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ADELA CATHCART

Volume I.

BY

GEORGE MACDONALD M.A.

Me list not of the chaf ne of the stre
Maken so long a tale as of the corn.

CHAUCER.--_Man of Lawes Tale_.

ADELA CATHCART

Originally published in 1864

With appreciation to Mrs. Morag Black for the master copies of Volumes II and III, to the Bodleian Library for the photo-copies of Volume I, and to Miss Tracy Samuel for type-copying Volumes I, II, and III for this Edition.

To John Rutherford Russell M.D.

This book is affectionately dedicated by the author.

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ADELA CATHCART.

Chapter I.

Christmas Eve.

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve, sinking towards the night. All day long the wintry light had been diluted with fog, and now the vanguard of the darkness coming to aid the mist, the dying day was well nigh smothered between them. When I looked through the window, it

was into a vague and dim solidification of space, a mysterious region in which awful things might be going on, and out of which anything might come; but out of which nothing came in the meantime, except small sparkles of snow, or rather ice, which as we swept rapidly onwards, and the darkness deepened, struck faster and faster against the weather-windows. For we, that is, myself and a fellow-passenger, of whom I knew nothing yet but the waistcoat and neckcloth, having caught a glimpse of them as he searched for an obstinate railway-ticket, were in a railway-carriage, darting along, at an all but frightful rate, northwards from London.

Being, the sole occupants of the carriage, we had made the most of it, like Englishmen, by taking seats diagonally opposite to each other, laying our heads in the corners, and trying to go to sleep. But for me it was of no use to try any longer. Not that I had anything particular on my mind or spirits; but a man cannot always go to sleep at spare moments. If anyone can, let him consider it a great gift, and make good use of it accordingly; that is, by going to sleep on every such opportunity.

As I, however, could not sleep, much as I should have enjoyed it, I proceeded to occupy my very spare time with building, up what I may call a conjectural mould, into which the face, dress, carriage, &c., of my companion would fit. I had already discovered that he was a clergyman; but this added to my difficulties in constructing the said mould. For, theoretically, I had a great dislike to clergymen; having, hitherto, always found that the _clergy_ absorbed the _man_; and that the _cloth_, as they called it even themselves, would be no bad epithet for the individual, as well as the class. For all clergymen whom I had yet met, regarded mankind and their interests solely from the clerical point of view, seeming far more desirous that a man should be a good church man, as they called it, than that he should love God. Hence, there was always an indescribable and, to me, unpleasant odour of their profession about them. If they knew more concerning the _life_ of the world than other men, why should everything they said remind one of mustiness and mildew? In a word, why were they not men at worst, when at best they ought to be more of men than other men?--And here lay the difficulty: by no effort could I get the face before me to fit into the clerical mould which I had all ready in my own mind for it. That was, at all events, the face of a man, in spite of waistcoat and depilation. I was not even surprised when, all at once, he sat upright in his seat, and asked me if I would join him in a cigar. I gladly consented. And here let me state a fact, which added then to my interest in my fellow-passenger, and will serve now to excuse the enormity of smoking in a railway carriage. We were going to the same place--we must be; and nobody would enter that carriage to-night, but the man who had to clean it. For, although we were shooting along at a terrible rate, the train would not stop to set us down, but would cast us loose a mile from our station; and some minutes after it had shot by like an infernal comet of darkness, our carriage would trot gently up to the platform, as if it had come from London all on its own hook--and thought nothing of it.

We were a long way yet, however, from our destination. The night grew darker and colder, and after the necessary unmuffling occasioned by the cigar process, we drew our wraps closer about us, leaned back in our corners, and smoked away in silence; the red glow of our cigars serving to light the carriage nearly as well as the red nose of the neglected and half-extinguished lamp. For we were in a second-class carriage, a fact for which I leave the clergyman to apologize: it is nothing to me, for I am nobody.

But, after all, I fear I am unjust to the Railway Company, for there was light enough for me to see, and in some measure scrutinize, the face of my fellow-passenger. I could discern a strong chin, and good, useful jaws; with a firm-lipped mouth, and a nose more remarkable for quantity than disposition of mass, being rather low, and very thick. It was surmounted by two brilliant, kindly, black eyes. I lay in wait for his forehead, as if I had been a hunter, and he some peculiar animal that wanted killing right in the middle of it. But it was some time before I was gratified with a sight of it. I did see it, however, and I was gratified. For when he wanted to throw away the end of his cigar, finding his window immovable (the frosty wind that bore the snow-flakes blowing from that side), and seeing that I opened mine to accommodate him, he moved across, and, in so doing, knocked his hat against the roof. As he displaced, to replace it, I had my opportunity. It was a splendid forehead for size every way, but chiefly for breadth. A kind of rugged calm rested upon it--a suggestion of slumbering power, which it delighted me to contemplate. I felt that that was the sort of man to make a friend of, if one had the good luck to be able. But I did not yet make any advance towards further acquaintance.

My reader may, however, be desirous of knowing what kind of person is making so much use of the pronoun I. He may have the same curiosity to know his fellow-traveller over the region of these pages, that I had to see the forehead of the clergyman. I can at least prevent any further inconvenience from this possible curiosity, by telling him enough to destroy his interest in me.

I am an----; well, I suppose I am an old bachelor; not very far from fifty, in fact; old enough, at all events, to be able to take pleasure in watching without sharing; yet ready, notwithstanding, when occasion offers, to take any necessary part in what may be going on, I am able, as it were, to sit quietly alone, and look down upon life from a second-floor window, delighting myself with my own speculations, and weaving the various threads I gather, into webs of varying kind and quality. Yet, as I have already said in another form, I am not the last to rush down stairs and into the street, upon occasion of an accident or a row in it, or a conflagration next door. I may just mention, too, that having many years ago formed the Swedenborgian resolution of never growing old, I am as yet able to flatter myself that I am likely to keep it.

In proof of this, if further garrulity about myself can be pardoned, I may state that every year, as Christmas approaches, I begin to grow

young again. At least I judge so from the fact that a strange, mysterious pleasure, well known to me by this time, though little understood and very varied, begins to glow in my mind with the first hint, come from what quarter it may, whether from the church service, or a bookseller's window, that the day of all the year is at hand--is climbing up from the under-world. I enjoy it like a child. I buy the Christmas number of every periodical I can lay my hands on, especially those that have pictures in them; and although I am not very fond of plum-pudding, I anticipate with satisfaction the roast beef and the old port that ought always to accompany it. And above all things, I delight in listening to stories, and sometimes in telling them.

It amuses me to find what a welcome nobody I am amongst young people; for they think I take no heed of them, and don't know what they are doing; when, all the time, I even know what they are thinking. They would wonder to know how often I feel exactly as they do; only I think the feeling is a more earnest and beautiful thing to me than it can be to them yet. If I see a child crowing in his mother's arms, I seem to myself to remember making precisely the same noise in my mother's arms. If I see a youth and a maiden looking into each other's eyes, I know what it means perhaps better than they do. But I say nothing. I do not even smile; for my face is puckered, and I have a weakness about the eyes. But all this will be proof enough that I have not grown very old, in any bad and to-be-avoided sense, at least.

And now all the glow of the Christmas time was at its height in my heart. For I was going to spend the Day, and a few weeks besides, with a very old friend of mine, who lived near the town at which we were about to arrive like a postscript.--Where could my companion be going? I wanted to know, because I hoped to meet him again somehow or other.

I ought to have told you, kind reader, that my name is Smith--actually _John_ Smith; but I'm none the worse for that; and as I do not want to be distinguished much from other people, I do not feel it a hardship.

But where was my companion going? It could not be to my friend's; else I should have known something about him. It could hardly be to the clergyman's, because the vicarage was small, and there was a new curate coming with his wife, whom it would probably have to accommodate until their own house was ready. It could not be to the lawyer's on the hill, because there all were from home on a visit to their relations. It might be to Squire Vernon's, but he was the last man likely to ask a clergyman to visit him; nor would a clergyman be likely to find himself comfortable with the swearing old fox-hunter. The question must, then, for the present, remain unsettled.--So I left it, and, looking out of the window once more, buried myself in Christmas fancies.

It was now dark. We were the under half of the world. The sun was scorching and glowing on the other side, leaving us to night and frost. But the night and the frost wake the sunshine of a higher world in our hearts; and who cares for winter weather at Christmas?--I believe in the proximate correctness of the date of our Saviour's

birth. I believe he always comes in winter. And then let Winter reign without: Love is king within; and Love is lord of the Winter.

How the happy fires were glowing everywhere! We shot past many a lighted cottage, and now and then a brilliant mansion. Inside both were hearts like our own, and faces like ours, with the red coming out on them, the red of joy, because it was Christmas. And most of them had some little feast _toward_. Is it vulgar, this feasting at Christmas? No. It is the Christmas feast that justifies all feasts, as the bread and wine of the Communion are the essence of all bread and wine, of all strength and rejoicing. If the Christianity of eating is lost--I will not say _forgotten_--the true type of eating is to be found at the dinner-hour in the Zoological Gardens. Certain I am, that but for the love which, ever revealing itself, came out brightest at that first Christmas time, there would be no feasting--nay no smiling; no world to go careering in joy about its central fire; no men and women upon it, to look up and rejoice.

"But you always look on the bright side of things."

No one spoke aloud; I heard the objection in my mind. Could it come from the mind of my friend--for so I already counted him--opposite to me? There was no need for that supposition--I had heard the objection too often in my ears. And now I answered it in set, though unspoken form.

"Yes," I said, "I do; for I keep in the light as much as I can. Let the old heathens count Darkness the womb of all things. I count Light the older, from the tread of whose feet fell the first shadow--and that was Darkness. Darkness exists but by the light, and for the light."

"But that is all mysticism. Look about you. The dark places of the earth are the habitations of cruelty. Men and women blaspheme God and die. How can this then be an hour for rejoicing?"

"They are in God's hands. Take from me my rejoicing, and I am powerless to help them. It shall not destroy the whole bright holiday to me, that my father has given my brother a beating. It will do him good. He needed it somehow.--He is looking after them."

Could I have spoken some of these words aloud? For the eyes of the clergyman were fixed upon me from his corner, as if he were trying to put off his curiosity with the sop of a probable conjecture about me.

"I fear he would think me a heathen," I said to myself. "But if ever there was humanity in a countenance, there it is."

It grew more and more pleasant to think of the bright fire and the cheerful room that awaited me. Nor was the idea of the table, perhaps already beginning to glitter with crystal and silver, altogether uninteresting to me. For I was growing hungry.

But the speed at which we were now going was quite comforting. I dropped into a reverie. I was roused from it by the sudden ceasing of the fierce oscillation, which had for some time been threatening to make a jelly of us. We were loose. In three minutes more we should be at Purleybridge.

And in three minutes more, we were at Purleybridge--the only passengers but one who arrived at the station that night. A servant was waiting for me, and I followed him through the booking-office to the carriage destined to bear me to _The Swanspond_, as my friend Colonel Cathcart's house was called.

As I stepped into the carriage, I saw the clergyman walk by, with his carpet-bag in his hand.

Now I knew Colonel Cathcart intimately enough to offer the use of his carriage to my late companion; but at the moment I was about to address him, the third passenger, of whom I had taken no particular notice, came between us, and followed me into the carriage. This occasioned a certain hesitation, with which I am only too easily affected; the footman shut the door; I caught one glimpse of the clergyman turning the corner of the station into a field-path; the horses made a scramble; and away I rode to the Swanspond, feeling as selfish as ten Pharisees. It is true, I had not spoken a word to him beyond accepting his invitation to smoke with him; and yet I felt almost sure that we should meet again, and that when we did, we should both be glad of it. And now he was carrying a carpet-bag, and I was seated in a carriage and pair!

It was far too dark for me to see what my new companion was like; but when the light from the colonel's hall-door flashed upon us as we drew up, I saw that he was a young man, with a certain expression in his face which a first glance might have taken for fearlessness and power of some sort, but which notwithstanding, I felt to be rather repellent than otherwise. The moment the carriage-door was opened, he called the servant by his name, saying,

"When the cart comes with the luggage, send mine up directly. Take that now."

And he handed him his dressing-bag.

He spoke in a self-approving tone, and with a drawl which I will not attempt to imitate, because I find all such imitation tends to caricature; and I want to be believed. Besides, I find the production of caricature has unfailingly a bad moral reaction upon myself. I daresay it is not so with others, but with that I have nothing to do: it is one of my weaknesses.

My worthy old friend, the colonel, met us in the hall--straight, broad-shouldered, and tall, with a severe military expression underlying the genuine hospitality of his countenance, as if he could not get rid of a sense of duty even when doing what he liked best.

The door of the dining-room was partly open, and from it came the red glow of a splendid fire, the chink of encountering glass and metal, and, best of all, the pop of a cork.

"Would you like to go up-stairs, Smith, or will you have a glass of wine first?--How do you do, Percy?"

"Thank you; I'll go to my room at once," I said.

"You'll find a fire there, I know. Having no regiment now, I look after my servants. Mind you make use of them. I can't find enough of work for them."

He left me, and again addressed the youth, who had by this time got out of his great-coat, and, cold as it was, stood looking at his hands by the hall-lamp. As I moved away, I heard him say, in a careless tone,

"And how's Adela, uncle?"

The reply did not reach me, but I knew now who the young fellow was.

Hearing a kind of human grunt behind me, I turned and saw that I was followed by the butler; and, by a kind of intuition, I knew that this grunt was a remark, an inarticulate one, true, but not the less to the point on that account. I knew that he had been in the dining-room by the pop I had heard; and I knew by the grunt that he had heard his master's observation about his servants.

"Come, Beeves," I said, "I don't want your help. You've got plenty to do, you know, at dinner-time; and your master is rather hard upon you--isn't he?"

I knew the man, of course.

"Well, Mr. Smith, master is the best master in the country, _he is_. But he don't know what work is, _he don't_."

"Well, go to your work, and never mind me. I know every turn in the house as well as yourself, Beeves."

"No, Mr. Smith; I'll attend to you, if _you_ please. Mr. Percy will take care of _his_-self. There's no fear of him. But you're my business. You are sure to give a man a kind word who does his best to please you."

"Why, Beeves, I think that is the least a man can do."

"It's the most too, sir; and some people think it's too much."

I saw that the man was hurt, and sought to soothe him.

"You and I are old friends, at least, Beeves."

"Yes, Mr. Smith. Money won't do't, sir. My master gives good wages, and I'm quite independing of visitors. But when a gentleman says to me, 'Beeves, I'm obliged to you,' why then, Mr. Smith, you feels at one _and_ the same time, that he's a gentleman, and that you aint a boot-jack or a coal-scuttle. It's the sentiman, Mr. Smith. If he despises us, why, we despises him. And we don't like waiting on a gentleman as aint a gentleman. Ring the bell, Mr. Smith, when you want anythink, and _I'll_ attend to you."

He had been twenty years in the colonel's service. He was not an old soldier, yet had a thorough _esprit de corps_, looking, upon service as an honourable profession. In this he was not only right, but had a vast advantage over everybody whose profession is not sufficiently honourable for his ambition. All such must _feel_ degraded. Beeves was fifty; and, happily for his opinion of his profession, had never been to London.

And the colonel was the best of masters; for because he ruled well, every word of kindness told. It is with servants as with children and with horses--it is of no use caressing them unless they know that you mean them to go.

When the dinner-bell rang, I proceeded to the drawing-room. The colonel was there, and I thought for a moment that he was alone. But I soon saw that a couch by the fire was occupied by his daughter, the Adela after whose health I had heard young Percy Cathcart inquiring. She was our hostess, for Mrs. Cathcart had been dead for many years, and Adela had been her only child. I approached to pay my respects, but as soon as I got near enough to see her face, I turned involuntarily to her father, and said,

"Cathcart, you never told me of this!"

He made me no reply; but I saw the long stern upper lip twitching convulsively. I turned again to Adela, who tried to smile--with precisely the effect of a momentary gleam of sunshine upon a cold, leafless, and wet landscape.

"Adela, my dear, what is the matter?"

"I don't know, uncle."

She had called me uncle, since ever she had begun to speak, which must have been nearly twenty years ago.

I stood and looked at her. Her face was pale and thin, and her eyes were large, and yet sleepy. I may say at once that she had dark eyes and a sweet face; and that is all the description I mean to give of her. I had been accustomed to see that face, if not rosy, yet plump and healthy; and those eyes with plenty of light for themselves, and some to spare for other people. But it was neither her wan look nor her dull eyes that distressed me: it was the expression of her

face. It was very sad to look at; but it was not so much sadness as utter and careless hopelessness that it expressed.

"Have you any pain, Adela?" I asked.

"No," she answered.

"But you feel ill?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I don't know."

And as she spoke, she tapped with one finger on the edge of the _couvre-pied_ which was thrown over her, and gave a sigh as if her very heart was weary of everything.

"Shall you come down to dinner with us?"

"Yes, uncle; I suppose I must."

"If you would rather have your dinner sent up, my love--" began her father.

"Oh! no. It is all the same to me. I may as well go down."

My young companion of the carriage now entered, got up expensively. He, too, looked shocked when he saw her.

"Why, Addie!" he said.

But she received him with perfect indifference, just lifting one cold hand towards his, and then letting it fall again where it had lain before. Percy looked a little mortified; in fact, more mortified now than sorry; turned away, and stared at the fire.

Every time I open my mouth in a drawing-room before dinner, I am aware of an amount of self-denial worthy of a forlorn hope. Yet the silence was so awkward now, that I felt I must make an effort to say something; and the more original the remark the better I felt it would be for us all. But, with the best intentions, all I could effect was to turn towards Mr. Percy and say,

"Rather cold for travelling, is it not?"

"Those foot-warmers are capital things, though," he answered. "Mine was jolly hot. Might have roasted a potato on it, by Jove!"

"I came in a second-class carriage," I replied; "and they are too cold to need a foot-warmer."

He gave a shrug with his shoulders, as if he had suddenly found himself in low company, and must make the best of it. But he offered no further remark.

Beeves announced dinner.

"Will you take Adela, Mr. Smith?" said the colonel.

"I think I won't go, after all, papa, if you don't mind. I don't want any dinner."

"Very well, my dear," began her father, but could not help showing his distress; perceiving which, Adela rose instantly from her couch, put her arm in his, and led the way to the dining-room. Percy and I followed.

"What can be the matter with the girl?" thought I. "She used to be merry enough. Some love affair, I shouldn't wonder. I've never heard of any. I know her father favours that puppy Percy; but I don't think she is dying for _him_."

It was the dreariest Christmas Eve I had ever spent. The fire was bright; the dishes were excellent; the wine was thorough; the host was hospitable; the servants were attentive; and yet the dinner was as gloomy as if we had all known it to be the last we should ever eat together. If a ghost had been sitting in its shroud at the head of the table, instead of Adela, it could hardly have cast a greater chill over the guests. She did her duty well enough; but she did not look it; and the charities which occasioned her no pleasure in the administration, could hardly occasion us much in the reception.

As soon as she had left the room, Percy broke out, with more emphasis than politeness:

"What the devil's the matter with Adela, uncle?"

"Indeed, I can't tell, my boy," answered the colonel, with more kindness than the form of the question deserved.

"Have you no conjecture on the subject?" I asked.

"None. I have tried hard to find out; but I have altogether failed. She tells me there is nothing the matter with her, only she is so tired. What has she to tire her?"

"If she is tired inside first, everything will tire her."

"I wish you would try to find out, Smith."

"I will."

"Her mother died of a decline."

"I know. Have you had no advice?"

"Oh, yes! Dr. Wade is giving her steel-wine, and quinine, and all that sort of thing. For my part, I don't believe in their medicines. Certainly they don't do her any good."

"Is her chest affected--does he say?"

"He says not; but I believe he knows no more about the state of her chest than he does about the other side of the moon. He's a stupid old fool. He comes here for his fees, and he has them."

"Why don't you call in another, if you are not satisfied?"

"Why, my dear fellow, they're all the same in this infernal old place. I believe they've all embalmed themselves, and are going by clockwork. They and the clergy make sad fools of us. But we make worse fools of ourselves to have them about us. To be sure, they see that everything is proper. The doctor makes sure that we are dead before we are buried, and the parson that we are buried after we are dead. About the resurrection I suspect he knows as much as we do. He goes by book."

In his perplexity and sorrow, the poor colonel was irritable and unjust. I saw that it would be better to suggest than to reason. And I partly took the homoeopathic system--the only one on which mental distress, at least, can be treated with any advantage.

"Certainly," I said, "the medical profession has plenty of men in it who live on humanity, like the very diseases they attempt to cure. And plenty of the clergy find the Church a tolerably profitable investment. The reading of the absolution is as productive to them now, as it was to the pardon-sellers of old. But surely, colonel, you won't huddle them all up together in one shapeless mass of condemnation?"

"You always were right, Smith, and I'm a fool, as usual.--Percy, my boy, what's going on at Somerset House?"

"The river, uncle."

"Nothing else?"

"Well--I don't know. Nothing much. It's horribly slow!"

"I'm afraid you won't find this much better. But you must take care of yourself."

"I've made that a branch of special study, uncle. I flatter myself I _can_ do that."

Colonel Cathcart laughed. Percy was the son of his only brother, who had died young, and he had an especial affection for him. And where

the honest old man loved, he could see no harm; for he reasoned something in this way: "He must be all right, or how could I like him as I do?" But Percy was a common-place, selfish fellow--of that I was convinced--whatever his other qualities, good or bad, might be; and I sincerely hoped that any designs he might have of marrying his cousin, might prove as vain as his late infantile passion for the moon. For I beg to assure my readers that the circumstances in which I have introduced Adela Cathcart, are no more fair to her real character, than my lady readers would consider the effect of a lamp-shade of bottle-green true in its presentation of their complexion.

We did not sit long over our wine. When we went up to the drawing-room, Adela was not there, nor did she make her appearance again that evening. For a little while we tried to talk; but, after many failures, I yielded and withdrew on the score of fatigue; no doubt relieving the mind of my old friend by doing so, for he had severe ideas of the duty of a host as well as of a soldier, and to these ideas he found it at present impossible to elevate the tone of his behaviour.

When I reached my own room, I threw myself into the easiest of arm-chairs, and began to reflect.

"John Smith," I said, "this is likely to be as uncomfortable a Christmas-tide, as you, with your all but ubiquity, have ever had the opportunity of passing. Nevertheless, please to remember a resolution you came to once upon a time, that, as you were nobody, so you would be nobody; and see if you can make yourself useful.--What can be the matter with Adela?"

I sat and reflected for a long time; for during my life I had had many opportunities of observation, and amongst other cases that had interested me, I had seen some not unlike the present. The fact was that, as everybody counted me nobody, I had taken full advantage of my conceded nonentity, which, like Jack the Giant-killer's coat of darkness, enabled me to learn much that would otherwise have escaped me. My reflections on my observations, however, did not lead me to any further or more practical conclusion just yet, than that other and better advice ought to be called in.

Having administered this sedative sop to my restless practicalness, I went to bed and to sleep.

Chapter II.

Church.

Adela did not make her appearance at the breakfast-table next morning, although it was the morning of Christmas Day. And no one who had seen her at dinner on Christmas Eve, would have expected to see her at

breakfast on Christmas-morn. Yet although her absence was rather a relief, such a gloom occupied her place, that our party was anything but cheerful. But the world about us was happy enough, not merely at its unseen heart of fire, but on its wintered countenance--evidently to all men. It was not "to hide her guilty front," as Milton says, in the first two--and the least worthy--stanzas on the Nativity, that the earth wooed the gentle air for innocent snow, but to put on the best smile and the loveliest dress that the cold time and her suffering state would allow, in welcome of the Lord of the snow and the summer. I thought of the lines from Crashaw's *Hymn of the Nativity*--Crashaw, who always suggested to me Shelley turned a Catholic Priest:

"I saw the curled drops, soft and slow,
Come hovering o'er the place's head,
Offering their whitest sheets of snow,
To furnish the fair infant's bed.
Forbear, said I, be not too bold:
Your fleece is white, but 'tis too cold."

And as the sun shone rosy with mist, I naturally thought of the next following stanza of the same hymn:

"I saw the obsequious seraphim
Their rosy fleece of fire bestow;
For well they now can spare their wings,
Since Heaven itself lies here below.
Well done! said I; but are you sure
Your down, so warm, will pass for pure?"

Adela, pale face and all, was down in time for church; and she and the colonel and I walked to it together by the meadow path, where, on each side, the green grass was peeping up through the glittering frost. For the colonel, notwithstanding his last night's outbreak upon the clergy, had a profound respect for them, and considered church-going one of those military duties which belonged to every honest soldier and gentleman. Percy had found employment elsewhere.

It was a blessed little church that, standing in a little meadow church-yard, with a low strong ancient tower, and great buttresses that put one in mind of the rock of ages, and a mighty still river that flowed past the tower end, and a picturesque, straggling, well-to-do parsonage at the chancel end. The church was nearly covered with ivy, and looked as if it had grown out of the churchyard, to be ready for the poor folks, as soon as they got up again, to praise God in. But it had stood a long time, and none of them came, and the praise of the living must be a poor thing to the praise of the dead, notwithstanding all that the Psalmist says. So the church got disheartened, and drooped, and now looked very old and grey-headed. It could not get itself filled with praise enough.--And into this old, and quaint, and weary but stout-hearted church, we went that bright winter morning, to hear about a baby. My heart was full enough before I left it.

Old Mr. Venables read the service with a voice and manner far more memorial of departed dinners than of joys to come; but I sat--little heeding the service, I confess--with my mind full of thoughts that made me glad.

Now all my glad thoughts came to me through a hole in the tower-door. For the door was far in a shadowy retreat, and in the irregular lozenge-shaped hole in it, there was a piece of coarse thick glass of a deep yellow. And through this yellow glass the sun shone. And the cold shine of the winter sun was changed into the warm glory of summer by the magic of that bit of glass.

Now when I saw the glow first, I thought without thinking, that it came from some inner place, some shrine of old, or some ancient tomb in the chancel of the church--forgetting the points of the compass--where one might pray as in the *penetralia* of the temple; and I gazed on it as the pilgrim might gaze upon the lamp-light oozing from the cavern of the Holy Sepulchre. But some one opened the door, and the clear light of the Christmas morn broke upon the pavement, and swept away the summer splendour.--The door was to the outside.--And I said to myself: All the doors that lead inwards to the secret place of the Most High, are doors outwards--out of self--out of smallness--out of wrong. And these were some of the thoughts that came to me through the hole in the door, and made me forget the service, which Mr. Venables mumbled like a nicely cooked sweetbread.

But another voice broke the film that shrouded the ears of my brain, and the words became inspired and alive, and I forgot my own thoughts in listening to the Holy Book. For is not the voice of every loving spirit a fresh inspiration to the dead letter? With a voice other than this, does it not kill? And I thought I had heard the voice before, but where I sat I could not see the Communion Table.--At length the preacher ascended the pulpit stairs, and, to my delight and the rousing of an altogether unwonted expectation, who should it be but my fellow-traveller of last night!

He had a look of having something to say; and I immediately felt that I had something to hear. Having read his text, which I forget, the broad-browed man began with something like this:

"It is not the high summer alone that is God's. The winter also is His. And into His winter He came to visit us. And all man's winters are His--the winter of our poverty, the winter of our sorrow, the winter of our unhappiness--even 'the winter of our discontent.'"

I stole a glance at Adela. Her large eyes were fixed on the preacher.

"Winter," he went on, "does not belong to death, although the outside of it looks like death. Beneath the snow, the grass is growing. Below the frost, the roots are warm and alive. Winter is only a spring too weak and feeble for us to see that it is living. The cold does for all things what the gardener has sometimes to do for valuable trees: he

must half kill them before they will bear any fruit. Winter is in truth the small beginnings of the spring."

I glanced at Adela again; and still her eyes were fastened on the speaker.

"The winter is the childhood of the year. Into this childhood of the year came the child Jesus; and into this childhood of the year must we all descend. It is as if God spoke to each of us according to our need: My son, my daughter, you are growing old and cunning; you must grow a child again, with my son, this blessed birth-time. You are growing old and selfish; you must become a child. You are growing old and careful; you must become a child. You are growing old and distrustful; you must become a child. You are growing old and petty, and weak, and foolish; you must become a child--my child, like the baby there, that strong sunrise of faith and hope and love, lying in his mother's arms in the stable.

