Olive, Vol. 3

Dinah Maria Craik

Table of Contents

Olive, Vol. 3

Dinah Maria Craik

CHAPTER I.

IT was again the season of late summer; and Time's soothing shadow had risen up between the daughter and her grief. The grave in the beautiful churchyard of Harbury was bright with many months' growth of grass and flowers. It never looked dreary—nay, often seemed almost to smile. It was watered by no tears—it never had been. Those which Olive shed were only for her own loneliness, and at times she felt that even these were wrong. Many people, seeing how calm she was, and how, after a season, she fell into her old pursuits and her kindly duties to all around, used to say, "Who would have thought that Miss Rothesay would have forgotten her mother so easily?"

But **she did not forget**. Selfish, worldly mourners are they, who think that the memory of the beloved lost can only be kept green by tears. Olive Rothesay was not of these. To her, her mother's departure appeared no more like death, than did one Divine parting—with reverence be it spoken!—appear to those who stood and looked heavenward from the hill of Bethany. And thus should we think upon all happy and holy deaths—if we fully and truly believed the faith we aver.

Olive did not forget her mother—she could as soon have forgotten her own soul. In all her actions, words, and thoughts, this most sacred memory abided—a continual presence, silent as sweet, and sweet as holy. When her many and most affectionate friends had beguiled her into cheerfulness, so that they fancied she had lost thought of her sorrow, she used to say in her heart, "See, mother, I can think of thee and not grieve. I would not, that, looking down from heaven, it should pain thee to know I suffer still!"

Yet human feelings could not utterly be suppressed; and there were many times, when at night−time she buried her face on the now lonely pillow, and blindly stretched out her arms into the empty darkness, crying, "My mother, oh my mother!" But then strong love came between Olive and her agony, whispering, "Child, wherever her spirit abides, thy mother forgets not thee!" And so the desolate one grew calm.

She looked very calm now, as she sat with Mrs. Gwynne in the bay−window of the little drawing−room at the Parsonage, engaged in some light work, with little Ailie reading a lesson at her knee. It was a lesson, too, taken from that lore—at once the most simple and most divine—the Gospels of the New Testament.

"I thought my son would prove himself right in all his opinions," observed Mrs. Gwynne, when the lesson was over and the child had run away. "I knew he would allow Ailie to learn everything at the right time."

Olive made no answer. Her thoughts turned to the day—now some months back—when, stung by the disobedience and falsehood that lay hid in a young mind which knew no higher law than a human parent's command, Harold had come to her for counsel. She remembered his almost despairing words, "Teach the child as you will—true or false—I care not; so that she becomes like yourself, and is saved from those doubts which rack her father's soul."

Harold Gwynne was not singular in this. Scarce ever was there an unbeliever who desired to see the image of his own scepticism reflected in his child.

Mrs. Gwynne continued—"I don't think I can ever sufficiently thank you, my dear Miss Rothesay."

"Say **Olive**, as you generally do," was the affectionate whisper.

It seemed that her Christian name sounded so sweet and homelike from Harold's mother; especially now that, save from these kind lips, its sound had ceased on earth.

"**Olive**, then! My dear, how good you are to take Ailie so entirely under your care and teaching. But for that, we must have sent her to some school from home, and, I will not conceal from you, that would have been a great sacrifice, even in a worldly point of view, since our income is so diminished by my son's resigning his duties to his curate." Mrs. Gwynne had learned to talk to Olive with more unreserve than to any other human being. "But tell me, do you think Harold looks any better? What an anxious summer this has been!"

And Olive, hearing the heavy sigh of the mother, whose whole existence was bound up in her son, felt that there was something holy even in that deceit, or rather concealment, wherein she herself was now a sorely−tried sharer. "You must not be anxious," she said; "you know that there is nothing dangerous in Mr. Gwynne's state of health, only his mind has been overworked."

"I suppose so; and perhaps it was the best plan for him to give up all clerical duties for a time. I think, too, that

these short excursions of his do him good."

"I hope so," said Olive, observing that the anxious mother looked for an acquiescence.

"Besides, seeing that he is not positively disabled by illness, his parishioners might think it peculiar that he should continually remain among them, and yet discharge none of his duties. But my Harold is a strange being; he always was. Sometimes I think his heart is not in his calling—that he would have been more happy as a man of science than as a clergyman. Yet of late he has ceased even that favourite pursuit; and though he spends whole days in his study, I sometimes find he has not displaced one book, except the large Bible which I gave him when he went to college. God bless him—my dear Harold!"

Olive's inmost heart echoed the blessing, and in the same words. For of late—perhaps with more frequently hearing him called by the familiar home appellation, she had thought of him less as **Mr. Gwynne** than as **Harold**. Alas! it is a serious thing for any woman, when, thinking of some friend, to her heart comes unconsciously not the name he bears in the world, but that which is uttered only by household affection or love.

"I wonder what makes your blithe Christal so late," observed Mrs. Gwynne, abruptly, as if, disliking to betray further emotion, she wished to change the conversation. "Lyle Derwent promised to bring her himself—much against his will, though," she added, smiling. "He seems quite afraid of Miss Manners; he says she teazes him so!"

"But she suffers no one else to do it. If I say a word against Lyle's little peculiarities, she is quite indignant. I rather think she likes him—that is, as much as she likes any of her friends."

"There is little depth of affection in Christal's nature. She is too proud. She feels no need of love, and therefore cares not to win it. Do you know, Olive," continued Mrs. Gwynne, "if I must unveil all my weaknesses, there was a time when I watched Miss Manners more closely than any one guesses. It was from a mother's jealousy over her son's happiness, for I heard her name coupled with Harold's."

"So have I, more than once," said Olive. "But I thought at the time how idle was the rumour."

"It was idle, my dear; but I did not quite think so then."

"Indeed!" There was a little quick gesture of surprise; and Olive, ceasing her work, looked inquiringly at Mrs. Gwynne.

"I knew that a man must love; that, having once been wedded, Harold's necessity for a wife's sympathy and affection would be the greater. I always expected that my son would marry again, and therefore I eagerly watched every young woman whom he might meet in society, and be disposed to choose. All men, especially clergymen, are better married—at least in my opinion. Even you yourself, as Harold's friend, his most valued friend, must acknowledge that he would be happier with a wife."

What was there in this frank speech that smote Olive with a secret pain? Was it the unconscious distinction drawn between her and all other women on whom Harold might look with admiring eyes, so that his mother, while calling her his **friend**, never dreamed of her being anything more?

Olive knew not whence came the pain, yet still she felt it was there. "Certainly he would," she answered, speaking in a slow, quiet tone. "Nevertheless, I should scarcely think Christal a girl whom Mr. Gwynne would be likely to select."

"Nor I. At first, deeming her something like the first Mrs. Harold, I had my doubts; but they quickly vanished. My son will never marry Christal Manners."

Olive, sitting at the window, looked up. It seemed to her as if over the room had come a lightness like the passing away of a cloud.

"Nor, as I believe now," pursued Mrs. Gwynne, "does it appear to me likely that he will marry at all. I fear that domestic love—the strong, yet quiet tenderness of a husband to a wife, is not in his nature. Passion is, or was, in his youth; but he is not young now. In his first hasty marriage I knew that the fire would soon burn itself out—it has left nothing but ashes. Once he deceived himself with a mistaken passion, and sorely he has reaped the fruits of his folly. The result is, that he will live to old age without ever having known the blessing of true love."

"Is that so mournful, then?" said Olive, more as if thinking aloud than speaking.

Mrs. Gwynne did not hear the words, for she had started up at the sound of a horse's hoofs at the gate. "If that should be Harold! He said he would be at home this week or next. It is—it is he! How glad I am—that is, I am glad that he should be in time to see the Fludyers and Miss Manners before their journey to−morrow."

Thus, from long habit, trying to make excuses for her overflowing tenderness, she hurried out. Olive heard Mr. Gwynne's voice in the hall—his anxious, tender inquiry for his mother; even the quick, flying step of little Ailie

bounding to meet "papa."

She paused: her work fell, and a mist came before her eyes. She felt then, as she had sometimes done before, though never so strongly, that it was hard to be in the world alone.

This thought haunted her a while; until at last it was banished by the influence of one of those pleasant social evenings, such as were often spent at the Parsonage. The whole party, including Christal and Lyle, were assembled in the twilight, the two latter keeping up a sort of Benedick and Beatrice warfare; Harold and his mother seemed both very quiet—they sat close together, her hand sometimes resting caressingly on his shoulder or his knee. It was a new thing, this outward show of affection; but of late, since his health had declined (and, in truth, he had often looked and been very ill), there had come a touching softness between the mother and son.

Olive Rothesay sat a little apart, a single lamp lighting her at her work; for she was not idle. Following her old master's example, she was continually making studies from life for the picture on which she was engaged. She took a pleasure in filling it with idealised heads, of which the originals had place in her own warm affections. Christal was there, with her gracefully−turned throat, and the singular charm of her black eyes and fair hair. Lyle, too, with his delicate, womanish, but yet handsome face. Nor was Mrs. Gwynne forgotten—Olive made great use of her well−outlined form, and her majestic sweep of drapery. There was one only of the group who had not been limned by Miss Rothesay.

"If I were my brother−in−law I should take it quite as an ill compliment that you had never asked him to sit," observed Lyle. "But," he added in a whisper, "I don't suppose any artist would care to paint such a hard, rugged−looking fellow as Gwynne."

Olive looked on the pretty red and white face of the boyish dabbler in Art—for Lyle had lately taken a fancy that way too—and then at the noble countenance he maligned. She did not say a word on the subject; but Lyle, hovering round her, found his interference somewhat sharply set aside during the whole evening.

When assembled round the supper−table they talked of Christal's journey. It was undertaken by invitation of Mrs. Fludyer, to whom the young damsel had made herself quite indipensable. Her liveliness charmed away the idle lady's *ennui*, while her pride and love of aristocratic exclusiveness equally gratified the same feelings in her patroness. And from the mist that enwrapped her origin, the ingenious and perhaps self−beguiled young creature had contrived to evolve such a grand fable of "ancient descent," and "noble but reduced family," that everybody regarded her in the light that she regarded herself. And surely, as the quick−sighted Mrs. Gwynne often said, no daughter of a long illustrious line was ever prouder than Christal Manners.

She indulged the party with a brilliant account of Mrs. Fludyer's anticipations of pleasure at the gay sea−side watering−place whither the whole family at the Hall were bound.

"Really, we shall be quite desolate without a single soul left at Farnwood, shall we not, Olive?" observed Mrs. Gwynne.

Olive answered, "Yes,—very," without much considering of the matter. Her thoughts were with Harold, who was leaning back in his chair absorbed in one of those fits of musing, which with him were not unfrequent, and which no one ever regarded, save herself. How deeply solemn it was to her at such times to feel that she alone held the key to this great soul—that it lay open, with all its secrets, to her, and to her alone. What marvel was it if this knowledge sometimes moved her with strange sensations; most of all, while, beholding the reserved exterior which he bore in society, she remembered the times when she had seen this cold, quiet man goaded into terrible emotion, or softened to the weakness of a child.

At Olive's mechanical answer, "Yes," Lyle Derwent brightened up amazingly. "Miss Rothesay, I—I don't intend going to Brighton, believe me!"

Christal turned quickly round. "What are you saying, Mr. Derwent?"

He hung his head and looked foolish. "I mean, that Brighton is too gay, and thoughtless, and noisy a place for me—I would rather stay at Harbury."

"You fickle, changeable, idle creature! 'Tis only an excuse to get out of your pupils' way;" and reckless Christal burst into a fit of laughter much louder than seemed warranted by the occasion.

"I assure you, Miss Manners, this is to be instead of my regular yearly holiday. I arranged it all with Mrs. Fludyer a week ago."

"A week ago! Mr. Derwent turned a schemer! How could he keep the mighty secret in his innocent breast for seven long days!"

"I can, and more secrets too," muttered Lyle, in a tone varying between anger and sentimentality, as he looked alternately from Christal to Miss Rothesay. Whereupon the latter considerately interposed, and passed with a smile to some other subject, which lasted until the hour of departure.

The three walked to the Dell together, Christal jesting merrily, either with or at Lyle Derwent, compelling him, perforce, to laugh and be amused. Olive walked beside them, rather silent than otherwise. She had been so used to walk home with Harold Gwynne, that any other companionship along the old familiar road seemed unwelcome. Remembering how they two had talked together, the light laughter beside her was even painful to her ear. As she passed along, from every bush, every tree, every winding of the lane, seemed to start some ghostlike memory; until there came over her a feeling almost of fear, to see how full her thoughts were of this one friend, how to pass from his presence was like passing into gloom, and the sense of his absence seemed a heavy void.

"It was not so while my mother lived," Olive murmured, sorrowfully. "I never needed any friend save her. What am I doing! Whither is my mind whirling?"

She trembled, and dared not answer the question.

At the Dell they parted from Lyle. "I shall see you once again before you leave, I hope," he said to his blithe companion, Christal.

"Oh, yes; you will not get rid of your tormentor so easily, Sir Minstrel."

"Get rid of you, fair Cruelty! Would a man wish to put out the sun because it scorches him sometimes?" cried Lyle, lifted to the seventh heaven of poetic fervour by the influence of a balmy night and a glorious harvest moon. Which said luminary shining on Christal's face, saw there,—she only, pale Lady Moon,—an expression fine and rare;—quivering lips, eyes not merely bright, but flaming as such dark eyes only can.

As Miss Rothesay was passing up the steps to the hall−door, Christal, a little in the rear, fell, crying out as with pain. She was quickly assisted into the house, where, recovering, she complained of having sprained her ankle. Olive, full of compassion, laid her on the sofa, and hurried away for some simple medicaments, leaving Christal alone.

That young lady, as soon as she heard Miss Rothesay's steps overhead, bounded to the half−open window, moving quite as easily on the injured foot as on the other. Eagerly she listened; and soon was rewarded by hearing Lyle's voice carolling down the road, in most sentimental fashion, the ditty,

"Io ti voglio ben assai,
Ma tu non pensi a me!"

'"Tis my song, mine! I taught him!" said Christal, laughing to herself. "He thought to stay behind and escape me and my 'cruelty.' But we shall see—we shall see!"

Though in her air was a triumphant, girlish coquetry, yet something there was of a woman's passion, too. But she heard a descending step, and had only just time to regain her invalid attitude and her doleful countenance, when Olive entered.

"This accident is really unfortunate," said Miss Rothesay. "How will you manage your journey to−morrow?"

"I shall not be able to go," said Christal, in a piteous voice, though over her averted face broke a comical smile.

"Are you really so much hurt, my dear?"

"Do you doubt it? I am sorry to have to trouble you; but I really cannot leave the Dell," was the girl's half−indignant speech.

Very often did she try Olive's patience thus; but the faithful daughter always remembered those feeble, dying words, "Take care of Christal."

So, her gentle nature excusing all, she tended the young sufferer carefully until midnight, and then went down stairs secretly to perform a little act of self−denial, by giving up an engagement she had made for the morrow. While writing to renounce it, she felt, with the former sense of vague apprehension, how keen a pleasure it was she thus resigned—a whole long day in the forest with her pet Ailie, Ailie's grandmamma, and—Harold Gwynne.

CHAPTER II.

MIDNIGHT was long passed, and yet Olive sat at her desk; she had finished her note to Mrs. Gwynne, and was poring over a small packet of letters carefully separated from the remainder of her correspondence. If she had been asked the reason of this, perhaps she would have made answer that they were unlike the rest—solemn in character, and secret withal. She never looked at them, but the expression of her face changed; when she touched them, she did it softly and tremulously, as one would touch a living sacred thing.

They were letters which at intervals, during his various absences, she had received from Harold Gwynne.

Often had she read them over—so often, that, many a time waking in the night, whole sentences came distinctly on her memory, vivid almost as a spoken voice. And yet, scarce a day passed that she did not read them still. Perhaps this was from their tenor, for they were letters such as man rarely writes to woman, or even friend to friend.

Let us judge, extracting portions from them at will.

The first, dated months back, began thus: "You will perhaps marvel, my dear Miss Rothesay, that I should write to you, when for some time we have met so rarely, and then apparently like ordinary acquaintance. Yet, who should have a better right than we to call each other **friends**? And like a friend you acted, when you consented that there should be between us for a time this total silence on the subject which first bound us together by a tie which we can neither of us break if we would. Alas! sometimes I could almost curse the weakness which had given you—a woman—to hold my secret in your hands. And yet so gently, so nobly have you held it, that I could kneel and bless you. You see I can write earnestly, though I cannot speak. * * *

"I told you, after that day when we two were alone with death (the words are harsh, I know, but I have no smooth tongue), I told you that I desired silence for weeks, perhaps months! I must 'commune with my own heart, and be still.' I must wrestle with this darkness alone. You assented; you forced on me no long argumentative homilies—you preached to me with your life, the pure, beautiful life of a Christian woman. Sometimes I tried to read, with open eyes and keenly−searching heart, the morality of Jesus, which I, and sceptics worse than I, must perforce allow to be perfect of its kind, and it struck me how nearly you approached to that divine life which I had thought impossible to be realised."

"I have advanced thus far in my solemn seeking. I have learned to see the revelation—imputedly divine—as clear and distinct from the mass of modern creeds with which it has been overladen. I have begun to read the book on which—as you truly say—every form of religion is founded. I try to read with my own eyes, putting aside all human interpretations, earnestly desiring to cast from my soul all long−gathered prejudices, and to bring it, naked and clear, to meet the souls of those who are said to have written by divine inspiration. * * *

"The book is a marvellous book. The history of all ages can scarcely show its parallel. What diversity, yet what unity! The stream seems to flow through all ages, catching the lights and shadows of different periods, and of various human minds. Yet it is one and the same stream—pure and shining as truth. Is it truth?—is it divine?"

"I will confess, candidly, that if the scheme of a world's history—with reference to its Creator, as set forth in the Bible—were true, it would be a scheme in many things worthy of a divine benevolence: such as that in which you believe. But can I imagine Infinity setting itself to work out such trivialities? What is even a world? A mere grain of dust in endless space? It cannot be. A God who could take interest in man, in such an atom as I, would be no God at all. What avails me to have risen unto more knowledge, more clearness in the sense of the divine, if it is to plunge me into such an abyss as this? Would I had never been awakened from my sleep—the dull stupor of materialism into which I was fast sinking. Then I might, in the end, have conquered even the last fear, that of 'something after death,' and have perished like a soulless thing, satisfied that there was no hereafter. Now, if there should be? I whirl and whirl; I can find no rest. I would I knew for certain that I was mad. But it is not so."

"You answer, my kind friend, like a woman—like the sort of woman that I believed in in my boyhood—when I longed for a sister, such an one as you. It is very strange, even to myself, that I should write so freely as I do to you. I know that I could never speak thus. Therefore, when I return home, you must not marvel to find me just the same reserved being as ever—less to you, perhaps, than most people, but still reserved. Yet, never believe but that I thank you for all your goodness most deeply. * *

"You say that, like most women, you have no power of keen philosophical argument. Perhaps not; but there is

in you a spiritual sense that may even transcend knowledge. I once heard—was it not you who said so?—that the poet who 'reads God's secrets in the stars,' soars nearer Him than the astronomer who calculates by figures and by line. As, even in the material universe, there are planets and systems, which mock all human ken; so in the immaterial world there must be a boundary where all human reasoning fails, and we can trust to nothing but that inward inexplicable sense which we call faith. This seems to me the great argument which inclines us to receive that supernatural manifestation of the all−pervading spirit which is termed revelation. And there we go back again to the relation between the finite—humanity, and the infinite—Deity. * * * *

"One of my speculations you answer by an allegory—Does not the sun's light make instinct with life not only man, but the meanest insect, the lowest form of vegetable existence? But is it therefore needful that every ray should pierce, impelled by the force of individual will, to an individual object? The sun shines. His light at once revivifies a blade of glass, and illumines a world. If thus it is with the created, must it not be also with the Creator? There is something within me that answers to this reasoning. * * * *

"If I have power to conceive the existence of God, to look up from my lowly nothingness unto His great height, to meditate, to argue, to desire nearer insight into His being, there must be in my soul something not unworthy of Him—something that, partaking His divinity, instinctively turns to the source whence it was derived. Shall I suffer myself to be guided by this power? Shall I seek less to doubt than to believe? * * * *

"My whole education has been contrary to this. I remember my first mathematical tutor once said to me, 'If you would know anything, begin by doubting everything.' I did begin, but I have never yet found an end."

"I will take your advice, my dear friend; advice given so humbly, so womanly, that it touches me more than ever did that of any living being. Yet I think you deal with me wisely. I am a man who never could be preached or argued into belief. I must find out the truth for myself. And so, according to your counsel, I will again carefully study the Holy Bible, trying to look upon it—not as an ingenious work of man, but as the clearest revelation which God has allowed of Himself on earth. Finding any contradictions or obscurities, I will remember, as you say, that it was not, and does not pretend to be, written visibly and actually by the finger of God, but by His inspiration conveyed through many human minds, and of course always bearing to a certain extent the impress of the mind through which it passes. Therefore, you say, of all its prophet−histories, none convey the sense of all−perfect righteousness save that of Him who came in latter days to crown what was before holy with the example of the Divine.

"You see how my mind echoes your words, my friend! I am becoming, I think, more worthy to call you by this name. There is a child−like peace creeping into my heart. All human affections are growing closer and dearer unto me. I can look at my good and pious mother without feeling, as I did at times, that she is either a self−deceiver or deceived. I do not now shrink from my little daughter, nor think with horror that she owes to me that as yet undefiled being which may lead her one day to 'curse God and die.' Still, I cannot rest at Harbury. All things there torture me, while my mind is in this chaos. As for resuming my duties as a minister, that seems all but impossible. What an accursed hypocrite I have been! If this search after truth should end in a belief anything like that of the Church of England, I shall marvel that Heaven's lightning has not struck me dead."

* * * * "You speak joyfully and hopefully of the time when we shall be one in faith, and both give thanks together unto the merciful God who has lightened my darkness. I cannot say this **yet**; but the time may come. And if it does, what shall I not owe to you, who first revived my faith in humanity? Many other things you have taught me—less in words than by your holy life. It has solved to me many of those enigmas of Providence which in my blindness I thought impugned the justice of God. Now I see how goodness is sufficient to itself, and how the trials which seem the wrongs of fortune are but tests ordained by Heaven to elicit the strength and devotion of its creatures. All circumstances reflect the nature of the soul. Hardship becomes sweet unto patience; content creates abundance out of poverty; faith translates death into immortality. My friend, is not this a creed something approaching yours? It ought to be, since it is drawn from the silent teaching of your own life. If ever I lift up a prayer worthy to reach the ear of God, it is that He may bless you, my comforter."

Olive refolded the letters, and sat long in mute thought. Then broken words came from her of thanksgiving and joy. Amidst them she often uttered the name which on her lips was now silent evermore, save at solemn seasons like this, when, clear above all earthly strife and turmoil, rose the unforgotten memory of the departed.

"Oh, mother, mother!" she murmured, "surely it would rejoice thee in thy heaven to know that even thy death left a blessing behind, and that I, out of my bitter grief, have been able, God helping me, to bring faith and peace

unto this erring soul."

And here, reader, for a moment, we pause. Following whither our subject led, we have gone far beyond the bounds usually prescribed to a book like this. After perusing the present chapter, you may turn to the title−page, and read thereon, "Olive, a **Novel**." "Most incongruous—most strange!" you may exclaim. Nay, some may even accuse us of irreverence in thus bringing into a fictitious story those subjects which are acknowledged as most vital to every human soul, but yet which most people are content, save at set times and places, tacitly to ignore. There are those who sincerely believe that in such works as this there should never once be named the Holy Name. Yet what is a novel, or, rather, what is it that a novel ought to be? The attempt of one earnest mind to show unto many what humanity is—ay, and more, what humanity might become; to depict what is true in essence through imaginary forms; to teach, counsel, and warn, by means of the silent transcript of human life. Human life without God! Who will dare to tell us we should paint **that**?

Authors, who feel the solemnity of their calling, cannot suppress the truth that is within them. Having put their hands to the plough, they may not turn aside, nor look either to the right or the left. They must go straight on, as the inward voice impels; and He who seeth their hearts will guide them aright.

CHAPTER III.

SOME days passed in quiet uniformity, broken only by the visits of good−natured Lyle, who came, as he said, to amuse the invalid. Whether that were the truth or no, he was always a frequent and a welcome guest at the Dell. Only he made the proviso, that in all the amusements which he and Christal shared, Miss Rothesay should be in some way united. So, morning after morning, the sofa whereon the invalid gracefully reclined was brought into the painting−room, and there, while Olive worked, she listened, sometimes almost in envy, to the gay young voices that mingled in song, or contended in the light battle of wits. How much older, and graver, and sadder, she seemed than they!

Harold Gwynne did not come. This circumstance troubled Olive. Not that he was in the habit of paying long morning visits, like young Derwent; but still, when he was at Harbury, it usually chanced that every few days they met somewhere, or on some excuse; and so habitual had this intercouse become, that a week's complete cessation of it seemed a positive pain.

Ever, when Olive rose, the morning−gilded spire of Harbury Church brought the thought, "I wonder, will he come to−day!" And at night, when he did not come, she could not conceal from herself, that looking back on the past day, over all duties done therein, all little pleasures planned, there rose a pale mist. She seemed to have only half lived. Alas! it is an awful thing when one's own life becomes insufficient—when all in the world grows dull, save where one other life interpenetrates—all dark, save where one other presence shines!

Olive knew, though she scarce would acknowledge it to herself, that for many months this interest in Harold Gwynne had been the one great interest of her existence. At first it came in the form of a duty, and as such she had entered upon it. She was one of those women who seem born ever to devote themselves to some one. When her mother died, it had comforted Olive to think there was one other human being who stretched out to her entreating hands, saying, "I need thee! I need thee!" Nay, it even seemed as if the voice of the saint departed called upon her to perform this sacred task. Thereto tended her thoughts and prayers. And thus there came upon her the fate which has come upon many another woman,—while thus devoting herself she learned to love. But so gradual had been the change that she yet knew it not.

"Why am I restless?" she thought. "One is too exacting in friendship: one should give all and ask nothing back. Still, it is not quite kind of him to stay away thus. But a man is not like a woman. He must have so many conflicting and engrossing interests, whilst I—" Here her thought broke and dissolved like a rock−riven wave. She dared not yet confess that she had no interest in the world save what was linked with him.

"If he comes not so often," she re−commenced her musings, "even then I ought to be quite content. I know he respects and esteems me; nay, that he has for me a warm regard. I have done him good, too; he tells me so. How fervently ought I to thank God if any feeble words of mine may so influence this noble soul, as in time to lead it from error into truth. My friend, my dear friend! I could not die, knowing or fearing that the abyss of eternity would lie between my spirit and his. Now, whatever may part us during life—"

Here again she paused, for there came upon her a consciousness of pain. If there was gloom in the silence of a week, what would a whole life's silence be? Something whispered, that even in this world it would be bitterness to part with Harold Gwynne.

"You are not painting, Miss Rothesay; you are thinking. What about?" suddenly cried Lyle Derwent.

Olive started almost with a sense of shame. "Has not an artist a right to dream a little?" she said. Yet she blushed deeply. Were her thoughts wrong, that they needed to be thus glossed over? Was there stealing into her heart a secret that taught her to feign?

"What! are you, always the idlest of the idle, reproving Miss Rothesay for being idle too?" said Christal, somewhat sharply. "No wonder she is dull, and I likewise. You have not half amused us to−day. You are getting as solemn as Mr. Gwynne himself. I almost wish he would come in your place."

"Do you? Then 'reap the misery of a granted prayer,' for there is a knock. It may be my worthy brother−in−law himself."

"If so, for charity's sake, give me your arm, and help me into the next room. I cannot abide his gloomy face."

"O woman—changeful—fickle—vain!" laughed the young man, as he performed the duty of supporting the not very fragile form of the fair Christal.

Olive stood alone. Why did she tremble? Why did her pulse sink, slower and slower? She asked herself this question, even in self−disdain. But there was no answer.

Harold entered.

"I am come with a message from my mother," said he, in a rather formal apology; but added, anxiously, "How is this, Miss Rothesay? You look as if you had been ill?"

"Oh, no; only weary with a long morning's work. But will you sit?"

He received, as usual, the quiet smile—the greeting gentle and friendly. He was deceived by them as heretofore.

"Are you better than when last I was at the Parsonage? I have seen nothing of you for a week, you know."

"Is it so long? I did not note the time." These words of his fell carelessly, as it seemed; but they wounded Olive's heart. He "did not note the time." And she had told every day by hours—every hour by minutes!

"I should have come before," he continued, "but I have had so many things to occupy me. Besides, I am so dreary and dull. I should only trouble you."

"You never trouble me."

"It is kind of you to say so. Well, let that pass. Will you now return with me and spend the day. My mother is longing to see you."

"I will come," said Olive; and a brightness shone over her face. There was a little demur about Christal's being left, but it was soon terminated by the incursion of a tribe of the young lady's "friends" whom she had made at Farnwood Hall.

Soon Olive was walking with Mr. Gwynne along the well−known road. The sunshine of the morning seemed to gather and float around her heart. She remembered no more the pain—the doubt—the weary waiting. All was happiness now!

Gradually they fell into their old way of conversing. "How beautiful all seems," said Harold, as he stood still, bared his head, and drank in, with a long sighing breath, the sunshine and the soft air. "I would that I could be happy in this happy world."

"You feel it is so, then; that it is God's world, and as He made it—good," answered Olive, softly.

"Much that you say I see like a vision afar off. I cannot realise it. But I pray you, do not speak to me of these things. My soul is in a wild labyrinth, from which it must work its way out alone. Nevertheless, my friend, keep near me!" Unconsciously, she clung closer to his arm. He started, and turned his head away. The next moment he added, in a somewhat constrained voice, "I mean—let me have your friendship—your silent comforting—your prayers. Yes! thus far I believe. I can say, 'Pray God for me,' doubting not that He will hear,—you, at least, if not me. Therefore, let me go on and struggle through this darkness."

"Until comes the light! It will come—I know it will!" Olive looked up at him, and their eyes met. In hers was the fulness of joy, in his a doubt—a contest. He removed them, and walked on in silence, pride sitting on his brow. The very arm on which Olive leaned seemed to grow coldly rigid—like a bar of severance between them.

"I would to Heaven!" Harold suddenly exclaimed, as they approached Harbury—"I would to Heaven I could get away from this place altogether. I think I shall do so. My knowledge and reputation in science is not small. I might begin a new life—a life of active exertion. In fact, I have nearly decided it all."

"Decided what? It is so sudden. I do not quite understand," said Olive, faintly.

