Olive, Vol. 2

Dinah Maria Craik

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CHAPTER I.

IN one of the western environs of London is a region which, lying between two great omnibus outlets, is yet as retired and old−fashioned as though it had been miles and miles distant from the metropolis. Fields there are few or none, certainly; but there are quiet, green lanes (where in spring−time you may pluck many a fragrant hawthorn branch), and market−gardens, and grand old trees; while on summer mornings you may continually hear a loud chorus of birds— especially larks—though these latter "blithe spirits" seem to live perpetually in the air, and one marvels how they ever contrived to make their nests in the potato−grounds below. Perhaps they do so in emulation of their human neighbours—authors, actors, artists, who in this place "most do congregate," many of them, poor souls! singing their daily songs of life out in the world, as the larks in the air; none knowing what a mean, lowly—sometimes even desolate home, is the nest whence such music springs.

Well, in this region, there is a lane (a crooked, unpaved, winding, quaint, dear old lane!); and in that lane there is a house; and in that house there are two especially odd rooms—where dwelt Olive Rothesay and her mother.

Chance had led them hither; but they both—Olive especially—thanked chance, every day of their lives, for having brought them to such a delicious old place. It was the queerest of all queer abodes, was Woodford Cottage. The entrance−door and the stable−door stood side by side; and the cellar−staircase led out of the drawing−room. The direct way from the kitchen to the diningroom, was through a suite of sleeping apartments; and the staircase, apparently cut out of the wall, had a beautiful little break−neck corner, which seemed made to prevent any one who once ascended from ever descending alive. Certainly, the contriver of Woodford Cottage must have had some slight twist of the brain, which caused the building to partake of the same unpleasant convolution.

Yet, save this slight peculiarity, it was a charming house to live in. It stood in a garden, whose high walls shut out all view, save of the trees belonging to an old dilapidated, uninhabited Lodge, where an illustrious statesman had once dwelt, and which was now creeping to decay and oblivion, like the great man's own memory. The trees waved, and the birds sang therein, for the especial benefit of Woodford Cottage, and of Olive Rothesay. She, who so dearly loved a garden, perfectly exulted in this one. Most delightful was its desolate, untrimmed luxuriance—where the peaches grew almost wild upon the wall, and one gigantic mulberry−tree looked beautiful all the year through. Moreover, climbing over the picturesque, bay−windowed house, was such a clematis as never was seen! Its blossoms glistened like a snow−shower throughout the day; and in the night−time, its perfume was a very breath of Eden. Altogether, the house was a grand old house—just suited for a dreamer, a poet, or an artist. An artist did really live therein; which had been no small attraction to draw Olive thither. But of him, more anon.

At present let us look at the mother and daughter, as they sit in the one parlour to which all the glories of Merivale Hall and Oldchurch had dwindled. But they did not murmur at that, for they were together; and now, that the first bitterness of their loss had passed away, they began to feel cheerful—even happy.

Olive was flitting in and out of the low windows which opened into the garden, and bringing thence her apron−full of flowers, to dispose about the large, somewhat gloomy, and scantily−furnished room. Mrs. Rothesay was sitting in the sunshine, engaged in some delicate needlework. In the midst of it she stopped, and her hands fell with a heavy sigh.

"It is of no use, Olive."

"What is of no use, mamma?"

"I cannot see to thread my needle. I really must be growing old."

"Nonsense, darling"—Olive often said "darling," quite in a protecting way—"Why, you are not near forty yet. Don't talk about growing old, my own beautiful mamma—for you are beautiful; I heard Mr. Vanbrugh saying so to his sister, the other day; and of course he, an artist, must know," added Olive, with a sweet flattery, as she took her mother's hands, and looked at her with the deep admiration which love alone creates.

And truly the admiration was not uncalled for. Over the delicate beauty of Sybilla Rothesay had crept a

spiritual charm, that increased with life's decline—for her life **was** declining, early maturity having caused early decay. Not that her health was broken, or that she looked withered and aged; but still there was a gradual change, as of the tree which from its richest green melts into hues that, though still lovely, indicate the time, distant but certain, of autumn days, and of leaves softly falling earthwards. So doubtless, her life's leaf would fall.

Mrs. Rothesay smiled; sweeter than any of the flatteries of her youth, now fell her daughter's tender praise. "You are a silly little maiden; but never mind!—Only, I wish my eyes did not trouble me so much. Olive, suppose I should come to be a blind old woman, for you to take care of."

Olive snatched away the work, and closed the strained, aching eyes with two sweet kisses. It was a subject she could not bear to talk upon; perhaps, because it rested often on Mrs. Rothesay's mind; and she herself had an instinctive apprehension that there was, after all, some truth in these fears concerning her mother's sight. She began quickly to talk of other matters.

"Hark, mamma, there is Mr. Vanbrugh walking in his painting−room overhead. He always does so when he is dissatisfied about his picture; and I am sure he need not be, for, oh! how beautiful it is! Miss Meliora took me in yesterday to see it, when he was out."

"She seems to make quite a pet of you, my child."

"Her kitten ran away last week, which accounts for it, mamma," said Olive, wickedly. "But indeed I ought not to laugh at her, for one must have something to love, and she has nothing but her dumb pets."

"And her brother."

"I wonder if anybody ever loved him, or if he ever loved anybody," said Olive, musingly. "But, mamma, if he is not handsome himself, he admires beauty in others. What do you think?—he is longing to paint somebody's face, and put it in this picture; and I promised to ask. Oh, darling, do sit to him! it would not be much trouble, and I should be so proud to see my beautiful mamma on the Academy−exhibition next year."

Mrs. Rothesay shook her head.

"Nay, mamma—here he comes to ask you for himself," cried Olive, as a tall, a very tall shadow darkened the window, and its corporeality entered the room.

He was a most extraordinary−looking man, was Mr. Vanbrugh. Olive had, indeed, delicately called him "not handsome," for you probably would not see an uglier man twice in a lifetime. Gigantic and ungainly in height, and coarse in feature, he certainly was the very antipodes of his own exquisite creations. And for that reason he created them. In his troubled youth, tortured with a keen, passionate sense of that blessing which was denied him, he had said, "Providence has created me hideous—I will out−do Providence; I, with my hand, will continually create beauty." And so he did—ay, and where he created, he loved. He took his art for his mistress, and, like the Rhodian sculptor, he clasped it to his soul night and day, until it grew warm and life−like, and became to him in the stead of every human tie. Thus Michael Vanbrugh had lived, for fifty years, a life solitary even to moroseness; emulating the great Florentine master, whose christian name it was his glory to bear. He painted grand pictures, which nobody bought, but which he and his faithful little sister Meliora thought the greater for that. The world did not understand him, nor did he understand the world; so he shut himself out from it altogether, until his small and rapidly−decreasing income caused him to admit into his house the widow and daughter. He might not have done so, had not Miss Meliora hinted how lovely the former was, and how useful she might be as a model, when they grew sociable together.

He came to make his request now, and he made it with the greatest unconcern. In his opinion, everything in life tended toward one great end!—Art! He looked on all beautiful forms of nature as only made to be painted. Accordingly, he stepped up to his inmate, with the following succinct address:

"Madam, I want a Grecian head. Yours just suits me; will you oblige me by sitting?" And then adding, as a soothing and flattering encouragement: "It is for my great work—my 'Alcestis!'—one of a series of six pictures, which I hope to finish one day."

He tossed back his long iron−grey hair, and his eyes, lighted with wild genius, scanned curiously the gentle creature, whom he had hitherto noticed only with the usual civilities of an acquaintanceship consequent on some months' residence in the same house.

"Really, Mr. Vanbrugh, you are very flattering. If it will oblige you in any way," began the widow, faintly colouring, and appealing to Olive, who looked delighted; for she regarded the old artist with as much reverence as

if he had been Michael Angelo himself.

He interrupted them both—"Ay, that will just do;" and his long, gaunt fingers drew in the air some magic circles over Mrs. Rothesay's head. "Good line of brow—Greek mouth. If, madam, you would favour me with taking off your cap. Thank you, Miss Olive. **You** understand me, I see. That will do—the white drapery over the hair—ah, divine! My 'Alcestis' to the life! Madam—Mrs. Rothesay, your head is glorious; it shall go down to posterity in my picture."

And he walked up and down the room, rubbing his hands with a delighted pride, which, in its perfect simplicity, could never be confounded with paltry vanity or self−adulation. "**My** work, **my** picture," in which he so gloried, was utterly different from—"I, the man who painted it." He worshipped—not himself at all; and scarce so much his real work, as the ideal which ever flitted before him, and which it was the one great misery of his life never to have sufficiently attained.

"When shall I sit?" timidly inquired Mrs. Rothesay, still too much of a woman not to be flattered by a painter's praise.

"At once, madam, at once, while the mood is on me. Miss Rothesay, you will lead the way; you are not unacquainted with the arcana of my studio." As, indeed, she was not, having before stood some three hours in the painful attitude of a "Cassandra raving," while he painted from her outstretched and very beautiful hands.

Happy she was the very moment her foot crossed the threshold of a painter's studio, for Olive's love of Art had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength. Moreover, the artistic atmosphere in which she now lived had increased this passion tenfold; and while her hand secretly laboured to attain perfection, her mind was expanding, so that the deeper things of Art were opening unto her.

"Truly, Miss Rothesay, you seem to know all about it," said Michael Vanbrugh, when, in great pride and delight, she was helping him to arrange her mother's attitude, and at last became absorbed in admiration of the graceful 'Alcestis.' "You might have been an artist's daughter or sister."

"I wish I had," said Olive, softly.

"My daughter is somewhat of an artist herself, Mr. Vanbrugh," observed Mrs. Rothesay, with a due maternal pride; which Olive, deeply blushing, soon quelled by an entreating motion of silence.

But the painter went on painting; he saw nothing, thought of nothing, save his 'Al− cestis.' He was indeed an enthusiast. Olive watched how, beneath the coarse, ill−formed hand, grew images of perfect beauty; how, within the mortal frame, almost repulsive in its ugliness, dwelt a mind which had power to produce the grandest ideal loveliness; and there dawned in the girl's spirit a stronger conviction than ever of the majesty of that genius which is superior to all human accident.

It was a comforting thought to one like her, who, as she deemed, had been deprived by Nature of so many of life's sweetnesses. For the sense of personal deformity, aroused by Sara's words, and increased by her father's cruel epithet, had now taken such strong hold on her mind, that it might perhaps never be obliterated.

The sitting had lasted some hours, during which it took all poor Mrs. Rothesay's gentle patience to humour Olive's enthusiasm, by maintaining that very arduous position in life, an artist's model. "Alcestis" was getting thoroughly weary of her duties, when they were broken by an advent rather rare at Woodford Cottage—that of the daily post. Vanbrugh grumblingly betook himself to the substitute of a lay figure and drapery, while Mrs. Rothesay read her letter, or rather looked at it, and gave it to Olive to read—glad, as usual, to escape from the trouble of correspondence.

Olive examined the superscription, as one sometimes does, uselessly enough—when breaking the seal would explain everything. It was a singularly bold, upright hand, distinct as print, free from all caligraphic flourishes, indicating, as most writing does indicate in some degree, the character of the writer. Slightly eccentric it might be, quick, restless, in its turned−up Gs and Ys, but still it was a good hand—an honest hand. Olive thought so and liked it. Wondering who the writer could be, she opened it, and read thus:

"MADAME,"From respect to your recent affliction I have kept silence for some months—a silence which, you will allow, was more than could have been expected from a wronged man.

Perhaps I should not break it now, save for the claim of a wife and mother, who are suffering, and must suffer, from the results of an act which sprung from my own folly, and another's cruel—But no; I will not apply harsh words towards one who is now no more.

"Are you aware, madam, that your late husband, not two days before his death, when in all human probability he must have known himself to be ruined, accepted from me as− sistance in a matter of business, which the enclosed correspondence between my solicitor and yours will explain? This act of mine, done for the sake of an ancient friendship subsisting between my mother and Captain Rothesay, has rendered me liable for a debt so heavy, that in paying it my income is impoverished, and must continue to be so, for years.

"Your husband gave me no security—I desired none. Therefore I have no legal claim of requital for this great and bitter sacrifice, which makes me daily curse my own folly in having trusted living man. But I ask of you, madam, who, secured from the effects of Captain Rothesay's insolvency, have, I understand, been left in comfort, if not affluence—I ask, is it right, in honour and in honesty, that I, a clergyman with a small stipend, should suffer the penalty of a deed wherein, with all charity to the dead, I cannot but think I was grievously injured?

"Awaiting your answer, I remain, madam, your very obedient,

"HAROLD GWYNNE."

"Harold Gwynne!"—Olive, repeating the name to herself, let the letter fall on the ground. Well was it that she stood hidden from sight by the "great picture," so that her mother could not know the pang which came over her.

The mystery, then, was solved. Now she knew why in that last agony her dying father had written the name of "Harold"—her poor father, who was here accused, by implication at least, of a wilful act of dishonesty! She regarded the letter with a sense of abhorrence—so coldly cruel it seemed to her, whose tenderness for a father's memory naturally a little belied her judgment. And the heartless charge was brought by the husband of Sara Derwent! There was bitterness in every association connected with the name of Harold Gwynne.

"Well, dear, who is the letter from? You were poring over it long enough," said Mrs. Rothesay, as they passed from the studio to their own apartment.

"It brings news that will grieve you. But never mind, mamma, darling—we will bear all our troubles together," said Olive, as she prepared to read the letter aloud.

Well she knew the effect it would produce on her mother's feebler mind. Tears it brought, and angry exclamations, and bitter repinings; but the tender daughter soothed them all.

"Now, dear mamma," she whispered, when Mrs. Rothesay was a little composed, "we must answer the letter at once. What shall we say?"

"Nothing! That cruel man deserves no reply at all."

"Mamma!" cried Olive, somewhat reproachfully. "Whatever he may be, the sum is evidently owed to him. Even Mr. Wyld admits this, you see. We must not forget justice and honour—my poor father's honour."

"No—no! You are right, my child. Let us do anything, if it is for the sake of his dear memory," sobbed the widow, whose love death had sanctified, and endowed with an added tenderness. "But, Olive, you must write—I cannot!"

Olive assented. She had long taken upon herself all similar duties. At once she sat down to pen this formidable letter. It took her some time; for there was a constant struggle between the necessary formality of a business−letter, and the impulse of wounded feeling, natural to her dead father's child. The finished epistle was a curious mingling of both.

"Shall I read it aloud, mamma? and then the subject will be taken from your mind," said Olive, as she came and stood by her mother's chair.

Mrs. Rothesay assented.

"Well, then, here it begins—'Reverend Sir' (I ought to address him so, you know, because he is a clergyman, though he does seem so harsh, and so unlike what a Christian pastor ought to be)."

"He does, indeed, my child—but, go on." And Olive read:

"'REVEREND SIR,'"I address you by my mother's desire, to say that she was quite unaware of your claim upon my late dear father. She can only reply to it, by requesting your patience for a little time, until she is able to liquidate the debt—not out of the wealth you attribute to her, but out of her present restricted means. And I, my father's only child, wishing to preserve his memory from the imputations you have cast upon it, must tell you in his defence, that his last moments were spent in a speechless effort to explain a mystery which none could divine. It has been now revealed by your letter, stating his secret debt. Oh, sir! was it right or kind of you so harshly to judge the dead? My father **intended** to pay you. If you have suffered, it was through his misfortune—not his crime. Have a little patience with us, and your claim shall be wholly discharged.

"'OLIVE ROTHESAY.'"

"You have said no word of Sara. I wonder if she knows all!" said the mother, as Olive folded up her letter.

"Hush, mamma! Let me forget every− thing that was once. Perhaps, too, she is not to blame. How, remembering the past, could Sara speak of **me** to her husband?"

Yet, with a look of bitter pain, Olive wrote the address of her letter—"Harbury Parsonage"—Sara's home!—She lingered, too, over the name of Sara's husband.

"**Harold Gwynne!** Oh, mamma! how different names look! I cannot bear the sight of this! It fills me with bitterness—even disgust." So spoke the lofty, but rarely roused spirit of Angus Rothesay's daughter.

Years after, Olive remembered these words.

CHAPTER II.

IF the old painter of Woodford Cottage was an ascetic and a misanthrope, never was the "milk of human kindness" so redundant in any human heart as in that of his excellent little sister, Miss Meliora Vanbrugh. From the day of her birth, when her indigent father's anticipation of a bequeathed fortune had caused her rather eccentric christian name, Miss Meliora began a chase after the wayward sprite Prosperity. She had hunted it during her whole lifetime, and never caught anything but its departing shadow. She had never grown rich, though she was always hoping to do so. She had never married, for no one had ever asked her. Whether she had loved—but that was another question. She had probably quite forgotten the days of her youth; at all events, she never talked about them now.

But though to herself her name had been a mockery, to others it was not so. Wherever she went, she always brought "better things"—at least, in anticipation. She was the most hopeful little body in the world, and carried with her a score of consolatory proverbs, about "long lanes" that had most fortunate "turnings," and "cloudy mornings" that were sure to change into "very fine days." She had always in her heart a garden full of small budding blessings; and though they never burst into flowers, she kept on ever expecting they would do so, and was therefore quite satisfied. Poor Miss Meliora! if her hopes never blossomed, she also never had the grief of watching them die.

Her whole life had been pervaded by one grand desire—to see her brother president of the Royal Academy. When she was a school−girl and he a student, she had secretly sketched his likeness—the only one extant of his ugly, yet soul−lighted face—and had prefixed thereto his name, with the magic letters, "P.R.A." She felt sure the prophecy would be fulfilled one day, and then she would show him the portrait, and let her humble, sisterly love go down to posterity on the hem of his robe of fame.

Meliora told all this to her favourite, Olive Rothesay, one day when they were busying themselves in gardening—an occupation wherein their tastes met, and which contributed no little to the affection and confidence that was gradually springing up between them.

"It is a great thing to be an artist," said Olive, musingly.

"Nothing like it in the world, my dear," was the enthusiastic answer. "Think of all the stories of little peasant−boys who have thus risen to be the companions of kings, whereby the kings ought to think themselves much honoured. Remember the stories of Francis I. and Titian, of Henry VII. and Hans Holbein, of Vandyck and Charles I.!"

"You seem quite learned in Art, Miss Vanbrugh. I wish you would impart to me a little of your knowledge."

"To be sure I will, my dear," said the proud, delighted little woman. "You see, when I was a girl, I 'read up' on Art, that I might be able to talk to Michael. Somehow, he never did care to talk with me; but perhaps he may yet."

Olive's mind seemed wandering from the conversation, and from her employment, too; for the mignonette−bed she was weeding lost quite as many flowers as weeds. At last she said—

"Miss Meliora, do people ever grow **rich** as artists?"

"Michael has not done so," answered her friend, a little confused (at which Olive began to blush for what seemed a thoughtless question). "But Michael has peculiar notions. However, I feel sure he will be a rich man yet—like Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Sir Thomas Lawrence, and many more."

Olive began to muse again. Then she said, timidly, "I wonder why, with all your love for Art, you yourself did not become an artist?"

"Bless you, my dear, I should never think of such a thing. I have no genius at all for anything—Michael always said so. I an artist!—a poor little woman like me!"

"Yet, some women have been painters."

"Oh, yes, plenty. There was Angelica Kauffman, and Properzia Rossi, and Elizabetta Sirani. In our day, there is Mrs. A— and Miss B—, and the two C—s. And if you read about the old Italian masters, you will find that many of them had wives, or daughters, or sisters, who helped them a great deal. I wish I had been such an one! Depend upon it, my dear girl," said Meliora, waxing quite oracular in her enthusiasm, "there is no profession in the world that brings fame, and riches, and happiness, like that of an artist."

Olive only half believed in the innocent optimism of her companion. Still, Miss Vanbrugh's words impressed

themselves strongly on her mind, wherein was now a chaos of anxious thought. From the day when Mr. Gwynne's letter came, she had positively writhed under the burden of this heavy debt, which it would take years to discharge, unless a great deduction were made from their slender income. And how could she propose that—how bear to see her delicate and often−ailing mother deprived of the small luxuries which had become necessary comforts? To their letter no answer came—the creditor was then a patient one; but this thought the more stimulated Olive to defray the debt. Night and day it weighed her spirit down; plan after plan she formed, chiefly in secret, for the mention of this painful circumstance was more than her mother could bear. Among other schemes, she thought of entering on that last resource of helpless womanhood, the dreary life of a daily governess; but her desultory education, she well knew, unfitted her for the duty; and no sooner did she venture to propose the plan, than Mrs. Rothesay's lamentations and entreaties rendered it impracticable.

But Miss Vanbrugh's conversation now awakened a new scheme, by which in time she might be able to redeem her father's memory, and to save her mother from any sacrifice entailed by this debt. And so—though this confession may somewhat lessen the romance of her character—it was from no yearning after fame, no genius−led ambition, but from the mere desire of earning money, that Olive Rothesay first conceived the thought of becoming an artist.

Very faint it was at first—so faint that she did not breathe it even to her mother. But it stimulated her to labour incessantly at her drawing; silently to try and acquire information from Miss Meliora; to haunt the painter's studio, until she had become familiar with many of its mysteries. She had crept into Vanbrugh's good graces, and he, with his customary, unconscious egotism, made her useful in a thousand ways.

But labouring secretly and without encouragement, Olive found her progress in drawing—she did not venture to call these humble efforts **Art**—very slow indeed. One day, when Mrs. Rothesay was gone out, Meliora came in to have a chat with her young favourite, and found poor Olive sitting by herself, quietly crying. There was lying beside her an unfinished sketch, which she hastily hid, before Miss Vanbrugh could notice what had been her occupation.

"My dear, what is the matter with you—no serious trouble, I hope?" cried the painter's little sister, who always melted into anxious compassion at the sight of anybody's tears. But Olive's only flowed the faster—she being in truth extremely miserable. For this day her mother had sorrowfully alluded to Mr. Gwynne's claim, and had begun to propose many little personal sacrifices on her own part, which grieved her affectionate daughter to the heart.

Meliora made vain efforts at womanly soothing, and then, as a last resource, she went and fetched two little kittens and laid them on Olive's lap by way of consolation; for her own delight and solace was in her household menagerie, from which she was ever evolving great future blessings. She had always either a cat so beautiful, that when sent to Edwin Landseer, it would certainly produce a revolution in the subjects of his animal−pictures—or else a terrier so bewitching, that she intended to present it to her then girlish, dog−loving Majesty, thereby causing a shower of prosperity to fall upon the household of Vanbrugh.

Olive dried her tears, and stroked the kittens—her propensity for such pets was not her lightest merit in Meliora's eyes. Then she suffered herself to be tenderly soothed into acknowledging that she was very unhappy.

"I'll not ask you why, my dear, because Michael used to tell me I had far too much feminine curiosity," said Miss Vanbrugh, humbly. "I only meant, if I could comfort you in any way."

There was something so unobtrusive in her sympathy, that Olive felt inclined to open her heart to the gentle Meliora. "I can't tell you all," she said, "I think it would not be quite right;" and, trembling and hesitating, as if in the confession were something of shame, she whispered her longing for that great comfort, money of her own earning.

"You, my dear, you want money!" cried Miss Meliora, who had always looked upon her new iniate, Mrs. Rothesay, as a sort of domestic gold−mine. But she had the delicacy not to press Olive farther.

"I do. I can't tell you why, but it is for a good purpose—a holy purpose! Oh, Miss Vanbrugh, if you could show me any way of earning money for myself! Think for me—you, who know so much more of the world than I."

—Which truth did not at all ignore the fact, that innocent little Meliora was a very child in worldly knowledge. She proved it by her next sentence, delivered oracularly after some minutes of hard cogitation. "My dear, there is but one way to gain wealth and prosperity. If you had but a taste for Art!"

Olive looked up eagerly. "Ah, that is what I have been brooding over this long time; until I was ashamed of

myself and my own presumption."

"Your presumption?"

"Yes; because I have sometimes thought my drawings were not so very, very bad; and I love Art so dearly, I would give anything in the world to be an artist!"

"You draw! You long to be an artist!" It was the only thing wanted to make Olive quite perfect in Meliora's eyes. She jumped up, and embraced her young favourite with the greatest enthusiasm. "I knew this was in you. All good people must have a love for Art. And you shall have your desire, for my brother shall teach you. I must go and tell him directly."

But Olive resisted, for her poor little heart began to quake. What if her long−loved girlish dreams should be quenched at once—if Mr. Vanbrugh's stern dictum should be that she had no talent, and never could become an artist at all!

"Well, then, don't be frightened, my dear girl. Let me see your sketches. I do know a little about such things, though Michael thinks I don't," said Miss Meliora.

And Olive, her cheeks tingling with that sensitive emotion which makes many a young artist, or poet, shrink in positive agony, when the crude first−fruits of his genius are brought to light—Olive stood by, while the painter's kind little sister turned over a portfolio, filled with a most heterogeneous mass of productions.

Their very oddity showed the spirit of Art that dictated them. There were no pretty, well−finished, young−ladyish sketches of tumble−down cottages, and trees whose species no botanist could ever define;—no smooth chalk heads, with very tiny mouths, and very crooked noses. Olive's productions were all as rough as rough could be; few even attaining to the dignity of drawing−paper. They comprised numberless pen−and−ink portraits of the one beautiful face, dearest to the daughter's heart—rude studies, in charcoal, of natural objects—outlines, from memory, of pictures she had seen, among which Meliora's eye proudly discerned several of Mr. Vanbrugh's; while, scattered on every scrap of paper, were original pencil designs, ludicrously voluminous, illustrating nearly every poet, living or dead.

Michael Vanbrugh's sister was not likely to be quite ignorant of Art. Indeed, she had quietly gathered up a tolerable critical knowledge of the same—love teaches women so much! She went through the portfolio, making remarks here and there. At last she closed it; but with a look so beaming and encouraging, that Olive trembled for very joy.

"Let us go to Michacl, let us go to Michael," was all the happy little woman said. So they went.

Unluckily, Michael was not himself; he had been "pestered with a popinjay," in the shape of a would−be connoisseur, and he was trying to smooth his ruffled feathers, and compose himself again to solitude and "Alcestis." His "well, what d'ye want?" was a sort of suppressed bellow, softening down a little at sight of Olive.

"Brother," cried Miss Meliora, trying to gather up her crumbling enthusiasm into one courageous point—"Michael, I have found out a new genius! Look here, and say if Olive Rothesay will not make an artist!"

"Pshaw—a woman make an artist! Ridiculous!" was the answer. "Ha! take the rubbish away—don't come near my picture. The paint's wet. Get away!"

And he stood, flourishing his mahl−stick and palette—looking very like a gigantic warrior, guarding the shrine of Art with shield and spear.

His poor little sister, quite confounded, tried to pick up the drawings which had fallen on the floor; but he thundered out "Let them stay!" and then politely desired his sister to quit the room.

"Very well, brother—perhaps it will be better for you to look at the sketches another time. Come, my dear."

