Olive, Vol. 1

Dinah Maria Craik

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TO A—. C—.THE BEST MOTHER, WIFE, AND FRIEND,—
THE TRUEST WOMAN I KNOW,—
I DEDICATE THIS STORY OF A WOMAN'S LIFE.

THE AUTHOR.

OLIVE.

CHAPTER I.

"**PUIR** wee lassie, ye hae a waesome welcome to a waesome warld!"

Such was the first greeting ever received by my heroine, Olive Rothesay. However, she would be then entitled neither a heroine, nor even "Olive Rothesay," being a small nameless concretion of humanity, in colour and consistency strongly resembling the "red earth," whence was taken the father of all nations. No foreshadowing of the coming life brightened her purple, pinched−up, withered face, which, as in all new−born children, bore such a ridiculous likeness to extreme old age. No tone of the all−expressive human voice thrilled through the unconscious wail that was her first utterance, and in her wide−open meaningless eyes had never dawned the beautiful human soul. There she lay, as you and I, reader, with all our compeers, lay once—a helpless lump of breathing flesh, faintly stirred by animal life, and scarce at all by that inner life which we call spirit. And, if we, every one, were thus to look back, half in compassion, half in humiliation, at our infantile likeness—may it not be that in the world to come some who in this world bore an outward image, poor, mean, and degraded, will cast a glance of equal pity on their well−remembered olden selves, now transfigured into beautiful immortality.

I seem to be wandering from my Olive Rothesay; but the time to come will show the contrary.

Poor little spirit! newly come to earth, who knows whether that "waesome welcome" may not be a prophecy? The old nurse seemed almost to dread this, even while she uttered it, for with the superstition from which not an "auld wife" in Scotland is altogether free, she changed the dolorous croon into a "God guide us!" and, pressing the babe to her aged breast, bestowed a hearty blessing on her nursling of the second generation—the child of him who was at once her master and her foster−son.

"An' wae's the day that he's sae far awa', and canna do't himsel, my bonnie bairn! It's ill coming into the warld without a father's blessing."

Perhaps the good soul's clasp was the tenderer, and her warm heart throbbed the warmer to the new−born child, for a passing remembrance of her own two fatherless babes, who now slept—as close together, as when, "twin−laddies," they had nestled in one mother's bosom—slept beneath the wide Atlantic which marks the sea−boy's grave.

Nevertheless, the memory was now grown so dim with years, that it vanished the moment the infant waked and began to cry. Rocking to and fro, the nurse tuned her cracked voice to a long−forgotten lullaby—something about a "boatie." It was stopped by a hand on her shoulder, followed by the approximation of a face which, in its bland gravity, bore "M.D." on every line.

"Well! my good—excuse me, but I forget your name."

"Elspeth, or mair commonly, Elspie Moray. A very gude name, doctor. The Murrays o' Perth were—"

"No doubt—no doubt, Mrs. Elsappy."

"**Elspie**, sir. Ye maunna ca' me out o' my name, wi' your unceevil English tongue," added the pertinacious old dame.

"Well, then, Elspie, or what the deuce you like," said the doctor, vexed out of his proprieties. But his rosy face became rosier when he met the horrified and sternly reproachful stare of Elspie's keen blue eyes as she turned round—a whole volume of sermons expressed in her, "Eh, sir?" Then she added, quietly,

"I'll thank ye no to speak ony mair sic words in the ears o' this puir innocent new−born lassie. It's no canny."

"Humph!—I suppose I must beg pardon again. I shall never get out what I wanted to say—which is, that you must be quiet, my good dame, and you must keep Mrs. Rothesay quiet. She is a delicate young creature, you know, and must have every possible comfort that she needs."

The doctor glanced round the room, as though there was scarce enough comfort for his notions of worldly necessity. Yet though not luxurious, the antechamber and the room half−revealed beyond it seemed to furnish all that could be needed by an individual of moderate fortune and desires. And an eye more romantic and poetic than that of the worthy medico might have found ample atonement for the want of rich furniture within, in the magnificent view without. The windows looked down on a lovely champaign, through which the many−winding Forth span its silver network, until, vanishing in the distance, a white sparkle here and there only showed whither the river wandered. In the distance, the blue mountains rose like dim clouds, marking the horizon. The foreground of this landscape was formed by the hill, castle−crowned—than which there is none in the world more beautiful or

more renowned.

In short, Olive Rothesay shared with many a king and hero the honour of her place of nativity. She was born at Stirling.

Perhaps this circumstance of birth has more influence over character than many matter−of−fact people would imagine. It is pleasant, in after−life, to think that we first opened our eyes in a spot famous in the world's story, or remarkable for natural beauty. It is sweet to say, "Those are **my** mountains," or "This is **my** fair valley;" and there is a delight almost like that of a child who glories in his noble or beautiful parents, in the grand historical pride which links us to the place where we were born. So this little morsel of humanity, yet unnamed, whom by an allowable prescience we have called Olive, may perhaps be somewhat influenced in her nature by the fact that her cradle was rocked under the shadow of the hill of Stirling, and that the first breezes which fanned her baby brow came from the Highland mountains.

But the excellent presiding genius at this interesting advent "cared for none of these things." Dr. Jacob Johnson stood at the window with his hands in his pockets—to him the wide beautiful world was merely a field for the exercise of the medical profession—a place where old women died, and children were born. He watched the shadows darkening over Ben Ledi—calculating how much longer he ought in propriety to stay with his present patient, and whether he should have time to run home and take a cosy dinner and a bottle of port before he was again required.

"Our sweet young patient is taking a nice sleep, I think, nurse," said he, at last, in his most benevolent tones.

"Ye may say that, doctor—ye ought to ken."

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"I might almost venture to leave her, except that she seems so lonely, without friends or attendance, save yourself."

"And wha's the best nurse for Captain Angus Rothesay's wife and bairn, but the woman that nursed himsel?" said Elspie, lifting up her tall gaunt frame, and for the second time frowning the little doctor into confused silence. "An' as for friends, ye suld just be unco' glad o' the chance that garr'd the leddy bide here, and no amang her ain folk. Else there wadna hae been sic a dowie welcome for her bonnie bairn. Maybe a waur, though, God forgie me;" added the woman to herself, with a sigh, as she once more half buried her little nursling in her capacious embrace.

"I have not the slightest doubt of Captain Rothesay's respectability," answered Dr. Johnson. **Respectability!** applied to the scions of a family which had had the honour of being nearly extirpated at Flodden−field, and again at Pinkie. Had the trusty follower of the Rothesays heard the term, she certainly would have been inclined to annihilate the presumptuous Englishman. But she was fortunately engaged in stilling the cries of the poor infant, who, in return for the pains she took in undressing it, began to give full evidence that the weakness of its lungs was not at all proportionate to the smallness of its size.

"Crying will do it good. A fine child—a very fine child," observed the doctor, as he made ready for his departure, while the nurse proceeded in her task, and the heap of white drapery was gradually removed, until from beneath it appeared the semblance of a very—very tiny specimen of babyhood.

"Ye needna trouble yoursel to say what's no true," was the answer; "it's just a bit bairnie—unco' sma'. An' that's nae wonder, considering the puir mither's trouble."

"And the father is gone abroad?"

"Just twa months sin' syne. But eh doctor, look ye here," suddenly cried Elspie, as with her great, brown, but tender hand she was rubbing down the delicate little spine of the now quieted babe.

"Well—what's the matter now?" said Dr. Johnson, rather sulkily, as he laid down his hat and gloves. "The child is quite perfect, rather small perhaps, but as nice a little girl as ever was seen. It's all right."

"It's no a' richt," cried the nurse, in a tone trembling between anger and apprehension. "Doctor, see!"

She pointed with her finger to a slight curve at the upper part of the spine, between the shoulder and neck. The doctor's professional anxiety was aroused—he came near and examined the little creature, with a countenance that grew graver each instant.

"Aweel?" said Elspie, inquiringly.

"I wish I had noticed this before; but it would have been of no use," he answered, his bland tones made earnest by real feeling.

"Eh, what?" said the nurse.

"I am sorry to say that the child is **deformed**—born so—and will remain so for life."

At this terrible sentence Elspie sank back in her chair, overpowered with blank dismay. Then she started up, clasping the child convulsively, and faced the doctor.

"Ye lee, ye ugly creepin, Englisher! How daur ye speak so of ane o' the Rothesays,—frae whase blude cam the tallest men an' the bonniest leddies—ne'er a lamiter amang them a'. How daur ye say that my master's bairn will be a —. Wae's me! I canna speak the word."

"Poor woman!" mildly said the doctor, "I am really concerned!" He looked so, and considerably frightened besides.

"Haud your tongue, ye fule!" muttered Elspie. While she again laid the child on her lap, and examined it earnestly for herself. The result confirmed all. She wrung her hands, and rocked to and fro, moaning, aloud.

"Ochone, the wearie day! O, my dear master, my bairn, that I nursed on my knee! how will ye come back an' see your firstborn, the last o' the Rothesays, a puir bit crippled lassie."

A faint call from the inner room startled both doctor and nurse.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the former. "We must think of the mother. Stay—I'll go. She does not, and she must not know of this. What a blessing that I told her the child was a fine and perfect child. Poor thing, poor thing!" he added, compassionately, as he hurried to his patient, leaving Elspie hushed into silence, still mournfully gazing on her charge.

It would have been curious to mark the changes in the nurse's face during that brief interval. At first it wore a look almost of repugnance as she regarded the unconscious child; and then that very unconsciousness seemed to awaken her womanly compassion.

"Puir hapless bairnie, ye little ken what ye're coming to! Lack o' kinsman's love, and lack o' siller, and lack o' beauty. God forgie me—but why did He send ye into the waefu' warld at a'?"

It was a question, the nature of which has perplexed theologians, philosophers, and mnetaphysicians, in every age, and will perplex them all to the end of time. No wonder, therefore, that it could not be solved by the poor simple Scotswoman. But as she stood hushing the child to her breast, and looking vacantly out of the window at the far mountains which grew golden in the sunset, she was unconsciously soothed by the scene, and settled the matter in a way which wiser heads might often do with advantage.

"Aweel! He kens best wha's made the warld and a' that's in't; and maybe He will gie unto this puir wee thing a meek spirit to bear ill luck. Ane must wark, anither suffer. As the minister says, It'll a' come richt at last."

Still the babe slept on, the sun sank, and night fell upon the earth. And so the morning and evening made the first day of the new existence, which was about to be developed, through all the various phases which compose that strange and touching mystery—A woman's life.

CHAPTER II.

THERE is not a more hackneyed subject for poetic enthusiasm than that sight—perhaps the loveliest in nature—a young mother with her first−born child. And perhaps because it is so lovely, and is ever renewed in its beauty, the world never tires of dwelling thereupon.

Any poet, painter, or sculptor, would certainly have raved about Mrs. Rothesay, had he seen her in the days of convalescence, sitting at the window with her baby on her knee. She furnished that rare sight—and one that is becoming rarer as the world grows older—an exquisitely beautiful woman. Would there were more of such!—that the ideal of physical beauty might pass into the heart, through the eyes, and bring with it the ideal of the soul's perfection, which our senses can only thus receive. So great is this influence—so unconsciously do we associate the type of spiritual with material beauty, that perhaps the world might have been purer and better if its onward progress in what it calls civilisation had not so nearly destroyed the fair mould of symmetry and loveliness which tradition celebrates.

It would have done any one's heart good only to look at Sybilla Rothesay. She was a creature to watch from a distance, and then to go away and dream of, scarce thinking whether she were a woman or a spirit. As for describing her, it is almost impossible—but let us try.

She was very small in stature and proportions—quite a little fairy. Her cheek had the soft peachy hue of girlhood; nay, of very childhood. You would never have thought her a mother. She lay back, half−buried in the great arm−chair; and then, suddenly springing up from amidst the cloud of white muslins and laces that enveloped her, she showed her young, blithe face.

"I will not have that cap, Elspie; I am not an invalid now, and I don't choose to be an old matron yet," she said, in a pretty, wilful way, as she threw off the ugly ponderous production of her nurse's active fingers, and exhibited her beautiful head.

It was, indeed, a beautiful head! exquisite in shape, with masses of light−brown hair folded round it. The little rosy ear peeped out, forming the commencement of that rare and dainty curve of chin and throat, so pleasant to an artist's eye. A beauty to be lingered over among all other beauties. Then the delicately outlined mouth, the lips folded over in a lovely gravity, that seemed ready each moment to melt away into smiles. Her nose—but who would destroy the romance of a beautiful woman by such an allusion? Of course, Mrs. Rothesay had a nose; but it was so entirely in harmony with the rest of her face, that you never thought whether it were Roman, Grecian, or aquiline. Her eyes—

> "She has two eyes, so soft and brown—
> She gives a side−glance and looks down."

But was there a soul in this exquisite frame? You never asked—you never cared! You took the thing for granted; and whether it were so or not, you felt that the world, and yourself especially, ought to be thankful for having looked at so lovely an image, if only to prove that earth still possessed such a thing as ideal beauty; and you forgave all the men, in every age, that have run mad for the same. Sometimes, perchance, you would pause a moment, to ask if this magic were real, and remember the calm, holy airs that breathed from the presence of some woman, beautiful only in her soul. But then you never would have looked upon Sybilla Rothesay as a woman at all—only a flesh−and−blood fairy—a Venus de Medici transmuted from the stone.

Perhaps this was the way in which Captain Angus Rothesay contrived to fall in love with Sybilla Hyde; until he woke from the dream to find his seraph of beauty—a baby−bride, pouting like a vexed child, because, in their sudden elopement, she had neither wedding−bonnet nor Brussels veil!

And now she was a baby−mother; playing with her infant as, not so very long since, she had played with her doll; twisting its tiny fingers, and making them close tightly round her own, which were quite as elfin−like, comparatively. For Mrs. Rothesay's surpassing beauty included beautiful hands and feet; a blessing which nature—often niggardly in her gifts—does not always extend to pretty women, but bestows it on those who have

infinitely more reason to be thankful for the boon.

"See, nurse Elspie," said Mrs. Rothesay, laughing in her childish way; "see how fast the little creature holds my finger! Really, I think a baby is a very pretty thing; and it will be so nice to play with until Angus comes home."

Elspie turned round from the corner where she sat sewing, and looked with a half−suppressed sigh at her master's wife, whose delicate English beauty, and quick, ringing English voice, formed such a strong contrast to herself, and were so opposed to her own peculiar prejudices. But she had learned to love the young creature, nevertheless; and for the thousandth time she smothered the half−unconscious thought that Captain Angus might have chosen better.

"Children are a blessing frae the Lord, as maybe ye'll see, ane o' these days, Mrs. Rothesay," said Elspie, gravely; "ye maun tak' them as they're sent, and mak' the best o' them."

Mrs. Rothesay laughed merrily. "Thank you, Elspie, for giving me such a solemn speech, just like one of my husband's. To put me in mind of him, I suppose. As if there were any need for that! Dear Angus! I wonder what he will say to his little daughter when he sees her; the new Miss Rothesay, who has come in opposition to the old Miss Rothesay—ha! ha!"

"The auld Miss Rothesay! Ye speak a wee bit too lightly, seeing she's your husband's aunt," observed Elspie, feeling it necessary to stand up for the honour of the family. "Miss Flora was a braw, braw leddy ance, as a' the Rothesays aye were."

"And this Miss Rothesay will be too, I hope, though she is such a little brown thing now. But people say that the brownest babies grow the fairest in time, eh, nurse?"

"They do say that," replied Elspie, with another and a heavier sigh; while she bent closer over her work, and her hard coarse features softened into a look of deepest compassion.

Mrs. Rothesay went on in her blithe chatter. "I half wished for a boy, as Captain Rothesay thought it would please his uncle; but that's of no consequence. He will be quite satisfied with a girl, and so am I. Of course she will be a beauty, my dear little baby!" And with a deeper shadowing of mother−love piercing through her childish pleasure, she bent over the infant; then took it up, awkwardly and comically enough, as though it were a toy she was afraid of breaking, and rocked it to and fro on her breast.

Elspie started up. "Tak' care, tak' care! ye'll hurt it, maybe, the puir wee—Oh, what was I gaun to say!" and she stopped hastily, with an expression of anguish which showed how hard was concealment to her honest nature.

"Don't trouble yourself," said the young mother, with a charming assumption of matronly dignity; "I shall hold the baby safe. I know all about it."

And she really did succeed in lulling the child to sleep; which was no sooner accomplished than she re−commenced her pleasant musical chatter, partly addressed to her nurse, but chiefly the unconscious overflow of a simple nature which could not conceal a single thought.

"I wonder what I shall call her—the darling! We must not wait until her papa comes home. She can't be 'baby' for three years. I shall have to decide on her name myself. Oh, what a pity! I, who never could decide anything. Poor dear Angus! he does all—he had even to fix the wedding−day!" And her musical laugh—another rare charm that she possessed—caused Elspie to look round with mingled pity and affection.

"Come, nurse; you can help me, I know. I am puzzling my poor head for a name to give this young lady here. It must be a very pretty one. I wonder what Angus would like? A family name, perhaps, after one of those old Rothesays that you and he make so much of."

"Oh, Mrs. Rothesay! And are ye no proud o' your husband's family?" said Elspie, reproachfully.

"Yes, very proud; especially as I have none of my own. He took me—an orphan, without a single tie in the wide world—he took me into his warm loving arms"—here her voice faltered, and a sweet womanly tenderness softened her eyes. "God bless my noble husband! I **am** proud of him, and of his people, and of all his race. So come," she added, her childish manner reviving, "tell me of the remarkable women in the Rothesay family for the last five hundred years—you know all about them, Elspie. Surely we'll find one to be a namesake for my baby."

Elspie—pleased and important—began eagerly to relate long traditions about the Lady Christina Rothesay, who was a witch, and a great friend of "Maister Michael Scott," and how, with spells, she caused her seven step−sons to pine away and die; also the Lady Isobel, who let her lover down from her bower−window with the long strings of her golden hair; and how her brother found and slew him;—whence she laid a curse on all the line

who had golden hair, and such never prospered, but died unmarried and young.

"I hope the curse has past away now," gaily said the young mother, "and that the latest scion will not be a golden−tressed damsel. Yet look here"—and she touched the soft down beneath her infant's cap, which might, by a considerable exercise of imagination, be called hair—"it is yellow, you see, Elspie! But I'll not believe your tradition. My child shall be both beautiful and beloved."

Smitten with a sudden pang, poor Elspie cried, "Oh my leddy, dinna think o' the future. Dinna!—" and she stopped, confused.

"Really, how strange you are. But go on. We'll have no more Christinas nor Isobels."

Hurriedly, Elspie continued to relate the histories: of noble Jean Rothesay, who died by an arrow aimed at her husband's heart; and Alison, her sister, the beauty of James the Fifth's reckless court, who was "no gude;" and Mistress Katharine Rothesay, who hid two of "the Prince's" soldiers after Culloden, and stood with a pair of pistols before their bolted door.

"Nay, I'll have none of these—they frighten me," cried Sybilla, hiding her pretty face with a pretended alarm; "I wonder I ever had courage to marry the descendant of such awful women. No! my sweet innocent! you shall not be christened after them," she continued, stroking the baby−cheek with her soft finger. "You shall not be like them at all, except in their beauty. And they were all handsome—were they, Elspie?"

"Ne'er a ane o' the Rothesay line, man or woman, that wasna fair to see—the fairest in the land," cried Elspie.

"Then so will my baby be!—like her father, I hope—or just a little like her mother, who is not so very ugly, either; at least, Angus says not." And with a charming consciousness, Mrs. Rothesay drew up her tiny figure, patted one dainty hand—the wedded one—with its fairy fellow; then—touched perhaps with a passing melancholy that he who most prized her beauty, and for whose sake she most prized it herself, was far away—she leaned back and sighed.

However, in a few minutes, she cried out, her words showing how light and wandering was the reverie, "Elspie, I have a thought! The baby shall be christened Olive!"

"It's a strange, heathen name, Mrs. Rothesay."

"Not at all. Listen how I chanced to think of it. This very morning, just before you came to waken me, I had such a queer, delicious dream."

"Dream! Are ye sure it was i' the morning−tide?" cried Elspie, aroused into interest.

"Yes; and so it certainly means something, you will say, Elspie? Well, it was about my baby. She was then lying fast asleep in my bosom, and her warm, soft breathing soon sent me to sleep too. I dreamt that somehow I had gradually let her go from me, so that I felt her in my arms no more, and I was very sad, and cried out how cruel it was for any one to steal my child, until I found I had let her go of my own accord. Then I looked up, after awhile, and saw standing at the foot of the bed a little angel—a child−angel—with a green olive−branch in its hand. It told me to follow; so I rose up, and followed it over a wide desert country, and across rivers and among wild beasts; but at every peril the child held out the olive−branch, and we passed on safely. And when I felt weary, and my feet were bleeding, with the rough journey the little angel touched them with the olive, and I was strong again. At last we reached a beautiful valley, and the child said, 'You are quite safe now.' I answered, 'And who is my beautiful comforting angel?' Then the white wings fell off, and I only saw a sweet child's face, which bore something of Angus's likeness and something of my own, and the little one stretched out her bands and said, 'Mother!'"

While Mrs. Rothesay spoke, her thoughtless manner had once more softened into deep feeling. Elspie watched her with wondering eagerness.

"It was nae dream; it was a vision. God send it true," said the old woman, solemnly.

"I know not. Angus always laughed at my dreams, but I have a strange feeling whenever I think of this. Oh, Elspie, you can't tell how sweet it was! And so I should like to call my baby Olive, for the sake of the beautiful angel. It may be foolish—but 'tis a fancy of mine. Olive Rothesay! It sounds well, and Olive Rothesay she shall be."

"Amen; and may she be an angel to ye a' her days. And ye'll mind o' the blessed dream, and love her evermair. Oh, my sweet leddy, promise me that ye will!" cried the nurse, approaching her mistress's chair, while two great tears stole down her hard cheeks.

"Of course I shall love her dearly! What made you doubt it? Because I am so young? Nay, I have a mother's

heart, though I am only eighteen. Come, Elspie, do let us be merry; send these drops away;" and she patted the old withered face with her little hand. "Was it not you who told me the saying, 'It's ill greeting ower a new born wean.' There! don't I succeed charmingly in your northern tongue?"

What a winning little creature she was, this young wife of Angus Rothesay! Probably the only person who did not think so was the old Highland uncle, Miss Flora's brother, who had disinherited his nephew and promised heir for bringing him a *Sassenach* niece.

"A charming scene of maternal felicity! I am quite sorry to intrude upon it," said a bland voice at the door, as Dr. Johnson put in his shining bald head.

Mrs. Rothesay welcomed him in her graceful, cordial way. She was so ready to cling to every one who showed her kindness—and he had been very kind; so kind that, with her usual quick impulses, she had determined to stay and live at Stirling until her husband's return from Jamaica. She told Dr. Johnson so now; and, moreover, as an earnest of the friendship which she, accustomed to be loved by every one, expected from him, she requested him to stand godfather to her little babe.

"She shall be christened after our English fashion, doctor, and her name shall be Olive. What do you think of her now? Is she growing prettier?"

The doctor bowed a smiling assent, and walked to the window. Thither Elspie followed him.

"Ye maun tell her the truth—I daurna. Ye will?" and she clutched his arm with eager anxiety. "An' oh! for Godsake, say it saftly, kindly. Think o' the puir mither."

He shook her off with an uneasy look. He had never felt in a more disagreeable position.

Mrs. Rothesay called him back again. "I think, doctor, her features are improving. She will certainly be a beauty. I should break my heart if she were not. And what would Angus say? Come—what are you and Elspie talking about so mysteriously?"

"My dear madam—hem!" began Dr. Johnson. "I do hope—indeed, I am sure—your child will be a good child, and a great comfort to both her parents;—"

"Certainly—but how grave you are about it."

"I have a painful duty—a very painful duty," he replied. But Elspie pushed him aside.

"Ye're just a fule, man!—ye'll kill her. Say your say at ance!"

The young mother turned deadly pale. "Say **what**, Elspie? What is he going to tell me? Angus—"

"No, no, my darlin' leddy! your husband's safe;" and Elspie flung herself on her knees beside the chair. "But, the bairnie—(dinna fear, for it's the will o' God, and a' for gude, nae doubt)—the sweet wee bairnie is—"

"Is, I grieve to say it, deformed," added Dr. Johnson.

The poor mother gazed incredulously on him, on the nurse, and lastly on the sleeping child. Then, without a word, she fell back, and fainted in Elspie's arms.

CHAPTER III.

IT was many days before Mrs. Rothesay recovered from the shock occasioned by the tidings—to her almost more fearful than her child's death—that it was doomed for life to suffer the curse of hopeless deformity. For a curse, a bitter curse, this seemed to the young and beautiful creature, who had learned since her birth to consider beauty as the greatest good. She was, so to speak, in love with loveliness; not merely in herself, but in every human creature. This feeling sprung more from enthusiasm than from personal vanity, the borders of which meanness she had just touched, but never crossed. Perhaps, also, she was too conscious of her own loveliness, and admired herself too ardently to care for attracting the petty admiration of others. She took it quite as a matter of course; and was no more surprised at being worshipped than if she had been the Goddess of Beauty herself.

But if Sybilla Rothesay gloried in her own perfections, she no less gloried in those of all she loved, and chiefly in her noble−looking husband. And they were so young and impassioned, so quickly wed and so soon parted, that this emotion had no time to deepen into that soul−united affection which is independent of outward semblance; or, rather, becomes so divine, that instead of beauty creating love, love has power to create beauty.

No marvel then, that not having attained to a higher experience, Sybilla considered beauty as all in all. And this child—her child and Angus's, would be a deformity on the face of the earth, a shame to its parents, a dishonour to its race. How should she ever bear to look upon it? Still more, how should she ever dare to show the poor cripple to its father, and say, "This is our child—our first−born." Would he not turn away in disgust, and answer that it had better died?

Such exaggerated fancies as these haunted the miserable and erring mother, when she passed from her long swoon into a sort of fever; which, though scarce endangering her life, was yet for days a source of great anxiety to the devoted Elspie. To the unhappy infant this madness—for it was temporary madness—almost caused death. Mrs. Rothesay positively refused to see or notice her child, scorning alike the tearful entreaties and the stern reproaches of the nurse. At last Elspie ceased to combat this passionate resolve, springing half from anger and half from delirium—

"God forgie ye, and save the innocent bairn—the dochter He gave, and the whilk ye're like to murder—unthankfu' woman as ye are," muttered Elspie, under her breath, as she quitted the room and went to succour the almost dying babe. Over it her heart yearned as it had never yearned before.

"Your mither casts ye aff, ye puir wee thing. Maybe ye're no lang for this warld, but while ye're in it ye sall be my ain lassie, an' I'll be your ain mammie, evermair."

So, like Naomi of old, Elspie Murray "laid the child in her bosom and became nurse unto it." But for her, the life of our Olive Rothesay,—with all its influences, good or evil, small or great, as yet unknown,—would have expired like a faint−flickering taper.

Perhaps, in her madness, the unhappy mother might almost have desired such an ending. As it was, the disappointed hope, which had at first resembled positive dislike, subsided into the most complete indifference. She endured her child's presence, but she took no notice of it; she seemed to have forgotten its very existence. Her shattered health supplied sufficient excuse for the utter abandonment of all a mother's duties, and the poor feeble spark of life was left to Elspie's cherishing. By night and by day the child knew no other resting−place than the old nurse's arms, the mother's seeming to be for ever closed to its helpless innocence. True, Sybilla kissed it once a day, when Elspie brought the little creature to her, and exacted, as a duty, the recognition which Mrs. Rothesay, girlish and yielding as she was, dared not refuse. Her husband's faithful retainer had over her an influence which could never be gainsaid.

