was said to have become flesh and dwelt with men! The next moment he would be gasping in that malarious exhalation from the marshes of his neglected heart—the counter-fear, namely, that the word under whose potent radiance the world seemed on the verge of budding forth and blossoming as the rose, was TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

"Yes, much too good, if there be no living, self-willing Good," said Polwarth one evening, in answer to the phrase just dropped from his lips. "But if there be such a God as alone could be God, can anything be too good to be true?—too good for such a God as contented Jesus Christ?"

At one moment he was ready to believe everything, even to that strangest, yet to me right credible miracle of the fish and the piece of money, and the next to doubt whether man had ever dared utter the words, "I and the Father are one." Tossed he was and tormented in spirit, calling even aloud sometimes to know if there was a God anywhere hearing his prayer, sure only of this, that whatever else any being might be, if he heard not prayer, he could not be the God for whom his soul cried and fainted. Sometimes there came to him, it is true, what he would gladly have taken for an answer, but it was nothing more than the sudden descent of a kind of calmness on his spirit, which, for aught he could tell, might be but the calm of exhaustion. His knees were sore with kneeling, his face white with thinking, his eyes dim with trouble; for when once a man has set out to find God, he must find him or die. This was the inside reality whose outcome set the public of Glaston babbling. It was from this that George Bascombe magisterially pronounced him a hypochondriac, worrying his brain about things that had no

existence—as George himself could with confidence testify, not once having seen the sight of them, heard the sound of them, or imagined in his heart that they ought to be, or even that they might possibly be. He pronounced indeed their existence inconsistent with his own. The thought had never rippled the grey mass of his self-satisfied brain that perhaps there was more of himself than what he counted he himself yet knew, and that possibly these matters had a consistent relation with parts unknown. Poor, poverty-stricken Wingfold! —actually craving for things beneath Bascombe's notice! actually crying for something higher and brighter than the moon! How independent was George compared with Thomas!—content to live what he called his life, be a benefactor to men, chiefly in ridding their fancies of the goblins of aspiration, then die his death, and have done with the business; while poor misguided, weak-brained, hypochondriacal Thomas could be contented with nothing less than the fulfilment of the promise of a certain man who perhaps never existed: "The Father and I will come to him and make our abode with him."

Yet Thomas too had his weakness for the testimony of the senses. If he did not, like George, refuse to believe without it, he yet could not help desiring signs and wonders that he might believe. Of this the following poem was a result, and I give it the more willingly because it will show how the intellectual nature of the man had advanced, borne on the waves that burst from the fountains of the great deep below it.

O Lord, if on the wind, at cool of day,
 I heard one whispered word of mighty grace;
 If through the darkness, as in bed I lay,
 But once had come a hand upon my face;
 If but one sign that might not be mistook,
 Had ever been, since first thy face I sought,
 I should not now be doubting o'er a book,
 But serving thee with burning heart and thought.
 So dreams that heart. But to my heart I say,
 Turning my face to front the dark and wind:
 Such signs had only barred anew His way
 Into thee, longing heart, thee, wildered mind.
 They asked the very Way, where lies the way;
 The very Son, where is the Father's face;
 How he could show himself, if not in clay,
 Who was the lord of spirit, form, and space.
 My being, Lord, will nevermore be whole
 Until thou come behind mine ears and eyes,
 Enter and fill the temple of my soul
 With perfect contact—such a sweet surprise—
 Such presence as, before it met the view,
 The prophet-fancy could not once foresee,
 Though every corner of the temple knew
 By very emptiness its need of thee.
 When I keep ALL thy words, no favoured some—
 Heedless of worldly winds or judgment's tide,
 Then, Jesus, thou wilt with thy Father come—
 O ended prayers!—and in my soul abide.
 Ah long delay!—ah cunning, creeping sin!
 I shall but fail and cease at length to try:
 O Jesus, though thou wilt not yet come in,
 Knock at my window as thou passest by.

CHAPTER VI. THE LINEN-DRAPER.

But there was yet another class amongst those who on that second day heard the curate testify what honestly he might, and no more, concerning Jesus of Nazareth. So far as he learned, however, that class consisted of one individual.

On the following Tuesday morning he went into the shop of the chief linen-drafter of Glaston, for he was going to a funeral, and wanted a new pair of gloves that he might decline those which would be offered him. A young woman waited on him, but Mr. Drew, seeing him from the other end of the shop, came and took her place. When he was fitted, had paid for his purchase, and was turning to take his leave, the drafter, with what appeared a resolution suddenly forced from hesitation, leaned over the counter and said:

"Would you mind walking up stairs for a few minutes, sir? I ask it as a great favour. I want very much to speak to you."

"I shall be most happy," answered Wingfold—conventionally, it must be allowed, for in reality he anticipated expostulation, and having in his public ministrations to do his duty against his own grain, he had no fancy for encountering other people's grain as well in private. Mr. Drew opened certain straits in the counter, and the curate followed him through them, then through a door, up a stair, and into a comfortable dining-room, which smelt strongly of tobacco. There Mr. Drew placed for him a chair, and seated himself in front of him.

The linen-drafter was a middle-aged, middle-sized, stoutish man, with plump rosy cheeks, keen black eyes, and features of the not uncommon pug-type, ennobled and harmonized by a genuine expression of kindly good-humour, and an excellent forehead. His dark hair was a little streaked with gray. His manner, which, in the shop, had been of the shop, that is, more deferential and would-be pleasing than Wingfold liked, settled as he took his seat into one more resembling that of a country gentleman. It was courteous and friendly, but clouded with a little anxiety.

An uncomfortable pause following, Wingfold stumbled in with the question, "I hope Mrs. Drew is well," without reflecting whether he had really ever heard of a Mrs. Drew.

The drafter's face flushed.

"It is twenty years since I lost her, sir," he returned. In his tone and manner there was something peculiar.

"I beg your pardon," said Wingfold, with self-accusing sincerity.

"I will be open with you sir," continued his host: "she left me—with another—nearly twenty years ago."

"I am ashamed of my inadvertence," rejoined Wingfold. "I have been such a short time here, and—"

"Do not mention it, sir. How could you help it? Besides, it was not here the thing took place, but a hundred miles away. I hope I should before long have referred to the fact myself. But now I desire, if you will allow me, to speak of something different."

"I am at your service," answered Wingfold.

"Thank you, sir.—I was in your church last Sunday," resumed the drafter after a pause. "I am not one of your regular hearers, sir; but your sermon that day set me thinking, and instead of thinking less when Monday came, I have been thinking more and more ever since; and when I saw you in the shop, I could not resist the sudden desire to speak to you. If you have time, sir, I hope you will allow me to come to the point my own way?"

Wingfold assured him that his time was at his own disposal, and could not be better occupied. Mr. Drew thanked him and went on.

"Your sermon, I must confess, sir, made me uncomfortable—no fault of yours, sir—all my own—though how much the fault is, I hardly know: use and custom are hard upon a man, sir, and you would have a man go by other laws than those of the world he lives in. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof—you will doubtless say. That is over the Royal Exchange in London, I think; but it is not the laws of the Lord that are specially followed inside for all that. However, it is not with other people we have to do, but with ourselves—as you will say. Well then it is for myself I am troubled now. Mr. Wingfold, sir, I am not altogether at ease in my own mind as to the way I have made my money—what little money I have—no great sum, but enough to retire upon when I please. I

would not have you think me worse than I am, but I am sincerely desirous of knowing what you would have me do."

"My dear sir," returned Wingfold, "I am the very last to look to for enlightenment. I am as ignorant of business as any child. I am not aware that I ever bought anything except books and clothes, or ever sold anything except a knife to a schoolfellow. I had bought it the day before for half-a-crown, but there was a spot of rust on one of the blades, and therefore I parted with it for twopence. The only thing I can say is: if you have been in the way of doing anything you are no longer satisfied with, don't do it any more."

"But just there comes my need of help. You must do something with your business, and DON'T DO IT, don't tell me what to do. Mind I do not confess to having done anything the trade would count inadmissible, or which is not done in the largest establishments. What I now make a question of I learned in one of the most respectable of London houses."

"You imply that a man in your line who would not do certain things the doing of which has contributed to the making of your fortune, would by the ordinary dealer be regarded as Quixotic?"

"He would; but that there may be such men I am bound to allow, for here am I wishing with all my heart that I had never done them. Right gladly would I give up the money I have made by them to be rid of them. I am unhappy about it. But I should never have dared to confess it to you, sir, or, I believe, to anyone, but for the confession you made in the pulpit some time ago. I was not there, but I heard of it. I foolishly judged you unwise to accuse yourself before an unsympathizing public—but here am I in consequence accusing myself to you!"

"To no unsympathising hearer, though," said the curate.

"It made me want to go and hear you preach," pursued the draper; "for no one could say but it was plucky—and we all like pluck, sir," he added, with a laugh that puckered his face, showed the whitest of teeth, and swept every sign of trouble from the half-globe of his radiant countenance.

"Then you know sum and substance of what I can do for you, Mr. Drew: I can sympathize with you;—not a whit more or less am I capable of. I am the merest beginner and dabbler in doing right myself, and have more need to ask you to teach me than to set up for teaching you."

"That's the beauty of you!—excuse me, sir," cried the draper triumphantly. "You don't pretend to teach us anything, but you make us so uncomfortable that we go about ever after asking ourselves what we ought to do. Till last Sunday, I had always looked upon myself as an honest man: let me see: it would be more correct to say I looked on myself as a man QUITE HONEST ENOUGH. That I do not feel so now, is your doing, sir. You said in your sermon last Sunday, and specially to business men: 'Do you do to your neighbour as you would have your neighbour do to you? If not, how can you suppose that the lord of Christians will acknowledge you as a disciple of his, that is, as a Christian?' Now I was even surer of being a Christian than of being an honest man. You will hardly believe it, and what to think of it myself I now hardly know, but I had satisfied myself, more or less, that I had gone through all the necessary stages of being born again, and it is now many years since I was received into a Christian church—dissenting of course, I mean; for what I count the most important difference after all between church and dissent is that the one, right or wrong, requires for communion a personal profession of faith, and credible proof of conversion—which I believed I gave them, and have been for years, I shame to say it, one of the deacons of that community. But it shall not be for long. To return to my story, however: I was indignant at being called upon from a church—pulpit to raise in myself the question whether or not I was a Christian;—for had I not put my faith in the—? But I will avoid theology, for I have paid more regard to that than has proved good for me. Suffice it to say that I was now driven from the tests of the theologians to try myself by the words of the Master: he must be the best theologian after all, mustn't he, sir?—and so there and then I tried the test of doing to your neighbour AS. But I could NOT get it to work; I could not see how to use it, and while I was trying how to make it apply, you were gone, and I lost all the rest of the sermon."

"Now whether it was anything you had said coming back to me, I cannot tell, but next day, that was yesterday, all at once, in the shop here, as I was serving Mrs. Ramshorn, the thought came to me: How would Jesus Christ have done if he had been a draper instead of a carpenter? When she was gone, I went up to my room to think about it. And there it seemed—that first I must know how he did as a carpenter. But that we are told nothing about. I could get no light upon that. And so my thoughts turned again to the original question. —How would he have done had he been a draper? And, strange to say, I seemed to know far more about that than the other, and to have something to go upon. In fact I had a sharp and decisive answer concerning several things of which I had

dared to make a question."

"The vision of the ideal woke the ideal in yourself," said Wingfold thoughtfully.

"I don't know that I quite understand that," returned Mr. Drew; "but the more I thought the more dissatisfied I became. And, in a word, it has come to this, that I must set things right, or give up business."

"That would be no victory," remarked the curate.

"I know it, and shall not yield without a struggle, I promise you. That same afternoon, taking the opportunity of having overheard one of them endeavouring to persuade an old farmer's wife to her disadvantage, I called all my people, and told them that if ever I heard one of them do such a thing, I would turn him or her away at once. But when I came to look at it, I saw how difficult it would be to convict of the breach of such a vague law; and unfortunately too I had some time ago introduced the system of a small percentage to the sellers, making it their interest to force sales. That however is easily rectified, and I shall see to it at once. But I do wish I had a more definite law to follow than that of doing AS!"

"Would not more light inside do as well as clearer law outside?" suggested Wingfold.

"How can I tell till I have had a chance of trying?" returned the draper with a smile, which speedily vanished as he went on: "Then again, there's about profits! How much ought I to take? Am I to do as others do, and always be ruled by the market? Am I bound to give my customers the advantage of any special bargain I may have made? And then again—for I do a large wholesale business with the little country shops—if I learn that one of my customers is going down hill, have I, or have I not, a right to pounce upon him, and make him pay me, to the detriment of his other creditors? There's no end of questions, you see, sir."

"I am the worst possible man to ask," returned Wingfold again. "I might, from very ignorance, judge that wrong which is really right, or that right which is really wrong. But one thing I begin to see, that before a man can do right by his neighbour, he must love him as himself. Only I am such a poor scholar in these high things that, as you have just said, I cannot pretend to teach anybody. That sermon was but an appeal to men's own consciences whether they kept the words of the Lord by whose name they called themselves. Except in your case, Mr. Drew, I am not aware that one of the congregation has taken it to heart."

"I am not sure of that," returned the draper. "Some talk amongst my own people has made me fancy that, perhaps, though talk be but froth, the froth may rise from some hot work down below. Never man could tell from the quiet way I am talking to you, how much I have felt these few days past."

Wingfold looked him in the face: the earnestness of the man was plain in his eyes, and his resolve stamped on every feature. The curate thought of Zacchaeus; thought of Matthew at the receipt of custom; thought with some shame of certain judgments concerning trade, and shopkeepers especially, that seemed somehow to have bred in him like creeping things—for whence they had come he could not tell.

Now it was clear as day that—always provided the man Christ Jesus can be and is with his disciples always to the end of the world—a tradesman might just as soon have Jesus behind the counter with him, teaching him to buy and sell IN HIS NAME, that is, as he would have done it, as an earl riding over his lands might have him with him, teaching him how to treat his farmers and cottagers—all depending on how the one did his trading and the other his earling. A mere truism, is it? Yes, it is, and more is the pity; for what is a truism, as most men count truisms? What is it but a truth that ought to have been buried long ago in the lives of men—to send up for ever the corn of true deeds and the wine of loving kindness,—but instead of being buried in friendly soil, is allowed to lie about, kicked hither and thither in the dry and empty garret of their brains, till they are sick of the sight and sound of it, and to be rid of the thought of it, declare it to be no living truth but only a lifeless truism! Yet in their brain that truism must rattle until they shift it to its rightful quarters in their heart, where it will rattle no longer but take root and be a strength and loveliness. Is a truth to cease to be uttered because no better form than that of some divine truism—say of St. John Boanerges—can be found for it? To the critic the truism is a sea-worn, foot-trodden pebble; to the obedient scholar, a radiant topaz, which, as he polishes it with the dust of its use, may turn into a diamond.

"Jesus buying and selling!" said Wingfold to himself. "And why not? Did Jesus make chairs and tables, or boats perhaps, which the people of Nazareth wanted, without any admixture of trade in the matter? Was there no transaction? No passing of money between hands? Did they not pay his father for them? Was his Father's way of keeping things going in the world, too vile for the hands of him whose being was delight in the will of that Father? No; there must be a way of handling money that is noble as the handling of the sword in the hands of the

Thomas Wingfold, Curate V2

patriot. Neither the mean man who loves it, nor the faithless man who despises it, knows how to handle it. The former is one who allows his dog to become a nuisance, the latter one who kicks him from his sight. The noble man is he who so truly does the work given him to do that the inherent nobility of that work is manifest. And the trader who trades nobly is nobler surely than the high-born who, if he carried the principles of his daily life into trade, would be as pitiful a sneak as any he that bows and scrapes falsely behind that altar of lies, his counter."—All flat truisms I know, but no longer such to Wingfold to whom they now for the first time showed themselves truths.

He had taken a kindly leave of the draper, promising to call again soon, and had reached the room-door on his way out, when he turned suddenly and said,

"Did you think to try praying, Mr. Drew? Men, whose minds, if I may venture to judge, seem to me, from their writings, of the very highest order, have really and positively believed that the loftiest activity of a man's being lay in prayer to the unknown Father of that being, and that light in the inward parts was the certain consequence—that, in very truth, not only did the prayer of the man find the ear of God, but the man himself found God Himself. I have no right to an opinion, but I have a splendid hope that I shall one day find it true. The Lord said a man must go on praying and not lose heart."

With the words he walked out, and the deacon thought of his many prayers at prayer-meetings and family-worships. The words of a young man who seemed to have only just discovered that there was such a thing as prayer, who could not pretend to be sure about it, but hoped splendidly, made him ashamed of them all.

CHAPTER VII. RACHEL.

Wingfold went straight to his friend Polwarth, and asked him if he would allow him to bring Mr. Drew some evening to tea.

"You mean the linen-drafter?" asked Polwarth. "Certainly, if you wish it."

"Some troubles are catching," said the curate. "Drew has caught my disease."

"I am delighted to hear it. It would be hard to catch a better, and it's one a rich man, as they say he is, seldom does catch. But I always liked his round, good-humoured, honest face. If I remember rightly, he had a sore trial in his wife. It is generally understood that she ran away with some fellow or other. But that was before he came to live in Glaston.—Would you mind looking in upon Rachel for a few minutes, sir? She is not so well to-day, and has not been out of her own room."

"With all my heart," answered Wingfold. "I am sorry to hear she is suffering."

"She is always suffering more or less," said the little man. "But she enjoys life notwithstanding, as you may clearly see. It is to her only a mitigated good, and that, I trust, for the sake of an unmitigated one.—Come this way, sir."

He led the curate to the room next his own. It was a humble little garret, but dainty with whiteness. One who did not thoroughly know her, might have said it was like her life, colourless, but bright with innocence and peace. The walls were white; the boards of the uncarpeted floor were as white as scrubbing could make old deal; the curtains of windows and bed were whiteness itself; the coverlet was white; so was the face that looked smiling over the top of it from the one low white pillow. But although Wingfold knew that face so well, he almost started at the sight of it now: in the patience of its suffering it was positively lovely. All that was painful to see was hidden; the crooked little body lay at rest in the grave of the bed-clothes; the soul rose from it, and looked, gracious with womanhood, in the eyes of the curate.

"I cannot give you my hand," she said smiling, as he went softly towards her, feeling like Moses when he put off his shoes, "for I have such a pain in my arm, I cannot well raise it."

The curate bowed reverentially, seated himself in a chair by her bedside, and, like a true comforter, said nothing.

"Don't be sorry for me, Mr. Wingfold," said her sweet voice at length. "The poor dwarfie, as the children call me, is not a creature to be pitied. You don't know how happy I am as I lie here, knowing my uncle is in the next room, and will come the moment I call him—and that there is one nearer still," she added in a lower voice, almost in a whisper, "whom I haven't even to call. I am his, and he shall do with me just as he likes. I fancy sometimes, when I have to lie still, that I am a little sheep, tied hands and feet—I should have said all four feet, if I am a sheep"—and here she gave a little merry laugh—"lying on an altar—the bed here—burning away, in the flame of life, that consumes the deathful body—burning, heart and soul and sense, up to the great Father.—Forgive me, Mr. Wingfold, for talking about myself, but you looked so miserable! and I knew it was your kind heart feeling for me. But I need not, for that, have gone on at such a rate. I am ashamed of myself!"

"On the contrary, I am exceedingly obliged to you for honouring me by talking so freely," said Wingfold. "It is a great satisfaction to find that suffering is not necessarily unhappiness. I could be well content to suffer also, Miss Polwarth, if with the suffering I might have the same peace."

"Sometimes I am troubled," she answered; "but generally I am in peace, and sometimes too happy to dare speak about it.—Would the persons you and my uncle were talking about the other day—would they say all my pleasant as well as my painful thoughts came from the same cause—vibrations in my brain?"

"No doubt. They would say, I presume, that the pleasant thoughts come from regular, and the unpleasant from irregular motions of its particles. They must give the same origin to both. Would you be willing to acknowledge that only your pleasant thoughts had a higher origin, and that your painful ones came from physical sources?"

Because of a headache and depression of spirits, Wingfold had been turning over similar questions in his own mind the night before.

"I see," said the dwarfie—"I see. No. There are sad thoughts sometimes which in their season I would not lose, for I would have their influences with me always. In their season they are better than a host of happy ones, and there is joy at the root of all. But if they did come from physical causes, would it follow that they did not come from God? Is he not the God of the dying as well as the God of the living?"

"If there be a God, Miss Polwarth," returned Wingfold eagerly, "then is he God everywhere, and not a maggot can die any more than a Shakespeare be born without him. He is either enough, that is, all in all, or he is not at all."

"That is what I think—because it is best:—I can give no better reason."

"If there be a God, there can be no better reason," said Wingfold.

This IF of Wingfold's was, I need hardly now say, an IF of bare honesty, and came of no desire to shake an unthinking confidence. Neither, had it been of the other sort, could it have shaken Rachel's, for her confidence was full of thinking. As little could it shock her, for she hardly missed a sentence that passed between her uncle and his new friend. She made no reply, never imagining it her business to combat the doubts of a man whom she knew to be eager after the truth, and being guiltless of any tendency, because she believed, to condemn doubt as wicked.

A short silence followed.

"How delightful it must be to feel well and strong!" said Rachel at length. "I can't help often thinking of Miss Lingard. It's always Miss Lingard comes up to me when I think of such things. Oh! ain't she beautiful and strong, Mr. Wingfold?—and sits on her horse as straight as a rush! It does one good to see her. Just fancy me on a great tall horse! What a bag of potatoes I should look!"

She burst into a merry laugh, and then came a few tears, which were not all of the merriment of which she let them pass as the consequence, remarking, as she wiped them away,

"But no one can tell, Mr. Wingfold,—and I'm sure Miss Lingard would be astonished to hear—what pleasure I have while lying unable to move. I suppose I benefit by what people call the law of compensation! How I hate the word! As if THAT was the way the Father of Jesus Christ did, and not his very best to get his children, elder brothers and prodigal sons, home to his heart! You heard what my uncle said about dreams the other day?" she resumed after a little pause.

"Yes. I thought it very sensible," replied the curate.

"It all depends on the sort, don't it?" said Rachel. "Some of mine I would not give for a library. They make me grow, telling me things I should never learn otherwise. I don't mean any rubbish about future events, and such like. Of all useless things a knowledge of the future seems to me the most useless, for what are you to do with a thing before it exists? Such a knowledge could only bewilder you as to the right way to take—would make you see double instead of single. That's not the sort I mean at all.—You won't laugh at me, Mr. Wingfold?"

"I can scarcely imagine anything less likely."

"Then I don't mind opening my toy-box to you.—In my dreams, for instance, I am sometimes visited by such a sense of freedom as fills me with a pure bliss unknown to my waking thoughts except as a rosy cloud on the horizon. As if they were some heavenly corporation, my dreams present me, not with the freedom of some poor little city like London, but with the freedom of all space."

The curate sat and listened with wonder—but with no sense of unfitness; such speech and such thought suited well with the face that looked up from the low pillow with its lovely eyes—for lovely they were, with a light that had both flash and force.

"I don't believe," she went on, "that even Miss Lingard has more of the blessed sense of freedom and strength and motion when she is on horseback than I have when I am asleep. The very winds of my dreams will make me so unspeakably happy that I wake weeping. Do not tell me it is gone then, for I continue so happy that I can hardly get to sleep again to hunt for more joy. Don't say it is an unreality—for where does freedom lie? In the body or in the mind? What does it matter whether my body be lying still or moving from one spot of space to another? What is the good of motion but to produce the feeling of freedom? The feeling is everything, and if I have it, that is all that I want. Bodily motion would indeed disturb it for me—lay fetters on my spirit.—Sometimes, again, I dream of a new flower—one never before beheld by mortal eye—with some strange, wonderful quality in it, perhaps, that makes it a treasure, like that flower of Milton's invention—haemony—in Comus, you know. But one curious thing is that that strange quality will never be recalled in waking hours; so that

what it was I can never tell—as if it belonged to other regions than the life of this world: I retain only the vaguest memory of its power, and marvel, and preciousness.—Sometimes it is a little poem or a song I dream of, or some strange musical instrument, perhaps like one of those I have seen angels with in a photograph from an old picture. And somehow with the instrument always comes the knowledge of how to play upon it. So you see, sir, as it has pleased God to send me into the world as crooked as a crab, and nearly as lame as a seal, it has pleased him also to give me the health and riches of the night to strengthen me for the pains and poverties of the day.—You rejoice in a beautiful thought when it comes to you, Mr. Wingfold—do you not?"

"When it comes to me," answered Wingfold significantly—almost petulantly. Could it be that he envied the dwarf-girl?

"Then is the thought any worse because it comes in a shape?—or is the feeling less of a feeling that it is born in a dream?"

"I need no convincing, I admit all you say," returned Wingfold.

"Why are you so silent, then? You make me think you are objecting inside to everything I am saying," rejoined Rachel with a smile.

"Partly because I fear you are exciting yourself too much and will suffer in consequence," answered the curate, who had noted the rosy flush on her face.

The same moment her uncle re-entered the room.

"I have been trying to convince Mr. Wingfold that there MAY be some good in dreaming, uncle," she said.

"Successfully?" asked Polwarth.

"Unnecessarily," interjected Wingfold. "I required for conviction only the facts. Why should I suppose that, if there be a God, he is driven out of us by sleep?"

"It is an awful thing," said Polwarth, "to think—that this feeble individuality of ours, the offspring of God's individuality, should have some power, and even more will than power, to close its door against him, and keep house without him!"

"But what sort of a house?" murmured Wingfold.

"Yes, uncle," said Rachel; "but think how he keeps about us, haunting the doors and windows like the very wind, watching to get in! And sometimes he makes of himself a tempest, that both doors and windows fly open, and he enters in fear and dismay."

The prophetic in the uncle was the poetic in the niece.

"For you and me, uncle," she went on, "he made the doors and windows so rickety that they COULD not keep him out."

"Ye are the temples of the Holy Ghost," said the curate, almost unconsciously.

"Some of us a little ruinous!" rejoined the girl.