"Stay, I want Miss Rothesay; no one else knows how to wear that purple chlamys properly, and I must work at the drapery today. I am fit for nothing else, thanks to that puppy who is just gone; confound him! I beg your pardon, Miss Rothesay," muttered the old painter, in a slight tone of concession, which encouraged Meliora to another gentle attack.

"Then, brother, since your day is spoiled, don't you think if you were to look—"

"I'll look at nothing; get away with you, and leave Miss Rothesay here—the only one of you womenkind who is fit to enter an artist's studio."

Here Meliora slyly looked at Olive with an encouraging smile, and then, by no means despairing of her kind−hearted mission, she made herself invisible.

Olive, very humbled and disconsolate, prepared for her voluntary duty as Vanbrugh's lay−figure. If she had not

so reverenced his genius, she certainly would not have altogether liked the man. But her hero−worship was so intense, and her womanly patience so all−forgiving, that she bore his occasional strange humours almost as meekly as Meliora herself. To−day, for the hundredth time, she watched the painter's brow smoothe, and his voice soften, as upon him grew the influence of his beautiful creation. "Alcestis," calmly smiling from the canvas, shed balm into his vexed soul.

But beneath the purple chlamys poor little Olive still trembled and grieved. Not until her hope was thus crushed, did she know how near her heart it had been. She thought of Michael Vanbrugh's scornful rebuke, and bitter shame possessed her. She stood—patient model!—her fingers stiffening over the rich drapery, her eyes wearily fixed on the one corner of the room, in the direction of which she was obliged to turn her head. The monotonous, silent attitude contributed to plunge her mind into that dull despair which produces immobility of frame;—Michael Vanbrugh had never had so excellent a model.

As Olive was placed, he could not see her face unless he moved. When he did so, he quite startled her out of a reverie by exclaiming—

"Exquisite! Stay just as you are. Don't change your expression. That's the very face I want for the Mother of Alcestis. A little older I must make it—but the look of passive misery, the depressed eyelids and mouth. Ah, beautiful—beautiful, Miss Rothesay—do, pray let me have that expression again, just for three minutes!" cried the eager painter.

He accomplished his end; for Olive's features, from long habit, had a great power of retaining immobility;—and she would willingly have acted all Le Brun's Passions, if necessary, for artistic purposes. Delighted at his success, Mr. Vanbrugh suddenly thought of his model, not **as** a model, but as a human being. He wondered what had produced the look which, now faithfully transferred to the canvas, completed "a bit" that had troubled him for weeks. He then thought of the drawings, and of his roughness concerning them. Usually, he hated amateurs and their productions, but perhaps these might not be so bad. He would not stoop to lift them, but, fidgeting with his mahl−stick, he stirred them about once or twice—accidentally as it seemed—until he had a very good notion of what they were. Then, after half an hour's silent painting, he thus addressed Olive.

"Miss Rothesay, what put it into your head that you wanted to be an artist?"

Olive answered nothing. She was ashamed to speak of her girlish aspirations, such as they had been; and she could not tell the other motive—the secret about Mr. Gwynne. Besides, Vanbrugh would have scorned the bare idea of her entering on the great career of Art for money! So she was silent.

He did not seem to mind it at all, but went on talking, as he sometimes did, in a sort of declamatory monologue.

"I am not such a fool as to say that genius is of either sex, but it is an acknowledged fact that no woman ever was a great painter, poet, or musician. Genius, the mighty one, does not exist in weak female nature, and even if it did, custom and education would certainly stunt its growth. Look here, child,"—and, to Olive's astonishment, he snatched up one of her drawings, and began lecturing thereupon—"here you have made a design—of some original power, too. I hate your young lady copyists of landscapes and flowers, and Jullien's paltry heads. Come, let us see this epigraph, 'Laon's Vision of Cythna,'

> Upon the mountain's dizzy brink she stood.

Good! Bold enough, too!"

And the painter settled himself into a long, silent examination of the sketch. Then he said,

"Well, this is tolerable; a woman standing on a rock, a man a little distance below looking at her—both drawn more correctly than most amateurs could, only overlaid with drapery to hide ignorance of anatomy. A very respectable design. But when one compares it with the poem!" And, in his deep, sonorous voice, he repeated the stanzas from the "Revolt of Islam."

> She stood alone.
> Above, the heavens were spread; below, the flood

Was murmuring in its caves; the wind had blown
Her hair apart, through which her eyes and forehead shone.

A cloud was hanging o'er the western mountains;
Before its blue and moveless depth was flying.
Grey mists poured forth from the unresting fountains
Of darkness in the north—the day was dying.
Sudden the sun shone forth; its beams were lying
Like boiling gold on ocean, strange to see;
And on the shattered vapours, which defying
The power of light in vain, tossed restlessly
In the red heaven, like wrecks in a tempestuous sea.

It was a stream of living beams, whose bank
On either side by the cloud's cleft was made;
And where its chasms that flood of glory drank,
Its waves gushed forth like fire, and, as if swayed
By some mute tempest, rolled on **her**. The shade
Of her bright image floated on the river
Of liquid light, which then did end and fade.
Her radiant shape upon its verge did shiver
Aloft, her flowing hair like strings of flame did quiver.

"There!" cried Vanbrugh, his countenance glowing with a fierce inspiration that made it grand amidst its ugliness; "there—what woman could paint **that**? Or rather, what man? Alas! how feeble we are—we, boldest followers of an Art which is divine. Truly there was but one among us who was himself above humanity, Michael the Angel!"

And he went and gazed reverently at the majestic head of Buonarotti, which loomed out from the shadowy corner of the studio.

Olive experienced—as she often did, when brought into contact with this man's enthusiasm—a delight almost like terror; for it made her shudder and tremble as though within her own poor frame was that Pythian effluence, felt, not understood—the spirit of Genius.

Vanbrugh came back, and continued his painting, talking all the while.

"I said that it was impossible for a woman to become an artist—I mean, a **great** artist. Have you ever thought what that term implies? Not only a painter, but a poet; a man of learning, of reading, of observation. A gentleman—we artists have been the friends of kings. A man of high virtue, or how can he reach the pure ideal? A man of iron will, unconquered daring, and passions strong—yet stainless. Last and greatest, a man who, feeling within him the divine spirit, with his whole soul worships God!"

Vanbrugh lifted off his velvet cap and reverently bared his lofty crown; then he continued:

"This is what an artist must **be** by nature. I have not spoken of what he has to make himself. Years of study such as few can bear lie before him,—no life of a carpet−knight, no easy play−work of scraping colours on canvas. Why, these hands of mine have wielded not only the pencil, but the scalpel; these eyes have rested on scenes of horror, misery—even crime. I glory in it; for it was all for Art. At times I have almost felt like Parrhasius of old, who exulted in his captive's dying throes, since upon them his hand of genius would confer immortality. But this is not meet for the ears of a woman—a girl," added Vanbrugh, seeing Olive shudder at his words. Yet he had not been unmindful of the ardent enthusiasm which had dilated her whole frame while listening. It touched him like the memory of his own youth. Some likeness, too, there seemed between himself and this young girl to whom nature had been so niggardly. She might also be one of those who, shut out from human ties, are the more free to work the glorious work of genius.

After a few minutes of thought, Michael again burst forth.

"They who embrace Art, must embrace her with heart and soul, as their one only bride. And she will be a loving bride to them,—she will stand in the place of all other joy. Is it not triumph for him to whom fate has denied personal beauty, that his hand—his flesh and blood hand—has power to create it? What cares he for worldly splendour, when in dreams he can summon up a fairyland so gorgeous that in limning it even his own rainbow−dyed pencil fails? What need has he for home, to whom the wide world is full of treasures of study—for which life itself is too short? And what to him are earthly and domestic ties? For friendship, he exchanges the world's worship, which **may** be his in life, **must** be, after death. For love—"

Here the old artist paused a moment, and there was something heavenly in the melody of his voice as he continued,

"For love—frail human love—the poison− flower of youth, which only lasts an hour—he has his own divine ideal. It flits continually before him, sometimes all but clasped; it inspires his manhood with purity, and pours celestial passion into his age. His heart, though dead to all human ties, is not cold, but burning. For he worships the ideal of beauty, he loves the ideal of love."

Olive listened, her senses reeling before these impetuous words. One moment she looked at Vanbrugh where he stood, his age transfigured into youth, his ugliness into majesty, by the radiance of the immortal fire that dwelt within him. Then she sank at his feet, crying,

"I, too, am one of these outcasts; give me then this inner life which is beyond all! Friend, counsel me! master, teach me! Woman as I am, I will dare all things—endure all things. Let me be an artist!"

CHAPTER III.

OLIVE ROTHESAY'S desire,

> Like all strongest hopes,
> By its own energy fulfilled itself.

She became an artist—not in a week, a month, a year—Art exacts of its votaries no less service than a lifetime. But in her girl's soul the right chord had been touched, which began to vibrate unto noble music—the true seed had been sown, which day by day grew into a goodly plant.

Vanbrugh had said truly, that genius is of no sex; and he had said likewise truly, that no woman can be an artist—that is, a great artist. The hierarchies of the soul's dominion belong only to man, and it is right they should. He it was whom God created first, let him take the pre−eminence. But among those stars of lesser glory, which are given to lighten the nations, among sweet−voiced poets, earnest prose writers, who, by the lofty truth that lies hid beneath legend and parable, purify the world, graceful painters and beautiful musicians, each brightening their generation with serene and holy lustre—among these, let woman shine!

But her sphere is, and ever must be, bounded; because, however lofty her genius may be, it always dwells in a woman's breast. Nature, which gave to man the dominion of the intellect, gave to her that of the heart and affections. These bind her with everlasting links from which she cannot free herself,—nay, she would not if she could. Herein man has the advantage. He, strong in his might of intellect, can make it his all in all, his life's sole aim and guerdon. A Brutus, for that ambition which is misnamed patriotism, can trample on all human ties. A Michael Angelo can stand alone with his genius, and so go sternly down unto a desolate old age. But there scarce ever lived the woman who would not rather sit meekly by her own hearth, with her husband at her side, and her children at her knee, than be the crowned Corinne of the Capitol.

Thus woman, seeking to strive with man, is made feebler by the very spirit of love which in her own sphere is her chiefest strength. But sometimes chance or circumstance or wrong, sealing up her woman's nature, converts her into a self−dependent human soul. Instead of life's sweetnesses, she has before her life's greatnesses. The struggle passed, her genius may lift itself upward, expand and grow mighty; never so mighty as man's, but still great and glorious. Then, even while she walks with scarce−healed feet over the world's rough pathway, heaven's glory may rest upon her up−turned brow, and she may become a light unto her generation.

Such a destiny lay open before Olive Rothesay.

She welcomed it as one who has girded himself with steadfast but mournful patience unto a long and dreary journey, welcomes the faint ray that promises to guide him through the desolation. No more she uttered, as was her custom in melancholy moods, the bitter complaint, "Why was I born?" but she said to herself, "I will live so as to leave the world better when I die. Then I shall not have lived in vain."

It was long before Michael Vanbrugh could thoroughly reconcile himself to the idea of a girl's becoming a painter. But by degrees he learned to view his young pupil **as** a pupil, and never thought of her sex at all. Under his guidance, Olive passed from the mere prettinesses of most woman−painters to the grandeur of sublimer Art. Strengthened by her almost masculine power of mind, she learned to comprehend and to reverence the mighty masters which Vanbrugh loved. He unveiled to her those heights and depths which are rarely opened to a woman's ken. And she, following as he led—following with a daring will, and a firm perseverance—applied herself to the most obstruse of Art−studies. Still, as he had said, there were bounds that she could not pass; but as far as in her lay, she sought to lift herself above her sex's weakness and want of perseverance; and by an arduous toil from which most women would have shrunk, to make herself worthy of being ranked among those painters who are not of the passing hour, but for all time.

That sense of personal imperfection which she deemed excluded her from a woman's natural destiny, gave her freedom in her own. Brought into contact with the world, she scarce felt like a young and timid girl, but as a being—isolated, yet strong in her isolation; who mingles, and must mingle, among men, not as a woman, but as one who, like themselves, pursues her own calling, has her own spirit's aim; and can therefore step aside for no

vain fear, nor sink beneath any idle shame. And wherever she went, her own perfect womanliness wrapped her round as with a shield.

Still, Olive could do many things with an independence that would have been impossible to beautiful and unguarded youth. Oftentimes Mrs. Rothesay trembled and mur− mured at the days of solitary study in the British Museum, and in various picture−galleries; the long lonely walks, sometimes in winter−time extending far into the dusk of evening. But Olive always answered, with a pensive smile,

"Nay, mother; I am quite safe everywhere. Remember, I am not like other girls. Who would notice **me**?"

But she always accompanied any painful allusion of this kind by saying how happy she was in being so free, and how fortunate it seemed that there could be nothing to hinder her from following her heart's desire. She was growing as great an optimist as Miss Meliora herself, who—cheerful little soul—was in the seventh heaven of delight whenever she heard her brother acknowledge Olive's progress.

"And don't you see, my dear Miss Rothesay," she said sometimes, "that everything always turns out for the best; and that if you had not been so unhappy, and I had not come in and found you crying, you might have gone on pining in secret, instead of growing up to be an artist."

Olive assented, and confessed it was rather strange that out of her chiefest trouble should have arisen her chiefest joy.

"It almost seems," said she to her mother, laughing, "as if that hard−hearted Mr. Harold Gwynne had held the threads of my destiny, and helped to make me an artist."

"Don't let us talk about Mr. Gwynne; it is a disagreeble subject, my child," was Mrs. Rothesay's answer.

Olive did not talk about him, but she thought the more. And—though had he known it, the pelf−despising Mr. Vanbrugh would never have forgiven such a desecration of Art—it was not Olive's lightest spur in the attainment of excellence, to feel that as soon as her pictures were good enough to sell, she might earn money enough to discharge the claim of this harsh creditor, whose very name sent a pang to her heart.

Day by day, as her spirit strengthened and her genius developed, Olive's existence seemed to brighten. Her domestic life was full of many dear ties, the chief of which was that wild devotion, less a sentiment than a passion, which she felt for her mother. Her intellectual life grew more intense and all−vivifying; while she felt the stay and solace of having one pursuit to occupy the whole aims and desires of her future. Also, it was good for her to dwell with the enthusiastic painter and his meek contented little sister; for she learnt thereby that life might pass not merely in endurance, but in peace, without either of those blessings which in her early romance she deemed the chief of all— beauty and love. She felt that worth and genius were above them both.

The lesson was impressed more deeply by a little incident that chanced about this time.

Miss Vanbrugh sometimes took Olive with her on those little errands of charity which were not unfrequent with the gentle Meliora.

"I wish you would come with me to−day," she said once, "because, to tell the truth, I hardly like to go alone."

"Indeed!" said Olive, smiling, for the little old maid was as brave as a lion among those gloomiest of all gloomy lanes. She would traverse them even in dark nights, and this was a sunny spring morning.

"I am not going to see an ordinary poor person, but that strange foreign−looking woman—Mrs. Manners; who is one of my brother's models sometimes—you know her?"

"Scarcely; but I have seen her pass through the hall. Oh, she was a grand, beautiful woman, like an Eastern queen. You remember it was she from whom Mr. Vanbrugh painted the "Cleopatra." What an eye she had, and what a glorious mouth!" cried Olive, waxing enthusiastic.

"Poor thing! Her beauty is sadly wasting now," said Meliora. "She seems to be slowly dying, and I shouldn't wonder if it were of sheer starvation; those models earn so little. Yesterday she fainted as she stood—Michael is so thoughtless. He had to call me to give her some wine, and then we sent the maid home with her. She lives in a poor place, Jane says, but quite decent and respectable. I shall surely go and see the poor creature; but she looks such a desperate sort of woman, her eyes glare quite ferociously sometimes. She might be angry—so I had rather not be alone, if you will come, Miss Rothesay?"

Olive consented at once; there was in her a daring romance which, putting all sympathy aside, would have quite gloried in such an adventure.

They walked for a mile or two until they reached a miserable street by the river−side; but Miss Meliora had forgotten the number. They must have returned, their quest unsatisfied, had not Olive seen a little girl leaning out

of an upper window,—her ragged elbows on the sill, her wild elf−like black eyes watching the boats up and down the Thames.

"I know that child," Olive said; "it is the poor woman's. She left it in the hall one day at Woodford−cottage, and I noticed it from its black eyes and fair hair. I remember, too—for I asked—its singular and very pretty name, **Christal**."

Talking thus, they mounted the rickety staircase, and inquired for Mrs. Manners. The door of the room was flung open from without, with a noise that would have broken any torpor less deep than that into which its wretched occupant had fallen.

"*Ma mie* is asleep don't wake her or she'll scold," said Christal, jumping down from the window, and interposing between Miss Vanbrugh and the woman who was called Mrs. Manners.

She was indeed a very beautiful woman, though her beauty was on a grand scale. She had flung herself, half−dressed, upon what seemed a heap of straw with a blanket thrown over. As she lay there, sleeping heavily, her arm tossed above her head, the large but perfect proportions of her form reminded Olive of the reclining figure in the group of the "Three Fates."

But there was in the prematurely old and wasted face something that told of a wrecked life. Olive, prone to romance−weaving, wondered whether nature had in a mere freak in− vested an ordinary low−born woman with the form of the ancient queens of the world, or whether within that grand body lay ruined an equally grand soul.

Miss Meliora did not think about anything of the sort; but merely that her brother's dinner−hour was drawing near, and that if poor Mrs. Manners did not wake, they must go back without speaking to her.

But she did wake soon—and the paroxysm of anger which seized her on discovering that she had intruding guests, caused Olive to shrink back almost to the staircase. But brave little Miss Vanbrugh did not so easily give up her charitable purpose.

"Indeed, my good woman, I only meant to offer you sympathy, or any help you might need in your illness."

The woman refused both, in an accent that to Olive seemed rather Spanish—or perhaps she fancied so, because the dark face had a Spanish, or Creole cast. "I tell you, we want for nothing."

"*Ma mie*! I am so hungry!" said little Christal, in a tone between complaint and effrontery. "I will have something to eat."

"You should not speak so rudely to your mother, little girl," interposed Miss Meliora.

"My mother! No, indeed; she is only *ma mie*. My mother was a rich lady, and my father a noble gentleman."

"Hear her, Heaven! oh, hear her!" groaned the woman on the floor.

"But I love *ma mie* very much—that's when she's kind to me," said Christal; "and as for my own father and mother, I don't remember them at all, for, as *ma mie* says, they were drowned together in the deep sea, years ago."

"I would they had been—I would they had been," was the muttered answer, as Mrs. Manners clutched the child—a little, thin− limbed, cunning−eyed girl, of eight or ten years old—and pressed her to her breast, with a strain more like the gripe of a lioness tha a tender woman's clasp.

Then she fell back quite exhausted, and took no more notice of anybody. Meliora's easily−roused compassion forgot Mr. Vanbrugh's dinner, and all things else, in making a few charitable arrangements, that resulted in a comfortable tea for little Christal and "*ma mie* ."

Sleep had again overpowered the sick woman, who appeared to be slowly dying of that anomalous disease called decline, in which the mind is the chief agent of the body's decay. Meanwhile, Miss Vanbrugh talked in an undertone to little Christal, who, her hunger satisfied, stood, her finger in her mouth, watching the two ladies with her fierce black eyes—the very image of a half−tamed gipsy. Indeed, Miss Meliora seemed rather uneasy, and desirous to learn more of her companions, for she questioned the child closely.

"And is the person you call *ma mie* any relation to you?"

"The neighbours say she must be my aunt, from the likeness. I don't know."

"And her name is Mrs. Manners—a widow, no doubt; for I remember she was in very respectable mourning when she first came to Woodford Cottage," said Meliora, who, having thus far drawn on her lively imagination, deeply sympathised with the supposed heroine of her fanciful tale.

"Poor young creature!" she continued, sitting down beside the object of her compassion, who was, or seemed, asleep. "How hard to lose her husband so soon! and I dare say she has gone through great poverty—sold one thing after another to keep her alive. Why, I declare," added the simple and unworldly Meliora, who could make a story

to fit anything, "poor soul! she has even been forced to part with her wedding−ring."

"I never had one—I scorned it!" cried the woman, leaping up with a violence that quite confounded the painter's sister. "Do you come to insult me, you smooth−tongued English lady? Ah, you shrink away—I am too vile for your presence, am I?"

"I don't know anything about you, indeed," said Meliora, creeping to the door; while Olive, who, as yet untouched by human passion, could not understand the mystery of half she witnessed, stood simply looking on in wonder—almost in admiration. To her there seemed a strange beauty, like that of a Pythoness, in the woman's attitude and mien.

"You know nothing of me? Then you shall know. I come from a country where are thousands of young maidens, whose blood, half−Southern, half−European, is too pure for slavery, too tainted for freedom. Lovely, and taught all accomplishments that can ennoble beauty, brought up delicately, in wealth and luxury, they yet have no higher future than to be the white man's passing toy—cherished, mocked, and spurned."

She paused; and Miss Vanbrugh, astonished at this sudden outburst, in language so vehement, and above her apparent sphere, had not a word to say. The woman continued:

"I but fulfilled my destiny. How could such as I hope to bear an honest man's honest name? So, when my fate came upon me, I cast all shame to the winds, and lived out my life. I followed my lover across the seas; I clung to him, faithful in my degradation; and when his child slept on my bosom, I looked at it, and was almost happy. Now, what think you of me, virtuous English lady?" cried the outcast, as she tossed back her cloud of dark crisped hair, chief token of her Quadroon blood, and fixed her eyes sternly, yet mockingly, upon her visitors.

Poor Miss Vanbrugh was conscious of but one thing, that this scene was most unmeet for a young girl; and that if once she could get Olive away, all future visits to the miserable woman should be paid by herself alone. Yet still she had the charity to say, in forbearing and half−disguised words,

"I will see you another day, Mrs. Manners, but we cannot really stay now. Come away, my dear Miss Rothesay."

And she and her charge quitted the room. Apparently, their precipitate departure still further irritated the poor creature they had come to succour; for as they descended the stairs, they heard her repeatedly shriek out Olive's surname, in tones so wild, that whether it was meant for rage or entreaty they could not tell.

Olive wanted to return.

"No, my dear; she would only insult you. Besides, I will go myself to−morrow. Poor wretch! she is plainly near her end. We must be merciful to the dying."

Olive walked home thoughtfully, not speaking much. When they passed out of the squalid, noisy streets, into the quiet lane that led to Woodford Cottage, she had never felt with so keen a sense the blessing of a pure and peaceful home. She mounted to the pretty bedchamber which she and her mother occupied, and stood at the open window, drinking in the fresh, sweet odour of the bursting leaves. Scarce a breath stirred the soft spring evening—the sky was like one calm blue lake, and therein floated, close to the western verge, "the new moon's silver boat."

She remembered how it had been one of her childish superstitions always "to wish at the new moon." How often, her desire seeming perversely to lift itself to− wards things unattainable, had she framed one sole wish, that she might be beautiful and loved!

Beautiful and beloved! She thought of the poor erring creature whose fierce words yet rang in her shrinking ear. Beautiful and beloved! **She** had been both, and what was she now?

And Olive rejoiced that her own childish longings had passed into the wisdom of subdued and patient womanhood. Had she now to frame a wish, it would have been for that pure heart and lowly mind which are more precious than beauty; for that serene peace of virtue, which is more to be desired than love.

Now her fate seemed plain before her—within her home she saw the vista of a life of filial devotion, blest in

> "A constant stream of love that knew no fall."

As she looked forth into the world without, there rose the vision, dim, yet sweet, of the great aim, that might perhaps achieve a success under shadow of which the lonely woman might go down to the grave not unhonoured

in her day. Remembering all this, Olive murmured no longer at her destiny. She thanked God, for she felt that she was not unhappy.

CHAPTER IV.

PERHAPS, ere following Olive's fortunes, it would be as well to set the reader's mind at rest concerning the incident narrated in the preceding chapter. It turned out the olden tale of passion, misery, and death. No more could be made of it, even by the imaginative Miss Meliora.

A few words will comprise all that she discovered. Returning faithfully next day, the kind little woman found that the object of her charity needed it no more. In the night, suddenly it was thought, the spirit had departed. There was no friend to arrange anything for the living or the dead; so Miss Vanbrugh undertook it all. Her own unobtrusive benevolence prevented a pauper funeral. But in examining the few relics of the deceased, she was surprised to find papers which clearly explained the fact, that some years before there had been placed in a London bank, to the credit of Celia Manners, a sum sufficient to produce a moderate annuity. The woman had rejected it, and starved.

But she had not died without leaving a written injunction, that it should be claimed by the child Christal, since it was "her right." This was accomplished, to the great satisfaction of Miss Vanbrugh and of the honest banker, who knew that the man—what sort of man he had quite forgotten—who deposited the money, had enjoined that it should be paid, whenever claimed by Celia or by Christal Manners.

Christal Manners was then the child's name. Miss Vanbrugh might have thought that this discovery implied the heritage of shame, but for the little girl's obstinate persistence in the tale respecting her unknown father and mother, who were "a noble gentleman and grand lady," and had both been drowned at sea. The circumstance was by no means improbable, and it had evidently been strongly impressed on Christal by the woman she called *ma mie*. Whatever relationship there was between them, it could not be the maternal one. Miss Vanbrugh could not believe in the possibility of a mother's thus voluntarily renouncing her own child.

Miss Meliora put Christal to board with an old servant of hers, for a few weeks. But there came such reports of the child's daring and unruly temper, that, quaking under her responsibility, she decided to send her *protègée* away to school. The only place she could think of was an old−fashioned *pension* in Paris, where, during her brother's studies there, her own slender education had been acquired. Thither the little stranger was despatched, by means of a succession of contrivances which almost drove the simple Meliora crazy. For—lest her little adventure of benevolence should come to Michael's ears—she dared to take no one into her confidence, not even the Rothesays. Madame Blandin, the mistress of the *pension* , was furnished with no explanations; indeed, there were none to give. The orphan appeared there under the character she so steadily sustained—as Miss Christal Manners, the child of illustrious parents lost at sea; and so she vanished altogether from the atmosphere of Woodford Cottage.

Olive Rothesay was now straining every nerve towards the completion of her first−exhibited picture—a momentous crisis in every young artist's life. It was March: always a pleasant month in this mild, sheltered neighbourhood where she had made her home. There, of all the regions about London, the leaves come earliest, the larks soonest begin to sing, and the first soft spring breezes blow. But nothing could allure Olive from that corner of their large drawing−room which she had made her studio, and where she sat painting from early morning until daylight was spent. The artist herself formed no unpleasing picture—at least, so her fond mother often thought; as Olive stood before her easel, the light from the half−closed−up window slanting downwards on her long curls, of that rare pale gold, the delight of the ancient painters, and now the especial admiration of Michael Vanbrugh. To please her master, Olive—though now a woman grown—wore her hair still in childish fashion, falling in most artistic confusion over her neck and shoulders. It seemed that nature had bestowed on her this great beauty, in order to veil that defect which, though made far less apparent by her maturer growth, and a certain art in dress, could never be entirely removed. Still there was an inexpressible charm in her purely−outlined features, to which the complexion always accompanying pale−gold hair imparted such a delicate, spiritual colouring. Oftentimes her mother sat and looked at her, thinking she beheld the very likeness of the angel in her dream.