Elspie seemed to be the sole regent of the babe's destiny. It was she who took it to its baptism;—not the festal ceremony which had pleased Sybilla's childish fancy with visions of christening robes and cakes, but the beautiful and simple "naming" of Elspie's own church. She stood before the minister, holding the desolate babe in her protecting arms; and there her heart sealed the promise of her lips, to bring it up in the knowledge and fear of God. And with an earnest credulity, which contained the germs of purest and loftiest faith, she, remembering the mother's dream, called her nursling by the name of Olive.

She carried the babe home and laid it on Mrs. Rothesay's lap. The young creature, who had so strangely renounced that dearest blessing of mother−love, would fain have put the child aside; but Elspie's stern eye

controlled her.

"Ye maun kiss and bless your dochter. Nae tongue but her mither's suld ca' her by her new−christened name."

"What name?"

"The name ye gied her yer ain sel."

"No, no. Surely you have not called her so. Take her away; she is not my sweet angel−baby—the darling in my dream." And Sybilla hid her face; not in anger, or disgust, but in bitter weeping.

"She's your ain dochter—Olive Rothesay," answered Elspie, less harshly. "She may be an angel to ye, yet."

While she spoke, it so chanced that there flitted over the infant−face one of those smiles that we see sometimes in young children—strange, causeless smiles, which seem the reflection of some invisible influence.

And so, while the babe smiled, there came to its face such an angel−brightness, that it shone into the mother's careless heart. For the first time since that mournful day which had so changed her nature, Sybilla Rothesay sat down and kissed the child of her own accord. Elspie heard no maternal blessing—the name of "Olive" was never breathed; but the nurse was satisfied when she saw that the babe's second baptism was its mother's repentant tears.

There was in Sybilla no hardness or cruelty, only the disappointment and vexation of a child deprived of an expected toy. She might have grown weary of her little daughter almost as soon, even if her pride and hope had not been crushed by the knowledge of Olive's deformity. Love to her seemed a treasure to be paid in requital, not a free gift bestowed without thought of return. That self−forgetting maternal devotion, lavished first on unconscious infancy, and then on unregarding youth, was a mystery to her utterly incom− prehensible. At least it seemed so now, when, with the years and the character of a child, she was called to the highest duty of woman's life. This duty comes to some girlish mothers as an instinct, but it was not so with Mrs. Rothesay. An orphan, and heiress to a competence, if not to wealth, she had been brought up like a plant in a hot−bed, with all natural impulses either warped and suppressed, or forced into undue luxuriance. And yet it was a sweet plant withal; one that might have grown, ay, and might yet grow, into perfect strength and beauty.

Mrs. Rothesay's education,—that education of heart, and mind, and temper, which is essential to a woman's happiness,—had to begin when it ought to have been completed—at her marriage. Most unfortunate it was for her, that ere the first twelvemonth of their wedded life had passed, Captain Rothesay was forced to depart for Jamaica, whence was derived his wife's little fortune; their whole fortune now, for he had quitted the army on his marriage. Thus Sybilla was deprived of that wholesome influence which man has ever over a woman who loves him, and by which he may, if he so will, counteract many a fault and weakness in her disposition.

Time passed on, and Mrs. Rothesay, a wife and mother, was at twenty−one years old just the same as she had been at seventeen—as girlish, as thoughtless, eager for any amusement, and often treading on the very verge of folly. She still lived at Stirling, enforced thereunto by the entreaties, almost the commands, of Elspie Murray, against whom she bitterly murmured sometimes, for shutting her up in such a dull Scotch town. When Elspie urged her unprotected situation, the necessity of living in retirement, for the "honour of the family," while Captain Angus was away, Mrs. Rothesay sometimes frowned, but more often put the matter off with a merry jest. Meanwhile she consoled herself by going as much into society as the limited circle of Dr. and Mrs. Johnson allowed; and therein, as usual, the lovely, gay, winning young creature was spoiled to her heart's content.

So she still lived the life of a wayward, petted child, whose natural instinct for all things good and beautiful kept her from ever doing what was positively wrong, though she did a great deal that was foolish enough in its way. She was, as she jestingly said, "a widow bewitched;" but she rarely coquetted, and then only in that innocent way which comes natural to some women, from a universal desire to please. And she never ceased talking and thinking of her beautiful, noble Angus.

When his letters came, she always made a point of kissing them half−a−dozen times, and putting them under her pillow at night, just like a child! And she wrote to him regularly once a month—pretty, playful, loving letters. But there was in them one peculiarity,—they were utterly free from that delicious maternal egotism which chronicles all the little incidents of babyhood. She said, in answer to her husband's questions, that "Olive was well;" "Olive could just walk;" "Olive had learned to say '**Papa** and **Elspie**.'" Nothing more.

The fatal secret she had not dared to tell him.

Her first letters,—full of joy about "the loveliest baby that ever was seen,"—had brought his in return echoing the rapture with truly paternal pride. They reached her in her misery, to which they added tenfold. Every sentence smote her with bitter regret, even with shame, as though it were her fault in having given to the world the

wretched child. Captain Rothesay expressed his joy that his little daughter was not only healthy, but pretty; for, he said, "He should be quite unhappy if she did not grow up as beautiful as her mother." The words pierced Sybilla's heart; she could not—dared not tell him the truth; not yet, at least. And whenever Elspie's rough honesty urged her to do so, she fell into such agonies of grief and anger, that the nurse was obliged to desist.

Sometimes, when letter after letter came from the father, full of inquiries about his precious first−born,—Sybilla, whose fault was more in weakness than deceit, resolved that she would nerve herself for the terrible task. But it was vain—she had not strength to do it.

The three years extended into four, and still Captain Rothesay sent gift after gift, and message after message, to his daughter. Still he wrote to the conscience−stricken mother how many times he had kissed the "little lock of golden hue," severed from the baby−head; picturing the sweet face and lithe, active form which he had never seen. And all the while there was stealing about the old house at Stirling, a pale, deformed, child; small and attenuated in frame—quiet beyond its years, delicate, spiritless, with scarce one charm that would prove its lineage from the young beautiful mother, out of whose sight it instinctively crept.

Thus the years fled with Olive Rothesay and her parents; each month, each day, sowing seeds that would assuredly spring up, for good or for evil, in the destinies of all three.

CHAPTER IV.

THE fourth year of Captain Rothesay's absence passed;—not without anxiety, for it was war−time, and his letters were frequently interrupted. At first, whenever this happened, his wife fretted extremely—**fretted** is the right word, for it was more a fitful chafing than a positive grief. Sybilla knew not the sense of deep sorrow. Her nature resembled one of those sunny climes where even the rains are dews. So, after a few disappointments, she composed herself to the certainty that nothing would happen amiss to her Angus; and she determined never to expect a letter until she received it, and not to look for **him** at all until he wrote her word that he was coming. He was sure to do what was right, and to return to his dearly−loved wife as soon as ever he could. And, though scarce acknowledging the fact to herself, her husband's return involved such a humiliating explanation of truth concealed, if not of positive falsehood, that Sybilla dared not even think of it. Whenever the long−parted wife mused on the joy of meeting—of looking once more into the beloved face, and being lifted up like a child to cling round his neck with her fairy arms, for Angus was a very giant to her—then there seemed to rise between them the phantom of the pale, deformed child.

To drown these fancies, Sybilla rushed into every amusement which her secluded life afforded. At last she resolved on an exploit at which Elspie looked aghast, and which made the quiet Mrs. Johnson shake her head—an evening party—nay, even a dance, at her own home.

"It will never do for the people here; they're '*unco gude*,'" said the doctor's English wife, who had imbibed a few Scottish pre− judices by a residence of thirty years. "Nobody ever dances in Stirling."

"Then I'll teach them," cried the lively Mrs. Rothlesay; "I long to show them a quadrille—even that new dance that all the world is shocked at. Oh! I should dearly like a waltz."

Mrs. Jacob Johnson was scandalised at first, but there was something in Sybilla to which she could not say nay,—nobody ever could. The matter was decided by Mrs. Rothesay's having her own way, except with regard to the waltz, which her friend stanchly resisted. Elspie, too, interfered as long as she could; but her heart was just now full of anxiety about her nursling, who seemed to grow more delicate every year. Day after day the faithful nurse might have been seen trudging across the country, carrying little Olive in her arms, to strengthen the child with the healing springs of Bridge of Allan, and invigorate her weak frame with the fresh mountain air—the heather breath of beautiful Ben−Ledi. Among these in− fluences did Olive's childhood dawn, so that in after−life they never faded from her.

Elspie scarce thought again about the gay party, until when she came in one evening, and was undressing the sleepy little girl in the dusk, a vision appeared at the nursery door. It quite startled the old Scotswoman at first, it looked so like a fairy apparition, all in white, with a green coronet. She hardly could believe that it was her young mistress.

"Eh! Mrs. Rothesay, ye're no goin' to show yoursel in sic a dress," she cried, regarding with horror the gleaming bare arms, the lovely neck, and the tiny white−sandalled feet, which the short and airy robe exhibited in all their perfection.

"Indeed, but I am! and 'tis quite a treat to wear a ball−dress. I, that have been smothered up in all sorts of ugly costume for nearly five years. And see my jewels! Why, Elspie, this pearl−set has only beheld the light once since I was married—so beautiful as it is—and Angus's gift too."

"Dinna say that name," cried Elspie, driven to a burst of not very respectful reproach. "I marvel ye daur speak of Captain Angus—and ye, wi' your havers and your jigs, while yer husband's far awa', and your bairn sick! It's for nae gude I tell ye, Mrs. Rothesay."

Sybilla had looked a little subdued at the allusion to her husband, but the moment Elspie mentioned the little Olive, her manner changed. "You are always blaming me about the child, and I will not bear it. She is quite well. Are you not, Baby?"—the mother never would call her **Olive**.

A feeble, trembling voice answered from the little bed, "Yes, please, mamma!"

"There, you hear, Elspie! Now, don't torment me any more about her. But I must go down stairs."

She danced across the room in a graceful waltzing step, held out her hand towards the child, and touched one so tiny, cold, and damp, that she felt half inclined to take and warm it in her own. But Elspie's hawk−eyes were watching her, and she was ashamed. So she only said, "Good night, Baby!" and danced back again, out through

the open door.

For hours Elspie sat in the dark room beside the bed of the little child, who lay murmuring, sometimes moaning, in her sleep. She never did moan but in her sleep, poor innocent! The sound of music and dancing rose up from below, and then Mrs. Rothesay's clear, bird−like voice was heard in many a blithe ditty.

"Ye'd better be hushin' your puir wee bairnie here, ye heartless woman!" muttered Elspie, who grew daily more jealous over the forsaken child, now the very darling of her old age. She knew not that her love for Olive, and its open tokens shown by reproaches to Olive's mother, were sure to suppress any dawning tenderness that might be awakened in Mrs. Rothesay's bosom.

It had not done so yet, for many a time during the dance and song did the touch of that little cold hand haunt the young mother, rousing a feeling akin to remorse. But she threw it off again and again, and entered with the gaiety of her nature into all the evening's pleasure. Her wild enjoyment was at its height, when an old acquaintance, just discovered—an English officer, quartered at the Castle—proposed a waltz. Before she had time to say "Yes" or "No," the music struck up one of those enchanting waltz−measures which, to all true lovers of dancing, are as irresistible as Maurice Connor's "Wonderful Tune." Sybilla felt again the same blithe young creature of sixteen, who had led the revels at her first ball, dancing into the heart of one old colonel, six ensigns, a doctor, a lawyer, and of Angus Rothesay. There was no resisting the impulse: in a moment she was whirling away.

In the midst of the dizzy round the door opened, and, like some evil spectre, in stalked Elspie Murray.

Never was there such an uncouth apparition seen in a ball−room. Her grey petticoat exhibited her bare feet; her short upper gown, that graceful and picturesque attire of the Scottish peasantry, was thrown carelessly over her shoulders; her *mutch* was put on awry, and from under its immense border her face appeared, as white almost as the cap itself. She walked right into the centre of the floor, laid her heavy hand on Sybilla's shoulder, and said,

"Mrs. Rothesay, your husband's here!"

The young wife stood one moment transfixed; she turned pale, afterwards crimson, and then, uttering a cry of joy, sprang to the door—sprang into her husband's arms.

Dazzled with the light, the traveller resisted not, while Elspie half led, half dragged him—still clasping his wife—into a little room close by, when she shut the door and left them. Then she burst in once more among the astonished guests.

"Ye may gang your gate, ye heathens! Awa wi' ye, for Captain Rothesay's come hame!"

Sybilla and her husband stood face to face in the little gloomy room, lighted only by a solitary candle. At first she clung about him so closely that he could not see her face, though he felt her tears falling, and her little heart beating against his own. He knew it was all for joy. But he was strangely bewildered by the scene which had flashed for a minute before his eyes, while standing at the door of the room.

After a while he drew his wife to the light, and held her out at arm's length to look at her. Then, for the first time, she remembered all. Trembling—blushing scarlet, over face and neck—she perceived her husband's eyes rest on her glittering dress. He regarded her fixedly, from head to foot. She felt his expression change from joy to uneasy wonder, from love to sternness, and then he wore a strange, cold look, such a one as she had never beheld in him before.

"So, the young lady I saw whirling madly in some man's arms—was you, Sybilla—was **my wife**."

As Captain Rothesay spoke, Sybilla distinguished in his voice a new tone, echoing the strange coldness in his eyes. She sprang to his neck, weeping now for grief and alarm, as she had before wept for joy; she prayed him to forgive her, told him with a sincerity that none could doubt, how rejoiced she was at his coming, and how dearly she loved him—now and ever. He kissed her, at her passionate entreaty; said he had nothing to blame; suffered her caresses patiently; but the impression was given, the deed was done.

While he lived, Captain Rothesay never forgot that night. Nor did Sybilla; for then she had first seen that cold, stern look and heard that altered tone. How many times was it to haunt her afterwards!

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning Captain Rothesay and his wife sat together by the fireside, where she had so often sat alone. Sybilla seemed in high spirits—her love was ever exuberant in expression—and the moment her husband seemed serious she sprang on his knee and looked playfully in his face.

"Just as much a child as ever, I see," said Angus Rothesay, with a rather wintry smile.

And then, looking in his face by daylight, Sybilla had opportunity to see how changed he was. He had become a grave, middle−aged man. She could not understand it. He had never told her of any cares, and he was little more than thirty. She felt almost vexed at him for growing so old; nay, she even said so, and began to pull out a few grey hairs that defaced the beauty of his black curls.

"You shall lecture me presently, my dear," said Captain Rothesay. "You forget that I had two welcomes to receive, and that I have not yet seen the little girl."

He had not indeed. His eager inquiries after Olive overnight had been answered by a pretty pout, and several trembling, anxious speeches about "a wife being dearer than a child." "Baby was asleep, and it was so very late—he might, surely, wait tills morning." To which, though rather surprised, he assented. A few more caresses, a few more excuses, had still further delayed the terrible moment; until at last the father's impatience would no longer be restrained.

"Come, Sybilla, let us go and see our little Olive."

"Oh, Angus!" and the mother turned deadly white.

Captain Rothesay seemed alarmed. "Don't trifle with me, Sybilla—there is nothing the matter? The child is not ill?"

"No; quite well."

"Then, why cannot Elspie bring her?" and he pulled the bell violently. The nurse appeared. "My good Elspie, you have kept me waiting quite long enough; do let me see my little girl."

Elspie gave one glance at the mother, who stood mute and motionless, clinging to the chair for support. In that glance was less compassion than a sort of triumphant exultation. When she quitted the room Sybilla flung herself at her husband's feet.

"Angus, Angus, only say you forgive me, before—"

The door opened, and Elspie led in a little girl. By her stature she might have been two years old, but her face was like that of a child of ten or twelve—so thoughtful, so grave. Her limbs were small and wasted, but exquisitely delicate. The same might be said of her features; which, though thin, and wearing a look of premature age, together with that quiet, earnest, melancholy cast peculiar to deformity, were yet regular, almost pretty. Her head was well−shaped, and from it fell a quantity of amber−coloured hair—pale "lint−white locks," which, with the almost colourless transparency of her complexion, gave a spectral air to her whole appearance. She looked less like a child than a woman dwarfed into childhood; the sort of being renowned in elfin legends, as springing up on a lonely moor, or appearing by a cradle−side; supernatural, yet fraught with a nameless beauty. She was dressed with the most care, in white, with blue ribands; and her lovely hair was arranged so as to hide, as much as possible, the defect, which, alas! was even then only too perceptible. It was not a humpback, nor yet a twisted spine; it was an elevation of the shoulders, shortening the neck, and giving the appearance of a perpetual stoop. There was nothing disgusting or painful in it, but still it was an imperfection, causing an instinctive compassion—an involuntary "Poor little creature, what a pity!"

Such was the child—the last daughter of the ever−beautiful Rothesay line—which Elspie led to claim the paternal embrace. Olive looked up at her father with her wistful, pensive eyes, in which was no childish shyness—only wonder. He met them with a gaze of frenzied unbelief. Then his fingers clutched his wife's arm with the grasp of an iron vice.

"Tell me! for God's sake, deceive me no longer. Is that our daughter, Olive Rothesay?"

She answered, "Yes." He shook her off angrily, looked once more at the child, and then turned away, putting his hand before his eyes, as if to shut out the sight.

Olive saw the gesture. Young as she was, it went deep to her child's soul. Elspie saw it too, and without bestowing a second glance on her master or his wife, she snatched up the child and hurried from the room.

The father and mother were left alone—to meet that crisis most fatal to wedded happiness, the discovery of the first deceit. Cap− tain Rothesay sat silent, with averted face; Sybilla was weeping—not that repentant shower which rains softness into a man's heart, but those fretful tears which chafe him beyond endurance.

"Sybilla, come to me!" The words were a fond husband's words; the tone was that of a master who took on himself his prerogative. Never had Angus spoken so before, and the wilful spirit of his wife rebelled.

"I cannot come. I dare not even look at you. You are so angry."

His only answer was the reiterated command, "Sybilla, come!" She crept from the far end of the room, where she was sobbing in a fear−stricken, childish way, and stood before him. For the first time she recognised her husband, whom she must "obey." Now, with all the power of his roused nature, he was teaching her the meaning of the word. "Sybilla," he said, looking sternly in her face, "tell me why, all these years, you have put upon me this cheat—this lie!"

"Cheat!—lie! Oh, Angus! What cruel, wicked words!"

"I am sorry I used them, then. I will choose a lighter term—deceit. Why did you so **deceive** your husband?"

"I did not mean it," sobbed the young wife. "And this is very unkind of you, Angus! As if Heaven had not punished me enough in giving me that miserable child!"

"Silence! I am not speaking of the child, but of you; my wife, in whom I trusted; who for five long years has wilfully deceived me. Why did you so?"

"Because I was afraid—ashamed. But those feelings are past now," said Sybilla, resolutely. "If Heaven made me mother, it made you father to this unhappy child. You have no right to reproach me."

"God forbid! No, it is not the misfortune—it is the falsehood which stings me. All these five years I have toiled and toiled—comforting myself with thoughts of you and our child, dreaming over your letters—oh, Heaven! what a dupe I have been!"

And his grave, mournful tone, rose into one of bitter anger. He paced the room, tossed by a passion such as his wife had never before seen.

"Sybilla!" he suddenly cried, pausing before her; "you do not know what you have done. You little think what my love has been, nor against how much it has struggled these five years. I have been true to you—ay, to the depth of my heart. And you to me have been—not wholly true."

Here he was answered by a burst of violent hysterical weeping. He longed to call for feminine assistance to this truly feminine ebullition, which he did not understand. But his pride forbade. So he tried to soothe his wife a little with softer words, though even these seemed somewhat foreign to his lips, after so many long−parted years.

"I did not mean to pain you thus deeply, Sybilla. I do not say that you have ceased to love me!"

Would that Sybilla had done as her first impulse taught her; have clung about him, crying "Never! never!" murmuring penitent words, as a tender wife may well do, and in such humility be the more exalted! But she had still the wayward spirit of a petted child. Fancying she saw her husband once more at her feet, she determined to keep him there. She wept on, refusing to be pacified.

At last Angus rose from her side, dignified and cold, his new, not his old self; the lover no more, but the quiet, half−indifferent husband. "I see we had better not talk of these things until you are more composed—perhaps, indeed, not at all. What is past—is past, and cannot be recalled."

"Angus!" She looked up, frightened at his grave manner. She determined to conciliate him a little. "What do you want me to do? To say I am sorry? That I will—but," she added with an air of coquettish command, "you must say so too."

The jest was ill−timed; he was in too bitter a mood. "I thank you, but you exact too much, Mrs. Rothesay."

"**Mrs. Rothesay!** oh, call me Sybilla, or my heart will break!" cried the young creature, throwing herself into his arms. He did not repulse her; he even looked down upon her with a melting, half reproachful tenderness.

"How happy we might have been! How different had been this coming home if you had only trusted me, and told me all from the beginning."

"Have you told **me**? Is there nothing you have kept back from me these five years?" said the young wife, in her pretty, wilful way.

He started a little, and then said resolutely, "Nothing, Sybilla! I declare to Heaven—nothing! save, perhaps, some trifles that I would at any time tell you; now, if you will."

"Oh no! some other time, I am too much exhausted now," murmured Sybilla, with an air of languor, half real,

half feigned, lest perchance she should lose what she had gained. In the sweetness of this reconciled "lovers' quarrel," she had almost forgotten its hapless cause. But Angus, after a pause of deep and evidently conflicting thoughts, referred to the child.

"She is ours still. I must not forget that. Shall I send for her again?" he said, as if he wished to soothe the mother's wounded feelings.

Alas, in Sybilla's breast the fountain of mother's feeling was as yet all sealed. "Send for Olive?" she said, "oh no! Do not, I implore you. The very sight of her is a pain to me. Let us be happy together, and let the child be left to Elspie."

Thus she said, thinking not only to save herself, but him, from what must be a constant pang. Little she knew him, or guessed the after−effect of her words.

Angus Rothesay looked at his wife, first with amazement, then with cold displeasure. "My dear, you scarce speak like a mother. You forget, likewise, that you are speaking to a father. A father who, whatever affection may be wanting, will never forsake his duty. Come, let us go and see our child."

"I cannot—I cannot!" and Sybilla hung back, weeping anew.

Angus Rothesay looked at his wife—the pretty, wayward idol of his bridegroom−memory—looked at her with the eyes of a world−tried, world−hardened man. She regarded him too, and noted the change which years had brought in her almost boyish lover of yore. His eye wore a fretful reproach—his brow, a proud sorrow.

He walked up to her and clasped her hand. "Sybilla, take care! All these years I have been dreaming of the wife and mother I should find here at home; let not the dream prove sweeter than the reality."

Sybilla was annoyed—she, the spoiled darling of every one, who knew not the meaning of a harsh word. She answered, "Don't let us talk so foolishly."

"You think it foolish? Well, then! we will not speak in this confidential way any more," said Angus, shrinking back into his reserve. "I promise, and you know I always keep my promises."

"I am glad of it," answered Sybilla. But she lived to rue the day when her husband made this one promise.

At present, she only felt that the bitter secret was disclosed, and Angus' anger overpast. She gladly let him quit the room, only pausing to ask him to kiss her, in token that all was right between them. He did so, kindly, though with a certain pride and gravity—and departed. She dared not ask him whether it was to see again their hapless child.

What passed between the father and mother whilst they remained shut up together there, Elspie thought not—cared not. She spent the time in passionate caresses of her darling, in half−muttered ejaculations, some of pity, some of wrath. All she desired was to obliterate the impression which she saw had gone deeply to the child's heart. Olive wept not—she rarely did; it seemed as though in her little spirit was a pensive repose, above either infant sorrow or infant fear. She sat on her nurse's knee, scarce speaking, but continually falling into those reveries which we see in quiet children even at that early age, and never without a mysterious wonder, approaching to awe. Of what can these infant musings be?

"Nurse Elspie," said the child, suddenly fixing on Elspie's face her large eyes, to look into which seemed like looking into a spring, not knowing what secrets may lie—depth within depth—beneath the dark blue waters. "Elspie, was that my papa I saw?"

"It was just himsel, my sweet wee pet," cried Elspie, trying to stop the little girl's question with impassioned caresses; but Olive went on.

"He is not like mamma—he is great and tall, like you. But he did not take me up and kiss me, as you said he would."

Elspie had no answer for these words—spoken in a tone of quiet pain—so unlike a child, in whom are the springs of anger and revenge, but rarely of wounded feeling. It is only after many years that we learn to suffer and be silent.

Was it that nature, ever merciful, had im− planted in this poor girl, as an instinct, that meek endurance which usually comes as the painful experience of after−life?

A similar thought passed through Elspie's mind, while she sat with little Olive at the window, where, a few years ago, she had stood rocking the new−born babe in her arms, and pondering drearily on its future. That future seemed still as dark in all outward circumstances—but there was one ray of hope, which centred in the little one herself. There was something in Olive which passed Elspie's comprehension. At times she looked almost with an

uneasy awe on the gentle, silent child, who rarely played; who wanted no amusing, but would sit for hours watching the sky from the window, or the grass and waving trees in the fields; who never was heard to laugh, but now and then smiled in her own peculiar way—a smile almost "uncanny," as Elspie expressed it. At times the old Scotswoman—who, coming from the debateable ground between Highlands and Lowlands, had united to the rigid piety of the latter much wild Gaelic superstition—was half inclined to believe that the little girl was possessed by some spirit. But she was certain it was a good spirit; such a darling as Olive was—so patient, and gentle, and good—more like an angel than a child.

If her misguided parents did but know this! Yet Elspie, in her secret heart, was almost glad they did not. Her passionate and selfish love could not have borne that any tie on earth, not even that of father or mother, should stand between her and the child of her adoption.

While she pondered, there came a light knock to the door, and Captain Rothesay's voice was heard without—his own voice, soothed down to its soft, gentleman−like tone; it was a rare emotion, indeed, that could deprive it of that peculiarity.

"Nurse, I wish to see Miss Olive Rothesay."

It was the first time that formal appellation had ever been given to the little girl. Still, it was a recognition. Elspie heard it with joy, for her excited and indignant fancy had almost pictured the parents disowning their child. She answered the summons, and Captain Rothesay walked in.

We have never described Olive's father—there could not be a better opportunity than now. His appearance did not belie his race, which, though of late generations somewhat mingled with Lowland blood, had been originally pure Gaelic. His tall, active form—now subsiding into the muscular fulness of middle age—was that of a Hercules of the mountains. The face combined Scottish beauties and Scottish defects, which, perhaps, cease to be defects when they become national peculiarities. There was the eagle−eye; the large, but perfectly−chiselled features—especially the mouth; and also there was the high cheek−bone, the rugged squareness of the chin, which, while taking away beauty, gave character to the whole.

When he came nearer, one could easily discern that the features of the father were strangely reflected in those of the child. Altered the likeness was—from strength into feebleness—from manly beauty into almost puny delicacy; but it did exist, and, faint as it was, Elspie perceived it.

Olive was looking up at the clouds, her thin cheek resting against the embrasure of the window, gazing so intently that she never seemed to hear her father's voice or step. Elspie motioned him to walk softly, and they came behind the child.

"Do ye no see, Captain Angus," she whispered, "'tis your ain bonnie face—aye, and your mither's, wha dee'd when ye were a bit laddie. Ye mind her weel?"

