GEORGE MACDONALD

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE SHOP

It was an evening early in May. The sun was low, and the street was mottled with the shadows of its paving-stones—smooth enough, but far from evenly set. The sky was clear, except for a few clouds in the west, hardly visible in the dazzle of the huge light, which lay among them like a liquid that had broken its vessel, and was pouring over the fragments. The street was almost empty, and the air was chill. The spring was busy, and the summer was at hand; but the wind was blowing from the north.

The street was not a common one; there was interest, that is feature, in the shadowy front of almost each of its old houses. Not a few of them wore, indeed, something like a human expression, the look of having both known and suffered. From many a porch, and many a latticed oriel, a long shadow stretched eastward, like a death flag streaming in a wind unfelt of the body—or a fluttering leaf, ready to yield, and flit away, and add one more to the mound of blackness gathering on the horizon's edge. It was the main street of an old country town, dwindled by the rise of larger and

more prosperous places, but holding and exercising a charm none of them would ever gain.

Some of the oldest of its houses, most of them with more than one projecting story, stood about the middle of the street. The central and oldest of these was a draper's shop. The windows of the ground-floor encroached a little on the pavement, to which they descended very close, for the floor of the shop was lower than the street. But, although they had glass on three oriel sides, they were little used for the advertising of the stores within. A few ribbons and gay handkerchiefs, mostly of cotton, for the eyes of the country people on market-days, formed the chief part of their humble show. The door was wide and very low, the upper half of it of glass—old, and bottle-colored; and its threshold was a deep step down into the shop. As a place for purchases it might not to some eyes look promising, but both the ladies and the housekeepers of Testbridge knew that rarely could they do better in London itself than at the shop of Turnbull and Marston, whether variety, quality, or price, was the point in consideration. And, whatever the first impression concerning it, the moment the eyes of a stranger began to grow accustomed to its gloom, the evident size and plenitude of the shop might well suggest a large hope. It was low, indeed, and the walls could therefore accommodate few shelves; but the ceiling was therefore so near as to be itself available for stowage by means of well-contrived slides and shelves attached to the great beams crossing it in several directions. During the shop-day, many an article,

light as lace, and heavy as broadcloth, was taken from overhead to lay upon the counter. The shop had a special reputation for all kinds of linen goods, from cambric handkerchiefs to towels, and from table-napkins to sheets; but almost everything was to be found in it, from Manchester moleskins for the navy's trousers, to Genoa velvet for the dowager's gown, and from Horrocks's prints to Lyons silks. It had been enlarged at the back, by building beyond the original plan, and that part of it was a little higher, and a little better lighted than the front; but the whole place was still dark enough to have awaked the envy of any swindling London shopkeeper. Its owners, however, had so long enjoyed the confidence of the neighborhood, that faith readily took the place of sight with their customers—so far at least as quality was concerned; and seldom, except in a question of color or shade, was an article carried to the door to be confronted with the day. It had been just such a shop, untouched of even legendary change, as far back as the memory of the sexton reached; and he, because of his age and his occupation, was the chief authority in the local history of the place.

As, on this evening, there were few people in the street, so were there few in the shop, and it was on the point of being closed: they were not particular there to a good many minutes either way. Behind the counter, on the left hand, stood a youth of about twenty, young George Turnbull, the son of the principal partner, occupied in leisurely folding and putting aside a number of things he had been showing to a farmer's wife, who was

just gone. He was an ordinary-looking lad, with little more than business in his high forehead, fresh-colored, good-humored, self-satisfied cheeks, and keen hazel eyes. These last kept wandering from his not very pressing occupation to the other side of the shop, where stood, behind the opposing counter, a young woman, in attendance upon the wants of a well-dressed youth in front of it, who had just made choice of a pair of driving-gloves. His air and carriage were conventionally those of a gentleman—a gentleman, however, more than ordinarily desirous of pleasing a young woman behind a counter. She answered him with politeness, and even friendliness, nor seemed aware of anything unusual in his attentions.

"They're splendid gloves," he said, making talk; "but don't you think it a great price for a pair of gloves, Miss Marston?"

"It is a good deal of money," she answered, in a sweet, quiet voice, whose very tone suggested simplicity and straightforwardness; "but they will last you a long time. Just look at the work, Mr. Helmer. You see how they are made? It is much more difficult to stitch them like that, one edge over the other, than to sew the two edges together, as they do with ladies' gloves. But I'll just ask my father whether he marked them himself."

"He did mark those, I know," said young Turnbull, who had been listening to all that went on, "for I heard my father say they ought to be sixpence more."

"Ah, then!" she returned, assentingly, and laid the gloves on the box before her, the question settled.

Helmer took them, and began to put them on.

"They certainly are the only glove where there is much handling of reins," he said.

"That is what Mr. Wardour says of them," rejoined Miss Marston.

"By the by," said Helmer, lowering his voice, "when did you see anybody from Thornwick?"

"Their old man was in the town yesterday with the dog-cart."

"Nobody with him?"

"Miss Letty. She came in for just two minutes or so."

"How was she looking?"

"Very well," answered Miss Marston, with what to Helmer seemed indifference.

"Ah!" he said, with a look of knowingness, "you girls don't see each other with the same eyes as we. I grant Letty is not very tall, and I grant she has not much of a complexion; but where did you ever see such eyes?"

"You must excuse me, Mr. Helmer," returned Mary, with a smile, "if I don't choose to discuss Letty's merits with you; she is my friend."

"Where would be the harm?" rejoined Helmer, looking puzzled. "I am not likely to say anything against her. You know perfectly well I admire her beyond any woman in the world. I don't care who knows it."

"Your mother?" suggested Mary, in the tone of one who makes a venture.

"Ah, come now, Miss Marston! Don't you turn my mother loose upon me. I shall be of age in a few months, and then my mother may—think as she pleases. I know, of course, with her notions, she would never consent to my making love to Letty—"

"I should think not!" exclaimed Mary. "Who ever thought of such an absurdity? Not you, surely, Mr. Helmer? What would your mother say to hear you? I mention her in earnest now."

"Let mothers mind their own business!" retorted the youth angrily. "I shall mind mine. My mother ought to know that by this time."

Mary said no more. She knew Mrs. Helmer was not a mother to deserve her boy's confidence, any more than to gain it; for she treated him as if she had made him, and was not satisfied with her work.

"When are you going to see Letty, Miss Marston?" resumed Helmer, after a brief pause of angry feeling.

"Next Sunday evening probably."

"Take me with you."

"Take you with me! What are you dreaming of, Mr. Helmer?"

"I would give my bay mare for a good talk with Letty Lovel," he returned.

Mary made no reply.

"You won't?" he said petulantly, after a vain pause of expectation.

"Won't what?" rejoined Miss Marston, as if she could not believe him in earnest.

"Take me with you on Sunday?"

"No," she answered quietly, but with sober decision.

"Where would be the harm?" pleaded the youth, in a tone mingled of expostulation, entreaty, and mortification.

"One is not bound to do everything there would be no harm in doing," answered Miss Marston. "Besides, Mr. Helmer, I don't choose to go out walking with you of a Sunday evening."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, your mother would not like it. You know she would not."

"Never mind my mother. She's nothing to you. She can't bite you.—Ask the dentist. Come, come! that's all nonsense. I shall be at the stile beyond the turnpike-gate all the afternoon—waiting till you come."

"The moment I see you—anywhere upon the road—that moment I shall turn back.—Do you think," she added with half-amused indignation, "I would put up with having all the gossips of Testbridge talk of my going out on a Sunday evening with a boy like you?"

Tom Helmer's face flushed. He caught up the gloves, threw the price of them on the counter, and walked from the shop, without even a good night.

"Hullo!" cried George Turnbull, vaulting over the counter, and taking the place Helmer had just left opposite Mary; "what did you say to the fellow to send him off like that? If you do hate the business, you needn't scare the customers, Mary."

"I don't hate the business, you know quite well, George. And if I did scare a customer," she added, laughing, as she dropped the money in the till, "it was not before he had done buying."

"That may be; but we must look to to-morrow as well as to-day. When is Mr. Helmer likely to come near us again, after such a wipe as you must have given him to make him go off like that?"

"Just to-morrow, George, I fancy," answered Mary. "He won't be able to bear the thought of having left a bad impression on me, and so he'll come again to remove it. After all, there's something about him I can't help liking. I said nothing that ought to have put him out of temper like that, though; I only called him a boy."

"Let me tell you, Mary, you could not have called him a worse name."

"Why, what else is he?"

"A more offensive word a man could not hear from the lips of a woman," said George loftily.

"A man, I dare say! But Mr. Helmer can't be nineteen yet."

"How can you say so, when he told you himself he would be of age in a few months? The fellow is older than I am. You'll be calling me a boy next."

"What else are you? You at least are not one-and-twenty."

"And how old do you call yourself, pray, miss?"

"Three-and-twenty last birthday."

"A mighty difference indeed!"

"Not much—only all the difference, it seems, between sense and absurdity, George."

"That may be all very true of a fine gentleman, like Helmer, that does nothing from morning to night but run away from his mother; but you don't think it applies to me, Mary, I hope!"

"That's as you behave yourself, George. If you do not make it apply, it won't apply of itself. But if young women had not more sense than most of the young men I see in the shop—on both sides of the counter, George—things would soon be at a fine pass. Nothing better in your head than in a peacock's!—only that a peacock *has* the fine feathers he's so proud of."

"If it were Mr. Wardour now, Mary, that was spreading his tail for you to see, you would not complain of that peacock!"

A vivid rose blossomed instantly in Mary's cheek. Mr. Wardour was not even an acquaintance of hers. He was cousin and friend to Letty Lovel, indeed, but she had never spoken to him, except in the shop.

"It would not be quite out of place if you were to learn a little respect for your superiors, George," she returned. "Mr. Wardour is not to be thought of in the same moment with the young men that were in my mind. Mr. Wardour is not a young man; and he is a gentleman."

She took the glove-box, and turning placed it on a shelf behind her.

"Just so!" remarked George, bitterly. "Any man you don't choose to count a gentleman, you look down upon! What have you got to do with gentlemen, I should like to know?"

"To admire one when I see him," answered Mary. "Why

shouldn't I? It is very seldom, and it does me good."

"Oh, yes!" rejoined George, contemptuously. "You *call* yourself a lady, but—"

"I do nothing of the kind," interrupted Mary, sharply. "I should *like* to be a lady; and inside of me, please God, I *will* be a lady; but I leave it to other people to call me this or that. It matters little what any one is *called* ."

"All right," returned George, a little cowed; "I don't mean to contradict you. Only just tell me why a well-to-do tradesman shouldn't be a gentleman as well as a small yeoman like Wardour."

"Why don't you say—as well as a squire, or an earl, or a duke?" said Mary.

"There you are, chaffing me again! It's hard enough to have every fool of a lawyer's clerk, or a doctor's boy, looking down upon a fellow, and calling him a counter-jumper; but, upon my soul, it's too bad when a girl in the same shop hasn't a civil word for him, because he isn't what she counts a gentleman! Isn't my father a gentleman? Answer me that, Mary."

It was one of George's few good things that he had a great opinion of his father, though the grounds of it were hardly such as to enable Mary to answer his appeal in a way he would have counted satisfactory. She thought of her own father, and was silent.

"Everything depends on what a man is in himself, George," she answered. "Mr. Wardour would be a gentleman all the same

if he were a shopkeeper or a blacksmith."

"And shouldn't I be as good a gentleman as Mr. Wardour, if I had been born with an old tumble-down house on my back, and a few acres of land I could do with as I liked? Come, answer me that."

"If it be the house and the land that makes the difference, you would, of course," answered Mary.

Her tone implied, even to George's rough perceptions, that there was a good deal more of a difference between them than therein lay. But common people, whether lords or shopkeepers, are slow to understand that possession, whether in the shape of birth, or lands, or money, or intellect, is a small affair in the difference between men.

"I know you don't think me fit to hold a candle to him," he said. "But I happen to know, for all he rides such a good horse, he's not above doing the work of a wretched menial, for he polishes his own stirrup-irons."

"I'm very glad to hear it," rejoined Mary. "He must be more of a gentleman yet than I thought him."

"Then why should you count him a better gentleman than me?"

"I'm afraid for one thing, you would go with your stirrup-irons rusty, rather than clean them yourself, George. But I will tell you one thing Mr. Wardour would not do if he were a shopkeeper: he would not, like you, talk one way to the rich, and another way to the poor—all submission and politeness to the one, and

familiarity, even to rudeness, with the other! If you go on like that, you'll never come within sight of being a gentleman, George—not if you live to the age of Methuselah."

"Thank you, Miss Mary! It's a fine thing to have a lady in the shop! Shouldn't I just like my father to hear you! I'm blowed if I know how a fellow is to get on with you! Certain sure I am that it ain't *my* fault if we're not friends."

Mary made no reply. She could not help understanding what George meant, and she flushed, with honest anger, from brow to chin. But, while her dark-blue eyes flamed with indignation, her anger was not such as to render her face less pleasant to look upon. There are as many kinds of anger as there are of the sunsets with which they ought to end: Mary's anger had no hate in it.

I must now hope my readers sufficiently interested in my narrative to care that I should tell them something of what she was like. Plainly as I see her, I can not do more for them than that. I can not give a portrait of her; I can but cast her shadow on my page. It was a dainty half-length, neither tall nor short, in a plain, well-fitting dress of black silk, with linen collar and cuffs, that rose above the counter, standing, in spite of displeasure, calm and motionless. Her hair was dark, and dressed in the simplest manner, without even a reminder of the hideous occipital structure then in favor—especially with shop women, who in general choose for imitation and exorbitant development whatever is ugliest and least lady-like in the fashion of the hour. It had a natural wave in it, which broke the too straight lines

it would otherwise have made across a forehead of sweet and composing proportions. Her features were regular—her nose straight—perhaps a little thin; the curve of her upper lip carefully drawn, as if with design to express a certain firmness of modesty; and her chin well shaped, perhaps a little too sharply defined for her years, and rather large. Everything about her suggested the repose of order satisfied, of unconstrained obedience to the laws of harmonious relation. The only fault honest criticism could have suggested, merely suggested, was the presence of just a possible *nuance* of primness. Her boots, at this moment unseen of any, fitted her feet, as her feet fitted her body. Her hands were especially good. There are not many ladies, interested in their own graces, who would not have envied her such seals to her natural patent of ladyhood. Her speech and manners corresponded with her person and dress; they were direct and simple, in tone and inflection, those of one at peace with herself. Neatness was more notable in her than grace, but grace was not absent; good breeding was more evident than delicacy, yet delicacy was there; and unity was plain throughout.

George went back to his own side of the shop, jumped the counter, put the cover on the box he had left open with a bang, and shoved it into its place as if it had been the backboard of a cart, shouting as he did so to a boy invisible, to make haste and put up the shutters. Mary left the shop by a door on the inside of the counter, for she and her father lived in the house; and, as soon as the shop was closed, George went home to the villa his

father had built in the suburbs.

CHAPTER II.
CUSTOMERS

The next day was Saturday, a busy one at the shop. From the neighboring villages and farms came customers not a few; and ladies, from the country-seats around, began to arrive as the hours went on. The whole strength of the establishment was early called out. Busiest in serving was the senior partner, Mr. Turnbull. He was a stout, florid man, with a bald crown, a heavy watch-chain of the best gold festooned across the wide space between waistcoat-button-hole and pocket, and a large hemispheroidal carbuncle on a huge fat finger, which yet was his little one. He was close-shaved, double-chinned, and had cultivated an ordinary smile to such an extraordinary degree that, to use the common hyperbole, it reached from ear to ear. By nature he was good-tempered and genial; but, having devoted every mental as well as physical endowment to the making of money, what few drops of spiritual water were in him had to go with the rest to the turning of the mill-wheel that ground the universe into coin. In his own eyes he was a strong churchman, but the only sign of it visible to others was the strength of his contempt for dissenters—which, however, excepting his partner and Mary, he showed only to church-people; a dissenter's money being, as he often remarked, when once in his till, as good as the

best churchman's.

To the receptive eye he was a sight not soon to be forgotten, as he bent over a piece of goods outspread before a customer, one hand resting on the stuff, the other on the yard-measure, his chest as nearly touching the counter as the protesting adjacent parts would permit, his broad smooth face turned up at right angles, and his mouth, eloquent even to solemnity on the merits of the article, now hiding, now disclosing a gulf of white teeth. No sooner was anything admitted into stock, than he bent his soul to the selling of it, doing everything that could be done, saying everything he could think of saying, short of plain lying as to its quality: that he was not guilty of. To buy well was a care to him, to sell well was a greater, but to make money, and that as speedily as possible, was his greatest care, and his whole ambition.

John Turnbull in his gig, as he drove along the road to the town, and through the street approached his shop-door, showed to the chance observer a man who knew himself of importance, a man who might have a soul somewhere inside that broad waistcoat; as he drew up, threw the reins to his stable-boy, and descended upon the pavement—as he stepped down into the shop even, he looked a being in whom son or daughter or friend might feel some honest pride; but, the moment he was behind the counter and in front of a customer, he changed to a creature whose appearance and carriage were painfully contemptible to any beholder who loved his kind; he had lost the upright bearing of a man, and cringed like an ape. But I fear it was thus he had

gained a portion at least of his favor with the country-folk, many of whom much preferred his ministrations to those of his partner. A glance, indeed, from the one to the other, was enough to reveal which must be the better salesman—and to some eyes which the better man.

In the narrow walk of his commerce—behind the counter, I mean—Mr. Marston stood up tall and straight, lank and lean, seldom bending more than his long neck in the direction of the counter, but doing everything needful upon it notwithstanding, from the unusual length of his arms and his bony hands. His forehead was high and narrow, his face pale and thin, his hair long and thin, his nose aquiline and thin, his eyes large, his mouth and chin small. He seldom spoke a syllable more than was needful, but his words breathed calm respect to every customer. His conversation with one was commonly all but over as he laid something for approval or rejection on the counter: he had already taken every pains to learn the precise nature of the necessity or desire; and what he then offered he submitted without comment; if the thing was not judged satisfactory, he removed it and brought another. Many did not like this mode of service; they would be helped to buy; unequal to the task of making up their minds, they welcomed any aid toward it; and therefore preferred Mr. Turnbull, who gave them every imaginable and unimaginable assistance, groveling before them like a man whose many gods came to him one after the other to be worshiped; while Mr. Marston, the moment the thing he

presented was on the counter, shot straight up like a poplar in a sudden calm, his visage bearing witness that his thought was already far away—in heavenly places with his wife, or hovering like a perplexed bee over some difficult passage in the New Testament; Mary could have told which, for she knew the meaning of every shadow that passed or lingered on his countenance.