March was nearly passed—March, that month the most trying of the year to English artists and their "forbears." Olive's anxiety that the picture should be finished, and worthily finished, amounted almost to torture. At last, when there was but one week left—a week whose every hour of daylight must be spent in work, the hope

and fear were at once terminated by her mother's sudden illness. Passing it was, and not dangerous; but to Olive's picture it brought a fatal interruption.

The tender mother more than once prayed her to neglect all a daughter's cares, rather than lose the year's exhibition; but Olive forsook not her duty. Yet it cost her somewhat—aye, more than Mrs. Rothesay could understand, to give up a year's hopes. She felt this the more when came the Monday and Tuesday for sending in pictures to the Academy.

Heavily these days passed, for there was not now the attendance on the invalid to occupy Olive's mind. She was called hither and thither all over the house; since on these two days, for the only time in the year, there was at Woodford Cottage a positive *levée* of artists, patrons, and connoisseurs. Miss Rothesay was needed everywhere; first in the painting−room, to assist in arranging its various treasures, her taste and tact assisting Mr. Vanbrugh's artistic skill. For the thousandth time, she helped to move the easel that sustained the small **purchasable** picture with which Michael this year condescended to favour the Academy; and admired, to the painter's heart's content, the beloved and long unsold "Alcestis," which extended in desolate grandeur over one whole side of the studio. Then she flitted to Miss Vanbrugh's room, to help her to dress for this important occasion. Never was there such a proud, happy little woman as Meliora Vanbrugh on the first Monday and Tuesday in April, when at least a dozen carriages usually rolled down the muddy lane, and the great surly dog, kennelled under the mulberry−tree, was never silent "from morn till dewy eve;" and all, thought the delighted Meliora, was an ovation to her brother's fame. Each year she fully expected that these visiting patrons would buy up every work of Art in the studio, to say nothing of those adorning the hall—the cartoons and frescoes of Michael's long−past youth. And each year, when the carriages rolled away, and the visitants' admiration remained nothing **but** admiration, she consoled herself with the thought that Michael Vanbrugh was "a man before his age," but that his time for appreciation would surely come. So she hoped on till the next April: happy Meliora!

"Yes, you do seem happy, Miss Vanbrugh," said Olive, when she had coaxed the stiff grizzled hair under a pretty cap of her own skilful manufacturing; and the painter's little sister was about to mount guard in the bay−window of the parlour, from whence she could see the guests walk down the garden, and be also ready to mark the expression of their faces as they came out of the studio.

"Happy!—to be sure I am! Everybody. must confess that this last is the best picture Michael ever painted"—(his sister had made the same observation every April for twenty years). "But, my dear Miss Rothesay, how wrong I am to talk so cheerfully to you, when **your** picture is not finished. But never mind, love! You have been a good, attentive daughter, and it will end all for the best."

Olive smiled faintly, and said she knew it would. But she thought in her troubled heart how much seldomer were hopes fulfilled than disappointed.

"Perhaps," continued Meliora, as a new and consolatory idea struck her, "perhaps, even if you had sent in the picture, it might have been returned, or put in the octagon room, or among the miniatures, where nobody could see it; and that would have been much worse, would it not?"

"I suppose so; and, indeed, I will be quite patient and content."

Patient she was, but not content. It was scarcely possible. Nevertheless, she quitted Miss Vanbrugh with smiles; and when she again sought her mother's chamber, it was with smiles too—or, at least, with that soft sweetness that ever dwelt in Olive's face. When she had left Mrs. Rothesay to take her afternoon sleep, she thought what she was to do to pass away the hours that, in spite of herself, dragged very wearily. This day was so different to what she had hoped. No eager, delighted "last touches" to her beloved picture; no exhibiting of it in its best light, in all the glory of the frame. It lay neglected below—she could not bear to look at it. The day was clear and bright—just the sort of day for painting; but Olive felt that the very sight of the poor picture would be more than she could bear. She did not go near it, but put on her bonnet and walked out.

"Courage! hope!" sang the larks to her, high up above the green lanes; but her heart was too sad to hear them. A year, a whole year, lost!—a whole year to wait for the next hope! And a year seems so long when one has scarce counted twenty. Afterwards, how fast it flies!

"Perhaps," she said, her thoughts taking their colour from the general weariness of her spirits, "perhaps Miss Vanbrugh was right, and I might have had the picture returned. It cannot be very good, or it would not have taken such long and constant labour. Genius, they say, never toils—all comes by inspiration. It may be that I have no genius; well then, where is the use of my labouring to excel?—indeed, where is the use of my living at all?"

Alas! how little is known of the struggles of young, half−formed genius!—struggles, not only with the world, but with itself; a hopeless, miserable bearing−down—a sense of utter unworthiness and self−contempt. At times, when the inner life—the soul's lamp—burns dimly, there rises the piteous moan—"Fool! fool! why strivest thou in vain? Thou hast deceived thyself; thou art no better than any brainless ass that plods through life!" And then the world grows so dull, and one's life seems so worthless, that one would fain blot it out at once.

Olive walked beneath this bitter cloud. She said to herself, that if her picture had been a work of genius, it would have been finished long ere the time; and that if she were destined to be an artist, there would not have come this cross. No! all fates were against her. She must be patient and submit, but she felt as if she should never have courage to paint again. And now, when her work had become the chief aim and joy of her life, how hard this seemed!

She came home, drearily enough; for the sunny day had changed to rain, and she was thoroughly wet. But even this was, as Meliora would have expressed it, "for the best;" since it made her feel the sweetness of having a tender mother to take off her dripping garments, and smooth her hair, and make her sit down before the bright fire. And then Olive laid her head in her mother's lap, and thought how wrong—nay, wicked—she had been! She was thinking thus, even with a few quiet tears, when Miss Meliora burst, like a stream of sunshine, into the room.

"Good news—good news!"

"What? Mr. Vanbrugh has sold his picture, as you hoped, to Mr. —"

"No, not yet!" and the least possible shadow troubled the sister's face, "but perhaps he will. And, meanwhile, what think you? Something has happened quite as good—at least, for somebody else. Guess!"

"Indeed, I cannot!"

"He has sold **yours**!"

Olive's face flushed, grew white, and then she welcomed this first success, as many another young aspirant to fame has done, by bursting into tears. So did the easily−touched Mrs. Rothesay, and so did the kind Miss Meliora, from pure sympathy. Never was good fortune hailed in a more lachrymose fashion.

But soon Miss Vanbrugh, resuming her smiles, explained how she had placed Olive's nearly−finished picture in her brother's studio, where all the visitors had admired it, and one, a good friend to Art, and to young, struggling artists, had bought it.

"My brother managed all—even to the payment. The full price you will have when you have completed the picture. And, meanwhile, look here!"

She had filled one hand with golden guineas, and now poured a Danae−stream into Olive's lap. Then, laughing and skipping about like a child, she vanished—the beneficent little fairy!—as swiftly as Cinderella's godmother.

Olive sat mute, her eyes fixed on the "bits of shining gold," which seemed to look different to all other pieces of gold that she had ever seen. She touched them, as if half fearing they would melt away, or, like elfin coins, change into withered leaves. Then, brightly smiling, she took them up, one by one, and told them into her mother's lap.

"Take them, darling—my first earnings; and kiss me—kiss your happy little girl!"

How sweet was that moment—worth whole years of after fame! Olive Rothesay might live to bathe in the sunshine of renown—to hear behind her the murmur of a world's praise—but she never could know again the bliss of laying at her mother's feet the first−fruits of her genius, and winning, as its first guerdon, her mother's proud and happy kiss.

"You will be quite rich now, my child."

"**We** will be," said Olive, softly.

"And to think that such a great connoisseur as Mr. — should choose my Olive's picture. Ah! she will be a celebrated woman some time—I always thought she would."

"**I will**!" said the firm voice in Olive's heart, as, roused to enthusiasm by this sweet first success, she felt stirring within her the spirit whose pulses she could not mistake—woman, nay, girl as she was—the spirit of Genius. Thinking on her future—the future that, with Heaven's blessing, she would nobly work out, her eye dilated and her breast heaved. And then on that wildly−heaving bosom strayed a soft, warm hand—a tender voice whispered, "My child."

And Olive, flinging her arms round her mother's neck, hid her face there, and was a simple trembling child once more.

It was a very happy evening for them both—almost the happiest in their lives. The mother formed a score of plans for expending this newly−won wealth, always to the winner's benefit solely; but Olive began to look grave, and at last said, timidly,

"Mamma, indeed I want for nothing; and for this money, let us spend it in a way that will make us both most content. Oh, mother! I can know no rest until we have paid Mr. Gwynne."

The mother sighed.

"Well, love, as you will. It is yours, you know; only, a little it pains me that my child's precious earnings should go to pay that cruel debt."

"Not that they should go to redeem my father's honour?" said Olive, still gently. But she had her will.

When her picture was finished, and its price received, Olive, with a joyful heart, enclosed the sum to their long−silent creditor.

"His name does not look quite so fearful now," she said, smiling, when she was addressing the letter. "I can positively write it without trembling, and perhaps I may not have to write it many times. If I grow very rich, mamma, we shall soon pay off this debt, and then we shall never hear any more of Harold Gwynne. Oh! how happy that would be!"

The letter went, and an answer arrived in due form—not to Mrs., but to **Miss** Rothesay:

"MADAM,−I thank you for your letter, and have pleasure in cancelling a portion of my claim. I would fain cancel the whole of it, but I must not sacrifice my own household to that of strangers.

"Allow me to express my deep respect for a child so honourably jealous over a father's memory, and to subscribe myself,

"Your very obedient, "HAROLD GWYNNE."

"He is not so stony−hearted after all, mamma," said Olive, smiling. "Shall I put this letter with the other; we had better keep them both?"

"Certainly, my dear."

"Look, the envelope is edged and sealed with black."

"Is it? Oh, perhaps he has lost his mother. I think I once heard your poor papa say he knew her once. She must be now a very old woman; still her loss has probably been a grief to her son."

"Most likely," said Olive, hastily. She never could bear to hear of any one's mother dying; it made her feel compassionately even towards Mr. Gwynne; and then she quickly changed the subject.

The two letters were put by in her desk, and thus—for a season at least—the Harbury correspondence closed.

CHAPTER V.

SEVEN summers more the grand old mulberry−tree at Woodford Cottage has borne leaf, flower, and fruit; the old dog that used to lie snarling under its branches, lies there still, but snarls no more. Between him and the upper air are two feet of earth, together with an elegant canine tombstone, on which Miss Rothesay, by the intreaty of the disconsolate Meliora, has modelled a very good head of the departed.

Snap is the only individual who has passed away at Woodford Cottage; in all things else there has been an increase, not a decrease. The peaches and nectarines cover two walls instead of one, and the clematis has mounted in white virgin beauty even to the roof. Altogether, the garden is changed for the better. Trim it is not, and never would be—thanks to Olive, who, a true lover of the picturesque, hated trim gardens. But its wild luxuriance is that of flowers, not weeds; and luxuriant it is, so that every day you might pull fore a friend that pleasantest of all pleasant gifts, a nosegay; yea, and afterwards find, that, like charity, the more you gave the richer was your store.

Enter from the garden into the drawing room, and you will perceive a change, too. Its once gloomy barrenness has been softened by many a graceful adjunct of comfort and luxury. Half of it, by means of a crimson screen, is transformed into a painting−room. Olive would have it so, even when need no longer required. She did this for several reasons, the chief of which was, that whether the young paintress was working or not, Mrs. Rothesay might never be out of the sound of her daughter's voice. For, alas! this same sweet, love−toned voice was all the mother now knew of Olive!

Gradually there had come over Mrs. Rothesay the misfortune which she once feared. She was now quite blind. Relating this, it may seem though we were about to picture a scene of grief and desolation; but not so. A misfortune that steals on year by year—slowly—inevitably—often comes with so light a footstep that we scarcely hear it. In this manner had come Mrs. Rothesay's blindness. Her sight faded so gradually, that its deprivation caused no despondency; and the more helpless she grew, the closer she was clasped by those supporting arms of filial love, which softened all pain, supplied all need, and were to her instead of strength, youth, eyesight!

One only bitterness did she know—that she could not see Olive's pictures. Not that she understood Art at all; but everything that Olive did **must** be beautiful. She missed nought else—not even her daughter's face; for she saw it continually in her heart. Perhaps, in the grey shadow of a form, which she said her eyes could still trace in the dim haze, she pictured the likeness of an Olive ten times fairer than the real one—an Olive, whose cheek never grew pale with toil, whose brow was never crossed by that cloud of heart weariness which all who labour in an intellectual pursuit must know at times. If so, the mother was saved from many of the pangs which visit those who see their beloved ones staggering under a burden which they themselves have no power either to take away or to bear.

And so, in spite of this affliction, the mother and daughter were happy—even quite cheerful, sometimes. For cheerfulness, originally foreign to Olive's nature, had sprung up there—one of those heart−flowers which Love, passing by, sows according as they are needed, until they bloom as though indigenous to the soil. To hear Miss Rothesay laugh, as she was laughing just now, you would have thought she was the merriest creature in the world, and had been so all her life. Moreover, from this blithe laugh, as well as from her happy face, you might have taken her for a young maiden of nineteen, instead of a woman of six−and−twenty—which she really was. But with some natures, after youth's first sufferings are passed, life's dial seems to run backward.

"My child, how very merry you are, you and Miss Vanbrugh!" said Mrs. Rothesay, from her inner corner.

"Well, mamma, and how can we help it—talking of my 'Charity,' and the lady who bought it. Would you believe, darling, she told Miss Vanbrugh that she did so because the background was like a view in their park, and the two little children resembled the two young Masters Fludyer—a fortunate likeness for me!"

"Aye," said Miss Meliora, "only my brother would say you were very wrong to sell your picture to such stupid people, who know nothing about Art."

"Perhaps I was; but," she added, whisperingly, "you know I have not sold my Academy picture yet, and mamma **must** go into the country this autumn."

"Mrs. Fludyer is a very nice lady−like woman," observed the mother; "and she talked of her beautiful country−seat at Farnwood Hall. I think it would do me good to go there, Olive."

"Well, you know she asked you, dear mamma."

"Yes; but only for courtesy. She would scarce be troubled with a guest so helpless as I," said Mrs. Rothesay, half sighing.

In a moment Olive was by her side, talking away, at first softly, and then luring her on to smiles with a merry tale,—how Mr. Fludyer, when the picture came home, wanted to have the three elder Fludyers painted in a row behind "Charity," that thus the allegorical picture might make a complete family−group. "He also sent to know if I couldn't paint his horse 'Beauty,' and one or two greyhounds also, in the same picture. What a comical idea of Art this country−squire must have!"

"My dear, every one is not so clever as you," said the mother. "I like Mrs. Fludyer very much, because, whenever she came to Woodford Cottage about the picture, she used to talk to me so kindly."

"And she has asked after you in all her letters since she went home. So she must be a good creature; and I too will like her very much indeed, because she likes my sweet mamma," was Olive's caressing answer.

The determination was soon called into exercise; for the next half hour, to the surprise of all parties, Mrs. Fludyer appeared.

She assigned no reason for her visit, except that being again in town, she had chosen to drive down to Woodford Cottage. She talked for half an hour in her mild, limpid way; and then, when the arrival of one of Olive's models broke the quiet leisure of the painting−room, she rose.

"Nay, Miss Rothesay, do not quit your easel; Miss Vanbrugh will accompany me through the garden, and besides, I wish to speak to her about her clematis. We cannot make them grow in S—shire; the Hall is perhaps too cold and bleak."

"Ah, how I love a clear bracing air!" said Mrs. Rothesay, with the restlessness peculiar to all invalids—and she had been a greater invalid than usual this summer.

"Then you must come down, as I said—you and Miss Rothesay—to S—shire; our part of the country is very beautiful. I should be most happy to see you at Farnwood."

She urged the invitation with an easy grace, even cordiality, which charmed Mrs. Rothesay, to whom it brought back the faint reflex of her olden life—the life at Merivale Hall.

"I should like to go, Olive," she said, appealingly. "I feel dull, and want a change."

"You shall have a change, darling," was the soothing but evasive answer. For Olive had a tincture of the old Rothesay pride, and had formed a somewhat disagreeable idea of the position the struggling artist and her blind mother would fill as charity−guests at Farnwood Hall. So, after a little conversation with Mrs. Fludyer, she contrived that the first plan should melt into one more feasible. There was a pretty cottage, the squire's lady said, on the Farnwood estate; Miss Fludyer's daily governess had lived there; it was all fitted up. What if Miss Rothesay would bring her mother there for the summer months? It would be pleasant for all parties.

And so, very quickly, the thing was decided—decided as suddenly and unexpectedly as things are, when it seems as though not human will, but destiny, held the balance.

Mrs. Fludyer seemed really pleased and interested; she talked to Miss Meliora, less about her clematis than about her two inmates—a subject not less grateful to the painter's sister.

"There is something quite charming about Miss Rothesay—an air and manner of one who has always moved in good society. Do you know who she was? I should apologise for the question, but that a friend of mine, looking at her picture, was struck by the name, and desired me to inquire."

Meliora explained that she believed Olive's family was Scottish, and that her father was a Captain Angus Rothesay.

"Captain Angus Rothesay! I think that was the name mentioned by my friend," answered Mrs. Fludyer, musing.

"Shall I call Miss Rothesay? Perhaps your friend is known to her," observed Meliora.

"Oh no! Mrs.— that is, the lady I allude to, said it was needless to mention her name. And, by−the−bye, there is no reason why you should trouble Miss Rothesay with my idle inquiry. Many thanks for the clematis, and good morning, my dear Miss Vanbrugh."

She ascended her carriage with the easy, smiling grace of one born to fortune, marrying fortune, and dwelling hand−in−hand with fortune all her life. Miss Meliora gazed in intense admiration after her departing wheels, and forthwith retired to plan out of the few words she had let fall a glorious future for her dear Miss Rothesay. There was certainly some unknown wealthy relative who would probably appear next week, and carry off Olive and her

mother to affluence—in a carriage as grand as Mrs. Fludyer's.

She would have rushed at once to communicate the news to her friends, had it not been that she was stopped in the garden−walk by the apparition of her brother escorting two gentlemen from his studio—a rare courtesy with him. Meliora accounted for it when, from behind a sheltering espalier, she heard him address one of them as "my lord."

But when she told this to Olive, the young paintress was of a different opinion. She had heard the name of Lord Arundale, and recognised it as that of a nobleman on whom his love of Art and science shed more honour than his title. That was why Mr. Vanbrugh showed him respect, she knew.

"Certainly, certainly!" said Meliora, a little ashamed. "But to think that such a clever man, and a nobleman, should be so ordinary in appearance. Why, he was not half so remarkable−looking as the gentleman who accompanied him."

"What was **he** like?" said Olive, smiling.

"You would have admired him greatly. His was just the sort of head you painted for your 'Aristides the Just'—your favourite style of beauty—dark, cold, proud, with such piercing, eagle eyes; they went right through me!"

Olive laughed merrily.

"Do you hear, mamma, how she runs on? What a bewitching young hero!"

"A hero perhaps, but not at all young; and as for bewitching, that he certainly might be, but it was in the fashion of a wizard or a magician. I never felt so nervous at the sight of any one in the whole course of my life," continued Miss Meliora, chattering on, as she often did, just to amuse Mrs. Rothesay, and make Olive smile. She would have gone on longer, but there was a knock at the drawing−room door.

"Come in," said Olive, and Mr. Vanbrugh entered.

For a moment he stood on the threshold without speaking; but there was a radiance in his face, a triumphant dignity in his whole carriage, which struck Olive and his sister with surprise.

"Brother—dear Michael, you are pleased with something; you have had good news."

He passed Meliora by, and walked up to Miss Rothesay.

"My pupil, rejoice with me; I have found at length appreciation, my life's aim has won success—I have sold my 'Alcestis.'"

Miss Vanbrugh, in her frantic joy, rushed towards her brother to embrace him. Olive Rothesay, full of delight, would have clasped her master's hand, but there was something in his look that repelled them both. His was the stern solitary triumph of a man who exulted only in and for his art, neither asking nor needing any human sympathies. Such a look might have been on the face of the great Florentine, when he beheld the multitude bend half in rapture, half in awe, before his work in the Sistine chapel, and, folding his coarse garments round him, walked through the streets of Rome to his hermit dwelling, and sat himself down in stern rejoicement and proud humility, under the shadow of his desolate renown.

Michael Vanbrugh continued,

"Yes, I have sold my grand picture, the dream—the joy of a lifetime. Sold it, too, to a man who is worthy to possess it. I shall see it in Lord Arundale's noble gallery; I shall know that it, at least, will remain where, after my death, it will keep from oblivion the name of Michael Vanbrugh. Glorious indeed is this my triumph—yet less mine, than the triumph of High Art. Do you not rejoice, my pupil?"

"I do, indeed, my dear and noble master," said Olive, regarding him with reverent affection, for there had grown up a deep sympathy between her and the eccentric painter.

"And brother, brother—you will be very rich. The price you asked for the 'Alcestis' was two thousand pounds," said Meliora.

He smiled bitterly.

"You women always think of that—the paltry gold that rewarded genius brings."

"But for you, only for you, dear Michael," cried his sister; and her tearful eyes spoke the truth. Poor little soul! she could but go as far as her gifts went, and they extended no farther than to the thought of what comforts would this money procure for Michael—a richer velvet gown and cap, like one of the old Italian painters—perhaps a journey to refresh his wearied eyes among lovely scenes of nature. She explained this, looking, not angry, but just a little hurt.

"A journey! yes, I will take a journey—one which I have longed for these thirty years—I will go to Rome! Once again I will lie on the floor of the Sistine, and look up worshippingly to Michael the Angel." (He always called him so.)

"And how long shall you stay, brother?"

"Stay? until my heart grows pulseless, and my brain dull. Why should I ever come back to this cold England? No; let me grow old, die, and be buried, under the shadow of the Eternal City."

"He will never come back again—never," said Miss Vanbrugh, looking at Olive with a vague bewilderment. "He will leave this pretty cottage, and me, and everything."

There was a dead silence, during which poor Meliora sat plaiting her white apron in fold after fold, as was her habit when in deep and perplexed thought. Then she went up to her brother.

"Michael, if you will take me, I should like to go with you."

"What!" cried Mrs. Rothesay, "you, my dear Miss Vanbrugh, who are so thoroughly English—who always said you hated moving from place to place, and would live and die at Woodford Cottage!"

"Hush—hush! we'll not talk about that, lest he should hear," said Meliora, glancing half frightened at her brother. But he stood absorbed by the window, looking out apparently on the sky, though his eyes saw nothing—nothing! "Michael, do you quite understand—may I go with you to Rome?"

"Very well—very well, sister," he answered, in the tone of a man who is indifferent to the subject, except that consent gives less trouble than refusal. Then he turned towards Olive, and asked her to go with him to his painting−room; he wanted to consult with her as to the sort of frame suited to the "Alcestis." Indeed, his pupil had now grown associated with all his pursuits, and had penetrated further in the depths of his inward life than any one else had been ever suffered to do. And Olive's ardent, almost masculine genius, sympathised deeply with the strange old artist; so that she became to him his cher− ished pupil—the child of his soul, to whom he would fain transmit the mantle of his fame. He had but one regret, sometimes touchingly expressed—that she was a woman—only a woman.

They went and stood before the picture, he and Olive, Meliora stealing after her brother's footsteps, noiseless but constant as his shadow. And this ever−following, faithful love clung so closely to its object, that, shadow−like, what all others beheld, by him was never seen. It is often so!

Michael Vanbrugh cast on his picture a look such as no living face ever had won, or ever would win, from his cold eyes. It was the gaze of a parent on his child, a lover on his mistress, an idolater on his self−created god. Then he took his palette, and began to paint, lingeringly and lovingly, on slight portions of background or drapery—less as though he thought this needed, than as if loath to give the last, the very last, touch to a work so precious. He talked all the while, seemingly to hide the emotion which he would not show.

"That Lord Arundale is an honour to his order, a **noble man** indeed. One does not often meet such, Miss Rothesay. It was a pleasure to receive him in my studio. It did me good to talk with him, and with his friend."

Here Olive looked at Meliora and smiled. "Was his friend, then, as pleasing as himself?"

"Not so brilliant in conversation, but far the higher nature of the two, or I have read the human countenance in vain. He said, boldly and frankly, that he was no artist, and no connoisseur, like Lord Arundale; but I saw from his eye, that, if he did not understand, he felt my picture."

"How so?" said Olive, with growing interest.

"He looked at Alcestis,—the 'Alcestis' I have painted,—sitting on her golden throne, her head on her husband's breast, waiting for death to call her from her kingdom and her lord: waiting solemnly, yet without fear. 'See,' said Lord Arundale to his friend, 'how love makes this feeble woman stronger than a hero! See how fearlessly a noble wife can die!'—'A wife who loves her husband,' was the answer, given so bitterly, that I turned to look at him. Oh, that I could have painted his head at that instant! It would have made a Heraclitus—a Timon!"

"And do you know who is this man?" asked Olive, unable to restrain her curiosity. "Will he come here again?"

"No; for he was leaving London to−day. I wish it had not been so, for I would have asked him to sit to me. That grand, iron, rigid head of his, with the close curling hair, would be a treasure indeed!"

"But who is he, brother?" inquired Meliora.

"A man of science; well known in the world, too, Lord Arundale said. He told me his name, but I forget it. However, you may find a card somewhere about."

Meliora ran to the mantel−piece, and brought one to her brother. "Is this it?" He nodded. She went quickly to

the light, and read aloud—

"**The Reverend Harold Gwynne**."

CHAPTER VI.

THE subject of Harold Gwynne served Olive and her mother for a full half hour's conversation during that idle twilight season which they always devoted to pleasant talk. It was a curious coincidence which thus revived in their memories a name now almost forgotten. For, the debt once paid, Mr. Gwynne and all things connected with him had passed into complete oblivion, save that Olive carefully kept his letters.

These she had the curiosity to take from their hiding−place, and examine once more—partly for her mother's amusement, partly for her own; for it was a whim of hers to judge of character by hand−writing, and she really had been quite interested in the character which both Miss Vanbrugh and her brother unconsciously drew of this man.

"How strange that he should have been so near us, and we not know the fact! though he must have known it, of course. He seems quite to haunt us—to be positively our evil genius—our **Daimon**!"

"Hush, my dear! it is wrong to talk so. Remember, too, that he is Sara's husband."

Olive did remember it. Jestingly though she spoke, there was in her spirit a remembrance, as mournful as a thing so long ended could be, of that early friendship, whose falseness had been her loving heart's first blight. She had never formed another. There was a grand unity in her nature which made it impossible to build the shrine of a second affection on the ruins of the first. She found it so, even in life's ordinary ties. What would it have been with her had she ever known the great mystery of love.