Captain Rothesay did not answer, but looked earnestly at his little daughter. She, turning round, met his eyes. There was something in their expression which touched her, for a rosy colour suffused her face; she smiled, stretched out her little hands, and said, "Papa!"

How Elspie then prided herself for the continual tutoring which had made the image of the absent father an image of love!

Captain Rothesay started from his reverie at the sound of the child's voice. The tone, and especially the word, broke the spell. He felt once more that he was the father, not of the blooming little angel that he had pictured, but of this poor deformed girl. However, he was a man in whom a stern sense of right stood in the place of many softer virtues. He had resolved on his duty—he had come to fulfil it—and fulfil it he would. So he took the two little cold hands, and said—

"Papa is glad to see you, my dear."

There was a silence, during which Elspie placed a chair for Captain Rothesay, and Olive, sliding quietly down from hers, came and stood beside him. He did not offer to take the two baby−hands again, but did not repulse them, when the little girl laid them on his knee, looking inquiringly, first at him, and then at Elspie.

"What does she mean?" said Captain Rothesay.

"Puir wee lassie! I tauld her, when her father was come hame, he wad be fair to tak' her in his arms and kiss her."

Rothesay looked angrily round, but recollected himself. "Your nurse was right, my dear." Then pausing for a moment, as though arming himself for a duty—repugnant, indeed, but necessary—he took his daughter on his

knee, and kissed her cheek—once, and no more. But she, remembering Elspie's instructions, and prompted by her loving nature, clung about him, and requited the kiss with many another. They melted him visibly. There is nothing sweeter in this world than a child's unasked, voluntary kiss!

He began to talk to her—uneasily and awkwardly—but still, he did it. "There, that will do, little one! What is your name, my dear?" he said, absently.

She answered, "Olive Rothesay."

"Aye—I had forgotten! The name, at least, was true." And he spoke bitterly. The next moment, he set down the child—softly—but as though it was a relief.

"Is papa going?" said Olive, with a troubled look.

"Yes; but he will come back to−morrow. Once a day will do," he added, to himself. Yet, when his little daughter lifted her mouth for another kiss, he could not help giving it.

"Be a good child, my dear, and say your prayers every night, and love nurse Elspie."

"And papa too, may I?"

He seemed to struggle violently against some inward feeling, and then answered, with a strong effort, "Yes."

The door closed after him abruptly. Very soon Elspie saw him walking with hasty strides along the beautiful walk that winds round the foot of the castle rock. The nurse sat still for a long time thinking, and then ended her ponderings with her favourite phrase—

"God guide us! it'll a' come richt at last."

Poor, honest, humble soul!

CHAPTER VI.

THE return of the husband and father produced a considerable change in the little family at Stirling. A household, long composed entirely of women, always feels to its very foundations the incursion of one of "the nobler sex." From the first morning when there resounded the multiplied ringing of bells, and the creaking of boots on the staircase, the glory of the feminine dynasty was departed. Its easy *laissez−aller*, its lax rule, and its indifference to regular forms, were at an end. Mrs. Rothesay could no longer indulge her laziness—no breakfasting in bed, and coming down in curl−paper. The long gossiping visits of her thousand−and−one acquaintances subsided into frigid morning calls, at which the grim phantom of the husband frowned from a corner, and suppressed all idle chatter. Sybilla's favourite system of killing time by half−hours in various idle ways, at home and abroad, was terminated at once. She had now to learn how to be a duteous wife, always ready at the beck and call of her husband, and attentive to his innumerable wants.

She was quite horrified by these at first. The captain actually expected to dine well and punctually, every day, without being troubled beforehand with "What he would like for dinner?" He listened once or twice, patiently too, to her histories of various small domestic grievances, and then requested politely that she would confine such details to the kitchen in future; at which poor Mrs. Rothesay retired in tears. He liked her to stay at home in the evening, make his tea, and then read to him, or listen while he read to her. This was the most arduous task of the two, for, dearly as she loved to hear the sound of his voice, Sybilla never could feel in− terested in the prosy books he read, and often fell half asleep; then he always stopped suddenly, sometimes looked cross, sometimes sad; and in a few minutes he invariably lighted her candle, with the gentle hint that it was time to retire. But often she woke, hours after, and heard him still walking up and down below, or stirring the fire perpetually, as a man does who is obliged to make the fire his sole companion.

And then Sybilla's foolish, but yet loving heart, would feel itself growing sad and heavy; and her husband's image, once painted there in such glittering colours, began to fade. The real Angus was not the Angus to her fancy. Joyful as was his coming home, it had not been quite what she expected. Else, why was it that at times, amidst all her gladness, she thought of their olden past with regret, and of their future with doubt, almost fear?

But it was something new for Sybilla to think at all. It did her good in spite of herself.

While these restless elements of future pain were brooding in the parents, the little, neglected, unsightly blossom, which had sprung up at their feet, lived the same unregarded, monotonous life as heretofore. Olive Rothesay had attained to five years, growing much as a daisy in the field, how, none knew or cared, except Heaven. And that Heaven did both know and care, was evident from the daily sweetness that was stealing into this poor wayside flower, so that it would surely one day be discovered through the invisible perfume which it shed.

Captain Rothesay kept to his firm resolve of seeing his little daughter in her nursery, once a day at least. After a while, the visit of a few minutes lengthened to an hour, even two. He listened with interest to Elspie's delighted eulogiums on her beloved charge, which sometimes went so far as to point out the beauty of the child's wan face, with the assurance that Olive, in features, at least, was a true Rothesay. But the father always stopped her with a dignified, cold look.

"We will quit that subject, if you please."

Nevertheless, guided by his rigid sense of a parent's duty, he showed all kindness to the child, and his omnipotent sway over his wife exacted the same consideration from the hitherto indifferent Sybilla. It might be, also, that in her wayward and informal nature, the chill which had unconsciously fallen on the heart of the wife, caused the mother's heart to awaken. Feelings unwonted began to dawn faintly in Mrs. Rothesay's bosom; they were reflected in her eyes; and then the mother would be almost startled to see the response which this new, though scarcely defined, tenderness created in her child.

For some months after Captain Rothesay's return, the little family abode in the retired old−fashioned dwelling on the hill of Stirling. Their quiet round of uniformity was only broken by the occasional brief absence of the head of the household, as he said, "on business." **Business** was a word conveying such distaste, if not horror, to Sybilla's ears, that she asked no questions, and her husband volunteered no information. In fact, he rarely was in the habit of doing so—whether interrogated or not.

At last, one day when he was sitting after dinner with his wife and child—he always punctiliously commanded

that "Miss Rothesay" might be brought in with the dessert—Angus made the startling remark:

"My dear Sybilla, I wish to consult with you on a subject of some importance."

She looked up with a pretty, childish surprise.

"Consult with me! Oh, Angus! pray don't teaze me with any of your hard business matters; I never could understand them."

"And I never for a moment imagined you could. In fact, you told me so, and therefore I have never troubled you with them, my dear," was the reply, dignified, with just the slightest shade of satire. But its bitterness passed away the moment Sybilla jumped up and came to sit down on the hearth at his feet, in an attitude of comical attention. Thereupon he patted her on the head, gently and smilingly, for he was but a young husband still, and she was such a sweet plaything for an idle hour.

A plaything! Would that all women considered the full meaning of the term—a thing sighed for, snatched, caressed, wearied of, neglected, scorned! And would, also, that every wife knew that her fate depends less on what her husband makes of her, than what she makes herself to him!

"Now, Angus, begin—I am all attention."

He looked one moment doubtfully at Olive, who sat in her little chair at the further end of the room, quiet, silent, and demure. She had beside her some purple plums, which she did not attempt to eat, but was playing with them, arranging them with green leaves in a thousand graceful ways, and smiling to herself when the afternoon sunlight, creeping through the dim window, rested upon them, and made their rich colour richer still.

"Shall we send Olive away?" said the mother.

"No, let her stay—she is of no importance."

The parents both looked at the child's pale, spiritual face, felt the reproach it gave, and sighed. Perhaps both father and mother would have loved her, but for a sense of shame in the latter, and the painful memory of deceit in the former.

"Sybilla," suddenly resumed Captain Rothesay, "what I have to say is merely, how soon you can arrange to leave Stirling?"

"Leave Stirling?"

"Yes; I have taken a house."

"Indeed! and you never told me anything about it," said Sybilla, with a vexed look.

"Now, my little wife, do not be foolish; you know that you never wish to hear about business, and I have taken you at your word; you cannot object to that?"

But she could, and she had a thousand half−pouting, half−jesting complaints to urge. She put them forth rather incoherently; in fact, she talked for five minutes without giving her husband opportunity for a single word, and yet she loved him dearly, and had in her heart scarce any objection to being saved the trouble of thinking beforehand; only she thought it right to stand up a little for her conjugal prerogative.

He listened in perfect silence. When she had done, he merely said, "Very well, Sybilla; then we will leave Stirling this day month. I have decided to live in England. Oldchurch is a very convenient town, and I have no doubt you will find Merivale Hall an agreeable residence.

"Merivale Hall. Are we really going to live in a Hall?" cried Sybilla, clapping her hands with childish glee. But immediately her face changed. "You must be jesting with me, Angus. I don't know much about money, but I know we are not rich enough to keep up a Hall."

"We **were** not rich, but we are now, I am happy to say," answered Captain Rothesay, with a look of dignified triumph.

"Rich! very rich! and you never told me!" Sybilla's hands fell on her knee, and it was doubtful which expression was dominant in her countenance—womanly pain, or womanly indignation.

Angus looked annoyed. "My dear Sybilla, listen to me quietly—yes, quietly," he added, in a resolute tone, seeing how her colour came and went, and her lips seemed ready to burst out into petulant reproach. "When I left England, I was taunted with having ran away with an heiress. That, I did not do, since you were far poorer than the world thought—and I loved little Sybilla Hyde for herself, and not for her fortune. But the taunt stung me, and, when I left you, I resolved never to return until I could return a rich man on my own account. I am such now. Are you not glad, Sybilla?"

"Glad—glad to have been kept in the dark like a baby—a fool! It was not proper treatment towards your wife,

Angus," was the petulant answer, as Sybilla drew herself from his arm, which came as a mute peace−maker to encircle her waist.

"Now you are a child, indeed. I did it from love—believe me or not, it was so—that you might not be pained with the knowledge of my struggles, toils, and cares. And was not the reward, the wealth, all for you?"

"No; for yourself."

"Pray, hear reason, Sybilla!" her husband continued, in those quiet, unconcerned tones, which, to a woman of quick feelings, and equally quick resentments, were sure to add fuel to fire.

"I will not hear reason. When you have these four years been rolling in wealth, and your wife and child were—oh, Angus!" and she began to weep.

Captain Rothesay tried at first, by explanations and by soothings, to stop the small torrent—the "continual dropping" of fretful tears and half−broken accusations. All his words were misconstrued or misapplied. Sybilla would not believe but that he had slighted, ill−used, **deceived** her.

At the term the husband rose up sternly.

"Mrs. Rothesay, who was it that deceived me?"

He pointed to the child, and the glance of both rested on little Olive.

She sat, her graceful playthings fallen from her hands, her large soft eyes dilated with such a terrified wonder, that both father and mother shrank before them. That fixed gaze of the unconscious child seemed like the reproachful look of some angel of innocence sent from a purer world.

There was a dead silence. In the midst of it the little child crept from her corner and stood between her parents, her little hands stretched out, and her eyes full of tears.

"Olive has done nothing wrong? Papa and mamma, you are not angry with poor little Olive?" said the faint, sweet voice, falling like oil on the troubled waters.

For the first time, as she looked into the poor child's face, there flashed across the mother's memory the likeness of the angel in her dream. She pressed the thought back, almost angrily, but it came again. Then Sybilla stooped down, and, for the only time since her babyhood, Olive found herself lifted to her mother's embrace.

"The child had better go away to bed," said Captain Rothesay, restlessly, but yet gently.

Olive was carried out, nestling closely in her mother's arms.

When Sybilla came back the angry pout had passed from her beautiful face, though a grave, troubled shadow still remained there. She made tea for her husband, tried to talk on common topics once or twice, but he gave little encouragement. Before retiring to rest, she said to him, timidly—

"There is no quarrel between us, Angus?"

"Not in the least, my dear," he answered, with that composed deprecation of any offence, given or received, which is the most painful check to an impulsive nature; "only, we will not discuss matters of business together again. Women never can talk things over quietly. Good night, Sybilla."

He lifted his head a little, a very little, for her accustomed kiss. She gave it, but with it there came a sigh. He scarcely noticed either one or the other, being apparently deep in a large folio "Commentary on the Proverbs," for it was Sunday evening. He lingered for a whole hour over the last chapter, and chiefly the passages,—

"Who can find a virtuous woman: for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her: so that he shall have no need of spoil.... She openeth her mouth with wisdom: and in her tongue is the law of kindness."

At this, Captain Rothesay closed the book, laid his arms upon it; and sighed—oh, how heavily! He did not go to bed that night until his young wife had lain awake for hours, regretting and resolving; nor until, after many determinations of future penitence and love, she had at last wept herself to sleep for very sorrow.

CHAPTER VII.

LOOKING back on a calm and uneventful childhood,—and by childhood we mean the seven years between the babyhood of five and the dignity of "'teens,"—it always seems like a cloudy landscape, with a few points of view here and there, which stand out clearly from the rest. Therein the fields are larger and the sky brighter than any we now behold. Persons, places, and events assume a mystery and importance. We never think of them, or hear them named afterwards, but there clings to them something of the strange glamour of the time when "we saw men as trees walking."

Olive's childhood was passed in the place mentioned by her father. Merivale! Oldchurch! In her future life the words, whenever heard, always sounded like an echo of that dreamy time, whose sole epochs are birthdays, Christmas−days, the first snowdrop found in the garden, the first daisy in the field. Such formed the only chronicle of Olive's childhood.

Its earliest period was marked by events which she was too young to notice, troubles which she was too young to feel. They passed over her like storm−clouds over a safely sheltered flower—only perceivedby the momentary shadow which they cast. Once—it was in the first summer at Merivale—the child noticed how pleased every one seemed, and how papa and mamma, now always together, used to speak more tenderly than usual to her. Elspie said it was because they were so happy, and that Olive ought to be happy too, because God would soon send her "a wee wee brother." She would find him some day in the pretty cradle, which Elspie showed her. So the little girl went to look there every morning, but in vain. At last her nurse said she need not look there any more, for God had taken away the baby− brother as soon as it came. Olive was very much disappointed, and when she went down to her father that day she told him of her trouble. But he angrily sent her away to her nurse. She looked ever after with grief and childish awe on the empty cradle.

At last it was empty no longer. She, a thoughtful child of seven, could never forget the impression made, when one morning she was roused by the loud pealing of the Oldchurch bells, and the maids told her, laughing, it was in honour of her little brother, come at last. She was allowed to kiss him once, and and then spent half her time, watching, with great joy and wonderment, the tiny face, and touching the tiny hands. After some days she missed him; and after some more Elspie showed her a little heap in the nearest churchyard, saying, that was her baby−brother's cradle now. Poor little Olive!—her only knowledge of the sweet tie of brotherhood was these few days of silent watching, and the little green mound left behind in the churchyard.

From that time there came a gradual change over the household, and over Olive's life. No more long, quiet hours after dinner, her father reading, her mother occupied in some light work, or resting on the sofa in delicious idleness, while Olive herself, little noticed, but yet treated with uniform kindness by both, sat on the hearthrug fondling the sleepy cat, or gazing with vague childish reverie into the fire. No more of the proud pleasure, with which, on Sunday afternoons, exalted to her grave papa's knee, she created an intense delight, out of what was to him a somewhat formal duty, and said her letters from the large family Bible. These childish joys vanished gradually, she scarce knew how. Her papa she now rarely saw, he was so much from home, and the quiet, dreamy house wherein she loved to ramble, became a house of feasting, her beautiful mamma being the centre of its gaiety. Olive retreated to her nursery and to Elspie, and the rest of her childhood was one long, solitary, pensive dream.

In that dream was the clear transcript of all the scenes amidst which it passed. The old hall, seated on a rising ground, and commanding views which were really beautiful in their way, considering that Merivale was on the verge of a manufacturing district, bounded by pastoral and moorland country. Those strange furnace−fires, which rose up at dusk from the earth, and gleamed all around the horizon, like red fiery eyes open all night long, how mysteriously did they haunt the imaginative child! Then the town, Oldchurch, how in her after−life it grew distinct from all other towns, like a place seen in a dream, so real and yet so unreal! There was its castle−hill, a little island within a large pool, which had once been a real fortress and moat. Old Elspie contemned alike tradition and reality, until Olive read in her little "History of England" the name of the place, and how John of Gaunt had built a castle there. And then Elspie vowed it was unworthy to be named the same day with beautiful Stirling. Continually did she impress on the child the glories of her birth−place, so that Olive in after−life, while remembering her childhood's scenes as a pleasant land of earth, came to regard her native Scotland as a sort of

dream paradise. The shadow of the mountains where she was born, fell softly, solemnly, over her whole life; influencing her pursuits, her character, perhaps even her destiny.

Yet there was a curious fascination about Oldchurch. In the cloudy memories of her childhood it rose up, as she used to go there with Elspie, at far distant intervals. The two great wide streets, High−street and Broadstreet, intersecting one another in the form of a cross: the two churches—the Old Church, gloomy, and Norman, with its ghostly graveyard; and the New Church, shining white amidst a pleasant garden−cemetery, beneath one of whose flower−beds her baby−brother lay. The two shops, the only ones she ever visited, the confectioner's, where she stood to watch the yearly fair, and the bookseller's, whither she dragged her nurse on any excuse, that she might pore over its incalculable treasures.

Above all, there was fixed in her memory the strange aspect the town wore on one day—a Coronation−day—the grandest gala of her childhood. One king had died and been buried. Olive saw the black−hung pulpit and heard the funeral sermon, awfully thundered forth at night. Another king had been proclaimed, and Olive had gloried in the sight of the bonfires and the roasted sheep. Now, the people talked of a Coronation−day. Simple child! she knew nothing of the world's events or the world's destinies, save that she rose early to the sound of carolling bells, was dressed in a new white frock, and taken to see the town—the beautiful town, smiling with triumphal flower−arches, and winding processions. How she basked in the merry sunshine, and heard the shouts, and the band playing "God save the King," and felt very loyal, until her enthusiasm vented itself in tears.

Such was one of the few links between Olive's early life and the world outside. Otherwise she dwelt, for those seven years of childhood, in a little Eden of her own, whose boundary was rarely crossed by the footsteps of either joy or pain. She was neither neglected nor ill−used, but she never knew that fullness of love, on which one looks back in after−life, saying deprecatingly, and yet sighing the while, "Ah, I was indeed a spoiled child!" Her little heart was not positively checked in its overflowings; but it had a world of secret tenderness that, being never claimed, expended itself in all sorts of wild fancies. She loved every flower of the field and every bird in the air. She also—having a passionate fondness for study and reading—loved her pet authors and their characters, with a curious individuality. Mrs. Hofland stood in the place of some good aunt, and Sandford and Merton were regarded just like real brothers.

She had no one to speak to about poetry; she did not know there was such a thing in the world. Yet she was conscious of strange and delicious sensations, when in the early days of spring she had at length conquered Elspie's fears about wet feet and muddy fields, and had gone with her nurse to take the first meadow ramble, she could not help bounding to pluck every daisy she saw; and when the violets came, and the primroses, she was out of her wits with joy. She had never even heard of Wordsworth; yet, as she listened to the first cuckoo note, she thought it no bird, but truly "a wandering voice." Of Shelley's glorious lyric ode she knew nothing; and yet she never heard the skylark's song without thinking it a spirit of the air, or one of the angels hymning at Heaven's gate. And many a time she looked up in the clouds at early morning, half expecting to see that gate open, and wondering whereabouts it was in the beautiful sky.

She had never heard of Art, yet there was something in the gorgeous sunset that made her bosom thrill; and out of the cloud−ranges she tried to form mountains such as there were in Scotland, and palaces of crystal such as she read of in her fairy tales. No human being had ever told her of the mysterious links that reach from the finite to the Infinite, out of which, from the buried ashes of dead Superstition, great souls can evoke those two mighty spirits, Faith and Knowledge; yet she went to sleep every night believing that she felt, nay, could almost see, an angel standing at the foot of her little bed, watching her with holy eyes, guarding her with outspread wings.

O Childhood! beautiful dream of unconscious poetry; of purity so pure, that it knew neither the existence of sin nor of its own innocence; of happiness so complete, that the thought, "I am now happy," came not to drive away the wayward sprite which never **is** , but always is to come! Blessed Childhood! spent in peace and loneliness and dreams! We would fain look back lovingly on our own, as Olive Rothesay may yet look on hers—feeling that hidden therein, lay the germs of a whole life.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLIVE ROTHESAY was twelve years old, and she had never learnt the meaning of that word whose very sound seems a wail—sorrow. And that other word, which is the dirge of the whole earth—death—was still to her only a name. She knew there was such a thing; she read of it in her books; its shadow had passed her by when she missed her little brother from the cradle; but still it had never stood by her side and said, "Lo, I am here!" Her circle of love was so small, that it seemed as though the dread spectre could not enter. She saw it afar off; she thought upon it sometimes in her poetical dreams, which clad the imaginary shape of grief with a strange beauty. It was sweet to be sad, sweet to weep. She even tried to make a few delicious sorrows for herself; and when a young girl—whose beautiful face she had watched in church—died, she felt pensive and mournful, and even took a pleasure in thinking that there was now one grave in the new churchyard which she would almost claim to weep over as her own.

Such were the strange tendencies of this child's mind—ever toward the melancholy and the beautiful united. Quietly pensive as her disposition was, she had no young companions to rouse her into mirth. But there was a serenity even in her sadness; and no one could have looked in her face without feeling that her nature was formed to suit her apparent fate, and that if less fitted to enjoy, she was the more fitted for the solemnity of that destiny, to endure.

She had lived twelve years without knowing sorrow, and it was time that the first lesson, bitter, yet afterwards sweet, should be learned by the child. The shaft came to her through Elspie's faithful bosom, where she had rested all her life, and did rest now, with the unconscious security of childhood, which believes all it loves to be immortal. That Elspie should grow old, seemed a thing of doubtful future; that she should be ill or die, was a thing that never crossed the child's imagination.

And when at last, one year in the fall of the leaf, the hearty and vigorous old woman sickened, and for two or three days did not quit her room, still Olive, though grieving for the moment, never dreamed of any serious affliction. She tended her nurse lovingly and cheerfully, made herself quite a little woman for her sake, and really half enjoyed the stillness of the sick−room. It was a gay time—the house was full of visitors—and Elspie and her charge, always much left to one another's society, were now alone in their nursery, night and day. No one thought the nurse was ailing, except with the natural infirmity of old age, and Elspie herself uttered no word of complaint. Once or twice, while Olive was doing her utmost to enliven the sick−chamber, she saw her nurse watch her with eager love, and then sink into a grave reverie, from which it took more than one embrace to rouse her.

One night, or rather morning, Olive was roused by the sight of a white figure standing at her bedside. She would have been startled, but that Elspie, sleeping in the same room, had many a time come to look on her darling, even in the middle of the night. She had apparently done so now.

"Go to your bed again, dear nurse," anxiously cried Olive. "You should not walk about. Nay, you are not worse?"

"Aye, aye, just a wee bit aur, maybe; but dinna fear, dearie, we'll bide till the morn," said Elspie, faintly, as she tried to move away, supporting herself by the bed. But soon she sank back dizzily. "It's nae use, I canna gang. My sweet lassie, will ye help your puir auld nurse."

Olive sprang up, and guided her back to her bed. When she reached it, Elspie said, thoughtfully, "It's strange, unco' strange, my strength is a' gane."

"Never mind, Elspie dear, you are weak with being ill; but you will get better soon. Oh, yes, very soon!" answered the child, with the eager certainty of desire.

"It's no that;" and Elspie took her child's hands and looked wistfully in her face. "Olive, what suld ye say gin ye were to tine your puir auld nurse, an' I were to gang far awa'?"

"Go where?"

"Unto God," said Elspie, solemnly.—"Dearie, I wadna grieve ye, but I'm aye sure this sickness is unto death."

It was strange that Olive did not begin to weep, as many a child would have done; but though a cold trembling crept through her young frame at these words, she remained quite calm. For Elspie must be kept calm likewise, and how could she be so if her child were seen to suffer. Olive remembered this, and showed no sign of grief or alarm. Besides, she could not—would not believe a thing so fearful as Elspie's death. It was impossible.

"You must not think thus—you must think of nothing but getting well. Lie down and go to sleep," she said, in a tone of almost womanly firmness, which Elspie obeyed mechanically. Then she would have roused the household, but the nurse forbade. By her desire Olive again sought her pillow.

It had always been her custom to creep to Elspie's bed as soon as she awoke, but now she did so long before daylight, in answer to a faint summons.

"I want ye, my bairn. Ye'll come to your auld nurse's arms—maybe they'll no haud ye lang," murmured Elspie. She clasped the child once, with an almost passionate tenderness, and then, turning away, dropped heavily asleep.

But Olive did not sleep. She lay until broad daylight, counting hour by hour, and thinking thoughts deep and strange in a child of her years—thoughts of death and eternity. She did not believe EIlspie's words; but if they should be true—if her nurse should die—if this should be the last time she would ever creep to her living bosom!

And then there came across the child's mind awful thoughts of death and of the grave. She struggled with them, but they clung with fearful tenacity to her fancy. All she had heard or read of mortality, of the coffin and the mould, came back with a vivid horror. She thought,—what if in a few weeks, a few days, the hand she held should be cold, lifeless; the form, whose faint breathings she listened to, should breathe no more, but be carried from her sight, and shut up in a grave—under a stone? And then where would be Elspie—the tender, the faithful—who seemed to live but in loving her? Olive had been told that when people died, it was their bodies only that lay in the grave, and their souls went up to heaven to be with God. But all her childish reasoning could not dissever the two.

It was a marvel, that, loving Elspie as she did, such thoughts should come at all—that her mind was not utterly numbed with grief and terror. But Olive was a strange child, there were in her little spirit depths of which no one dreamed.

Hour after hour she lay in these ponderings, so horrible, yet fraught with such a strange fascination, and starting with a shudder every time they were broken by the striking of the clock below. How awful a clock sounds in the night−time, and to such a watcher—a mere child too! Olive longed for morning, and yet when the dusk of daybreak came, the very curtains took ghastly shapes, and her own white dress, hanging behind the door, looked like a shroud, within which—. She shuddered—and yet, all the while, she could not help eagerly conjecturing what the visible form of death would be.

Utterly unable to endure her own thoughts, she tried to rouse her nurse. And then Elspie started up in bed, seized her with burning hands, and asked her who she was, and what she had done with little Olive.

"I am little Olive—indeed, I am," cried the terrified child.

"Are ye sure? Aweel then, dearie, dinna greet," murmured poor Elspie, striving vainly against the delirium that she felt fast coming on, "My bairn, is it near morn? Oh, for a wee drappie o' milk or tea."

"Shall I go and call the maids. But that dark, dark passage—I dare not," cried Olive, whose wild imagination often exposed her to the terrors of a superstition far beyond mere childish fear of darkness.

"It's no matter, bide ye till the daylight," said Elspie, as she sank again into heavy sleep.

But the child could not rest. Was it not cruel to let her poor nurse lie suffering burning thirst, rather than encounter a few vague terrors? and if Elspie should have a long illness, should die—what then would the remembrance be? Without another thought the child crept out of bed and groped her way to the door.