So full was her soul of a lively devotion that she took the liberties of a child of the house with sacred things.

"But, Mr. Wingfold," she continued. "I must tell you one more curious thing about my dreams: I NEVER dream of being crooked and dwarfish. I don't dream that I am straight either; I suppose I feel all right, and therefore never think about it. That makes me fancy my soul must be straight.—Don't you think so, sir?"

"Indeed I do," said Wingfold warmly.

"I'm afraid I shall be telling you some of my dreams some day."

"We are rather given to that weakness," said Polwarth,— "so much so as to make me fear for our brains sometimes. But a crooked rose-tree may yet bear a good rose."

"Ah! you are thinking of my poor father, uncle, I know," said Rachel. "His was a straight stem and a fine rose, only overblown, perhaps.—I don't think I need be much afraid of that, for if I were to go out of my mind, I should not have strength to live—unless indeed I knew God through all the madness. I think my father did in a way."

"It was quite plain he did," answered her uncle, "and that in no feeble way either.—Some day I must tell you,"—here he turned to Wingfold—"about that brother of mine, Rachel's father. I should even like to show you a manuscript he left behind him—surely one of the strangest ever written! It would be well worth printing if that would ensure its falling into the hands of those who could read through the madness.—But we have talked quite long enough for your head, child; I will take Mr. Wingfold into the next room."

CHAPTER VIII. THE BUTTERFLY.

As Wingfold walked home that afternoon, he thought much of what he had heard and seen. "If there be a God," he said to himself, "then all is well, for certainly he would not give being to such a woman, and then throw her aside as a failure, and forget her. It is strange to see, though, how he permits his work to be thwarted. To be the perfect God notwithstanding, he must be able to turn the very thwarting to higher furtherance. Don't we see something of the sort in life—the vigorous nursed by the arduous? Is it presumptuous to imagine God saying to Rachel: 'Trust me, and bear, and I will do better for thee than thou canst think?' Certainly the one who most needs the comfort of such a faith, in this case HAS it. I wish I could be as sure of him as Rachel Polwarth!—But then," he added, smiling to himself, "she has had her crooked spine to help her! It seems as if nothing less than the spiritual beholding of the Eternal will produce at least absolute belief. And till then what better or indeed other proof can the less receive of the presence of the greater than the expansion of its own being under the influences of that greater? But my plague now is that the ideas of religion are so grand, and the things all around it in life so common—place, that they give the lie to each other from morning to night—in my mind, I mean. Which is the true? a loving, caring father, or the grinding of cruel poverty and the naked exposure to heedless chance? How is it that, while the former seems the only right, reasonable, and all—sufficing thing, it should yet come more naturally to believe in the latter? And yet, when I think of it, I never did come closer to believing in the latter than is indicated by terror of its possible truth—so many things looked like it.—Then, what has nature in common with the Bible and its metaphysics?—There I am wrong—she has a thousand things. The very wind on my face seems to rouse me to fresh effort after a pure healthy life! Then there is the sunrise! There is the snowdrop in the snow! There is the butterfly! There is the rain of summer, and the clearing of the sky after a storm! There is the hen gathering her chickens under her wing!—I begin to doubt whether there be the common—place anywhere except in our own mistrusting nature, that will cast no care upon the Unseen. It is with me, in regard to my better life, as it was with the disciples in regard to their bodily life, when they were for the time rendered incapable of understanding the words of our Lord by having forgotten to take bread in the boat: they were so afraid of being hungry that they could think of nothing but bread."

Such were some of the curate's thoughts as he walked home, and they drove him to prayer, in which came more thoughts. When he reached his room he sat down at his table, and wove and knotted and pieced together the following verses, venturing that easy yet perilous thing, a sonnet. I give here its final shape, not its first or second:

Methought I floated sightless, nor did know
That I had ears until I heard the cry
As of a mighty man in agony:
"How long, Lord, shall I lie thus foul and slow?
The arrows of thy lightning through me go,
And sting and torture me—yet here I lie
A shapeless mass that scarce can mould a sigh."
The darkness thinned; I saw a thing below,
Like sheeted corpse, a knot at head and feet.
Slow clomb the sun the mountains of the dead,
And looked upon the world: the silence broke!
A blinding struggle! then the thunderous beat
Of great exulting pinions stroke on stroke!
And from that world a mighty angel fled.

But upon the heels of the sonnet came, as was natural, according to the law of reaction, a fresh and more appalling, because more self—assertive and verisimilous invasion of the commonplace. What a foolish, unreal thing he had written! He caught up his hat and stick and hurried out, thinking to combat the demon better in the open air.

CHAPTER IX. THE COMMON-PLACE.

It was evening, and the air was still warm. Pine Street was almost empty, save of the red sun, which blinded him so that wherever he looked he could only see great sunblots. All but a few of the shops were closed, but amongst the few he was surprised to find that of his friend the linendraper, who had always been a strong advocate of early closing. The shutters were up, however, though the door stood wide open. He peeped in. To his sun-blinded eyes the shop looked very dark, but he thought he saw Mr. Drew talking to some one, and entered. He was right; it was the draper himself, and a poor woman with a child on one arm, and a print dress she had just bought on the other. The curate leaned against the counter, and waited until business should be over to address his friend.

"Is Mr. Drew an embryonic angel?" he half felt, half thought within himself. "Is this shop the chrysalis of a great psyche? Will the draper, with his round good-humoured face and puckering smile, ever spread thunderous wings and cleave the air up to the throne of God?"

"I cannot tell you how it goes against me to take that woman's money," said the voice of the draper.

The curate woke up in the presence of the unwinged, and saw that the woman had left the shop.

"I did let her have the print at cost-price," Mr. Drew went on, laughing merrily. "That was all I could venture on."

"Where was the danger?"

"Ah, you don't know so well as I do the good of having some difficulty in getting what you need! To ease the struggles of the poor, unless it be in sickness or absolute want, I have repeatedly proved to be a cruel kindness."

"Then you don't sell to the poor women at cost-price always?"

"No—only to the soldiers' wives. They have a very hard life of it, poor things!"

"That is your custom, then?"

"For the last ten years, but I don't let them know it."

"Is it for the soldiers' wives you keep your shop open so late? I thought you were the great supporter of early closing in Glaston," said the curate.

"I will tell you how it happened to-night," answered the draper, and as he spoke he turned round, not his long left ear upon the pivot of his skull, but his whole person upon the pivot of the counter—to misuse the word pivot with Wordsworth—and bolted the shop-door.

"After the young men had put up the shutters and were gone," he said, returning to the counter, "leaving me as usual to bolt the door, I fell a-thinking. Outside, the street was full of sunlight, but only enough came in to show how gloomy the place was without more of it, and the back of the shop was nearly dark. It was very still too—so still that the silence seemed to have taken the shape of gloom. Pardon me for talking in this unbusiness-like way: a man can't be a draper always; he must be foolish sometimes. Thirty years ago I used to read Tennyson. I believe I was amongst the earliest of his admirers."

"Foolish!" echoed Wingfold, thoughtfully.

"You see," the draper went on, "there IS something solemn in the quiet after business is over. Sometimes it's more so, sometimes less; but this night it came upon me that the shop felt like a chapel—had the very air of one somehow, and so I fell a thinking, and forgot to shut the door. How it began I don't know, but my past life came up to me, and I remembered how, when I was a young man, I used to despise my father's business, to which he was bringing me up, and feed my fancy with things belonging to higher walks in life. Then I saw that must have been partly how I fell into the mistake of marrying Mrs. Drew. She was the daughter of a doctor in our town, a widower. He was in poor health, and unable to make much of his practice, so that when he died she was left destitute, and for that reason alone, I do believe, accepted me. What followed you know: she went away with a man who used to travel for a large Manchester house. I have never heard of her since.

"After she left me, a sort of something which I think I may call the disease of self-preservation, laid hold upon me. I must acknowledge that the loss of my wife was not altogether a misery. She despised my trade, which

drove me to defend it—and the more bitterly that I also despised it. There was therefore a good deal of strife between us. I did not make allowance enough for the descent she had made from a professional father to a trade-husband. I forgot that, if she was to blame for marrying me for bread, I was to blame for marrying her to enlarge myself with her superiority. After she was gone, I was aware of a not unwelcome calm in the house, and in the emptiness of that calm came the demon of selfishness sevenfold into my heart, and took up his abode with me. From that time I busied myself only about two things—the safety of my soul, and a good provision for my body. I joined the church I had occasion to mention to you before, sir, grew a little harder in my business dealings, and began to lay by money. And so, ever since, have I been going on till I heard your sermon the other day, which I hope has waked me up to something better.—All this long story is but to let you understand how I was feeling when that woman came into the shop. I told you how, in the dusk and the silence, it was as if I were in the chapel. I found myself half-listening for the organ. Then the verse of a hymn came into my mind—I can't tell where or when I had met with it, but it had stuck to me:

Let me stand ever at the door,
And keep it from the entering sin,
That so thy temple, walls and floor,
Be pure for thee to enter in.

"Now that, you see, is said of the temple of the heart; but somehow things went rather cross-cut that evening—they got muddled in my head. It seemed as if I was the door-keeper of my shop, and at the same time as if my shop, spreading out and dimly vanishing in the sacred gloom, was the temple of the Holy Ghost, out of which I had to keep the sin. And with the thought, a great awe fell upon me: could it be—might it not be that God was actually in the place?—that in the silence he was thinking—in the gloom he was knowing? I laid myself over the counter, with my face in my hands, and went on half thinking, half praying. All at once the desire arose burning in my heart: Would to God my house were in truth a holy place, haunted by his presence! 'And wherefore not?' rejoined something within me—heart or brain or something deeper than either. 'Is thy work unholy? Are thy deeds base? Is thy buying or selling dishonest? Is it all for thyself and nothing for thy fellows? Is it not a lawful calling? Is it, or is it not, of God? If it be of God, and yet he be not present, then surely thy lawful calling thou followest unlawfully.'" So there I was—brought back to the old story. And I said to myself, 'God knows I want to follow it lawfully. Am I not even now seeking how to do so? But this, though true, did not satisfy me. To follow it lawfully—even in his sight—no longer seemed enough.—Was there then no possibility of raising it to dignity? Did the business of Zacchaeus remain, after the visit of Jesus, a contemptible one still? Could not mine be made Christian? Was there no corner in the temple where a man might buy and sell and not be driven out by the whip of small cords?—I heard a step in the shop, and lifting my head, saw a poor woman with a child in her arms. Annoyed at being found in that posture, like one drunk or in despair; annoyed also with myself for not having shut the door, with my usual first tendency to injustice a harsh word was trembling on my very lips, when suddenly something made me look round in a kind of maze on the dusky back shop. A moment more and I understood: God was waiting to see what truth was in my words. That is just how I felt it, and I hope I am not irreverent in saying so. Then I saw that the poor woman looked frightened—I suppose at my looks and gestures—perhaps she thought me out of my mind. I made haste and received her, and listened to her errand as if she had been a duchess—say rather an angel of God, for such I felt her in my heart to be. She wanted a bit of dark print with a particular kind of spot in it, which she had seen in the shop some months before, but had not been able to buy. I turned over everything we had, and was nearly in despair. At last, however, I found the very piece which had ever since haunted her fancy—just enough of it left for a dress! But all the time I sought it, I felt as if I were doing God service—or at least doing something he wanted me to do. It sounds almost ludicrous now, but—"

"God forbid!" said Wingfold.

"I'm glad you don't think so, sir. I was afraid you would."

"Had the thing been a trifle, I should still have said the same," returned the curate. "But who with any heart would call it—a trifle to please the fancy of a poor woman, one who is probably far oftener vexed than pleased? She had been brooding over this dress—you took trouble to content her with her desire. Who knows what it may do for the growth of the woman? I know what you've done for me by the story of it."

"She did walk out pleased—like," said the draper, "—and left me more pleased than she,—and so grateful to her for coming—you can't think!"

Thomas Wingfold, Curate V2

"I begin to suspect," said the curate, after a pause, "that the common transactions of life are the most sacred channels for the spread of the heavenly leaven. There was ten times more of the divine in selling her that gown as you did, in the name of God, than in taking her into your pew and singing out of the same hymn-book with her."

"I should be glad to do that next though, if I had the chance," said Mr. Drew. "You must not think, because he has done me so little good, that our minister is not a faithful preacher; and, owing you more than heart can tell, sir, I like chapel better than church, and consider it nearer the right way. I don't mean to be a turncoat, and leave Drake for you, sir; I must give up my deaconship, but I won't my pew or my subscription."

"Quite right, Mr. Drew," said Wingfold; "that could do nothing but harm. I have just been reading what our Lord says about proselytizing. Good night."

CHAPTER X. HOME AGAIN.

The curate had entered the draper's shop in the full blaze of sunset, but the demon of unbelief sat on his shoulders; he could get no nearer his heart, but that was enough to make of the "majestical roof fretted with golden fire a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." When he left the shop, the sun was far below the horizon, and the glory had faded out of the west; but the demon had fled, and the brown feathers of the twilight were beautiful as the wings of the silver dove, sprung heavenwards from among the pots. And as he went he reasoned with himself—

"Either there is a God, and that God the perfect heart of truth and loveliness, or all poetry and art is but an unsown, unplanted, rootless flower, crowning a somewhat symmetrical heap of stones. The man who sees no beauty in its petals, finds no perfume in its breath, may well accord it the parentage of the stones; the man whose heart swells beholding it will be ready to think it has roots that reach below them."

The curate's search, it will be remarked, had already widened greatly the sphere of his doubts; but, the larger the field, the greater the chance of finding a marl-pit; and, if there be such a thing as truth, every fresh doubt is yet another finger-post pointing towards its dwelling.—So talked the curate to himself, and, full in the face, rounding the corner of a street, met George Bascombe.

The young barrister held out his large hospitable hand at the full length of his arm, and spread abroad his wide chest to greet him, and they went through the ceremony of shaking hands,—which, even in their case, I cannot judge so degrading and hypocritical as the Latin nations seem to consider it. Then Wingfold had the first word.

"I have not yet had an opportunity of thanking you for the great service you have done me," he said.

"I am glad to know I have such an honour; but—"

"I mean, in opening my eyes to my true position."

"Ah, my dear fellow! I was sure you only required to have your attention turned in the right direction. When—?—ah!—I—I was on the verge of committing the solecism of asking you when you thought of resigning. Ha! ha!"

"Not yet," replied Wingfold to the question thus at once withdrawn and put. "The more I look into the matter, the more reason I find for hoping it may be possible for me to—to—keep the appointment."

"Oh!"

"The further I inquire, the more am I convinced that, if not in a certain portion of what the church teaches, then nowhere else, and assuredly not in what you teach, shall I find anything by which life can either account for or justify itself."

"But if what you find is not true!" cried George, with a burst of semi-grand indignation.

"But if what I find should be true, even though you should never be able to see it!" returned the curate. And as if disjected by an explosion between them, the two men were ten paces asunder, each hurrying his own way.

"If I can't prove there is a God," said Wingfold to himself, "as little surely can he prove there is none."

But then came the thought—"The fellow will say that, there being no sign of a God, the burden of proof lies with me." And therewith he saw how useless it would be to discuss the question with any one who, not seeing him, had no desire to see him.

"No," he said, "my business is not to prove to any other man that there is a God, but to find him for myself. If I should find him, then will be time enough to think of showing him." And with that his thoughts turned from Bascombe, and went back to the draper.

When he reached home, he took out his sonnet, but, after working at it for a little while, he found that he must ease his heart by writing another. Here it is:

Methought that in a solemn church I stood.

Its marble acres, worn with knees and feet,

Lay spread from, door to door, from street to street.

Midway the form hung high upon the rood

Thomas Wingfold, Curate V2

Of him who gave his life to be our good;
Beyond, priests flitted, bowed, and murmured meet
Among the candles shining still and sweet.
Men came and went, and worshipped as they could,
And still their dust a woman with her broom,
Bowed to her work, kept sweeping to the door.
Then saw I, slow through all the pillared gloom,
Across the church a silent figure come;
"Daughter," it said, "thou sweepest well my floor!"
It is the Lord! I cried; and saw no more.

I suppose, if one could so stop the throat of the blossom-buried nightingale, that, though he might breathe at will, he could no longer sing, he would drop from his bough, and die of suppressed song. Perhaps some men so die—I do not know; it were better than to live, and to bore their friends with the insuppressible. But, however this may be, the man who can utter himself to his own joy in any of the forms of human expression—let him give thanks to God; and, if he give not his verses to the printer, he will probably have cause to give thanks again. To the man's self, the utterance is not the less invaluable. And so Wingfold found it.

He went out again, and into the churchyard, where he sat down on a stone.

"How strange," he said to himself, "that out of faith should have sprung that stone church! A poor little poem now and then is all that stands for mine—all that shows, that is! But my heart does sometimes burn, within me. If only I could be sure they were HIS words that set it burning!"

CHAPTER XI. THE SHEATH.

"Mr. Wingfold," said Polwarth one evening, the usual salutations over, taking what he commonly left to his friend—the initiative,—"I want to tell you something I don't wish even Rachel to hear."

He led the way to his room, and the curate followed. Seated there, in the shadowy old attic, through the very walls of which the ivy grew, and into which, by the open window in the gable, from the infinite west, blew the evening air, carrying with it the precious scent of honeysuckle, to mingle with that of old books, Polwarth recounted and Wingfold listened to a strange adventure. The trees hid the sky, and the little human nest was dark around them.

"I am going to make a confidant of you, Mr. Wingfold," said the dwarf, with troubled face, and almost whispered word. "You will know how much I have already learned to trust you when I say that what I am about to confide to you plainly involves the secret of another."

His large face grew paler as he spoke, and something almost like fear grew in his eyes, but they looked straight into those of the curate, and his voice did not tremble.

"One night, some weeks ago—I can, if necessary, make myself certain of the date,—I was—no uncommon thing with me—unable to sleep. Sometimes, when such is my case, I lie as still and happy as any bird under the wing of its mother; at other times I must get up and go out, for I take longings for air almost as a drunkard for wine, and that night nothing would serve my poor prisoned soul but more air through the bars of its lungs. I rose, dressed, and went out.

"It was a still, warm night, no moon, but plenty of star-light, the wind blowing as now, gentle and sweet and cool—just the wind my lungs sighed for. I got into the open park, avoiding the trees, and wandered on and on, without thinking where I was going. The turf was soft under my feet, the dusk soft to my eyes, and the wind to my soul; I had breath and room and leisure and silence and loneliness, and everything to make me more than usually happy; and so I wandered on and on, neither caring nor looking whither I went: so long as the stars remained unclouded, I could find my way back when I pleased.

"I had been out perhaps an hour, when through the soft air came a cry, apparently from far off. There was something in the tone that seemed to me unusually frightful. The bare sound made me shudder before I had time to say to myself it was a cry. I turned my face in the direction of it, so far as I could judge, and went on. I cannot run, for, if I attempt it, I am in a moment unable even to walk—from palpitation and choking.

"I had not gone very far before I found myself approaching the hollow where stands the old house of Glaston, uninhabited for twenty years. Was it possible, I thought, that the cry came from the house, and had therefore sounded farther off than it was? I stood and listened for a moment, but all seemed still as the grave. I must go in, and see whether anyone was there in want of help. You may well smile at the idea of my helping anyone, for what could I do if it came to a struggle?"

"On the contrary," interrupted Wingfold, "I was smiling with admiration of your pluck."

"At least," resumed Polwarth, "I have this advantage over some, that I cannot be fooled with the fancy that this poor miserable body of mine is worth thinking of beside the smallest suspicion of duty. What is it but a cracked jug? So down the slope I went, got into the garden, and made my way through the tangled bushes to the house. I knew the place perfectly, for I had often wandered all over it, sometimes spending hours there.

"Before I reached the door, however, I heard some one behind me in the garden, and instantly stepped into a thicket of gooseberry and currant bushes. It is sometimes an advantage to be little—the moment I stepped aside I was hidden. That same moment the night seemed rent in twain by a most hideous cry from the house. Ere I could breathe again after it, the tall figure of a woman rushed past me, tearing its way through the bushes towards the door. I followed instantly, saw her run up the steps, and heard her open and shut the door. I opened it as quietly as I could, but just as I stepped into the dark hall, came a third fearful cry, through the echoes of which in the empty house I heard the rush of hurried feet and trailing garments on the stair. As I say I knew the house quite well, but my perturbation had so muddled the idea of it in my brain, that for a few seconds I had to consider how it lay. The

moment I recalled its plan, I made what haste I could, reached the top of the stair, and was hesitating which way to turn, when once more came the fearful cry, and set me trembling from head to foot. I cannot describe the horror of it. It was as the cry of a soul in torture—unlike any sound of the human voice I had ever before heard. I shudder now at the recollection of it as it echoed through the house, clinging to the walls and driven along. I was hurrying I knew not whither, for I had again lost all notion of the house, when I caught a glimpse of a light shining from under a door. I approached it softly, and finding that door inside a small closet, knew at once where I was. As I was in office on the ground, and it could hardly be any thing righteous that led to such an outcry in the house, which, although deserted, was still my master's, I felt justified in searching further into the matter. Laying my ear therefore against the door, I heard what was plainly a lady's voice. Right sweet and womanly it was, though full of pain—even agony, I thought, but heroically suppressed. She soothed, she expostulated, she condoled, she coaxed. Mingled with hers was the voice of a youth, as it seemed. It was wild, yet so low as sometimes to be all but inaudible, and not a word from either could I distinguish. Hardly the less plain was it, however, that the youth spoke either in delirium or with something terrible on his mind, for his tones were those of one in despair. I stood for a time bewildered, fascinated, terrified. At length I grew convinced somehow that I had no right to be there. Doubtless the man was in hiding, and where a man hides there must be reason, but was it any business of mine? I crept out of the house, and up to the higher ground. There I drew deep breaths of the sweet night air—so pure that it seemed to be washing the world clean for another day's uses. But I had no longer any pleasure in the world. I went straight home, and to bed again—but had brought little repose with me: I must do something—but what? The only result certain to follow, was more trouble to the troubled already. Might there not be innocent reasons for the questionable situation?—Might not the man have been taken ill, and so suddenly that he could reach no other shelter? And the lady might be his wife, who had gone as soon as she could leave him to find help, but had failed. There MUST be some simple explanation of the matter, however strange it showed! I might, in the morning, be of service to them. And partly comforted by the temporary conclusion, I got a little troubled sleep.

"As soon as I had had a cup of tea, I set out for the old house. I heard the sounds of the workmen's hammers on the new one as I went. All else was silence. The day looked so honest and so clear of conscience that it was difficult to believe the night had shrouded such an awful meeting. Yet, in the broad light of the forenoon, a cold shudder seized me when first I looked down on the slack ridges and broken roofs of the old house. When I got into the garden I began to sing and knock the bushes about, then opened the door noisily, and clattered about in the hall and the lower rooms before going up the stair. Along every passage and into every room I went, to give good warning ere I approached that in which I had heard the voices. At length I stood at the door of it and knocked. There was no answer. I knocked again. Still no answer. I opened it and peeped in. There was no one there! An old bedstead was all I saw. I searched every corner, but not one trace could I discover of human being having been there, except this behind the bed—and it may have lain there as long as the mattress, which I remember since the first time I ever went into the house."

As he spoke Polwarth handed to the curate a small leather sheath, which, from its shape, could not have belonged to a pair of scissors, although neither of the men knew any sort of knife it would have fitted.

"Would you mind taking care of it, Mr. Wingfold?" the gate-keeper continued as the curate examined it; "I don't like having it. I can't even bear to think of it even in the house, and yet I don't quite care to destroy it."

"I don't in the least mind taking charge of it," answered Wingfold.

Why was it that, as he said so, the face of Helen Lingard rose before his mind's eye as he had now seen it twice in the congregation at the Abbey—pale with an inward trouble as it seemed, large-eyed and worn—so changed, yet so ennobled? Even then he had felt the deadening effect of its listlessness, and had had to turn away lest it should compel him to feel that he was but talking to the winds, or into a desert where dwelt no voice of human response. Why should he think of her now? Was it that her troubled pallid face had touched him—had set something near his heart a trembling, whether with merely human sympathy or with the tenderness of man for suffering woman? Certainly he had never till then thought of her with the slightest interest, and why should she come up to him now? Could it be that—? Good heavens! There was her brother ill! And had not Faber said there seemed something unusual about the character of his illness?—What could it mean?—It was impossible of course—but yet—and yet—

"Do you think," he said, "we are in any way bound to inquire further into the affair?"

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"If I had thought so, I should not have left it unmentioned till now," answered Polwarth. "But without being busybodies, we might be prepared in case the thing should unfold itself, and put it in our power to be useful. Meantime I have the relief of the confessional."

CHAPTER XII. INVITATION.

As Wingfold walked back to his lodgings, he found a new element mingling with the varied matter of his previous inquiry. Human suffering laid hold upon him—neither as his own nor as that of humanity, but as that of men and women—known or unknown, it mattered nothing: there were hearts in the world from whose agony broke terrible cries, hearts of which sad faces like that of Miss Lingard were the exponents. Such hearts might be groaning and writhing in any of the houses he passed, and, even if he knew the hearts, and what the vampire that sucked their blood, he could do nothing for their relief.

Little indeed could he have imagined the life of such a comfort-guarded lady as Miss Lingard, exposed to the intrusion of any terror-waking monster, from the old ocean of chaos, into the quiet flow of its meadow-banked river! And what multitudes must there not be in the world—what multitudes in our island—how many even in Glaston, whose hearts, lacerated by no remorse, overwhelmed by no crushing sense of guilt, yet knew their own bitterness, and had no friend radiant enough to make a sunshine in their shady places! He fell into mournful mood over the troubles of his race. Always a kind-hearted fellow, he had not been used to think about such things; he had had troubles of his own, and had got through at least some of them; people must have troubles, else would they grow unendurable for pride and insolence. But now that he had begun to hope he saw a glimmer somewhere afar at the end of the darksome cave in which he had all at once discovered that he was buried alive, he began also to feel how wretched those must be who were groping on without even a hope in their dark eyes.