She never had known it. She had lived all these years with a heart as virgin as mountain snows. When the one sweet dream which comes to all pure spirits in early maidenhood—the dream of loving and being loved—was crushed, her heart drew back within itself, and, after a time of suffering almost as deep as if for the loss of a real object instead of a mere ideal, she meekly prepared herself for her destiny. She went out into society, and there saw men, as they are **in society**—feeble, fluttering coxcombs, hard, grovelling men of business; some few men of pleasure, and of scarce−concealed vice; and, floating around all, the race of ordinary mankind, neither good nor bad. Out of these classes, the first she merely laughed at, the second she turned from with distaste, the third she abhorred and despised, the fourth she looked upon with a calm indifference. Some good and clever men she had met occasionally, towards whom she had felt herself drawn with a friendly inclination; but they had always been drifted from her by the ever−shifting currents of society.

And these, the exceptions, were chiefly old, or at least elderly persons; men of long−acknowledged talent, wise and respected heads of families. The "new generation," the young men out of whose community her female acquaintances were continually choosing lovers and husbands, were positively disliked by Olive Rothesay. Gradually, when she saw how mean was the general standard of perfection, how ineffably beneath her own ideal—the man she could have worshipped—she ceased to regret that loneliness which on earth was, she deemed, her perpetual lot. She saw her companions wedded to men who from herself would never have won a single thought. So she gathered up all her passionate love−impulses into her virgin soul, and married herself unto her Art.

She indulged in some of her sage reflections on men and women, courtship and wedlock, in general, when she sat at her mother's feet talking of Harold Gwynne and of his wife.

"Sara, too, must have suffered—if Mr. Gwynne be really the man that Miss Vanbrugh and her brother describe," thought Miss Rothesay; and there recurred over and over again to her fancy the words, "**A wife who loved her husband**." Olive at least knew too well that Sara Derwent, when she married, could not have loved hers. Wonderings as to what that marriage had been, and what was Sara's present fate, occupied her mind for a long, long time. She had full opportunity for thought; as her mother, oppressed by the sultry August evening, had fallen asleep with her hand on her daughter's neck, and Olive could not stir for fear of waking her.

Slowly she watched the twilight darken into a deeper shadow—that of a gathering thunderstorm. The trees beyond the garden began to sway restlessly about, and then, with a sudden flash and distant thunder growl, down came the rain in torrents. Mrs. Rothesay started and woke; like most timid women, she had a great dread of thunder, and it took all Olive's powers of soothing to quiet her nervous alarms. These were increased by another sound that broke through the pouring rain—a violent ringing of the garden−bell, which, in Mrs. Rothesay's excited state, seemed a warning of all sorts of horrors.

"The house is on fire—the bolt has struck it. Oh, Olive, Olive, save me!" she cried.

"Hush, darling! You are quite safe with me." And Olive rose up, folding her arms closely round her mother, who hid her head in her daughter's bosom. They stood—Mrs. Rothesay trembling and cowering—Olive with her pale brow lifted fearlessly, as though she would face all terror, all danger, for her mother's sake. Thus they showed, in the faint glimmer of the lightning, a beautiful picture of filial love—to the eyes of a stranger, who that moment opened the door. She was a woman, whom the storm had apparently driven in for shelter.

"Is this Miss Vanbrugh's house?—is there any one here?" she asked; her accent was slightly foreign, as far as could be traced through the hurried manner.

Olive answered with a kindly civility, and invited her to enter.

"Thank you, forgive my intrusion, but I am frightened—half drowned. The thunder is awful; will you take me in till Miss Vanbrugh returns?"

"Certainly; go to her, Olive. Poor thing! How dreadful to be out in this storm!" said Mrs. Rothesay, her alarm conquered by her quick sympathies.

A light was quickly procured, and Olive came to divest the stranger of her dripping garments.

"Thank you, no! I can assist myself—I always do."

And she tried to unfasten her shawl—a rich heavy fabric, and of gaudy colours, when her trembling fingers failed; she knitted her brows, and muttered some sharp exclamation in French.

"You had better let me help you," said Olive, gently, as, with a firm hand, she took hold of the shivering woman, or girl, for she did not look above seventeen, drew her to a seat, and there disrobed her of her drenched mantle.

Not until then did Miss Rothesay pause to consider further about this incognita, arrived in such a singular manner. But when, recovered from her alarm, the young stranger subsided into the very unromantic occupation of drying her wet frock by the kitchen fire, Olive regarded her with no small curiosity.

She stood, a picture less of girlish grace, than of such grace as French fashion dictates. Her tall, well−rounded form, struggled through a painful slimness; her whole attire had that peculiar *tournure* which we rude scornful islanders term Frenchified. Nay, there was something in the very tie of her neck−ribbon which showed it never could have been done by English fingers. She appeared, all over, "a young lady from abroad."

We have noticed her dress first, because that was itself most noticeable. The form it enveloped was that of a fine, tall, well−modelled girl, who would have been graceful had fashion allowed her. She had one beauty— a proud, arched, column−like neck, gliding into a well−set head, which she carried loftily. Her features were somewhat large, not pretty, and yet not plain. She had a good mouth and chin; her eyes were very dark and silken−fringed; and, what was rather singular, her hair was quite fair.

This peculiarity caught Olive's eye at once; so much so, that she almost fancied she had seen the face before, but could not tell where. She puzzled about the matter, until the young guest, who seemed to make herself quite at home, had dried her garments, and voluntarily proposed that they should return to the drawing−room.

They did so; the stranger leading the way, and, much to Olive's surprise, seeming to thread with perfect ease the queer labyrinths of the house.

By this time the storm was over, and they found Mrs. Rothesay sitting quietly waiting for tea. The young lady again apologised in her easy, foreign manner, and asked if she might stay with them until Miss Vanbrugh's return? Of course her hostess assented, and she talked for above an hour; chiefly of Paris, which she said she had just left; of French customs, music, and literature.

In the midst of this, Miss Vanbrugh's voice was heard in the hall. The girl started, as one does at the sound of some old tune, heard in youth, and forgotten for years; her gaiety ceased; she put her hand before her eyes; but when the door opened, she was her old self again.

No child "frayed with a sprite" could have looked more alarmed than Miss Meliora at the sudden vision of this elegant young damsel, who advanced towards her. The little old maid was quite overpowered with her stylish bend; her elegant salute, French fashion, cheek to cheek; and her anxious inquiries after Miss Vanbrugh's health.

"I am quite well, thank you, madam. A friend of Mrs. Rothesay's, I suppose?" was poor Meliora's bewildered reply.

"No, indeed; I—have not till now had the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Rothesay's name. My visit was to you," said the stranger, evidently enjoying the *incognito* she had kept, for her black eyes sparkled with most malicious fun.

"I am happy to see you, madam," again stammered the troubled Meliora.

"I thought you would be so—I came to surprise you. My dear Miss Vanbrugh, have you really forgotten me? Then allow me to re−introduce myself. My name is Christal Manners."

Miss Meliora looked as if she could have sunk into the earth! Year after year, from the sum left in the bank, she had paid the school−bill of her self−assumed charge; but that was all. After−thoughts, and a few prudish hints given by good−natured friends,had made her feel both ashamed and frightened at having taken such a doubtful *protégée*. Whenever she chanced to think of Christal's growing up, and coming back a woman, she drove the subject from her mind in positive alarm. Now the very thing she dreaded had come upon her. Here was the desolate child returned, a stylish young woman, with no home in the world but that of her sole friend and protectress.

Poor Miss Vanbrugh was quite over whelmed. She sank on a chair, muttering, "Christal Manners here! Dear me! I am so frightened—that is, so startled. Oh, Miss Rothesay, what shall I do?" And she looked appealingly to Olive.

But between her and Miss Rothesay glided the young stranger. The bright colour paled from Christal's face—her smile passed into a frown.

"Then you are not glad to see me—you, the sole friend I have in the world, whom I have travelled a thousand miles to meet—travelled alone and unprotected—you are not glad to see me? I will turn and go back again—I will leave the house—I will—I—"

Her rapid speech ended in a burst of tears. Poor Meliora felt like a guilty thing. "Miss Manners—Christal—my poor child! I didn't mean that! Don't cry—don't cry! I am very glad to see you—so are we all—are we not, Olive?"

Olive was almost as much puzzled as herself. She had a passing recollection of the death of Mrs. Manners, and of the child's being sent to school; but since then she had heard no more of her. She could hardly believe that the elegant creature before her was the little ragged imp of a child whom she had once seen staring idly down the river. However, she asked no questions, but helped to soothe the girl, and to restore, as far as possible, peace and composure to the household.

They all spent the evening together without any reference to the past. Only once, Christal—in relating how, as soon as ever her term of education expired, she had almost compelled her governess to let her come to England, and to Miss Vanbrugh,—said, in her proud way,

"It was not to ask a maintenance—for you know my parents left me independent; but I wanted to see you, because I believed that, besides taking charge of my fortune, you had been kind to me when a child. How, or in what way, I cannot clearly remember; for I think," she added, laughing, "that I must have been a very stupid little girl: all seems so dim to me until I went to school. Can you enlighten me, Miss Vanbrugh?"

"Another time, another time, my dear," said the painter's sister, growing very much confused.

"Well! I thank you all the same, and you shall not find me ungrateful," said the young lady, kissing Miss Meliora's hand, and speaking in a tone of real feeling, which would have moved any woman. It quite overpowered Miss Vanbrugh—the softest−hearted little woman in the world. She embraced her *protégée*, declaring that she would never part with her.

"But," she added, with a sudden thought, a thought of intense alarm, "what will Michael say?"

"Do not think of that to−night," interposed Olive. "Miss Manners is tired; let us get her to bed quickly, and we will see what morning brings."

The advice was followed, and Christal disappeared; not, however, without lavishing on Mrs. and Miss Rothesay a thousand gracious thanks and apologies, with an air and deportment that did infinite honour to the polite instruction of her *pension*.

Mrs. Rothesay, confused with all that had happened, did not ask many questions, but only said, as she retired,

"I don't quite like her, Olive—I don't like the tone of her voice; and yet there was something that struck me in the touch of her hand—which is so different in different people."

"Hers is a very pretty hand, mamma. It is quite classic in shape—like poor papa's!—which I remember so well!"

"There never was such a beautiful hand as your papa's. He said it descended in the Rothesay family. You have it, you know, my child," observed Mrs. Rothesay. She sighed, but softly; for, after all these years, the widow and

the fatherless had learned to speak of their loss without pain, though with tender remembrance.

Thinking of him and of her mother, Olive thought, likewise, how much happier was her own lot than that of the orphan−girl, who, by her own confession, had never known what it was to remember the love of the dead, or to rejoice in the love of the living. And her heart was moved with deep pity—nay, even tenderness, for Christal Manners.

When she had assisted her mother to bed—as she always did—Olive, in passing down stairs, moved by some feeling of interest, listened at the door of the young stranger. She was apparently walking up and down her room with a quick, hurried step. Olive knocked.

"Are you quite comfortable?—do you want anything?"

"Who's there? Oh! come in, Miss Rothesay."

Olive entered, and found, to her surprise, that the candle was extinguished.

"I thought I heard you moving about, Miss Manners."

"So I was. I felt restless and could not sleep. I am very tired with my journey, I suppose, and the room is strange to me. Come here—give me your hand."

"You are not afraid, my dear child?" said Olive, remembering that she was, indeed, little more than a child, though she looked so womanly. "You are not frightening yourself in this gloomy old house, nor thinking of ghosts and goblins?"

"No—no! I was thinking, if I must tell the truth," said the girl, with something very like a suppressed sob—"I was thinking of you and your mother, as I saw you standing when I first came in. No one ever clasped me so, or ever will! Not that I have any one to blame; my father and mother died; they could not help that. But if they had just brought me into the world and left me, as I have heard some parents have done, then I should cry out, 'Wicked parents! if I grow up heartless, because I have no one to love me; and vile, because I have none to guide me,—my sin be upon your head!'"

She said these words with vehement passion. But Olive answered, calmly, "Hush, Christal!—let me call you Christal; for I am much older than you. Lie down and rest. Be loving, and you will never want for love; be humble, and you will never want for guiding. You have good friends here, who will care for you very much, I doubt not. Be content, my poor, tired child!"

She spoke very softly; for the darkness quite obliterated the vision of that stylish damsel who had put forth her airs and graces in the drawing−room. As she sat by Christal's bedside, Olive only felt the presence of a desolate orphan child. She said in her heart, "Please God, I will do her all the good that lies in my feeble power. Who knows but that, in some way or other, I may comfort and help this child!"

So she stooped down and kissed Christal on the forehead, a tenderness that the girl passionately returned. Then Olive went and lay down by her blind mother's side, with a quiet and a happy heart.

CHAPTER VII.

IN a week's time Christal Manners was fairly domiciled at Woodford Cottage. In what capacity it would be hard to say—certainly not as Miss Vanbrugh's *protégée*—for she assumed towards the little old maid a most benignant air of superiority. Mr. Vanbrugh she privately christened "the old Ogre," and kept as much out of his way as possible. This was not difficult, for the artist was too much wrapped up in his own peculiarities to meddle with any domestic affairs. He seemed to be under some mystification that the lively French girl was a guest of Miss Rothesay's, and his sister ventured not to break this delusion. Christal's sirname created no suspicions; the very name of his former model, Celia Manners, had long since passed from his memory.

So the young visitor made herself quite at home—amused the whole household with her vivacity, clinging especially to the Rothesay portion of the establishment. She served Olive as general assistant in her studio, model included—or, at least, as lay figure; for she was too strictly fashionable to be graceful in form, and not quite beautiful enough in face to attract an artist's notice. But she did very well; and she amused Mrs. Rothesay all the while with her gay French songs, so that Olive was glad to have her near.

The day after Christal's arrival, Miss Vanbrugh had summoned her chief state−councillor, Olive Rothesay, to talk over the matter. Then and there, Meliora unfolded all she knew and all she guessed of the girl's history. How much of this was to be communicated to Christal she wished Olive to decide; and Olive, remembering what had passed between them on the first night of her coming, advised that, unless Christal herself imperatively demanded to know, there should be maintained on the subject a kindly silence.

"Her parents are dead, that she is persuaded," Olive urged. "Whoever they were, they have carefully provided for her. If they erred or suffered, let neither their sin nor their sorrow go down to their child."

"It shall be so," said the good Meliora. And since Christal asked no further questions—and, indeed, her lively nature seemed unable to receive any impressions save of the present—the subject was not again referred to.

But the time came when the little household must be broken up. Mr. Vanbrugh announced that in one fortnight he must leave Woodford Cottage, on his journey to Rome. He never thought of such mundane matters as letting the house, or disposing of the furniture; he left all those things to his active little sister, who was busy from morning till night—aye, often again from night till morning. When Michael commanded anything, it must be done, if within human possibility; and there never was any one to do it but Meliora. She did it, always;—how, he never asked or though. He was so accustomed to her ministrations that he no more noticed them than he did the daylight. Had the light suddenly gone—then—Michael Vanbrugh would have known what it once had been!

Ere the prescribed time had quite expired, Miss Vanbrugh announced that all was arranged for their leaving Woodford Cottage. Her brother had nothing to do but to pack up his easels and his pictures; and this duty was quite absorbing enough to one who had no existence beyond his painting−room.

There was one insuperable difficulty, which perplexed Meliora. What was to be done with Christal Manners? She troubled herself about the matter night and day. At last she hinted something of it to the girl herself. And Miss Manners at once decided the question by saying, "I will not go."

She was of a strange disposition, was Christal, as they had already found out at Woodford Cottage. With all her volatile gaiety, when she chose to say "I will!" she was as firm as a rock. No persuasions—no commands—could move her. In this case there were none tried. Her fortunes seemed to arrange themselves; for Mrs. Fludyer, coming in one day to make the final arrangements for the Rothesays' arrival at Farnwood, took a vehement liking to the young French lady, as Miss Manners was generally considered, and requested that Mrs. Rothesay would bring her down to Farnwood. Olive demurred a little, lest the intrusion of a constant inmate might burden her mother; but the plan was at last decided upon—Christal's own entreaties having no small influence in turning the scale.

Thus, all things settled, there came the final parting of the two little families who for so many years had lived together in peace and harmony. The Rothesays were to leave one day, the Vanbrughs the next. Olive and Meliora were both very busy—too busy to have time for regrets. They did not meet until evening, when Olive saw Miss Vanbrugh quietly and sorrowfully watering her flowers, with a sort of mechanical interest—the interest of a mother, who meekly goes on arranging all things for the comfort and adornment of the child from whom she is about to separate. It made Olive sad; she went into the garden, and joined Meliora.

"Let me help you, dear Miss Vanbrugh. Why should you tire yourself thus, after all the fatigues of the day?"

Meliora looked up.—"Ah! true, true! I shall never do this any more, I know. But the poor flowers should not suffer; I'll take care of them while I can. Those dahlias, that I have watched all the year, want watering every night, and will do for a month to come. A month! Oh! Miss Rothesay, I am very foolish, I know, but it almost breaks my heart to say good−bye to my poor little garden!"

Her voice faltered, and at last her tears began to fall—not bitterly, but in a quiet, gentle way, like the dropping of evening rain. However, she soon recovered herself, and began to talk of her brother and of Rome. She was quite sure that there his genius would; find due recognition, and that I would rival the old masters in honour at prosperity. She was content to go with him, she said; perhaps the warm climate would suit her better than England, now that she was growing—not exactly old, for she was much younger than Michael, and he had half a lifetime of fame before him—but still, older than she had been. The language would be a trouble; but then she was already beginning to learn it, and she had always been used to accommodate herself to everything. She was quite certain that this plan of Michael's would turn out for the good of both.

"And as for the poor old cottage, when you return to London you will come and look at it sometimes, and write me word how it looks. You can send a bit of the clematis in a letter, too; and who knows, but if you get a very rich lady, you may take the whole cottage yourself some day, and come and live here again."

"And you will come back from Rome, and visit me here?" said Olive, smiling; for she was glad to encourage any cheerful hope.

"No, no, I shall never leave Michael—I shall never leave Michael!" She said these words over to herself many times, and then took up her watering−pot and went on with her task.

Her affectionate companion followed her for some time; but Miss Vanbrugh did not seem disposed to talk, so Olive returned to the house.

She felt in that unquiet, dreary state of mind which precedes a great change, when all preparations are complete, and there is nothing left to be done but to ponder on the coming parting. She could not rest anywhere, or compose herself to anything; but wandered about the house, thinking of that last day at Oldchurch, and vaguely speculating when or what the next change would be. She passed into the drawing−room, where Christal was amusing Mrs. Rothesay with her foreign ditties; and then she went to Mr. Vanbrugh's studio to have a last talk about Art with her old master.

He was busily engaged in packing up his casts and remaining pictures. He just acknowledged his pupil's presence, and received her assistance, as he always did, with perfect indifference. Nay, he often suffered her, unaided, to do things which required the strength of a man; for, from mere carelessness, Vanbrugh had reduced the womankind about him to the condition of perfect slaves.

"There, that will do. Now bring me the great treasure of all—the bust of Michael the Angel."

She climbed on a chair, and lifted it down, carefully and reverentially, so as greatly to please the artist.

"Thank you, my pupil; you are very useful; I cannot tell what I should do without you."

"You will have to do without me very soon," was Olive's gentle and somewhat sorrowful answer. "This is my last evening in this dear old studio—my last talk with you, my good and kind master."

He looked surprised and annoyed. "Nonsense, child! If I am going to Rome, you are going too. I thought Meliora would arrange all that."

Olive shook her head.

"No, Mr. Vanbrugh; indeed, it is impossible."

"What! not go with me to Rome!—you my pupil, unto whom I meant to unfold all the glorious secrets of my art! Olive Rothesay, are you dreaming?" he cried, angrily.

She only answered him softly, that all her plans were settled, and that much as she should delight in seeing Rome, she could not think of leaving her mother.

"Your mother! What right have we artists to think of any ties of kindred, or to allow them for one moment to weigh in the balance with our noble calling?—I say **ours**, for I tell you now what I never told you before, that, though you are a woman, you have a man's soul—the soul of genius. I am proud of you; I design to make for you a glorious future. Even in this scheme I mingled you—how we should go together to the City of Art, dwell together, work together, master and pupil. What great things we should execute! We should be like the brothers Caracci—like Titian with his scholar and adopted son. Would that you had not been a woman! that I could have

made you my son in Art, and given you my name, and then died, bequeathing to you the mantle of my glory!"

His rapid and excited language softened into something very like emotion; he threw himself into his painting−chair, and waited for Olive's answer.

It came brokenly—almost with tears.

"My dear, my noble master, to whom I owe so much, what can I say to you?"

"That you will go with me—that when my failing age needs your young hand, it shall be ready; and that so the master's waning powers may be forgotten, in the scholar's rising fame."

Olive answered nothing but, "My mother, my mother—she would not quit England; I could not part from her."

"Fool!" said Vanbrugh, roughly; "does a child never leave a mother? It is a thing that happens every day; girls do it when they marry." He stopped suddenly, and pondered; then he said, hastily, "Child, go away; you have made me angry. I would be alone—I will call you when I want you."

She disappeared, and for an hour she heard him walking up and down his studio with heavy strides. Soon after, there was a pause; Olive heard him call her name, and quickly answered the summons.

His anger had vanished; he stood calmly, leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, the lamp light falling on the long unbroken lines of his velvet gown, and casting a softened shadow over his rugged features. There was majesty, even grace, in his attitude; and his aspect bore a certain dignified serenity, that well became the man conscious of his genius.

He motioned his young pupil to sit down, and then said to her,

"Miss Rothesay, I wish to talk to you as to a sensible and noble woman (there are such I know, and such I believe you to be). I also speak as to one like myself—a true follower of our divine Art, who to that one great aim would bend all life's purposes, as I have done."

He paused a moment, and seeing that no answer came, continued,

"All these years you have been my pupil, and have become necessary to me and to my Art. To part with you is impossible; it would change all my plans and hopes. There is but one way to prevent this. You are a woman; I cannot take you for my son, but I can take you for—my wife!"

Utterly astounded, Olive listened like one in a dream. "Your wife—I—your wife!" was all she murmured.

"Yes," he cried, still not changing the firm, grave, dignified tone in which he had spoken. "I ask you—not for my own sake, but for that of our noble Art. I am a man long past my youth—perhaps even a stern, rude man. I cannot give you love, but I can give you glory. Living, I can make of you such an artist as no woman ever was before; dying, I can bequeath to you the immortality of my fame. Answer me—is this nothing?"

"I cannot answer—I am bewildered!"

"Then you will listen to me. You are not one of those foolish girls who would make sport of my grey hairs. I will be very tender over you, for you have been good to me. I will learn how to treat you with the mildness that women need. You shall be like a child to my old age. You will marry me, then, Olive Rothesay?"

He walked up to her, and took her hand, gravely, though not without gentleness; but she shrank away.

"I cannot, I cannot; it is impossible."

He looked at her one moment, neither in angry reproach, nor in wounded tender ness, but with a stern, cold pride. "I have been mistaken—pardon me." Then he quitted her, walked back to his position near the hearth, and resumed his former attitude.

There was silence. Afterwards Michael Vanbrugh felt his robe touched, and saw beside him the small, delicate figure of his pupil.

"Mr. Vanbrugh, my dear master and friend, look at me, and listen to what I have to say."

He moved his head assentingly, without turning round.

"I have lived," Olive continued, "for six−and−twenty years, and no one has even spoken to me of marriage. I did not dream that anyone ever would—it is not my destiny. You have asked me to be your wife, and I have refused. This is not because of your age, or of my youth; but because you have, as you say, no love to give me, nor have I love to bring to you; therefore, for us to marry would be a heavy sin."

"As you will, as you will. I thought you a great−souled, kindred genius—I find you a mere **woman**. Jest on at the old fool with his grey hairs—go and wed some young, gay—"

"Look upon me!" said Olive, with a mournful meaning in her tone; "is such an one as I likely to marry?"

"I have spoken ill," said Vanbrugh, in a touched and humbled voice. "Nature has mocked us both; we ought to

deal gently with one another. Forgive me, Olive."

He offered her his hand; she took it, and pressed it to her heart. "Oh! that I could be still your pupil—your daughter! My dear, dear master! I will never forget you while I live."

"Be it so!" He moved away, and sat down, leaning his head upon his hand. Who knows what thoughts might have passed through his mind—regretful, almost remorseful thoughts of that bliss which he had lost or scorned—life's crowning sweetness, woman's love!

Olive went up to the old artist's side.

"I must go now. You will bid me goodbye—will you not, gently, kindly? You will not think the worse of me for what has passed this night?" And she knelt down beside him, pressing her lips to his hand.

He stooped and kissed her forehead. It was the first and last kiss that, since boyhood, Michael Vanbrugh ever gave to woman.

Then he stood up—the great artist only. In his eye was no softness, but the pride of genius—genius, the mighty, the daring, the eternally alone!

"Go, my pupil! and remember my parting words. Fame is sweeter than all pleasure, stronger than all pain. We give unto Art our life, and she gives us immortality."

As Olive went out, she saw him still standing, stern, motionless, with folded arms and majestic eyes;—like a solitary rock, whereon no flowers grow, but on whose summit heaven's light continually shines.

CHAPTER VIII.

"**WELL**, darling, how do you feel in our new home?" said Olive to her mother, when, after a long and weary journey, the night came down upon them at Farnwood—the dark, gusty, autumn night, made wildly musical by the neighbourhood of dense woods.

"I feel quite content, my child—I am always content everywhere, with you," was Mrs. Rothesay's affectionate reply. "And I like the wind—it helps me to imagine the sort of country we are in."

"A forest country, hilly and bleak. We drove through miles of forest−land, over roads carpeted with fallen leaves. The woods will look glorious this autumn time."

"That will be very pleasant, my child," said Mrs. Rothesay, who was so accustomed to see with Olive's eyes, and to delight in the vivid pictures painted by Olive's eloquent tongue, that she never spoke like a person who is blind. Even the outward world was to her no blank of desolation. Wherever they went, every beautiful place, or thing, or person, that Olive saw, she treasured in memory.—"I must tell mamma of this," or "I must bring mamma here, and paint the view for her." And so she did, in words so rich and clear, that the blind mother often said she enjoyed such scenes infinitely more than when the whole wide earth lay open to her unregardful eyes.

"I wonder," said Olive, "what part of S—shire we are in. We really might have been fairy−guided hither; we seem only aware that our journey began in London and ended at Farnwood. I don't know anything about the neighbourhood either."

"Never mind the neighbourhood, dear, since we are settled, you say, in such a pretty house. Tell me, is it like Woodford Cottage?"

"Not at all! It is quite modern and comfortable. And they have made it all ready for us, just as if we were come to a friend's house on a visit. How kind of Mrs. Fludyer!"

"Nay! I'm sure Mrs. Fludyer never knew how to arrange a house in her life. She had no hand in the matter, trust me!" observed the sharply−observant Christal.

"Well, then, it is certainly the same guiding−fairy who has done this for us, too. And I am very thankful to have such a quiet, pleasant coming−home."

"I, too, feel it like coming home," said Mrs. Rothesay, in a soft, weary voice. "Olive, love, I am glad the journey is over; it has been almost too much for me. We will not go back to London yet awhile; we will stay here a long time."