His partner and his like-minded son despised him, as a matter of course; his unbusiness-like habits, as they counted them, were the constantly recurring theme of their scorn; and some of these would doubtless have brought him the disapprobation of many a business man of a moral development beyond that of Turnbull; but Mary saw nothing in them which did not stamp her father the superior of all other men she knew.

To mention one thing, which may serve as typical of the man: he not unfrequently sold things under the price marked by his partner. Against this breach of fealty to the firm Turnbull never ceased to level his biggest guns of indignation and remonstrance, though always without effect. He even lowered himself in his own eyes so far as to quote Scripture like a canting dissenter, and remind his partner of what came to a house divided against itself. He did not see that the best thing for some houses must be to come to pieces. "Well, but, Mr. Turnbull, I thought it was marked too high," was the other's invariable answer. "William, you are a fool," his partner would rejoin for the hundredth time. "Will you never understand that, if we get a little more than

the customary profit upon one thing, we get less upon another? You must make the thing even, or come to the workhouse." Thereto, for the hundredth time also, William Marston would reply: "That might hold, I daresay, Mr. Turnbull—I am not sure—if every customer always bought an article of each of the two sorts together; but I can't make it straight with my conscience that one customer should pay too much because I let another pay too little. Besides, I am not at all sure that the general scale of profit is not set too high. I fear you and I will have to part, Mr. Turnbull." But nothing was further from Turnbull's desire than that he and Marston should part; he could not keep the business going without his money, not to mention that he never doubted Marston would straightway open another shop, and, even if he did not undersell him, take from him all his dissenting customers; for the junior partner was deacon of a small Baptist church in the town—a fact which, although like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes of John Turnbull in his villa, was invaluable in the eyes of John Turnbull behind his counter.

Whether William Marston was right or wrong in his ideas about the rite of baptism—probably he was both—he was certainly right in his relation to that which alone makes it of any value—that, namely, which it signifies; buried with his Master, he had died to selfishness, greed, and trust in the secondary; died to evil, and risen to good—a new creature. He was just as much a Christian in his shop as in the chapel, in his bedroom as at the prayer-meeting.

But the world was not now much temptation to him, and, to tell the truth, he was getting a good deal tired of the shop. He had to remind himself, oftener and oftener, that in the mean time it was the work given him to do, and to take more and more frequently the strengthening cordial of a glance across the shop at his daughter. Such a glance passed through the dusky place like summer lightning through a heavy atmosphere, and came to Mary like a glad prophecy; for it told of a world within and beyond the world, a region of love and faith, where struggled no antagonistic desires, no counteracting aims, but unity was the visible garment of truth.

The question may well suggest itself to my reader—How could such a man be so unequally yoked with such another as Turnbull? —To this I reply that Marston's greatness had yet a certain repressive power upon the man who despised him, so that he never uttered his worst thoughts or revealed his worst basenesses in his presence. Marston never thought of him as my reader must soon think—flattered himself, indeed, that poor John was gradually improving, coming to see things more and more as he would have him look on them. Add to this, that they had been in the business together almost from boyhood, and much will be explained.

An open carriage, with a pair of showy but ill-matched horses, looking unfit for country work on the one hand, as for Hyde Park on the other, drew up at the door; and a visible wave of interest ran from end to end of the shop, swaying as well those

outside as those inside the counter, for the carriage was well known in Testbridge. It was that of Lady Margaret Mortimer; she did not herself like the *Margaret* , and signed only her second name *Alice* at full length, whence her *friends* generally called her to each other Lady Malice. She did not leave the carriage, but continued to recline motionless in it, at an angle of forty-five degrees, wrapped in furs, for the day was cloudy and cold, her pale handsome face looking inexpressibly more indifferent in its regard of earth and sky and the goings of men, than that of a corpse whose gaze is only on the inside of the coffin-lid. But the two ladies who were with her got down. One of them was her daughter, Hesper by name, who, from the dull, cloudy atmosphere that filled the doorway, entered the shop like a gleam of sunshine, dusky-golden, followed by a glowing shadow, in the person of her cousin, Miss Yolland.

Turnbull hurried to meet them, bowing profoundly, and looking very much like Issachar between the chairs he carried. But they turned aside to where Mary stood, and in a few minutes the counter was covered with various stuffs for some of the smaller articles of ladies' attire.

The customers were hard to please, for they wanted the best things at the price of inferior ones, and Mary noted that the desires of the cousin were farther reaching and more expensive than those of Miss Mortimer. But, though in this way hard to please, they were not therefore unpleasant to deal with; and from the moment she looked the latter in the face, whom she had not

seen since she was a girl, Mary could hardly take her eyes off her. All at once it struck her how well the unusual, fantastic name her mother had given her suited her; and, as she gazed, the feeling grew.

Large, and grandly made, Hesper stood "straight, and steady, and tall," dusky-fair, and colorless, with the carriage of a young matron. Her brown hair seemed ever scathed and crinkled afresh by the ethereal flame that here and there peeped from amid the unwilling volute rolled back from her creamy forehead in a rebellious coronet. Her eyes were large and hazel; her nose cast gently upward, answering the carriage of her head; her mouth decidedly large, but so exquisite in drawing and finish that the loss of a centimetre of its length would to a lover have been as the loss of a kingdom; her chin a trifle large, and grandly lined; for a woman's, her throat was massive, and her arms and hands were powerful. Her expression was frank, almost brave, her eyes looking full at the person she addressed. As she gazed, a kind of love she had never felt before kept swelling in Mary's heart.

Her companion impressed her very differently.

Some men, and most women, counted Miss Yolland *strangely* ugly. But there were men who exceedingly admired her. Not very slight for her stature, and above the middle height, she looked small beside Hesper. Her skin was very dark, with a considerable touch of sallowness; her eyes, which were large and beautifully shaped, were as black as eyes could be, with light in the midst of their blackness, and more than a touch of hardness in the

midst of their liquidity; her eyelashes were singularly long and black, and she seemed conscious of them every time they rose. She did not *use* her eyes habitually, but, when she did, the thrust was sudden and straight. I heard a man once say that a look from her was like a volley of small-arms. Like Hesper's, her mouth was large and good, with fine teeth; her chin projected a little too much; her hands were finer than Hesper's, but bony. Her name was Septimia; Lady Margaret called her Sepia, and the contraction seemed to so many suitable that it was ere long generally adopted. She was in mourning, with a little crape. To the first glance she seemed as unlike Hesper as she could well be; but, as she stood gently regarding the two, Mary, gradually, and to her astonishment, became indubitably aware of a singular likeness between them. Sepia, being a few years older, and in less flourishing condition, had her features sharper and finer, and by nature her complexion was darker by shades innumerable; but, if the one was the evening, the other was the night: Sepia was a diminished and overshadowed Hesper. Their manner, too, was similar, but Sepia's was the haughtier, and she had an occasional look of defiance, of which there appeared nothing in Hesper. When first she came to Durnmelling, Lady Malice had once alluded to the dependence of her position—but only once: there came a flash into rather than out of Sepia's eyes that made any repetition of the insult impossible and Lady Malice wish that she had left her a wanderer on the face of Europe.

Sepia was the daughter of a clergyman, an uncle of Lady

Malice, whose sons had all gone to the bad, and whose daughters had all vanished from society. Shortly before the time at which my narrative begins, one of the latter, however, namely Sepia, the youngest, had reappeared, a fragment of the family wreck, floating over the gulf of its destruction. Nobody knew with any certainty where she had been in the interim: nobody at Durnmelling knew anything but what she chose to tell, and that was not much. She said she had been a governess in Austrian Poland and Russia. Lady Margaret had become reconciled to her presence, and Hesper attached to her.

Of the men who, as I have said, admired her, some felt a peculiar enchantment in what they called her ugliness; others declared her devilish handsome; and some shrank from her as if with an undefined dread of perilous entanglement, if she should but catch them looking her in the face. Among some of them she was known as Lucifer, in antithesis to Hesper: they meant the Lucifer of darkness, not the light-bringer of the morning.

The ladies, on their part, especially Hesper, were much pleased with Mary. The simplicity of her address and manner, the pains she took to find the exact thing she wanted, and the modest decision with which she answered any reference to her, made Hesper even like her. The most artificially educated of women is yet human, and capable of even more than liking a fellow-creature as such. When their purchases were ended, she took her leave with a kind smile, which went on glowing in Mary's heart long after she had vanished.

"Home, John," said Lady Margaret, the moment the two ladies were seated. "I hope you have got *all* you wanted. We shall be late for luncheon, I fear. I would not for worlds keep Mr. Redmain waiting.—A little faster, John, please."

Hesper's face darkened. Sepia eyed her fixedly, from under the mingling of ascended lashes and descended brows. The coachman pretended to obey, but the horses knew very well when he did and when he did not mean them to go, and took not a step to the minute more: John had regard to the splendid-looking black horse on the near side, which was weak in the wind, as well as on one fired pastern, and cared little for the anxiety of his mistress. To him, horses were the final peak of creation—or if not the horses, the coachman, whose they are—masters and mistresses the merest parasitical adjuncts. He got them home in good time for luncheon, notwithstanding—more to Lady Margaret's than Hesper's satisfaction.

Mr. Redmain was a bachelor of fifty, to whom Lady Margaret was endeavoring to make the family agreeable, in the hope he might take Hesper off their hands. I need not say he was rich. He was a common man, with good cold manners, which he offered you like a handle. He was selfish, capable of picking up a lady's handkerchief, but hardly a wife's. He was attentive to Hesper; but she scarcely concealed such a repugnance to him as some feel at sight of strange fishes—being at the same time afraid of him, which was not surprising, as she could hardly fail to perceive the fate intended for her.

"Ain't Miss Mortimer a stunner?" said George Turnbull to Mary, when the tide of customers had finally ebbed from the shop.

"I don't exactly know what you mean, George," answered Mary.

"Oh, of course, I know it ain't fair to ask any girl to admire another," said George. "But there's no offense to you, Mary. One young lady can't carry *every* merit on her back. She'd be too lovely to live, you know. Miss Mortimer ain't got your waist, nor she ain't got your 'ands, nor your 'air; and you ain't got her size, nor the sort of hair she 'as with her."

He looked up from the piece of leno he was smoothing out, and saw he was alone in the shop.

CHAPTER III.
THE ARBOR AT THORNWICK

The next day was Sunday at last, a day dear to all who do anything like their duty in the week, whether they go to church or not. For Mary, she went to the Baptist chapel; it was her custom, rendered holy by the companionship of her father. But this day it was with more than ordinary restlessness and lack of interest that she stood, knelt, and sat, through the routine of observance; for old Mr. Duppa was certainly duller than usual: how could it be otherwise, when he had been preparing to spend a mortal hour in descanting on the reasons which necessitated the separation of all true Baptists from all brother-believers? The narrow, high-souled little man—for a soul as well as a forehead can be both high and narrow—was dull that morning because he spoke out of his narrowness, and not out of his height; and Mary was better justified in feeling bored than even when George Turnbull plagued her with his vulgar attentions. When she got out at last, sedate as she was, she could hardly help skipping along the street by her father's side. Far better than chapel was their nice little cold dinner together, in their only sitting-room, redolent of the multifarious goods piled around it on all the rest of the floor. Greater yet was the following pleasure—of making her father lie down on the sofa, and reading him to sleep, after which she

would doze a little herself, and dream a little, in the great chair that had been her grandmother's. Then they had their tea, and then her father always went to see the minister before chapel in the evening.

When he was gone, Mary would put on her pretty straw bonnet, and set out to visit Letty Lovel at Thornwick. Some of the church-members thought this habit of taking a walk, instead of going again to the chapel, very worldly, and did not scruple to let her know their opinion; but, so long as her father was satisfied with her, Mary did not care a straw for the world besides. She was too much occupied with obedience to trouble her head about opinion, either her own or other people's. Not until a question comes puzzling and troubling us so as to paralyze the energy of our obedience is there any necessity for its solution, or any probability of finding a real one. A thousand foolish *doctrines* may lie unquestioned in the mind, and never interfere with the growth or bliss of him who lives in active subordination of his life to the law of life: obedience will in time exorcise them, like many another worse devil.

It had drizzled all the morning from the clouds as well as from the pulpit, but, just as Mary stepped out of the kitchen-door, the sun stepped out of the last rain-cloud. She walked quickly from the town, eager for the fields and the trees, but in some dread of finding Tom Helmer at the stile; for he was such a fool, she said to herself, that there was no knowing what he might do, for all she had said; but he had thought better of it, and she was soon

crossing meadows and cornfields in peace, by a path which, with many a winding, and many an up and down, was the nearest way to Thornwick.

The saints of old did well to pray God to lift on them the light of his countenance: has the Christian of the new time learned of his Master that the clouds and the sunshine come and go of themselves? If the sunshine fills the hearts of old men and babes and birds with gladness and praise, and God never meant it, then are they all idolaters, and have but a careless Father. Sweet earthy odors rose about Mary from the wet ground; the raindrops glittered on the grass and corn-blades and hedgerows; a soft damp wind breathed rather than blew about the gaps and gates; with an upward springing, like that of a fountain momently gathering strength, the larks kept shooting aloft, there, like music-rockets, to explode in showers of glowing and sparkling song; while, all the time and over all, the sun as he went down kept shining in the might of his peace; and the heart of Mary praised her Father in heaven.

Where the narrow path ran westward for a little way, so that she could see nothing for the sun in her eyes, in the middle of a plowed field she would have run right against a gentleman, had he been as blind as she; but, his back being to the sun, he saw her perfectly, and stepped out of her way into the midst of a patch of stiff soil, where the rain was yet lying between the furrows. She saw him then, and as, lifting his hat, he stopped again upon the path, she recognized Mr. Wardour.

"Oh, your nice boots!" she cried, in the childlike distress of a simple soul discovering itself the cause of catastrophe, for his boots were smeared all over with yellow clay.

"It only serves me right," returned Mr. Wardour, with a laugh of amusement. "I oughtn't to have put on such thin ones at the first smile of summer."

Again he lifted his hat, and walked on.

Mary also pursued her path, genuinely though gently pained that one should have stepped up to the ankles in mud on her account. As I have already said, except in the shop she had never before spoken to Mr. Wardour, and, although he had so simply responded to her exclamation, he did not even know who she was.

The friendship which now drew Mary to Thornwick, Godfrey Wardour's place, was not one of long date. She and Letty Lovel had, it is true, known each other for years, but only quite of late had their acquaintance ripened into something better; and it was not without protestation on the part of Mrs. Wardour, Godfrey's mother, that she had seen the growth of an intimacy between the two young women. The society of a shopwoman, she often remarked, was far from suitable for one who, as the daughter of a professional man, might lay claim to the position of a gentlewoman. For Letty was the orphan daughter of a country surgeon, a cousin of Mrs. Wardour, for whom she had had a great liking while yet they were boy and girl together. At the same time, however much she would have her consider herself the superior of Mary Marston, she by no means treated her as

her own equal, and Letty could not help being afraid of her aunt, as she called her.

The well-meaning woman was in fact possessed by two devils—the one the stiff-necked devil of pride, the other the condescending devil of benevolence. She was kind, but she must have credit for it; and Letty, although the child of a loved cousin, must not presume upon that, or forget that the wife and mother of long-descended proprietors of certain acres of land was greatly the superior of any man who lived by the exercise of the best-educated and most helpful profession. She counted herself a devout Christian, but her ideas of rank, at least—therefore certainly not a few others—were absolutely opposed to the Master's teaching: they who did least for others were her aristocracy.

Now, Letty was a simple, true-hearted girl, rather slow, who honestly tried to understand her aunt's position with regard to her friend. "Shop-girls," her aunt had said, "are not fitting company for you, Letty."

"I do not know any other shop-girls, aunt," Letty replied, with hidden trembling; "but, if they are not nice, then they are not like Mary. She's downright good; indeed she is, aunt!—a great deal, ever so much, better than I am."

"That may well be," answered Mrs. Wardour, "but it does not make a lady of her."

"I am sure," returned Letty, bewildered, "on Sundays you could not tell the difference between her and any other young

lady."

"Any other well-dressed young woman, my dear, you should say. I believe shop-girls do call their companions young ladies, but that can not justify the application of the word. I am scarcely bound to speak of my cook as a lady because letters come addressed to her as Miss Tozer. If the word 'lady' should sink at last to common use, as in Italy every woman is Donna, we must find some other word to ex-press what *used* to be meant by it."

"Is Mrs. Cropper a lady, aunt?" asked Letty, after a pause, in which her brains, which were not half so muddled as she thought them, had been busy feeling after firm ground in the morass of social distinction thus opened under her.

"She is received as such," replied Mrs. Wardour, but with doubled stiffness, through which ran a tone of injury.

"Would you receive her, aunt, if she called upon you?"

"She has horses and servants, and everything a woman of the world can desire; but I should feel I was bowing the knee to Mammon were I to ask her to my house. Yet such is the respect paid to money in these degenerate days that many a one will court the society of a person like that, who would think me or your cousin Godfrey unworthy of notice, because we have no longer a tithe of the property the family once possessed."

The lady forgot there is a Rimmon as well as a Mammon.

"God knows," she went on, "how that woman's husband made his money! But that is a small matter nowadays, except to old-fashioned people like myself. Not *how* but *how much* , is all the

question now," she concluded, flattering herself she had made a good point.

"Don't think me rude, please, aunt: I am really wishing to understand—but, if Mrs. Cropper is not a lady, how can Mary Marston not be one? She is as different from Mrs. Croppor as one woman can be from another."

"Because she has not the position in society," replied Mrs. Wardour, enveloping her nothing in flimsy reiteration and self-contradiction.

"And Mrs. Cropper has the position?" ventured Letty, with a little palpitation from fear of offending.