If he had never committed any crime, he had yet done wrong enough to understand the misery of shame and dishonour, and should he not find a loving human heart the heart of the world, would rejoice—with what rejoicing might then be possible—to accept George Bascombe's theory, and drop into the jaws of darkness and cease. How much more miserable then must those be who had committed some terrible crime, or dearly loved one who had! What relief, what hope, what lightening for them! What a breeding nest of vermiculate cares and pains was this human heart of ours! Oh, surely it needed some refuge! If no saviour had yet come, the tortured world of human hearts cried aloud for one with unutterable groaning! What would Bascombe do if he had committed a murder? Or what could he do for one who had? If fable it were, it was at least a need—invented one—that of a Saviour to whom anyone might go, at any moment, without a journey, without letters or commendations or credentials! And yet no: if it had been invented, it could hardly be by any one in the need, for such even now could hardly be brought to believe it. Ill bested were the world indeed if there were no one beyond whose pardon crime could not go! Ah! but where was the good of pardon if still the conscious crime kept stinging? and who would wish one he loved to grow callous to the crime he had committed? Could one rejoice that his guilty friend had learned to laugh again, able at length to banish the memory of the foul thing? Would reviving self-content render him pleasant to the eyes, and his company precious in the wisdom that springs from the knowledge of evil? Would not that be the moment when he who had most assiduously sought to comfort him in his remorse, would first be tempted to withdraw his foot from his threshold? But if there was a God—such a God as, according to the Christian story, had sent his own son into the world—had given him to appear among us, clothed in the garb of humanity, the armour that can be pierced, to take all the consequences of being the god of obedience amongst the children of disobedience, engulfing their wrongs in his infinite forbearance, and winning them back, by slow and unpromising and tedious renewal, to the heart of his father, surely such a God would not have created them, knowing that some of them would sin sins from the horror of which in themselves all his devotion could not redeem them!—And as he thought thus, the words arose in his mind—"COME UNTO ME ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST." His heart filled. He pondered over them. When he got home he sought and found them in the book.—Did a man ever really utter them? If a man did, either he was the most presumptuous of mortals, or HE COULD DO WHAT HE SAID. If he could, then to have seen and distrusted that man, Wingfold felt, would have been to destroy in himself the believing faculty and become incapable of trusting for ever after. And such a man must, in virtue of his very innocence, know that the worst weariness and the worst load is evil and crime, and must know himself able, in full righteousness, with no

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jugglery of oblivion or self-esteem, to take off the heavy load and give rest.

"And yet," thought the curate, not without self-reproach, "for one who will go to him to get the rest, a thousand will ask—HOW CAN HE THEN DO IT?—As if they should be fit to know!"

CHAPTER XIII. A SERMON TO HELEN.

All the rest of the week his mind was full of thoughts like these, amid which ever arose the suffering face of Helen Lingard, bringing with it the still strengthening suspicion that behind it must lie some oppressive, perhaps terrible secret. But he made no slightest movement towards the discovery of it, put not a single question in any direction for its confirmation or dissolution. He would not look in at her windows, but what seeds of comfort he could find, he would scatter wide, and hope that some of them might fall into her garden.

When he raised his head on the Sunday from kneeling, with heart honest, devout, and neighbourly, in the pulpit before the sermon, and cast his eyes round his congregation, they rested first, for one moment and no more, upon the same pallid and troubled countenance whose reflection had so often of late looked out from the magic mirror of his memory; the next, they flitted across the satisfied, healthy, handsome, clever face of her cousin, behind which plainly sat a conscience well-to-do, in an easy chair; the third, they saw and fled the peevish autumnal visage of Mrs. Ramshorn; the next, they roved a little, then rested on the draper's good-humoured disc, on the white forehead of which brooded a cloud of thoughtfulness. Last of all they sought the free seats, and found the faces of both the dwarfs. It was the first time he had seen Rachel's there, and it struck him that it expressed greater suffering than he had read in it before. She ought rather to be in bed than in church, he thought. But the same seemed the case with her uncle's countenance also; and with that came the conclusion that the pulpit was a wonderful watch-tower whence to study human nature; that people lay bare more of their real nature and condition to the man in the pulpit than they know—even before the sermon. Their faces have fallen into the shape of their minds, for the church has an isolating as well as congregating power, and no passing emotion moulds them to an evanescent show. When Polwarth spoke to a friend, the suffering melted in issuing radiance; when he sat thus quiescent, patient endurance was the first thing to be read on his countenance. This flashed through the curate's mind in the moments ere he began to speak, and with it came afresh the feeling—one that is, yet ought not to be sad—that no one of all these hearts could give summer-weather to another. The tears rose in his eyes as he gazed, and his heart swelled towards his own flesh and blood, as if his spirit would break forth in a torrent of ministering tenderness and comfort. Then he made haste to speak lest he should become unable. As usual his voice trembled at first, but rose into strength as his earnestness found way. This is a good deal like what he said:

"The marvellous man who is reported to have appeared in Palestine, teaching and preaching, seems to have suffered far more from sympathy with the inward sorrows of his race than from pity for their bodily pains. These last, could he not have swept from the earth with a word? and yet it seems to have been mostly, if not indeed always, only in answer to prayer that he healed them, and that for the sake of some deeper, some spiritual healing that should go with the bodily cure. It could not be for the dead man whom he was about to call from the tomb, that his tears flowed. What source could they have but compassion and pitiful sympathy for the sorrows of the dead man's sisters and friends who had not the inward joy that sustained himself, and the thought of all the pains and heartaches of those that looked in the face of death—the meanings of love—torn generations, the blackness of bereavement that had stormed through the ever changing world of human hearts since first man had been made in the image of his Father? Yet are there far more terrible troubles than this death—which I trust can only part, not keep apart. There is the weight of conscious wrong being and wrong doing—that is the gravestone that needs to be rolled away ere a man can rise to life. Call to mind how Jesus used to forgive men's sins, thus lifting from their hearts the crushing load that paralyzed all their efforts. Recall the tenderness with which he received those from whom the religious of his day turned aside—the repentant women who wept sore-hearted from very love, the publicans who knew they were despised because they were despicable. With him they sought and found shelter. He was their saviour from the storm of human judgment and the biting frost of public opinion, even when that opinion and that judgment were re-echoed by the justice of their own hearts. He received them, and the life within them rose up, and the light shone—the conscious light of light, despite even of shame and self-reproach. If God be for us who can be against us? In his name they rose from the hell of their own hearts' condemnation, and went forth to do the truth in strength and hope. They heard and believed and obeyed his words. And of all words

that ever were spoken, were ever words gentler, tenderer, humbler, lovelier—if true, or more arrogant, man-degrading, God-defying—if false, than these, concerning which, as his, I now desire to speak to you: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'?

"Surely these words, could they but be heartily believed, are such as every human heart might gladly hear! What man is there who has not had, has not now, or will not have to class himself amongst the weary and heavy-laden? Ye who call yourselves Christians profess to believe such rest is to be had, yet how many of you go bowed to the very earth, and take no single step towards him who says Come, lift not an eye to see whether a face of mercy may not be looking down upon you! Is it that, after all, you do not believe there ever was such a man as they call Jesus? That can hardly be. There are few so ignorant, or so wilfully illogical as to be able to disbelieve in the existence of the man, or that he spoke words to this effect. Is it then that you are doubtful concerning the whole import of his appearance? In that case, were it but as a doubtful medicine, would it not be well to make some trial of the offer made? If the man said the words, he must have at least believed that he could fulfil them. Who that knows anything of him at all can for a moment hold that this man spoke what he did not believe? The best of the Jews who yet do not believe in him, say of him that he was a good though mistaken man. Will a man lie for the privilege of being despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? What but the confidence of truth could have sustained him when he knew that even those who loved him would have left him had they believed what he told them of his coming fate?—But then: believing what he said, might he not have been mistaken?—A man can hardly be mistaken as to whether he is at peace or not—whether he has rest in his soul or not. Neither I think can a man well be mistaken as to whence comes the peace he possesses,—as to the well whence he draws his comfort. The miser knows his comfort is his gold. Was Jesus likely to be mistaken when he supposed himself to know that his comfort came from his God? Anyhow he believed that his peace came from his obedience—from his oneness with the will of his Father. Friends, if I had such peace as was plainly his, should I not know well whence it came?—But I think I hear some one say: 'Doubtless the good man derived comfort from the thought of his Father, but might he not be mistaken in supposing there was any Father?' Hear me, my friends: I dare not say I know there is a Father. I dare not even say I think, I can only say with my whole heart I hope we have indeed a Father in heaven; but this man says HE KNOWS. Am I to say he does not know? Can I, who know so much I would gladly have otherwise in myself, imagine him less honest than I am? If he tells me he knows, I am dumb and listen. One I KNOW: THERE IS—outweighs a whole creation of voices crying each I KNOW NOT, THEREFORE THERE IS NOT. And observe it is his own, his own best he wants to give them—no bribe to obedience to his will, but the assurance of bliss if they will do as he does. He wants them to have peace—HIS peace—peace from the same source whence he has it. For what does he mean by TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME? He does not mean WEAR THE YOKE I LAY UPON YOU, AND OBEY MY WORDS. I do not say he might not have said so, or that he does not say what comes to the same thing at other times, but that is not what he says here—that is not the truth he would convey in these words. He means TAKE UPON YOU THE YOKE I WEAR; LEARN TO DO AS I DO, WHO SUBMIT EVERYTHING AND REFER EVERYTHING TO THE WILL OF MY FATHER, YEA HAVE MY WILL ONLY IN THE CARRYING OUT OF HIS: BE MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART, AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS. With all the grief of humanity in his heart, in the face of the death that awaited him, he yet says, FOR MY YOKE, THE YOKE I WEAR, IS EASY, THE BURDEN I BEAR IS LIGHT. What made that yoke easy,—that burden light? That it was the will of the Father. If a man answer: 'Any good man who believed in a God, might say as much, and I do not see how it can help me;' my reply is, that this man says, COME UNTO ME, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST—asserting the power to give perfect help to him that comes.—Does all this look far away, my friends, and very unlike the things about us? The things about you do not give you peace; from something different you may hope to gain it. And do not our souls themselves fall out with their surroundings, and cry for a nobler, better, more beautiful life?

"But some one will perhaps say: 'It is well; but were I meek and lowly in heart as he of whom you speak, it could not touch MY trouble: that springs not from myself, but from one I love.' I answer, if the peace be the peace of the Son of man, it must reach to every cause of unrest. And if thou hadst it, would it not then be next door to thy friend? How shall he whom thou lovest receive it the most readily—but through thee who lovest him? What if

thy faith should be the next step to his? Anyhow, if this peace be not an all-reaching as well as a heart-filling peace; if it be not a righteous and a lovely peace, and that in despite of all surrounding and opposing troubles, then it is not the peace of God, for that passeth all understanding:—so at least say they who profess to know, and I desire to take them at their word. If thy trouble be a trouble thy God cannot set right, then either thy God is not the true God, or there is no true God, and the man who professed to reveal him led the one perfect life in virtue of his faith in a falsehood. Alas for poor men and women and their aching hearts!—If it offend any of you that I speak of Jesus as THE MAN who professed to reveal God, I answer, that the man I see, and he draws me as with the strength of the adorable Truth; but if in him I should certainly find the God for the lack of whose peace I and my brethren and sisters pine, then were heaven itself too narrow to hold my exultation, for in God himself alone could my joy find room.

"Come then, sore heart, and see whether his heart cannot heal thine. He knows what sighs and tears are, and if he knew no sin in himself, the more pitiful must it have been to him to behold the sighs and tears that guilt wrung from the tortured hearts of his brethren and sisters. Brothers, sisters, we MUST get rid of this misery of ours. It is slaying us. It is turning the fair earth into a hell, and our hearts into its fuel. There stands the man, who says he knows: take him at his word. Go to him who says in the might of his eternal tenderness and his human pity—COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY-LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN OF ME; FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART: AND YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS. FOR MY YOKE IS EASY AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT."

CHAPTER XIV. A SERMON TO HIMSELF.

Long ere he thus came to a close, Wingfold was blind to all and every individuality before him—felt only the general suffering of the human soul, and the new-born hope for it that lay in the story of the ideal man, the human God. He did not see that Helen's head was down on the book-board. She was sobbing convulsively. In some way the word had touched her, and had unsealed the fountain of tears, if not of faith. Neither did he see the curl on the lip of Bascombe, or the glance of annoyance which, every now and then, he cast upon the bent head beside him. "What on earth are you crying about? It is all in the way of his business, you know," said Bascombe's eyes, but Helen did not hear them. One or two more in the congregation were weeping, and here and there shone a face in which the light seemed to prevent the tears. Polwarth shone and Rachel wept. For the rest, the congregation listened only with varying degrees of attention and indifference. The larger portion looked as if neither Wingfold nor any other body ever meant anything—at least in the pulpit.

The moment Wingfold reached the vestry, he hurried off the garments of his profession, sped from the Abbey, and all but ran across the church-yard to his lodging. There he shut himself up in his chamber, fearful lest he should have said more than he had yet a right to say, and lest ebbing emotion should uncover the fact that he had been but "fired by the running of his own wheels," and not inspired by the guide of "the fiery-wheeled throne, the cherub Contemplation." There, from the congregation, from the church, from the sermon, from the past altogether, he turned aside his face and would forget them quite.

What had he to do with the thing that was done,—done with, and gone, either into the treasury or the lumber-room, of creation? Towards the hills of help he turned his face—to the summits over whose tops he looked for the dayspring from on high to break forth. If only Christ would come to him!—Do what he might, however, his thoughts WOULD wander back to the great gothic gulf into which he had been pouring out his soul, and the greater human gulfs that opened into the ancient pile, whose mouths were the faces that hid the floor beneath them—until at length he was altogether vexed with himself for being interested in what he had done, instead of absorbed in what he had yet to do. He left therefore his chamber, and placed himself at a side-table in his sitting-room, while his landlady prepared the other for his dinner. She too had been at church that morning, whence it came that she moved about and set the things on the table with unusual softness, causing him no interruption while he wrote down a line here and there of what afterwards grew into the following verses—born in the effort to forget the things that were behind, and reach forth after the things that lay before him.

Yes, Master, when thou comest thou shalt find
 A little faith on earth, if I am here!
 Thou know'st how oft I turn to thee my mind,
 How sad I wait until thy face appear!
 Hast thou not ploughed my thorny ground full sore,
 And from it gathered many stones and sherds?
 Plough, plough and harrow till it needs no more—
 Then sow thy mustard-seed, and send thy birds.
 I love thee, Lord; and if I yield to fears,
 Nor trust with triumph that pale doubt defies,
 Remember, Lord, 'tis nigh two thousand years,
 And I have never seen thee with mine eyes.
 And when I lift them from the wondrous tale,
 See, all about me has so strange a show!
 Is that thy river running down the vale?
 Is that thy wind that through the pines doth blow?
 Couldst thou right verily appear again,
 The same who walked the paths of Palestine,

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And here in England teach thy trusting men,
In church and field and house, with word and sign?
Here are but lilies, sparrows, and the rest!—
My hands on some dear proof would light and stay!
But my heart sees John leaning on thy breast,
And sends them forth to do what thou dost say.

CHAPTER XV. CRITICISM.

"Extraordinary young man!" exclaimed Mrs. Ramshorn as they left the church, with a sigh that expressed despair. "Is he an infidel or a fanatic? a Jesuit or a Socinian?"

"If he would pay a little more attention to his composition," said Bascombe indifferently, "he might in time make of himself a good speaker. I am not at all sure there are not the elements of an orator in him, if he would only reflect a little on the fine relations between speech and passion, and learn of the best models how to play upon the feelings of a congregation. I declare I don't know, but he might make a great man of himself. As long as he don't finish his sentences however, jumbles his figures, and begins and ends abruptly without either exordium or peroration, he needn't look to make anything of a preacher—and that seems his object."

"If that be his object, he had better join the Methodists at once. He would be a treasure to them," said Mrs. Ramshorn.

"That is not his object, George. How can you say so?" remarked Helen quietly, but with some latent indignation.

George smiled a rather unpleasant smile and held his peace.

Little more was said on the way home. Helen went to take off her bonnet, but did not re-appear until she was called to their early Sunday dinner.

Now George had counted upon a turn in the garden with her before dinner, and was annoyed—more, it is true, because of the emotion which he rightly judged the cause of her not joining him, than the necessity laid on him of eating his dinner without having first unburdened his mind; but the latter fact also had its share in vexing him.

When she came into the drawing-room it was plain she had been weeping; but, although they were alone, and would probably have to wait yet a few minutes before their aunt joined them, he resolved in his good nature to be considerate, and say nothing till after dinner, lest he should spoil her appetite. When they rose from the table, she would have again escaped, but when George left his wine and followed her, she consented, at his urgent, almost expostulatory request, to walk once round the garden with him.

As soon as they were out of sight of the windows, he began—in the tone of one whose love it is that prompts rebuke.

"How COULD you, my dear Helen, have so little care of your health, already so much shaken with nursing your brother, as to yield your mind to the maundering of that silly ecclesiastic, and allow his false eloquence to untune your nerves! Remember your health is the first thing—positively the FIRST and foremost thing to be considered, both for your own sake and that of your friends. Without health, what is anything worth?"

Helen made no answer, but she thought with herself there were two or three things for the sake of which she would willingly part with a considerable portion of her health. Her cousin imagined her conscience-stricken, and resumed with yet greater confidence.

"If you MUST go to church, you ought to prepare yourself beforehand by firmly impressing on your mind the fact that the whole thing is but part of a system—part of a false system; that the preacher has been brought up to the trade of religion, that it is his business, and that he must lay himself out to persuade people—himself first of all if he can, but anyhow his congregation, of the truth of everything contained in that farrago of priestly absurdities—called the Bible, forsooth! as if there were no other book worthy to be mentioned beside it. Think for a moment how soon, were it not for their churches and prayers and music and their tomfoolery of preaching, the whole precious edifice would topple about their ears, and the livelihood, the means of contentment and influence, would be gone from so many restless paltering spirits! So what is left them but to play upon the hopes and fears and diseased consciences of men as they best can! The idiot! To tell a man when he is hipped to COME UNTO ME! Bah! Does the fool really expect any grown man or woman to believe in his or her brain that the man who spoke those words, if ever there was a man who spoke them, can at this moment anni domini"—George liked to be correct—"1870, hear whatever silly words the Rev. Mr. Wingfold, or any other human biped, may think proper to address to him with his face buried in his blankets by his bedside or in his surplice over the

pulpit—bible?—not to mention that they would have you believe, or be damned to all eternity, that every thought vibrated in the convolutions of your brain is known to him as well as to yourself! The thing is really too absurd! Ha! ha! ha! The man died—the death of a malefactor, they say; and his body was stolen from his grave by his followers, that they might impose thousands of years of absurdity upon generations to come after them. And now, when a fellow feels miserable, he is to cry to that dead man, who said of himself that he was meek and lowly in heart, and straightway the poor beggar shall find rest to his soul! All I can say is that, if he find rest so, it will be the rest of an idiot! Believe me, Helen, a good Havannah and a bottle of claret would be considerably more to the purpose;—for ladies, perhaps rather a cup of tea and a little Beethoven!" Here he laughed, for the rush of his eloquence had swept away his bad humour. "But really," he went on, "the whole is TOO absurd to talk about. To go whining after an old Jew fable in these days of progress! Why, what do you think is the last discovery about light?"

"You will allow this much in excuse for their being so misled," returned Helen, with some bitterness, "that the old fable pretends at least to provide help for sore hearts; and except it be vivisection, I——"

"Do be serious, Helen," interrupted George. "I don't object to joking, you know, but you are not joking in a right spirit. This matter has to do with the well-being of the race; and we MUST think of others, however your Jew-gospel, in the genuine spirit of the Hebrew of all time, would set everybody to the saving of his own wind-bubble of a soul. Believe me, to live for others is the true way to lose sight of our own fancied sorrows."

Helen gave a deep sigh. Fancied sorrows!—Yes, gladly indeed would she live for ONE other at least! Nay more—she would die for him. But alas! what would that do for one whose very being was consumed with grief ineffable!—She must speak, else he would read her heart.

"There are real sorrows," she said. "They are not all fancied."

"There are very few sorrows," returned George, "in which fancy does not bear a stronger proportion than even a woman of sense, while the fancy is upon her, will be prepared to admit. I can remember bursts of grief when I was a boy, in which it seemed impossible anything should ever console me; but in one minute all would be gone, and my heart, or my spleen, or my diaphragm, as merry as ever. Believe that all is well, and you will find all will be well—very tolerably well, that is, considering."

"Considering that the well-being has to be divided and apportioned and accommodated to the various parts of such a huge whole, and that there is no God to look after the business!" said Helen, who, according to the state of the tide in the sea of her trouble, resented or accepted her cousin's teaching.

Few women are willing to believe in death. Most of them love life, and are faithful to hope; and I much doubt whether, if Helen had but had a taste of trouble to rouse the woman within her before her cousin conceived the wish of making her a proselyte, she would have turned even a tolerably patient ear to his instructions. Yet it is strange to see how even noble women, with the divine gift of imagination, may be argued into unbelief in their best instincts by some small man, as common-place as clever, who beside them is as limestone to marble. The knowing craft comes creeping up into the shadow of the rich galleon, and lo, with all her bountiful sails gleaming in the sun, the ship of God glides off in the wake of the felucca to the sweltering hollows betwixt the winds!

"You perplex me, my dear cousin," said Bascombe. "It is plain your nursing has been too much for you. You see everything with a jaundiced eye."

"Thank you, Cousin George," said Helen. "You are even more courteous than usual."

She turned from him and went into the house. Bascombe walked to the bottom of the garden and lighted his cigar, confessing to himself that for once he could not understand Helen.—Was it then only that he was ignorant of the awful fact that lay burrowing in her heart, or was he not ignorant also of the nature of that heart in which such a fact must so burrow? Was there anything in his system to wipe off that burning, torturing red? "Such things must be: men who wrong society must suffer for the sake of that society." But the red lay burning on the conscience of Helen too, and she had not murdered! And for him who had, he gave society never a thought, but shrieked aloud in his dreams, and moaned and wept when he waked over the memory of the woman who had wronged him, and whom he had, if Bascombe was right, swept out of being like an aphid from a rose-leaf.

CHAPTER XVI. A VANISHING GLIMMER.

Helen ran upstairs, dropped on her knees by her brother's bedside, and fell into a fit of sobbing, which no tears came to relieve.

"Helen! Helen! if you give way I shall go mad," said a voice of misery from the pillow.

She jumped up, wiping her dry eyes.

"What a wicked, selfish, bad sister, bad nurse, bad everything, I am, Poldie!" she said, her tone ascending the steps of vocal indignation as she spoke. "But shall I tell you"—here she looked all about the chamber and into the dressing-room ere she proceeded—"shall I tell you, Poldie, what it is that makes me so—I don't know what?—It is all the fault of the sermon I heard this morning. It is the first sermon I ever really listened to in my life—certainly the first I ever thought about again after I was out of the church. Somehow or other of late Mr. Wingfold has been preaching so strangely! but this is the first time I have cared to listen. Do you know he preaches as if he actually believed the things he was saying, and not only that, but as if he expected to persuade you of them too! I USED to think all clergymen believed them, but I doubt it now more than ever, for Mr. Wingfold speaks so differently and looks so different. I never saw any clergyman look like that; and I never saw such a change on a man as there is on him. There must be something to account for it. Could it be that he has himself really gone to—as he says—and found rest—or something he hadn't got before? But you won't know what I mean unless I tell you first what he was preaching about. His text was: Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden;—a common enough text, you know? Poldie! but somehow it seemed fresh to him, and he made it look fresh to me, for I felt as if it hadn't been intended for preaching about at all, but for going straight into people's hearts its own self, without any sermon. I think the way he did it was this: he first made us feel the sort of person that said the words, and then made us feel that he did say them, and so made us want to see what they could really mean. But of course what made them so different to me, was"—here Helen did burst into tears, but she fought with her sobs, and went on—"was—was—that my heart is breaking for you, Poldie—for I shall never see you smile again, my darling!"

She buried her face on his pillow, and Leopold uttered "a great and exceeding bitter cry." Her hand was on his mouth instantly, and her sobs ceased, while the tears kept flowing down her white face.

"Just think, Poldie," she said, in a voice which she seemed to have borrowed in her need from some one else, "—just think a moment! What if there should be some help in the great wide universe—somewhere, for as wide as it is—a heart that feels for us both, as my heart feels for you, Poldie! Oh! oh! wouldn't it be grand? Wouldn't it be lovely to be at peace again, Poldie? If there should be somebody somewhere who could take this gnawing serpent from my heart!"—She pulled wildly at her dress.—"'Come unto me,' he said, 'all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' That's what he said:—oh! if it could be true!"

"Surely it is—for you, best of sisters," cried Leopold; "but what has it to do with me? Nothing. She is DEAD—I killed her. Even if God were to raise her to life again, HE could not make it that I didn't drive the knife into her heart! Give ME rest!—why there's the hand that did it! O my God! my God!" cried the poor youth, and stared at his thin wasted hand, through which the light shone red, as at a conscious evil thing that had done the deed, and was still stained with its signs.

"God CAN'T be very angry with you, Poldie," sobbed Helen, feeling about blindly in the dark forest of her thoughts for some herb of comfort, and offering any leaf upon which her hand fell first.

"Then he ain't fit to be God!" cried Leopold fiercely. "I wouldn't have a word to say to a God that didn't cut a man in pieces for such a deed! Oh Helen, she was so lovely!—and what is she now?"

"Surely if there were a God, he would do something to set it right somehow! I know if I was God, Poldie, I should find some way of setting you up again, my darling. You ain't half as bad as you make yourself out."

"You had better tell that to the jury, Helen, and see how they will take it," said Leopold contemptuously.

"The jury!" Helen almost screamed. "What do you mean, Poldie?"

"Well!" returned Leopold, in a tone of justification, but made no further answer to her question. "All God can

do to set it right," he resumed, after a pause, "is to damn me for ever and ever, as one of the blackest creatures in creation."