"As long as ever you like, darling. And now, shall I show you the house?"

"Showing" the house, implied, a long description of it, in Olive's blithest language, as they passed from room to room. It was a pretty, commodious dwelling—perhaps the prettiest portion of which was the chamber which Miss Rothesay appropriated as her mother's and her own.

"It is a charming sleeping−room, with its white draperies, and its old oak furniture; and the quaint pier−glass, stuck round with peacocks' feathers, country fashion. And there, mamma, are some prints—a 'Raising of Lazarus,' though not quite so grand as my beloved 'Sebastian del Piombo.' And here are views from my own beautiful Scotland—a 'Highland Loch,' and 'Edinburgh Castle;' and oh, mamma! there is grand old 'Stirling,' the place where I was born! Our good fairy might have known the important fact; for, lo! she has adorned the mantelpiece with two great bunches of heather,—in honour of me, I suppose. How pleasant!"

"Yes! But I am weary, love. I wish I were in bed and at rest."

This was soon accomplished; and Olive sat down by her mother's side, as she often did, waiting until Mrs. Rothesay fell asleep.

She sat, looking about her mechanically, as one does when taking possession of a strange room. Curiously her eye marked every quaint angle in the furniture, which would in time become so familiar. Then she thought, as one of dreamy mood is apt to do under such circumstances, of how many times she should lay her head down on the pillow in this same room, and when, and how would be the **last time** . For to all things on earth must come a last time.

But, waking herself out of such dreamy pondering, she turned to look at her mother. The delicate, placid face lay in the stillness of deep sleep—a stillness that sometimes startles one, from its resemblance to another and more solemn repose. While she looked, a pain entered the daughter's heart. To chase it thence, she stooped and

softly kissed the face which to her was, and ever had been, the most beautiful in the world; and then, following the train of her former musings, came the thought that one day—it might be far distant, but still, in all human probability, it must come—she would kiss her mother's brow for the **last time**.

A moment's shiver, a faint prayer, and the thought passed. But long afterwards she remembered it, and marvelled that it should have first come to her then and there.

The morning that rose at Farnwood Dell—so the little house was called—was one of the brightest that ever shone from September skies. Olive felt cheerful as the day; and as for Christal, she was perpetually running in and out, making the wonderful discoveries of a young damsel who had never in all her life seen the real country. She longed for a ramble, and would not let Olive rest until the exploit was determined on. It was to be a long walk, the appointed goal being a beacon that could be seen for miles—a church on the top of a hill.

Olive quite longed to go thither, because it had been the first sight at Farnwood on which her eyes had rested. Looking out from her chamber−window, at the early morning, she had seen it gleaming goldenly in the sunrise. All was so new—so lovely! It had made her feel quite happy, just as though with that first sunrise at Farnwood had dawned a new era in her life. Many times during the day she looked at the hill−church; she would have asked about it, had there been any one to ask, so she determined that her first walk should be thither.

The graceful spire rose before them, guiding them all the way,—which did not seem long to Olive, whose artist−soul revelled in the beauties unfolded along their lonely walk—a winding road, bounding the forest, on whose verge the hill stood. But Christal's Parisian feet soon grew wearied, and when they came to the ascent of the hill, she fairly sat down by the roadside.

"I will go into this cottage, and rest until you come back, Miss Rothesay; and you need not hurry, for I shall not be able to walk home for an hour," said the wilful young lady, as she quickly vanished, and left her companion to proceed to the church alone.

Slowly Olive wound up the hill, and through a green lane that led to the churchyard. There seemed a pretty little village close by, but she was too tired to proceed further. She entered the churchyard, intending to sit down and rest on one of the grave−stones; but at the wicket−gate she paused, to look around at the wide expanse of country that lay beneath the afternoon sunshine—a peaceful earth, smiling back the smile of heaven. The old grey church, with its girding wall of gigantic trees, shut out all signs of human habitation; and there was no sound, not even the singing of birds, to break the perfect quiet that brooded around.

Olive had scarce ever seen so sweet a spot. Its sweetness passed into her soul, moving her even to tears. From the hilltop she looked on the wide verdant plain,—then up into the sky, and wished for doves' wings to sail out into the blue. Never had she so deeply felt how beautiful was earth, and how happy it might be made. And was Olive not happy? She thought of all those whose forms had moved through her life's picture; very beautiful to her heart they were—beautiful and dearly loved; but now it seemed as though there was one great want—one glorious image that should have risen above them all, melting them into a grand harmonious whole.

Half conscious of this want, Olive thought, "I wonder how it would have been with me had I ever penetrated that great mystery which crowns all life—had I ever known Love!"

The thought glided into a solemn sadness, bringing with it the remembrance of Michael Vanbrugh's words about the eternal loneliness of genius.

"It may be true—perchance, all is well. Let me think so. If, on earth, I must ever feel this void, God grant that it may be filled at last, in that rich after−life to which all spirits tend!"

She pondered thus meekly, but the solitude oppressed her. She was rather glad to see it broken by the appearance of a little girl, who entered from a wicket−gate at the other end of the churchyard, and walked, very slowly and quietly, to a grave−stone, near where Miss Rothesay stood.

Olive approached, but the child, a thoughtful−looking little creature, of about eight years old, did not see her until she came quite close.

"Do not let me disturb you, my dear," said she, gently, as the little girl seemed shy and frightened, and about to run away. But Miss Rothesay, who loved all children, began to talk to her, and very soon succeeded in conquering the timidity of the pretty little maiden. For she was a pretty creature, with a countenance full of the sweetness of childhood. Olive especially admired the eyes, which were large and dark, the sort of eyes she had always loved, for the sake of Sara Derwent. Looking into them now, she seemed carried back once more to the days of her early youth, and of that long−vanished dream.

"Are you fond of coming here, my child?"

"Yes; whenever I can steal quietly away, out of sight of papa and grandmamma. They do not forbid me; else, you know, I ought not to do it," she added, with a certain sense of right; "but they say it is not good for me to stay thinking here, and send me to go and play."

"And why had you rather come and sit here than play?"

"Because there is a secret, and I want to try and find it out. I dare not tell you, for you might tell papa and grandlnamma, and they would be angry."

"But your mamma—you could surely tell mamma; I always tell everything to mine."

"Do you? and have you got a mamma? Then, perhaps, you could help me in finding out all about mine. You must know," added the child, lifting up her eager face with an air of mystery, "when I was very little, I lived away from here—I never saw my mamma, and my nurse always told me that she had 'gone away.' A little while since, when I came home—my home is there," and she pointed to what seemed the vicarage−house, glimmering whitely through the trees—"they told me mamma was here, under this stone, but they would tell me nothing more. Now, what does it all mean?"

Olive discerned, through these words, that the child was playing upon her mother's grave. Only it seemed strange that she should have been left so entirely ignorant with regard to the great mysteries of death and immortality. Miss Rothesay was puzzled what to answer.

"My child, I can only tell you that if your mamma be here, it is her body only." And Olive paused, startled at the difficulty she found in explaining in the simplest terms the doctrine of the soul's immortality. At last she continued, "When you go to sleep do you not often dream of walking in beautiful places and seeing beautiful things, and the dreams are so happy that you would not mind whether you slept on your soft bed or on the hard ground? Well, so it is with your mamma; her body has been laid down to sleep, but her mind—her spirit, is flying far away in beautiful dreams. She never feels at all that she is lying in her grave under the ground."

"But how long will her body lie there? and will it ever wake?"

"Yes, it will surely wake, though how soon we know not, and be taken up to heaven and to God."

The child looked earnestly in Olive's face, and put the strange, startling question, "What is heaven, and what is God?"

Miss Rothesay's amazement was not unmingled with a sense of horror. Her own religious faith had dawned so imperceptibly—at once an instinct and a lesson—that there seemed something awful in this question of an utterly untaught mind.

"My poor child," she said, "do you not know—has no one told you?"

"No one."

"Then, I will."

"Stay, madam," said a man's voice behind, calm, cold, but not unmusical; "it seems to me that a father is the best guide of his child's faith!"

"Papa—it is papa." With a look of shyness almost amounting to fear, the child slid from the tombstone and ran away.

Olive stood face to face with the father.

He was a gentleman—a true **gentleman**; at the first glance any one would have given him that honourable and rarely−earned name. His age might be about thirty−five, but his face was cast in the firm rigid mould over which years pass and leave no trace. He might have looked as old as now at twenty; at fifty he would probably look little older. Handsome he was, as Olive discerned at a glance, but there was something in him that controlled her much more than mere beauty would have done. It was a grave dignity of presence, which indicated that mental sway which some men are born to hold, first over themselves, and then over their kind. Wherever he came, he seemed to say, "I rule—I am master here!"

Olive Rothesay, innocent as she was of any harm to this gentleman or to his child, felt as cowed and humbled as if she had done wrong. She wished she could have fled like the little girl—fled out of reach of his searching glance.

He waited for her to speak first, but she was silent; her colour rose to her very temples; she knew not whether she ought to apologise, or to summon her woman's dignity and meet the intruder with a pride equal to his own.

She was relieved when the sound of his voice broke the pause.

"I fear I startled you, madam; but I was not at first aware that it was a stranger talking to my little girl. Afterwards, the few words of yours which I overheard induced me to pause."

"What words?"

"About sleep, and dreams, and immortality. Your way of putting the case was graceful—poetical. Whether a child would apprehend it or not, is another question."

Olive was surprised at the half−sarcastic, half−earnest way in which he said this. She longed to ask what motive he could have had in bringing the child up in such perfect ignorance of the first principles of Christianity. The stranger seemed to divine her question, and answer it.

"No doubt you think it strange that my little daughter is so ill−informed in some theological points, and still more that I should have stopped you when you were kind enough to instruct her thereon. But, being a father—to say nothing of a clergyman"—(now Olive looked at him in some surprise, and found that her interlocutor bore, in dress at least, a clerical appearance)—"I choose to judge for myself in some things; and I deem it very inexpedient that the feeble mind of a child should be led to dwell on subjects which are beyond the grasp of the profoundest philosopher."

"But not beyond the reverent faith of a meek Christian," Olive ventured to say.

He looked at her with his piercing eyes, and said eagerly, "You think so, you feel so?" then recovering his old manner, "Certainly—of course—I often find that the great beauty of a woman's religion. She pauses not to argue,—she is always ready to believe; therefore you women are a great deal happier than the philosophers."

It was doubtful, from his tone, whether he meant this in compliment or in sarcasm. But Olive replied as her own true and pious spirit prompted.

"It seems to me that while the intellect comprehends, the heart, or rather the instinct of the soul, is the only fountain of belief. Without that, could a man dive into the infinite until he became as an angel in power?—could he 'by searching find out God?'—still he could not believe."

"Can **you** understand and believe in God."

"I love God!" She said no more; but her countenance spoke faith, holiness, peace; and her companion saw it. He stood, as silently gazing as a man who in the desert comes face to face with an angel.

Olive, recollecting herself, felt her shyness and humility rising up in blushes. "I ought to apologise for speaking so freely of these things to a stranger and a clergyman—in this place too."

"Can there be a fitter place, or one that so sanctifies, and at the same time accounts for this conversation?" was the answer, as the speaker glanced round the quiet domain of the dead. Then Olive remembered where they stood—that she was talking to the husband over his lost wife's tomb. The thought touched her with sympathy for this grave, reserved man, whose words, though so earnest, were yet so piercing. It seemed as though he would tear away every flimsy veil, to behold the shining image of Truth.

They were silent for a moment, and then he resumed, with a smile—the first that had yet lightened his face, and which now threw thereon an almost womanly sweetness—

"I ought to thank you for talking so kindly to my little daughter. I trust I have sufficiently explained why I interrupted your lessons."

"Still, it seems strange," said Olive. And her feeling of interest conquering that of diffidence, she asked how he, a clergyman, had possibly contrived to keep the child in such utter ignorance?

"She has not lived here with me," he answered; "my little Ailie has been brought up in complete solitude. It was best for a child, whose birth was soon followed by her mother's death."

Olive trembled lest she had opened a wound; but his words and manner bore the grave composure of one who speaks of any ordinary event. Whatever grief he had felt, it had evidently long been healed. But there was an awkward pause, during which Miss Rothesay tried to think in what way she could best end the conversation. It was broken at last by little Ailie, who crept timidly across the churchyard to her father.

"Please papa, grandmamma wants to see you before she goes out. She is going to John Dent's, and to Farnwood, and—"

"Hush, little chatterbox! this lady cannot be interested in our family revelations. Bid her 'good−afternoon,' and come!"

He tried to speak playfully, but it was a rigid playfulness. Though a father, it was evident he did not understand children. Bowing to Olive with a stately acknowledgment, he walked on alone towards the little

wicket−gate. She noticed that his eye never turned back, either to his dead wife's grave or to his living child. Ailie, while his shadow was upon her, had been very quiet; when he walked away, she sprang up, gave Olive one of those rough, sudden, childish embraces, which are so sweet; and then bounded away after her father.

Miss Rothesay watched them both disappear, and then was seized with an eager impulse to know who were this strange father and daughter. She remembered the tombstone, the inscription of which she had not yet seen; for it was half−hidden by an overhanging cornice, and by the tall grass that grew close by. Olive had to kneel down in order to decipher it. She did so, and read—

"SARA,

Wife of the Reverend Harold Gwynne,

Died—, Aged 21"

Then, the turf she knelt on covered Sara!—the kiss, yet warm on her lips, was given by Sara's child! Olive bowed her face in the grass, trembling violently. Far—far, through long−divided years, her heart fled back to its olden tenderness. She saw again the thorn−tree and the garden−walk, the beautiful girlish face, with its frank and constant smile. She sat down and wept over Sara's grave.

Then she thought of little Ailie. Oh! would that she had known this sooner! that she might have closer clasped the motherless child, and have seen poor Sara's likeness shining from her daughter's eyes! With a yearning impulse, Olive rose up to follow the little girl. But she remembered the father.

How strange—how passing strange, that he with whom she had been talking, towards whom she had felt such an awe, and yet a vague attraction, should have been Sara's husband, and the man whose influence had curiously threaded her own life for many years.

She felt glad that the mystery was now dissolved—that she had at last seen Harold Gwynne.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS ROTHESAY was very silent during the walk home. She accounted for it to Christal by telling the simple truth—that in the churchyard she had found the grave of an early and dear friend. Her young companion looked serious, condoled in set fashion; and then became absorbed in the hateful labyrinths of the muddy road. Certainly, Miss Manners was never born for a simple rustic. Olive could not help remarking this.

"No; I was born for what I am," answered the girl," proudly. "My parents were high and noble—I am the same. Don't lecture me! Wrong or right, I always felt thus, and always shall. If I have neither friends nor relatives, I have at least this, my family and my name."

She talked thus, as she did sometimes when she was in an earnest mood, until they came to the garden−gate of Farnwood Dell. There stood an elegant carriage. Christal's eyes brightened at the sight, and she trod with a more patrician air.

The maid—a parting bequest of Miss Meliora's, and who had long and faithfully served at Woodford Cottage—came anxiously to communicate that there were two ladies waiting. One of them she did not know; the other was Mrs. Fludyer. "The latter would have disturbed Mrs. Rothesay," Hannah added, "but the other lady said, 'No; they would wait.'" Whereat Olive's heart inclined towards "the other lady."

She went in and found, with Mrs. Fludyer, an ancient dame of large and goodly presence. Aged though she seemed, her tall figure was not bent; and dignity is to the old what grace is to the young. She stood a little aside, and did not speak, but Olive, labouring under the weight of Mrs. Fludyer's gracious inquiries, felt that the old lady's eyes were carefully reading her face. At last Mrs. Fludyer made a motion of introduction.

"No, I thank you," said the stranger, in the clear, quick Northern tongue, which, falling from poor Elspie's lips, had made the music of Olive's childhood, and to which her heart yearned evermore. "Miss Rothesay, will you, for your father's sake, let me shake hands with his child? I am Mrs. Gwynne."

Thus it was that Olive received the first greeting of Harold's mother.

It startled—overpowered her; she had been so much agitated that day. She surprised the formal Mrs. Fludyer with the childish weakness of a burst of tears. Mrs. Gwynne came up to her, with a softness almost motherly.

"You are pained, Miss Rothesay; you remember the past. But I have now come to hope that everything may be forgotten, save that I was your father's old friend. For our Scottish friendship, like our pride, descends from generation to generation," she added, with that cheerful smile that sometimes curiously mingled with her gravity. "Fortune has made us neighbours, let us then be friends. It is my earnest wish, and that of my son Harold."

"Your son!" echoed Olive; and then, half−bewildered by all these adventures, coincidences, and *éclaircissements*, she told how she had already met him, and how that meeting had shown to her her old companion's grave.

"That is strange, too. Never while she lived did Mrs. Harold Gwynne mention your name. And you loved her so! Well! 'twas like her—like her!" muttered Harold's mother; "but peace be with the dead!"

She walked up, and laid her hand on Olive's shoulder.

"My dear, I am an old woman; excuse my speaking plainly. You know nothing of me and of my son, save what is harsh and painful. Forget all this, and remember only that I loved your father when he was quite a child, and that I am prepared to love his daughter, if she so choose. You must not think I am taking a hasty fancy—we Scottish folk never do that," and she smiled again. "But I have learnt much about you lately—more than you guess—and have recognised in the noble woman and duteous daughter that same 'little Olive' of whose sweetness Angus Rothesay told me only a few days before his death."

"Did you see my dear father then?—did he talk of me?" cried Olive, eagerly, as, forgetting all the painful remembrances attached to the Gwynne family, she began to look at Harold's mother almost with affection.

But Mrs. Gwynne, who, probably moved by Olive's agitation, had unfolded herself in a way most unusual, now was relapsing into reserve. She said, rather coldly, "We will talk of this another time, my dear. Now, I should desire much to see Mrs. Rothesay."

Olive went to fetch her. How she contrived to explain all that had transpired, she never clearly knew herself. However, she succeeded, and shortly re−appeared, with her mother leaning on her arm.

And, beholding the pale, worn, but still graceful woman, who, with her sightless eyes cast down, clung

tremblingly to her sole stay—her devoted child—Mrs. Gwynne seemed deeply moved. There was even a sort of deprecatory hesitation in her manner, but it soon passed.—She clasped the widow's hands, and spoke to her in a voice so sweet, so winning, that all pain vanished from Mrs. Rothesay's mind.

In a little while she was sitting calmly by Mrs. Gwynne's side, listening to her speech. It went into the blind woman's heart. Soft the voice was, and kind; and, above all, there were in it the remembered accents of the Northern tongue—the accents which had wooed her in her girlhood. In her advancing age, they were sacred still. She felt again like young Sybilla Hyde, creeping along in the moonlight by the side of her stalwart Highland lover, listening to his whispers, and thinking that there was in the wide world no one like her own Angus Rothesay—so beautiful and so brave!

When Mrs. Gwynne quitted the Dell, she left on the hearts of both mother and daughter a pleasure which they sought not to repress. They were quite glad that the next day was Sunday, when they would go to Harbury, and hear Harold Gwynne preach. Olive told her mother all that had passed in the churchyard, and they agreed that he must be a very strange, though a very clever man. As for Christal, she had gone off with her friend Mrs. Fludyer, and did not interfere in the conversation at all.

When Sunday morning came, Mrs. Rothesay's feeble strength was found unequal to a walk of two miles. Christal, apparently not sorry for the excuse, volunteered to remain with her, and Olive went to church alone. She was loath to leave her mother; but then she did so long to hear Mr. Gwynne preach! She thought, all the way, what kind of minister he would make. Not at all like any other, she was quite sure.

She entered the grey, still, village church, and knelt down to pray in a retired corner−pew. There was a solemn quietness over her heart—a repose, soft and dewy as that of the morning before sunrise. She felt a meek happiness, a hopeful looking forth into life; and yet a touch would have awakened the fountains of tears.

She saw Mrs. Gwynne walk up the aisle alone, with her firm, stately step, and then the service began. Olive glanced one instant at the officiating minister;—it was the same stern face that she had seen by Sara's grave; nay, perhaps even more stern. She did not like Harold's reading either, for there was in it the same iron coldness. He repeated the touching liturgy of the English Church with the tone of a judge delivering sentence—an orator pronouncing his well−written, formal harangue. Olive had to shut her ears, else that day she could not have lifted her pious heart to prayer. It pained her too; there was something so noble in Mr. Gwynne's face, so musical in his voice, that any short−coming gave her a sense of disappointment. She felt troubled to think that this feeling would last; since he was the clergyman of the parish, and she must necessarily hear him every Sunday.

Harold Gwynne mounted his pulpit, and Olive listened intently. From what she had heard of him as a highly intellectual man, from the faint indications of character which she had herself noticed in their conversation, Miss Rothesay expected that he would have dived deeply into theological disquisition. She had too much penetration to look for the meek, beautiful Christianity of a St. John—it was evident that such was not his nature; but she thought he would surely love to employ his powerful mind in wrestling with those knotty points of theology which might furnish arguments for a modern St. Paul.

But Harold Gwynne did neither. His sermon was a plain moral discourse—an essay such as Locke or Bacon might have written; save that he took care to translate his high philosophy into language suitable to his hearers—the generality of whom were of the labouring class. Olive liked him for this, believing she recognised therein the strong sense of duty, the wish to do good, which overpowered all desire of intellectual display. And when she had once succeeded in ignoring the fact that his sermon was of a character more suited to the professor's chair than the pulpit, she listened with deep interest to his teaching of a lofty, but somewhat stern morality. Yet, despite his strong, clear arguments, and his evident earnestness, there was about him a repellant atmosphere, which prevented her inclining towards **the man**, even while she was constrained to respect the powerful and noble intellect of the preacher.

Nevertheless, when Mr. Gwynne ended his brief discourse with the usual prayer, that it might be "grafted inwardly" in his hearers' minds, it sounded very like a mockery—at least, to Olive, who for the moment had almost forgotten that she was in a church. She could not kneel and say the prayer, and her pious spirit reproached her bitterly. During the silent pause of the congregation, she raised her eyes and looked at the minister. He, too, knelt like the rest, with covered face, but his hands were not folded in prayer—they were clenched like those of a man writhing under some strong and secret agony; and when he lifted his head, his rigid fea− tures were more rigid than ever. The organ awoke, pealing forth that jubilant orison of perfect faith—Handel's "Hallelujah

Chorus," and still the pastor sat motionless in his pulpit, his stern face showing white in the sunshine. The heavenly music rolled round him its angelic waves—they never touched his soul. Beneath, his simple congregation passed, exchanging with one another demure Sunday greetings, and kindly Sunday smiles: he saw them not. He sat alone, like one who shares no sympathy either with heaven or earth.

But there watched him from the hidden corner eyes he knew not of—the wondering, half−pitying eyes of Olive Rothesay. And while she gazed, there came into her heart—involuntarily, as if whispered by an unseen angel at her side—the words from the Litany—words which he himself had coldly read an hour before:

> "*That it may please Thee to lead into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived. We beseech Thee to hear us, O Lord!*"

She knelt down and said them as her departing orison, ere she left the church.

Scarce conscious was she why she thus felt, or for whom she prayed; but, years after, it seemed to her that there had been a solemn import in these words.

Miss Rothesay was late in quitting her pew. As she did so, she felt her arm lightly touched, and saw beside her Mrs. Gwynne.

"My dear, I am glad to meet you—we scarcely expected to have seen you at church to−day. Alone, too! then you must come with me to the Parsonage to lunch. You say nay? What! are we still so far enemies that you refuse our bread and salt?"

Olive coloured with sensitive fear lest she might have given pain. Besides, she felt a strong attraction towards Mrs. Gwynne—a sense of looking−up, such as she had never before experienced towards any woman. For, it is needless to say, Olive's affection for her mother was the passionate, protecting tenderness of a nurse for a beloved charge—nay, even of a lover towards an idolised mistress; but there was nothing of reverential awe in it at all. Now Mrs. Gwynne carried with her dignity, influence, command. Olive, almost against her will, found herself passing down the green alley that led to the Parsonage. As she walked along—her slight small figure pressed close to her companion, who had taken her "under her arm,"—she felt almost like a child beside Harold's mother.

At the door sat little Ailie, amusing herself with a great dog. She looked restless and wearied, as a child does, kept in the house under the restrictions of "Sunday play." At the sight of her grandmother, the little girl seemed half−pleased, half−frightened, and tried to calm Rover's frolics within the bounds of Sabbatic propriety. This being impossible, Mrs, Gwynne's severe voice ordered both the offenders away in different directions. Then she apologized to Miss Rothesay.

"Perhaps," she continued, "you are surprised that Ailie was not with me this morning. But such is her father's will. My son Harold is peculiar in his opinions, and has a great hatred of cant, especially infantile cant."

"And does Ailie never go to church?"

"No! but I take care that she keeps Sunday properly and reverently at home. I remove her playthings and her baby−books, and teach her a few of Dr. Watts's moral hymns."

Olive sighed. She felt that this was not the way to teach the faith of Him who smiled with benign tenderness on the little child "set in the midst." And it grieved her to think what a wide gulf there was between the untaught Ailie, and that sincere, but stern piety over which had gathered the formality of advancing years.

Mrs. Gwynne and her guest had sat talking for some minutes, when Harold was seen crossing the lawn. His mother called him, and he came to the window with the quick response of one who in all his life had never heard that summons unheeded. It was a slight thing, but Olive noticed it, and the loving daughter felt more kindly towards the duteous son.

"Harold, Miss Rothesay is here."

He glanced in at the open window with a surprised, half−confused air, which was not remarkable, considering the awkwardness of this second meeting, after their first rencontre. Remembering it, Olive heard his steps down the long hall, with some trepidation. But entering, he walked up to her with the graceful ease of a true gentleman, took her hand, and expressed his pleasure in meeting her. He did not make the slightest allusion either to their

former correspondence, or to their late conversation in the churchyard.

Olive's sudden colour paled beneath his serene, unconcerned air; her heart's faintlyquickened pulses sank down into quietness; it seemed childish to have been so nervously sensitive in meeting Harold Gwynne. She felt thoroughly ashamed of herself, and was afraid lest her shyness might have conveyed to him and to his mother the impression, which she would not for worlds have given,—that she bore any painful or uncharitable remembrance of the past.

Soon the conversation glided naturally into ease and pleasantness. Mrs. Gwynne had the gift of talking well—a rare quality among women, whose conversation mostly consists of disjointed chatter, long−winded repetitions, or a commonplace remark, and—silence. But Alison Gwynne had none of these feminine peculiarities. To listen to her was like reading a pleasant book. Her terse, well−chosen sentences had all the grace of easy chat, and yet were so unaffected that not until you paused to think them over, did you discover that you might have "written them all down," and found there a style both elegant and pure.

Her son had not this gift; or, if he had, he left it unemployed. It was only a moment of great passion or earnestness that could draw more than ordinary words from the lips of Harold Gwynne; and such moments seemed to have been rare indeed with him. In most circumstances he appeared—as he did now to Olive Rothe− say—the dignified, gentleman−like, but rather silent master of the household—in whose most winning grace there was reserve, and beneath whose very courtesy lurked an air that implied command.