"To leave England—to enter as tutor in some academy of science abroad. What think you of the plan?"

What thought she? Nothing. There was a dull sound in her ears as of a myriad waters—the ground whereon she stood seemed reeling to and fro—yet she did not fall. One minute, and she answered him.

"You know best. If good for you, it is a good plan."

He seemed relieved, and yet disappointed. "I am glad you say so. I imagined, perhaps, you might have thought it wrong."

"Why wrong?"

"Women have peculiar feelings about home, and country, and friends. I shall leave all these; perhaps for ever. I would not care ever to see England more. I would put off this black gown, and with it every remembrance of the life of vile hypocrisy which I have led here. I would drown the past in new plans—new energies—new hopes. And, to do this, I must break all ties, and go alone. My poor mother! I have not dared yet to tell her this. To her, the thought of parting would be like death, so dearly does she love me."

He spoke all this rapidly, never looking towards his silent companion. When he ceased, Olive feebly stretched out her hand, as if to grasp something for support, then drew it back again, and, hid under her mantle, pressed it tightly against her heart. On that heart Harold's words fell, rending away all its disguises, laying it naked and bare to the cold, bitter truth. "To me," she thought—"to me, also, this parting is like death. And why? Because I, too, love him—dearer than ever mother loved son, or sister brother; ay, dearer than my own soul. O miserable me!"

"You are silent," said Harold. "You think I am acting cruelly towards one who loves me so well. Men often act so. Human affections are to us secondary things. We scarce need them; or, when our will demands, we can crush them from our hearts—thus."

He stamped fiercely on the ground, not heeding that there had fluttered to his feet from the hedge a young, tender−winged autumn butterfly. As he passed on before her to open the churchyard−gate, Olive saw the poor crushed insect lying dead. She took it up tenderly, and sighed. She might even have wept, but that her tears seemed all scorched up.

"Poor thing, poor thing! But he has done no wrong. He knew it not: he never shall know it. It is best so!"

She laid the dead butterfly on a mound of grass, followed Harold, and, at his silent gesture, again linked her arm in his.

"I think," she said—when, without talking any more, they had nearly reached the Parsonage—"I think, that wherever you go, you ought to take your mother with you; and little Ailie, too! With them your home will be complete."

"Yet I have friends to leave—one friend at least—**yourself** ," he said, abruptly.

"I, as others, shall miss you; but all true friends should desire, above all things, each other's welfare. I shall be satisfied if I hear at times of yours."

He made no answer, and they went in at the hall door.

There was much to be done and talked of that afternoon at the Parsonage. First, there was a long lesson to be given to little Ailie; then, at least an hour was spent in following Mrs. Gwynne round the garden, and hearing her dilate on the beauty of her hollyhocks and dahlias.

"I shall have the finest dahlias in the country next year," said the delighted old lady.

Next year! next year! It seemed to Olive as if she were talking of the next world!

In some way or other the hours went by; how, Olive could not tell. She did not see, hear, or feel anything, save that she had to make an effort to appear in the eyes of Harold, and of Harold's mother, just as usual—the same quiet little creature—gently smiling, gently speaking—who had already begun to be called "an old maid"—whom no one in the world suspected of any human passion—least of all, the passion of **love**.

After their early dinner Harold went out. He did not return even when the misty autumn night had began to fall. As the daylight waned and the firelight brightened, Olive felt terrified at herself. One hour of that quiet evening commune, so sweet of old, and her strength and self−control would have failed. Making some excuse about Christal, she asked Mrs. Gwynne to let her go home.

"But not alone, my dear; you will surely wait until Harold comes in?"

"No, no! It will be late, and the mist is rising. Do not fear for me; the road is quite safe; and, you know, I am used to being alone," said Olive, feebly smiling.

"You are a brave little creature, my dear. Well, do as you will."

So, ere long, Olive found herself on her solitary homeward road. It lay through the churchyard. Closing the Parsonage−gate, the first thing she did was to creep across the long grass to her mother's grave.

"Oh! mother, mother, why did you go and leave me? Else this misery had not befallen me. I should never have loved any one if my mother had not died!"

And burning tears fell, and burning blushes came. With these came also the sense of self−degradation which smites a woman when she knows, that, unwooed, unrequited, she has dared to love.

"What have I done?" she cried. "O earth, take me in and cover me! Hide me from myself—from my misery—my shame." Suddenly she started up. "What if he should pass and find me here! I must go. I must go home."

She fled out of the churchyard and down the road. For a little way she walked rapidly, then gradually slower and slower. A white mist arose from the meadows; it folded round her like a shroud; it seemed to creep even into her heart, and make its beatings grow still. Down the long road, where she and Harold had so often passed

together, she walked alone. Alone—as once had seemed her doom through life—and must now be so unto the end.

It might be the **certainty** of this which calmed her. She had no maiden doubts or hopes; not one! The possibility of Harold's loving her, or choosing her as his wife, never entered her mind.

Since the days of her early girlhood, when she wove such a bright romance around Sara and Charles, and created for herself a beautiful ideal for future worship, Olive had ceased to dream about love at all. Feeling that its happiness was for ever denied her, she had bravely relinquished all those airy imaginings in which young maidens indulge. In their place had come the intense devotion to her Art, which, together with her passionate love for her mother, had absorbed all the interests of her secluded life. Scarcely was she even conscious of the happiness that she lost; for she had read few of those books which foster sentiment or passion; and in the wooings and weddings she heard of, were none that aroused either her sympathy or her envy. Coldly and purely she had moved in her sphere, superior to both love's joy and love's pain.

Reaching home, Olive sought not to enter the house, where she knew there could be no solitude. She went into the little arbour—her mother's favourite spot—and there, hidden in the shadows of the mild autumn night, she sat down, to gather up her strength, and calmly to think over her mournful lot.

She said to herself, "There has come upon me that which I have heard is, soon or late, every woman's destiny. I cannot beguile myself any longer. It is not friendship I feel; it is love. My whole life is threaded by one thought—the thought of him. It comes between me and everything else on earth—almost between me and Heaven. I never wake at morning but his name rises to my heart—the first hope of the day; I never kneel down at night but in my prayer, whether in thought or speech, that name is mingled too. If I have sinned, oh God! forgive me! Thou knowest how lonely and desolate I was—how, when that one best love was taken away, my heart ached and yearned for some other human love. And this has come to fill it. Alas for me!

"Let me think—will it ever pass away? There are feelings which come and go—light girlish fancies. But I am six−and−twenty years old. All this while I have lived without loving any man. And none has ever wooed me by word or look, except my master, Vanbrugh, whose feeling for me was not love at all. No! no! I am, as they call me, 'an old maid,' destined to pass through life alone and unloved.

"Perhaps, though I have long ceased to think on the subject—perhaps my first girlish misery was true, and there is in me something repulsive—something that would prevent any man's seeking me as a wife. Therefore, even if my own feelings could change, there will never come any soothing after−tie to fill up my heart's affection, and chase away the memory of this utterly hopeless love.

"Hopeless I know it is. He admires beauty and grace—I have neither. Yet I will not do him the injustice to believe he would contemn me for this. Even once I overheard him say, there was such sweetness in my face, that he had never noticed my being 'slightly deformed.' Therefore, did he but love me, perhaps—O fool!—dreaming fool that I am! It is impossible! * *

"Let me think calmly once more. He has given me all he could—kindness, friendship, brotherly regard; and I have given him love—a woman's whole and entire love, such as she can give but once, and be beggared all her life after. I to him am like any other friend—he to me is all my world. Oh! but it is a fearful difference!

"I will look my doom in the face—I will consider how I am to bear it. No hope is there for me of being loved as I love. I shall never be his wife—never be more to him than I am now; in time, perhaps, even less. He will go out into the world, and leave me, as brothers leave sisters (even supposing he regards me as such). He will form new ties; perhaps he will marry; and then this silent, secret love of mine would be—sin!"

Olive pressed her hands tightly together, and crushed her hot brow upon them, bending it even to her knees. Thus bowed, she lay until the fierce struggle passed.

"I do not think that misery will come. His mother, who knows him best, was surely right when she said he would never take a second wife. Therefore I may be his sister still. Neither he nor any living soul will ever know that I loved him otherwise than as a sister might love a brother. Who would dream there could be any other passion in me—a pale, unlovely thing—a woman past her youth (for I seem very old now)?—It ought not to be so; many women are counted young at six−and−twenty; but they are those who have been nurtured tenderly in joyous homes, while I have been struggling with the hard world these many years. No wonder I am not as they—that I am quiet and silent, without mirth or winning grace—a creature worn out before her time−pale, joyless, **deformed**. Yes! let me teach myself that word, with all other truths that can quench this mad dream.

Then, perhaps, knowing all hope vain, I may be able to endure.

"What am I to do? Am I to try and cleanse my heart of this love, as if it were some pollution? Not so. Sorrow it is—deep, abiding sorrow; but it is not sin. If I thought it so, I would crush it out, though I crushed my life out with it. But I need not. My heart is pure—O God, Thou knowest!

"Another comfort I have. He has not deceived me, as men sometimes deceive, with wooing that seems like love, and yet is only idle, cruel sport. He has ever treated me as a friend—a sister—nothing more! Therefore, no bitterness is there in my sorrow, since he has done no wrong.

"I will not cease from loving—I would not if I could. Better this suffering than the utter void which must otherwise be in my heart eternally, seeing I have neither father, mother, brother, nor sister, and shall never know any nearer tie than the chance friendships which spring up on the world's wayside, and wither where they spring. I know there are those who would bid me cast off this love as it were a serpent from my bosom. No! Rather let it creep in there, and fold itself close and secret. What matter, even if its sweet sting be death?

"But I shall not die. How could I, while my heart's beloved lived, and might need aught that I could give? Did he not say, 'Keep near me!' Ay, I will! Though a world lay between us, my spirit shall follow him all his life long. Distance shall be nothing—years nothing! Whenever he calls 'Friend, I need thee,' I will answer, 'I am here!' If I could condense my whole life's current of joy into one drop of peace for him, I would pour it out at his feet, smile content, and die.

"And then, after death, I shall await him in the land of souls. Oh, Harold! whom in this world I never may call **my** Harold, with full and perfect love my spirit shall meet thee **there**."

Thrice, with an accent of most divine tenderness, she sighed his name; and then rose up and went forth, her step wavering not, her countenance serene and clear.

The mist had all passed away, and over her shone the dark night−blue heaven, with its eternal stars.

CHAPTER IV.

I KNOW that I am promulgating a new theory of love; I know that in Olive Rothesay I dare to paint a woman full of all high, pure, maidenly virtues, who has yet given her heart away unrequited,—cast it down irretrievably and hopelessly at the feet of a man who knows not of the gift he has never sought to win. The case, I grant, is rare. I believe that a woman seldom bestows her love save in response to other love—silent or spoken—real or imaginary. Should this prove false, either she has deceived herself, or has been deceived.

But the thing is quite possible—aye, and chances sometimes—that a woman unselfish in her nature, in all her affections more prone to give than to receive, free from idle notions of lovers and weddings, may be unconsciously attracted by some image of perfection in the other sex, and be thus led on through the worship of abstract goodness until she wakes to find that she has learned to love **the man**. For what is love, in its purest and divinest sense, but that innate yearning after the ideal which we vainly dream is realised in some other human soul? Why should not this be felt by woman as by man? Ay, and by hearts most pure from every thought of unfeminine boldness, vanity, or wrong.

I know, too, that from many a sage and worthy matron my Olive has for ever earned her condemnation, because at last discovering her mournful secret, she did not strive in horror and shame to root out this misplaced love. Then, after years of cruel self−martyrdom, she might at last have pointed to her heart's trampled garden, and said, "Look what I have had strength to do!" But from such a wrecked and blasted soil what aftergrowth could ever spring?

Better, a thousand times, that a woman to whom this doom has come, should lift her brow and gaze upon it without fear. It is vain to wrestle with it—she cannot! Let her meet it as she would meet death—solemnly, calmly, patiently. Then let her draw nigh and look upon the bier of her life's dead hope, until the pale image grows beautiful as sleep; or, perchance, at last rises from the clay, transfigured into a likeness no longer human, but divine.

It is time that we women should begin to teach and to think thus. It is meet that we—maidens, wives, mothers, to whom the lines have fallen in more pleasant places— should turn and look on that pale sisterhood—some carrying meekly to the grave their heavy unuttered secret, some living unto old age, to bear the world's smile of pity, even of derision, over an "unfortunate attachment." Others, perhaps, furnishing a text whereupon prudent mothers may lesson romantic daughters, saying, "See that you be not like these 'foolish virgins;' give not **your** heart away in requital of fancied love; or, madder still, in worship of ideal goodness—give it for nothing but the safe barter of a speedy settlement, a comfortable income, a husband, and a ring."

Olive Rothesay, pale virgin martyr! hide the arrow close in thy soul—lay over it thy folded hands and look upwards. Far purer art thou than many a young creature, married without love, living on in decent dignity as the mother of her lord's children, the convenient mistress of his household, and so sink− ing down into the grave, a pattern of all matronly virtue. But thou, unwedded and childless woman, envy her not! A thousand times holier and happier than such a destiny is that silent lonely lot of thine.

With meekness, yet with courage, Olive Rothesay prepared to live her appointed life. At first it seemed very bitter, as must needs be. Youth, while it is still youth, cannot at once and altogether be content to resign love. It will yearn for that tie which Heaven ordained to make its nature's completeness; it will shrink and quail before the long dull vista of a solitary, aimless existence. Sometimes, wildly as she struggled against such thoughts, there would come to Olive's fancy dreams of what her life might have been. The joys of lovers' love, of wedded love, of mother−love, would at times flit before her imagination; and her heart, still warm, still young, trembled to picture the lonely old age, the hearth blank and silent, the utter isolation from all those natural ties whose place not even the dearest bonds of adopted affection can ever entirely fill. But, whenever these murmurings arose, Olive checked them; sometimes almost with a feeling of shame.

She devoted herself more than ever to her Art, trying to make it as once before the chief interest and enjoyment of her life. It would become the same again, she hoped. Often and often in the world's history had been noted that of brave men who rose from the wreck of some bitter love, and found happiness in their genius and their fame. But Olive had yet to learn that, with women, it is rarely so.

She felt more than ever the mournful change which had come over her, when it happened that great success

was won by one of her later pictures—a picture unconsciously created from the inspiration of that sweet love−dream. When the news came—tidings which a year ago would have thrilled her with pleasure—Olive only smiled faintly, and a few minutes after went into her chamber, hid her face, and wept.

There was not, and there could not be, any difference made in her ordinary way of life. She still went to the Parsonage, and walked and talked with Harold, as he seemed always to expect. She listened to all his projects for the future—a future wherein she, alas! had no part. Eagerly she strove to impress this fact upon her mind—to forget herself entirely, to think only of him, and what would be best for his happiness. Knowing him so well as she did, and having over him an influence in which he seemed rather to rejoice, and which, at least, he never repelled, she was able continually to reason, encourage, and sympathise with him. He often thanked her for this, little knowing how every quiet word of hers was torn from a bleeding heart. Walking home with her at nights, as usual, he never saw the white face turned upwards to the stars—the eyes wherein tears burned, but would not fall; the lips compressed in a choking agony, or opened to utter calm ordinary speech, in which his ear detected not one tremulous or discordant tone. When he sat in the house, absorbed in anxious thought, little he knew what mournful looks were fastened on his face, as if secretly to learn by heart every beloved lineament, against the time which his visible likeness would be beheld no more.

Thus miserably did Olive struggle. The record of that time, its every day, its every hour, was seared on her heart as with a burning brand. Afterwards, she never thought of it but with a shudder, marvelling how she had ever been able to endure all and live.

At last the inward suffering began to be outwardly written on her face. Some people said—Lyle Derwent first—that Miss Rothesay did not look so well as she used to do. But indeed it was no wonder, she was so engrossed in her painting, and worked far too much for her strength. Olive neither dissented nor denied; but she never complained, and still went painting on. Harold himself saw she was ill, and sometimes treated her with almost brotherly tenderness. Often he noticed her pale face, paler than ever beneath his eye, or in wrapping her from the cold observed how she shivered and trembled. And then Olive would go home and cry out in her misery,

"How long, how long? Oh, that this struggle might cease, or else I die!"

She was quite alone at the Dell now, for Mrs. Fludyer had paid a flying visit home, and had taken back with her both Christal and the somewhat unwilling Lyle. Solitude, once sweet and profitable, now grew fearful unto Olive's tortured mind. And to escape it she had no resource, but that which she knew was to her like a poison−draught, and for which she yet thirsted evermore—the daily welcome at the Parsonage. But the web of circumstance, which she herself seemed to have no power to break, was at length apparently broken for her. One day she received a letter from her father's aunt, Mrs. Flora Rothesay, inviting, nay entreating her to visit Edinburgh, that the old lady might look upon the last of her race.

For a moment Olive blessed this chance of quitting the scenes now become so painful. But then, Harold might need her. In his present conflict of feeling and of purpose he had no confidant save herself. She would have braved years of suffering, if her presence could have yielded him one hour's relief from care. But of this she must judge, so she set off at once to the Parsonage.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Gwynne, with a smiling and mysterious face, "of course you will go at once! It will do your health a world of good. Harold said so only this morning."

"Then he knew?"

"Yes, your aunt wrote and told him. In fact, I half suspect him of originating the plan. So kind and thoughtful as he is, and such a regard as he has for you! You must certainly go, Olive."

Then **he** had done it all. He could let her part from him, easily, as friend from friend. Yet, what marvel! They were nothing more. She never thought of opposing anything he seemed to wish, so she answered, quietly, "I will go."

She told him so when he came in; he appeared much pleased; and said, with more than his usual frankness,

"I should like you to know aunt Flora. You see, I call her **my** aunt Flora, too, for she is of some distant kin, and I have dearly loved her ever since I was a boy."

It was something to be going to one whom Harold "dearly loved." Olive felt a little comfort in her proposed journey.

"Besides, she knows you quite well already, my dear," observed Mrs. Gwynne. "She tells me Harold used often to talk about you during his visit with her this summer."

"I had a reason," said Harold, his dark cheek changing a little. "I wished her to know and love her niece, and I was sure her niece would soon learn to love **her**."

"Why, that is kind, and like yourself, my son. How thoughtfully you have been planning everything for Olive."

"She will not be angry with me for that, will you, Olive?" he said, and stopped. It was the first time she had ever heard him utter her christian name. At the sound her heart leaped wildly, but only for an instant. The next, Harold had corrected himself, and said, " **Miss Rothesay**," in a distinct, cold, and formal tone. Very soon afterwards he went away.

Mrs. Gwynne persuaded Olive to spend the day at the Parsonage. They two were alone together, for Harold did not return. But in the afternoon their quietness was broken by the sudden appearance of Lyle Derwent.

"So soon back from Brighton! Who would have thought it?" said Mrs. Gwynne, smiling.

Lyle put on his favourite sentimental air, and muttered something about "not liking gaiety, and never being happy away from Farnwood."

"Miss Rothesay is scarcely of your opinion, at all events she is going to try the experiment of leaving us for awhile."

"Miss Rothesay leaving us?" And Lyle, looking troubled and alarmed, came hastily to Olive's side.

"It is indeed true," she said, with an effort. "You see I have not been well of late, and my kind friends are so anxious for me; and I want to see my aunt in Scotland."

"Then it is to Scotland you are going—all that long dreary way! You may stay there weeks, months! and that while what will become of me—I mean, of us all at Farnwood?"

His evident regret touched Olive deeply. It was something to be missed, even by this boy—he always seemed a boy to her, partly because of old times, partly because he was so unsophisticated in mind and manner.

"My dear Lyle, how good of you to think of me in this manner! But indeed I will not forget you when I am away."

"Oh no; I hope not! And you will not go and make other friends, and never come back to Farnwood? You promise that?" cried Lyle, eagerly.

Olive promised;—with a sorrowful thought, that none asked this pledge, none needed it, save the affectionate Lyle!

He was still inconsolable, poor youth! He looked so drearily pathetic, and quoted such doleful poetry, that Mrs. Gwynne, who in her matter−of−fact plainness had no patience with any of Lyle's "romantic vagagaries," as she called them, began to exert the dormant humour by which she always quenched his little ebullitions. Olive at last considerately came to the rescue, and proposed an evening stroll about the garden, to which Lyle eagerly assented.

There he still talked of her departure, but his affectations were now tempered by real feeling.

"I shall miss you bitterly," he said, in a low tone, "but if your health needs change, and this journey is for your good, of course I would not think of myself at all."

—The very expressions she had herself used to Harold! This coincidence touched her, and she half reproached herself for feeling so coldly to all her kind friends, and chiefly to Lyle Derwent, who evidently regarded her with such affection. But all other affections grew pale before the one great love. Every lesser tie that would fain come in the place of that which was unattainable, smote her with only a keener pain.

Still, half remorsefully, she looked on her old favourite, and wished that she could care for him more. So thinking, her manner be− came gentler than usual, while that of Lyle grew more earnest and less dreamy.

"I wish you would write to me while you are away, Miss Rothesay; or, at all events, let me write to you."

"That you may; and I shall be so glad to hear all about Harbury and Farnwood." Here she paused, half−shaming to confess to herself that for this reason chiefly would she welcome the letters of poor Lyle.

"Is that all? Will you not care to hear about **me**? Oh, Miss Rothesay," cried Lyle, "I often wish I was again a little boy in the dear old garden at Oldchurch."

"Why so?"

"Because, because,"—and some inexplicable feeling brought the quick blood, crimsoning his boyish cheek. "No, no, I cannot tell you now; but perhaps I may, sometime," he murmured.

"Just as you like," answered Olive, ab− sently. Her thoughts, wakened by the long−silent name, were travelling over many years; back to her old home, her happy girlhood. She almost wished she had died then, and never

known this bitter love. But her mother!

"No, I am glad I lived to comfort **her**," she mused. "Perhaps it may be true that none ever pass from earth until their ministry here is no longer needed. So I will even patiently live on."

Unable to talk more with Lyle, Olive reentered the Parsonage. Harold sat there reading.

"Have you long come in?" she asked in a somewhat trembling voice.

He answered, "About an hour."

"I did not see you enter."

"Of course not, you were too much engaged in conversation. Therefore I would not disturb you, but took my book."

He spoke in the abrupt, cold manner he sometimes used. Olive thought something had happened to annoy him and in her gentle, womanly fashion, she sat down and talked with him until the cloud passed away.

Many times during the evening Lyle renewed his lamentations over Miss Rothesay's journey; but Harold never uttered one word of regret. Bitter, bitter was the contrast to Olive's heart. When she departed, however, Mr. Gwynne offered to accompany her home.

"You need not. It is a cold night, and I have Lyle's kindness to depend upon."

"Very well, since you choose it so," and he sat down again. But Olive saw she had wounded his pride—**only** his pride;—she said this to her heart, to keep down its unconscious thrill. Yet never for a moment would she grieve him in anything; so she went up to him with a sweet, contrite look,

"You know I am always glad to talk to you, and be with you, my dear friend. We shall not have many more walks home together, therefore will you come?"

And he came. Moreover, he contrived to keep her beside him. Lyle, poor fellow, went whistling in solitude down the other side of the road, until at the Dell he said good−night, and vanished.

Harold had talked all the way on indifferent subjects, never once alluding to Olive's departure. He did so now, however, but carelessly, as if with an accidental thought.

"I wonder whether you will return to Harbury before I start for Heidelberg—that is, if I should really go. I should like to see you once again. Well, chance must decide."

Chance! when she would have controlled all accidents, provided against all hindrances, woven together all purposes, to be with him for one single day!

At once the thought broke through the happy spell which, for the time, his kindness had laid upon her. She felt that it was **only** kindness; and as such, he meant it, no more! In his breast was not the faintest echo of the devotion which filled her own. A sense of womanly pride arose, and with it a pang of womanly shame. These lasted while she bade him good−night, somewhat coldly; then both sank at once, and there remained to her nothing but helpless sorrow.

She listened, as she ever did, for the last sound of his footsteps down the road. But she heard them not; and thought, half−sighing, how quickly he must have walked away! What if an hour hence she had seen or known—but how could she, with her poor heart crushed beneath the weight of a love so great, yet so humble—her eyes blinded with the mist of perpetual tears?

A very few days intervened between Miss Rothesay's final decision and her departure. During this time, she only once saw Harold Gwynne. She thought he might have met her a little oftener, seeing they were so soon to part. But he did not; and the pain she suffered from this warned her that all was chancing for the best. Her health failing—her cheerful spirit broken—even her meek temper growing embittered with this mournful struggle, she saw that in some way or other it must be ended. She was thankful that all things had arranged themselves so plainly before her feet. There was a Father's care over her still. Though, remembering her own unworthiness, and feeling that this intense human love had been nigh unto idolatry,—often when she knelt down at night she could offer unto Heaven nothing but speechless tears.

There was planned no farewell meeting at the Parsonage; but Mrs. Gwynne spent at the Dell the evening before Olive's departure. Harold would have come, his mother said, but he had some important matters to arrange; he would, however, appear some time that evening. However, it grew late, and still his welcome knock was not heard. At last there sounded one; it was only Lyle, who came to bid Miss Rothesay good−bye. He did so, dolorously enough, but Olive scarce felt any pain. The one pang absorbed all the rest.

"It is of no use waiting," said Mrs. Gwynne. "I think I will go home with Lyle—that is, if he will take my son's

place for the occasion. It is not quite right of Harold; he does not usually forget his mother."

Olive unconsciously urged some excuse. She was ever prone to do so, when any shadow of blame fell on Harold.

"You are always good, my dear. But still he might have come, even for the sake of proper courtesy to you."

Courtesy! Alas! a poor balm for the breaking heart!

Mrs. Gwynne entreated Olive to call at the Parsonage on her journey next morning. It would not hinder her a minute. Little Ailie was longing for one good−bye, and perhaps she might likewise see Harold. Miss Rothesay assented. It would have been so hard to go away without one more look at the beloved face—one more clasp of the beloved hand.

Yet both seemed denied her. Trembling with the excitement of parting from home, and of taking that long journey—her first journey alone—Olive reached the Parsonage. But Harold was not there. He had gone out riding, little Ailie thought; no one else knew anything about him.

"It was very wrong and unkind," said Mrs. Gwynne, in real annoyance.

"Oh no, not at all," was all that Olive murmured. She took Ailie on her knee, and hid her face upon the child's curls.

"Ah, dear Miss Rothesay, you must come back soon," whispered the little girl. "We can't do without you. We have all been much happier since you came to Harbury; papa said so, last night."

"Did he?"

"Yes; when I was crying at the thought of your going away, and he came to my little bed, and comforted me, and kissed me. Oh, you don't know how sweet papa's kisses are! Now, I get so many of them. Before he rode out this morning he gave me half−a−dozen here, upon my eyes, and said I must learn all you taught me, and grow up a good woman, just like you. What, are you crying? Then I will cry too."

Olive laid her thin cheek to the rosy one of Harold's daughter; she wept, but could not speak.

"What kisses you are giving me, dear Miss Rothesay, and just where papa gives me them, too. How kind! Ah, I love you—I love you dearly," murmured the little affectionate voice, haunting Olive long after she had torn herself away.

"God bless and take care of you, my dear child—almost as dear as though you had been born my own," was Mrs. Gwynne's farewell, as she bestowed on Olive one of her rare embraces. And then the parting was over.

Closing her eyes—her heart;—striving to make her thoughts a blank, and to shut out everything save the welcome sense of blind exhaustion that was creeping over her; Olive lay back in the carriage, and was whirled from Harbury.

She had a long way to journey across the forest−country until she reached the nearest railway−station. When she arrived, it was already late, and she had barely time to take her seat ere the carriages started. That moment her quick ear caught the ringing of a horse's hoofs, and as the rider leaped on the platform she saw it was Harold Gwynne. He looked round eagerly—more eagerly than she had ever seen him look before. The train was already moving, but they momently recognised each other, and Harold smiled—his own frank affectionate smile. It fell like a sunburst upon poor lonely Olive Rothesay.

Her last sight of him was as he stood with folded arms, intently watching the winding northward line. Fervently she blessed him in her faithful heart, that, giving so much, was content with so little; and then, feeling that this one passing sight of him had taken away half her pain, she was borne upon her solitary journey.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is not in this world a more exquisite sight than a beautiful old age. It is almost better than a beautiful youth. Early loveliness passes away with its generation, and becomes at best only a melancholy tradition recounted by younger lips with a half−incredulous smile. But if one must live to be the last relic of a past race, one would desire in departing to leave behind the memory of a graceful old age. And since there is only one kind of beauty which so endures, it ought to be a consolation to those whom fate has denied the personal loveliness which charms at eighteen, to know that we all have it in our power to be beautiful at eighty.

Miss, or rather Mrs. Flora Rothesay—for so she was always called—appeared to Olive the most beautiful old lady she had ever beheld. It was a little after dusk on a dull wet day, when she reached her journey's end. Entering, she saw around her the dazzle of a rich warm fire−light, her cloak was removed by light hands, and she felt on both cheeks the kiss of peace and salutation.

"Is that Olive Rothesay, Angus Rothesay's only child? Welcome to bonnie Scotland—welcome, my dear lassie!"

The voice lost none of its sweetness for bearing, strongly and unmistakably, the "accents of the mountain tongue," such as still lingers with ancient Scottish ladies. Mrs. Flora used, without a trace of vulgarity, the tones and some of the phrases of her native Doric, as spoken a century ago.

Surely the mountain breezes that rocked Olive's cradle had sung in her memory for twenty years, for she felt like coming home the moment she set foot in her father's land. She expressed this to Mrs. Flora, and then, quite overpowered, she knelt and hid her face in the old lady's lap, and her excitement melted away in a soft dew—too sweet to seem like tears.

"The poor lassie! she's just wearied out!" said Mrs. Flora, laying her hands on Olive's hair. "Jean, rin awa' and get her some tea. Now, my bairn, lift up your face, and let me see ye. Ay, there it is—a Rothesay's, every line! and with the golden hair, too. Ye have heard tell o' the weird saying, about the Rothesays with yellow hair? No? Ah well, we'll no talk of it now." And the old lady suddenly looked thoughtful—even somewhat grave. When Olive rose up, she made her bring a seat opposite to her own arm−chair, and there watched her very intently.