"THAT I don't believe, anyhow!" returned Helen with equal vehemence and indefiniteness.

And for the first time, George Bascombe's teachings were a comfort to her. It was all nonsense about a God. As to her brother's misery, it had no source but that to which Shakespeare attributed the misery of Macbeth—and who should know better than Shakespeare?—the fear, namely, of people doing the like to himself! But straightway thereupon—horrible thought!—she found herself—yes! it was in her—call it thought, or call it feeling, it was hers!—she found herself despising her poor crushed brother! disgusted with him! turning from him, not even in scorn of his weakness, but in anger at what he had brought upon her! It was but a flash of the lightning of hell: one glance of his great, troubled, appealing, yet hopeless eyes, vague with the fogs that steamed up from the Phlegethon within him, was enough to turn her anger at him into hate of herself who had stabbed his angel in her heart. Then in herself she knew that all murderers are not of Macbeth's order, and that all remorse is not for oneself.

But where was the God to be found who could and MIGHT help in the wretched case? How were they to approach him? Or what could he do for them? Were such a being to assure Leopold that no hurt should come to him—even that he thought little of the wrong that he had done—would that make his crushed heart begin to swell again with fresh life? would that bring back Emmeline from the dark grave and the worms to the sunny earth and the speech of men? And whither, yet farther, he might have sent her, she dared not think. And Leopold was not merely at strife with himself, but condemned to dwell with a self that was loathsome to him. She no longer saw any glimmer of hope but such as lay in George's doctrine of death. If there was no helper who could clean hearts and revive the light of life, then welcome gaunt death! let the grim-mouthed skeleton be crowned at every feast!

CHAPTER XVII. LET US PRAY!

That was the sole chink in the prison where these two sat immured alone from their kind—unless, indeed, the curate might know of another.

One thing Helen had ground for being certain of—that the curate would tell them no more than he knew. Even George Bascombe, who did not believe one thing he said, counted him an honest man! Might she venture to consult him, putting the case as of a person who had done very wrong—say stolen money or committed forgery or something? Might she not thus gather a little honey of comfort and bring it home to Leopold?

Thinking thus and thus she sat silent; and all the time the suffering eyes were fixed upon her face, looking for no comfort, but finding there all they ever had of rest.

"Are you thinking about the sermon, Helen?" he asked. "What was it you were telling me about it just now? Who preached it?"

"Mr. Wingfold," she answered listlessly.

"Who is Mr. Wingfold?"

"Our curate at the Abbey."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Oh, a man somewhere about thirty—a straightforward, ordinary kind of man."

"Ah!" said Leopold—then added after a moment—"I was hoping he might be an old man, with a grey head, like the brahmin who used to teach me Sanscrit.—I wish I had treated him better, poor old fellow! and learned a little more."

"What does it matter about Sanscrit? Why should you make troubles of trifles?" said Helen, whose trials had at last begun to undermine her temper.

"It was not of the Sanscrit, but the moonshee I was thinking," answered Leopold mildly.

"You darling!" cried Helen, already repentant. But with the revulsion she felt that this state of things could not long continue—she must either lose her senses, or turn into something hateful to herself: the strain was more than she could bear. She MUST speak to somebody, and she would try whether she could not approach the subject with Mr. Wingfold.

But how was she to see him? It would be awkward to call upon him at his lodgings, and she must see him absolutely alone to dare a whisper of what was on her mind.

As she thus reflected, the thought of what people would say, were it remarked that she contrived to meet the curate, brought a shadow of scorn upon her face. Leopold saw the expression, and, sensitive as an ailing woman, said,

"Helen, what HAVE I done to make you look like that?"

"How did I look, my Poldie?" she asked, turning on him eyes like brimming wells of love and tenderness.

"Let me see," answered Leopold; and after a moment's thought replied, "As Milton's Satan might have looked if Mammon had counselled him to make off with the crown-jewels instead of declaring war."

"Ah, Poldie!" cried Helen, delighted at the stray glance of sunshine, and kissing him as she spoke, "you must really be better! I'll tell you what!" she exclaimed joyfully, as a new thought struck her: "As soon as you are able, we will set out for New York—to pay Uncle Tom a visit of course! but we shall never be seen or heard of again. At New York we will change our names, cross to San Francisco, and from there sail for the Sandwich Islands. Perhaps we may be able to find a little one to buy, just big enough for us two; and you shall marry a nice native——"

Her forced gaiety gave way. She burst out weeping afresh, and throwing her arms round him, sobbed—

"Poldie, Poldie! you can pray: cry to God to help us somehow or other; and if there be no God to hear us, then let us die together. There are easy ways of it, Poldie."

"Thank you! thank you, sister dear!" he answered, pressing her to his bosom: "that is the first word of real comfort you have spoken to me. I shall not be afraid if you go with me."

It was indeed a comfort to both of them to remember that there was this alternative equally to the gallows and a long life of gnawing fear and remorse. But it was only to be a last refuge of course. Helen withdrew to the dressing-room, laid herself on her bed, and began to compass how to meet and circumvent the curate, so as by an innocent cunning to wile from him on false pretences what spiritual balm she might so gain for the torn heart and conscience of her brother. There was no doubt it would be genuine, and the best to be had, seeing George Bascombe, who was honesty itself, judged the curate an honest man. But how was it to be done? She could see only one way. With some inconsistency, she resolved to cast herself on his generosity, and yet would not trust him entirely.

She did not go downstairs again, but had her tea with her brother. In the evening her aunt went out to visit some of her pensioners, for it was one of Mrs. Ramshorn's clerical duties to be kind to the poor—a good deal at their expense, I am afraid—and presently George came to the door of the sick-room to beg her to go down and sing to him. Of course, in the house of a dean's relict, no music except sacred must be heard on a Sunday; but to have Helen sing it, George would condescend even to a hymn tune; and there was Handel, for whom he professed a great admiration! What mattered his subjects? He could but compose the sort of thing the court wanted of him, and in order to that, had to fuddle his brains first, poor fellow! So said George at least.

That Leopold might not hear them talking outside his door, a thing which no invalid likes, Helen went downstairs with her cousin; but although she had often sung from Handel for his pleasure, content to reproduce the bare sounds, and caring nothing about the feelings both they and the words represented, she positively refused this evening to gratify him. She must go back to Leopold. She would sing from *The Creation* if he liked, but nothing out of *The Messiah* would she or could she sing.

Perhaps she could herself hardly have told why, but George perceived the lingering influence of the morning's sermon, and more vexed than he had ever yet been with her, for he could not endure her to cherish the least prejudice in favour of what he despised, he said he would overtake his aunt, and left the house. The moment he was gone, she went to the piano, and began to sing, "Comfort ye." When she came to "Come unto me," she broke down. But with sudden resolution she rose, and, having opened every door between it and her brother, raised the top of the piano, and then sang, "Come unto me," as she had never sung in her life. Nor did she stop there. At the distance of six of the wide-standing houses, her aunt and cousin heard her singing "Thou didst not leave," with the tone and expression of a prophetess—of a Maenad, George said. She was still singing when he opened the door, but when they reached the drawing-room she was gone. She was kneeling beside her brother.

CHAPTER XVIII. TWO LETTERS.

The next morning, as Wingfold ate his breakfast by an open window looking across the churchyard, he received a letter by the local post. It was as follows:—

"Dear Mr. Wingfold, I am about to take an unheard-of liberty, but my reasons are such as make me bold. The day may come when I shall be able to tell you them all. Meantime I hope you can help me. I want very much to ask your counsel upon a certain matter, and I cannot beg you to call, for my aunt knows nothing of it. Could you contrive a suitable way of meeting? You may imagine my necessity is grievous when I thus expose myself to the possible bitterness of my own after judgment. But I must have confidence in the man who spoke as you did yesterday morning. I am, dear Mr. Wingfold, sincerely yours, Helen Lingard.

"P.S.—I shall be walking along Pine Street from our end, at eleven o'clock to-morrow."

The curate was not taken with a great surprise. But something like fear overshadowed him at finding his sermons come back upon him thus. Was he, an unbelieving labourer, to go reaping with his blunt and broken sickle where the corn was ripest! But he had no time to think about that now. It was nearly ten o'clock, and she would be looking for her answer at eleven. He had not to think long, however, before he saw what seemed a suitable plan to suggest; whereupon he wrote as follows:

"Dear Miss Lingard, I need not say that I am entirely at your service. But I am doubtful if the only way that occurs to me will commend itself to you. I know what I am about to propose is safe, but you may not have sufficient confidence in my judgment to accept it as such.

"Doubtless you have seen the two deformed persons, an uncle and niece, named Polwarth, who keep the gate of Osterfield Park. I know them well, and, strange as it may seem, I must tell you, in order that you may partake of my confidence, that whatever change you may have observed in my public work is owing to the influence of those two, who have more faith in God than I have ever met with before. It may not be amiss to mention also that, although poor and distorted, they are of gentle blood as well as noble nature. With this preamble, I venture to propose that you should meet me at their cottage. To them it would not appear at all strange that one of my congregation should wish to see me alone, and I know you may trust their discretion. But while I write thus, with all confidence in you and in them, I must tell you that I have none in myself. I feel both ashamed and perplexed that you should imagine any help in me. Of all I know, I am the poorest creature to give counsel. All I can say for myself is that I think I see a glimmer of light, and light is light, through whatever cranny, and into whatever poverty-stricken chamber, it may fall. Whatever I see I will say. If I can see nothing to help you, I will be silent. And yet I may be able to direct you where to find what I cannot give you. If you accept my plan, and will appoint day and hour, I shall acquaint the Polwarths with the service we desire of them. Should you object to it, I shall try to think of another. I am, dear Miss Lingard, yours very truly, Thomas Wingfold."

He placed the letter between the pages of a pamphlet, took his hat and stick, and was walking down Pine Street as the Abbey clock struck eleven. Midway he met Helen, shook hands with her, and, after an indifferent word or two, gave her the pamphlet, and bade her good morning.

Helen hurried home. It had required all her self-command to look him in the face, and her heart beat almost painfully as she opened the letter.

She could not but be pleased—even more than pleased with it. If the secret had been her own, she thought she could have trusted him entirely; but she must not expose poor Leopold.

By the next post the curate received a grateful answer, appointing the time, and expressing perfect readiness to trust those whom he had tried.

She was received at the cottage door by Rachel, who asked her to walk into the garden, where Mr. Wingfold was expecting her. The curate led her to a seat overgrown with honeysuckle.

CHAPTER XIX. ADVICE IN THE DARK.

It was some moments before either of them spoke, and it did not help Wingfold that she sat clouded by a dark-coloured veil. At length he said,

"You must not fear to trust me because I doubt my ability to help you. I can at least assure you of my sympathy. The trouble I have myself had enables me to promise you that."

"Can you tell me," she said, from behind more veils than that of lace, "how to get rid of a haunting idea?"

"That depends on the nature of the idea, I should imagine," answered the curate. "Such things sometimes arise merely from the state of the health, and there the doctor is the best help."

Helen shook her head, and smiled behind her veil a grievous smile. The curate paused, but, receiving no assistance, ventured on again.

"If it be a thought of something past and gone, for which nothing can be done, I think activity in one's daily work must be the best aid to endurance."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" sighed Helen—"when one has no heart to endure, and hates the very sunlight!—You wouldn't talk about work to a man dying of hunger, would you?"

"I'm not sure about that."

"He wouldn't heed you."

"Perhaps not."

"What would you do then?"

"Give him some food, and try him again, I think."

"Then give me some food—some hope, I mean, and try me again. Without that, I don't care about duty or life or anything."

"Tell me, then, what is the matter; I MAY be able to hint at some hope," said Wingfold, very gently. "Do you call yourself a Christian?"

The question would to most people have sounded strange, abrupt, inquisitorial; but to Helen it sounded not one of them all.

"No," she answered.

"Ah!" said the curate a little sadly, and went on. "Because then I could have said, you know where to go for comfort.—Might it not be well however to try if there is any to be had from him that said 'COME UNTO ME, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST?'"

"I can do nothing with that. I have tried and tried to pray, but it is of no use. There is such a weight on my heart that no power of mine can lift it up. I suppose it is because I cannot believe there is anyone hearing a word I say. Yesterday, when I got alone in the park, I prayed aloud: I thought that perhaps, even if he might not be able to read what was in my heart, he might be able to hear my voice. I was even foolish enough to wish I knew Greek, because perhaps he would understand me better if I were to pray in Greek. My brain seems turning. It is of no use! There is no help anywhere!"

She tried hard, but could not prevent a sob. And then came a burst of tears.

"Will you not tell me something about it?" said the curate, yet more gently. Oh, how gladly would he relieve her heart if he might! "Perhaps Jesus has begun to give you help, though you do not know it yet," he said, "His help may be on the way to you, or even with you, only you do not recognize it for what it is. I have known that kind of thing. Tell me some fact or some feeling I can lay hold of. Possibly there is something you ought to do and are not doing, and that is why you cannot rest. I think Jesus would give no rest except in the way of learning of him."

Helen's sobs ceased, but what appeared to the curate a long silence followed. At length she said, with faltering voice:

"Suppose it were a great wrong that had been done, and that was the unendurable thought? SUPPOSE, I say, that was what made me miserable!"

"Then you must of course make all possible reparation," answered Wingfold at once.

"But if none were possible—what then?"

Here the answer was not so plain, and the curate had to think.

"At least," he said at length, "you could confess the wrong, and ask forgiveness."

"But if that also were impossible," said Helen, shuddering inwardly to find how near she drew to the edge of the awful fact.

Again the curate took time to reply.

"I am endeavouring to answer your questions as well as I can," he said; "but it is hard to deal with generalities. You see how useless, for that very reason, my answers have as yet been! Still I have something more to say, and hesitate only because it may imply more confidence than I dare profess, and of all things I dread untruth. But I am honest in this much at least, that I desire with true heart to find a God who will acknowledge me as his creature and make me his child, and if there be any God I am nearly certain he will do so; for surely there cannot be any other kind of God than the Father of Jesus Christ! In the strength of this much of conscious truth I venture to say—that no crime can be committed against a creature without being committed also against the creator of that creature; therefore surely the first step for anyone who has committed such a crime must be to humble himself before God, confess the sin, and ask forgiveness and cleansing. If there is anything in religion at all it must rest upon an actual individual communication between God and the creature he has made; and if God heard the man's prayer and forgave him, then the man would certainly know it in his heart and be consoled—perhaps by the gift of humility."

"Then you think confession to God is all that is required?"

"If there be no one else wronged to whom confession can be made. If the case were mine—and sometimes I much fear that in taking holy orders I have grievously sinned—I should then do just as I have done with regard to that—cry to the living power which I think originated me, to set the matter right for me."

"But if it could not be set right?"

"Then to forgive and console me."

"Alas! alas! that he will not hear of. He would rather be punished than consoled. I fear for his brain. But indeed that might be well."

She had gone much farther than she had intended; but the more doubtful help became, the more she was driven by the agony of a perishing hope to search the heart of Wingfold.

Again the curate pondered.

"Are you sure," he said at length, "that the person of whom you speak is not neglecting something he ought to do—something he knows perhaps?"

He had come back to the same with which he started.

Through her veil he saw her turn deadly white. Ever since Leopold said the word JURY, a ghastly fear had haunted Helen. She pressed her hand on her heart and made no answer.

"I speak from experience," the curate went on—"from what else could I speak? I know that so long as we hang back from doing what conscience urges, there is no peace for us. I will not say our prayers are not heard, for Mr. Polwarth has taught me that the most precious answer prayer can have, lies in the growing strength of the impulse towards the dreaded duty, and in the ever sharper stings of the conscience. I think I asked already whether there were no relatives to whom reparation could be made?"

"Yes, yes," gasped Helen;" and I told you reparation was impossible."

Her voice had sunk almost to a groan.

"But at least confession—" said Wingfold—and started from his seat.

CHAPTER XX. INTERCESSION.

A stifled cry had interrupted him. Helen was pressing her handkerchief to her mouth. She rose and ran from him. Wingfold stood alarmed and irresolute. She had not gone many steps, however, when her pace slackened, her knees gave way, and she dropped senseless on the grass. Wingfold ran to the house for water. Rachel hastened to her assistance, and Polwarth followed. It was some time before they succeeded in reviving her.

When at length the colour began to return a little to her cheek, Polwarth dropped on his knees at her feet. Wingfold in his ministrations was already kneeling on one side of her, and Rachel now kneeled on the other. Then Polwarth said, in his low and husky, yet not altogether unmelodious voice,

"Life eternal, this lady of thine hath a sore heart and we cannot help her. Thou art Help, O mighty Love. They who know thee best rejoice in thee most. As thy sun that shines over our heads, as thy air that flows into our bodies, thou art above, around, and in us; thou art in her heart: Oh speak to her there; let her know thy will, and give her strength to do it, O Father of Jesus Christ! Amen."

When Helen opened her eyes, she saw only the dark leaves of an arbutus over her, and knew nothing beyond a sense of utter misery and weakness, with an impulse to rise and run. With an effort she moved her head a little, and then she saw the three kneeling forms, the clergyman with bowed head, and the two dwarfs with shining upturned faces: she thought she was dead and they were kneeling about her corpse. Her head dropped with a weary sigh of relief, she lay passive, and heard the dwarf's prayer. Then she knew that she was not dead, and the disappointment was bitter. But she thought of Leopold, and was consoled. After a few minutes of quiet, they helped her into the house, and laid her on a sofa in the parlour.

"Don't be frightened, dear lady," said the little woman; "nobody shall come near you. We will watch you as if you were the queen. I am going to get some tea for you."

But the moment she left the room, Helen got up. She could not endure a moment longer in the place. There was a demon at her brother's ear, whispering to him to confess, to rid himself of his torture by the aid of the law: she must rush home and drive him away. She took her hat in her hand, opened the door softly, and ere Rachel could say a word, had flitted through the kitchen, and was amongst the trees on the opposite side of the road. Rachel ran to the garden to her uncle and Wingfold. They looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"I will follow her," said Wingfold. "She may faint again. If she does I shall whistle."

He followed, and kept her in sight until she was safe in her aunt's garden.

"What IS to be done?" he said, returning in great trouble. "I do not think I made any blunder, but there she is gone in tenfold misery! I wish I could tell you what passed, but that of course I cannot."

"Of course not," returned Polwarth. "But the fact of her leaving you so is no sign that you said the wrong thing,—rather the contrary. When people seek advice, it is too often in the hope of finding the adviser side with their second familiar self, instead of their awful first self, of which they know so little. Do not be anxious. You have done your best. Wait for what will come next."

CHAPTER XXI. HELEN ALONE.

Helen tottered to a little summer-house in the garden, which had been her best retreat since she had given her room to her brother, and there seated herself to regain breath and composure ere she went to him. She had sought the door of Paradise, and the door of hell had been opened to her! If the frightful idea which, she did not doubt, had already suggested itself to Leopold, should now be encouraged, there was nothing but black madness before her! Her Poldie on the scaffold! God in heaven! Infinitely rather would she poison herself and him! Then she remembered how pleased and consoled he had been when she said something about their dying together, and that reassured her a little: no, she was certain Leopold would never yield himself to public shame! But she must take care that foolish, extravagant curate should not come near him. There was no knowing to what he might persuade him! Poor Poldie was so easily led by any show of nobility—anything that looked grand or self-sacrificing!

Helen's only knowledge of guilt came from the pale image of it lifted above her horizon by the refraction of her sympathy. She did not know, perhaps never would understand the ghastly horror of conscious guilt, besides which there is no evil else. Agonies of injury a man may endure, and, so far from being overwhelmed, rise above them tenfold a man, who, were he to awake to the self-knowledge of a crime, would sink into a heap of ruin. Then indeed, if there be no God, or one that has not an infinite power of setting right that which has gone wrong with his work, then indeed welcome the faith, for faith it may then be called, of such as say there is no hereafter! Helen did not know to what gulfs of personal shame, nay, to what summits of public execration, a man may be glad to flee for refuge from the fangs of home-born guilt—if so be there is any refuge to be found in either. And some kind of refuge there does seem to be. Strange it is and true that in publicity itself lies some relief from the gnawing of the worm—as if even a cursing humanity were a barrier of protection between the torn soul and its crime. It flees to its kind for shelter from itself. Hence, I imagine, in part, may the coolness of some criminals be accounted for. Their quietness is the relief brought by confession—even confession but to their fellows. Is it that the crime seems then lifted a little from their shoulders, and its weight shared by the ace?

Helen had hoped that the man who had spoken in public so tenderly, and at the same time so powerfully, of the saving heart of the universe, that would have no divisions of pride, no scatterings of hate, but of many would make one, would in private have spoken yet sweeter words of hope and consolation, which she might have carried home in gladness to her sick-souled brother, to comfort and strengthen him—words of might to allay the burning of the poison within him, and make him feel that after all there was yet a place for him in the universe, and that he was no outcast of Gehenna. But instead of such words of gentle might, like those of the man of whom he was so fond of talking, he had only spoken drearily of duty, hinting at a horror that would plunge the whole ancient family into a hell of dishonour and contempt! It did indeed show what mere heartless windbags of effete theology those priests were! Skeletons they were, and no human beings at all!—Her father!—the thought of him was distraction! Her mother! Oh, if Leopold had had her mother for his too, instead of the dark-skinned woman with the flashing eyes, he would never have brought this upon them! It was all his mother's fault—the fault of her race—and of the horrible drug her people had taught him to take! And was he to go and confess it, and be tried for it, and be—? Great God!—And here was the priest actually counselling what was worse than any suicide!

Suddenly, however, it occurred to her that the curate had had no knowledge of the facts of the case, and had therefore been compelled to talk at random. It was impossible he should suspect the crime of which her brother had been guilty, and therefore could not know the frightful consequences of such a confession as he had counselled. Had she not better then tell him all, and so gather from him some right and reasonable advice for the soothing of the agonies of her poor broken-winged angel? But alas! what security had she that a man capable of such priestly severity and heartlessness—her terrors made her thus inconsequent—would not himself betray the all but innocent sufferer to the vengeance of justice so called? No; she would venture no farther. Sooner would she go to George Bascombe—from whom she not only could look for no spiritual comfort, but whose theories were so cruel against culprits of all sorts! Alas, alas! she was alone! absolutely alone in the great waste, death-eyed universe!—But for a man to talk so of the tenderness of Jesus Christ, and then serve her as the curate

had done—it was indeed shameless! HE would never have treated a poor wretched woman like that!—And as she said thus to herself, again the words sounded in the ear of her heart: 'COME UNTO ME, ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.' Whence came the voice? From her memory, or from that inner chamber of the spirit which the one spirit-bearing spirit keeps for his own in every house that he builds—alas so long in most human houses shut away from the rest of the rooms and forgotten, or recollected with uneasiness as a lumber-closet in which lie too many things that had better not be looked into? But what matter where the voice that had said them, so long as the words were true, and she might believe them!—Whatever is true CAN be believed of the true heart.

Ere she knew, Helen was on her knees, with her head on the chair, yet once more crying to the hearer of cries—possible or impossible being she knew not in the least, but words reported of him had given birth to the cry—to help her in her dire need.

Instead of any word, or thought even, coming to her that might be fancied an answer, she was scared from her knees by an approaching step—that of the house-keeper come to look for her with the message from her aunt that Leopold was more restless than usual, not at all like himself, and she could do nothing with him.

CHAPTER XXII. A HAUNTED SOUL.

Helen rose and hastened to her brother, with a heart of lead in her body.

She started when she saw him: some change had passed on him since the morning! Was that eager look in his eyes a fresh access of the fever? That glimmer on his countenance, doubtful as the first of the morning, when the traveller knows not whether the light be in the sky or only in his brain, did look more like a dawn of his old healthful radiance than any fresh fire of madness; but at the same time he appeared more wasted and pinched and death-like than she had yet seen him. Or was it only in her eyes—was she but reading in his face the agony she had herself gone through that day?

"Helen, Helen!" he cried as she entered the room, "come here, close to me."

She hastened to him, sat down on the bedside, took his hand, and looked as cheerfully as she could, yet it was but the more woefully, in his face.

"Helen!" he said again, and he spoke with a strange expression in his voice, for it seemed that of hope, "I have been thinking all day of what you told me on Sunday."

"What was that, Poldie?" asked Helen with a pang of fear.

"Why, those words of course—what else? You sang them to me afterwards, you know. Helen, I should like to see Mr. Wingfold. Don't you think he might be able to do something?"

"What sort of thing, Poldie?" she faltered, growing sick at heart.—Was this what came of praying! she thought bitterly.

"Something or other—I don't know what exactly," returned Leopold.—"Oh Helen!" he broke out with a cry, stifled by the caution that had grown habitual to both of them, "is there no help of any kind anywhere? Surely Mr. Wingfold could tell me something—comfort me somehow, if I were to tell him all about it! I could trust the man that said such things as those you told me. That I could!—Oh! I wish I hadn't run away, but had let them take me and hang me!"

Helen felt herself grow white. She turned away, and pretended to search for something she had dropped.

"I don't think he would be of the slightest use to you," she said, still stooping.

And she felt like a devil dragging the soul of her brother to hell. But that was a foolish fancy, and must be resisted!

"Not if I told him everything?" Leopold hissed from between his teeth in the struggle to keep down a shriek.

"No, not if you told him everything," she answered, and felt like a judge condemning him to death.

"What is he there for then?" said Leopold indignantly, and turned his face to the wall and moaned.

Helen had not yet thought of asking herself whether her love to her brother was all clear love, and nowise mingled with selfishness—whether in the fresh horror that day poured into the cup that had seemed already running over, it was of her brother only she thought, or whether threatened shame to herself had not a part in her misery. But, as far as she was aware, she was quite honest in saying that the curate could not comfort him—for what attempt even had he made to comfort her? What had he done but utter common-places and truisms about duty? And who could tell but—indeed was she not certain that such a man, bringing the artillery of his fanaticism to bear upon her poor boy's wild enthusiastic temperament, would speedily persuade him to make a reality of that terrible thing he had already thought of, that hideously impossible possibility which she dared not even allow to present itself before her imagination? So he lay and moaned, and she sat crushed and speechless with despairing misery.