"Apparently so," answered Mrs. Wardour. But her inquiring pupil did not feel much enlightened. Letty had not the logic necessary to the thinking of the thing out; or to the discovery that, like most social difficulties, hers was merely one of the upper strata of a question whose foundation lies far too deep for what is called Society to perceive its very existence. And hence it is no wonder that Society, abetted by the Church, should go on from generation to generation talking murderous platitudes about it.

But, although such was her reasoning beforehand, heart had so far overcome habit and prejudice with Mrs. Wardour, that, convinced on the first interview of the high tone and good influence of Mary, she had gradually come to put herself in the way of seeing her as often as she came, ostensibly to herself that she might prevent any deterioration of intercourse; and although she always, on these occasions, played the grand lady, with a

stateliness that seemed to say, "Because of your individual worth, I condescend, and make an exception, but you must not imagine I receive your class at Thornwick," she had almost entirely ceased making remarks upon the said class in Letty's hearing.

On her part, Letty had by this time grown so intimate with Mary as to open with her the question upon which her aunt had given her so little satisfaction; and this same Sunday afternoon, as they sat in the arbor at the end of the long yew hedge in the old garden, it had come up again between them; for, set thinking by Letty's bewilderment, Mary had gone on thinking, and had at length laid hold of the matter, at least by the end that belonged to *her* .

"I can not consent, Letty," she said, "to trouble my mind about it as you do. I can not afford it. Society is neither my master nor my servant, neither my father nor my sister; and so long as she does not bar my way to the kingdom of heaven, which is the only society worth getting into, I feel no right to complain of how she treats me. I have no claim on her; I do not acknowledge her laws —hardly her existence, and she has no authority over me. Why should she, how could she, constituted as she is, receive such as me? The moment she did so, she would cease to be what she is; and, if all be true that one hears of her, she does me a kindness in excluding me. What can it matter to me, Letty, whether they call me a lady or not, so long as Jesus says *Daughter* to me? It reminds me of what I heard my father say once to Mr. Turnbull, when he had been protesting that none but church people ought

to be buried in the churchyards. 'I don't care a straw about it, Mr. Turnbull,' he said. 'The Master was buried in a garden.'—'Ah, but you see things are different now,' said Mr. Turnbull.—'I don't hang by things, but by my Master. It is enough for the disciple that he should be as his Master,' said my father.—'Besides, you don't think it of any real consequence yourself, or you would never want to keep your brothers and sisters out of such nice quiet places!'—Mr. Turnbull gave his kind of grunt, and said no more."

After passing Mary, Mr. Wardour did not go very far before he began to slacken his pace; a moment or two more and he suddenly wheeled round, and began to walk back toward Thornwick. Two things had combined to produce this change of purpose—the first, the state of his boots, which, beginning to dry in the sun and wind as he walked, grew more and more hideous at the end of his new gray trousers; the other, the occurring suspicion that the girl must be Letty's new shopkeeping friend, Miss Marston, on her way to visit her. What a sweet, simple young woman she was! he thought; and straightway began to argue with himself that, as his boots were in such evil plight, it would be more pleasant to spend the evening with Letty and her friend, than to hold on his way to his own friend's, and spend the evening smoking and lounging about the stable, or hearing his sister play polkas and mazurkas all the still Sunday twilight.

Mary had, of course, upon her arrival, narrated her small adventure, and the conversation had again turned upon Godfrey

just as he was nearing the house.

"How handsome your cousin is!" said Mary, with the simplicity natural to her.

"Do you think so?" returned Letty.

"Don't *you* think so?" rejoined Mary.

"I have never thought about it," answered Letty.

"He looks so manly, and has such a straightforward way with him!" said Mary.

"What one sees every day, she may feel in a sort of take-for-granted way, without thinking about it," said Letty. "But, to tell the truth, I should feel it as impertinent of me to criticise Cousin Godfrey's person as to pass an opinion on one of the books he reads. I can not express the reverence I have for Cousin Godfrey."

"I don't wonder," replied Mary. "There is that about him one could trust."

"There is that about him," returned Letty, "makes me afraid of him—I can not tell why. And yet, though everybody, even his mother, is as anxious to please him as if he were an emperor, he is the easiest person to please in the whole house. Not that he tells you he is pleased; he only smiles; but that is quite enough."

"But I suppose he talks to you sometimes?" said Mary.

"Oh, yes—now. He used not; but I think he does now more than to anybody else. It was a long time before he began, though. Now he is always giving me something to read. I wish he wouldn't; it frightens me dreadfully. He always questions me, to know whether I understand what I read."

Letty ended with a little cry. Through the one narrow gap in the yew hedge, near to the arbor, Godfrey had entered the walk, and was coming toward them.

He was a well-made man, thirty years of age, rather tall, sun-tanned, and bearded, with wavy brown hair, and gentle approach. His features were not regular, but that is of little consequence where there is unity. His face indicated faculty and feeling, and there was much good nature, shadowed with memorial suffering, in the eyes which shone so blue out of the brown.

Mary rose respectfully as he drew near.

"What treason were you talking, Letty, that you were so startled at sight of me?" he said, with a smile. "You were complaining of me as a hard master, were you not?"

"No, indeed, Cousin Godfrey!" answered Letty energetically, not without tremor, and coloring as she spoke. "I was only saying I could not help being frightened when you asked me questions about what I had been reading. I am so stupid, you know!"

"Pardon me, Letty," returned her cousin, "I know nothing of the sort. Allow me to say you are very far from stupid. Nobody can understand everything at first sight. But you have not introduced me to your friend."

Letty bashfully murmured the names of the two.

"I guessed as much," said Wardour. "Pray sit down, Miss Marston. For the sake of your dresses, I will go and change my boots. May I come and join you after?"

"Please do, Cousin Godfrey; and bring something to read to

us," said Letty, who wanted her friend to admire her cousin. "It's Sunday, you know."

"Why you should be afraid of him, I can't think," said Mary, when his retreating steps had ceased to sound on the gravel. "He is delightful!"

"I don't like to look stupid," said Letty.

"I shouldn't mind how stupid I looked so long as I was learning," returned Mary. "I wonder you never told me about him!"

"I couldn't talk about Cousin Godfrey," said Letty; and a pause followed.

"How good of him to come to us again!" said Mary. "What will he read to us?"

"Most likely something out of a book you never heard of before, and can't remember the name of when you have heard it —at least that's the way with me. I wonder if he will talk to you, Mary? I should like to hear how Cousin Godfrey talks to girls."

"Why, you know how he talks to you," said Mary.

"Oh, but I am only Cousin Letty! He can talk anyhow to me."

"By your own account he talks to you in the best possible way."

"Yes; I dare say; but—"

"But what?"

"I can't help wishing sometimes he would talk a little nonsense. It would be such a relief. I am sure I should understand better if he would. I shouldn't be so frightened at him then."

"The way I generally hear gentlemen talk to girls makes me

ashamed—makes me feel as if I must ask, 'Is it that you are a fool, or that you take that girl for one?' They never talk so to me."

Letty sat pulling a jonquil to pieces. She looked up. Her eyes were full of thought, but she paused a long time before she spoke, and, when she did, it was only to say:

"I fear, Mary, I should take any man for a fool who took me for anything else."

Letty was a rather small and rather freckled girl, with the daintiest of rounded figures, a good forehead, and fine clear brown eyes. Her mouth was not pretty, except when she smiled—and she did not smile often. When she did, it was not unfrequently with the tears in her eyes, and then she looked lovely. In her manner there was an indescribably taking charm, of which it is not easy to give an impression; but I think it sprang from a constitutional humility, partly ruined into a painful and haunting sense of inferiority, for which she imagined herself to blame. Hence there dwelt in her eyes an appeal which few hearts could resist. When they met another's, they seemed to say: "I am nobody; but you need not kill me; I am not pretending to be anybody. I will try to do what you want, but I am not clever. Only I am sorry for it. Be gentle with me." To Godfrey, at least, her eyes spoke thus.

In ten minutes or so he reappeared, far at the other end of the yew-walk, approaching slowly, with a book, in which he seemed thoughtfully searching as he came. When they saw him the girls instinctively moved farther from each other, making large room

for him between them, and when he came up he silently took the place thus silently assigned him.

"I am going to try your brains now, Letty," he said, and tapped the book with a finger.

"Oh, please don't!" pleaded Letty, as if he had been threatening her with a small amputation, or the loss of a front tooth.

"Yes," he persisted; "and not your brains only, Letty, but your heart, and all that is in you."

At this even Mary could not help feeling a little frightened; and she was glad there was no occasion for her to speak.

With just a word of introduction, Godfrey read Carlyle's translation of that finest of Jean Paul's dreams in which he sets forth the condition of a godless universe all at once awakened to the knowledge of the causelessness of its own existence. Slowly, with due inflection and emphasis—slowly, but without pause for thought or explanation—he read to the end, ceased suddenly, and lifted his eyes.

"There, Letty," he said, "what do you think of that? There's a bit of Sunday reading for you!"

Letty was looking altogether perplexed, and not a little frightened.

"I don't understand a word of it," she answered, gulping back her tears. He glanced at Mary. She was white as death, her lips quivered, and from her eyes shot a keen light that seemed to lacerate their blue.

"It is terrible!" she said. "I never read anything like that."

"There *is* nothing like it," he answered.

"But the author is a Unitarian, is he not?" remarked Mary—for she heard plenty of theology, if not much Christianity, in her chapel.

Godfrey looked at her, then at the book for a moment.

"That may merely seem, from the necessity of the supposition," he answered; and read again:

"'Now sank from aloft a noble, high Form, with a look of uneffaceable sorrow, down to the Altar, and all the Dead cried out, "Christ! is there no God?" He answered, "There is none!" The whole Shadow of each then shuddered, not the breast alone; and one after the other all, in this shuddering, shook into pieces.'—"You see," he went on, "that if there be no God, Christ can only be the first of men."

"I understand," said Mary.

"Do you really then, Mary?" said Letty, looking at her with wondering admiration.

"I only meant," answered Mary—"but," she went on, interrupting herself, "I do think I understand it a little. If Mr. Wardour would be kind enough to read it through again!"

"With much pleasure," answered Godfrey, casting on her a glance of pleased surprise.

The second reading affected Mary more than the first—because, of course, she took in more. And this time a glimmer of meaning broke on the slower mind of Letty: as her cousin

read the passage, "Oh, then came, fearful for the heart, the dead Children who had been awakened in the Churchyard, into the temple, and cast themselves before the high Form on the Altar, and said, 'Jesus, have we no Father?' And he answered, with streaming tears: 'We are all orphans, I and you; we are without Father!'"—at this point Letty gave her little cry, then bit her lip, as if she had said something wrong.

All the time a great bee kept buzzing in and out of the arbor, and Mary vaguely wondered how it could be so careless.

"I can't be dead stupid after all, Cousin Godfrey," said Letty, with broken voice, when once more he ceased, and, as she spoke, she pressed her hand on her heart, "for something kept going through and through me; but I can not say yet I understand it.—If you will lend me the book," she continued, "I will read it over again before I go to bed."

He shut the volume, handed it to her, and began to talk about something else.

Mary rose to go.

"You will take tea with us, I hope, Miss Marston," said Godfrey.

But Mary would not. What she had heard was working in her mind with a powerful fermentation, and she longed to be alone. In the fields, as she walked, she would come to an understanding with herself.

She knew almost nothing of the higher literature, and felt like a dreamer who, in the midst of a well-known and ordinary

landscape, comes without warning upon the mighty cone of a mountain, or the breaking waters of a boundless ocean.

"If one could but get hold of such things, what a glorious life it would be!" she thought. She had looked into a world beyond the present, and already in the present all things were new. The sun set as she had never seen him set before; it was only in gray and gold, with scarce a touch of purple and rose; the wind visited her cheek like a living thing, and loved her; the skylarks had more than reason in their jubilation. For the first time she heard the full chord of intellectual and emotional delight. What a place her chamber would be, if she could there read such things! How easy would it be then to bear the troubles of the hour, the vulgar humor of Mr. Turnbull, and the tiresome attentions of George! Would Mr. Wardour lend her the book? Had he other books as good? Were there many books to make one's heart go as that one did? She would save every penny to buy such books, if indeed such treasures were within her reach! Under the enchantment of her first literary joy, she walked home like one intoxicated with opium—a being possessed for the time with the awful imagination of a grander soul, and reveling in the presence of her loftier kin.

CHAPTER IV.
GODFREY WARDOUR

The property of which Thornwick once formed a part was then large and important; but it had, by not very slow degrees, generation following generation of unthrift, dwindled and shrunk and shriveled, until at last it threatened to disappear from the family altogether, like a spark upon burnt paper. Then came one into possession who had some element of salvation in him; Godfrey's father not only held the poor remnant together, but, unable to add to it, improved it so greatly that at length, in the midst of the large properties around, it resembled the diamond that hearts a disk of inferior stones. Doubtless, could he have used his wife's money, he would have spent it on land; but it was under trustees for herself and her children, and indeed would not have gone far in the purchase of English soil.

Considerably advanced in years before he thought of marrying, he died while Godfrey, whom he intended bringing up to a profession, was yet a child; and his widow, carrying out his intention, had educated the boy with a view to the law. Godfrey, however, had positively declined entering on the studies special to a career he detested; nor was it difficult to reconcile his mother to the enforced change of idea, when she found that his sole desire was to settle down with her, and manage the two hundred

acres his father had left him. He took his place in the county, therefore, as a yeoman-farmer—none the less a gentleman by descent, character, and education. But while in genuine culture and refinement the superior of all the landed proprietors in the neighborhood, and knowing it, he was the superior of most of them in this also, that he counted it no derogation from the dignity he valued to put his hands upon occasion to any piece of work required about the place.

His nature was too large, however, and its needs therefore too many, to allow of his spending his energies on the property; and he did not brood over such things as, so soon as they become cares, become despicable. How much time is wasted in what is called thought, but is merely care—an anxious idling over the fancied probabilities of result! Of this fault, I say, Godfrey was not guilty—more, however, I must confess, from healthful drawings in other directions, than from philosophy or wisdom: he was *a reader* —not in the sense of a man who derives intensest pleasure from the absorption of intellectual pabulum—one not necessarily so superior as some imagine to the *gourmet* , or even the *gourmand* : in his reading Godfrey nourished certain of the higher tendencies of his nature—read with a constant reference to his own views of life, and the confirmation, change, or enlargement of his theories of the same; but neither did he read with the highest aim of all—the enlargement of reverence, obedience, and faith; for he had never turned his face full in the direction of infinite growth—the primal end of a man's being,

who is that he may return to the Father, gathering his truth as he goes. Yet by the simple instincts of a soul undebased by self-indulgence or low pursuits, he was drawn ever toward things lofty and good; and life went calmly on, bearing Godfrey Wardour toward middle age, unruffled either by anxiety or ambition.

To the forecasting affection of a mother, the hour when she must yield the first place both in her son's regards and in the house-affairs could not but have often presented itself, in doubt and pain—perhaps dread. Only as year after year passed and Godfrey revealed no tendency toward marriage, her anxiety changed sides, and she began to fear lest with Godfrey the ancient family should come to an end. As yet, however, finding no response to covert suggestion, she had not ventured to speak openly to him on the subject. All the time, I must add, she had never thought of Letty either as thwarting or furthering her desires, for in truth she felt toward her as one on whom Godfrey could never condescend to look, save with the kindness suitable for one immeasurably below him. As to what might pass in Letty's mind, Mrs. Wardour had neither curiosity nor care: else she might possibly have been more considerate than to fall into the habit of talking to her in such swelling words of maternal pride that, even if she had not admired him of herself, Letty could hardly escape coming to regard her cousin Godfrey as the very first of men.

It added force to the veneration of both mother and cousin—for it was nothing less than veneration in either—that there was

about Godfrey an air of the inexplicable, or at least the unknown, and therefore mysterious. This the elder woman, not without many a pang at her exclusion from his confidence, attributed, and correctly, to some passage in his life at the university; to the younger it appeared only as greatness self-veiled from the ordinary world: to such as she, could be vouchsafed only an occasional peep into the gulf of his knowledge, the grandeur of his intellect, and the imperturbability of his courage.

The passage in Godfrey's life to which I have referred as vaguely suspected by his mother, I need not present in more than merest outline: it belongs to my history only as a component part of the soil whence it springs, and as in some measure necessary to the understanding of Godfrey's character. In the last year of his college life he had formed an attachment, the precise nature of which I do not know. What I do know is, that the bonds of it were rudely broken, and of the story nothing remained but disappointment and pain, doubt and distrust. Godfrey had most likely cherished an overweening notion of the relative value of the love he gave; but being his, I am certain it was genuine—by that, I mean a love with no small element of the everlasting in it. The woman who can cast such a love from her is not likely to meet with such another. But with this one I have nothing to do.

It had been well if he had been left with only a wounded heart, but in that heart lay wounded pride. He hid it carefully, and the keener in consequence grew the sensitiveness, almost feminine, which no stranger could have suspected beneath the

manner he wore. Under that bronzed countenance, with its firm-set mouth and powerful jaw—below that clear blue eye, and that upright easy carriage, lay a faithful heart haunted by a sense of wrong: he who is not perfect in forgiveness must be haunted thus; he only is free whose love for the human is so strong that he can pardon the individual sin; he alone can pray the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses," out of a full heart. Forgiveness is the only cure of wrong. And hand in hand with Sense-of-injury walks ever the weak sister-demon Self-pity, so dear, so sweet to many—both of them the children of Philautos, not of Agape. But there was no hate, no revenge, in Godfrey, and, I repeat, his weakness he kept concealed. It must have been in his eyes, but eyes are hard to read. For the rest, his was a strong poetic nature—a nature which half unconsciously turned ever toward the best, away from the mean judgments of common men, and with positive loathing from the ways of worldly women. Never was peace endangered between his mother and him, except when she chanced to make use of some evil maxim which she thought experience had taught her, and the look her son cast upon her stung her to the heart, making her for a moment feel as if she had sinned what the theologians call the unpardonable sin. When he rose and walked from the room without a word, she would feel as if abandoned to her wickedness, and be miserable until she saw him again. Something like a spring-cleaning would begin and go on in her for some time after, and her eyes would every now and then steal toward her judge with a glance of awe and

fearful apology. But, however correct Godfrey might be in his judgment of the worldly, that judgment was less inspired by the harmonies of the universe than by the discords that had jarred his being and the poisonous shocks he had received in the encounter of the noble with the ignoble. There was yet in him a profound need of redemption into the love of the truth for the truth's sake. He had the fault of thinking too well of himself —which who has not who thinks of himself at all, apart from his relation to the holy force of life, within yet beyond him? It was the almost unconscious, assuredly the undetected, self-approbation of the ordinarily righteous man, the defect of whose righteousness makes him regard himself as upright, but the virtue of whose uprightness will at length disclose to his astonished view how immeasurably short of rectitude he comes. At the age of thirty, Godfrey Wardour had not yet become so displeased with himself as to turn self-roused energy upon betterment; and until then all growth must be of doubtful result. The point on which the swift-revolving top of his thinking and feeling turned was as yet his present conscious self, as a thing that was and would be, not as a thing that had to become. Naturally the pivot had worn a socket, and such socket is sure to be a sore. His friends notwithstanding gave him credit for great imperturbability; but in such willfully undemonstrative men the evil burrows the more insidiously that it is masked by a constrained exterior.