Olive herself noticed with curious eyes the outward likeness of her aunt. Mrs. Flora's attire was quite a picture, with the ruffled elbow−sleeves and the long, square boddice, above which a close white kerchief hid the once lovely neck and throat of her whom old Elspie had chronicled—and truly—as "the Flower of Perth." The face, Olive thought, was as she could have imagined that of Mary Queen of Scots when grown old. But age could never obliterate the charm of the soft languishing eyes, the almost infantile sweetness of the mouth. Therein sat a spirit, ever young and lovely, because ever loving; smiling away all natural wrinkles—softening down all harsh lines. You regarded them no more than the faint shadows in a twilight landscape, over which the soul of peace is everywhere serenely diffused. There was peace, too, in the very attitude—leaning back, the head a little raised, the hands crossed, each folded round the other's wrist. Olive particularly noticed these little hands, shrunk but not withered. On the right was a marriage−ring, which had outlasted two lives, mother and daughter; on the left, at the wedding−finger, was another, a hoop of gold with a single diamond. Both seemed less ornaments than tokens—gazed on, perhaps, as the faint landmarks of a long past journey, which now, with its joys and pains alike, was all fading into shadow before the dawn of another world.

"So they called you 'Olive,' my dear," said Mrs. Flora. "A strange name! the like of it is not in our family."

"My mother gave it to me from a dream she had."

"Ay, I mind it weel; Harold Gwynne told me, saying that Mrs. Rothesay had told **him**. Was she, then, so sweet and dainty a creature—your mother? Once Angus spoke to me of her—little Sybilla Hyde. She was his wife then, though we did not know it. That was no richt. Poor Angus, we loved him very much—better than he thought. Tears again, my dearie? Then we'll speak nae mair o' the like o' that."

"And so you know my dear Alison Balfour. She was a deal younger than I, and yet you see we are both grown auld wives thegither. Little Olive—I think I will call you so, such a wee bit thing as you are—little Olive! know you that you have come to me on my birth day. This ae day I have lived just eighty years in a dark, dowie world, as they ca' it. And yet 'tis no sae dark nor dowie while there's aye light in the lift aboon."

The old lady reverently raised her pale blue eyes—true Scottish eyes—limpid and clear as the dew on Scottish

heather. Cheerful they were withal, for they soon began to flit hither and thither, following the motions of Jean's "eident hand" with most housewifely care. And Jean herself, a handmaid, prim and ancient indeed, but youthful compared to her mistress, seemed to watch the latter's faintest gesture with most affectionate observance. Of all the light traits which reveal characters none is more suggestive than the sight of a mistress whom her servants love.

After tea, Mrs. Flora insisted on Olive's retiring for the night. "I hae gi'en ye a room wi' a bonnie prospect owerlooking the Braid Hills. They ca' them hills here; but oh! for the broad blue mountains sweeping in waves from the old castle in Perth. Night and day I was wearying to see them, for years after I came to live at Morningside. But ane must e'en dree one's weird! My puir brother was dead and gane, and I had tint a' the rest of my kin, save some young folk in Edinburgh, that were sib to my mother—she was a Lowland woman, ye see. Thae puir bairns were wanting me sair, so I left the dear auld hame, for gude and a'!"

She always spoke in this rambling way, wandering from the subject, after the fashion of old age. Olive could have listened long to the pleasant stream of talk, which seemed murmuring round her, wrapping her in a soft dream of peace. She laid down her tired head on the pillow, with an unwonted feeling of calmness and rest. Even the one weary pain that ever pursued her sank into momentary repose. Her last waking thought was still of Harold; but it was more like the yearning of a spirit from another world than the passionate longing of one who struggles with the misery of a hopeless love.

Just between waking and sleeping Olive was roused by what seemed an almost spiritlike strain of music. Her door had been left ajar, and the sound she heard was the voices of the household, engaged in their evening devotion. The tune was that sweetest of all Presbyterian psalmody, "plaintive Martyrs." Olive caught some words of the hymn—it was one with which she had often been lulled to sleep in poor old Elspie's arms. Distinct and clear its quaint rhymes came back upon her memory now:

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green, and leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.

Poor lonely Olive lay and listened. Then rest, deep and placid, came over her, as over one who, escaped from a stormy wrack and tempest, falls asleep amid the murmur of "quiet waters," in a pleasant land.

She awoke at morning, as if waking in another world. The clear cold air, threaded with sunshine, filled her room. It was the "best room," furnished with a curious mingling of the ancient and the modern. The pretty chintz couch laughed at the oaken, high−backed chair, stiff with its century of worm−eaten state. On either side the fire−place hung two ancient engravings, of Mary Stuart and "bonnie Prince Charlie," both garnished with verses, at once remarkable for devoted loyalty and eccentric rhythm. Between the two was Sir William Ross's sweet, maidenly portrait of our own Victoria. Opposite, on a shadowy wall, with one sunbeam glinting on the face, was a large, well−painted likeness, which Olive at once recognised. It was Mrs. Flora, then young Flora Rothesay, at eighteen. No wonder, Olive thought, that she was called "the flower of Perth." But strange it was, that the fair flower had been planted in no good man's bosom; that this lovely and winning creature had lived, bloomed, withered—"an old maid." Olive, looking into the sweet eyes that followed her everywhere—as those of some portraits do—tried to read therein the foreshadowing of a life−history of eighty years. It made her dreamy and sad, so she arose and looked out upon the sunny slopes of the Braid Hills until her cheerfulness returned. Then she descended to the breakfast−table.

It was too early for the old lady to appear, but there were waiting three or four young damsels—invited, they said, to welcome Miss Rothesay, and show her the beauties of Edinburgh. They talked continually of "dear Auntie Flora," and were most anxious to "call cousins" with Olive herself, who, though she could not at all make out the relationship, was quite ready to take it upon faith. She tried very hard properly to inform herself concerning the three Miss M'Gillivrays, daughters of Sir Andrew Rothesay's half−sister's niece, and Miss Flora Anstruther, the old lady's third cousin and name−child, and especially little twelve−years−old Maggie Oliphant, whose grandfather was Mrs. Flora's nephew on the mother's side, and first cousin to Alison Balfour.

All these conflicting relationships wrapped Olive in an inexplicable net; but it was woven of such friendly arms that she had no wish to get free. Her heart opened to the loving welcome; and when she took her first walk on Scottish ground, it was with a sensation more akin to happiness than she had felt for many a long month.

"And so you have never before seen your aunt," said one of the M'Gillivrays;—for her life, Olive could not tell whether it was Miss Jane, Miss Janet, or Miss Marion, though she had tried for half−an−hour to learn the difference. "You like her of course—our dear old Auntie Flora?"

"Aunt to which of you," said Olive, smiling.

"Oh, she is everybody's Auntie Flora; no one ever calls her anything else," observed little Maggie Oliphant, who, during all their walk, clung tenaciously to Miss Rothesay's hand, as most children were prone to do.

"I think," said the quiet Miss Anstruther, lifting up her dreamy brown eyes, "that in all **our** lives put together, we will never do half the good that Aunt Flora has done in hers. Papa says, every one of her friends ought to be thankful that she has lived an old maid!"

"Yes, indeed, for who else would have taken care of her cross old brother, Sir Andrew, until he died?" said Janet M'Gillivray.

"And who," added her sister, "would have come and been a mother to us when we lost our own, living with us, and taking care of us for seven long years?"

"I am sure," cried blithe Maggie, "my brothers and I used often to say, that if Auntie Flora had been young, and any disagreeable husband had come to steal her from us, we would have hooted him away down the street, and pelted him with stones."

Olive laughed; and afterwards said, thoughtfully, "She has then lived a happy life—has this good Aunt Flora!"

"Not always happy," answered the eldest and gravest of the M'Gillivrays. "My mother once heard that she had some great sorrow in her youth. But she has outlived it, and conquered it in time. People say such things are possible,—I cannot tell," added the girl, with a faint sigh;—that of unbelieving youth just beginning to find out the difference between romance and reality. Olive thought how some other time she would have a little quiet talk with Marion M'Gillivray.

There was no more said of Mrs. Flora, but oftentimes during the day, when some passing memory stung poor Olive, causing her to turn wearily from the mirth of her young companions, there came before her in gentle reproof the likeness of the aged woman who had lived down her one great woe—lived, not only to feel, but to impart cheerfulness.

A few hours after, Olive saw her aunt sitting smiling amidst a little party which she had gathered together, playing with the children, sympathising with those of elder growth, and looked up to by old and young with an affection passing that of mere kindred. And then there came a balm of hope to the wounded spirit that had felt life's burden too heavy to be borne.

"How happy you are, and how much every one loves you!" said Olive, when Mrs. Flora and herself were left alone, and their hearts inclined each to each with a vague sympathy. "Yours must have been a noble woman's life."

"I hae tried to mak it sae, as far as I could, my dear bairn," answered the old lady. "And a' the little good I hae dune has come back upon me fourfold. It is always so."

"And you have been content— nay, happy?"

"Ay, I have! God quenched the fire on my own hearth, that I might learn to make that of others bright. My dear lassie, one's life never need be empty of love, even though, after seeing all near kindred drop away, one lingers to be an old maid of eighty years."

CHAPTER VI.

"**NO** letters to−day from Harbury!" observed Mrs. Flora to her niece, as, some weeks after Olive's arrival, they were taking their usual morning airing along the Queen's Drive. "My dear, are you not wearying for news from home?"

"Aunt Flora's house has grown quite home−like to me," said Olive, affectionately. It was true. She had sunk down, nestling into its peace like a tired, broken−winged dove. As she sat beside the old lady, and drank in the delicious breezes that swept across from the Lothians, she was quite another creature from the pale drooping Olive Rothesay who had crept wearily up Harbury Hill. Still, the mention of the place even now took a little of the faint roses from her cheek.

"I am weel pleased that you are sae happy, my dear niece," answered Mrs. Flora; "yet I wadna like that they should forget you at hame."

"They do not. Christal writes now and then from Brighton, and Lyle Derwent indulges me with a long letter every week," said Olive, trying to smile. She did not mention Harold; she would fain have hidden how much his silence grieved her. It felt like a mist of cold estrangement rising up between them. Yet—as sometimes she tried to think—perhaps it was best so! She would thus earlier learn to bear meekly the burden which must last through life.

"Alison Gwynne was aye the worst of all correspondents," pursued the old lady, "but Harold might write to you; I think he did so once or twice when he was living with me here, this summer."

"Yes!" said Olive, "we have always been good friends."

"I ken that, my dearie. It wasna little that we talked about you. He told me all that chanced long ago atween your father and himsel. Ah, that was a strange, strange thing!"

"It was so. But we have never once spoken of it—neither I, nor Mr. Gwynne."

"Harold could not. He was sair grieved, and bitterly he repented having 'robbed' you, as he ca'd it. But he was no the same man then that he is noo. She cost him muckle dule, that gay young wife of his—fair and fause, fair and fause. It's ill for a man wha in his young days comes to love sic a woman. I would like unco weel to see my dear Harold wed to some leal−hearted lassie—winsome and winning. But I fear me it will never be."

Thus the old lady's talk gently wandered on. Olive listened in silence, her eyes vacantly turned towards the wide open country that sweeps down from Duddingston Loch. The yellow, harvest−clad valley smiled; but beneath the same bright sky the loch lay quiet, dark, and still. The sunshine passed over it, and entered it not. Olive wistfully regarded the scene which seemed a symbol of her own fate. She did not murmur at it, for day by day a solemn peace was gathering over her spirit. She tried to respond with cheerfulness to the new affections that greeted her on every side; to fill each day with those duties, that by the alchemy of a meek nature are so often transmuted into pleasures. Still, at her heart's core, lay ever one long sighing thought of Harold Gwynne.

The rest of the drive was rather dull, for Mrs. Flora, usually the most talkative, cheerful old lady in the world, seemed disposed to be silent and thoughtful. Not sad—sadness rarely comes over the face of old age. All strong feelings, whether of joy or pain, belong to youth alone.

"Noo, my bairn, ye maun bide wi' Marion M'Gillivray the day," said Mrs. Flora, after a somewhat protracted silence. "Twa young things thegither will be aye happier alane, than wi' an auld wifie like me."

Olive disclaimed this, affirming, and with her whole heart, that she was never so happy as when with her good Aunt Flora.

"'Tis pleasant to hear ye say the like o' that. Ye are a sweet, sweet lassie, Olive! But it must be even as I say—I hae kept this 20th of September in my ain house alane for five−and−forty year," said the old lady, unconsciously gliding more than usual into the speech of her youth. And then she was silent until the carriage stopped at the house of the M'Gillivrays.

"I will see ye again the morn," she once more observed, as her niece descended. And then, after looking up pleasantly to the window that was filled with a whole host of juvenile M'Gillivrays vehemently nodding and smiling, Aunt Flora pulled down her veil and drove away.

"I thought you would be given up to us for to−day," said Marion, as she and Olive, now grown almost into friends, strolled out arm−in−arm along the shady walks of Morningside.

"Indeed! Did Aunt Flora say—"

"She said nothing—she never does. But for years I have noticed this 20th of September; because, when she lived with us, on this day, after teaching us in the mornings she used to go to her own room, or take a long, lonely walk, come back very pale and quiet, and we never saw her again that night. It was the only day in the year that she seemed to keep away from us. Afterwards, when I grew a woman, I found out why this was."

"Did she tell you?"

"No; Aunt Flora never talks about herself. But from her maid and foster−sister, an old woman who died awhile ago, I heard a little of the story, and guessed the rest—we women easily can," added quiet Marion, whose grave young brow already "told a tale."

"I think I guess, too. But let me hear," said Olive Rothesay; "that is, if I **may** hear."

"Oh yes. 'Tis many, many years ago. Aunt Flora was quite a girl then, and lived with Sir Andrew, her elder brother. She had 'braw wooers,' in plenty, according to Isbel Grærme (you should have seen old Isbel, cousin Olive.) However, she cared for nobody; and some said it was for the sake of a far−away cousin of her own, one of the 'gay Gordons.' But he was anything but 'gay'—delicate in health, plain to look at, and poor besides. While he lived he never said to her a word of love; but after he died,—and that was not until both were past their youth,—there came to Aunt Flora a letter and a ring. She wears it on her wedding−finger to this day!"

"And this 20th of September must have been the day he died," said Olive.

"I think so. But she never says a word, and never did."

And the two walked on silently. Olive was thinking of the long woe−wasted youth—the knowledge of love requited come too late—and then of the noble spirit which after this great blow could gird up its strength and endure, for nearly fifty years. Ay, so as to find in life not merely peace, but sweetness. Her own path looked less gloomy to the view. From the depths of her forlorn heart uprose a feeble−winged hope; it came and fluttered about her pale lips, bringing to them

> The smile of one,
> God−satisfied; and earth−undone.

Marion turned round and saw it. "Cousin Olive! how very mild, and calm, and beautiful you look! Before you came, Aunt Flora told us she had heard you were 'like a dove.' I can understand that now. I think, if I were a man, I should fall in love with you."

"With me; surely you forget! Oh no, Marion, not with me; that would be impossible!"

Marion coloured a little, but then earnestly continued, "I don't mean any one who was young and thoughtless, but some grave, wise man, who saw your beautiful soul shining in your face, and learned, slowly and quietly, to love you for your goodness. Ay, in spite of—of—" (here the frank, plain−speaking Marion again hesitated a little, but continued boldly) "any little imperfection which may make you fancy yourself different to other people. If that is your sole reason for saying, as you did the other day, that—"

"Nay, Marion, you have talked quite enough of me," interrupted Miss Rothesay.

"But you will forgive me! I could hate myself if I have pained you, seeing how much I love you, how much every one learns to love you."

"Is it so? Then I am very happy!" And the smile sat long on her face, until some chance word, or thought, awoke as ever the olden sting. Poor Olive! her spirit changed within her every hour. Yet how brave and meek a spirit it was, Heaven only knew!

"Can you guess whither I am taking you?" said Marion, as they paused before a large and handsome gateway. "Here is the Roman Catholic convent—beautiful St. Margaret's, the sweetest spot at Morningside. Shall we enter?"

Olive assented. Of late she had often thought of those old tales of forlorn women, sorrow−stricken or wronged, who, sick of life, had hidden themselves from the world in solitudes like this. Sometimes she had almost wished she could do the same. A feeling deeper than curiosity attracted her to the convent of St. Margaret's.

It was indeed a sweet place; one that a weary heart might well long after. The whole atmosphere was filled

with a soft calm—a silence like death, and yet a freshness as of new−born life. When the heavy door closed it seemed to shut out the world; and, without any sense of regret or loss, you passed, like a passing soul, into another existence.

They entered the little convent−parlour. There, from the plain, ungarnished walls, looked the two favourite pictures of Catholic worship; one, thorn−crowned, ensanguined, but still Divine; the other, bearing the pale endurance of womanhood, the Mother lifted above all mothers in blessedness and suffering. Olive gazed long upon both. They seemed meet for the place. Looking at them one felt as if all trivial earthly sorrows must crumble into dust before these two grand images of sublimated woe.

"I think," said Miss Rothesay, "if I were a nun, and had known ever so great misery, I should grow calm by looking at these pictures."

"The nuns don't pass their time in that way I assure you," answered Marion M'Gillivray. "They spend it in making such things as these." And she pointed to a case of quaint baby−like ornaments, pincushions, and artificial flowers.

"How very strange," said Olive, "to think that the interests and duties of a woman's life should sink down into such trifles as these. I wonder if the nuns are happy?"

"Stay and judge, for here comes one, my chief friend here, Sister Ignatia." And Sister Ignatia—who was, despite her quaint dress, the most bright−eyed, cheerful−looking little Scotswoman imaginable—flitted in, kissed Marion on both cheeks, smiled a pleasant welcome on the stranger, and began talking in a manner so simple and hearty, that Olive's received notions of a "nun" were quite cast to the winds. But after a while, there seemed to her something painfully solemn in looking upon the serene face, where not one outward line marked the inward current which had run on for forty years—how, none could tell. All was silence now.

They went all over the convent. There was a still pureness pervading every room. Now and then a black−stoled figure crossed their way, and vanished like a ghost. Sister Ignatia chattered merrily of their work, their beautiful flowers, and the pupils of the convent school. Happy, very happy, she said they all were at St. Margaret's; but it seemed to Olive like the aimless, thoughtless happiness of a child. Still, when there came across her mind the remembrance of herself—a woman, all alone, struggling with the world, and with her own heart; looking forward to a life's toil for bread and for fame, with which she must try to quench one undying thirst—when she thus thought, she almost longed for such an existence as this quiet monotony, without pleasure and without pain.

"You must come and see our chapel, our beautiful chapel," said sister Ignatia. "We have got pictures of our St. Margaret and all her children." And when they reached the spot—a gilded, fairy−like, flower−strewn, garden temple, she pointed out with great interest the various memorials of the sainted Scottish Queen.

Olive thought, though she did not then say, that good St. Margaret, the mother of her people, the softener of her half−savage lord, the teacher and guide of her children, was more near the ideal of womanhood than the simple, kind−hearted, but childish worshippers, who spent their lives in the harmless baby−play of decking her shrine with flowers.

"Yet these are excellent women," said Marion M'Gillivray, when, on their departure, Olive pursued her thoughts aloud. "You cannot imagine the good they do in their restricted way. But still, if one must lead a solitary maiden life, I would rather be Aunt Flora!"

"Yes, a thousand, thousand times! There is something far greater and holier in a woman who goes about the world, keeping ever her pure nun's heart sacred to Heaven, and to some human memories; not shrinking from her appointed work, but doing it meekly and diligently, hour by hour, through life's long day; waiting until at eve God lifts the burden off, saying, 'Faithful handmaid, sleep!'"

Olive spoke softly, but earnestly. Marion did not quite understand her. But she thought everything Miss Rothesay said must be true and good, and was always pleased to watch her the while, declaring that whenever she talked thus her face became "like an angel's."

Miss Rothesay spent the evening very happily, though in the noisy household of the M'Gillivrays. She listened to the elder girl's music, and let the younger tribe of "wee toddling bairnies" climb on her knee and pull her long gold curls. Finally, she began to think that some of these days there would be a sweetness in becoming an universal "Aunt Olive" to the rising generation.

She walked home, escorted valiantly by three stout boys, who guided her by a most circuitous route across Bruntsfield Links, that she might gain a moonlight view of the couchant lion of Arthur's Seat. They amused her

the whole way home with tales of High−school warfare. On reaching the garden−gate she was half surprised, yet glad, to hear the unwonted cheerfulness of her own laugh. The sunshine she daily strove to cast around her was falling faintly back upon her own heart.

"Good−night, good−night! Allan, and Charlie, and James. We must have another merry walk soon!" was her gay adieu as the boys departed, leaving her in the garden−walk, where Mrs. Flora's tall hollyhocks cast a heavy shadow up to the hall−door.

"You seem very happy, Miss Rothesay," said a voice. It came from some one standing close by. The next instant her hand was taken in that of Harold Gwynne.

But the pressure was very cold—scarcely that even of a friend. Olive's heart, which had leaped up within her, sank down heavily, so heavily, that her greeting was only the chilling words,

"I did not expect to see you here!"

"Possibly not; but I—I had business in Edinburgh. However it will not, I think, detain me long." He said this sharply, even bitterly.

Olive, startled and overwhelmed by the suddenness of this meeting, could make no answer, but as they stood beneath the lamp she glanced at the face, whose every change she knew so well. She saw that something troubled him. Forgetful of all else, her heart fled to him in sympathy and tenderness.

"There is nothing wrong, surely! Tell me, are you quite well, quite happy? You do not know how glad I am to see you, my dear friend?"

And her little gentle hand alighted on his arm like a bird of peace. Harold pressed it and kept it there, as he often did; they were used to that kind of friendly familiarity.

"You are very good, Miss Rothesay. Yes, all is well at Harbury. Pray, be quite easy on that account. But I thought, hearing how merry you were at the garden−gate, that amidst your pleasures here you scarcely remembered us at all."

His somewhat vexed tone went to Olive's heart. Alas! and upon that wildly swelling heart was a mournful seal. She could not say anything more than the quiet words,

"You were not quite right there. I never forget my friends."

"No, no! I ought to have known that. Forgive me; I speak rudely, unkindly; but I have so many things to embitter me just now. Let us go in, and you shall talk my ill−humour away, as you have done many a time."

There was a repentant accent in his voice as he drew Olive's arm in his. And she—she looked, and spoke, and smiled, as she had long learned to do. In the little quiet face, the soft, subdued manner, was no trace of any passion or emotion.

"Have you seen Aunt Flora," said Olive, as they stood together in the house.

"No! When I came she had already retired. I have only been here an hour. I passed that in walking about the garden. Jean told me you would come in soon."

"I would have come sooner had I known. How weary you must be after your journey! Come, take Aunt Flora's chair here, and rest!"

He did indeed seem to need rest. As he leaned back with closed eyes on the cushions she had placed, Olive stood and looked at him a moment. She thought, "Oh, that I were dead, and become an invisible spirit, that I might lean over him and kiss his poor worn brow into peace. But I shall never do it. Never in this world!"

She pressed back two burning tears, and then began to move about the room, arranging little household matters for his comfort. She had never done so before, and now the duties seemed sweet and homelike, like those of a sister, or—a wife. Once she thought thus—but she dared not think again, or she could not have remained unmoved. And Harold was watching her, too; following her—as she deemed—with the vacant listless gaze of weariness. But soon he turned his face from her, and whatever was written thereon Olive read no more.

He was to stay that night, for Mrs. Flora's house was always his home in Edinburgh. But he seemed disinclined to talk. One or two questions Olive put about himself and his journey to Heidelberg, but they seemed to increase his restlessness.

"I cannot tell; perhaps I shall go; perhaps not at all. We will talk the matter over tomorrow—that is, if you are still kind enough to listen."

She smiled faintly. "Little doubt of that, I think."

"Thank you! And now I will say good night," observed Harold, rising.

Ere he went, however, he looked down curiously into Olive's face.

"You seem quite strong and well now, Miss Rothesay. You have been happy here?"

"Happy—oh, yes! quite happy." Poor heart! that was forced to coin the mournful falsehood.

"I thought it would be so—I was right! Though still—but I am glad, very glad to hear it. Good−night."

He shook her hand—an easy, careless shake; not the close, lingering clasp—how different they were! Then he went quickly up−stairs to his chamber.

But hour after hour sped; the darkness changed to dawn, the dawn to light, and still Olive lay sleepless. Her heart, stirred from its serenity, again swayed miserably to and fro. Vainly she argued with herself on her folly in giving way to these emotions; counting over, even in pitiful scorn, the years that she had past her youth.

—"Three more, and I shall be a woman of thirty. Yet here I lie, drowning my pillow with tears, like a love−sick girl. Oh that this madness had visited me long ago, that I might have risen up from it like the young grass after rain! But now it falls on me like an autumn storm—it tears me, it crushes me; I shall never, never rise."

When it was broad daylight, she roused herself, bathed her brow in water, shut out the sunbeams from her hot, aching eyes, and then laid down again and slept.

Sleeping, she dreamed that she was walking with Harold Gwynne, hand−in−hand, as if they were little children. Suddenly he took her in his arms, clasping her close as a lover his betrothed; and in so doing pressed a bright steel into her heart. Yet it was such sweet death, given lovingly amidst kisses and passionate tears, that, waking, she would fain have wished it true.

But she lifted her head, saw the sunlight dancing on the floor, and knew that morning was come—that she must rise once more to renew her life's bitter strife.

CHAPTER VII.

OLIVE dressed herself carefully in her delicate−coloured morning robe. She was one of those women who take pains to appear freshest and fairest in the early hours of the day; to greet the sun as the flowers greet him, rich "in the dew of youth." Despite her weary vigil, the balmy morning brought colour to her cheek and a faint sweetness to her heart. It was a new and pleasant thing to wake beneath the same roof as Harold Gwynne; to know that his face would meet her when she descended, that she would walk and talk with him the whole day long.

Never did any woman think less of herself than Olive Rothesay. Yet as she stood twisting up her beautiful hair, she felt glad that it **was** beautiful. Once she thought of what Marion had told her about some one saying she was "like a dove." Who said it? Not Harold—that was impossible. Arranging her dress, she looked a moment, with half−mournful curiosity, at the pale, small face reflected in the mirror.

"Ah, no! There is no beauty in me. Even did he care for me, I could give him nothing but my poor, lowly woman's heart. I can give him that still. There is something sweet and holy in pouring round him this invisible flood of love. It must bring some blessing on him yet; and, despite all I suffer, the very act of loving is blessedness to me!"

So thinking, she left her chamber.

It was long before the old lady's time for rising. There was no one in the breakfast−room, but she saw Harold walking on the garden terrace. Very soon he came in with some heliotrope in his hand. He did not give it to Olive, but laid it by her plate, observing, half−carelessly,

"You were always fond of my mother's heliotropes, Miss Rothesay."

"Thank you for remembering my likings;" and Olive put the flowers in her bosom. She fancied he looked pleased; and suddenly she remembered the meaning given to the flower, "I love you!" At the thought, she began to tremble all over; though contemning her own folly the while. Even had the words been true, she and Harold were both too old for such sentimentalities.

They breakfasted alone. Harold still looked pale and weary, nor did he deny the fact that he had scarce slept. He told her all the Harbury news, but spoke little of him− self or of his plans. "They were yet uncertain," he said, "but a few more days would decide all." And then he remained silent until, a little time after, they were standing together at the window. From thence it was a pleasant view. Close beneath, a little fountain rose in slender diamond threads, and fell again with a soft trickling, like a Naiad's sigh. Bees were humming over the richest of autumn flower−gardens, which sloped down, terrace after terrace, until its boundary was hid in the little valley below. Beyond—looking in the pure September air so close that you almost see the purple of the heather—lay the Braid Hills, a horizon−line soft as that which enclosed the Happy Valley of Prince Rasselas.

There came a trembling over Harold's features.

"How beautiful and calm this is! It looks like a little quiet nest—a **home** to comfort a man's tired heart and brain. Tell me, friend, do you think one could ever find such in this world?" said he, turning suddenly round upon Olive Rothesay.

"A home!" she repeated, somewhat confusedly; for his voice had startled her from a long, silent, secret gaze upon his face. "You have often said that man needed none; that his life was in himself—in his intellect and his power. It is only we women who have a longing after rest and home."

Harold made no immediate reply; but after a while he said,

"I want to have a quiet talk with you about—yes, about Heidelberg. And I long to see once more my favourite haunt, the Hermitage of Braid. 'Tis a sweet place, and we can walk and converse there at our leisure. You will come?"

She never said him nay in anything, and he somehow unconsciously used a tone of command, like an elder brother;—but there was such sweetness in being ruled by him! Olive obeyed at once; and soon, for the thousandth time, she and Harold were walking out together arm−in−arm.

If ever there was a "lover's walk," it is that which winds along the burn−side in the Hermitage of Braid. On either side

The braes ascend like lofty wa's,

shutting out all but the small blue rift of sky above. Even the sun seems slow to peep in, as if his brightness were not needed by those who walk in the light of their own hearts. And the little birds warble, and the little burnie runs, as if neither knew there was a weary world outside, where many a heart, pure as either, grows dumb amidst its singing, and freezes slowly as it flows.

Olive walked along by Harold's side, like one in a happy dream. He looked so cheerful, so "good,"—a word she had often used, and he had smiled at—meaning those times when, beneath her influence, the bitterness melted from his proud and somewhat sarcastic spirit. Such times there were—else she could never have learned to love him as she did. Then, as now, his eyes were wont to lighten, and his lips to smile, and there came an almost angelic beauty over his face.

"I think," he said, apparently forgetting Heidelberg and all pertaining thereto, "I think my spirit is changing within me. I feel as if I had never known life until now. In vain I say unto myself, that this must be a mere fantasy of mine; I, who am marked with the 'frost of eild,' who will soon be—let me see—seven−and−thirty years old. What think you of that?"

His eyes, bent on her, spoke more than mere curiosity; but Olive, unaware, looked up and smiled.

"Why, I am getting an elderly dame myself; but I heed it not. One need mind nothing if one's heart does not grow old."

"Does yours?"

"I hope not. I would like to lead a life like Aunt Flora's—a quiet stream, that goes on singing to the end."

"Look me in the face, Olive Rothesay," said Harold, abruptly. "Nay—pardon me, but I speak like one athirst, who would fain know if any other human lips are ever satisfied. Tell me, do you look back on your life with content, and forward with hope? Are you happy?"

Olive's eyes sank on the ground.

"Do not question me so," she said, tremblingly. "In life there is nothing perfect; but I have peace, great peace. And for you there might be not only peace, but happiness."

Again there fell between them one of those pauses which rarely come save between two friends or lovers, who know thoroughly—in words or in silence—the speech of each other's hearts. Then Harold, guiding the conversation as he always did, changed it suddenly.

"I am thinking of the last time I walked here—when I came to Edinburgh this summer. There was with me one whom I regarded highly, and we talked—as gravely as you and I do now, though on a far different theme."

"What was it?"

"One suited to the season and the place, and my friend's ardent youth. He was in love, poor fellow, and he asked me about his wooing. Perhaps you may think he chose an adviser ill fitted to the task."