"But one may say to me: 'You are talking in a dream. The Son of God is a child no longer. He is the King of Heaven.' True, my friends. But He who is the Unchangeable, could never become anything that He was not always, for that would be to change. He is as much a child now as ever he was. When he became a child, it was only to show us by itself, that we might understand it better, what he was always in his deepest nature. And when he was a child, he was not less the King of Heaven; for it is in virtue of his childhood, of his sonship, that he is Lord of Heaven and of Earth--'for of such'--namely, of children--'is the kingdom of heaven.' And, therefore, when we think of the baby now, it is still of the Son of man, of the King of men, that we think. And all the feelings that the thought of that babe can wake in us, are as true now as they were on that first Christmas day, when Mary covered from the cold his little naked feet, ere long to be washed with the tears of repentant women, and nailed by the hands of thoughtless men, who knew not what they did, to the cross of fainting, and desolation, and death."

Adela was hiding her face now.

"So, my friends, let us be children this Christmas. Of course, when I say to anyone, 'You must be like a child,' I mean a good child. A naughty child is not a child as long as his naughtiness lasts. He is not what God meant when He said, 'I will make a child.' Think of the best child you know--the one who has filled you with most admiration. It is his child-likeness that has so delighted you. It is because he is so true to the child-nature that you admire him. Jesus is like that child. You must be like that child. But you cannot help knowing some faults in him--some things that are like ill-grown men and women. Jesus is not like him, there. Think of the best child you can imagine; nay, think of a better than you can imagine--of the one that God thinks of when he invents a child in the depth of his fatherhood: such child-like men and women must you one day become; and what day better to begin, than this blessed Christmas Morn? Let such a child be born in your hearts this day. Take the child Jesus to your

bosoms, into your very souls, and let him grow there till he is one with your every thought, and purpose, and hope. As a good child born in a family will make the family good; so Jesus, born into the world, will make the world good at last. And this perfect child, born in your hearts, will make your hearts good; and that is God's best gift to you.

"Then be happy this Christmas Day; for to you a child is born. Childless women, this infant is yours--wives or maidens. Fathers and mothers, he is your first-born, and he will save his brethren. Eat and drink, and be merry and kind, for the love of God is the source of all joy and all good things, and this love is present in the child Jesus.--Now, to God the Father, &c."

"O my baby Lord!" I said in my heart; for the clergyman had forgotten me, and said nothing about us old bachelors.

Of course this is but the substance of the sermon; and as, although I came to know him well before many days were over, he never lent me his manuscript--indeed, I doubt if he had any--my report must have lost something of his nervous strength, and be diluted with the weakness of my style.

Although I had been attending so well to the sermon, however, my eyes had now and then wandered, not only to Adela's face, but all over the church as well; and I could not help observing, a few pillars off, and partly round a corner, the face of a young man--well, he was about thirty, I should guess--out of which looked a pair of well-opened hazel eyes, with rather notable eyelashes. Not that I, with my own weak pair of washed-out grey, could see the eyelashes at that distance, but I judged it must be their length that gave a kind of feminine cast to the outline of the eyes. Nor should I have noticed the face itself much, had it not seemed to me that those eyes were pursuing a very thievish course; for, by the fact that, as often as I looked their way, I saw the motion of their withdrawal, I concluded that they were stealing glances at, certainly not from, my adopted niece, Adela. This made me look at the face more attentively. I found it a fine, frank, brown, country-looking face.--Could it have anything to do with Adela's condition? Absurd! How could such health and ruddy life have anything to do with the worn pallor of her countenance? Nor did a single glance on the part of Adela reveal that she was aware of the existence of the neighbouring observatory. I dismissed the idea. And I was right, as time showed.

We remained to the Communion. When that was over, we walked out of the old dark-roofed church, Adela looking as sad as ever, into the bright cold sunshine, which wrought no change on her demeanour. How could it, if the sun of righteousness, even, had failed for the time? And there, in the churchyard, we found Percy, standing astride of an infant's grave, with his hands in his trowser-pockets, and an air of condescending satisfaction on his countenance, which seemed to say to the dead beneath him:

"Pray, don't apologize. I know you are disagreeable; but you can't help it, you know;"

--and to the living coming out of church:

"Well, have you had your little whim out?"

But what he did say, was to Adela:

"A merry Christmas to you, Addie! Won't you lean on me? You don't look very stunning."

But her sole answer was to take my arm; and so we walked towards the Swanspond.

"I suppose that's what they call _Broad Church,_" said the colonel.

"Generally speaking, I prefer breadth," I answered, vaguely. "Do you think that's _Broad Church?_"

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose it's all right. He ran me through, anyhow."

"I hope it _is_ all right," I answered. "It suits me."

"Well, I'm sure you know ten times better than I do. He seems a right sort of man, whatever sort of clergyman he may be."

"Who is he--can you tell me?"

"Why, don't you know? That's our new curate, Mr. Armstrong."

"Curate!" I exclaimed. "A man like that! And at his years too! He must be forty. You astonish me!"

"Well, I don't know. He may be forty. He is our curate; that is all I can answer for."

"He was my companion in the train last night."

"Ah! that accounts for it. You had some talk with him, and found him out? I believe he is a superior sort of man, too. Old Mr. Venables seems to like him."

"All the talk I have had with him passed between pulpit and pew this morning," I replied; "for the only words that we exchanged last night were, 'Will you join me in a cigar?' from him, and 'With much pleasure,' from me."

"Then, upon my life, I can't see what you think remarkable in his being a curate. Though I confess, as I said before, he ran me through the body. I'm rather soft-hearted, I believe, since Addie's illness."

He gave her a hasty glance. But she took no notice of what he had said; and, indeed, seemed to have taken no notice of the conversation--to which Percy had shown an equal amount of indifference. A very different indifference seemed the only bond between them.

When we reached home, we found lunch ready for us, and after waiting a few minutes for Adela, but in vain, we seated ourselves at the table.

"Awfully like Sunday, and a cold dinner, uncle!" remarked Percy.

"We'll make up for that, my boy, when dinner-time comes."

"You don't like Sunday, then, Mr. Percy?" I said.

"A horrid bore," he answered. "My old mother made me hate it. We had to go to church twice; and that was even worse than her veal-broth. But the worst of it is, I can't get it out of my head that I ought to be there, even when I'm driving tandem to Richmond."

"Ah! your mother will be with us on Sunday, I hope, Percy."

"Good heavens, uncle! Do you know what you are about? My mother here! I'll just ring the bell, and tell James to pack my traps. I won't stand it. I can't. Indeed I can't."

He rose as he spoke. His uncle caught him by the arm, laughing, and made him sit down again; which he did with real or pretended reluctance.

"We'll take care of you, Percy. Never mind.--Don't be a fool," he added, seeing the evident annoyance of the young fellow.

"Well, uncle, you ought to have known better," said Percy, sulkily, as, yielding, he resumed his seat, and poured himself out a bumper of claret, by way of consolation.

He had not been much of a companion before: now he made himself almost as unpleasant as a young man could be, and that is saying a great deal. One, certainly, had need to have found something beautiful at church, for here was the prospect of as wretched a Christmas dinner as one could ever wish to avoid.

When Percy had drunk another bumper of claret, he rose and left the room; and my host, turning to me, said:

"I fear, Smith, you will have anything but a merry Christmas, this year. I hoped the sight of you would cheer up poor Adela, and set us all right. And now Percy's out of humour at the thought of his mother coming, and I'm sure I don't know what's to be done. We shall sit over our dinner to-day like four crows over a carcass. It's very good of you to stop."

"Oh! never mind me," I said. "I, too, can take care of myself. But has Adela no companions of her own age?"

"None but Percy. And I am afraid she has got tired of him. He's a good fellow, though a bit of a puppy. That'll wear off. I wish he would take a fancy to the army, now."

I made no reply, but I thought the more. It seemed to me that to get tired of Percy was the most natural proceeding that could be adopted with regard to him and all about him.

But men judge men--and women, women--hardly.

"I'll tell you what I will do," said the colonel. "I will ask Mr. Bloomfield, the schoolmaster, and his wife, to dine with us. It's no use asking anybody else that I can think of. But they have no family, and I dare say they can put off their own Christmas dinner till to-morrow. They have but one maid, and she can dine with our servants. They are very respectable people, I assure you."

The colonel always considered his plans thoroughly, and then acted on them at once. He rose.

"A capital idea!" I said, as he disappeared. I went up to look for Adela. She was not in the drawing-room. I went up again, and tapped at the door of her room.

"Come in," she said, in a listless voice.

I entered.

"How are you now, Adela?" I asked.

"Thank you, uncle," was all her reply.

"What is the matter with you, my child?" I said, and drew a chair near hers. She was half reclining, with a book lying upside down on her knee.

"I would tell you at once, uncle, if I knew," she answered very sweetly, but as sadly. I believe I am dying; but of what I have not the smallest idea."

"Nonsense!" I said. "You're not dying."

"You need not think to comfort me that way, uncle; for I think I would rather die than not."

"Is there anything you would like?"

"Nothing. There is nothing worth liking, but sleep."

"Don't you sleep at night?"

"Not well.--I will tell you all I know about it.--Some six weeks ago, I woke suddenly one morning, very early--I think about three o'clock--with an overpowering sense of blackness and misery. Everything I thought of seemed to have a core of wretchedness in it. I fought with the feeling as well as I could, and got to sleep again. But the effect of it did not leave me next day. I said to myself: 'They say "morning thoughts are true." What if this should be the true way of looking at things?' And everything became grey and dismal about me. Next morning it was just the same. It was as if I had waked in the middle of some chaos over which God had never said: 'Let there be light.' And the next day was worse. I began to see the bad in everything--wrong motives--and self-love--and pretence, and everything mean and low. And so it has gone on ever since. I wake wretched every morning. I am crowded with wretched, if not wicked thoughts, all day. Nothing seems worth anything. I don't care for anything."

"But you love somebody?"

"I hope I love my father. I don't know. I don't feel as if I did."

"And there's your cousin Percy." I confess this was a feeler I put out.

"Percy's a fool!" she said, with some show of indignation, which I hailed, for more reasons than one.

"But you enjoyed the sermon this morning, did you not?"

"I don't know. I thought it very poetical and very pretty; but whether it was true--how could I tell? I didn't care. The baby he spoke about was nothing to me. I didn't love him, or want to hear about him. Don't you think me a brute, uncle?"

"No, I don't. I think you are ill. And I think we shall find something that will do you good; but I can't tell yet what. You will dine with us, won't you?"

"Oh! yes, if you and papa wish it."

"Of course we do. He is just gone to ask Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield to dine with us."

"Oh!"

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh! no. They are nice people. I like them both."

"Well, I will leave you, my child. Sleep if you can. I will go and walk in the garden, and think what can be done for my little girl."

"Thank you, uncle. But you can't do me any good. What if this should

be the true way of things? It is better to know it, if it is."

"Disease couldn't make a sun in the heavens. But it could make a man blind, that he could not see it."

"I don't understand you."

"Never mind. It's of no consequence whether you do or not. When you see light again, you will believe in it. For light compels faith."

"I believe in you, uncle; I do."

"Thank you, my dear. Good-bye."

I went round by the stables, and there found the colonel, talking to his groom. He had returned already from his call, and the Bloomfields were coming. I met Percy next, sauntering about, with a huge cigar in his mouth.

"The Bloomfields are coming to dinner, Mr. Percy," I said.

"Who are they?"

"The schoolmaster and his wife."

"Just like that precious old uncle of mine! Why the deuce did he ask me this Christmas? I tell you what, Mr. Smith--I can't stand it. There's nothing, not even cards, to amuse a fellow. And when my mother comes, it will be ten times worse. I'll cut and run for it."

"Oh! no, you won't," I said. But I heartily wished he would. I confess the insincerity, and am sorry for it.

"But what the devil does my mother want, coming here?"

"I haven't the pleasure of knowing your mother, so I cannot tell what the devil she can want, coming here."

"Humph!"

He walked away.

Chapter III.

The Christmas dinner.

Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield arrived; the former a benevolent, grey-haired man, with a large nose and small mouth, yet with nothing of the foolish look which often accompanies such a malconformation; and the latter a nice-looking little body, middle-aged, rather more; with

half-grey curls, and a cap with black ribbons. Indeed, they were both in mourning. Mr. Bloomfield bore himself with a kind of unworldly grace, and Mrs. Bloomfield with a kind of sweet primness. The schoolmaster was inclined to be talkative; nor was his wife behind him; and that was just what we wanted.

"I am sorry to see you in mourning," said the colonel to Mr. Bloomfield, during dessert. "I trust it is for no near relative."

"No relative at all, sir. But a boy of mine, to whom, through God's grace, I did a good turn once, and whom, as a consequence, I loved ever after."

"Tell Colonel Cathcart the story, James," said his wife. "It can do no harm to anybody now; and you needn't mention names, you know. You would like to hear it, wouldn't you, sir?"

"Very much indeed," answered the colonel.

"Well, sir," began the schoolmaster, "there's not much in it to you, I fear; though there was a good deal to him and me. I was usher in a school at Peckham once. I was but a lad, but I tried to do my duty; and the first part of my duty seemed to me, to take care of the characters of the boys. So I tried to understand them all, and their ways of looking at things, and thinking about them.

"One day, to the horror of the masters, it was discovered that a watch belonging to one of the boys had been stolen. The boy who had lost it was making a dreadful fuss about it, and declaring he would tell the police, and set them to find it. The moment I heard of it, my suspicion fell, half by knowledge, half by instinct, upon a certain boy. He was one of the most gentlemanly boys in the school; but there was a look of cunning in the corner of his eye, and a look of greed in the corner of his mouth, which now and then came out clear enough to me. Well, sir, I pondered for a few moments what I should do. I wanted to avoid calling any attention to him; so I contrived to make the worst of him in the Latin class--he was not a bad scholar--and so keep him in when the rest went to play. As soon as they were gone, I took him into my own room, and said to him, 'Fred, my boy, you knew your lesson well enough; but I wanted you here. You stole Simmons's watch.'"

"You had better mention no names, Mr. Bloomfield," interrupted his wife.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. But it doesn't matter. Simmons was eaten by a tiger, ten years ago. And I hope he agreed with him, for he never did with anybody else I ever heard of. He was the worst boy I ever knew.--'You stole Simmons's watch. Where is it?' He fell on his knees, as white as a sheet. 'I sold it,' he said, in a voice choked with terror. 'God help you, my boy!' I exclaimed. He burst out crying. 'Where did you sell it?' He told me. 'Where's the money you got for it?' 'That's all I have left,' he answered, pulling out a small

handful of shillings and halfcrowns. 'Give it me,' I said. He gave it me at once. 'Now you go to your lesson, and hold your tongue.' I got a sovereign of my own to make up the sum--I could ill spare it, sir, but the boy could worse spare his character--and I hurried off to the place where he had sold the watch. To avoid scandal, I was forced to pay the man the whole price, though I daresay an older man would have managed better. At all events, I brought it home. I contrived to put it in the boy's own box, so that the whole affair should appear to have been only a trick, and then I gave the culprit a very serious talking-to. He never did anything of the sort again, and died an honourable man and a good officer, only three months ago, in India. A thousand times over did he repay me the money I had spent for him, and he left me this gold watch in his will--a memorial, not so much of his fault, as of his deliverance from some of its natural consequences."

The schoolmaster pulled out the watch as he spoke, and we all looked at it with respect.

It was a simple story and simply told. But I was pleased to see that Adela took some interest in it. I remembered that, as a child, she had always liked better to be told a story than to have any other amusement whatever. And many a story I had had to coin on the spur of the moment for the satisfaction of her childish avidity for that kind of mental bull's-eye.

When we gentlemen were left alone, and the servants had withdrawn, Mr. Bloomfield said to our host:

"I am sorry to see Miss Cathcart looking so far from well, colonel. I hope you have good advice for her."

"Dr. Wade has been attending her for some time, but I don't think he's doing her any good."

"Don't you think it might be well to get the new doctor to see her? He's quite a remarkable man, I assure you."

"What! The young fellow that goes flying about the country in boots and breeches?"

"Well, I suppose that is the man I mean. He's not so very young though--he's thirty at least. And for the boots and breeches--I asked him once, in a joking way, whether he did not think them rather unprofessional. But he told me he saved ever so much time in open weather by going across the country. 'And,' said he, 'if I can see patients sooner, and more of them, in that way, I think it is quite professional. The other day,' he said, 'I was sent for, and I went straight as the crow flies, and I beat a little baby only by five minutes after all.' Of course after that there was nothing more to say."

"He has very queer notions, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has, for a medical man. He goes to church, for instance."

"I don't count that a fault."

"Well, neither do I. Rather the contrary. But one of the profession here says it is for the sake of being called out in the middle of the service."

"Oh! that is stale. I don't think he would find that answer. But it is a pity he is not married."

"So it is. I wish he were. But that is a fault that may be remedied some day. One thing I know about him is, that when I called him in to see one of my boarders, he sat by his bedside half an hour, watching him, and then went away without giving him any medicine."

"I don't see the good of that. What do you make of that? I call it very odd."

"He said to me: 'I am not sure what is the matter with him. A wrong medicine would do him more harm than the right one would do him good. Meantime he is in no danger. I will come and see him to-morrow morning.' Now I liked that, because it showed me that he was thinking over the case. The boy was well in two days. Not that that indicates much. All I say is, he is not a common man."

"I don't like to dismiss Dr. Wade."

"No; but you must not stand on ceremony, if he is doing her no good. You are judge enough of that."

I thought it best to say nothing; but I heartily approved of all the honest gentleman said; and I meant to use my persuasion afterwards, if necessary, to the same end; for I liked all he told about the new doctor. I asked his name.

"Mr. Armstrong," answered the schoolmaster.

"Armstrong--" I repeated. "Is not that the name of the new curate?"

"To be sure. They are brothers. Henry, the doctor, is considerably younger than the curate."

"Did the curate seek the appointment because the doctor was here before him?"

"I suppose so. They are much attached to each other."

"If he is at all equal as a doctor to what I think his brother is as a preacher, Purleybridge is a happy place to possess two such healers," I said.

"Well, time will show," returned Mr. Bloomfield.

All this time Percy sat yawning, and drinking claret. When we joined the ladies, we found them engaged in a little gentle chat. There was something about Mrs. Bloomfield that was very pleasing. The chief ingredient in it was a certain quaint repose. She looked as if her heart were at rest; as if for her everything, was right; as if she had a little room of her own, just to her mind, and there her soul sat, looking out through the muslin curtains of modest charity, upon the world that went hurrying and seething past her windows. When we entered--

"I was just beginning to tell Miss Cathcart," she said, "a curious history that came under my notice once. I don't know if I ought though, for it is rather sad."

"Oh! I like sad stories," said Adela.

"Well, there isn't much of romance in it either, but I will cut it short now the gentlemen are come. I knew the lady. She had been married some years. And report said her husband was not overkind to her. All at once she disappeared, and her husband thought the worst of her. Knowing her as well as I did, I did not believe a word of it. Yet it was strange that she had left her baby, her only child, of a few months, as well as her husband. I went to see her mother directly I heard of it, and together we went to the police; and such a search as we had! We traced her to a wretched lodging, where she had been for two nights, but they did not know what had become of her. In fact, they had turned her out because she had no money. Some information that we had, made us go to a house near Hyde Park. We rang the bell. Who should open the door, in a neat cap and print-gown, but the poor lady herself! She fainted when she saw her mother. And then the whole story came out. Her husband was stingy, and only allowed her very small sum for housekeeping; and perhaps she was not a very good manager, for good management is a gift, and everybody has not got it. So she found that she could not clear off the butcher's bills on the sum allowed her; and she had let the debt gather and gather, till the thought of it, I believe, actually drove her out of her mind for the time. She dared not tell her husband; but she knew it must come out some day, and so at last, quite frantic with the thought of it, she ran away, and left her baby behind her."

"And what became of her?" asked Adela.

"Her husband would never hear a word in her favour. He laughed at her story in the most scornful way, and said he was too old a bird for that. In fact, I believe he never saw her again. She went to her mother's. She will have her child now, I suppose; for I hear that the wretch of a husband, who would not let her have him, is dead. I daresay she is happy at last. Poor thing! Some people would need stout hearts, and have not got them."

Adela sighed. This story, too, seemed to interest her.

"What a miserable life!" she said.

"Well, Miss Cathcart," said the schoolmaster, "no doubt it was. But every life that has to be lived, can be lived; and however impossible it may seem to the onlookers, it has its own consolations, or, at least, interests. And I always fancy the most indispensable thing to a life is, that it should be interesting to those who have it to live. My wife and I have come through a good deal, but the time when the life looked hardest to others, was not, probably, the least interesting to us. It is just like reading a book: anything will do if you are taken up with it."

"Very good philosophy! Isn't it, Adela?" said the colonel.

Adela cast her eyes down, as if with a despairing sense of rebuke, and did not reply.

"I wish you would tell Miss Cathcart," resumed the schoolmaster to his wife, "that little story about the foolish lad you met once. And you need not keep back the little of your own history that belongs to it. I am sure the colonel will excuse you."

"I insist on hearing the whole of it," said the colonel, with a smile.

And Mrs. Bloomfield began.

Let me say here once for all, that I cannot keep the tales I tell in this volume from partaking of my own peculiarities of style, any more than I could keep the sermon free of such; for of course I give them all at second hand; and sometimes, where a joint was missing, I have had to supply facts as well as words. But I have kept as near to the originals as these necessities and a certain preparation for the press would permit me.

Mrs. Bloomfield, I say, began:

"A good many years ago, now, on a warm summer evening, a friend, whom I was visiting, asked me to take a drive with her through one of the London parks. I agreed to go, though I did not care much about it. I had not breathed the fresh air for some weeks; yet I felt it a great trouble to go. I had been ill, and my husband was ill, and we had nothing to do, and we did not know what would become of us. So I was anything but cheerful. I knew that all was for the best, as my good husband was always telling me, but my eyes were dim and my heart was troubled, and I could not feel sure that God cared quite so much for us as he did for the lilies.

"My friend was very cheerful, and seemed to enjoy everything; but a kind of dreariness came over me, and I began comparing the loveliness of the summer evening with the cold misty blank that seemed to make up my future. My wretchedness grew greater and greater. The very colours of the flowers, the blue of the sky, the sleep of the water, seemed to push us out of the happy world that God had made. And yet the children

seemed as happy as if God were busy making, the things before their eyes, and holding out each thing, as he made it, for them to look at.

"I should have told you that we had two children then."

"I did not know you had any family," interposed the colonel.

"Yes, we had two then. One of them is now in India, and the other was not long out of heaven.--Well, I was glad when my friend stopped the carriage, and got out with the children, to take them close to the water's edge, and let them feed the swans. I liked better to sit in the carriage alone--an ungrateful creature, in the midst of causes for thankfulness. I did not care for the beautiful things about me; and I was not even pleased that other people should enjoy them. I listlessly watched the well-dressed ladies that passed, and hearkened contemptuously to the drawling way in which they spoke. So bad and proud was I, that I said in my heart, 'Thank God! I am not like them yet!' Then came nursemaids and children; and I did envy the servants, because they had work to do, and health to do it, and wages for it when it was done. The carriage was standing still all this time, you know. Then sickly-looking men passed, with still more sickly-looking wives, some of them leading a child between them. But even their faces told of wages, and the pleasure of an evenings walk in the park. And now I was able to thank God that they had the parks to walk in. Then came tottering by, an old man, apparently of eighty years, leaning on the arm of his grand-daughter, I supposed--a tidy, gentle-looking maiden. As they passed, I heard the old man say: 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.' And his quiet face looked as if the fields were yet green to his eyes, and the still waters as pleasant as when he was a little child.

"At last I caught sight of a poor lad, who was walking along very slowly, looking at a gay-coloured handkerchief which he had spread out before him. His clothes were rather ragged, but not so ragged as old. On his head was what we now call a wide-awake. It was very limp and shapeless; but some one that loved him had trimmed it with a bit of blue ribbon, the ends of which hung down on his shoulder. This gave him an odd appearance even at a distance. When he came up and I could see his face, it explained everything. There was a constant smile about his mouth, which in itself was very sweet; but as it had nothing to do with the rest of the countenance, the chief impression it conveyed was of idiotcy. He came near the carriage, and stood there, watching some men who were repairing the fence which divided the road from the footpath. His hair was almost golden, and went waving about in the wind. His eye was very large and clear, and of a bright blue. But it had no meaning in it. He would have been very handsome, had there been mind in his face; but as it was, the very regularity of his unlighted features made the sight a sadder one. His figure was young; but his face might have belonged to a man of sixty.

"He opened his mouth, stuck out his under jaw, and stood staring and grinning at the men. At last one of them stopped to take breath, and, catching sight of the lad, called out:

"Why, Davy! is that you?"

"Ya-as, it be," replied Davy, nodding his head.

"Why, Davy, it's ever so long since I clapped eyes on ye!" said the man. "Where ha' ye been?"

"I 'aint been nowheres, as I knows on."

"Well, if ye 'aint been nowheres, what have ye been doing? Flying your kite?"

Davy shook his head sorrowfully, and at the same time kept on grinning foolishly.

"I 'aint got no kite; so I can't fly it."

"But you likes flyin' kites, don't ye?" said his friend, kindly.

"Ya-as," answered Davy, nodding his head, and rubbing his hands, and laughing out. "Kites is such fun! I wish I'd got un."

Then he looked thoughtfully, almost moodily, at the man, and said:

"Where's your kite? I likes kites. Kites is friends to me."

But by this time the man had turned again to his work, and was busy driving a post into the ground; so he paid no attention to the lad's question."

"Why, Mrs. Bloomfield," interrupted the colonel, "I should just like you to send out with a reconnoitring party, for you seem to see everything and forget nothing."

"You see best and remember best what most interests you, colonel; and besides that, I got a good rebuke to my ingratitude from that poor fellow. So you see I had reason to remember him. I hope I don't tire you, Miss Cathcart."

"Quite the contrary," answered our hostess.

"By this time," resumed Mrs. Bloomfield, "another man had come up. He had a coarse, hard-featured face; and he tried, or pretended to try, to wheel his barrow, which was full of gravel, over Davy's toes. The said toes were sticking quite bare through great holes in an old pair of woman's boots. Then he began to tease him rather roughly. But Davy took all his banter with just the same complacency and mirth with which he had received the kindness of the other man.

"How's yer sweetheart, Davy?" he said.

"Quite well, thank ye," answered Davy.

"What's her name?"

"Ha! ha! ha! I won't tell ye that."

"Come now, Davy, tell us her name."

"Noa."

"Don't be a fool."

"I aint a fool. But I won't tell you her name."

"I don't believe ye've got e'er a sweetheart. Come now."

"I have though."

"I don't believe ye."

"I have though. I was at church with her last Sunday."

"Suddenly the man, looking hard at Davy, changed his tone to one of surprise, and exclaimed:

"Why, boy, ye've got whiskers! Ye hadn't them the last time I see'd ye. Why, ye _are_ set up now! When are ye going to begin to shave? Where's your razors?"

"'Aint begun yet,' replied Davy. 'Shall shave some day, but I 'aint got too much yet.'

"As he said this, he fondled away at his whiskers. They were few in number, but evidently of great value in his eyes. Then he began to stroke his chin, on which there was a little down visible--more like mould in its association with his curious face than anything of more healthy significance. After a few moments' pause, his tormentor began again:

"Well, I can't think where ye got them whiskers as ye're so fond of. Do ye know where ye got them?"

"Davy took out his pocket-handkerchief, spread it out before him, and stopped grinning.

"Yaas; to be sure I do,' he said at last.

"Ye do?' growled the man, half humorously, half scornfully.

"Yaas,' said Davy, nodding his head again and again.

"Did ye buy 'em?"

"Noa,' answered Davy; and the sweetness of the smile which he now

smiled was not confined to his mouth, but broke like light, the light of intelligence, over his whole face.