CHAPTER V.
GODFREY AND LETTY

Godfrey, being an Englishman, and with land of his own, could not fail to be fond of horses. For his own use he kept two—an indulgence disproportioned to his establishment; for, although precise in his tastes as to equine toilet, he did not feel justified in the keeping of a groom for their use only. Hence it came that, now and then, strap and steel, as well as hide and hoof, would get partially neglected; and his habits in the use of his horses being fitful—sometimes, it would be midnight even, when he scoured from his home, seeking the comfort of desert as well as solitary places—it is not surprising if at times, going to the stable to saddle one, he should find its gear not in the spick-and-span condition alone to his mind. It might then well happen there was no one near to help him, and there be nothing for it but to put his own hands to the work: he was too just to rouse one who might be nowise to blame, or send a maid to fetch him from field or barn, where he might be more importantly engaged.

One night, meaning to start for a long ride early in the morning, he had gone to the stable to see how things were; and, soon after, it happened that Letty, attending to some duty before going to bed, caught sight of him cleaning his stirrups: from that moment she took upon herself the silent and unsuspected

supervision of the harness-room, where, when she found any part of the riding-equipments neglected, she would draw a pair of housemaid's gloves on her pretty hands, and polish away like a horse-boy.

Godfrey had begun to remark how long it was since he had found anything unfit, and to wonder at the improvement somewhere in the establishment, when, going hastily one morning, some months before the date of my narrative, into the harness-room to get a saddle, he came upon Letty, who had imagined him afield with the men: she was energetic upon a stirrup with a chain-polisher. He started back in amazement, but she only looked up and smiled.

"I shall have done in a moment, Cousin Godfrey," she said, and polished away harder than before.

"But, Letty! I can't allow you to do things like that. What on earth put it in your head? Work like that is only for horny hands."

"Your hands ain't horny, Cousin Godfrey. They may be a little harder than mine—they wouldn't be much good if they weren't—but they're no fitter by nature to clean stirrups. Is it for me to sit with mine in my lap, and yours at this? I know better."

"Why shouldn't I clean my own harness, Letty, if I like?" said Godfrey, who could not help feeling pleased as well as annoyed; in this one moment Letty had come miles nearer him.

"Oh, surely! if you like, Cousin Godfrey," she answered; "but do you like?"

"Better than to see you doing it."

"But not better than I like to do it; that I am sure of. It is hands that write poetry that are not fit for work like this."

"How do you know I write poetry?" asked Godfrey, displeased, for she touched here a sensitive spot.

"Oh, don't be angry with me!" she said, letting the stirrup fall on the floor, and clasping her great wash-leather gloves together; "I couldn't help seeing it was poetry, for it lay on the table when I went to do your room."

"Do my room, Letty! Does my mother—?"

"She doesn't want to make a fine lady of me, and I shouldn't like it if she did. I have no head, but I have pretty good hands. Of course, Cousin Godfrey, I didn't read a word of the poetry. I daredn't do that, however much I might have wished."

A childlike simplicity looked out of the clear eyes and sounded in the swift words of the maiden; and, had Godfrey's heart been as hard as the stirrup she had dropped, it could not but be touched by her devotion. He was at the same time not a little puzzled how to carry himself. Letty had picked up the stirrup, and was again hard at work with it; to take it from her, and turn her out of the saddle-room, would scarcely be a proper way of thanking her, scarcely an adequate mode of revealing his estimate of the condescension of her ladyhood. For, although Letty did make beds and chose to clean harness, Godfrey was gentleman enough not to think her less of a lady—for the moment at least—because of such doings: I will not say he had got so far on in the great doctrine concerning the washing of hands as to be able to think

her *more* of a lady for thus cleaning his stirrups. But he did see that to set the fire-engine of indignant respect for womankind playing on the individual woman was not the part of the man to whose service she was humbling herself. He laid his hand on her bent head, and said:

"I ought to be a knight of the old times, Letty, to have a lady serve me so."

"You're just as good, Cousin Godfrey," she rejoined, rubbing away.

He turned from her, and left her at her work.

He had taken no real notice of the girl before—had felt next to no interest in her. Neither did he feel much now, save as owing her something beyond mere acknowledgment. But was there anything now he could do for her—anything in her he could help? He did not know. What she really was, he could not tell. She was a fresh, bright girl—that he seemed to have just discovered; and, as she sat polishing the stirrup, her hair shaken about her shoulders, she looked engaging; but whether she was one he could do anything for that was worth doing, was hardly the less a question for those discoveries.

"There must be *something* in the girl!" he said to himself—then suddenly reflected that he had never seen a book in her hand, except her prayer-book; how *was* he to do anything for a girl like that? For Godfrey knew no way of doing people good without the intervention of books. How could he get near one that had no taste for the quintessence of humanity? How was he to offer her

the only help he had, when she desired no such help? "But," he continued, reflecting further, "she may have thirsted, may even now be athirst, without knowing that books are the bottles of the water of life!" Perhaps, if he could make her drink once, she would drink again. The difficulty was, to find out what sort of spiritual drink would be most to her taste, and would most entice her to more. There must be some seeds lying cold and hard in her uncultured garden; what water would soonest make them grow? Not all the waters of Damascus will turn mere sand sifted of eternal winds into fruitful soil; but Letty's soul could not be such. And then literature has seed to sow as well as water for the seed sown. Letty's foolish words about the hands that wrote poetry showed a shadow of respect for poetry—except, indeed, the girl had been but making game of him, which he was far from ready to believe, and for which, he said to himself, her face was at the time much too earnest, and her hands much too busy; he must find out whether she had any instincts, any predilections, in the matter of poetry!

Thus pondering, he forgot all about his projected ride, and, going up to the study he had contrived for himself in the rambling roof of the ancient house, began looking along the backs of his books, in search of some suggestion of how to approach Letty; his glance fell on a beautifully bound volume of verse—a selection of English lyrics, made with tolerable judgment—which he had bought to give, but the very color of which, every time his eye flitting along the book-shelves caught it, threw a

faint sickness over his heart, preluding the memory of old pain and loss:

"It may as well serve some one," he said, and, taking it down, carried it with him to the saddle-room.

Letty was not there, and the perfect order of the place somehow made him feel she had been gone some time. He went in search of her; she might be in the dairy.

That was the very picture of an old-fashioned English dairy —green-shadowy, dark, dank, and cool—floored with great irregular slabs, mostly of green serpentine, polished into smooth hollows by the feet of generations of mistresses and dairy-maids. Its only light came through a small window shaded with shrubs and ivy, which stood open, and let in the scents of bud and blossom, weaving a net of sweetness in the gloom, through which, like a silver thread, shot the twittering song of a bird, which had inherited the gathered carelessness and bliss of a long ancestry in God's aviary.

Godfrey came softly to the door, which he found standing ajar, and peeped in. There stood Letty, warm and bright in the middle of the dusky coolness. She had changed her dress since he saw her, and now, in a pink-rosebud print, with the sleeves tucked above her elbows, was skimming the cream in a great red-brown earthen pan. He pushed the door a little, and, at its screech along the uneven floor, Letty's head turned quickly on her lithe neck, and she saw Godfrey's brown face and kind blue eyes where she had never seen them before. In his hand glowed the book: some

of the stronger light from behind him fell on it, and it caught her eyes.

"Letty," he said, "I have just come upon this book in my library: would you care to have it?"

"You don't mean to keep for my own, Cousin Godfrey?" cried Letty, in sweet, childish fashion, letting the skimmer dive like a coot to the bottom of the milk-pool, and hastily wiping her hands in her apron. Her face had flushed rosy with pleasure, and grew rosier and brighter still as she took the rich morocco-bound thing from Godfrey's hand into her own. Daintily she peeped within the boards, and the gilding of the leaves responded in light to her smile.

"Poetry!" she cried, in a tone of delight. "Is it really for me, Cousin Godfrey? Do you think I shall be able to understand it?"

"You can soon settle that question for yourself," answered Godfrey, with a pleased smile—for he augured well from this reception of his gift—and turned to leave the dairy.

"But, Cousin Godfrey—please!" she called after him, "you don't give me time to thank you."

"That will do when you are certain you care for it," he returned.

"I care for it very *much* !" she replied.

"How can you say that, when you don't know yet whether you will understand it or not?" he rejoined, and closed the door.

Letty stood motionless, the book in her hand illuminating the dusk with gold, and warming its coolness with its crimson

boards and silken linings. One poem after another she read, nor knew how the time passed, until the voice of her aunt in her ears warned her to finish her skimming, and carry the jug to the pantry. But already Letty had taken a little cream off the book also, and already, between the time she entered and the time she left the dairy, had taken besides a fresh start in spiritual growth.

The next day Godfrey took an opportunity of asking her whether she had found in the book anything she liked. To his disappointment she mentioned one of the few commonplace things the collection contained—a last-century production, dull and respectable, which, surely, but for the glamour of some pleasant association, the editor would never have included. Happily, however, he bethought himself in time not to tell her the thing was worthless: such a word, instead of chipping the shell in which the girl's faculty lay dormant, would have smashed the whole egg into a miserable albuminous mass. And he was well rewarded; for, the same day, in the evening, he heard her singing gayly over her work, and listening discovered that she was singing verse after verse of one of the best ballads in the whole book. She had chosen with the fancy of pleasing Godfrey; she sang to please herself. After this discovery he set himself in earnest to the task of developing her intellectual life, and, daily almost, grew more interested in the endeavor. His main object was to make her think; and for the high purpose, chiefly but not exclusively, he employed verse.

The main obstacle to success he soon discovered to be Letty's

exceeding distrust of herself. I would not be mistaken to mean that she had too little confidence in herself; of that no one can have too little. Self-distrust will only retard, while self-confidence will betray. The man ignorant in these things will answer me, "But you must have one or the other." "You must have neither," I reply. "You must follow the truth, and, in that pursuit, the less one thinks about himself, the pursuer, the better. Let him so hunger and thirst after the truth that the dim vision of it occupies all his being, and leaves no time to think of his hunger and his thirst. Self-forgetfulness in the reaching out after that which is essential to us is the healthiest of mental conditions. One has to look to his way, to his deeds, to his conduct—not to himself. In such losing of the false, or merely reflected, we find the true self. There is no harm in being stupid, so long as a man does not think himself clever; no good in being clever, if a man thinks himself so, for that is a short way to the worst stupidity. If you think yourself clever, set yourself to do something; then you will have a chance of humiliation."

With good faculties, and fine instincts, Letty was always thinking she must be wrong, just because it was she was in it—a lovely fault, no doubt, but a fault greatly impeditive to progress, and tormenting to a teacher. She got on very fairly in spite of it, however; and her devotion to Godfrey, as she felt herself growing in his sight, increased almost to a passion. Do not misunderstand me, my reader. If I say anything grows to a passion, I mean, of course, the passion of that thing, not of something else. Here I no

more mean that her devotion became what in novels is commonly called love, than, if I said ambition or avarice had grown to a passion, I should mean those vices had changed to love. Godfrey Wardour was at least ten years older than Letty; besides him, she had not a single male relative in this world—neither had she mother or sister on whom to let out her heart; while of Mrs. Wardour, who was more severe on her than on any one else, she was not a little afraid: from these causes it came that Cousin Godfrey grew and grew in Letty's imagination, until he was to her everything great and good—her idea of him naturally growing as she grew herself under his influences. To her he was the heart of wisdom, the head of knowledge, the arm of strength.

But her worship was quiet, as the worship of maiden, in whatever kind, ought to be. She knew nothing of what is called love except as a word, and from sympathy with the persons in the tales she read. Any remotest suggestion of its existence in her relation to Godfrey she would have resented as the most offensive impertinence—an accusation of impossible irreverence.

By degrees Godfrey came to understand, but then only in a measure, with what a self-refusing, impressionable nature he was dealing; and, as he saw, he became more generous toward her, more gentle and delicate in his ministration. Of necessity he grew more and more interested in her, especially after he had made the discovery that the moment she laid hold of a truth—the moment, that is, when it was no longer another's idea but her own perception—it began to sprout in her in all directions of

practice. By nature she was not intellectually quick; but, because such was her character, the ratio of her progress was of necessity an increasing one.

If Godfrey had seen in his new relation to Letty a possibility of the revival of feelings he had supposed for ever extinguished, such a possibility would have borne to him purely the aspect of danger; at the mere idea of again falling in love he would have sickened with dismay; and whether or not he had any dread of such a catastrophe, certain it is that he behaved to her more as a pedagogue than a cousinly tutor, insisting on a precision in all she did that might have gone far to rouse resentment and recoil in the mind of a less childlike woman. Just as surely, notwithstanding all that, however, did the sweet girl grow into his heart: it *could* not be otherwise. The idea of her was making a nest for itself in his soul—what kind of a nest for long he did not know, and for long did not think to inquire. Living thus, like an elder brother with a much younger sister, he was more than satisfied, refusing, it may be, to regard the probability of intruding change. But how far any man and woman may have been made capable of loving without falling in love, can be answered only after question has yielded to history. In the mean time, Mrs. Wardour, who would have been indignant at the notion of any equal bond between her idolized son and her patronized cousin, neither saw, nor heard, nor suspected anything to rouse uneasiness.

Things were thus in the old house, when the growing affection of Letty for Mary Marston took form one day in the request that

she would make Thornwick the goal of her Sunday walk. She repented, it is true, the moment she had said the words, from dread of her aunt; but they had been said, and were accepted. Mary went, and the aunt difficulty had been got over. The friendship of Godfrey also had now run into that of the girls, and Mary's visits were continued with pleasure to all, and certainly with no little profit to herself; for, where the higher nature can not communicate the greater benefit, it will reap it. Her Sunday visit became to Mary the one foraging expedition of the week—that which going to church ought to be, and so seldom can be.

The beginning and main-stay of her spiritual life was, as we have seen, her father, in whom she believed absolutely. From books and sermons she had got little good; for in neither kind had the best come nigh her. She did very nearly her best to obey, but without much perceiving the splendor of the thing required, or much feeling its might upon her own eternal nature. She was as yet, in relation to the gospel, much as the Jews were in relation to their law; they had not yet learned the gospel of their law, and she was yet only serving the law of the gospel. But she was making progress, in simple and pure virtue of her obedience. Show me the person ready to step from any, let it be the narrowest, sect of Christian Pharisees into a freer and holier air, and I shall look to find in that person the one of that sect who, in the midst of its darkness and selfish worldliness, mistaken for holiness, has been living a life more obedient than the rest.

And now was sent Godfrey to her aid, a teacher himself far

behind his pupil, inasmuch as he was more occupied with what he was, than what he had to become: the weakest may be sent to give the strongest saving help; even the foolish may mediate between the wise and the wiser; and Godfrey presented Mary to men greater than himself, whom in a short time she would understand even better than he. Book after book he lent her—now and then gave her one of the best—introducing her, with no special intention, to much in the way of religion that was good in the way of literature as well. Only where he delighted mainly in the literature, she delighted more in the religion. Some of my readers will be able to imagine what it must have been to a capable, clear-thinking, warm-hearted, loving soul like Mary, hitherto in absolute ignorance of any better religious poetry than the chapel hymn-book afforded her, to make acquaintance with George Herbert, with Henry Vaughan, with Giles Fletcher, with Richard Crashaw, with old Mason, not to mention Milton, and afterward our own Father Newman and Father Faber.

But it was by no means chiefly upon such that Godfrey led the talk on the Sunday afternoons. A lover of all truly imaginative literature, his knowledge of it was large, nor confined to that of his own country, although that alone was at present available for either of his pupils. His seclusion from what is called the world had brought him into larger and closer contact with what is really the world. The breakers upon reef and shore may be the ocean to some, but he who would know the ocean indeed must leave them afar, sinking into silence, and sail into wider and lonelier

spaces. Through Godfrey, Mary came to know of a land never promised, yet open—a land of whose nature even she had never dreamed—a land of the spirit, flowing with milk and honey—a land of which the fashionable world knows little more than the dwellers in the back slums, although it imagines it lying, with the kingdoms of the earth, at its feet.

As regards her feeling toward her new friend, this opener of unseen doors, the greatness of her obligation to him wrought against presumption and any possible folly. Besides, Mary was one who possessed power over her own spirit—rare gift, given to none but those who do something toward the taking of it. She was able in no small measure to order her own thoughts. Without any theory of self-rule, she yet ruled her Self. She was not one to slip about in the saddle, or let go the reins for a kick and a plunge or two. There was the thing that should be, and the thing that should not be; the thing that was reasonable, and the thing that was absurd. Add to all this, that she believed she saw in Mr. Wardour's behavior to his cousin, in the careful gentleness evident through all the severity of the schoolmaster, the presence of a deeper feeling, that might one day blossom to the bliss of her friend—and we need not wonder if Mary's heart remained calm in the very floods of its gratitude; while the truth she gathered by aid of the intercourse, enlarging her strength, enlarged likewise the composure that comes of strength. She did not even trouble herself much to show Godfrey her gratitude. We may spoil gratitude as we offer it, by insisting on its recognition.

To receive honestly is the best thanks for a good thing.

Nor was Godfrey without payment for what he did: the revival of ancient benefits, a new spring-time of old flowers, and the fresh quickening of one's own soul, are the spiritual wages of every spiritual service. In giving, a man receives more than he gives, and the *more* is in proportion to the worth of the thing given.