Harold spoke carelessly as it seemed; and waiting Olive's reply, he pulled a handful of red−brown leaves from a tree that overhung the path, and began playing with them.

"You do not answer, Miss Rothesay. Come, there is scarce a subject we have not discussed some time or other, save this. Let us, just for amusement, take my friend's melancholy case as a text, and argue concerning what young people call 'love.'"

"As you will."

"A cold acquiescence! You think, perhaps, the matter is either above or beneath **me**—that I can have no interest therein?" And his eyes, bright, piercing, commanding, seemed to force an answer.

It came, very quietly and coldly.

"I have heard you say that love was the brief madness of a man's life; if fulfilled, a burden; if unfulfilled or deceived, a curse."

"I said so, did I! Well, you give my opinions—what think you of **me**? Answer truly—like a friend."

She did so! She never could look in Harold's eyes and tell him what was not true.

"I think you are one of those men in whom strong intellect prevents the need of love. Youthful passion you may have felt; but true, deep, earnest love you never did know, and, as I believe, never will! Nay, forgive me if I err; I only take you on your own showing."

"Thank you, thank you! You speak honestly and frankly—that is something for a woman," muttered Harold;

and then there was a long, awkward pause. Oh, how one poor heart ached the while!

At last, fearing lest her silence annoyed him, Olive took courage to say, "You were going to talk to me about Heidelberg. Do so now; that is, if you are not angry with me," she added, with a little deprecatory soothing in her manner.

It seemed to touch him. "Angry! how could you think so? I am never angry with you. But what do you desire to hear about Heidelberg;—whether I am going, and when? Do you then wish—I mean, advise me to go?"

"Yes, if it is for your good! If leaving Harbury would give you rest on that one subject of which we never speak."

"But of which I, at least, think night and day, and never without a prayer—(I can pray now)—for the good angel who brought light into my darkness," said Harold, solemnly. "That comfort is with me, whatever else may—But you wanted to hear about Heidelberg?"

"Yes; tell me all. You know I like to hear."

"Well, then, I have only to decide, and I might depart immediately. Mine would be a safe, sure course; but, at the beginning, I might have a hard struggle. I do not like to take any one to share it."

"Not your mother, who loves you so?"

"No, because her love would be sorely tried. We should be strangers in a strange land; perhaps poverty would be added to our endurance; I should have to labour unceasingly, and my temper might fail. These are hard things for a woman to bear."

"Oh, you do not know what a woman's affection is!" said Olive, earnestly. "How could she be desolate when she had you with her! Little would she care for being poor! And if, when sorely tried, you were bitter at times, the more need for her to soothe you. We women can bear all things for those we love."

"Is it so?" Harold said, thoughtfully, his countenance changing, and his voice becoming soft as he looked upon her. "Do you think that any woman—I mean my mother, of course—would love **me** with this love?"

And once more, Olive, sealing up her bursting heart, answered calmly, "I do think so."

Again there was a silence. Harold broke it by saying, "You would smile to know how childishly my last walk here haunts me; I really must go and see that love−stricken friend of mine. But you, I suppose, take no interest in his wooing?"

"Oh yes! I like to hear of young people's happiness," said Olive, trying to wear an indifferent smile.

"But he was not quite happy. He did not know whether the woman he loved loved him. He had never asked her."

"Wherefore not?"

"There were several reasons. First, because he was a proud man, and, like many others, had been deceived once. He would not again let a woman mock his peace. And he was right! Do you not think so?"

"Yes, if she were one who would do this. But no true woman ever mocked true love. Rarely, **knowingly**, would she give cause for it to be cast before her in vain. If your friend be worthy, how knows he but that she may love him all the while?"

"Well, well, let that pass. He has other reasons." He paused and looked towards her, but Olive's face was drooped out of sight. He continued,—"Reasons such as men only feel. Women know not what an awful thing it is to cast one's pride, one's hope—perhaps the weal or woe of one's whole life—upon a light 'Yes' or 'No' from the lips of a thoughtless girl. I speak," he added, abruptly, "as my friend, the youth in love, would speak."

"Yes, I know—I understand. But tell me more," said Olive, drawn with trembling interest to the subject.

"His other reasons were,—that he was poor; that, if betrothed, he might have to wait years before they could marry; or, perhaps, as his health was feeble, he might die, and never call her wife at all. Therefore, though he loved her as dearly as ever man loved woman, he deemed it right, and good, and just, to keep silence evermore."

"Did he deem, even in his lightest thought, that she loved him?"

"He could not tell. Sometimes it almost seemed so."

"Then he was wrong—cruelly wrong! He thought of his own pride, not of **her**. Little he knew the long, silent agony that she must bear—the doubt of being loved bringing even the shame of loving. Little he saw of the daily struggle: the poor heart sometimes frozen into dull endurance, and then wakened into miserable throbbing life by the shining of some hope, which passes and leaves it darker and colder than before. Poor thing—poor thing!"

And utterly forgetting herself, forgetting all but the compassion learnt from sorrow, Olive spoke with strong

agitation.

Harold watched her intently. "Your words are sympathising and kind. Say on! What should he, this lover, do?"

"Let him tell her that he loves her—let him save her from the mournful struggle that wears away youth, and strength, and hope."

"What! and bind her by a promise which may take years to fulfil?"

"If he has won her heart, she is already bound. It is mockery to talk, as the world talks, of the sense of honour that leaves a woman 'free.' Tell him so! Bid him take her to his heart, that, come what will, she may feel she has a place there. Let him not shame her by the doubt that she dreads poverty or long delay. If she loves him truly, she will wait years, a whole lifetime, until he claim her. If he labour, she will strengthen him; if he suffer, she will comfort him; in the world's fierce battle, her faithfulness will be to him rest, and help, and balm."

"But," said Harold, his voice hoarse and trembling, "what if they should live on thus for years, and never marry? What if he should die?"

"Die!"

"Yes. If so, far better that he should never have spoken—that his secret should go down with him to the grave."

"What, you mean that he should die, and she never know that he loved her! O Heaven! what misery could equal that!"

As Olive spoke, the tears sprang into her eyes, and, utterly subdued, she stood still and let them flow.

Harold, too, seemed strangely moved, but only for a moment. Then he said, very softly and quietly, "Miss Rothesay, you speak like one who feels every word. These are things we learn in but one school. Tell me—as a friend, who night and day prays for your happiness—are you not speaking from your own heart? You love, or you have loved?"

For a moment Olive's senses seemed to reel. But his eyes were upon her—those truthful, truth−searching eyes. "Must I look in his face and tell him a lie," was her half−frenzied thought. "I cannot, I cannot! And he will never, never know."

She bowed her head, and answered, in a low, heart−broken murmur, one word—"Yes!"

"And, with a woman like you, to love once is to love for evermore?"

Again Olive bent her head, speechlessly, —and that was all. There was a sound as of crushed leaves, and those with which Harold had been playing fell scattered on the ground. He gave no other sign of emotion or sympathy.

For many minutes they walked on slowly, the little laughing brook beside them seeming to rise like a thunder−voice upon the dead silence. Olive listened to every ripple, that fell as it were like the boom of an engulphing wave. Nothing else she heard, or felt, or thought, until Harold spoke.

His tone was soft and very kind, and he took her hand the while. "I thank you for this confidence. You must forgive me if I did wrong in asking it. Henceforth I shall ask no more. If your life be happy, as I pray God it may, you will have no need of me. If not, hold me ever to your service as a true friend and brother."

She stooped, she leaned her brow upon the two clasped hands—her own and his—and wept as if her heart were breaking.

But very soon all this ceased, and she felt a calmness like death. Upon it broke Harold's cold, clear voice—as cold and clear as ever.

"Once more, let me tell you all I owe you—friendship, counsel, patience,—for I have tried your patience much. I pray you pardon me! From you I have learned to have faith in Heaven, peace towards men, reverence for woman. Your friendship has blessed me—may God bless you!"

His words ceased, somewhat tremulously; and she felt, for the first time, Harold's lips touch her hand. If she could have snatched his, buried it in her bosom, and poured out upon it her whole soul's love in one long kiss, she would have sunk down, and let life and being part from her as easily as from a sun−exhaled cloud.

Quietly and mutely they walked home; quietly and mutely, nay, even coldly, they parted. The time had come and passed; and between their two hearts now rose the silence of an existence.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLIVE and Harold parted at Mrs. Flora's gate. He had business in town, he said, but would return to dinner. So he walked quickly away, and Olive went in and crept up−stairs. There, she bolted her door, groped her way to the bed, and lay down. Life and strength, hope and love, seemed to have ebbed from her at once. She felt no power or desire to weep. Once or twice, she caught herself murmuring, half aloud, "It is all over—quite over. There can be no doubt now."

And then she knew, by this utter death of hope, that it must have lived **once**—a feeble, half−unconscious life, but life it was. Despite her reason, and the settled conviction to which she had tutored herself, she must have had some faint thought that Harold loved her, or would love her in time. Now, this dream gone, she might perhaps rise, as a soul rises from the death of the body, into a new existence. But of that she could not yet think. She only lay, motionless as a corse, with pale hands folded, and eyes heavily closed. Sometimes, with a strange wandering of fancy, she seemed to see herself thus, looking down, as a spirit might do upon its own olden self, with a vague compassion. Once she even muttered, in a sort of childish way,

"Poor little Olive! Poor, crushed, broken thing!"

Thus she lay for many hours, sometimes passing into what was either a swoon or a sleep. At last, she roused herself, lifted her head, and saw by the shadows that it was quite late in the day. There is great mournfulness in waking thus of one's own accord, and alone; hearing the various noises of the busy mid−day household, and feeling as if all would go on just the same without thought of us, even if we had died in that weary sleep.

Olive wished she had!—that is, had Heaven willed it. She could so easily have crept out of the bitter world, and no one have missed her! Still, if it must be, she would try once more to lift her burden, and pursue her way.

There was a little comfort for her the minute she went down−stairs. Entering the drawing−room, she met Mrs. Flora's brightest smile.

"My dear lassie, welcome! I thocht the day unco lang without ye. But ye're douf and dowie like. Hae ye no slept after your weary walk this morning?"

"This morning!" echoed poor Olive. She had half forgotten what had happened then, there had come such a death−like cloud between.

"Ye were baith away at the Hermitage, Harold tauld me. Ah! puir Harold, I am sair grieved for him."

"Wherefore?" asked Olive, awaiting to hear some horrible thing. All misfortunes seemed to come so naturally now, she felt as though she would scarce have marvelled had they told her Harold was dead.

"Because I hae scarce seen aught o' my dear Harold, and he has gane awa'."

"He is gone away," repeated Olive, slowly, as her cold hands fell heavily on her lap. She gave no other sign.

"I am sair fashed aboot it," continued the unconscious old lady. "All is no richt wi' that laddie. He cam ben frae the toun, unco wearied like, and said he must gang awa' hame at once."

"He was here then?"

"Only for a wee while. I would hae sent till ye, my dearie, but Jean thocht you were sleeping, and Harold said we had best not waken ye, for ye had seemed sair wearied. He couldna bide longer, so he bade me say fareweel to ye. Lassie—lassie, whar are ye gaun?" But Olive had already crept out of the room.

He was gone then. That last clasp of his hand was indeed the last. Oh, miserable parting! Not as between two who love, and, loving, can murmur the farewell, heart to heart, until its sweetness lingers there long after its sound has ceased; but a parting that has no voice—no hope—wherein one soul follows the other in a wild despair, crying—"Give me back my life that is gone after thee!" and from the void silence there comes no answer, until the whole earth grows blank and dark, like an universal grave.

For many days after **that** day, one of those which form the solemn epochs of life, Olive scarce lifted her head. There came to her some friendly physical ailment, cold or fever, so that she had an excuse to comply with Mrs. Flora's affectionate orders, and take refuge in the quietness of a sick chamber. There, such showers of love poured down upon her, that she arose refreshed and calmed. After a few weeks, her spirit came to her again like a little child's, and she was once more the quiet Olive Rothesay, rich in all social affections, and even content, save for the one undying thirst which on earth could never be satisfied.

After a season of rest, she began earnestly to consider her future, especially with respect to her Art. She longed

to go back to it, and drink again at its wells of peace. For dearly, dearly she loved it still. Half−smiling, she began to call her pictures her children, and to think of the time when they, a goodly race, would live, and tell no tale of their creator's woe. This Art−life—all the life she had, and all she would leave behind—must not be sacrificed by any miserable contest with an utterly hopeless human love. Therefore she determined to quit Harbury,—and at once, before she began to paint her next picture. Her first plan had been to go and live in London, but this was overruled by Mrs. Flora Rothesay.

"Bide ye here wi' me, my dear niece. Come and dwell amang your ain folk, your father's kin. Ye'll be aye happy, for ye are dearly loved."

And so it was at last fixed to be. But first Olive must go back to Farnwood, to wind up the affairs of her little household, and to arrange about Christal. She had lately thought a good deal of this young girl; chiefly, perhaps, because she was now so eagerly clinging to every interest that could occupy her future life. She remembered, with a little compunction, how her heart had sprung to Christal on her first coming, and how that sympathy had slowly died away, possibly from its being so lightly reciprocated. Though nominally one of the household at the Dell, Miss Manners had gradually receded from it; so that by degrees the interest with which Olive had once regarded her, melted down into the quiet, duty−bound liking of an ordinary domestic tie. Whether this should be continued, became now a matter of question. Olive felt almost indifferent on the subject, but determined that Christal herself should decide. She never would give up the girl, not even to go and live in the dear quiet household of Aunt Flora. Having thus far made up her mind, Miss Rothesay fixed the day for her return to Farnwood—a return looked forward to with a mixture of fear and yearning. But the trial must be borne. It could not be for long.

Ever since his departure Olive had never heard the sound of Harold's name. Mrs. Flora did not talk of him at all. This, her niece thought, sprang from the natural forgetfulness of old age, which, even when least selfish, seems unconsciously to narrow its interests to the small circle of its own simple daily life. But perhaps the old lady was more quick−sighted than Olive dreamed; for such a true and tried woman's heart could hardly be quite frozen, even with the apathy of eighty years.

A few days before Olive's journey Mrs. Flora called her into her own room.

"I've got ae thing or anither to say to ye, lassie; ye'll listen till 't, if sae be ye're no weary o' the clavers of an auld, auld wife."

"Aunt Flora!" said Olive, in affectionate reproach, and, sitting down at her feet, she took the withered hand and laid it on her neck.

"My sweet, wee lassie—my bonnie, bonnie birdie!" said the tender−hearted old lady, who often treated her grand−niece as if she were a child. "And to think that for sae mony a year I should live here, and no ken that puir Angus had left a daughter. My bairnie, ye maun come back soon."

"In a month, dear Auntie Flora."

"A month seems unco lang. At eighty years one shouldna boast o' the morrow. That is why I ettle to tell ye now what rests on my mind. But dinna look sae feared—it's just naething ava."

"Well, dear aunt, let me hear it now."

"'Tis anent the warldly gear that I will leave ahint me;—ower muckle as some folk say. Maybe so—maybe not. I hae been aye careful o' the gude things Heaven lent."

—She paused; but Olive, not quite knowing what to say, said nothing at all. Mrs. Flora continued:

"God has gi'en me length o' days—I hae seen the young grow auld, and the auld perish. Some I wad fain hae chosen to come after me on earth hae gane awa' to heaven before me; some hae wealth eneuch, and need nae mair. Of all my kith and kin there is nane to whom the bit siller can do gude, but my niece Olive, and Harold Gwynne. Ye turn frae me—does that grieve ye, lassie? Nay, his right is no like your ain. But he comes of blood that was ance sib to ours. Alison was a Gordon by the mother's side."

As Mrs. Flora uttered the name, Olive felt a movement in the left hand that lay on her neck; the aged fingers were fluttering to and fro over the diamond ring. She looked up, but there was perfect serenity on the face. And, turning back, she prayed that the like peace might come to **her** in time.

"Afore ye came hither," continued Mrs. Flora, "I thocht to mak Harold my heir, and that he should take the name of Gordon—for dearly I loed that name, in auld lang syne. But nae mair o' that. Ah, lassie! even in this warld God can wipe away all tears from our eyes, so that we may look clearly forth unto the eternal land."

"Amen, amen!" murmured Olive Rothesay—aye, though while she uttered the prayer, her own tears blindingly

rose. But her aunt's soft cold hand glided silently on her drooped head, pressing its throbbings into peace.

"I am wae to think," continued the old lady, "that ye are the last o' the Rothesay line. The **name** maun end, even should Olive marry."

"I shall never marry, Aunt Flora! I shall live as you have done—God make my life equally worthy!"

And her eyes, full of solemn patience, met the penetrating gaze of her aunt.

"Is it e'en sae? Then, Olive, my child! God comfort thee with His peace."

Mrs. Flora said this, kissed her on the forehead, and asked no more. It might be that she divined all. Shortly afterwards, she again began to speak about her will. She wished to be just, she said, and to leave her property where it would be most required. Her heart inclined chiefly to her niece, as being a woman, struggling alone through the world; whereas Harold, firmly settled in his curacy, would not need additional fortune.

"Oh, but he does need it; you little know how sorely!" cried Olive.

"Eh, my dear? He, a minister—sae weel to do i' the warld! What mean ye?"

Olive drew back, afraid lest she had betrayed too much of the secret so painfully shared between her and Harold Gwynne. She trembled and blushed beneath the old lady's keen eyes. At last she said, beseechingly,

"Aunt Flora, do not question me—I cannot, ought not, to tell you any more than this—that there may come a time when this money might save him from great misery."

"Misery aye follows sin," said Mrs. Flora, almost sternly. "Has he dune wickedly in the sight o' God or man? Am I deceived in him, my dear Harold—poor Alison's Harold?"

"No, no, no! He is noble, just, and true. There is no one like him in the whole world," cried Olive, passionately; and then stopped, covered with blushes. But soon the weakness passed, and she said, quietly though very earnestly, "Listen to me, Aunt Flora, for this once. Harold Gwynne,"—she faltered not over the name,—"Harold Gwynne is, and will be always, my dear friend and brother. I know more of his affairs than any one else; and I know, too, that he may be in great poverty one day. For me, I have only my poor self to work for; and work I must, since it is the comfort of my life. As to this fortune, I need it not—how should I? I pray you leave all to him."

Mrs. Flora wrapped her arms round her niece without speaking—nor did she again refer to the subject, either then, or at any other time.

But the night before Olive left Edinburgh she bade her farewell with a solemn blessing—the more solemn, as it was given in words taken out of the Holy Book which she had just closed—words never used lightly by the aged and strict Presbyterian.

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee! The Lord cause His face to shine upon thee! **The Lord give thee thy heart's desire, and fulfil all thy mind**."

Olive rose with an indescribable sense of hope and peace. As she left the room she looked once more at her aunt. Mrs. Flora sat in her crimson chair, her hands laid on her knee, her face grave, but serene, and half lifted, as that of one who hearkens to some unseen call. A secret consciousness struck Olive that in this world she should never more hear the voice, or see the face, of one who had been truly a saint on earth.

It was indeed so.

CHAPTER IX.

COMING home!—coming home! In different hearts how differently sound the words! They who in all their wanderings have still the little, well−filled, love−expectant nest whereto they may wing their way, should think sometimes of the many there are to whom the whole wide world is all alike; whose sole rest must be in themselves; who never can truly say, "I am going home," until they say it with eyes turned longingly towards a Home unseen.

Something of this mournfulness felt Olive Rothesay. It was dreary enough to reach her journey's end alone, and have to wait some hours at the small railway station; and then, tired and worn, to be driven for miles across the country through the gloomiest of all gloomy November days. Still, the dreariness passed, when she saw, shining from afar, the light from the windows of Farnwood Dell. As the chaise stopped, out came running old Hannah, the maid, with little Ailie too; while, awaiting her in the parlour, were Christal and Mrs. Gwynne. **No one else!** Olive saw that in one moment, and blamed herself for having wished—what she had no right to hope—what had best not be.

Mrs. Gwynne embraced her warmly—Christal with dignified grace. The young lady looked gay and pleased, and there was a subdued light in her black eyes which almost softened them into sweetness. The quick, restless manner in which she had in− dulged at times since she came to Farnwood seemed melting into a becoming womanliness. Altogether, Christal was improved.

"Well, now I suppose you will be wanting to hear the news of all your friends," said Miss Manners, with smiles bubbling round her pretty mouth. "We are not all quite the same as you left us. To begin with—let me see—Mr. Harold Gwynne—"

"Of that, Miss Christal, I will beg you not to speak. It is a painful subject to me," observed Mrs. Gwynne, with a vexed air. "You need not look at me so earnestly, dear, kind Olive! All is well with me and with my son; but he has done what I think is not exactly good for him, and it somewhat troubles me. However, we will talk of this another time."

"More news do you want, Olive?" (Christal now sometimes called her so.) "Well, then, Dame Fortune is in the giving mood. She has given your favourite Mr. Lyle Derwent a fortune of 1000*l*. a year, and a little estate to match!"

"I am so glad! for his sake, good dear Lyle!"

"**Dear** Lyle!" repeated Christal, turning round with a sparkle either of pleasure or anger in her glittering eyes; but it was quenched before it met those of Olive. "Well, winning is one thing, deserving is another!" she continued, merrily. "I could have picked out a dozen worthy, excellent young men, who would have better merited the blessing of a rich uncle, ay, and made a better use of his money, too."

"Lyle would thank you if he knew," said Mrs. Gwynne.

"That he ought, and that he does, and that he shall do, every day of his life!" cried Christal, lifting up her tall figure with a sudden haughtiness, not the less real because she laughed the while; and then making one light bound, she vanished from the room.

Olive, left alone with Mrs. Gwynne, would fain have taken her hands, and said, as she had oft done before, "Friend, tell me all that troubles you—all that concerns you and **him**." But now a faint fear repelled her. However, Harold's mother, understanding her looks, observed,

"You are anxious, my dear. Never was there such a faithful friend to me and to my son! I wish you had been here a week ago, and then you might have helped me to persuade him not to go away."

"He is gone, then, to Heidelberg?"

"Heidelberg!—who mentioned Heidelberg?" said Mrs. Gwynne, sharply. "Has he told you more than he told me?"

Olive, sorely repentant for the words that had burst from her unwittingly, be− gan to soothe the natural jealousy which she had aroused. "You know well, Mr. Gwynne has no nearer friend than his mother; only I have heard him talk of having friends at Heidelberg—of wishing to go thither."

"He has not gone, then. He has started with his friend, Lord Arundale, to travel all through Europe. It is scarce meet, I think, for one of his cloth, and it shows a wandering and restless mind. I know not what has come over my

dear Harold."

"Was it a sudden journey?—is it long since he went," said Olive, shading her eyes from the fire−light.

"Only yesterday. I told him you were coming to−day; and he desired me to say how grieved he was that he thus missed you, but it was unavoidable. He had kept Lord Arundale waiting already, and it would not be courteous to delay another day. You will not mind?"

"Oh no! oh no!" The hand was pressed down closer over the eyes. No other word or gesture betrayed the cold sharp pain, not stilled even yet. Poor Olive!

Mrs. Gwynne pursued. "Though I have all confidence in my son, yet I own this sudden scheme has troubled me. His health is better;—why could he not stay at Harbury?"

Olive, wishing to discover if she knew aught, or how much, of her son's sad secret, observed, "It is a monotonous life that Mr. Gwynne leads here—one hardly suited for him."

"Ah, I know," said the mother, sighing. "His heart is little in his calling. I feared so long ago. But it is not that which drives him abroad; for I told him if he still wished to resign his duties to his curate, we would give up the Parsonage, and he should take pupils. There is a charming little house in the village that would suit us. But no, he seemed to shrink from this plan too; he said he must go away from Harbury."

"And for how long?"

"I cannot tell—he did not say. I should think, not above a year—his mother may not have many more years to spend with him;" and there was a little trembling of Mrs. Gwynne's mouth; but she continued with dignity: "Do not imagine, Olive, that I mean to blame my son. He has done what he thought right. Against my wish, or my happiness, he would not have done it at all. So I did not let him see any little pain it might have given me. 'Twas best not. Now we will let the subject rest."

But though they spoke no more, Olive speculated vainly on what had induced Harold to take this precipitate journey. She thought she had known him so thoroughly—better than any one else could. But in him lay mysteries beyond her ken. She could only rest on that sense, which had comforted her in she suffered;—an entire faith in him and in all his goodness. While a woman has that, even the most hopeless or sorrow−tried love cannot be altogether bitterness.

Mrs. Gwynne sat an hour or two, and then rose to return to the Parsonage. "We must be home before it is dark, little Ailie and I. We have no one to take care of us now."

There was a light trace of pain visible as she said this. When she took her grandchild by the hand, and walked down the garden, it seemed to Olive that her step was less firm than usual. The heart so true to Harold sprang tenderly to Harold's mother.

"Let me walk with you a little way, Mrs. Gwynne. I am thoroughly rested now; and as for coming back alone, I shall not mind it."

"What a little trembling arm it is for me to lean on!" said Mrs. Gwynne, smiling, when, after some faint resistance, she had taken Olive for a companion. "'Tis nothing like my Harold's, and yet I am glad to have it. I am afraid I shall often have to look to it now Harold is away. Are you willing, Olive?"

"Quite, quite willing!" And, oh! how glad, how thankful she felt, that her passionate devotion could expend itself upon one who was dear unto him!

Olive went nearly all the way to Harbury. She was almost happy, walking between Harold's mother and Harold's child. But when she parted from them she felt alone, quite alone. Then first she began to realise the truth, that the dream of so many months was now altogether ended! It had been something, even after her sorrow began, to feel that Harold was near; that, although days might pass without her seeing him, still he **was** there—within a few miles. Any time, sitting wearily in her painting−room, she might hear his knock at the door; or in any walk, however lonely and sad, there was at least the possibility of his face crossing her path, and, despite herself, causing her heart to bound with joy. Now, all these things could not be again. She went homeward along the dear old Harbury road, knowing that no possible chance could make his well−beloved image appear to brighten its loneliness; that where they had so often walked, taking sweet counsel together as familiar friends, she must learn to walk alone. Perhaps, neither there nor elsewhere would she ever walk with Harold more!

In her first suffering, in her brave resolve to quit Harbury, she had not thought how she should feel when all was indeed over. She had not pictured the utter blankness of a world wherein Harold was not. The snare broken and her soul escaped, she knew not how it would beat its broken wings in the dun air, meeting nothing but the

black, silent waste, ready once more to flutter helplessly down into the alluring death.

Olive walked along with feet heavy and slow. In her eyes were no tears—she had wept them all away long since. She did not look up much; but still she saw, as one sees in a dream, all that was around her—the white, glittering, grass, the spectral hedges, the trees laden with a light snow, silent, motionless, stretching their bare arms up to the dull sky. No, not the sky, that seemed far, far off; between it and earth interposed a mist, so thick and cold that it blinded sight and stifled breath. She could not look up at God's dear heaven—she almost felt that through the gloom the pitying Heaven could not look at her. But after a while the mist changed a little, and then Olive drew her breath, and her thoughts began to form themselves as she went along.

"I am now alone, quite alone. I must shut my life up in myself—look to no one's help, yearn for no one's love. What I receive I will take thankfully; but I have no claim upon any one in this wide world. Many pleasant friendships I have, many tender ties, but none close enough to fill the void in a soul that was ever thrilling with its store of passionate love. Once it spent them wildly, till Heaven said, 'It is enough!' and took my idol. It has been the same once more. Now I must sweep out my heart's silent chamber, and keep it pure and empty for the Divine Guest."

Over and over again she said to herself, "I am alone—quite alone in the world;" and at last the words seemed to strike the echo of some old remembrance. But it was one so very dim, that for a long time Olive could not give it any distinct form. At last she recollected the letter which, ten years ago, she had put away in the secret drawer of her father's desk. Strange to say, she had never thought of it since. Perhaps this was because, at the time, she had instinctively shuddered at the suggestions it gave, and so determined to banish them. And then the quick changing scenes of life had prevented her ever recurring to the subject. Now, when all had come true, when on that desert land which, still distant, had seemed so fearful to the girl's eyes, the woman's feet already stood, she turned with an eager desire to the words which her father had written—"**To his daughter Olive, when she was quite alone in the world**."

Reaching home, and hearing Christal's light voice warbling some Italian song, Olive stayed not, but went at once to her own apartment, half parlour, half studio. There was a fire lit, and candles. She fastened the door that she might not be interrupted, and sat down before her desk.

She found some difficulty in opening the secret drawer, for the spring was rusty from long disuse, and her own fingers trembled much. When at last she held the letter in her hand, its yellow paper and faded ink struck her painfully. It seemed like suddenly coming face to face with the dead.

A solemn, anxious feeling stole over her. Ere breaking the seal, she lingered long; she tried to call up all she remembered of her father—his face—his voice—his manners. Very dim everything was! She had been such a mere child until he died, and the ten following years were so full of the action, passion, and endurance of much−tried womanhood, that they made the old time look pale and distant. She could hardly remember how she used to feel then, least of all how she used to feel towards her father. She had loved him, she knew, and her mother had loved him, ay, long after love became only memory. He had loved them, too, in his quiet way. Olive thought, with tender remembrance, of his kiss on that early morning when, for the last time, he had left his home. And for her mother! Often, during Mrs. Rothesay's declining days, had she delighted to talk of the time when she was a young, happy wife, and of the dear love that Angus bore her. Something, too, she hinted of her own faults, which had once shadowed that love, and something Olive's own childish memory told her that this was true. But she repelled the thought, remembering that her father and mother were now together before God.

At length, with an effort, she opened the letter. She started to see its date—the last night Captain Rothesay ever spent at home—the night, which of all others, she had striven to remember clearly, because they were all three so happy together, and he had been so kind, so loving, to her mother and to her. Thinking of him on this wise, with a most tender sadness, she began to read:

OLIVE ROTHESAY—MY DEAR CHILD!"It may be many—many years—(I pray so, God knows!) before you open this letter. If so, think of me as I sit writing it—or rather as I sat an hour ago—by your mother's side, with your arms round my neck. And, so thinking of me, consider

what a fierce struggle I must have had to write as I am going to do—to confess what I never would have confessed while I lived, or while your mother lived. I do it, because remorse is strong upon me; because I would fain that my Olive—the daughter who may comfort me, if I live—should, if I die, make atonement for her father's sins. Ay, sins. Think how I must be driven, thus to humble myself before my own child—to unfold to my pure daughter that— But I will tell the tale plainly, without any exculpation or reserve.

