

John Greswold, Vol. I

Caroline Wigley Clive

Table of Contents

<u>John Greswold, Vol. I</u>	1
<u>Caroline Wigley Clive</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I</u>	1
<u>CREDITOR</u>	5
<u>DEBTOR</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER II</u>	8
<u>CHAPTER III</u>	17
<u>CHAPTER IV</u>	19
<u>CHAPTER V</u>	21
<u>CHAPTER VI</u>	25
<u>CHAPTER VII</u>	29
<u>CHAPTER VIII</u>	33
<u>CHAPTER IX</u>	37
<u>CHAPTER X</u>	41
<u>CHAPTER XI</u>	44
<u>CHAPTER XII</u>	47
<u>CHAPTER XIII</u>	50
<u>CHAPTER XIV</u>	53
<u>CHAPTER XV</u>	54
<u>CHAPTER XVI</u>	57

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- [CHAPTER I.](#)
- [CREDITOR.](#)
- [DEBTOR.](#)
- [CHAPTER II.](#)
- [CHAPTER III.](#)
- [CHAPTER IV.](#)
- [CHAPTER V.](#)
- [CHAPTER VI.](#)
- [CHAPTER VII.](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII.](#)
- [CHAPTER IX.](#)
- [CHAPTER X.](#)
- [CHAPTER XI.](#)
- [CHAPTER XII.](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII.](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV.](#)
- [CHAPTER XV.](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI.](#)

CHAPTER I.

WE lived a very secluded life in the country; but it was one in which there was a great deal of enjoyment. Our degree of wealth enabled us to partake of all the occupations which country life affords moderately indeed, but rather a higher degree than our immediate neighbours.

We had large woods with a fair sprinkling of game, of which, as boys, we were always in pursuit, more or less vain; we had ponies, two amongst four, and we always persuaded the girls to give up their share. We were as free to wander as the hares and foxes; and we shared in the hereditary popularity of a family which had lived for centuries among a moderate number of tenantry, with each of whom and their parlours and kitchen-hearths we were thoroughly and familiarly acquainted.

Our family dates very far back, and there were influencing traditions of gentility which kept our habits above the level of the smaller gentry with whom we chiefly associated. Our old place was beautiful, our old house large, our hall surrounded by pictures of our ancestors, and on the hearth blazed in the winter weather great logs of wood. Here took place the dances and sports of our childhood and youth; and from one circumstance and another we grew to think our home a place as much beyond all other places in its merits as it was beyond all others in our affections.

While I was a young boy I was happy all the hours I was awake, but not at all happy all the hours of my sleep. I

was tormented with dreadful dreams.

The worst I ever had was this one. In my dream I was gazing with the nurse and the other children down on the large old high-backed sofa, covered with a nankeen-coloured stuff, which, in fact, occupied a place in the nursery. We were looking intently on the fiat cushions of the seat; our eyes could not get away, and suddenly in the middle of one of the cushions there appeared, just level with the surface, a human face, very dark from the clotted blood upon it. One eye crushed to a bloody jelly, the other malignantly fixed upon us; the nose battered by some recent violence into the face. There was no expression of suffering, only hideous unearthly frightfulness and cruelty. In my dream I was in the nurse's arms and bowed down by her stooping position over the accursed face. I woke myself by screaming, and was not in the least appeased at finding myself safe in my accustomed bed.

Such ghostly visions appalled my childhood, and when they taught me to repeat

"Teach me to dread

My grave as little as my bed," I thought to myself, now I'm praying to be very much afraid indeed of my grave.

Very early I was sent to a cheap school in the neighbourhood. People with little money must embrace the penalties of their comparative poverty; and whereas the rich man's sons go where the luxuries and watchfulness of home are repeated, the sons of the straitened must be sent where school and school cares are to be had for the smallest price.

At home, be it a rich or poor one, the mother's attentions are much the same in all degrees. She is equally alive to the first sign of illness; equally tender to procure amusement and avoid pain; equally careful of soul and body; and mine was as anxious as anyone, and as successful in tendering my disposition and hardening my constitution. But now I was cast on a sea, as short as ever received the traveller outside the harbour of Ostend; as sick with its tossings I was as that same traveller, and longing for my dear easy home again, as a little fellow longs during the first half.

It chanced that towards the much desired end of that period the boys were all indulged with a holiday to see a show of wild beasts at a neighbouring fair; I remember one of the bigger boys, Hunter, who was ill at the time of sore throat, borrowing my woollen comforter, "because," said he, "at home my mother made me promise not to go out when there was a lump in my throat but that's women's bosh, you know."

At the fair there were temptations of bulls' eyes and gingerbread, and having some pence I ate till I made myself sick.

When we got back to the school my miserable white face and swollen eyes caused me to be sent to what is called the staying-out room, namely, the school infirmary, and here I lay in bed ill with indigestion.

I was not the only occupant. There were eight beds; and scarlet-fever being about, five boys who were suspected of it had already been deposited in as many beds.

The next morning Hunter was brought in, and took up a sixth. He could scarcely articulate; but as well as he could, he declared to me that he was quite well, if it was not for that bit of a lump in his throat.

In the remaining bed the housekeeper took up her post at night; and, as was natural enough after the fatigue of each day, made but a poor night nurse.

Hunter and all of us had the doctor; he sent us potions, but Hunter soon gave up all attempts to swallow his; the pain being such as to baffle the power on his part to do so. I was stupefied with headache, but still did take notice of the strange noise his throat made, and how at times he would raise himself on his elbow and gasp as if his breath would not come.

The third night he was never still for a minute at a time. I slept, but Hunter's bed being next to mine, I was awakened out of very profound slumber by a sudden start or tumble that he made out of his bed; his mouth open. as I could see by the fire-light, his fingers stretched out, he tottered up to the nurse, pulled at her, and before she was well awake fell like a stone on her bed and never stirred again.

I lay quite still, half-terrified, half-asleep, as in some of my dreadful dreams, and saw the nurse fling herself out of bed, raise his head, let it fall, then go out of the room and return with the man who waited on the house. They whispered loud; the man took Hunter up in his arms, and both went out. I thought, confusedly perhaps, they were carrying him to the doctor.

Next morning, when we were all awake, we saw Hunter's bed, made, as though nobody had slept in it. They told us he had been removed to the cottage, as an outside room was called, and a week after they said he was dead. But I knew that he died that moment I saw him fall on the nurse's bed.

My mother, when the holidays came, and I related all this adventure, took fright. She thought that a careful nurse and the doctor summoned would have saved the boy's life; and she would not suffer me to be exposed to the like peril. I did not go again. My eldest brother undertook to teach me Latin, and one way or other this was the first and last experience I had of school life.

I was sixteen when our father was seized with the lingering illness which terminated his life, but which was never in our comprehension of it hopeless up to the very last day. With all the pure faith of unspotted youth, we made our prayers together and alone for his recovery. Every alleviation of his illness made us believe our prayers were granted; every aggravation of it sent us to prolonged petitions, of which the fault was that we expected but one answer, namely, that the thing we asked must be given.

One night of augmented suffering, after leaving the sick-room, where a youth's presence was useless, if not inconvenient, I went to my bedchamber, and for half an hour or more continued to repeat, in every varied form, my adjuration that the added pain and danger of the day might pass by.

I was pouring out in silence my unspoken words when in a moment they seemed to be interrupted by a voice equally soundless with my own, which took their place. This voice was at a little distance, distinctly producing silent words. The words were these: "One week, two weeks, three weeks. A sacrifice." I instantly applied them to my father. I did not believe they were uttered by a supernatural being, but I thought they arose in some way prophetically. I kept them to myself constantly recalling how I had seemed called off from my own inward utterances by the words which arose at a distance, but to which my ear was directed, as in common circumstances it is to speech heard suddenly, though the person speaking is not perceived.

Being young, and not yet true to myself, I made more of the occurrence than I really felt. I imagined to myself that I should pass the last minutes of these three weeks in a state of nervous anxiety the more vivid in that I would conceal my fears from every one.

The moments I had been looking forward to came at last. The last day of the three weeks was running into midnight. I stood alone in my room, acting terror, though I alone was my audience.

Just as the clock was beginning to strike twelve, I heard the door of my father's room open, and some one run hastily along the passage. Then for the first time I believed what I had persuaded myself I believed during the three past weeks; my heart seemed to throb backward. I rushed to the door. The runner was gone. I went silently and swiftly to my father's room, which was open, and entered frightened at what I thought I was about to see.

My sister was watching. She put up her finger for silence, smiling at me. I cast my eyes on the bed, and there he was gently breathing in a good sleep. I made a friendly sign to my sister and withdrew again.

The voice was one of those queer growths of the mind, which I believe form our dreams, but which are as frequent in our waking hours as in our sleep, only outer objects generally prevent them when we are awake from filling the attention.

Towards the end of the autumn my father died. The happy home was broken up; my mother and my sister retired to a house in the county town; my eldest brother was already a soldier in India; and the rest of us had to seek our fortunes wherever our friends could place us.

It was a new epoch in our lives, and excited all the latent feelings and ideas which had been growing up within us, and which the great change suddenly matured. We were all fain to be helpful fain to take a part in life, and according to our bent make efforts towards that end.

I had a vague genius for composition, and great faith in its success. I often speculated on the success obtained by this or that author, and knowing that a few thousand pounds would be extremely useful to my mother, I revolved schemes in my mind of which the end was to surprise her some not distant day with the desirable few thousands.

I began in the following manner. At the bottom of a great oaken chest where ephemeral productions were thrown and accumulated from year by year, I found a pamphlet which seemed to have been published in the time of the first French Empire, and its point consisted in the multitude of events which the author had seen accumulate in the career of one man. He took the Plaideur's form *J'ai vu*; and in his first sentence he saw emperors, kings, crowns, and continents all crumble and change their shapes and natures at the presence of the conqueror.

This idea I undertook to apply once more. My materials were yet to be found. I sought them in the yearly chronology at the end of an almanac, and my opening period was this: "I saw a house burned down in Conduit Street."

How wonderfully stupid young people can be! The success of my endeavour corresponded to its deserts; but I was not much disheartened, and my next production was a tragedy of which only seven-tenths of one infirm line remains as a specimen:

"Too much, too much; much too much."

With such talents budding within me, I was placed in an attorney's office in London, where nobody cared for our good county-name, our beautiful house and its great hall, nor thought the least consideration due to me as the younger son of the house of Greswold. I was aware that this would be the case, and therefore did not run myself into any trouble by acting as if I could draw at all on those claims; there was some pain to be gone through, but on the whole I adapted myself very quickly to my altered circumstances.

My master was concerned with numerous clients in high life. He had I believe a most amusing business, if he could have enjoyed it as it might have been enjoyed. He had to work the worsen puppets of the world so as to keep up their show of prosperity, happiness, and goodness. Those who had all these articles in their genuine state, did not come to him. I got only glances, but I argued the whole pictures from them.

For instance, there was a great lady who visited his office occasionally, so beautiful and beautifully appointed that we clerks always contrived to open our door for a sight of her when her carriage appeared. We read her name in the *Morning Post* at evening parties, and also in the *Times*, when there were lists of patronesses to a bazaar or of contributions to the relief of distress.

One evening our master's sister came in a state of excitement and told me and another of the clerks, that My Lady had proposed to take her daughter, my master's niece, to the country for a few days, and she was come to tell her brother. Accordingly, when he was disengaged she went into his room, but came out two minutes after, hiding her face behind her veil, and before she was fully out of the old gentleman's room I heard the words

"Let me hear no more of such folly; no niece of mine shall ever associate with that woman."

Among his clients was a young man of considerable rank, whose family belonged to our own county; of it Mr. Pypps also was a native, and there was an hereditary connexion between the firm and the family. This young man got into difficulties from time to time; he had to raise money, and in all his troubles he came to my master.

He had the most engaging manner a man can have, as well as the kindest face. He was very young, active, strong, and healthy; and Mr. Pypps really loved him. He had loved his father, and had known this young client ever since he was a boy; and sometimes he would get one of his irreplaceable bottles of Madeira from his cellar, and a neck of venison on the table, and young Lord Ennavant would come to dine in order to talk over his affairs; in fact, I believe they got on splendidly during the hour and a half spent in the comfortable parlour of the attorney.

Our poor master was not happy; he had dealt so much with money that it had bewildered him, I believe. He was certainly rich, and when he was paying his bills, my opinion is that he was quite comfortable; the reality of the payment giving him a tangible conviction that he had plenty wherewith to pay. But at other times, I have evidence that he was occupied almost always, when he had no business on hand, with calculations as to whether his money would meet the calls upon it.

He would stand still in the street, his lips moving as if in calculation; he would take out his purse and count it. I have seen him as soon as he was settled in a railroad carriage produce his memorandum-book, and jot down a whole page of figures. Once I met with the blank side of a letter, covered with debtor and creditor accounts, of which this below is a copy:

CREDITOR.

*#s.d.*In Bank63500In purse18160Due, one quarter from tenant in Chester Court100 00753160

DEBTOR.

*#s.d.*Housekeeper's book5186Rent, half year10500Wages, Christmas7800188186Christmas bills will come, I dare say, to #10001000 00#118818 6

His Christmas bills were more likely to be bills of a single week; but I imagine he put them down conjecturally at an imaginary thousand, in order to persuade himself that his balance was against instead of for him. I am sure his reason fought against the phantom of indigence which appeared to haunt him, for he never changed his style of expenditure, nor refused any legitimate call on his bounty; but ever when his intellect could withdraw itself from matter of fact, it took the false food of illusion, and with more and more appetite as it continued to feed.

During the second winter that I was with him his health began to fail, and more obvious symptoms of what was going wrong in his mind presented themselves. He grew profoundly melancholy, and could with difficulty prevail on himself to take an interest in anything.

One day an old friend called to ask how he was; they were in habits of extreme familiarity, the friend a little below him in the world, and no kind of restraint between them. "It is very kind of you, Baker," he said, "to pay me a visit, but I'm not glad to see you."

Another time his sister and the niece he had forbidden to go to the beautiful "My Lady," were passing the evening with him, and being such near relations, he put no restraint on himself, but suffered their attempts at amusing him without any corresponding effort to be amused.

"Well, brother, we must leave you now," said Mrs. Crump; "I'm sure we've passed a delightful evening."

"You must love dullness very much, then," said he. "Is it duller in the grave, do you think?"

These things excited my attention very much, for I had my own reasons for being curious about them. I had read in books of medicine of epochs in a man's life when it becomes a matter of arithmetic that he should be hipped, ill, and out of love with himself. Mysterious figures bring about mental and bodily phenomena\$, 14, 21, 49, 63. This fact laid hold on my imagination prodigiously. I set it down that Mr. Pypps was approaching the last of these periods, and I watched him very curiously to see the sum total come out of him.

There was a more important person interested in poor Mr. Pypps, and that was the kindly young Lord Ennavant. When he came on his own business to the office, he would stay a few minutes and tell some quaint story out of his own world, which amused the ailing man; and we clerks heard gladly the laugh which had been thus excited.

He came several times to dinner, with usually the same cheering effect, but on the occasion I am about to record, I passed and repassed the door, vainly hoping to hear the even stream of conversation which used to flow between them. There were brief bursts; there was Lord Ennavant's hearty voice, and Mr. Pypps trying to be hearty in reply; but then talk fell off, there would be silence, and then a jerk of talk again.

At last came the sound of a dialogue, in the one pressed seemingly to obtain a point, which the other was reluctantly brought to yield. The two gentlemen came out of the dining-room, and my master seeing me, asked me if I would fetch his cloak from his bedroom upstairs. I ran up to do so, and Lord Ennavant was very impatient for my return, calling to me before I could scarcely reach the top, and evidently afraid that any delay would cost him the unwilling companion he had secured.

"Thank you, Mr. Greswold," said my master, evidently wishing to distinguish me from a servant, in which rank Lord Ennavant, it seemed, supposed me to be. "I am sorry to give you the trouble."

"Oh, I am sure Mr. Greswold does not mind," said Lord Ennavant, pretending he had thought me a gentleman all the time. "I am very anxious to get our friend here out for a walk."

I made a sign of acquiescence, and then my master said

"What if he went with us?"

"Humph," said Lord Ennavant, "it is not the best place in the world for him."

"Why, where are we going?" said my master.

"Oh, it's very good for you and me, but not quite so well for such a young man."

"Nay, if it's any harm " began Mr. Pypps.

"No harm in the world. Oh, let him come then. **You** must at all events. Now, here's your hat. Have you got your purse in your pocket?"

"Yes; my purse. There's not much in it, nor ought to be."

"Enough, I dare say. Come along."

So we all three sallied out of the house, and Lord Ennavant, making a few instants' delay on the door step, whispered to me, who was last

"I'm going to make him gamble, just to give him something to cry for;" and away we went.

The house we came to had nothing externally to attract attention, but the door I observed on its opening was strongly defended by bars and locks. A few yards further in, another door had to be opened which was similarly defended; and upon the staircase were no less than three more, each of which had a small barred window through it. We were reconnoitered before we were let through.

When at last we had cleared all these barriers, we entered a room where a dozen men were standing about, and rather less than that number sitting round a table, the surface of which was divided by a line, on each side of which a word was written, I could not at first see what.

One of the men wore a green shade over his eyes, and held a wooden rake in his hand; and cards were thrown on either side of the line which was drawn on the table. There was money on the table, which changed owners frequently; often being raked up to himself by the man with the shade, and often pushed over by him to one or other of the players; but let what would happen to the money, nobody made the least remark or exclamation. They only uttered in unvarying tones, from time to time, one of the two words "Rouge" or "Noir."

Lord Ennavant spoke to one of the men who were standing round, and who, smiling as at some good jest, proceeded to make room for Pypps at the table.

"There, old friend," said Lord Ennavant, "sit down and take your chance. All you have got to do is to choose a card on either side of the line; if on this side, call it *rouge*, if on the other, *noir*; and put your money on it. You will win or lose, that's quite certain. And, mind me: don't lose more money than you've got in your purse. It can't ruin you; and it will do your health good."

"Sad folly, my lord," said Pypps; but he sat down, and named five shillings for his stake on *noir*.

Nobody seemed to take any notice whether the stake was large or small; the cards continued to be laid down on the table, and presently, by no volition of his own, double the amount of his venture was pushed over to Mr. Pypps.

"Leave it alone," said Lord Ennavant, interfering to prevent him from touching the money. "As long as you win, and say nothing, your stake and your gains double every time."