It is easy to laugh at children's fancies about "ghosts" and "bogie," but Dante's terrors in the haunted wood were not greater or more real than poor little Olive's, when she stood at the entrance of the long gallery, dimly peopled with the fantastic shadows of dawn. None but those who remember the fearful imaginings of their childhood, can comprehend the self−martyrdom, the heroic daring, which dwelt in that little trembling bosom, as Olive groped across the gloom.

Half−way through, she touched the cold handle of a door, and could scarce repress a scream. Her fears took to positive shape, but she felt surrounding her Things before and Things behind. No human courage could give her strength to resist such terrors. She paused, closed her eyes, and said the Lord's Prayer all through. But "*Deliver us from evil*," she repeated many times, feeling each time stronger and bolder. Then first there entered into her heart that mighty faith "which can remove mountains;" that fervent boldness of prayer with the very utterance of which an answer comes. And who dare say that the Angel of that child, "always behold− ing the face of the Father in Heaven," did not stand beside her then, and teach her in faint shadowings the mysteries of her life to come.

Olive's awe−struck fancy became a truth—she never crept to her nurse's bosom more. By noon that day, Elspie

lay in the deathly torpor which marks the last stage of rapid inflammation. She did not even notice the child, who crept in and out of the thronged room, speaking to no one, neither weeping nor trembling, but struck with a strange awe, that made her countenance and mien almost unearthly in their quietness.

"Take her away to her parents," whispered the physician. But her mother had left home the day before, and Captain Rothesay had been absent a week. There were only servants in the house, and they looked at her often, said, "Poor child!" and left her to go where she would. Olive followed the physician downstairs.

"Will she die?"

He started at the touch of the soft hand— soft but cold, always cold. He looked at the little creature, whose face wore such an unchildlike expression. He never thought to pat her head, or treat her like a girl of twelve years old, but said gravely, as though he were speaking to a grown woman:

"I have done my best, but it is too late. In three hours, or perhaps four, all will be over." He quitted the room, and Olive heard the rattle of his carriage−wheels. They died away down the gravel road, and all was silent. Silent, except the twitter of a few birds, heard through the stillness of a July evening. Olive stood at the window and mechanically looked out. It was so beautiful, so calm. At the west, the clouds were stretched out in pale folds of rose colour and grey. On the lawn slept the long shadows of the trees, for behind them was rising the round, red moon. And yet, within the house was—death.

She tried to realize the truth. She said to herself, time after time, "Elspie will die!" But even yet she could not believe it. How could the little birds sing and the sunset shine, when Elspie was dying. At last the light faded, and then she believed it all. Night and death seemed to come upon the world together.

Suddenly she remembered the physician's words. "Three hours—four hours." Was that all? And Elspie had not spoken to her since the moment when she cried and was afraid to rise in the dark. Elspie was going away, for ever, without one kiss, one goodbye.

Weeping passionately, Olive flew back to the chamber, where several women stood round the bed. There lay the poor aged form, in a torpor which, save for the purple face and the loud, heavy breathing, had all the unconsciousness of death. Was that Elspie? The child saw, and her tears were frozen. The maids would have drawn her away.

"No—no," Olive said, in a frightened whisper; "let me look at her—let me touch her hand."

It lay outside the bedclothes, helpless and rigid, the fingers falling together, as they always do in the hour of parting life. Olive touched them. They were cold—so cold! Then she knew what was death. The maids carried her fainting from the room, and she entered it no more.

Mrs. Rothesay had returned, and frightened and grieved, now wept with all a woman's softness over the death−bed of the faithful old nurse. She took her little daughter to her own sitting−room, laid her on the sofa, and watched by her very tenderly. Olive, exhausted and half insensible, heard, as in a dream, her mother whispering to the maid:

"Come and tell me, when there is **any change**."

Any change. What change? That from life to death—from earth to Heaven! And would it take place at once? Could they tell the instant when Elspie's soul departed, "to be beyond the sun?"

Such and so strange were the thoughts that floated through the mind of this child of twelve years old. And from these precocious yearnings after the infinite, Olive's fancy turned to earthly, childish things. She pictured with curious minuteness how she would feel when she awoke next morning, and found that Elspie was dead;—how there would be a funeral; how strange the house would seem afterwards; even, what would be done with the black bonnet and shawl which two days since Elspie had hung up against the nursery−door, never to put on again.

And then a long silent agony of weeping came upon the child. Her mother, thinking she slept, sat quietly by; but in any case, Olive would never have thought of going to her for consolation. Young as she was, Olive knew that her sorrow must be borne alone, for none could understand it. Until we feel that we are alone on earth, how rarely do we feel that we are **not** alone in heaven. For the second time this day, the child thought of God. Not merely as of Him to whom she offered her daily prayers, and those repeated after the clergyman in church on Sunday, but as One to whom, saying "Our Father," she could ask for anything she desired.

And she did so, lying on the sofa, not even turning to kneel down, using her own simple words. She prayed that God would comfort her when Elspie died, and teach her not to grieve, but to be a good patient child, so that

she might one day go to her dear nurse in heaven, and never be parted from her any more.

She heard the maid come in and whisper to her mamma. Then she knew that all was over—that Elspie was dead. But so deep was the peace which had fallen on her heart that the news gave no pang—caused no tears.

"Olive, dearest," said Mrs. Rothesay, herself subdued into weeping.

"I know all, mamma," was the answer. "Now I have no one to love me but you."

The feeling was strange, perhaps even wrong; but as Mrs. Rothesay clasped her child, it was not without a thrill of freedom and exultation that Olive was all her own now.

"Where shall Miss Rothesay sleep tonight," was the whispered question of the maid. Olive burst into tears.

"She shall sleep with me. Darling, do not cry for your poor nurse; will not mamma do instead?"

And looking up, Olive saw, as though she had never seen it before, the face which, now shining with maternal love, seemed beautiful as an angel's. It became to her like an angel's evermore.

How often, in our human fate, does the very Hand that taketh, give!

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. ROTHESAY, touched by an impulse of regretful tenderness, showed all due respect to the memory of the faithful woman who had nursed with such devotion her husband and her child. For a whole long week Olive wandered about the shut−up house, the formal solemnities of death, now known for the first time, falling heavily on her young heart. Alas! that there was no one to lift it beyond the terrors of the grave to the sublime mysteries of immortality.

But the child knew none of these, and therefore she crept, awe−struck, about the silent house, and, when night fell, dared not even to pass near the chamber—once her own and Elspie's—now Death's. She saw the other members of the household enter with solemn faces through the perpetually−locked door. What must there be within? Something on which she dared not think, and which nothing could induce her to behold. At times she forgot her sorrow; and, still keeping close to her mother's side, amused herself with her usual childish games, piecing disjointed maps, or drawing on a slate; but all was done with a quietness, sadder than even tears.

The evening before the funeral, Mrs. Rothesay went to look for the last time on the remains of her faithful old servant. She tried to persuade little Olive to go with her; the child accompanied her to the door, and then weeping violently, fled back and hid herself in another chamber. From thence she heard her mother come away—also weeping, for the feeble nature of Sybilla Rothesay had lost none of its tender−hearted softness. Olive listened to the footsteps gliding downstairs, and there was silence. Then the passionate affection which she had felt for her old nurse rose up, driving away all childish fear, and strengthening her into a resolution which until then she had not dared to form. Tomorrow they would take away Elspie— **for ever**. On earth she would never again see the face which had been so beloved. Could she let Elspie go without one look, only one? She would enter the awful room now, and alone.

No tongue can tell the intensity of love that must have been in that young child's heart to nerve her thus!

It was about seven in the evening, still daylight, though in the darkened house dimmer than without. Olive drew the blind aside, took one long gaze into the cheerful sunset landscape to strengthen and calm her mind, and then walked with a firm step to the chamber−door. It was not locked this time, but closed ajar. The child looked in, a little way only. There stood the well−remembered furniture, the room seemed the same, only pervaded with an atmosphere of silent, solemn repose. There would surely be no terror there.

Olive stole in, hearing in the stillness every beating of her heart. She stood by the bed. It was covered, not with its usual starry counterpane, the work of Elspie's diligent hand through many a long year, and on which her own baby−fingers had been first taught to sew—but with a large white sheet. She stood, scarce knowing whether to fly or not, until she heard a footstep on the stairs. One minute, and it would be too late. With a resolute hand she lifted the sheet, and saw the white fixed countenance, not of sleep, but death.

With a shriek so wild and piercing that it rang through the house, Olive sprang to the door, fled through the passage, at the end of which she sank in convulsions.

That night the child was taken from the house, and never entered it until some weeks after, when the grass was already springing on poor Elspie's grave.

It is nature's blessed ordinance, that in the mind of childhood the remembrance of fear or sorrow fades so fast. Therefore, when Olive came back to Merivale, and saw the house now smiling within and without amidst the beauty of early autumn,—the horrors of death passed from her mind, or were softened into a tender memory. Perhaps, in the end, it was well for her that she had looked on that poor dead face, to be certain that it was not Elspie. She never thought of Elspie in that awful chamber any more. She thought of her as in life, standing knitting by the nursery−window, walking slowly and sedately along the green lanes, carrying the basket of flowers and roots, collected in their rambles, or sitting in calm Sunday afternoons with her Bible on her knee.

And then passing from the memory of Elspie once on earth, Olive thought of Elspie now in heaven. Her glowing imagination idealised all sorrow into poesy. She never watched the sunset, she never looked up into the starry sky at night, without picturing Elspie as there. All the foibles and peculiarities of her poor old Scottish nurse became transmuted into the image of a guardian invisible, incorporeal; which seemed to draw her own spirit nearer to heaven, with the thought that there was one she loved, and who loved her, in the glorious mansions there.

So do pure hearts ever feel when the first beloved goes; and oh, how ought we to feel when we have many beloveds passed thither, each following the other's holy footsteps, and heralding ours to the one home!

From the time of her nurse's death, the whole current of Olive's life changed. It cast no shadow over the memory of the deep affection lost, to say that the full tide of living love now flowed towards Mrs. Rothesay as it had never done before, perhaps never would have done but for Elspie's death. And truly the mother's heart now thirsted for that flood.

For seven years the little cloud which appeared when Captain Rothesay returned, had risen up between husband and wife, in− creasing slowly but surely, and casting a shadow over their married home. Like many another pair who wed in the heat of passion, or the wilful caprice of youth, their natures, never very similar, had grown less so, day by day, until in mature age their two lives, instead of flowing onward in one bright loving current, had severed wider and wider. There was no open dissension that the wicked world could take hold of, to glut its eager eyes with the spectacle of an unhappy marriage; but the chasm was there, a gulf of coldness, indifference and distrust, which no foot of love would ever cross.

Angus Rothesay was a disappointed man. At five−and−twenty he had taken a beautiful, playful, half−educated child

> His bride and his darling to be,

forgetting that at thirty−five he should need a sensible woman to be his trust−worthy sympathising wife, the careful and thoughtful mistress of his household. When hard experience had made him old and wise, even a little before his time, he came home expecting to find her old and wise too. The hope failed. He found Sybilla as he had left her—a very child. Ductile and loving as she was, he might even then have guided her mind, have formed her character, in fact, have made her anything he liked. But he would not do it; he was too proud. He brooded over his disappointed hope in silence and reserve; and though he reproached her not, and never ceased to love her in his own cold way, yet the respect, the sympathy were gone. Her ways were not his ways, and was it the place of a man and a husband to bend? After a few years of struggling, less with her than with himself, he decided that he would take his own separate course, and let her take hers.

He did so. At first she tried to win him back, not with a woman's sweet and placid dignity of love, never−failing, never−tiring, yet invisible as a rivulet that runs through deep green bushes, scarcely heard and never seen. Sybilla's arts—the only arts she knew, were the whole armoury of girlish coquetry, or childish wile, passionate tenderness and angry or sullen reproach, alternating each other. Her husband was equally unmoved by all. He seemed a very rock, indifferent to either sunshine or storm. And yet it was not so. He had in his nature deep, earnest, abiding tenderness; but he was one of those people who must be loved only in their own quiet, silent way. A hard lesson for one whose every feeling was less a principle than an impulse, Sybilla could not learn it. And thus the happiness of two lives were blighted, not from evil, or even lack of worth in either, but because they did not understand one another. Their current of existence flowed on coldly and evenly, in two parallel lines, which would never, never meet!

The world beheld Captain Rothesay in two phases—one as the grave, somewhat haughty but respected master of Merivale Hall; the other as the rash and daring speculator, who was continually doubling and trebling his fortune by all the thousand ways of legal gambling in which men of capital and mer− chandise can indulge. There was in this kind of life an interest and excitement. Captain Rothesay sprang to it as many another man would have sprung to far less sinless means of atoning for the dreary blank of home.

In Mrs. Rothesay the world only saw one of its fairest adornments—one of those "charming women" who make society so agreeable; beautiful, kind−hearted—at least as much so as her thoughtless life allowed; lively, fond of amusement—perhaps a little in the extreme, for it caused people to note the contrast between the master and the mistress of the Hall, and to say what no wife should ever give the world reason to say. "Poor thing! I wonder if she is happy with her husband?"

But between these two stood the yet scarce recognised tie which bound them together—the little deformed child.

CHAPTER X.

"**CAPTAIN ROTHESAY**?"

"My dear?"

Reader, did you ever notice the intense frigidity that can be expressed in a "my dear!" The coldest, cruellest husband we ever knew once impressed this fact on our childish fancy, by our always hearing him call his wife thus—poor, pale, broken−hearted creature! He "my−deared" her into her grave.

Captain Rothesay also used the epithet with that formality which was chilling enough in its way. He said it without lifting his eyes from the book, "Smith's Wealth of Nations," which had become his usual evening's study now, whenever he was at home. That cir− cumstance, rare enough to have been welcome, and yet it was not welcome, now subdued his wife and daughter into silence and quietness. Alas! that ever a presence which ought to be the sunshine of a household should enter only to cast a perpetual shade.

The firelight shone on the same trio which had formed the little after−dinner circle years ago at Stirling. But there was a change in all. The father and mother sat—not side by side, in that propinquity which is so sweet, when every breath, every touch of the beloved's garment gives pleasure; they sat one at each corner of the table, engrossed in their several occupations of reading with an uncommunicative eagerness, and sewing in unbroken silence. Each was placed within a chilling circle of thoughts and interests in which the other never entered. And now the only point of meeting between them was the once−banished child.

Little Olive was growing almost a woman now, but she was called "little Olive" still. She retained her diminutive stature, together with her girlish dress, but her face wore, as ever, its look of premature age. And as she sat between her father and mother, now helping the one in her delicate fancy−work, now arranging the lamp for the other's reading, continually in request by both, or when left quiet for a minute, watching both with anxious earnestness, there was quite enough in Olive's manner to show that she had entered on a woman's life of care, and had not learned a woman's wisdom one day too soon.

The captain's last "my dear" found his wife in the intricacies of a Berlin wool pattern, so that she did not speak again for several minutes, when she again appealed to "Captain Rothesay." She rarely called him anything else now. Alas! the time of "Angus" and "Sybilla" was gone.

"Well, my dear, what have you to say?"

"I wish you would not be always reading, it makes the evening so dull."

"Does it?" and he turned over another leaf of Adam Smith, and leisurely settled himself for its perusal.

"Papa is tired, and may like to be quiet. Suppose we talk to one another, mamma?" whispered Olive, as she put aside her own work—idle, but graceful designings with pencil and paper—and, drawing near to her mother, began to converse in a low tone. She discussed all questions as to whether the rose should be red or white, and what coloured wool would form the striped tulip, just as though they had been the most interesting topics in the world. Only once her eyes wandered wistfully to the deserted "Sabrina," which, half sketched, lay within the leaves of her "Comus." Mrs. Rothesay observed this, and said, kindly—

"Let me look at what you are doing, love. Ah!—very pretty! What is it, Sabrina? Tell me all about her." And she listened, with a pleased, maternal smile, while her gratified little daughter dilated on the beloved "Comus," and read a passage or two in illustration. "Very pretty, my love," again repeated Mrs. Rothesay, stroking Olive's hair. "Ah! you are a clever child. But now come and tell me what sort of winter dresses you think we should have."

If any observer could have seen a shade of disappointment on Olive's face, he would also have seen it instantly suppressed. The young girl closed "Comus" with the drawing inside, and came to sit down again, looking up into the eyes of her "beautiful mamma." And even the commonplace question of dress soon became interesting to her, for her artistic predilection followed her even there, and no lover ever gloried in his mistress's charms, no painter ever delighted to deck his model, more than Olive loved to adorn and to admire the still exquisite beauty of her mother. It stood to her in the place of all attractions in herself—in fact, she rarely thought about herself at all. The consciousness of her personal defect had worn off through habit, and her almost total seclusion from strangers prevented its being painfully forced on her mind.

"I wish we could leave off this mourning," said Mrs. Rothesay. "It is quite time, seeing Sir Andrew Rothesay

has been dead six months. And, living or dying, he did not show kindness enough to make one remember him longer."

"Yet he was kind to papa, when a child; and so was Auntie Flora," softly said Olive, to whose enthusiastic memory there ever clung Elspie's tales about the Perthshire relatives—bachelor brother and maiden sister, living together in their lonely, gloomy home. But she rarely talked about them; and now, seeing her mamma look troubled, as she always did at any reference to Scotland and the old times, the little maiden ceased at once. Mrs. Rothesay was soon again safely and contentedly plunged into the mysteries of winter costume.

"Yours must be handsomer and more womanly now, Olive; for I intend to take you out with me now and then. You are quite old enough; and I am tired of visiting alone. I intended to speak to your papa about it to−night; but he seems not in good−humour."

"Only tired with his journey," put in the sweet little mediator. "Is it not so, papa?"

Captain Rothesay started from a dull, anxious reverie, into which his reading had merged, and lifted his face, knitted and darkened with some inward care, heavy enough to make his tone sharp and angry, as he said,

"Well, child, what do you want?"

"Do not scold Olive; it was I who wished to speak to you." And then, without pausing to consider how evidently ill−timed the conversation was, Mrs. Rothesay began to talk eagerly about Olive's "coming out," and whether it should be at home or abroad; finally arguing that a ball at Merivale would be best, and entering at large on the question of ball−costume. There was nothing wrong in anything she said, but she said it at the wrong time. Her husband listened first with indifference, then fidgeted restlessly in his chair, and at last subsided into an angry silence.

"Why don't you speak, Captain Rothesay?" He took up the poker and ham− mered the fire to small cinders. "Of course, you will be reasonable. Say, shall it be as I have arranged?"

"No!" The word came thundering out—as Captain Rothesay rarely thundered; for he was calm and dignified even in his wrath. Immediately afterwards he rose up and left the room.

Sybilla grew pale, sorrowful, and then melted into tears. She tried not to let Olive see them. She was still too faithful a wife to seek in any way to turn the child against her father. But yet she wept; and drawing her young daughter closer to her arms, she felt the sweetness of having a child—and such a child—left to love her. In proportion as the wife's heart closed, the mother's opened.

Ere long, Captain Rothesay sent for little Olive, to read the evening newspaper to him in his study.

"Go, love," said Mrs. Rothesay; and she went. Without fear, too; for her father never said a harsh word to **her**. And as, each year of her life, the sterling truth and stern uprightness of his character dawned upon her, she could not fail to respect him, even while she worshipped her sweet−tempered, gentle mother.

Captain Rothesay made no remark, save upon the subject she was reading, and came in with Olive to tea, just as usual. But when he had finished, and was fast sinking back into that painful reverie which seemed to oppress him, his weak, ill−judging wife recommenced her attack. She talked gently when speaking of Olive, even affectionately—poor soul! She persuaded herself, all the time, that she was doing right, and that he was a hard−hearted father not to listen to her. He did listen, apparently; and she took his silence for consent, for she ended with—

"Well, then, it is quite settled; the ball shall be at Merivale, on the 20th of next month?"

Angus turned round, his blue eyes glittering, yet cold as steel—"Mrs. Rothesay, if you will worm the truth out of me, you shall. By next month you may not have a roof over your head."

He rose up and again quitted the room. Mrs. Rothesay trembled—grew terrified—but tried to reassure herself. "He only says this in anger, or else to frighten me. I will not believe it." Then conscience whispered, that never in her whole life had she known Angus Rothesay to tell a falsehood; and she trembled more and more. Finally, she passed into a violent fit of nervous weeping—a circumstance by no means rare. Her health was weakened by the exciting gaieties of her outward life, and the inward sorrow which preyed upon her heart.

This night—and not for the first time either—the little maiden of fifteen might have been seen, acting with the energy and self−possession of a woman—soothing her mother's hysterical sufferings—smoothing her pillow, and finally watching by her until she fell asleep. Then Olive crept downstairs, and knocked at her father's study−door. He said, "Come in," in a dull, subdued tone. She entered, and saw him sitting, his head on his hand, jaded and exhausted, leaning over the last embers of the fire, which had gone out without his noticing it. If there had been

any anger in the child's heart, it must have vanished at once, when she looked upon her father thus.

"Oh! is that you, Olive?" was all he said, beginning to turn over his papers, as if to make a show of occupation. But he soon relapsed into that unknown thought which oppressed him so much. It was some minutes before he completely roused himself, and saw the little elfin−like figure standing beside him, silent and immoveable, with the taper in her hand.

"Shall I bring your candle, dear papa? It is eleven o'clock and more."

"Where is your mother, Olive?"

"She is gone to bed;" and Olive paused, uncertain whether she should tell him that her mamma was ill. Again there was a silence—during which, do what he would, Captain Rothesay could not keep his eyes from the earnest, wistful, entreating gaze of his "little Olive." At last, he lifted her on his knee, and took her face between his two hands, saying, in a smothered tone,

"You are not like your mother; you are like **mine**—aye, and seem more so as you grow to be a woman.

"I wish I were a woman, that papa might talk to me and tell me anything which he has on his mind," whispered Olive, scarcely daring to breathe that which she had nerved herself to say, during many minutes of silent pondering at the study−door.

Captain Rothesay relapsed hastily into his cold manner. "Child, how do you know?"

"I know nothing, and want to know nothing, that papa does not wish to tell me," answered Olive, gently.

The father turned round again, and looked into his daughter's eyes. Perhaps he read there a spirit equal to, and not unlike, his own—a nature calm, resolute, clear−sighted; the strong will and decision of a man, united to the tenderness of a woman. From that hour father and daughter understood one another.

"Olive, how old are you?—I forget."

"Fifteen, dear papa."

"Ah! and you are a thoughtful girl. I can talk to you as to a woman—pah! I mean, a sensible woman. Put out your candle; you can sit up a while longer."

She obeyed, and sat with him for two whole hours in his study, while he explained to her how sudden reverses had so damaged his fortune, that it was necessary to have a far smaller establishment than Merivale Hall.

"Not that we need fear poverty, my dear child; but the future must be considered and provided for. Your mother's jointure, should I die—nay, do not look sad, we will not talk of that—and then, too, your own portion, when you marry."

Olive blushed, as any girl of fifteen will do, when talked to on such a topic, even in the most business−like way. "I shall not marry, papa," said she, expressing the thought which had come to her, as it does to most young girls who love their parents very dearly, too dearly to imagine a parting.

Captain Rothesay started, as if suddenly recollecting himself. Then he regarded her earnestly, mournfully; and in the look was something which struck on Olive's memory as though she had seen it before.

"I had forgotten," muttered Captain Rothesay to himself. "Of course, she will never marry. Poor child!—poor child!"

He kissed her very tenderly, then lighted his candle, and went upstairs to bed, holding her hand all the way, until they parted at her room−door, when he kissed her a second time. As he did so, she contrived to whisper—

"Mamma is sure to wake; she always does when you come in. Kiss mamma, too."

Olive went to bed, happier than she could have believed possible, had any one told her in the morning that ere night she would hear the ill news of having to leave beautiful Merivale. But it was so sweet to feel herself a comfort to both parents—they who, alas! would receive no comfort from each other.

Only, just when she was falling asleep, the thought floated across Olive's mind—

"I wonder why papa said that of course I should never marry!"

CHAPTER XI.

"**DEAR** mamma! is not this a pretty house, even though it is in a town?—so pretty, one need hardly pine after Merivale!"

Thus said Olive when they had been established some time in their new abode, and sat together, one winter evening, listening to the sweet bells of Oldchurch—one of the few English parishes where lingers "the curfew's solemn sound."

"A pretty house, if any one came to see us in it, my dear; but nobody does. And then we miss the close carriage so much. To think that I have been obliged to refuse the Stantons' ball, and the dinner−party at Everingham. How dull these long winter evenings will be, Olive!"

Olive answered neither **yes** nor **no**; but tried quietly, by her actions, to disprove the fact. She was but a child—scarcely would have been called a clever child; was neither talkative nor musical; and yet she had a thousand winning ways of killing time, so sweetly that each minute died, dolphin−like, shedding glorious hues.

A very romantic simile this—one that would never have crossed Olive's innocent brain. She only knew that she loved her mother; and therefore tried to amuse and make her happy, so that she might not feel the change of circumstances—a change so unimportant to Olive, so vital to Mrs. Rothesay.

Olive, this night, was peculiarly successful in her little *ruse* of love. Her mother listened while she explained a whole sketchbook of designs, illustrative of half−a−dozen modern poets. Mrs. Rothesay even asked her to read some of the said poets aloud; and though not of an imaginative temperament, was fain to shed a few womanly tears over Tennysons delicious home−lyrics, especially "The Queen of the May," and "The Miller's Daughter." Finally, she was coaxed into sitting to her daughter for her portrait, which Olive thought would make a design exactly suited to the heroine of the latter poem, and chiefly at the verse—

> "Look through mine eyes with thine. True wife,
> Round my true heart thine arms entwine;
> My other dearer life in life,
> Look through my very soul with thine."

And, reading the verses over and over again, to bring the proper expression to her mother's face, the young girl marvelled that they brought likewise a look so sad, that she would fain have made some excuse, and terminated the sitting.

"No, no, my dear, it amuses me, and I can talk with you the while."

But Mrs. Rothesay did not talk much; she was continually falling into a reverie. Once she broke it, with the words—

"Olive, my child, I think, now we lead a quieter life, your papa will stay at home more. He seems to like this house, too—he never liked Merivale."

"Dear old Merivale!" said Olive, with a sigh. It seemed ages since she had left the familiar place.

"Do not call it **dear**. It was a dreary home. I did not think so at first, but I did afterwards."

"Why, mamma?" asked Olive. She was glad to lure her mother on to talk a little, if only to dispel the shadow which so ill became Mrs. Rothesay's still fair face.

"You were too young to know anything then—indeed you are now, almost. But somehow, I have learned to talk with you as if you were quite a little woman, Olive, my dear."

"Thank you, mamma. And what made you dislike sweet Merivale?"

"It was when your papa first began to take his long journeys—on business, you know. He was obliged to do it, I suppose; but, nevertheless, it was very dull for me. I never had such a dreary summer as that one. You could not remember it, though—you were only ten years old."

Olive did remember it faintly, nevertheless—a time when her father's face was sterner, and her mother's more

fretful, than now; when the shadow of many domestic storms passed over the pure spirit of their unconscious child. But she never spoke of these things; and, lest her mother should ponder painfully on them now, she began to talk of lighter matters. Yet though the sweet companionship of her only daughter was balm to Mrs. Rothesay's heart, still there was a pain there which even Olive could not remove. Was it that the mother's love had sprung from the ruins of the wife's happiness; and that while smiling gaily with her child, Sybilla, Rothesay's thoughts were with the husband who, year by year, was growing more estranged, and whom, as she found out too late, by a little more wisdom, patience, and womanly sympathy, she might perhaps have kept for ever at her side?