"I was very young when I married Sybilla Hyde. God be my witness! I loved her then, and in my inmost heart I have loved her evermore. Remember, I say this—hear it, as if I were speaking from my grave—Olive, **I did love your mother**. Would to Heaven she had loved me, or shown her love, only a little more!

"Soon after our marriage I was parted from my wife for some years. You, a girl, ought not to know—and I pray may never know—the temptations of the world and of man's own nature. I knew both, and I withstood both. I came back, and clasped my wife to the most loving and faithful heart that ever beat in a husband's breast. I write this even with tears—I, who have been so cold. But in this letter—which no eye will ever see until I and your mother have lain together long years in our grave—I write as if I were speaking, not in my own worldly self, but as I should speak then.

"Well, between my wife and me there came a cloud. I know not whose was the fault—perhaps mine, perhaps hers; or, it might be, both. But there the cloud was—it hung over my home, so that I could find therein no peace, no refuge. It drove me to money−getting excitement, to amusement—at last to crime!

"In the West Indies there was one who had loved me, in vain,—mark you, I said **in vain**,—but with the vehemence of her southern blood. She was a Quadroon lady —one of that miserable race, the children of planters and slaves, whose beauty is their curse, whose passion knows no law except a blind fidelity. And, God forgive me! that poor wretch was faithful unto me.

"She followed me to England without my knowledge. Little she had ever heard of marriage; she cared nothing for mine. I did not love her—not with a pure heart as I loved Sybilla. But I pitied her. Sometimes I turned from my dreary home—where no eye brightened at mine, where myself and my interests were nothing—and I thought of this woman, to whom I was all the world. My daughter Olive, if ever you be a wife, and would keep your husband's love, never let these thoughts darken his spirit! Give him your whole heart, and he will ask no other. Make his home sweet and pleasant to him, and he will not stray from it. Bind him round with cords of love —fast—fast. Oh, that my wife had had strength so to encircle me!

"But she had not; and so the end came! Olive, you are not my **only** child.

"I have no desire to palliate my sin. Sin, I know it was, heavy and deadly; against God's law, against my trusting wife, and against that hapless creature on whom I brought a whole life−time of misery. Ay, not on her alone, but on that innocent being who has received from me nothing but the heritage of shame, and to whom in this world I can never make atonement. No man can! I felt this when she was born. It was a girl, too—a helpless girl. I looked on the little faces sleeping so purely, and remembered that on her brow would rest through life a perpetual stain; and that I, her father, had fixed it there! Then there awoke in me a remorse which can never die. For, alas, Olive, I have more to unfold! My re− morse, like my crimes, was selfish at the root, and I wreaked it on her, who, if guilty, was less guilty than I.

"One day I came to her, restless, bitter in spirit, unable to hide the worm that was continually gnawing at my heart. She saw it there, and her proud spirit rose up in anger; she poured on me a torrent of reproachful words. I answered them as one who had erred like me was sure to answer. Poor wretch! I reviled her as having been the cause of my misery. When I saw her in her fury, I contrasted her image with that of the pale, patient, trusting creature I had left that morning—my wife, my poor Sybilla—until, hating myself, I absolutely loathed **her**—the enchantress who had been my undoing. With her shrill voice yet pursuing me, I precipitately left the house. Next day mother and child had disappeared! Whither, I knew not; and I never have known, though I left no

effort untried to solve a mystery which made me feel like a **murderer**.

"Nevertheless, a feeling rests with me that they are still alive—these wretched two. If I thought not so, I should almost go mad at times.

"Olive, have pity on your father, and hearken to what I implore. Whilst I live, I shall continue this search—but I may die without having had the chance of making atonement. In that case I entreat of my daughter Olive, who will, I foresee, grow up noble and virtuous among women, to stand between her father and his sin. If you have no other ties—if you never marry, but live alone in the world—seek out and protect that child! Remember, she is of your own blood—**she** , at least, never wronged you. In showing mercy to her, you do so to me, your father; who, when you read this, will have been for years among the dead, though the evil that he caused may still remain unexpiated. Oh! think that this is his voice crying out from the dust, beseeching you to absolve his memory from guilt. Save me from the horrible thought, now haunting me evermore, that the being who owes me life may one day heap curses on her father's name!

"Herewith enclosed you will find instructions respecting an annuity I wish paid toto the woman. It was placed in —'s bank by Mr. Wyld, whom, however, I deceived concerning it—I am now old enough in the school of hypocrisy. Hitherto the amount has never been claimed.

"Olive, my daughter, forgive me! Judge me not harshly. I never would have asked this of you while your mother lived—your mother, whom I **loved**, though I wronged her so grievously. In some things, perhaps, she erred towards me; but I ought to have shown her more sympathy, and have dealt gently with her tender nature, so unlike my own. May God forgive us both!—God, in whose presence we shall both be, when you, our daughter, read this record. And may He bless you evermore, prays your loving father,

"ANGUS ROTHESAY.

"In my shame, I have not yet written the name of that hapless woman. It was Celia Manners. To the child, I remember, she gave a remarkable name—I think, that of **Christal**."

It ceased—this voice from the ten years' silent grave of Angus Rothesay. His daughter sat motionless, her fixed eyes blindly out−gazing, her whole frame cold and rigid, frozen into the likeness of a statue of stone.

CHAPTER X.

RIVETTED by an inexplicable influence, Olive had read the letter through, without once pausing or blenching;—read it as though it had been some strange romance of misery, not relating to herself at all. She felt unable to comprehend or realise it, until she came to the name—"Christal." Then the whole truth burst upon her, wrapping her round with a cold horror, and, for the time, paralysing all her faculties. When she awoke, the letter was still in her hand, and from it still there stood out clear the name, which had long been a familiar word. Therefore, all this while, destiny had been leading her to work out her father's desire. The girl who had dwelt in her household for months, whom she had tried to love, and generously sought to guide, was—**her sister**.

But what a chaos of horror was revealed by this discovery! Olive's first thought was of her mother, who had showered kindness on this child of shame; who, dying, had unconsciously charged her to "take care of Christal."

With a natural revulsion of feeling, Olive thrust the letter from her. Its touch seemed to pollute her fingers.

"Oh, my mother—my poor, wronged mother!—well for you that you never lived to see this day. You—so good, so loving, so faithfully remembering him even to the last. But I—I have lived to shrink with abhorrence from the memory of my own father."

Suddenly she stopped, aghast at thinking that she was thus speaking of the dead—the dead from whom her own life had sprung.

"I am bewildered," she murmured. "Heaven help me! I know not what I say or do." And Olive fell on her knees.

She had no words to pray with; but, in such time of agony, all her thoughts were prayers. After a while, these calmed her, and made her strong to endure one more trial—different from, perhaps even more awful than, all the rest.

Much sorrow had been her life's portion; but never until this hour had Olive Rothesay stood face to face with crime. She had now to learn the crowning lesson of virtue—how to deal with vice. Not by turning away in saintly pride, but by boldly con− fronting it, with an eye stern in purity, yet melting in compassion; remembering ever—

> How all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
> And He who might the vantage best have took
> Found out the remedy.

Angus Rothesay's daughter read over once more the record of his sin. In so doing, she was struck with the depth of that remorse which, to secure a future expiation, threw aside pride, reserve, and shame. How awful must have been the repentance which had impelled such a confession, and driven a father to humble himself in the dust before his own child! She seemed to hear, rising from the long−closed grave, that mournful, beseeching cry, "Atone my sin!" It silenced even the voice of her mother's wrongs.

This duty then remained, to fulfil which—as it would appear—Olive had been left alone on earth. The call seemed like that of fate; nay, she half−shuddered to think of the almost supernatural chance, which had arranged everything before her, and made her course so plain. But it had often happened so. Her life appeared, as some lives do, all woven about with mysteries; threads of guidance, first unseen, and then distinctly traced, forcing on the mind that sweet sense of invisible ministry which soothes all suffering, and causes a childlike rest on the Omnipotence which out of all evil continually evolves good.

With this thought there dawned upon Olive a solemn sense of calm. To lay down this world's crown of joys, and to take up its cross—no longer to be ministered unto, but to minister,—this was to be her portion henceforth, and with this holy work was her lonely life to be filled.

"I will do it," she cried. "O, my poor father, may God have forgiven you, as my mother would, and as I now do! It is not mine to judge your sin; enough for me is the duty to atone it. How can this be best fulfilled?"

She sat long in silence, mournfully pondering. She tried to collect every scattered link of memory respecting

what she had heard of Christal's mother. For such, she now knew, was the woman who, for the time, had once strongly excited her girlish imagination. That visit, and its incidents, now came vividly back upon her memory. Much there was which made her naturally revolt from the thought of this unhappy creature. How could it be otherwise with her mother's child? Still, amidst all, she was touched by the love of this other most wretched mother, who—living and dying—had renounced her maternal claim; and impressed upon her daughter's mind a feigned story, rather than let the brand of illegitimate birth rest upon the poor innocent.

Suddenly she heard from the next room Christal's happy, unconscious voice, singing merrily.

"My sister!" Olive gasped. "She is my sister—my father's child!"

And there came upon her, in a flood of mingled compassion and fear, all that Christal would feel when she came to know the truth! Christal—so proud of her birth—her position—whose haughty nature, inherited from both father and mother, had once struggled wrathfully against Olive's mild control. Such a blow as this would either crush her to the earth, or, rousing up the demon in her nature, drive her to desperation. Thinking thus, Olive forgot everything in pity for the hapless girl;—everything, save an awe−struck sense of the crime which, as its necessary consequence, entailed such misery from generation to generation.

It seemed most strange that Christal had lived for so many years, cherishing her blind belief, nay, not even seeking to investigate it when it lay in her power. For since the day she returned from France, she had never questioned Miss Vanbrugh, nor alluded to the subject of her parentage. Such indifference seemed incredible, and could only be accounted for by Christal's light, careless nature, her haughtiness, or her utter ignorance of the world.

What was Olive to do? Was she to reveal the truth, and thus blast for ever this dawning life, so full of hope? Was her hand to place the stigma of shame on the brow of this young creature?—a girl too! There might come a time when some proud, honourable man, however loving, would scruple to take to his bosom as a wife one whose erring mother had never known that name. But then—was Olive to fix on her own soul the perpetual burden of this secret—the continual dread of its betrayal—the doubt, lest one day, chance might bring it to Christal's knowledge, perhaps when the girl would no longer be shielded by a sister's protection, or comforted by a sister's love?

While she struggled in this conflict, she heard a voice at the door.

"Olive—Olive!"—the tone was more affectionate than usual. "Are you never coming? I am quite tired of being alone. Do let me into the studio?"

With a mazed, terrified look, Olive sprang to her desk and hid the letter therein. Then, without speaking—she had no power to speak—she mechanically unlocked the door.

"Well, I am glad to get at you at last," cried Christal, merrily. "I thought you were going to spend the night here. But what is the matter? You are as white as a ghost. You can't look me in the face. Why, one would almost imagine you had been planning a murder, and I was the 'innocent, unconscious victim,' as the novels have it."

"You—a victim—alas! alas!" cried Olive, in fearful agitation. But by an almost superhuman effort, she repressed it, and added, quietly, "Christal, my dear, don't mind me. It is nothing—only I feel ill—excited."

"Why, what have you been doing?"

Well for Olive she could answer as she did, with truth, "I have been sitting here alone—thinking of old times—reading old letters."

"Whose? nay, but I will know," answered Christal, half playfully, half in earnest, as though there were some distrust in her mind.

Again Olive murmured the truth: "It was my father's—my poor lost father's."

"Is that all? Oh, then don't vex yourself about any old father dead and gone. I wouldn't! Though, to be sure, I never had the chance. Little I ever knew or cared about mine," added the girl, lightly.

Olive turned away, and was silent; but Christal, who seemed, for some reason best known to herself, to be in a particularly unreserved and benignant humour, said kindly, "You poor little trembling thing, how ill you have made yourself! You can scarcely stand alone; give me your hand, and I'll help you to the sofa."

But Olive shrank from the touch as if there had been a sting in the slender fingers which lay on her arm. She looked at them, and a circumstance, long forgotten, rushed back upon her memory,—something she had noticed to her mother the first night that the girl came home. Tracing the beautiful hereditary mould of the Rothesay line, she now knew why Christal's hand was like her own father's.

A shiver of instinctive repugnance came over her, and then the mysterious voice of kindred blood awoke in her heart. She, the poor lonely one, took and passionately clasped that hand—the hand of **her sister**.

"O Christal! let us love one another—we two, who have no other tie left to us on earth," she cried, weeping.

But Christal was rarely in a pathetic mood. She only shrugged her shoulders, and then stroked Olive's arm with a patronising air. "Come, your journey has been too much for you, and you had no business to wander off in that way with Mrs. Gwynne; you shall lie down and rest a little, and then go to bed."

But Olive shrank from night and its solitude. She knew there was no slumber for her. When she was a little recovered, feeling unable to talk, she asked Christal to read aloud.

The young lady looked annoyed. "Pleasant! to be made a mere lady's companion! Miss Rothesay forgets who I am, I think," muttered she, though apparently not meaning Olive to hear her proud speech.

But Olive did hear, and shuddered at the hearing.

Miss Manners carelessly took up the newspaper, and read the first paragraph which caught her eye. It was one of those mournful episodes which are sometimes revealed at the London police−courts. A young girl—a lady swindler—had been brought up for trial there. In her defence came out the story of a life, cradled in shame, nurtured in vice, and only working out its helpless destiny—that of a rich man's deserted illegitimate child. The report added, that "The convict was led from the dock in a state of violent excitement, calling down curses on her parents, but especially on her father, who, she said, had cruelly forsaken her mother. She ended by exclaiming that it was to him she herself owed all her life of misery, and that her blood was upon his head."

"It **was** upon his head," burst forth Christal, whose sympathies, as by some fatal instinct, seemed ever attracted by a case like this. "If I had been that girl, I would have hunted my vile father through the world. While he lived, I would have heaped my miseries in his path, that everywhere they might torture and shame him. When he died, I would have trampled on his grave, and cursed him!"

She stood up, her eyes flashing, her hands clenched in one of those paroxysms of fierce emotion, which to her came so rarely, but, when roused, were terrible to witness. Her mother's soul was in the girl. Olive saw it, and from that hour knew that, whatever it cost her, the secret of Christal's birth must be buried in her own breast for evermore.

Most faithfully Miss Rothesay kept her inward vow, to watch over her sister evermore. But it entailed upon her the necessity of changing her whole plans for the future. For some inexplicable reason, Christal refused to go and live with her in Edinburgh, or, in fact, to leave Farnwood at all. Therefore Olive's despairing wish to escape from Harbury, and all its bitter associations, was entirely frustrated. It would be hard to say whether she lamented or rejoiced at this. The brave resolve had cost her much, yet she scarcely regretted that it would not be fulfilled. There was a secret sweetness in living near Harbury—in stealing, as it were, into a daughter's place beside the mother of him she still so fervently loved. But, think− ing of him, she did not suffer now. For all great trials there is an unseen compensation; and this last shock, with the change it had wrought, made her past sorrows grow dim. Life became sweeter to her, for it was filled with a new and holy interest. It could be so filled, she found, even when love had come and vanished, and only duty remained.

She turned from all repining thoughts, and tried to make for herself a peaceful nest in her little home. And thither, above all, she desired to allure and to keep, with all gentle wiles of love, her sister. **Her sister!** Often, yearning for kindred ties, she longed to fall on Christal's neck, and call her by that tender name! But she knew it could never be, and her heart had been too long schooled in the patience of silent, self−denying, unrequited love, to murmur because in every human tie this seemed to be perpetually her doom. Her **doom**? Say, rather, her glory!

Harold Gwynne wrote frequently from Rome, but only to his mother. However, he always mentioned Miss Rothesay, and kindly. Once, when Mrs. Gwynne was unable to write herself, she asked Olive to take her place, and indulge Harold with a letter.

"He will be so glad, you know. I think of all his friends there is none whom my son regards more warmly than you," said the mother. And Olive could not refuse. Why, indeed, should she feel reluctance? He had never been her lover; she had no right to feel wounded, or angry at his silence. Certainly, she would write.

She did so. It was a quiet, friendly letter, making no reference to the past—expressing no regret, no pain. It was scarce like the earnest letters which she had once written to him—that time was past. She struggled to make it an epistle as from any ordinary acquaintance—easy and pleasant, full of everything likely to amuse him. She knew he would never dream how it was written—with a cold, trembling hand and throbbing heart, its smooth

sentences broken by pauses of burning, blinding tears.

She said little about herself or her own affairs, save to ask that, being in Rome, he would contrive to find out the Vanbrughs, of whom she had heard nothing for a long time. Writing, she paused a moment to think whether she should not apologise for giving him this trouble. But then she remembered his words—almost the last she had heard him utter—that she must always consider him "as a friend and brother."

"I will do so," she murmured; and despite all her pain at his silence, there was great sweetness in the thought. "I will not doubt him, or his true regard for me. It is all he can give; and while he gives me that, I shall endure life contentedly, even unto the end."

CHAPTER XI.

IT was mid−winter before the inhabitants of the Dell were visited by their friend, Lyle Derwent, now grown a rich and important personage. Olive rather regretted his apparent neglect, for it grieved her gentle spirit to suspect a change in any one whom she regarded. Christal only mocked the while, at least in outside show. Miss Rothesay did not see with what wild eagerness the girl listened to every sound, nor how every morning, fair and foul, she would restlessly start to walk up the Harbury road and meet the daily post.

It was during one of these absences of hers that Lyle made his appearance. Olive was sitting in her painting−room, arranging the contents of her desk. She was just musing, for the hundredth time, over her father's letter, considering whether or not she should destroy it, lest any unforeseen chance—her own death, for instance—might bring the awful secret to Christal's knowledge. Lyle's entrance startled her, and she hastily thrust the letter within the desk. From this cause in meeting him her manner was rather fluttered, and her greeting scarce so cordial as she would have wished it to be. The infection apparently communicated itself to her visitor, for he sat down, looking decidedly agitated and uncomfortable.

"You are not angry with me for staying so long away, are you, Miss Rothesay?" said Lyle, when he had received her congratulations on his recent acquisitions. "You don't think this change in fortune will make any change in my heart towards you?"

Olive half−smiled at his sentimental way of putting the matter, but it was the young man's peculiarity. So she frankly assured him that she had never doubted his regard towards her. At which poor Lyle fell into ecstasies of delight.

They had a long talk together about his dawning prospects, in all of which Olive took a warm and lively interest. He told her of his new house and grounds; of his plan of life, which seemed very Arcadian and poetical indeed. But he was a simple−minded, warm−hearted youth, and Miss Rothesay listened with pleasure to all he said. It did her good to see that there was a little happiness to be found in the world.

"You have drawn the sweetest possible picture of rural felicity," she said, smiling; "I earnestly hope you may realise it, my dear Lyle— But I suppose one must not call you so any more, since you are now Mr. Derwent, the young squire of Holly−wood."

"Oh, no; call me Lyle, nothing but Lyle. It sounds so sweet from your lips—it always did, even when I was a little boy."

"I am afraid I have treated you quite like a boy until now. But you must not mind it, for the sake of old times."

"Do you remember them still?" asked Lyle, a tone of deeper earnestness stealing through his affectations of sentiment. "Do you remember how I was your little knight, and used to say I loved you better than all the world?"

"I do, indeed. It was an amusing rehearsal of what you will begin to enact in reality some of these days. You, with your poetic vein, would make the beau−ideal of a lover."

"Do you think I should? Oh, Miss Rothesay, do you really think I should?" And then the poor youth's eagerness subsided into most girlish blushes, which positively caused Olive pain. She began to fear that, unwittingly, she had been playing on some tender string, and that there was more earnest feeling in Lyle than she had ever dreamed of. She would not for the world have jested thus, had she thought there was any real attachment in the case. So, a good deal touched and interested, she began to talk to him in her own quiet, affectionate way.

"You must not mistake me, Lyle; you must not think I am laughing at you. Nothing would make me happier than to see you a **true** lover, worthily loving and loved. But I did not know that you had ever considered these things. Tell me candidly—you know you may—do you think you were ever seriously in love with any one?"

Lyle drooped his head in almost painful confusion. "It is very strange for you to ask me these questions."

"Then de not answer them. Forgive me, I only spoke from the desire I have to see you happy; you, who are so mingled with many recollections; you, poor Sara's brother, and my own little favourite in olden time." And speaking in a subdued and tender voice, Olive held out her hand to Lyle.

He snatched it eagerly. "How I love to hear you speak thus! Oh, if I could but tell you all."

"You may, indeed," said Olive, gently. "I am sure, my dear Lyle, you can trust me. Tell me the whole story,"

"—The story of a dream I had, all my boyhood through, of a beautiful, noble, winning creature, whom I reverenced, admired, and at last have dared to love," Lyle answered, in much agitation.

Olive felt quite sorry for him. "I did not expect this," she said. "You poetic dreamers have so many light fancies. My poor Lyle, is it indeed so? You, whom I should have thought would choose a new idol every month, have you all this while been seriously and heartily in love, and with one girl only? Are you quite sure it was but one?" And Olive, though her sympathies were warmly excited, was unable to reconcile this new revelation of Lyle with her old belief in his easy, thoughtless temperament.

He seemed now more confused than ever. "Nobody can speak anything but truth to you," he murmured. "You make me tell you everything, whether I will or no. And if I did not, you might hear it from some one else, and that would make me very miserable."

"Well, what was it?"

"That though I never loved but this my beautiful lady, once,—only once, for a very little while, I assure you,—I was half disposed to like some one else you know."

Olive thought a minute, and then said, very seriously, "Was it Christal Manners?"

"It was. She led me into it, and then she teazed me out of it. But indeed it was not love—only a mere passing fancy."

"Did you tell her of your feelings?"

"Only in some foolish verses, which she laughed at."

"You should not have done that. It is very wicked to make any pretence about love."

"Oh! dearest Miss Rothesay, you are not angry with me?" cried Lyle, bending over her in real emotion. "Whatever my folly, you must know well that there is but one woman in the world whom I ever truly loved—whom I do love, most passionately! It is **yourself**."

Olive looked up in blank astonishment. She almost thought that idle sentiment had driven him into some mad vagary. But he went on with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, though it was mingled with the extravagance of a boyish lover.

"All the good that is in me I learned from you when I was a little boy. I thought you an angel even then, and used to lie dreaming about you for hours. When I grew older, I made you into an idol. All the poetry I ever wrote was about you—your golden hair, and your sweet eyes. You seemed to me then, and you seem now, the most beautiful creature in the whole world."

"Lyle, you are mocking me," said Olive, in slow, sad speech.

"Mocking you! Oh, it is very cruel to tell me so," and he turned away with an expression of deep pain.

Olive began to wake from the bewilderment into which his words had thrown her. But she could not realise the possibility of a young man like Lyle Derwent loving **her**, his senior by some years, many years older than he in heart; pale, worn, **deformed**. For the sense of personal defect which had so haunted her throughout her life, was present still, even against much evidence that might well have removed it from her mind. But when she looked again at Lyle, she regretted having spoken to him so harshly.

"Forgive me," she said. "All this is so strange; you cannot really mean it. It is utterly impossible that you can love me. I am old, compared with you; I have no beauty, nay, even more than that—" here she paused, and her colour sensitively rose.

"I know what you would say," quickly added the young man. "But I think nothing of it—nothing! To me you are, as I said, like an angel. I have come here to−day on purpose to tell you so; to ask you to share my riches, and teach me to deserve them. Dearest Miss Rothesay, listen to me, and be my wife?"

There was no doubting him now. The strong passion within him gave him dignity and manhood. Olive scarcely recognised in the earnest wooer before her, the poesy−raving, blushing, sentimental Lyle. A sense of pity, sorrow, pain, came over her. She had never dreamed of one trial—that of being loved by another as hopelessly as she herself loved.

"You do not answer, Miss Rothesay? What does your silence mean? That I have presumed too much! You think me a boy; a foolish, romantic boy; but I can love you, for all that, with my whole heart and soul."

"Alas! alas! that it should be so. Oh, Lyle, would that you had never talked to me in this way; you do not know how deeply it grieves me."

"It grieves you—you do not love me, then? Well," he added, sighing, "I could hardly expect it at once; but you will grant me time, you will let me try to prove myself worthy of you—you will give me hope to win you one day?"

Olive shook her head mournfully. "It can never, never be! Lyle, dear Lyle, forget all. It is a wild, youthful dream; it will pass, I know it will. You will choose some young girl who is suited for you, and to whom you will make a good and happy husband."

Lyle turned very pale. "That means to say, that you think me unworthy to be yours."

"No—no—I did not say you were unworthy; you are dear to me, you always were, though I never dreamed of this. It goes to my very heart to inflict even a momentary pain; but I cannot, cannot marry you!"

And then Olive, deeply agitated, hid her face and wept. Lyle moved away to the other end of the room. Perhaps, with manhood's love was also dawning manhood's pride.

"There must be some reason for this," he said at last. "If I am dear to you, though ever so little, a stronger love for me might come in time. Will it be so?"

"No, never, never!"

"Perhaps I am too late," he continued, bitterly. "You may have already promised your love. Tell me, I have a right to know."

She blushed crimson, and then arose, a pale, sorrowful dignity resting on her brow. "I think, Lyle, you go too far; I have given you no cause to pain me thus."

"Forgive me, forgive me!" cried Lyle, melted at once, and humbled too. "I will ask no more—I do not wish to hear. It is misery enough for me to know that you can never be mine, that I must not love you any more!"

"But you may regard me tenderly still. You may learn to feel for me as a sister—an elder sister, as I am most meet to be to you. You yourself will think so, in time." And Olive truly believed what she said. Perhaps she judged him rightly: that this passion was indeed only a boyish romance, such as most men have in their youth, which fades painlessly in the realities of after years. But now, at least, it was most deep and sincere.

As Miss Rothesay spoke, once more as in his childish days Lyle threw himself at her feet, taking both her hands, and looking up in her face with the wildest adoration.

"I must—must worship you still; I always shall! You are so good—so pure; I look up to you as to some saint. I was mad to think of you in any other way. But you will not forget me; you will guide and counsel me, and be my life's angel. Only, if you should be taken away from me—if you should marry—"

"I shall never marry," said Olive, uttering the words she had uttered many a time, but never more solemnly than now: "Heaven made my life lonely. It must be so. I am content." And her eyes,—so mournful, yet so full of calm, passing Lyle, looked out beyond into the winter sky, where, dimly, Harbury Church spire rose.

Lyle regarded her for a long and breathless space, and then, laying his head on her knees, he wept like a little child.

That moment, at the suddenly−opened door there stood Christal Manners! Like a vision, she came—and passed. Lyle never saw her at all. But Olive did; and when the young man had departed, amidst all her own agitation, there flashed before her, as it were an omen of some woe to come—that livid face, lit with its eyes of fire.

Not long had Olive to ponder, for the door once more opened, and Christal came in. Her hair had all fallen down, her eyes had the same intense glare, her bonnet and shawl were still hanging on her arm. She flung them aside, and stood in the doorway.

"Miss Rothesay, I wish to speak with you; and that no one may interrupt us, I will do this." She bolted and locked the door, and then clenched her fingers over the key, as if it had been a living thing for her to crush.

Olive sat utterly confounded. For in her sister's look she saw two likenesses; one, of the woman who had once shrieked after her the name of "Rothesay,"—the other, that of her own father, in his rare moments of passion, as she had seen him the night he had called her by that opprobrious word which had planted the sense of personal humiliation in her heart for life.

Christal walked up to her. "Now tell me—for I **will** know—what has passed between you and—him who just now went hence."

"Lyle Derwent?"

"Yes. Repeat every word—every word!"

"I cannot—I ought not. You are not acting kindly towards me," said Olive, trying to resume her wonted dignity, but still speaking in a placable, quiet tone. "My dear Christal, you are younger than I, and have scarcely a right to question me thus."

"Right! When it comes to that, where is yours? How dare you suffer Lyle Derwent to kneel at your feet? How dare you, I say!"

"Christal—Christal! Hush!"

"I will not! I will speak. I wish every word were a dagger to stab you—wicked, wicked woman! who have come between me and my lover—for he is my lover, and I love him."

"Alas! alas! I feared it—I knew it," murmured Olive.

"You knew it, and yet you stole him from me—you bewitched him with your vile flatteries. How else could he have turned from **me** to **you**?"

And lifting her graceful, majestic height, she looked contemptuously on poor shrinking Olive—ay, as her father—the father of both—had done before. Olive remembered the time well. For a moment a sense of wrong pressed down her compassion, but it rose again. Who was most injured, most unhappy—she, or the young creature who stood before her, shaken by this storm of rage?

She stretched her hands imploringly.—"Christal, listen to me. Indeed, indeed, I am innocent of this wickedness. It is not my fault that Lyle Derwent sought me. I shall never marry him—never! I have just told him so."

"He has asked you, then?"—and the girl almost gnashed her teeth—"Then he has deceived me. No, I will not believe that. It is you who are deceiving me now. Could Lyle Derwent woo any one, and woo in vain?"

"What am I to do—how am I to convince you! Ah, me! how bitter this is!"

"Bitter! What, then, must it be to me? You did not think this passion was in me, did you? You judged me by that meek, cold−blooded heart of yours. But mine is all burning—burning! Woe be to those who kindled the fire."

She began to walk to and fro, sweeping past Olive with angry strides. She looked, from head to foot, her mother's child. Hate and love, melting and mingling together, flashed from her black, southern eyes. But in the close mouth there was an iron will, inherited with her northern blood. Suddenly she stopped, and confronted Olive.

"You consider me a mere girl—you would mock me with my eighteen years. But I learned to be a woman early. I had need."

"Poor child!—poor child!"

"How dare you pity me? You think I am dying for love, do you? But no! It is pride—only pride! Why did I not always scorn that pitiful boy? I did once, and he knows it. And afterwards, because there was no one else to care for, and I was lonely, and wanted a home—haughty, and wanted a position—I have humbled myself thus."

"Then, Christal, if you never did really love him—"

"Who told you that? Not I!" she cried, her broken and contradictory speech revealing the chaos of her mind. "I say, I did love him—more than you, with your cold prudence, could ever dream of! What could such an one as you know about love? Yet you have beguiled him, and allured him from me."

"I tell you, no! Never till this day did he breathe one word of love to me. I can show you his letters."

"Letters! He wrote to you, then, and I never knew it. Oh! how I hate you! I could kill you where you stand!"

She went to the open desk, and began searching there with her trembling hands.

"What—what are you going to do?" cried Olive, with sudden terror.

"To take those letters, and read them. I do it in your presence, for I am no dishonourable thief. But I will know everything. You are in my power—you need not stir or shriek."

But Olive did shriek, for she saw that Christal's hand already touched the one fatal letter. A hope there was that she might pass it by, unconscious that it contained her doom! But no! her eye had been attracted by her own name, mentioned in the postscript.