All at once Leopold sat straight up, his eyes fixed and flaming, his face white: he looked like a corpse possessed by a spirit of fear and horror. Helen's heart swelled into her throat, the muscles of her face contracted with irresistible rigor, and she felt it grow exactly like his, while with wide eyes she stared at him, and he stared at something which lest she also should see, she dared not turn her head. Surely, she thought afterwards, she must have been that moment in the presence of something unearthly! Her physical being was wrenched from her control, and she must simply sit and wait until the power or influence, whichever it might be, should pass away.

How long it was ere it relaxed its hold she could not tell; it could not have been long, she thought. Suddenly the light sank from Leopold's eyes, his muscles relaxed, he fell back motionless, apparently senseless, on the pillow, and she thought he was dead. The same moment she was free; the horror had departed from her own atmosphere too, and she made haste to restore him. But in all she did for him, she felt like the executioner who gives restoratives to the wretch that has fainted on the rack or the wheel. What right had SHE, she thought, to multiply to him his moments of torture? If the cruel power that had created him for such misery, whoever, whatever, wherever he might be, chose thus to torture him, was she, his only friend, out of the selfish affection he had planted in her, to lend herself his tool? Yet she hesitated not a single moment in her ministrations.

There is so much passes in us of which our consciousness takes no grasp,—or but with such a flitting touch as scarcely to hand it over to the memory—that I feel encouraged to doubt whether ever there was a man absolutely without hope. That there have been, alas, are many, who are aware of no ground of hope, nay even who feel no glimmer in them of anything they can call hope, I know; but I think in them all is an underlying unconscious hope. I think that not one in all the world has more than a shadowy notion of what hopelessness means. Perhaps utter hopelessness is the outer darkness.

At length Leopold opened his eyes, gave a terrified glance around, held out his arms to her, and drew her down upon his face.

"I saw her!" he said, in a voice that sounded as if it came from the grave, and she heard it in her heart.

"Nonsense, dear Poldie! it was all fancy—nothing more," she returned, in a voice almost as hollow as his; and the lightness of the words uttered in such a tone jarred dismayfully on her own ear.

"Fancy!" he repeated; "I know what fancy is as well as any man or woman born: THAT was no fancy. She stood there, by the wardrobe—in the same dress!—her face as white as her dress! And—listen!—I will tell YOU—I will soon satisfy you it COULD be no fancy."—Here he pushed her from him and looked straight in her eyes.—"I saw her back reflected in the mirror of the wardrobe—door, and"—here the fixed look of horror threatened to return upon his face, but he went on—"listen,—there was a worm crawling on it, over her lovely white shoulder! Ugh! I saw it in the mirror!"

His voice had risen to a strangled shriek, his face was distorted, and he shook like a child on the point of yelling aloud in an agony of fear. Helen clasped his face between her hands, and gathering courage from despair, if indeed that be a possible source of courage, and it is not gathered rather from the hidden hope of which I speak, and the love that will cleave and not forsake, she set her teeth, and said:

"Let her come then, Poldie! I am with you, and I defy her! She shall know that a sister's love is stronger than the hate of a jilt—even if you did kill her. Before God, Poldie, I would after all rather be you than she. Say what you will, she had herself to blame, and I don't doubt did twenty worse things than you did when you killed her."

But Leopold seemed not to hear a word she said, and lay with his face to the wall.

At length he turned his head suddenly, and said,

"Helen, if you don't let me see Mr. Wingfold, I shall go mad, and then everything will come out."

CHAPTER XXIII. COMPELLED CONFIDENCE.

Helen flew to the dressing-room to hide her dismay, and there cast herself on the bed. The gray Fate above, or the awful Demo-gorgon beneath, would have its way! Whether it was a living Will or but the shadow of the events it seemed to order, it was too much for her. She had no choice but yield. She rose and returned to her brother.

"I am going to find Mr. Wingfold," she said in a hoarse voice, as she took her hat.

"Don't be long then, Helen," returned Leopold. "I can't bear you out of my sight. And don't let aunt come into the room. SHE might come again, you know, and then all would be out.—Bring him with you, Helen."

"I will," answered Helen, and went.

The curate might have returned: she would seek him first at his lodging. She cared nothing about appearances now.

It was a dull afternoon. Clouds had gathered, and the wind was chilly. It seemed to blow out of the church, which stood up cold and gray against the sky, filling the end of the street. What a wretched, horrible world it was! She approached the church, and entered the churchyard from which it rose like a rock from the Dead Sea—a type of the true church, around whose walls lie the dead bodies of the old selves left behind by those who enter. Helen would have envied the dead, who lay so still under its waves; but, alas! if Leopold was right, they but roamed elsewhere in their trouble, and were no better for dying.

She hurried across, and reached the house; but Mr. Wingfold had not yet returned, and she hurried back across it again, to tell Leopold that she must go farther to find him.

The poor youth was already more composed. What will not the vaguest hope sometimes do for a man! Helen told him she had seen the curate in the park, when she was out in the morning, and he might be there still, or she might meet him coming back. Leopold only begged her to make haste. She took the road to the lodge.

She did not meet him, and it was with intense repugnance that she approached the gate.

"Is Mr. Wingfold here?" she asked of Rachel, as if she had never spoken to her before; and Rachel, turning paler at the sight of her, answered that he was in the garden with her uncle, and went to call him.

The moment he appeared she said, in a tone rendered by conflicting emotions inexplicable, and sounding almost rude,

"Will you come to my brother? He is very ill, and wants to see you."

"Certainly," returned Wingfold; "I will go with you at once."

But in his heart he trembled at the thought of being looked to for consolation and counsel, and that apparently in a case of no ordinary kind. Most likely he would not know what to say, or how to behave himself! How different it would be if with all his heart he believed the grand lovely things recorded in the book of his profession! Then indeed he might enter the chambers of pain and fear and guilt with the innocent confidence of a winged angel of comfort and healing! But now the eyes of his understanding were blinded with the IFS and BUTS that flew swarming like black muscae wherever they turned. Still he would—nay, he must go and do his best.

They walked across the park to reach the house by the garden, and for some distance they walked in silence. At length Helen said:

"You must not encourage my brother to talk much, if you please; and you must not mind what he says; he has had brain-fever, and sometimes talks strangely. But on the other hand, if he fancy you don't believe him, it will drive him wild—so you must take care— please."

Her voice was like that of a soul trying to speak with unproved lips.

"Miss Lingard," said Wingfold, slowly and quietly—and if his voice trembled, he only was aware of it, "I cannot see your face, therefore you must pardon me if I ask you—are you quite honest with me?"

Helen's first feeling was anger. She held her peace for a time. Then she said,

"So, Mr. Wingfold!—that is the way you help the helpless!"

"How can any man help without knowing what has to be helped?" returned the curate. "The very being of his

help depends upon his knowing the truth. It is very plain you do not trust me, and equally impossible I should be of any service as long as the case is such."

Again Helen held her peace. Resentment and dislike towards himself combined with terror of his anticipated counsel to render her speechless.

Her silence lasted so long that Wingfold came to the resolution of making a venture that had occurred to him more than once that morning. Had he not been convinced that a soul was in dire misery, he would not have had recourse to the seeming cruelty.

"Would this help to satisfy you that, whatever my advice may be worth, at least my discretion may be trusted?" he said.

They were at the moment passing through a little thicket in the park, where nobody could see them, and as he spoke, he took the knife-sheath from his pocket, and held it out to her.

She started like a young horse at something dead: she had never seen it, but the shape had an association. She paled, retreated a step, with a drawing back of her head and neck and a spreading of her nostrils, stared for a moment, first at the sheath, then at the curate, gave a little moan, bit her under lip hard, held out her hand, but as if she were afraid to touch the thing, and said:

"What is it? Where did you find it?"

She would have taken it, but Wingfold held it fast.

"Give it me," she said imperatively. "It is mine. I lost it."

"There is something dark on the lining of it," said the curate, and looked straight into her eyes.

She let go her hold. But almost the same moment she snatched the sheath out of his hand and held it to her bosom, while her look of terror changed into one of defiance. Wingfold made no attempt to recover it. She put it in her pocket, and drew herself up.

"What do you mean?" she said, in a voice that was hard yet trembled.

She felt like one that sees the vultures gathering above him, and lifts a moveable finger in defence. Then with sudden haughtiness both of gesture and word:

"You have been acting the spy, sir!"

"No," returned the curate quietly. "The sheath was committed to my care by one whom certain facts that had come to his knowledge— certain words he had overheard—"

He paused. She shook visibly, but still would hold what ground might yet be left her.

"Why did you not give it me before?" she asked.

"In the public street, or in your aunt's presence?"

"You are cruel!" she panted. Her strength was going. "What do you know?"

"Nothing so well as that I want to serve you, and you may trust me."

"What do you mean to do?"

"My best to help you and your brother."

"But to what end?"

"To any end that is right."

"But how? What would you tell him to do?"

"You must help me to discover what he ought to do."

"Not—" she cried, clasping her hands and dropping on her knees before him, "—you WILL not tell him to give himself up? Promise me you will not, and I will tell you everything. He shall do anything you please but that! Anything but that!"

Wingfold's heart was sore at sight of her agony. He would have raised her with soothing words of sympathy and assurance, but still she cried, "Promise me you will not make him give himself up."

"I dare not promise anything," he said. "I MUST do what I may see to be right. Believe me, I have no wish to force myself into your confidence, but you have let me see that you are in great trouble and in need of help, and I should be unfaithful to my calling if I did not do my best to make you trust me."

A pause followed. Helen rose despairingly, and they resumed their walk. Just as they reached the door in the fence which would let them out upon the meadow in sight of the Manor-house, she turned to him and said,

"I will trust you, Mr. Wingfold. I mean, I will take you to my brother, and he shall do as he thinks proper."

They passed out and walked across the meadow in silence. In the passage under the fence, as she turned from

closing the door behind them, she stood and pressed her hand to her side.

"Oh! Mr. Wingfold," she cried, "my heart will break! He has no one but me! No one but me to be mother and sister and all to him! He is NOT wicked—my poor darling!"

She caught the curate by the arm with a grasp which left its mark behind it, and gazed appealingly into his face: in the dim tomb-like light, her wide-strained eyes, white agonized countenance, and trembling roseless lips made her look like one called back from death "to speak of horrors."

"Save him from madness," she said, in forced and unnatural utterance. "Save him from the remorse gnawing at his heart. But do not, DO not counsel him to give himself up."

"Would it not be better you should tell me about it," said the curate, "and save him the pain and excitement?"

"I will do so, if he wishes it, not otherwise. Come; we must not stay longer. He can hardly bear me out of his sight. I will leave you for one moment in the library, and then come to you. If you should see my aunt, not a word of all this, please. All she knows is that he has had brain-fever, and is recovering only very slowly. I have never given her even a hint of anything worse. Indeed, honestly, Mr. Wingfold, I am not at all certain he did do what he will tell you. But there is his misery all the same. Do have pity on us, and don't be hard upon the poor boy. He is but a boy—only twenty."

"May God be to me as I am to him!" said Wingfold solemnly.

Helen withdrew her entreating eyes, and let go his arm. They went up into the garden and into the house.

Afterwards, Wingfold was astonished at his own calmness and decision in taking upon him—almost, as it were, dragging to him—this relation with Helen and her brother. But he had felt that not to do so would be to abandon Helen to her grief, and that for her sake he must not hesitate to encounter whatever might have to be encountered in doing so.

Helen left him in the library, as she had said, and there he waited her return in a kind of stupor, unable to think, and feeling as if he were lost in a strange and anxious dream.

CHAPTER XXIV. WILLING CONFIDENCE.

"Come," said Helen, re-entering, and the curate rose and followed her.

The moment he turned the corner of the bed and saw the face on the pillow, he knew in his soul that Helen was right, and that that was no wicked youth who lay before him—one, however, who might well have been passion-driven. There was the dark complexion and the great soft yet wild eyes that came of tropical blood. Had not Helen so plainly spoken of her brother, however, he would have thought he saw before him a woman. The worn, troubled, appealing light that overflowed rather than shone from his eyes, went straight to the curate's heart.

Wingfold had had a brother, the only being in the world he had ever loved tenderly; he had died young, and a thin film of ice had since gathered over the well of his affections; but now suddenly this ice broke and vanished, and his heart yearned over the suffering youth. He had himself been crying to God, not seldom in sore trouble, and now, ere, as it seemed, he had himself been heard, here was a sad brother crying to him for help. Nor was this all; the reading of the gospel story had roused in his heart a strange yet most natural longing after the face of that man of whom he read such lovely things, and thence, unknown to himself, had come a reverence and a love for his kind, which now first sprang awake to his consciousness in the feeling that drew him towards Leopold.

Softly he approached the bed, his face full of tenderness and strong pity. The lad, weak with protracted illness and mental torture, gave one look in his face, and stretched out both his arms to him. How could the curate give him but a hand? He put his arms round him as if he had been a child.

"I knew you would come," sobbed Lingard.

"What else should I do but come?" returned Wingfold.

"I have seen you somewhere before," said Lingard—"in one of my dreams, I suppose."

Then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he added:

"Do you know you came in close behind HER? She looked round and saw you, and vanished!"

Wingfold did not even try to guess at his meaning.

"Hush, my dear fellow!" he said; "I must not let you talk wildly, or the doctor might forbid my seeing you."

"I am not talking a bit wildly," returned Leopold. "I am as quiet as a mountain-top. Ah! when I AM wild—if you saw me then, you might say so!"

Wingfold sat down on the side of the bed, and took the thin, hot hand next him in his own firm, cool one.

"Come now," he said, "tell me all about it. Or shall your sister tell me?—Come here, please, Miss Lingard."

"No, no!" cried Leopold hastily; "I will tell you myself. My poor sister could not bear to tell it you. It would kill her.—But how am I to know you will not get up and walk out the moment you have a glimpse of what is coming?"

"I would as soon leave a child burning in the fire, and go out and shut the door," said Wingfold.

"You can go now, Helen," said Lingard very quietly. "Why should you be tortured over again? You needn't mind leaving me. Mr. Wingfold will take care of me."

Helen left the room, with one anxious look at her brother as she went.

Without a moment's further delay, Leopold began, and in wonderfully direct and unbroken narrative, told the sad evil tale as he had formerly told it to his sister, only more consecutively and quietly. Possibly his anxiety as to how the listener would receive it, served, by dividing him between two emotions, to keep the reuttered tale from overpowering him with freshened vividness. All the time, he kept watching Wingfold's face, the expressions of which the curate felt those eyes were reading like a book.

He was so well prepared, however, that no expression of surprise, no reflex of its ghastfulness met Leopold's gaze, and he went on to the end without a pause even. When he had finished, both sat silent, looking in each other's eyes, Wingfold's beaming with compassion, and Lingard's glimmering with doubtful, anxious inquiry and appeal. At length Wingfold said:

"And what do you think I can do for you?"

"I don't know. I thought you could tell me something. I cannot live like this! If I had but thought before I did

it, and killed myself instead of her! It would have done so much better! Of course I should be in hell now, but that would be all right, and this is all wrong. I have no right to be lying here and Emmeline in her grave. I know I deserve to be miserable for ever and ever, and I don't want not to be miserable—that is all right—but there is something in this wretchedness that I cannot bear. Tell me something to make me able to endure my misery. That is what you can do for me. I don't want to go mad. And what is worst of all, I have made my sister miserable, and I can't bear to see it. She is wasting away with it. And besides I fancy she loves George Bascombe—and who would marry the sister of a murderer? And now she has begun to come to me again—in the daytime—I mean Emmeline!—or I have begun to see her again—I don't know which;—perhaps she is always there, only I don't always see her—and it don't much matter which. Only if other people were to see her!—While she is there nothing could persuade me I do not see her, but afterwards I am not so sure that I did. And at night I keep dreaming the horrible thing over and over again; and the agony is to think I shall never get rid of it, and never never feel clean again. To be for ever and ever a murderer and people not know it, is more than I CAN bear."

CHAPTER XXV. THE CURATE'S COUNSEL.

Not seeing yet what he had to say, but knowing that scintillation the smallest is light, the curate let the talk take its natural course, and said the next thing that came to him.

"How do you feel when you think that you may yet be found out?" he asked.

"At first I was more afraid of that than of anything else. Then after that danger seemed past, I was afraid of the life to come. That fear left me next, and now it is the thing itself that is always haunting me. I often wish they would come and take me, and deliver me from myself. It would be a comfort to have it all known, and never need to start again. I think I could even bear to see her in the prison. If it would annihilate the deed, or bring Emmeline back, I cannot tell you how gladly I would be hanged. I would, indeed, Mr. Wingfold. I hope you will believe me, though I don't deserve it."

"I do believe you," said the curate, and a silence followed.

"There is but one thing I can say with confidence at this moment," he resumed: "it is, that I am your friend, and will stand by you. But the first part of friendship sometimes is to confess poverty, and I want to tell you that, of the very things concerning which I ought to know most, I knew least. I have but lately begun to feel after God, and I dare not say that I have found him, but I think I know now where to find him. And I do think, if we could find him, then we should find help. All I can do for you now is only to be near you, and talk to you, and pray to God for you, that so together we may wait for what light may come.—Does anything ever look to you as if it would make you feel better?"

"I have no right to feel better or take comfort from anything."

"I am not sure about that.—Do you feel any better for having me come to see you?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do!"

"Well, there is no wrong in that, is there?"

"I don't know. It seems a sneaking kind of thing: she has got none of it. My sister makes excuses for me, but the moment I begin to listen to them I only feel the more horrid."

"I have said nothing of that kind to you."

"No, sir."

"And yet you like to have me here?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," he answered, earnestly.

"And it does not make you think less of your crime?"

"No. It makes me feel it worse than ever to see you sitting there, a clean, strong, innocent man, and think what I might have been."

"Then the comfort you get from me does you no harm, at least. If I were to find my company made you think with less hatred of your crime, I should go away that instant."

"Thank you, sir," said Leopold humbly. "Oh, sir!" he resumed after a little silence, "—to think that never more to all eternity shall I be able to think of myself as I used to think!"

"Perhaps you used to think too much of yourself," returned the curate. "For the greatest fool and rascal in creation there is yet a worse condition, and that is—not to know it, but think himself a respectable man. As the event proves, though you would doubtless have laughed at the idea, you were then capable of committing a murder. I have come to see—at least I think I have—that except a man has God dwelling in him, he may be, or may become, capable of any crime within the compass of human nature."

"I don't know anything about God," said Leopold. "I daresay I thought I did before this happened—before I did it, I mean," he added in correction, "—but I know now that I don't, and never did."

"Ah, Leopold!" said the curate, "think, if my coming to you comforts you, what would it be to have him who made you always with you!"

"Where would be the good? I daresay he might forgive me, if I were to do this and that, but where would be the good of it? It would not take the thing off me one bit."

"Ah! now," said Wingfold, "I fear you are thinking a little about your own disgrace and not only of the bad you have done. Why should you not be ashamed? Why would you have the shame taken off you? Nay; you must humbly consent to bear it. Perhaps your shame is the hand of love washing the defilement from off you. Let us keep our shame, and be made clean from the filth!"

"I don't know that I understand you, sir. What do you mean by the defilement? Is it not to have done the deed that is the defilement?"

"Is it not rather to have that in you, a part, or all but a part of your being, that makes you capable of doing it? If you had resisted and conquered, you would have been clean from it; and now, if you repent and God comes to you, you will yet be clean. Again I say, let us keep our shame and be made clean! Shame is not defilement, though a mean pride persuades men so. On the contrary, the man who is honestly ashamed has begun to be clean."

"But what good would that do to Emmeline? It cannot bring her up again to the bright world out of the dark grave."

"Emmeline is not in the dark grave."

"Where is she, then?" he said with a ghastly look.

"That I cannot tell. I only know that, if there be a God, she is in his hands," replied the curate.

The youth gazed on in his face and made no answer. Wingfold saw that he had been wrong in trying to comfort him with the thought of God dwelling in him. How was such a poor passionate creature to take that for a comfort? How was he to understand or prize the idea, who had his spiritual nature so all undeveloped? He would try another way.

"Shall I tell you what seems to me sometimes the only one thing I want to help me out of my difficulties?"

"Yes, please, sir," answered Leopold, as humbly as a child.

"I think sometimes, if I could but see Jesus for one moment—"

"Ah!" cried Leopold, and gave a great sigh.

"YOU would like to see him then, would you?"

"Oh, Mr. Wingfold!"

"What would you say to him if you saw him?"

"I don't know. I would fall down on my face and hold his feet lest he should go away from me."

"Do you think then he could help you?"

"Yes. He could make Emmeline alive again. He could destroy what I have done."

"But still, as you say, the crime would remain."

"But, as you say, he could pardon that, and make me that I would never never sin again."

"So you think the story about Jesus Christ is true?"

"Yes. Don't you?" said Leopold with an amazed, half-frightened look.

"Yes, indeed I do.—Then do you remember what he said to his disciples as he left them: 'I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD'?—If that be true, then he can hear you just as well now as ever he could. And when he was in the world, he said, 'COME UNTO ME ALL YE THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY-LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.' It is rest you want, my poor boy—not deliverance from danger or shame, but rest—such peace of mind as you had when you were a child. If he cannot give you that, I know not where or how it is to be had. Do not waste time in asking yourself how he can do it: that is for him to understand, not you—until it is done. Ask him to forgive you and make you clean and set things right for you. If he will not do it, then he is not the saviour of men, and was wrongly named Jesus."

The curate rose. Leopold had hid his face. When he looked again he was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI. SLEEP.

As Wingfold came out of the room, which was near the stair, Helen rose from the top of it, where she had been sitting all the time he had been with her brother. He closed the door gently behind him, and stepped softly along the landing. A human soul in guilt and agony is an awful presence, but there was more than that in the hush of the curate: he felt as if he had left the physician of souls behind him at the bedside; that a human being lay on the rack of the truth, but at his head stood one who watched his throes with the throbs of such a human heart as never beat in any bosom but his own, and the executioners were angels of light. No wonder if with such a feeling in his breast Wingfold walked softly, and his face glistened! He was not aware that the tears stood in his eyes, but Helen saw them.

"You know all!" she faltered.

"I do. Will you let me out by the garden again? I wish to be alone."

She led the way down the stair, and walked with him through the garden. Wingfold did not speak.

"You don't think very badly of my poor brother, do you, Mr. Wingfold?" said Helen, meekly.

"It is a terrible fate," he returned. "I think I never saw a lovelier disposition. I do hope his mind will soon be more composed. I think he knows where alone he can find rest. I am well aware how foolish that of which I speak seems to some minds, Miss Lingard; but when a man is once overwhelmed in his own deeds, when they have turned into spectres to mock at him, when he loathes himself and turns with sickness from past, present, and future, I know but one choice left, and that is between the death your friend Mr. Bascombe preaches, and the life preached by Jesus, the crucified Jew. Into the life I hope your brother will enter."

"I am so glad you don't hate him."

"Hate him! Who but a demon could hate him?"

Helen lifted a grateful look from eyes that swam in tears. The terror of his possible counsel for the moment vanished. He could never tell him to give himself up!

"But, as I told you, I am a poor scholar in these high matters," resumed the curate, "and I want to bring Mr. Polwarth to see him."

"The dwarf!" exclaimed Helen, shuddering at the remembrance of what she had gone through at the cottage.

"Yes. That man's soul is as grand and beautiful and patient as his body is insignificant and distorted and troubled. He is the wisest and best man I have ever known.

"I must ask Leopold," returned Helen, who, the better the man was represented, felt the more jealous and fearful of the advice he might give. Her love and her conscience were not yet at one with each other.

They parted at the door from the garden, and she returned to the sick-room.

She paused, hesitating to enter. All was still as the grave. She turned the handle softly and peeped in: could it be that Wingfold's bearing had communicated to her mind a shadow of the awe with which he had left the place where perhaps a soul was being born again? Leopold did not move. Terror laid hold of her heart. She stepped quickly in, and round the screen to the side of the bed. There, to her glad surprise, he lay fast asleep, with the tears not yet dried upon his face. Her heart swelled with some sense unknown before: was it rudimentary thankfulness to the Father of her spirit?

As she stood gazing with the look of a mother over her sick child, he lifted his eyelids, and smiled a sad smile.

"When did you come into the room?" he said.

"A minute ago," she answered.

"I did not hear you," he returned.

"No, you were asleep."

"Not I! Mr. Wingfold is only just gone."

"I have let him out on the meadow since."

Leopold stared, looked half alarmed, and then said,

"Did God make me sleep, Helen?"

Thomas Wingfold, Curate V2

She did not answer. The light of a new hope in his eye, as if the dawn had begun at last to break over the dark mountains, was already reflected from her heart.

"Oh! Helen," he said, "that IS a good fellow, SUCH a good fellow!"

A pang of jealousy, the first she had ever felt, shot to her heart: she had hitherto, since his trouble, been all in all to her Leopold! Had the curate been a man she liked, she would not perhaps have minded it so much.

"You will be able to do without me now," she said sadly. "I never could understand taking to people at first sight!"

"Some people are made so, I suppose, Helen. I know I took to you at first sight! I shall never forget the first time I saw you—when I came to this country a lonely little foreigner,—and you, a great beautiful lady, for such you seemed to me, though you have told me since you were only a great gawky girl—I know that could never have been—you ran to meet me, and took me in your arms, and kissed me. I was as if I had crossed the sea of death and found paradise in your bosom! I am not likely to forget you for Mr. Wingfold, good and kind and strong as he is! Even SHE could not make me forget you, Helen. But neither you nor I can do without Mr. Wingfold any more, I fancy. I wish you liked him better!—but you will in time. You see he's not one to pay young ladies compliments, as I have heard some parsons do; and he may be a little—no, not unpolished, not that—that's not what I mean—but unornamental in his manners! Only, you see,—"

"Only, you see, Poldie," interrupted Helen, with a smile, a rare thing between them, "you know all about him, though you never saw him before."