But none of these mysteries came to the knowledge of little Olive. She lived the dream−life of early girlhood—dwelling in an atmosphere still and pure as a grey spring morning, ere the sun has risen. All she learnt was from books; for though she had occasional teachers, she had never been sent to school. Sometimes she regretted this, thinking how pleasant it would be to have companions, or at least one friend of her own age, to whom she might talk on the various subjects of which she had of late begun to dream. These never passed the still sanctuary of her own thoughts; for some instinct told her that her mother would scarce sympathise with her wild imaginations in Art and Poetry. So she thought of them always by herself, when she was strolling about the small but pleasant garden that sloped down from the back of the house to the river; or when, extending her peregrinations, she went to sit in the summer−house of the garden adjoining, which belonged to a large mansion close by, long uninhabited. It was quite a punishment to Olive when a family came to live there, and she lost the use of the beautiful, deserted garden.

Still, it was something new to have neighbours. She felt quite a curiosity respecting them, which was not diminished when, looking out one day from the stair−case window (a favourite seat, from which every night she watched the sun set), Olive caught a sight of the new occupants of her former haunts.

They were two little boys of about nine or ten, playing noisily enough—as boys will. Olive did not notice them much, except the youngest, who appeared much the quieter and gentler of the two; but her gaze rested a long time on a girl, who seemed to be their elder sister. She was walking by herself up and down an alley, with a shawl thrown over her head, and her thick, black hair blown about by the March winds. Olive thought she looked very picturesque—in fact, just like some of her own fantastic designs of "Norna on the Fitful Head," "Medora watching for Conrad," &c. &c. And when the young stranger drew nearer, her admiration was still further excited, by perceiving under the shawl a face that needed but a little romantic imagination to make it positively beautiful. Olive thought so, and accordingly sat the whole evening drawing it from memory, under various characters, from Scott, Byron, Moore, and Coleridge.

For several days after, she took a deep interest in watching the family−party, and chiefly this young girl—partly because she was so pretty, and partly because she seemed nearly about her own age, or perhaps a year or two older. Olive often contrived to walk in her garden when her neighbours were in theirs—so that she could hear the boys' cheerful voices over the high hedge. By this means she learnt their Christian names, Robert, and Lyle—the latter of which she admired very much, and thought it exactly suited the pretty, delicate younger brother. She wished much to find out that of their sister—but could not; for the elder girl took little notice of them, or they of her. So Olive, after thinking and talking of her for some time, as "my beauty next door," to Mrs. Rothesay's great amusement, at last christened her by the imaginary name of Maddalena.

After a few weeks, it seemed as though the interest between the young neighbours became mutual—for Olive, in her walks, sometimes fancied she saw faces watching **her**, too, from the staircase window. And once, peering over the wall, she perceived the mischievous eyes and pointed finger of the elder boy, and heard the younger one say, reproachfully—

"Don't—pray! You are very cruel, Bob."

And Olive, deeply blushing—though at what she scarcely knew—fled into the house, and did not take her usual garden walks for some days.

At last, when, one lovely spring evening, she stood leaning over the low wall at the garden's end, idly watching the river flow by beneath, she turned round, and saw fixed on her, with a curiosity not unmingled with interest, the dark eyes of "Maddalena." Somehow or other, the two girls smiled—and then the elder spoke.

"The evening was very fine," she said; "and it was rather dull, walking in the garden all alone."

Olive had never found it so; but she was used to it. Her young neighbour was not; she had always lived in a large town, &c. &c.

A few more simple nothings spun out the conversation for ten minutes. The next day it was resumed, and extended to twenty; during which Olive learnt that her young beauty's name, so far from being anything so fine as Maddalena, was plain Sarah—or **Sara**, as its owner took care to explain. Olive was rather disappointed—but she thought of Coleridge's ladye love; consoled herself, and tried to console the young lady, with repeating

> My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined, &c.

At which Miss Sara Derwent laughed, and asked who wrote that very pretty poetry?

Olive was a little confounded. She fancied everybody read Coleridge, and her companion sank just one degree in her estimation. But as soon as she looked again on the charming face, with its large, languishing Asiatic eyes, and delicate mouth—just like that of the lotus−leaved "Clytie," which she loved so much,—Olive felt all her interest revive. Never was there any girl over whom every form of beauty exercised more fascination. By the week's end she was positively enchanted with her neighbour, and before a month had passed the two young girls had struck up that romantic friendship peculiar to sixteen.

There is a deep beauty—more so than the world will acknowledge—in this impassioned first friendship, most resembling first love, whose faint shadowing it truly is. Who does not, even while smiling at its apparent folly, remember the sweetness of such a dream? Many a mother with her children at her knee, may now and then call to mind some old playmate, for whom, when they were girls together, she felt such an intense love. How they used to pine for the daily greeting—the long walk, fraught with all sorts of innocent secrets. Or, in absence, the almost interminable letters—positive love− letters, full of "dearest"s and "beloved"s, and sealing−wax kisses. Then the delicious meetings—sad partings, also quite lover−like in the multiplicity of tears and embraces—embraces sweeter than those of all the world beside—and tears, but our own are gathering while we write—Ah!

> We also have been in Arcadia.

Gracious reader! grave, staid mother of a family!—you are not quite right if you jest at the days of old, and at such feelings as these. They were real at the time—and most pure, true, and beautiful. What matter, if years, sweeping on, have swept them all away, or merged them into higher duties and closer ties? Perhaps, if you met your beautiful idol of fifteen, you would see a starched old maid of fifty, or a grandame presiding over the third generation; or, perchance, in seeking thus, you would find only a green hillock, or a stone inscribed with the well−known name. But what of that? To you the girlish image is still the same—it never can grow old, or change, or die. Think of it thus; and then you will think, not mockingly, but with an interest almost mournful, on the rapturous dream of first friendship which now came to visit Olive Rothesay.

Sara Derwent was the sort of girl of whom we meet some hundreds in a life−time—the class from whence are taken the lauded "mothers, wives, and daughters of England." She was sincere, good−tempered, affectionate; not over−clever, being more gifted with heart than brains; rather vain, which fault her extreme prettiness half excused; always anxious to do right, yet, from a want of decision of character, often contriving to do wrong.

But she completely charmed the simple Olive with her beauty, her sparkling, winning cheerfulness, and her ready sympathy. So they became the most devoted friends. Not a day passed without their spending some portion of it together—Olive teaching the young Londoner the pleasures of the country; and Sara, in her turn, inducting the wondering Olive into all the deligtful mysteries of life, as learnt in a large home circle, and a still larger circle of society. Olive, not taking aught from the passionate love with which she looked up to her mother, yet opened her warm heart to the sweetness of this affection—so fresh, so sudden, so full of sympathetic contact. It was like a new revelation in her girlhood—the satisfying of a thirst, just beginning to be felt. She thought of Sara continually; delighted in being with her; in admiring her beauty, and making interests out of every interest of hers. And to think that her friend loved her in return, brought a sensation of deep happiness, not unmixed with gratitude.

Sara's own feelings may be explained by one sentence of a letter which she wrote to an old school−mate.

Therein she told how she had found "such a dear, loving, gentle thing; a girl, not pretty—even slightly deformed; but who was an amusing companion, and to whom she could confide everything. Such a blessing in that dull place, Oldchurch!"

Poor little Olive!—

CHAPTER XII.

AS the summer advanced, Olive Rothesay and her new friend, sanctioned by the elders of both families, took long walks together, read, and practised. Not that Olive practised, for she had no voice, and little knowledge of music; but she listened to Sara's performances for hours, with patience, if not with delight. And then they talked—oh, what talks those were!

Now, reader, be not alarmed lest we should indulge you with the same. Go back into your own *répertoire* of early friendships, and that will suit us quite as well. Still, we may just say, that these young friends flitted like bees over every subject under heaven, and at last alighted on the subject most interesting at their age—love.

It is curious to note how the heart first puts out its tendrils and stretches them forth toward the yet unknown good which is to be in after−life its happiness and its strength. What folly of parents to repress these blind seekings after such knowledge—this yearning which nature teaches, and which in itself involves nothing wrong. Girls **will** think of love, whether or no! How much better, then, that they should be taught to think of it rightly; as the one deep feeling of life. Not, on the one hand, to be repressed by ridicule; or, on the other, to be forced by romance into a precocious growth; but to be entered upon, when fate brings the time, rationally, earnestly, and sacredly.

Olive Rothesay found, with considerable pain, that Miss Derwent and she did not at all agree in their notions of love. Olive had always felt half−frightened at the subject, and never approached it save with great awe and timidity; but Sara did not seem to mind it in the least. She talked of a score of "flirtations" at quadrille parties—showed her friend half−a−dozen complimentary billet−doux which she had received, and all with the greatest unconcern. By degrees this indifference vanished under the influence of Olive's more earnest nature; and at last, when they were sitting together one night, listening to the fierce howling of the wind, a little secret came out.

"I don't like that equinoctial gale," said Sara, shyly. "I used to hear so much of its horrors from—from a friend I have—at sea."

"Indeed. Who was that?"

"Only Charles Geddes. Did I never speak of him? Very likely not—because I was so vexed at his leaving college and run− ning off to sea. It was a foolish thing. But don't mention him to papa or the boys." And Sara blushed—a real, good, honest blush.

Olive did the same—perhaps from sympathy. She continued very thoughtful for a long time; longer even than Sara. They were not many days in making out between them the charming secret for which in their hearts they had been longing. Both were thirsting to taste—or at least to see each other taste—of that enchanting love−stream, the stream of life or of death, at whose verge they had now arrived.

And so, it somehow chanced that however the conversation began, it usually glided into the subject of Charles Geddes. Sara acknowledged that he and she had always liked one another very much, though she allowed that he was fonder of her than she was of him; that, when they parted, he had seemed much agitated, and she had cried—but they were mere boy and girl then. It was nothing—nothing at all.

Olive did not think so; and, contrasting all this with similar circumstances in her pet poems and novels, she wove a very nice romance round Charles Geddes and her beloved Sara, whom she now began to look upon with greater interest and reverence than ever. This did not prevent her reading Sara a great many lectures on constancy, and giving her own opinions on what true love ought to be—opinions which were a little too ethereal for Miss Derwent's comprehension, but which she liked very much, nevertheless.

Olive took quite an affectionate interest in her friend's lover—for lover she had decided that he must be. Not a day passed that she did not eagerly consult the *Times'* "shipping intelligence;" and when at last she saw the name of Charles Geddes' vessel, as "arrived," her heart beat, and tears sprang to her eyes. When she showed it to Sara, Olive could hardly speak for joy. Little simpleton! she counted her friend's happiness as if it were her own. She kept the secret even from her mother; that is, in the only manner Olive would conceal aught from any one so beloved, by saying, "Please, mamma, do not ask me anything." And Mrs. Rothesay, who, always guided by some one, was now in a fair way to be entirely guided by her daughter, made no inquiries, but depended entirely upon Olive's wisdom and tenderness.

Charles Geddes came to Oldchurch. It was quite a new life for Olive—a changed life, too; for now the daily rambles with her friend were less frequent. Instead of which, she used to sit at her window, and watch Sara and Charles taking long strolls in the garden, arm−in−arm, looking so happy, that it was beautiful to see them.

Who can describe the strange, half−defined thoughts which often brought tears to the young girl's eyes as she watched them thus! It was no jealousy of Sara's deserting her for Charles, still less was it envy; but it was a vague longing—a desiring of love for love's own sake. Not as regarded any individual object, for Olive had never seen any one in whom she felt or fancied the slightest interest. Yet, as she looked on these two young creatures, apparently so bound up in each other, she thought how sweet such a tie must be, and how dearly she herself could love some one. And her yearning was always **to love** rather than **to be loved**.

One morning, when Olive had not seen Sara for a day or two, she was hastily summoned to their usual trysting−place, a spot by the river−side, where the two gardens met, and where an over−arching thorn−tree made a complete bower. Therein Sara stood, looking so pale and serious, that Olive remarked it.

"Has anything happened?"

"Nothing—that is, nothing amiss. But oh! Olive, what do you think? Charles put this letter into my hand last night. I have scarcely slept—I feel so agitated—so frightened."

And in truth she looked so. Was there ever a very young girl who did not, on receiving her first love−letter?

It was an era in Olive's life, too. She even trembled, as by her friend's earnest desire she read the missive. It was boyish, indeed, and full of the ultra−romantic devotion of boyish love; but it was sincere, and it touched Olive deeply. She finished it, and leaned against the thorn−tree, pale and agitated as Sara herself.

"Well, Olive," said the latter.

Olive threw her arms round her friend's neck and kissed her, feeling almost ready to cry.

"And now, dear, tell me what I must do," said Sara, earnestly; for of late she had positively begun to look up to Olive, so great was the influence of the more thoughtful and higher nature.

"Do! Why, if you love him, you must tell him so, and give him your whole life−long faith and affection."

"Really, Olive, how grave you are! I had no idea of making it such a serious matter. But, poor Charles!—to think that he should love me so very much!"

"Oh, Sara—Sara!" murmured Olive, "how happy you ought to be!"

The time that followed was a strange period in Olive's life. It was one of considerable excitement, too; she might as well have been in love herself, so deeply did she sympathise with Sara and with Charles. With the latter, even more than with her friend; for there was something in the sincere, reserved, and yet passionate nature of the young sailor, that answered to her own. If he had been her brother, she could not have felt more warmly interested in Charles Geddes and his wooing. And he liked her very much, for Sara's sake first, and then for her own, regarding her also with that gentle compassion which the strong and bold delight to show to the weak. He often called her "his faithful little friend;" and truly she stood his friend in every conceivable way, by soothing Sara's only parent—a most irascible papa—to consent to the engagement, and also by lecturing the gay and coquettish Sara herself into as much good behaviour as could be expected from an affianced damsel of seventeen.

Charles Geddes went to sea again. Poor little Olive, in her warm sympathies, suffered almost as much as the young man's own betrothed, who, after looking doleful for a week, consoled herself by entering, heart and soul, into the gaieties of the gayest Christmas that ever was spent by the society of Oldchurch. Everywhere Miss Derwent was the belle, and continually did her friend need to remind her of the promise which Olive herself regarded as such a sacred, solemn thing.

The love−adventure in which she had borne a part had stirred strange depths in the nature of the young girl. She was awakening slowly to the great mystery of woman's life. And when, by degrees, Sara's amusements somewhat alienated their continual intercourse, Olive was thrown back upon her own thoughts more and more. She felt a vague sadness—a something wanting in her heart, which not even her mother's love could supply.

Mrs. Rothesay saw how dull and pensive she was at times, and with a tender unselfishness contrived that, by Sara Derwent's intervention, Olive should see a little more society; in a very quiet way, though; for her own now delicate health, and Captain Rothesay's will, prevented any regular introduction of their daughter into the world. And sometimes Mrs. Rothesay, pondering on Olive's future, felt glad of this.

"Poor child! she is not made for the world, or the world for her. Better that she should lead her own quiet life, where she will suffer no pain, and be wounded by no neglect."

Yet, nevertheless, it was with a vague pleasure that Mrs. Rothesay dressed Olive for her first ball—a birthday treat—coaxed by Sara Derwent out of her formidable papa, and looked forward to by both young girls for many weeks.

No one would have believed that the young creature, on whom Mrs. Rothesay gazed with a tenderness, not unmingled with admiration, had been the poor infant from which she once turned with a sensation of pain, almost amounting to disgust. But, learning to love, one learns also to admire. Besides, Olive's defect was less apparent as she grew up, and the extreme sweetness of her countenance almost atoned for her figure. Yet, as the mother fastened her white dress, and arranged the golden curls so as to fall in a shower on her neck and bosom, she sighed heavily.

Olive did not notice it; she was too much occupied in tying up a rare bouquet—a birthday gift for Sara.

"Well, are you quite satisfied with my dress, dearest mamma?"

"Not quite;" and Mrs. Rothesay fetched a small mantle of white fur, which she laid round Olive's shoulders. "Wear this, dear; you will look better then—see." She led her to the mirror, and Olive saw the reflection of her own figure, so effectually disguised, that the head, with its delicate and spiritual beauty, seemed lifting itself out of a white cloud.

"'Tis a pretty little mantle, but why must I wear it, mamma?—the night is not cold," said Olive, unconsciously. So little did she think of herself, and so slight had been her intercourse with the world, that the defect in her shape rarely crossed her mind. But the mother, so beautiful herself, and to whom beauty was still of such importance, was struck with bitter pain. She would not even console herself by the reflec− tion, with which many a one had lately comforted her, that Olive's slight deformity was becoming less perceptible, and that she might, in a great measure, outgrow it in time. Still it was there. As Mrs. Rothesay looked at the swan−like curves of her own figure, and then at her daughter's, she would almost have resigned her own once−cherished, but now disregarded, beauty, could she have bestowed that gift upon her beloved child.

Without speaking, lest Olive should guess her thoughts, she laid the mantle aside, only, with a trembling affection, she whispered in bidding adieu, "Dear, if you see other girls prettier, or more admired, more noticed than yourself, never mind! Olive is mamma's own pet—always."

Oh, blessed adversity! oh, sweetness, taught by suffering! How marvellous was the change wrought in the mother's heart!

Olive had never in her life before been at an orthodox "private ball," with chalked floors, rout seats, and a regular band. She was quite dazzled by the transformation thus effected in the Derwents' large, rarely−used dining−room, where she had had many a merry game with little Robert and Lyle. It was perfect fairy−land. The young damsels of Oldchurch—haughty boarding−school belles, whom she had always rather feared, when Sara's hospitality brought her in contact with them—were now grown into perfect court beauties. She was quite alarmed by their dignity, and they scarce noticed poor little Olive at all. Sara, sweeping across the room in all the blaze of her remarkable loveliness, to say nothing of her mother's long−hidden jewels, appeared to the eyes of her little friend a perfect queen of beauty. But the vision came and vanished. Never was there a belle so much in request as the lively Sara.

Only once, Olive looked at her, and remembered the sailor−boy, who was, perhaps, tossing in some awful night−storm, or lying on the lonely deck, in the midst of the wide Atlantic. And she thought, that when her time came to love and be loved, she would not feel everything quite so lightly as Sara.

"How pleasant quadrilles must be!" said Olive, as she sat with her favourite Lyle, watching the dancers. Lyle had crept to her, sliding his hand in hers, and looking up to her with a most adoring gaze, as indeed he often did. He had even communicated his intention of marrying her when he grew a man—a determination which excited the great ridicule of his elder brother.

"I like far better to sit here quietly with you," murmured the faithful little cavalier.

"Thank you, Lyle; still, they all look so merry, I almost wish some one had asked me to dance."

"You dance, Miss Rothesay! What fun! Why nobody would ever dance with you," cried rude Bob.

Lyle looked imploringly at his brother: "Hush! you naughty boy! Please, Miss Rothesay, I will dance with you at any time, that is, if you think I am tall enough."

"Oh, quite; I am so tiny myself," answered Olive, laughing; for she took quite a pride in patronising him, as girls of sixteen often affectionately patronise boys some five or six years their junior. "You know, you are to grow

up to be my little husband."

"Your husband!" repeated Bob, mischievously. "Don't be too sure of getting one at all. What do you think I overheard those girls there say? That you looked just like an old maid; and, indeed, no one would ever care to marry you, because you were—"

Here Lyle, blushing crimson, stopped his brother's mouth with his little hand; whereat Bob flew into such a passion, that he quite forgot Olive, and all he was about to say, in the excitement of a pugilistic combat with his unlucky *cadet*. In the midst of which the two belligerents—poor, untaught, motherless lads—were hurried off to bed.

Their companionship lost, Olive was left very much to her own devices for amusement. Some few young people that she knew came and talked to her for a little while, but they all went back to their singing, dancing, or flirting; and Olive, who seemed to have no gift nor share in either, was left alone. She did not feel this much at first, being occupied in her thoughts and observations on the rest. She took great interest in noticing all around. Her warm heart throbbed in sympathy with many an idle, passing flirtation, which she in her simplicity mistook for a real "attachment." It seemed as if every one loved, or was loved, except herself. She thought this, blushing as if it were unmaidenliness, when it was only nature speaking in her heart.

Poor Olive! perhaps it was ill for her that Sara's "love affair" had aroused prematurely these blind gropings after life's great mystery, so often

> Too early seen unknown, and known too late.

"What! tired of dancing already?" cried Sara, flitting to the corner where Olive sat.

"I have not danced once yet," Olive answered, rather piteously; for she was a blithe little lassie in the main, and began to long for a quadrille.

"Come—shall I get you a partner?" said Sara, carelessly.

"No, no; every one is strange to me here. If you please, and if it would not trouble you, Sara, I had much rather dance with you."

Sara consented with a tolerably good grace; but there was a slight shadow on her face, which somewhat pained her friend.

"Is she ashamed of me, I wonder?" thought Olive. "Perhaps, because I am not beautiful. Yet, no one ever told me I was **very** disagreeable to look at. I will see."

As they danced, she watched in the tall mirror Sara's graceful, floating image, and the little pale figure that moved beside her. There **was** a contrast! Olive, who inherited all her mother's love of beauty, spiritualised by the refinement of a dawning artist−soul, felt keenly the longing regret after physical perfection. She went through the dance with less spirit, and in her heart there rung the idle echoes of some old song she knew:

> I see the courtly ladies pass, with their dark and shining hair;
> And I coldly turn aside to weep—"Oh, would that I were fair!"

The quadrille ended, she hid herself in her old corner; and Sara, whose goodnature led her to perform this sacrifice to friendship, seemed to smile more pleasantly and affectionately when it was over. At least Olive thought so. She did not see her beautiful idol again for some time; and feeling little interest in any other girl, and none at all in the awkward Oldchurch "beaux," she took consolation in her own harmless fashion. This was hiding herself under the thick curtains, and looking out of the window at the moon.

—Sara's voice, close by, talking to a young girl whom Olive knew. But Olive was too shy to join them. She greatly preferred her friend, the moon.

"I quite smiled to see you dancing with that little Olive Rothesay, Miss Derwent. For my part, I hate dancing with girls—and as for **her** —But I suppose you wanted to show the contrast between you."

"Nay, that's ill−natured," answered Sara. "She is a sweet little creature, and my very particular friend."

Here Olive, blushing and happy, doubted whether she ought not to come out of the curtains. It was almost wrong to listen—only her beloved Sara often said she had no secret in the world that she had not told to Olive.

"Yes, I know she is your friend, and Mr. Charles Geddes' great friend too; if I were you, I should be almost jealous."

"Jealous of Olive—how very comical!" and the silver laugh was a little scornful. "To think of Olive's stealing any girl's lover! She, who will probably never have one in all her life—poor thing!"

"Of course not; nobody would fall in love with her! But there is a waltz, I must run away. Will you come?"

"Presently—when I have looked in the other room for Olive."

"Olive is here," said a timid voice. "Oh, Sara, forgive me if I have done wrong; but I can't keep anything from you. It would grieve me to think I heard what you were saying, and never told you of it."

Sara appeared confused, and with a quick impulse kissed and fondled her little friend: "You are not vexed, or pained, Olive?"

"Oh, no—that is, not much; it would be very silly if I were. But," she added, doubtfully, "I wish you would tell me one thing, Sara—not that I am proud, or vain; but still, I should like to know—why do I seem different from other girls? Why did you and Jane Ormond say just now that nobody would ever love me?"

"Don't talk so, my little pet," said Sara, looking pained and puzzled. Yet, instinctively, her eye glanced to the mirror, where their two reflections stood. So did Olive's.

"Yes, I know," she murmured, "I am little, and plain, and in figure very awkward—not graceful, like you. Would that make people hate me, Sara?"

"Not hate you; but—"

"Well, go on—nay, I **will** know all!" said Olive, firmly; though, gradually, a thought—long subdued—began to dawn painfully in her mind.

"I assure you, dear," began Sara, hesitatingly, "it does not signify to me, or to any of those who care for you; you are such a gentle little creature, we forget it all in time. But perhaps with strangers, especially with men, who think so much about beauty, this defect—"

She paused, laying her arm round Olive's shoulders—even affectionately, as if she herself were much moved. But Olive, with a cheek that whitened and a lip that quivered more and more, looked resolutely at her own shape imaged in the glass.

"I see, as I never saw before—so little I thought of myself. Yes, it is quite true—quite true."

She spoke beneath her breath, and her eyes seemed fascinated into a hard, cold gaze. Sara became almost frightened.

"Do not look so, my dear girl; I did not say that it was a positive **deformity**."

Olive faintly shuddered: "Ah, that is the word! I understand it all now."

She paused a moment, covering her face. But very soon she sat down, so quiet and pale that Sara was deceived.

"You do not mind it, then, Olive—you are not angry with me?" she said, soothingly.

"Angry with you—how could I be?"

"Then you will come back with me, and we will have another dance."

"Oh, no, no!" And the cheerful goodnatured voice seemed to make Olive shrink with pain. "Sara, dear Sara, let me go home!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"**WELL**, my love, was the ball as pleasant as you expected?" said Mrs. Rothesay, when Olive drew the curtains, and roused her invalid mother to the usual early breakfast, received from no hands but hers.

Olive answered quietly, "Every one said it was pleasant."

"But you," returned the mother, with an anxiety she could scarce disguise—"who talked to you?—who danced with you?"

"No one, except Sara."

"Poor child!" was the half involuntary sigh; and Mrs. Rothesay drew her daughter to her with deep tenderness.

It was a strange fate, that made the once slighted child almost the only thing in the world to which Sybilla Rothesay now clung. And yet, so rich, so full, had grown the springs of maternal love, long hidden in her nature, that she would not have exchanged their sweetness to be again the petted, wilful, beautiful darling of society, as she was at Stirling. The neglected wife—the often−ailing mother—dependent on her daughter's tenderness, was happier and nearer to heaven than she had ever been in her life.

Mrs. Rothesay regarded Olive earnestly. "You look as ill as if you had been up all night; and yet you came to rest tolerably early, and I thought you slept, you lay so quiet. Was it so, darling?"

"Not quite; I was thinking," said Olive, truthfully, though her face flushed, for she would fain have kept her bitter thoughts from her mother. Just then, Mrs. Rothesay started at the sound of the hall−bell.

"Is that your father come home? He said he might, to−day or to−morrow." And she positively trembled.

Olive went down−stairs. It was only a letter, to say Captain Rothesay would return that day; and would bring—most rare circumstance!—some guests to visit them. Olive seemed to shrink painfully at this news.

"What, my child, are you not pleased?—It will make the house less dull for you."

"No, no—I do not wish; O mamma! if I could only shut myself up, and never see any one but you—" And Olive turned very pale. At last, resolutely trying to speak without any show of trouble, she con− tinued—"I have found out something that I never knew—at least, never thought of before—that I am different to other girls. Oh, mother! am I then so painful to look upon? shall I, indeed, cause people to dislike me wherever I go?"

She spoke with much agitation. Mrs. Rothesay burst into tears.

"Oh, Olive! how wretched you make me, to talk thus. Unhappy mother that I am! Why should Heaven have punished me thus?"

"Punished you, mother?"

"Nay, my child—my poor innocent child! I did not mean that," cried Mrs. Rothesay; embracing her with a passionate revulsion of feeling.

But the word was said,—to linger, for ever after, on Olive's mind. It brought back the look once written on her childish memory— grown faint, but never quite erased—her father's first look. She understood it now.

Mrs. Rothesay continued weeping, and Olive had to cast aside all other feelings in the care of soothing her mother. She succeeded at last; but she learnt at the same time that on this one subject there must be silence between them for ever. It seemed, also, to her sensitive nature, as if every tear and every complaining word were a reproach to the mother that bore her. Henceforth her bitter thoughts must be wrestled with alone.