"More wicked devices against me!" cried the girl, passionately. "But I will find out this plot too," and she began to unfold the paper.

"The letter—give me that letter. Oh Christal! for the happiness of your whole life, I charge you—I implore you not to read it!" cried Olive, springing forward, and catching her arm.

But Christal thrust her back with violence. "'Tis something you wish to hide from me; but I defy you! I **will** read!"

Nevertheless, in the confusion of her mind, she could not at once find the passage where she had seen her own name. She began, and read the letter all through, though without a change of countenance until she reached the

end. Then the change was so awful, none could be like it, save that left by death on the human face. Her arms fell paralysed, and she staggered dizzily against the wall.

Trembling, Olive crept up and touched her; Christal recoiled and stamped on the ground, crying,

"It is all a lie, a hideous lie! **You** have done it—to shame me in the eyes of my lover."

"Not so," said Olive, most tenderly; "no one in the wide world knows this, but we two. No one ever shall know it! Oh would that you had listened to me, then I should still have kept the secret, even from you! My sister—my poor sister!"

"**Sister**! And you are his child, his lawful child, while I— But you shall not live to taunt me. I will kill you, that you may go to your father, and mine, and tell him that I cursed him in his grave!"

As she spoke, she wreathed her arms round Olive's slight frame, but the deadly embrace was such as never sister gave. With the marvellous strength of fury, she lifted her from the floor, and dashed her down again. In falling, Olive's forehead struck against the marble chimney−piece, and she lay stunned and insensible on the hearth.

Christal looked at her sister for a moment,—without pity or remorse, but in a sort of motionless horror. Then she unlocked the door and fled.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Olive returned to consciousness she was lying on her own bed, the same whereon her mother had died. Olive almost thought that she herself had died too, so still lay the shadows of the white curtains, cast by the one faint night−lamp that was hidden on the floor. She breathed heavily in a kind of sigh, and then she was aware of some watcher close beside, who said, softly, "Are you sleeping, my dear Olive!"

In her confused fancy, the voice seemed to her like Harold's. She imagined that she was dead, and that he was sitting beside her bier—sorrowfully—perhaps even in tenderness, as he might look on her, **then**. So strong was the delusion that she feebly uttered his name.

"It is Harold's mother, my dear," said Mrs. Gwynne, rather surprised. "Were you dreaming of him?"

Olive was far too ill to have any feeling of self−betrayal or shame; nor was there any consecutive memory in her exhausted mind. She only stretched out her hands to Harold's mother with a sense of refuge and peace.

"Take care of me! Oh, take care of me!" she murmured; and as she felt herself drawn lovingly to that warm breast—the breast where Harold had once lain—she could there have slept herself into painless death, wherein the only consciousness was this one thought of him.

But, after an hour or two, the life within her grew stronger, and she began to consider what had happened. A horrible doubt came, of something she had to hide.

"Tell me, do tell me, Mrs. Gwynne, have I said anything in my sleep? Don't mind it, whatever it be. I am ill, you know."

"Yes, you have been ill for some days. I have been nursing you."

"And what has happened in this house the while? Oh, where is Christal,—poor Christal?"

There was a frown on Mrs. Gwynne's countenance—a frown so stern that it brought back to Olive's memory all that had befallen. Earnestly regarding her, she said, "Something has happened—something awful. How much of it do you know?"

"Everything! But, Olive, we must not talk."

"**I** must not be left to think, or I should lose my senses again. Therefore, let me hear all that you have found out, I entreat you!"

Mrs. Gwynne saw she had best comply, for there was still a piteous bewilderment in Olive's look. "Lie still," she said, "and I will tell you. I came to this house when that miserable girl was rushing from it. I brought her back—I controlled her, as I have ere now controlled passions as wild as hers, though she is almost a demon."

"Hush, hush!" murmured Olive. "My sister, my poor wronged sister!"

"Ay, I learnt that too when I entered the room. But all is safe, for I have possession of the letter; and I have nursed you myself, alone."

"Oh, how good, how wise, how faithful you have been!"

"I would have done all and more for your sake, Olive, and for the sake of your unhappy father. But, oh! that ever I should hear this of Angus Rothesay. Alas! it is a sinful, sinful world. Never knew I one truly good man, save my son, Harold."

The mention of this beloved name fell on Olive's wandering thoughts like balm, turning her mind from the horror she had passed through. Besides, from her state of exhaustion, everything was growing dim and indistinct to her mind.

"You shall tell me more another time," she said; and then sinking back on her pillow, still holding fast the hand of Harold's mother, she lay and slept till morning.

When, in the daylight, she recovered a little more, Mrs. Gwynne told her all that had happened. From the moment that Christal saw her sister carried up−stairs, dead, as it were,—her passion ceased. But she exhibited neither contrition nor alarm. She went and locked herself up in her chamber, from whence she had never stirred. She let no one enter except Mrs. Gwynne, who seemed to have over her that strong rule which was instinctive in a woman like Ha rold's mother. She it was who brought Christal her meals, and compelled her to take them; or else, in her sullen misery, the girl would, as she threatened, have starved herself to death. And though many a stormy contest arose between the two when Mrs. Gwynne, stern in her justice, began to reprove and condemn, still she ever conquered so far as to leave Christal silent, if not subdued.

Subdued she was not. Night after night, when Olive was recovering, they heard her pacing up and down her chamber, sometimes even until dawn. A little her spirit had been crushed, Mrs. Gwynne thought, when there was hanging over her what might become the guilt of murder; but as soon as Olive's danger passed, it again rose. No commands, no persuasions, could induce Christal to visit her sister, though the latter entreated it daily, longing for the meeting and reconciliation.

But for this sorrow there was great peace in Olive's illness, as there is in illness sometimes, especially after a long mental struggle. In the dreamy quiet of her sick−room, all things belonging to the world without, all cares, all sufferings, grew dim. Ay, even her mournful, hopeless love. It became sanctified, as though it had been an affection beyond the grave. She lay for hours together, thinking of Harold; of all that had passed between them—of his goodness, his tender friendship; of hers to him, more faithful than he would ever know; and sometimes there came to her an inward consciousness of the sacred self−devotion of a love like this, so that her heart was healed of the oft−recurring pang of shame.

It was very sweet, too, to be nursed so tenderly by Harold's mother—to feel that there was growing between them a bond like that of parent and child. Often Mrs. Gwynne even said so, wishing that in her old age she could have a daughter like Olive; and now and then, when Olive did not see, she stole a penetrating glance, as if to observe how her words were received. Perhaps she too had gained some womanly quickness of perception, or at all events was indulging in some desire for the future of one she had learned to love so well.

One day when Olive was just able to sit up, and looked, in her white drapery and close cap, so like her lost mother,—Mrs. Gwynne entered with letters. Olive grew pale. To her fancy every letter that came to Harbury could only be from Rome.

"Good tidings, my dear; tidings from my Harold. But you are trembling."

"Everything sudden startles me now. I am very weak, I fear," murmured Olive. "But you look so pleased!—All is well with him?" added she, trying to talk.

"All is quite well. He has written me a long letter, and here is one for you!"

"For me!" The poor pale face lighted up, and the hand was eagerly stretched out. But when she held the letter, she could not open it for trembling. In her feebleness, all power of self−control vanished. She looked wistfully at Harold's writing, and burst into tears.

In Mrs. Gwynne's eyes there rose a troubled inquiry, not unmingled with pity. Her vague suspicion gained completeness every hour. She regarded Olive for a moment, as **his** mother would, jealous over her own claim, yet not blaming the one whose sorrow was "loving where **she** did." But she said nothing, or in any way betrayed the secret thus learnt. Perhaps, after all, she was proud that her son should be so truly loved, and by such a woman.

Leaning over Olive, she soothed her with beautiful tenderness. "You are indeed too weak to hear anything of the world without. I ought to have taken better care of you, my dear child. Nay, never mind, because you gave way a little," she said, seeing the burning blushes that rose one after the other in Olive's face. "It was quite natural. The most trifling thing must agitate one who has been so very—very ill. Come, will you read your letter, or shall I put it by till you are stronger?"

"No, no, I should like to read it. He is very good to write to me,—very good indeed. I felt it the more from being ill; that is why it made me weep," said Olive, faintly.

"Certainly, my dear; but I will leave you now, for I have not yet read mine. I am sure Harold would be pleased to know how glad **we both** are to hear from him," said Mrs. Gwynne, with a light but kindly emphasis. And then Olive was left alone.

Oh that Harold had seen her as she sat, her love−beaming eyes drinking in every written line! Oh that he had heard her broken words of thankful joy, when she read of his welfare! Then he might at last have felt what blessedness it was to be so loved; to reign like a throned king in a pure woman's heart, where no man had ever reigned before, and none ever would, until that heart was dust!

Harold wrote much as he had always done, perhaps a little more reservedly, and with a greater degree of measured kindliness. He took care to answer every portion of Olive's letter, but wrote little about himself, or his own feelings. He had not been able to find out the Vanbrughs, he said, though he would try every possible means of so doing before he left Rome for Paris. Miss Rothesay must always use his services in everything, when needed, he said, nor forget how much he was "her sincere and faithful friend."

"He is so, and will be always to me! I am content, quite content;" and she gazed down, calmly smiling at the

letter on her knee. Fain would she have laid her cheek on the paper where Harold's hand had lain—a girlish impulse—but it passed. Her love was far too deep, too solemn, for any passionate outward show.

Yet this news from Rome seemed to have given her new life. Hour by hour she grew rapidly better, and the peace in her own heart made it the more to yearn over her unhappy sister, who, if sinning, had been sinned against, and who, if she erred much, must bitterly suffer too.

"Tell Christal I long to see her," she said. "To−morrow I shall be quite strong, I think, and then I will go to her room myself, and never quit her until we are at peace."

But Christal was deaf to all these her beseechings; no power, she declared, would induce her to meet Olive more.

"Alas! what are we to do?" cried Olive, sorrowfully; and the whole night, during which she was disturbed by the restless sounds in Christal's room, she lay awake, planning numberless compassionate devices to soothe and win over this obdurate heart. Something told her they would not be in vain; love rarely is! When it was almost morning, she peacefully fell asleep.

It was late when she awoke, and then the house, usually so quiet, seemed all astir. Hasty feet were passing in all directions, and Mrs. Gwynne's voice, sharpened and agitated, was heard in the next room. Very soon she stood by Olive's bed, and told her troubled tale.

Christal had fled! Ere any one had risen, whilst the whole household must have been asleep, she had effected her escape. It was evidently done with the greatest ingenuity and forethought. Her door was still bolted, and she had apparently descended from the window, which was very low, and made accessible by an espalier. But the flight, thus secretly accomplished, had doubtless been long arranged and provided for, since all her money and ornaments, together with most of her attire, had likewise disappeared. In whatever way the mystery had been planned and executed, the fact was plain that it had thoroughly succeeded. Christal was gone; whither, there was at first not a single clue to tell.

But when afterwards her room was searched, they found a letter addressed to Miss Rothesay. It ran thus:

"I would have killed myself, days since, but that I know, so doing, I should release you from a burden and a pang which I wish to last your life, as it must mine. Also, had I died, I might have gone to hell, and there met him whom I hate,—my wicked, wicked father. Therefore I would not die.

"But I will not stay to be tyrannised over, or insulted by hypocritical pity. I will neither eat your bread, nor live upon the cowardly charity of—the man who is dead. I intend to work for my own maintenance; most likely, to offer myself as a teacher in the school where I was brought up. I tell you this, plainly; though I tell you, at the same time, that if you dare to seek me there, or drag me thence—. But no! you will be glad to be freed from me for ever.

"One thing only I regret; that in justice to my own mother, I must no longer think tenderly of **yours**. For yourself, all is ended between us. Pardon I neither ask nor grant; I only say, Farewell.

"CHRISTAL MANNERS."

The letter was afterwards apparently reopened, and a hasty postscript added:

"Tell Lyle Derwent that I have gone for ever; or, still better, that I am dead. But if you dare to tell him anything more, I will hunt you through the world but I will be revenged."

Mrs. Gwynne read this letter aloud. It awoke in the stern, upright, God−fearing Scotswoman, less of pity, than a solemn sense of retributive justice, which she scarce could repress, even though it involved the condemnation of him whose memory was mingled with the memories of her youth.

But Olive, more gentle, tried to wash away her dead father's guilt with tears; and for her living sister, she offered unto Heaven that beseeching never offered in vain, a pure heart's humble prayers.

CHAPTER XIII.

MANY a consultation was held between Mrs. Gwynne and Olive, as to what must be done concerning that hapless child: for little more than child she was in years, though her miserable destiny had nurtured in her so much of woman's suffering, and more than woman's sin. Yet still, when Olive read the reference to Mrs. Rothesay, she thought there yet might be a lingering angel sitting in poor Christal's heart.

"Oh that some one could seek her out and save her, some one who would rule and yet soothe her; who, coming from us, should not be mingled with us in her fancy, so that no good influence might be lost."

"I have thought of this," answered Mrs. Gwynne. "But, Olive, it is a solemn secret—your father's, too. You ought never to reveal it, except to one bound to you by closest ties. If you married, your husband would have a right to know it, or you might tell your brother."

"I do not quite understand," said Olive; yet she changed colour a little.

Mrs. Gwynne kindly dropped her eyes, and avoided looking at her companion as she said, "You, my dear, are my adopted daughter; therefore, my son should be to you as a brother. Will you trust Harold?"

"Trust him? There is nothing with which I could not trust him," said Olive, earnestly. She had long found out that praise of Harold was as sweet to his mother's heart as to her own.

"Then trust him in this. I think he has almost a right—or one day he may have."

Mrs. Gwynne's latter words sank indistinctly, and scarce reached Olive. Perhaps it was well; such light falling on her darkness might have blinded her.

Ere long the decision was made. Mrs. Gwynne wrote to her son, and told him all. He was in Paris then, as she knew. So she charged him to seek out the school where Christal was. Sustained by his position as a clergyman, his grave dignity, and his mature years, he might well and ably exercise an unseen guardianship over the girl. His mother earnestly desired him to do this, from his natural benevolence, and for **Olive's sake**.

"I said that, my dear," observed Mrs. Gwynne, "because I know his regard for you, and his anxiety for your happiness."

These words thrilling in her ear, made broken and trembling the few lines which Olive wrote to Harold, saying how entirely she trusted him, and how she implored him to save her sister.

And now came back tenfold into Olive's bosom the measure she had meted unto Harold Gwynne. Her influence passing into his heart, had shaken it from its proud coldness, and disposed it to charity for all men. Her faith penetrating his soul, had purified and strengthened it into all goodness. Now, reclaimed himself, he was able to reclaim another.

"I am ready to do all you wish," wrote Harold, in reply. "O, my dear friend, to whom I owe so much, most happy should I be if in any way I could do good to you and yours!"

From that time, his letters came frequently and regularly. Passages from them will best show how his work of mercy sped.

"PARIS, JAN.—I have had no difficulty in gaining admittance to the *pension*, for I chanced to go in Lord Arundale's carriage, and Madame Blandin would receive any one who came under the shadow of an English *milord*. Christal is there, in the situation she planned. I found out speedily,—as she, poor girl, will find,—how different is the position of a poor teacher from that of a rich pupil. I could not speak with her at all. Madame Blandin said she refused to see any English friends; and besides, she could not be spared from the schoolroom. I must try some other plan. * * * Do not speak again of this matter being 'burdensome' to me. How could it be so, when it is for you and your sister? Believe me, though the duty is somewhat new, it is most grateful to me for your sake, my dear friend.

* * * "I have seen Christal. It was at mass. She goes there with some Catholic pupils, I suppose. I watched her closely, but secretly. Poor girl! a life's anguish is written in her face. How changed since I last saw it! Even knowing all, I could not choose but pity her. When she was bending before a crucifix, I saw how her whole frame trembled with sobs. It seemed not like devotion—it must be heart−broken misery. I came closer, to meet her when she rose. The moment she saw me her whole face blazed. But for the sanctity of the place, I think she could not have controlled herself. I never before saw at once such anger, such defiance, and yet such bitter shame. She turned away, took her little pupils by the hand, and walked out of the chapel. I dared not follow her; but many

times since then I have watched her from the same spot, taking care that she should not see me. Who would think that haggard woman, sharp in manner, careless in dress— you see how closely I observe her—was the blithe Christal of old! But I sometimes fancied, even from her sporting, that there was the tigress−nature in that girl. Poor thing! And she had the power of passionately loving, too. Ah! we should all be slow to judge. We never can look into the depths of one another's hearts.

* * * "Christal saw me to−day. Her eye was almost demoniacal in its threatening. Perhaps the pity she must have read in mine only kindled her wrath the more. I do not think she will come to the chapel again.

* * * "My dear Miss Rothesay, I do not like playing this underhand game—it almost makes me despise myself. Yet it is with a good intent; and I would do anything from my friendship for you.

"I have heard much about your sister to−day from a little girl who is a *pensionnaire* at Madame Blandin's. But fear not, I did the questioning skilfully, nor betrayed anything. My friend, you know me well, as you say; but even you know not how wisely I can acquire one secret and hold fast another. An honourable school of hypocrisy I learnt this in, truly! But to my subject.—Little Clotilde does not love her instructress. Poor Christal seems to be at war with the whole household. The richly−paying pupil and the poor teacher must be very different in Madame Blandin's eyes. No wonder the girl is embittered—no marvel are those storms of passion, in which, according to Clotilde, she indulges, 'just as if she were a great English *miladi*, when she is nobody at all, as I told her once,' said the triumphant little French girl.

"'And what did she answer?' asked I.

"'She went into a great fury, and shook me till I trembled all over; then she threw herself on her own bed, at one end of the dormitory, and all that night, whenever I woke, I heard her crying and moaning. I would have been very sorry for her, except that she was **only** the teacher—a poor, penniless *Anglaise*.'

"This, my friend, is the lesson that Christal must soon have to learn. It will wring her heart, and either break it or soften it. But trust me, I will watch over her continually. Ill−fitted I may be, for the duty is more that of a woman—such a woman as you are. But you have put something of your own nature into mine. I will silently guard Christal as if I had been her own brother,—and yours.

* * * "The crisis must be coming, from what the little girl tells me. Miss Manners and Madame Blandin have been at open war for days. Clotilde is in great glee since the English teacher is going away. Poor forlorn Christal, whither can she go? I must try and save her, before it is too late.

* * * "I sit down at midnight to inform you of all that has happened this day, that you may at once answer and tell me what further I am to do. I went once more to visit Madame Blandin, who poured out upon me a whole stream of reproaches against Christal.

—"'She was *un petit diable* always; and now, though she has been my own pupil for years, I would rather turn her out to starve than keep her in my house for another day.'

"'But,' said I, 'you might at least find her some other situation.'

"'I offered, if she would only tell me who she is, and what are her connexions. I cannot recommend as governess a girl without friends—a **nobody**.'

"'Yet you took her as a pupil.'

"'Oh, Monsieur, that was a different matter; and then I was so liberally paid. Now, if you should be a relative—'

"'I am not, as I told you,' said I, indignant at the woman's meanness. 'But I will see this poor girl, nevertheless, if she will permit me.'

"'Her permission is no matter. No one cares for Miss Manners's whims now,' was the careless reply, as Madame ushered me into the deserted schoolroom, and then quickly vanished. She evidently dreaded a meeting with her refractory teacher. Well she might, for there sat Christal—but I will tell you all minutely. You see how I try to note down every trifle, knowing your anxiety.

"Christal was sitting at the window, gazing at the high, blank, convent−like walls. Dull, helpless misery was in every line of her face and attitude. But the moment she saw me she rose up, her eyes darting fire.

"'Have you come to insult me, Mr. Gwynne? Did I not send you word I would see no one? What do you mean by haunting me in this way?'

"I spoke to her very quietly, and begged her to remember I was a friend, and had parted from her as such only three months before.

"'But you know what has happened since? Attempt not to deceive me—you do! I read it in your eyes long ago, at the chapel. You are come to pity the poor nameless wretch—the— Ah! you know the horrible word. Well, do I look like that? Can you read in my face my mother's shame?'

"She was half beside herself, I saw. It was an awful thing to hear her, a young girl, talk thus to me, ay, and without one natural blush. I said to her, gently, 'that I knew the unhappy truth; but, as regarded herself, it could make no difference of feeling in any right−judging mind, nor would with those who had loved her, and who now auxiously wished to hear from me of her welfare.'

"'You mean your mother, who hates me as I hate her; and Olive Rothesay, whom I tried to murder!' (Friend, you did not tell me that.)

"I drew back the hand I had offered. Forgive me, Olive!—let me this once call you so!—forgive me that I felt a momentary abhorrence for the miserable creature who might have taken your precious life away. My heart melts when I think of it. And you would not reveal the secret—even to me! Remembering this, I turned again to your sister; who cannot be altogether evil since she is dear to you. I said, and solemnly, I know, for I was greatly moved,

"'Christal, from your own lips have I first heard of this wickedness. Your sister's were sealed, as they would have been on that other bitter secret. Are you not softened by all this goodness?'

"'No! She thinks to crush me down with it, does she? But she shall not do so. If I grow wicked, ay, worse than you ever dream of, I shall be glad. It will punish her for the wrong her father did, and so I shall be revenged upon his child. Remember, it is all because of him! As to his daughter, I could have loved her once, until she came between me and—'

"'I know all that,' said I, heedlessly enough; but I was not thinking of Christal just then. She rose up in a fury, and demanded what **right** I had to know? I answered her as, after a struggle with myself, I thought best—**how**, I will tell you one day; but I must hasten on now. She was calmed a little, I saw; but her passion rose again when I mentioned Lyle.

"'Speak of that no more,' she cried. 'It is all past and gone. There is no feeling in my heart but hatred and burning shame. Oh, that I had never been born!'

"I pitied her from my soul, as she crouched down, not merely weeping, but groaning out her misery. Strange, that she should have let me see it; but she was so humbled now; and perceiving that I trusted her, perhaps she was the more won to trust me—I had considered this when I spoke to her as I did. My dear friend Olive, I myself am learning what I fain would teach this poor girl—that there is sometimes great evil done by that selfishness which we call a just pride.

"While we were talking, I very earnestly, and she listening much subdued, there entered Madame Blandin. At sight of her the evil spirit awoke again in unhappy Christal. She did not speak, but I saw the flaming of her eyes—the haughtiness of her gesture. It was not tempered by the woman's half−insulting manner.

"'I am come to make one last offer to Mademoiselle—who will do well to accept it, always with the advice of her English friend, or—whatever he may be," she added, smirking.

"'I have already told you, Madame, that I am a clergyman, and that this young lady is my mother's friend,' said I, striving hard to restrain my anger, by thinking of one meek spirit, for whom I ought and would endure all things."

"'Then Monsieur can easily explain the mystery about Mademoiselle Christal; and she can accept this situation. For her talents I myself will answer. It is merely requisite that she should be of Protestant principles and of good parentage. Now, of course, the latter is no difficulty with a young lady who was once so enthusiastic about her family.'

"Christal looked as if she could have sprung at her tormentor, and torn her limb from limb. Then turning deadly white, she gasped out, 'Take me away; let me hide my head anywhere from the scoffing world."

"Madame Blandin began to make bitter guesses at the truth. I feared lest she would drive the girl mad, or goad her on to the perpetration of some horrible crime. I dared not leave her in the house another hour. A thought struck me. 'Come, Christal!' I said, 'I will take you home with me.'

"'Home with you! What then would they say of me—the cruel, malicious world? I am beginning to be very wise in crimes you see!' and she laughed frightfully. 'But it matters not what is done by my mother's child. I will go!'

"'You shall,' I said, gravely; 'to the care of my friend, the wife of Lord Arundale. It will be enough for her to hear that you come from Harbury, and are known to Harold Gwynne.'

"Christal resisted no more. There seemed a numbing stupor coming over her, which was not removed even when I brought her to share the kindness of good Lady Arundale, who needed no other guarantee than that it was a kindness asked by me. Olive (may I begin to call you so? Acting as your brother, I feel to have almost a right)—Olive, be at rest. To−night, ere I sat down to write, I heard that your sister was quietly sleeping beneath this hospitable roof. It will shelter her safely until some other plan can be formed. I also feel at peace, since I have given peace to you. Peace, too, I see in both our futures, when this trouble is overpast. God grant it! —He to whom, as I stand at this window, and look up at the stars shining down into the midnight river, I cry, 'Thou art my God!'"

—"I have an awful tale to tell—one that I should fear to inform you, save that I can say, 'Thank God with me that the misery has passed—that He has overruled it into good.' So, reading this, do not tremble—do not let it startle you—feeble, as my mother tells me, you still are. '**Poor little Olive**.' She calls you so—may not I?

"Last night, after I closed my letter, I went out to take my usual quiet ramble before going to rest. I went to the Pont Neuilly, near which Lord Arundale resides. I walked slowly, for I was thinking deeply—of what, it matters not now. On the whole, my thoughts were happy—so happy that I did not see how close to me was standing Misery—misery in the shape of a poor wretch, a woman! When I did see her, it was with that pang, half shame, half pity, which must smite an honest man, to think how vile and cruel are some among his brethren. I went away to the other wall of the bridge—I could not bear that the unhappy creature should think I watched her crouching there. I was just departing without again looking round, when my eye was unconsciously caught by the glitter of white garments in the moonlight.

"She was climbing the parapet to leap into the arms of Death!

"I know not how that awful moment passed—what I said—or did, for there was no time for words. But I saved her. I held her fast, though she struggled with miraculous strength. Once she had nearly perilled both our lives, for we stood on the very edge of the bridge. But I saved her.—Olive, cry with me, 'Thank God, thank God!'

"At last, half−fainting, she sank on the ground, and I saw her features bare in the moonlight. It was Christal's face! Olive, if I had not been kept wandering here, filled with these blessed thoughts (which, please Heaven! I will tell you one day), your sister might have perished! Say again with me—thank God! His mercy is about us continually.

"I cannot clearly tell what I did in that first instant of horror. I only remember that Christal, recognising me, cried out in piteous reproach, 'You should have let me die! you should have let me die!' But she is saved—Olive, be sure that she is saved. Her right spirit will come into her again, it is dawning even now, for she is with kind Lady Arundale, a woman almost like yourself. To her, when I carried Christal home, I was obliged to reveal something of the truth, though not much. How the miserable girl contrived to escape, we cannot tell; but it will not hap− pen again. Do not be unhappy about your sister; take care of your own health. Think how precious you are to my mother and to—all your friends. This letter is abrupt, for my thoughts are still bewildered, but I will write again soon. Only let me hear that you are well, and that in this matter you trust to me."

* * * "I have not seen Christal for many days until yesterday. She has had a severe illness; during which Lady Arundale has been almost like a mother to her. We thought it best that she should see no one else; but yesterday she sent for me, and I went. She was lying on a sofa, her high spirit utterly broken down and crushed into pale humility. She faintly smiled when I came in, but her mouth had a patient sunken look, such as I have seen you wear when you were ill last year. She reminded me of you much—I could almost have wept over her. Olive, my friend,— do you not think my nature is strangely changed?—I do sometimes—but no more of this now.

"Christal made no allusion to the past. She said, 'She desired to speak to me about her future—to consult me about a plan she had.' It was one at which I did not marvel. She wished to hide herself from the world altogether, in some life which in its eternal quiet might be likest death.

"I said to her, 'I will see what can be done, but it is not easy. There are no convents or monasteries open to us Protestants.

"Christal looked for a moment like her own scornful self. '**Us Protestants**,' she echoed; and then she said, humbly; 'One more confession can be nothing to me now. I have deceived you all;—I am—and I have ever been, a Roman Catholic.'

"She thought, perhaps, I should have blamed her for this long course of religious falsehood. I blame **her**! (Olive, for God's sake do not let my mother read all I write to you. She shall know everything soon, but not now.)

"'But you will not thwart me,' Christal said; 'though you are an English clergyman, you will find me some resting−place, some convent where I can hide, and no one ever hear of me any more.'

"I found that to oppose her was useless; little religion she ever seemed to have had, so that no devoteeism urged her to this scheme, she only wanted rest. Olive, you will agree with me that it is best she should have her will, for the time at least."

* * * "I have just received your letter. Yes! yours is a wise and kindly plan; I will write at once to Aunt Flora about it. Poor Christal! perhaps she may find peace as a novice at St. Margaret's. Some little fear I had in communicating the scheme to her; for she still shudders at the very mention of her father's name, and she might refuse to go to her father's land. But she is so helpless in body and mind, that in everything she has at last implicitly trusted to my guidance."

"I suppose you, too, have heard from Edinburgh? Dear Aunt Flora! despite her growing feebleness, her mind is continually seeking to do good. I, like you, judged it better not to tell her the whole story; but only that Christal was an orphan who had suffered much. At St. Margaret's she will see no one but the good nuns, until, as your aunt proposes, you yourself go to Edinburgh. You may be your sister's saving angel still."

"Christal is gone. Lady Arundale herself will take her safe to St. Margaret's, where your aunt has arranged all. Olive, we must not fail both to go to Edinburgh soon. Something tells me this will be the last good deed done on earth by our noble Aunt Flora.—For what you say in your last letter, thank you! But why do you talk of gratitude? All I ever did was not half worthy of you. You ask of myself, and my plans? I have thought little of either lately, but I shall now. Tell my mother that all her letters came safe, and welcome—especially **the first** she wrote."

"Lord Arundale stays abroad until the year's close. For me, in the early spring, when I have finished my duties with him, I shall come home. **Home!** Thank God!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NIGHT and day, there rung in Olive's heart the last words of Harold's letter: "I shall come home!" Simple they were; but they seemed so strangely joyful—so full of hope. She could not tell why, but thinking of him now, her whole world seemed to change and sublimate into content. He was coming back! With him came spring and sunshine, youth and hope!

It was yet early in the year. The little crocuses peeped out—the violets purpled the banks. Now and then came soft west winds, sighing sweetness over the earth. Not a breeze passed her by—not a flower sprang in her sight—not one sunny day dawned to ripen the growing year, but Olive's heart leaped within her; for she said, "He will come with the spring—he will come with the spring!"

How and with what mind he would come,—whether he would tell her he loved her, or ask her to be his wife,—she counted none of these things. Her love was too unselfish, too utterly bound up in him. She only thought that she would see his face, clasp his hand, and walk with him—the same as in the dear old time. Not quite, perhaps, for she was conscious that in the bond between them had come a change, a growth. How, she knew not, but it had come. Sometimes she sat thinking—would he tell her all those things which he had promised, and what could they be? And, above all, would he call her, as in his letters, **Olive**? Written, it looked most beautiful in her sight; but when spoken it must be a music of which the world could hold no parallel.