He showed this when, after an hour's pleasant visit. Miss Rothesay moved to depart. Harold requested her to remain a few minutes longer.

"I have occasion to go to the Hall before evening service, and I shall be happy to accompany you on the way, if you do not object to my escort."

If Olive had been quite free, probably she would have answered that she did; for her independent habits made her greatly enjoy a long quiet walk alone, especially through a beautiful country. She almost felt that the company of her redoubtable pastor would be a restraint. But in all that Harold Gwynne did or said there lurked an inexplicable sway: every one seemed to bend to this influence—even Olive. Almost against her will, she remained; and in a few minutes she was walking beside him to the little wicket−gate.

Here he was interrupted by some one on clerical business. Mr. Gwynne desired her to proceed, and he would overtake her ere she had descended the hill. Thither Olive went, half hoping that she might after all take her walk alone. But very soon she heard behind her footsteps, quick, firm, manly, less seeming to tread than to crush the ground. Such footsteps give one a feeling of being haunted—as they did to Olive. It was a relief when they came up with her, and she was once more joined by Harold Gwynne.

"You keep your word," observed Miss Rothesay, by way of saying something.

"Yes, always; when I say **I will**, I do it," was his characteristic answer.—"The road is uneven and rough, will my arm aid you, Miss Rothesay?"

She accepted it, perhaps the more readily because it was offered less as a courtesy than a support, and one not unheeded, for Olive was rather tired with her morning's exertions, and with the excitement of talking to strangers. As she walked, there came across her mind the thought—what a new thing it was for her to have a strong, kindly arm to lean on! But it seemed rather pleasant than otherwise, and she felt gratefully towards Mr. Gwynne.

They conversed on the ordinary topics, natural to such a recent acquaintance—the beauty of the country around, the chief peculiarities of forest scenery, &c. &c. Never once did the tenor of Harold's conversation assimilate to that which had so struck Olive when they stood beside poor Sara's grave. He seemed to have changed characters, as though the former Harold Gwynne—the object of her girlhood's dislike, her father's enemy, her friend's husband—had vanished for ever, and in his stead was a man whose deep thought and fine intellect already interested her. And over all this was cast a sense of mystery which roused up the lingering romance of Olive's nature, and made her observe his manner and his words with a curious vigilance, as if to seek some new revelations of humanity in his character or his history. Therefore, every little incident of conversation in that first walk was carefully put by in her hidden nooks of memory, to amuse her mother with,—and perhaps also to speculate thereupon herself.

They reached Farnwood Dell, and Olive's conscience began to accuse her of having left her mother for so many hours. Therefore her adieux and thanks to Mr. Gwynne were some− what abrupt. Mechanically she invited him to enter, and, to her surprise, he did so.

Mrs. Rothesay was sitting out of doors, in her little garden chair. A beautiful picture she made, leaning back with a mild sweetness, scarce a smile, hovering on her lips. Her pale little hands were folded on her black dress; her soft braids of hair, already silver−grey, and her complexion, lovely as that of a young girl, showing delicately in contrast with her crimson garden−hood, the triumph of her daughter's skilful fingers.

Olive crossed the grass with a quick and noiseless step,—Harold following. "Mamma, darling!"

A light, bright as a sun−burst, shone over Mrs. Rothesay's face.—"My child! how long you have been away. Did Mrs. Gwynne—"

"Hush, darling!"—in a whisper—"I have been at the Parsonage, and Mr. Gwynne has kindly brought me home. He is here now."

Harold stood at a distance and bowed.

Olive came to him, saying, in a low tone, "Take her hand, she cannot see you, she is blind."

He started with surprise. "I did not know—my mother told me nothing."—And then, advancing to Mrs. Rothesay, he pressed her hand in both his, with such an air of reverent tenderness and gentle compassion, that it made his face grow softened—beautiful, divine!

Olive Rothesay, turning towards him, beheld that look. It never afterwards faded from her memory.

Mrs. Rothesay arose, and said in her own sweet manner, "I am happy to meet Mr. Gwynne, and to thank him for taking care of my child." They talked for a few minutes, and then Olive persuaded her mother to return to the house.

"You will come, Mr. Gwynne?" said Mrs. Rothesay. He answered, hesitating, that the afternoon would close soon, and he must go to Farnwood Hall. Mrs. Rothesay rose up from her chair with the touching, helpless movement of one who is blind.

"Permit me," said Harold Gwynne, as, stepping quickly forward, he drew her arm through his, arranging her shawl with a care equal to a woman's. And so he led her into the house, guiding her somewhat feeble steps with a tenderness beautiful to see.

Olive, as she followed silently after, felt her whole heart melted towards him. While she lived, she never forgot Harold's first meeting with her mother.

He went away, promising to pay another visit soon.

"I am quite charmed with Mr. Gwynne," said Mrs. Rothesay. "Tell me, Olive, what he is like."

Olive described him, though not enthusiastically at all. Nevertheless, her mother answered, smiling, "He must, indeed, be a remarkable person. He is such a perfect gentleman, and his voice is so kind and pleasant;—like his mother too, he has a little of the sweet Scottish tongue. Truly,I did not think there had been in the world such a man as Harold Gwynne."

"Nor I!" answered Olive, in a soft, quiet, happy voice. She hung over her mother with a deeper tenderness—she looked out into the lovely autumn sunset with a keener sense of beauty and of joy. The sun was setting, the year was waning; but on Olive Rothesay's life had dawned a new season and a new day.

CHAPTER X.

"**WELL**, I never in my life knew such a change as Farnwood has made in Miss Manners!" observed old Hannah, the Woodford Cottage maid; who, though carefully kept in ignorance of any facts that could betray the secret of Christal's history, yet seemed at times to bear a secret grudge against her, as an interloper. "There she comes, riding across the country like some wild thing—she who used to be so prim and precise!"

"Poor young creature, she is like a bird just let out of a cage," said Mrs. Rothesay, kindly. "It is often so with girls brought up as she has been. Olive, I am glad you never went to school."

Olive's answer was stopped by the appearance of Christal, followed by one of the young Fludyer boys, with whom she had become a first−rate favourite. Her fearless frankness, her exuberant spirits, tempered only by her anxiety to appear always "the grand lady," made her a welcome guest at Farnwood Hall. Indeed, she was scarce ever at home, save when appearing, as she did now, on hasty visits, which quite disturbed Mrs. Rothesay's placidity, and almost drove old Hannah crazy.

"He is not come yet, you see," Christal said, with a mysterious nod to Charley Fludyer. "I thought we should outride him—he can't manage a pony any more than a child. But he will surely be here soon?"

"**Who** will be here soon?" asked Olive, considerably surprised. "Are you speaking of Mr. Gwynne?"

"Mr. Gwynne, no! Far better fun than that, isn't it, Charley? Shall we tell the secret or not? Or else shall we tell half of it, and let her puzzle it out till he comes?" The boy nodded assent. "Well, then, there is coming to see you to−day Charley's tutor, who was away for the holidays. He only arrived at Farnwood last night, and since then he has been talking of nothing else but his old friend, Miss Olive Rothesay. So I told him to meet me here, and, lo! he comes."

There was a hurried knock at the door, and immediately the little parlour was graced by the presence of an individual,—whom Olive did not recognise in the least. He seemed about twenty, slight and tall, of a complexion red and white; his features pretty, though rather girlish.

Olive bowed to him in undisguised surprise; but the moment he saw her his face became "celestial rosy red," apparently from a habit he had, in common with other bashful youths, of blushing on all occasions.

"I see you do not remember me, Miss Rothesay. Of course, I could not expect it. But I have not forgotten you."

Olive, though still doubtful, instinctively offered him her hand. The tall youth took it eagerly, and as he looked down upon her, something in his expression reminded her of a face she had herself once looked down upon,—her little knight of the garden at Oldchurch. In the impulse of the moment she called him again by his old name—"Lyle, dear Lyle!"

"Yes, it is indeed I!" cried the young man. "Oh, Miss Rothesay, you can't tell how glad I am to meet you again."

"I am glad, too," said Olive, much moved; and she regarded him with that half−mournful curiosity with which we trace the lineaments of some long−forgotten face, belonging to that olden time, between which and now a whole lifetime seems to have intervened.

"Is that little Lyle Derwent?" cried Mrs. Rothesay, catching the name. "How very strange! Come hither, my dear boy! Alas, I cannot see you. Let me put my hand on your head."

But she could not reach it, he was grown so tall. She seemed startled to think how time had flown.

"He is quite a man now, mamma," said Olive; "you know we have not seen him for many years—"

Lyle added, blushing deeper than before—"The last time—I remember it well—was in the garden, one Sunday in spring—nine years ago."

"Nine years ago! Is it then nine years since my Angus died?" murmured the widow; and a grave sadness spread itself over all. In the midst of it Christal and Charley, seeing this meeting was not likely to produce the "fun" they expected, took the opportunity of escaping.

Then came the questions, which after so long a period one shrinks from asking, lest the answer should be silence. Olive learnt that old Mr. Derwent had ceased to scold, and wicked Bob played his mischievous pranks no more—the grave had closed over both. Worldly losses, too, had chanced, until the sole survivor of the family found himself condemned to the hard life of a tutor.

"I should not have had even that resource," said Lyle, "but for the kindness of my brother−in−law, Harold

Gwynne."

Olive started. "Oh, true—I forgot all about that. How strangely everything seems mingled together! Then he has been a good brother to you?" added she, with a feeling of pleasure and interest.

"He has indeed. When my father died, I had not a relative in the world, save a rich old uncle who wanted to put me in his counting−house; but Harold stood between us, and saved me from a calling I hated. And when my uncle turned me off, he took me home. Yes! I am not ashamed to say that I owe everything in the world to my brother Harold. I feel this the more, because he was not quite happy in his marriage. She did not suit him—my sister Sara."

"Hush!" said Olive, seeing that references to old times brought a cloud on her mother's face. She spoke on the subject no more, until, after tea, Lyle, who appeared rather a sentimental, poetical young gentleman, proposed a moonlight walk in the garden. Miss Christal, after eyeing Olive and her cavalier with a mixture of amusement and vexation, as if she did not like to miss so excellent a chance of fun and flirtation, con− soled herself with ball−playing and Charley Fludyer.

As their conversation grew more familiar, Olive was rather disappointed in Lyle. In his boyhood, she had thought him quite a little genius; but the bud had given more promise than the flower was ever likely to fulfil. Now she saw in him one of those not uncommon characters, who with sensitive feeling, and some graceful talent, yet never rise to the standard of genius. Strength, daring, and, above all, originality, were wanting in his mind. With all his dreamy sentiment—his lip−library of perpetually quoted poets—and his own numberless scribblings (of which he took care to inform Miss Rothesay)—Lyle Derwent would probably remain to his life's end a mere "poetical gentleman."

Olive's quick perception soon divined all this, and she began to weary a little of her companion and his vague sentimentalities, "in linked sweetness long drawn out." Besides, thoughts much deeper had haunted her at times, during the evening—thoughts of the marriage which had been "not quite happy." This fact scarcely surprised her. The more she began to know of Mr. Gwynne—and she had seen a good deal of him, considering the few weeks of their acquaintance—the more she marvelled that he had ever chosen Sara Derwent as his wife. Their union must have been like that of night and day, fierce fire and unstable water. Olive longed to fathom the mystery, and could not resist saying,

"You were talking of your sister a−while ago. I stopped you, for I saw it pained mamma. But now I should so like to hear something about my poor Sara."

"I can tell you little, for I was but a boy when she died. But things I then little noticed, I put together afterwards. It must have been quite a romance, I think. You know my sister had a former lover—Charles Geddes! Do you remember him?"

"Ah, I do!" and Olive sighed—perhaps over the remembrance of the dream born in that fairy time—her first girlish dream of ideal love.

"He was at sea when Sara married. On his return the news almost drove him wild. I remember his coming in the garden—our old garden, you know—where he and Sara used to walk. He seemed half mad, and I went to him, and comforted him, as well as I could, though little I understood his grief. Perhaps I should now!" said Lyle, lifting his eyes with rather a doleful, sentimental air; which, alas! was all lost upon his companion.

"Poor Charles!" she murmured, compassionately. "But tell me more."

"He persuaded me to take back all her letters, together with one from himself, and give them to my sister, the next time I went to Harbury. I did so. Well I remember that night! Harold came in, and found his wife crying over the letters. In a fit of jealousy he took them, and read them all through—together with that of Charles. He did not see me, or know the part I had in the matter, but I shall never forget **him**."

"What did he do?" asked Olive, eagerly. Strange, that her question and her thoughts were not of Sara, but of Harold.

"Do? nothing! But his words—I remember them distinctly, they were so freezing. so stern. He grasped her arm, and said, 'Sara, when you said you loved me, you uttered **a lie**! When you took your marriage oath, you vowed a lie! Every day since, that you have smiled in my face, you have looked a lie! Henceforth I will never trust you or any woman more.'"

"And what followed?" cried Olive, now so strongly interested that she never paused to think if she had any right to ask these questions.

"Soon after, Sara came home to us. Her husband did not send her, but she came. She did not stay long, and then returned to Harbury. Harold was never unkind to her—that I know. But, somehow, she pined away; the more so after she heard of Charles Geddes' sudden death.

"Alas! he died too."

"Yes; by an accident his own recklessness caused. But he was weary of his life, poor fellow! Well—Sara never quite recovered that shock. After little Ailie was born, she lingered a few weeks, and then died. It was almost a relief to us all."

"What! did you not love your sister?" cried Olive, reproachfully.

"Of course I did; but then she was older than I, and had never cared for me much. Now, as to Harold, I owe him everything. He has been to me less like a brother than a father; not in affection, perhaps that is scarcely in his nature, but in kindness and in counsel. There is not in the world a better man than Harold Gwynne."

Olive unconsciously clasped Lyle's hand. "I am sure of it, and I like you the more for saying so." Then, in some confusion, she added, "Pardon me for speaking so freely, but I had quite gone back to the old times, when you were my little pet. I really must learn to show more formality and respect to Mr. Derwent."

"Don't say **Mr. Derwent**. Pray call me Lyle, as you used to do."

"That I will, with pleasure. Only," she continued, smiling, "when I look up at you, I shall begin to feel quite an ancient dame, since I am so much older than you."

"Not at all," Lyle answered, with an eagerness, somewhat deeper than the mannish pride of youths who have just crossed the Rubicon that divides them from their much−scorned '*teens*.' "I have advanced, and you seem to have stood still; there is scarce any difference between us now." And Olive, somewhat amused, let her old favourite have his way.

They spoke on trivial subjects, until it was time to return to the house. Just as they were entering, Lyle said,

"Look! there is my brother−in−law standing at the gate. Oh, Miss Rothesay, be sure you never tell him of the things we have been talking about."

"It is not likely I shall ever have the opportunity. Mr. Gwynne seems a very reserved man."

"He is so; and of these matters he now never speaks at all."

"Hush! he is here;" and with a feeling of unwonted agitation, as if she feared he had been aware of how much she had thought and conversed about him, Olive met Harold Gwynne.

"I am afraid I am an intruder, Miss Rothesay," said the latter, with a half−suspicious glance at the tall, dark figure which stood near her in the moonlight.

"What! did you not know me, Harold," cried the cheerful voice of Lyle. And he laughed,—his laugh was something like Sara's.

It seemed to ring jarringly on Mr. Gwynne's ear. "I was not aware, Miss Rothesay, that I should find your house graced by the presence of my worshipful brother−in−law," he said, with a rather forced attempt at jesting.

"Oh, Miss Rothesay and I were friends almost ten years ago. She was our neighbour at Oldchurch."

"Indeed; I was not aware of that." And Olive thought she discerned in his face—which she had already begun to read—some slight pain or annoyance. Perhaps it wounded him to know any one who had known Sara. Perhaps—but conjectures were vain. She only saw that his face was darkening, and with a womanly kindness she tried to disperse the cloud.

"I am glad you are come," she said to Harold. "Mamma has been wishing for you all day. You know you are quite a favourite of hers. Lyle, will you go and tell her who is here. Nay, Mr. Gwynne, surely you will come back with me to the house."

He seemed half−inclined to resist, but at last yielded. So he made one of the little circle, and "assisted" at this, the first of many social evenings, at Farnwood Dell. But at times, even when he seemed to unbend, and give out a little of his terse, keen, and though somewhat sarcastic conversation, Olive caught herself looking earnestly at him, and conjuring up in fancy the look and voice with which he had said the bitter words about "never trusting woman more."

He and Lyle went away together, and Christal, who had at last succeeded in apparently involving the light−hearted young tutor within the meshes of her smiles, took consolation in a little quiet drollery with Charlie Fludyer; but even this resource failed when Charlie spoke of returning home.

"I shall not go back with you to−night," said Christal. "I shall stay at the Dell. You may come and fetch me

to−morrow, with the pony you lent me; and bring Mr. Derwent too—to lead it. To see him so employed would be excellent fun."

"You seem to have taken a sudden passion for riding, Christal," said Olive, with a smile, when they were alone.

"Yes, it suits me. I like dashing along across the country—it is excitement; and I like, too, to have a horse obeying me—'tis so delicious to rule! To think that Madame Blandin should consider riding unfeminine! and that I should have missed that pleasure for so many years. But I am my own mistress now. By the way," she added, carelessly, "I wanted to have a few words with you, Miss Rothesay." She had rarely called her **Olive** of late.

"Nay, my dears," interposed Mrs. Rothesay, "do not begin to talk just yet—not until I am gone to bed—for I am very, very tired." And so, until Olive came down stairs again, Christal sat in dignified solitude by the parlour fire.

"Well," said Miss Rothesay, when she entered, "what have you to say to me, my dear child!"

Christal drew back a little at the familiar word and manner, as though she did not quite like it. But she only said, "Oh! it is a mere trifle; I am obliged to mention it, because I understand Miss Vanbrugh left my money matters under your care until I came of age."

"Certainly—you know it was by your consent, Christal."

"Oh yes! because it will save me trouble. Well! all I wanted to say was, that I wish to keep a horse."

"To keep a horse!"

"Certainly—what harm can there be in that? I long to ride about at my own will—go to the meets in the forest—even to follow the hounds. I am my own mistress, and I choose to do it," said Christal, in rather a high tone.

"You cannot, indeed, my dear," answered Olive, mildly. "Think of all the expenses it would entail—expenses far more than befit your income."

"I myself am the best judge of that."

"Not quite! Because, Christal, you are still very young, and have little knowledge of the worlds ways; and to tell you the plain truth—must I?"

"If you will;—of all things I hate deceit and concealment." Here Christal stopped; blushed a little; and, half turning aside, hid further in her bosom a little ornament which occasionally peeped out—a silver cross and beads. Then she said in a somewhat less angry tone, "You are right—tell me all your mind."

"I think, then, that though your income is sufficient to afford you independence, it cannot provide luxuries; and besides," she continued, speaking very gently, "it seems to me scarcely right, that a young girl like you, without father or brother, should go riding and hunting in the way you propose."

"That, still, is my own affair—no one has a right to control me." Olive was silent. "Do you mean to say **you** have? Because you are in some sort my guardian, are you to thwart me in this manner? I will not endure it," cried Christal, vehemently.

And there rose in her the same fierce spirit which had startled Olive on the first night of the girl's arrival at Woodford Cottage, and which, something to her surprise, had lain dormant ever since, covered over with the light−hearted trifling which formed Christal's outward character.

"What am I to do?" thought Olive, much troubled. "How am I to wrestle with this girl? But I will do it—if only for Meliora's sake. Christal," she said, affectionately, "we have never talked together seriously for a long time; not since the first night we met."

"I remember, you were good to me then," answered Christal, a little subdued.

"But I was grieved for you—I pitied you."

"Pitied!" and the angry demon again rose. Olive saw she must not touch that chord again.

"My dear," she said, still most kindly; "indeed, I have neither the wish nor the right to rule you; I only advise."

"And to advice I am ready to listen. Don't mistake me, Miss Rothesay," said Christal, divided between her old affectionate ways and her newly−assumed importance. "I liked you—I do still—very much indeed; but you don't quite understand or sympathise with me now."

"Why not, dear? Is it because I have little time to be with you, since I am so much occupied with my mother, and with my profession."

"Ay, that is it," said Christal, loftily. "My dear Miss Rothesay, I am much obliged to you for all your kindness;

but we do not suit one another. I have found that out since I visited at Farnwood Hall. There is a difference between an artist working for a livelihood, and an independent lady."

Even Christal, abrupt as her anger had made her, blushed for the rudeness of this speech. But false shame kept her from offering any atonement.

Olive's slight figure expressed unwonted dignity. In her arose something of the old Rothesay pride, but still more of pride in her Art. "There is a difference; but, to my way of thinking, it is on the side of those gifted by Heaven, not those enriched by man."

Christal made no answer, and Olive continued, resuming her usual manner. "But we will not discuss this matter. All that is to be decided now is, whether or not I shall aid you to draw the sum you will need, in order to carry out this wild scheme. I will, if you desire it; because, as you say, I have indeed no control over you. But, my dear Christal, I entreat you to pause and consider; at least till morning."

Olive rose, for she was unequal to further conversation. Deeply it pained her that this girl, whom she so wished to love, should evidently turn from her, not in dislike—that her meek spirit would have conquered—but in a sort of contemptuous indifference. Still she made one effort more. As she was retiring, she went up, bade her good−night, and kissed her as usual.

"Do not let this conversation make any division between us, Christal."

"Oh no," said Christal, rather coldly. "Only," she added, in the passionate, yet mournful tone, which she had before used when at Woodford Cottage; "only, you must not interfere with me, Olive. Remember, I was not brought up like you. I had no one to control me, no one to teach me to control myself. It could not be helped! and it is too late now."

"It is never too late," cried Olive, melting at once into tenderness. But Christal's emo− tion had passed, and she resumed her lofty manner.

"Excuse me, but I am a little too old to be lessoned; and, I have no doubt, shall be able to guide my own conduct. For the future, we will not have quite such serious conversations as this. Good−night!"

Olive went away, heavy at heart. She had long been unaccustomed to wrestle with an angry spirit. Indeed, she lived in an atmosphere so pure and full of love, that on it never gloomed one domestic storm. She almost wished that Christal had not come with them to Farnwood. But then it seemed such an awful thing for this young and headstrong creature to be adrift on the wide world. She determined that, whether Christal desired it or no, she would never lose sight of her, but try to guide her with so light a hand, that the girl might never even feel the sway.

Next morning Miss Manners abruptly com− municated her determination not to have the horse, and the matter was never again referred to. But it had placed a chasm between Olive and Christal, which the one could not, the other would not pass. And as various other interests grew up in Miss Rothesay's life, her anxiety over this wayward girl a little ceased. Christal stayed almost wholly at Farnwood Hall; and in humble, happy, Farnwood Dell, Olive abode, devoted to her Art and to her mother.

CHAPTER XI.

WEEKS glided into months; and within the three−mile circle of the Hall, the Parsonage, and the Dell, was as pleasant a little society as could be found anywhere. Frequent meetings, usually confined to themselves alone, produced the necessary intimacy of a country neighbourhood.

As it sometimes happens that persons, or families, taught to love each other unknown, when well known, learn to hate; so, on the contrary, it is no unfrequent circumstance for those who have lived for years in enmity, when suddenly brought together, to become closer friends than if there had been no for− mer antipathy between them. So it was with the Rothesays and the Gwynnes.

Once after Mrs. Gwynne and her son had spent a long pleasant evening at the Dell, Olive chanced to light upon the packet of Harold's letters, which, years before, she had put by, with the sincere wish that she might never hear anything of him more.

"You would not wish so now, Olive—nor would I," said Mrs. Rothesay, when her daughter had smilingly referred to the fact. "The society of the Gwynnes has really proved a great addition to our happiness. How kind and warm−hearted Mrs. Gwynne is—so earnest in her friendship for us, too!"

"Yes, indeed. Do you know, it struck me that it must have been from her report of us, that Aunt Flora Rothesay sent the kind message which the Gwynnes brought to day. I own, that did make me happy! To think that my long−past romantic dream should be likely to come true, and that next year we should go to Scotland and see papa's dear old aunt."

"**You** will go, my child," said Mrs. Rothesay, in an under tone.

"And you too, darling. Think how much you would like it, when the summer comes. You will be quite strong, then; and how pleasant it will be to know that good aunt Flora, of whom the Gwynnes talk so much. She must be a very, very old lady now, though Mrs. Gwynne says she is quite beautiful still. But she can't be so beautiful as my own mamma. Oh, darling, there never will be seen such a wondrous old lady as you, when you are seventy or eighty. Then, I shall be quite elderly myself too. We shall seem just like two sisters—growing old together."

Olive never spoke, never dreamed of any other possibility than this.

Calmly, cheerfully, passed the winter, Miss Rothesay devoting herself, as heretofore, to the two great interests of her life; but she had other minor interests gathering up around her, which in some respects were of much service. They subdued her mind a little from that wild enthusiasm, which was sometimes more than her health would bear. Once when reading letters from Rome, from Mr. Vanbrugh and Meliora, Olive said,

"Mamma, I think, on the whole, I am happier here than I was at Woodford Cottage. I feel less of an artist and more of a woman."

"And Olive, I am happy too—happy to think that my child is safe with me, and not carried off to Rome." For Olive had of course told her mother of that strange chance in her life, which might have changed its current so entirely. "My daughter, I would not have you leave me to marry any man in the world!"

"I never shall, darling!" she answered. And she felt the promise to be no pain. Her heart was absorbed in her mother.

Nevertheless, the other interests, before mentioned, though quite external, filled up many little crevices in that loving heart which had room for so many affections. Among these was one which, in Olive's whole lifetime, had been an impulse, strong, but ever unfulfilled—love for a child. She took to her heart Harold's little daughter, less regarding it as his, than as poor Sara's. The more so, because, though a good and careful, he was not a very loving father. But he seemed gratified by the kindness that Miss Rothesay showed to little Ailie; and frequently suffered the child to stay with her, and be taught by her all things, save those in which it was his pleasure that his daughter should remain ignorant—the dogmas of the Church of England faith.

Sometimes in her Sunday−school teaching, and visiting of the poor, Olive saw the frightful profanities of that cant knowledge which young or ignorant minds acquire, and by which the solemn, almost fathomless mysteries of Christianity are lowered to a burlesque. Then she inclined to think that Harold Gwynne was right, and that in this prohibition he acted as became a wise father and "a discreet and learned minister of God's word." As such she ever considered him; though she sometimes thought he received and communicated that word less through his heart, than through his intellect. His moral character and doctrines were irreproachable, but it seemed to her as if

the dew of Christian love had never fallen on his soul.

This feeling gave her, in spite of herself, a sort of shrinking awe of him, which she would not willingly have felt towards her pastor, and one whom she so much regarded and respected. Especially as on any other subject she ever held with him full and free commu− nion, and he seemed gradually to unbend his somewhat hard nature unto that most gentle one of hers, as a man will do who inclines in friendship towards a mind that answers his, and finds added thereto the meekness of womanhood.