Mr. Pypps said nothing, but he lost. He immediately put down ten shillings for a new stake on the *noir*. That time he won; and now he rose and was willing to leave off, having gained nothing, as he said, nor lost.

"Nay, don't finish yet," said Lord Ignorant. "I have got something to do. Play as if you were just beginning. It's not worth while to rise as you sat down."

He went into another part of the room, where I believe he played at cards, and I stayed, watching my master. Again the latter took his place, winning on the whole, and by degrees caring very much whether the event was or was not favourable.

Lord Ennavant came to him in about half an hour, ready to go home.

"Stay five minutes," said Pypps. "I want to see the issue of this venture."

It went against him.

"Confound it," he cried; "what luck! I must get that back again;" and now he named a stake the amount of which would have frightened him half an hour before.

"Come, never mind," said Lord Ennavant. "Do come now; I can't stay here all night."

"Go then, my dear lord; don't wait for me on any account. I must stay a little longer. I begin to feel some life."

"Poor devil!" said his friend. What a word! "But don't talk so loud, my beloved Pypps. Nobody is ever glad or sorry here. Take my first advice, and stick to one colour; whichever you will. If you win, your money will be pushed over to you; and if you lose it will be raked away from you. Only say nothing, for you disgrace both yourself and me by this acuteness of sensibility."

He turned away again, engaging in some new game, and left old Pypps playing, and me gazing. Fortune was very favourable to Pypps. He obeyed the injunction of his friend as far as he was able, but he could not altogether avoid some bodily expression of his feelings. His face was flushed; he pulled off his cravat, and flung it on the floor; the rapid influx of money to him who had made it by driblets appeared intoxicating.

In a very short time Lord Ennavant's attention was caught by the buzz in the room of people interested in this wonderful run of luck. He and all the rest of the spectators came up, surrounding the table.

Pypps cast one glance at them, and then seeming to be conscious that he must make no appeal to sympathy, concentrated himself, and supporting his head on his hands, stooped it over the table where his winnings were accumulating by a stake that doubled every time. The sum became hundreds. It rose to thousands. One change of luck would swallow up half his fortune. Another stroke of it in a favourable direction would go hard to his opponent.

The banker at the table went on doggedly, but there was a dumb fury in his abrupt movements which was as intelligible as though it had been expressed in words. His ruin was imminent. If Pypps cried content, he had to pay a terrible amount of thousands, but the next turn of the cards might redeem all. Fortune must change at last, but to venture it might only double his destruction. He looked hard at Pypps, not knowing what he himself desired. Suddenly he sprang up, breaking the normal silence of the table

"Not fair," he cried; "the dead don't play." Then a little lower "The man's dead."

We rushed up; we pulled at the hands. The head fell lower; the wide eyes were staring at the card table. There was no breath no pulse. Yes, the man was dead!

CHAPTER II.

LORD ENNAVANT was shaken out of all his habitual health and spirits by the terrible death of which he had been the involuntary cause. He could not raise himself to the level of the scenes around him, and rather than expose to others the sunken condition of his nerves, or endure the effort of attempting to conceal it, he hastily resolved to go abroad.

I was little better than he, and the good-natured young man, perceiving his state and mine to be pretty much the same, offered to take me with him, saying carelessly, "You have got no employment just now, so you may as well take a run between times."

Nothing could be more agreeable to me than this proposal. I had not known how I should be able to set myself down to another desk under another master, so soon after I had lost the kind one whose last look I could not get

out of my head. When I was sitting still, I constantly saw those open eyes, glazed yet staring that mouth with a ghastly smile frozen on it and the only remedy was to spring up and run, talk, tire myself; so that just in proportion as it was dreadful to imagine myself stooping over white paper all day, was it acceptable to think of perpetually moving among new and delightful objects.

My master had left all his clerks 20*l.* apiece; and with this I was independent of Lord Ennavant, should he tire of me. I got my legacy paid by relating the circumstances I was in to the late Mr. Pyppe's sister, Mrs. Crump, who inherited his property, and who, with her daughter, was raised by it from indigence to a situation of luxury. They were passing a sort of probationary time when I saw them, walking slowly, speaking plaintively, correcting any approach to a smile which their lips might commit, and, if unluckily betrayed into interest in subjects foreign to their grief, harking back upon it, with a sudden sigh and a raising of their eyelids. But Mrs. Crump was very kind about my legacy, and what with this money in my pocket, and the degree of sorrow beyond my natural sorrow which I had obliged to assume in her presence, I left that house with a reaction of spirits such as I had not felt since my poor master died.

My kind patron also was relieved by getting rid of all necessity to be gay, and on the whole we travelled to Folkestone with easier spirits than either of us had yet enjoyed. It was like getting well after an illness; you can't do much, but if you are let alone, you can do something, and have pleasure in quietly getting about.

We were standing in the great station at Folkestone, our tickets taken, and ready to go down to the packet, when Lord Ennavant's servant, accompanied by one of the clerks of the establishment, came running along the gallery, and the latter being brought up by the former to Lord Ennavant, said a telegraphic message had just come for him, the paper with a copy of which he put into his lordship's hands.

"I shall not go back to London, let it be what it will," he said, looking at it.

Then in an instant he handed it to me without a word. It ran thus:

"Mr. Greswold must return. A Will has been found making him Mr. Pyppe's heir."

I stared and turned it over, looking in vain for more explanation. The mere words never seem enough, yet there is no questioning the bit of paper as one does a messenger.

"It must be nonsense," I said; "Mrs. Crump has got the Will."

"People don't write nonsense at twopence per letter by the Electric telegraph," said Lord Ennavant. "The news is true; though wires can't say or swear it."

"Oh no; it can't be true, and even if it is, it does not matter to me. I shan't take his money of course. The bell is ringing; let us go, pray."

"Oh, you will take his money of course you will. Good-bye, Mr. Greswold. Write to me at Châlons; I shall like to hear details."

"Oh, indeed I must go with you; I do so long to go. This is ridiculous."

"Pho! you will soon think otherwise. I must be off. No; you are not to come another step. Good-bye!"

And against all my endeavours and entreaties, he left me behind to return to London on the authority of a few words which really seemed to have no meaning at all. They appeared to me so wholly unreal that my thoughts did not fix upon them scarcely at all.

I felt keenly that my pleasant prospect was over; and that was the reflection which occupied me as I sadly travelled back.

Then I went straight to my old master's office, where Mr. Hadley, his head clerk, winding up his affairs. I got an interview with him at once. He assured me that the news was true, and told me a Will of later date than any other had been found at the bottom of a bundle of other Wills, made at different dates, and laid by on the topmost shelf of his iron closet.

"And there he meant it to remain, no doubt, with the others which he had superseded," said I. "The one he intended should be acted upon was that which Mrs. Crump has."

"One has no right to judge from appearance," said Mr. Hadley. "Facts are the sole standard, and this Will is dated subsequently to that in favour of Mrs. Crump; therefore it stands good rather than that."

"Not if I know his intentions to have been different."

"You can't know that. You can only tell what intention he has expressed. The law acknowledges no other."

"But you see yourself he put it among other old Wills which he had annulled by making the one which was left in the place most likely to find it in."

"The place was a strange one, and why he put it there nobody may be able to tell. But the fact that it is subsequent to all others overpowers whatever there may be odd about it."

"Ay, that's the thing, Mr. Hadley; he had been odd some little time, and it's because he was odd that this Will was made."

"Hush, hush," said Mr. Hadley; "not a word of that on our side."

"Why, you know yourself it is true."

"No need for you to say so. Let the other party prove that, if they can. But you are not called upon to throw away 3000 *l.* a year if holding your tongue will keep it."

"Don't you think I am supposing I feel convinced?"

"No, indeed I don't. What is the law for, except to look after everybody's right? Now this money may be yours by right. Supposing him to have been in his full senses it is yours; and nobody doubted that he was so. He did business to the last; a client was consulting him up to the moment he last quitted his house. He liked you, and he disliked Mrs. Crump. Did he never say a word to you on the subject?"

"Never; and you know he left me 20*l.* as one of the clerks."

"However, he also left you 3000*l.* a year. That's the state of the case at present, and it will not be long before I trust to see you in possession."

My intention had been, when I arrived in London, to go straight to Mrs. Crump, after I had ascertained the fact briefly communicated by the telegram, and if I found that a Will in my favour had been really made, to renounce it at once on the ground of its obvious injustice. But I altered my purpose after this interview with Mr. Hadley. If I had a right to 3000*l.* a year, there was no doubt as to the pleasure of it. At all events, I would not be in a hurry. There was always time to give it up, but there would be no time to take it again, if I renounced it and afterwards

repented.

I resolved to consult my mother before I took any decided step; and the first thing I did after leaving the office was to state the whole matter in a letter to her.

Next morning I took my way to the residence of Mrs. Crump, the same where a few days ago she had paid me in advance the 20 *l.* left me by Mr. Pypps. I was admitted at once, which was rather more than I had expected, but I soon found it was with no friendly feeling.

Mrs. Crump was standing up when I entered, and she flew at me as if I had been a rat and she a hawk.

"Do you dare come into my presence, you great mean hypocrite?" cried she. "Is this the way you return all my kindness? But I'll be too much for you;" and faint with passion she fell on a chair which was near her and rocked herself to and fro, sobbing bitterly.

"Mother, mother," cried Miss Crump, "don't take on so. Judgment must reach the evil doers."

"True, true, my precious child my poor injured darling," said the elder lady, clasping her daughter, and both crying in close contact.

I tried to speak, but was stopped instantly.

"You snake in the grass," cried Mrs. Crump, "to go and delude that poor foolish old man into wronging his natural heirs for the sake of a cormorant like you. I daresay you forged every word yourself, and I'll sell my last shift but what I see justice done upon you, and this poor wronged innocent child too."

Miss Crump remarked that she did not mind herself, but to think of her poor mother broke her heart.

"Not that you have got your wicked way," said the mother. "I'll have the best that is to be had, and **that** the old fool might be pretty sure of, or he did not know his sister Bess."

Though I am excitable in some things, others I am quiet enough; especially when people choose to exhibit the workings of their secret souls, for then I look upon it as a play acted before me; and if I myself am a party to it, I consider that I am very fortunate to have a seat in the front box. Thus, this violence, and this unveiling of their real sentiments towards my old master, had been disguised in black *crêpe* and weepers the last time I was here, and occupied me; and I was not in any haste to answer the accusations heaped upon me.

When the right time came, however, I assured my auditresses that I was as ignorant of the Will made in my favour as they were till recalled by the telegram, and they could judge of the truth of this assertion by the fact that I had obtained from Mrs. Crump the of a legacy which became mine only in right of the Will in their favour.

"That was another trick on your part," cried the angry lady. "A dirty trick to get that paltry sum from me besides my brother's estate. What a villain!" and she cast up eyes and hands.

"I suppose at all events you mean to pay back at least that 20*l.* ?" said Miss Crump, "that is, if there should be no reason why we should make you a present of 20*l.* besides the property," and trying to she overreached her moral balance, and broke into an hysterical sob.

"Don't cry, Miss Crump. Dear Mrs., dear Miss Crump," I said, coming a little nearer, "it was very good of you to advance that money so readily, and I am willing, if you request, to return it. I can pay back 18*l.* at once, and I'll get the rest from home if you desire."

With which words I pulled out my purse and pocketbook.

"Snake!" repeated Mrs. Crump, "you think to catch me, do you?"

"No, indeed, dear ma'am; I have no intention but to restore the money if you require it."

"Of course I require it."

"Well, then, here it is only be pleased to give me back the receipt."

"I give back the receipt? I shall do no such thing, and that **you** may depend upon."

"Then, ma'am, I must keep the money."

"Hypocrite; I thought it would come to that."

"One or the other I must have. It would appear otherwise as if you had paid me 20*l.*, whereas I shall have received nothing."

"Nothing! Oh, I suppose, 3000*l.* a year is nothing, is it?"

"But if I get 3000*l.* a year I will give back the 20*l.*," I observed; "one or other surely, dear madam, is my right."

"He says it is his right!" cried Mrs. Crump, casting up her hands and eyes.

"Nay, it is not I" but she interrupted me.

"No, and it shan't be you. I've sent for counsel, I can tell you; and if there is law in England I'll have it on you."

"I think you are quite right, Mrs. Crump, to try the question at law," I began.

"Upon your word, do ye?" said she, sneering at me with all her lips.

"Yes, ma'am," I said; "but as you take the matter in an unpleasant point of view, I am afraid to lose my temper if I stay longer; so, ma'am, and Miss Crump, I'll wish you good morning. Good-bye." And I went out, putting my hat on my head as quietly as I could.

The air soon took away what little agitation had been generated in that noisy, close little parlour, and I walked back to Mr. Hadley's who had given me a bed, and allowed my letters to be directed to his house.

There I found a letter from my mother. I was waiting for it to clench the determination which I had all but taken, for I felt what her opinion would be.

"My dear Son,

"It would be very pleasant if you were possessed of two or three thousand a year; but if there is a moral barrier between you and those thousands they are no more yours than Windsor Castle, though that would be very pleasant too. Mr. Pypps has done a palpable injustice to his family. To accept his injustice in your own favour would be to do it yourself. It is not a doubtful case you are a stranger, and they are his heirs. They are excessively poor, and are naturally the persons to be benefited by what no longer belongs to their brother and uncle. You have

no claim, nor do you stand in the position of one whose benefit would do no injury to others. Mr. Pointz thinks you might agree with them to give up your claim, if they would make over to you some share of the money; but if you are entitled to a part you are entitled to all, and if to none don't ask for charity.

"Your dear brother writes me word that he shall be in England within a few days. Alas! dear John, he is dreadfully wounded. My boy is maimed for life, and is become, he says himself, not only maimed, but an object of disgust. Oh, not to his mother. God bless you, John; bless you all, my dear children.

"Ever your loving mother,

"CHARLOTTE GRESWOLD."

"Yes, yes, noble-minded mother, I knew what you would say. I learnt it at your knee long before this particular case arose, and I'll go at once and act as you wish; there is no use in trifling with a right resolution."

So I straightway walked down to the office.

Mr. Hadley was vexed; he remonstrated and reasoned, but for fear of losing sight of my instinctive resolution, I would not listen to his reasonings, and only insisted on executing my purpose in the most effectual manner.

"And now," said Mr. Hadley, "you are on the wide world again, what do you mean to do?"

"The same as before, I suppose."

"Will you become a clerk again, and enter the office with me? I am succeeding to the old master's business, and am ready to take you to-morrow, if you like."

"Thank you, thank you," I said, "But I can't set to work so soon. A man who has just been possessed of three thousand a year is entitled to spend a little money like a gentleman don't you think so?"

Mr. Hadley smiled.

"Ay! I see the propriety, the necessity so what shall you do?"

"Go home for a while. I shall like to talk over matters there; for I am quite another person since all my adventures. So good-bye, Mr. Hadley. Many and kind thanks, Mr. Hadley good-bye."

"Good-bye, John; and if I can be of any use at any time, mind I'm ready."

Thus we parted, and that night I put myself into a railroad-carriage, and went home.

My mother was re-established in her old paternal house, for my brother had written to her earnestly begging her to come back there, and offering to make again a home for us all, whenever we chose to inhabit it. Had he been what he was when he went out had he brought back limb and life in the radiant state of health in which he left us, my mother would have refused this arrangement; but, as it was, he returned an infirm and an ailing man, and wanted the succour of family affection. He had received the news of his inheritance to my father's property when on the eve of a battle. Like any other soldier, he did what Mr. Ruskin nobly says a soldier nobly does "Put him in a fortress-breach with all the pleasures of the world behind him, and only death and his duty in front of him, he

will keep his face to the front."

He ran the chances of war, and they went against him. It never occurred to him to regret; that he had done so; but though he had no regrets he had not the less suffering, He bore all, however, with absolute firmness; he never uttered a complaint, but his patience was less than his fortitude.

Pity was intolerable to him. He never endured it except from a little child of my married sister; whose small face and open mouth would reflect every change he chose to indicate when telling this child of the wound, the amputation, and the starting pain.

There was a family near us, that of the clergyman of the parish, with whom we had grown up much as if the house had been our own. The father and mother were both people of good families, and of some fortune besides his preferment. They had one daughter, a girl whom my brother had come to love dearly as they both grew up, and to whom he had engaged himself before he left England; though during our father's lifetime they had not means enough to marry.

He was twenty-three, she was not yet seventeen; but her fancy had fixed itself on him almost more fervently than his had fixed on her. She was a girl of great personal beauty; her figure was of the ordinary height; but the slope of her shoulders made her look taller than she was. The trimmest rounded waist gathered to its due proportions from her spreading bust. She had a brilliant colour upon a creamy skin, and black hair naturally waving, so that, where short, it made soft large curls, and where long, thick ringlets. Her eyes were as dark as her hair, but not sparkling; they were gentle, honest eyes, telling all she felt, but not penetrating the hidden meaning of others. Her mouth was rounded at the ends and bowed at the centre of the lips, and the smile which unclosed them gave a new expression, whenever it came, to her otherwise pensive face.

Though her frame was elastic and her spirits excitable, she was easily tired and easily subdued. She was never strong enough to finish a long walk with us, though always ready begin one. Her mother watched over her with the double adoration of affection and anxiety; and her father, though less alive to anxiety, had wrapped up his being in her, as though his life and hers were indissolubly one.

My brother Robert knew that all was over between him and her. What pangs it may cost him I cannot tell; but he never said anything on the subject, except as to the fact of having renounced the prospect which had once been his. He spoke of it as a matter of course, and was ready to see her under that new character.

My mother had prepared her for the terrible change in him; but the quiet girl had not, I think, realized anything that was told her. I was with Robert when she came with her mother the first time into the south parlour, appropriated to him. He would not lie on the sofa, nor in any way be as complete an invalid as he really was; but moved feebly about the room to the best of his ability; his disfigured face bandaged and mortally pale; his sleeve empty, his coat buttoned across his chest.

This was the spectacle which met her instead of the handsome face and person which had so fondly kissed and bidden her farewell instead also of the image I think she had conceived of her lover, pale and weak, but with all his beauty, and in due time all his recovered health.

He took her hand when she came in, and one could distinguish the effort in his voice to speak steadily.

"God bless you, Mary," he said; "see what I am become an old man but you are as young as ever; you have slipped far, far, behind me."