A little she strove to temper her happiness, for she was no love−sick girl, but a woman, who, giving her heart,—how wholly none but herself could tell—had given it in the fear of God, and in all simplicity. Having known the sorrow of love, she was not ashamed to rejoice in love's joy. But she did so meekly and half−tremblingly, scarce believing that it was such, lest it should overpower her. She set herself to all her duties, and, above all, worked sedulously at a picture which she had begun.

"It must be finished before Harold comes home," said Harold's mother. "I told him of it in my letters, you know."

"Indeed. I do not remember that. And yet for this long while you have let me see all your letters, I think."

"All—except one I wrote when you were ill. But never mind it, my dear. I can tell you what I said,—or, perhaps, Harold will," answered Mrs. Gwynne, her face brightening in its own peculiar smile of heartfelt benevolence and lurking humour. And then the brief conversation ceased.

For a while longer, these two loving hearts waited anxiously for Harold's coming. At last he came.

It was in that sweetest month, the opening gate of the summer year—April. Mrs. Gwynne and Olive—only they two—had spent the day together at Harbury; for little Ailie, a child too restless to be ruled by quiet age, was now sent away to school. Mrs. Gwynne sat in her arm−chair, knitting. Olive stood at the window, thinking how beautiful the garden looked, just freshened with an April shower; and how the same passing rain−cloud, melting in the west, had burst into a most gorgeous sunset. Her happiness even took a light tone of girlish romance. Looking at the thorn−tree, now covered with pale green leaves, she thought with a pleasant fancy, that when it was white with blossoms Harold would be here. And her full heart, scarce conscious why, ran over with a trembling joy.

Nevertheless, amidst all her own hope, she remembered tenderly her poor sister far away. And also Lyle, whom since that day he parted from her she had never seen. Thinking, "How sweet it is to feel happy!" she thought likewise—as those who have suffered ever must—"Heaven make all the world happy too!"

It was just after this silent aspiration, which of all others must bring an answering blessing down, that the long−desired one came home. His mother heard him first.

"Hark—there's some one in the hall. Listen, Olive! It is his voice—I know it is! He is come home—my son!—my dear son Harold." And with eager, trembling steps, she hurried out.

Olive stayed behind. She had no right to go and meet him, as his mother did. And after one wild throb, her heart sank, so faintly that she could hardly stand.

His voice—his long, silent voice! Hearing it, the old, passionate love came over her. She felt, now, that she must have **his** too, or die. The whole pent−up tide of nature was breaking loose at last. She shuddered, even with a sort of fear. "Heaven save me from myself! Heaven keep my heart at peace and pure! Perhaps he will not suffer himself to love me, or does not wish me to love him. I have thought so sometimes. Then, rather than pain him, I

will hide it eternally. Yes! am quite calm—quite ready to meet him now." And she felt herself growing all white and cold as she stood.

The door opened, and Harold came in alone. Not one step could she advance to meet him, not one word of welcome fell from her lips,—nor from his, which were pale as her own. But as he clasped her hands and held them fast, she felt him gazing down upon her—now, for the first time, beginning to read her long−tried, long−patient heart. Something in that look was drawing her closer to him—something that bade her lean forward to his breast and call him "Harold!" It might have happened so—that moment might have proved the crowning moment of life, which blends two hearts of man and woman into one love, making their being complete and all perfect, as God meant it should be.

But at the same instant Mrs. Gwynne came in. Their hands fell from one another; Harold quitted Olive's side, and began talking to his mother.

Olive stood by herself in the window. She felt as if her whole destiny was changing—melting from cloud to glory—like the sunset she had watched an hour before. Whatever was the mystery that had kept him silent, whether he would ever ask her to be his wife or no—she believed that in the secret depth of his heart Harold loved her. Once she had thought, that were this knowledge true, the joy would surely overpower her reason. Now, it came with such a solemnity, that all agitation ceased. Her hands were folded on her heart, her eyes looked heavenwards. Her prayer was,—"O God, if this should be, even on earth, make me worthy of my happiness—worthy of him!—If not, keep us both safe until the eternal meeting!"

Then, all emotion having passed away, she went back quietly to Harold and his mother.

They were sitting together on the sofa, Harold holding his mother's hand in one of his. When Olive approached, he stretched out the other, with a smile of beautiful home−affection, saying, "Come to us, little Olive,—come! Shall she, my mother?"

"Yes," was Mrs. Gwynne's low answer. But Olive heard it. It was the lonely heart's first welcome home.

For an hour afterwards she sat by Harold's side in the gathering darkness, feeling her hand safe clasped in his. Never was there any clasp like Harold's—so firm, yet soft—so gentle, yet so close and warm. It filled her with a sense of rest and protection—she, long tossed about in the weary world. Once or twice she moved her hand, but only to lay it again in his, and feel his welcoming fingers close over it, as if to say, "Mine—mine—always mine!"

So they sat and talked together—she, and Harold, and Harold's mother—talked as if they were one loving household, whose every interest was united. Though, nevertheless, not one word was spoken that might break the seal upon any of their hearts.

"How happy it is to come home!" said Harold. "How blessed to feel that one has a home! I thought so more strongly than ever I had done before, one day, at Rome, when I was with Olive's old friend, Michael Vanbrugh."

"Oh, tell me of the Vanbrughs," cried Olive eagerly. "Then you did see them at last, though you never said anything about it in your letters?"

"No; for it was a long story, and both our thoughts were too full. Shall I tell it now? Yet it is sad, it will pain you, Olive." And he pressed her hand closer while he spoke.

She answered, "Still, tell me all!" And she felt that, so listening, the deepest worldly sorrow would have fallen light.

"I was long before I could discover Mr. Vanbrugh, and still longer before I found out his abode. Day after day I met him, and talked with him at the Sistine, but he never spoke of his home, or asked me thither. He had good reason."

"Were they so poor, then? I feared this," said Olive, compassionately.

"Yes, it was the old story of a shattered hope. As, I think, Vanbrugh was a man to whom Fortune could never come. He must have hunted her from him all his life, with his pride, his waywardness, his fitful, morose ambition. I soon read his nature—for I had read another very like it, once. But that is changed now, thank God," said Harold, softly. "Well, so it was; the painter dreamed his dream, the little sister stayed at home and starved."

"Oh, no! you cannot mean it!" cried Olive.

"It would have been so, save for Lord Arundale's goodness, when we found them out at last. They lived in a miserable house, which had but one decent room—the studio. 'Michael's room must always be comfortable,' said Miss Meliora—I knew her at once, Olive, after all you had told me of her. The poor little woman! she almost wept to hear the sound of my English voice, and to talk with me about you. She said, 'she was very lonely among

strangers, but she would get used to it in time. She was not well too, but it would never do to give way—it might trouble Michael. She would get better in the spring.'"

"Poor Meliora! But you were very kind to her—you went to see her often?—I knew you would," said Olive.

"There was no time," Harold answered, sadly. "The day after this we sought out Michael Vanbrugh, in his old haunt up the Sistine. He was somewhat discomposed, because his sister had not risen in time to set his palette, and get all things ready in his painting−room at home. I went thither, and found her—dying."

Harold paused—but Olive was too much moved to speak. He went on—

"So sudden was the call that she would not believe it herself. She kept saying continually, that she must contrive to rise before Michael came back at night. Even when she knew she was dying, she seemed to think only of him; but always in her simple, humble way. I remember how she talked, brokenly, of some white draperies she had to make for his model that day—asking me to get some one else to do it, or the picture would be delayed. Once she wept, saying who would take care of Michael when she was gone! She would not have him sent for—he never liked to be disturbed when he was at the Sistine. Towards evening she seemed to lie eagerly listening, but he did not come home. At last she bade me give her love to Michael: she wished he had come, if only to kiss her before she died—he had not kissed her for thirty years. Once more, just when she seemed passing into a death−like sleep, she half−roused herself, to beg some one would take care that Michael's tea was all ready for him against he came home. After this she never spoke again."

"Poor Meliora; poor simple, loving soul!" And Olive melted into quiet tears. After a while she inquired in what way this blow had fallen upon Michael Vanbrugh.

"Strangely, indeed," said Harold. "It was I who told him first of his sister's death. He received the news quite coldly—as a thing impossible to realise! He even sat down to the table, as if he expected her to come in and pour out his tea; but afterwards, leaving the meal untouched, he went and shut himself up in his painting−room, without speaking a word. And then I quitted the house."

"But you saw him again?"

"No; for I left Rome immediately. However, I had a friend who watched over him and constantly sent me news. So I learnt that after his sister's death a great change came over him. His one household stay gone, he seemed to sink down helpless as a child. He would wander about the house, as though he missed something—he knew not what; his painting was neglected, he became slovenly in his dress, restless in his look. No one could say he grieved for his sister, but he missed her—as one misses the habit of a lifetime. So he gradually changed, and grew speedily to be a wornout, miserable, old man. A week since I heard that his last picture had been bought by the Cardinal F—, and that Michael Vanbrugh slept eternally beneath the blue sky of Rome."

"He had his wish—he had his wish!" said Olive, gently. "And his faithful little sister had hers; for nothing ever parted them. We women are content when we can thus give up our lives to some one beloved. The happiness is far beyond the pain."

"You told me so once before," answered Harold, in a low tone. "Do you remember? It was at the Hermitage of Braid."

He stopped, thinking she would have replied; but she was silent, so heavy still was the remembrance of that bitter, bitter hour! Her silence seemed to grow over him like a cloud. When the lights came in, he looked the same proud, impassive Harold Gwynne, such as he used to look in the old time. Already his clasp had melted from Olive's hand. Before she could guess the reason why, she found him speaking, and she answering coldly, indifferently. All the sweetness of that sweet hour had with it passed away.

This sudden change so pained her, that very soon she began to talk of returning home. Harold rose to accompany her, but he did so with the formal speech of necessary courtesy—"Allow me the pleasure, Miss Rothesay." It stung her to the heart.

"Indeed, you need not, when you are already tired. It is still early. I had much rather go home alone."

Harold sat down again at once.

She prepared to depart. She shook hands with his mother, and then with himself, saying, in a voice that, lest it should tremble, she made very low, quiet, and cold, how glad she was that he had come home safe. However, before she reached the garden gate, Harold followed her.

"Excuse me, but my mother is not content for you to set off thus; and we may as well return to our old custom of walking home together—just once more."

What could he mean? Olive would have asked him, but she dared not. Even yet there was a veil between their hearts. Would it ever be drawn aside?

There were few words spoken on the way to Farnwood, and those few were of ordinary things. Once Olive talked of Michael Vanbrugh and his misfortunes.

"You call him unfortunate; how know you that?" said Harold, quickly. "He needed no human affection, and so, on its loss, suffered no pain; he had no desire save that of fame; his pride was never humbled to find himself dependent on earthly love. The old painter was a great and a happy man."

"Great he was, but not happy. There can be little happiness in a heart barren of love. I think I had rather be the poor little sister who spent her life for him."

"Ay, in a foolish affection, that was all in vain."

"Affection is never in vain. I have thought sometimes that as to give is better than to receive, they who love are happier than they who are loved."

Harold was silent. He remained so until they stood at Miss Rothesay's door. Then, bidding her good−bye, he took her two hands, saying, as if inquiringly, "Olive?"

"Yes!" she answered, trembling a little—but not much—for her dream of happi− ness was fading slowly away, and she was sinking back into her old patient, hopeless self. That olden self alone spoke as she added, "is there anything you would say to me?"

"No, no—nothing—only good night." And he hastily walked away.

An hour after, Olive closed her heavy eyes, that burned with long weeping, and lay down to sleep, thinking there was no blessing like the oblivion of night, after every weary day! She lay down, little knowing what mystery of fate that quiet night was bearing in its bosom.

From her first sleep she started, filled with the vague terror of one who has been suddenly awakened. There was a great noise—knocking—crashing—a sound of mingled voices—and, above all, her name called. Anywhere, waking or sleeping, she would have known **that** voice, for it was Harold Gwynne's. At first, she thought she must still be dreaming some horrible dream; but consciousness came quick, as it often does at such a time. Before the next outcry was raised, she had guessed its meaning. Upon her had come that most awful waking—the waking in a house on fire.

There are some women who in moments of danger gain an almost miraculous composure and presence of mind. Olive was one of these. Calmly she answered Harold's half−frenzied call from without her door.

"I am awake and safe; the fire is not in my room. Tell me, what must I do?"

"Dress quickly—there is time. Think of all you can save, and come," she heard Harold reply. His passionate cry of "Olive!" had ceased; he was now as self−possessed as she.

Her room was light as day, with the re− flection of the flames that were consuming the other end of the long, straggling house. She dressed herself, her hands never trembling—her thoughts quick, vivid, and painfully minute. There came into her mind everything she would lose—her household mementos—the unfinished picture—her well−beloved books. She saw herself penniless—homeless—escaping only with life. But that life she owed to Harold Gwynne. How everything had chanced she never paused to consider. There was a sweetness, even a wild gladness, in the thought of peril from which Harold had come to save her.

She heard his voice, eager with anxiety. "Olive—Olive! hasten. The fire is gaining on us fast!" And added to his was the cry of her faithful old servant, Hannah, whom he had rescued too. He seemed to stand firm amidst the confusion and terror, ruling every one with the very sound of his voice—that knew no fear, except when it trembled with Olive's name.

"Quick—quick! I cannot rest till I have you safe. Olive! for God's sake, come! Bring with you anything you value, only come!"

She had but two chief treasures, always kept near her—her mother's portrait, and Harold's letters; the letters she hid in her bosom, the picture she carried in her arms. Thus laden, she quitted the burning house.

It was an awful scene. The utter loneliness of the place precluded any hope of battling with the fire; but, the night being still and windless, it advanced slowly. Sometimes, mockingly, it almost seemed to die away, and then rose up again in a hurricane of flame.

Olive and Harold stood on the lawn, she clinging to his hand like a child. "Is there no hope of saving it—my pretty cottage—my dear home, where my mother died!"

"Since you are safe, let the house burn—I care not," muttered Harold. He seemed strangely jealous even of her thoughts—her tears. "Be content," he said—"you see, much has been done." He pointed to the lawn strewn with furniture. "All is there—your picture—your mother's little chair—everything I thought you cared for I have saved."

"And my life, too. Oh! it is so sweet to owe you all!"

He quitted her for a moment to speak to some of the men whom he had brought with him from Harbury, then he came back, and stood beside Olive on the lawn—she watching the doomed house—he only watching her.

"The night is cold—you shiver. I am glad I thought to bring this." He took off his plaid and wrapped her in it, holding his arm round her the while. But she scarce felt it then. Through the yawning, blazing windows, she saw the fire within, lighting up in its laughing destruction her beloved studio and the little parlour where her mother used to sit, twining round the white−curtained bed, whereon her mother's last breath had been sighed away peacefully in her arms. She stood all speechless, gazing upon this piteous household ruin, wherein were engulfed so many memories. But very soon there came the crash of the sinking roof, and then a cloud of dense smoke and flame arose, sweeping over where she and Harold stood, falling in showers of sparks around their feet.

Instinctively, Olive clung to Harold, hiding her blinded eyes upon his arm. She felt him press her to him, for an instant only, but with the strong true impulse, taught by one only feeling. Yet he struggled against it still.

"You must not stay here," he said. "Come with me home!"

"Home!" and she looked wistfully at the ruins of her own.

"Yes—to my home—my mother's. You know for the present it must indeed be yours. Come!"

He gave her his arm to lean on. She tried to walk, but, quite overpowered, she staggered, fainted, and fell. When she awoke, she felt herself borne like a child in Harold's arms, her head lying on his breast. No power had she to move or speak—all was a dizzy dream. Through it, she faintly heard him whisper as though to himself, "I have saved her—I hold her fast—little Olive—little Olive!"

When they reached the Parsonage door, he stood still a moment, passionately looking down upon her face. One minute he strained her closer to his heart, and then placed her quietly and tenderly in his mother's arms.

"She is safe—oh thank God!" cried Mrs. Gwynne, joyfully. "And you, too, my dear son—my brave Harold!" And she turned to him as he stood, leaning breathless against the wall.

He tried to speak, but in vain. There was one gasp; the blood poured in a torrent from his mouth, and he fell down at his mother's feet.

CHAPTER XV.

"**HE** has given his life in saving mine. Oh, would that I had died for thee—my Harold—my Harold!"

This was evermore Olive's cry during the days of awful suspense, when they knew not but that every hour might be Harold's last. He had broken a blood−vessel in the lungs; through some violent and secret emotion, the physician said. Nothing else could have produced such results in his usually strong and manly frame.

"And it was for me—for me!" moaned Olive. "Yet I doubted him—I almost called him cruel. Oh, Harold, that I should never have known thy heart until now!"

Every feeling of womanly shame vanished before the threatening shadow of death. Night and day, Olive hovered about the door of Harold's room, listening for any sound. But there was always silence. No one passed in and out except his mother—his mother, on whom Olive scarce dared to look, lest—innocent though she was—she might read reproach in Mrs. Gwynne's sorrowful eye. Once, she even ventured to hint this.

"I angry, because it was in saving you that this came upon my son? No, Olive, no! Whatever God sends, we will bear together."

Mrs. Gwynne said this kindly, but her heart seemed frozen to every thought except one. She rarely quitted Harold's chamber, and scarcely noticed any person—not even Olive.

One night, or rather early morning, during a time of great crisis, she came out, and saw Olive standing in the passage, with a face whereon was written such utter woe, that before it even the mother's sorrow paled. It seemed to move Mrs. Gwynne deeply.

"Olive, how long have you been here?"

"All night."

"Poor child—poor child!"

"It is all I can do, for him and you. If I could only—"

"I guess what you would say. No, no! He must be perfectly quiet; he must not see or hear **you**." And the mother turned away, as though she had said too much. But what to Olive was it now to know that Harold loved her? She would have re− signed all the blessing of his love to bring to him health and life. So crushed, so hopeless was her look, that Harold's mother pitied her. Thinking a moment, she said,

"He is fast asleep now. If it would comfort you, poor child, to look at him for one moment—but it must be only one—"

Olive bowed her head—she was past speaking—and followed Mrs. Gwynne. With a step as silent and solemn as though she were going to look on death, she went and looked on the beloved of her heart.

Harold lay in the dim light; his face perfectly blanched, his dark hair falling heavily on the pillow, as if never to be stirred by life or motion more. They stood by his bed—the mother that bore him, and the woman who loved him dearer than her own soul. These two—the strongest of all earthly loves—so blended in one object, constrained them each to each. They turned from gazing on Harold, and—all silently still—sank into one another's arms.

For a few more days continued this agonised wrestling with death, during which they who would have given their life for Harold's could only look on and pray. During this time there came news to Olive from the world without—news that otherwise would have moved her, but which was now idly received, as of no moment at all. Lyle Derwent had married; as, from his variable nature he was sure to do, when his dreamy passion came to an end. And Mrs. Flora Rothesay had passed away; dying in the quiet night−time, peacefully, and without pain, for they found her hands folded as if she slept.

But even for her Olive had no tears. She only shuddered over the letter, because it spoke of death. All the world seemed full of death. She walked in its shadow night and day. Her only thought and prayer was, "Give him life—give him life, O God!"

And Harold's life was given him. But the hope came very faintly at first, or it might have been too much joy for Olive to bear. Day by day it grew stronger, until all present danger was gone. But there were many chances to be guarded against; and so, as soon as this change for the better arrived, Olive came to look at him in his sleep no more. His mother was very cautious over his every look and word, so that Olive could not even learn whether he had ever given any sign that he thought of her. And now that his health was returning, her womanly reserve came

back; she no longer lingered at his door; even her joy was restrained and mingled with a trembling doubt.

At length, Harold was allowed to be moved to his mother's dressing−room. Very eager and joyful Mrs. Gwynne was, ransack− ing the house for pillows to make him lie easy on the sofa; and plaids to wrap him in;—full of that glad, even childish excitement with which we delight to hail the recovery of one beloved, who has been nearly lost. The pleasure extended itself over the whole household, to whom their master was very dear. Olive only, not daring to mingle in anything, sat in her own room, listening to every footstep.

Mrs. Gwynne came to her at last. "It is all done, my dear, and he is not so weak as we feared. But he is very much exhausted still. We must take great care even now."

"Certainly," answered Olive. She knew what the anxious mother meant, and dared not utter the longing at her heart.

"I scarce know what to do," said Mrs. Gwynne, restlessly. "He has been asking for you."

"For me—for me! Oh, let me see him," cried Olive, imploringly.

"I told him not to−day, and I was right. Child, look at your own face now! Until you can calm yourself, you shall not see Harold," was the mother's firm, almost angry speech. Without offering any answer, Olive sat down sorrowfully. Mrs. Gwynne was melted. "Nay," she said, "you shall do as you will, little patient one! I left him asleep now; you shall stay by him until he wakes. Come."

She took her to the door, but quitted her there, perhaps remembering the days when she too was young.

Olive entered noiselessly, and took her place by Harold's side. He was sleeping; though it was not the death−like sleep in which she had beheld him, that mournful night; but a quiet healthful slumber. His whole face seemed softened and spiritualised, as is often the case with strong men, whom a long illness has brought low. With childlike helplessness there seems to come a childlike peace. Olive knew now why Mrs. Gwynne had said, a few days since, that Harold looked as he had done when he was a little boy, whose only shelter in the wide world was in his mother's arms.

For a few minutes Olive sat silently watching. She felt how utterly she loved him—how, had he died, the whole world would have faded from her like a blank dream. And even now, should she have to part from him in any way—

"I cannot—I cannot. It would be more than I could bear." And from the depth of her heart rose a heavy sigh.

Harold seemed to hear it. He moved a little, and said, faintly, "Who is there?"

"It is I."

"Olive—little Olive." His white cheek flushed, and he held out his hand to her.

She could have sunk beside him, weeping for joy,but remembering his mother's caution, she only whispered, "I am so glad—so glad!" clasping tenderly his feeble hand.

"It is a long time since I saw you," he said, brokenly. "Stand so that I can look at you, Olive!" She came and stood in front of him. He looked long at her face. "You have been weeping, I see. Wherefore?"

"Because I am so happy to know you are better—to see you once again!"

"Is that true? Do you think so much of me?" And a pale but most joyful smile broke over his face; though, leaving it, the features trembled with emotion. Olive was alarmed.

"You must not talk now—not one word. Remember how very, very ill you have been. I will sit by you here. Nay, let me keep your hand! Oh! what can I ever do or say in gratitude for all you have done for me?"

"Gratitude!" Harold echoed the word, as if with pain, and then lay still, looking up at her no more. Gradually there came a change over his countenance, as if some bitter thought were slowly softening into calmness. "Olive," he said, "you speak of gratitude, then what must be mine to you? In those long hours when I lay conscious, but silent, knowing that there might be but a breath between me and eternity, how should I have felt had I not learnt from you that holy faith which conquers death?"

"Thank God! thank God! But you are weak, and must not speak."

"I must, for I am stronger now; I draw strength from your very presence—you, who have been my life's good angel. Oh! let me tell you so while I can."

"While you can!"

"Yes; for I sometimes think that, though I am thus far better, I shall never be like my own self again; but slowly, perhaps without suffering, pass away from this world."

"Oh, no!—oh, no!" And Olive clasped his hand tighter, looking up with a terrified air. "You cannot—shall not

die! I will not let you part from me." And then her face was dyed with a crimson blush—soon washed away by a torrent of tears.

Harold turned feebly round, and laid his right hand on her head. "Little Olive! To think that you should weep thus, and I should be so calm!" He waited a while, until her passionate emotion had ceased. Then he said, "Lift up your face; let me look at you. Nay, tremble not, for I am going to speak very solemnly;—of things that I might never have uttered, save for such an hour as this. You will listen, my own dear friend, my sister, as you said you would be?"

"Yes—yes, always!"

"Ah! Olive, you thought not that you were more to me than any friend—any sister—that I loved you—not calmly, brotherly—but with all the strength and passion of my heart, as a man loves the woman he would choose out of all the world to be his wife."

These words trembled on lips white as though they had been the lips of death. Olive heard; but so solemnly had the love−confession been breathed, that it awoke in her no passionate response: she only pressed his hand without speaking.

Harold went on. "I tell you this, because now, when I feel so changed that all earthly things grow dim, I am not too proud to say I love you. Once I was. You stole into my heart before I was aware. Oh! how I wrestled against this love—I, who had been once deceived, until I believed in no woman's truth. At last, I resolved to trust in yours; but I would try to find out your heart first. I did so; you remember how I talked to you, and how you answered, in the Hermitage of Braid? Then I knew you loved, but I thought you loved not me."

"I loved not you? Oh! Harold—Harold!"

As she uttered his name, tremulously, as a woman breathes for the first time the beloved name in the beloved ear, Harold started. But still he answered calmly,

"Whether that thought was true or not, would not change what I am about to say now. All my pride is gone—I only desire that you should know how deeply I loved you; and that, living or dying, I shall love you evermore."

There was a brief silence, and then Olive, gliding from her seat, knelt beside the couch where Harold lay. She tried to speak—she tried to tell him the story of her one great love—so hopeless, yet so faithful—so passionate, yet so dumb. But she could utter nothing save the heart−bursting cry—"Harold! Harold!" And therein he learnt all.

Looking upon her, there came into his face an expression of unutterable joy. He made an effort to raise himself, but in vain. "Come," he murmured, "come near me, Olive—my little Olive that loves me!—is it not so?"

"Ever—from the first; you only—none but you!"

"Kiss me, then, my own faithful one," he said, faintly.

Olive leaned over him, and kissed him on the eyes and mouth. He tried to fold his arms round her, but his powers failed.

"I have no strength at all," he said, sorrowfully. "I cannot take her to my heart— my darling—my wife! So worn−out am I—so weak."

"But I am strong," Olive answered. She put her arm under his head, and drew him close to her, until he leaned upon her breast. He looked up to her, helplessly, yet peacefully as a child—so solemn, so calm, and yet so infinite was her tenderness.

"Oh, this is sweet, very sweet!" Harold murmured, closing his eyes with a look of exhaustion. "I could sleep—I could almost die—thus—"

"No, God will not let you die, my Harold," whispered Olive; and then neither of them spoke more.

Overpowered by an emotion which was too much for his feeble strength, Harold lay quiet. By degrees, when the shadows of the room darkened—for it was evening time—his breathing grew deeper, and he fell asleep, his head still resting on Olive's shoulder.

She looked down upon him—his thin, wasted face—his pale hand, that, even in slumber, still clung helplessly to hers. What a tide of emotion swept through her heart! It seemed that therein was gathered up for him every tenderness that woman's soul could know. She loved him at once with the love of mother, sister, friend, and wife—loved him as those only can who have no other kindred tie—nothing in the whole wide world to love beside. She laid her cheek upon his brow—but softly, lest she should waken him.

"I thought to have led a whole long life of silent love for thee, my Harold! And I would have led it, without

murmuring, either against Heaven's will or thine, knowing my own unworthiness. But since it is not to be so, I will give thee a whole life of faithful love—a wife's love—such as never was wife's before."

And then, over a long course of past time, her fancy went back, discerning how all things had worked together to this end. She saw how patience had ripened into hope, and suffering into joy. Not one step of the whole weary way had been trodden in vain—not one thorn had pierced her feet, that had not while entering there distilled a saving balm.

Travelling over many scenes, her memory beheld Harold, as in those early days when her influence and her prayers had, as it were, brought down a merciful angel to change his heart, and lead him from darkness to light. Again, as in the first bitterness of her hopeless love; when continually his words and actions wrung her heart—he never dreaming of the wounds he gave. And once more, as in the time, when knowing her fate, she had calmly prepared to meet it, and tried to make herself a humble, patient sister unto him—he so unresponsive, cold, and stern. Remembering him thus, she looked at him as he lay, turning for rest and comfort to her loving breast. Once more she kissed his forehead as he slept, and then her lips uttered the words with which Mrs. Flora had blessed her.

"O God, I thank Thee, for Thou hast given me my heart's desire!"

Soon after, Mrs. Gwynne entered the room, and beheld her thus. But no blush came to Olive's cheek—too solemn was her joy.

"Hush!" she whispered; "do not wake him. He loves me—I know it now. He is mine, and I am his, evermore!"

Harold's mother stood a long time in silence. Heaven only knows what struggle there might have been in her heart—so bound up as it was in him—her only child. Ere it ended—he awoke.

"Mother!—is not that my mother?"

"Yes!" Mrs. Gwynne answered. She went up and kissed them both, first her son, and afterwards Olive. Then, without speaking, she quitted the room, leaving them alone together.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT was a Sunday afternoon, not bright, but dull. All the long day the low clouds had been dropping freshness down;—the soft May−rain, which falls warm and silent, as if the spring were weeping itself away for very gladness. Through the open window came the faint odour which the earth gives forth during rain—an odour of bursting leaves and dew−covered flowers. On the lawn you could almost "have seen the grass grow." And though the sky was dull and grey, still the whole air was so full of summer, so rich in the promise of what the next day would be, that you did not marvel to hear the birds singing as merrily as if it had been sunshine. There was one thrush to which Olive had stood listening for half−an−hour. He sat sheltered in the heart of the great syringa bush. Though the rain kept dropping continually from its flowers, he poured out a song so loud and full of joyance, that he even disturbed his friends in the parlour—the happy silent three—mother, son, and the son's betrothed.

Mrs. Gwynne, who sat in the far corner, put down her book—the best Book, for Sunday and all other days—the only one she ever read now. Harold, still feeble, lying back in his armchair by the window, turned his face and listened to the happy bird.

"Do you like to hear it, or shall I close the window?" said Olive, coming towards him.

"Nay, it does me good; everything does me good now," he answered, smiling. And then he lay a long time, quietly looking out on the garden and the misty view beyond. Olive sat, looking alone at him; watching him in that deep peace, that satisfied content with which our eyes drink in every lineament beloved, when, all sorrow past, the fulness of love has come. No need had she to seek his glance, as though saying restlessly, "Harold, love me!" In her own love's completeness she desired no outward show of his. To her it was perfect joy only to sit near him and to look at his face; the face which, whether seen or remembered, shone distinct from every other face in the wide world; and had done so from the first moment when it met her sight. Very calm and beautiful it was now; so beautiful, that even his mother turned round and looked at him for a moment with dimmed eyes.

"You are sure you feel quite well to− day? I mean, as well as usual. You are not sitting up too long, or wearying yourself too much?"

"Oh, no, mother! I think I could even exert myself more; but there is such sweetness in this dreamy life. I am so happy! It will be almost a pain to go back to the troublous world again."