"Were they gave to ye?" pursued the man, now really curious to hear what he would say.

"Yaas," said the poor fellow; and he clapped his hands in a kind of suppressed glee.

"Why, who gave 'em to ye?"

"Davy looked up in a way I shall never forget, and, pointing up with his finger too, said nothing.

"What do ye mean?" said the man. 'Who gave ye yer whiskers?'

"Davy pointed up to the sky again; and then, looking up with an earnest expression, which, before you saw it, you would not have thought possible to his face, said,

"Blessed Father.'

"Who?' shouted the man.

"Blessed Father,' Davy repeated, once more pointing upwards.

"Blessed Father!' returned the man, in a contemptuous tone; 'Blessed Father!--I don't know who that is. Where does he live? I never heerd on him.'

"Davy looked at him as if he were sorry for him. Then going closer up to him, he said:

"Didn't you though? He lives up there'--again pointing to the sky. 'And he is so kind! He gives me lots o' things.'

"Well!' said the man, 'I wish he'd give me thing's. But you don't look so very rich nayther.'

"Oh! but he gives me lots o' things; and he's up there, and he gives everybody lots o' things as likes to have 'em.'

"Well, what's he gave you?'

"Why, he's gave me some bread this mornin', and a tart last night--he did.'

"And the boy nodded his head, as was his custom, to make his assertion still stronger.

"But you was sayin' just now, you hadn't got a kite. Why don't he give you one?'

"_He'll_ give me one fast 'nuff,' said Davy, grinning again, and rubbing his hands.

"Miss Cathcart, I assure you I could have kissed the boy. And I hope I felt some gratitude to God for giving the poor lad such trust in Him, which, it seemed to me, was better than trusting in the three-per-cents, colonel; for you can draw upon him to no end o' good things. So Davy thought anyhow; and he had got the very thing for the want of which my life was cold and sad, and discontented. Those words, _Blessed Father_, and that look that turned his vacant face, like Stephen's, into the face of an angel, because he was looking up to the same glory, were in my ears and eyes for days. And they taught me, and comforted me. He was the minister of God's best gifts to me. And to how many more, who can tell? For Davy believed that God did care for his own children.

"Davy sauntered away, and before my friend came back with the children, I had lost sight of him; but at my request we moved on slowly till we should find him again. Nor had we gone far, before I saw him sitting in the middle of a group of little children. He was showing them the pictures on his pocket-handkerchief. I had one sixpence in my purse--it was the last I had, Mr. Smith."

Here, from some impulse or other, Mrs. Bloomfield addressed me.

"But I wasn't so poor but I could borrow, and it was a small price to give for what I had got; and so, as I was not able to leave the carriage, I asked my friend to take it to him, and tell him that Blessed Father had sent him that to buy a kite. The expression of childish glee upon his face, and the devout God bless you, Lady, upon his tongue, were strangely but not incongruously mingled.

"Well, it was my last sixpence then, but here I and my husband are, owing no man anything, and spending a happy Christmas Day, with many thanks to Colonel and Miss Cathcart."

"No, my good Madam," said the colonel; "it is we who owe you the happiest part of our Christmas Day. Is it not, Adela?"

"Yes, papa, it is indeed," answered Adela.

Then, with some hesitation, she added,

"But do you think it was quite fair? It was _you_, Mrs. Bloomfield, who gave the boy the sixpence."

"I only said God sent it," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"Besides," I interposed, "the boy never doubted it; and I think, after all, with due submission to my niece, he was the best judge."

"I should be only too happy to grant it," she answered, with a sigh. "Things might be all right if one could believe that--"

thoroughly, I mean."

"At least you will allow," I said, "that this boy was not by any means so miserable as he looked."

"Certainly," she answered, with hearty emphasis. "I think he was much to be envied."

Here I discovered that Percy was asleep on a sofa.

Other talk followed, and the colonel was looking very thoughtful. Tea was brought in, and soon after, our visitors rose to take their leave.

"You are not going already?" said the colonel.

"If you will excuse us," answered the schoolmaster. "We are early birds."

"Well, will you dine with us this day week?"

"With much pleasure," answered both in a breath.

It was clear both that the colonel liked their simple honest company, and that he saw they might do his daughter good; for her face looked very earnest and sweet; and the clearness that precedes rain was evident in the atmosphere of her eyes.

After their departure we soon separated; and I retired to my room full of a new idea, which I thought, if well carried out, might be of still further benefit to the invalid.

But before I went to bed, I had made a rough translation of the following hymn of Luther's, which I have since completed--so far at least as the following is complete. I often find that it helps to keep good thoughts before the mind, to turn them into another shape of words.

From heaven above I come to you,
To bring a story good and new:
Of goodly news so much I bring--
I cannot help it, I must sing.

To you a child is come this morn,
A child of holy maiden born;
A little babe, so sweet and mild--
It is a joy to see the child!

'Tis little Jesus, whom we need
Us out of sadness all to lead:
He will himself our Saviour be,
And from all sinning set us free.

Here come the shepherds, whom we know;

Let all of us right gladsome go,
To see what God to us hath given--
A gift that makes a stable heaven.

Take heed, my heart. Be lowly. So
Thou seest him lie in manger low:
That is the baby sweet and mild;
That is the little Jesus-child.

Ah, Lord! the maker of us all!
How hast thou grown so poor and small,
That there thou liest on withered grass--
The supper of the ox and ass?

Were the world wider many-fold,
And decked with gems and cloth of gold,
'Twere far too mean and narrow all,
To make for Thee a cradle small.

Rough hay, and linen not too fine,
The silk and velvet that are thine;
Yet, as they were thy kingdom great,
Thou liest in them in royal state.

And this, all this, hath pleased Thee,
That Thou mightst bring this truth to me:
That all earth's good, in one combined,
Is nothing to Thy mighty mind.

Ah, little Jesus! lay thy head
Down in a soft, white, little bed,
That waits Thee in this heart of mine,
And then this heart is always Thine.

Such gladness in my heart would make
Me dance and sing for Thy sweet sake.
Glory to God in highest heaven,
For He his son to us hath given!

Chapter IV.

The new doctor.

Next forenoon, wishing to have a little private talk with my friend, I went to his room, and found him busy writing to Dr. Wade. He consulted me on the contents of the letter, and I was heartily pleased with the kind way in which he communicated to the old gentleman the resolution he had come to, of trying whether another medical man might not be more fortunate in his attempt to treat the illness of his daughter.

"I fear Dr. Wade will be offended, say what I like," said he.

"It is quite possible to be too much afraid of giving offence," I said; "But nothing can be more gentle and friendly than the way in which you have communicated the necessity."

"Well, it is a great comfort you think so. Will you go with me to call on Mr. Armstrong?"

"With much pleasure," I answered; and we set out at once.

Shown into the doctor's dining-room, I took a glance at the books lying about. I always take advantage of such an opportunity of gaining immediate insight into character. Let me see a man's book-shelves, especially if they are not extensive, and I fancy I know at once, in some measure, what sort of a man the owner is. One small bookcase in a recess of the room seemed to contain all the non-professional library of Mr. Armstrong. I am not going to say here what books they were, or what books I like to see; but I was greatly encouraged by the consultation of the auguries afforded by the backs of these. I was still busy with them, when the door opened, and the doctor entered. He was the same man whom I had seen in church looking at Adela. He advanced in a frank manly way to the colonel, and welcomed him by name, though I believe no introduction had ever passed between them. Then the colonel introduced me, and we were soon chatting very comfortably. In his manner, I was glad to find that there was nothing of the professional. I hate the professional. I was delighted to observe, too, that what showed at a distance as a broad honest country face, revealed, on a nearer view, lines of remarkable strength and purity.

"My daughter is very far from well," said the colonel, in answer to a general inquiry.

"So I have been sorry to understand," the doctor rejoined. "Indeed, it is only too clear from her countenance."

"I want you to come and see if you can do her any good."

"Is not Dr. Wade attending her?"

"I have already informed him that I meant to request your advice."

"I shall be most happy to be of any service; but--might I suggest the most likely means of enabling me to judge whether I can be useful or not?"

"Most certainly."

"Then will you give me the opportunity of seeing her in a non-professional way first? I presume, from the fact that she is able to go to church, that she can be seen at home without the formality of an express visit?"

"Certainly," replied the colonel, heartily. "Do me the favour to dine with us this evening, and, as far as that can go you will see her--to considerable disadvantage, I fear," he concluded, smiling sadly.

"Thank you; thank you. If in my power, I shall not fail you. But you must leave a margin for professional contingencies."

"Of course. That is understood."

I had been watching Mr. Armstrong during this brief conversation, and the favourable impressions I had already received of him were deepened. His fine manly vigour, and the simple honesty of his countenance, were such as became a healer of men. It seemed altogether more likely that health might flow from such a source, than from the _pudgy_, flabby figure of snuff-taking Dr. Wade, whose face had no expression except a professional one. Mr. Armstrong's eyes looked you full in the face, as if he was determined to understand you if he could; and there seemed to me, with my foolish way of seeing signs everywhere, something of tenderness about the droop of those long eyelashes, so that his interpretation was not likely to fail from lack of sympathy. Then there was the firm-set mouth of his brother the curate, and a forehead as broad as his, if not so high or so full of modelling. When we had taken our leave, I said to the colonel,

"If that man's opportunity has been equal to his qualification, I think we may have great hopes of his success in encountering this unknown disease of poor Adela."

"God grant it!" was all my friend's reply.

When he informed Adela that he expected Mr. Henry Armstrong to dinner, she looked at him with a surprised expression, as much as to say--"Surely you do not mean to give me into his hands!" but she only said:

"Very well, papa."

So Mr. Armstrong came, and made himself very agreeable at dinner, talking upon all sorts of subjects, and never letting drop a single word to remind Adela that she was in the presence of a medical man. Nor did he seem to take any notice of her more than was required by ordinary politeness; but behavior without speciality of any sort, he drew his judgments from her general manner, and such glances as fell naturally to his share, of those that must pass between all the persons making up a small dinner-company. This enabled him to see her as she really was, for she remained quite at such ease as her indisposition would permit. He drank no wine at dinner, and only one glass after; and then asked the host if he might go to the drawing-room.

"And will you oblige me by coming with me, Mr. Smith? I can see that you are at home here."

Of course the colonel consented, and I was at his service. Adela rose from her couch when we entered the room. Mr. Armstrong went up to her gently, and said:

"Are you able to sing something, Miss Cathcart? I have heard of your singing."

"I fear not," she answered; "I have not sung for months."

"That is a pity. You must lose something by letting yourself get out of practice. May I play something to you, then?"

She gave him a quick glance that indicated some surprise, and said:

"If you please. It will give me pleasure."

"May I look at your music first?"

"Certainly."

He turned over all her loose music from beginning to end. Then without a word seated himself at the grand piano.

Whether he extemporized or played from memory, I, as ignorant of music as of all other accomplishments, could not tell, but even to stupid me, what he did play spoke. I assure my readers that I hardly know a term in the whole musical vocabulary; and yet I am tempted to try to describe what this music was like.

In the beginning, I heard nothing but a slow sameness, of which I was soon weary. There was nothing like an air of any kind in it. It seemed as if only his fingers were playing, and his mind had nothing to do with it. It oppressed me with a sense of the common-place, which, of all things, I hate. At length, into the midst of it, came a few notes, like the first chirp of a sleepy bird trying to sing; only the attempt was half a wail, which died away, and came again. Over and over again came these few sad notes, increasing in number, fainting, despairing, and reviving again; till at last, with a fluttering of agonized wings, as of a soul struggling up out of the purgatorial smoke, the music-bird sprang aloft, and broke into a wild but unsure jubilation. Then, as if in the exuberance of its rejoicing it had broken some law of the kingdom of harmony, it sank, plumb-down, into the purifying fires again; where the old wailing, and the old struggle began, but with increased vehemence and aspiration. By degrees, the surrounding confusion and distress melted away into forms of harmony, which sustained the mounting cry of longing and prayer. Then all the cry vanished in a jubilant praise. Stronger and broader grew the fundamental harmony, and bore aloft the thanksgiving; which, at length, exhausted by its own utterance, sank peacefully, like a summer sunset, into a grey twilight of calm, with the songs of the summer birds dropping asleep one by one; till, at last, only one was left to sing the sweetest prayer for all, before he, too, tucked his head

under his wing, and yielded to the restoring silence.

Then followed a pause. I glanced at Adela. She was quietly weeping.

But he did not leave the instrument yet. A few notes, as of the first distress, awoke; and then a fine manly voice arose, singing the following song, accompanied by something like the same music he had already played. It was the same feelings put into words; or, at least, something like the same feelings, for I am a poor interpreter of music:

Rejoice, said the sun, I will make thee gay
With glory, and gladness, and holiday;
I am dumb, O man, and I need thy voice.
But man would not rejoice.

Rejoice in thyself said he, O sun;
For thou thy daily course dost run.
In thy lofty place, rejoice if thou can:
For me, I am only a man.

Rejoice, said the wind, I am free and strong;
I will wake in thy heart an ancient song.
In the bowing woods--hark! hear my voice!
But man would not rejoice.

Rejoice, O wind, in thy strength, said he,
For thou fulfilllest thy destiny.
Shake the trees, and the faint flowers fan:
For me, I am only a man.

I am here, said the night, with moon and star;
The sun and the wind are gone afar;
I am here with rest and dreams of choice.
But man would not rejoice.

For he said--What is rest to me, I pray,
Who have done no labour all the day?
He only should dream who has truth behind.
Alas! for me and my kind!

Then a voice, that came not from moon nor star,
From the sun, nor the roving wind afar,
Said, Man, I am with thee--rejoice, rejoice!
And man said, I will rejoice!

"A wonderful physician this!" thought I to myself. "He must be a follower of some of the old mystics of the profession, counting harmony and health all one."

He sat still, for a few moments, before the instrument, perhaps to compose his countenance, and then rose and turned to the company.

The colonel and Percy had entered by this time. The traces of tears were evident on Adela's face, and Percy was eyeing first her and then Armstrong, with some signs of disquietude. Even during dinner it had been clear to me that Percy did not like the doctor, and now he was as evidently jealous of him.

A little general conversation ensued, and the doctor took his leave. The colonel followed him to the door. I would gladly have done so too, but I remained in the drawing-room. All that passed between them was:

"Will you oblige me by calling on Sunday morning, half an hour before church-time, colonel?"

"With pleasure."

"Will you come with me, Smith?" asked my friend, after informing me of the arrangement.

"Don't you think I might be in the way?"

"Not at all. I am getting old and stupid. I should like you to come and take care of me. He won't do Adela any good, I fear."

"Why do you think so?"

"He has a depressing effect on her already. She is sure not to like him. She was crying when I came into the room after dinner."

"Tears are not grief," I answered; "nor only the signs of grief, when they do indicate its presence. They are a relief to it as well. But I cannot help thinking there was some pleasure mingled with those tears, for he had been playing very delightfully. He must be a very gifted man."

"I don't know anything about that. You know I have no ear for music.--That won't cure my child anyhow."

"I don't know," I answered. "It may help."

"Do you mean to say he thinks to cure her by playing the piano to her? If he thinks to come here and do that, he is mistaken."

"You forget, Cathcart, that I have had no more conversation with him than yourself. But surely you have seen no reason to quarrel with him already."

"No, no, my dear fellow. I do believe I am getting a crusty old curmudgeon. I can't bear to see Adela like this."

"Well, I confess, I have hopes from the new doctor; but we will see what he says on Sunday."

"Why should we not have called to-morrow?"

"I can't answer that. I presume he wants time to think about the case."

"And meantime he may break his neck over some gate that he can't or won't open."

"Well, I should be sorry."

"But what's to become of us then?"

"Ah! you allow that? Then you do expect something of him?"

"To be sure I do, only I am afraid of making a fool of myself, and that sets me grumbling at him, I suppose."

Next day was Saturday; and Mrs. Cathcart, Percy's mother, was expected in the evening. I had a long walk in the morning, and after that remained in my own room till dinner time. I confess I was prejudiced against her; and just because I was prejudiced, I resolved to do all I could to like her, especially as it was Christmas-tide. Not that one time is not as good as another for loving your neighbour, but if ever one is reminded of the duty, it is then. I schooled myself all I could, and went into the drawing-room like a boy trying to be good; as a means to which end, I put on as pleasant a face as would come. But my good resolutions were sorely tried.

* * * * *

These asterisks indicate the obliteration of the personal description which I had given of her. Though true, it was ill-natured. And besides, so indefinite is all description of this kind, that it is quite possible it might be exactly like some woman to whom I am utterly unworthy to hold a candle. So I won't tell what her features were like. I will only say, that I am certain her late husband must have considered her a very fine woman; and that I had an indescribable sensation in the calves of my legs when I came near her. But then, although I believe I am considered a good-natured man, I confess to prejudices (which I commonly refuse to act upon), and to profound dislikes, especially to certain sorts of women, which I can no more help feeling, than I can help feeling the misery that permeates the joints of my jaws when I chance to bite into a sour apple. So my opinions about such women go for little or nothing.

When I entered the drawing-room, I saw at once that she had established herself as protectress of Adela, and possibly as mistress of the house. She leaned back in her chair at a considerable angle, but without bending her spine, and her hands lay folded in her lap. She made me a bow with her neck, without in the least altering the angle of her position, while I made her one of my most profound obeisances. A few common-places passed between us, and then her brother-in-law leading her down to dinner, the evening passed by with

politeness on both sides. Adela did not appear to heed her presence one way or the other. But then of late she had been very inexpressive.

Percy seemed to keep out of his mother's way as much as possible. How he amused himself, I cannot imagine.

Next morning we went to call on the doctor, on our way to church.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong, what do you think of my daughter?" asked the colonel.

"I do not think she is in a very bad way. Has she had any disappointment that you know of?"

"None whatever."

"Ah--I have seen such a case before. There are a good many of them amongst girls at her age. It is as if, without any disease, life were gradually withdrawn itself--ebbing back as it were to its source. Whether this has a physical or a psychological cause, it is impossible to tell. In her case, I think the later, if indeed it have not a deeper cause; that is, if I'm right in my hypothesis. A few days will show me this; and if I am wrong, I will then make a closer examination of her case. At present it is desirable that I should not annoy her in any such way. Now for the practical: my conviction is that the best thing that can be done for her is, to interest her in something, if possible--no matter what it is. Does she take pleasure in anything?"

"She used to be very fond of music. But of late I have not heard her touch the piano."

"May I be allowed to speak?" I asked.

"Most certainly," said both at once.

"I have had a little talk with Miss Cathcart, and I am entirely of Mr. Armstrong's opinion," I said. "And with his permission--I am pretty sure of my old friend's concurrence--I will tell you a plan I have been thinking of. You remember, colonel, how she was more interested in the anecdotes our friend the Bloomfields told the other evening, than she has been in anything else, since I came. It seems to me that the interest she cannot find for herself, we might be able to provide for her, by telling her stories; the course of which everyone should be at liberty to interrupt, for the introduction of any remark whatever. If we once got her interested in anything, it seems to me, as Mr. Armstrong has already hinted, that the tide of life would begin to flow again. She would eat better, and sleep better, and speculate less, and think less about herself--not of herself--I don't mean that, colonel; for no one could well think less of herself than she does. And if we could amuse her in that way for a week or two, I think it would give a fair chance to any physical remedies Mr. Armstrong might think proper to try, for they act most rapidly on a system in movement. It would be beginning from the inside, would it not?"

"A capital plan," said the doctor, who had been listening with marked approbation; "and I know one who I am sure would help. For my part, I never told a story in my life, but I am willing to try--after awhile, that is. My brother, however, would, I know, be delighted to lend his aid to such a scheme, if colonel Cathcart would be so good as to include him in the conspiracy. It is his duty as well as mine; for she is one of his flock. And he can tell a tale, real or fictitious, better than any one I know."

"There can be no harm in trying it, gentlemen--with kindest thanks to you for your interest in my poor child," said the colonel. "I confess I have not much hope from such a plan, but--"

"You must not let her know that the thing is got up for her," interrupted the doctor.

"Certainly not. You must all come and dine with us, any day you like. I will call on your brother to-morrow."

"This Christmas-tide gives good opportunity for such a scheme," I said. "It will fall in well with all the festivities; and I am quite willing to open the entertainment with a funny kind of fairy-tale, which has been growing in my brain for some time."

"Capital!" said Mr. Armstrong. "We must have all sorts."

"Then shall it be Monday at six--that is, to-morrow?" asked the colonel. "Your brother won't mind a short invitation?"

"Certainly not. Ask him to-day. But I would suggest five, if I might, to give us more time afterwards."

"Very well. Let it be five. And now we will go to church."

The ends of the old oak pews next the chancel were curiously carved. One had a ladder and a hammer and nails on it. Another a number of round flat things, and when you counted them you found that there were thirty. Another had a curious thing--I could not tell what, till one day I met an old woman carrying just such a bag. On another was a sponge on the point of a spear. There were more of such carvings; but these I could see from where I sat. And all the sermon was a persuading of the people that God really loved them, without any if or but.

Adela was very attentive to the clergy man; but I could see her glance wander now and then from his face to that of his brother, who was in the same place he had occupied on Christmas-day. The expression of her aunt's face was judicial.

When we came out of church, the doctor shook hands with me and said:

"Can I have a word with you, Mr. Smith?"

"Most gladly," I answered. "Your time is precious: I will walk your way."

"Thank you.--I like your plan heartily. But to tell the truth, I fancy it is more a case for my brother than for me. But that may come about all in good time, especially as she will now have an opportunity of knowing him. He is the best fellow in the world. And his wife is as good as he is. But--I feel I may say to you what I could not well say to the colonel--I suspect the cause of her illness is rather a spiritual one. She has evidently a strong mental constitution; and this strong frame, so to speak, has been fed upon slops; and an atrophy is the consequence. My hope in your plan is, partly, that it may furnish a better mental table for her, for the time, and set her foraging in new direction for the future."

"But how could you tell that from the very little conversation you had with her?"

"It was not the conversation only--I watched everything about her; and interpreted it by what I know about women. I believe that many of them go into a consumption just from discontent--the righteous discontent of a soul which is meant to sit at the Father's table, and so cannot content itself with the husks which the swine eat. The theological nourishment which is offered them is generally no better than husks. They cannot live upon it, and so die and go home to their Father. And without good spiritual food to keep the spiritual senses healthy and true, they cannot see the things about them as they really are. They cannot find interest in them, because they cannot find their own place amongst them. There was one thing though that confirmed me in this idea about Miss Cathcart. I looked over her music on purpose, and I did not find one song that rose above the level of the drawing-room, or one piece of music that had any deep feeling or any thought in it. Of course I judged by the composers."

"You astonish me by the truth and rapidity of your judgements. But how did you, who like myself are a bachelor, come to know so much about the minds of women?"

"I believe in part by reading Milton, and learning from him a certain high notion about myself and my own duty. None but a pure man can understand women--I mean the true womanhood that is in them. But more than to Milton am I indebted to that brother of mine you heard preach to-day. If ever God made a good man, he is one. He will tell you himself that he knows what evil is. He drank of the cup, found it full of thirst and bitterness; cast it from him, and turning to the fountain of life, kneeled and drank, and rose up a gracious giant. I say the last--not he. But this brother kept me out of the mire in which he soiled his own garments, though, thank God! they are clean enough now. Forgive my enthusiasm, Mr. Smith, about my brother. He is worthy of it."

I felt the wind cold to my weak eyes, and did not answer for some

time, lest he should draw unfair conclusions.

"You should get him to tell you his story. It is well worth hearing; and as I see we shall be friends all, I would rather you heard it from his own mouth."

"I sincerely hope I may call that man my friend, some day."

"You may do so already. He was greatly taken with you on the journey down."

"A mutual attraction then, I am happy to think. Good-bye, I am glad you like my plan."

"I think it excellent. Anything hearty will do her good. Isn't there any young man to fall in love with her?"

"I don't know of any at present."

"Only the best thing will make her well; but all true things tend to healing."

"But how is it that you have such notions--so different from those of the mass of your professional brethren?"

"Oh!" said he, laughing, "if you really want an answer, be it known to all men that I am a student of Van Helmont."

He turned away, laughing; and I, knowing nothing of Van Helmont, could not tell whether he was in jest or in earnest.

At dinner some remark was made about the sermon, I think by our host.

"You don't call that the gospel!" said Mrs. Cathcart, with a smile.

"Why, what do you call it, Jane?"

"I don't know that I am bound to put a name upon it. I should, however, call it pantheism."

"Might I ask you, madam, what you understand by pantheism?"

"Oh! neology, and all that sort of thing."

"And neology is--?"

"Really, Mr. Smith, a dinner-table is not the most suitable place in the world for theological discussion."

"I quite agree with you, madam," I responded, astonished at my own boldness.--I was not quite so much afraid of her after this, although I had an instinctive sense that she did not at all like me. But Percy was delighted to see his mother discomfited, and laughed into his

plate. She regarded him with lurid eyes for a moment, and then took refuge in her plate in turn. The colonel was too polite to make any remark at the time, but when he and I were alone, he said:

"Smith, I didn't expect it of you. Bravo, my boy!"

And I, John Smith, felt myself a hero.

Chapter V.

The light princess.

Five o'clock, anxiously expected by me, came, and with it the announcement of dinner. I think those of us who were in the secret would have hurried over it, but with Beeves hanging upon our wheels, we could not. However, at length we were all in the drawing-room, the ladies of the house evidently surprised that we had come up stairs so soon. Besides the curate, with his wife and brother, our party comprised our old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield, whose previous engagement had been advanced by a few days.

When we were all seated, I began, as if it were quite a private suggestion of my own:

"Adela, if you and our friends have no objection, I will read you a story I have just scribbled off."

"I shall be delighted, uncle."

This was a stronger expression of content than I had yet heard her use, and I felt flattered accordingly.

"This is Christmas-time, you know, and that is just the time for story-telling," I added.

"I trust it is a story suitable to the season," said Mrs. Cathcart, smiling.

"Yes, very," I said; "for it is a child's story--a fairy tale, namely; though I confess I think it fitter for grown than for young children. I hope it is funny, though. I think it is."

"So you approve of fairy-tales for children, Mr. Smith?"

"Not for children alone, madam; for everybody that can relish them."

"But not at a sacred time like this?"

And again she smiled an insinuating smile.

"If I thought God did not approve of fairy-tales, I would never read, not to say write one, Sunday or Saturday. Would you, madam?"

"I never do."

"I feared not. But I must begin, notwithstanding."

The story, as I now give it, is not exactly as I read it then, because, of course, I was more anxious that it should be correct when I prepared it for the press, than when I merely read it before a few friends.

"Once upon a time," I began; but I was unexpectedly interrupted by the clergyman, who said, addressing our host:

"Will you allow me, Colonel Cathcart, to be Master of the Ceremonies for the evening?"

"Certainly, Mr. Armstrong."

"Then I will alter the arrangement of the party. Here, Henry--don't get up, Miss Cathcart--we'll just lift Miss Cathcart's couch to this corner by the fire.--Lie still, please. Now, Mr. Smith, you sit here in the middle. Now, Mrs. Cathcart, here is an easy chair for you. With my commanding officer I will not interfere. But having such a jolly fire it was a pity not to get the good of it. Mr. Bloomfield, here is room for you and Mrs. Bloomfield."

"Excellently arranged," said our host. "I will sit by you, Mr. Armstrong. Percy, won't you come and join the circle?"

"No, thank you, uncle," answered Percy from a couch, "I am more comfortable here."

"Now, Lizzie," said the curate to his wife, "you sit on this stool by me.--Too near the fire? No?--Very well.--Harry, put the bottle of water near Mr. Smith. A fellow-feeling for another fellow--you see, Mr. Smith. Now we're all right, I think; that is, if Mrs. Cathcart is comfortable."

"Thanks. Quite."

"Then we may begin. Now, Mr. Smith.--One word more: anybody may speak that likes. Now, then."

So I did begin--

"Title: THE LIGHT PRINCESS.

"Second Title: A FAIRY-TALE WITHOUT FAIRIES."

"Author: JOHN SMITH, Gentleman.

"Motto:--' _Your Servant, Goody Gravity_.'