I think what was said in former days of people who saw a ghost, was what came over Mary; his was the presence of something unaccountable, supernatural. The pink hue of her cheeks deepened into excessive colour; her

eyebrows contracted themselves a little; she did not know whether to take that left hand which he held out to her, and though she did take it after a few seconds, it seemed as if the fear and the shock had gone to her heart.

My brother let drop her hand, and sitting down beside her, talked of her father, of her garden, of anything but himself: she was shy like a frightened child.

I thought it best to relieve them both from spectators, and went out; her mother called to me at the door, and asked if I would show her where my sister was.

I thought her right to come out of the way, and gladly held the door for her. But my mother told me that when we were gone, and when she also rose to open the garden window, meaning to steal away if it seemed desirable, Mary got up hastily and pressed closely against her, trembling, and seemingly afraid to stay behind. Then my mother sat down, and after a few minutes' painful talk, told Mary they would go into the garden, and leave Robert to rest.

Robert did not take her hand again; only nodded to her, and thanked her for coming; and then they two stepped over the low window-sill. My mother told me that Mary at first said nothing, but walked beside her till they had gone about a hundred yards, then she suddenly said in a low voice, "Is that Robert?" and flung her arms round my mother's neck, sobbing unappeasably, and exclaiming in the midst of her tears "Oh my poor Robert dear, dear Robert, poor Robert!"

It was hard enough for my mother to bear, but she had compassion on the poor young thing, and let her tears flow freely without attempting to stop them or reason with her. Pity and tender caresses were all that could do her good, and at last the paroxysm subsided, and my mother left her on the turf, hiding her face on the trunk of a tree, while she fetched her own mother, and saw them go away together.

Robert said nothing about this till he and I were alone when the rest had retired for night; for we constantly talked together, when all was still in the house, and while he lay unable to sleep on his uneasy couch. He had been lying silent, with open eyes, for a little time, and till he spoke I would not break in on what I readily conjectured was the train of his thoughts.

At last, "John," said he, "if I were the stout fellow I was on the morning of the battle and if you had three thousand a year of your own, we should be more thought of than we are now."

"True, Bob," said I; "but neither of us would choose to be other than we are."

"I would," cried he, "only I cannot; therefore I make the best of it. That is the ground on which to take one's stand. Should I, a soldier and a Christian gentleman, lower myself to complain of what is irremediable?"

"And for me to complain," I said, "would be ridiculous, for it is my own free choice."

"Ay, but I'll tell you what, Master Jack, you are rather drawing upon that honourable choice, for it **was** honourable, though simply right; you are squandering your small moneys because you have renounced the great moneys you might have had to squander."

"Oh, well, a little; but I'll pull up, Robert. What you say is true, but I never conceived before what it was to have money."

"Then forget it now. How much have you spent?"

"Oh, no great deal. It don't matter. But I love you the better for being so stout-hearted."

"Ay, ay; **ready to die for one's country** sounds best, but it is much more difficult to be **ready to be wounded for one's country** ."

"John," he began again, after a pause, "the two things in the world which I should like best would be for you to marry Mary, and for me to die. To die is not so very much to ask, is it?"

I thought in my own heart it **was** much. It was like asking to go home at three o'clock when office hours would not be over till six. But I did not say so.

"No, no, dear Bob," I said, and laid my hand upon his as it rested outside the counterpane.

"I can't put it in my Will," Robert went on, "that I wish and hope Mary may become your wife; but I should like to leave her 5000*l.* whether she is or no; and yet it does not seem fair to you, who will come into the property after me, to burthen it with that sum."

"Oh, Robert," I said, "don't think of that. It is your own, out and out. If ever I possess it, whatever comes will be a clear windfall to me, so to speak."

"True," said he; "and it is possible, John, is it not, that she may bring my legacy back to you?"

"No, not that; she, having been your affianced wife, seems my own sister."

"That's done with, and doubly done with," said Robert.

He proceeded shortly after this conversation to charge his estate with the sum he wished Mary should inherit from him, and at the same time I became perfectly acquainted with the state of the family affairs. My father had left 5000*l.* in money to the owner of the estate, charged with 150*l.* per annum for the three younger children, from which payment the estate was to be relieved at the death of my mother, who had 30,000*l.* of her own, which was to be divided amongst us three; that is, my married sister, my single sister Bessie, and myself. My mother was young, comparatively speaking. Her eldest child, Robert, was just twenty-three, and she was not more than twenty-five years older; so that we had to look to ourselves to maintain ourselves, with the help of our 50*l.* a-piece, for the chief part, as we hoped, of our lives.

It was quite necessary, therefore, that I should be looking out again for employment. But just at present my brother wanted me at home, and till he should be better, I was to not to leave him. It suited me in every respect to remain where I was.

In the first place, Robert and I had the most perfect brotherly regard and communion, and in the next, I had all the instincts of the money-spending class in which I was born, and liked my gun and a horse a thousand times better than my pen and a three-legged stool.

Mary often came to see us. After the first shock of meeting was over, she did her very best to act naturally, and to resume the relation she had held to us all, but it would not do. She was very young, and had grown up connecting all her future with Robert, and now his life was worse to her than his death would have been, for he was present, yet totally separated from her. She had loved him, yet now shuddered at him. She was his affianced wife, yet he himself treated her as a father might, and it was so only that she could wish to look on the man whose love-letters were scarce a month old.

Her mother's heart was heavier even than hers, for she saw at home how hard it went with her child, and confided to my mother what tears, what hysterical agitation, what failing appetite this state of things cost poor Mary; and before long it was agreed between the two matrons, both equally interested in her, that an absence from home was

the best chance there was for her recovery.

Robert eagerly approved the proposal, and it was settled that Mrs. Percy and Mary should go to a sister of the former in London, who was glad to have the beautiful girl and her own calm, handsome sister. They came to bid us good-bye; Robert was suffering dreadfully that morning, and forced to be quiet on the sofa.

At the end of the brief visit, when Mary came up to touch his hand and say farewell, he held hers a few moments and drew her down towards him; then laid his hand on her hair, and said—

"God bless you, Mary. I have got a little ornament for you; will you wear it in London?"

Alas! it was, I believe, the wedding present he had brought home. It was a necklace worked of the lightest little bars of gold slenderest golden fetters the clasp ornamented with pearls, and the links of the chain were fashioned into these words "Léger Poids d'Amour."

Mary took it, and blinded with tears, saw it not at all choked with sobs, could not thank at all. I know not what pressure there might be of that left hand which grasped hers. I saw the tears fill Robert's eyes, and he withdrew it to dash them away. Then my mother laid hold of Mary's arm, and took her hastily from the room.

CHAPTER III.

THEY were away a month before we heard anything of them, except through Mr. Percy, who remained at home. He always answered our inquiries briefly, by saying "All was very well; Mary seemed to be enjoying herself." But at the end of that time, letters being brought into the morning room as usual, Robert saw there was one in Mrs. Percy's handwriting addressed to my mother.

"Now we shall have the true state of things," said he, and impatiently waited till she returned.

She opened it, and soon turned to the window with her back to us while she read it.

"What is it, mother?" said Robert. "Bad news?"

"No," said my mother, "I don't think so. I hope not."

"Well, mother, give me the letter," said Robert. "Pshaw," he added, as she hesitated, "my mind is not shot away, though my face and my arm are. I can stand news, good or bad."

She instantly gave it him, saying

"Mary is not well."

He read it without a word, and gave it to me, shading his eyes with his hand while I also read.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,

"I should have written sooner if I could have written what you would have been glad to hear; and I have been hoping to have such news to give, but there is none. My child cannot lift her head, from the blow dear Robert's afflictions have given her. She is very young, and has never seen illness at home before; never seen it, but as the portion of another class, and the subject of from her own hand as a superior; but now it comes all at once on her

dearest prospects and her fondest affections. Forgive her, my kind friend. She has done her best.

"My sister was very, very kind to her, and to turn the current of her thoughts, took us to scenes so gay and splendid that the like had never passed through the thoughts of my country-bred girl. Her beauty made her conspicuous even in those gay assemblies. Alas! I may say it, for where will that fair, that dear, dear face be another year? She did her best. She endeavoured to enjoy. She danced, and tried to talk, and to be pleased with the music her aunt took her to hear; but I could see her listless look whenever she was not absolutely excited. I could see her absence in spirit from the scene around her. I could see her stealing her fingers up to hide and brush off the tears that would come.

"In her room I have found her in floods of tears. She can scarcely eat. The book lies on her lap unread, and yet when she sees I observe all this, her sweet smile trying to be happy goes to my very heart.

"Yesterday I asked a doctor about her. He said the low state of energy in spirits was letting the bodily organs go down like a watch unwound. He told me the act of living thus unsustained had already overwrought the lungs, and that whether the cause could be removed or not, they must breathe an air easier to be digested than that of our winter.

"Oh, my friend, it was like a sentence of death that he pronounced when he told me that a winter at Algiers might save her. How can we go so far, so expensively?

"My sister does not see it in the light I do. She says that doctors recommend impossible things to save their own credit. But when a man of experience says, **there** is life, and **here** is, or may be, death, what anguish does he leave behind him?

"Meantime, Sarah has arranged that we shall go to their place in Surrey, and try the quiet and novelty of that scene.

"Write to me, Farhurst, Guildford. Is dear Robert better?

"Yours affectionately,

"A. PERCY."

That post took a letter from my brother to Farhurst. He sent me to the county town to arrange with his banker for advancing him 300*l.*, and when that should be safely settled I was to post the following letter:

"MY DEAR MRS. PERCY,

"Mary was my affianced wife. She is the widow of my better days. My spirit dwells upon her as it might have done out of another state of being.

"Let her be the heir of all I could have left her had I died while she was my betrothed, and so let me partake a gleam of happiness by enabling her to go where health, I trust, awaits her. You are too just to refuse me.

"Yours affectionately,

"R. GRESWOLD."

CHAPTER IV.

IT was finally resolved that the Percys should do as my brother wished, and the father left home in the end of October to join his wife and daughter in Surrey, and accompany them to Algeria. He had remained behind till then, establishing a curate in his place, although he merely taken a well-recommended man and left him to find his own way, he would have done as well as he did by staying and saved both himself and his curate trouble. From his habits of study, his poorer parishioners had got to say of him he had a book-craze, and all errors he committed of omission or commission were excused by them on that plea. They saw him reward the little children at school with tracts addressed to "Women in Childbirth," and heard him preach a sermon to a body of young, active fellows emigrating to New Zealand on "The Utility of Bedridden Old Women."

He himself walked home on such occasions with a placid smile arising from a sense of his well-composed discourse; while the scandalized school-mistress or half-offended congregation excused him on the plea of his having the "book-craze."

Accordingly, when he undertook to guide the new curate over the parish, he took him into that of a neighbour to see the Runic stones half-way up Coynston Hill; and setting out next morning to inspect a chapel-of-ease where duty was sometimes done on a weekday, they found themselves, instead of in the plain little brick building, at the famous church belonging to the living of Peckle, where there is a unique specimen of a double chancel.

Mr. Winspear, the young curate, by no means saw the propriety of studying antiquities when he came in order to be made acquainted with living men and women. He was intent upon his new duties, and finding efforts fruitless to extract either the actual state of things, or the state desired, from the preoccupied brain of Mr. Percy, he wished for nothing more than the end of their walk and to be sole master of the scene.

"Besides," said he to Robert and me, "though I don't care much about what I eat and drink, the old fellow poisons me with fried liver every day. What is the final cause, as he would say, of that fancy?"

Neither of us could tell; especially as Mrs. Percy's table, though very unpretending, was always fit for an emperor, if the emperor had as healthy an appetite as Winspear.

We advised him to ask an explanation; and he afterwards told us that when he proposed the subject at dinner one day, Mr. Percy, collecting what his curate meant with some difficulty I daresay he intruded it into the midst of a dissertation on the marriage-feast of Ataulphus), broke into a real pet on the subject, and causing the cook to be summoned, exclaimed

"What's this Mr. Winspear tells me? I've been eating liver he tells me. How could you let me eat liver? You know I can't bear it; you know how I dislike it."

"It is all you've had for three days," said the cook, her wrath something raised. "You told me yourself, sir, to give it you till further orders, and I've been sending the all over the county for it."

"I could not do that, Anne, since I dislike it so much; and if I did, you ought not to have attended to me," said Mr. Percy, apologetically.

"I shan't another time," said Anne, and flounced out of the room with some words grumbled about "Missus never trusted **him** with anything useful."

It was not till he was just leaving the house to set off on his African journey that Mr. Winspear was witness to any further interview between the master and maid. Then, while the former was looking in a bewildered manner at the list of articles which his servant had given him to take away, a knock at the door heralded in Anne, who, after the pleasant manner of small families, took an interest in her employers which is seldom felt by the members of larger establishments.

"Please sir, give my duty to Mrs. Percy, and I hope Miss Mary is better, and all will come back safe and hearty."

"Thank you, I will indeed."

"And tell her I've put down five dozen eggs and twenty pounds of butter. And sir, now there's only the young gentleman and Amos and me in the house, there'll be nothing fit for the pig to eat; he's too big us; what shall I do with him?"

"Can't you kill him?" said Mr. Percy.

"What, half fat and in October? You might as well throw him away."

"Might I, really?" said Mr. Percy.

"To be sure, it was all very well while we were to be all at home with him, but now he's far too big for our waste meat."

"Oh yes, very likely," said her master.

"But what shall I do with him?" persisted Anne, driving her master to a corner.

"Well," said Mr. Percy, collecting all his wits to bear on this one point "I'll tell you. Mr. Nerood at the farm is always very civil to me; take it over with my compliments, and ask if he'll change it for a little one."

"Lord, sir!" said Anne, and uttered no more on the subject.

Mr. Winspear enjoyed this scene extremely, and came up in the evening to make Robert smile at it.

He was a great addition to our society, and gave my brother one new object in the day to which he could look for some variety in his sick and painful hours. Our new neighbour gladly yielded any assistance he could in this way, and taking an unaffected pleasure in Robert's society, quickly became a fast though a new friend.

He had been accustomed to a large family at home, and he was glad occasionally to exchange his solitary sitting-room for the society of ours, where he would take a book, or talk if we talked, or do such offices for Robert as he permitted, and sometimes Robert was more willing that a stranger should wait upon him than one of his own family.

We soon called our friend by the name which was not his, but which, like most others, was the one he was known by much better than his own. Being christened George, we called him Peter. It was a letter from his sister

accidentally shown to us which made us aware that such was his appellation at home.

This sister, Ruth by name, was one of two daughters of his house, and there were three brothers besides himself. One brother was older than our friend Peter, and two were younger. These two boys and the other sister were children still, and were learning their parts for the world at school, or at home under the mother's eye.

They were not wealthy. Colonel Winspear, to increase his means, had sought and obtained the office of Chief of the County Police, and the income thence arising was more than half of what he had. He was of noble descent, being the uncle of my transient friend, Lord Ennavant. In him all the wealth of the family centred, and his cousins, the sons of Colonel Winspear, had to earn their own living. They were being trained to do so, and the daughters to make the best of the small provision which the father could lay up for them.

The eldest son was in the army, and unluckily, as it seemed, had been placed in a regiment of an expensive class, better fitted for those who are born to waste than to make money. I discovered that his position was one that caused them great anxiety, and even influenced the habits of the family.

Peter had been first led towards his clerical profession by the prospect of a family living, but he had become sincerely attached to its duties, and was happy and useful in exercising them. This was the first time he had been entirely alone and independent in the care of a parish and he enjoyed the sense of a home and responsibilities of his own.

CHAPTER V.

THE first letter from Algiers was looked for with great eagerness. There came one addressed to Robert; just such a one as gave him pleasure. It made him feel himself the good genius of his still darling Mary, the person who all day long was in her thoughts, as doing her good and overruling her destiny.

She was much the better for the change of climate and of scene, and her mother's gratitude was proportionably lively and tender.

Robert was pleased.

"I can be her brother still," said he. "She will love me like a sister, and that will be enough happiness. I could ill endure to see her shrink from me as she did at first; but now, though another must one day be her husband, she will still love her brother Robert."

He pleased himself with these ideas, and writing to Mary or her mother, and receiving their letters, formed an object in the slow moving days.

Another variety in them arose from the acquaintance we made with Winspear's family. Naturally enough they came to see their son and brother keeping house for the first time, to hear him read and preach in his church, and to take a new impression of **him** who had been a child, a schoolboy, and a collegian among them; but was now a teacher, a man amongst men, the head of an independent house however small the house, however limited the occupation.

My first acquaintance with them occurred in so unheroic a manner, that it would not do to form part of a story if it were not true, and if the heroine of it were anything less unapproachable by the ignoble than Ruth Winspear.

The Rectory stood alone in the country, half a mile from the church and from the few scattered houses which formed the village. The approach was down a very steep hill opposite to the one on which the house stood.

I was coming over the brow of this hill when I saw before me signs of an accident an empty carriage, figures about it, and as for the horse I could not make out what had become of it.

I ran on, and as I came near perceived that the horse had fallen as it descended the steep road, and that it was kept from struggling by a young lady, who had adopted the effectual but unheroic method of sitting upon its head.

An elderly lady stood by, half crying, and suggesting modes of proceeding none of which were eligible and few feasible; but I took no time to listen, only hastened at once to begin unbuckling the harness and freeing the horse, exhorting the young lady to keep fast a few moments longer until the horse could struggle with impunity.

When I told her she could leave it, she did so with as much simplicity as if she had been rising from an arm-chair, and handy and active in helping me to get beast free from its trammels, and in holding it by the broken bridle, while I patched the headstall and drew the little carriage on one side.

"Where is your servant?" said I, like a fool. "What can I do for you?"

"Why," began the old lady, "the horse is so quiet, and my daughter likes driving "

"We have not a servant," said the young lady, "but we sent a boy to the Rectory to my brother for help; he will be back directly, I dare say."

"We are going there, to my son's, to stay with him," said the elder lady. "You know Mr. Winspear, I dare say."

"Oh yes I" cried I. "My name is Greswold; perhaps he may have mentioned us. Let me help you, pray. I'll put the hone in again; but I am sorry to say the shaft is broken. Can you walk that little way?"

"I am not very much used to walking exercise," said the elder lady; "but with your arm, I dare say I can manage it. Cannot I, Ruth? Only I'm sorry to give you the trouble."

"I am very glad to take it," said I. "I'll just put my other hand on the bridle."