She did so wrestle with them. She walked out into her favourite meadow—now lying in the silent, frost−bound mistiness of a January day. It was where she had often been in summer with Sara, and Charles Geddes, and the little boys. Now everything seemed so wintry and lonely. What if her own future life were so—one long winter−day, wherein was neither beauty, gladness, nor love?

"I am '**deformed**.' That was Sara's own word," murmured Olive to herself. "If this is felt by one who loves me, what must I appear to the world? Will not all shrink from me—and even those who pity, turn away in pain. As for loving me—"

Thinking thus, Olive's fancy began to count, almost in despair, all those whose affection she had ever known. There was Elspie, there were her parents. Yet, the love of both father and mother—how sweet soever, now—had not blessed her always. She remembered the time when it was not there.

"Alas! that I should have been, even to them, a burden—a pang!" cried the girl, in the first outburst of suffering, which became ten times keener, because concealed. Her vivid fancy even exaggerated the truth. She

saw in herself a poor deformed being, shut out from all natural ties—a woman, to whom friendship would be given but in kindly pity; to whom love—that blissful dream in which she had of late indulged—would be denied for evermore. How hard seemed her doom! If it were for months only, or even years; but, to bear for a whole life this withering ban—never to be freed from it, except through death! And her lips unconsciously repeated the bitter murmur, "O God! why hast thou made me thus?"

It was scarcely uttered before her heart trembled at its impiety. And then the current of her thoughts changed. Those mysterious yearnings which had haunted her throughout childhood, until they had grown fainter under the influence of earthly ties and pleasures—returned to her now. God's immeasurable Infinite rose before her in glorious serenity. What was one brief lifetime to the ages of eternity? She felt it: she, in her weakness—her untaught childhood—her helplessness—felt that her poor deformed body enshrined a living soul. A soul that could look on Heaven, and on whom Heaven also looked—not like man, with scorn or loathing, but with a Divine tenderness that had power to lift the mortal into communion with the immortal.

Olive Rothesay seemed to have grown years older in that hour of solitary musing. She walked homewards through the silent fields, over which the early night was falling—night coming, as it were, in the midst of day, where the only light was given by the white, cold snow. To Olive this was a symbol, too—a token that the freezing sorrow which had fallen on her path, might palely light her on her earthly way. Strange things for a young girl to dream of! But they whom Heaven teaches are sometimes called—Samuel−like—while to them still pertains the childish ephod and the temple−porch.

Passing on, with footsteps silent and solemn as her own heart, Olive came to the street, on the verge of the town, where was her own dwelling and Sara's. From habit she looked in at the Derwents' house. It had all that cheerful brightness given by a blazing fire, glimmering through windows not yet closed. Olive could plainly distinguish the light shining on the crimson wall; even the merry faces of the circle round the hearth. And, as if to chant the chorus of so sweet a scene, there broke out on the clear frosty air the distant carillon of Oldchurch−bells—marriage−bells, too—signifying that not far off was dawning another scene of love and hope; that, somewhere in the parish, was celebrated the "coming home" of a bride.

The young creature, born with a woman's longings—longings neither unholy or impure, after the love which is the religion of a woman's heart—the sweetness of home, which is the heaven of a woman's life—felt that from both she was shut out for ever.

"Not for me—alas! not for me," she murmured; and her head drooped, and it seemed as though a cold hand were laid on her breast, saying, "Grow still, and throb no more!"

Then, lifting her eyes, she saw shining far up in the sky, beyond the mist and the frost and the gloom, one little star—the only one. With a long sigh, her soul seemed to pass upward in prayer.

"Oh God! since Thou hast willed it so,—if in this world I must walk alone, do Thou walk with me! If I must know no human love, fill my soul with Thine! If earthly joy be far from me, give me that peace of Heaven which passeth all understanding!"

And so—mournful, yet serene—Olive Rothesay reached her home.

She found her friend there. Sara looked confused at seeing her, and appeared to try, with the unwonted warmth of her greeting, to efface from Olive's mind the remembrance of what had happened the previous evening. But Olive, for the first time, shrank from these tokens of affection.

"Even Sara's love may be only compassion," she bitterly thought; and her calm endurance was again changed into grief and humiliation. She betrayed neither; for her father's nature was in the girl—his self−command—his proud reserve. Sara Derwent only thought her rather silent and cold. Little she wondered at this, though her regret rose at having been so foolish as to talk to her poor little friend in the way she did.

There was a constraint on both—so much so that Olive heard, without testifying much pain, news which a few days before would have grieved her to the heart. This visit was an adieu. Sara had been suddenly sent for by her grandfather, who lived in a distant county; and the summons entailed a parting of some weeks—perhaps, longer.

"But I shall not forget you, Olive. I shall write to you constantly. It will be my sole amusement in the dull place I am going to. Why, nobody ever used to enter my grandfather's house, except the parson, who lived some few miles off. Poor old soul! I used to set fire to his wig, and hide his spectacles. But he is dead now, I hear, and there has come in his place a young clergyman. Shall I strike up a little flirtation with **him**, eh—Olive?"

But Olive was in no jesting mood. She only shook her head.

Mrs. Rothesay looked with admiration on Sara. "What a blithe young creature you are, my dear. You win everybody's liking. I wish Olive were only half as merry as you."

Another arrow in poor Olive's heart!

"Well—we must try to make her so when I come back," said Sara, affectionately. "I shall have tales enough to tell; perhaps, about that young curate. Nay, don't frown, Olive. My cousin says he is a Scotsman born—and you like Scotland. Only his father was Welsh, and he has a horrid Welsh name—Gwyrdyr, or Gwynne, or something like it. But I'll give you all information."

And then she rose—still laughing—to bid adieu; which seemed so long a farewell, when the friends had never yet been parted but for one brief day. In saying it, Olive felt how dear to her had been this girl—this first idol of her warm heart. And then there came a thought almost like terror. Though fated to live unloved, she could not keep herself from loving. And if so, how would she bear the perpetual void—the yearning, never to be fulfilled?

She fell on Sara's neck and wept. "You do care for me a little—only a little."

"A great deal—as much as ever I can, seeing I have so many people to care for," answered Sara, trying to laugh away the tears that—from sympathy, perhaps—sprang to her eyes.

"Ah, true! And everybody cares for you. No wonder," answered Olive.

"Now, little Olive, why do you put on that grave face? Are you going to lecture me about not flirting with that stupid curate, and always remembering Charles. Oh! no fear of that."

"I hope not," said Olive, quietly. She could not talk more, and they bade each other good−bye; perhaps not quite so enthu− siastically as they might have done a week ago, but still with much affection. Sara had reached the door, when with a sudden impulse she came back again.

"Olive, I am a foolish, thoughtless girl; but if ever I pained you in any way, don't think of it again. Kiss me—will you—once more?"

Olive did so, clinging to her passionately. When Sara went away, she felt as though the first flower had perished in her garden, the first star had melted from her sky. It seemed a foreshadowing of that lonely fate, the portion of some humble ones, unblessed with the power to inspire other hearts with their own warmth. Alas! for that love which ever sees its objects come and go, brighten and fade, while it alone endures, and its very constancy becomes its deepest woe. Yet, not so. Greater—far greater—than the rolling, changing planets, is the sun; that burns on in its eternal loneliness, an emblem of that One Love which, from its infinite solitude, guides and sustains the universe.

Sara gone, Olive went back to her old dreamy life. The romance of first friendship seemed to have been swept away like a morning cloud. From Sara there came no letters—save a brief one, during her first week at Waterton. Olive wrote once or twice, even thrice. But a sense of wounded feeling prevented her writing again. Some tidings she gained from Robert and Lyle, that their sister was quite well, and very merry. Then, over all the dream of sweet affection fell a cold silence.

It might have utterly frozen so young and sensitive a heart, but that in Olive's own home were arising many cares. A great change came over her father. His economical habits became those of the wildest extravagance—extravagance in which his wife and daughter were not likely to share. Little they saw of it either, save during his rare visits to his home. Then, he either spent his evenings out, or else dining, smoking, drinking—horrible orgies of dissipated men—disturbed the quiet house at Oldchurch.

Many a time, till long after midnight, the mother and child sat listening to the gay, tumult of voices below; clinging to each other, pale and sad. Not that Captain Rothesay was unkind, or that either had any fear for him, for he had always been a strict and temperate man. But it pained them to think that any society seemed sweeter to him than that of his wife and daughter—that any place was become dearer to him than his home.

One night, when Mrs. Rothesay appeared exhausted, either with weariness or sorrow of heart, Olive persuaded her mother to go to rest, while she herself sat up for her father.

"Nay, let some of the servants do that, not you, my child."

But Olive, innocent as she was of all worldly guile, had accidentally seen the footman smile rudely when he spoke of "master coming home last night;" and a vague thought struck her, that such late hours were discreditable in the head of a family. Her father should not be mocked in his servants' eyes.

She dismissed the household and waited up for him alone. Twelve—one—two. The hours went by like long years. Heavily at first drooped her poor drowsy eyes, and then all weariness was dispelled by a feeling of

loneliness—an impression of coming sorrow. At last, when this sense was gradually merging into fear, she heard the sound of the swinging gate, and her father's knock at the door.

A loud, unsteady, angry knock—one that made her feet fly swifter even than by the impulse of affection.

"Why do you stay up for me? I don't want anybody to sit up," grumbled Captain Rothesay, without looking at her.

"But I liked to wait for you, papa."

"What! is that you, Olive?" and he stepped in with a lounging heavy gait—that of a person overpowered with fatigue as his young daughter thought.

"Did you not see me before? It was I who opened the door."

"Oh I yes—but—I was thinking of something else," he said, throwing himself into the study−chair, and trying with an effort to seem just as usual. "You are—a very good girl—I'm much obliged to you. The pleasure is—I may truly say—on both sides." And he energetically struck the table with his hand.

Olive thought this an odd form of speech; but her father's manner was grown so changed of late—sometimes he seemed quite in high spirits, even jocose—as he did now.

"I am glad to see you not much tired, papa. I thought you were—you walked so wearily when you first came in."

"I tired? nonsense—child! I have had the merriest evening in the world. I'll have another to−morrow, for I've asked then all to dine here. We'll give dinner parties to all the county."

"Papa," said Olive timidly, "will that be quite right, after what you told me of your being now so much poorer."

"Did I? Pshaw! I don't remember. However, I am a rich man now; richer than I have ever been."

"I am so glad; because then, dear papa, you know you need not be so much away from home, or weary yourself with the speculations you told me off; but come and live quietly with us."

Her father laughed loudly. "Foolish little girl! your notion of quietness would not suit a man like me. Take my word for it, Olive, home serves as a fantastic dream till five−and−twenty, and then means nothing at all. A man's home is the world."

"Is it?"

"Ay, as I intend to show to you. By−the−bye, I shall give up this stupid place, and enter into society. Your mother will like it, of course; and you, as my only child—eh—what did I say?" here he stopped hastily, with a blank, frightened look—then repeated, "Yes—you, my only child, will be properly introduced to the world. Why, you'll be quite an heiress, my girl," continued he, with an excited jocularity that frightened Olive. "And the world always courts such; who knows but that you may marry in spite of—"

"Oh, no—never!" interrupted Olive, turning away with bitter pain.

"Come, don't mind it," continued her father, with a reckless indifference to her feelings, quite unusual to him. "Why—my little sensible girl—you are better than any beauty in England; beauties are all fools, or worse."

And he laughed so loud, so long, that Olive was seized with a great horror, that absorbed even her own individual suffering. Was her father mad? Alas! there is a madness worse than disease, a voluntary madness, by which a man—longing at any price for excitement or oblivion—"puts an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains." This was the foe—the stealthy−footed demon, that had at last come to overmaster the brave and noble Angus Rothesay. As yet it ruled him not—he was no sot; but his daughter saw enough to know that the fiend was nigh upon him—that this night he was even in its grasp.

It is only the noblest kind of affection that can separate the sinner from the sin, and even while condemning, pity. Fallen as he was, Olive Rothesay looked on her father mournfully—intreatingly. She could not speak.

He seemed annoyed, and slightly confounded. "Come, simpleton, why do you stare at me—there is nothing the matter. Go away to bed."

Olive did not move.

"Make haste—what are you waiting for? Nay, stay; 'tis a cold night—just leave out the keys of the sideboard, will you, there's a good little housekeeper," he said, coaxingly.

Olive turned away in disgust, but only for a moment. "In case you should want any− thing, let me stay a little longer, papa; I am not tired, and I have some work to do—suppose I go and fetch it."

She went into the inner room, slowly. quietly; and when safe out of sight, burst into tears of such shame and

terror as she had never before known. Then she sat down to think. Her father thus; her mother feeble in mind and body; no one in the wide world to trust to but herself; no one to go to for comfort and counsel—none, save Heaven! She sank on her knees and prayed. As she rose, the angel in the daughter's soul was stronger than the demon in the father's.

Olive waited a little, and then walked softly into the other room. Some brandy, left on the sideboard, had attracted Captain Rothesay's sight. He had reached it with a noiseless hand, as if the act still conveyed to his dulled brain a consciousness of degradation. Once he looked round suspiciously; alas, the father dreaded his daughter's eye! Then stealthily standing with his face to the fire, he began to drink the tempting poison.

It was taken out of his hand! So noiseless was Olive's step, so gentle her movement, that he stood dumb, astonished, as though in the presence of some apparition. And, in truth, the girl looked like a spirit; for her face was very white, and her lips seemed as though they never had uttered, and never could utter, one living sound.

Father and daughter stood for some moments thus gazing at each other; and then Captain Rothesay threw himself into his chair, with a forced laugh.

"What's the matter, little fool? Cannot your father take care of himself? Give me the brandy again."

But she held it fast, and made no answer.

"Olive, I say—do you insult me thus?" and his voice rose in anger. "Go to bed, I command you! Will you not?"

"No!" The refusal was spoken softly—very softly—but it expressed indomitable firmness; and there was something in the girl's resolute spirit, before which that of the father quailed. With a sudden transition, which showed that the drink had already somewhat overpowered his brain, he melted into complaints.

"You are very rude to your poor father; you—almost the only comfort he has left!"

This touch even of maudlin sentiment went direct to Olive's heart. She clung to him, kissed him, begged his forgiveness, nay, even wept over him. He ceased to rage, and sat in a sullen silence for many minutes. Meanwhile Olive took away every temptation from his sight. Then she roused him gently.

"Now, papa, it is time to go to bed. Pray, come up−stairs."

He—the calm, gentlemanlike, Captain Rothesay—burst into a storm of passion that would have disgraced a boor. "How dare you order me about in this manner! Cannot I do as I like, without being controlled by you—a mere chit of a girl—a very child."

"I know I am only a child," answered Olive, meekly. "Do not be angry with me, papa; do not speak unkindly to your poor little daughter."

"My daughter! how dare you call yourself so, you white−faced, mean−looking hunchback—"

At the word, Olive recoiled—a strong shudder ran through her frame; she moaned one long, sobbing sigh, and no more.

Her father, shocked, and a little sobered, paused in his cruel speech. For minutes, they remained—he leaning back with a stupified air—she standing before him; her face drooped, and covered with her hands.

"Olive!" he muttered, in a repentant, humbled tone.

"Yes, papa."

"I am quite ready. If you like, I'll go to bed now."

Without speaking, she lighted him upstairs—nay **led** him; for, to his bitter shame, the guidance was not unneeded. When she left him, he had the grace to whisper—

"Child, you are not vexed about anything I said?"

She looked sorrowfully into his hot, fevered face, and stroked his arm with her pale hand. "No—no—not vexed at all! You could not help it, poor father!"

She heard her mother's feeble, sleepless voice speaking to him as he entered, and saw his door close. Long she watched there, until beneath it she perceived not one glimmer of light. Then she crept away, only murmuring to herself—

"God! teach me to endure!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"**WHAT** is the matter with the child today?" said Captain Rothesay to his wife, with whom, oh, rare circumstance! he was sitting *tête−à−tête*. But this, and a few other alterations for the better, had taken place in consequence of his longer stay at home than usual, during which an unseen influence had been busily at work. Poor Olive! Was it not well for her, that, to temper the first shock of her bitter destiny, there should arise, in the dreary blank of the future, duties so holy, that they stood almost in the place of joys?

"How dull the girl seems!" again observed Captain Rothesay, looking after his daughter, with a tenderness of which he afterwards appeared rather ashamed.

"Dull, is she?" said the mother; "oh, very likely, poor child! She is grieving to lose her chief friend and companion, Miss Derwent. News came to her this morning that Sara is about to be married."

"Oh, indeed!" and Captain Rothesay made an attempt at departure. He hated gossiping, even of the most harmless kind. But his wife, pleased that he condescended to talk to her at all, tried to amuse him in her own easy way.

"Poor Sara! I am glad she is going to have a home of her own—though she is young enough to marry. But I believe it was a very sudden affair; and the gentleman fell so desperately in love with her."

"More fool he!" muttered Captain Rothesay.

"Nay, he is not a fool at all; he is a very sensible, clever man, and a clergyman too; Miss Derwent said so in her brief note to Olive. But she did not mention where he lived; little indeed she told, but that his name was Gwynne—"

Captain Rothesay turned round quickly.

"—And Sara speaks of his mother being a stiff old Scotswoman. Ah, you are listening now, my dear. Let me see, I think Miss Derwent mentions her maiden name. The silly girl makes quite a boast of her lover's ancient family, on the maternal side."

"There is no silliness in that, I hope, Mrs. Rothesay?"

"Certainly not—was I not always proud of yours?" said the wife, with a meekness not newly learnt. She hunted in her reticule for Sara's letter, and read.

"Ah, here is the name—Alison Balfour: do you know it?"

"I did once, when I was a boy; but that is long ago," said Captain Rothesay, in a suppressed tone.

"Stay! do not go away in that hasty manner. Pray, talk to me a little more, Angus; it is so dull to be confined to this sickroom. Tell me of this Alison Balfour; you know, I should like to hear about your friends."

"Should you?—that is something new. If it had been always so—if you had indeed made my interests yours, Sybilla!" There was a touch of regret and old tenderness in his voice. She thought he was kind on account of her illness, and thanked him warmly. But the thanks sent him back to his usual cold self; he did not like to have his weakness noticed.

Mrs. Rothesay understood neither one state of feeling nor the other, so she said, cheerfully, "Come, now for the story of Alison Balfour."

"There is no story to tell. She was merely a young companion of my aunt's, Flora. I knew her for some years—in fact, until she married Mr. Gwynne. She was a noble woman."

"Really, Angus, I shall grow jealous," said Mrs. Rothesay, half in jest, half in earnest. "She must have been an old love of yours."

Her husband frowned. "Folly, Sybilla! She was a woman, and I a school−boy!"

And yet the words galled him, for they were not far off the truth. True, Alison was old enough to have been his mother; but many a precocious lad of sixteen conceives a similar romantic passion, and Angus Rothesay had really been very much in love, as he thought, with Alison Balfour.

Even when he quitted the room, and walked out into the road, his thoughts went backward many years; picturing the old, dull mansion, whose only brightness had come with her presence. He remembered how he used to walk by her side, in lonely mountain rambles—he a little boy, and she a grown woman; and how proud he was, when she stooped her tall stature to lean upon his arm. Once, she kissed him; and he lay awake all night, and many a night after, dreaming of the remembered bliss. And, as he grew a youth, what delicious sweetness in these

continued dreams! what pride to think himself "in love"—and with such a woman! Folly it was—hopeless folly—for she had been long betrothed to one she loved. But that was not Owen Gwynne. Alas! Alison, like many another proud, passionate woman, had married in sudden anger, thereby wrecking her whole life! When she did so, Angus Rothesay lost his boyish dream. He had already begun to find out that it was only a dream; though his first fancy's idol never ceased to be to him a memory full of all that was noble and beautiful in womanhood.

For many years, this enchanted portion of Captain Rothesay's past life had rarely crossed his mind; but when it did, it was always with a half−unconscious thought, that he himself might have been a better and a happier man, had his own beautiful Sybilla been more like Alison Balfour.

This chance news of her awakened memories connected with other scenes and characters, which had gradually melted away from Angus Rothesay's life, or been enveloped in the mist of selfishness and worldliness which had gathered over it, and over him. He thought of the old uncle, Sir Andrew Rothesay, whose pride he had been; of the sweet aunt Flora, whose pale beauty had bent over his cradle with a love almost like a mother's, save that it was so very, very sad. One had died estranged; the other— He would not let many weeks pass before he sought out Miss Flora Rothesay: that he was determined on! And, to do so, the best plan would be, first to go and see Alison—Mrs. Gwynne.

Captain Rothesay always kept his intentions to himself, and transacted his matters alone. Therefore, without the aid of wife or daughter, he soon discovered in what region lay Mr. Gwynne's curacy, and determined to hasten his customary journey to London, that he might visit the place on his way.

The night before his departure came. It was really a melancholy evening; for he had stayed at home so long, and been most of the time what his wife called "so good," that she quite regretted his going. The more so, as he was about to travel by the awful railway—then newly established—which, in the opinion of poor Mrs. Rothesay, with her delicate nerves and easily−roused terrors, entailed on him the certainty of being killed. She pleaded so much and so anxiously—even to the last—that when, in order to start at daybreak, he bade "goodbye" to her and Olive overnight, Captain Rothesay was softened even to tenderness.

"Do you really care so much about me, Sybilla?" said he, half mournfully.

She did not spring to his arms, like the young wife at Stirling, but she kissed his hand affectionately, and called him "Angus!"

"Olive!" said the father, when, having embraced his wife, he now turned to his daughter, "Olive, my child! take care of your mother! I shall be at home soon, and we will be very happy again—all three!"

As they ascended the staircase, they saw him watching them from below. Olive felt so content, even though her father was going away. She kissed her hand to him, with a blithe gesture, and then saw him go in and close the door. When the house sank into quietness, a curious feeling oppressed Captain Rothesay. It seemed to take rise in his wife's infectious fears.

"Women are always silly," he argued to himself. "Why should I dread any danger? The railway is safe as a coach—and yet, that affair of poor Huskisson! Pooh! what a fool I am!"

But even while he mocked it, the vague presentiment appeared to take form in his mind; and sitting, the only person awake in the slumbering house, where no sound broke the stillness, except the falling of a few cinders, and the occasional noise of a mouse behind the wainscoat, somewhat of the superstitions of his northern youth came over him. His countenance became grave, and he sank into deep thought.

It is a trite saying, that every man has that in his heart, which, if known, would make all his fellow−creatures hate him. Was it this evil spirit which now struggled in Captain Rothesay's breast, and darkened his face with storms of passion, remorse, or woe? He gave no utterance to them in words. If any secret there were, he would not trust it even to the air. But, at times, his mute lips writhed; his cheeks burned, and grew ghastly. Sometimes, too, he wore a cowed and humbled look, as on the night when his daughter had stood like a pure angel to save him from the abyss, on the brink of which he trod.

She had saved him, apparently. That night's shame had never occurred again. Slowly, his habits were changing, and his tastes becoming home−like. But still his lonely hours betokened some secret hidden in his soul—a secret which, if known, might have accounted for his having plunged into uproarious excitement, or drunken oblivion.

At length, as by a violent effort, Angus Rothesay sat down and began to write. He wrote for several hours—though frequently his task was interrupted by long reveries, and by fits of vehement emotion. When he

had finished, he carefully sealed up what he had written, and placed it in a secret drawer of his desk. Then he threw himself on a sofa, to sleep during the brief time that intervened before daybreak.

In the grey of the morning, when he stood despatching a hasty breakfast, he was startled by a light touch on his arm.

"Little Olive!—why, I thought you were fast asleep."

"I could not sleep when papa was going away; so I rose and dressed. You will not be angry?"

"Angry—no!" He stooped down and kissed her, more affectionately even than was his wont. But he was hasty and fidgety, as most men are when starting on a journey. They were both too busy for more words, until the few minutes during which he sat down to wait for the carriage. Then he took his daughter on his knee—an act of fatherly tenderness rather rare with him.

"I wish you were not going, or that I were going with you, papa," Olive whispered, nestling to him, in a sweet, childish way, though she was almost a woman, now. "How tired you look! You have not been in bed all night."

"No; I had writing to do." As he spoke, his countenance darkened. "Olive," he said, looking at her with sorrowful, questioning eyes.

"Well, dear papa."

"Nothing—nothing. Is the carriage ready?"

"Not yet. You will have time just for one little thing—'twill take only a minute," said Olive, persuasively.

"What is it, little one?"

"Mamma is asleep—she was tired and ill; but if you would run up−stairs, and kiss her once again before you go, it would make her so much happier—I know it would."

"Poor Sybilla!" he muttered, remorsefully, and quitted the room, slowly—not meeting his daughter's eyes; but when he came back, he took her in his arms, very tenderly.

"Olive, my child in whom I trust, always remember I did love you—you and your mother."

These were the last words she heard him utter, ere he went away.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN ROTHESAY had intended to make the business−excursion wait on that of pleasure—if pleasure the visit could be called, which was entered on from duty, and would doubtless awaken many painful associations; but he changed his mind, and it was not until his return from London, that he stayed on the way, and sought out the village of Harbury.

Verbal landscape painting is rarely interesting to the general reader; and as Captain Rothesay was certainly not devoted to the picturesque, it seems idle to follow him during his ten−mile ride from the nearest railway station to the place which he discovered was that of Mrs. Gwynne's abode, and where her son was "perpetual curate."

Her son! It seemed very strange to imagine Alison a mother; and yet, while he thought, Angus Rothesay almost laughed at himself for his folly. His boyish fancy had, perforce, faded at seventeen, and he was now—pshaw—he was somewhere above forty. As for Mrs. Gwynne, sixty would, probably, be nearer her age. Yet, not having seen her since she married, he never could think of her but as Alison Balfour.

As before observed, Captain Rothesay was by no means keenly susceptible to beauty of scenery; otherwise, he would often have been attracted from his meditations by that through which he passed. Lovely woodlands, just bursting into the delicate green of spring; deep, still streams, flowing through meadows, studded with cattle; forest−roads shadowed with stately trees, and so little frequented, that the green turf spread from hedge to hedge, and the primroses and bluebells sprung up almost in the pathway. All these composed a picture of rural loveliness, which is peculiar to England, and chiefly to that part of England where Harbury is situated. Captain Rothesay scarcely noticed it, until, pausing to consider his track, he saw in the distance a church upon a hill. Beautiful and peaceful it looked—its ancient tower rising out against the sky, and the evening sun shining on its windows and gilded vane.

"That must surely be my landmark," thought Captain Rothesay; and he made an inquiry to that effect of a man passing by.

"Aye, aye, measter," was the answer, in rather unintelligible Doric; "thot bees Harbury Church, as sure as moy name's John Dent; and thot red house—conna ye see't?—thot's our parson's."

Prompted by curiosity, Rothesay observed—"Oh! Mr. Gwynne's. He is quite a young man, I believe? Do you like him—you good folk hereabouts?"

"Some on us dun, and some on us dunna. He's not much of a parson, though; he wunna send yer to sleep wi' his long preachings. But oi say the mon's a good mon: he'll coom and see yer when you're bad, an' talk t' ye by th' hour; though he dunna talk oot o' th' Bible. But oi'm a lad o' t' forest, and 'll be a keeper some toime. That's better nor book−larning."

Captain Rothesay had no will to listen to more personal revelations from honest John Dent; so he said, quickly—"Perhaps so, my good fellow." Then he added, rather hesitatinoly—"Mr. Gwynne has a mother living with him, I believe. What sort of person is she?"