"Do not say so, my son," answered Mrs. Gwynne, with a quick anxiety; the cause of which she did not name. "Indeed, we must have you quite well soon—the sooner the better—and then you will return to all your old duties, you know. When I sat in church this morning, I was counting how many Sundays it would possibly be before I heard my son Harold's voice there again."

Harold moved restlessly.

"What say you, Olive, my dear?" continued Mrs. Gwynne. "Will it not be a pleasure to hear him in his own pulpit again? How soon, think you, will he be able to preach?"

"I cannot tell," answered Olive, in a low voice; and she looked anxiously at her betrothed. For well she knew his heart, and well she guessed that though that heart was pure and open in the sight of God and in **her** sight, it might not be so in that of every man. And although his faith was now the Christian faith—even, in most points, that of the Church—still, there was in his nature a stern simplicity which somewhat cast aside forms. Added to this, came the remembrance of that old bitter life which he had led at Harbury, and which, did he remain there, must for ever haunt him. Though he nothing said, still Olive had lately begun to doubt whether he would ever be a Church of England minister again. No wonder that she watched his face in anxious love, and then looked from him to his mother, who, all unconscious, continued to speak.

"In truth, all your parishioners will be glad to have you back again. Even Mrs. Fludyer was saying so yesterday; and noticing that it was a whole year since you had preached in your own church. A long absence! Of course, it could not be helped; still, it was rather a pity. Please God, it shall not happen again—shall it, Harold?"

"Mother—mother!" His hands were pressed together, and on his face was a look of pain. Olive stole to his side.

"He looks ill! Perhaps we are talking too much for him. Shall we go away, Harold, and leave you to sleep?"

"Hush, Olive! hush!" he whispered. "I have thought of this before. I knew I must tell it to her—all the truth."

"But not now—not now. Wait till you are stronger; wait a week—a day."

"No, not an hour. It is right!"

"What are you talking to my son about?" said Mrs. Gwynne, with a quick jealousy, which even yet was not altogether stilled.

Neither of the betrothed spoke.

"You are not hiding anything from me, Harold; from me, your mother!"

"My mother—my noble, self−denying mother!" murmured Harold, as if thinking aloud. "Surely, if I sinned for her, God will forgive me!"

"Sinned for me! What are you talking of, Harold? Is there anything in your thought—anything I do not know?" And her look—still tender, yet becoming cold with a half−formed suspicion—was fixed, searchingly, on her son. And when, as if to shield him even from his mother, Olive leaned over him, Mrs. Gwynne's voice grew stern with reproof.

"Stand aside, Olive. Let me see his face. Not even you have a right to interpose between me and my son."

Olive moved a little aside. Very meek was her spirit—meek as had need to be that of one whom Mrs. Gwynne would call daughter, and Harold wife. Yet by her meekness she had oftentimes controlled them both. She did so now.

"Olive—darling," whispered Harold, his eyes full of love; "my mother says right. Let her come and sit by me a little. Nay, stay near, though. I must have your face in my sight—it will strengthen me."

She pressed his hand, and went away to the other end of the room.

Then Harold said, tenderly, "Mother, come and talk to me—I want to tell you something."

"It is no misfortune—no sin? Oh, my son, I am too old to bear either!" she answered, as she sat down, trembling a little. But she let him take her hands, and her face softened as he continued,

"My own mother—my mother that I love, dearer now than ever in my life before—listen to me, and then judge me. Twelve or fourteen years ago, there was a son—an only son—who had a noble mother. She had sacrificed everything for him—the time came when he had to sacrifice something for her. It was a point of conscience; light, perhaps, **then**—but still, it caused him a struggle. He must conquer it, and he did so. He stifled all scruples, pressed down all doubts, and became minister of a Church in whose faith he only half believed."

"Go on," said Mrs. Gwynne, hurriedly. "I had a fear once—a bitter fear. But no matter! Go on!"

"Well, he did this sin, for sin it was, though done for his mother's sake. He had better have supported her by the labour of his hands, than have darkened his soul by a lie. But he did not think of that, then. All the fault was his—not his mother's; mind—I say **not his mother's**."

She looked at him, and then looked away again, with a bewildered sorrow in her eyes.

"He could blame no one but himself—he never did—though his doubts grew, until they prisoned him like a black mist, through which he could see neither earth nor heaven. God makes men's natures different; his was not meant for that of a quiet village priest. Circumstances, associations, habits of mind—all were against him. And so his scepticism and his misery increased, until in despair of heaven, he plunged into the oblivion of an earthly passion. He went mad for a woman's beauty,—for her beauty only!"

Harold pressed his hand upon his brow, as if old memories stung him still. His betrothed saw it, but she felt no pain. She knew that her own strong, pure, infinite love had shone down into his heart's dark depths, removing every stain, binding up every wound. By that love's great might she had controlled his. She had saved him, and won him, and would have power to keep him evermore.

"Mother," Harold pursued, "I must pass on quickly to the end. This man's one error seemed to cause all fate to rise against him that he might become an infidel to God and to man. At last he had faith in no living soul except his mother. This alone saved him from being the vilest wretch that ever crawled, as he was already the most miserable."

A faint groan—only one—broke from the depth of the mother's heart, but she never spoke.

"There was no escape—his pride shut out that. So, year after year, he fulfilled his calling, and lived his life honestly, morally—in some things towards man, at least; but towards Heaven it was one long, awful lie. For he—a minister in God's temple—was in his heart an atheist."

Harold stopped. In his strong excitement he had forgotten his mother. She, letting go his hand, glided to her knees; there she knelt for a long time, her lips moving silently. At last she rose, her grand figure lifted to its utmost height, her face very stern, her voice without one tone of tremulous age, or mother's anguish.

"And this hypocrite in man's sight—this blasphemer in the face of God—is my son Harold!"

"Was, but is not—never will be more. Oh, mother, have mercy! for Heaven has had mercy too.—Now, at last, I believe!"

Mrs. Gwynne uttered a great cry, and fell on his neck. Never since the time when he was a child in her arms had he received such a passionate clasp—an embrace mingled with weeping that shook the whole frame of the aged mother. For a moment she lifted her head, murmured a thanksgiving for the son who "was dead, and alive again—was lost, and found," and then she clung to him once more.

Olive stayed aloof, until, seeing what a ghastly paleness was coming over the face of her betrothed, she came and stood beside him, saying,

"Do not talk more, you are too weak. Let me tell the rest."

"You there, Olive? Go! Leave my son to me; you have no part here," said Mrs. Gwynne, putting her aside.

But Harold held his betrothed fast.—"Nay, mother, I beseech you, no harsh words to her. Take her and bless her, for it was she who saved your son."

And then, in a few broken words, he told the rest of the tale; told it so that not even his mother's passionate affection could be wounded by the thought of a secret known to Olive and concealed from her—of an influence that over her son's spirit was more powerful than her own. Afterwards, when Olive's arms were round her neck, and Olive's voice was heard imploring pardon for both, her whole heart melted within her. Solemnly she blessed her son's betrothed, and called her "daughter." And then she sank again into the calm, reserved Alison Gwynne, whose vehement passions had been once frost−bound by circumstance, and, save at rare intervals such as this, would remain so until unsealed by life−renewing death.

"Now, my Harold!" she said, when, all trace of emotion passed from either, she sat by her son's side. "Now I understand all. Olive is right; with your love of action, and a spirit that would perhaps find a limitation in the best forms of belief, you never can be again a minister of the English Church. We must not think of it any more."

"But, mother, how shall we live? That is what tortures me! Whither shall we turn if we go from Harbury? Alone, I could bear anything, but you—"

"No matter for me! My Harold," she added, a little moved, "if you had trusted me, and told me your sufferings at any time all these years,—I would have given up everything here, and lived, as I once did, when you were a youth at college. It was not hard then, nor would it have been now. O my son, you did not know your mother!"

He looked at her, and slowly, slowly there rose in his eyes—those clear, proud, manly eyes!—two great crystal tears. He was not ashamed of them; he let them gather and fall. And Olive loved him dearer, ay, ten thousand times, even though these tears—the first and last she ever beheld him shed—were given, not to her, but to his mother.

Mrs. Gwynne resumed.

"Let us think, my son, what we must do; this day—this hour, for we have no time to lose. As soon as you are quite strong, you must give up the curacy, and we will leave Harbury."

"Leave Harbury! your dear old home, from which you have often said you could never part? Oh, mother, mother!"

"It is nothing—do not think of it, my son! Afterwards, what must you do?"

"I cannot tell—I am faint, bewildered. Olive, my faithful one, think for me!" said Harold, looking helplessly towards her.

Olive advised—timidly at first, but growing firmer as she proceeded—that he should carry out his old plan of trying to be a scien− tific Professor in some University abroad. They talked over the project for a long time, until it grew matured. Ere the afternoon closed, it was finally decided on—at least, so far as Harold's yet doubtful health permitted.

"But I shall grow strong now, I know. Oh mother—Oh, Olive! my heart is lightened of the load of years!"

And truly there was great peace and serenity in his face—nay, when tea−time came, he even rose and walked across the room with something of his old firm step, as if the spirit of returning health were rising strong within him.

After tea, Harbury bells broke out in their evening chime. Mrs. Gwynne arose; Olive asked if she were thinking of going to church?

"Yes—to thank God!" she answered, speaking tremulously, as if her heart were full.

"Go with her, Olive," said Harold, as he watched his mother pass from the room. Olive followed, but Mrs. Gwynne said she would rather go to church alone, and Harold must not be left. For a while Olive stayed, rendering all those little services which youth can so sweetly pay towards age. And sweet, too, was the reward when Harold's mother kissed her, and once more called her "daughter." So, full of content, she went down stairs to her betrothed.

Harold was again sitting in his favourite armchair by the window. The rain had lately ceased, and just at the horizon there had come to the heavy grey sky a golden fringe—a line of watery light, so dazzling that the eye could scarce bear to gaze. It filled the whole room, and fell like a glory on Harold's head, so that for a moment Olive stood still to look at him. Coming closer, she saw that he was not asleep, though his eyes were cast down in painful thought. Something in his expression reminded her of that which he had worn on the night when he first came to Edinburgh, and she had leaned over him, longing to comfort him—as she had now a right to do. She did so! He felt the kiss on his brow, and smiled.

"Little Olive—good little Olive, she always comes when I most need her," he said, fondly.

"Little Olive is very happy in so doing. And now, Harold, tell me what you were thinking of, that you pressed your lips together, and knotted your forehead—the broad, beautiful forehead that I love? It was not good of you, my Harold."

"Do not jest, Olive; I cannot! There is a thought rankling in my heart so bitterly. If I go abroad, I must go alone. What will become of my mother and Ailie?"

"They shall stay and comfort me. Nay," she said, trying to veil half her loving intents, "you will not forbid it. How could I go on with my painting, living all alone?"

"Ay, there is another sting," he answered. "Not one word say you;—but I feel it. How many years you may have still to work on alone!"

"Do you think I fear that? Nay—I did not give my heart like some women I have known—from a dread of living to be an old maid, or from a wish to gain a house, a name, and a husband;—I gave it for love, pure love! If I were to wait for years—if I were never your wife at all, but died only your betrothed, still I should die satisfied. Oh, Harold, you know not how sweet it is to love you, and be loved by you—to share all your cares, and rejoice in all your joys! Indeed—indeed I am content."

"You might, my gentle one, but not I. Little you think how strong is man's pride—how stronger still is man's love. We will not look to such a future—I could not bear it. If I go, you shall go with me, my wife! Poor or not, what care I, so you are mine?"

He spoke hurriedly, and in his countenance rose the proud Harold of old—ay, the pride mingled with a stronger passion still. But in Olive's eyes was such sweet calmness that she gazed both into peace.

"Harold," she said, parting his hair with her cool soft hands, "do not be angry with me! You know I love you dearly—but how dearly none knows, save Heaven. Sometimes I think I must have loved you before you loved me, long. Yet I am not ashamed of this, my Harold."

"Ah!" he muttered, "how often I must have made you suffer, when I knew it not— how often, blindly struggling with my own pride, have I tortured you. But still—still I loved you. Forgive me, dear!"

"Nay, there is nothing to forgive. The joy has blotted out all the pain."

"It shall do so, when you are once mine. That must be soon, Olive—soon."

She answered firmly, though a little blushing the while: "I would it were this week, this day; if for your good. But it would not be. You must not be troubled with bitter worldly cares. To see you so would break my heart. No—your spirit must be free to work its way, and gain fame and success. My love shall never fetter it down to anxious poverty. I regard your glory even dearer than yourself, you see!"

Thus said she, striving to be to him a faithful betrothed, and true unselfish wife, such as a man of learning or of genius needs. And gradually she led him in the way she wished—even to consent to her entreaty that they should both work together for their dearest ones; and that in the home which she with her slender means could win, there should ever be a resting−place for Mrs. Gwynne and for little Ailie.

Then they put aside all anxious talk, and sat in the pale twilight, with clasped hands, speaking softly and brokenly; or else never speaking at all; only feeling that they were together—they two, whose being was all in all to each other, while the whole world of life went whirling outside, never touching that sweet centre of complete repose. At last, Olive's full heart ran over.

"Oh, Harold!" she cried, "this happiness is almost more than I can bear. To think that you should love me thus—me, poor little Olive! Sometimes I feel—as I once bitterly felt—how unworthy I am of you."

"Darling! why?"

"Because I have no beauty; and, besides—I cannot speak it, but you know—you know!"

She hid her face, burning with blushes. The words and act revealed how deeply in her heart lay the sting which had at times tortured her her whole life through—shame for that personal imperfection with which Nature had marked her from her birth, and which, though now so slight as to be forgotten in an hour by those who learned to love her, still seemed to herself a perpetual humiliation. The pang came, but only for the last time, ere it quitted her heart for ever.

For, dispelling all doubts, healing all wounds, fell the words of her betrothed husband—tender, though grave: "Olive, if you love me, and believe that I love you, never grieve me by such thoughts again. To me you are all beautiful—in heart and mind, in form and soul."

Then, as if silently to count up her beauties, he kissed her little hands, her soft−smiling mouth, her long gold curls. And Olive hid her face in his breast, murmuring,

"I am content, since I am fair in your sight, my Harold—my only love!"

CHAPTER XVII.

LATE autumn, that season so beautiful in Scotland, was shining with a flood of pale sunshine into the house at Morningside. She, its mistress, who had there lived from middle life to far−extended years, and then glided from the weakness of age to the fresh youth of immortality, was seen no more within its walls. But her spirit seemed to live there still; in the flowers which at early spring she had planted for other hands to gather at summer time; in the fountain she had placed, which sang its song of murmuring freshness to soothe many an ear and heart, when **she**, walking by the streams of living waters, needed those of earth no more.

Mrs. Flora Rothesay was dead; but she had lived one of those holy lives whose influence never wholly dies, but is fruitful throughout generations. So, though now for months past her name had gradually ceased from familiar lips, and from her house and garden walks, her image faded slowly in the thoughts of those who best loved her; still she lived, even on earth, in the good deeds she had left behind—in the happiness she had created wherever her own sore−wounded footsteps trod.

In the dwelling from which she had departed there seemed little change. Everything looked as it had done more than a year before, when one poor bruised heart had come thither, and found rest and peace. There were fewer flowers in the autumnal garden, and the Hermitage woods beyond were all brown and gold; but there was the same clear line of the Braid Hills, their purple slopes lying in the early morning sun. No one looked at them, though, for the breakfast−room was empty. But very soon there stole into it, with the soft footstep of old, with the same quiet smile,—Olive Rothesay.

No, reader! Neither you nor any one else will ever see Olive **Rothesay** more. She wears on her finger a golden ring, she bears the well−beloved name—her husband's name. She is Harold Gwynne's wife now.

To their fortunes Heaven allowed, as Heaven sometimes does, the sweetness of a brave resolve, the joy of finding that the trial is not needed. Scarcely had Olive and her betrothed prepared to meet their future, and go on, faithfully loving, though perhaps unwedded for years, when a change came which made everything plain before them. They learned that Mrs. Flora Rothesay, by a will made a little before her death, had devised her whole fortune to Harold, on condition that he should take the name of his ancestors on the mother's side, and be henceforth Harold Gordon Gwynne. She made no reservations, save that she wished her house and personal property at Morningside to go to her grand−niece Olive, adding in the will the following sentence:

"I leave her this, and **no more**, that she may understand how deeply I reverenced her true woman's nature, and how dearly I loved herself."

And Olive did understand all; but she hid the knowledge in her rejoicing heart, both then and always. It was the only secret she ever kept from her husband.

She had been married some weeks only; yet she felt as if the old life had been years gone by, so faint and dream−like did it seem. No wild raptures had she known—no thrilling honeymoon bliss; such were not likely to mark the crowning of a love which had been so solemn, almost sad, from its beginning to its end. Its **end**?—say, rather, its new dawn;—its fulfilment in a deeper, holier bond than is ever dreamed of by girlish sentiment or boyish passion—the still, sacred love of marriage. And, however your modern heart−infidels may doubt, and your free−thinking heart−desecrators scoff, **that** is the true love—the tie which God created from the beginning, making man and woman to be one flesh, and pronouncing it "good."

It is good! None can question it who sees the look of peace and full contentment—a look whose like one never beholds in the wide world save then, as it sits smiling on the face of a bride who has married for true love. Very rare it is, in− deed—rare as such marriages ever are; but one sees it sometimes;—**we** saw it, reader, a while since, on a young wife's face, and it made us think of little Olive in her happy home at Morningside.

She stood by the window for a minute or two, her artist−soul drinking in all that was beautiful in the scene; then she went about her little household duties, already grown so sweet. She took care that Mrs. Gwynne's easy chair was placed in its proper angle by the fire, and that Harold had beside his plate the great ugly scientific book which he always liked to read at breakfast. Indeed, it was a saying of Marion M'Gillivray's—from whose bonnie face the cloud had altogether passed, leaving only a thoughtful gravity meet for a girl who would shortly leave her maiden home for one far dearer—Marion often said that Mr. Gwynne was trying to make his wife as learned as himself, and that his influence was robbing their Scottish Academy of no one knew how many grand pictures.

Perhaps it might be—it was a natural and a womanly thing that in her husband's fame Olive should almost forget her own.

When she had seen all things meet for the morning welcome, Olive went away upstairs, and stood by a child's bed—little Ailie's. Not the least sweet of all her new ties was it, that Harold's daughter was now her own. And tender, like a mother's, was the kiss with which she wakened the child. There was in her hand a book—a birthday gift; for Ailie was nine years old that day.

"Oh, how good you are to me, my sweet, dear, new mamma!" cried the happy little one, clinging round Olive's neck. "What a pretty, pretty book! And you have written in it my name—'Ailie.' But," she added, after a shy pause, "I wish, if you do not mind, that you would put there my whole long name, which I am just learning to write."

"That I will, my pet. Come, tell me what shall I say—word for word, 'Alison—'"

"Yes, that is it—my beautiful long name, which I like so much, though no one ever calls me by it—**Alison Sara Gwynne**."

"Sara! did they call you Sara?" said Olive, letting her pen fall. She took the little girl in her arms, and looked long and wistfully into the large oriental eyes—so like those which death had long sealed. And her tears rose, remembering the days of her youth. How strange—how very strange, had been her whole life's current, even until now! She thought of her who was no more—whose place she filled, whose slighted happiness was to herself the crown− ing of all joy. But Heaven had so willed it, and to that end had made all things tend. It was best for all. One moment her heart melted, thinking of the garden at Oldchurch, the thorn tree at the river−side, and afterwards of the long−closed grave at Harbury, over which the grass waved in forgotten silence. Then, pressing Ailie to her bosom, she resolved that while her own life lasted, she would be a faithful and most loving mother unto poor Sara's child.

A **Mother**!—The word brought back—as it often did when Harold's daughter called her by that name—another memory, never forgotten, though sealed among the holy records of the past. Even on her marriage−day the thought had come—"Oh thou, to whom in life I gave all love, all duty,—now needed by thee no more, both pass unto **him**. If souls can behold and rejoice in the happiness of those beloved on earth,—mother, look down from heaven and bless my husband!"

Nor did it wrong the dead, if this marriage−bond involved another, which awakened in Olive feelings that seemed almost a renewal of the love once buried in Mrs. Rothesay's grave. And Harold's wife inly vowed, that while she lived, his mother should never want the devotion and affection of a daughter.

In the past fading memories of Olive's former life was one more, which now grew into a duty, over whose fulfilment, even amidst her bridal happiness, she pondered continually; and talked thereof to her husband, to whom it was scarcely less absorbing.

Since they came home to Morningside, they had constantly sought at St. Margaret's for news of Christal Manners. Many times Olive had written to her in her own beautiful and tender way, but no answer came. The silence of the convent walls seemed to fold itself over all revelations of the tortured spirit which had found refuge there. However, Christal had taken no vows. Mrs. Flora and Harold had both been rigid on that point, and the good nuns reverenced their order too much to admit any one who might have sought it from the impulse of despair, rather than from any pious "vocation."

Olive's heart yearned over her sister. On this day she resolved to make one more effort to break the silence between them. So, in the afternoon, she went to the convent, quite alone, walking through the pleasant lanes where she had formerly walked with Marion M'Gillivray. Strange contrast between the present and the past! When she stood in the little convent parlour, and remembered how she had stood there with a bursting heart, that longed for any rest—any oblivion, to deaden the pang of its hopeless love,— Olive's spirit trembled with the happiness that filled it now. And she felt how solemn is the portion of those whose cup God has crowned with blessing, in order that they may pour it out before Him continually, in offerings of thanksgiving and of fruitful deeds.

Sister Ignatia entered—the same bright−eyed, benevolent, simple soul. "Ah, you are come again this week, too, my dear Mrs. Harold Gwynne—(I can hardly remember your new name even yet)—but I fear your coming is vain; though, day after day, I beseech your sister to see you."

"She will not, then. Alas! how sad this is," said Olive, sighing.

"Yet she says she has no bitterness against you. How could she? However, I ask no questions, for the past is all kept in silence here. And I love the poor young creature. Oh, if you knew her fasts and her vigils and her prayers! God and the Virgin pity her, poor broken−hearted thing!" said the compassionate nun.

"Speak to her once more. Do not tell her I am here; only speak of me to her," said Olive. And she waited anxiously until Sister Ignatia came back.

"She says, she is glad you are happy, and married to that good friend of hers, to whom she owes so much; but she is dead to the world, and wishes to hear of no one any more. Still, when I told her you lived at Morningside, she began to tremble. I think—I hope, if she were to see you suddenly, before she had time to reflect—only not now—you look so agitated yourself."

"No, no; I can always be calm at will—I have learned that long," said Olive. "Your plan is kind; let it be to−day. It may end in good, please God. Where is my dear sister?"

"She is sitting in the dormitory of the convent−school. She stays a great deal with our little girls, and takes much care of them, especially some orphans that we have."

Olive sighed. Well she read unhappy Christal's thought. But the way in which it was betrayed showed some softening of the stony heart. Almost hopeful, she followed Sister Ignatia to the dormitory.

It was a long, narrow room, lined with tiny white beds. Over its pure neatness good fairies might have continually presided. Through it swept the fresh air coming from the open window which overlooked the garden. And there, darkening it with her tall black shadow, stood the only present occupant of the room, Christal Manners.

She wore a garb half−secular, half−nunlike. Her black serge dress betrayed no attention to fashion, scarcely even to neatness; her beautiful hair was all put back under a white linen veil, and her whole appearance showed that last bitter change in a woman's nature, when she ceases to have a woman's instinctive personal pride. Olive saw not her face, except the cheek's outline, almost worn to the straightness of age. Nor did Christal observe her sister until Olive had approached quite close.

Then she gave a wild start, the old angry flush mounted to her temples, and sank.

"Why did you come here?" she said hoarsely; "I sent you word I wished to see no one—that I was utterly dead to the world."

"But not to me—oh, not to me, my sister!"

"Sister!" she repeated, with flashing eyes, and then crossed herself humbly, muttering, "The evil spirit must not rise again. Help me, Blessed Mother—good saints, help me!"

She told her rosary over once, twice, and then turned to Olive with a subdued, composed look.

"Now say what you have to say to me. I told you I had no anger in my heart—I even asked your forgiveness. I only desire to be left alone—to spend the rest of my bitter life in penance and prayer."

"But I cannot leave you, my sister."

"I wish you would not call me so, nor take my hand, nor look at me as you do now—as you did the first night I saw you, and again on that awful, awful day!" And Christal sank back on one of the little beds—the pure, thornless pillow where some happy child slept—and there gushed out her soul in many a bitter sob.

More than once she motioned Olive away, but Olive would not go. "Do not send me away! If you knew how I suffer daily from the thought of you!"

"You suffer? happy as they tell me you are—you, with your home and your husband!"

"Ah, Christal, even my husband grieves—my husband, who would do anything in the whole world for your peace. You have forgotten Harold."

A softness came over Christal's face. "No, I have not forgotten him. Day and night I pray for him who saved more than my life—my soul. For that deed God bless him!—and God pardon me."

She said this in a low voice, shuddering, too, as though at some awful memory. So deeply it moved her that, after a while, she spoke to Olive in a gentler tone, for the first time lifting her eyes to her sister's face.

"You seem well in health, and you have a peaceful look. I am glad of it—I am glad you are happy, and married to Harold Gwynne. He told me of this love between you."

"But he could not tell you all. If I am happy, I have suffered too. We must all suffer, some time; but patience works out joy," said Olive, soothingly.

"Not with me—not with me," Christal answered in sorrow, though without bitterness. "But I desire not to think

of myself."

"Shall I talk then about your friend Harold—your **brother**. He told me to say he would ever hold you as his dear sister," said Olive, striving in her own winning way to awaken Christal's sympathies by what seemed the strongest emotion on the girl's heart. And something she succeeded; for, during a long space, her sister listened quietly, and with some show of interest, while she spoke of Harold and of their dear home.

"It is so near you, too; we can hear the convent bells when we walk in our pretty garden. You must come and see it, Christal."

"No, no; I have rest here; I will never go beyond these walls. As soon as I am of age, I shall become a nun, and then I, with all my sorrows, will be buried out of sight for evermore."

So said she; and Olive did not contradict her at the time. But she thought that if there was any strength in faithful affection and earnest prayers, the peace of a useful life, spent, not in barren solitude, but in the fruitful garden of God's world, should be Christal's portion yet.

One only doubt troubled her, for which she longed to see deeper into the girl's wounded heart. After considering for a long time, she ventured to say:

"I have told you now nearly all that has happened among us this year. You have spoken of all your friends, save one." She hesitated, and at last uttered the name of Lyle.

"Hush!" said Christal. But her cheek's paleness changed not; her heavy eye neither kindled nor drooped. "Hush! I do not wish to hear that name. It has passed out of my world for ever—blotted out by the horrors that followed."

"Then you have forgotten—"

"Forgotten all. It was but a dream of my old vain life—it troubles me no more."

"Thank God!" murmured Olive, though in her heart she marvelled to think how many false reflections there were of the one true love—the only love that can endure—such as had been hers.

She bade an affectionate farewell to her sister, who went with her to the outer court of the convent. Christal did not ask her to come again, but she kissed her when they parted, and once looked back ere she again passed into the quiet silent home which she had chosen as her spirit's grave.

Olive walked on quickly, for the afternoon was closing. Very soon she heard overtaking her a footstep, whose sound quickened her pulse even now. "How good and thoughtful of him, my dear Harold—my husband!"

My husband! Never did she say or think the words, but her heart swelled with inexpressible emotion, remembering the old time of hopeless suffering, the long silent struggle, the wasting care. Yet she would have borne it all a thousand times—ay, even had the end come never in her life on earth,—rather than not have known the sweetness of loving—the glory of loving such a one as he!

Harold met her with a smile. "I have been waiting long—I could not let my little Olive walk home alone."

She, who had walked through the world alone for so many weary years! But she would never do so any more. She clung to her husband's arm, clasping over it both her little hands in a sweet caressing way; and so they went on together.

Olive told him all the good news she had to tell, and he rejoiced with her for Christal's sake. He agreed that there was hope and comfort for their sister still; for he could not believe there was in the whole world a heart so hard and cold, that it could not be melted by Olive's gentle influence, and warmed by the shining of Olive's spirit of love.

They were going home, when she saw that her husband looked tired and dull—he had been poring over his books all day. For though now independent of the world, as regarded fortune, he could not relinquish his scientific pursuits; but was every day adding to his acquirements, and to the fame which had been his when only a poor clergyman at Harbury. So, without saying anything Olive led him down the winding road that leads from Edinburgh towards the Braid Hills, laughing and talking with him the while, "to send the cobwebs out of his brain," as she often told him. Though at the time she never let him see how skilfully she did this, lest his man's dignity should revolt at being so lovingly beguiled. For he was still as ever the very quintessence of pride. Well for him his wife had not that quality—yet perhaps she loved him all the better for that he possessed it.

At the gate of the Hermitage Harold paused. Neither of them had seen the spot since they last stood there—she weeping, leaning her forehead against his hands in the speechless woe whose mystery he could not, would not read. At the remembrance, he seemed greatly moved.

His wife looked lovingly up to him. "Harold, are you content? You would not send me from you?—you would not wish to live your whole life without me now?"

"No—no!" he cried, pressing her hand close to his heart. The mute gesture said enough—Olive desired no more.

They walked on a long way, even climbing to the summit of the Braid Hills. The night was coming on fast—the stormy night of early winter—for the wind had risen, and swept howling over the heathery ridge.

"But I have my plaid here, and you will not mind the cold, my lassie—Scottish born," said Harold to his wife. And in his own cheek, now brown with health, rose the fresh mountain−blood, while the bold mountain−spirit shone in his fearless eyes. No marvel that Olive, stealing beside him, looked with pride to her noble husband, and thought that not in the whole world was there such another man!

"I glory in the wind," cried Harold, tossing back his head, and shaking his wavy hair, something lion−like. "It makes me strong and bold. I love to meet it, to wrestle with it; to feel myself in spirit and in frame, stern to resist, daring to achieve, as a man should feel!"

And on her part, Olive, with her clinging sweetness, her upward gaze, was a type of true woman. But Harold did not bend his look upon her; he was just then in the mood when a great man needs no human intervention—not even a wife's—between him and the aspirations which fill his soul.

"I think," he cried, "that there is a full, rich life before me yet. I will go forth and rejoice therein; and if misfortune come, I will meet it—thus!"—

He planted his foot firmly on the ground, lifted his proud head, and looked out fearlessly with his majestic eyes.

"And I," said Olive, "thus."

She stole her two little cold hands under his plaid, laid her head upon them, close to his heart, and, smiling, nestled there.

And the loud, fierce wind swept by, but it harmed not them, thus warm and safe in love. So they stood, true man and woman, husband and wife, ready to go through the world without fear, trusting in each other, and looking up to Heaven to guide their way.

THE END.