"No, don't do that," said Miss Winspear. "I can lead the horse; oh, I can do it quite easily."

"Ruth, my love, can you carry my little writing-case? I don't like to leave it here by the road side."

"It will be safe, mother, if we put it into the seat."

"Still I don't quite like."

"Oh, I'll hang it on my finger," said I, taking it up; although then I found it not so very light. However, I put my hand through the strap.

"Now, then!" and we set out; Mrs. Winspear leaning on my arm, and puzzled with the mud; her daughter stepping like Diana free and fair, though she was holding the horse's head to bring it along. I, with an arm soon aching from the heavy box and the shawl which I had also taken charge of, but ready that my fingers should crack before I would let it be seen that they suffered, or that it should be supposed I had not my right arm quite at the service of the tired lady. And so we arrived at my friend's door, who saw us coming up to the house from his study window, and came forth with laughter and with chaff to greet us.

He took the horse from his sister, and bidding us enter the house, led the animal to the stable himself, as there was no one else to do it; but his mother did not like this act to appear (even to me) one of necessity.

"How can Peter be so fond of that horse as to think it necessary to see it taken care of himself?" she said. "Why can't he come and welcome me?"

"He will come as soon as he can," said her daughter. "Perhaps there is nobody belonging to the stable."

"Did not Mr. Percy leave him a groom, do you know?" said Mrs. Winspear. "If we had been aware of that, I think we should hardly have let him take the curacy."

Miss Winspear did not contradict her, the colour mounted into her face slightly, and she asked some trifling question about the garden when her brother broke into the room

"I've just wiped old Rampage over with a wisp of straw till Ralph could leave his job in the garden to attend to him. But don't be uneasy about him, mother; I can do such a turn as that by a horse, and better still, as you very well knew at home. And now, have some tea; I'll call the maid, if she will come. Come along, Ruth, and look at my domestic establishment. I am in want of you to put it in order."

"First, I think," said she, smiling, "you ought to thank Mr. Greswold for his timely help to us."

"So I do," said he, putting his hand on my shoulder. "He's my good friend always, and I forgot civility."

"I want none," said I. "I am very much pleased to have made acquaintance. I hope I may come again, 'since I have had the luck to know you so soon?"

"By all means," said Peter, "come and dine to-morrow. Ruth is so handy and quick that I shall have a clean tablecloth and two or three plates that match by tomorrow."

"That will not require any wonderful dexterity, will it?" said Ruth.

"I am not quite sure," said I; "for the governing spirit here, Mrs. Anne, tyrannizes over your brother tremendously. But I won't keep myself in your way now. Good morning! good morning! Good-bye, Peter. My mother will hope to pay her respects soon."

I went away with a new interest in life. I longed for the hour when I should see Miss Winspear again. I began to count how many hours would intervene before dinner time to-morrow. Surely I had fallen in love?

Yet, the bare foolish thought was presumption! I, a youth, rather younger as I thought than she; a youth, too, with no certain future the evil of which occurred to me strongly to-day; whereas **she** was highly allied and showed it in every moulding of her shape and hue of her colour; and whereas there was a self-possession and a grace about her which no awkward situation could make ridiculous as had been proved to-day, and which would become any graceful and any conspicuous position.

She was poor, however, very evidently; and that was the only comfort. Her father, I had often heard, had much difficulty in meeting the expenses of his large family; and she herself, I could see, was accustomed to lend a hand to the business of living, and freely avowed it.

What would be beneath her notice if her means were like her merits, might be comparative ease under her present circumstances; and if a man offers all he has in the world he can do no more, and he deserves some consideration. But then, was it credible that a creature so invaluable should not be sought by those who had every human advantage to offer her? Would not they lay before her everything I had not, and were there not many already enjoying the advantage of long acquaintance and already seeking to improve it?

Her cousin, for instance, Lord Ennavant. By-the-bye I had heard her father lived in a house belonging to his nephew, and not more than two or three miles from Winspear Castle. No doubt Lord Ennavant must have sought to make himself acceptable to her; perhaps they were half engaged already. But then his habits were improvident, as I knew, and great as was his income, he might have made it impossible for himself to add the expenses of a wife to his establishment.

"Oh, I hope he will ruin himself. I hope he will have to sell Winspear Castle, and be reduced to 50*l.* a year like me. It would be out of the question then to marry her.

"But perhaps her generous nature would induce her all the more to share his poverty if he were brought so low. Only it would be impossible to exist on 50*l.* a year, and he could not work to increase it. I could. I would become clerk to Mr. Hadley; he will soon raise me to 200*l.*, and we will take a house in St. John's Wood, in Primrose Row, where they have gardens before the houses.

"What nonsense!" cried I, aloud, when my thoughts had silently run on to this point, and were interrupted by the necessity of passing a gate which stood in my way. "This is real dreaming. If I had been asleep and arrived at hiring a house to live in with Ruth Winspear, I should have been dreaming a ridiculous dream; and so I have been now. What absurdity!"

And brushing along, I soon reached my own home, and went in to tell my people of my new acquaintance.

Robert heard me and smiled.

"Describe them to me," said he, "since they have left so strong an impression, for must be some time before they will come to my sick-room to see me. First tell us about the mother."

"Oh, she is short and all out of shape, like an elderly woman past stays-time. She wore a very white, neat cap round her face and a black bonnet with very clean strings; she had got a kind of holiday gown, black and white in checks, but she did not hold it out of the mud; and she talked a little grand, but more as if she had in some far back ages been really grand than as if she only copied it. I think, however, she is rather a foolish old woman."

"With a sensible daughter?" said Robert.

"Yes, but with very easy sense; pliable sense, that could be nonsensical. You can't think how lightly she could meet Peter's high spirits."

"That's good," said Robert; "and she is good-looking, too, you say. What does she look like?"

"She looks a sort of princess, though I don't know why. A stature of five feet six or so, shoulders which throw her shawl into long lines, and a waist which brings the puckers of her gown down to a point, should belong to a princess."

"What a strange sort of shawl and gown you are talking about!" said my sister; "and what do you mean by puckers?"

"I understood him quite well," said Robert; "and then?"

"Then her nose is fine, and her nostrils well marked, her hair waves across her forehead, her eyebrows are like clear lines drawn by a fine brush; she reefed her gown through two loops in two seconds, and the petticoat underneath was dark grey. It just came down above her ankles and her small thick boots. She looked as if I had done her a small service which was her due, and for which she was obliged, but not much obliged."

Robert and my mother laughed.

"You are in love, John," said the latter.

"I begin to think so," said I.

"Yes," said Robert, "she is your loadstone. It does not matter what she is, she captivates you. After all your admiration, you don't think her very handsome, I believe."

"Well, I really think I do not," I said, reverting in my own mind to Mary, the most lovely, the most perfect beauty my eyes ever beheld; "but her figure is perfect, and her face agrees with her figure better than any other possibly could. I don't think she would be so beautiful if she were handsomer."

"All right," said Robert; "I must see her some day."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next evening I went with great expectations of pleasure to dine at the Rectory. I had done so before with my friend alone, certainly there had been great room for improvement in his circumstances. The dirty girl (Mrs. Anne's subordinate) who brought in dinner, the untidy dinner and torn tablecloth, the table set crooked to the wall, the bread forgotten, had made us laugh, but were very uncomfortable.

To-day, however, as Winspear took delight observe, all was amended. I smelt flowers as soon as the sitting-room door opened; and when we went in to dinner, all was unobservably neat, if it had not been for the remarkable untidiness with which it contrasted.

"See," said Peter to me, "what active fingers have mended the holes, wiped the dust, roasted "

"They have done none of these things," said Ruth; "all my merit lies in overthrowing the despot downstairs."

"It is good-natured of you, my love," said Mrs. Winspear, "to exert yourself in the house as you have done to-day."

"Don't I always, dear mother?" said Ruth. "Thanks to you, none of us have learned to be idle."

"No, indeed," said the son; "and, mother, you must leave Ruth with me till she has **reduced** my shirts and tablecloths, that Swiss governess used to say when lessons were over. *Reduisez vos livres, Ma'mselle.*"

This turned the conversation from domestic economy to misused idioms, a change which Ruth seemed very glad to promote, and on which subject we all had an anecdote or two to relate.

Mrs. Winspear was very well bred and well mannered, only a little nervous about being undervalued as to her position in life; therefore, whatever adventitious circumstances could throw that into sunshine, she inclined to avail herself of them.

In a pause of conversation therefore, she said, addressing her son

"I find, George, that your cousin and Lady Ennavant are come back to Winspear Castle. Have you seen them?"

"No; but they have been at home six weeks. They are going to give a great ball," said he. "Somebody told me who

was going there."

"Really!" cried his mother, in a tone of deadly surprise; then recovering a little, she added, "True, I think we did hear something of it; did not we, Ruth?"

"No, I think not," said Ruth, gently. "You did not mention it to me at all events."

"Oh, it's quite a new idea," said Peter; "his mother has got a niece she wants to amuse, and Ennavant was willing enough to do so in this manner."

"Is she pretty?" said I.

"Who? the niece! I'm sure I can't tell; I don't even know who she is. Why do wish to know?"

The hope had struck me that perhaps she might captivate her host, and so bar Ruth's way to her cousin's heart. I said no more.

"It's Miss Styles, I dare say," said Mrs. Winspear; "her sister's girl. She might have done as much for her husband's niece. I think."

"Oh, no; that's not likely," said Ruth.

"She is very fond of you, my dear," answered the mother; "and she said to me how like you were to your poor uncle, the last lord."

"Is the castle a fine place?" I asked Ruth.

"Yes," said Ruth, "very."

"I hear they give many great things there," I went on. "Are they well done?"

"I never was at one," said Ruth.

"Have you never been at the Castle fêtes my dear?" cried her mother. "I'm sure you've been asked often enough."

"Have I?" said Ruth. "At all events I never went."

"And yet your aunt is so fond of you."

"Is she? Oh, she is very civil always."

"That she is; driving over to see us, and that sort of thing."

"Ay," said Peter, "once in two years at least."

"Much oftener than that," said the mother.

Ruth seemed anxious to drop the subject. She had a degree of sincerity in her composition which rejected all false appearances as the sun melts snow and leaves the thing covered bare.

However, she did not seem to consider it necessary to unveil everybody else, and preferred getting rid of an uneasy subject to exposing its deformity.

On this occasion she suggested to her mother to move into the dining-room, and promised to make some coffee with her own hands by the time we followed. When Peter and I were alone he came back to the subject of the ball, and said he fancied there was an invitation impending, but he thought Ruth would enjoy it so much that he would not hint it, lest he should be mistaken. He had met Lord Ennavant, who was with foxhounds, trotting through a wood which he himself was crossing on foot. The meeting was but for a minute, but as his cousin put his horse in motion again, he had turned round in his saddle, and cried

"You are coming to our ball, are not you?"

Winspear answered, "Am I?"

He shouted back, "All of you." "And," continued Winspear to me, "if he thinks of it again, we shall all have invitations; but he is as thoughtless as a grasshopper, and may very likely remember neither it nor us any more."

"I knew him once," said I; "I was very near going abroad with him; but he has taken no notice of me since."

"Because he has forgotten you. If he met you, he would take you up at the very point where you parted. Where did you know him?"

"Accidentally, at poor old Mr. Pyppe's. You know Pyppe was his man of business."

"Oh, true; well, I wish he would send you a card too. I say **too**, but I've no confidence in one myself yet."

As for me, I found myself wishing no card might come for anybody, neither for them nor me.

It made me uneasy (especially as I had no right whatever to be so), to think other people proffering admiration, and occupying Ruth's thoughts with their splendour or their wit. If she should go I felt she must be the first object there, and what place could I keep in her thoughts under such circumstances!

Nothing more was said on the subject, however, and I went home more thoughtful and restless than I had ever been before, at least than I had ever been when there was no occasion whatever to be so.

Next day I made my mother and sister come with me to call at the Rectory. The first thing I saw on the table was a card with "Lady Ennavant requests the pleasure, &c. &c." Mrs. Winspear called my attention to it.

"I knew, of course, we should have our card as soon as possible, and I am glad for Ruth's sake. I never go to such things, but she will have her father and brother."

"I am glad; yes," said Ruth to me; "I like dancing. It comes because I was certain it would not come."

"Why should you have supposed that?" said her mother. "Of course I was perfectly aware you would be at your own aunt's ball."

This was a flourish for my mother, who cared nothing at all about it. My sister was more on the alert.

"Is your dress made?" said she.

"I have not thought about it yet. The letter is but just come."

"But you wont have much time," said my sister. "I know the ball is fixed for the 10th, and this is the 3rd. How odd to invite people so late for a ball!"

"Oh," said Ruth, "I daresay most of the cards have been sent out long ago, but perhaps they did not think of us till yesterday."

"People take liberties with their own relations," said Mrs. Winspear. "However, you must set about your preparations, for your aunt would be dreadfully disappointed if you were not there."

"Can't you trust your dressmaker?" said my sister, rather grandly.

"That is myself," said Ruth.

"How very clever!" my sister began. "I daresay you do it better than " but Miss Winspear interrupted her.

"Not at all," said she; "it is merely necessary. I should prefer employing a dressmaker of course, but it suits me best to do things myself. Can one buy tarlatan and ribbon in your town here?" she added; and the two girls fell into conversation about shops and prices. I could hear Ruth's sweet calm voice deciding upon whatever was economical, and never for an instant giving in to the traps for vanity and love of seeming well with the world, which my sister's share of those articles laid for her. Even in the buying of a ball gown she was doing all things "decently and in order."

For the two next days, I saw the little drawing-room at the Rectory encumbered with a white, gauzy-looking material at which Miss Winspear sewed and hemmed, looping it up here and folding it there, while we talked or read; no notice was taken of her work, and if there was any household matter wanted arrangement the work was laid aside in a moment.

"It is nothing very exquisite," said she, smiling at the admiration I expressed one evening. "It is the plainest thing, to look well at all, that I could get; and I have doubts at times whether it **will** look well after all. You think it very fine, but remember your own ignorance of such woman's work," she added, smiling at me.

"Are not **you** going to the ball?" said the old lady; "you know my nephew, I think. Why don't you go?"

"I would, if he asked me," I said.

"Well, but surely I might very well write a word, and request a card for you," said she. "It is no such great favour to ask an invitation for a young man."

"No, it's no favour at all," said George.

"Well, then, really I think I will. Don't you think so, Ruth?"

"Indeed, mother, I hardly do. Their ball is no affair of ours; we have no right to make it an occasion for obliging our friends."

"Not much of an oblige," Mrs. Winspear began. But George broke in "Perhaps Ruth is right?" and I eagerly added "I am sure she is quite right not to ask anybody anything is the cleanest way;" at which the lovely Ruth smiled at me, and I was a thousand times more obliged to her, than to her mother for her offers of a whole evening's amusement.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT the ball engagement was foreign to the chief matters which interested the Winspear ladies. The real interest related to the employment of the son and brother whom they had come to visit.

Ruth had never inhabited a clergyman's house before, and though in all kindly country houses there is an intimate connexion between the rich and the poor, she had to learn how nearly this connexion is drawn when they stand in the relation of pastor and people.

Being new to her, she took a pride and a delight in seeing her brother appealed to, as the friend of all occasions; not as the richer man whose purse was thought of, but as the wiser, kinder, better man, to act for them and with them. She stood by silently when the walk they were taking together was interrupted by a peasant, to say he had a sick child, and the doctor said "it was bound to die; would his Reverence please to come and comfort its mother?"

Or another had a son come home, "unexpected, as had given his mother and him a deal of trouble. Perhaps if Mr. Winspear spoke to him he would take thought and mend," like Burns' auld Nicky Ben. Ruth's hand was ready with her slender purse, but her brother silently withheld her; he would not be looked upon as money by his people. And then she would heartily adopt his views and content herself with employing her skilful fingers with desultory works for their benefit; or would take her tin case, inclosed in its wicker basket, with some small delicacy for a sickly appetite. Often I met her carrying this prettily-shaped basket, and if possible, got permission to relieve her of it, and waited at a distance to join her again accidentally, as I pretended, when she should have finished her errand at the cottage.

She did not forbid me. I almost wished she had given permission less willingly. For a young man's ambition is not limited to be looked upon no better than a dog who has been taught to run after one with a stick in its mouth.

Ruth had pleasure in all that wore the appearance of duty refined from self. Her brother told me, laughingly, how glad she was one stormy night when he was summoned after midnight to give a pastoral blessing to a little life, just born to die again, and whom, "in such times of extremity," he received suddenly into holy church.

Another day he learned that fever was in the house of one of his parishioners, and he called Ruth aside to tell her he was going thither himself, but she should neither accompany him nor mention the fact to his mother. "She thought it probable I should be catch the fever," he went on, and answered "No, I'll say nothing, for fear you should be prevented from going." "I really wished," added Peter, "that there had been some danger, that I might have acted up to the brave answer."

A brave, a quiet, a generous spirit, indeed she had, clothed in a body as noble as itself. I loved her over well before I was aware of it. An incident occurred which further set forth her gentle and generous qualities.

It chanced that in one of the cottages belonging to my brother there lived a widow who had been a servant in Colonel Winspear's family, and had been present at Ruth's birth, and had the charge of her childish years. She was a friend and favourite of Ruth, and when she married the man who had occupied this cottage, she came into our parish charged with many a token of the good-will of her young mistress.

Yet fortune had not proved kind to her in her further life. If any one might be called unlucky, indeed, it was this poor woman. As she gained a blessing, so she lost it. The husband whose industry at first provided a comfortable home for her and the children she bore, suffered the bankruptcy of the poor, the loss of health; and their state of ease and sufficiency changed at once, as the rich man's luxuries do when his ships founder and his banks break. Instead of enjoying independence they had to be thankful for charity; and finally he died, leaving her alone to provide for the subsistence of their family.

She worked hard, but did not prosper. She suffered from her over-exertions, and had to undergo torments of bodily pain from the irritated nerves of her head, under which infliction, however, there was no relaxation from the necessity of labour. Neither was there a change in her downward fortunes. This poor head of hers made certain sounds intolerable; that is, as intolerable as things can be to those who have little means of escaping the necessity of tolerating. And once when a wandering minstrel, with his German pianoforte and its dancing figures, was performing before her door, she took him out a halfpenny to beg him to relieve her of the sounds, telling how and why they aggrieved her. He stopped to recommend a nostrum, and while she listened as people in pain will listen to the promise of ease, a bright light flashed on her from her cottage door and window, and rushing back she found that the draught of the door had drawn the clothes she had been drying into the flames, and her poor house and all the property it contained was destroyed.