Mary did not encourage Letty to call at the shop, because the rudeness of the Turnbulls was certain to break out on her departure, as it did one day that Godfrey, dismounting at the door, and entering the shop in quest of something for his mother, naturally shook hands with Mary over the counter. No remark was made so long as her father was in the shop, for, with all their professed contempt of him and his ways, the Turnbulls stood curiously in awe of him: no one could tell what he might or might not do, seeing they did not in the least understand him; and there were reasons for avoiding offense.

But the moment he retired, which he always did earlier than the rest, the small-arms of the enemy began to go off, causing Mary a burning cheek and indignant heart. Yet the great desire of Mr. Turnbull was a match between George and Mary, for that would, whatever might happen, secure the Marston money to the business. Their evil report Mary did not carry to her father. She scorned to trouble his lofty nature with her small annoyances; neither could they long keep down the wellspring of her own peace, which, deeper than anger could reach, soon began to

rise again fresh in her spirit, fed from that water of life which underlies all care. In a few moments it had cooled her cheek, stilled her heart, and washed the wounds of offense.

CHAPTER VI.
TOM HELMER

When Tom Helmer's father died, his mother, who had never been able to manage him, sent him to school to get rid of him, lamented his absence till he returned, then writhed and fretted under his presence until again he went. Never thereafter did those two, mother and son, meet, whether from a separation of months or of hours, without at once tumbling into an obstinate difference. When the youth was at home, their sparring, to call it by a mild name, went on from morning to night, and sometimes almost from night to morning. Primarily, of course, the fault lay with the mother; and things would have gone far worse, had not the youth, along with the self-will of his mother, inherited his father's good nature. At school he was a great favorite, and mostly had his own way, both with boys and masters, for, although a fool, he was a pleasant fool, clever, fond of popularity, and complaisant with everybody—except always his mother, the merest word from whom would at once rouse all the rebel in his blood. In person he was tall and loosely knit, with large joints and extremities. His face was handsome and vivacious, expressing far more than was in him to express, and giving ground for expectation such as he had never met. He was by no means an ill-intentioned fellow, preferred doing well and acting fairly,

and neither at school nor at college had got into any serious scrape. But he had never found it imperative to reach out after his own ideal of duty. He had never been worthy the name of student, or cared much for anything beyond the amusements the universities provide so liberally, except dabbling in literature. Perhaps his only vice was self-satisfaction—which few will admit to be a vice; remonstrance never reached him; to himself he was ever in the right, judging himself only by his sentiments and vague intents, never by his actions; that these had little correspondence never struck him; it had never even struck him that they ought to correspond. In his own eyes he did well enough, and a good deal better. Gifted not only with fluency of speech, that crowning glory and ruin of a fool, but with plausibility of tone and demeanor, a confidence that imposed both on himself and on others, and a certain dropsical impressionableness of surface which made him seem and believe himself sympathetic, nobody could well help liking him, and it took some time to make one accept the disappointment he caused.

He was now in his twenty-first year, at home, pretending that nothing should make him go back to Oxford, and enjoying more than ever the sport of plaguing his mother. A soul-doctor might have prescribed for him a course of small-pox, to be followed by intermittent fever, with nobody to wait upon him but Mrs. Gamp: after that, his mother might have had a possible chance with him, and he with his mother. But, unhappily, he had the best of health—supreme blessing in the eyes of the fool whom it enables

to be a worse fool still; and was altogether the true son of his mother, who consoled herself for her absolute failure in his moral education with the reflection that she had reared him sound in wind and limb. Plaguing his mother, amusing himself as best he could, riding about the country on a good mare, of which he was proud, he was living in utter idleness, affording occasion for much wonder that he had never yet disgraced himself. He talked to everybody who would talk to him, and made acquaintance with anybody on the spur of the moment's whim. He would sit on a log with a gypsy, and bamboozle him with lies made for the purpose, then thrash him for not believing them. He called here and called there, made himself specially agreeable everywhere, went to every ball and evening party to which he could get admittance in the neighborhood, and flirted with any girl who would let him. He meant no harm, neither had done much, and was imagined by most incapable of doing any. The strange thing to some was that he staid on in the country, and did not go to London and run up bills for his mother to pay; but the mare accounted for a good deal; and the fact that almost immediately on his late return he had seen Letty and fallen in love with her at first sight, accounted for a good deal more. Not since then, however, had he yet been able to meet her so as only to speak to her; for Thornwick was one of the few houses of the middle class in the neighborhood where he was not encouraged to show himself. He was constantly, therefore, on the watch for a chance of seeing her, and every Sunday went to church in that

same hope and no other. But Letty knew nothing of the favor in which she stood with him; for, although Tom had, as we have heard, confessed to her friend Mary Marston his admiration of her, Mary had far too much good sense to make herself his ally in the matter.

CHAPTER VII.
DURNMELLING

In the autumn, Mr. Mortimer of Durnmelling resolved to give a harvest-home to his tenants, and under the protection of the occasion to invite also a good many of his neighbors and of the townsfolk of Testbridge, whom he could not well ask to dinner: there happened to be a political expediency for something of the sort: America is not the only country in which ambition opens the door to mean doings on the part of such as count themselves gentlemen. Not a few on whom Lady Margaret had never called, and whom she would never in any way acknowledge again, were invited; nor did the knowledge of what it meant cause many of them to decline the questionable honor—which fact carried in it the best justification of which the meanness and insult were capable. Mrs. Wardour accepted for herself and Letty; but in their case Lady Margaret did call, and in person give the invitation. Godfrey positively refused to accompany them. He would not be patronized, he said; "—and by an inferior," he added to himself.

Mr. Mortimer was the illiterate son of a literary father who had reaped both money and fame. The son spent the former, on the strength of the latter married an earl's daughter, and thereupon began to embody in his own behavior his ideas of how

a nobleman ought to carry himself; whence, from being only a small, he became an objectionable man, and failed of being amusing by making himself offensive. He had never manifested the least approach to neighborliness with Godfrey, although their houses were almost within a stone's throw of each other. Had Wardour been an ordinary farmer, of whose presuming on the acquaintance there could have been no danger, Mortimer would doubtless have behaved differently; but as Wardour had some pretensions—namely, old family, a small, though indeed *very* small, property of his own, a university education, good horses, and the habits and manners of a gentleman—the men scarcely even saluted when they met. The Mortimer ladies, indeed, had more than once remarked—but it was in solemn silence, each to herself only—how well the man sat, and how easily he handled the hunter he always rode; but not once until now had so much as a greeting passed between them and Mrs. Wardour. It was not therefore wonderful that Godfrey should not choose to accept their invitation. Finding, however, that his mother was distressed at having to go to the gathering without him, and far more exercised in her mind than was needful as to what would be thought of his absence, and what excuse it would be becoming to make, he resolved to go to London a day or two before the event, and pay a long-promised visit to a clerical friend.

The relative situation of the houses—I mean the stone-and-lime houses—of Durnmelling and Thornwick, was curious; and that they had at one time formed part of the same property might

have suggested itself to any beholder. Durnmelling was built by an ancestor of Godfrey's, who, forsaking the old nest for the new, had allowed Thornwick to sink into a mere farmhouse, in which condition it had afterward become the sole shelter of the withered fortunes of the Wardours. In the hands of Godfrey's father, by a continuity of judicious cares, and a succession of partial resurrections, it had been restored to something like its original modest dignity. Durnmelling, too, had in part sunk into ruin, and had been but partially recovered from it; still, it swelled important beside its antecedent Thornwick. Nothing but a deep ha-ha separated the two houses, of which the older and smaller occupied the higher ground. Between it and the ha-ha was nothing but grass—in front of the house fine enough and well enough kept to be called lawn, had not Godfrey's pride refused the word. On the lower, the Durnmelling side of the fence, were trees, shrubbery, and out-houses—the chimney of one of which, the laundry, gave great offense to Mrs. Wardour, when, as she said, wind and wash came together. But, although they stood so near, there was no lawful means of communication between the houses except the road; and the mile that implied was seldom indeed passed by any of the unneighborly neighbors.

The father of Lady Margaret would at one time have purchased Thornwick at twice its value; but the present owner could not have bought it at half its worth. He had of late been losing money heavily—whence, in part, arose that anxiety of Lady Margaret's not to keep Mr. Redmain fretting for his lunch.

The house of Durnmelling, new compared with that of Thornwick, was yet, as I have indicated, old enough to have passed also through vicissitudes, and a large portion of the original structure had for many years been nothing better than a ruin. Only a portion of one side of its huge square was occupied by the family, and the rest of that side was not habitable. Lady Margaret, of an ancient stock, had gathered from it only pride, not reverence; therefore, while she valued the old, she neglected it; and what money she and her husband at one time spent upon the house, was devoted to addition and ornamentation, nowise to preservation or restoration. They had enlarged both dining-room and drawing-rooms to twice their former size, when half the expense, with a few trees from a certain outlying oak-plantation of their own, would have given them a room fit for a regal assembly. For, constituting a portion of the same front in which they lived, lay roofless, open to every wind that blew, its paved floor now and then in winter covered with snow—an ancient hall, whose massy south wall was pierced by three lovely windows, narrow and lofty, with simple, gracious tracery in their pointed heads. This hall connected the habitable portion of the house with another part, less ruinous than itself, but containing only a few rooms in occasional use for household purposes, or, upon necessity, for quite inferior lodgment. It was a glorious ruin, of nearly a hundred feet in length, and about half that in width, the walls entire, and broad enough to walk round upon in safety. Their top was accessible from a tower, which formed part of

the less ruinous portion, and contained the stair and some small rooms.

Once, the hall was fair with portraits and armor and arms, with fire and lights, and state and merriment; now the sculptured chimney lay open to the weather, and the sweeping winds had made its smooth hearthstone clean as if fire had never been there. Its floor was covered with large flags, a little broken: these, in prospect of the coming entertainment, a few workmen were leveling, patching, replacing. For the tables were to be set here, and here there was to be dancing after the meal.

It was Miss Yolland's idea, and to her was committed the responsibility of its preparation and adornment for the occasion, in which Hesper gave her active assistance. With colored blankets, with carpets, with a few pieces of old tapestry, and a quantity of old curtains, mostly of chintz, excellent in hues and design, all cunningly arranged for as much of harmony as could be had, they contrived to clothe the walls to the height of six or eight feet, and so gave the weather-beaten skeleton an air of hospitable preparation and respectful reception.

The day and the hour arrived. It was a hot autumnal afternoon. Borne in all sorts of vehicles, from a carriage and pair to a taxed cart, the guests kept coming. As they came, they mostly scattered about the place. Some loitered on the lawn by the flower-beds and the fountain; some visited the stables and the home-farm, with its cow-houses and dairy and piggeries; some the neglected greenhouses, and some the equally neglected old-

fashioned alleys, with their clipped yews and their moss-grown statues. No one belonging to the house was anywhere visible to receive them, until the great bell at length summoned them to the plentiful meal spread in the ruined hall. "The hospitality of some people has no roof to it," Godfrey said, when he heard of the preparations. "Ten people will give you a dinner, for one who will offer you a bed and a breakfast:"

Then at last their host made his appearance, and took the head of the table: the ladies, he said, were to have the honor of joining the company afterward. They were at the time—but this he did not say—giving another stratum of society a less ponderous, but yet tolerably substantial, refreshment in the dining-room.

By the time the eating and drinking were nearly over, the shades of evening had gathered; but even then some few of the farmers, capable only of drinking, grumbled at having their potations interrupted for the dancers. These were presently joined by the company from the house, and the great hall was crowded.

Much to her chagrin, Mrs. Wardour had a severe headache, occasioned by her working half the night at her dress, and was compelled to remain at home. But she allowed Letty to go without her, which she would not have done had she not been so anxious to have news of what she could not lift her head to see: she sent her with an old servant—herself one of the invited guests—to gather and report. The dancing had begun before they reached the hall.

Tom Helmer had arrived among the first, and had joined the tenants in their feast, faring well, and making friends, such as he knew how to make, with everybody in his vicinity. When the tables were removed, and the rest of the company began to come in, he went about searching anxiously for Letty's sweet face, but it did not appear; and, when she did arrive, she stole in without his seeing her, and stood mingled with the crowd about the door.

It was a pleasant sight that met her eyes. The wide space was gayly illuminated with colored lamps, disposed on every shelf, and in every crevice of the walls, some of them gleaming like glow-worms out of mere holes; while candles in sconces, and lamps on the window-sills and wherever they could stand, gave a light the more pleasing that it was not brilliant. Overhead, the night-sky was spangled with clear pulsing stars, afloat in a limpid blue, vast even to awfulness in the eyes of such—were any such there?—as say to themselves that to those worlds also were they born. Outside, it was dark, save where the light streamed from the great windows far into the night. The moon was not yet up; she would rise in good time to see the scattering guests to their homes.

Tom's heart had been sinking, for he could see Letty nowhere. Now at last, he had been saying to himself all the day, had come his chance! and his chance seemed but to mock him. More than any girl he had ever seen, had Letty moved him—perhaps because she was more unlike his mother. He knew nothing, it is true, or next to nothing, of her nature; but that

was of little consequence to one who knew nothing, and never troubled himself to know anything, of his own. Was he doomed never to come near his idol?—Ah, there she was! Yes; it was she—all but lost in a humble group near the door! His foolish heart—not foolish in that—gave a great bound, as if it would leap to her where she stood. She was dressed in white muslin, from which her white throat rose warm and soft. Her head was bent forward, and a gentle dissolved smile was over all her face, as with loveliest eyes she watched eagerly the motions of the dance, and her ears drank in the music of the yeomanry band. He seized the first opportunity of getting nearer to her. He had scarcely spoken to her before, but that did not trouble Tom. Even in a more ceremonious assembly, that would never have abashed him; and here there was little form, and much freedom. He had, besides, confidence in his own carriage and manners—which, indeed, were those of a gentleman—and knew himself not likely to repel by his approach.

Mr. Mortimer had opened the dancing by leading out the wife of his principal tenant, a handsome matron, whose behavior and expression were such as to give a safe, home-like feeling to the shy and doubtful of the company. But Tom knew better than injure his chance by precipitation: he would wait until the dancing was more general, and the impulse to movement stronger, and then offer himself. He stood therefore near Letty for some little time, talking to everybody, and making himself agreeable, as was his wont, all round; then at last, as if he had just

caught sight of her, walked up to her where she stood flushed and eager, and asked her to favor him with her hand in the next dance.

By this time Letty had got familiar with his presence, had recalled her former meeting with him, had heard his name spoken by not a few who evidently liked him, and was quite pleased when he asked her to dance with him.

In the dance, nothing but commonplaces passed between them; but Tom had a certain pleasant way of his own in saying the commonest, emptiest things—an off-hand, glancing, skimming, swallow-like way of brushing and leaving a thing, as if he "could an' if he would," which made it seem for the moment as if he had said something: were his companion capable of discovering the illusion, there was no time; Tom was instantly away, carrying him or her with him to something else. But there was better than this—there was poetry, more than one element of it, in Tom. In the presence of a girl that pleased him, there would rise in him a poetic atmosphere, full of a rainbow kind of glamour, which, first possessing himself, passed out from him and called up a similar atmosphere, a similar glamour, about many of the girls he talked to. This he could no more help than the grass can help smelling sweet after the rain.

Tom was a finely projected, well-built, unfinished, barely furnished house, with its great central room empty, where the devil, coming and going at his pleasure, had not yet begun to make any great racket. There might be endless embryonic evil in him, but Letty was aware of no repellent atmosphere about him,

and did not shrink from his advances. He pleased her, and why should she not be pleased with him? Was it a fault to be easily pleased? The truer and sweeter any human self, the readier is it to be pleased with another self—save, indeed, something in it grate on the moral sense: that jars through the whole harmonious hypostasy. To Tom, therefore, Letty responded with smiles and pleasant words, even grateful to such a fine youth for taking notice of her small self.

The sun had set in a bank of cloud, which, as if he had been a lump of leaven to it, immediately began to swell and rise, and now hung dark and thick over the still, warm night. Even the farmers were unobservant of the change: their crops were all in, they had eaten and drunk heartily, and were merry, looking on or sharing in the multiform movement, their eyes filled with light and color.

Suddenly came a torrent-sound in the air, heard of few and heeded by none, and straight into the hall rushed upon the gay company a deluge of rain, mingled with large, half-melted hail-stones. In a moment or two scarce a light was left burning, except those in the holes and recesses of the walls. The merrymakers scattered like flies—into the house, into the tower, into the sheds and stables in the court behind, under the trees in front—anywhere out of the hall, where shelter was none from the perpendicular, abandoned down-pour.

At that moment, Letty was dancing with Tom, and her hand happened to be in his. He clasped it tight, and, as quickly as the

crowd and the confusion of shelter-seeking would permit, led her to the door of the tower already mentioned. But many had run in the same direction, and already its lower story and stair were crowded with refugees—the elder bemoaning the sudden change, and folding tight around them what poor wraps they were fortunate enough to have retained; the younger merrier than ever, notwithstanding the cold gusts that now poked their spirit-arms higher and thither through the openings of the half-ruinous building: to them even the destruction of their finery was but added cause of laughter. But a few minutes before, its freshness had been a keen pleasure to them, brightening their consciousness with a rare feeling of perfection; now crushed and rumpled, soiled and wet and torn, it was still fuel to the fire of gayety. But Tom did not stay among them. He knew the place well; having a turn for scrambling, he had been all over it many a time. On through the crowd, he led Letty up the stair to the first floor. Even here were a few couples talking and laughing in the dark. With a warning, by no means unnecessary, to mind where they stepped, for the floors were bad, he passed on to the next stair.

"Let us stop here, Mr. Helmer," said Letty. "There is plenty of room here."

"I want to show you something," answered Tom. "You need not be frightened. I know every nook of the place."

"I am not frightened," said Letty, and made no further objection.

At the top of that stair they entered a straight passage, in the middle of which was a faint glimmer of light from an oval aperture in the side of it. Thither Tom led Letty, and told her to look through. She did so.

Beneath lay the great gulf, wide and deep, of the hall they had just left. This was the little window, high in its gable, through which, in far-away times, the lord or lady of the mansion could oversee at will whatever went on below.