"From--SIR CHARLES GRANDISON."

"I must be very stupid, I fear, Mr. Smith; but to tell the truth, _I_ can't make head or tail of it," said Mrs. Cathcart.

"Give me leave, madam," said I; "that is my office. Allow me, and I hope to make both head and tail of it for you. But let me give you first a mere general, and indeed a more applicable motto for my story. It is this--from no worse authority than John Milton:

'Great bards beside
In sage and solemn times have sung
Of turneys and of trophies hung;
Of forests and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.'

"Milton here refers to Spencer in particular, most likely. But what distinguishes the true bard in such work is, that _more is meant than meets the ear_; and although I am no bard, I should scorn to write anything that only spoke to the _ear_, which signifies the surface understanding."

General silence followed, and I went on.

"THE LIGHT PRINCESS.

"CHAPTER I.--WHAT! NO CHILDREN?

"Once upon a time, so long ago, that I have quite forgotten the date, there lived a king and queen who had no children.

"And the king said to himself: 'All the queens of my acquaintance have children, some three, some seven, an some as many as twelve; and my queen has not one. I feel ill-used.' So he made up his mind to be cross with his wife about it. But she bore it all like a good patient queen as she was. Then the king grew very cross indeed. But the queen pretended to take it all as a joke, and a very good one, too.

"'Why don't you have any daughters, at least?' said he, 'I don't say sons; that might be too much to expect.'

"'I am sure, dear king, I am very sorry,' said the queen.

"'So you ought to be,' retorted the king; 'you are not going to make a virtue of _that_, surely.'

"But he was not an ill-tempered king; and, in any matter of less moment, he would have let the queen have her own way, with all his heart. This, however, was an affair of state.

"The queen smiled.

"You must have patience with a lady, you know, dear king," said she.

"She was, indeed, a very nice queen, and heartily sorry that she could not oblige the king immediately.

"The king tried to have patience, but he succeeded very badly. It was more than he deserved, therefore, when, at last, the queen gave him a daughter--as lovely a little princess as ever cried.

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"CHAPTER II.--WON'T I, JUST?"

"The day drew near when the infant must be christened. The king wrote all the invitations with his own hand. Of course somebody was forgotten.

"Now, it does not generally matter if somebody is forgotten, but you must mind who. Unfortunately, the king forgot without intending it; and the chance fell upon the Princess Makemnoit, which was awkward. For the Princess was the king's own sister; and he ought not to have forgotten her. But she had made herself so disagreeable to the old king, their father, that he had forgot her in making his will; and so it was no wonder that her brother forgot her in writing his invitations. But poor relations don't do anything to keep you in mind of them. Why don't they? The king could not see into the garret she lived in, could he? She was a sour, spiteful creature. The wrinkles of contempt crossed the wrinkles of peevishness, and made her face as full of wrinkles as a pat of butter. If ever a king could be justified in forgetting anybody, this king was justified in forgetting his sister, even at a christening. And then she was so disgracefully poor! She looked very odd, too. Her forehead was as large as all the rest of her face, and projected over it like a precipice. When she was angry, her little eyes flashed blue. When she hated anybody, they shone yellow and green. What they looked like when she loved anybody, I do not know; for I never heard of her loving anybody but herself, and I do not think she could have managed that, if she had not somehow got used to herself. But what made it highly imprudent in the king to forget her, was--that she was awfully clever. In fact, she was a witch; and when she bewitched anybody, he very soon had enough of it; for she beat all the wicked fairies in wickedness, and all the clever ones in cleverness. She despised all the modes we read of in history, in which offended fairies and witches have taken their revenges; and therefore, after waiting and waiting in vain for an invitation, she made up her mind at last to go without one, and make the whole family miserable, like a princess and a philosopher.

"She put on her best gown, went to the palace, was kindly received by the happy monarch, who forgot that he had forgotten her, and took her place in the procession to the royal chapel. When they were all gathered about the font, she contrived to get next to it, and throw

something into the water. She maintained then a very respectful demeanour till the water was applied to the child's face. But at that moment she turned round in her place three times, and muttered the following words, loud enough for those beside her to hear:

'Light of spirit, by my charms,
Light of body, every part,
Never weary human arms--
Only crush thy parents' heart!'

"They all thought she had lost her wits, and was repeating some foolish nursery rhyme; but a shudder went through the whole of them. The baby, on the contrary, began to laugh and crow; while the nurse gave a start and a smothered cry, for she thought she was struck with paralysis: she could not feel the baby in her arms. But she clasped it tight, and said nothing.

"The mischief was done."

Here I came to a pause, for I found the reading somewhat nervous work, and had to make application to the water-bottle.

"Bravo! Mr. Smith," cried the clergyman. "A good beginning, I am sure; for I cannot see what you are driving at."

"I think I do," said Henry. "Don't you, Lizzie?"

"No, I don't," answered Mrs. Armstrong.

"One thing," said Mrs. Cathcart with a smile, not a very sweet one, but still a smile, "one thing, I must object to. That is, introducing church ceremonies into a fairy-tale."

"Why, Mrs. Cathcart," answered the clergyman, taking up the cudgels for me, "do you suppose the church to be such a cross-grained old lady, that she will not allow her children to take a few gentle liberties with their mother? She's able to stand that surely. They won't love her the less for that."

"Besides," I ventured to say, "if both church and fairy-tale belong to humanity, they may occasionally cross circles, without injury to either. They must have something in common. There is the *Fairy Queen*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, you know, Mrs. Cathcart. I can fancy the pope even telling his nephews a fairy-tale."

"Ah, the pope! I daresay."

"And not the archbishop?"

"I don't think your reasoning quite correct, Mr. Smith," said the clergyman; "and I think moreover there is a real objection to that scene. It is, that no such charm could have had any effect where holy

water was employed as the medium. In fact I doubt if the wickedness could have been wrought in a chapel at all."

"I submit," I said. "You are right. I hold up the four paws of my mind, and crave indulgence."

"In the name of the church, having vindicated her power over evil incantations, I permit you to proceed," said Mr. Armstrong, his black eyes twinkling with fun.

Mrs. Cathcart smiled, and shook her head.

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"CHAPTER III.--SHE CAN'T BE OURS.

"Her atrocious aunt had deprived the child of all her gravity. If you ask me how this was effected, I answer: In the easiest way in the world. She had only to destroy gravitation. And the princess was a philosopher, and knew all the ins and outs of the laws of gravitation as well as the ins and outs of her boot-lace. And being a witch as well, she could abrogate those laws in a moment; or at least so clog their wheels and rust their bearings, that they would not work at all. But we have more to do with what followed, than with how it was done.

"The first awkwardness that resulted from this unhappy privation was, that the moment the nurse began to float the baby up and down, she flew from her arms towards the ceiling. Happily, the resistance of the air brought her ascending career to a close within a foot of it. There she remained, horizontal as when she left her nurse's arms, kicking and laughing amazingly. The nurse in terror flew to the bell, and begged the footman who answered it, to bring up the house-steps directly. Trembling in every limb, she climbed upon the steps, and had to stand upon the very top, and reach up, before she could catch the floating tail of the baby's long clothes.

"When the strange fact came to be known, there was a terrible commotion in the palace. The occasion of its discovery by the king was naturally a repetition of the nurse's experience. Astonished that he felt no weight when the child was laid in his arms, he began to wave her up and--not down; for she slowly ascended to the ceiling as before, and there remained floating in perfect comfort and satisfaction, as was testified by her peals of tiny laughter. The king stood staring up in speechless amazement, and trembled so that his beard shook like grass in the wind. At last, turning to the queen, who was just as horror-struck as himself, he said, gasping, staring, and stammering:

"'She can't be ours, queen!'

"Now the queen was much cleverer than the king, and had begun already to suspect that 'this effect defective came by cause.'

"I am sure she is ours,' answered she. 'But we ought to have taken better care of her at the christening. People who were never invited ought not to have been present.'

"Oh, ho!' said the king, tapping his forehead with his forefinger, 'I have it all. I've found her out. Don't you see it, queen? Princess Makemnoit has bewitched her.'

"That's just what I say,' answered the queen.

"I beg your pardon, my love; I did not hear you. John! bring the steps I get on my throne with.'

"For he was a little king with a great throne, like many other kings.

"The throne-steps were brought, and set upon the dining-table, and John got upon the top of them. But he could not reach the little princess, who lay like a baby-laughter-cloud in the air, exploding continuously.

"Take the tongs, John,' said his majesty; and getting up on the table, he handed them to him.

"John could reach the baby now, and the little princess was handed down by the tongs.

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"CHAPTER IV.--WHERE IS SHE?"

"One fine summer day, a month after these her first adventures, during which time she had been very carefully watched, the princess was lying on the bed in the queen's own chamber, fast asleep. One of the windows was open, for it was noon, and the day so sultry that the little girl was wrapped in nothing less ethereal than slumber itself. The queen came into the room, and not observing that the baby was on the bed, opened another window. A frolicsome fairy wind which had been watching for a chance of mischief, rushed in at the one window, and taking its way over the bed where the child was lying, caught her up, and rolling and floating her along like a piece of flue, or a dandelion-seed, carried her with it through the opposite window, and away. The queen went down stairs, quite ignorant of the loss she had herself occasioned. When the nurse returned, she supposed that her majesty had carried her off, and, dreading a scolding, delayed making inquiry about her. But hearing nothing, she grew uneasy, and went at length to the queen's boudoir, where she found her majesty.

"Please your majesty, shall I take the baby?' said she.

"Where is she?' asked the queen.

"Please forgive me. I know it was wrong.'

"What do you mean?' said the queen, looking grave.

"Oh! don't frighten me, your majesty!' exclaimed the nurse, clapping her hands.

"The queen saw that something was amiss, and fell down in a faint. The nurse rushed about the palace, screaming, 'My baby! my baby!'

"Every one ran to the queen's room. But the queen could give no orders. They soon found out, however, that the princess was missing, and in a moment the palace was like a bee-hive in a garden. But in a minute more the queen was brought to herself by a great shout and a clapping of hands. They had found the princess fast asleep under a rose-bush, to which the elvish little wind-puff had carried her, finishing its mischief by shaking a shower of red rose-leaves all over the little white sleeper. Startled by the noise the servants made, she woke; and furious with glee, scattered the rose-leaves in all directions, like a shower of spray in the sunset.

"She was watched more carefully after this, no doubt; yet it would be endless to relate all the odd incidents resulting from this peculiarity of the young princess. But there never was a baby in a house, not to say a palace, that kept a household in such constant good humour, at least below stairs. If it was not easy for her nurses to hold her, certainly she did not make their arms ache. And she was so nice to play at ball with! There was positively no danger of letting her fall. You might throw her down, or knock her down, or push her down, but you couldn't _let_ her down. It is true, you might let her fly into the fire or the coal-hole, or through the window; but none of these accidents had happened as yet. If you heard peals of laughter resounding from some unknown region, you might be sure enough of the cause. Going down into the kitchen, or _the room_, you would find Jane and Thomas, and Robert and Susan, all and sum, playing at ball with the little princess. She was the ball herself, and did not enjoy it the less for that. Away she went, flying from one to another, screeching with laughter. And the servants loved the ball itself better even than the game. But they had to take care how they threw her, for if she received an upward direction, she would never come down without being fetched.

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"CHAPTER V.--WHAT IS TO BE DONE?"

"But above stairs it was different. One day, for instance, after breakfast, the king went into his counting-house, and counted out his money. The operation gave him no pleasure.

"To think,' said he to himself, 'that every one of these gold sovereigns weighs a quarter of an ounce, and my real, live, flesh-and-blood princess weighs nothing at all!'

"And he hated his gold sovereigns, as they lay with a broad smile of self-satisfaction all over their yellow faces.

"The queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey. But at the second mouthful, she burst out crying, and could not swallow it. The king heard her sobbing. Glad of anybody, but especially of his queen, to quarrel with, he clashed his gold sovereigns into his money-box, clapped his crown on his head, and rushed into the parlour.

"What is all this about?" exclaimed he. "What are you crying for, queen?"

"I can't eat it," said the queen, looking ruefully at the honey-pot.

"No wonder!" retorted the king. "You've just eaten your breakfast--two turkey eggs, and three anchovies."

"Oh! that's not it!" sobbed her majesty. "It's my child, my child!"

"Well, what's the matter with your child? She's neither up the chimney nor down the draw-well. Just hear her laughing." Yet the king could not help a sigh, which he tried to turn into a cough, saying,

"It is a good thing to be light-hearted, I am sure, whether she be ours or not."

"It is a bad thing to be light-headed," answered the queen, looking with prophetic soul, far into the future.

"'Tis a good thing to be light-handed," said the king.

"'Tis a bad thing to be light-fingered," answered the queen.

"'Tis a good thing to be light-footed," said the king.

"'Tis a bad thing," began the queen; but the king interrupted her.

"In fact," said he, with the tone of one who concludes an argument in which he has had only imaginary opponents, and in which, therefore, he has come off triumphant--"in fact, it is a good thing altogether to be light-bodied."

"But it is a bad thing altogether to be light-minded," retorted the queen, who was beginning to lose her temper.

"This last answer quite discomfited his majesty, who turned on his heel, and betook himself to his counting-house again. But he was not halfway towards it, when the voice of his queen overtook him:

"And it's a bad thing to be light-haired," screamed she, determined to have more last words, now that her spirit was roused.

"The queen's hair was black as night; and the king's had been, and his

daughter's was, golden as morning. But it was not this reflection on his hair that troubled him; it was the double use of the word *_light_*. For the king hated all witticisms, and punning especially. And besides he could not tell whether the queen meant *light-_haired_* or *light-_heired_*; for why might she not aspirate her vowels when she was ex-asperated herself?"

"Now, really," interrupted the clergyman, "I must protest. Mr. Smith, you bury us under an avalanche of puns, and, I must say, not very good ones. Now, the story, though humorous, is not of the kind to admit of such fanciful embellishment. It reminds one rather of a burlesque at a theatre--the lowest thing, from a literary point of view, to be found."

"I submit," was all I could answer; for I feared that he was right. The passage, as it now stands, is not nearly so bad as it was then, though, I confess, it is still bad enough.

"I think," said Mrs. Armstrong, "since criticism is the order of the evening, and Mr. Smith is so kind as not to mind it, that he makes the king and queen too silly. It takes away from the reality."

"Right too, my dear madam," I answered.

"The reality of a fairy-tale?" said Mrs. Cathcart, as if asking a question of herself.

"But will you grant me the justice," said I, "to temper your judgments of me, if not of my story, by remembering that this is the first thing of the sort I ever attempted?"

"I tell you what," said the doctor, "it's very easy to criticise, but none of you could have written it yourselves."

"Of course not, for my part," said the clergyman.

Silence followed; and I resumed.

"He turned upon his other heel, and rejoined her. She looked angry still, because she knew that she was guilty, or, what was much the same, knew that he thought so.

"'My dear queen,' said he, 'duplicity of any sort is exceedingly objectionable between married people, of any rank, not to say kings and queens; and the most objectionable form it can assume is that of punning.'

"'There!' said the queen, 'I never made a jest, but I broke it in the making. I am the most unfortunate woman in the world!'

"She looked so rueful, that the king took her in his arms; and they sat down to consult.

"Can you bear this?' said the king.

"No, I can't,' said the queen.

"Well, what's to be done?' said the king.

"I'm sure I don't know,' said the queen. 'But might you not try an apology?'

"To my old sister, I suppose you mean?' said the king.

"Yes,' said the queen.

"Well, I don't mind,' said the king.

"So he went the next morning to the garret of the princess, and, making a very humble apology, begged her to undo the spell. But the princess declared, with a very grave face, that she knew nothing at all about it. Her eyes, however, shone pink, which was a sign that she was happy. She advised the king and queen to have patience, and to mend their ways. The king returned disconsolate.

The queen tried to comfort him.

"We will wait till she is older. She may then be able to suggest something herself. She will know at least how she feels, and explain things to us.'

"But what if she should marry!' exclaimed the king, in sudden consternation at the idea.

"Well, what of that?' rejoined the queen.

"Just think! If she were to have any children! In the course of a hundred years, the air might be as full of floating children as of gossamers in autumn.'

"That is no business of ours,' replied the queen. 'Besides, by that time, they will have learned to take care of themselves.'

"A sigh was the king's only answer.

"He would have consulted the court physicians; but he was afraid they would try experiments upon her.

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"CHAPTER VI--SHE LAUGHS TOO MUCH.

"Meantime, notwithstanding awkward occurrences, and griefs that she brought her parents to, the little princess laughed and grew--not fat, but plump and tall. She reached the age of seventeen, without having fallen into, any worse scrape than a chimney; by rescuing her from

which, a little bird-nesting urchin got fame and a black face. Nor, thoughtless as she was, had she committed anything worse than laughter at everybody and everything, that came in her way. When she heard that General Clanrunfort was cut to pieces with all his forces, she laughed; when she heard that the enemy was on his way to besiege her papa's capital, she laughed hugely; but when she heard that the city would most likely be abandoned to the mercy of the enemy's soldiery--why, then, she laughed immoderately. These were merely reports invented for the sake of experiment. But she never could be brought to see the serious side of anything. When her mother cried, she said:

"What queer faces mamma makes! And she squeezes water out of her cheeks! Funny mama!"

"And when her papa stormed at her, she laughed, and danced round and round him, clapping her hands, and crying:

"Do it again, papa. Do it again! It's such fun! Dear, funny papa!"

"And if he tried to catch her, she glided from him in an instant, not in the least afraid of him, but thinking, it part of the game not to be caught. With one push of her foot, she would be floating in the air above his head; or she would go dancing backwards and forwards and sideways, like a great butterfly. It happened several times, when her father and mother were holding a consultation about her in private, that they were interrupted by vainly repressed outbursts of laughter over their heads; and looking up with indignation, saw her floating at full length in the air above them, whence she regarded them with the most comical appreciation of the position.

"One day an awkward accident happened. The princess had come out upon the lawn with one of her attendants, who held her by the hand. Spying her father at the other side of the lawn, she snatched her hand from the maid's, and sped across to him. Now, when she wanted to run alone, her custom was to catch up a stone in each hand, so that she might come down again after a bound. Whatever she wore as part of her attire had no effect in this way: even gold, when it thus became as it were a part of herself, lost all its weight for the time. But whatever she only held in her hands, retained its downward tendency. On this occasion she could see nothing to catch up, but a huge toad, that was walking across the lawn as if he had a hundred years to do it in. Not knowing what disgust meant, for this was one of her peculiarities, she snatched up the toad, and bounded away. She had almost reached her father, and he was holding out his arms to receive her, and take from her lips the kiss which hovered on them like a butterfly on a rosebud, when a puff of wind blew her aside into the arms of a young page, who had just been receiving a message from his majesty. Now it was no great peculiarity in the princess that, once she was set a-going, it always cost her time and trouble to check herself. On this occasion there was no time. She must kiss--and she kissed the page. She did not mind it much; for she had no shyness in her composition; and she knew, besides, that she could not help it. So she only laughed, like a

musical-box. The poor page fared the worst. For the princess, trying to correct the unfortunate tendency of the kiss, put out her hands to keep her off the page; so that, along with the kiss, he received, on the other cheek, a slap with the huge black toad, which she poked right into his eye. He tried to laugh, too, but it resulted in a very odd contortion of countenance, which showed that there was no danger of his pluming himself on the kiss. Indeed it is not safe to be kissed by princesses. As for the king, his dignity was greatly hurt, and he did not speak to the page for a whole month.

"I may here remark that it was very amusing to see her run, if her mode of progression could properly be called running. For first she would make a bound; then, having alighted, she would run a few steps, and make another bound. Sometimes she would fancy she had reached the ground before she actually had, and her feet would go backwards and forwards, running upon nothing at all, like those of a chicken on its back. Then she would laugh like the very spirit of fun; only in her laugh there was something missing. What it was, I find myself unable to describe. I think it was a certain tone, depending upon the possibility of sorrow--_morbidezza_, perhaps. She never smiled."

"I am not sure about your physics, Mr. Smith," said the doctor. "If she had no gravity, no amount of muscular propulsion could have given her any momentum. And again, if she had no gravity, she must inevitably have ascended beyond the regions of the atmosphere."

"Bottle your philosophy, Harry, with the rest of your physics," said the clergyman, laughing. "Don't you see that she must have had some weight, only it wasn't worth mentioning, being no greater than the ordinary weight of the atmosphere. Besides, you know very well that a law of nature could not be destroyed. Therefore, it was only witchcraft, you know; and the laws of that remain to be discovered--at least so far as my knowledge goes.--Mr. Smith, you have gone in for a fairy-tale; and if I were you, I would claim the immunities of Fairyland."

"So I do," I responded fiercely, and went on.

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"CHAPTER VII.--TRY METAPHYSICS.

"After a long avoidance of the painful subject, the king and queen resolved to hold a counsel of three upon it; and so they sent for the princess. In she came, sliding and flitting and gliding from one piece of furniture to another, and put herself at last in an armchair, in a sitting posture. Whether she could be said _to sit_, seeing she received no support from the seat of the chair, I do not pretend to determine.

"'My dear child,' said the king, 'you must be aware that you are not exactly like other people.'

"Oh, you dear funny papa! I have got a nose and two eyes and all the rest. So have you. So has mamma.'

"Now be serious, my dear, for once,' said the queen.

"No, thank you, mamma; I had rather not.'

"Would you not like to be able to walk like other people?' said the king.

"No indeed, I should think not. You only crawl. You are such slow coaches!'

"How do you feel, my child?' he resumed, after a pause of discomfiture.

"Quite well, thank you.'

"I mean, what do you feel like?'

"Like nothing at all, that I know of.'

"You must feel like something.'

"I feel like a princess with such a funny papa, and such a dear pet of a queen-mamma!'

"Now really!' began the queen; but the princess interrupted her.

"Oh! yes,' she added, 'I remember. I have a curious feeling sometimes, as if I were the only person that had any sense in the whole world.'

"She had been trying to behave herself with dignity; but now she burst into a violent fit of laughter, threw herself backwards over the chair, and went rolling about the floor in an ecstasy of enjoyment. The king picked her up easier than one does a down quilt, and replaced her in her former relation to the chair. The exact preposition expressing the relation I do not happen to know.

"Is there nothing you wish for?' resumed the king, who had learned by this time that it was quite useless to be angry with her.

"O you dear papa!--yes,' answered she.

"What is it, my darling?'

"I have been longing for it--oh, such a time! Ever since last night.'

"Tell me what it is.'

"Will you promise to let me have it?'

"The king was on the point of saying _yes_; but the wiser queen checked him with a single motion of her head.

"Tell me what it is first,' said he.

"No, no. Promise first.'

"I dare not. What is it?'

"Mind I hold you to your promise.--It is--to be tied to the end of a string--a very long string indeed, and be flown like a kite. Oh, such fun! I would rain rose-water, and hail sugar-plums, and snow whipt-cream, and, and, and--'

"A fit of laughing checked her; and she would have been off again, over the floor, had not the king started up and caught her just in time. Seeing that nothing but talk could be got out of her, he rang the bell, and sent her away with two of her ladies-in-waiting.

"Now, queen,' he said, turning to her majesty, 'what _is_ to be done?'

"There is but one thing left,' answered she. 'Let us consult the college of Metaphysicians.'

"Bravo!' cried the king; 'we will.'

"Now at the head of this college were two very wise Chinese philosophers--by name, Hum-Drum, and Kopy-Keck. For them the king sent; and straightway they came. In a long speech, he communicated to them what they knew very well already--as who did not?--namely, the peculiar condition of his daughter in relation to the globe on which she dwelt; and requested them to consult together as to what might be the cause and probable cure of her _infirmity_. The king laid stress upon the word, but failed to discover his own pun. The queen laughed; but Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck heard with humility and retired in silence. Their consultation consisted chiefly in propounding and supporting, for the thousandth time, each his favourite theories. For the condition of the princess afforded delightful scope for the discussion of every question arising from the division of thought--in fact of all the Metaphysics of the Chinese Empire. But it is only justice to say that they did not altogether neglect the discussion of the practical question, _what was to be done_.

"Hum-Drum was a Materialist, and Kopy-Keck was a Spiritualist. The former was slow and sententious; the latter was quick and flighty; the latter had generally the first word; the former the last.

"I assert my former assertion,' began Kopy-Keck, with a plunge.

'There is not a fault in the princess, body or soul; only they are wrong put together. Listen to me now, Hum-Drum, and I will tell you in brief what I think. Don't speak. Don't answer me. I won't hear you till I have done.--At that decisive moment, when souls seek their

appointed habitations, two eager souls met, struck, rebounded, lost their way, and arrived each at the wrong place. The soul of the princess was one of those, and she went far astray. She does not belong by rights to this world at all, but to some other planet, probably Mercury. Her proclivity to her true sphere destroys all the natural influence which this orb would otherwise possess over her corporeal frame. She cares for nothing here. There is no relation between her and this world.

"She must therefore be taught, by the sternest compulsion, to take an interest in the earth as the earth. She must study every department of its history--its animal history; its vegetable history; its mineral history; its social history; its moral history; its political history; its scientific history; its literary history; its musical history; its artistical history; above all, its metaphysical history. She must begin with the Chinese Dynasty, and end with Japan. But first of all she must study Geology, and especially the history of the extinct races of animals--their natures, their habits, their loves, their hates, their revenges. She must----'

"Hold, h-o-o-old!' roared Hum-Drum. 'It is certainly my turn now. My rooted and insubvertible conviction is that the causes of the anomalies evident in the princess's condition are strictly and solely physical. But that is only tantamount to acknowledging that they exist. Hear my opinion.--From some cause or other, of no importance to our inquiry, the motion of her heart has been reversed. That remarkable combination of the suction and the force pump, works the wrong way--I mean in the case of the unfortunate princess: it draws in where it should force out, and forces out where it should draw in. The offices of the auricles and the ventricles are subverted. The blood is sent forth by the veins, and returns by the arteries. Consequently it is running the wrong way through all her corporeal organism--lungs and all. Is it then all mysterious, seeing that such is the case, that on the other particular of gravitation as well, she should differ from normal humanity? My proposal for the cure is this:

"Phlebotomize until she is reduced to the last point of safety. Let it be effected, if necessary, in a warm bath. When she is reduced to a state of perfect asphyxy, apply a ligature to the left ankle, drawing it as tight as the bone will bear. Apply, at the same moment, another of equal tension around the right wrist. By means of plates constructed for the purpose, place the other foot and hand under the receivers of two air-pumps. Exhaust the receivers. Exhibit a pint of French brandy, and await the result.'

"Which would presently arrive in the form of grim Death,' said Kopy-Keck.

"If it should, she would yet die in doing our duty,' retorted Hum-Drum.

"But their Majesties had too much tenderness for their volatile offspring to subject her to either of the schemes of the equally

unscrupulous philosophers. Indeed the most complete knowledge of the laws of nature would have been unserviceable in her case; for it was impossible to classify her. She was a fifth imponderable body, sharing all the other properties of the ponderable.

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"CHAPTER VIII.--TRY A DROP OF WATER.

"Perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been falling in love. But how a princess who had no gravity at all, could fall into anything, is a difficulty--perhaps _the_ difficulty. As for her own feelings on the subject, she did not even know that there was such a bee-hive of honey and stings to be fallen into. And now I come to mention another curious fact about her.