This is but an example of her bad luck.

She had two sons who left her early to get their own living; like heroes they got out to the mining districts, to fight with and take prisoner the great potentate Money, but an accident befell the youngest, and the eldest had enough to do to supply him with lodging, food, and doctors' stuff. Meantime the giant whom they went out to conquer escaped; and in return for their time and labour expended, they came home at last no better off, nay not so well as if they had sat in idleness all that time by the cottage hearth. With ragged clothes, with enfeebled bodies, with little debts, they wanted assistance from the patient mother to whom they had hoped to bring it. But she was thankful to share with her boys the pittance of her labour.

We, at the squirealty, had come to their assistance, and done them what kindness we could the best being that the two sons were at last employed as waggoners on the homefarm.

But in no long time trouble came again to the door. The eldest son, who had behaved so well to his brother in his illness, was not a perfect character for all that. He did wrong about the horses under his care, and when reproved used as bad words to the bailiff as the bailiff did to him. He was instantly dismissed; there was no room for repentance; the unpardonable sin had been committed.

Then he fell on his mother's hands again, and though he tried many ways of living, never prospered; till at last both brothers went off again to the coal-mines, and here they gained a living, and were able to bring back assistance from time to time to the submissive and uncomplaining cottage.

Things looked well again therefore; one afternoon during the time when Ruth and her mother were paying their visit to the Vicarage, a rumour came, changed soon after to a certainty, that the Widow Morgan's two sons had been killed in an explosion of mines where they worked.

She lived in an out-of-the-way cottage, had suffered this misery some days before was known to us. We learned at the same time that the poor woman had instantly upon hearing of the catastrophe set out for the scene, of it, and had returned the evening previous to this very day. My mother dispatched me to her to find out if any relief in her power was available; and I willingly undertook the errand, interested both by my human feelings and my curiosity in this deep tragedy.

Two of her kindly neighbours were with her, and, seeing me coming up the cottage garden, met me, excited to tears by the dismal scene, yet treating my expressions of sympathy in it as if, because I was richer than they, it was a good action in me to feel what they themselves felt so deeply. They said that several of the widow's neighbours had accompanied her on her journey to the scene of her sons' death and burial; among them were their two selves.

"And William and John Edwards went," said they; "and poor Hannah's sister's son, James Farr, and his wife; we could not do less than see them buried, poor fellows, and the widow took it very respectful to go to the funeral."

I followed the women into the house, and there the bereaved mother rose at my entrance and saluted me with her respectful curtsey, just as if she were not raised by grief above all human distinction. The habit of respect was stronger than the absorbing passion of her sorrow, but indeed daily and hourly patience formed a cloak around her feelings and their expression. She spoke calmly at first of her calamity, and I did not know how to express my intense sympathy so as to release her from her oppressive calm. It was almost spectral to hear her answering my questions so coldly, and entering into details the farthest from the rich man's life, but prominent to the poor man from the habitual necessity of poverty.

"Whose colliery was it?" I asked.

"Mr. Unwin's," said one of the neighbours.

"No, Mary," interposed the bereaved mother; "it was some new man's, if you recollect, for they said the new collieries had made agreement not to pay for coffins, only to give the wood."

"Ay, true; that made it so costly," answered the neighbours.

"Did it cost you a good deal of money?" said I, my heart smiting me to think that a trouble of that kind should be added to the one great grief.

"Indeed, sir, it did. After wood is bought for the coffin, there's ten shillings for the carpenter, and then there's trimmings cost thirty shillings."

"Trimmings?" said I, doubtful of her meaning.

"It's the handles and the cloth," said the neighbour.

"And then," went on the widow, "there's ten shillings for laying out; and two shillings the clergyman's fee, and for the bearers' rum and beer four shillings. That's their custom in that country; they are a funny people, not a bit like we."

"And, poor fellows," said I, "did they leave nothing behind which could assist you in these expenses?"

"Well, sir, very nigh nothing. It's hard to judge; I'm to judge no man, but I do think there ought to have been more. They were not spenders, and when they were home last July they had six pounds, and now but eight shillings."

"That was cruel, if indeed anyone took it. I can help you a little in that part of your trouble. I wish I could do better than that."

And I put money into her hand, feeling all the time that I had best go away, for her eyes, though so dry now, were red and swollen with having cried, and her face was as pale as though no blood had ever been there.

"Many thanks, sir, and God give you never to want it!" said the widow; and at that moment a gentle knock was heard at the door, and the latch being noiselessly raised, there entered, swift yet silent, Ruth herself.

"Oh, Hannah!" she said, catching hold of the poor woman's hands.

"Miss Ruth Miss Ruth!" cried the widow; "how kind of you to come! Everybody is kind to me."

"Everybody would be kind if they could," said Ruth; "everybody knows what trouble you are in. And you went all that way, did you, Hannah? you so ill, too!"

"Oh, Miss Ruth, I never felt my head after Farr came in and told me that terrible tale; I got up and went straight away, to be in time to see them once more if I could; but no. They told me about it, though."

"How was it? dear Hannah, tell me how."

"Oh, Miss Ruth, it was pitiful. George was found lying with his hand under his head, taken, they thought, at his last stroke of work. And Jem, poor fellow, he seemed to have run; his two arms were bent upwards from the elbow, on his breast, not crossed, this wise." And as she brought the image before herself in words and signs, it acted with all the force of actual presence, and she broke from her unnatural quiet.

"Oh, my poor lads, my poor lads! to think of his dear hands that way, poor fellow, poor fellow!" and she burst into a passion of tears, and flung herself upon the wooden screen-seat.

Ruth sat down close to her and caressed her hands, tears in the meantime filling her eyes, and her voice broken with emotion.

"It is dreadful oh! it is, indeed! let her cry, poor soul, poor dear Hannah!" said she to the women who tried to compose her.

"Ay, do; do let me. I can't keep it always down. My trouble is more than I can bear. I read in the Bible that God does not try us beyond our strength, but my trouble is too hard for me."

"Not too hard to be borne," said Ruth, very gently; "but too hard both to bear and to be quiet. You can't help crying: don't try; try only to bear."

"Thank you, thank you, Miss Ruth! you know what sorrow is, dear soul! Yes, I must bear, but I don't know how; I'm set in the midst of my trouble and I can't get away I must go through."

"You was all quiet just now," said Mary Maynard; "I thought you was getting better."

"Oh, Mary! all are very kind to me, and some don't talk of my trouble for fear of hurting me; but I never see one come in but I say to myself, Will this one listen to me about my poor dear boys, for they are lying on my heart, as if they kept it from beating?"

"And they were such good sons," said Ruth.

"Oh, they was, indeed," said the mother. "'Jem,' he said to them he lodged with once, 'I do believe I've the best mother as ever was born. I'd sooner go home to our old mother than take holiday in London's self.' Ah, my boys! they can't say that now. Their coming home is never to be."

"Alas! never, never!" said Ruth; "you have had that happiness, and though it is gone it is better to remember it than never to have been so happy."

"So it is, Miss Ruth. I would not forget them, to sing and laugh again, like your own little sister. And **they** can't have forgot me, neither; one minute they were loving me, and the next they could not have forgotten me. I thought of that when I came back here alone last night. They would be very fain to say, Good-bye, mother. I burned a candle quite to the end, and if they had come in at the door I should not have been afraid to see them in the least."

"You can remember them, at all events," said Ruth; "you can never forget them till you meet them where there will be no good-bye."

"Oh yes, that's a good word, my darling Miss Ruth; it just falls on the right place. They're safe, aren't they? though they had not time for one prayer. My dear George, my dear George, he was taken at the last stroke of his work; but the Lord is merciful, he is."

"And he is just," said Ruth; "they were about their lawful work. It was no fault of theirs that they passed away so suddenly."

"Yes, indeed, and I have so longed to speak with his Reverence, and ask him, was they not safe? Do you think, would he come and see me some time?"

"Oh, I am sure he will, directly," said Ruth. "I will tell him you want to see him when I go home."

"When it don't trouble him; and meantime I'll be humble. There's been as bad sufferers as me. Job was a better Christian than me, and he lost everything, and still said 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

There was a temporary lull in her anguish, and though no doubt it would return black and fearful as ever, yet she had known some ease and was the better for it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE evening was growing late, and Ruth had more than a mile to go to the Vicarage. She rose to depart.

"I'll come again to-morrow, Hannah. I am so very sorry for you, that I can't but think of you, and come to you. Good night, and God bless you!"

"Bless you too!" said the widow; "you were always comfort and kindness. Good night. But, dear Miss Ruth, it's over late you to be walking alone. I'd have sent my poor boy with you a week ago; but I'm nothing now; I'm alone; I'm nothing."

"Nay, nay," said Ruth; "you have not lost quite all. Are we not all your friends?"

"Oh, over kind; over kind, indeed. Mr. Greswold and all; ye've been very kind to me."

"I should be glad if I could be so," said I.

"Oh, sir, you could do something for me if you would."

"What?" I asked eagerly.

"What I could have told my poor boys to do. Just see my poor lady safe to her own home, sir."

"If I may " I began, looking at Ruth; but by a sign she asked me to say nothing, and, tenderly bidding the widow good-bye, left the cottage.

I followed Ruth from the door, and walked in silence at her side.

"You were right not to contradict her in anything," said Ruth; "though it is an idle fear she has."

Ruth was agitated, and occupied by the scene she had witnessed, and had no thought of any further or other interest than that immediately before her. She talked of it with a full heart, and I felt myself engaged with her in a

private conversation which she and I alone understood. It took me by surprise, and gave my growing love material to feed upon. I had gained so much by it, that I wanted to grasp much more, and felt as if I could advance into the very depths of her confidence.

"How well you know," I said, "the way to enter into that poor woman's feelings how they were relieved when you came to her!"

"That's because I do so intensely feel for her. Who could see such passion and not understand within themselves what it is?"

"But you also are so skilful in getting at those feelings. You know exactly the things that ought to be said."

"Skilful is not the word, is it?" said Ruth.

"I am sure I used no skill. I only felt what she felt."

"But all people cannot do that. They feel only what they themselves feel."

"Even that is better than nothing," said Ruth smiling.

"Indeed I fear it is too much for some," I answered "some who have heavy burthens hidden in their own hearts, and will let nothing appear."

"And they are quite right. The less the better," said Ruth.

"But what pain they inflict on others by that means; for is it not relief and ease to those others when they are allowed to partake the griefs of the persons in whom they are interested?"

"If they have any right to expect it," said Ruth, gravely.

"At what price could one purchase that right too dearly?" said I.

Ruth was silent for a minute, then said

"I believe you are alluding to what poor Hannah said to me about troubles of my own. It is best to speak plainly. Of course everybody has some evil in his fortune, but whatever it be it is best hidden. It would soon magnify itself if it were paraded before the eye of the world. Let us think of this poor woman. I must tell my brother about her."

She talked with me less easily from this time till we reached her door. I went with her into the house, and accounted for my presence to her mother, by my desire to see her safe home again. I had that uneasy feeling which most of us know, I suppose, of having by the last mismanaged moments spoiled an hour which had passed prosperously and successfully, and instead of resting happily on the hour, I had to repair the moments.

"I hope this late walk," I said, "will do you no harm. I shall call to-morrow and ask how you are."

"Now I am?" said Ruth. "Oh, I am sure to be well. I am always well."

My friend Peter took up the word and repeated

"Ride next morn, three counties o'er,
The ball's fair partner to behold,
And humbly hope she took no cold."

Peter said this with a friendly smile. I laughed also, but went away a little vexed.

I did not go to the Vicarage the next day, and thought it best not to do so; but I went the day after, fearing that they might observe I was staying away. When I entered the drawing-room, two days from this time, I perceived there was an addition to the party in the person of a young and very handsome man, to whom Mrs. Winspear introduced me as her eldest son. He was, as I have said, a soldier, and notwithstanding the sober fortunes of the family, belonged to a regiment of very expensive habits. I was sorry he was come, for I expected him to break into the simple way of life which we all were sharing together, and into the very quiet modes of passing time which were found full of contentment by us, but were hardly likely to satisfy him. However, his manner gave no such indication.

He did not join in the conversation, nor refuse it, if addressed to him. He seemed to wish humbly to be quiet, the very last phase of character I should have attributed to him.

Our talk wandered to the ball, the day for which was now approaching, and Mrs. Winspear inquired of her eldest son whether he were going or not.

"No, indeed!" said he. "They did send me a card; but I would as soon work in the treadmill."

"Are you so *blasé* as that?" said Peter.

"Not I; I hate that affectation. But the ball would be odious to me. I would go if it were a duty; but one is welcome to be miser-able on duty; and one must grin in a pleasure party."

Ruth looked gravely and sadly at her brother.

Mrs. Winspear was less discreet.

"My dearest son," she said, "it breaks my heart to hear you talk so. If I could find the means to be of use to you I would give my life for them "

"No, no, there's no help. It's my own fault "

"Not yours; it's been a mistake. Your father thought "

But here Ruth broke in, to stop the inroad making into private matters before a stranger.

"Look here, Walter," she said to her eldest brother, "give me your advice you who see all sorts of pretty things. Shall I put blue bows here, or not? This is my dress for the ball, to which I am not so indifferent as you."

"Pshaw! put away your frippery," said Peter, "and come and walk. Walter, do come too. It's a glorious day, is it not?" he asked of me.

"Yes, indeed; just warmly cold, like the best of winter."

"Come on, then come on," he said; and Ruth went for her cloak and bonnet.

"John," said Peter to me, "I'll tell you the truth. Do not make one of our walk to-day. We are full of family talk."

"Yes, yes," I answered. "Thank you for speaking plainly. I'm off."

"Wait a moment till Ruth is ready. Don't be in a hurry. There come as far as the garden gate, John."

The home of Mrs. Winspear and of Ruth was near Castle Winspear, whereas our home and the Vicarage were at the distance of about ten miles; however, it was settled that Ruth and her brother should go over from the Vicarage, as they were to stay with Lady Ennavant.

Accordingly, the day before the ball, the brother and sister set out in the little carriage (the shaft of which had been mended by the time), with old Rampage to draw it. I was very uneasy on account of their visit; for I began to dislike every thing and person which changed in any way my relations to Ruth. If I could have thought she would remember that I was absent, if I could have hoped that she would have wished I was present, I should not have minded the short separation, but was over-certain that for me to be away no change in her enjoyment.

With this want of ease in my head, I longed to say something or other, no matter what, to her before she left the place where we had been together; I wished for some sign of friendship or good-will, be it ever so slight, to keep for her sake in my thoughts while she was absent; and in order to have a chance of obtaining it, I took my way on the day and rather before the hour when they were to set out, along the road they would have to follow, and I almost persuaded myself that my object was to look at a young plantation of my brother's, which, however, could not possibly be benefited by looks of mine.

All the while my ear was acutely attentive to every sound behind me which seemed like that of approaching wheels. Many of us know what it is to listen for and hear such sounds, and to find them bring only the butcher's cart, or some tedious old man and woman taking their airing. We have begun to think the beloved carriage must after all have passed already, and all chance be over for that day; and just then perhaps a turn in the road has revealed the one vehicle worth seeing coming in actual personality, and the heart has been glad while the face assumed a due indifference, and the step went doggedly forward as though a meeting were quite the most unexpected thing that could have happened.

So it was with me to-day. Winspear's voice roused me (as I feigned to myself) from ambulatory musing.

"Where am I going? Oh, there's the young spinny just beyond, you know, which Robert planted afresh I'm going there. I'm glad, Miss Winspear, the afternoon is so fine. Shall you come back on Saturday?"

"I believe so," said Ruth.

"But **you** must come back for Sunday, must not you?" I asked, hoping that her brother's return must involve hers.

"Oh yes," he answered, "of course. Tell me, John, which way is best to go through the forest or over the hill? Which is shortest?"

"The hill, certainly; that is, if you must pass through Kreuthurst to get to the Castle. But I was never so far as that."

"Ay, ay; we will go that way; I wish Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Ruth; and these half-dozen words, indeed they were but five, were all I got from her in return for all my walk and waiting, and delight to see her carriage coming at last.

Peter, I believe, was going to say, "I you were coming too," but felt it more civil to say nothing. He did not forget me, however; for next morning, while I was uneasily thinking how Ruth was about to be surrounded all day by admiring friends and strangers, the servant gave me a letter, brought, he said, by a groom who did not know whether an answer was expected or not, and I felt there was a great rise in the world for me; it must be it was an

invitation to the house where Ruth was a guest. Such, in fact, were its contents.

"DEAR GRESWOLD,

"If you knew where I was, why did you come to look for me? To tell truth, I had forgotten you were so near a neighbour. Let us see you to-night, if you can manage it, at my mother's ball. She says I can't ask you to sleep, for the house is full; but you mind the drive, I hope.

"Yours,

"ENNAVANT."

I mind a drive, when by it I should pass in evening in Ruth's company, and perhaps have the bliss of once, at least, dancing with her! No, indeed.

CHAPTER IX.

A BALL, when you are in the middle of it, is a very fine thing, but the approaches to it, and some of the circumstances that hang about it, are often but ill-conditioned appendices. That particular night, when I had to drive ten miles in a gig, wrapped up to preserve my dress in neat condition, the rain was coming down in a steady pour, the sky was covered with clouds, and a cold wind blew in my face. I took a young lad out of the stables, and drove one of the old carriage horses, and set forth in better heart at the beginning of the drive, than after I had spent an hour and a half in silence, darkness, wet, and cold.

I missed my way twice towards the end of the drive, and, as if ten miles were not enough, had to retrace my steps, and do at least two that were supererogatory. At last I got into sight of my fellow-creatures. Carriages passed me, and some few I passed. Here was a chariot with the windows up, rolling behind post-horses whose speed was a mere matter of course to the inmates. There was a vehicle with the head up, crowded with cloaks, while the one horse was come to a stand-still on the hill, and the men of the party were all trying to lug it by the head and push it by the wheel into motion. No doubt they would succeed in time, and I had too much to do myself to stop and offer any succour to them.

I pressed forward, therefore, as best I could, and took the back way to the Castle, in order to provide by personal exertion some shelter for my horse and boy, who, I felt, were likely to be overlooked among statelier claimants.