"That is true," returned Leopold; "but then he came to me with his door open, and let me walk in. It doesn't take long to know a man then. He hasn't got a secret like us, Helen," he added, sadly.

"What did he say to you?"

"Much what he said to you from the pulpit the other day, I should think."

Then she was right! For all his hardness and want of sympathy, the curate had yet had regard to her entreaties, and was not going to put any horrid notions about duty and self-sacrifice into the poor boy's head!

"He's coming again to-morrow," added Leopold, almost gleefully, "and then perhaps he will tell me more, and help me on a bit!"

"Did he tell you he wants to bring a friend with him?"

"No."

"I can't see the good of taking more people into our confidence."

"Why should he not do what he thinks best, Helen? You don't interfere with the doctor—why should you with him? When a man is going to the bottom as fast as he can, and another comes diving after him—it isn't for me to say how he is to take hold of me. No, Helen; when I trust, I trust out and out."

Helen sighed, thinking how ill that had worked with Emmeline.

Ever since George Bascombe had talked about the Polwarths that day they met him in the park, she had felt a sort of physical horror of them, as if they were some kind of unclean creature that ought not to be in existence at all. But when Leopold uttered himself thus, she felt that the current of events had seized her, and that she could only submit to be carried along.

CHAPTER XXVII. DIVINE SERVICE.

The next day the curate called again on Leopold. But Helen happened to be otherwise engaged for a few minutes, and Mrs. Ramshorn to be in the sick-room when the servant brought his name. With her jealousy of Wingfold's teaching, she would not have admitted him, but Lingard made such loud protest when he heard her say "Not at home," insisting on seeing him, that she had to give way, and tell the maid to show him up. She HAD NO NOTION however of leaving him alone in the room with the invalid: who could tell what absurd and extravagant ideas he might not put into the boy's head! He might make him turn monk, or Socinian, or latter-day-saint, for what she knew! So she sat, blocking up the sole small window in the youth's dark dwelling that looked eastward, and damming back the tide of the dawn from his diseased and tormented soul. Little conversation was therefore possible. Still the face of his new friend was a comfort to Leopold, and ere he left him they had managed to fix an hour for next day, when they would not be thus foiled of their talk.

That same afternoon, Wingfold took the draper to see Polwarth.

Rachel was lying on the sofa in the parlour—a poor little heap, looking more like a grave disturbed by efforts at a resurrection, than a form informed with humanity. But she was cheerful and cordial, receiving Mr. Drew and accepted his sympathy most kindly.

"We'll see what God will do for me," she said in answer to a word from the curate. Her whole bearing, now as always, was that of one who perfectly trusted a supreme spirit under whose influences lay even the rugged material of her deformed dwelling.

Polwarth allowed Wingfold to help him in getting tea, and the conversation, as will be the case where all are in earnest, quickly found the right channel.

It is not often in real life that such conversations occur. Generally, in any talk worth calling conversation, every man has some point to maintain, and his object is to justify his own thesis and disprove his neighbour's. I will allow that he may primarily have adopted his thesis because of some sign of truth in it, but his mode of supporting it is generally such as to block up every cranny in his soul at which more truth might enter. In the present case, unusual as it is for so many as three truth-loving men to come thus together on the face of this planet, here were three simply set on uttering truth they had seen, and gaining sight of truth as yet veiled from them.

I shall attempt only a general impression of the result of their evening's intercourse, partly recording the utterances of Polwarth.

"I have been trying hard to follow you, Mr. Polwarth," said the draper, after his host had for a while had the talk to himself, "but I cannot get a hold of your remarks. One moment I think I have got the end of the clew, and the next find myself all abroad again. Would you tell me what you mean by divine service, for I think you must use the phrase in some different sense from what I have been accustomed to?"

"Ah! I ought to remember," said Polwarth, "that what has grown familiar to my mind from much solitary thinking, may not at once show itself to another, when presented in the forms of a foreign individuality. I ought to have premised that, when I use the phrase, DIVINE SERVICE, I mean nothing whatever belonging to the church, or its observances. I mean by it what it ought to mean—the serving of God—the doing of something for God. Shall I make of the church in my foolish imaginations a temple of idolatrous worship by supposing that it is for the sake of supplying some need that God has, or of gratifying some taste in him, that I there listen to his word, say prayers to him, and sing his praises? Shall I be such a dull mule in the presence of the living Truth? Or, to use a homely simile, shall I be as the good boy of the nursery rhyme, who, seated in his corner of selfish complacency, regards the eating of his pie as a virtuous action, enjoys the contemplation of it, and thinks what a pleasant object he thus makes of himself to his parents? Shall I, to take a step farther, degrade the sanctity of the closet, hallowed in the words of Jesus, by shutting its door in the vain fancy of there doing something that God requires of me as a sacred OBSERVANCE? Shall I foolishly imagine that to put in exercise the highest and loveliest, the most entrancing privilege of existence, that of pouring forth my whole heart into the heart of him

who is ACCOUNTABLE FOR me, who hath glorified me with his own image—in my soul, gentlemen, sadly disfigured as it is in my body!—shall I say that THAT is to do anything for God? Was I serving my father when I ate the dinner he provided for me? Am I serving my God when I eat his bread and drink his wine?"

"But," said Drew, "is not God pleased that a man should pour out his soul to him?"

"Yes, doubtless; but what would you think of a child who said, 'I am very useful to my father, for when I ask him for anything, or tell him I love him, it gives him—oh, such pleasure!'"

"I should say he was an unendurable prig. Better he had to be whipped for stealing!" said the curate.

"There would be more hope of his future," returned Polwarth. "—Is the child," he continued, "who sits by his father's knee and looks up into his father's face, SERVING that father, because the heart of the father delights to look down upon his child? And shall the moment of my deepest repose and bliss, the moment when I serve myself with the very life of the universe, be called a serving of my God? It is communion with God; he holds it with me, else never could I hold it with him. I am as the foam—froth upon his infinite ocean, but of the water of the ocean is the bubble on its waves."

Not the eyes only, but the whole face of the man, which had grown of a pure, semi-transparent whiteness, appeared to Wingfold to emit light.

"When my child would serve me," he went on, "he spies out some need I have, springs from his seat at my knee, finds that which will meet my necessity, and is my eager, happy servant, of consequence in his own eyes inasmuch as he has done something for his father. His seat by my knee is love, delight, well-being, peace—not service, however pleasing in my eyes.—'Why do you seat yourself at my knee, my son?' 'To please you, father.' 'Nay then, my son! go from me, and come again when it shall be to please thyself.'—'Why do you cling to my chair, my daughter?' 'Because I want to be near you, father. It makes me so happy!' 'Come nearer still—come to my bosom, my child, and be yet happier.'—Talk not of public worship as divine service; it is a mockery. Search the prophets and you will find the observances, fasts and sacrifices and solemn feasts, of the temple by them regarded with loathing and scorn, just because by the people they were regarded as DIVINE SERVICE."

"But," said Mr. Drew, while Wingfold turned towards him with some anxiety lest he should break the mood of the little prophet, "I can't help thinking I have you! for how are poor creatures like us—weak, blundering creatures, sometimes most awkward when best-intentioned—how are we to minister to a perfect God—perfect in wisdom, strength, and everything—of whom Paul says that he is not worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything? I cannot help thinking that you are fighting merely with a word. Certainly, if the phrase ever was used in that sense, there is no meaning of the kind attached to it now: it stands merely for the forms of public worship."

"Were there no such thing as Divine Service in the true sense of the word, then, indeed it would scarcely be worth while to quarrel with its misapplication. But I assert that true and genuine service may be rendered to the living God; and, for the development of the divine nature in man, it is necessary that he should do something for God. Nor is it hard to discover how; for God is in every creature that he has made, and in their needs he is needy, and in all their afflictions he is afflicted. Therefore Jesus says that whatever is done to one of his little ones is done to him. And if the soul of a man be the temple of the Spirit, then is the place of that man's labour, his shop, his counting-house, his laboratory, the temple of Jesus Christ, where the spirit of the man is incarnate in work.—Mr. Drew!"—Here the gate-keeper stood up, and held out both his hands, palms upward, towards the draper on the other side of the table.—"Mr. Drew! your shop is the temple of your service where the Lord Christ, the only image of the Father is, or ought to be throned; your counter is, or ought to be his altar; and everything thereon laid, with intent of doing as well as you can for your neighbour, in the name of THE man Christ Jesus, is a true sacrifice offered to Him, a service done to the eternal creating Love of the universe."

The little prophet's head as he stood, did not reach the level of the draper's as he sat, but at this Drew dropped his head on his hands upon the table, as if bowed down by a weight of thought and feeling and worship.

"I say not," Polwarth went on, "that so doing you will grow a rich man, but I say that so doing you will be saved from growing too rich, and that you will be a fellow-worker with God for the salvation of his world."

"I must live; I cannot give my goods away!" murmured Mr. Drew, thinkingly, as one that sought enlightenment.

"That would be to go direct against the order of his world," said Polwarth. "No; a harder task is yours, Mr. Drew—to make your business a gain to you, and at the same time to be not only what is commonly counted just,

but interested in, and careful of, and caring for your neighbour, as a servant of the God of bounty who giveth to all men liberally. Your calling is to do the best for your neighbour that you reasonably can."

"But who is to fix what is reasonable?" asked Drew.

"The man himself, thinking in the presence of Jesus Christ. There is a holy moderation which is of God."

"There won't be many fortunes—great fortunes—made after that rule, Mr. Polwarth."

"Very few."

"Then do you say that no great fortunes have been righteously made?"

"If RIGHTEOUSLY means AFTER THE FASHION OF JESUS CHRIST.—But I will not judge: that is for the God—enlightened conscience of the man himself to do—not for his neighbour's. Why should I be judged by another man's conscience?—But you see, Mr. Drew,—and this is what I was driving at—that you have it in your power to SERVE God, through the needs of his children, all the working day, from morning to night, so long as there is a customer in your shop."

"I do think you are right, sir," said the linen-drapeer. "I had a glimpse of the same thing the other night myself. And yet it seems as if you spoke of a purely ideal state—one that could not be realised in this world."

"Purely ideal or not, one thing is certain: it will never be reached by one who is so indifferent to it as to believe it impossible. Whether it may be reached in this world or not, that is a question of NO consequence; whether a man has begun to REACH AFTER it, is of the utmost awfulness of import. And should it be ideal, which I doubt, what else than the ideal have the followers of the ideal man to do with?"

"Can a man reach anything ideal before he has God dwelling in him—filling every cranny of his soul?" asked the curate with shining eyes.

"Nothing, I do most solemnly believe," answered Polwarth. "It weighs on me heavily sometimes," he resumed, after a pause, "to think how far all but a few are from being able even to entertain the idea of the indwelling in them of the original power of their life. True, God is in every man, else how could he live the life he does live? but that life God keeps alive for the hour when he shall inform the will, the aspiration, the imagination of the man. When the man throws wide his door to the Father of his spirit, when his individual being is thus supplemented—to use a poor miserable word—with the individuality that originated it, then is the man a whole, healthy, complete existence. Then indeed, and then only, will he do no wrong, think no wrong, love perfectly, and be right merry. Then will he scarce think of praying, because God is in every thought and enters anew with every sensation. Then will he forgive, and endure, and pour out his soul for the beloved who yet grope their way in doubt and passion. Then every man will be dear and precious to him, even the worst, for in him also lies an unknown yearning after the same peace wherein he rests and loves."

He sat down suddenly, and a deep silence filled the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A SHOP IN HEAVEN.

"Uncle," said Rachel, "may I read your visions of the shops in heaven?"

"Oh no, Rachel. You are not able to read to-night," said her uncle deprecatingly.

"I think I am, uncle. I should like to try. It will let the gentlemen see what you WOULD think an ideal state of things.—It is something, Mr. Wingfold, my uncle once dictated to me, and I wrote down just as he said it. He can always do better dictating than writing, but this time he was so ill with asthma that he could not talk much faster than I could write; and yet to be so ill I never saw him show so little suffering; his thinking seemed to make him forget it.—Mayn't I read it, uncle? I know the gentlemen would like to hear it."

"That we should," said both men at once.

"I will fetch it you then," said Polwarth, "if you will tell me where to find it."

Rachel gave him the needful directions, and presently he brought a few sheets of paper, and handed them to her.

"This is no dream, Mr. Wingfold," he said. "It is something I thought fairly out before I began to dictate it. But the only fit form I could find for it was that of a vision—like the Vision of Mirza, you know.—Now read, Rachel, and I will hold my tongue."

After a little arranging of the sheets, Rachel began. She read not without difficulty, but her pleasure in what she read helped her through.

"And now, said my guide to me, I will bring thee to a city of the righteous, and show thee how they buy and sell in this the kingdom of heaven. So we journeyed a day and another day and half a day, and I was weary ere we arrived thither. But when I saw the loveliness of the place, and drew in the healing air thereof, my weariness vanished as a dream of the night, and I said, IT IS WELL.—I may not now speak of the houses and the dress and the customs of the dwellers therein, save what may belong to the buying and selling of which I have spoken. Gladly would I tell of the streams that went, some noiselessly gliding, others gurgling, some sweeping, some rushing and roaring, through every street, all issuing from one right plenteous fountain in the middle of the city, so that the ear was for ever filled with the sound of many waters all the day, ceasing when the night came, that silence might have its perfect work upon the soul. Gladly too would I tell of the trees and flowers and grass that grew in every street along the banks of the rivers. But I must withhold.

"After I had, I know not for how long, refreshed my soul with what it was thus given, me to enjoy,—for in all that country there is no such thing as haste, no darting from one thing to another, but a calm eternal progress in which unto the day the good thereof is sufficient—one great noon-day, my conductor led me into a large place, such as we would call a shop here, although the arrangements were different, and an air of stateliness dwelt in and around the house. It was filled with the loveliest silken and woollen stuffs, of all kinds and colours, a thousand delights to the eye—and to the thought also, for here was endless harmony, and no discord.

"I stood in the midst, and my guide stood by me in silence; for all the time I was in the country, he seldom spoke to me save when first I asked of him, and yet he never showed any weariness, and often a half-smile would dwell for a moment upon his countenance.

"And first I watched the faces of them that sold; and I could read therein—for be it understood that, according to the degree of his own capacity, a man there could perfectly read the countenance of every neighbour, that is, unless it expressed something that was not in himself—and I could read in them nothing of eagerness, only the calm of a concentrated ministration. There was no seeking there, but a strength of giving, a business-like earnestness to supply lack, enlivened by no haste, and dulled by no weariness, brightened ever by the reflected content of those who found their wants supplied. As soon as one buyer was contented they turned graciously to another, and gave ear until they perfectly understood with what object he had come to seek their aid. Nor did their countenances change utterly as they turned away, for upon them lingered the satisfaction as of one who hath had a success, and by degrees melted into the supervening content.

"Then I turned to watch the countenances of them that bought.—And there in like manner I saw no cupidity

and no meanness. They spake humbly, yet not because they sought a favour, but because they were humble, for with their humility was mingled the confidence of receiving that they sought. And truly it was a pleasure to see how everyone knew what his desire was, making his choice readily and with decision. I perceived also that everyone spoke not merely respectfully, but gratefully, to him who served him. And at meeting and parting such kindly though brief greetings passed as made me wonder whether every inhabitant of such a mighty city could know every other that dwelt therein. But I soon saw that it came not of individual knowledge, but of universal faith and all-embracing love.

"And as I stood and watched, suddenly it came into my mind that I had never yet seen the coin of the country, and thereupon I kept my eyes upon a certain woman who bought silk, that when she paid for the same I might see the money. But that which she had largely bought she took in her arms and carried away, and paid not. Therefore I turned to watch another, who bought for a long journey, but when he carried away that he bought, neither did he pay any money. And I said to myself, These are well-known persons, to whom it is more convenient to pay all at a certain season; and I turned to a third who bought much fine linen. But behold! he paid not. Then I began to observe again those that sold; whereupon I thought with myself, How good must be the air of this land for the remembrance of things! for these men write down nothing to keep on record the moneys men owe them on all sides. And I looked and looked again and yet again, and stood long watching—but so it was throughout the whole place, which thronged and buzzed and swarmed like the busiest of bee-hives—no man paid, and no man had a book wherein to write that which the other owed!

"Then I turned to my guide and said: How lovely is honesty! and truly from what a labour it absolveth men! for here I see every man keepeth in his mind his own debts, and not the debts of others, so that time is not spent in paying of small sums, neither in the keeping of account of such; but he that buyeth counteth up, and doubtless when the day of reckoning arrives, each cometh and casteth the money he oweth into the merchant's coffer, and both are satisfied.

"Then my conductor smiled, and said, Watch yet a while.

"And I did as he said unto me, and stood and watched. But the same thing went on everywhere; and I said to myself, Lo, I see nothing new!—Suddenly, at my side, a man dropped upon his knees, and bowed his head to the ground. And those that stood nigh him dropped also upon their knees, and there arose a sound as of soft thunder; and lo! everyone in the place had dropped upon his knees, and spread his hands out before him. Every voice and every noise was hushed, every movement had ceased, and I and my guide alone were left standing.

"Then I whispered in his ear, It is the hour of prayer: shall we not kneel also? And my guide answered, No man in this city kneeleth because others do, and no man is judged if he kneeleth not. If thou hast any grief or pain upon thee, then kneel; if not, then love God in thy heart and be thankful, and kneel when thou goest into thy chamber. Then said I, I will not kneel, but will watch and see.—It is well, said my guide; and I stood.

"For certain moments all was utter stillness—every man and woman kneeling, with hands outstretched, save him who had first kneeled, and his hands hung by his sides and his head was still bowed to the earth. At length he rose up, and lo! his face was wet with tears; and all the people rose also, and with a noise throughout the place; and the man made a low obeisance to them that were nigh him, the which they returned with equal reverence, and then with downcast eyes he walked slowly from the shop. The moment he was gone, the business of the place, without a word of remark on any side concerning what had passed, began again and went on as before. People came and went, some more eager and outward, some more staid and inward, but all contented and cheerful. At length a bell somewhere rang sweet and shrill, and after that no one entered the place, and what was in progress began to be led to a decorous conclusion. In three or four minutes the floor was empty, and the people also of the shop had gone, each about his own affairs, without shutting door or window.

"I went out last with my guide, and we seated ourselves under a tree of the willow-kind on the bank of one of the quieter streams, and straightway I began to question him. Tell me, sir, I said, the purport of what I have seen, for not yet have I understood how these happy people do their business and pass from hand to hand not a single coin. And he answered, Where greed and ambition and self-love rule, money must be: where there is neither greed nor ambition nor self-love, money is needless. And I asked, Is it then by the same ancient mode of barter that they go about their affairs? Truly I saw no exchange of any sort.—Bethink thee, said my guide, if thou hadst gone into any other shop throughout the whole city, thou wouldst have seen the same thing. I see not how that should make the matter plainer to me, I answered.—Where neither greed nor ambition nor selfishness reigneth,

said my guide, there need and desire have free scope, for they work no evil.—But even now I understand you not, sir, I said.—Hear me then, answered my guide, for I will speak to thee more plainly. Wherefore do men take money in their hands when they go where things are?—Because they may not have the things without giving the money.—And where they may have things without giving money, there they take no money in their hands?—Truly no, sir, if there be such a place.—Then such a place is this, and so is it here.—But how can men give of their goods and receive nought in return?—By receiving everything in return. Tell me, said my guide, why do men take money for their goods?—That they may have wherewithal to go and buy other things which they need for themselves.—But if they also may go to this place or that place where the things are the which they need, and receive of those things without money and without price, is there then good cause why they should take money in their hands?—Truly no, I answered; and I begin, methinks, to see how the affair goeth. Yet are there some things still whereupon I would gladly be resolved. And first of all, how cometh it that men are moved to provide these and those goods for the supply of the wants of their neighbours, when they are drawn thereto by no want in themselves, and no advantage to themselves?—Thou reasonest, said my guide, as one of thine own degree, who to the eyes of the full-born ever look like chrysalids, closed round in a web of their own weaving; and who shall blame thee until thou thyself shinest within thyself? Understand that it is never advantage to himself that moveth a man in this kingdom to undertake this or that. The thing that alone advantageth a man here is the thing which he doth without thought unto that advantage. To your world, this world goeth by contraries. The man here that doeth most service, that aideth others the most to the obtaining of their honest desires, is the man who standeth highest with the Lord of the place, and his reward and honour is, to be enabled to the spending of himself yet more for the good of his fellows. There goeth a rumour amongst us even now that one shall ere long be ripe for the carrying of a message from the King to the spirits that are in prison. Thinkest thou it is a less potent stirring up of thought and energy to desire and seek and find the things that will please the eye, and cheer the brain, and gladden the heart of the people of this great city, so that when one prayeth, 'Give me, friend, of thy loaves,' a man may answer, 'Take of them, friend, as many as thou needest'—is that, I say, an incentive to diligence less potent than the desire to hoard or to excel? Is it not to share the bliss of God who hoardeth nothing, but ever giveth liberally? The joy of a man here is to enable another to lay hold upon that which is of his own kind and be glad and grow thereby—doctrine strange and unbelievable to the man in whom the well of life is yet sealed. Never have they been many at a time in the old world who could thus enter into the joy of their Lord. And yet, if thou bethink thee, thou wilt perceive that such bliss is not unknown amongst thy fellows. Knowest thou no musician who would find it joy enough for a night, to scale the tower of a hundred bells, and send the great meteors of music—light flying over the care—tortured city? Would everyone even of thy half-created race reason with himself and say: Truly it is in the night, and no one can see who it is that ministereth; the sounds alone will go forth nor bear my image; I shall reap no honour; I will not rise and go? Thou knowest, I say, some in thy world who would not speak thus in their hearts, but would willingly consent to be as nothing, so to give life to their fellows. In this city so is it with all—in shop or workshop, in study or theatre, all seek to spend and be spent for the lovely all. —And I said, One thing tell me, sir—how much a man may have for the asking.—What he will—that is, what he can well use.—Who then shall be the judge thereof?—Who but the man himself?—What if he should turn to greed, and begin to hoard and spare?—Sawest thou not the man this day because of whom all business ceased for a time?—to that man had come a thought of accumulation instead of growth, and he dropped upon his knees in shame and terror. And thou sawest how all business ceased, and straightway that of the shop was made what below they call a church; for everyone hastened to the poor man's help, the air was filled with praying breath, and the atmosphere of God-loving souls was around him; the foul thought fled, and the man went forth glad and humble, and to-morrow he will return for that which he needeth. If thou shouldst be present then, thou wilt see him more tenderly ministered unto than all the rest.—And if such a man prayed not?—If such a man slept ere he repented, he would wake with hatred in his heart towards the city and everyone therein, and would straightway flee into the wilderness. And the angel of the Lord would go out after him, and smite him with a word, and he would vanish from amongst us, and his life would be the life of one of those least of living things that are in your world born of the water; and there must he grow up again, crawling through the channels of thousand-folded difference, from animal to animal, until at length a human brain be given him, and after generations he become once again capable of being born of the spirit into the kingdom of liberty. Then shall all his past life open upon him, and in shame and dismay will he repent a thousand-fold, and will sin no more. Such,

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at least, are thoughts of our wise men upon the matter; but truly we know not.—It is good, I said. But how are men guided as to what lies to them to provide for the general good?—Every man doeth what thing he can, and the more his labour is desired, the more he rejoices.—If a man should desire that he could no where find in the city?—Then would he straightway do his endeavour to provide that thing for all in the city who might after him desire the same.—Now, sir, methinks I know and understand, I answered. And we rose and went farther."

"I think that **COULD** be!" said the curate, breaking the silence that followed when Rachel ceased.

"Not in this world," said the draper.

"To doubt that it **COULD** be," said the gatekeeper, "would be to doubt whether the kingdom of heaven is a chimera or a divine idea."

CHAPTER XXIX. POLWARTH AND LINGARD.

The morning after Wingfold's second visit, Lingard, much to his sister's surprise, partly to her pleasure, and somewhat to her consternation, asked for his clothes: he wanted to get up. So little energy had he hitherto shown, so weak was he, and so frequent had been the symptoms of returning fever, that the doctor had not yet thought of advising more than an hour's sitting while his bed was made comfortable. And Helen had felt that she had him, if not safe, yet safer in bed than he could be elsewhere.

His wish to rise was a sign that he was getting better. But could she wish him to get better, seeing every hour threatened to be an hour of torture? On the other hand, she could not but hope that, for the last day or so, his mind had been a little more at ease. Assuredly the light in his eye was less troubled: perhaps he saw prospect of such mental quiet as might render life endurable.

He declined assistance, and Helen, having got him everything he required, left the room to wait within hearing. It took him a long time to dress, but he had resolved to do it himself, and at length called Helen.

She found he looked worse in his clothes—fearfully worn and white! Ah, what a sad ghost he was of his former sunny self! Helen turned her eyes from him, that he might not see how changed she thought him, and there were the trees in the garden and the meadows and the park beyond, bathing in the strength of the sun, betwixt the blue sky and the green earth! "What a hideous world it is!" she said to herself. She was not yet persuaded, like her cousin, that it was the best possible world—only that, unfortunately, not much was possible in worlds.

"Will you get me something, Helen," he said. "Mr. Wingfold will be here, and I want to be able to talk to him."

It was the first time he had asked for food, though he had seldom refused to take what she brought him. She made him lie on the couch, and gave orders that, if Mr. Wingfold called, he should be shown up at once. Leopold's face brightened; he actually looked pleased when his soup came. When Wingfold was announced, he grew for a moment radiant.

Helen received the curate respectfully, but not very cordially: SHE could not make Leopold's face shine!

"Would your brother like to see Mr. Polwarth?" asked the curate rather abruptly.

"I will see anyone you would like me to see. Mr. Wingfold," answered Liugard for himself, with a decision that clearly indicated returning strength.

"But, Leopold, you know it is hardly to be desired," suggested Helen, "that more persons—"

"I don't know that," interrupted Leopold with strange expression.