"The palace was built on the shore of the loveliest lake in the world; and the princess loved this lake more than father or mother. The root of this preference no doubt, although the princess did not recognize it as such--was, that, the moment she got into it, she recovered the natural right of which she had been so wickedly deprived--namely, gravity. Whether this was owing to the fact that water had been employed as the means of conveying the injury, I do not know. But it is certain that she could swim and dive like the duck that her old nurse said she was. The way that this alleviation of her misfortune was discovered, was as follows. One summer evening, during the carnival of the country, she had been taken upon the lake, by the king and queen, in the royal barge. They were accompanied by many of the courtiers in a fleet of little boats. In the middle of the lake she wanted to get into the lord chancellor's barge, for his daughter, who was a great favourite with her, was in it with her father. The old king rarely condescended to make light of his misfortune; but on this occasion he happened to be in a particularly good humour; and, as the barges approached each other, he caught up the princess to throw her into the chancellor's barge. He lost his balance, however, and, dropping into the bottom of the barge, lost his hold of his daughter; not however before imparting to her the downward tendency of his own person, though in a somewhat different direction; for, as the king fell into the boat, she fell into the water. With a burst of delighted laughter, she disappeared in the lake. A cry of horror ascended from the boats. They had never seen the princess go down before. Half the men were under water in a moment; but they had all, one after another, come up to the surface again for breath, when--tinkle, tinkle, babble and gush! came the princess's laugh over the water from far away. There she was, swimming like a swan. Nor would she come out for king or queen, chancellor or daughter. But though she was obstinate, she seemed more sedate than usual. Perhaps that was because a great pleasure spoils laughing. After this, the passion of her life was to get into the water, and she was always the better behaved and the more beautiful the more she had of it. Summer and winter it was all the same; only she could not stay quite so long in the water, when they had to break the ice to let her in. Any day, from morning till evening, she might be descried--a streak of white in the blue

water--lying as still as the shadow of a cloud, or shooting along like a dolphin; disappearing, and coming up again far off, just where one did not expect her. She would have been in the lake of a night too, if she could have had her way; for the balcony of her window overhung a deep pool in it; and through a shallow reedy passage she could have swum out into the wide wet water, and no one would have been any the wiser. Indeed when she happened to wake in the moonlight, she could hardly resist the temptation. But there was the sad difficulty of getting into it. She had as great a dread of the air as some children have of the water. For the slightest gust of wind would blow her away; and a gust might arise in the stillest moment. And if she gave herself a push towards the water and just failed of reaching it, her situation would be dreadfully awkward, irrespective of the wind; for at best there she would have to remain, suspended in her nightgown, till she was seen and angled for by somebody from the window.

"Oh! if I had my gravity,' thought she contemplating the water, 'I would flash off this balcony like a long white sea-bird, head-long into the darling wetness. Heigh-ho!'

"This was the only consideration that made her wish to be like other people.

"Another reason for being fond of the water was that in it alone she enjoyed any freedom. For she could not walk out without a cortege, consisting in part of a troop of light horse, for fear of the liberties which the wind might take with her. And the king grew more apprehensive with increasing years, till at last he would not allow her to walk abroad without some twenty silken cords fastened to as many parts of her dress, and held by twenty noble-men. Of course horseback was out of the question. But she bade good-bye to all this ceremony when she got into the water. So remarkable were its effects upon her, especially in restoring her for the time to the ordinary human gravity, that, strange to say, Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck agreed in recommending the king to bury her alive for three years; in the hope that, as the water did her so much good, the earth would do her yet more. But the king had some vulgar prejudices against the experiment, and would not give his consent. Foiled in this, they yet agreed in another recommendation; which, seeing that the one imported his opinions from China and the other from Thibet, was very remarkable indeed. They said that, if water of external origin and application could be so efficacious, water from a deeper source might work a perfect cure; in short, that, if the poor afflicted princess could by any means be made to cry, she might recover her lost gravity.

"But how was this to be brought about? Therein lay all the difficulty. The philosophers were not wise enough for this. To make the princess cry was as impossible as to make her weigh. They sent for a professional beggar; commanded him to prepare his most touching oracle of woe; helped him, out of the court charade-box, to whatever he wanted for dressing up, and promised great rewards in the event of his success. But it was all in vain. She listened to the mendicant artist's story, and gazed at his marvellous make-up, till she could

contain herself no longer, and went into the most undignified contortions for relief, shrieking, positively screeching with laughter.

"When she had a little recovered herself, she ordered her attendants to drive him away, and not give him a single copper; whereupon his look of mortified discomfiture wrought her punishment and his revenge, for it sent her into violent hysterics, from which she was with difficulty recovered.

"But so anxious was the king that the suggestion should have a fair trial, that he put himself in a rage one day, and, rushing up to her room, gave her an awful whipping. But not a tear would flow. She looked grave, and her laughing sounded uncommonly like screaming--that was all. The good old tyrant, though he put on his best gold spectacles to look, could not discover the smallest cloud in the serene blue of her eyes.

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"CHAPTER IX.--PUT ME IN AGAIN.

"It must have been about this time that the son of a king, who lived a thousand miles from Lagobel, set out to look for the daughter of a queen. He travelled far and wide, but as sure as he found a princess, he found some fault with her. Of course he could not marry a mere woman, however beautiful, and there was no princess to be found worthy of him. Whether the prince was so near perfection that he had a right to demand perfection itself, I cannot pretend to say. All I know is that he was a fine, handsome, brave, generous, well-bred and well-behaved youth, as all princes are.

"In his wanderings he had come across some reports about our princess; but as everybody said she was bewitched, he never dreamed that she could bewitch him. For what indeed could a prince do with a princess that had lost her gravity? Who could tell what she might not lose next? She might lose her visibility; or her tangibility; or, in short, the power of making impressions upon the radical sensorium; so that he should never be able to tell whether she was dead or alive. Of course he made no further inquiries about her.

"One day he lost sight of his retinue in a great forest. These forests are very useful in delivering princes from their courtiers, like a sieve that keeps back the bran. Then the princes get away to follow their fortunes. In this they have the advantage of the princesses, who are forced to marry before they have had a bit of fun. I wish our princesses got lost in a forest sometimes.

"One lovely evening, after wandering about for many days, he found that he was approaching the outskirts of this forest; for the trees had got so thin that he could see the sunset through them; and he soon came upon a kind of heath. Next he came upon signs of human neighbourhood; but by this time it was getting late, and there was

nobody in the fields to direct him.

"After travelling for another hour, his horse, quite worn out with long labour and lack of food, fell, and was unable to rise again. So he continued his journey on foot. At length he entered another wood--not a wild forest, but a civilized wood, through which a footpath led him to the side of a lake. Along this path the prince pursued his way through the gathering darkness. Suddenly he paused, and listened. Strange sounds came across the water. It was, in fact, the princess laughing. Now, there was something odd in her laugh, as I have already hinted; for the hatching of a real hearty laugh, requires the incubation of gravity; and, perhaps, this was how the prince mistook the laughter for screaming. Looking over the lake, he saw something white in the water; and, in an instant, he had torn off his tunic, kicked off his sandals, and plunged in. He soon reached the white object, and found that it was a woman. There was not light enough to show that she was a princess, but quite enough to show that she was a lady, for it does not want much light to see that.

"Now, I cannot tell how it came about;--whether she pretended to be drowning, or whether he frightened her, or caught her so as to embarrass her; but certainly he brought her to shore in a fashion ignominious to a swimmer, and more nearly drowned than she had ever expected to be; for the water had got into her throat as often as she had tried to speak.

"At the place to which he bore her, the bank was only a foot or two above the water; so he gave her a strong lift out of the water, to lay her on the bank. But, her gravitation ceasing the moment she left the water, away she went, up into the air, scolding and screaming:

"'You naughty, _naughty_, NAUGHTY, NAUGHTY man!'

"No one had ever succeeded in putting her into a passion before.--When the prince saw her ascend, he thought he must have been bewitched, and have mistaken a great swan for a lady. But the princess caught hold of the topmost cone upon a lofty fir. This came off; but she caught at another; and, in fact, stopped herself by gathering cones, dropping them as the stalks gave way. The prince, meantime, stood in the water, forgetting to get out. But the princess disappearing, he scrambled on shore, and went in the direction of the tree. He found her climbing down one of the branches, towards the stem. But in the darkness of the wood, the prince continued in some bewilderment as to what the phenomenon could be; until, reaching the ground, and seeing him standing there, she caught hold of him, and said:

"'I'll tell papa.'

"'Oh, no, you won't!' rejoined the prince.

"'Yes, I will,' she persisted. 'What business had you to pull me down out of the water, and throw me to the bottom of the air? I never did you any harm.'

"I am sure I did not mean to hurt you.'

"I don't believe you have any brains; and that is a worse loss than your wretched gravity. I pity you.'

"The prince now saw that he had come upon the bewitched princess, and had already offended her. Before he could think what to say next, the princess, giving a stamp with her foot that would have sent her aloft again, but for the hold she had of his arm, said angrily:

"Put me up directly.'

"Put you up where, you beauty?' asked the prince. "He had fallen in love with her, almost, already; for her anger made her more charming than anyone else had ever beheld her; and, as far as he could see, which certainly was not far, she had not a single fault about her, except, of course, that she had no gravity. A prince, however, must be incapable of judging of a princess by weight. The loveliness of a foot, for instance, is hardly to be estimated by the depth of the impression it can make in mud!

"Put you up where, you beauty?' said the prince.

"In the water, you stupid!' answered the princess.

"Come, then,' said the prince.

"The condition of her dress, increasing her usual difficulty in walking, compelled her to cling to him; and he could hardly persuade himself that he was not in a delightful dream, notwithstanding the torrent of musical abuse with which she overwhelmed him. The prince being in no hurry, they reached the lake at quite another part, where the bank was twenty-five feet high at least. When they stood at the edge, the prince, turning towards the princess, said:

"How am I to put you in?'

"That is your business,' she answered, quite snappishly. 'You took me out--put me in again.'

"Very well,' said the prince; and, catching her up in his arms, he sprang with her from the rock. The princess had just time to give one delighted shriek of laughter before the water closed over them. When they came to the surface, the princess, for a moment or two, could not even laugh, for she had gone down with such a rush, that it was with difficulty that she recovered her breath. The moment they reached the surface--

"How do you like falling in?' said the prince.

"After a few efforts, the princess panted out:

"Is that what you call _falling in_?"

"Yes," answered the prince, "I should think it a very tolerable specimen."

"It seemed to me like going up," rejoined she.

"My feeling was certainly one of elevation, too," the prince conceded.

"The princess did not appear to understand him, for she retorted his first question:

"How do _you_ like falling in?"

"Beyond everything," answered he; "for I have fallen in with the only perfect creature I ever saw."

"No more of that: I am tired of it," said the princess.

"Perhaps she shared her father's aversion to punning.

"Don't you like falling in, then?" said the prince.

"It is the most delightful fun I ever had in my life," answered she. "I never fell before. I wish I could learn. To think I am the only person in my father's kingdom that can't fall!"

"Here the poor princess looked almost sad.

"I shall be most happy to fall in with you any time you like," said the prince, devotedly.

"Thank you. I don't know. Perhaps it would not be proper. But I don't care. At all events, as we have fallen in, let us have a swim together."

"With all my heart," said the prince.

"And away they went, swimming, and diving, and floating, until at last they heard cries along the shore, and saw lights glancing in all directions. It was now quite late, and there was no moon.

"I must go home," said the princess. "I am very sorry, for this is delightful."

"So am I," responded the prince. "But I am glad I haven't a home to go to--at least, I don't exactly know where it is."

"I wish I hadn't one either," rejoined the princess; "it is so stupid! I have a great mind," she continued, "to play them all a trick. Why couldn't they leave me alone? They won't trust me in the lake for a single night! You see where that green light is burning?"

That is the window of my room. Now if you would just swim there with me very quietly, and when we are all but under the balcony, give me such a push--_up_ you call it--as you did a little while ago, I should be able to catch hold of the balcony, and get in at the window; and then they may look for me till to-morrow morning!

"With more obedience than pleasure,' said the prince, gallantly; and away they swam, very gently.

"Will you be in the lake to-morrow-night?' the prince ventured to ask.

"To be sure I will. I don't think so. Perhaps,'--was the princess's somewhat strange answer.

"But the prince was intelligent enough not to press her further; and merely whispered, as he gave her the parting lift: 'Don't tell.' The only answer the princess returned was a roguish look. She was already a yard above his head. The look seemed to say: 'Never fear. It is too good fun to spoil that way.'

"So perfectly like other people had she been in the water, that even yet the prince could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw her ascend slowly, grasp the balcony, and disappear through the window. He turned, almost expecting to see her still by his side. But he was alone in the water. So he swam away quietly, and watched the lights roving about the shore for hours after the princess was safe in her chamber. As soon as they disappeared, he landed in search of his tunic and sword, and, after some trouble, found them again. Then he made the best of his way round the lake to the other side. There the wood was wilder, and the shore steeper--rising more immediately towards the mountains which surrounded the lake on all sides, and kept sending it messages of silvery streams from morning to night, and all night long. He soon found a spot whence he could see the green light in the princess's room, and where, even in the broad daylight, he would be in no danger of being discovered from the opposite shore. It was a sort of cave in the rock, where he provided himself a bed of withered leaves, and lay down too tired for hunger to keep him awake. All night long he dreamed that he was swimming with the princess."

"All that is very improper--to my mind," said Mrs. Cathcart. And she glanced towards the place where Percy had deposited himself, as if she were afraid of her boy's morals.

But if she was anxious on that score, her fears must have been dispersed the same moment by an indubitable snore from the youth, who was in his favourite position--lying at full length on a couch.

"You must remember all this is in Fairyland, aunt," said Adela, with a smile. "Nobody does what papa and mamma would not like here. We must not judge the people in fairy tales by precisely the same conventionalities we have. They must be good after their own fashion."

"Conventionalities! Humph!" said Mrs. Cathcart.

"Besides, I don't think the princess was quite accountable," said I.

"You should have made her so, then," rejoined my critic.

"Oh! wait a little, madam," I replied.

"I think," said the clergyman, "that Miss Cathcart's defence is very tolerably sufficient; and, in my character of Master of the Ceremonies, I order Mr. Smith to proceed."

I made haste to do so, before Mrs. Cathcart should open a new battery.

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"CHAPTER X.--LOOK AT THE MOON.

"Early the next morning, the prince set out to look for something to eat, which he soon found at a forester's hut, where for many following days he was supplied with all that a brave prince could consider necessary. And having plenty to keep him alive for the present, he would not think of wants not yet in existence. Whenever Care intruded, this prince always bowed him out in the most princely manner.

"When he returned from his breakfast to his watch-cave, he saw the princess already floating about in the lake, attended by the king and queen--whom he knew by their crowns--and a great company in lovely little boats, with canopies of all the colours of the rainbow, and flags and streamers of a great many more. It was a very bright day, and soon the prince, burned up with the heat, began to long for the water and the cool princess. But he had to endure till the twilight; for the boats had provisions on board, and it was not till the sun went down, that the gay party began to vanish. Boat after boat drew away to the shore, following that of the king and queen, till only one, apparently the princess's own boat, remained. But she did not want to go home even yet, and the prince thought he saw her order the boat to the shore without her. At all events, it rowed away; and now, of all the radiant company, only one white speck remained. Then the prince began to sing.

"And this was what he sang:

"Lady fair,
Swan-white,
Lift thine eyes,
Banish night
By the might
Of thine eyes.

Snowy arms,
Oars of snow,
Oar her hither,

Plashing low
Soft and slow,
Oar her hither.

Stream behind her
O'er the lake,
Radiant whiteness!
In her wake
Following, following for her sake,
Radiant whiteness!

Cling about her,
Waters blue;
Part not from her,
But renew
Cold and true
Kisses round her.

Lap me round,
Waters sad
That have left her;
Make me glad,
For ye had
Kissed her ere ye left her.'

"Before he had finished his song, the princess was just under the place where he sat, and looking up to find him. Her ears had led her truly.

"'Would you like a fall, princess?' said the prince, looking down.

"'Ah! there you are! Yes, if you please, prince,' said the princess, looking up.

"'How do you know I am a prince, princess?' said the prince.

"'Because you are a very nice young man, prince,' said the princess.

"'Come up then, princess.'

"'Fetch me, prince.'

"The prince took off his scarf, then his sword-belt, then his tunic, and tied them all together, and let them down. But the line was far too short. He unwound his turban, and added it to the rest, when it was all but long enough; and his purse completed it. The princess just managed to lay hold of the knot of money, and was beside him in a moment. This rock was much higher than the other, and the splash and the dive were tremendous. The princess was in ecstasies of delight, and their swim was delicious.

"Night after night they met, and swam about in the dark clear lake; where such was the prince's delight, that (whether the princess's way

of looking at things infected him, or he was actually getting light-headed,) he often fancied that he was swimming in the sky instead of the lake. But when he talked about being in heaven, the princess laughed at him dreadfully.

"When the moon came, she brought them fresh pleasure. Everything looked strange and new in her light, with an old, withered, yet unfading newness. When the moon was nearly full, one of their great delights was, to dive deep in the water, and then, turning round, look up through it at the great blot of light close above them, shimmering and trembling and wavering, spreading and contracting, seeming to melt away, and again grow solid. Then they would shoot up through it; and lo! there was the moon, far off, clear and steady and cold, and very lovely, at the bottom of a deeper and bluer lake than theirs, as the princess said.

"The prince soon found out that while in the water the princess was very like other people. And besides this, she was not so forward in her questions, or pert in her replies at sea as on shore. Neither did she laugh so much; and when she did laugh, it was more gently. She seemed altogether more modest and maidenly in the water than out of it. But when the prince, who had really fallen in love when he fell in the lake, began to talk to her about love, she always turned her head towards him and laughed. After a while she began to look puzzled, as if she were trying to understand what he meant, but could not--revealing a notion that he meant something. But as soon as ever she left the lake, she was so altered, that the prince said to himself: 'If I marry her, I see no help for it; we must turn merman and mermaid, and go out to sea at once.'

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"CHAPTER XI.--HISS!

"The princess's pleasure in the lake had grown to a passion, and she could scarcely bear to be out of it for an hour. Imagine then her consternation, when, diving with the prince one night, a sudden suspicion seized her, that the lake was not so deep as it used to be. The prince could not imagine what had happened. She shot to the surface, and, without a word, swam at full speed towards the higher side of the lake. He followed, begging to know if she was ill, or what was the matter. She never turned her head, or took the smallest notice of his question. Arrived at the shore, she coasted the rocks, with minute inspection. But she was not able to come to a conclusion, for the moon was very small, and so she could not see well. She turned therefore and swam home, without saying a word to explain her conduct to the prince, of whose presence she seemed no longer conscious. He withdrew to his cave, in great perplexity and distress.

"Next day she made many observations, which, alas! strengthened her fears. She saw that the banks were too dry; and that the grass on the shore, and the trailing plants on the rocks, were withering away. She caused marks to be made along the borders, and examined them, day

after day, in all directions of the wind; till at last the horrible idea became a certain fact--that the surface of the lake was slowly sinking.

"The poor princess nearly went out of the little mind she had. It was awful to her, to see the lake which she loved more than any living thing, lie dying before her eyes. It sank away, slowly vanishing. The tops of rocks that had never been seen before, began to appear far down in the clear water. Before long, they were dry in the sun. It was fearful to think of the mud that would lie baking and festering, full of lovely creatures dying, and ugly creatures coming to life, like the unmaking of a world. And how hot the sun would be without any lake! She could not bear to swim in it, and began to pine away. Her life seemed bound up with it; and ever as the lake sank, she pined. People said she would not live an hour after the lake was gone.--But she never cried.

"Proclamation was made to all the kingdom, that whosoever should discover the cause of the lake's decrease, would be rewarded after a princely fashion. Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck applied themselves to their physics and metaphysics; but in vain. No one came forward to suggest a cause.

"Now the fact was, that the old princess was at the root of the mischief. When she heard that her niece found more pleasure in the water, than any one else had out of it, she went into a rage, and cursed herself for her want of foresight.

"'But,' said she, 'I will soon set all right. The king and the people shall die of thirst; their brains shall boil and frizzle in their skulls, before I shall lose my revenge.'

"And she laughed a ferocious laugh, that made the hairs on the back of her black cat stand erect with terror.

"Then she went to an old chest in the room, and opening it, took out what looked like a piece of dried sea-weed. This she threw into a tub of water. Then she threw some powder into the water, and stirred it with her bare arm, muttering over it words of hideous sound, and yet more hideous import. Then she set the tub aside, and took from the chest a huge bunch of a hundred rusty keys, that clattered in her shaking hands. Then she sat down and proceeded to oil them all. Before she had finished, out from the tub, the water of which had kept on a slow motion ever since she had ceased stirring it, came the head and half the body of a huge grey snake. But the witch did not look round. It grew out of the tub, waving itself backwards and forwards with a slow horizontal motion, till it reached the princess, when it laid its head upon her shoulder, and gave a low hiss in her ear. She started--but with joy; and seeing the head resting on her shoulder, drew it towards her and kissed it. Then she drew it all out of the tub, and wound it round her body. It was one of those dreadful creatures which few have ever beheld--the White Snakes of Darkness.

"Then she took the keys and went down into her cellar; and as she unlocked the door, she said to herself,

"This is worth living for!"

"Locking the door behind her, she descended a few steps into the cellar, and crossing it, unlocked another door into a dark, narrow passage. This also she locked behind her, and descended a few more steps. If any one had followed the witch-princess, he would have heard her unlock exactly one hundred doors, and descend a few steps after unlocking each. When she had unlocked the last, she entered a vast cave, the roof of which was supported by huge natural pillars of rock. Now this roof was the underside of the bottom of the lake.

"She then untwined the snake from her body, and held it by the tail, high above her. The hideous creature stretched up its head towards the roof of the cavern, which it was just able to reach. It then began to move its head backwards and forwards, with a slow oscillating motion, as if looking for something. At the same moment, the witch began to walk round and round the cavern, coming nearer to the centre every circuit; while the head of the snake described the same path over the roof that she did over the floor, for she held it up still. And still it kept slowly oscillating. Round and round the cavern they went thus, ever lessening the circuit, till, at last, the snake made a sudden dart, and clung fast to the roof with its mouth. 'That's right, my beauty!' cried the princess; 'drain it dry.'

"She let it go, left it hanging, and sat down on a great stone, with her black cat, who had followed her all round the cave, by her side. Then she began to knit, and mutter awful words. The snake hung like a huge leech, sucking at the stone; the cat stood with his back arched, and his tail like a piece of cable, looking up at the snake; and the old woman sat and knitted and muttered. Seven days and seven nights they sat thus; when suddenly the serpent dropped from the roof, as if exhausted, and shrivelled up like a piece of dried sea-weed on the floor. The witch started to her feet, picked it up, put it in her pocket, and looked up at the roof. One drop of water was trembling on the spot where the snake had been sucking. As soon as she saw that, she turned and fled, followed by her cat. She shut the door in a terrible hurry, locked it, and having muttered some frightful words, sped to the next, which also she locked and muttered over; and so with all the hundred doors, till she arrived in her own cellar. There she sat down on the floor ready to faint, but listening with malicious delight to the rushing of the water, which she could hear distinctly through all the hundred doors.

"But this was not enough. Now that she had tasted revenge, she lost her patience. Without further measures, the lake would be too long in disappearing. So the next night, with the last shred of the dying old moon rising, she took some of the water in which she had revived the snake, put it in a bottle, and set out, accompanied by her cat. Ere she returned, she had made the entire circuit of the lake, muttering fearful words as she crossed every stream, and casting into it some of

the water out of her bottle. When she had finished the circuit, she muttered yet again, and flung a handful of the water towards the moon. Every spring in the country ceased to throb and bubble, dying away like the pulse of a dying man. The next day there was no sound of falling water to be heard along the borders of the lake. The very courses were dry; and the mountains showed no silvery streaks down their dark sides. And not alone had the fountains of mother Earth ceased to flow; for all the babies throughout the country were crying dreadfully--only without tears.

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"CHAPTER XII.--WHERE IS THE PRINCE?"

"Never since the night when the princess left him so abruptly, had the prince had a single interview with her. He had seen her once or twice in the lake; but as far as he could discover, she had not been in it any more at night. He had sat and sung, and looked in vain for his Nereid; while she, like a true Nereid, was wasting away with her lake, sinking as it sank, withering as it dried. When at length he discovered the change that was taking place in the level of the water, he was in great alarm and perplexity. He could not tell whether the lake was dying because the lady had forsaken it; or whether the lady would not come because the lake had begun to sink. But he resolved to know so much at least.

"He disguised himself, and, going to the palace, requested to see the lord chamberlain. His appearance at once gained his request; and the lord chamberlain being a man of some insight, perceived that there was more in the prince's solicitation than met the ear. He felt likewise that no one could tell whence a solution of the present difficulties might arise. So he granted the prince's prayer to be made shoe-black to the princess. It was rather knowing in the prince to request such an easy post; for the princess could not possibly soil as many shoes as other princesses.

"He soon learned all that could be told about the princess. He went nearly distracted; but, after roaming about the lake for days, and diving in every depth that remained, all that he could do was to put an extra-polish on the dainty pair of boots that was never called for.

"For the princess kept her room, with the curtains drawn to shut out the dying lake. But she could not shut it out of her mind for a moment. It haunted her imagination so that she felt as if her lake were her soul, drying up within her, first to become mud, and then madness and death. She brooded over the change, with all its dreadful accompaniments, till she was nearly out of her mind. As for the prince, she had forgotten him. However much she had enjoyed his company in the water, she did not care for him without it. But she seemed to have forgotten her father and mother too.

"The lake went on sinking. Small slimy spots began to appear, which glittered steadily amidst the changeful shine of the water. These grew

to broad patches of mud, which widened and spread, with rocks here and there, and floundering fishes and crawling eels swarming about. The people went everywhere catching these, and looking for anything that might have been dropped into the water.

"At length the lake was all but gone; only a few of the deepest pools remaining unexhausted.

"It happened one day that a party of youngsters found themselves on the brink of one of these pools, in the very centre of the lake. It was a rocky basin of considerable depth. Looking in, they saw at the bottom something that shone yellow in the sun. A little boy jumped in and dived for it. It was a plate of gold, covered with writing. They carried it to the king.

"On one side of it stood these words:

'Death alone from death can save.
Love is death, and so is brave.
Love can fill the deepest grave.
Love loves on beneath the wave.'

"Now this was enigmatical enough to the king and courtiers. But the reverse of the plate explained it a little. Its contents amounted to this:

"_If the lake should disappear, they must find the hole through which the water ran. But it would be useless to try to stop it by any ordinary means. There was but one effectual mode.--The body of a living man could alone stanch the flow. The man must give himself of his own will; and the lake must take his life as it filled. Otherwise the offering would be of no avail. If the nation could not provide one hero, it was time it should perish._

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"CHAPTER XIII.--HERE I AM.

"This was a very disheartening revelation to the king. Not that he was unwilling to sacrifice a subject, but that he was hopeless of finding a man willing to sacrifice himself. No time could be lost, however; for the princess was lying motionless on her bed, and taking no nourishment but lake-water, which was now none of the best. Therefore the king caused the contents of the wonderful plate of gold to be published throughout the country.

"No one, however, came forward.

"The prince, having gone several days' journey into the forest, to consult a hermit whom he had met there on his way to Lagobel, knew nothing of the oracle till his return.

"When he had acquainted himself with all the particulars, he sat down

and thought.

"She would die, if I didn't do it; and life would be nothing to me without her: so I shall lose nothing by doing it. And life will be as pleasant to her as ever, for she will soon forget me, and there will be so much more beauty and happiness in the world. To be sure I shall not see it.'--Here the poor prince gave a sigh.--'How lovely the lake will be in the moonlight, with that glorious creature sporting in it like a wild goddess! It is rather hard to be drowned by inches, though. Let me see--that will be seventy inches of me to drown.'--Here he tried to laugh, but could not.--'The longer the better, however,' he resumed; 'for can I not bargain that the princess shall be beside me all the time? So I shall see her once more, kiss her perhaps, who knows?--and die looking in her eyes. It will be no death. At least I shall not feel it. And to see the lake filling for the beauty again!--All right! I am ready.'

"He kissed the princess's boot, laid it down, and hurried to the king's apartment. But feeling, as he went, that anything sentimental would be disagreeable, he resolved to carry off the whole affair with burlesque. So he knocked at the door of the king's counting-house, where it was all but a capital crime to disturb him. When the king heard the knock, he started up, and opened the door in a rage. Seeing only the shoe-black, he drew his sword. This, I am sorry to say, was his usual mode of asserting his regality, when he thought his dignity was in danger. But the prince was not in the least alarmed.

"Please your majesty, I'm your butler,' said he.

"My butler! you lying rascal? What do you mean?'

"I mean, I will cork your big bottle.'

"Is the fellow mad?' bawled the king, raising the point of his sword.