Here indeed was no holiday scene. The great stables, it is true, were lighted and filled to repletion by horses which were friends with the Castle horses, but outside stood rows of drenched animals with drooping heads, accustomed to patience, and exercising it plentifully that night. The place swarmed with servants who, having more sense than their beasts, each one tried to make his own self comfortable; and who, wherever there was a shelter took possession; wherever there was a cask of ale, seized a draught; wherever tobacco could be smoked, smoked tobacco.

I think nobody should give a *fête* who has not the power, and who does not also exercise that power, of making it no purgatory for the servants and animals concerned. Probably the household of my host was one good not governed by the strict rules of management; at all events, on the present occasion there was a disorder, in the midst of which I found a bribe the only method which secured my old horse and little groom a shelter, and even that, I fear, was purchased at the expense of some similar pair who had not a master with half-a-crown to throw

away; a fear which disturbed me several times that night when in illuminated rooms, and amidst luxurious appliances, I heard bursts of the storm against the windows and long blasts of the wind howling round the walls.

However, it was not long before I myself was housed in the warmth and splendour of the *fête*. Lady Ennavant received her guests with so much courtesy that each one thought she distinguished him among the mass, and that she knew the place he came from, and the reason she had had for inviting him. I myself was under the delusion for a minute, and thought her son had spoken well of me perhaps, and had mentioned our name as an old one in the county. But I believe I was quite mistaken, for whereas she had bowed to me most hospitably, and said she was delighted to see Mr. Greswold, next time I happened to pass her with no announcement of my name, she smiled and bowed hospitably again, and said she was delighted to see Mr. Ransom. But this was all very natural and me the satisfaction of seeing a bit of Life's Comedy acted before me, in addition to the amusement I was about to partake as an actor myself.

On I went, therefore, on my discovery voyage through the illuminated scene, with one object as the Pharos by which I wished to steer. I surveyed every group of dancers, to find Ruth Winspear, for I knew she must be where the most coveted partners were to be found, and I envied those who had a right to invite her to dance. Still I did not see her, and at last I drew back under a gallery, purposing to stand while the tide swelled and ebbed till she should at last emerge from it; and here while I looked on I felt at last a hand laid on my shoulder, and turning saw it was Winspear himself who had then called my attention; and his beloved sister, unclaimed by any one else, was holding his arm.

I felt the blood rush into my face at the unexpected sight. A thrill of pleasure ran through all my frame, that Ruth should be neglected and that my homage therefore was not wholly without value. Whatever value it might have, I wished for nothing so much as to lay it all and instantly before her, and to save her as far as its small worth could save her from feeling herself overlooked.

"I am charmed to have found you," I said. "I was looking for you everywhere; the evening has been pleasant now, whatever happens in the end, for I have met with the persons I wanted to see."

Ruth laughed. "You can see **us** at home," she said. "You must look out for others and more remarkable here."

"If I may stay by you, and you will point them out."

"Oh, stay by all means," said Peter. "Whom do you know?"

"Nobody," I said, "except the master of the house himself. That's he, is it not, for it is a long time since I have seen him?"

"Yes, and he guesses it's you; he is coming to you."

And accordingly Lord Ennavant turned through the crowd toward us.

"Mr. Greswold, is it not?" said he, somewhat doubtfully but cordially, in case he should be right, and then as he asked my name he went on

"You are a good fellow to have come on such short notice; you knew I should be glad to see you, though I confess to have been a long time saying so but you forgive me, and believe me. So all's right."

"Certainly, and thank your much."

"My cousin here said your family was squire to him; and then I was quite amazed at myself for not having found you out sooner. But your brother does not go out yet?"

"Not yet; but he is better. I hope he will be able to enjoy life again in some degree."

"I hope so; a fine, gallant soldier! he is very well known in the county. Tell him I hope he will receive me some day."

"Oh, most certainly. He will be very happy."

"And you, what have you been doing since you lost your journey, and, as I heard, threw away your fortune too? That was an action beyond me. I am too poor to give up 3000*l.* a year. If it had been offered me, my debts would all have cried out like harpies and swallowed the morsel whole; but you having no debts could afford to cast it from you for a high point of honour."

"I've almost forgotten it now," I said, "I should not like to think I might have kept it honourably."

"You took the safe side, at all events," said he; "but why don't you dance? Will not my fair cousin do you the honour?"

"May I venture to ask it?" I said, very deferentially.

"Oh, yes," said Ruth, carelessly.

"And I hope," said Lord Ennavant to her, "you will engage yourself to me for the first round dance after supper."

"Yes, I will," said Ruth, a little coldly; but the happiness was mine now, as I actually led her towards the dancers; and as she in the ordinary way, but to me it seemed a thing to be remembered for ever, just raised her arm that I might put my hand on her waist, and laid one hand on my shoulder, giving the other into the grasp of mine, I thought "kings may be blessed, but **John** was glorious;" yet even in this first shudder of happiness I was also somewhat occupied with what Lord Ennavant had said to me. It brought upwards in my mind a subject which had gone by, and to which I thought myself very indifferent; but I was conscious now that I wished Winspear and his sister had taken notice of what our host said, and inquired into it; for I felt it was creditable to me, and I said or thought to myself,

"Whatever some people do of right is noised abroad, and carried to their credit; and let others do whatever they will it soaks in, and nobody thinks anything of it."

Now among my acquaintance I had the character of a modest and simple-minded man, but see how much the contrary it was with me internally!

And now the waltz having ceased, an acquaintance came to ask Ruth to dance the "Lancers," and rather than lose sight of her, I did not engage any one as partner, but stood watching her graceful and sensible Ways.

Some of the young men were gay and excited, and though they did no more than joy and health prompted, their movements were more like high spirits than like the business of dancing. One or two of the girls imitated them, stamping and leaping wildly; but I observed Ruth, though her colour was high, and she talked gaily to her partner, preserve amid the grotesqueness which was fair enough in men, the grace and decorum of dancing, which, by womanly influence, kept it free from the least approach to levity. Even in that matter again, she did things decently and in order.

Yet while I looked at her, delighted with her pleasant influence, I felt a something growing up in my meditations, which had another colour, and, examining it steadily, found and acknowledged that Ruth, that noble creature, that woman cast in the finest mould of body and mind, would have been the better for alas! a finer gown. Hers was that of a heroine in story-books, the purest white, as they say, disdaining all appearance of ornament.

Dear Ruth, it was not that she disdained ornament, but could not well afford it; her hair was dressed with a real white Camellia;—hang that white Camellia, the edges turned yellow before half the evening was over; besides, those masses of dark golden hair were arranged in a manner which, for want of being like that of other girls, had a look less lovely, less suitable, than they ought to have had. Yes, I saw, and silently owned that instead of being the first object of the ball-room she wanted something, without which the gay partakers of the festivity would not, and did not remark her in any prominent degree.

More than once I saw her sitting alone, and then was the time for me to forsake other partners and society, and to a her with some pretext, which should looking as if I observed she was alone, yet should give me the right of being near her, even when I dared not again and again ask her to dance.

I took her down to supper, and was almost ashamed that so much happiness was engrossed by me. I felt she ought to have been among the most remarkable in the room, and that, perhaps, I had done wrong in offering my arm, though there had not seemed any nobler escort approaching.

As for her, she was in higher spirits than I had yet seen her. The scene excited her, and whatever share of it fell to her naturally, she seemed to enjoy, without thinking whether was more or less than that of other people. That she was engaged to her cousin for the first waltz after supper was a fact much in my remembrance as we returned to the ball-room, where she took her place by her brother, and I stood beside.

"Don't go away yet, George," she said, as he began to look round for a partner. "Ennavant engaged me; he will be here directly."

But he did not come; make the best of it she could, it was mortifying.

"He's kept by something or other," said George.

"I should think he had forgotten me," said Ruth. "Never mind me then, George; I shall do very well here. Go and dance."

"Well, I think you must be tired," said her brother; "it will be just as well to sit still."

"You must be tired," I said, afraid in my inexperience to propose myself; so ashamed myself that she should be ashamed, that I dared not let it be seen that I saw she was so.

"No, I'm not tired," answered Ruth to me; "but I am quite content to sit still. Don't make speeches which your good-nature is inventing, for though I do care a little at being forsaken by my partner, I care only very little."

What could I say? her frankness, which prompted her to put whatever was real into words seemed to me so enchanting that I longed to exclaim

"Enchanting Ruth!" but that would have had so strange an effect that I withheld it and said nothing. She therefore probably thought I was too stupid to feel and understand what she had said.

Before I thought of anything to contradict this impression, a man whom I knew in the neighbourhood came up and invited her to dance, and she went away at once, quite in a common-place manner, which, however, made me

stand worrying my brain to know whether I might not nay ought not, to have secured that happiness.

As she went, the flower of that white camellia in her hair fell out of the calyx on the floor, and left her hair ornamented only with its empty place among the green leaves. I started before the passers, who would have swept or kicked away the fallen bloom, hastily picked it up and gave it the very best place the breast of my coat could afford. It was the first thing I thought of when I got home.

I have it now; most people, I should think, have got a spectral flower wrapped in stained white paper. Whether hopes and wishes have flourished or faded, the hour that gave the flower has the melancholy of things gone by, and is set before us in the shadow of the shrivelled, discoloured petals.

At this point of the evening I stood alone, thinking uneasily of the fact that I had not done what I ought to have done, though all the time it was the thing I desired above all other things to do, namely, assume the place of Ruth's defaulting partner. I could not be easy without trying to patch up this breach in my services to her; and alas! like other patchers, I but made the matter worse. I dodged her all the time she was dancing, and when her waltz was finished rushed in to secure her hand, as if it was for the very first time that evening. Ruth laughed.

"Well, if you are not tired of the same partner so often repeated?" she said.

"That is, you are tired of the same partner."

"No, no; I will not quarrel with so good a friend. One more then, when the next quadrille begins."

I was vexed to the heart. I felt she was treating me like a school-boy; like an officious school-boy, to whom she might say what she pleased. I made a formal bow and went away till the first notes sounded, yet I would not, for any consideration, have given up the opportunity of again touching her finger, of seeing her hand held out to me, of having the right to stand by her, and feeling her gown sweep against me; but I could not feel that to her I was better, no, nor nearly so good as another partner would have been, and when the dance was over I would stay in the ball no longer. I felt I was a little worse off with her than when the evening began, and would not hazard getting from bad to worse, even for the chance of making bad better. I wished her an abrupt good night therefore; and having thought of her only during the evening, did not think it necessary to take leave of anyone else, but made my way from splendour and lights and sound into darkness, cold, and rain, where in a few minutes from the time we parted I was plodding my way home wearily with my ancient horse; and when the winter dawn first stirred the darkness of the east, driving at last into the stable-yard of our own house.

CHAPTER X.

RUTH and her brother came back two days later, and the former took an engagement to stay after her mother should return home. I saw her very constantly, for though always trying to keep away, I always found some reason for calling at the Rectory, and always was fevered with anxiety to feel she thought well of me, or to make her think better.

I gained a step in her favour, when, a few days after the ball, old Mrs. Winspear questioned me whether she was not right in supposing that Ruth's dress was the prettiest in the room, and I with a beating heart, took courage to reply

"No; I thought it would have been, it was not."

Ruth looked at me with a gay smile, said she loved the truth, and she wore a more amiable manner towards me thenceforward.

Alas! it was well she did not know that if I had believed she would have liked a civil little falsity, I should have told one. What I said was to please her, not to tell the truth.

But my own interests did not absorb my attention; I was almost the more alive on account of them to Robert's. The letters from Algiers were the most interesting event of his monotonous life.

He would call Mary sometimes "My dear widow," yet would speculate on seeing her again, and on the events which would befall her, and in which he should interest himself.

Her marriage some future day was one which he often contemplated; but I thought I could perceive that he looked on it as one does on those future things which seem as if they would always be future, and of which one should think very differently if they became present. I implied this to him one day, but he reflected a moment and denied it.

"No," he said, "I am not deceiving myself; I saw at once how it must be, as much as I saw when the shattered arm hung here, that no vain hopes of cure availed one jot to save."

"Both were painful, Jack, but it is over now."

"Well, you are right, no doubt, yet "

"No, don't begin with yet. It is mere useless pain. See what I am become; dis-figured, ailing. What was her impression when she saw me? Remember that "

I could but agree in the recollection.

"What I could ill bear," said Robert, after a little while, "is, that any harm should happen to her. If **she** died and **I** lived, it would be indeed a bitter portion. And yet, have not you observed an expression now and then in the letters that looked as if they did not tell all as if there were something they were afraid of, and which they either do not acknowledge to themselves, or do not reveal?"

It had not struck me, but Robert could turn to all the passages at once. "Whatever happens, our gratitude will be the same." "This is Mary's birthday; she is eighteen oh, poor child! may she be happy!" "You are good, dear Robert, you are strong, and ready to meet every event; I am weaker."

"I fear Mrs. Percy means that we must not rely on the improvement which has taken place. The mother's eye sees more than others, and she means to prepare me. That, I confess, is the bitter thought that will come over me; and which tussles hard with one's fortitude."

Robert said thus much, and then was unwilling to talk upon the subject again he would point out to me any expression that occurred to the same effect in future letters, but scarcely said a word more.

I could not offer any consolation; for, after he had made me observe it, the same conclusion struck me also, and men have not the art with each other which a woman has, of suggesting hopes and reasons which do not appear unreasonable, even though they are so.

I could not but remark also that the letters came less frequently than they had done, and that there was constraint in them. Subjects were dilated upon which were nothing in comparison to the one of Mary's well-doing; Robert was told of French exiles who cultivated gardens and sent presents of roses at Christmas; but what did he care for them, when his only thought was the faded cheek which perhaps would never bloom again? What to him were the ruins of the Roman cities which Mr. Percy loved to explore with French generals out on their cruel razzie? If the

news had been that Mary could accompany him, it would have been interesting; but when it was said she had lost her interest in such things, and that her pleasure was found in the sunshine of her sitting-room, he could not but feel there was de-caying strength in that beloved figure, to which the ruin of empires bore no comparison.

Meantime I was able to render Ruth a great service at no expense to myself, which advanced the friendliness of our intercourse, and gave me something like a hold in the family.

The day was settled for Mrs. Winspear's return home, and as it was not convenient for Peter to drive her to the station, he commissioned me to do so. Ruth was to accompany her to the station (not above a mile), and she must therefore return alone with me, a pleasure which occupied all my thoughts from the time it was arranged to that of actually arriving.

Mrs. Winspear made apologies for troubling me, and hinted her regret at not having brought her own servant to conduct her; but Peter implied he had probably been wanted for digging the garden, and she forbore. She, however, indulged me during the drive with an anecdote or two of accidents which had happened to the leaders of her carriage when she and Colonel Winspear were on their wedding-tour, and of her husband's insatiable desire of activity, which had quite obliged him to accept the office of head of the County Police, in which he could amuse himself with perpetual motion from place to place.

Ruth said nothing she was so respectful to her mother, and so tender of her little foibles, that no one could have ventured to be anything less than forbearing also; and as for me I had not the least desire to be otherwise, for the flourishes were all very innocent, and seeming to believe them did not com-promise my own sagacity. The happy moment, therefore, approached when I should find Ruth by my side in an humble shandradan, just as if she had consented to take me with my poverty, and we were driving together, man and wife, on some domestic errand.

We stood all three together on the platform, waiting the time when the train should be due; Mrs. Winspear was rather a restless body, and disliked doing nothing, when she had time to spare to be in a hurry; and this it was which suggested to her that she wanted a book, and that there was a stand on the opposite side, where one could be bought.

There was plenty of time to cross and recross, and I offered to do so, but she would trust no one but her daughter to choose for her, and I offered Ruth my arm to go on this errand. She agreed, and as we set out said to her mother

"Only promise to stay quite quietly, till we come back."

She promised, but I believe the fact of engaging to do so, made her do otherwise. What else could have led her into the midst of the lines as the train was actually in sight.

We heard a scream, and starting round, saw her standing in the very line of danger, evidently quite bewildered and helpless.

Ruth was as silent as death, only pressed her hand on my arm, her eyes fastened on her mother. There were quite enough instants; I sprang upon the old lady, who I had no idea was so light, and tossing her in consequence high in the air, bounded over the intervening space, and set her down while the engine was yet a couple of yards behind us.

The people on the platform set up a clapping; Mrs. Winspear clung round my neck and screamed, which I could willingly have dispensed with, but in as short a time as she could run to us, behind the train, Ruth came up, grasped my hand, and then hurried her mother into the waiting-room.

I went off with all speed to look for the shandradan, and then to pack Mrs. Winspear into the train, while we two should go off both on that blessed drive together, but I found she had no idea more distant than that of travelling so soon after her fright, although I suggested that when she should be inside the train she was quite safe from being run over by it; but Ruth herself rather clung to the notion of keeping together, just after such chance of separating for ever, and I was obliged to bring up the carriage and put the two ladies into it Mrs. Winspear sitting with her feet up, in right of having been in danger of possessing no feet to put anywhere.

Thus we reached the Rectory, and had to make Peter cognizant of the danger so recently escaped by his mother.

Her gratitude to me was most oppressive. I could not find words to parry it, and was reduced to "Oh, I'm sure," and "Not at all, indeed," long before she had ceased repeating over and over that I was her saviour, her hero, and appealing to her puzzled children for more of the old thanks over again.

Ruth gently tried to introduce new subjects, and would succeed for a few minutes; then, on the slightest pause, poor Mrs. Winspear would break out

"Think what I should have been at this moment, but for the bravest of men. What a load of gratitude have you laid on us all!" and there was always some time to get over before a subject so personal to her could be again gently laid.

She insisted I should stay for luncheon; it was a kindly feeling of offering me a good office from the overflowing of her thankfulness; and I accepted with as little glorification as I could.

We were all relieved, however, when it was over, and when Mrs. Winspear said she should go to her own room and try to recover herself by lying down for an hour.

Ruth went with her, and then Peter, reaching out his hand to me, said

"Now, come down from your pedestal, I'm sure you are tired of standing there. Thank you, old boy and take a walk with me, will you?"

CHAPTER XI.