The rain had ceased as suddenly as it came on, and already lights were moving about in the darkness of the abyss—one, and another, and another, was searching for something lost in the hurry of the scattering. It was a waste and dismal show. Neither of them had read Dante; but Letty may have thought of the hall of Belshazzar, the night after the hand-haunted revel, when the Medes had had their will; for she had but lately read the story. A strange fear came upon her, and she drew back with a shudder.

"Are you cold?" said Tom. "Of course you must be, with nothing but that thin muslin! Shall I run down and get you a shawl?"

"Oh, no! do not leave me, please. It's not that," answered Letty. "I don't mind the wind a bit; it's rather pleasant. It's only that the look of the place makes me miserable, I think. It looks as if no one had danced there for a hundred years."

"Neither any one has, I suppose, till to-night," said Tom. "What a fine place it would be if only it had a roof to it! I can't think how any one can live beside it and leave it like that!"

But Tom lived a good deal closer to a worse ruin, and never spent a thought on it.

Letty shivered again.

"I'm quite ashamed of myself," she said, trying to speak cheerfully. "I can't think why I should feel like this—just as if something dreadful were watching me! I'll go home, Mr. Helmer.".

"It will be much the safest thing to do: I fear you have indeed caught cold," replied Tom, rejoiced at the chance of accompanying her. "I shall be delighted to see you safe."

"There is not the least occasion for that, thank you," answered Letty. "I have an old servant of my aunt's with me—somewhere about the place. The storm is quite over now: I will go and find her."

Tom made no objection, but helped her down the dark stair, hoping, however, the servant might not be found.

As they went, Letty seemed to herself to be walking in some old dream of change and desertion. The tower was empty as a monument, not a trace of the crowd left, which a few minutes before had thronged it. The wind had risen in earnest now, and was rushing about, like a cold wild ghost, through every cranny of the desolate place. Had Letty, when she reached the bottom of the stairs, found herself on the rocks of the seashore, with the waves dashing up against them, she would only have said to herself, "I knew I was in a dream!" But the wind having blown away the hail-cloud, the stars were again shining down into the

hall. One or two forlorn-looking searchers were still there; the rest had scattered like the gnats. A few were already at home; some were harnessing their horses to go, nor would wait for the man in the moon to light his lantern; some were already trudging on foot through the dark. Hesper and Miss Yolland were talking to two or three friends in the drawing-room; Lady Margaret was in her boudoir, and Mr. Mortimer smoking a cigar in his study.

Nowhere could Letty find Susan. She was in the farmer's kitchen behind. Tom suspected as much, but was far from hinting the possibility. Letty found her cloak, which she had left in the hall, soaked with rain, and thought it prudent to go home at once, nor prosecute her search for Susan further. She accepted, therefore, Tom's renewed offer of his company.

They were just leaving the hall, when a thought came to Letty: the moon suddenly appearing above the horizon had put it in her head.

"Oh," she cried, "I know quite a short way home!" and, without waiting any response from her companion, she turned, and led him in an opposite direction, round, namely, by the back of the court, into a field. There she made for a huge oak, which gloomed in the moonlight by the sunk fence parting the grounds. In the slow strength of its growth, by the rounding of its bole, and the spreading of its roots, it had so rent and crumbled the wall as to make through it a little ravine, leading to the top of the ha-ha. When they reached it, before even Tom saw it, Letty turned from him, and was up in a moment. At the top she turned to bid

him good night, but there he was, close behind her, insisting on seeing her safe to the house.

"Is this the way you always come?" asked Tom.

"I never was on Durnmelling land before," answered Letty.

"How did you find the short-cut, then?" he asked. "It certainly does not look as if it were much used."

"Of course not," replied Letty. "There is no communication between Durnmelling and Thornwick now. It was all ours once, though, Cousin Godfrey says. Did you notice how the great oak sends its biggest arm over our field?"

"Yes."

"Well, I often sit there under it, when I want to learn my lesson, and can't rest in the house; and that's how I know of the crack in the ha-ha."

She said it in absolute innocence, but Tom laid it up in his mind.

"Are you at lessons still?" he said. "Have you a governess?"

"No," she answered, in a tone of amusement. "But Cousin Godfrey teaches me many things."

This made Tom thoughtful; and little more had been said, when they reached the gate of the yard behind the house, and she would not let him go a step farther.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE OAK

In the morning, as she narrated the events of the evening, she told her aunt of the acquaintance she had made, and that he had seen her home. This information did not please the old lady, as, indeed, without knowing any reason, Letty had expected. Mrs. Wardour knew all about Tom's mother, or thought she did, and knew little good; she knew also that, although her son was a general favorite, her own son had a very poor opinion of him. On these grounds, and without a thought of injustice to Letty, she sharply rebuked the poor girl for allowing such a fellow to pay her any attention, and declared that, if ever she permitted him so much as to speak to her again, she would do something which she left in a cloud of vaguest suggestion.

Letty made no reply. She was hurt. Nor was it any wonder if she judged this judgment of Tom by the injustice of the judge to herself. It was of no consequence to her, she said to herself, whether she spoke to him again or not; but had any one the right to compel another to behave rudely? Only what did it matter, since there was so little chance of her ever seeing him again! All day she felt weary and disappointed, and, after the merrymaking of the night before, the household work was irksome. But she would soon have got over both weariness and tedium had her aunt

been kind. It is true, she did not again refer to Tom, taking it for granted that he was done with; but all day she kept driving Letty from one thing to another, nor was once satisfied with anything she did, called her even an ungrateful girl, and, before evening, had rendered her more tired, mortified, and dispirited, than she had ever been in her life.

But the tormentor was no demon; she was only doing what all of us have often done, and ought to be heartily ashamed of: she was only emptying her fountain of bitter water. Oppressed with the dregs of her headache, wretched because of her son's absence, who had not been a night from home for years, annoyed that she had spent time and money in preparation for nothing, she had allowed the said cistern to fill to overflowing, and upon Letty it overflowed like a small deluge. Like some of the rest of us, she never reflected how balefully her evil mood might operate; and that all things work for good in the end, will not cover those by whom come the offenses. Another night's rest, it is true, sent the evil mood to sleep again for a time, but did not exorcise it; for there are demons that go not out without prayer, and a bad temper is one of them—a demon as contemptible, mean-spirited, and unjust, as any in the peerage of hell—much petted, nevertheless, and excused, by us poor lunatics who are possessed by him. Mrs. Wardour was a lady, as the ladies of this world go, but a poor lady for the kingdom of heaven: I should wonder much if she ranked as more than a very common woman there.

The next day all was quiet; and a visit paid Mrs. Wardour by

a favorite sister whom she had not seen for months, set Letty at such liberty as she seldom had. In the afternoon she took the book Godfrey had given her, in which he had set her one of Milton's smaller poems to study, and sought the shadow of the Durnmelling oak.

It was a lovely autumn day, the sun glorious as ever in the memory of Abraham, or the author of Job, or the builder of the scaled pyramid at Sakkara. But there was a keenness in the air notwithstanding, which made Letty feel a little sad without knowing why, as she seated herself to the task Cousin Godfrey had set her. She, as well as his mother, heartily wished he were home. She was afraid of him, it is true; but in how different a way from that in which she was afraid of his mother! His absence did not make her feel free, and to escape from his mother was sometimes the whole desire of her day.

She was trying hard, not altogether successfully, to fix her attention on her task, when a yellow leaf dropped on the very line she was poring over. Thinking how soon the trees would be bare once more, she brushed the leaf away, and resumed her lesson.

"To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,"

she had just read once more, when down fell a second tree-leaf on the book-leaf. Again she brushed it away, and read to the end of the sonnet:

"Hast gained thy entrance, virgin wise and pure."

What Letty's thoughts about the sonnet were, I can not tell: how fix thought indefinite in words defined? But her angel might well have thought what a weary road she had to walk before she gained that entrance. But for all of us the road *has* to be walked, every step, and the uttermost farthing paid. The gate will open wide to welcome us, but it will not come to meet us. Neither is it any use to turn aside; it only makes the road longer and harder.

Down on the same spot fell the third leaf. Letty looked up. There was a man in the tree over her head. She started to her feet. At the same moment, he dropped on the ground beside her, lifting his hat as coolly as if he had met her on the road. Her heart seemed to stand still with fright. She stood silent, with white lips parted.

"I hope I haven't frightened you," said Tom. "Do forgive me," he added, becoming more aware of the perturbation he had caused her. "You were so kind to me the other night, I could not help wanting to see you again. I had no idea the sight of me would terrify you so."

"You gave me such a start!" gasped Letty, with her hand pressed on her heart.

"I was afraid of it," answered Tom; "but what could I do? I was certain, if you saw me coming, you would run away."

"Why should you think that?" asked Letty, a faint color rising in her cheek.

"Because," answered Tom, "I was sure they would be telling you all manner of things against me. But there is no harm in me

—really, Miss Lovel—nothing, that is, worth mentioning."

"I am sure there isn't," said Letty; and then there was a pause.

"What book are you reading, may I ask?" said Tom.

Letty had now remembered her aunt's injunctions and threats; but, partly from a kind of paralysis caused by his coolness, partly from its being impossible to her nature to be curt with any one with whom she was not angry, partly from mere lack of presence of mind, not knowing what to do, yet feeling she ought to run to the house, what should she do but drop down again on the very spot whence she had been scared! Instantly Tom threw himself on the grass at her feet, and there lay, looking up at her with eyes of humble admiration.

Confused and troubled, she began to turn over the leaves of her book. She supposed afterward she must have asked him why he stared at her so, for the next thing she remembered was hearing him say:

"I can't help it. You are so lovely!"

"Please don't talk such nonsense to me," she rejoined. "I am not lovely, and I know it. What is not true can not please anybody."

She spoke a little angrily now.

"I speak the truth," said Tom, quietly and earnestly. "Why should you think I do not?"

"Because nobody ever said so before."

"Then it is quite time somebody should say so," returned Tom, changing his tone. "It may be a painful fact, but even ladies ought

to be told the truth, and learn to bear it. To say you are not lovely would be a downright lie."

"I wish you wouldn't talk to me about myself!" said Letty, feeling confused and improper, but not altogether displeased that it was possible for such a mistake to be made. "I don't want to hear about myself. It makes me so uncomfortable! I am sure it isn't right: is it, now, Mr. Helmer?"

As she ended, the tears rose in her eyes, partly from unanalyzed uneasiness at the position in which she found herself and the turn the talk had taken, partly from the discomfort of conscious disobedience. But still she did not move.

"I am very sorry if I have vexed you," said Tom, seeing her evident trouble. "I can't think how I've done it. I know I didn't mean to; and I promise you not to say a word of the kind again —if I can help it. But tell me, Letty," he went on again, changing in tone and look and manner, and calling her by her name with such simplicity that she never even noticed it, "do tell me what you are reading, and that will keep me from *talking* about you— not from—the other thing, you know."

"There!" said Letty, almost crossly, handing him her book, and pointing to the sonnet, as she rose to go.

Tom took the book, and sprang to his feet. He had never read the poem, for Milton had not been one of his masters. He stood devouring it. He was doing his best to lay hold of it quickly, for there Letty stood, with her hand held out to take the book again, ready upon its restoration to go at once. Silent

and motionless, to all appearance unhasting, he read and reread. Letty was restless, and growing quite impatient; but still Tom read, a smile slow-spreading from his eyes over his face; he was taking possession of the poem, he would have said. But the shades and kinds and degrees of possession are innumerable; and not until we downright love a thing, can we *know* we understand it, or rightly call it our own; Tom only admired this one; it was all he was capable of in regard to such at present. Had the whim for acquainting himself with it seized him in his own study, he would have satisfied it with a far more superficial interview; but the presence of the girl, with those eyes fixed on him as he read—his mind's eye saw them—was for the moment an enlargement of his being, whose phase to himself was a consciousness of ignorance.

"It is a beautiful poem," he said at last, quite honestly; and, raising his eyes, he looked straight in hers. There is hardly a limit to the knowledge and sympathy a man may have in respect of the finest things, and yet be a fool. Sympathy is not harmony. A man may be a poet even, and speak with the tongue of an angel, and yet be a very bad fool.

"I am sure it must be a beautiful poem," said Letty; "but I have hardly got a hold of it yet." And she stretched her hand a little farther, as if to proceed with its appropriation.

But Tom was not yet prepared to part with the book. He proceeded instead, in fluent speech and not inappropriate language, to set forth, not the power of the poem—that he both took and left as a matter of course—but the beauty of those

phrases, and the turns of those expressions, which particularly pleased him—nor failing to remark that, according to the strict laws of English verse, there was in it one bad rhyme.

That point Letty begged him to explain, thus leading Tom to an exposition of the laws of rhyme, in which, as far as English was concerned, he happened to be something of an expert, partly from an early habit of scribbling in ladies' albums. About these surface affairs, Godfrey, understanding them better and valuing them more than Tom, had yet taught Letty nothing, judging it premature to teach polishing before carving; and hence this little display of knowledge on the part of Tom impressed Letty more than was adequate—so much, indeed, that she began to regard him as a sage, and a compeer of her cousin Godfrey. Question followed question, and answer followed answer, Letty feeling all the time she *must* go, yet standing and standing, like one in a dream, who thinks he can not, and certainly does not break its spell—for in the act only is the ability and the deed born. Besides, was she to go away and leave her beautiful book in his hand? What would Godfrey think if she did? Again and again she stretched out her own to take it, but, although he saw the motion, he held on to the book as to his best anchor, hurriedly turned its leaves by fits and searching for something more to his mind than anything of Milton's. Suddenly his face brightened.

"Ah!" he said—and remained a moment silent, reading. "I don't wonder," he resumed, "at your admiration of Milton. He's very grand, of course, and very musical, too; but one can't be

listening to an organ always. Not that I prefer merry music; that must be inferior, for the tone of all the beauty in the world is sad." Much Tom Helmer knew of beauty or sadness either! but ignorance is no reason with a fool for holding his tongue. "But there is the violin, now!—that can be as sad as any organ, without being so ponderous. Hear this, now! This is the violin after the organ—played as only a master can!"

With this preamble, he read a song of Shelley's, and read it well, for he had a good ear for rhythm and cadence, and prided himself on his reading of poetry.

Now the path to Letty's heart through her intellect was neither open nor well trodden; but the song in question was a winged one, and flew straight thither; there was something in the tone of it that suited the pitch of her spirit-chamber. And, if Letty's heart was not easily found, it was the readier to confess itself when found. Her eyes filled with tears, and through those tears Tom looked large and injured. "He must be a poet himself to read poetry like that!" she said to herself, and felt thoroughly assured that her aunt had wronged him greatly. "Some people scorn poetry like sin," she said again. "I used myself to think it was only for children, until Cousin Godfrey taught me differently."

As thus her thoughts went on interweaving themselves with the music, all at once the song came to an end. Tom closed the book, handed it to her, said, "Good morning, Miss Lovel," and ran down the rent in the ha-ha; and, before Letty could come to herself, she heard the soft thunder of hoofs on the grass. She ran

to the edge, and, looking over, saw Tom on his bay mare, at full gallop across the field. She watched him as he neared the hedge and ditch that bounded it, saw him go flying over, and lost sight of him behind a hazel-copse. Slowly, then, she turned, and slowly she went back to the house and up to her room, vaguely aware that a wind had begun to blow in her atmosphere, although only the sound of it had yet reached her.

CHAPTER IX.
CONFUSION

Then first, and from that moment, Letty's troubles began. Up to this point neither she herself nor another could array troublous accusation or uneasy thought against her; and now she began to feel like a very target, which exists but to receive the piercing of arrows. At first sight, and if we do not look a long way ahead of what people stupidly regard as the end when it is only an horizon, it seems hard that so much we call evil, and so much that is evil, should result from that unavoidable, blameless, foreordained, preconstituted, and essential attraction which is the law of nature, that is the will of God, between man and woman. Even if Letty had fallen in love with Tom at first sight, who dares have the assurance to blame her? who will dare to say that Tom was blameworthy in seeking the society and friendship, even the love, of a woman whom in all sincerity he admired, or for using his wits to get into her presence, and detain her a little in his company? Reasons there are, infinitely deeper than any philosopher has yet fathomed, or is likely to fathom, why a youth such as he—foolish, indeed, but not foolish in this—and a sweet and blameless girl such as Letty, should exchange regards of admiration and wonder. That which thus moves them, and goes on to draw them closer and closer, comes with them from

the very source of their being, and is as reverend as it is lovely, rooted in all the gentle potencies and sweet glories of creation, and not unworthily watered with all the tears of agony and ecstasy shed by lovers since the creation of the world. What it is, I can not tell; I only know it is *not* that which the young fool calls it, still less that which the old sinner thinks it. As to Letty's disobedience of her aunt's extravagant orders concerning Tom, I must leave that to the judgment of the just, reminding them that she was taken by surprise, and that, besides, it was next to impossible to obey them. But Letty found herself very uncomfortable, because there now was that to be known of her, the knowledge of which would highly displease her aunt—for which very reason, if for no other, ought she not to tell her all? On the other hand, when she recalled how unkindly, how unjustly her aunt had spoken, when she confessed her new acquaintance, it became to her a question whether in very deed she *must* tell her all that had passed that afternoon. There was no smallest hope of any recognition of the act, surely more hard than incumbent, but severity and unreason; *must* she let the thing out of her hands, and yield herself a helpless prey—and that for good to none? Concerning Mrs. Wardour, she reasoned justly: she who is even once unjust can not complain if the like is expected of her again.