"I will put a stopper--plug--what you call it, in your leaky lake, grand monarch,' said the prince.

"The king was in such a rage, that before he could speak he had time to cool, and to reflect that it would be great waste to kill the only man who was willing to be useful in the present emergency, seeing that in the end the insolent fellow would be as dead as if he had died by his majesty's own hand.

"Oh!' said he at last, putting up his sword with difficulty--it was so long; 'I am obliged to you, you young fool! Take a glass of wine?'

"No, thank you,' replied the prince.

"Very well,' said the king. 'Would you like to run and see your parents before you make your experiment?'

"No, thank you,' said the prince.

"Then we will go and look for the hole at once,' said his majesty, and proceeded to call some attendants.

"Stop, please your majesty; I have a condition to make,' interposed the prince.

"What!' exclaimed the king; 'a condition! and with me! How dare you?'

"As you please,' said the prince coolly. 'I wish your majesty good morning.'

"You wretch! I will have you put in a sack, and stuck in the hole.'

"Very well, your majesty,' replied the prince, becoming a little more respectful, lest the wrath of the king should deprive him of the pleasure of dying for the princess. 'But what good will that do your majesty? Please to remember that the oracle says the victim must offer himself.'

"Well, you have offered yourself,' retorted the king.

"Yes, upon one condition.'

"Condition again!' roared the king, once more drawing his sword. 'Begone! Somebody else will be glad enough to take the honour off your shoulders.'

"Your majesty knows it will not be easy to get one to take my place.'

"Well, what is your condition?' growled the king, feeling that the prince was right.

"Only this,' replied the prince: 'that, as I must on no account die before I am fairly drowned, and the waiting will be rather wearisome, the princess, your daughter, shall go with me, feed me with her own hands, and look at me now and then, to comfort me; for you must confess it is rather hard. As soon as the water is up to my eyes, she may go and be happy, and forget her poor shoe-black.'

"Here the prince's voice faltered, and he very nearly grew sentimental, in spite of his resolutions.

"Why didn't you tell me before what your condition was? Such a fuss about nothing!' exclaimed the king.

"Do you grant it?' persisted the prince.

"I do,' replied the king.

"Very well. I am ready.'

"Go and have some dinner, then, while I set my people to find the

place.'

"The king ordered out his guards, and gave directions to the officers to find the hole in the lake at once. So the bed of the lake was marked out in divisions, and thoroughly examined; and in an hour or so, the hole was discovered. It was in the middle of a stone, near the centre of the lake, in the very pool where the golden plate had been found. It was a three-cornered hole, of no great size. There was water all round the stone, but none was flowing through the hole.

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"CHAPTER XIV.--THIS IS VERY KIND OF YOU.

"The prince went to dress for the occasion, for he was resolved to die like a prince.

"When the princess heard that a man had offered to die for her, she was so transported that she jumped off the bed, feeble as she was, and danced about the room for joy. She did not care who the man was; that was nothing to her. The hole wanted stopping; and if only a man would do, why, take one. In an hour or two more, everything was ready. Her maid dressed her in haste, and they carried her to the side of the lake. When she saw it, she shrieked, and covered her face with her hands. They bore her across to the stone, where they had already placed a little boat for her. The water was not deep enough to float it, but they hoped it would be, before long. They laid her on cushions, placed in the boat wines and fruits and other nice things, and stretched a canopy over all.

"In a few minutes, the prince appeared. The princess recognized him at once; but did not think it worth while to acknowledge him.

"'Here I am,' said the prince. 'Put me in.'

"'They told me it was a shoe-black,' said the princess.

"'So I am,' said the prince. 'I blacked your little boots three times a day, because they were all I could get of you. Put me in.'

"The courtiers did not resent his bluntness, except by saying to each other, that he was taking it out in impudence.

"But how was he to be put in? The golden plate contained no instructions on this point. The prince looked at the hole, and saw but one way. He put both his legs into it, sitting on the stone, and, stooping forward, covered the two corners that remained open, with his two hands. In this uncomfortable position he resolved to abide his fate, and, turning to the people, said:

"'Now you can go.'

"The king had already gone home to dinner.

"Now you can go,' repeated the princess after him, like a parrot.

"The people obeyed her, and went.

"Presently a little wave flowed over the stone, and wetted one of the prince's knees. But he did not mind it much. He began to sing, and the song he sang was this:

"As a world that has no well,
Darkly bright in forest-dell;
As a world without the gleam
Of the downward-going stream;
As a world without the glance
Of the ocean's fair expanse;
As a world where never rain
Glittered on the sunny plain;
Such, my heart, thy world would be,
If no love did flow in thee.

"As a world without the sound
Of the rivulets under ground;
Or the bubbling of the spring
Out of darkness wandering;
Or the mighty rush and flowing
Of the river's downward going;
Or the music-showers that drop
On the outspread beech's top;
Or the ocean's mighty voice,
When his lifted waves rejoice;
Such, my soul, thy world would be,
If no love did sing in thee.

"Lady, keep thy world's delight;
Keep the waters in thy sight.
Love hath made me strong to go,
For thy sake, to realms below,
Where the water's shine and hum
Through the darkness never come:
Let, I pray, one thought of me
Spring, a little well, in thee;
Lest thy loveless soul be found
Like a dry and thirsty ground.'

"Sing again, prince. It makes it less tedious,' said the princess.

"But the prince was too much overcome to sing any more. And a long pause followed.

"This is very kind of you, prince,' said the princess at last, quite coolly, as she lay in the boat with her eyes shut.

"I am sorry I can't return the compliment,' thought the prince; 'but

you are worth dying for after all.'

"Again a wavelet, and another, and another, flowed over the stone, and wetted both the prince's knees thoroughly; but he did not speak or move. Two--three--four hours passed in this way, the princess apparently fast asleep, and the prince very patient. But he was much disappointed in his position, for he had none of the consolation he had hoped for.

"At last he could bear it no longer.

"Princess!' said he.

"But at the moment, up started the princess, crying,

"I'm afloat! I'm afloat!"

"And the little boat bumped against the stone.

"Princess!' repeated the prince, encouraged by seeing her wide awake, and looking eagerly at the water.

"Well?'" said she, without once looking round.

"Your papa promised that you should look at me; and you haven't looked at me once.'

"Did he? Then I suppose I must. But I am so sleepy!"

"Sleep then, darling, and don't mind me,' said the poor prince.

"Really, you are very good,' replied the princess. 'I think I will go to sleep again.'

"Just give me a glass of wine and a biscuit, first,' said the prince very humbly.

"With all my heart,' said the princess, and gaped as she said it.

"She got the wine and the biscuit, however; and, coming nearer with them,

"Why, prince,' she said, 'you don't look well! Are you sure you don't mind it?'"

"Not a bit,' answered he, feeling very faint indeed. 'Only, I shall die before it is of any use to you, unless I have something to eat.'

"There, then!' said she, holding out the wine to him.

"Ah! you must feed me. I dare not move my hands. The water would run away directly.'

"'Good gracious!' said the princess; and she began at once to feed him with bits of biscuit, and sips of wine.

"As she fed him, he contrived to kiss the tips of her fingers now and then. She did not seem to mind it, one way or the other. But the prince felt better.

"'Now, for your own sake, princess,' said he, 'I cannot let you go to sleep. You must sit and look at me, else I shall not be able to keep up.'

"'Well, I will do anything I can to oblige you,' answered she, with condescension; and, sitting down, she did look at him, and kept looking at him with wonderful steadiness, considering all things.

"The sun went down, and the moon came up; and, gush after gush, the waters were flowing over the rock. They were up to the prince's waist now.

"'Why can't we go and have a swim?' said the princess. 'There seems to be water enough just about here.'

"'I shall never swim more,' said the prince.

"'Oh! I forgot,' said the princess, and was silent.

"So the water grew and grew, and rose up and up on the prince. And the princess sat and looked at him. She fed him now and then. The night wore on. The waters rose and rose. The moon rose likewise, higher and higher, and shone full on the face of the dying prince. The water was up to his neck.

"'Will you kiss me, princess?' said he feebly at last; for the fun was all out of him now.

"'Yes, I will,' answered the princess; and kissed him with a long, sweet, cold kiss.

"'Now,' said he, with a sigh of content, 'I die happy.'

"He did not speak again. The princess gave him some wine for the last time: he was past eating. Then she sat down again, and looked at him. The water rose and rose. It touched his chin. It touched his lower lip. It touched between his lips. He shut them hard to keep it out. The princess began to feel strange. It touched his upper lip. He breathed through his nostrils. The princess looked wild. It covered his nostrils. Her eyes looked scared, and shone strange in the moonlight. His head fell back; the water closed over it; and the bubbles of his last breath bubbled up through the water. The princess gave a shriek, and sprang into the lake.

"She laid hold first of one leg, then of the other, and pulled and tugged, but she could not move either. She stopped to take breath, and

that made her think that he could not get any breath. She was frantic. She got hold of him, and held his head above the water, which was possible now his hands were no longer on the hole. But it was of no use, for he was past breathing.

"Love and water brought back all her strength. She got under the water, and pulled and pulled with her whole might, till, at last, she got one leg out. The other easily followed. How she got him into the boat she never could tell; but when she did, she fainted away. Coming to herself, she seized the oars, kept herself steady as best she could; and rowed and rowed, though she had never rowed before. Round rocks, and over shallows, and through mud, she rowed, till she got to the landing-stairs of the palace. By this time her people were on the shore, for they had heard her shriek. She made them carry the prince to her own room, and lay him in her bed, and light a fire, and send for the doctors.

"But the lake, your Highness!' said the Chamberlain, who, roused by the noise, came in, in his night-cap.

"Go and drown yourself in it!' said she.

"This was the last rudeness of which the princess was ever guilty; and one must allow that she had good cause to feel provoked with the lord chamberlain.

"Had it been the king himself, he would have fared no better. But both he and the queen were fast asleep. And the chamberlain went back to his bed. So the princess and her old nurse were left with the prince. Somehow, the doctors never came. But the old nurse was a wise woman, and knew what to do.

"They tried everything for a long time without success. The princess was nearly distracted between hope and fear, but she tried on and on, one thing after another, and everything over and over again.

"At last, when they had all but given it up, just as the sun rose, the prince opened his eyes.

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"CHAPTER XV.--LOOK AT THE RAIN!

"The princess burst into a passion of tears, and fell on the floor. There she lay for an hour, and her tears never ceased. All the pent-up crying of her life was spent now. And a rain came on, such as had never been seen in that country. The sun shone all the time, and the great drops, which fell straight to the earth, shone likewise. The palace was in the heart of a rainbow. It was a rain of rubies, and sapphires, and emeralds, and topazes. The torrents poured from the mountains like molten gold; and if it had not been for its subterranean outlet, the lake would have overflowed and inundated the country. It was full from shore to shore.

"But the princess did not heed the lake. She lay on the floor and wept. And this rain within doors was far more wonderful than the rain out of doors. For when it abated a little, and she proceeded to rise, she found, to her astonishment, that she could not. At length, after many efforts, she succeeded in getting upon her feet. But she tumbled down again directly. Hearing her fall, her old nurse uttered a yell of delight, and ran to her, screaming:

"My darling child! She's found her gravity!"

"Oh! that's it, is it?" said the princess, rubbing her shoulder and her knee alternately. 'I consider it very unpleasant. I feel as if I should be crushed to pieces.'

"Hurrah!" cried the prince, from the bed. 'If you're all right, princess, so am I. How's the lake?'

"Brimful," answered the nurse.

"Then we're all jolly.'

"That we are, indeed!" answered the princess, sobbing.

"And there was rejoicing all over the country that rainy day. Even the babies forgot their past troubles, and danced and crowed amazingly. And the king told stories, and the queen listened to them. And he divided the money in his box, and she the honey in her pot, to all the children. And there was such jubilation as was never heard of before.

"Of course the prince and princess were betrothed at once. But the princess had to learn to walk, before they could be married with any propriety. And this was not so easy, at her time of life, for she could walk no more than a baby. She was always falling down and hurting herself.

"Is this the gravity you used to make so much of?" said she, one day, to the prince. 'For my part, I was a great deal more comfortable without it.'

"No, no; that's not it. This is it," replied the prince, as he took her up, and carried her about like a baby, kissing her all the time. 'This is gravity.'

"That's better," said she. 'I don't mind that so much.'

"And she smiled the sweetest, loveliest smile in the prince's face. And she gave him one little kiss, in return for all his; and he thought them overpaid, for he was beside himself with delight. I fear she complained of her gravity more than once after this, notwithstanding.

"It was a long time before she got reconciled to walking. But the pain

of learning it, was quite counterbalanced by two things, either of which would have been sufficient consolation. The first was, that the prince himself was her teacher; and the second, that she could tumble into the lake as often as she pleased. Still, she preferred to have the prince jump in with her; and the splash they made before, was nothing to the splash they made now.

"The lake never sank again. In process of time, it wore the roof of the cavern quite through, and was twice as deep as before.

"The only revenge the princess took upon her aunt, was to tread pretty hard on her gouty toe, the next time she saw her. But she was sorry for it the very next day, when she heard that the water had undermined her house, and that it had fallen in the night, burying her in its ruins; whence no one ever ventured to dig up her body. There she lies to this day.

"So the prince and princess lived and were happy; and had crowns of gold, and clothes of cloth, and shoes of leather, and children of boys and girls, not one of whom was ever known, on the most critical occasion, to lose the smallest atom of his or her due proportion of gravity."

* * * * *

"Bravo!"

"Capital!"

"Very good indeed!"

"Quite a success!"

cried my complimentary friends.

"I don't think the princess could have rowed, though--without gravity, you know," said the schoolmaster.

"But she did," said Adela. "I won't have my uncle found fault with. It is a very funny, and a very pretty story."

"What is the moral of it?" drawled Mrs. Cathcart, with the first syllable of _moral_ very long and very gentle.

"That you need not be afraid of ill-natured aunts, though they are witches," said Adela.

"No, my dear; that's not it," I said. "It is, that you need not mind forgetting your poor relations. No harm will come of it in the end."

"I think the moral is," said the doctor, "that no girl is worth anything till she has cried a little."

Adela gave him a quick glance, and then cast her eyes down. Whether he had looked at her I don't know. But I should think not.--Neither the clergyman nor his wife had made any remark. I turned to them.

"I am afraid you do not approve of my poor story," I said.

"On the contrary," replied Mr. Armstrong, "I think there is a great deal of meaning in it, to those who can see through its fairy-gates. What do you think of it, my dear?"

"I was so pleased with the earnest parts of it, that the fun jarred upon me a little, I confess," said Mrs. Armstrong. "But I daresay that was silly."

"I think it was, my dear. But you can afford to be silly sometimes, in a good cause."

"You might have given us the wedding," said Mrs. Bloomfield.

"I am an old bachelor, you see. I fear I don't give weddings their due," I answered. "I don't care for them--in stories, I mean."

"When will you dine with us again?" asked the colonel.

"When you please," answered the curate.

"To-morrow, then?"

"Rather too soon that, is it not? Who is to read the next story?"

"Why, you, of course," answered his brother.

"I am at your service," rejoined Mr. Armstrong. "But to-morrow!"

"Don't you think, Ralph," said his wife, "you could read better if you followed your usual custom of dining early?"

"I am sure I should, Lizzie. Don't you think, Colonel Cathcart, it would be better to come in the evening, just after your dinner? I like to dine early, and I am a great tea-drinker. If we might have a huge tea-kettle on the fire, and tea-pot to correspond on the table, and I, as I read my story, and the rest of the company, as they listen, might help ourselves, I think it would be very jolly, and very homely."

To this the colonel readily agreed. I heard the ladies whispering a little, and the words--"Very considerate indeed!" from Mrs. Bloomfield, reached my ears. Indeed I had thought that the colonel's hospitality was making him forget his servants. And I could not help laughing to think what Beeves's face would have been like, if he had heard us all invited to dinner again, the next day.

Whether Adela suspected us now, I do not know. She said nothing to show it.

Just before the doctor left, with his brother and sister, he went up to her, and said, in a by-the-bye sort of way:

"I am sorry to hear that you have not been quite well of late, Miss Cathcart. You have been catching cold, I am afraid. Let me feel your pulse."

She gave him her wrist directly, saying:

"I feel much better to-night, thank you."

He stood--listening to the pulse, you would have said--his whole attitude was so entirely that of one listening, with his eyes doing nothing at all. He stood thus for a while, without consulting his watch, looking as if the pulse had brought him into immediate communication with the troubled heart itself, and he could feel every flutter and effort which it made. Then he took out his watch and counted.

Now that his eyes were quite safe, I saw Adela's eyes steal up to his face, and rest there for a half a minute with a reposeful expression. I felt that there was something healing in the very presence and touch of the man--so full was he of health and humanity; and I thought Adela felt that he was a good man, and one to be trusted in.

He gave her back her hand, as it were, so gently did he let it go, and said:

"I will send you something as soon as I get home, to take at once. I presume you will go to bed soon?"

"I will, if you think it best."

And so Mr. Henry Armstrong was, without more ado, tacitly installed as physician to Miss Adela Cathcart; and she seemed quite content with the new arrangement.

Chapter VI.

The bell.

Before the next meeting took place, namely, after breakfast on the following morning, Percy having gone to visit the dogs, Mrs. Cathcart addressed me:

"I had something to say to my brother, Mr. Smith, but--"

"And you wish to be alone with him? With all my heart," I said.

"Not at all, Mr. Smith," she answered, with one of her smiles, which

were quite incomprehensible to me, until I hit upon the theory that she kept a stock of them for general use, as stingy old ladies keep up their half worn ribbons to make presents of to servant-maids; "I only wanted to know, before I made a remark to the colonel, whether Dr. Armstrong--"

"Mr. Armstrong lays no claim to the rank of a physician."

"So much the better for my argument. But is he a friend of yours, Mr. Smith?"

"Yes--of nearly a week's standing."

"Oh, then, I am in no danger of hurting your feelings."

"I don't know that," thought I, but I did not say it.

"Well, Colonel Cathcart--excuse the liberty I am taking--but surely you do not mean to dismiss Dr. Wade, and give a young man like that the charge of your daughter's health at such a crisis."

"Dr. Wade is dismissed already, Jane. He did her no more good than any old woman might have done."

"But such a young man!"

"Not so very young," I ventured to say. "He is thirty at least."

But the colonel was angry with her interference; for, an impetuous man always, he had become irritable of late.

"Jane," he said, "is a man less likely to be delicate because he is young? Or does a man always become more refined as he grows older? For my part--" and here his opposition to his unpleasant sister-in-law possibly made him say more than he would otherwise have conceded--"I have never seen a young man whose manners and behaviour I liked better."

"Much good that will do her! It will only hasten the mischief. You men are so slow to take a hint, brother; and it is really too hard to be forced to explain one's self always. Don't you see that, whether he cures her or not, he will make her fall in love with him? And you won't relish that, I fancy."

"You won't relish it, at all events. But mayn't he fall in love with her as well?" thought I; which thought, a certain expression in the colonel's face kept me from uttering. I saw at once that his sister's words had set a discord in the good man's music. He made no reply; and Mrs. Cathcart saw that her arrow had gone to the feather. I saw what she tried to conceal--the flash of success on her face. But she presently extinguished it, and rose and left the room. I thought with myself that such an arrangement would be the very best thing for Adela; and that, if the blessedness of woman lies in any way in the

possession of true manhood, she, let her position in society be what it might compared with his, and let her have all the earls in the kingdom for uncles, would be a fortunate woman indeed, to marry such a man as Harry Armstrong;--for so much was I attracted to the man, that I already called him Harry, when I and Myself talked about him. But I was concerned to see my old friend so much disturbed. I hoped however that his good generous heart would right its own jarring chords before long, and that he would not spoil a chance of Adela's recovery, however slight, by any hasty measures founded on nothing better than paternal jealousy. I thought, indeed, he had gone too far to make that possible for some time; but I did not know how far his internal discomfort might act upon his behaviour as host, and so interfere with the homeliness of our story-club, upon which I depended not a little for a portion of the desired result.

The motive of Mrs. Cathcart's opposition was evident. She was a partizan of Percy; for Adela was a very tolerable fortune, as people say.

These thoughts went through my mind, as thoughts do, in no time at all; and when the lady had closed the door behind her with protracted gentleness, I was ready to show my game; in which I really considered my friend and myself partners.

"Those women," I said, (women forgive me!), with a laugh which I trust the colonel did not discover to be a forced one--"Those women are always thinking about falling in love and that sort of foolery. I wonder she isn't jealous of me now! Well, I do love Adela better than any man will, for some weeks to come. I've been a sweetheart of hers ever since she was in long clothes." Here I tried to laugh again, and, to judge from the colonel, I verily believe I succeeded. The cloud lightened on his face, as I made light of its cause, till at last he laughed too. If I thought it all nonsense, why should he think it earnest? So I turned the conversation to the club, about which I was more concerned than about the love-making at present, seeing the latter had positively no existence as yet.

"Adela seemed quite to enjoy the reading last night," I said.

"I thought she looked very grave," he answered.

The good man had been watching her face all the time, I saw, and evidently paying no heed to the story. I doubted if he was the better judge for this--observing only *_ab extra_*, and without being in sympathy with her feelings as moved by the tale.

"Now that is just what I should have wished to see," I answered.

"We don't want her merry all at once. What we want is, that she should take an interest in something. A grave face is a sign of interest. It is all the world better than a listless face."

"But what good can stories do in sickness?"

"That depends on the origin of the sickness. My conviction is, that, near or far off, in ourselves, or in our ancestors--say Adam and Eve, for comprehension's sake--all our ailments have a moral cause. I think that if we were all good, disease would, in the course of generations, disappear utterly from the face of the earth."

"That's just like one of your notions, old friend! Rather peculiar. Mystical, is it not?"

"But I meant to go on to say that, in Adela's case, I believe, from conversation I have had with her, that the operation of mind on body is far more immediate than that I have hinted at."

"You cannot mean to imply," said my friend, in some alarm, that Adela has anything upon her conscience?"

"Certainly not. But there may be moral diseases that do not in the least imply personal wrong or fault. They may themselves be transmitted, for instance. Or even if such sprung wholly from present physical causes, any help given to the mind would react on those causes. Still more would the physical ill be influenced through the mental, if the mind be the source of both.

"Now from whatever cause, Adela is in a kind of moral atrophy, for she cannot digest the food provided for her, so as to get any good of it. Suppose a patient in a corresponding physical condition, should show a relish for anything proposed to him, would you not take it for a sign that that was just the thing to do him good? And we may accept the interest Adela shows in any kind of mental pabulum provided for her, as an analogous sign. It corresponds to relish, and is a ground for expecting some benefit to follow--in a word, some nourishment of the spiritual life. Relish may be called the digestion of the palate; interest, the digestion of the inner ears; both significant of further digestion to follow. The food thus relished may not be the best food; and yet it may be the best for the patient, because she feels no repugnance to it, and can digest and assimilate, as well as swallow it. For my part, I believe in no cramming, bodily or mental. I think nothing learned without interest, can be of the slightest after benefit; and although the effort may comprise a moral good, it involves considerable intellectual injury. All I have said applies with still greater force to religious teaching, though that is not definitely the question now."

"Well, Smith, I can't talk philosophy like you; but what you say sounds to me like sense. At all events, if Adela enjoys it, that is enough for me. Will the young doctor tell stories too?"

"I don't know. I fancy he could. But to-night we have his brother."

"I shall make them welcome, anyhow."

This was all I wanted of him; and now I was impatient for the evening, and the clergyman's tale. The more I saw of him the better I liked

him, and felt the more interest in him. I went to church that same day, and heard him read prayers, and liked him better still; so that I was quite hungry for the story he was going to read to us.

The evening came, and with it the company. Arrangements, similar to those of the evening before, having been made, with some little improvements, the colonel now occupying the middle place in the half-circle, and the doctor seated, whether by chance or design, at the corner farthest from the invalid's couch, the clergyman said, as he rolled and unrolled the manuscript in his hand:

"To explain how I came to write a story, the scene of which is in Scotland, I may be allowed to inform the company that I spent a good part of my boyhood in a town in Aberdeenshire, with my grandfather, who was a thorough Scotchman. He had removed thither from the south, where the name is indigenous; being indeed a descendant of that Christy, whom his father, Johnie Armstrong, standing with the rope about his neck, ready to be hanged--or murdered, as the ballad calls it--apostrophizes in these words:

'And God be with thee, Christy, my son,
Where thou sits on thy nurse's knee!
But an' thou live this hundred year,
Thy father's better thou'lt never be.'

But I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen all, for this has positively nothing to do with the story. Only please to remember that in those days it was quite respectable to be hanged."

We all agreed to this with a profusion of corroboration, except the colonel; who, I thought, winced a little. But presently our attention was occupied with the story, thus announced:

"_The Bell. A Sketch in Pen and Ink_."

He read in a great, deep, musical voice, with a wealth of pathos in it--always suppressed, yet almost too much for me in the more touching portions of the story.

"One interruption more," he said, before he began. "I fear you will find it a sad story."

And he looked at Adela.

I believe that he had chosen the story on the homoeopathic principle.

"I like sad stories," she answered; and he went on at once.

"THE BELL.

"A SKETCH IN PEN AND INK.

"Elsie Scott had let her work fall on her knees, and her hands on her

work, and was looking out of the wide, low window of her room, which was on one of the ground floors of the village street. Through a gap in the household shrubbery of fuchsias and myrtles filling the window-sill, one passing on the foot-pavement might get a momentary glimpse of her pale face, lighted up with two blue eyes, over which some inward trouble had spread a faint, gauze-like haziness. But almost before her thoughts had had time to wander back to this trouble, a shout of children's voices, at the other end of the street, reached her ear. She listened a moment. A shadow of displeasure and pain crossed her countenance; and rising hastily, she betook herself to an inner apartment, and closed the door behind her.

"Meantime the sounds drew nearer; and by and by, an old man, whose strange appearance and dress showed that he had little capacity either for good or evil, passed the window. His clothes were comfortable enough in quality and condition, for they were the annual gift of a benevolent lady in the neighbourhood; but, being made to accommodate his taste, both known and traditional, they were somewhat peculiar in cut and adornment. Both coat and trousers were of a dark grey cloth; but the former, which, in its shape, partook of the military, had a straight collar of yellow, and narrow cuffs of the same; while upon both sleeves, about the place where a corporal wears his stripes, was expressed, in the same yellow cloth, a somewhat singular device. It was as close an imitation of a bell, with its tongue hanging out of its mouth, as the tailor's skill could produce from a single piece of cloth. The origin of the military cut of his coat was well known. His preference for it arose in the time of the wars of the first Napoleon, when the threatened invasion of the country caused the organization of many volunteer regiments. The martial show and exercises captivated the poor man's fancy; and from that time forward nothing pleased his vanity, and consequently conciliated his good will more, than to style him by his favourite title--the Colonel. But the badge on his arm had a deeper origin, which will be partially manifest in the course of the story--if story it can be called. It was, indeed, the baptism of the fool, the outward and visible sign of his relation to the infinite and unseen. His countenance, however, although the features were not of any peculiarly low or animal type, showed no corresponding sign of the consciousness of such a relation, being as vacant as human countenance could well be.

"The cause of Elsie's annoyance was that the fool was annoyed; for, he was turned his rank into scorn, and assailed him with epithets hateful to him. Although the most harmless of creatures when let alone, he was dangerous when roused; and now he stooped repeatedly to pick up stones and hurl them at his tormentors, who took care, while abusing him, to keep at a considerable distance, lest he should get hold of them. Amidst the sounds of derision that followed him, might be heard the words frequently repeated--' Come hame, come hame.' But in a few minutes the noise ceased, either from the interference of some friendly inhabitant, or that the boys grew weary, and departed in search of other amusement. By and by, Elsie might be seen again at her work in the window; but the cloud over her eyes was deeper, and her whole face more sad.

"Indeed, so much did the persecution of the poor man affect her, that an onlooker would have been compelled to seek the cause in some yet deeper sympathy than that commonly felt for the oppressed, even by women. And such a sympathy existed, strange as it may seem, between the beautiful girl (for many called her a _bonnie lassie_) and this 'tatter of humanity.' Nothing would have been farther from the thoughts of those that knew them, than the supposition of any correspondence or connection between them; yet this sympathy sprung in part from a real similarity in their history and present condition.