THIS accident produced good consequences to me, for Mrs. Winspear became my fast friend; and after her visit to her son was over, I was invited to the Homestead, that being the name of their place. It was a gentil-hommière, rented from the estate of Lord Ennavant, and at the distance of a couple of miles from Winspear Castle. There was an oblong space in front of it, bounded by walls and occupied by turf, which was traversed by a short, straight drive up to the house; and between the turf and the walls lay a border for shrubs and flowers. An avenue of trained limes bordered the short drive, and the house stood at the end, covered to a certain height with cotoneaster and pyrocanthus.

It was a stone structure with large windows, over each of which ran a label; and it was entered by a porch which defended the interior from wind. To the right as you entered there hung a thick curtain, and this instead of a wall formed one side of the entrance passage. The curtain when lifted gave access to a large, rather low room with a wide chimney, where wood was burned, and the three windows of the room had deep recesses occupied by window seats.

This room ran the whole length of the house to the front, and a smaller room lay behind, looking and opening on a garden; while other rooms, together with a wide oak staircase, occupied the rest of the space to the back. Nothing could be less like the ordinary centre passage, and room to right and room to left.

I had arrived by the railroad, a short journey of ten miles, and had felt glad that the arrangement of trains had obliged me to arrive early, but when I entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Winspear was there alone, all the rest of the party being dispersed on their morning occupations. Thus I found myself in the awkward situation of a guest who has been forced upon his host by the unpliant time-table, when both host and guest are under the necessity of pretending they are delighted to meet so early, and yet each of them would give their purse to separate till dinner-time.

She was anxious to succeed, because she was ever conscious of owing me gratitude for saving her life; and I was anxious to show that she did succeed from a due sense of how heavy a weight a young man may be on the hands of an elderly lady, not to dwell on the converse of that proposition.

"I am afraid to go out to-day," said she after one of the pauses which would occur; "the wind is cold, though it is so fine, and I've accustomed myself earlier in life to so much care that I can't brave weather and fatigue as I ought."

"Why ought you?" said I; "I never can see any virtue in putting oneself to inconvenience which one might avoid."

"No; but to avoid it is the difficult thing. A large family presses hard on one's time and one's income, whatever that may be."

"Your family is so satisfactory," said I, straining my brains for something agreeable to say, "that nothing it entails can be too much sacrifice."

"So they are," said Mrs. Winspear. "Ruth and Peter, whom you know, are not bad specimens."

"They are both fit to excite your pride, indeed."

"I'm glad to hear them highly spoken of," answered the mother; "for indeed they are too little known. But they are good children, they repine at nothing, and will bear whatever comes as well as they have hitherto borne."

"Oh, but I trust, nothing evil **will** come," said I.

"I wish I could say the same," answered the lady; "but I must not trouble you with such matters. Have you seen to-day's paper?"

"No, I've not," said I, unwillingly, taking the newspaper from her hand; "but you would not say 'trouble me,' if you knew how greatly I prize my acquaintance with your family, and how much I think about every member of it. I wish you all the utmost prosperity you can enjoy."

"Thank you thank you" said Mrs. Winspear. "I have reason, indeed, to acknowledge how true and brave a friend you are to us, and I am sure you feel that it is hard upon people, like us, in short who ought to be above the pressing cares of fortune, to have to struggle in this manner."

I was ignorant both that they had to struggle, and ought not to struggle, but I feigned to know all, in order to learn something.

"Indeed, indeed, it is hard," I said.

"A little consideration is no more than is Colonel Winspear's due," 'she went on; "Does it not strike you so yourself?"

"Undoubtedly; he is entitled to the highest consideration from everyone."

"Especially his own nephew."

"Especially, indeed."

"Under the peculiar circumstances, too?"

"That's the very point of all," said I.

"It strikes you in that light?" asked Mrs. Winspear.

"Quite so," I answered, "as far as I'm able to judge." Then finding she was silent I added, "A younger relation always owes duty to his elder; especially to one so superior to him as Colonel Winspear. As to the particular reason in this case, I believe that is, I think."

"Nay, I meant merely that as my husband is heir to his nephew, Ennavant owes him consideration."

"The uncle his nephew's heir?" I cried; trying to bring down my voice from the tone of surprise to the intonation of one who knew that already; but the words had struck me in a moment with the conclusion that the first accident or illness of Lord Ennavant might remove Ruth from the cottage to the Castle, and further than ever from me and from the little I could offer.

"That's what you knew, I suppose?" said Mrs. Winspear. "Peter had told you that?"

"Not Peter, exactly."

"If he had not told you, I am sorry I mentioned it, though indeed it is a thing so generally understood."

"Oh yes, certainly."

"It was the Will of the old lord, you know; he had everything in his power, and entailed his estates on my husband. Of course that is if the present young man should not marry."

"Oh, but he will marry," cried I, eagerly, catching at the comfort that idea held out to me.

"Marry? Whom pray?" said Mrs. Winspear, in a suddenly severe tone, and fixing her eyes upon me.

"Nay," said I, "that I am sure I don't know." And then again a thought darted through my mind, they expect him to marry Ruth; they would be angry to hear he thought of anyone else. Oh! there again I lose her.

"Not but what I should be delighted," said Mrs. Winspear, "to see the Castle with a young mistress; one who could make Ennavant happy. I wish for nothing more than his happiness; but in the meantime it is his duty to consult his uncle's convenience, so near as he is to his estate; but I dare say it is the agent's fault."

I was eagerly looking for the word which should help to continue the conversation, when Mrs. Winspear perceived her daughter at a distance in the garden, and saying, "Oh! there's Ruth," opened the window and called her. Ruth had a basket on her arm, and wore a bonnet like a quaker's, beneath which her bright colour and her bright eyes seemed shading them only to be more eagerly looked after. She welcomed me frankly, but I felt it was just as she would have welcomed a boy of fourteen, instead of a man of twenty-one; when her mother bade her take me as her assistant to gather flowers, she did so willingly, and not only gave me the charge of collecting

them, but also of helping her in the arrangement when gathered.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL WINSPEAR came in shortly before dinner-time. I was introduced to him, and he received me with a courteous familiarity, such as took me up at the point I had reached with the rest of his family. I was neither neglected, nor made much of; their habits of talking and doing were made to include me. I could not but see that the means of the family were limited but there were all the traditions of good society. There was a scrupulous cleanliness, the absence of which is often the fault of even the most respectable poverty. Colonel Winspear enforced it rigorously.

The little girl Kate, for instance, had profited by a few moments, when she was not observed, to tie her short hair up with a ribbon, in imitation of her sister Ruth only she forgot that Ruth's hair was long and lovely, and hers but the cropped poll of a child.

"Heigho, Kate, what's this?" said her father, laying his hand on the faded ribbon.

"Don't, papa, don't take it off," said Kate; "it is to keep my hair from hurting my eyes that's all."

"Oh, then a bit of packthread will answer your purpose, and clean string is better than dirty ribbon."

And with that he jerked away the latter, and was about to fling it into the fire, when Kate, leaping up at his arm, caught it, crying

"Oh, don't, papa see, Ruth has got a ribbon round her hair."

"True, but Ruth's locks would be down to her waist if nothing held them, whereas your funny little crop sticks out like a furze bush. Besides, how bright and neat Ruth's ribbon is!"

"Well, she can make mine bright and neat too," said Katy. "She washed her own."

"Oh, nonsense, child," said Mrs. Winspear. "Don't talk nonsense."

"Indeed I did," said Ruth; "I wore it and washed it, and I'll do the same for Kate, if you'll spare it, papa. You should have brought it to me before you put it on, dear Kitten."

"Well, run off with it then," said Colonel Winspear, "for here's dinner."

The little ones were excluded from that meal, and we were but six, including myself.

Though everything was in perfect order, there certainly was a sense of restraint in all that related to expenditure. It occurred to me that Ruth's printed gown, adorned though it was by being moulded on her stately, lovely shape, and Ruth's general share in the business of living, were perhaps dictated by a practical sense that every possible saving was expedient, and the idea touched my intense passion for her with a shade of pity which made it become almost idolatry.

Every instant I longed to lay some homage at her feet in the absence of those outer circumstances which ought to have been heaped by Fortune upon her every instant I was possessed by the thought whether it might be in any way possible to supply one or other of those circumstances, in some silent way which should relieve her, yet not seem to come from any human hand.

I watched every word, every gesture; I noted the quiet cheerfulness with which she tried to raise her mother's, and meet her father's spirits the topics she had plainly laid up to promote her father's pleasure in the sociable meal which followed his day's exertion; her willingness to listen, and how she never once acted her part, but was naturally thoughtful for all interested in everything anxious to make her own resources available for all.

I failed to be any addition to the circle, for all my being was absorbed in picturing myself to myself agreeable and acceptable to Ruth, and what a heavenly happiness such a state of things would be so that, as long as she was present, I succeeded only in being agreeable and acceptable to nobody. When Colonel Winspear and I were alone things mended; he did not think any scorn to put forth his agreeability for me, and as the pressure of Ruth's presence was removed, I was able to show how much I could enjoy his. In a short time, however, we went back to the drawing-room, where as yet the younger children as well as the eider remained.

All were busy doing something nothing very useful, but all were active, and taking pleasure in being so. Even little Katy was employed, though what she could be doing was a puzzle. She had cut up several half-sheets of old letters into as regular forms as she could manage, and having secured a pencil, made some flourishes upon each; and as she finished them, laid them one by one over the other in a heap.

"Don't disturb me," she said to her brother Robin "or I shan't be able to finish before bedtime."

"If you don't, what harm will be done?" said Robin. "What are they for?"

"They are tickets for the club," said Katy. "I am helping Ruth."

"Oh, by all means," said Robin "these pothooks and links will be precious useful."

Colonel Winspear, when he saw Katy's occupation, laughed, and observed the curious delusion which made her so busy in doing nothing. "What a droll entanglement babyish faculties!" said he. He thought the child had heard him, but her hand ceased to work, her face, which before was intent, grew piteous; she slid gently from her chair, and collecting all her labours stole to the fire, and bade her brother throw them in.

"In fact, Katy," said her father, taking her up, "that's the best thing you could do with them for they were a silly bit of work. Don't cry about it, however. Burning them was a little bit wise, crying would be a great bit of folly."

He set her down, and began talking of other things; while she ran to Ruth and hid her face on her sister's knee. Ruth let her stay there neither checked nor petted—till her little head came up of its own accord, and she took Ruth's handkerchief to wipe the traces of her late tears.

When tea was over, and there chanced to be a pause in the conversation, Mrs. Winspear with a sigh remarked—

"Alas! no more music!" and when she had said it, her eyes wandered to her husband, with an expression (as I thought) of one who had said the thing which ought not to have been said. A look of impatience passed over his face, and he said hastily,

"Well, so be it, then. No more music. Does it matter?" But Ruth interposed before the words were scarcely uttered.

"Robin and I," said she, "have learned a duet which you will like, father. Do hear it;" and sounding the key note, she and her brother sang together "Now is happy; ask no more," to which there is the lively chorus, "Happy, bright, delightful Now."

She smiled to the others and signed to join in the chorus, and voices stole in towards the end of the first verse and joined more confidently in the next repetition of the chorus, so that at last there was an eager clamour of voices, and we all ended, more or less well, singing with all our might. Robin was delighted.

"That's well done capital!" cried he. "Oh, I'm glad the pianoforte is gone. It sounds much better without accompaniment. Don't it, Ruth?"

"Ruth will never say that," said her father. "My scrupulous Ruth," he added, drawing her towards him.

"I **will** say it sounds very well, father," answered she; "and that is enough. Let us try something more. You are very useful to us," she said, turning to me. "Can you read the tenor, do you think, of this glee or perhaps you know it?"

"I don't, indeed, you are very kind to call me useful. I really know nothing. I am nothing of a musician."

"Oh, are you not?" said Ruth. "I'm sorry. Then we can't have this glee."

I had not intended to be understood so literally. I was vexed with myself, for I **could** have done it, I believe. However, Ruth pressed the matter no further, and we went on to other things in which I did my part; and altogether the evening passed gaily over.

When the candles had been lighted and given into the ladies' hands, I remarked to my friend Robin, that they all seemed possessed of good ears, and corrected themselves when a mistake did occur.

"Pretty well for that," answered he, "but you have a better. Why did you not undertake the glee? you could have done it."

"Nay, I don't know; I might."

"But it's just like Ruth to take what one says literally. Not that she believed you, but that it is more truth-telling to receive words for exactly what they say."

"Oh well ay, I understand; and don't you ever sing with accompaniment?"

"Dear me, yes. This is the first night we have not done so. But our pianoforte is gone going at least. It is packed up in the back passage to go off the first thing in the morning."

"Going to be repaired?"

"No. Going quite away."

"Really?"

"Yes, really; my mother said the noise made her head ache, but I can hardly believe that is the reason."

"Perhaps it is," said I, not willing to intrude through the young boy on family secrets, and so we parted for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

I STAYED two days in the Homestead; and the third morning was come, in the afternoon of which I was again to resort to the railroad to carry me back home.

Breakfast had not long been over, and Colonel Winspear was preparing some papers in his own room before he set out on his day's business, when the sound of wheels made itself heard at the door, and presently the maid who waited (parlour maid as she was called), announced the man so little in favour with Mrs. Winspear, Lord Ennavant.

She drew up, and received him very coldly; but his good-humoured, frank manner set her coldness at defiance, as if he had been in the habit of seeking their society every day. Me also, he himself would fain have believed, and caused me to believe, he was delighted to meet, and his wish to see my brother, which had slumbered since we met at his own ball in the winter, revived in cheery rigour.

"You are going home to-day, are you?" said he; "drive over with me. It will be a capital opportunity for me to pay my visit, and I can get back to Winspear, round by Alwern, as well or better than the straight road."

I of course assented, if such was his wish, and it was so arranged.

"I came so early," said he, "to Mrs. Winspear, to catch my uncle before he went out; and your servant told me that I was in time. Mr. Pointz wants him to put his name to a lease which I should be glad to give if he will join me, and I thought I would come myself to ask him. Can I see him?"

"No doubt," said Mrs. Winspear. "Ruth, will you call him?"

Ruth rose.

"Oh, don't give yourself the trouble," said Lord Ennavant, starting up; "or may I go with you to him? I won't put him out of his way. A thousand pardons for troubling you."

And as he opened the door for Ruth, he looked a man so accustomed to please, so especially pleased with his conductress, that it went to my heart to see him.

It was not very long before he and Colonel Winspear returned together, the latter looking a little less cordial than he might have been, and the former giving me the idea that his attention had been caught by the manner of his host and hostess. His own laboured to be gay and cordial, and he seemed in haste to get news that his carriage was at the door.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said he, "all round, and thank you for your name, uncle. It does me a good turn; I wish I could do you one, but you are above all services on my part."

Colonel Winspear shook hands with him, without meeting his eyes, and I (but little delighted to lose an hour or two at the Homestead) followed him into the phaeton.

"Are you much acquainted with my uncle's people here?" said he. "I did not know you were friends."

"One of the sons," I answered, "has the curacy of my brother's parish, and that brought me into their acquaintance."

"Oh, of Alwern? has he" (the circumstance which made him recollect me before his ball having quite escaped him). "You find him a very pleasant neighbour, don't you?"

"Very much so. We are become great friends."

"In that case, you can tell me perhaps if I am not out of favour at the Homestead, and what's the reason? There is something wrong I can see."

"Is it not your agent?" said I.

"Very likely. Mr. Pointz is a relation of my mother's, and rather a considerable man in the county. Sometimes he is a little supercilious, or hasty, or something of the kind; and besides he employs sub-agents to do the practical part, and perhaps they are not always as discreet as they ought to be. That's the reason I came here myself on this business to-day."

"I imagined **you** knew nothing about it," I answered.

"Not I. Whatever it is, Pointz is not very confiding; nor I very inquisitive that's true. But if you know, tell me, there's a good fellow?"

"Has not he or his subordinates been over punctilious about the moment of the rent?"

"Has he, by Jove? That's too bad; and I asking a favour of my uncle at the same time! What could Pointz be thinking of?"

"I fancy it has vexed the family a little."

"No doubt, no doubt. A man like him; so highly respectable, so honourable; a man who ought to be in my place, and then the county ay, and the country would be the better for what I only waste, and scarcely enjoy myself."

"Oh, I trust he never will have it," I cried, thinking instantly of Ruth. Lord Ennavant laughed.

"That's very civil of you to me," said he, diverted with my eagerness. "But now tell me, is there any little present I could make them, do you think, by way of amends? a horse for Ruth, or a pianoforte, or a pony-carriage?"

"But," said I, "if you'll forgive me for speaking, would not it be better to remit the rent?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, as to rent, if he's behindhand with that, I've nothing to do with it. Pointz can't spare it, I am quite sure. No, I'll buy Ruth a pianoforte. I did not see one in the room."

"That will cost as much as remitting the rent, won't it?" said I.

"Ay, but it will be put down in a bill, and paid a year hence."

"With more rent?" I asked, laughing.

"Pshaw! don't be so wise," said Lord Ennavant, laughing also; then suddenly he became silent for a minute or two, and seemed pondering something in his own mind, which caused him lightly to flip one of the horses on the neck, much to the animal's disdain.

"Gently there, Bryan," said he. "There, there!"

"Greswold," he said, turning to me, "what you said makes me think of something Mr. Pointz was talking about. He is really fond of the place and the property, and of me as belonging to those two. Now he knows he is growing old, and he came to me to point out that truism, and to ask whether I knew any gentleman who would like to take his place when he should drop off, and who would live with him at present, and learn how **he** had fostered and **I** had bedevilled the estate. Will you do it, Greswold?"

It struck me in an instant that if I lived with Mr. Pointz I should be within two miles of the home of Ruth, and I answered promptly—

"On the first blush of the thing, it looks as if I should like it."

"It's a bargain, then," said he.

"Not quite," cried I. "It wants thinking over."

"Ay, true; it's needful to ascertain what you think of old Pointz."

"Rather what old Pointz thinks of young Greswold," said I.

"Oh, his thinking be hanged!" said Lord Ennavant, but I knew better than that.

"You're such an honourable fellow," he went on. "You're very English and reserved; and you've nothing to do, I know that."

"Except for my brother; he has wanted me very much."

"But he's better now?"

"Yes; but I will talk to him about it, if you'll give me leave."

"All right," said Lord Ennavant; and casting off the subject, went on to others which seemed to have more claim to interest him.