But, supposing it remained Letty's duty to acquaint her aunt with what had taken place, and not forgetting that, as one of the old people, I have to render account of the young that come after me, and must be careful over their lovely dignities and fair

duties, I yet make haste to assert that the old people, who make it hard for the young people to do right, may be twice as much to blame as those whom they arraign for a concealment whose very heart is the dread of their known selfishness, fierceness, and injustice. If children have to obey their parents or guardians, those parents and guardians are over them in the name of God, and they must look to it: if in the name of God they act the devil, that will not prove a light thing for their answer. The causing of the little ones to offend hangs a fearful woe about the neck of the causer. It were a hard, as well as a needless task, seeing there is One who judges, to set forth how far the child is to blame as toward the parent, where the parent first of all is utterly wrong, yea out of true relation, toward the child. Not, therefore, is the child free; obligation remains—modified, it may be, but how difficult, alas, to fulfill! And, whether Letty and such as act like her are *excusable* or not in keeping attentions paid them a secret, this sorrow for the good ones of them certainly remains, that, next to a crime, a secret is the heaviest as well as the most awkward of burdens to carry. It has to be carried always, and all about. From morning to night it hurts in tenderest parts, and from night to morning hurts everywhere. At any expense, let there be openness. Take courage, my child, and speak out. Dare to speak, I say, and that will give you strength to resist, should disobedience become a duty. Letty's first false step was here: she said to herself *I can not* , and did not. She lacked courage—a want in her case not much to be wondered at, but much to be

deplored, for courage of the true sort is just as needful to the character of a woman as of a man. Had she spoken, she might have heard true things of Tom, sufficient so to alter her opinion of him as, at this early stage of their intercourse, to alter the *set* of her feelings, which now was straight for him. It may be such an exercise of courage would have rendered the troubles that were now to follow unnecessary to her development. For lack of it, she went about from that time with the haunting consciousness that she was one who might be found out; that she was guilty of what would go a good way to justify the hard words she had so resented. Already the secret had begun to work conscious woe. She contrived, however, to quiet herself a little with the idea, rather than the resolve, that, as soon as Godfrey came home, she would tell him all, confessing, too, that she had not the courage to tell his mother. She was sure, she said to herself, he would forgive her, would set her at peace with herself, and be unfair neither to Mr. Helmer nor to her. In the mean time she would take care—and this was a real resolve, not a mere act contemplated in the future—not to go where she might meet him again. Nor was the resolve the less genuine that, with the very making of it, rose the memory of that delightful hour more enticing than ever. How beautifully, and with what feeling, he read the lovely song! With what appreciation had he not expounded Milton's beautiful poem! Not yet was she capable of bethinking herself that it was but on this phrase and on that he had dwelt, on this and on that line and rhythm, enforcing their loveliness of sound and

shape; while the poem, the really important thing, the drift of the whole—it was her own heart and conscience that revealed that to her, not the exposition of one who at best could understand it only with his brain. She kept to her resolve, nevertheless; and, although Tom, leaving his horse now here now there, to avoid attracting attention, almost every day visited the oak, he looked in vain for the light of her approach. Disappointment increased his longing: what would he not have given to see once more one of those exquisite smiles break out in its perfect blossom! He kept going and going—haunted the oak, sure of some blessed chance at last. It was the first time in his life he had followed one idea for a whole fortnight.

At length Godfrey came. But, although all the time he was away Letty had retained and contemplated with tolerable calmness the idea of making her confession to him, the moment she saw him she felt such confession impossible. It was a sad discovery to her. Hitherto Godfrey, and especially of late, had been the chief source of the peace and interest of her life, that portion of her life, namely, to which all the rest of it looked as its sky, its overhanging betterness—and now she felt before him like a culprit: she had done what he might be displeased with. Nay, would that were all! for she felt like a hypocrite: she had done that which she could not confess. Again and again, while Godfrey was away, she had flattered herself that the help the objectionable Tom had given her with her task would at once recommend him to Godfrey's favorable regard; but now that she

looked in Godfrey's face, she was aware—she did not know why, but she was aware it would not be so. Besides, she plainly saw that the same fact would, almost of necessity, lead him to imagine there had been much more between them than was the case; and she argued with herself, that, now there was nothing, now that everything was over, it would be a pity if, because of what she could not help, and what would never be again, there should arise anything, however small, of a misunderstanding between her cousin Godfrey and her.

The moment Godfrey saw her, he knew that something was the matter; but there had been that going on in him which put him on a false track for the explanation. Scarcely had he, on his departure for London, turned his back on Thornwick, ere he found he was leaving one whom yet he could not leave behind him. Every hour of his absence he found his thoughts with the sweet face and ministering hands of his humble pupil. Therewith, however, it was nowise revealed to him that he was in love with her. He thought of her only as his younger sister, loving, clinging, obedient. So dear was she to him, he thought, that he would rejoice to secure her happiness at any cost to himself. *Any* cost? he asked—and reflected. Yes, he answered himself—even the cost of giving her to a better man. The thing was sure to come, he thought—nor thought without a keen pang, scarcely eased by the dignity of the self-denial that would yield her with a smile. But such a crisis was far away, and there was no necessity for now contemplating it. Indeed, there was no *certainty*

it would ever arrive; it was only a possibility. The child was not beautiful, although to him she was lovely, and, being also penniless, was therefore not likely to attract attention; while, if her being unfolded under the genial influences he was doing his best to make powerful upon her, if she grew aware that by them her life was enlarging and being tenfold enriched, it was possible she might not be ready to fall in love, and leave Thornwick. He must be careful, however, he said to himself, quite plainly now, that his behavior should lead her into no error. He was not afraid she might fall in love with him; he was not so full of himself as that; but he recoiled from the idea, as from a humiliation, that she might imagine him in love with her. It was not merely that he had loved once for all, and, once deceived and forsaken, would love no more; but it was not for him, a man of thirty years, to bow beneath the yoke of a girl of eighteen—a child in everything except outward growth. Not for a moment would he be imagined by her a courtier for her favor.

Thus, even in the heart of one so far above ordinary men as Godfrey, and that in respect of the sweetest of child-maidens, pride had its evil place; and no good ever comes of pride, for it is the meanest of mean things, and no one but he who is full of it thinks it grand. For its sake this wise man was firmly resolved on caution; and so, when at last they met, it was no more with that *abandon* of simple pleasure with which he had been wont to receive her when she came knocking at the door of his study, bearing clear question or formless perplexity; and his

restraint would of itself have been enough to make Letty, whose heart was now beating in a very thicket of nerves, at once feel it impossible to carry out her intent—impossible to confess to him any more than to his mother; while Godfrey, on his part, perceiving her manifest shyness and unwonted embarrassment, attributed them altogether to his own wisely guarded behavior, and, seeing therein no sign of loss of influence, continued his caution. Thus the pride, which is of man, mingled with the love, which is of God, and polluted it. From that hour he began to lord it over the girl; and this change in his behavior immediately reacted on himself, in the obscure perception that there might be danger to her in continued freedom of intercourse: he must, therefore, he concluded, order the way for both; he must take care of her as well as of himself. But was it consistent with this resolve that he should, for a whole month, spend every leisure moment in working at a present for her—a written marvel of neatness and legibility?

Again, by this meeting askance, as it were, another disintegrating force was called into operation: the moment Letty knew she could not tell Godfrey, and that therefore a wall had arisen between him and her, that moment woke in her the desire, as she had never felt it before, to see Tom Helmer. She could no longer bear to be shut up in herself; she must see somebody, get near to somebody, talk to somebody; her secret would choke her otherwise, would swell and break her heart; and who was there to think of but Tom—and Mary Marston?

She had never once gone to the oak again, but she had not altogether avoided a certain little cobwebbed gable-window in the garret, from which it was visible; neither had she withheld her hands from cleaning a pane in that window, that through it she might see the oak; and there, more than once or twice, now thickening the huge limb, now spotting the grass beneath it, she had descried a dark object, which could be nothing else than Tom Helmer on the watch for herself. He must surely be her friend, she reasoned, or how would he care, day after day, to climb a tree to look if she were coming—she who was the veriest nobody in all other eyes but his? It was so good of Tom! She *would* call him Tom; everybody else called him Tom, and why shouldn't she —to herself, when nobody was near? As to Mary Marston, she treated her like a child! When she told her that she had met Tom at Durnmelling, and how kind he had been, she looked as grave as if it had been wicked to be civil to him; and told her in return how he and his mother were always quarreling: that must be his mother's fault, she was sure-it could not be Tom's; any one might see that at a glance! His mother must be something like her aunt! But, after that, how could she tell Mary any more? It would not be fair to Tom, for, like the rest, she would certainly begin to abuse him. What harm could come of it? and, if harm did, how could she help it! If they had been kind to her, she would have told them everything, but they all frightened her so, she could not speak. It was not her fault if Tom was the only friend she had! She *would* ask his advice; he was sure to advise her just the right

thing. He had read that sonnet about the wise virgin with such feeling and such force, he *must* know what a girl ought to do, and how she ought to behave to those who were unkind and would not trust her.

Poor Letty! she had no stay, no root in herself yet. Well do I know not one human being ought, even were it possible, to be enough for himself; each of us needs God and every human soul he has made, before he has enough; but we ought each to be able, in the hope of what is one day to come, to endure for a time, not having enough. Letty was unblamable that she desired the comfort of humanity around her soul, but I am not sure that she was quite unblamable in not being fit to walk a few steps alone, or even to sit still and expect. With all his learning, Godfrey had not taught her what William Marston had taught Mary; and now her heart was like a child left alone in a great room. She had not yet learned that we must each bear his own burden, and so become able to bear each the burden of the other. Poor friends we are, if we are capable only of leaning, and able never to support.

But the moment Letty's heart had thus cried out against Mary, came a shock, and something else cried out against herself, telling her that she was not fair to her friend, and that Mary, and no other, was the proper person to advise with in this emergency of her affairs. She had no right to turn from her because she was a little afraid of her. Perhaps Letty was on the point of discovering that to be unable to bear disapproval was an unworthy weakness. But in her case it came nowise of the

pride which blame stirs to resentment, but altogether of the self-depreciation which disapproval rouses to yet greater dispiriting. Praise was to her a precious thing, in part because it made her feel as if she could go on; blame, a misery, in part because it made her feel as if all was of no use, she never could do anything right. She had not yet learned that the right is the right, come of praise or blame what may. The right will produce more right and be its own reward—in the end a reward altogether infinite, for God will meet it with what is deeper than all right, namely, perfect love. But the more Letty thought, the more she was sure she must tell Mary; and, disapprove as she might, Mary was a very different object of alarm from either her aunt or her cousin Godfrey.

The first afternoon, therefore, on which she thought her aunt could spare her, she begged leave to go and see Mary. Mrs. Wardour yielded it, but not very graciously. She had, indeed, granted that Miss Marston was not like other shop-girls, but she did not favor the growth of the intimacy, and liked Letty's going to her less than Mary's coming to Thornwick.

CHAPTER X.
THE HEATH AND THE HUT

Letty seldom went into the shop, except to buy, for she knew Mr. Turnbull would not like it, and Mary did not encourage it; but now her misery made her bold. Mary saw the trouble in her eyes, and without a moment's hesitation drew her inside the counter, and thence into the house, where she led the way to her own room, up stairs and through passages which were indeed lanes through masses of merchandise, like those cut through deep-drifted snow. It was shop all over the house, till they came to the door of Mary's chamber, which, opening from such surroundings, had upon Letty much the effect of a chapel—and rightly, for it was a room not unused to having its door shut. It was small, and plainly but daintily furnished, with no foolish excess of the small refinements on which girls so often set value, spending large time on what it would be waste to buy: only they have to kill the weary captive they know not how to redeem, for he troubles them with his moans.

"Sit down, Letty dear, and tell me what is the matter," said Mary, placing her friend in a chintz-covered straw chair, and seating herself beside her.

Letty burst into tears, and sat sobbing.

"Come, dear, tell me all about it," insisted Mary. "If you don't

make haste, they will be calling me."

Letty could not speak.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Mary; "you must stop with me to-night, that we may have time to talk it over. You sit here and amuse yourself as well as you can till the shop is shut, and then we shall have such a talk! I will send your tea up here. Beenie will be good to you."

"Oh, but, indeed, I can't!" sobbed Letty; "my aunt would never forgive me."

"You silly child! I never meant to keep you without sending to your aunt to let her know."

"She won't let me stop," persisted Letty.

"We will try her," said Mary, confidently; and, without more ado, left Letty, and, going to her desk in the shop, wrote a note to Mrs. Wardour. This she gave to Beenie to send by special messenger to Thornwick; after which, she told her, she must take up a nice tea to Miss Lovel in her bedroom. Mary then resumed her place in the shop, under the frowns and side-glances of Turnbull, and the smile of her father, pleased at her reappearance from even such a short absence.

But the return, in an hour or so, of the boy-messenger, whom Beenie had taken care not to pay beforehand, destroyed the hope of a pleasant evening; for he brought a note from Mrs. Wardour, absolutely refusing to allow Letty to spend the night from home: she must return immediately, so as to get in before dark.

The rare anger flushed Letty's cheek and flashed from her

eyes as she read; for, in addition to the prime annoyance, her aunt's note was addressed to her and not to Mary, to whom it did not even allude. Mary only smiled inwardly at this, but Letty felt deeply hurt, and her displeasure with her aunt added yet a shade to the dimness of her judgment. She rose at once.

"Will you not tell me first what is troubling you, Letty?" said Mary.

"No, dear, not now," replied Letty, caring a good deal less about the right ordering of her way than when she entered the house. Why should she care, she said to herself—but it was her anger speaking in her—how she behaved, when she was treated so abominably?

"Then I will come and see you on Sunday," said Mary; "and then we shall manage to have our talk."

They kissed and parted—Letty unaware that she had given her friend a less warm kiss than usual. There can hardly be a plainer proof of the lowness of our nature, until we have laid hold of the higher nature that belongs to us by birthright, than this, that even a just anger tends to make us unjust and unkind: Letty was angry with every person and thing at Thornwick, and unkind to her best friend, for whose sake in part she was angry. With glowing cheeks, tear-filled eyes, and indignant heart she set out on her walk home.

It was a still evening, with a great cloud rising in the southwest; from which, as the sun drew near the horizon, a thin veil stretched over the sky between, and a few drops came

scattering. This was in harmony with Letty's mood. Her soul was clouded, and her heaven was only a place for the rain to fall from. Annoyance, doubt, her new sense of constraint, and a wide-reaching, undefined feeling of homelessness, all wrought together to make her mind a chaos out of which misshapen things might rise, instead of an ordered world in which gracious and reasonable shapes appear. For as the place such will be the thoughts that spring there; when all in us is peace divine, then, and not till then, shall we think the absolutely reasonable. Alas, that by our thoughtlessness or unkindness we should so often be the cause of monster-births, and those even in the minds of the loved! that we should be, if but for a moment, the demons that deform a fair world that loves us! Such was Mrs. Wardour, with her worldly wisdom, that day to Letty.

About half-way to Thornwick, the path crossed a little heathy common; and just as Letty left the hedge-guarded field-side, and through a gate stepped, as it were, afresh out of doors on the open common, the wind came with a burst, and brought the rain in earnest. It was not yet very heavy, but heavy enough, with the wind at its back, and she with no defense but her parasol, to wet her thoroughly before she could reach any shelter, the nearest being a solitary, decrepit old hawthorn-tree, about half-way across the common. She bent her head to the blast, and walked on. She had no desire for shelter. She would like to get wet to the skin, take a violent cold, go into a consumption, and die in a fortnight. The wind whistled about her bonnet, dashed the rain-

drops clanging on the drum-tight silk of her parasol, and made of her skirts fetters and chains. She could hardly get along, and was just going to take down her parasol, when suddenly, where was neither house nor hedge nor tree, came a lull. For from behind, over head and parasol, had come an umbrella, and now came a voice and an audible sigh of pleasure.

"I little thought when I left home this afternoon," said the voice, "that I should have such a happiness before night!"

At the sound of the voice Letty gave a cry, which ran through all the shapes of alarm, of surprise, of delight; and it was not much of a cry either.

"O Tom!" she said, and clasped the arm that held the umbrella. How her foolish heart bounded! Here was help when she had sought none, and where least she had hoped for any! Her aunt would have her run from under the umbrella at once, no doubt, but she would do as she pleased this time. Here was Tom getting as wet as a spaniel for her sake, and counting it a happiness! Oh, to have a friend like that—all to herself! She would not reject such a friend for all the aunts in creation. Besides, it was her aunt's own fault; if she had let her stay with Mary, she would not have met Tom. It was not her doing; she would take what was sent her, and enjoy it! But, at the sound of her own voice calling him Tom, the blood rushed to her cheeks, and she felt their glow in the heart of the chill-beating rain.

"What a night for you to be out in, Letty," responded Tom, taking instant advantage of the right she had given him. "How

lucky it was I chose the right place to watch in at last! I was sure, if only I persevered long enough, I should be rewarded."

"Have you been waiting for me long?" asked Letty, with foolish acceptance.

"A fortnight and a day," answered Tom, with a laugh. "But I would wait a long year for such another chance as this." And he pressed to his side the hand upon his arm. "Fate is indeed kind to-night."

"Hardly in the weather," said Letty, fast recovering her spirits.

"Not?" said Tom, with seeming pretense of indignation. "Let any one but yourself dare to say a word against the weather of this night, and he will have me to reckon with. It's the sweetest weather I ever walked in. I will write a glorious song in praise of showery gusts and bare commons."

"Do," said Letty, careful not to say Tom this time, but unwilling to revert to Mr. Helmer, "and mind you bring in the umbrella."

"That I will! See if I don't!" answered Tom.

"And make it real poetry too?" asked Letty, looking archly round the stick of the umbrella.

"Thou shalt thyself be the lovely critic, fair maiden!" answered Tom.

And thus they were already on the footing of somewhere about a two years' acquaintance—thanks to the smart of ill-usage in Letty's bosom, the gayety in Tom's, the sudden wild weather, the quiet heath, the gathering shades, and the umbrella! The

wind blew cold, the air was dank and chill, the west was a low gleam of wet yellow, and the rain shot stinging in their faces; but Letty cared quite as little for it all as Tom did, for her heart, growing warm with the comfort of the friendly presence, felt like a banished soul that has found a world; and a joy as of endless deliverance pervaded her being. And neither to her nor to Tom must we deny our sympathy in the pleasure which, walking over a bog, they drew from the flowers that mantled awful deeps; they will not sink until they stop, and begin to build their house upon it. Within that umbrella, hovered, and glided with them, an atmosphere of bliss and peace and rose-odors. In the midst of storm and coming darkness, it closed warm and genial around the pair. Tom meditated no guile, and Letty had no deceit in her. Yet was Tom no true man, or sweet Letty much of a woman. Neither of them was yet *of the truth.*

At the other side of the heath, almost upon the path, stood a deserted hut; door and window were gone, but the roof remained: just as they neared it, the wind fell, and the rain began to come down in earnest.

"Let us go in here for a moment," said Tom, "and get our breath for a new fight."

Letty said nothing, but Tom felt she was reluctant.

"Not a soul will pass to-night," he said. "We mustn't get wet to the skin."