"All the facts that were known about _Feel Jock's_ origin were these: that seventy years ago, a man who had gone with his horse and cart some miles from the village, to fetch home a load of peat from a desolate _moss_, had heard, while toiling along as rough a road on as lonely a hill-side as any in Scotland, the cry of a child; and, searching about, had found the infant, hardly wrapt in rags, and untended, as if the earth herself had just given him birth,--that desert moor, wide and dismal, broken and watery, the only bosom for him to lie upon, and the cold, clear night-heaven his only covering. The man had brought him home, and the parish had taken parish-care of him. He had grown up, and proved what he now was--almost an idiot. Many of the townspeople were kind to him, and employed him in fetching water for them from the river and wells in the neighbourhood, paying him for his trouble in victuals, or whisky, of which he was very fond. He seldom spoke; and the sentences he could utter were few; yet the tone, and even the words of his limited vocabulary, were sufficient to express gratitude and some measure of love towards those who were kind to him, and hatred of those who teased and insulted him. He lived a life without aim, and apparently to no purpose; in this resembling most of his more gifted fellow-men, who, with all the tools and materials needful for the building of a noble mansion, are yet content with a clay hut.

"Elsie, on the contrary, had been born in a comfortable farmhouse, amidst homeliness and abundance. But at a very early age, she had lost both father and mother; not so early, however, but that she had faint memories of warm soft times on her mother's bosom, and of refuge in her mother's arms from the attacks of geese, and the pursuit of pigs. Therefore, in after-times, when she looked forward to heaven, it was as much a reverting to the old heavenly times of childhood and mother's love, as an anticipation of something yet to be revealed. Indeed, without some such memory, how should we ever picture to ourselves a perfect rest? But sometimes it would seem as if the more a heart was made capable of loving, the less it had to love; and poor Elsie, in passing from a mother's to a brother's guardianship, felt a change of spiritual temperature, too keen. He was not a bad man, or incapable of benevolence when touched by the sight of want in anything of which he would himself have felt the privation; but he was so coarsely made, that only the purest animal necessities affected him; and a hard word, or unfeeling speech, could never have reached the quick of his nature through the hide that enclosed it. Elsie, on the contrary, was excessively and painfully sensitive, as if her nature

constantly protended an invisible multitude of half-spiritual, half-nervous antennae, which shrunk and trembled in every current of air at all below their own temperature. The effect of this upon her behaviour was such, that she was called odd; and the poor girl felt that she was not like other people, yet could not help it. Her brother, too, laughed at her without the slightest idea of the pain he occasioned, or the remotest feeling of curiosity as to what the inward and consistent causes of the outward abnormal condition might be. Tenderness was the divine comforting she needed; and it was altogether absent from her brother's character and behaviour.

"Her neighbours looked on her with some interest, but they rather shunned than courted her acquaintance; especially after the return of certain nervous attacks, to which she had been subject in childhood, and which were again brought on by the events I must relate. It is curious how certain diseases repel, by a kind of awe, the sympathies of the neighbours: as if, by the fact of being subject to them, the patient were removed into another realm of existence, from which, like the dead with the living, she can hold communion with those around her only partially, and with a mixture of dread pervading the intercourse. Thus some of the deepest, purest wells of spiritual life, are, like those in old castles, choked up by the decay of the outer walls. But what tended more than anything, perhaps, to keep up the painful unrest of her soul (for the beauty of her character was evident in the fact, that the irritation seldom reached her _mind_), was a circumstance at which, in its present connection, some of my readers will smile, and others feel a shudder corresponding in kind to that of Elsie.

"Her brother was very fond of a rather small, but ferocious-looking bull-dog, which followed close at his heels, wherever he went, with hanging head and slouching gait, never leaping or racing about like other dogs. When in the house, he always lay under his master's chair. He seemed to dislike Elsie, and she felt an unspeakable repugnance to him. Though she never mentioned her aversion, her brother easily saw it by the way in which she avoided the animal; and attributing it entirely to fear--which indeed had a great share in the matter--he would cruelly aggravate it, by telling her stories of the fierce hardihood and relentless persistency of this kind of animal. He dared not yet further increase her terror by offering to set the creature upon her, because it was doubtful whether he might be able to restrain him; but the mental suffering which he occasioned by this heartless conduct, and for which he had no sympathy, was as severe as many bodily sufferings to which he would have been sorry to subject her. Whenever the poor girl happened inadvertently to pass near the dog, which was seldom, a low growl made her aware of his proximity, and drove her to a quick retreat. He was, in fact, the animal impersonation of the animal opposition which she had continually to endure. Like chooses like; and the bull-dog _in_ her brother made choice of the bull-dog _out of_ him for his companion. So her day was one of shrinking fear and multiform discomfort.

"But a nature capable of so much distress, must of necessity be _capable_ of a corresponding amount of pleasure; and in her case this

was manifest in the fact, that sleep and the quiet of her own room restored her wonderfully. If she was only let alone, a calm mood, filled with images of pleasure, soon took possession of her mind.

"Her acquaintance with the fool had commenced some ten years previous to the time I write of, when she was quite a little girl, and had come from the country with her brother, who, having taken a small farm close to the town, preferred residing in the town to occupying the farm-house, which was not comfortable. She looked at first with some terror on his uncouth appearance, and with much wonderment on his strange dress. This wonder was heightened by a conversation she overheard one day in the street, between the fool and a little pale-faced boy, who, approaching him respectfully, said, 'Weel, cornel!' 'Weel, laddie!' was the reply. 'Fat dis the wow say, cornel?' 'Come hame, come hame!' answered the _colonel_, with both accent and quantity heaped on the word _hame_. She heard no more, and knew not what the little she had heard, meant. What the _wow_ could be, she had no idea; only, as the years passed on, the strange word became in her mind indescribably associated with the strange shape in yellow cloth on his sleeves. Had she been a native of the town, she could not have failed to know its import, so familiar was every one with it, although the word did not belong to the local vocabulary; but, as it was, years passed away before she discovered its meaning. And when, again and again, the fool, attempting to convey his gratitude for some kindness she had shown him, mumbled over the words--_'The wow o' Rivven--the wow o' Rivven,'_ the wonder would return as to what could be the idea associated with them in his mind, but she made no advance towards their explanation.

"That, however, which most attracted her to the old man, was his persecution by the children. They were to him what the bull-dog was to her--the constant source of irritation and annoyance. They could hardly hurt him, nor did he appear to dread other injury from them than insult, to which, fool though he was, he was keenly alive. Human gad-flies that they were! they sometimes stung him beyond endurance, and he would curse them in the impotence of his anger. Once or twice Elsie had been so far carried beyond her constitutional timidity, by sympathy for the distress of her friend, that she had gone out and talked to the boys,--even scolded them, so that they slunk away ashamed, and began to stand as much in dread of her as of the clutches of their prey. So she, gentle and timid to excess, acquired among them the reputation of a termagant. Popular opinion among children, as among men, is often just, but as often very unjust; for the same manifestations may proceed from opposite principles; and, therefore, as indices to character, any mislead as often as enlighten.

"Next door to the house in which Elsie resided, dwelt a tradesman and his wife, who kept an indefinite sort of shop, in which various kinds of goods were exposed to sale. Their youngest son was about the same age as Elsie; and while they were rather more than children, and less than young people, he spent many of his evenings with her, somewhat to the loss of position in his classes at the parish school. They were, indeed, much attached to each other; and, peculiarly constituted as

Elsie was, one may imagine what kind of heavenly messenger a companion stronger than herself must have been to her. In fact, if she could have framed the undefinable need of her child-like nature into an articulate prayer, it would have been--'Give me some one to love me stronger than I.' Any love was helpful, yes, in its degree, saving to her poor troubled soul; but the hope, as they grew older together, that the powerful, yet tender-hearted youth, really loved her, and would one day make her his wife, was like the opening of heavenly eyes of life and love in the hitherto blank and death-like face of her existence. But nothing had been said of love, although they met and parted like lovers.

"Doubtless if the circles of their thought and feeling had continued as now to intersect each other, there would have been no interruption to their affection; but the time at length arrived when the old couple seeing the rest of their family comfortably settled in life, resolved to make a gentleman of the youngest; and so sent him from school to college. The facilities existing in Scotland for providing a professional training, enabled them to educate him as a surgeon. He parted from Elsie with some regret; but, far less dependent on her than she was on him, and full of the prospects of the future, he felt none of that sinking at the heart which seemed to lay her whole nature open to a fresh inroad of all the terrors and sorrows of her peculiar existence. No correspondence took place between them. New pursuits and relations, and the development of his tastes and judgments, entirely altered the position of poor Elsie in his memory. Having been, during their intercourse, far less of a man than she of a woman, he had no definite idea of the place he had occupied in her regard; and in his mind she receded into the background of the past, without his having any idea that she would suffer thereby, or that he was unjust towards her; while, in her thoughts, his image stood in the highest and clearest relief. It was the centre-point from which and towards which all lines radiated and converged; and although she could not but be doubtful about the future, yet there was much hope mingled with her doubts.

"But when, at the close of two years, he visited his native village, and she saw before her, instead of the homely youth who had left her that winter evening, one who, to her inexperienced eyes, appeared a finished gentleman, her heart sank within her, as if she had found Nature herself false in her ripening processes, destroying the beautiful promise of a former year by changing instead of developing her creations. He spoke kindly to her, but not cordially. To her ear the voice seemed to come from a great distance out of the past; and while she looked upon him, that optical change passed over her vision, which all have experienced after gazing abstractedly on any object for a time: his form grew very small, and receded to an immeasurable distance; till, her imagination mingling with the twilight haze of her senses, she seemed to see him standing far off on a hill, with the bright horizon of sunset for a back-ground to his clearly defined figure.

"She knew no more till she found herself in bed in the dark; and the

first message that reached her from the outer world, was the infernal growl of the bull-dog from the room below. Next day she saw her lover walking with two ladies, who would have thought it some degree of condescension to speak to her; and he passed the house without once looking towards it.

"One who is sufficiently possessed by the demon of nervousness to be glad of the magnetic influences of a friend's company in a public promenade, or of a horse beneath him in passing through a churchyard, will have some faint idea of how utterly exposed and defenceless poor Elsie now felt on the crowded thoroughfare of life. And the insensibility which had overtaken her, was not the ordinary swoon with which Nature relieves the over-strained nerves, but the return of the epileptic fits of her early childhood; and if the condition of the poor girl had been pitiable before, it was tenfold more so now. Yet she did not complain, but bore all in silence, though it was evident that her health was giving way. But now, help came to her from a strange quarter; though many might not be willing to accord the name of help to that which rather hastened than retarded the progress of her decline.

"She had gone to spend a few of the summer days with a relative in the country, some miles from her home, if home it could be called. One evening, towards sunset, she went out for a solitary walk. Passing from the little garden gate, she went along a bare country road for some distance, and then, turning aside by a footpath through a thicket of low trees, she came out in a lonely little churchyard on the hill-side. Hardly knowing whether or not she had intended to go there, she seated herself on a mound covered with long grass, one of many. Before her stood the ruins of an old church which was taking centuries to crumble. Little remained but the gable-wall, immensely thick, and covered with ancient ivy. The rays of the setting sun fell on a mound at its foot, not green like the rest, but of a rich, red-brown in the rosy sunset, and evidently but newly heaped up. Her eyes, too, rested upon it. Slowly the sun sank below the near horizon.

"As the last brilliant point disappeared, the ivy darkened, and a wind arose and shook all its leaves, making them look cold and troubled; and to Elsie's ear came a low faint sound, as from a far-off bell. But close beside her--and she started and shivered at the sound--rose a deep, monotonous, almost sepulchral voice: 'Come hame, come hame! The wow, the wow!'

"At once she understood the whole. She sat in the churchyard of the ancient parish church of Ruthven; and when she lifted up her eyes, there she saw, in the half-ruined belfry, the old bell, all but hidden with ivy, which the passing wind had roused to utter one sleepy tone; and there, beside her, stood the fool with the bell on his arm; and to him and to her the 'wow o' Rivven' said, 'Come hame, come hame!' Ah, what did she want in the whole universe of God but a home? And though the ground beneath was hard, and the sky overhead far and boundless, and the hill-side lonely and companionless, yet somewhere within the visible, and beyond these the outer surfaces of creation, there might

be a home for her; as round the wintry house the snows lie heaped up cold and white and dreary all the long _forenight_, while within, beyond the closed shutters, and giving no glimmer through the thick stone walls, the fires are blazing joyously, and the voices and laughter of young unfrozen children are heard, and nothing belongs to winter but the grey hairs on the heads of the parents, within whose warm hearts child-like voices are heard, and child-like thoughts move to and fro. The kernel of winter itself is spring, or a sleeping summer.

"It was no wonder that the fool, cast out of the earth on a far more desolate spot than this, should seek to return within her bosom at this place of open doors, and should call it _home_. For surely the surface of the earth had no home for him. The mound at the foot of the gable contained the body of one who had shown him kindness. He had followed the funeral that afternoon from the town, and had remained behind with the bell. Indeed, it was his custom, though Elsie had not known it, to follow every funeral going to this, his favourite churchyard of Ruthven; and, possibly in imitation of its booming, for it was still tolled at the funerals, he had given the old bell the name of the _wow_, and had translated its monotonous clangour into the articulate sounds--_come home, come home_. What precise meaning he attached to the words, it is impossible to say; but it was evident that the place possessed a strange attraction for him, drawing him towards it by the cords of some spiritual magnetism. It is possible that in the mind of the idiot there may have been some feeling about this churchyard and bell, which, in the mind of another, would have become a grand poetic thought; a feeling as if the ghostly old bell hung at the church-door of the invisible world, and ever and anon rung out joyous notes (though they sounded sad in the ears of the living), calling to the children of the unseen to _come home, come home_.--She sat for some time in silence; for the bell did not ring again, and the fool spoke no more; till the dews began to fall, when she rose and went home, followed by her companion, who passed the night in the barn.

"From that hour Elsie was furnished with a visual image of the rest she sought; an image which, mingling with deeper and holier thoughts, became, like the bow set in the cloud, the earthly pledge and sign of the fulfilment of heavenly hopes. Often when the wintry fog of cold discomfort and homelessness filled her soul, all at once the picture of the little churchyard--with the old gable and belfry, and the slanting sunlight steeping down to the very roots the long grass on the graves--arose in the darkened chamber (_camera obscura_) of her soul; and again she heard the faint ^{colian}olian sound of the bell, and the voice of the prophet-fool who interpreted the oracle; and the inward weariness was soothed by the promise of a long sleep. Who can tell how many have been counted fools simply because they were prophets; or how much of the madness in the world may be the utterance of thoughts true and just, but belonging to a region differing from ours in its nature and scenery!

"But to Elsie looking out of her window came the mocking tones of the

idle boys who had chosen as the vehicle of their scorn the very words which showed the relation of the fool to the eternal, and revealed in him an element higher far than any yet developed in them. They turned his glory into shame, like the enemies of David when they mocked the would-be king. And the best in a man is often that which is most condemned by those who have not attained to his goodness. The words, however, even as repeated by the boys, had not solely awakened indignation at the persecution of the old man: they had likewise comforted her with the thought of the refuge that awaited both him and her.

"But the same evening a worse trial befell her. Again she sat near the window, oppressed by the consciousness that her brother had come in. He had gone up-stairs, and his dog had remained at the door, exchanging surly compliments with some of his own kind; when the fool came strolling past, and, I do not know from what cause, the dog flew at him. Elsie heard his cry and looked up. Her fear of the brute vanished in a moment before her sympathy for her friend. She darted from the house, and rushed towards the dog to drag him off the defenceless idiot, calling him by his name in a tone of anger and dislike. He left the fool, and, springing at Elsie, seized her by the arm above the elbow with such a gripe that, in the midst of her agony, she fancied she heard the bone crack. But she uttered no cry, for the most apprehensive are sometimes the most courageous. Just then, however, her former lover was coming along the street, and, catching a glimpse of what had happened, was on the spot in an instant, took the dog by the throat with a gripe not inferior to his own, and having thus compelled him to give up his hold, dashed him on the ground with a force that almost stunned him, and then with a superadded kick sent him away limping and howling; whereupon the fool, attacking him furiously with a stick, would certainly have finished him, had not his master descried his plight and come to his rescue.

"Meantime the young surgeon had carried Elsie into the house; for, as soon as she was rescued from the dog, she had fallen down in one of her fits, which were becoming more and more frequent of themselves, and little needed such a shock as this to increase their violence. He was dressing her arm when she began to recover; and when she opened her eyes, in a state of half-consciousness, the first object she beheld, was his face bending over her. Re-calling nothing of what had occurred, it seemed to her, in the dreamy condition in which the fit had left her, the same face, unchanged, which had once shone in upon her tardy spring-time, and promised to ripen it into summer. She forgot that it had departed and left her in the wintry cold. And so she uttered wild words of love and trust; and the youth, while stung with remorse at his own neglect, was astonished to perceive the poetic forms of beauty in which the soul of the uneducated maiden burst into flower. But as her senses recovered themselves, the face gradually changed to her, as if the slow alteration of two years had been phantasmagorically compressed into a few moments; and the glow departed from the maiden's thoughts and words, and her soul found itself at the narrow window of the present, from which she could behold but a dreary country.--From the street came the iambic cry of

the fool, 'Come hame, come hame.'

"Tycho Brahe, I think, is said to have kept a fool, who frequently sat at his feet in his study, and to whose mutterings he used to listen in the pauses of his own thought. The shining soul of the astronomer drew forth the rainbow of harmony from the misty spray of words ascending ever from the dark gulf into which the thoughts of the idiot were ever falling. He beheld curious concurrences of words therein, and could read strange meanings from them--sometimes even received wondrous hints for the direction of celestial inquiry, from what, to any other, and it may be to the fool himself, was but a ceaseless and aimless babble. Such power lieth in words. It is not then to be wondered at, that the sounds I have mentioned should fall on the ears of Elsie, at such a moment, as a message from God himself. This then--all this dreariness--was but a passing show like the rest, and there lay somewhere for her a reality--a home. The tears burst up from her oppressed heart. She received the message, and prepared to go home. From that time her strength gradually sank, but her spirits as steadily rose.

"The strength of the fool, too, began to fail, for he was old. He bore all the signs of age, even to the grey hairs, which betokened no wisdom. But one cannot say what wisdom might be in him, or how far he had not fought his own battle, and been victorious. Whether any notion of a continuance of life and thought dwelt in his brain, it is impossible to tell; but he seemed to have the idea that this was not his home; and those who saw him gradually approaching his end, might well anticipate for him a higher life in the world to come. He had passed through this world without ever awakening to such a consciousness of being, as is common to mankind. He had spent his years like a weary dream through a long night--a strange, dismal, unkindly dream; and now the morning was at hand. Often in his dream had he listened with sleepy senses to the ringing of the bell, but that bell would awake him at last. He was like a seed buried too deep in the soil, to which, therefore, has never forced its way upwards to the open air, never experienced the resurrection of the dead. But seeds will grow ages after they have fallen into the earth; and, indeed, with many kinds, and within some limits, the older the seed before it germinates, the more plentiful is the fruit. And may it not be believed of many human beings, that, the great Husbandman having sown them like seeds in the soil of human affairs, there they lie buried a life long; and only after the upturning of the soil by death, reach a position in which the awakening of their aspiration and the consequent growth become possible. Surely he has made nothing in vain.

"A violent cold and cough brought him at last near to his end, and, hearing that he was ill, Elsie ventured one bright spring day to go to see him. When she entered the miserable room where he lay, he held out his hand to her with something like a smile, and muttered feebly and painfully, 'I'm gaein' to the wow, nae to come back again.' Elsie could not restrain her tears; while the old man, looking fixedly at her, though with meaningless eyes, muttered, for the last time, '_Come hame! come hame!_' and sank into a lethargy, from which nothing could

rouse him, till, next morning, he was waked by friendly death from the long sleep of this world's night. They bore him to his favourite church-yard, and buried him within the site of the old church, below his loved bell, which had ever been to him as the cuckoo-note of a coming spring. Thus he at length obeyed its summons, and went home.

"Elsie lingered till the first summer days lay warm on the land. Several kind hearts in the village, hearing of her illness, visited her and ministered to her. Wondering at her sweetness and patience, they regretted they had not known her before. How much consolation might not their kindness have imparted, and how much might not their sympathy have strengthened her on her painful road! But they could not long have delayed her going home. Nor, mentally constituted as she was, would this have been at all to be desired. Indeed it was chiefly the expectation of departure that quieted and soothed her tremulous nature. It is true that a deep spring of hope and faith kept singing on in her heart, but this alone, without the anticipation of speedy release, could only have kept her mind at peace. It could not have reached, at least for a long time, the border land between body and mind, in which her disease lay.

"One still night of summer, the nurse who watched by her bedside heard her murmur through her sleep, 'I hear it: _come hame--come hame_. I'm comin', I'm comin'--I'm gaein' hame to the wow, nae to come back.' She awoke at the sound of her own words, and begged the nurse to convey to her brother her last request, that she might be buried by the side of the fool, within the old church of Ruthven. Then she turned her face to the wall, and in the morning was found quiet and cold. She must have died within a few minutes after her last words. She was buried according to her request; and thus she, too, went home.

"Side by side rest the aged fool and the young maiden; for the bell called them, and they obeyed; and surely they found the fire burning bright, and heard friendly voices, and felt sweet lips on theirs, in the home to which they went. Surely both intellect and love were waiting them there.

"Still the old bell hangs in the old gable; and whenever another is borne to the old churchyard, it keeps calling to those who are left behind, with the same sad, but friendly and unchanging voice--_'Come hame! come hame! come hame!_'_"

For a full minute, there was silence in the little company. I myself dared not look up, but the movement of indistinct and cloudy white over my undirected eyes, let me know that two or three, amongst them Adela, were lifting their handkerchiefs to their faces. At length a voice broke the silence.

"How much of your affecting tale is true, Mr. Armstrong?"

The voice belonged to Mrs. Cathcart.

"I object to the question," said I. "I don't want to know. Suppose,

Mrs. Cathcart, I were to put this story-club, members, stories, and all, into a book, how would any one like to have her real existence questioned? It would at least imply that I had made a very bad portrait of that one."

The lady cast rather a frightened look at me, which I confess I was not sorry to see. But the curate interposed.

"What frightful sophistry, Mr. Smith!" Then turning to Mrs. Cathcart, he continued:

"I have not the slightest objection to answer your question, Mrs. Cathcart; and if our friend Mr. Smith does not want to hear the answer, I will wait till he stops his ears."

He glanced to me, his black eyes twinkling with fun. I saw that it was all he could do to keep from winking; but he did.

"Oh no," I answered; "I will share what is going."

"Well, then, the fool is a real character, in every point. But I learned after I had written the sketch, that I had made one mistake. He was in reality about seventeen, when he was found on the hill. The bell is a real character too. Elsie is a creature of my own. So of course are the brother and the dog."

"I don't know whether to be glad or sorry that there was no Elsie," said his wife. "But did you know the fool yourself?"

"Perfectly well, and had a great respect for him. When a little boy, I was quite proud of the way he behaved to me. He occasionally visited the general persecution of the boys, upon any boy he chanced to meet on the road; but as often as I met him, he walked quietly past me, muttering '_Auntie's folk!_' or returning my greeting of '_A fine day, Colonel!_' with a grunted '_Ay!_'"

"What did he mean by 'Auntie's folk?'" asked Mrs. Armstrong.

"My grandmother was kind to him, and he always called her '_Auntie_'. I cannot tell how the fancy originated; but certainly he knew all her descendants somehow--a degree of intelligence not to have been expected of him--and invariably murmured 'Auntie's folk,' as often as he passed any of them on the road, as if to remind himself that these were friends, or relations. Possibly he had lived with an aunt before he was exposed on the moor."

"Is '_wow_' a word at all?" I asked.

"If you look into Jamieson's Dictionary," said Armstrong, "as I have done for the express purpose, you will find that the word is used differently in different quarters of the country--chiefly, however, as a verb. It means '_to bark, to howl;_ likewise '_to wave or beckon;_ also '_to woo, or make love to_'. Any of these might be given as an

explanation of his word. But I do not think it had anything to do with these meanings; nor was the word used, in that district, in either of the last two senses, in my time at least. It was used, however, in the meaning of _alas_--a form of _woe_ in fact; as _wow's me!_ But I believe it was, in the fool's use, an attempt to reproduce the sound which the bell made. If you repeat the word several times, resting on the final _w_, and pausing between each repetition--_wow! wow! wow!--you will find that the sound is not at all unlike the tolling of a funeral bell; and therefore the word is most probably an onomatopoetic invention of the fool's own."

Adela offered no remark upon the story, and I knew from her countenance that she was too much affected to be inclined to speak. Her eyes had that fixed, forward look, which, combined with haziness, indicates deep emotion, while the curves of her mouth were nearly straightened out by the compression of her lips. I had thought, while the reader went on, that she could hardly fail to find in the story of Elsie, some correspondence to her own condition and necessities: I now believe that she had found that correspondence. More talk was not desirable; and I was glad when, after a few attempts at ordinary conversation, Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield rose to take their leave, which was accepted by the whole company as a signal for departure.

"But stay," I interposed; "who is to read or tell next?"

"Why, I will be revenged on Harry," said the clergyman.

"That you can't," said the doctor; "for I have nothing to give you."

"You don't mean to say you are going to jib?"

"No. I don't say I won't read. In fact I have a story in my head, and a bit of it on paper; but I positively can't read next time."

"Will you oblige us with a story, Colonel?" said I.

"My dear fellow, you know I never put pen to paper in my life, except when I could not help it. I may tell you a story before it is all over, but write one I cannot."

"A tale that is told is the best tale of all," I said. "Shall we book you for next time?"

"No, no! not next time; positively not. My story must come of itself, else I cannot tell it at all."

"Well, there's nobody left but you, Mr. Bloomfield. So you can't get rid of it."

"I don't think I ever wrote what was worth calling a story; but I don't mind reading you something of the sort which I have at home, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That nobody ask any questions about it."

"Oh! certainly."

"But my only reason is, that somehow I feel it would all come to pieces if you did. It is nothing, as a story; but there are feelings expressed in it, which were very strong in me when I wrote it, and which I do not feel willing to talk about, although I have no objection to having them thought about."

"Well, that is settled. When shall we meet again?"

"To-morrow, or the day after," said the colonel; "which you please."

"Oh! the day after, if I may have a word in it," said the doctor. "I shall be very busy to-morrow--and we mustn't crowd remedies either, you know."

The close of the sentence was addressed to me only. The rest of the company had taken leave, and were already at the door, when he made the last remark. He now came up to his patient, felt her pulse, and put the question,

"How have you slept the last two nights?"

"Better, thank you."

"And do you feel refreshed when you wake?"

"More so than for some time."

"I won't give you anything to-night.--Good night."

"Good night. Thank you."

This was all that passed between them. Jealousy, with the six eyes of Colonel, Mrs., and Percy Cathcart, was intent upon the pair during the brief conversation. And I thought Adela perceived the fact.

Chapter VII.

The schoolmaster's story.

I was walking up the street the next day, when, finding I was passing the Grammar-school, and knowing there was nothing going on there now, I thought I should not be intruding if I dropped in upon the schoolmaster and his wife, and had a little chat with them. I already counted them friends; for I felt that however different our training

and lives might have been, we all meant the same thing now, and that is the true bond of fellowship. I found Mr. Bloomfield reading to his wife--a novel, too. Evidently he intended to make the most of this individual holiday, by making it as unlike a work-day as possible.

"I see you are enjoying yourselves," I said. "It's a shame to break in upon you."

"We are delighted to see you. Your interruption will only postpone a good thing to a better," said the kind-hearted schoolmaster, laying down his book. "Will you take a pipe?"

"With pleasure--but not here, surely?"

"Oh! we smoke everywhere in holiday-time."

"You enjoy your holiday, I can see."