"Perhaps I had better tell you, Miss Lingard," said the curate, "that it was Mr. Polwarth who found the thing I gave you. After your visit, he could not fail to put things together, and had he been a common man, I should have judged it prudent to tell him for the sake of secrecy what I have told him for the sake of counsel. I repeat in your brother's hearing what I have said to you, that he is the wisest and best man I have ever known.—I left him in the meadow at the foot of the garden. He is suffering to-day, and I wanted to save him the longer walk. If you will allow me, I will go and bring him in."

"Do," said Leopold. "Think, Helen!—If he is the wisest and best man Mr. Wingfold ever knew! Tell him where to find the key."

"I will go myself," she said—with a yielding to the inevitable.

When she opened the door, there was the little man seated a few yards off on the grass. He had plucked a cowslip and was looking into it so intently that he neither heard nor saw her.

"Mr. Polwarth!" said Helen.

He lifted his eyes, rose, and taking off his hat, said with a smile,

"I was looking in the cowslip for the spots which the fairy, in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, calls 'rubies.'—How is your brother, Miss Lingard?"

Helen answered with cold politeness, and led the way up the garden with considerably more stateliness of demeanour than was necessary.

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When he followed her into the room, "This is Mr. Polwarth, Leopold," said the curate, rising respectfully. "You may speak to him as freely as to me, and he is far more able to give you counsel than I am."

"Would you mind shaking hands with me, Mr. Polwarth?" said Leopold, holding out his shadowy hand.

Polwarth took it with the kindest of smiles, and held it a moment in his.

"You think me an odd-looking creature—don't you?" he said; "but just because God made me so, I have been compelled to think about things I might otherwise have forgotten, and that is why Mr. Wingfold would have me come to see you."

The curate placed a chair for him, and the gate-keeper sat down. Helen seated herself a little way off in the window, pretending, or hardly more, to hem a handkerchief. Leopold's big eyes went wandering from one to the other of the two men.

"What a horrible world it is!" was the thought that kept humming on like an evil insect in Helen's heart. "I am sorry to see you suffer so much," said Leopold kindly, for he heard the laboured breath of the little man, and saw the heaving of his chest.

"It does not greatly trouble me," returned Polwarth. "It is not my fault, you see," he added with a smile; "at least I don't think it is."

"You are happy to suffer without fault," said Leopold. "It is because it is just that my punishment seems greater than I can bear."

"You need God's forgiveness in your soul."

"I don't see how that should do anything for me."

"I do not mean it would take away your suffering; but it would make you able to bear it. It would be fresh life in you."

"I can't see why it should. I can't feel that I have wronged God. I have been trying to feel it, Mr. Wingfold, ever since you talked to me. But I don't know God, and I only feel what I have done to Emmeline. If I said to God, 'Pardon me,' and he said to me, 'I do pardon you,' I should feel just the same. What could that do to set anything right that I have set wrong? I am what I am, and what I ever shall be, and the injury which came from me, cleaves fast to her, and is my wrong wherever she is."

He hid his face in his hands.

"What use CAN it be to torture the poor boy so?" said Helen to herself.

The two men sat silent. Then Polwarth said:

"I doubt if there is any use in trying to feel. And no amount of trying could enable you to imagine what God's forgiveness is like to those that have it in them. Tell me something more you do feel, Mr. Lingard."

"I feel that I could kill myself to bring her back to life."

"That is, you would gladly make amends for the wrong you have done her."

"I would give my life, my soul, to do it."

"And there is nothing you can do for it?"

Helen began to tremble.

"What is there that can be done?" answered Leopold. "It does seem hard that a man should be made capable of doing things that he is not made capable of undoing again."

"It is indeed a terrible thought! And even the smallest wrong is, perhaps, too awful a thing for created being ever to set right again."

"You mean it takes God to do that?"

"I do."

"I don't see how he ever could set some things right."

"He would not be God if he could not or would not do for his creature what that creature cannot do for himself, and must have done for him or lose his life."

"Then he isn't God, for he can't help me."

"Because you don't see what can be done, you say God can do nothing—which is as much as to say there cannot be more within his scope than there is within yours! One thing is clear, that, if he saw no more than what lies within your ken, he could not be God. The very impossibility you see in the thing points to the region wherein God works."

"I don't quite understand you. But it doesn't matter. It's all a horrible mess. I wish I was dead."

"My dear sir, is it reasonable that because a being so capable of going wrong finds himself incapable of setting right, he should judge it useless to cry to that being who called him into being to come to his aid?—and that in the face of the story—if it were but an old legend, worn and disfigured—that he took upon himself our sins?"

Leopold hung his head.

"God needs no making up to him," the gate-keeper went on—"so far from it that he takes our sins on himself, that he may clear them out of the universe. How could he say he took our sins upon him, if he could not make amends for them to those they had hurt?"

"Ah!" cried Leopold, with a profound sigh, "—if that could be!—if he could really do that!"

"Why, of course he can do that!" said Polwarth. "What sort of watchmaker were he who could not set right the watches and clocks himself made?"

"But the hearts of men and women!" "Which God does far more than make!" interposed Polwarth. "That a being able to make another self-conscious being distinct from himself, should be able also to set right whatever that being could set wrong, seems to me to follow of simple necessity. He might even, should that be fit, put the man himself in the way of making up for what he had done, or at least put it in his power to ask and receive a forgiveness that would set all right between him and the person wronged. One of the painful things in the dogma of the endless loss of the wicked is that it leaves no room for the righteous to make up to them for the wrongs they did them in this life. For the righteous do the wicked far more wrong than they think—the righteous being all the time, in reality, the wealthy, and the wicked the poor. But it is a blessed word that there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first."

Helen stared. This last sounded to her mere raving madness, and she thought how wrong she had been to allow such fanatics to gain power over her poor Leopold—who sat before them whiter than ever, and with what she took for a wilder gleam in his eye.

"Is there not the might of love, and all eternity for it to work in, to set things right?" ended Polwarth.

"O God!" cried Leopold, "if that might be true! That would be a gift indeed—the power to make up for the wrong I have done!"

He rose from the couch—slowly, sedately, I had almost said formally, like one with a settled object, and stood erect, swaying a little from weakness.

"Mr. Wingfold," he said, "I want of you one more favour: will you take me to the nearest magistrate? I wish to give myself up."

Helen started up and came forward, paler than the sick man.

"Mr. Wingfold! Mr. Polwarth!" she said, and turned from the one to the other, "the boy is not himself. You will never allow him to do such a mad thing!"

"It may be the right thing," said the curate to Leopold, "but we must not act without consideration."

"I have considered and considered it for days—for weeks," returned Leopold; "but until this moment I never had the courage to resolve on the plainest of duties.—Helen, if I were to go up to the throne of God with the psalm in my mouth, and say to him, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,' it would be false; for I have sinned against every man, woman, and child in England at least, and I will repudiate myself. To the throne of God I want to go, and there is no way thither for me but through the gate of the law."

"Leopold!" pleaded Helen, as if for her own life with some hard judge, "what good can it do to send another life after the one that is gone? It cannot bring it back, or heal a single sorrow for its loss."

"Except perhaps my own," said Leopold, in a feeble voice, but not the less in a determined tone.

"Live till God send for you," persisted Helen, heedless of his words. "You can give your life to make up for the wrong you have done in a thousand better ways: that would be but to throw it in the dirt. There is so much good waiting to be done!"

Leopold sank on the couch.

"I am sitting down again, Helen, only because I am not able to stand," he said. "I WILL go. Don't talk to me about doing good! Whatever I touched I should but smear with blood. I want the responsibility of my own life taken off me. I am like the horrible creature Frankenstein made—one that has no right to existence—and at the same time like the maker of it, who is accountable for that existence. I am a blot on God's creation that must be wiped off. For this my strength is given back to me, and I am once more able to will and resolve. You will find I can act too. Helen, if you will indeed be my sister, you must NOT prevent me now. I know it is hard upon you,

awfully hard. I know I am dragging your life down with mine, but I cannot help it. If I don't do it, I shall but go out of one madness into another, ever a deeper, until the devils can't hold me. Mr. Polwarth, is it not my duty to give myself up? Ought not the evil thing to be made manifest and swept out of the earth? Most people grant it a man's first duty to take care of his life: that is the only thing I can do for mine. It is now a filthy pool with a corpse in it:—I would clean it out—have the thing buried at least, though never forgotten—never, never forgotten. Then I shall die and go to God and see what he can do for me."

"Why should you put it off till then?" said Polwarth. "Why not go to him at once and tell him all?"

As if it had been Samuel at the command of Eli, Leopold rose and crept feebly across the floor to the dressing-room, entered it, and closed the door.

Then Helen turned upon Wingfold with a face white as linen, and eyes flashing with troubled wrath. The tigress-mother swelled in her heart, and she looked like a Maenad indeed.

"Is this then your religion?" she cried with quivering nostril. "Would he you dare to call your master have stolen into the house of a neighbour to play upon the weakness of a poor lad suffering from brain-fever? A fine trophy of your persuasive power and priestly craft you would make of him! What is it to you whether he confesses his sins or not? If he confesses them to him you say is your God, is not that enough? For shame, gentlemen!"

She ceased, and stood trembling and flashing—a human thunder-cloud. Neither of the men cared to assert innocence, because, although they had not advised the step, they entirely approved of it.

A moment more, and her anger suddenly went out. She burst into tears, and falling on her knees before the curate, begged and prayed like a child condemned to some frightful punishment. It was terrible to Wingfold to see a woman in such an agony of prayer—to one who would not grant it—and that one himself. In vain he sought to raise her.

"If you do not save Leopold, I will kill myself," she cried, "and my blood will be on your head."

"The only way to save your brother is to strengthen him to do his duty, whatever that may be."

The hot fit of her mental fever returned. She sprang to her feet, and her face turned again almost like that of a corpse with pale wrath.

"Leave the house!" she said, turning sharply upon Polwarth, who stood solemn and calm at Wingfold's side, a step behind. It was wonderful what an unconscious dignity radiated from him.

"If my friend goes, I go too," said Wingfold. "But I must first tell your brother why."

He made a step towards the dressing-room.

But now came a fresh change of mood upon Helen. She darted between him and the door, and stood there with such a look of humble entreaty as went to his very heart, and all but unmanned him. Ah, how lovely she looked in the silent prayer of tears! But not even her tears could turn Wingfold from what seemed his duty. They could only bring answering tears from the depth of a tender heart. She saw he would not flinch.

"Then may God do to you as you have done to me and mine!" she said.

"Amen!" returned Wingfold and Polwarth together.

The door of the dressing-room opened, and out came Leopold, his white face shining.

"God has heard me!" he cried.

"How do you know that?" said his sister, in the hoarse accents of unbelieving despair.

"Because he has made me strong to do my duty. He has reminded me that another man may be accused of my crime, and now to conceal myself were to double my baseness."

"It will be time enough to think of that when there is a necessity for it. The thing you imagine may never happen," said Helen, in the same unnatural voice.

"Leave it," cried Leopold, "until an innocent man shall have suffered the torture and shame of a false accusation, that a guilty man may a little longer act the hypocrite! No, Helen, I have not fallen so low as that yet. Believe me, this is the only living hour I have had since I did the deed!"

But as he spoke, the light died out of his face, and ere they could reach him he had fallen heavily on the floor.

"You have killed him!" cried Helen, in a stifled shriek, for all the time she had never forgotten that her aunt might hear.

But the same moment she caught from his condition a lurid hope.

"Go, I beg of you," she said—"by the window there, before my aunt comes. She must have heard the fall.

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There is the key of the door below."

The men obeyed, and left the house in silence.

It was some time before Leopold returned to consciousness. He made no resistance to being again put to bed, where he lay in extreme exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXX. THE STRONG MAN.

The next day he was much too exhausted and weak to talk about anything. He took what his sister brought him, smiled his thanks, and once put up his hand and stroked her cheek. But her heart was not gladdened by these signs of comparative composure, for what gave him quiet but the same that filled her with unspeakable horror?

The day after that was Saturday, and George Bascombe came as usual. The sound of his step in the hall made her dying hope once more flutter its wings: having lost the poor stay of the parson, from whom she had never expected much, she turned in her fresh despair to the cousin from whom she had never looked for anything. But what was she to say to him?—Nothing yet, she resolved; but she would take him to see Leopold—for was he not sure to hear that the parson had been admitted? She did not feel at all certain that she was doing right, but she would do it; and if she left them together, possibly George might drop some good PRACTICAL advice, which, though spoken in ignorance, might yet tell. George was such a healthy nature and such a sound thinker! Was it not as ridiculous as horrible for any man to think he had a right to throw away his very existence, and bring disgrace upon his family as well, for a mere point of honour—no, not honour, mere fastidiousness!

Leopold was better, and willing enough to see George, saying only,

"I would rather it were Mr. Wingfold. But he can't come to-day, I suppose, to-morrow being Sunday."

George's entrance brought with it a waft of breezy health, and a show of bodily vigour pleasant and refreshing to the heart of the invalid. Kindness shone in his eyes, and his large, handsome hand was out as usual while he was yet yards away. It swallowed up that of poor Leopold, and held it fast.

"Come, come, old fellow! What's the meaning of this?" he said right cheerily. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself—lying in bed like this in such weather! Why ain't you riding in the park with Helen, instead of moping in this dark room? You'll be as blind as the fish in the cave of Kentucky if you don't get out of this directly! We must see what we can do to get you up!"

He glanced round the room, saw that Helen had left it, and changed his tone to a lower and serious one:

"I say, my boy, you must have been playing old Harry with your constitution to bring yourself to such a pass! By Jove! this will never do! You must turn over a new leaf, you know. That sort of thing never pays. The game's not worth the candle. Why, you've been at death's door, and life's not so long that you can afford to play ducks and drakes with it."

Thus he talked, in expostulatory rattle, the very high-priest of social morality, for some, time before Leopold could get a word in. But when he did, it turned the current into quite another channel.

An hour passed, and George reappeared in the drawing-room, where Helen was waiting for him. He looked very grave.

"I fear matters are worse with poor Leopold than I had imagined," he said.

Helen gave a sad nod of acquiescence.

"He's quite off his head," continued George, "—telling me such an awful cock-and-bull story with the greatest gravity! He WILL have it that he is a murderer—the murderer of that very girl I was telling you about, you remember,—"

"Yes, yes! I know," said Helen, as a faint gleam of reviving hope shot up from below her horizon. George took the whole thing for a sick fancy, and who was likely to know better than he—a lawyer, and skilled in evidence? Not a word would she say to interfere with such an opinion!

"I hope you gave him a good talking-to," she said.

"Of course I did," he answered; "but it was of no use. I see exactly how it is. He gave me a full and circumstantial account of the affair, filling up all the gaps, it is true, but going only just as far as the newspapers supplied the skeleton. How he got away, for instance, he could not tell me. And now nothing will serve him but confess it! He don't care who knows it! He's as mad as a hatter!—I beg your pardon, Helen—on that one point, I mean. The moment I saw him I read madness in his eye!—What's to be done now?"

"George, I look to you," said Helen. "Poor aunt is of no use. Think what will become of her, if the unhappy

boy should attempt to give himself up! We should be the talk of the county—of the whole country!"

"Why didn't you tell me of this before, Helen? It must have been coming on for some time."

"George, I didn't know what to do. And I had heard you say such terrible things about the duty of punishing crime."

"Good gracious, Helen! where is your logic? What has crime to do with it! Is down—right stark—staring madness a crime? Anyone with half an eye can see the boy is mad!"

Helen saw she had made a slip, and held her peace. George went on:—

"He ought to be shut up."

"No! no! no!" Helen almost screamed, and covered her face with her hands.

"I've done my best to persuade him. But I will have another try. That a fellow is out of his mind is no reason why he should be unassailable by good logic—that is, if you take him on his own admissions."

"I fear you will make nothing of him, George. He is set upon it, and I don't know what IS to be done."

George got up, went back to Leopold, and plied him with the very best of arguments. But they were of no avail. There was for him but one door out of hell, and that was the door of confession—let what might lie on the other side of it.

"Who knows," he said, "but the law of a life for a life may have come of compassion for the murderer?"

"Nonsense!" said George. "It comes of the care of society over its own constituent parts."

"Whatever it came from, I know this," returned Leopold, "that, since I made up my mind to confess, I am a man again."

George was silent. He found himself in that rare condition for him—perplexity. It would be most awkward if the thing came to be talked of! Some would even be fools enough to believe the story! Entire proof of madness would only make such set it down as the consequence—or, if pity prevailed, then as the cause of the deed. They might be compelled to shut him up, to avoid no end of the most frightful annoyances. But Helen, he feared, would not consent to that. And then his story was so circumstantial—and therefore so far plausible—that there was no doubt most magistrates would be ready at once to commit him for trial—and then where would there be an end of the most offensive embarrassments!

Thus George reflected uneasily. But at length an idea struck him.

"Well," he said lightly, "if you will, you will. We must try to make it as easy for you as we can. I will manage it, and go with you. I know all about such things, you know. But it won't do just to-day. If you were to go before a magistrate, looking as you do now, he would not listen to a word you uttered. He would only fancy you in a fever and send you to bed. If you are quiet to-day—let me see— to-morrow is Sunday—and if you are in the same mind on Monday, I will take you to Mr. Hooker—he's one of the county magistrates, and you shall make your statement to him."

"Thank you.—I should like Mr. Wingfold to go too."

"Soh!" said George to himself.

"By all means," he answered. "We can take him with us."

He went again to Helen.

"This is a most awkward business," he said. "Poor girl! what you must have gone through with him! I had no idea! But I see my way out of it. Keep your mind easy, Helen. I do see what I can do. Only what's the meaning of his wanting that fellow Wingfold to go with him? I shouldn't a bit wonder now if it all came of some of his nonsense! At least, it may be that ass of a curate that has put confession in his head—to save his soul, of course! How did he come to see him?"

"The poor boy would see him."

"What made him want to see him?"

Helen held her peace. She saw George suspected the truth.

"Well, no matter," said George. "But one never knows what may come of things. We ought always to look well ahead.—You had better go and lie down awhile, Helen; you don't seem quite yourself."

"I am afraid to leave Leopold," she answered. "He will be telling aunt and everybody now."

"That I will take care he does not," said George. "You go and lie down a while."

Helen's strength had been sorely tried: she had borne up bravely to the last; but now that she could do no more, and her brother had taken himself out of her hands, her strength had begun to give way, and, almost for the

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first time in her life, in daylight, she longed to go to bed. Let George, or Wingfold, or who would, see to the wilful boy! She had done what she could.

She gladly yielded to George's suggestion, sought an unoccupied room, bolted the door, and threw herself upon the bed.

CHAPTER XXXI. GEORGE AND LEOPOLD.

George went again to Leopold's room, and sat down by him. The youth lay with his eyes half closed, and a smile—a faint sad one—flickered over his face. He was asleep: from infancy he had slept with his eyes open.

"Emmeline!" he murmured, in the tone of one who entreats forgiveness.

"Strange infatuation!" said George to himself: "even his dreams are mad! Good God! there can't be anything in it—can there? I begin to feel as if I were not quite safe myself. Mad—doctors go mad themselves, they say. I wonder what sort of floating sporule carries the infection—reaching the brain by the nose, I fancy. Or perhaps there is latent madness in us all, requiring only the presence of another madness to set it free."

Leopold was awake and looking at him.

"Is it a very bad way of dying?" he asked.

"What is, old boy!"

"Hanging."

"Yes, very bad—choking, you know," answered George, who wanted to make the worst of it.

"I thought the neck was broken and all was over," returned Leopold, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Yes, that's how it ought to be; but it fails so often!"

"At least there's no more hanging in public, and that's a comfort," said Leopold.

"What a queer thing," said George to himself, "that a man should be ready to hang for an idea! Why should he not do his best to enjoy what is left of the sunlight, seeing, as their own prophet says, the night cometh when no man can work? A few more whiffs of his cigar before it goes out, would hurt no one. It is one thing to hang a murderer, and quite another to hang yourself if you happen to be the man. But he's stark raving mad, and must be humoured. Dance upon nothing for an idea! Well, it's not without plenty of parallels in history!—I wonder whether his one idea would give way now, if it were brought to the actual test of hanging! It is a pity it couldn't be tried, just for experiment's sake. But a strait-waistcoat would be better."

Leopold's acquaintance with George had been but small, and of his favourite theories he knew nothing. But he had always known that he was not merely his sister's cousin, but the trusted friend both of her and of her aunt; and since he had come to know of his frequent visits, he had begun to believe him more to Helen than a friend. Hence the moment he had made up his mind to confess, he was ready to trust George entirely, and although he was disappointed to find him receive his communication in a spirit so different from that of Wingfold and his friend, he felt no motion of distrust on that account, seeing Helen, who had been to him true as steel, took the same view of his resolution.

"What would you do yourself then, George, if you had committed a crime like mine?" he asked, after lying silent for a while.

None of George's theories had greatly taxed his imagination. He had not been in any habit of fancying himself in this or that situation—and when he did, it was always in some pleasant one of victory or recognition. Possible conditions of humanity other than pleasant, he had been content to regard from the outside, and come to logical conclusions concerning, without, as a German would say, thinking himself into them at all; and it would have been to do the very idea of George Bascombe a wrong to imagine him entangled in any such net of glowing wire as a crime against society! Therefore, although for most questions George had always an answer ready, for this he had none at hand, and required a moment, and but a moment, to think.

"I would say to myself," he replied, "'What is done, is done, and is beyond my power to alter or help.' And so I would be a man and bear it—not a weakling, and let it crush me. No, by Jove! it shouldn't crush ME!"

"Ah, but you haven't tried the weight of it, George!" returned Leopold.

"God forbid!" said George.

"God forbid! indeed," rejoined Leopold; "but there 'tis done for all his forbidding!"

"What's done is done, God or devil, and must be borne, I say," said Bascombe, stretching out his legs. He was aware it sounded heartless, but how could he help it? What else was there to be said?

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"But if you can't bear it? If it is driving you mad—mad—mad? If you must do something or kill yourself?" cried Leopold.

"You haven't done your best at trying yet," returned George. "But you are ill, and not very able to try, I daresay, and so we can't help it. On Monday we shall go to Mr. Hooker, and see what he says to it."

He rose and went to get a book from the library. On the stair he met the butler: Mr. Wingfold had called to see Mr. Lingard.

"He can't see him to-day. He is too much exhausted," said Bascombe; and the curate left the house thoughtful and sorry, feeling as if a vulture had settled by the side of the youth—a good-natured vulture, no doubt, but not the less one bent on picking out the eyes of his mind.

He walked away along the street towards the church with down-bent head, seeing no one. He entered the churchyard, not looking whither he went: a lovely soul was in pain and peril, and he could not get near to help it. They were giving it choke-damp to breathe, instead of mountain-air. They were washing its sores with anodynes instead of laying them open with the knife of honesty, that they might be cleansed and healed. He found himself stumbling among the level gravestones, and stopped and sat down.

He sat a while, seeming to think of nothing, his eyes resting on a little tuft of moss that shone like green gold in the sunlight on the shoulder of an awkward little cherub's wing. Ere long he found himself thinking how not the soul of Leopold, but that of Helen, was in chief danger. Poor Leopold had the serpent of his crime to sting him alive, but Helen had the vampyre of an imperfect love to fan her asleep with the airs of a false devotion. It was Helen he had to be anxious about more than Leopold.

He rose and walked back to the house.

"Can I see Miss Lingard?" he asked.

It was a maid who opened the door this time. She showed him into the library, and went to inquire.

CHAPTER XXXII. WINGFOLD AND HELEN.

When Helen lay down, she tried to sleep, but she could not even lie still. For all her preference of George and his counsel, and her hope in the view he took of Leopold's case, the mere knowledge that in the next room her cousin sat by her brother, made her anxious and restless.

At first it was the bare feeling that they were together—the thing she had for so long taken such pains to prevent. Next came the fear lest Leopold should succeed in persuading George that he was really guilty—in which case, what would George, the righteous man, counsel? And last and chief of all, what hope of peace to Leopold could he in any of his counsel—except indeed he led him up to the door of death, and urged him into the nothingness behind it? Then what if George should be wrong, and there WAS something behind it? Whatever sort of a something it might be, could the teaching of George be in the smallest measure a preparation for it? Were it not better, so far as the POSSIBILITY which remained untouched by any of George's arguments was concerned, that Leopold should die believing after Mr. Wingfold's fashion, and not disbelieving after George's? If then there were nothing behind, he would be nothing the worse; if there were, the curate might have in some sort prepared him for it.

And now first she began to feel that she was a little afraid of her cousin—that she had yielded to his influence, or rather allowed him to assume upon the possession of influence, until she was aware of something that somewhere galled. He was a very good fellow, but was he one fit to rule her life? Would her nature consent to look up to his always, if she were to marry him? But the thought only flitted like a cloud across the surface of her mind, for all her care was Leopold, and alas! with him she was now almost angry, and it grieved her sorely.

All these feelings together had combined to form her mood, when her maid came to the door with the message that Mr. Wingfold was in the library. She resolved at once to see him.

The curate's heart trembled a little as he waited for her. He was not quite sure that it was his business to tell her her duty—yet something seemed to drive him to it: he could not bear the idea of her going on in the path of crookedness. It is no easy matter for one man to tell another his duty in the simplest relations of life; and here was a man, naturally shy and self-distrustful, daring to rebuke and instruct a woman, whose presence was mighty upon him, and whose influence was tenfold heightened by the suffering that softened her beauty!

She entered, troubled yet stately, doubtful, yet with a kind of half-trust in her demeanour, white, and blue-eyed, with pained mouth, and a droop of weariness and suffering in eyelids and neck—a creature to be worshipped if only for compassion of dignified distress.

Thomas Wingfold's nature was one more than usually bent towards helpfulness, but his early history, his lack of friends, of confidence, of convictions, of stand or aim in life, had hitherto prevented the outcome of that tendency. But now, like issuing water, which, having found way, gathers force momentarily, the pent-up ministration of his soul was asserting itself. Now that he understood more of the human heart, and recognised in this and that human countenance the bars of a cage through which peeped an imprisoned life, his own heart burned in him with the love of the helpless; and if there was mingled therein anything of the ambition of benefaction, anything of the love of power, anything of self-recommendation, pride of influence, or desire to be a centre of good, and rule in a small kingdom of the aided and aiding, these marshy growths had the fairest chance of dying an obscure death; for the one sun, potent on the wheat for life, and on the tares for death, is the face of Christ Jesus, and in that presence Wingfold lived more and more from day to day.