Perhaps here it would be as well to observe, that, close and intimate friends as they were, the tie was such that none of their two households, no, not even the most tattling gossips of Farnwood and Harbury, ever dreamed of saying that Harold Gwynne was in love with Olive Rothesay. The good folks did chatter now and then, as country gossips will, about him and Miss Christal Manners; and perhaps they would have chattered more, if the young lady had not been almost constantly at the Hall, whither Mr. Gwynne rarely went. But they left the bond between him and Miss Rothesay untouched, untroubled by their idle jests. Perhaps those who remembered the beautiful Mrs. Harold Gwynne, imagined the widower would never choose a second wife so different from his first; or perhaps there was cast about the daughter, so devotedly tending her blind mother, a sanctity which their unholy and foolish tongues dared not to violate.

Thus Olive went on her way, showing sweet tenderness to little Ailie, and, as it seemed, being gradually drawn by the child to the father. Besides, there was another sympathy between them, caused by the early associations of both, and by their common Scottish blood. For Harold had inherited from his father nothing but his name; from his mother everything. Born on northern soil, he was a Scotsman to the very depth of his nature. His influence awakened once more every feeling that bound Olive Rothesay to the land of her birth—her father's land. All things connected therewith, took, in her eyes, a new romance. She was happy, she knew not why—happy as she had been in her dreamy girlhood. It seemed as though in her life had dawned a second spring.

Perhaps there was but one thing which really troubled her; and that was the prohibition about little Ailie. She talked the matter over with her mother; that is, she uttered aloud her own thoughts, to which Mrs. Rothesay meekly assented; saying, as usual, that Olive was quite right. And at last, after much hesitation, she made up her mind to speak openly on the subject with Mr. Gwynne.

For this arduous undertaking, at which in spite of herself she trembled a little, she chose a time when he had met her in one of her forest−walks, which she had undertaken, as she often did, to fulfil some charitable duty, usually that of the clergyman or the clergyman's family.

"How kind you are, Miss Rothesay; and to come all through the wintry forest, too! It was scarcely meet for you."

"Then it certainly was not for Mrs. Gwynne. I was quite glad to relieve her; and, then, it gives me real pleasure to do as I am now going to do—reading and talking with John Dent's sick mother. Much as she suffers, she is the happiest old woman I ever saw in my life."

"What makes her happy, think you?" said Harold, continuing the conversation as if he wished it to be continued, and so falling naturally into a quiet arm−in−arm walk.

Olive answered, responding to his evident intention, and passing at once, as in their conversations they always did, to a subject of earnest interest, "She is happy, because she has a meek and trusting faith in God; and though she knows little, she loves much."

"Can one love Him, when one does not fully know?" It was one of the sharp searching questions that Mr. Gwynne sometimes put, which never failed to startle Olive, and to which she could not always reply; but she made an effort to do so now.

"Yes, when what we do know of Him deserves our love. Does Ailie, even Ailie, thoroughly know her father? And yet she loves him."

"That I cannot judge; but most true it is, we know as little of God as Ailie knows of her father—ay, and look up to Heaven with as blindfold ignorance as Ailie looks up to me," said Harold, bitterly.

"Alas! Ailie's is indeed blindfold ignorance!" said Olive, not quite understanding his half−muttered words, but thinking they offered a good opportunity for fulfilling his purpose. "Mr. Gwynne, will you let me speak to you about something which has long troubled me."

"Troubled you, Miss Rothesay? Surely I have no share in that; I would not for the world do aught that would give pain to one so good as you."

He said this very kindly, pressing her arm with a brotherly gentleness, which passed into her heart; imparting to her not only a quick sense of pleasure, but likewise courage.

"Thank you, Mr. Gwynne. But this does really pain me. It is the subject on which we talked the first time that ever you and I met, and of which we have never since spoken—your determination with respect to little Ailie."

"Ah!" He gave a start, and a dark look crossed his face. "Well, Miss Rothesay, what have you to say?"

"That I think you are not quite right—nay, quite wrong," said Olive, gathering resolution. "You are taking from your child her only strength in life—her only comfort in death. You hide from her the true faith; she will soon make to herself a false one."

"Nay, what is more false than the idle traditions taught by ranting parents to their offspring—the Bible travestied into a nursery tale—heaven transformed into a pretty pleasure−house—and hell and its horrors brought to frighten children in the dark. Do you think I would have my child turned into a baby saint, to patter glibly over parrot−like prayers, to exchange pet sweetmeats for missionary pennies, and so learn to keep up a debtor and creditor account with Heaven? No, Miss Rothesay, I would rather see her grow up a heathen."

Olive, awed by his language, which was bitter even to fierceness, at first made him no answer. At length, however, she ventured, not without trembling, to touch another chord.

"But—suppose that your child should be taken away, would you have her die as she is flow, utterly ignorant of all holy things?"

"Would I have her die an infant bigot—prattling blindly of subjects which in the common course of nature no child can comprehend? Would I have her chronicled in some penny tract as a 'remarkable instance of infant piety,' a small 'vessel of mercy,' to whom the Gospel was revealed at three years old?"

"Do not—oh! do not speak thus," cried Olive, shrinking from him, for she saw in his face a look she had never seen before—an expression answering to the bitter, daring sarcasm of his tone.

"You think me a strange specimen of a Church of England clergyman. Well, perhaps you are right! I believe I am rather different to my class." He said this with an irony impossible to describe. "Nevertheless, if you will inquire concerning me in the neighbourhood, I think you will find that my moral conduct has never disgraced my cloth."

"Never!" cried Olive, warmly. "Mr. Gwynne, pardon me if I have overstepped the deference due to yourself and your opinions. In some things I cannot fathom them or you; but that you are a good, true, and pious man, I most earnestly believe."

"**Do you**?"

Olive started. The two words were simple, but she thought they had an under−meaning, as though he were mocking either himself or her, or both. But she thought this could only be fancy; when, in a minute or two after, he said in his ordinary quiet, dignified manner,

"Miss Rothesay, we have been talking earnestly, and you have unconsciously betrayed me into speaking more warmly than I ought to speak. Do not misjudge me. All men's faith is free; and in some minor points of Christianity," here he smiled, "I perhaps think differently from my clerical brethren. As regards little Ailie, I thank you for your kind interest in this matter, which we will discuss again another time."

They had now reached John Dent's cottage. Olive asked if he would not enter with her.

"No, no; you are a far better apostle than the clergyman. Besides, I have business at home, and must return. Good morning, Miss Rothesay."

He lifted his hat with a courtly grace, but his eyes showed that reverence which no courts could command—the reverence of a sincere man for a noble−hearted woman. And so he walked back into the forest.

CHAPTER XII.

THE dwelling which Miss Rothesay entered was one of the keeper's cottages, built within the forest. The door stood open, for the place was too lowly, even for robbers; and, besides, its inmates had nothing to lose. Still Olive thought it was wrong to leave a poor bedridden old woman in a state of such unprotected desolation. As her step was heard crossing the threshold, there was a shrill cry from the inner room.

"John, John—the lad!—hast thee found the lad?"

"It is not your son—'tis I. Why, what has happened, my good Margery?" But the poor old creature fell back and wrung her hands, sobbing bitterly.

"The lad!—dun ye know aught o' the lad? Poor Reuben!—he wunnot come back no more! Alack! alack!"

And with some difficulty Olive learnt that Margery's grandson, the keeper's only child, had gone into the forest some days before, and had never returned. It was no rare thing for even practised woodsmen to be lost in this wild, wide forest; and at night, in the winter time, there was no hope. John Dent had gone out with his fellows, less to find the living than to bring back the dead.

Filled with deep pity, Olive sat down by the miserable grandmother; but the poor soul refused to be comforted.

"John'll go mad—clean mad! There wasna in the world such a good lad as our Reuben; and to be clemmed to death, and froze! O Lord, tak' pity on us miserable sinners!"

For hours Olive sat in that desolate cottage by the old woman's bedside. The murky, winter day soon closed in, and the snow began to fall; but still there was nothing heard save the wind howling in the forest. Often Margery started up, crying out that there were footsteps at the door; and then sank back in dumb despair.

At last there was a tramp of many feet on the frozen ground, the latch was lifted, and John Dent burst in.

He was a sturdy woodsman, of a race that are often seen in this forest region, almost giant−like in height and bulk. The snow lay thick on his uncovered head and naked breast, for he had stripped off all his upper garments to wrap round something that was clasped tightly in his arms. He spoke to no one, looked at no one, but laid his burden before the hearth, supported on his knees. It was the corpse of a boy, blue and shrivelled, like that of one frozen to death. He tried to chafe and bend the fingers, but they were as stiff as iron; he wrung the melting snow out of the hair, and, as the locks became soft and supple under his hand, seemed to think there was yet a little life remaining.

"Why dunnot ye stir, ye fools! Get t' blanket—pull 't off th' ould woman. I tell 'ee the lad's alive."

No one moved, and then the frantic father began to curse and swear. He rushed into old Margery's room.

"Get up wi' thee. How darest thee lie hallooing there. Come and help t' lad!" And then he fled wildly back to where poor Reuben's body lay extended on the hearth, surrounded by the other woodsmen, most of whom were pale with awe, some even melting into tears. John Dent dashed them all aside, and took his son again in his arms. Olive, from the corner where she had crept, watched the writhings of his rugged features, but she ventured not to approach.

"Tak' heart, tak' heart, John?" said one of the men.

"He didna suffer much, I reckon," said another. "My owd mother was nigh froze to death in t' forest, and her said 'twas just like dropping to sleep. An' luck ye, the poor lad's face be as quiet as a child."

"John Dent, mon!" whispered one old keeper; "say thy prayers, thee doesna often do 't, and thee'll want it now."

And then John Dent broke into such a paroxysm of despair, that one by one his comforters quitted the cottage. They, strong bold men, who feared none of the evils of life, became feeble as children before the awful power of Death. One only remained—the old huntsman who had given the last counsel to the wretched father. This man, whom Olive knew, was beckoned by her to Margery's room to see what could be done.

"I'll fetch Mr. Gwynne to manage John, poor fellow! The devil's got un, sure enough; and it'll tak' a parson to drive't away. But ourn be a queer gentleman. When I get to Harbury, what mun I say?" hesitated the man.

"Say that I am here, that I entreat him to come at once," cried Olive, feeling her woman's strength sinking before this painful scene, from which in common charity she could not turn aside. She came once more to look at John Dent, who had crouched down before the hearth, with the stiff form of the poor dead boy extended on his knees, gazing at it with a sort of vacant, hopeless misery. Then she went back to the old woman, and tried to

speak of comfort and of prayer.

It was not far to Harbury, but, in less time than Olive had expected, Harold Gwynne appeared.

"Miss Rothesay, you sent for me?"

"I did—I did. Oh, thank Heaven that you are come," eagerly cried Olive, clasping his two hands. He regarded her with a surprised and troubled look, and took them away.

"What did you wish me to do?"

"What a minister of God is able—nay, bound to do—to speak comfort in this house of misery."

And from the poor old woman's couch echoed the same entreaty—

"Oh, Mr. Gwynne, you that be a parson, a man of God, come and help us."

Harold looked round, and saw he had to face the woe that no worldly comfort or counsel can lighten;—that he had entered into the awful presence of the Power, which, strip− ping man of all his earthly pomp, wisdom, and strength, leaves him poor, weak, and naked before his God.

The proud, the moral, the learned Harold Gwynne, stood dumb before the mystery of Death. It was too mighty for him. He looked on the dead boy, and on the living father; then cast his eyes down to the ground, and muttered within himself, "What should **I** do here?"

"Read to him—pray with him," whispered Olive. "Speak to him of God—of heaven—of immortality."

"God—heaven—immortality," echoed Harold, vacantly, but he never stirred.

"They say that this man has been a great sinner, that he has done evil on earth, and scoffed at Heaven. Oh, tell him he cannot deceive himself now. Death knells into his ear that there is a God—there is a hereafter. Mr. Gwynne, you, who are a minister, you can tell the poor wretch that at a time like this there is no comfort, no hope, save in God and in His word."

Olive had spoken thus in the excitement of the moment; then recovering herself, she asked pardon for a speech so bold coming from her to him, as if she would fain teach the clergyman his duty.

"My duty—yes, I must do my duty," muttered Harold Gwynne. And with his hard−set face—the face he wore in the pulpit—he went up to the father of the dead child, and said something about "patience," "submission to the decrees of Providence," and "all trials being sent for good, and by the will of God."

"Dun ye talk to me of God? I know nought about Him, parson—ye never larned me."

Harold's rigid mouth quivered visibly, but he made no direct answer, only saying, in the same formal tone, "You go to church—at least, you used to go—you have heard there about 'God in his judgments remembering mercy.'"

"Mercy! ye mun easy say that; why did He let the poor lad die i' the snow, then?"

And Harold's lips dared to profane those holy words, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away."

"He should ha' takken th' owd mother, then. She's none wanted; but the dear lad—the only one left out o' six—oh, Reuben, Reuben, wunna ye never speak to your poor father again?"

He looked on the corpse fixedly for some minutes, and then a new thought seemed to strike him.

"**That's** not my lad—my merry little lad!—I say," he cried, starting up and catching Mr. Gwynne's arm; "I say, you parson that ought to know, where's my lad gone to?"

Harold Gwynne's head sank upon his breast: he made no answer. Perhaps—aye, and looking at him, the thought smote Olive with a great fear—perhaps to that awful question there was no answer in his soul.

John Dent passed him by, and came to the side of Olive Rothesay.

"Miss, folk say you're a good woman. Dun ye know aught o' these things—canna ye tell me if I shall meet my poor lad again?"

And then Olive, casting one glance at Mr. Gwynne, who remained motionless, sat down beside the childless father, and talked to him of God—not the Infinite Unknown, into whose mysteries the mightiest philosophers may pierce and find no end—but the God mercifully revealed, "Our Father which is in heaven"—He to whom the poor, the sorrowing, and the ignorant may look, and not be afraid.

Long she spoke; simple, meekly, and earnestly. Her words fell like balm; her looks lightened the gloomy house of woe. When, at length, she passed out of the threshold, John Dent's eyes followed her, as though she had been a visible angel of peace.

It was quite night when she and Harold went out of the cottage. The snow had ceased falling, but it lay on every tree of the forest like a white shroud. And high above, through the opening of the branches, was seen the

blue−black frosty sky, with its innumerable stars. The keen, piercing cold, the utter stirlessness, the mysterious silence, threw a sense of death—white death—over all things. It was a night when one might faintly dream what the world would be, if the infidel's boast were true, and **there were no God**.

They walked for some time in perfect silence. Troubled thoughts were careering like storm−clouds over Olive's pure spirit. Wonder was there, and pity, and an indefined dread. As she leaned on Mr. Gwynne's arm, she had a presentiment that in the heart whose strong beatings she could almost feel, was prisoned some great secret—some wild chaos of woe or wrong, before which her own meek nature would stand aghast. Yet such was the nameless attraction which drew her to this man, that the more she dreaded, the more she longed to unveil his mystery, whatsoever it might be. She determined to break the silence.

"Mr. Gwynne, I trust you will not think it presumption in me to have spoken as I did; in your stead, as it seemed; but I saw how shocked and overpowered you were."

He answered in the low tone of one struggling under great excitement. "You would say, then, that I have mocked my calling—that I was summoned as a clergyman to give comfort in distress, and that I had none to offer."

"Nay, you did attempt some consolation."

"Ay, I tried to preach peace with my lips, and could not, because there was none in my heart. No, nor ever will be!"

Olive looked at him with amazement, but he seemed to shrink from her observation. "I am indeed truly grieved," she began to say, but he stopped her.

"Do not speak to me, I pray you. Let me have quiet—silence."

She obeyed; but her woman's heart was yearning with tenderness and ruth over this man, whose spirit seemed at once so daring and so crushed. Hitherto, in all their intercourse, whatever had been his kindness towards her, towards him she had continually felt a sense of restraint—even of fear. That controlling influence, that invisible rule, which he seemed to exercise over all with whom he deigned to associate, was heavy upon Olive Rothesay. Before him she felt more subdued than she had ever done before any one; in his presence she unconsciously measured her words and guarded her looks, as if meeting the eye of a master. And he was a master—a man born to rule over the wills of his brethren, swaying them at his lightest breath, as the wind bends the grass of the field.

But now the sceptre seemed torn from his hand—he was a king no more. He walked along—his head drooped, his eyes fixed heavily on the ground. And beholding him thus, there came to Olive, in the place of fear, a strong compassion, tender as strong, and pure as tender. Angel−like, it arose in her heart, ready to pierce his darkness with its shining eyes−to fold around him and all his misery its sheltering wings. He was a great and learned man, and she a lowly woman: in her knowledge not worthy to touch his garment's hem—in her faith able to watch him as from Heaven.

Olive was not deceiving herself in these emotions. With impassioned human love—the love of woman unto man—she did not love him. If she had, she could not have done as her heart now prompted—have summoned a strength proportioned to his weakness; resolving to wind her spirit around him—to soothe and comfort him; and so, with the devotion of a sister towards a brother, to force from him the secret of his woe.

She began very carefully. "You are not well, I fear. This painful scene has been too much, even for you. It often seems to me that Death has more of horror to men than to feeble women."

"Death!—do you think that I fear Death?" he broke out, fiercely; and he clenched his hand and shook it, as though he would battle with the great Destroyer. "No!—I have stood as it were on life's verge, and gazed into the black abyss beyond, until my eyes were blinded, and my brain reeled. But what am I saying? Don't heed me, Miss Rothesay; I am troubled—bewildered—ill;" and, with a quick and alarmed air, he began to walk on hurriedly.

"You are ill, I am sure; and there is something that rests on your mind," said Olive, in a quiet, soft tone.

"What!—have I betrayed anything? Nay, not that! I mean, have you aught to charge me with? Have I left any duty unfulfilled; said any words unbecoming a clergyman?" asked he, with a freezing haughtiness.

"No, no; forgive me, if I trespass beyond the bounds of our friendship. For we are friends—have you not often said so?"

"Yes, and with truth. I respect you, Miss Rothesay. You are no thoughtless girl, but an earnest woman, whom the world has long tried. I have been tried, too; therefore it is no marvel we are friends. I am glad that it should be so."

It was not often that he spoke so frankly, and never had he done what he now did—of his own accord, to take and clasp her hand with a friendly air of confidence. Long after the pressure passed from Olive's fingers, the strength and comfort it gave lingered in her heart. They walked on a little further; and then he said, not without some slight agitation,

"Miss Rothesay, if you are indeed my friend, listen to one request I make;—that you will not say anything, think anything, of whatever part of my conduct this day may have seemed strange to you. I know not what fate it is that has thus placed you, a year ago a perfect stranger, in a position which forces me to speak to you thus. Still less can I tell what there is in you which draws from me much that no human being has ever drawn before. Accept this acknowledgment, and pardon me."

"Nay, what have I to pardon? Oh, Mr. Gwynne, if I might be indeed your friend—if I could but do you any good!"

"You do good to **me**?" he muttered, bitterly. "I tell you, we are as far apart as earth from heaven, nay, as heaven from hell; that is, if there be— Mad fool that I am;" he broke off suddenly, with an alarmed look. "Miss Rothesay, do not listen to me. Why do you lead me on, and make me speak thus?" he added, almost fiercely.

"I do not!—indeed I would not so beguile your confidence. Believe me, Mr. Gwynne, I know very well the difference between us. I am a poor, weak, unlearned woman, and you—"

"Ay, tell me what I am—that is, what you think I am."

"A wise, noble, and good man; but yet one in whom high and keen intellect may at times overpower that simple Faith, which is above all knowledge; that Love, which, as saith the great apostle of our church—"

"Silence!" His deep voice rose and fell, like the sound of a breaking wave. Then he stopped, turned full upon her, and said, in a fierce, keen whisper, "Would you learn the truth—the scathing truth? Know, then, that I believe in none of these things—I am an infidel!"

Olive's arm fell from him. She grew cold, pale, and mute as death.

"Do you shrink from me, then? Good and pious woman, do you think I am Satan standing by your side?"

"Oh, no, no!" She made an effort to restrain herself; then her courage failed, and she burst into tears.

Harold looked at her, and it seemed that his fierceness melted away.

"Thou meek and gentle soul!" he murmured. "It would, perhaps, have been good for me had Olive Rothesay been born my sister."

"I would I had—I would I had! But, oh! this is awful to hear. You, an unbeliever—you, who all these years have been a minister at the altar—what a fearful thing!"

"You say right—it is fearful! Think now what my life is, and has been! One long lie—a lie to man and to God! For I do believe in a God," he added, solemnly; "I believe in the one ruling Spirit of the universe—unknown, unapproachable. None but a madman would deny the existence of a God."

He ceased, and looked upwards with his piercing eyes—piercing, yet full of restless sorrow. Then he moved a little towards his companion.

"Shall we walk on, or do you utterly renounce me?" said he, with a touching, sad humility.

"Renounce you!"

"Ah! you would not, could you know all I have endured. To me, earth has been a hell—not the place of flames and torments of which your divines prate, but the true hell—that of the conscience and the soul. I, too, a man whose whole nature was athirst for truth. I sought it first among its professors; there I found that they who, too idle or too weak to fathom their creed, took it upon trust, did what their fathers did, believed what their fathers believed—were accounted orthodox and pious men; while those who, in their earnest eager youth, dared—not yet to doubt, but meekly to ask a **reason** for their faith—**they** were at once condemned as impious. But I pain you: shall I go on, or cease?"

"Go on."

"Truth, still truth, I yearned for in another form—in domestic peace—in the love of woman. My soul was famishing for any food; I snatched this—in my mouth it became ashes!" His voice seemed choking, but with an effort he continued. "After this time I gave up earth's delights, and turned to interests beyond it. With straining eyes I gazed into the Infinite—and I was dazzled, blinded, whirled from darkness to light, and from light to darkness—no rest, no rest! This state lasted long, but its end came. Now I walk like a man in his sleep, without feeling or fearing,—no, thou mighty Unknown, I do **not** fear! But then I hope nothing: I believe nothing: Those

pleasant dreams of yours—God, Heaven, Immortality—are to me meaningless words. At times I utter them, and they seem to shine down like pitiless stars upon the black boiling sea in which I am drowning."

"Oh, God, have mercy!" moaned Olive Rothesay. "Give me strength that my own faith fail not, and that I may bring Thy light unto this perishing soul!" And turning to Harold, she said aloud, as calmly as she could, "Tell me—since you have told me thus far—how you came to take upon yourself the service of the Church; you who—"

"Aye, well may you pause and shudder! Hear, then, how the devil—if there be one—can mock men's souls in the form of an angel of light. But it is a long history—it may drive me to utter things that will make you tremble and shrink from me."

"I **will** hear it." There was in that soft, firm voice an influence which Harold perforce obeyed. She was stronger than he, even as light is stronger than darkness, heaven than hell.

Mr. Gwynne began speaking quietly, even humbly. "When I was a youth, studying for the Church, doubts came upon my mind, as they will upon most young minds whose strivings after truth are hedged in by a thorny rampart of old, worn−out forms. Then there came a sudden crisis in my life: I must either enter on a ministry in whose creed I only half believed, or let my mother—my noble, self−denying mother—starve. You know her, Miss Rothesay; but you know not half that she is, and ever was, to me."

Olive clasped his hand. Infidel as he was, she could have clung to Harold Gwynne and called him brother.

"Well, after a time of great inward conflict, I decided—for my mother's sake. Though little more than a boy in years, struggling in a chaos of mingled doubt and faith, I bound myself to believe whatever the Church taught, to lead erring souls to Heaven in the Church's own way. These very bonds, this vow so blindly to be fulfilled, made me, in after years, an infidel."

He paused to look at her.

"I listen—speak on," said Olive Rothesay.

"As you say truly, I am one whose natural bent of mind is less to humble faith than to searching knowledge. Above all, I am one who hates all falsehood, all hypocritical show. Perchance in the desert I might have learned to serve God. Face to face with Him I might have worshipped His revealings. But when between me and the one great Truth came a thousand petty veils of cunning forms and blindly−taught precedents; when among my brethren I saw vile men preaching virtue—men with weak, uncomprehending brains set to expound the mighty mysteries of God—then I said to myself, "The whole system is a lie!" So I cast it from me, and my soul stood forth in its naked strength before the Creator of all."

"But why, oh why, did you still keep up this awful mockery?"

"Because," and his voice sounded hoarse and hollow, "just then, there was upon me a madness which all men have in youth—a human passion—a woman's love. For that I became a liar in the face of Heaven, of men, and of my own soul."

"It was a sin, a heavy sin."

"I know it; and, as such, it fell down upon my head in a curse. Since then I have been what you now see me—a very honest, painstaking clergyman; doing good, preaching, not doctrine, but decent moralities, carrying a civil face to the world, and a heart—Oh God! whosoever and whatsoever Thou art, Thou knowest what blackest darkness there is **there**!"

He leaned, almost staggering, against a tree. After awhile he murmured, "You must forgive me, Miss Rothesay; I can speak no more."

"You shall not. Rest, rest; and may God pity you, the merciful God whom you do not know, but whom you will know yet! I will pray for you—I will comfort you. Oh, friend, lean on me! Would that I were indeed your sister, that I might never leave you until I brought to you faith and peace."

He smiled very faintly. "Thank you; it is something to feel there is goodness in the world. I did not believe in any, except my mother's. Oh, if she had known all this if I could have told her—perhaps I had not been the wretched man I am."

"Hush; do not talk any more." And then she stood beside him for some minutes quite silent, until he grew calm.

They were on the verge of the forest, close to Olive's home. It was about seven in the evening, but all things lay as in the stillness of midnight. They two might have been the only beings in the living world—all else dead

and buried under the white snow. And then, lifting itself out of the horizon's black nothingness, arose the great red moon, like an immortal soul.

"Look!" said Olive. He looked once, and no more. Then, with a deep−heaved sigh, he placed her arm in his, and led her to her own door.

Arrived there, he bade her adieu, adding, "I would bid God bless you; but in such words from me, you would not believe. How could you?"

He said this with a mournful emphasis, to which she could not reply.

"But," he continued, in a tone of eager anxiety, "remember that I have trusted you as I never trusted human being. My secret is in your hands. You will be silent,I know; silent as death, or eternity.—That is, as both are to me!"

Olive promised solemnly; and he left her. She stood listening, until the echo of his strong firm footfall ceased along the frosty road; then, clasping her hands, she lifted once more the petition "for those who have erred and are deceived," the prayer which she had once uttered—unconscious how much and by whom it was needed. Now she said it with a yearning cry—a cry that would fain pierce heaven, and ringing above the loud choir of saints and angels, call down mercy on one perishing human soul.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEVER since her birth had Olive felt such a bewildering weight of pain, as when she awoke to the full sense of that terrible secret which she had learned from Harold Gwynne. This pain lasted, and would last, not alone for an hour or a day, but perpetually. It gathered round her like a mist, beyond which she saw nothing. She seemed to walk blindfold, and knew not whither. Never across her soul—in which the spiritual sense was ever so bright and undimmed—had come the image of such a mind as Harold's, a mind whose very eagerness for truth had led it into scepticism. His doubts must be wrestled with, not with the religion of precedent—not even with the religion of feeling—but by means of that clear demonstration of reason which forces conviction.