"I should think so. I don't believe one of the boys delights in a holiday quite as heartily as I do. You must not imagine I don't enjoy my work, though."

"Not in the least. Earnest work breeds earnest play. But you must find the labour wearisome at times."

"I confess I have felt it such. I have said to myself sometimes: 'Am I to go on for ever teaching boys Latin grammar, till I wish there had never been a Latin nation to leave such an incubus upon the bosom of after ages?' Then I would remind myself, that, under cover of grammar and geography, and all the other _farce_-meat (as the word ought to be written and pronounced), I put something better into my pupils; something that I loved myself, and cared to give to them. But I often ask myself to what it all goes.--I learn to love my boys. I kill in them all the bad I can. I nourish in them all the good I can. I send them across the borders of manhood--and they leave me, and most likely I hear nothing more of them. And I say to myself: 'My life is like a wind. It blows and will cease.' But something says in reply: 'Wouldst thou not be one of God's winds, content to blow, and scatter the rain and dew, and shake the plants into fresh life, and then pass away and know nothing of what thou hast done?' And I answer: 'Yes, Lord.'"

"You are not a wind; you are a poet, Mr. Bloomfield," I said, with emotion.

"One of the speechless ones, then," he returned, with a smile that showed plainly enough that the speechless longed for utterance. It was such a smile as would, upon the face of a child, wile anything out of you. Surely God, who needs no wiles to make him give what one is ready to receive, will let him sing some day, to his heart's content! And me, too, O Lord, I pray.

"What a pleasure it must be to you now, to have such a man as Mr. Armstrong for your curate! He will be a brother to you," I said,

as soon as I could speak.

"Mr, Smith, I cannot tell you what he is to me already. He is doing what I would fain have done--what was denied to me."

"How do you mean?"

"I studied for the church. But I aimed too high. My heart burned within me, but my powers were small. I wanted to relight the ancient lamp, but my rush-light would not kindle it. My friends saw no light; they only smelt burning: I was heterodox. I hesitated, I feared, I yielded, I withdrew. To this day, I do not know whether I did right or wrong. But I am honoured yet in being allowed to teach. And if at the last I have the faintest 'Well done' from the Master, I shall be satisfied."

Mrs. Bloomfield was gently weeping; partly from regret, as I judged, that her husband was not in the position she would have given him, partly from delight in his manly goodness. A watery film stood in the schoolmaster's eyes, and his wise gentle face was irradiated with the light of a far-off morning, whose dawn was visible to his hope.

"The world is the better for you at least, Mr. Bloomfield," I said. "I wish some more of us were as sure as you of helping on the daily Creation, which is quite as certain a fact as that of old; and is even more important to us, than that recorded in the book of Genesis. It is not great battles alone that build up the world's history, nor great poems alone that make the generations grow. There is a still small rain from heaven that has more to do with the blessedness of nature and of human nature, than the mightiest earthquake, or the loveliest rainbow."

"I do comfort myself," he answered, "at this Christmas-time, and for the whole year, with the thought that, after all, the world was saved by a child.--But that brings me to think of a little trouble I am in, Mr. Smith. The only paper I have, at all fit for reading to-morrow night, is much too short to occupy the evening. What is to be done?"

"Oh! we can talk about it."

"That is just what I could not bear. It is rather an odd composition, I fear; but whether it be worth anything or not, I cannot help having a great affection for it."

"Then it is true, I presume?"

"There again! That is just one of the questions I don't want to answer. I quite sympathized with you last night in not wishing to know how much of Mr. Armstrong's story was true. Even if wholly fictitious, a good story is always true. But there are things which one would have no right to invent, which would be worth nothing if they were invented, from the very circumstance of their origin in the brain, and not in the world. The very beauty of them demands that they should be

fact; or, if not, that they should not be told--sent out poor unclothed spirits into the world before a body of fact has been prepared for them. But I have always found it impossible to define the kinds of stories I mean. The nearest I can come to it is this: If the force of the lesson depends on the story being a fact, it must not be told except it is a fact. Then again, there are true things that one would be shy of telling, if he thought they would be attributed to himself. Now this story of mine is made up of fiction and fact both. And I fear that if I were called upon to take it to pieces, it would lose the force of any little truth it possesses, besides exposing me to what I would gladly avoid. Indeed I fear I ought not to read it at all."

"You are amongst friends, you know, Mr. Bloomfield."

"Entirely?" he asked, with a half comic expression.

"Well," I answered, laughing, "any exception that may exist, is hardly worth considering, and indeed ought to be thankfully accepted, as tending to wholesomeness. Neither vinegar nor mustard would be desirable as food, you know; yet--"

"I understand you. I am ashamed of having made such a fuss about nothing. I will do my best, I assure you."

I fear that the fastidiousness of the good man will not be excuse enough for the introduction of such a long preamble to a story for which only a few will in the least care. But the said preamble happening to touch on some interesting subjects, I thought it well to record it. As to the story itself, there are some remarks of Balzac in the introduction to one of his, that would well apply to the schoolmaster's. They are to the effect that some stories which have nothing in them as stories, yet fill one with an interest both gentle and profound, if they are read in the mood that is exactly fitted for their just reception.

Mr. Bloomfield conducted me to the door.

"I hope you will not think me a grumbler," he said; "I should not like your disapprobation, Mr. Smith."

"You do me great honour," I said, honestly. "Believe me there is no danger of that. I understand and sympathize with you entirely."

"My love of approbation is large," he said, tapping the bump referred to with his forefinger. "Excuse it and me too."

"There is no need, my dear friend," I said, "if I may call you such."

His answer was a warm squeeze of the hand, with which we parted.

As I returned home, I met Henry Armstrong, mounted on a bay mare of a far different sort from what a sportsman would consider a doctor

justified in using for his purposes. In fact she was a thorough hunter; no beauty certainly, with her ewe-neck, drooping tail, and white face and stocking; but she had an eye at once gentle and wild as that of a savage angel, if my reader will condescend to dream for a moment of such an anomaly; while her hind quarters were power itself, and her foreleg was flung right out from the shoulder with a gesture not of work but of delight; the step itself being entirely one of work,--long in proportion to its height. The lines of her fore and hind-quarters converged so much, that there was hardly more than room for the saddle between them. I had never seen such action. Altogether, although not much of a hunting man, the motion of the creature gave me such a sense of power and joy, that I longed to be scouring the fields with her under me. It was a sunshiny day, with a keen cold air, and a thin sprinkling of snow; and Harry looked so radiant with health, that one could easily believe he had health to convey, if not to bestow. He stopped and inquired after his patient.

"Could you not get her to go out with you, Mr. Smith?" he said.

"Would that be safe, Mr. Henry?"

"Perfectly safe, if she is willing to go; not otherwise. Get her to go willingly for ten minutes, and see if she is not the better for it. What I want is to make the blood go quicker and more plentifully through her brain. She has not fever enough. She does not live fast enough."

"I will try," I said. "Have you been far to-day?"

"Just come out. You might tell that by the mare. You should see her three hours after this."

And he patted her neck as if he loved her--as I am sure he did--and trotted gently away.

When I came up to the gate, Beeves was standing at it.

"A nice gentleman that, sir!" said he.

"He is, Beeves. I quite agree with you."

"And rides a good mare, sir; and rides as well as any man in the country. I never see him leave home in a hurry. Always goes gently out, and comes gently in. What has gone between, you may see by her skin when she comes home."

"Does he hunt, Beeves?"

"I believe not, sir; except the fox crosses him in one of his rounds. Then if he is heading anywhere in his direction, they say doctor and mare go at it like mad. He's got two more in his stable, better horses to look at; but that's the one to go."

"I wonder how he affords such animals."

"They say he has a way of buying them lame, and a wonderful knack of setting them up again. They all go, anyhow."

"Will you say to your mistress, that I should like very much if she would come to me here."

Beeves stared, but said, "Yes, sir," and went in. I was now standing in front of the house, doubtful of the reception Adela would give my message, but judging that curiosity would aid my desire. I was right. Beeves came back with the message that his mistress would join me in a few minutes. In a quarter of an hour she came, wrapt in furs. She was very pale, but her eye was brighter than usual, and it did not shrink from the cold glitter of the snow. She put her arm in mine, and we walked for ten minutes along the dry gravel walks, chatting cheerfully, about anything and nothing.

"Now you must go in," I said.

"Not yet, surely, uncle. By the bye, do you think it was right of me to come out?"

"Mr. Henry Armstrong said you might."

She did not reply, but I thought a slight rose-colour tinged her cheek.

"But he said you must not be out more than ten minutes."

"Well, I suppose I must do as I am told."

And she turned at once, and went up the stair to the door, almost as lightly as any other girl of her age.

There was some progress, plainly enough. But was that a rose-tinge I had seen on her cheek or not?

The next evening, after tea, we arranged ourselves much as on the last occasion; and Mr. Bloomfield, taking a neat manuscript from his pocket, and evidently restraining himself from apology and explanation, although as evidently nervous about the whole proceeding, and jealous of his own presumption, began to read as follows.

His voice trembled as he read, and his wife's face was a shade or two paler than usual.

"BIRTH, DREAMING, AND DEATH.

"In a little room, scantily furnished, lighted, not from the window, for it was dark without, and the shutters were closed, but from the peaked flame of a small, clear-burning lamp, sat a young man, with his back to the lamp and his face to the fire. No book or paper on the

table indicated labour just forsaken; nor could one tell from his eyes, in which the light had all retreated inwards, whether his consciousness was absorbed in thought, or reverie only. The window curtains, which scarcely concealed the shutters, were of coarse texture, but of brilliant scarlet--for he loved bright colours; and the faint reflection they threw on his pale, thin face, made it look more delicate than it would have seemed in pure daylight. Two or three bookshelves, suspended by cords from a nail in the wall, contained a collection of books, poverty-stricken as to numbers, with but few to fill up the chronological gap between the Greek New Testament and stray volumes of the poets of the present century. But his love for the souls of his individual books was the stronger that there was no possibility of its degenerating into avarice for the bodies or outsides whose aggregate constitutes the piece of house-furniture called a library.

"Some years before, the young man (my story is so short, and calls in so few personages, that I need not give him a name) had aspired, under the influence of religious and sympathetic feeling, to be a clergyman; but Providence, either in the form of poverty, or of theological difficulty, had prevented his prosecuting his studies to that end. And now he was only a village schoolmaster, nor likely to advance further. I have said only a village schoolmaster; but is it not better to be a teacher of babes than a preacher to men, at any time; not to speak of those troublous times of transition, wherein a difference of degree must so often assume the appearance of a difference of kind? That man is more happy--I will not say more blessed--who, loving boys and girls, is loved and revered by them, than he who, ministering unto men and women, is compelled to pour his words into the filter of religious suspicion, whence the water is allowed to pass away unheeded, and only the residuum is retained for the analysis of ignorant party-spirit.

"He had married a simple village girl, in whose eyes he was nobler than the noblest--to whom he was the mirror, in which the real forms of all things around were reflected. Who dares pity my poor village schoolmaster? I fling his pity away. Had he not found in her love the verdict of God, that he was worth loving? Did he not in her possess the eternal and unchangeable? Were not her eyes openings through which he looked into the great depths that could not be measured or represented? She was his public, his society, his critic. He found in her the heaven of his rest. God gave unto him immortality, and he was glad. For his ambition, it had died of its own mortality. He read the words of Jesus, and the words of great prophets whom he has sent; and learned that the wind-tossed anemone is a word of God as real and true as the unbending oak beneath which it grows--that reality is an absolute existence precluding degrees. If his mind was, as his room, scantily furnished, it was yet lofty; if his light was small, it was brilliant. God lived, and he lived. Perhaps the highest moral height which a man can reach, and at the same time the most difficult of attainment, is the willingness to be nothing relatively, so that he attain that positive excellence which the original conditions of his being render not merely possible, but imperative. It is nothing to a

man to be greater or less than another--to be esteemed or otherwise by the public or private world in which he moves. Does he, or does he not, behold and love and live the unchangeable, the essential, the divine? This he can only do according as God has made him. He can behold and understand God in the least degree, as well as in the greatest, only by the godlike within him; and he that loves thus the good and great has no room, no thought, no necessity for comparison and difference. The truth satisfies him. He lives in its absoluteness. God makes the glow-worm as well as the star; the light in both is divine. If mine be an earth-star to gladden the wayside, I must cultivate humbly and rejoicingly its green earth-glow, and not seek to blanch it to the whiteness of the stars that lie in the fields of blue. For to deny God in my own being is to cease to behold him in any. God and man can meet only by the man's becoming that which God meant him to be. Then he enters into the house of life, which is greater than the house of fame. It is better to be a child in a green field, than a knight of many orders in a state ceremonial.

"All night long he had sat there, and morning was drawing nigh. He has not heard the busy wind all night, heaping up snow against the house, which will make him start at the ghostly face of the world when at length he opens the shutters, and it stares upon him so white. For up in a little room above, white-curtained, like the great earth without, there has been a storm, too, half the night--moanings and prayers--and some forbidden tears; but now, at length, it is over; and through the portals of two mouths instead of one, flows and ebbs the tide of the great air-sea which feeds the life of man. With the sorrow of the mother, the new life is purchased for the child; our very being is redeemed from nothingness with the pains of a death of which we know nothing.

"An hour has gone by since the watcher below has been delivered from the fear and doubt that held him. He has seen the mother and the child--the first she has given to life and him--and has returned to his lonely room, quiet and glad.

"But not long did he sit thus before thoughts of doubt awoke in his mind. He remembered his scanty income, and the somewhat feeble health of his wife. One or two small debts he had contracted, seemed absolutely to press on his bosom; and the newborn child--'oh! how doubly welcome,' he thought, 'if I were but half as rich again as I am!--brought with it, as its own love, so its own care. The dogs of need, that so often hunt us up to heaven, seemed hard upon his heels; and he prayed to God with fervour; and as he prayed he fell asleep in his chair, and as he slept he dreamed. The fire and the lamp burned on as before, but threw no rays into his soul; yet now, for the first time, he seemed to become aware of the storm without; for his dream was as follows:--

"He lay in his bed, and listened to the howling of the wintry wind. He trembled at the thought of the pitiless cold, and turned to sleep again, when he thought he heard a feeble knocking at the door. He rose in haste, and went down with a light. As he opened the door, the wind,

entering with a gust of frosty particles, blew out his candle; but he found it unnecessary, for the grey dawn had come. Looking out, he saw nothing at first; but a second look, turned downwards, showed him a little half-frozen child, who looked quietly, but beseechingly, in his face. His hair was filled with drifted snow, and his little hands and cheeks were blue with cold. The heart of the schoolmaster swelled to bursting with the spring-flood of love and pity that rose up within it. He lifted the child to his bosom, and carried him into the house; where, in the dream's incongruity, he found a fire blazing in the room in which he now slept. The child said never a word. He set him by the fire, and made haste to get hot water, and put him in a warm bath. He never doubted that this was a stray orphan who had wandered to him for protection, and he felt that he could not part with him again; even though the train of his previous troubles and doubts once more passed through the mind of the dreamer, and there seemed no answer to his perplexities for the lack of that cheap thing, gold--yea, silver. But when he had undressed and bathed the little orphan, and having dried him on his knees, set him down to reach something warm to wrap him in, the boy suddenly looked up in his face, as if revived, and said with a heavenly smile, 'I am the child Jesus.' 'The child Jesus!' said the dreamer, astonished. 'Thou art like any other child.' 'No, do not say so,' returned the boy; 'but say, _Any other child is like me_.' And the child and the dream slowly faded away; and he awoke with these words sounding in his heart--'Whosoever shall receiveth one of such children in my name, receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.' It was the voice of God saying to him: 'Thou wouldst receive the child whom I sent thee out of the cold, stormy night; receive the new child out of the cold waste into the warm human house, as the door by which it can enter God's house, its home. If better could be done for it, or for thee, would I have sent it hither? Through thy love, my little one must learn my love and be blessed. And thou shall not keep it without thy reward. For thy necessities--in thy little house, is there not yet room? in thy barrel, is there not yet meal? and thy purse is not empty quite. Thou canst not eat more than a mouthful at once. I have made thee so. Is it any trouble to me to take care of thee? Only I prefer to feed thee from my own hand, and not from thy store.' And the schoolmaster sprang up in joy, ran upstairs, kissed his wife, and clasped the baby in his arms in the name of the child Jesus. And in that embrace, he knew that he received God to his heart. Soon, with a tender, beaming face, he was wading through the snow to the school-house, where he spent a happy day amidst the rosy faces and bright eyes of his boys and girls. These, likewise, he loved the more dearly and joyfully for that dream, and those words in his heart; so that, amidst their true child-faces, (all going well with them, as not unfrequently happened in his schoolroom), he felt as if all the elements of Paradise were gathered around him, and knew that he was God's child, doing God's work.

"But while that dream was passing through the soul of the husband, another visited the wife, as she lay in the faintness and trembling joy of the new motherhood. For although she that has been mother before, is not the less a new mother to the new child, her former

relation not covering with its wings the fresh bird in the nest of her bosom, yet there must be a peculiar delight in the thoughts and feelings that come with the first-born.--As she lay half in a sleep, half in a faint, with the vapours of a gentle delirium floating through her brain, without losing the sense of existence she lost the consciousness of its form, and thought she lay, not a young mother in her bed, but a nosegay of wild flowers in a basket, crushed, flattened and half-withered. With her in the basket lay other bunches of flowers, whose odours, some rare as well as rich, revealed to her the sad contrast in which she was placed. Beside her lay a cluster of delicately curved, faintly tinged, tea-scented roses; while she was only blue hyacinth bells, pale primroses, amethyst anemones, closed blood-coloured daisies, purple violets, and one sweet-scented, pure white orchis. The basket lay on the counter of a well-known little shop in the village, waiting for purchasers. By and by her own husband entered the shop, and approached the basket to choose a nosegay. 'Ah!' thought she, 'will he choose me? How dreadful if he should not, and I should be left lying here, while he takes another! But how should he choose me? They are all so beautiful; and even my scent is nearly gone. And he cannot know that it is I lying here. Alas! alas!' But as she thought thus, she felt his hand clasp her, heard the ransom-money fall, and felt that she was pressed to his face and lips, as he passed from the shop. He had chosen her; he had known her. She opened her eyes: her husband's kiss had awakened her. She did not speak, but looked up thankfully in his eyes, as if he had, in fact, like one of the old knights, delivered her from the transformation of some evil magic, by the counter-enchantment of a kiss, and restored her from a half-withered nosegay to be a woman, a wife, a mother. The dream comforted her much, for she had often feared that she, the simple, so-called uneducated girl, could not be enough for the great schoolmaster. But soon her thoughts flowed into another channel; the tears rose in her dark eyes, shining clear from beneath a stream that was not of sorrow; and it was only weakness that kept her from uttering audible words like these:--'Father in heaven, shall I trust my husband's love, and doubt thine? Wilt thou meet less richly the fearing hope of thy child's heart, than he in my dream met the longing of his wife's? He was perfected in my eyes by the love he bore me--shall I find thee less complete? Here I lie on thy world, faint, and crushed, and withered; and my soul often seems as if it had lost all the odours that should float up in the sweet-smelling savour of thankfulness and love to thee. But thou hast only to take me, only to choose me, only to clasp me to thy bosom, and I shall be a beautiful singing angel, singing to God, and comforting my husband while I sing. Father, take me, possess me, fill me!'

"So she lay patiently waiting for the summer-time of restored strength that drew slowly nigh. With her husband and her child near her, in her soul, and God everywhere, there was for her no death, and no hurt. When she said to herself, 'How rich I am!' it was with the riches that pass not away--the riches of the Son of man; for in her treasures, the human and the divine were blended--were one.

"But there was a hard trial in store for them. They had learned to

receive what the Father sent: they had now to learn that what he gave he gave eternally, after his own being--his own glory. For ere the mother awoke from her first sleep, the baby, like a frolicsome child-angel, that but tapped at his mother's window and fled--the baby died; died while the mother slept away the pangs of its birth, died while the father was teaching other babes out of the joy of his new fatherhood.

"When the mother woke, she lay still in her joy--the joy of a doubled life; and knew not that death had been there, and had left behind only the little human coffin.

"Nurse, bring me the baby,' she said at last. 'I want to see it.'

"But the nurse pretended not to hear.

"I want to nurse it. Bring it.'

"She had not yet learned to say _him_; for it was her first baby.

"But the nurse went out of the room, and remained some minutes away. When she returned, the mother spoke more absolutely, and the nurse was compelled to reply--at last.

"Nurse, do bring me the baby; I am quite able to nurse it now.'

"Not yet, if you please, ma'am. Really you must rest a while first. Do try to go to sleep.'

"The nurse spoke steadily, and looked her too straight in the face; and there was a constraint in her voice, a determination to be calm, that at once roused the suspicion of the mother; for though her first-born was dead, and she had given birth to what was now, as far as the eye could reach, the waxen image of a son, a child had come from God, and had departed to him again; and she was his mother.

"And the fear fell upon her heart that it might be as it was; and, looking at her attendant with a face blanched yet more with fear than with suffering, she said,

"Nurse, is the baby--?'

"She could not say _dead_; for to utter the word would be at once to make it possible that the only fruit of her labour had been pain and sorrow.

"But the nurse saw that further concealment was impossible; and, without another word, went and fetched the husband, who, with face pale as the mother's, brought the baby, dressed in its white clothes, and laid it by its mother's side, where it lay too still.

"Oh, ma'am, do not take on so,' said the nurse, as she saw the face of the mother grow like the face of the child, as if she were about to

rush after him into the dark.

"But she was not 'taking on' at all. She only felt that pain at her heart, which is the farewell kiss of a long-cherished joy. Though cast out of paradise into a world that looked very dull and weary, yet, used to suffering, and always claiming from God the consolation it needed, and satisfied with that, she was able, presently, to look up in her husband's face, and try to reassure him of her well-being by a dreary smile.

"'Leave the baby,' she said; and they left it where it was. Long and earnestly she gazed on the perfect tiny features of the little alabaster countenance, and tried to feel that this was the child she had been so long waiting for. As she looked, she fancied she heard it breathe, and she thought--'What if it should be only asleep!' but, alas! the eyes would not open, and when she drew it close to her, she shivered to feel it so cold. At length, as her eyes wandered over and over the little face, a look of her husband dawned unexpectedly upon it; and, as if the wife's heart awoke the mother's she cried out, 'Baby! baby!' and burst into tears, during which weeping she fell asleep.

"When she awoke, she found the babe had been removed while she slept. But the unsatisfied heart of the mother longed to look again on the form of the child; and again, though with remonstrance from the nurse, it was laid beside her. All day and all night long, it remained by her side, like a little frozen thing that had wandered from its home, and now lay dead by the door.

"Next morning the nurse protested that she must part with it, for it made her fret; but she knew it quieted her, and she would rather keep her little lifeless babe. At length the nurse appealed to the father; and the mother feared he would think it necessary to remove it; but to her joy and gratitude he said, 'No, no; let her keep it as long as she likes.' And she loved her husband the more for that; for he understood her.

"Then she had the cradle brought near the bed, all ready as it was for a live child that had open eyes, and therefore needed sleep--needed the lids of the brain to close, when it was filled full of the strange colours and forms of the new world. But this one needed no cradle, for it slept on. It needed, instead of the little curtains to darken it to sleep, a great sunlight to wake it up from the darkness, and the ever-satisfied rest. Yet she laid it in the cradle, which she had set near her, where she could see it, with the little hand and arm laid out on the white coverlet. If she could only keep it so! Could not something be done, if not to awake it, yet to turn it to stone, and let it remain so for ever? No; the body must go back to its mother, the earth, and the _form_ which is immortal, being the thought of God, must go back to its Father--the Maker. And as it lay in the white cradle, a white coffin was being made for it. And the mother thought: 'I wonder which trees are growing coffins for my husband and me.'

"But ere the child, that had the prayer of Job in his grief, and had died from its mother's womb, was carried away to be buried, the mother prayed over it this prayer:--'O God, if thou wilt not let me be a mother, I have one refuge: I will go back and be a child: I will be thy child more than ever. My mother-heart will find relief in childhood towards its Father. For is it not the same nature that makes the true mother and the true child? Is it not the same thought blossoming upward and blossoming downward? So there is God the Father and God the Son. Thou wilt keep my little son for me. He has gone home to be nursed for me. And when I grow well, I will be more simple, and truthful, and joyful in thy sight. And now thou art taking away my child, my plaything, from me. But I think how pleased I should be, if I had a daughter, and she loved me so well that she only smiled when I took her plaything from her. Oh! I will not disappoint thee--thou shall have thy joy. Here I am, do with me what thou wilt; I will only smile.'

"And how fared the heart of the father? At first, in the bitterness of his grief, he called the loss of his child a punishment for his doubt and unbelief; and the feeling of punishment made the stroke more keen, and the heart less willing to endure it. But better thoughts woke within him ere long.

"The old woman who swept out his schoolroom, came in the evening to inquire after the mistress, and to offer her condolences on the loss of the baby. She came likewise to tell the news, that a certain old man of little respectability had departed at last, unregretted by a single soul in the village but herself, who had been his nurse through the last tedious illness.

"The schoolmaster thought with himself:

"Can that soiled and withered leaf of a man, and my little snow-flake of a baby, have gone the same road? Will they meet by the way? Can they talk about the same thing--anything? They must part on the borders of the shining land, and they could hardly speak by the way.'

"He will live four-and-twenty hours, nurse,' the doctor had said.

"No, doctor; he will die to-night,' the nurse had replied; during which whispered dialogue, the patient had lain breathing quietly, for the last of suffering was nearly over.

He was at the close of an ill-spent life, not so much selfishly towards others as indulgently towards himself. He had failed of true joy by trying often and perseveringly to create a false one; and now, about to knock at the gate of the other world, he bore with him no burden of the good things of this; and one might be tempted to say of him, that it were better he had not been born. The great majestic mystery lay before him--but when would he see its majesty?

"He was dying thus, because he had tried to live as Nature said he should not live; and he had taken his own wages--for the law of the

Maker is the necessity of his creature. His own children had forsaken him, for they were not perfect as their Father in heaven, who maketh his sun to shine on the evil and on the good. Instead of doubling their care as his need doubled, they had thought of the disgrace he brought on them, and not of the duty they owed him; and now, left to die alone for them, he was waited on by this hired nurse, who, familiar with death-beds, knew better than the doctor--knew that he could live only a few hours.

"Stooping to his ear, she had told him, as gently as she could--for she thought she ought not to conceal it--that he must die that night. He had lain silent for a few moments; then had called her, and, with broken and failing voice, had said, 'Nurse, you are the only friend I have: give me one kiss before I die.' And the woman-heart had answered the prayer.

"'And,' said the old woman, 'he put his arms round my neck, and gave me a long kiss, such a long kiss! and then he turned his face away, and never spoke again.'

"So, with the last unction of a woman's kiss, with this baptism for the dead, he had departed.

"'Poor old man! he had not quite destroyed his heart yet,' thought the schoolmaster. 'Surely it was the child-nature that woke in him at the last, when the only thing left for his soul to desire, the only thing he could think of as a preparation for the dread something, was a kiss. Strange conjunction, yet simple and natural! Eternity--a kiss. Kiss me; for I am going to the Unknown!--Poor old man!' the schoolmaster went on in his thoughts, 'I hope my baby has met him, and put his tiny hand in the poor old shaking hand, and so led him across the borders into the shining land, and up to where Jesus sits, and said to the Lord: "Lord, forgive this old man, for he knew not what he did." And I trust the Lord has forgiven him.'

"And then the bereaved father fell on his knees, and cried out:

"'Lord, thou hast not punished me. Thou wouldst not punish for a passing thought of troubled unbelief, with which I strove. Lord, take my child and his mother and me, and do what thou wilt with us. I know thou givest not, to take again.'

"And ere the schoolmaster could call his protestantism to his aid, he had ended his prayer with the cry:

"'And O God! have mercy upon the poor old man, and lay not his sins to his charge.'

"For, though a woman's kiss may comfort a man to eternity, it is not all he needs. And the thought of his lost child had made the soul of the father compassionate."

* * * * *

He ceased, and we sat silent.

* * * * *

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