And now came Helen, who, more than anyone whose history he had yet learned—more perhaps than even her brother, needed such help as he confidently hoped he knew now where she might find! But when he saw her stand before him wounded and tearful and proud, regarding his behaviour in respect of her brother as cruel and heartless; when he felt in his very soul that she was jealous of his influence, that she disliked and even despised him; it was only with a strong effort he avoided assuming a manner correspondent to the idea of himself he saw reflected in her mind, and submitting himself, as it were, to be what she judged him.

When, however, by a pure effort of will, he rose above this weakness and looked her full and clear in the face,

a new jealousy of himself arose: she stood there so lovely, so attractive, so tenfold womanly in her misery, that he found he must keep a stern watch upon himself, lest interest in her as a woman should trespass on the sphere of simple humanity, wherein with favouring distinction is recognized neither Jew nor Greek, prince nor peasant—not even man or woman, only the one human heart that can love and suffer. It aided him in this respect however, that his inherent modesty caused him to look up to Helen as to a suffering goddess, noble, grand, lovely, only ignorant of the one secret, of which he, haunting the steps of the Unbound Prometheus, had learned a few syllables, broken yet potent, which he would fain, could he find how, communicate in their potency to her. And besides, to help her now looking upon him from the distant height of conscious superiority, he must persuade her to what she regarded as an unendurable degradation! The circumstances assuredly protected him from any danger of offering her such expression of sympathy as might not have been welcome to her.

It is true that the best help a woman can get is from a right man—equally true with its converse; but let the man who ventures take heed. Unless he is able to counsel a woman to the hardest thing that bears the name of duty, let him not dare give advice even to her asking.

Helen however had not come to ask advice of Wingfold. She was in no such mood. She was indeed weary of a losing strife, and only for a glimmer of possible help from her cousin, saw ruin inevitable before her. But this revival of hope in George had roused afresh her indignation at the intrusion of Wingfold with what she chose to lay to his charge as unsought counsel. At the same time, through all the indignation, terror, and dismay, something within her murmured audibly enough that the curate and not her cousin was the guide who could lead her brother where grew the herb of what peace might yet be had. It was therefore with a sense of bewilderment, discord, and uncertainty, that she now entered the library.

Wingfold rose, made his obeisance, and advanced a step or two. He would not offer a hand that might be unwelcome, and Helen did not offer hers. She bent her neck graciously, and motioned him to be seated.

"I hope Mr. Lingard is not worse," he said.

Helen started. Had anything happened while she had been away from him?

"No. Why should he be worse?" she answered. "Have they told you anything?"

"I have heard nothing; only as I was not allowed to see him,—"

"I left him with Mr. Bascombe half an hour ago," she said, willing to escape the imputation of having refused him admittance.

Wingfold gave an involuntary sigh.

"You do not think that gentleman's company desirable for my brother, I presume," she said with a smile so lustreless that it seemed bitter.

"He won't do him any harm—at least I do not think you need fear it."

"Why not? No one in your profession can think his opinions harmless, and certainly he will not suppress them."

"A man with such a weight on his soul as your brother carries, will not be ready to fancy it lightened by having lumps of lead thrown upon it. An easy mind may take a shroud on its shoulders for wings, but when trouble comes and it wants to fly, then it knows the difference. Leopold will not be misled by Mr. Bascombe."

Helen grew paler. She would have him misled—so far as not to betray himself.

"I am far more afraid of your influence than of his," added the curate.

"What bad influence do you suppose me likely to exercise?" asked Helen, with a cold smile.

"The bad influence of wishing him to act upon your conscience instead of his own."

"Is my conscience then a worse one than Leopold's?" she asked, but as if she felt no interest in the answer.

"It is not his, and that is enough. His own and no other can tell him what he ought to do."

"Why not leave him to it, then?" she said bitterly.

"That is what I want of you, Miss Lingard. I would have you fear to touch the life of the poor youth."

"Touch his life! I would give him mine to save it. YOU counsel him to throw it away."

"Alas, what different meanings we put on the word! You call the few years he may have to live in this world his life; while I—"

"While you count it the millions of which you know nothing,—somewhere whence no one has ever returned to bring any news!—a wretched life at best if it be such as you represent it."

"Pardon me, that is merely what you suppose I mean by the word. I do not mean that; I mean something

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altogether different. When I spoke of his life, I thought nothing about here or there, now or then. You will see what I mean if you think how the light came back to his eye and the colour to his cheek the moment he had made up his mind to do what had long seemed his duty. When I saw him again that light was still in his eyes, and a feeble hope looked out of every feature. Existence, from a demon-haunted vapor, had begun to change to a morning of spring; life, the life of conscious well-being, of law and order and peace, had begun to dawn in obedience and self-renunciation; his resurrection was at hand. But you then, and now you and Mr. Bascombe, would stop this resurrection; you would seat yourselves upon his gravestone to keep him down!—And why?—Lest he, lest you, lest your family should be disgraced by letting him out of his grave to tell the truth."

"Sir!" cried Helen, indignantly drawing herself to her full height and something more.

Wingfold took one step nearer to her.

"My calling is to speak the truth," he said: "and I am bound to warn you that you will never be at peace in your own soul until you love your brother aright."

"Love my brother!" Helen almost screamed. "I would die for him."

"Then at least let your pride die for him," said Wingfold, not without indignation.

Helen left the room, and Wingfold the house.

She had hardly shut the door, and fallen again upon the bed, when she began to know in her heart that the curate was right. But the more she knew it, the less would she confess it even to herself: it was unendurable.

CHAPTER XXXIII. A REVIEW.

The curate walked hurriedly home, and seated himself at his table, where yet lay his Greek Testament open at the passage he had been pondering for his sermon. Alas! all he had then been thinking with such fervour had vanished. He knew his inspiring text, but the rest was gone. Worst of all, feeling was gone with thought, and was, for the time at least, beyond recall. Righteous as his anger was, it had ruffled the mirror of his soul till it could no longer reflect heavenly things. He rose, caught up his New Testament, and went to the church-yard. It was a still place, and since the pains of a new birth had come upon him, he had often sought the shelter of its calm. A few yards from the wall of the rectory garden stood an old yew-tree, and a little nearer on one side was a small thicket of cypress; between these and the wall was an ancient stone upon which he generally seated himself. It had already begun to be called the curate's chair. Most imagined him drawn thither by a clerical love of gloom, but in that case he could scarcely have had such delight in seeing the sky through the dark foliage of the yew: he thought the parts so seen looked more divinely blue than any of the rest. He would have admitted, however, that he found quiet, for the soul as well as the body, upon this edge of the world, this brink of the gulf that swallowed the ever-pouring ever-vanishing Niagara of human life. On the stone he now seated himself and fell a-musing.

What a change had come upon him—slow, indeed, yet how vast, since the night when he sat in the same churchyard indignant and uneasy with the words of Bascombe like hot coals in his heart! He had been made ashamed of himself who had never thought much of himself, but the more he had lost of worthiness in his own eyes the more he had gained in worth. And the more his poor satisfaction with himself had died out, the more the world had awaked around him. For it must be remembered that a little conceit is no more to be endured than a great one, but must be swept utterly away. Sky and wind and water and birds and trees said to him, "Forget thyself and we will think of thee. Sing no more to thyself thy foolish songs of decay, and we will all sing to thee of love and hope and faith and resurrection." Earth and air had grown full of hints and sparkles and vital motions, as if between them and his soul an abiding community of fundamental existence had manifested itself. He had never in the old days that were so near and yet seemed so far behind him, consciously cared for the sunlight: now even the shadows were marvellous in his eyes, and the glitter the golden weather-cock on the tower was like a cry of the prophet Isaiah. High and alone in the clear blue air it swung, an endless warning to him that veers with the wind of the world, the words of men, the summer breezes of their praise, or the bitter blasts of their wintry blame; it was no longer to him a cock of the winds, but a cock of the truth—a Peter-cock, that crew aloud in golden shine its rebuke of cowardice and lying. Never before had he sought acquaintance with the flowers that came dreaming up out of the earth in the woods and the lanes like a mist of loveliness, but the spring-time came in his own soul, and then he knew the children of the spring. And as the joy of the reviving world found its way into the throats of the birds, so did the spring in his reviving soul find its way into the channels of thought and speech, and issue in utterance both rhythmic and melodious.—But not in any, neither in all of these things lay the chief sign and embodiment of the change he recognised in himself. It was this: that, whereas in former times the name Christ had been to him little more than a dull theological symbol, the thought of him and of his thoughts was now constantly with him; ever and anon some fresh light would break from the cloudy halo that enwrapped his grandeur; ever was he growing more the Son of Man to his loving heart, ever more the Son of God to his aspiring spirit. Testimony had merged almost in vision: he saw into, and partly understood the perfection it presented: he looked upon the face of God and lived. Oftener and oftener, as the days passed, did it seem as if the man were by his side, and at times, in the stillness of the summer-eve, when he walked alone, it seemed almost, as thoughts of revealing arose in his heart, that the Master himself was teaching him in spoken words. What need now to rack his soul in following the dim-seen, ever evanishing paths of metaphysics! he had but to obey the prophet of life, the man whose being and doing and teaching were blended in one three-fold harmony, or rather, were the three-fold analysis of one white essence—he had but to obey him, haunt his footsteps, and hearken after the sound of his spirit, and all truth would in healthy process be unfolded in himself. What philosophy could carry him where Jesus would carry his obedient friends—into his own peace, namely, far above all fear and all hate, where his soul

should breathe such a high atmosphere of strength at once and repose, that he should love even his enemies, and that with no such love as condescendingly overlooks, but with the real, hearty, and self-involved affection that would die to give them the true life! Alas! how far was he from such perfection now—from such a martyrdom, lovely as endless, in the consuming fire of God! And at the thought, he fell from the heights of his contemplation—but was caught in the thicket of prayer.

By the time he reached his lodging, the glow had vanished, but the mood remained. He sat down and wrote the first sketch of the following verses, then found that his sermon had again drawn nigh, and was within the reach of his spiritual tentacles.

Father, I cry to thee for bread,
With hungered longing, eager prayer;
Thou hear'st, and givest me instead
More hunger and a half-despair.
O Lord, how long? My days decline;
My youth is lapped in memories old;
I need not bread alone, but wine—
See, cup and hand to thee I hold.
And yet thou givest: thanks, O Lord,
That still my heart with hunger faints!
The day will come when at thy board
I sit forgetting all my plaints.
If rain must come and winds must blow,
And I pore long o'er dim-seen chart,
Yet, Lord, let not the hunger go,
And keep the faintness at my heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV. A SERMON TO LEOPOLD.

When the curate stood up to read, his eyes as of themselves sought Mrs. Ramshorn's pew. There sat Helen, with a look that revealed, he thought, more of determination and less of suffering. Her aunt was by her side, cold and glaring, an ecclesiastical puss, ready to spring upon any small church-mouse that dared squeak in its own murine way. Bascombe was not visible, and that was a relief. For an unbelieving face, whether the dull dining countenance of a mayor, or the keen searching countenance of a barrister, is a sad bone in the throat of utterance, and has to be of set will passed over, and, if that may be, forgotten. Wingfold tried hard to forget Mrs. Ramshorn's, and one or two besides, and by the time he came to the sermon, thought of nothing but human hearts, their agonies, and him who came to call them to him.

"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

"Was it then of the sinners first our Lord thought ere he came from the bosom of the Father? Did the perfect will embrace in the all-atoning tenderness of the divine heart, the degraded, disfigured, defiled, distorted thing, whose angel is too blind ever to see the face of its Father? Through all the hideous filth of the charnel-house, which the passions had heaped upon her, did the Word recognise the bound, wing-lamed, feather-draggled Psyche, panting in horriblemst torture? Did he have a desire to the work of his hands, the child of his father's heart, and therefore, strong in compassion, speed to the painful rescue of hearts like his own? That purity arid defilement should thus meet across all the great dividing gulf of law and morals! The friend of publicans and sinners! Think: he was absolutely friendly with them! was not shocked at them! held up no hands of dismay! Only they must do so no more.

"If he were to come again, visibly, now, which do you think would come crowding around him in greater numbers—the respectable church-goers, or the people from the slums? I do not know. I dare not judge. But the fact that the church draws so few of those that are despised, of those whom Jesus drew and to whom most expressly he came, gives ground for question as to how far the church is like her Lord. Certainly many a one would find the way to the feet of the master, from whom the respectable church-goer, the pharisee of our time, and the priest who stands on his profession, would draw back with disgust. And doubtless it would be in the religious world that a man like Jesus, who, without a professional education, a craftsman by birth and early training, uttered scarce a phrase endorsed by clerical use, or a word of the religious cant of the day, but taught in simplest natural forms the eternal facts of faith and hope and love, would meet with the chief and perhaps the only BITTER opponents of his doctrine and life.

"But did our Lord not call the righteous? Did he not call honest men about him—James and John and Simon—sturdy fisher-folk, who faced the night and the storm, worked hard, fared roughly, lived honestly, and led good cleanly lives with father and mother, or with wife and children? I do not know that he said anything special to convince them that they were sinners before he called them. But it is to be remarked that one of the first effects of his company upon Simon Peter was, that the fisherman grew ashamed of himself, and while ashamed was yet possessed with an impulse of openness and honesty no less than passionate. The pure man should not be deceived as to what sort of company he was in! 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' I would I could clearly behold with my mind's eye what he then saw in Jesus that drew from him that cry! He knew him for the Messiah: what was the working of the carpenter upon the fisherman that satisfied him of the fact? Would the miracle have done it but for the previous talk from the boat to the people? I think not. Anyhow St. Peter judged himself among the sinners, and we may be sure that if these fishers had been self-satisfied men, they would not have left all and gone after him who called them. Still it would hardly seem that it was specially as sinners that he did so. Again, did not men such as the Lord himself regarded as righteous come to him—Nicodemus, Nathaniel, the young man who came running and kneeled to him, the scribe who was not far from the kingdom, the centurion, in whom he found more faith than in any Jew, he who had built a synagogue in Capernaum, and sculptured on its lintel the pot of manna? These came to him, and we know he was ready to receive them. But he knew such would always come drawn of the Father; they did not want much calling; they were not so much in his

thoughts therefore; he was not troubled about them; they were as the ninety and nine, the elder son at home, the money in the purse. Doubtless they had much to learn, were not yet in the kingdom, but they were crowding about its door. If I set it forth aright, I know not, but thus it looks to me. And one thing I cannot forget—it meets me in the face—that some at least,—who knows if not all?—of the purest of men have counted themselves the greatest sinners! Neither can I forget that other saying of our Lord, a stumbling-block to many—our Lord was not so careful as perhaps some would have had him, lest men should stumble at the truth—The first shall be last and the last first. While our Lord spoke the words: The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service, even then was Saul of Tarsus at the feet of Gamaliel, preparing to do God that service; but like one born out of due time, after all the rest he saw the Lord, and became the chief in labour and suffering. Thus the last became first. And I bethink me that the beloved disciple, who leaned on the bosom of the Lord, who was bolder to ask him than any—with the boldness of love, he whom the meek and lowly called a Son of Thunder, was the last of all to rejoin the master in the mansions of his Father. Last or first—if only we are with him! One thing is clear that in the order of the Lord's business, first came sinners.

"Who that reflects can fail to see this at least, that a crime brings a man face to face with the reality of things? He who knows himself a sinner—I do not mean as one of the race—the most self-righteous man will allow that as a man he is a sinner—he to whom, in the words of the communion service, the remembrance of his sins is grievous, and the burden of them intolerable, knows in himself that he is a lost man. He can no more hold up his head among his kind; he cannot look a woman or a child in the face; he cannot be left alone with the chaos of his thoughts, and the monsters it momentarily breeds. The joys of his childhood, the delights of existence, are gone from him. There dwells within him an ever present judgment and fiery indignation. Such a man will start at the sound of pardon and peace, even as the camel of the desert at the scent of water. Therefore surely is such a man nearer to the gate of the kingdom than he against whom the world has never wagged a tongue, who never sinned against a social custom even, and has as easy a conscience as the day he was born; but who knows so little of himself that, while he thinks he is good enough, he carries within him the capacity and possibility of every cardinal sin, waiting only the special and fitting temptation which, like the match to the charged mine, shall set all in a roar! Of this danger he knows nothing, never dreams of praying against it, takes his seat in his pew Sunday after Sunday with his family, nor ever murmurs Lead us not into temptation with the least sense that temptation is a frightful thing, but repeats and responds and listens in perfect self-satisfaction, doubting never that a world made up of such as he must be a pleasant sight in the eyes of the Perfect. There are men who will never see what they are capable or in danger of until they have committed some fearful wrong. Nay there are some for whom even that is not enough; they must be found out by their fellow-men, and scorned in the eyes of the world, before they can or will admit or comprehend their own disgrace. And there are worse still than these.

"But a man may be oppressed by his sins, and hardly know what it is that oppresses him. There is more of sin in our burdens than we are ourselves aware. It needs not that we should have committed any grievous fault. Do we recognize in ourselves that which needs to be set right, that of which we ought to be ashamed, something which, were we lifted above all worldly anxieties, would yet keep us uneasy, dissatisfied, take the essential gladness out of the sunlight, make the fair face of the earth indifferent to us, a trustful glance a discomposing look, and death a darkness?—I say to the man who feels thus, whatever he may have done or left undone, he is not so far from the kingdom of heaven but that he may enter thereinto if he will.

"And if there be here any soul withered up with dismay, torn with horrible wonder that he should have done the deed which he yet hath done, to him I say—Flee from the self that hath sinned and hide thee with Christ in God. Or if the words sound to thee as the words of some unknown tongue, and I am to thee as one that beateth the air, I say instead—Call aloud in thy agony, that, if there be a God, he may hear the voice of his child, and put forth his hand and lay hold upon him, and rend from him the garment that clings and poisons and burns, squeeze the black drop from his heart, and set him weeping like a summer rain. O blessed, holy, lovely repentance to which the Son of Man, the very root and man of men, hath come to call us! Good it is, and I know it. Come and repent with me, O heart wounded by thine own injustice and wrong, and together we will seek the merciful. Think not about thy sin so as to make it either less or greater in thine own eyes. Bring it to Jesus, and let him show thee how vile a thing it is. And leave it to him to judge thee—sure that he will judge thee justly, extenuating nothing, for he hath to cleanse thee utterly, and yet forgetting no smallest excuse that may cover the amazement of thy guilt, or witness for thee that not with open eyes didst thou do the deed. At the last he cried, Father forgive them,

for they know not what they do. For his enemies the truth should be spoken, his first words when they had nailed him to the cross. But again I say, let it be Christ that excuseth thee; he will do it to more purpose than thou, and will not wrong thy soul by excusing thee a hair too much, or thy heart by excusing thee a hair too little.

"I dreamed once that I had committed a terrible crime. Carried beyond myself by passion, I knew not at the moment HOW evil was the thing I did. But I knew it was evil. And suddenly I became aware, when it was too late, of the nature of that which I had done. The horror that came with the knowledge was of the things that belong only to the secret soul. I was the same man as before I did it, yet was I now a man of whom my former self could not have conceived the possibility as dwelling within it. The former self seemed now by contrast lovely in purity, yet out of that seeming purity this fearful, foul *I* of the present had just been born! The face of my fellow-man was an avenging law, the face of a just enemy. Where, how, should the frightful face be hidden? The conscious earth must take it into its wounded bosom, and that before the all-seeing daylight should come. But it would come, and I should stand therein pointed at by every ray that shot through the sunny atmosphere! "The agony was of its own kind, and I have no word to tell what it was like. An evil odour and a sickening pain combined, might be a symbol of the torture. As is in the nature of dreams, possibly I lay but a little second on the rack, yet an age seemed shot through and through with the burning meshes of that crime, while, cowering and terror-stricken, I tossed about the loathsome fact in my mind. I had DONE it, and from the done there was no escape: it was for evermore a thing done.—Came a sudden change: I awoke. The sun stained with glory the curtains of my room, and the light of light darted keen as an arrow into my very soul. Glory to God! I was innocent! The stone was rolled from my sepulchre. With the darkness whence it had sprung, the cloud of my crime went heaving lurid away. I was a creature of the light and not of the dark. For me the sun shone and the wind blew; for me the sea roared and the flowers sent up their odours. For me the earth had nothing to hide. My guilt was wiped away; there was no red worm gnawing at my heart; I could look my neighbour in the face, and the child of my friend might lay his hand in mine and not be defiled! All day long the joy of that deliverance kept surging on in my soul.

"But something yet more precious, more lovely than such an awaking, will repentance be to the sinner; for after all it was but a dream of the night from which that set me free, and the spectre-deed that vanished had never had a place in the world of fact; while the horror from which repentance delivers, is no dream, but a stubborn abiding reality. Again, the vanishing vision leaves the man what he was before, still capable it may be of committing the crime from which he is not altogether clean to whom in his sleep it was possible: repentance makes of the man a new creature, one who has awaked from the sleep of sin to sleep that sleep no more. The change in the one case is not for greatness comparable with that in the other. The sun that awakes from the one sleep, is but the outward sun of our earthly life—a glorious indeed and lovely thing, which yet even now is gathering a crust of darkness, blotting itself out and vanishing: the sun that awakes a man from the sleep of death is the living Sun that casts from his thought out into being that other sun, with the space wherein it holds planetary court—the Father of lights, before whose shining in the inner world of truth eternal, even the deeds of vice become as spectral dreams, and, with the night of godlessness that engendered them, flee away.

"But a man may answer and say to me—"Thou art but borne on the wings of thine imagination. The fact of the crime remains, let a man tear out his heart in repentance, and no awaking can restore an innocence which is indeed lost.' I answer: The words thou speakest are in themselves true, yet thy ignorance makes them false, Thou knowest not the power of God, nor what resurrection from the dead means. What if, while it restored not thy former innocence, it brought thee a purity by the side of whose white splendour and inward preciousness, the innocence thou hadst lost was but a bauble, being but a thing that turned to dross in the first furnace of its temptation? Innocence is indeed priceless—that innocence which God counteth innocence, but thine was a flimsy show, a bit of polished and cherished glass—instead of which, if thou repentest, thou shalt in thy jewel-box find a diamond. Is thy purity, O fair Psyche of the social world, upon whose wings no spattering shower has yet cast an earthy stain, and who knowest not yet whether there be any such thing as repentance or need of the same!—is thy purity to compare with the purity of that heavenly Psyche, twice born, who even now in the twilight-slumbers of heaven, dreams that she washes with her tears the feet of her Lord, and wipes them with the hairs of her head? O bountiful God, who wilt give us back even our innocence tenfold! He can give an awaking that leaves the past of the soul ten times farther behind than ever waking from sleep left the dreams of the night.

"If the potency of that awaking lay in the inrush of a new billow of life, fresh from its original source, carrying

with it an enlargement of the whole nature and its every part, a glorification of every faculty, every sense even, so that the man, forgetting nothing of his past or its shame, should yet cry out in the joy of his second birth: 'Lo! I am a new man; I am no more he who did that awful and evil thing, for I am no more capable of doing it! God be praised, for all is well!'—would not such an awaking send the past afar into the dim distance of the first creation, and wrap the ill deed in the clean linen cloth of forgiveness, even as the dull creature of the sea rolls up the grain of intruding sand in the lovely garment of a pearl? Such an awaking means God himself in the soul, not disdaining closest vital company with the creature he foresaw and created. And the man knows in full content that he is healed of his plague. Nor would he willingly lose the scars which record its outbreak, for they tell him what he is without God, and set him ever looking to see that the door into the heavenly garden stands wide for God to enter the house when it pleases him. And who can tell whether, in the train of such an awaking, may not follow a thousand opportunities and means of making amends to those whom he has injured? "Nor must I fail to remind the man who has committed no grievous crime, that except he has repented of his evil self, and abjured all wrong, he is not safe from any, even the worst offence. There was a time when I could not understand that he who loved not his brother was a murderer: now I see it to be no figure of speech, but, in the realities of man's moral and spiritual nature, an absolute simple fact. The murderer and the unloving sit on the same bench before the judge of eternal truth. The man who loves not his brother, I do not say is at this moment capable of killing him, but if the natural working of his unlove be not checked, he will assuredly become capable of killing him. Until we love our brother, yes, until we love our enemy, who is yet our brother, we contain within ourselves the undeveloped germ of murder. And so with every sin in the tables or out of the tables. There is not one in this congregation who has a right to cast a look of reproach at the worst felon who ever sat in the prisoners' dock. I speak no hyperbole, but simple truth. We are very ready to draw in our minds a distinction between respectable sins—human imperfections we call them, perhaps—and disreputable vices, such as theft and murder; but there is no such distinction in fact. Many a thief is a better man than many a clergyman, and miles nearer to the gate of the kingdom. The heavenly order goes upon other principles than ours, and there are first that shall be last, and last that shall be first. Only, at the root of all human bliss lies repentance.

"Come then at the call of the Water, the Healer, the Giver of repentance and light, the Friend of publicans and sinners, all ye on whom lies the weight of a sin, or the gathered heap of a thousand crimes. He came to call such as you, that he might make you clear and clean. He cannot bear that you should live on in such misery, such badness, such blackness of darkness. He would give you again your life, the bliss of your being. He will not speak to you one word of reproach, except indeed you should aim at justifying yourselves by accusing your neighbour. He will leave it to those who cherish the same sins in their hearts to cast stones at you: he who has no sin casts no stone. Heartily he loves you, heartily he hates the evil in you—so heartily that he will even cast you into the fire to burn you clean. By making you clean he will give you rest. If he upbraid, it will not be for past sin, but for the present little faith, holding out to him an acorn-cup to fill. The rest of you keep aloof, if you will, until you shall have done some deed that compels you to cry out for deliverance; but you that know yourselves sinners, come to him that he may work in you his perfect work, for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, us, you and me, to repentance."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.