In the dead of night, when all was still—when the frosty moon cast an unearthly light over her chamber, Olive lay and thought of these things. Ever and anon she heard the striking of the clock, and remembered with horror that it heralded the Sabbath morn, when she must go to Harbury Church—and hear, oh, with what feelings! the holy service uttered by the lips of an infidel. Not until now had she so thoroughly realised the sacrilege of Harold's daily life. It rushed upon her mind; and she felt as though to think of him, to speak of his very name, were like associating herself with his sin.

But calmer thoughts enabled her to judge him more mercifully. She tried to view this awful position not as with her own eyes, but as it must appear in his. To him who believed nothing of the sanctity of the Christian faith, the repetitions of its forms could seem no sacrilege, but a mere idle mummery. He suffered, not for having outraged Heaven, but for having outraged his own conscience. So loving and desiring truth, this agony of self−humiliation must be to him a living death. Then, again, there awoke in Olive's heart a divine pity; and once more she dared to pray that this soul, in which was so much that was true and earnest, might not be cast out, but guided into the right way.

Yet, who should do it? He was, as he had said, drowning in a black abyss of despair, and there was no human hand to save him—none, save that feeble one of hers!

It were not meet here to dwell on the strivings of Olive's spirit; how she sought to strengthen her religion by arguments from the Holy Word; how she pondered and prayed, and then rose filled with a divine boldness to cope with the unbelief of this erring and most wretched soul. Aye, in its wretchedness lay the hope, her strength for herself, her trust for him. She, who had felt from her very childhood the joy and peace of believing—to whom her own holy faith had given light in darkness, strength in weakness, humility in success—whose love of God, transfused through all human channels, had filled her life with holiness and happiness—she **could not** be clinging to a broken reed. The creed, whose existence was thus proved, must be true. Can there be daylight without the sun?

Nevertheless, she suffered exceedingly. To bear the burden of this heavy secret; to keep it from her mother; to wear a feigned brow before Mrs. Gwynne; above all, to go to church, and have the ministry of such an one as Harold between her and heaven—this last was the most awful point of all; but she could not escape it without betrayal of his trust. And it seemed to her that the sin—if sin it were—would be forgiven; nay, her voluntary presence might strike into the heart of the infidel like an accusing conscience.

It was so. When Harold beheld her, his cheeks grew ashen; but he controlled himself. Still, all through the service, his reading at times faltered, and his eyes were lowered. Once, too, during the epistle for the day, which chanced to be the sixth Sunday after Epiphany, the simple words of St. John seemed to attract his notice, and his voice took an accent of keen sorrow.

Yet, when Olive passed out of the church, she felt as though she had spent there years of torture—such torture as no earthly power should make her endure again. And it so chanced that she was not called upon to do so.

Within a week from that time Mrs. Rothesay sank into a state of lingering feebleness, not indicating positive danger, but still so nearly resembling illness that Olive could never quit her, not even for an hour. This painful interest engrossing all her thoughts, shut out from them even Harold Gwynne. She saw little of him, though she heard that he came almost daily to inquire at the house. But for a long time he rarely crossed the threshold.

"Harold is like all men—he does not understand sickness," said that most kind and constant friend, Mrs. Gwynne. "You must forgive him, both of you. I tell him often it would be an example for him, or for any clergyman in England, to see dear Olive here—the best and most pious daughter that ever lived. He thinks so too;

for once, when I hoped that his own daughter might be like her, you should have heard the earnestness of his '**Amen**!'"

This circumstance touched Olive deeply, and strengthened her the more in that work to which she had determined to devote herself—to win him to the truth by patience and tenderness. And a secret hope told her that an erring soul is oftentimes reclaimed less by the zeal of a Christian's preaching, than by the silent voice of a Christian's life.

And so, though they never met again alone, and no words on the one awful subject passed between them, Harold gradually came to be often with the little circle at the Dell. Mrs. Rothesay's lamp of life was paling so gradually, that not even her child knew how little space it would shine among those to whom its every ray was so precious and so beautiful—more beautiful as it drew nearer its close.

Yet there was no sorrow at the Dell, but great peace—a peace so holy that it seemed to rest upon all whose foot crossed the threshold. These were not few; never was there any one who gained so many kindly attentions as Mrs. Rothesay. Even the wild young Fludyers came to inquire after her every day; and shot more game than ever, to ease their consciences by bringing it to Mrs. Rothesay. Christal, who was almost domiciled at the Hall, and seemed by some invisible attraction most disinclined to leave it, was yet a daily visitor—her high spirit softened to a quiet gentleness whenever she came near the invalid.

As to Lyle Derwent, he positively haunted them. His affectations fell from him, he ceased his sentimentalities, and never quoted a single line of poetry. To Olive he appeared in a more pleasing light, and she treated him with her old regard; and as for him, his glances seemed to adore the very ground she trod upon. A ministering angel could not have appeared more hallowed in his eyes. He often made Mrs. Rothesay and Olive smile with his raptures; and the latter said sometimes that he was certainly the same enthusiastic little boy who had been her knight in the garden by the river. She never thought of him otherwise; and though he often tried, in half−jesting indignation, to assure her that he was quite a man now, he seemed still a child to her who had struggled so much in the wide arena of the world. There was the difference of a lifetime between his juvenile romance, and her calm reality of six−and−twenty years.

She did not always feel so old, though. When kneeling by her mother's side, amusing her with playful, almost childish caresses, Olive still felt a very child; and there were times when her spirit fell beneath the stern manhood of Harold Gwynne, and she grew once more a feeble, trembling, timid girl. But now that the secret bond between them was held in abeyance, their intercourse sank within its former boundary. Even his influence, and the awful interest attached to him, could not compete with that affection which had been the day−star of Olive's life. No other human tie could come between her and her mother.

Beautiful it was to see them, clinging together so closely that none of those who loved both, and regarded them with a mournful doubt, had the courage to tell them how soon they must part. Sometimes Mrs. Gwynne would watch Olive with a look that seemed to ask, "Child, hast thou strength to bear?" But she herself had not the strength to utter more. Besides, it seemed as though these close cords of love were knitted so tightly around the mother, and every breath of her fading life so fondly cherished, that she could not perforce depart. Months—nay, years might pass, ere that frail tabernacle was quite dissolved.

As the winter glided away, Mrs. Rothesay seemed to grow much better. One evening in March, when Harold Gwynne came laden with a whole basket of violets, he said—and truly—that she was looking as blooming as the spring itself. Olive quite coincided in this opinion—nay, declared, in her cheerful happiness, that any one would fancy her mother was only making pretence of illness, to win more kindness and consideration.

"As if you had not enough of that from every one, mamma! I never knew such a spoiled darling in all my life; and yet see, Mr. Gwynne, how meekly she bears it, and how beautiful and content she looks!"

It was true. Let us draw the picture which lived on Olive's memory evermore.

Mrs. Rothesay sat in a little low chair, her own chair, which no one else ever claimed. She did not wear an invalid's shawl, but a graceful wrapping−gown of pale colours—such as she had always loved, and which suited well her delicate, fragile beauty. Closely tied over her silvery hair—the only sign of age—was a little cap, whose soft pink gauze lay against her cheek—that cheek which even now was all unwrinkled, and tinted with a lovely faint rose colour, like a young girl's. Her eyes were cast down; she had a habit of doing this, lest others might see there the painful expression of blindness; but her mouth smiled a serene, cheerful, holy smile, such as is rarely seen on human face, save when earth's dearest happiness is beginning to melt away, dimmed in the coming

brightness of heaven. Her little thin hands lay meekly crossed on her knee, one finger playing, as she often did, with her wedding−ring, now worn to a mere thread of gold.

Her daughter looked at her with eyes of passionate yearning that threw into one minute's gaze the love of a whole lifetime. Harold Gwynne looked at her too, and then at Olive. He thought, "Can she, if, knowing what I know—can she rest meekly, be resigned—nay, happy? Then, what a sublime faith hers must be!"

Olive seemed not to see **him**, but only her mother. She gazed and gazed, then she came and knelt before Mrs. Rothesay, and wound her arms round her.

"Darling, kiss me! or I shall fear you are growing quite an angel—an angel with wings."

There lurked a troubled tone beneath the playfulness; she rose up quickly, and began to talk to Mr. Gwynne.

They had a pleasant evening, all three together; for Mrs. Rothesay, knowing that Harold was lonely—since his mother and Ailie had gone away on a week's visit—prevailed upon him to stay. He read to them; Mrs. Rothesay was fond of hearing him read; and to Olive the world's richest music was in his deep, pathetic voice, more especially when reading, as he did now, with great earnestness and emotion. The poem was not one of his own choosing, but of Mrs. Rothesay's, whose interest was always most attracted by the simple tenderness of human feeling. She listened eagerly while he read from Tennyson's "May Queen."

> Upon the chancel casement, and upon that grave of mine,
> In the early, early morning the summer sun will shine.
> I shall not forget you, mother; I shall hear you when you pass,
> With your feet above my head on the long and pleasant grass.
> Good night, good night! When I have said, good night, for evermore,
> And you see me carried out from the threshold of the door.
> Don't let Effie come to see me till my grave is growing green:
> She'll be a better child to you than I have ever been.

Here Harold paused, for, looking at Olive, he saw her tears falling fast; but Mrs. Rothesay, generally so easily touched, was now quite unmoved. On her face was a soft calm. She said to herself, musingly,

"How terrible for one's child to go away thus! But I shall never know that grief, never! My Olive will not die first." And then she bade Mr. Gwynne go on.

He read—what words for him to read!—the concluding stanzas; and, as he did so, the movement of Mrs. Rothesay's lips seemed silently to follow them.

> O sweet and strange it seems to me, that ere this day is done,
> The voice which now is speaking may be beyond the sun,
> For ever and for ever with those just souls and true,
> And what is life that we should moan? Why make we such ado?
>
> For ever and for ever all in a blessed home,
> And there to wait a little while till you and Effie come;
> To lie within the light of God, as I lie upon your breast,
> Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

As he concluded, they were all three very silent. What thoughts were in each heart? After a while, Mrs. Rothesay said,

"Now, my child, it is growing late. Take and read to us yourself, out of the best Book of all." And when Olive

was gone to fetch it, she added, in her gentle, quiet way, "Mr. Gwynne will pardon my not asking him to read the Bible, but a child's voice sounds so sweet in a mother's ears, especially when—" She stopped, for Olive just then entered.

"Where shall I read, mamma?"

"Where I think we have come to—reading every night as we do—the last few chapters of the Revelations."

Olive read them—the blessed words, the delight of her childhood—telling of the heavenly kingdom, and the after−life of the just. And **he** heard them: he who believed in neither. He sat in the shadow, covering his face with his hands, or lifting it at times with a blind, despairing look, like that of one who, staggering in darkness, sees afar a faint light, and yet cannot, dare not, believe in its reality.

When he bade Mrs. Rothesay good night, she held his hand, and said, "God bless you!" with more than her usual kindness. He shrank away, as if the words stung him. Then he wrung Olive's hand, looked at her a moment, as if to say something, but drew back and quitted the house.

The mother and daughter were alone. They clasped their arms round each other, and sat a little while listening to the wild March wind.

"It is just such a night as that on which we came to Farnwood, is it not, darling?"

"Yes, my child! And we have been very happy here; happier, I think, than I have ever been in my life. Remember that, love, always!"

She said these words with a beautiful, life−beaming smile. Then, leaning on Olive's shoulder, she lifted herself, rather feebly, from her little chair, and prepared to walk up−stairs.

"Tired, are you? I wish I could carry you, darling; I almost think I could."

"You carry me in your heart, evermore, Olive! You bear all my feebleness, troubles, and pains. God ever bless you, my daughter!"

When Olive came down once more to the little parlour, she thought it looked rather lonely. However, she stayed a minute or two, put her mother's little chair in the corner, and her mother's knitting basket beside it.

"It will be ready for her when she comes down again," said the thoughtful Olive.

Then she went up−stairs to bed; and mother and daughter fell asleep, as ever, closely clasped in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

"**MY** child!"

The feeble call startled Olive out of a dream, wherein she walked through one of those lovely visionary landscapes—more glorious than any ever seen by day—with her mother and with Harold Gwynne.

"Yes, darling," she answered, in a sleepy, happy voice, thinking it a continuation of the dream.

"Wake, Olive! I feel ill—very ill! I have a dull pain here, near my heart. I cannot breathe. It is so strange—so strange!"

Quickly the daughter rose, and groped through the faint dawn for a light; she was long accustomed to all offices of tender care by night and by day. This sudden illness gave her little alarm; her mother had so many slight ailments. But, nevertheless, she roused the little household, and applied herself to all the simple remedies which she so well knew how to use.

But there must come a time when all physicians' arts fail; it was coming now. Mrs. Rothesay's illness increased, and the daylight broke upon a chamber where more than one anxious face bent over the poor blind sufferer who suffered so meekly. She did not speak much; she only held closely to Olive's hand or Olive's dress, murmuring now and then, with an accent of sorrow, "My child—my child!" Once or twice she eagerly besought those around her to try all means for her restoration, and seemed anxiously to expect the coming of the physician. "For Olive's sake—for Olive's sake!" was all the reason she gave.

And suddenly it entered into Olive's mind that her mother thought herself about to die.

Her mother about to die! She paused a moment, and then flung the horror from her as a thing utterly impossible—out of the bounds of human fear. So many illnesses as Mrs. Rothesay had passed through—so many times as her daughter had clasped her close, and dared Death to come nigh one who was shielded by so much love? It could not be; there was no cause for dread. Yet Olive waited restlessly during the morning, which seemed of frightful length. She busied herself about the room, talking constantly to her mother; and by degrees, when the physician still delayed, her voice took a quick, sharp, anxious tone.

"Hush, love, hush!" was the soft reproof. "Be content, Olive; he will come in time. I shall recover, if it so please God."

"Of course—of course you will. Don't talk in that way, mamma!"—she dared not trust herself to say **darling**. She spoke even less caressingly than usual, lest her mother might think there was any dread upon her mind. But gradually, when she heard the strangely solemn patience of Mrs. Rothesay's voice, and saw the changes in the beloved face, she began to tremble. Once her wild glance darted upward in an almost threatening despair. "God! Thou wilt not—Thou canst not pour upon me this woe!" And when, at last, she heard the ringing of hoofs, and saw the physician's horse at the gate, she could not stay to speak with him, but fled out of the room in a passion of tears.

She composed herself in time to meet him when he came down stairs. She was glad that he was a stranger, so that she had to be re− strained, and to ask him, in a calm, every−day voice, "What he thought of her mother?"

"You are Miss Rothesay, I believe," he answered, indirectly.

"I am."

"Is there no one to aid you in nursing your mother—are you here quite alone?"

"Quite alone." These dull, echoing answers, were freezing slowly at her heart.

Dr. Witherington took her hand; kindly too. "My dear Miss Rothesay, I would not deceive—I never do. If you have any relatives or friends to send for, any business to arrange—"

"Ah—I see, I know! Do not say any more!" She closed her eyes faintly, and leaned against the wall. Had she loved her mother with a love less intense, less self−devoted, less utterly absorbing in its passion, at that moment she would have gone mad, or died.

There was one little low sigh; and then upon her great height of woe she rose—rose to a superhuman calm.

"You mean to tell me, then, that there is no hope?"

He looked on the ground, and said nothing.

"And how long—how long?"

"It may be six hours—it may be twelve; I fear it cannot be more than twelve." And then he began to give

consolation in the only way that lay in his poor power, explaining that in a frame so shattered the spirit could not have lingered long, and might have lingered in much suffering. "It was best as it was," he said.

And Olive, knowing all, bowed her head, and answered, "Yes." She thought not of herself—she thought only of the enfeebled body about to be released from earthly pain, of the soul before whom heaven was even now opened. She caught the physician's arm.

"Does **she** know? Did you tell here?"

"I did. She asked me, and I thought it right."

Thus, both knew, mother and child, that a few brief hours were all that lay between their love and eternity. And knowing this, they again met.

With a step so soft that it could have reached no ear but that of the dying woman, Olive re−entered the room.

"Is that my child!"

"My mother, my own mother!" Close, and wild, and strong—wild as love and strong as death—was the clasp that followed. No words passed between them, not one, until Mrs. Rothesay said, faintly,

"My child, are you content—quite content?"

Olive answered, "I am content!" And in her uplifted eyes was a silent voice that seemed to say, "Take, O God, this treasure, which I give out of my arms unto Thine. Take and keep it for me, safe until the eternal meeting!"

Slowly the day sank, and the night came down. Very still and solemn was that chamber; but there was no sorrow there—no weeping, no struggle of life with death. After a few hours all suffering passed, and Mrs. Rothesay lay quiet; sometimes in her daughter's arms, sometimes with Olive sitting by her side. Now and then they talked together, holding peaceful communion, like friends about to part for a long journey, in which neither wished to leave any words unsaid that spoke of love or counsel; but all was spoken calmly, hopefully, and without grief or fear.

As midnight approached, Olive's eyes grew heavy, and a strange drowsiness oppressed her. Many a watcher has doubtless felt this—the dull stupor which comes over heart and brain, sometimes even compelling sleep, though some beloved one lies dying. The old servant who sat up with Olive tried to persuade her to go down and take some coffee which she had prepared. Mrs. Rothesay, overhearing, entreated the same. Most touching it was to see the mother just trembling on the verge of life, turn back to think of those little cares of love which had been shared between them for so many years.

Olive went down in the little parlour, and forced herself to take food and drink, for she knew how much her strength would be needed. As she sat there by herself, in the still night, with the wind howling round the cottage, she tried to realise the truth that her mother was then dying—that ere another day, in this world she would be alone, quite alone, for evermore. Yet there she sat, wrapped in that awful calm.

When Olive came back, Mrs. Rothesay roused herself and asked for some wine. Her daughter gave it.

"It is very good—all things are very good—very sweet to me from Olive's hand. My only daughter—my life's comfort—I bless God for thee!"

After a while she said—passing her hand over her daughter's cheek—"Olive, little Olive, I wish I could see your face—just once, once more. It feels almost as small and soft as when you were a little babe at Stirling."

And saying this, there came a cloud over Mrs. Rothesay's face; but soon it changed into peace, as she continued, "Child! listen to something I never told you—never could have told you, until now. Soon after you were born, I dreamt a strange dream—that I lost you, and there came to me in your stead an angel, who comforted me and guided me through a long weary way, until, in part− ing, I knew that it was indeed my Olive. All has come true, save that I did not **lose** you: I wickedly cast you from me. Ay, God forgive me! there was a time when I, a mother, had no love for the child I bore."

She wept a little, and held Olive with a closer strain as she proceeded. "I was punished, for in forsaking my child I lost my husband's love—at least not all, but for a time; and so for my suffering God pardoned me, and sent my child back to me as I saw her in my dream—an angel—to guard me through many troublous ways; to lead me safe to the eternal shore. And now, when I am going away, I say with my whole soul, God bless thee, thou most loving and duteous daughter that ever mother had; and God will bless thee evermore!"

One moment, with a passionate burst of anguish, Olive cried, "O mother, mother, stay! Do not go and leave me in this bitter world alone." It was the only moan she made. When she saw the suffering it brought to her so peacefully dying, she stilled it at once. And then God's comfort came down upon her; and that night of death was

full of a peace so deep that it was most like happiness. In after years Olive thought of it as one thinks of a remembered dream of heaven.

Once, when Olive's voice sounded weak, Mrs. Rothesay said, "My child, you are tired. Lay your head down here beside me."

And so, with her head on the same pillow, and her arm thrown round her mother's neck, Olive lay, as she had lain every night for so many years. Once or twice Mrs. Rothesay spoke again, as passing thoughts seemed to arise; but her mind was perfectly composed and clear. She mentioned several that she regarded—among the rest, Mrs. Gwynne, to whom she left "her love."

"And to Christal too, Olive. She has many faults; but, remember, she was good to me, and I loved her. Always take care of that child."

"I will," said Olive. Little she knew how solemnly would that promise be fulfilled. "And is there none else?" she whispered, for to her thought, even then, there came another name.

"Yes—Harold Gwynne." And, as if in that dying hour there came to the mother's heart a clear−sightedness of the present and the future, she said earnestly, "I would he had been here, that I might have blessed him, and prayed him all his life long to show kindness and tenderness to my child."

After this she spoke of earthly things no more, but her thoughts went, like heralds of her soul, far into the eternal land. Thither her daughter's followed likewise, until, like the martyr Stephen, Olive almost seemed to see the heavens opened, and the angels of God standing around the throne. Her heart was filled, not with anguish, but with an awful joy. It passed not even when, lifting her head from the pillow, she saw that over her mother's face was coming a change—the change that comes but once.

"My child, are you still there?"

"Yes, darling."

"Ah! that is well. All is well now. Little Olive, kiss me."

Olive bent down and kissed her. With that last kiss she received her mother's soul.

Then she suffered the old servant to lead her from the room. She never wept; it would have appeared sacrilege to weep. She went to the open door, and stood, looking to the east, where the sun was rising gloriously. Through the golden clouds she almost seemed to behold, ascending, the freed spirit upon whom had just dawned the everlasting morning.

An hour after, when she was all alone in the little parlour, lying on the sofa with her eyes closed, she heard entering a well−known step. It was Harold Gwynne's. He looked much agitated; at first he drew back, as though fearing to approach; then he came up, and took her hand with a tender compassion.

"Alas, Miss Rothesay, what can I say to you?"

She shed a few tears, less for her own sorrow than because she was touched by his kindness.

"I would have been here yesterday," continued he, "but I was away from Harbury. Yet what help, what comfort could you have received from such as I?" he added, mournfully.

Olive turned to him her face, in whose pale serenity yet lingered the light which had guided her through the valley of the shadow of death.

"God," she whispered, "has taken from me the desire of my eyes, and yet I have peace—perfect peace!"

She ceased. Harold looked at her with astonishment.

"Tell me," he muttered, involuntarily, "whence comes this peace?"

"From God, and from the revelation of His word."

He was silent. He sat, his head bent upon his hands; his aspect of hopeless misery went to Olive's heart. She came and stood beside him.

"Oh that I could give to you this peace—this faith!"

His keen, searching glance was tempered with deep sorrow, as he answered,

"Alas! if I knew what **reason** you have for yours."

Olive paused. An awful thing it was, with the dead lying in the chamber above, to wrestle with the unbelief of the living. But it seemed as if the spirit of her mother had passed into her spirit, giving her strength to speak with words not her own; nay, constraining her, as by the influence of the faithful departed, to lift off the burden from Harold's tortured and despairing soul. What if, in the inscrutable purposes of Heaven, this hour of death was to be to him an hour of life—the moment when conviction would smite his stony heart, and bid faith's saving waters

flow.

So, repressing all grief and weakness, Olive said, "Let us speak of the things which in times like this come home to us as the only realities."

"To you, not to me! You forget the gulf between us!"

"Nay," Olive said, earnestly; "you believe, as I do, in one God—the Creator and Ruler of this world?"

Harold made solemn assent.

"Of this world," she continued, "wherein is so much of beauty,happiness, and love. And can that exist in the created which is not in the Creator? Must not, therefore, the great Spirit of the Universe be a Spirit of Love?"

"Your argument contradicts itself," was Harold's desponding answer. Can **you** speak thus—you, whose heart yet bleeds with recent suffering?"

"Suffering which my faith has overcome, and changed into joy. Never, until this hour, did I look so clearly from this world into the world of souls; never did I so strongly feel within me the presence of God's spirit, a pledge for the immortality of mine."

"Immortality! Alas, that dream!" he sighed, in an incredulous, but still subdued tone. "And yet," he added, looking at her reverently, even with tenderness, "I could half believe that a life like yours—so full of purity, goodness, and love—can never be destined to perish."

"And can you believe in human love, yet doubt the love of Him who is its origin? Can you think that He would give the yearning for the hereafter, and yet deny its fulfilment? That what He made good He will not make happy, and what He makes happy He will not make immortal?"

Harold seemed struck. "You speak plain, reasonable words—not like the vain babblers of perverted creeds. Yet you profess a creed—you join in the Church's service?"

"Because I think it pure—perhaps the purest of all human forms of worship. But I do not set up the Church and its ministra− tions between myself and God. I follow no ritual, and trust no creed, except so far as I find it in the Holy Word."

"And how know you **that** is true," cried Harold.

His look was eager; its dull misery seemed melting away. Olive thought of her beloved dead; she almost heard once more the faint words, "I would Harold had been here, that I might bless him." "O mother!" she said in her heart, "it may be so even now!"

Then she said, summoning all her faculties, and speaking as perchance she could not have spoken but for the awful inspiration of the time, "My friend, think you that an all−wise God would leave His work so imperfect as to give to the creature He has made no revelation of Himself? Were the Bible not true, would He have suffered it to prevail from the earliest ages until now? Would He have caused all history to confirm its facts, and the purest codes of morality to be drawn from its fountains? Ask yourself, could the world exist without a Providence; and could this book, involving all that is precious to the soul, exist without the providence of God?"

As she spoke, her hand rested on the Bible out of which she had last read to her mother. It opened at the very place, and from it there dropped the little book−marker which Mrs. Rothesay always used, one worked by Olive in her childish days. The sight drew her spirit down from the height of sublime faith to the helplessness of human woe.

"Oh, my mother!—my mother!" She bowed her head upon. her knees, and for some minutes wept bitterly. Then she rose with a calm brow.

"I am going"—her voice failed.

"I know—I know," said Harold.

"She spoke of you: they were almost her last words. You will come with me, friend?"

Harold was a man who never wept—never could weep—but his face grew pale, and there came over him a great awe. His step faltered, even more than her own, as he followed Olive up−stairs.

Her hand paused a moment on the latch of the door. She stood still, and trembled. "No," she said, as if to herself,—"no, it is not my mother; my mother is not here!"

Then she went in composedly, and looked on the face of the dead. Harold looked, too, standing beside her in silence.

Olive was the first to speak. "See," she whispered, "how very placid and beautiful the image looks!—like her, and yet unlike. I never for a moment feel that it is **my mother**."

Harold regarded with amazement the daughter newly orphaned, who stood serenely beholding her dead. Then he took Olive's hand, softly and with reverence, as if there were something sacred in her touch. **His** she scarcely seemed to feel, but continued, speaking in the same tranquil voice.

"An hour ago we were so happy, she and I, talking together of holy things—of the love we had borne each other on earth, and would still bear in heaven. And can such love end with death? Can I believe that one moment—the fleeting of a breath—has left of **my mother** nought but this?"

She half turned from the frail clay, and met Harold's eye—intense—athirst—as if his soul's life were in her words.

"You are calm—very calm," he murmured. "You stand here, and have no dread."

"No; for I have seen my mother die. Her last sigh was on my cheek. I **felt** her spirit pass, and I knew that it was passing unto God."

"And you sorrow not, but rejoice?"

"Yes; since for all I lose on earth, heaven grows nearer to me. It will seem the more my home, now I have a mother there."

Harold Gwynne fell on his knees beside the dead, crying out—

"Oh God—oh God—that I could believe!"