"Her's a good−enough lady, oi reckon; only a bit too proud. Many's the blanket her's gen to poor folk; and my owd mother sees her every week—but her's never shook hands wi' her yet. Eh, measter, won ye go?"

This last remark was bellowed after Captain Rothesay, whose horse had commenced a sudden canter, which ceased not until its owner dismounted at the parsonage−gate.

This gate formed the boundary of the garden—and a most lovely spot it was. It extended to the churchyard, with which it communicated by a little wicket−door. You passed through beautiful parterres and alleys, formed of fragrant shrubs, to the spot

> Where grew the turf, in many a mouldering heap.

It seemed as though the path of death were indeed through flowers. Garden and churchyard covered the hill's summit; and from both might be discerned a view such as is rarely seen in level England. It was a panorama—extending some twenty or thirty miles across the country—where, through woodlands and

meadow−lands, flowed the silver windings of a small river. Here and there was an old ruined castle—a manor−house, rising among its ancestral trees—or the faint, misty smoke−cloud, that indicated some hamlet or small town. Save these, the landscape swept on unbroken, until it ended at the horizon in the high range of the D—shire hills.

Even to Captain Rothesay, this scene seemed strangely beautiful. He contemplated it for some time—his hand still on the unopened gate; and then he became aware that a lady, whose gardening−dress and gardening−implemerts showed she was occupied in her favourite evening employment, was looking at him with some curiosity.

The traces of life's downward path are easier to recognise than those of its ascent. Though the mature womanhood of Alison Balfour had glided into age, Rothesay had no difficulty in discovering that he was in the presence of his ancient friend. Not so with her. He advanced, addressed her by name, and even took her hand, before she had the slightest idea that her guest was Angus Rothesay.

"Have you, then, so entirely forgotten me—forgotten the days in our native Perthshire, when I was a bit laddie, and you, our guest, were Miss Alison Balfour?"

There came a trembling over her features—ay, aged woman as she was! But at her years, all the past, whether of joy or grief, becomes faint; else, how would age be borne? She extended both her hands, with a warm friendliness.

"Welcome, Angus Rothesay! No won− der I did not know you. These thirty years—is it not thus much?—have changed you from a boy into a middle−aged man, and made of me an old woman."

She really was an elderly lady now. It seemed almost ridiculous to think of her as his youth's idol. Neither was she beautiful,—how could he ever have imagined her so? Her irregular features—unnoticed when the white and red tints of youth adorned them—were now, in age, positively plain. Her strong−built frame had, in losing elasticity, lost much of grace, though dignity remained. Looking on Mrs. Gwynne for the first time, she appeared a large, rather plain woman. Looking again, it would be to observe the noble candour that dwelt in the eyes, and the sweetness—at times even playfulness—that hovered round the mouth. Regarding her for the third time, you would see a woman whom you felt sure you must perforce respect, and might, in time, love very much—if she would let you. Of that gracious permission you would long have considerable doubt; but once granted, you would never unlove her to the end of your days. As for her loving **you**, you would not be quite clear that it did not spring from the generous benevolence of her nature, rather than from any individual warmth toward yourself; and such was the reserve of her character, that were her affection ever so deep, she might possibly never let you know it until the day of your death.

Yet she was capable of attachments, strong as her own nature. All her feelings, passions, energies, were on a grand scale: in her, were no petty feminine follies—no weak, narrow illiberalities of judgment. She had the soul of a man, and the heart of a woman.

"You were gardening, I see?" said Captain Rothesay, making the first ordinary remark that came to his mind, to break the awkward pause.

"Yes; I do so every fine evening. Harold is very fond of flowers—and that reminds me I must call him to you at once, as it is Wednesday,—service−night, and he will be engaged in his duties soon."

"Pray, let us enter the house; I should much like to see your son," said Angus Rothesay. He gave her his arm; and they walked together, through the green alleys of holly, to the front−door. Then Mrs. Gwynne stopped, put her hand over her eyes for a moment, removed it, and looked earnestly at her guest.

"Angus Rothesay! how strange this seems!—like a dream—a dream of thirty years. Well, let us go in."

Mechanically, and yet in a subdued, absent manner, she laid her bonnet and shawl on the hall−table, and took off her gardening−gloves, thereby discovering hands, which, though large, were white and well−formed, and in their round, taper delicacy, exhibited no sign of age. Captain Rothesay, without pausing to think, took the right hand.

"Ah! you wear still the ring I used to play with when a boy. I thought—" and, recollecting himself, he stopped, ashamed of his discourtesy in alluding to what must have been a painful past.

But she said, quietly, sadly, though without any agitation, "You have a good memory. It was left to me, ten years since, on the death of Archibald Maclean."

Strange that she could thus speak that name! But over how many a buried grief does the grass grow green in

thirty years!

In the hall, they encountered a young man.

"Harold," said Mrs. Gwynne, "give wel− come to an old—a very old friend of mine—Captain Angus Rothesay. Angus, this is my son—my only son, Harold."

And she looked upon him as a mother, widowed for twenty years, looks upon an only son; yet the pride was tempered with dignity, the affection was veiled under reserve. She, who doubtless would have sustained his life with her own heart's blood, had probably never since his boyhood suffered him to know a mother's passionate tenderness, or to behold a mother's tear.

Perhaps that was the reason that Harold's whole manner was the reflection of her own. Not that he was like her in person; for nature had to him, been far more bountiful; and Harold Gwynne, though not above mediocre height, was considerably above mediocre beauty. But there was a certain rigidness and harshness in his mien, and a slightly repellant atmosphere around him. Probably, not one of the young lambs of his flock had ever dreamed of climbing the knee of the Reverend Harold Gwynne. Though he wore the clerical garb, he did not look at all apostle−like; he was neither a St. Paul nor a St. John. Yet a grand, noble head it was. It might have been sketched for that of a young philosopher—a Galileo or a Priestley, with the heavy, strongly−marked brows. The eyes—hackneyed as the description is, no one can paint a man without mentioning his eyes: those of Harold Gwynne were not unlike his mother's, in their open, steadfast look; yet they were not soft, like hers, but of a steel−grey, diamond clear. He carried his head very erect; and these eyes of his seemed as though unable to rest on the ground; they were always turned upwards, with a gaze—not reverent or dreamy—but eager, inquiring, and piercing as truth itself.

Such was the young man with whom Cap− tain Rothesay shook hands, congratulating his old friend on having such a son.

"You are more fortunate than I," he said; "my marriage has only bestowed on me a daughter."

"Daughters are a great comfort sometimes," answered Mrs. Gwynne; "though, for my part, I never wished for one."

The quick, reproachful glance of Harold sought his mother's face; and shortly afterwards, he re−entered his study.

"My son thinks I meant to include a daughter−in−law," was Mrs. Gwynne's remark, while the concealed playfulness about her mouth appeared. "He is soon to bring me one."

"I know it—and know her, too; by this means I found you out. I should scarcely have imagined Sara Derwent the girl for you to choose."

"**He** chooses, not I. A mother, whose dutiful son has been her sole stay through life, has no right to interfere with what he deems his happiness," said Alison, gravely. And, at that moment, the young curate reappeared, ready for the duties to which he was summoned by the sharp sound of the "church−going bell."

"I will stay at home with Captain Rothesay," observed Mrs. Gwynne. Her guest made a courteous disclaimer, which ended in something about "religious duties."

"Hospitality is a duty too—at least we thought so in the north," she answered. "And old friendship is ever somewhat of a religion with me. Therefore I will stay, Harold."

"You are right, mother," said Harold. But he would not that his mother had seen the smile which curled his lip as he passed along the hall, and through the garden towards the churchyard. There it faded into a look, dark and yet mournful; which, as it turned from the dust beneath his feet to the stars overhead, and then back again to the graves, seemed to ask despairingly, at once of heaven and earth, for the solution of some inward mystery.

While Harold preached, his mother and Captain Rothesay sat in the parsonage and talked of their olden days, now faint as a dream. The rising wind, which, sweeping over the wide champaign, came to moan in the hill−side trees, seemed to sing the dirge of that long−past life. Yet the heart of both, even of Angus Rothesay, throbbed to its memory; as a Scottish heart ever does to that of home and the mountain−land.

Among other long unspoken names came that of Miss Flora Rothesay. "She is an old woman now—a few years older than I; Harold visits her not infrequently; and she and I correspond now and then, but we have not met for many years."

"Yet you have not forgotten her?"

"Do I ever forget?" said Alison, as she turned her face towards him. And looking thereon, he felt that such a

woman never could.

Their conversation, passing down the stream of time, touched on all that was memorable in the life of both. She mentioned her husband—but merely the two events, not long distant each from each, of their marriage and his death.

"Your son is not like yourself—does he resemble Mr. Gwynne," observed Rothesay.

"In person, yes, a little; in mind—no! a thousand times no!" Then recollecting herself, she added, "It was not likely. Mr. Gwynne has been dead so many years that my son"—it was always **my** son—"has no remembrance of his father."

Alas! that there should be some whose memories are gladly suffered to perish, with the falling of the earth above them.

A thought like this passed through the mind of Angus Rothesay. "I fancy," said he, "that I once met Mr. Gwynne; he was—"

"My husband!" Mrs. Gwynne's tone suppressed all further remark—even all recollection of the contemptible image that was intruding on her guest's mind—an image of a young, roistering, fox−hunting fool. Rothesay looked on the widow, and the remembrance passed away, or became sacred as memory itself. And then the conversation glided as a mother's heart would fain direct it—to her only son.

"He was a strange creature ever, was my Harold. In his childhood he always teazed me with his 'why and because;' he would come to the root of everything, and would not believe anything that he could not quite understand. Gradually I began to glory in this peculiarity, for I saw it argued a mind far above the common order. Angus, you are a father; you may be happy in your child, but you never can understand the intense pride of a mother in an only son."

While she talked, her countenance and manner brightened, and Captain Rothesay saw again, not the serene, stern widow of Owen Gwynne, but the energetic, impassioned mountain−girl, Alison Balfour. He told her this.

"Is it so? Strange! And yet I do but talk to you as I often did when we were young together."

He begged her to continue—his heart warmed as it had not done for many a day; and, to lead the way, he asked what chance had caused the descendant of the Balfours to become an English clergyman?

"From circumstances. When he was very young and we two lived together in the poor Highland cottage where he was born, my boy made acquaintance with an Englishman, one Lord Arundale, a great student. Harold longed to be a student, too."

"A noble desire."

"I shared it too. When the thought came to me that my boy would be a great man, I nursed it, cherished it, made it my whole life's aim. We were not rich—I had not married for money"—and there was a faint show of pride in her lip—"yet, Harold must go, as he desired, to an English university. I said in my heart, 'He shall!' and he did."

Angus looked at Mrs. Gwynne, and thought that a woman's will might sometimes be as strong and daring as a man's.

Alison continued—"My son had only half finished his education when fortune made the poor poorer. But Scotland and Cambridge, thank Heaven! were far distant. I never told him one word—I lived—it matters little how—I cared not! Our fortune lasted, as I had calculated it would, till he had taken his degree, and left college rich in honours—and then—"

She ceased, and the light in her countenance faded. Angus Rothesay gazed upon the aged mother as reverently as he had done upon the good angel of his boyish days.

"I said you were a noble woman, Alison Balfour."

"I was a mother, and I had a noble son!" was her only answer.

They sat a long time silent, looking at the fire, and listening to the wind. There was a momentary interruption—a message from the young clergyman, to say that he was summoned some distance to visit a sick person.

"On such a stormy night as this!" said Angus Rothesay.

"Harold never fails in his duties," replied the mother, with a smile. Then turning abruptly to her guest—"You will let me talk, old friend, and about him. I cannot often talk **to** him, for he is so reserved—that is, so occupied with his clerical studies. But there never was a better son than my Harold."

"I am sure of it," said Captain Rothesay.

The mother continued—"Never shall I forget the triumph of his coming home from Cambridge. Yet it brought a pang, too; for then first he had to learn the whole truth. Poor Harold! it pained me to see him so shocked and overwhelmed at the sight of our lowly roof and mean fare; and to know that even these would not last us long. But I said to him—'My son, what signifies it, when you can soon bring your mother to your own home.' For he, already a deacon, had had a curacy offered him, as soon as ever he chose to take priest's orders."

"Then he had already decided on entering the church?"

"He had chosen that career in his youth. Towards it his whole education had tended. But," she added, with a troubled look, "my old friend, I may tell you one doubt, which I have never yet breathed to living soul—I think at this time there was a struggle in his mind. Perhaps his dreams of ambition rose higher than the simple destiny of a country clergyman. I hinted this to him, but he repelled my questionings. Alas! he knew, as well as I, that there was now no other path open for him."

Mrs. Gwynne paused, and then went on, as though speaking more to herself than to her listener.

"The time came for Harold to decide. I marvelled not at the trouble and restlessness which oppressed him, for I knew how strong ambition must be in a man like him. God knows I would have worked, begged, starved, rather than he should be thus tried. I told him so, the day before his ordination; but he entreated me to be silent, with a look such as I never saw on his face before—such as I trust in God I never may see again. I heard him all night walking about his chamber; and the next morning he was gone ere I rose. When he came back, he seemed quite excited with joy, embraced me, told me I should never know poverty more, for that he was in priest's orders, and we should go the next week to the curacy at Harbury."

"And he has never repented?"

"I think not. He is not without the honours he desired; for his fame in science is extending far beyond his small parish. He fulfils his duties scrupulously; and the people respect him, though he sides with no party, high−church or evangelical. We abhor illiberality—my son and I."

"That is clear, otherwise I had never seen Alison Balfour quitting the kirk for the church."

"Angus Rothesay," said Mrs. Gwynne, with dignity, "I have learned, throughout a long life, the lesson that trifling outward differences matter little—the spirit of religion is its true life. This lesson I have taught my son from his cradle; and where will you find a more sincere, moral, or pious man than Harold Gwynne?"

"Where indeed, mother?" echoed a voice, as Harold, opening the door, caught her last words. "But come, 'no more o' that, an thou lovest me!'"

"Harold!" She looked at him commandingly, and the light tone in which he had spoken was quelled. The coldness of reserve grew up between mother and son once more.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTAIN ROTHESAY found himself at breakfast on the sixth morning of his stay at Harbury—so swiftly had the time flown. But he felt a purer and a happier man every hour that he spent with his ancient friend.

The breakfast−room was Harold's study. It was more that of a man of science and learning than that of a clergyman. Beside Leighton and Flavel, were placed Bacon and Descartes; dust lay upon John Newton's Sermons, while close by, rested in honoured well−thumbed tatters, his great namesake, who read God's scriptures in the stars. In one corner lay a large unopened packet—marked "Religious Society's Tracts;" it served as a stand for a large telescope, whose clumsiness betrayed the ingenuity of home manufacture. The theological contents of the library was a vast mass of polemical literature, orthodox and heterodox, including all faiths, all variations of sect. Mahomet and Swedenborg, Calvin and the Talmud, lay side by side; and on the farthest shelf was the great original of all creeds—the Book of Books.

On this morning, as on most others, Harold Gwynne did not appear until after prayers were over. His mother read them, as indeed she always did morning and evening. A stranger might have said, that her doing so was the last lingering token of her sway as "head of the household."

Harold entered, his countenance bearing the pallid restless look of one who lies half−dreaming in bed, long after he is awake and ought to have risen. His mother saw it.

"You are not right, Harold. I had far rather that you rose at six and studied till nine, as formerly, than that you should dream away the morning hours, and come down looking as you do now. Forgive me, but it is not good for you, my son."

She often called him **my son** with a beautiful simplicity, that reminded one of the holy Hebrew mothers—of Rebekah or of Hannah.

Harold looked for a moment disconcerted—not angry. "Do not mind me, mother; I shall go back to study in good time. Let me do as I judge best."

"Certainly," was all the mother's reply. She reproved—she never "scolded." Turning the conversation, she directed hers to Captain Rothesay, while Harold ate his break− fast in silence—a habit not unusual with him. Immediately afterwards he rose, and prepared to depart for the day.

"I need not apologise to Captain Rothesay," he said, in his own straightforward manner, which was only saved from the imputation of bluntness by a certain manly dignity—and contrasted strongly with the reserved and courtly grace of his guest. "My pursuits can scarcely interest you, while I know, and **you** know, what pleasure my mother takes in your society."

"You will not stay away all this day too, Harold. Surely that is a little too much to be required, even by Miss Derwent," spoke the quick impulse of the mother's unconscious jealousy. But she repressed it at once—even before the sudden flush of anger awakened by her words had faded from Harold's brow. "Go, my son—your mother never interferes either with your duties or your pleasures."

Harold took her hand—though with scarce less formality than he did that of Captain Rothesay; and in a few minutes they saw him gallop down the hill and across the open country, with a speed beseeming well the age of five−and−twenty, and the season of a first love.

Mrs. Gwynne looked after him with an intensity of feeling that in any other woman would have found vent in a tear—certainly a sigh. But neither was easily awakened in her nature; it was too deep.

"You are thinking of your son and his marriage," said Angus.

"That is not strange. It is a life crisis with all men—and it has come so suddenly—I scarcely know my Harold of two months since in my Harold now."

"To work such results, it must be an ardent love."

"Say, rather,a vehement passion—love does not spring up and flower, like my hyacinths there, in six weeks," answered Mrs. Gwynne, smiling with that quiet humour which formed a curious and apparently contradictory trait in her character. "But I murmur little. Reason, if not feeling, tells me that a mother advancing in years cannot be all in all to a young man. Harold needs a wife—let him take one! They will be married soon; and if all Sara's qualities equal her beauty, this wild passion will soon mature into affection. He may be happy—I trust so!"

She folded her hands over her breast, less in meekness than to press down its swelling emotion. Well she knew

that woman's deepest love, as mother, sister, wife, is often but another name for self−denying martyrdom.

"But does your son's affianced return his love?" asked Rothesay.

"Is there any girl who would not love my Harold?" spoke the quick−rising maternal pride. But she almost smiled at it herself, and added—"Really, you must excuse these speeches of mine. I talk to you as I never do to any one else; but it is all for the sake of olden times. This has been a happy week to me. You must pay us another visit soon."

"I will. And you must take a journey to my home, and learn to know my wife and Olive," said Rothesay. The pure influence of Alison Gwynne was unconsciously strengthening to all good; and though, from some inexplicable feeling, he had spoken but little of his wife and child, there were growing up in his mind many schemes, the chief of which were connected with Olive. But he now thought less of her appearing in the world as Captain Rothesay's heiress, than of her being placed within the shadow of the noble nature of Alison Gwynne, and so reflecting back upon her father's age that benign influence which had been the blessing of his youth.

He went on to tell Mrs. Gwynne more of his affairs and of his plans than he had communicated to any one for many a long year. In the midst of their conversation came the visitation—always so important in remote country districts—the every−other−day's post.

"For you—not me. I have few correspondents. So I will go to my duties, while you attend to yours," said Mrs. Gwynne, and departed.

When she came in again, Captain Rothesay was pacing the room with a vexed and disordered aspect.

"No ill news, I hope," said the voice, which, when it chose, could soften to all a woman's sympathy.

"No, my kind friend—not exactly ill−news, though vexatious enough. But why should I trouble you with them?"

"Nothing ever troubles me that can be of use to my friends. I ask no unwelcome confidence. If it is any relief to you to speak, I will gladly hear. It is sometimes good for a man to have a woman to talk to."

"It is—it is! Would that I had been blessed with common sense at home," thought Rothesay in his heart. And that heart opening itself more and more, he told her his cause of annoyance. A most important mercantile venture would be lost to him for want of what he called "a few paltry hundreds," to be forthcoming on the morrow.

"If it had been a fortnight—just till my next ship is due; or even one week, to give me time to make some arrangement! But where is the use of complaining? It is too late."

"Not quite," said Alison Gwynne, looking up after a few moments of deep thought; and, with a clearness which would have gained for her the repute of "a thorough woman of business," she questioned Captain Rothesay, until she drew from him a possible way of obviating his difficulty.

"If, as you say, I were in London now, where my banker or some business friend would take up a bill for me; but that is impossible!"

"Nay—why say that you have friends alone in London?" replied Alison,with agentle smile. "That is rather too unjust, Angus Rothesay. Our Highland clanship is not so clean forgotten, I hope. Come, old friend, it will be hard if I cannot do something for you. And Harold, who loves Flora Rothesay almost as much as he loves me, would gladly aid her kinsman."

"How—how! Nay, but I will never consent," cried Angus, with a resoluteness through which his first eager sense of relief was clearly discernible. Truly, there was coming upon him, with this mania of speculation, the same desperation which causes the gambler to clutch money from the starving hands of those who even yet are passionately dear.

"You **shall** consent, friend," answered Mrs. Gwynne, composedly. "Why should you not? It is a mere form—an obligation of a week, at most. You will accept that for the sake of Alison Balfour."

He clasped her hand with as much emotion as was in his nature to show.

She continued—"Well, we will talk of this again when Harold comes in to dinner. But, positively, I see him returning. There he is, dashing up the hill. I hope nothing is the matter."

Yet she did not quit the room to meet him, but sat apparently quiet, though her hands were slightly trembling, until her son came in. In answer to her question, he said—

"No, no; nothing amiss. Only Mr. Fludyer would have me go to the Hall to see his new horses; and there I found—"

"Sara!" interrupted the mother. "Well, perhaps she thought it would be a pleasant change from the dulness of

Waterton during your absence; so never mind."

He did mind. He restlessly paced the room, angry with his mother, himself—with the whole world. Mrs. Gwynne might well notice how this sudden passion had changed his nature. A moralist looking on the knotted brow, which indicated the most majestic intellect, would have smiled to see—not for the first time—a great and wise man making of himself a slave, nay, a very fool, for the enchantments of a beautiful woman.

His mother took his arm and walked with him up and down the room, without talking to him at all. But her firm step and firm clasp seemed to soothe—almost force him into com− posure. She had over him at once a mother's influence and a father's control.

Meanwhile, Captain Rothesay busied, or seemed to busy himself, with his numerous letters, and very wisely kept nearly out of sight.

As soon as her son appeared a little recovered from his vexation, Mrs. Gwynne said,

"Now, Harold, if you are quite willing, I want to talk to you for a few minutes. Shall it be now or this evening?"

"This evening I shall ride over to Waterton."

"What! not one evening to spare for your mother, or—" she corrected herself speedily, "for your beloved books?"

He moved restlessly.

"Nay, I have had enough of study; I must have interest, amusement, excitement. I think I have drunk all the world's pleasures dry, except this one. Mother, don't keep it from me; I know no rest except I am beside Sara."

He rarely spoke to her so freely, and, despite her pain, the mother was touched.

"Go, then, go to Sara; and the matter I wished to speak upon we will discuss now."

He sat down and listened, though often only with his outward ears, to her plan, wherewith Captain Rothesay might be saved from his difficulty.

"It is a mere nominal thing; I would execute it myself, but a wonman's name would scarcely do. Yours will. My son Harold will at once perform such a trifling act of kindness for his mother's friend."

"Of course—of course. Come, tell me what to do; you understand all these business affairs—wise woman that you are, mother!" said Harold, as he rose up to seek his guest.

Captain Rothesay scrupled a while longer; but at length the dazzling vision of coming wealth absorbed both pride and reluctance. It would be so hard to miss the chance of thousands, by objecting to a mere form. "Besides, Harold Gwynne shall share the success," he thought; and he formed many schemes for changing the comparative poverty of the parsonage into comfort and luxury. It was only when the pen was in the young man's hand, ready to sign the paper, that the faintest misgiving crossed Rothesay's mind.

"Stay, it is but for a few days—yet life sometimes ends in an hour. What, if I should die, at once, before I can requite you? Mr. Gwynne, you shall not do it."

"He **shall**—I mean, he will," answered the mother.

"But not until I have secured him in some way."

"Nay, Angus; we 'auld acquaintance' should not thus bargain away our friendship," said Mrs. Gwynne, with wounded pride—Highland pride. "And besides, there is no time to lose. Here is the acceptance ready—so, Harold, sign!"

And Harold did sign. The instant after, glad to escape, he quitted the room.

Angus Rothesay sank on a chair with a heart−deep sigh of relief. It was done now. He eyed with thankfulness the paper which had secured him the golden prize.

"It is but a trifle—a sum not worth naming," he muttered to himself; and so, indeed, it seemed to one who had "turned over" thousands like mere heaps of dust. He never thought that it was an amount equal to Harold's yearly income for which the young man had thus become bound.

Yet he omitted not again and again to thank Mrs. Gwynne, and with excited eagerness to point to all the prospects now before him.

"And, besides, you cannot think from what you have saved me—the annoyance—the shame of breaking my word. Oh! my friend, you know not in what a whirling, restless world of commerce I live! To fail in anything, or be thought to fail, would positively ruin me and drive me mad."

"Angus—old companion!" answered Mrs. Gwynne, regarding him earnestly, "you must not blame me if I tell

you this is wrong. In one week I have seen far into your heart—farther than you think. Be advised by me; change this life for one more calm. Home and its blessings never come too late."

"You are right," said Angus. "I sometimes think that all is not well with me. I am growing old, and business racks my head sadly sometimes. Feel it now!"

He carried to his brow her hand—the hand which had led him when a boy, which in his fantastic dream of youth he had passionately kissed; even now, when the pulses were grown leaden with age, it felt cool, calm, like the touch of some pitying and protecting angel.

Alison Gwynne shook her head gently. "My friend, you say truly all is not well with you. Let us put aside all business, and walk in the garden. Come!"

Captain Rothesay lingered at Harbury yet one day more. But he could not stay longer, for this important business−venture made him restless. Besides, Harold's wedding was near at hand; in less than a week the mother would be sole regent of her son's home no more. No wonder that this made her grave and anxious—so that even her old friend's presence was a slight restraint. Yet she bade him adieu with her own cordial sincerity. He began to pour out thanks for all kindness—especially the one kindness of all, adding—

"But I will say no more. You shall see or hear from me in a few days at farthest."

"Not until after the wedding—I can think of nothing till after the wedding," answered Mrs. Gwynne. "Now, farewell, friend! but not for another thirty years, I trust!"

"No, no!" cried Angus,warmly. He looked at her as she sat in serene, subdued age, by the light of her own hearth—life's trials conquered—life's duties fulfilled—and she appeared not less divine a creature than the Alison Balfour who had trod the mountains full of joy, and hope, and energy. Holy and beautiful she had seemed to him in her youth; and though every shadow of that passionate idealisation, once called love, was gone, still holy and beautiful she seemed to him in her age.

Angus Rothesay rode away from Harbury Parsonage, feeling that there he had gained a new interest to make life and life's duties more sacred. He thought with tenderness of his home—of his wife, and of his "little Olive;" and then, travelling by a rather circuitous route, his thoughts rested on Harold Gwynne.

"The kind−hearted, generous fellow! I will take care he is requited double. And to−morrow, before ever I reach Oldchurch, I will go to my lawyer's and make all safe on his account."

To−morrow! He remembered not who sayeth, "Boast not thyself of to−morrow."

CHAPTER XVII.

OLIVE sat mournfully contemplating Sara Derwent's last letter—the last she knew it would be. It was written, not with the frank simplicity of their girlish confidence, but with the formal dignity of one who the next day would become a bride. It spoke of no regret, no remorse for her violated troth; it mentioned her former promise in a cold, business−like manner, without inferring any changed love, but merely stating her friends' opinion on the "evil of long engagements, and that she would be much better married at once to Harold Gwynne, than waiting some ten years for Charles Geddes." How lightly won and lightly lost are hearts like that of Sara Derwent!