That evening Robert and I reasoned out the matter. He at once gave his opinion in favour of accepting the proposal, which might lead to an advantageous position for me. Mr. Pointz, who managed the large Ennavant estates, was in fact their deputy—owner. He had much of the pleasure and employment of a great landed proprietor, and some of the misery also, for he suffered mentally from the extravagance which he had not the pleasure of committing. The expedients necessary to get 21 *l.* out of every 20*l.* cost him a good portion of the anxiety and regret which they ought to have cost the real owner; and his attention being wholly directed to the relief of the racked estate, he was perhaps less considerate than the possessor would fain have been of the human means which produced the necessary income.

I had seen him more than once, in the office of my old master, Mr. Pypps, when Mr. Pointz had come there on business for Lord Ennavant, and had even had some personal communications with him respecting matters which had passed through my hands as one of the working clerks; but whether he recollected me or not I could not tell.

"At all events, you must see him," said Robert, "and learn whether the thing will suit you."

"Still, if I am of any use to you at home," I began, "I won't go."

"Of any use? Of course you are; but you **will** go nevertheless; how impossible, as Nature has arranged matters, it would be for me, the elder brother, to keep my younger at home as my nurse!"

"Nay, Robert "

"You have been nurse, and an excellent one; but I am going to live now; and you have your own career to care for. Besides, you'd be acting the impertinent part of martyr if you stayed at home for me," he added, smiling and wringing my hand brother-like.

The matter was accordingly put into consideration, and after long thought and strict investigation on the part of Mr. Pointz, it was decided that I should take up my abode with him in the course of the next autumn, and should be initiated into cares of which he was anxious to discharge a part upon younger shoulders than his own.

CHAPTER XIV.

I HAD, meantime, to share the uneasiness which Robert suffered from the silence of the Percy family, and which seemed to indicate that they waited for some glad thing to say, which nevertheless never came. The sufferings of his mind were all the acuter, inasmuch as his bodily ailment began to yield to time and care; he had passed that stage of illness when it forms the necessary occupation of both the sufferer, and of those around him, and had come to the next, when the illness or the infirmity are in other people's way and one's own also. Then arise things to be done more interesting than being sick: one would fain have *relâche* during one busy morning, for one interesting journey, for some quite other project. The general rule of the world is health and strength; and the exception must be an uneasy one; let him who is excepted treat the matter as bravely as he will. This, to a young man who had hitherto pushed along life unmarked, except as a useful part of the torrent, was somewhat hard to bear. But my brother was of a strong, independent spirit, who took his own way, and had capacities for enjoyment which he never suffered to be overladen beyond what was inevitable. Had he been at ease respecting Mary, he would have found every day some fresh food to turn into happiness, but to bear the troubles of another is not so easy as it is to bear one's own. Where is the patience that reaches to the sickness which one we love is enduring? Where is the moral strength that bears up under their moral pain? The pleasant things of life are all covered over with a mist, and nipped with a disheartening chill, when they offer themselves alongside the trials of those who have a first share in our heart.

Thus it was with Robert. The monotonous quiet of home, which would have suited well with the calm languor of returning health, wore the spirit which was questioning what might be the events at a distance. The monotonous scene, the same recurring actions, seemed to belong to a selfish tranquillity; books speaking of interests and amusement, could not interest nor amuse when placed side by side with the realities of life and death. The loveliness of Earth and Heaven was nothing in comparison with the doubt and fear which rose like a cloud as big as a man's hand, but spread and shut out all beside itself. Those things were beautiful, were good, were all in all to others; but there was something that excluded their enjoyment and their interest from the heart that was filled with that too dear something.

Robert's restlessness urged him at last to break away from home, and to seek in a change of scene something which should force itself upon attention, and hide imperiously the thoughts which were engraven there. He proposed to me to go with him to various places, where he would not have gone in his present feeble state, if he could have borne to stay quiet; and which he would have enjoyed when he got there in spite of feebleness, if he had not wanted to forget rather than to meditate.

As for me, I had no right to say one word; yet I was better disposed to stay at home than to move from it. I cared for nothing in comparison with the presence of Ruth, or with, at least, the knowledge of what she was doing and thinking. I reflected how little she was thinking of me, while I was thinking of nothing but her. I should have been

easier if she had been but ever so little uneasy. If she had missed me at all, I could have had some pleasure in being away; if she would have been glad to see me, I could have been glad to stay awhile among the scenes we visited; but her indifference to my absence made me feel as if I should slide out of her recollection, unless I could keep her in mind that, if present, she liked me rather than otherwise.

Go where we would, the most interesting place to Robert was that where we expected letters, and when the packet from home was opened, and still there was none from or about Mary, there was a blank which patience only came down to fill.

But one does not wait for ever. At last the moment arrives, when waiting is behind, and an end is come. Perhaps it is the end of all; the haven where we would be; the reality of which is now to be compared with that which fancy has pictured it. Perhaps it is but one stage of the journey, which, though but one stage out of many, at least ends so much of anxiety; and thus, indeed, at last was that letter put into the hands of Robert, the superscription of which was in the handwriting of Mrs. Percy herself.

"John," said he, putting it into my hands when he had read it, "they are coming home; but who is coming? Is it my Mary, or do they mean I shall never see her again? Read; what do they mean?" Thus it ran :

"MY DEAR ROBERT,

"My husband is writing to you, but I, though relieved by him from a task I am not able to endure, will give some lines of my own. Your kind purpose has been answered. That alone will be reward sufficient to your generous heart. You will ever remember the face and form of your earliest friend, restored during three hopeful, three happy months to bloom and ease. I thought all was safe, and would have been as it used to be; I hoped that in our homes again we should have been happy as we were in your early youth. I cannot write as I ought. My heart will break, unless you feel for me. It will not be long before I see you, now that we are about to leave this place. God bless my dear Robert! my dear son I thought to call you."

"And you see," added Robert "Mr. Percy has not written; he cannot tell how to say the deadly word; he has perhaps no heart to think of me. I wish they knew what is the pain of not knowing."

Alas, what could I say? I felt too plainly that Mrs. Percy had tried to add a woman's softening phrases to those which she had entrusted to her husband; and of which no human words could lessen the bitterness. He had not written; accident, or his habits of delay, had prevented him, and thus, unwittingly, she had inflicted pain more intolerable by its lengthened torture than he deadliest words, said at once, could have given.

I had no consolation to offer except that which one man knows as well as another, and which Christian and heathen alike feel to be the noblest part, if they can but take it.

"Quit you like men. Be strong." *ST. PAUL*. "My friends, be men; and take to yourselves a stout heart."
HOMER.

CHAPTER XV.

THE end was, that we ceased to talk about that which both continually thought of; and we lived on in each other's company, tacitly agreeing to avoid the one subject we cared for.

What we did, however, was, by Robert's decision, to move to the part where the Percys, as we heard from home, were to land. Each arrival from the Continent we eagerly but silently watched, and I grieved to see the ill effect

which anxiety and suspense had upon my brother. He would wait upon the pier all day; his strength failed him more and more as he returned each disappointed evening; and at times the exertion of walking even that short distance was too much for him, and he let the heavy hours drag by, as he lay restlessly on his couch. In this languid state he was one evening turning over the leaves of a local newspaper late in the night, while the open window admitted a refreshing air after a hot day, and the waters of the great ocean before us moved like contented spirits, keeping their place, but stirring in it, as if for joy, beneath the light of the moonbeams.

Suddenly he started, and with an exclamation showed me the paper.

"They are here," he said, "but she is not." And there, indeed, among the arrivals of that very morning, at an hotel further on in the town, were the names we had so looked for "Mr. and Mrs. Percy, from Algiers."

"Mary is not," he said; and in truth we looked vainly through all the list, but the place she should have filled was blank. There were other names, Sir Danby and Lady Hopecourt, Mr. and Mrs. Adnews, Mr. Sebright, and a few more; but the Percys were there alone, and the one hope that had remained perished.

"Be it so," said Robert, after a pause. "That paper might have borne the dearest name in the world; and at this moment I should have been at the end of trouble; joy in place of sorrow would have been mine. As it is, sorrow has settled down; it is a tangible presence. Be it so."

He entreated me to go with the earliest morning to the hotel in question, and find when he could see the Percys; and then, with a kindly pressure of my hand, went to his room, and I felt that he had said all it did him good to say.

It was at an hour as early as I thought it possible to see our friends that I presented myself at the doors. They were already open, and attendants bustling about them. In answer to my question I learned that Mr. and Mrs. Percy had already left the hotel, for the station, whence an early train was about to start for London. Could I get there before it set out? The man thought so, for the hour of departure was still at some distance; but another gentleman of the party, either Mr. Adnew or Sir Danby he was not sure which had been very impatient about getting away soon.

I ran to the station, and seeing by the great clock that there were yet ten minutes before the time of starting, walked more leisurely along the wide platform, hoping to meet with the objects of my search. Many a hasty passenger met and went by me, many a figure emerged on the distance; I could see over the heads of most of those about me, and it was not very long, before some fifty yards in front of me, two persons, a man and a woman, two only no young gracious girl at their side met my sight with the well-known forms for which I was seeking.

The tears started up into my eyes impetuously as I perceived them. I dashed them away, and at once rushed to meet my old friends. They did not perceive me; but I laid my hand upon the arm of Mary's mother, and with a start and a smothered scream she recognised me.

"Where is Mary?" I whispered, my voice quenched with sorrow.

"Do you not know all?" she murmured. "Oh, surely, surely you know?"

"I guess it too surely. Robert is here. How can I tell him? Let me go for him."

"You wrote, surely?" she said to her husband.

"I thought to do so but perhaps I never did," he answered.

"She is dead," I said, wringing her hand. "Alas! poor Mary! Poor Robert!"

"Oh, poor Robert!" she sobbed. "Kind, good Robert! Worse, even worse for him. John, come with me."

She caught hold of my arm, and drew me hastily towards one of the carriages on the line. The door was open.

I looked where she pointed; and I started as but very seldom in one's life one starts, when I saw within, Mary. Mary, lovely and radiant, and round her waist the arm of the bright happy-looking man at her side. Mary, whose face was covered with deep blushes as she saw me, started up and stretched out her hand to me.

"My husband," she said, looking back at her companion then at me; "and this is Mr. Greswold you have heard us talk of him?" she said.

"Can Robert ever forgive us?" murmured Mrs. Percy to me, and scarcely able to speak for tears. "I had no idea they would have thought of marrying so soon; or even at all; and then I tried to prepare him did not he understand? And then it came so quickly and Sir Danby persuaded her and I wrote to Robert, and Mr. Percy was to write and now "

"What is there to forgive?" I said. "Had he not set her free as air?"

"But I thought perhaps he did not quite mean it," said Mrs. Percy.

"That he did; he made up his mind to mean, and to say it. I wish you had known him better. He would have rejoiced, and will only it comes rather suddenly. Let me run for him?"

"No, no," cried Mary, "let us go; we are going now. The time is up, I am sure."

"Not by many minutes," I said. "Oh, Mary, he will wish so to see you; I mean to see you thus well again, thus happy; you must not grudge him that pleasure?"

"I cannot see him," said Mary, shrinking into the corner of the carriage; and the tears gushing from her eyes, she caught hold of her husband's arm, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"What is it? What is it?" he repeated, greatly perplexed.

"This is Mr. Greswold," I heard her murmur; "you know, surely."

"Greswold, Greswold," said he. "No, I know nothing what do you mean?"

"Did you never hear my name, sir," I asked, "during your acquaintance with this family?"

"No, sir, I cannot recall it."

"At least, then, it is one you are not intimate with?" I said.

"Certainly not."

"Listen to me, John; let me explain," said Mrs. Percy.

"There will be no time for that now, as Mary says," I answered. "I wish you had spared us the uncertainty whether our dear, our beautiful Mary was alive or dead, and whether she had quite, quite forgotten her old friends."

"We had not forgotten, that's impossible, John; you know it."

"But it was inconvenient to recall them."

"Or uninteresting," said Sir Danby. "My wife has not been troubled with any of these reminiscences which seem so lively on your part."

"Hush," cried Mrs. Percy, "you don't know what you are saying. For heaven's sake, John, promise me to say nothing of this to my dear Robert?"

"Nay, I must tell him all, dear Mrs. Percy."

"Why, why?"

"Only because it is the truth."

I shook her by the hand, made a cordial sign of farewell to Mary, who hardly knew whether to return it or hide her face from me, and drew back. Porters and passengers were hastening along the platform, and I got out of their way, and retired from the little party I had so unwittingly embarrassed; remaining however at hand till the train started, and then waving them one more farewell.

"So it is!" thought I, as I went slowly back from the platform. "Mary had a mind to marry this Sir Danby, and thought it best to keep her old kind friend out of sight. If they had but trusted him!"

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the end of the autumn I went to live with Mr. Pointz, and I passed a twelvemonth with him before I was initiated into any of the mysteries of the situation. During that time I learned only the routine of management. I had to get the estate by heart, and to witness all the operations performed upon it by its superintendents. I had to learn not only the science but the art, and soon became useful to Mr. Pointz.

Meantime I saw very little of Lord Ennavant, though he was thoroughly good-natured, and at first pressed upon me so many of the amusements of the estate, that had I been so minded I might have been as idle as an heir-apparent. There was, however, at first a slight sense of degradation in my employment which kept me reserved and retired; I liked best to work here according to my compact, and go home to play.

There I shot and fished on a small scale, it is true, compared with Winspear Castle, but it was the home of my own people. I scarcely ever mentioned Lord Ennavant and his interests elsewhere. I avoided, from pure repugnance, making him and them the familiar subjects of discourse.

Seeing me unsociable, he by degrees let me slip out of his mind, so that before the end of the first twelvemonth I came scarcely ever to see him, unless I went to him on a message for Mr. Pointz. An occasion happened, however, which brought me into contact with him.

There was a young incumbent of the living in which Colonel Winspear's place, the Homestead, was situated, whose delicate health had always predicted a catastrophe, and who, in consequence of his critical state had leave of absence, which he spent abroad. There, owing to some accidental exposure to cold and fatigue, he was suddenly attacked with a very dangerous illness, notice of which was received in the village, and made known to Mr. Pointz as a matter of business.

The best of friends look at the greatest of troubles in the light of their own interest before long; and thus the family of Winspear and I thought and talked of this absentee after the first fire of regret and compassion had burned itself out.

It so happened that I was staying at the Homestead, where I went as often as I could find a pretext, or get an invitation for so doing; and here it was, that in the freedom of domestic talk, the subject of this living, of which the presentation belonged to Lord Ennavant, came uppermost.

"If I loved Ennavant," said Colonel Winspear, "I would ride over to-morrow, and ask him for it on your account, Edward; but one must be fond enough of a man to make it easy to be refused or granted a favour before one can ask for one."

"What does it matter?" said Mrs. Winspear. "The good would last all Edward's life, and the slight pain or the evil would be over in a morning visit."

"By no means; I should be the man who had asked a favour of one whom I thought meanly of."

"Oh, he's very good-humoured."

"Good-natured, too," said Ruth.

"And your own nephew," said Mrs. Winspear, "and it would be so delightful to have Edward settled near us."

"Would not **you** like it, old silent," said Ruth, laying her hand on her brother's arm.

"Not a little," answered he, smiling.

"Oh, beyond all measure," said Ruth.

"And all to be lost for want of asking," said Mrs. Winspear; but her husband shook his head, and other things were talked of.

But before the sun of the next day had set, the intense desire of doing whatsoever Ruth might be pleased should be done, had overcome in me shyness and pride, had helped me to overcome difficulty and obstacle, and had shown me the way, with more or less awkwardness, to make known to Lord Ennavant the probability that he would have so considerable a gift to make, and to bring into his mind the fact that he had a cousin to whom it would be acceptable.

I had, indeed, but to hint it most remotely, for he eagerly sprang to the conclusion

"There's young Edward might like it. Who knows? Have you any idea whether it might be worth his having? If so, he's most welcome."

"It is the living in which the Homestead is," said I.

"Very true, and a good house and some-thing a-year, I suppose £00 *l.* or 400*l.* is it, do you think? I suppose what he has now is less than that?"

"Besides," I said, "Mr. Percy, I believe, intends to resume doing his own duty, and if so, Mr. Winspear will lose the curacy."

"Mr. Percy who's that? What is Mr. Percy to Edward?"

"Oh, he's the rector of the parish of which my brother is squire, and Edward curate."

"Is he? oh really. Meantime, if the poor fellow die, and my cousin like to succeed him, do say, if you see him, that as far as I am concerned he is most welcome to it."

"You will write, I daresay," I answered.

"Oh yes, most certainly but the promise is the same. It is his and I'll write when the time comes; but never mind that now. I don't know much about particulars, and when the time comes will be best."

Highly satisfied, I rode over to my friend, and told him what had passed. He took it, as it was indeed, a prospect of very great advantage to him. "A relief to my father," said he, "an assured home for my mother occupation for myself; but I don't depend on it. Ennavant heartily enjoys doing a good-natured thing but it must come just to his hand: he likes the catastrophe of the play, but has not patience for the second act. Say nothing yet to my father."

"Nay, but he has made you the offer of it."

"I shall be heartily obliged to him if he carries it out but I won't bind him to it," said Edward, smiling.

It was about ten days after this time, that Mr. Pointz and I were busy over the auditing of the accounts for the quarter, and satisfactorily went through all the receipts of the great landed property, duly carried to account.

"Does it seem as if a man could ever be poor," said Pointz, "with these sums in his banker's hands? Is not there enough for spending, enough for giving, enough for extravagance even? Yet ask this young man for 100*l.* and see what he would say."

"He would say, **Yes**, I'm sure of that."

"He would say it with another man's 100*l.* then, for **I** am sure he has it not of his own."

"What can become of all this?"

"Oh, just cast your eye on the debtor's sheet. Look at the sum total to be paid before any income is touched. What remains after that?"

"Nay," cried I, after reading his statement, and out of breath at the proportion between debt and revenue, "how can he get on at all?"

"Well, it is the vexation of my life; and no sooner do I clear a moderate space, and think things will go straight for a while, than he writes me word he has unluckily been 'hard hit,' and must have 5000 *l.* or some other impossible sum by such a day. Everything is settled by Will, you know, on his uncle, and he can sell nothing."

"What is done?" said I.

"Why, there's the devil to pay, as is the case now. I'm vexed to the heart this very morning by exactly such a billet, and he'll be here, I am well aware, in the course of the morning to cool his impatience at my expense."

"Have you got any remedy?"

"Oh, in so great an estate, there is always some paring, or some windfall; but it is ruinous, quite ruinous."