But to Olive this change seemed a positive sin. She shuddered to think of Sara's wicked faithlessness; she wept with pity, remembering poor Charles. The sense of wrong, as well as of misery, had entered her world at once; her idols were crumbling into dust. She mourned now, not only the hopelessness of being loved, but the hopelessness of finding aught to love with the adoration that requires nothing less than perfection to fulfil all its aspirings. To love—not to be loved—could now be her only blessing; was this, also, to be denied? Life grew painful to her, and a morbid bitterness was settling on her soul.

She read the account that Sara had somewhat boastfully written, of her prospects, her pretty home, and of Harold's devotion to her. "This clever man—this noble man (as people call him, and most of all his mother)—I could wind him round my little finger. What think you, Olive? Is not that something to be married for? You ask if I am happy. Yes, certainly, happier than you can imagine."

"That is true indeed," murmured Olive; and there came upon her a bitter sense of the inequalities of life. It seemed that Heaven to some gave all things; to others, nothing! But she hushed the complainings, for they seemed impious. Her spirit grew calm beneath the faith she had been taught by Elspie, which, though carried by the old Scotswoman into all the mystic horrors of Calvinistic predestination, yet had sweetness at its root. For it was a faith that taught the peace of resting childlike beneath the shadow of that Omnipotent Will, which holds every tangled thread of fate within one mighty Hand, which rules all things, and rules them continually for good.

While thinking thus, Olive was sitting in her "bower," as she called her favourite place of solitude. It was a garden−seat, placed under the thorn−tree, and shut out from sight of the house by an espalier of apple−trees. Not very romantic, certainly, but a most pleasant spot, with the sound of the "shallow river" gliding by, and of many a bird that "sang madrigals" in the meadows opposite. And Olive herself, as she sat with her hands crossed on her knee, her bending head and pensive eyes out−gazing, added no unmeet picture to the still beauty of the scene. Many a lovely woman might have coveted the meek yet heavenly look which cast sweetness over the pale features of the deformed girl.

Olive, sitting with her eyes cast down, was some time before she became conscious that she was watched—long and earnestly; but by an innocent watcher—her "little knight," as he had dubbed hinself, Lyle Derwent. His face looked out from the ivy−leaves at the top of the wall. Soon he had leaped down, and was kneeling at her feet, just like a young lover in a romance. Smiling, she told him so; for in truth she made a great pet of the child, whose delicate beauty pleased her artist−eye, while his gentleness won her affection.

"Well, and I will be your lover, Miss Olive," said he, stoutly; "for I love you very much indeed. I should so like to kiss you—may I?"

She stooped down; the little clinging arms, the sweet childish kiss, moved her almost to tears.

"Why are you always so sad, Miss Rothesay? why do you never laugh, like Sara, or the other young ladies we know?"

"Because I am not like Sara, or like any other girl. Ah! Lyle, all is very different with me," said Olive, sighing softly. "But, my little knight, this can scarcely be understood by one so young as you."

"Though I am a little boy, I know thus much, that I love you, and think you more beautiful than anybody else in the world—even than Sara."

And speaking rather loudly and energetically, he was answered by a burst of derisive laughter from behind the wall.

Olive crimsoned; it was one more of those passing wounds which her sensitive nature now continually received. Was even a child's love for her deemed so unnatural, and worthy to be mocked at thus cruelly? Lyle, with a quickness beyond his years, seemed to have divined her thoughts, and his gentle temper was roused into

passion.

"I will kill Bob, I will! Never mind him, sweet, dear, beautiful Miss Rothesay; I love you, and I hate him."

"Hush! Lyle, hush! that is wrong." And then she was silent. Her heaving breast and white cheek alone revealed how deeply the arrow had entered. The little boy stood by her side, his face still burning with indignation.

Soon Olive's trouble subsided. She whispered to herself, "It must be always thus—I will try to bear it," and then she became composed. She bade her little friend adieu, telling, him she was going back into the house.

"But you will forgive all, you will not think of anything that would tease you?" said Lyle, hesitatingly.

Olive promised, with a pale, patient smile.

"And to prove this, will you kiss your little knight once again?"

"If you desire it."

Her soft drooping hair swept his cheek; her lips touched his. Afterwards, when, in his childish but most fanciful musings, Lyle Derwent used to dream of an angel's kiss, it always seemed to him like this of Olive Rothesay's—her last!

The young girl entered the house. Within it rested the slumberous quiet of a Sunday afternoon. Her mother had gone to a distant church, and there was none left "to keep house," save one of the maids and the old grey cat, that dosed on the window−sill in the sunshine. The latter was a great pet of Olive's; and the moment it saw its young mistress, it was purring round her feet, following her from room to room, never resting until she took it up in her arms. The love even of a dumb animal touched her then. She sat down on her own little low chair, spread on her lap the smooth white apron which Miss Pussy loved—cats have delicate and refined tastes sometimes—and so she leaned back, soothed by the monotonous song of her purring favourite, and think− ing that there was at least one living creature who loved her, and whom she could make happy.

She sat at the open window, seeing only the high, green privet hedge that enclosed the front−garden, the little wicket−gate, and the blue sky beyond. How still everything was! By degrees the footsteps of a few late churchgoers vanished along the road; the bells ceased—first the quick, sharp clang of the new church, and then the musical peal that rang out from the grey Norman tower. There never were such bells as those of Oldchurch! but they melted away in silence; and then the dreamy quietness of the hour stole over Olive's sense.

She thought of many things—things which might have been sad, but for the slumberous peace that took away all pain. It was just the hour when she had used to sit on the floor, leaning against Elspie's knees, generally reading aloud in the Book which alone the nurse permitted on Sundays. Now and then—once in particular she remembered—old Elspie fell asleep; and then Olive turned to her favourite study, the Book of Revelations. Childlike, she terrified herself over the mysterious prophecies of the latter days, until at last she forgot the gloom and horror, in reading of the "beautiful city, New Jerusalem."

She seemed to see it—its twelve gates, angel−guarded, its crystal river, its many−fruited tree—the Tree of Life. Her young but glowing fancy, unable to separate truth from allegory, created out of these marvels a paradise, material in itself. She knew not that heaven is only the continual presence of the Eternal. Yet she was happy; and in her dreams she never pictured the land beyond the grave, but there came back to her, as though the nearest foreshadowing of its deep, holy rest, the visions of that Sunday afternoon.

She sat a long time thinking of them, and of herself—how much older she felt since then, and how many troubles shehad passed through. Troubles! Poor child!—how little knew she those of the world! But even her own small burthen seemed lightened now. She leaned her head against the window, listening to the bees humming in the garden—bees, the only Sunday workers, and even they seemed to toil with a kind of Sabbatic solemnity. And then, turning her face upwards, Olive watched many a fair white butterfly, that, having flitted awhile among the flowers, spread its wings and rose far into the air, like a pure soul weary of earth, and floating heavenward. How she wished—girlish dreamer!—that she could do likewise; and leaving earth behind—its flowers as well as weeds, its sunshine as its storm—soar into another and a higher existence!

Not yet, Olive—not yet! None receives the guerdon, save he who has won the goal!

A pause in the girl's reverie—caused by a light sound that broke the perfect quietness around. She listened; it was the rumbling of carriage−wheels along the road—a rare circircumstance; for the people of Oldchurch, if not personally devout, lived in a devout atmosphere, which forbade pleasure−drives on the day of rest.

A momentary hope struck Olive that it might be her father returning home, where he was now daily expected.

But he was a strict man; he never travelled on Sundays. Nevertheless, Olive listened mechanically to the wheels: they dashed rapidly on—came near—stopped. Yes, it must be her father.

Full of joy, she flew to the hall−door, to welcome him. There, stood, not her father, but a little hard−featured old man, Mr. Wyld, the family lawyer. Olive drew back, sorely disappointed; for if in her gentle heart lingered one positive aversion, it was felt towards this man—partly on his own account, partly because his appearance seemed always the forewarning of evil in the little household. He never came, but, at his departure, Captain Rothesay wore a frowning brow, and indulged in a hasty temper for days and days. No marvel was there in Olive's dislike; yet she regretted having shown it, and said courteously—

"Pardon me, Mr. Wyld, but I thought it was my father. I am sorry that he is not at home to receive you."

"Nay, I—I did not come to see Captain Rothesay," answered the lawyer, betraying some confusion and hesitation beneath his usual smooth manner. "The fact is, my dear young lady, I bring a letter for your mother."

"From papa?" cried Olive, eagerly.

"No, not exactly; that is—. But can I see Mrs. Rothesay?"

"She is at church. She will be at home in half an hour, probably. Will you wait?"

He shook his head.

"Nay, there is nothing wrong—nothing about papa?" said Olive, growing frightened.

"Don't alarm yourself, my dear."

Olive shrank from the touch of his.hand, as he led her into the parlour.

"Your papa is at my house. But I think, Miss Rothesay, as your mother is not at home, you had better read the letter yourself."

She took it with a hand that trembled despite her will. Slowly, silently, she read it through—twice; for the words seemed to dazzle and blaze before her eyes. Then she looked up helplessly. "I—I cannot understand."

"I thought the doctor wrote plainly enough, and broke the matter cautiously, too," muttered Mr. Wyld; adding aloud, "Upon my honour, my dear, I assure you your father is alive. It is a painful task—a very painful task, to bring this news."

"Tell me—I cannot read, I cannot see—Oh, my poor father!" And then she sank down slowly where she stood, as if pressed by some heavy, invisible hand. Mr.Wyld thought she had fainted—but it was not so. In another moment she stood before him, quiet, cold, nerved by this great woe to a firmness which was awful in its rigid composure.

"I can listen now. Tell me everything!"

He told her in a few words how Captain Rothesay had come to his house the night before, and while waiting his return, had taken up the newspaper. "Suddenly, my clerk said, he let it fall with a cry, and was immediately seized with the fit from which he has not yet recovered. There is hope, the doctor thinks; but, in case of the worst, you must come to him at once."

"Yes, yes, at once!" She rose and walked to the door. guiding herself by the wall, and groping as if she were blind.

"Nay, Miss Rothesay, what are you doing? You forget we cannot go without your mother."

"My mother! Oh, heaven! it will kill my mother!" And the thought brought tears, the first that had burst from her. It was well, or her bewildered brain might have reeled beneath the sudden blow.

She awoke to consciousness and strength. In this great crisis, there came to her the wisdom and forethought that lay dormant in her nature. She became a woman—one of those of whom the world contains few—at once gentle and strong, meek and fearless, patient to endure, heroic to act.

She sat down for a moment and considered. "Fourteen miles it is to B—. If we start in an hour, we shall reach there by sunset." Then she summoned the maid; and said, speaking steadily, that she might by no sign betray what might in turn be betrayed to her mother—

"You must go and meet mamma as she comes from church; or, if not, seek her there. Tell her there is a message come from my father, and ask her to hasten home on his account. Make haste yourself I will keep house the while.—There, that is done;—she will not guess anything," added Olive, as the woman left the room, murmuring a little, but never thinking to disobey her young mistress—so sudden, so all−constraining, was the dignity which had come upon the girl. Even Mr. Wyld felt it; and his manner changed from smooth, patronising condolence, to a respect not unmingled with awe.

"What can I do, Miss Rothesay?" he said, humbly. "You turn from me. No wonder, when I have had the misfortune to be the bearer of such evil tidings."

"Hush!" she said; for there was tenfold bitterness in the sound of his harsh voice, croaking regret and sympathy. Mechanically she set wine before him—he eagerly swallowed it; even then prating, between the draughts, of his deep sorrow, and earnest hope that no serious evil would befall his good friend, Captain Rothesay.

Olive could endure no more. She fled away, shut herself up in her own room, and fell on her knees; but no words came, save the bitter cry "O God, have pity on us!" And there was no time, not even to pray, except with the silent voice of her heart.

She pressed her hands on her brow, and once more thought what she had to do. At that moment, through the quietness of the lonely house, she heard the clock striking four. Never had time's passing seemed so awful. The day was fleeting on whose every moment perhaps hung a life.

Something she must do, or her senses would have failed. She thought of little things aught that might be needed when they reached her father. Quietly she went into Mrs. Rothesay's room, and put up some clothes and necessaries, in case they stayed more than one day at B—; her mother's large, warm shawl, too, for she might have to sit up all night. In these trifling arrangements what a horrible reality there was! And yet she scarce felt it—she was half stunned still.

It was past four, and her mother had not come. Every minute seemed an eternity. Olive walked to the window and looked out. There was the same cheerful sunshine—the bees humming, and the butterflies flitting about, in the sweet stillness of the Sabbath afternoon, as she had watched them an hour ago. One little hour, to have brought into her world such utter misery.

She thought of it all, dwelling vividly on every accompaniment of woe—even as she remembered to have done when she first learned that Elspie would die. She pictured her mother's coming home; and almost fancied she could see her now, walking across the fields. But no; it was some one in a white dress, strolling by the hedge−row's side; and Mrs. Rothesay that day wore blue—her favourite pale blue muslin, in which she looked so lovely. She had gone out, laughs ing at her daughter for saying this. What if Olive should never see her in that pretty dress again!

All this, and more, clung to the girl's mind, with a horrible pertinacity. And then, through the silence, she heard the Oldchurch−bells awaking again, in the dull minute−peal which told that service−time was ended, and the afternoon funerals were taking place. Olive, shuddering, closed her ears against the sound; and then, gazing out once more, she saw her mother stand at the gate. All unconscious still, Mrs. Rothesay looked up at the window and smiled.

Olive had never thought of that worst pang of all—how she should break the news to her mother—her timid, delicate mother, whose feeble frame quivered beneath the lightest breath of suffering. Scarcely knowing what she did, the daughter flew down stairs.

"Not there, mamma—not there!" she cried, as Mrs. Rothesay was about to enter the par− lour. Olive drew her into another room, and made her sit down.

"What is all this, my dear?—why do you look so strange? Is not your papa come home? Let us go to him."

"We will, we will! But, mamma"—One moment she looked speechlessly in Mrs. Rothesay's face, and then fell on her neck, crying, "I can't, I can't keep it from you any longer. Oh, mother, mother! there is great trouble come upon us; we must be patient; we must bear it together. God will help us."

"Olive!" The shrill terror of Mrs. Rothesay's voice rung through the room.

"Hush! we must be quiet, very quiet. Papa is dangerously ill at B—, and we must start at once. I have arranged all. Come, mamma, dearest!"

But her mother had fainted.

There was no time to lose. Olive snatched some restoratives, and then made ready to depart. Mrs. Rothesay, still insensible, was lifted into the carriage. She lay there, for some time, quite motionless, supported in her daughter's arms—to which never had she owed support before. As Olive looked down upon her, strange, new feelings came into the girl's heart. The natural instinct of filial tenderness seemed transmuted into a devotion passing the love of child to mother, and mingled therewith was a sense of protection, of watchful guardianship.

She thought, "What if my father should die, and we two should be left alone in the world! Then she will have

none to look to save me, and I will be to her in the stead of all. Once, I think, she loved me little; but, oh! mother, dearly we love one another now."

When Mrs. Rothesay's senses returned, she lifted her head, with a bewildered air. "Where are we going? What has happened? I can't think clearly of anything."

"Dearest mamma, do not try—I will think for us both. Be content; you are quite safe with your own daughter."

"My daughter—ah! I remember, I fainted, as I did long years ago, when they told me something about my daughter. Are you she—that little child whom I cast from my arms? and now I am lying in yours!" she cried, her mind seeming to wander, as if distraught by this sudden shock.

"Hush, mamma! don't talk; rest quiet here," was the soothing answer.

Mrs. Rothesay looked wistfully in her daughter's face, and there seemed to cross her mind some remembered sense of what had befallen. She clung helplessly to those affectionate arms—"Take care of me, Olive!—I do not deserve it, but take care of me!"

"I will, until death!" was Olive's inward vow.

And so, travelling fast, but in solemn silence, they came to B—. Alas! it was already too late! By Angus Rothesay's bed of death they stood—the widow and the fatherless!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE tomb had scarcely closed over Captain Rothesay, when it was discovered that his affairs were in a state of irretrievable confusion. For months, he must have lived with ruin staring him in the face. His sudden death was then no mystery. The newspaper had startled him with tidings—partly false, as afterwards appeared—of a heavy disaster by sea, and the failure of his latest speculation at home. There seemed lifted against him at once the hand of Heaven and of man. His proud nature could not withstand the shock; shame smote him, and he died.

"Tell me only one thing!" cried Olive to Mr.Wyld, with whom, after the funeral, she was holding conference—she only—for her mother was incapable of acting, and this girl of sixteen was the sole ruler of the household now. "Tell me only that my father died unblemished in honour—that there are none to share misfortune with us, and to curse the memory of the ruined merchant."

"I know of none," answered Mr. Wyld. "One fear your father had was vain—the missing ship has come safe to land. True, there are still remaining many private debts, but they may be paid." And he cast a meaning glance round the luxuriously furnished room.

"I understand. It shall be done," said Olive. Misery had made her very wise—very quick to comprehend. Without shrinking, she talked over every matter connected with that saddest thing—a deceased bankrupt's sale.

The lawyer was a hard man, and Olive's prejudice against him was not unfounded. Still, the most stony heart has often a little softness buried deep at its core. Mr. Wyld looked with curiosity, even with kindness, on the young creature who sat opposite to him, in the dim lamp−light of the silent room, once Captain Rothesay's study. Her cheek, ever delicate, was now of a dull white; her pale gold hair fell neglected over her black dress; her hand supported her care−marked brow, as she pored over dusty papers, pausing at times to speak, in a quiet, sensible, subdued manner, of things fit only for old heads and worn hearts. Mr. Wyld thought of his own two daughters, whom he had left at home, blithe in their untried youth, and felt a vague thankfulness that they were not as Olive Rothesay. Tenderness was rare in his nature; but in all his intercourse with her, he could not help treating with a sort of reverence the dead merchant's forlorn child.

When they had finished their conversation, he said, "There is one matter—painful, too—upon which I ought to speak to you. I should have done so before, but I did not know it myself until yesterday."

"Know what? Alas! alas! is there more trouble to come upon us?" answered Olive, sighing bitterly. "But tell me all."

"**All**, is very little. You know, my dear Miss Rothesay, that your late lamented father—" he puckered his face into an expression of condolence, but seeing Olive's restless gesture, smoothed it out again—"your father was quite speechless and senseless, until his death—that is, almost. But my wife, who never quitted him—ah! I assure you she was a devoted nurse to him, was Mrs. Wyld."

"I thank her deeply, as she knows."

"Well, she has just told me, that a few minutes before his death, your poor father's consciousness returned; that he seemed struggling in vain to speak; at last, she placed a pencil in his hand, and he wrote—one word only, in the act of writing which he died. Forgive me, my dear young lady, for thus agitating you, but—"

"The paper—give me the paper!" gasped Olive.

Mr. Wyld pulled out his pocket−book, and produced a torn and blotted scrap, whereon was written, in characters scarcely legible, the name " *Harold*."

Olive wept over the blurred letters, seeming almost to behold the quivering, death−struck hand which had formed them. She wearied herself in agonized conjecture over the mystery, now apparently for ever sealed.

"Do you know any one who bears that name?" asked the penetrating lawyer.

"No. Yes—one," added she, suddenly remembering that the name of Sara's husband was Harold Gwynne. But between him and her father she knew of no single tie. It must be a mere chance−coincidence. Nevertheless, she would have asked something concerning him, save that the whole Derwent family were gone to their sister's wedding, which took place, not at Oldchurch, but in a distant county.

"It is hopeless!" cried Olive. "I know no clue, and I dare not tell this to my mother yet. We must let the matter rest."

Mr. Wyld, feeling his professional acuteness at stake, took up the paper, with an air of mysterious importance.

"If it were a woman's name, now—I executed a little commission once."

"What did you say?" asked Olive, looking up at him with her innocent eyes. He could not meet them; his own fell confused, for he remembered that she was her father's child.

"What did I say, Miss Rothesay? Oh, nothing—nothing at all; only that if I had a commission—to—to hunt out this secret. We lawyers are acute sometimes, you know," said Mr. Wyld, ingeniously twisting his words to an opposite meaning.

Olive thought he was angling for more fees; and inwardly disgusted, she resolved to put a stop to his interference. "I thank you, Mr. Wyld; but a daughter would not willingly employ any third person to "hunt out" her father's secret. His papers will doubtless inform me of all needful things that he might wish executed; therefore we will speak no more of this subject."

"As you will." He gathered up his blue bag and its voluminous contents, and made his adieux, leaving to welcome solitude the young creature whom a hard fate had made his assistant in tasks so unsuited for her sex and years.

But Olive had scarcely sat down again, and, with her head leaning on her father's desk, had given vent to a sigh of relief, in that she was freed from Mr. Wyld's presence,—when the old lawyer again appeared.

"Miss Rothesay, I merely wished to say, if ever you find out anything—anything that you don't know now—or need any advice or information about that paper, or any other, I'm the man to give it. Good evening!"

Olive thanked him coldly, somewhat proudly, for what she deemed a piece of unnecessary impertinence. However, it quickly passed from her gentle mind; and then, as the best way to soothe all her troubles, she quitted the study, and sought her mother's side.

Of Mrs. Rothesay's affliction we have as yet said little. Many and various are earth's griefs; but there must be an awful individuality in the stroke which severs the closest human tie, that between two whom marriage had made "one flesh." And though some coldness had loosened this sacred tie, still no power could utterly divide it, while life endured. Angus Rothesay's widow remembered that she had once been the loved and loving bride of his youth. As such, she mourned him; nor was her grief without that keenest sting, the memory of unatoned wrong. From the dim shores of the past, arose ghosts that nothing could ever lay, because death's river ran eternally between.

Sybilla Rothesay was one of those women whom no force of circumstances can ever teach self−dependence or command. She had looked entirely to her husband for guidance and control, and now for both she looked to her child. From the moment of Captain Rothesay's death, Olive seemed to rule in his stead—or rather, the parent and child seemed to change places. Olive watched, guided, and guarded the passive, yielding sorrow−stricken woman, as it were, with a mother's care; while Mrs. Rothesay trusted implicitly in all things to her daughter's stronger mind, and was never troubled by thinking or acting for herself in any one thing.

This may seem a new theory of maternal and filial bond, but in the world it is frequently so. If we look around on those daughters who have best fulfilled that holy duty, without which no life is or can be blest, are they not women of firm, steadfast nature—able to will and to act? Each of them could say, "I am as a mother unto my mother. I, the strongest now, take her in her feeble age, like a child to my bosom—I shield her, and cherish her, and am to her all in all."

And so, in her heart, resolved Olive Rothesay. She had made that vow when her mother lay insensible in her arms; she kept it faithfully; until eternity, closing between them, sealed it with that best of earth's blessings—the blessing that falls on a duteous daughter, whose mother is with God.

When Captain Rothesay's affairs were settled, the sole wreck of his wealth that remained to his widow and child was the small settlement from Mrs. Rothesay's fortune, on which she had lived at Stirling. So they were not left in actual need; or even Olive's brave spirit might have quailed, and her sweet nature been stung into evil by the bitterness of want.

Still, she and her mother were poor—poor enough to make them desire to leave prying, gossiping Oldchurch, and settle in the solitude of some great town. "There," Olive said to herself, "I shall surely find means to work for her—that she may have not merely necessaries, but comforts." And many a night—during the few weeks that elapsed before their home was broken up—she lay awake by her sleeping mother's side, planning all sorts of schemes; arranging everything so that Mrs. Rothesay's vacillating mind might not be annoyed with arguings or consultations. When all was matured, she had only to say, "Dearest mother, should we not be very happy living

together in London?" And scarcely had Mrs. Rothesay assented, than she found everything arranged itself, as under an invisible fairy hand—so that she had but to ask, "My child, when shall we go?"

The time of departure at last arrived. It was the night but one before the sale. Olive persuaded her mother to go to rest early; for she herself had a trying duty to perform—the examining of her father's private papers. As she sat in his study—solitude and darkness around her—the young girl might have been forgiven many a pang of grief, even of superstitious fear. But Heaven had given her a hero−soul, not the less heroic because in all things it was so entirely a woman's.

Her father's business−papers she had already examined: these were only his private memoranda. But they were few; for, throughout his whole career, Captain Rothesay had lived within himself. His thoughts never found vent in words; there were no data of any kind to mark the history of a life, which was almost as unknown to his wife and daughter as to any stranger. Of letters, she found very few; he was not a man who loved correspondence. Only, among these few, she was touched deeply to see some, dated years back, at Stirling. Olive opened one of them. The delicate hand was that of her mother when she was young. Olive only glanced at the top of the page, where still smiled, from the worn, yellow paper, the words, "My dearest, dearest Angus;" and then, too right−minded to penetrate further, folded it up again. Yet, she felt glad; she thought it would comfort her mother to know how carefully he had kept these letters. Soon after, she found a memento of herself—a little curl, wrapped in silver−paper, and marked with his own hand, "Olive's hair." Her father had loved her then—aye, and more deeply than she knew. It soothed her heart to re− member the love once borne to her by the dead. She knew that no change could take **that** love from her now.

The chief thing which troubled Olive was the sight of the paper on which her father's dying hand had scrawled "Harold." No date of any kind had been found to explain the mystery. Once she had tried to talk with her mother on the subject, but it affected Mrs. Rothesay to a degree so agonising that Olive was obliged to cease. She determined to think of the matter no more, but to put the paper by in a secret drawer.

In doing so, she found a small packet, carefully tied and sealed. She was about to open it, when the superscription caught her eyes. Thereon she read her father's solemn desire—nay, entreaty—that it should after his death be burnt **unopened**.

His faithful daughter fulfilled his will. In− stantly, without pausing to think, she threw the packet on the fire; even turning aside, lest the flames, while destroying, should reveal anything of the secret which seemed guarded by her dead father's prayer. Only once, forgetting herself; the crackling fire made her start and turn, and she caught a momentary glimpse of some curious foreign ornament; while near it, twisted in the flame into almost life−like motion, was what seemed a long lock of black hair. But she could be certain of nothing, she hated herself for even that involuntary glance. It seemed an insult to the dead.

Still more did these remorseful feelings awake, when, her task being almost done, she found one letter addressed thus:

"For my daughter, Olive; but I charge her not to open it until she is alone in the world."

Alone in the world! His fatherly tenderness had looked forward, then, even to that bitter time which might come one day, when, her mother safely laid to rest, Olive would be alone—a woman no longer young, without husband, or child, or smiling home. She doubted not that her father had written this letter to counsel and comfort her at such a season of desolation, years after he was in the dust.

His daughter blessed him for it; and her tender tears fell upon words which he had written,as she saw by the date, on that night,—the last he ever spent at home. She never thought of breaking his injunction, or of opening the letter before the time; and after considering deeply, she decided that it was a mystery too sacred even for the ear of her mother, to whom it would only give pain. Therefore she placed it in the private drawer of her father's desk—now her own—to wait until time should bring about the revealing of this solemn secret between her and the dead.

Then she went to bed, wearied and worn; and, creeping close to her slumbering mother, thanked God that there was one warm living bosom to which she could cling, and which would never cast her out.

O mother! O daughter! who, when time has blended into an almost sisterly bond the difference of years, grow together, united, as it were, in one heart and one soul by that intense love which is beyond even "honour" and "obedience," because including both—how happy are ye! How blessed she, who, looking on her daughter—woman grown—can say, "Child, thou art bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, as when I brought

thee into the world!" And thrice blessed is she who can answer, "Mother, I am all thine own—I desire no love but thine—I bring to thee my every joy; and my every grief finds rest on thy bosom."

Let those who know this happiness rejoice! Let those who only know its memory pray always, that God would make that memory live, until the eternal meeting at the resurrection of the just!

END OF VOL. I.