Letty felt, or fancied, refusal would be more unmaidenly than consent, and allowed Tom to lead her in. And there, within those

dismal walls, the twilight sinking into a cheerless night of rain, encouraged by the very dreariness and obscurity of the place, she told Tom the trouble of mind their interview at the oak was causing her, saying that now it would be worse than ever, for it was altogether impossible to confess that she had met him yet again that evening.

So now, indeed, Letty's foot was in the snare: she had a secret with Tom. Every time she saw him, liberty had withdrawn a pace. There was no room for confession now. If a secret held be a burden, a secret shared is a fetter. But Tom's heart rejoiced within him.

"Let me see!—How old are you, Letty?" he asked gayly.

"Eighteen past," she answered.

"Then you are fit to judge for yourself. You ain't a child, and they are not your father and mother. What right have they to know everything you do? I wouldn't let any such nonsense trouble me."

"But they give me everything, you know—food, and clothes, and all."

"Ah, just so!" returned Tom. "And what do you do for them?"

"Nothing."

"Why! what are you about all day?"

Letty gave him a brief sketch of her day.

"And you call that nothing?" exclaimed Tom. "Ain't that enough to pay for your food and your clothes? Does it want your private affairs to make up the difference? Or have you to pay for

your food and clothes with your very thoughts?—What pocket-money do they give you?"

"Pocket-money?" returned Letty, as if she did not quite know what he meant.

"Money to do what you like with," explained Tom.

Letty thought for a moment.

"Cousin Godfrey gave me a sovereign last Christmas," she answered. "I have got ten shillings of it yet."

Tom burst into a merry laugh.

"Oh, you dear creature!" he cried. "What a sweet slave you make! The lowest servant on the farm gets wages, and you get none: yet you think yourself bound to tell them everything, because they give you food and clothes, and a sovereign last Christmas!"

Here a gentle displeasure arose in the heart of the girl, hitherto so contented and grateful. She did not care about money, but she resented the claim her conscience made for them upon her confidence. She did not reflect that such claim had never been made by them; nor that the fact that she felt the claim, proved that she had been treated, in some measure at least, like a daughter of the house.

"Why," continued Tom, "it is mere, downright, rank slavery! You are walking to the sound of your own chains. Of course, you are not to do anything wrong, but you are not bound not to do anything they may happen not to like."

In this style he went on, believing he spoke the truth, and

was teaching her to show a proper spirit. His heart, as well as Godfrey's, was uplifted, to think he had this lovely creature to direct and superintend: through her sweet confidence, he had to set her free from unjust oppression taking advantage of her simplicity. But in very truth he was giving her just the instruction that goes to make a slave—the slave in heart, who serves without devotion, and serves unworthily. Yet in this, and much more such poverty-stricken, swine-husk argument, Letty seemed to hear a gospel of liberty, and scarcely needed the following injunctions of Tom, to make a firm resolve not to utter a word concerning him. To do so would be treacherous to him, and would be to forfeit the liberty he had taught her! Thus, from the neglect of a real duty, she became the slave of a false one.

"If you do," Tom had said, "I shall never see you again: they will set every one about the place to watch you, like so many cats after one poor little white mousey, and on the least suspicion, one way or another, you will be gobbled up, as sure as fate, before you can get to me to take care of you."

Letty looked up at him gratefully.

"But what could you do for me if I did?" she asked. "If my aunt were to turn me out of the house, your mother would not take me in!"

Letty was not herself now; she was herself and Tom—by no means a healthful combination.

"My mother won't be mistress long," answered Tom. "She will have to do as I bid her when I am one-and-twenty, and that

will be in a few months." Tom did not know the terms of his father's will. "In the mean time we must keep quiet, you know. I don't want a row—we have plenty of row as it is. You may be sure *I* shall tell no one how I spent the happiest hour of my life. How little circumstance has to do with bliss!" he added, with a philosophical sigh. "Here we are in a wretched hut, roared and rained upon by an equinoctial tempest, and I am in paradise!"

"I must go home," said Letty, recalled to a sense of her situation, yet set trembling with pleasure, by his words. "See, it is getting quite dark!"

"Don't be afraid, my white bird," said Tom. "I will see you home. But surely you are as well here as there anyhow! Who knows when we shall meet again? Don't be alarmed; I'm not going to ask you to meet me anywhere; I know your sweet innocence would make you fancy it wrong, and then you would be unhappy. But that is no reason why I should not fall in with you when I have the chance. It is very hard that two people who understand each other can not be friends without other people shoving in their ugly beaks! Where is the harm to any one if we choose to have a few minutes' talk together now and then?"

"Where, indeed?" responded Letty shyly.

A tall shadow—no shadow either, but the very person of Godfrey Wardour—passed the opening in the wall of the hut where once had been a window, and the gloom it cast into the dusk within was awful and ominous. The moment he saw it, Tom threw himself flat on the clay floor of the hut. Godfrey

stopped at the doorless entrance, and stood on the threshold, bending his head to clear the lintel as he looked in. Letty's heart seemed to vanish from her body. A strange feeling shook her, as if some mysterious transformation were about to pass upon her whole frame, and she were about to be changed into some one of the lower animals. The question, where was the harm, late so triumphantly put, seemed to have no heart in it now. For a moment that had to Letty the air of an aeon, Godfrey stood peering.

Not a little to his displeasure, he had heard from his mother of her refusal to grant Letty's request, and had set out in the hope of meeting and helping her home, for by that time it had begun to rain, and looked stormy.

In the darkness he saw something white, and, as he gazed, it grew to Letty's face. The strange, scared, ghastly expression of it bewildered him.

Letty became aware that Godfrey did not recognize her at first, and the hope sprung up in her heart that he might not see Tom at all; but she could not utter a word, and stood returning Godfrey's gaze like one fascinated with terror. Presently her heart began again to bear witness in violent piston-strokes.

"Is it really you, my child?" said Godfrey, in an uncertain voice —for, if it was indeed she, why did she not speak, and why did she look so scared at the sight of him?

"O Cousin Godfrey!" gasped Letty, then first finding a little voice, "you gave me such a start!"

"Why should you be so startled at seeing me, Letty?" he returned. "Am I such a monster of the darkness, then?"

"You came all at once," replied Letty, gathering courage from the playfulness of his tone, "and blocked up the door with your shoulders, so that not a ray of light fell on your face; and how was I to know it was you, Cousin Godfrey?"

From a paleness grayer than death, her face was now red as fire; it was the burning of the lie inside her. She felt all a lie now: there was the good that Tom had brought her! But the gloom was friendly. With a resolution new to herself, she went up to Godfrey and said:

"If you are going to the town, let me walk with you, Cousin Godfrey. It is getting so dark."

She felt as if an evil necessity—a thing in which man must not believe—were driving her. But the poor child was not half so deceitful inside as the words seemed to her issuing from her lips. It was such a relief to be assured Godfrey had not seen Tom, that she felt as if she could forego the sight of Tom for evermore. Her better feelings rushed back, her old confidence and reverence; and, in the altogether nebulo-chaotic condition of her mind, she felt as if, in his turn, Godfrey had just appeared for her deliverance.

"I am not going to the town, Letty," he answered. "I came to meet you, and we will go home together. It is no use waiting for the rain to stop, and about as little to put up an umbrella, I have brought your waterproof, and we must just take it as it comes."

The wind was up again, and the next moment Letty, on Godfrey's arm, was struggling with the same storm she had so lately encountered leaning on Tom's, while Tom was only too glad to be left alone on the floor of the dismal hut, whence he did not venture to rise for some time, lest any the most improbable thing should happen, to bring Mr. Wardour back. He was as mortally afraid of being discovered as any young thief in a farmer's orchard.

He had a dreary walk back to the public house where he had stabled his horse; but he trudged it cheerfully, brooding with delight on Letty's beauty, and her lovely confidence in Tom Helmer—a personage whom he had begun to feel nobody trusted as he deserved.

"Poor child!" he said to himself—he as well as Godfrey patronized her—"what a doleful walk home she will have with that stuck-up old bachelor fellow!"

Nor, indeed, was it a very comfortable walk home she had, although Godfrey talked all the way, as well as a head-wind, full of rain, would permit. A few weeks ago she would have thought the walk and the talk and everything delightful. But after Tom's airy converse on the same level with herself, Godfrey's sounded indeed wise—very wise—but dull, so dull! It is true the suspicion, hardly awake enough to be troublous, lay somewhere in her, that in Godfrey's talk there was a value of which in Tom's there was nothing; but then it was not wisdom Letty was in want of, she thought, but somebody to be kind to her—as kind as

she should like; somebody, though she did not say this even to herself, to pet her a little, and humor her, and not require too much of her. Physically, Letty was not in the least lazy, but she did not enjoy being forced to think much. She could think, and to no very poor purpose either, but as yet she had no hunger for the possible results of thought, and how then could she care to think? Seated on the edge of her bed, weary and wet and self-accused, she recalled, and pondered, and, after her faculty, compared the two scarce comparable men, until the voice of her aunt, calling to her to make haste and come to tea, made her start up, and in haste remove her drenched garments. The old lady imagined from her delay she was out of temper because she had sent for her home; but, when she appeared, she was so ready, so attentive, and so quick to help, that, a little repentant, she said to herself, "Really the girl is very good-natured!" as if then first she discovered the fact. But Thornwick could never more to Letty feel like a home! Not at peace with herself, she could not be in rhythmic relation with her surroundings.

The next day, the old manner of life began again; but, alas! it was only the old manner, it was not the old life; that was gone for ever, like an old sunset, or an old song, and could not be recalled from the dead. We may have better, but we can not have the same. God only can have the same. God grant our new may inwrap our old! Letty labored more than ever to lay hold of the lessons, to his mind so genial, in hers bringing forth more labor than fruit, which Godfrey set before her, but success seemed

further from her than ever. She was now all the time aware of a weight, an oppression, which seemed to belong to the task, but was in reality her self-dissatisfaction. She was like a poor Hebrew set to make brick without straw, but the Egyptian that had brought her into bondage was the feebleness of her own will. Now and then would come a break—a glow of beauty, a gleam of truth; for a moment she would forget herself; for a moment a shining pool would flash on the clouded sea of her life; presently her heart would send up a fresh mist, the light would fade and vanish, and the sea lie dusky and sad. Not seldom reproaching herself with having given Tom cause to think unjustly of her guardians, she would try harder than ever to please her aunt; and the small personal services she had been in the way of rendering to Godfrey were now ministered with the care of a devotee. Not once should he miss a button from a shirt or find a sock insufficiently darned! But even this conscience of service did not make her happy. Duty itself could not, where faith was wanting, where the heart was not at one with those to whom the hands were servants. She would cry herself to sleep, and rise early to be sad. She resolved at last, and seemed to gain strength and some peace from the resolve, to do all in her power to avoid Tom; and certainly not once did she try to meet him. Not with him, she could resist him.

Thus it went on. Her aunt saw that something was amiss, and watched her, without attempt at concealment, which added greatly to Letty's discomfort. But the only thing her keenness

discovered was, that the girl was forwardly eager to please Godfrey, and the conviction began to grow that she was indulging the impudent presumption of being in love with her peerless cousin. Then maternal indignation misled her into the folly of dropping hints that should put Godfrey on his guard: men were so easily taken in by designing girls! She did not say much; but she said a good deal too much for her own ends, when she caused her fancy to present itself to the mind of Godfrey.

He had not failed, no one could have failed, to observe the dejection that had for some time ruled every feature and expression of the girl's countenance. Again and again he had asked himself whether she might not be fancying him displeased with her; for he knew well that, becoming more and more aware of what he counted his danger, he had kept of late stricter guard than ever over his behavior; but, watching her now with the misleading light of his mother's lantern, nor quite unwilling, I am bound to confess, that the thing might be as she implied, he became by degrees convinced that she was right.

So far as this, perhaps, the man was pardonable—with a mother to cause him to err. But, for what followed, punishment was inevitable. He had a true and strong affection for the girl, but it was an affection as from conscious high to low; an affection, that is, not unmixed with patronage—a bad thing—far worse than it can seem to the heart that indulges it. He still recoiled, therefore, from the idea of such a leveling of himself as he counted it would be to show her anything like the love of a lover.

All pride is more or less mean, but one pride may be grander than another, and Godfrey was not herein proud in any grand way. Good fellow as he was, he thought much too much of himself; and, unconsciously comparing it with Letty's, altogether overvalued his worth. Stranger than any bedfellow misery ever acquainted a man withal, are the heart-fellows he carries about with him. Noble as in many ways Wardour was, and kind as, to Letty, he thought he always was, he was not generous toward her; he was not Prince Arthur, "the Knight of Magnificence." Something may perhaps be allowed on the score of the early experience because of which he had resolved—pridefully, it is true—never again to come under the power of a woman; it was unworthy of any man, he said, to place his peace in a hand which could thenceforth wring his whole being with agony. But, had he now brought himself as severely to task as he ought, he would have discovered that he was making no objection to the little girl's loving him, only he would not love her in the same way in return; and where was the honor in that? Doubtless, had he thus examined himself, he would have thought he meant to take care that the child's love for him should not go too far—should not endanger her peace; and that, if the thing should give her trouble, it should be his business to comfort her in it; but descend he would not—would not *yet* —from his pedestal, to meet the silly thing on the level ground of humanity, and the relation of the man and the woman! Something like this, I say, he would have found in his heart, horrid as it reads. That heart's action was

not even, was not healthy.

When in London he had ransacked Holywell Street for dainty editions of so many of his favorite authors as would make quite a little library for Letty; and on his return, had commissioned a cabinet-maker in Testbridge to put together a small set of book-shelves, after his own design, measured and fitted to receive them exactly; these shelves, now ready, he fastened to her wall one afternoon when she was out of the way, and filled them with the books. He never doubted that, the moment she saw them, she would rush to find him; and, when he had done, retreated, therefore, to his study, there to sit in readiness to receive her and her gratitude with gentle kindness; when he would express the hope that she would make real friends of the spirits whose quintessence he had thus stored to her hand; and would introduce her to what Milton says in his "Areopagitica" concerning good books. There, for her sake, then, he sat, in mental state, expectant; but sat in vain. When they met at tea, then, in the presence of his mother, with embarrassment and broken utterance, she did thank him.

"O Cousin Godfrey!" she said, and ceased; then, "It is so much more than I deserve, I dare hardly thank you." After another pause, with a shake of her pretty head, as if she would toss aside her hair, or the tears out of her eyes, "I don't know—I seem to have no right to thank you; I ought not to have such a splendid present. Indeed, I don't deserve it. You would not give it me if you knew how naughty I am."

These broken sentences were by both mother and son altogether misinterpreted. The mother, now hearing for the first time of Godfrey's present, was filled with jealousy, and began to revolve thoughts of dire disquietude: was the hussy actually beginning to gain her point, and steal from her the heart of her son? Was it in the girl's blood to wrong her? The father of her had wronged her: she would take care his daughter should not! She had taken a viper to her bosom! Who was *she* , to wriggle herself into an old family and property? Had *she* been born to such things? She would teach her who she was! When dependents began to presume, it was time they had a lesson.

Letty could not bear the sight of the books and their shelves; the very beauty of the bindings was a reproach to her. From the misery of this fresh burden, this new stirring of her sense of hypocrisy, she began to wish herself anywhere out of the house, and away from Thornwick. It was torture to her to think how she had deceived Cousin Godfrey at the hut; and throughout the night, across the darkness, she felt, though she could not see, the books gazing at her, like an embodied conscience, from the wall of her chamber. Twenty times that night she started from her sleep, saying, "I will go where they shall never see me"; then rose with the dawn, and set herself to the hardest work she could find.

The next day was Sunday, and they all went to church. Letty felt that Tom was there, too, but she never raised her eyes to glance at him.

He had been looking out in vain for a sight of her—now from

the oak-tree, now from his bay mare's back, as he haunted the roads about Thornwick, now from the window of the little public-house where the path across the fields joined the main road to Testbridge: but not once had he caught a glimpse of her.

He had seated himself where he could not fail to see her if she were in the Thornwick pew. How ill she looked! His heart swelled with indignation.

"They are cruel to her," he said; "that is plain. Poor girl, they will kill her! She is a pearl in the oyster-maw of Thornwick. This will never do; I *must* see her somehow!"

If at this crisis Letty had but had a real friend to strengthen and advise her, much suffering might have been spared her, for never was there a more teachable girl. She was, indeed, only too ready to be advised, too ready to accept for true whatever friendship offered itself. None but the friend who will strengthen us to stand, is worthy of the name. Such a friend Mary would have been, but Letty did not yet know what she needed. The unrest of her conscience made her shrink from one who was sure to side with that conscience, and help it to trouble her. It was sympathy Letty longed for, not strength, and therefore she was afraid of Mary. She came to see her, as she had promised, the Sunday after that disastrous visit; but the weather was still uncertain and gusty, and she found both her and Godfrey in the parlor; nor did Letty give her a chance of speaking to her alone. The poor girl had now far more on her mind that needed help than then when she went in search of it, but she would seek it no more from her! For, the

more she thought, the surer she felt that Mary would insist on her making a disclosure of the whole foolish business to Mrs. Wardour, and would admit neither her own fear nor her aunt's harshness as reason sufficient to the contrary. "More than that," thought Letty, "I can't be sure she wouldn't go, in spite of me, and tell her all about it! and what would become of me then? I should be worse off a hundred times than if I had told her myself."

CHAPTER XI
WILLIAM MARSTON

The clouds were gathering over Mary, too—deep and dark, but of altogether another kind from those that enveloped Letty: no troubles are for one moment to be compared with those that come of the wrongness, even if it be not wickedness, that is our own. Some clouds rise from stagnant bogs and fens; others from the wide, clean, large ocean. But either kind, thank God, will serve the angels to come down by. In the old stories of celestial visitants the clouds do much; and it is oftenest of all down the misty slope of griefs and pains and fears, that the most powerful joy slides into the hearts of men and women and children. Beautiful are the feet of the men of science on the dust-heaps of the world, but the patient heart will yield a myriad times greater thanks for the clouds that give foothold to the shining angels.

Few people were interested in William Marston. Of those who saw him in the shop, most turned from him to his jolly partner. But a few there were who, some by instinct, some from experience, did look for him behind the counter, and were disappointed if he were absent: most of them had a repugnance to the over-complaisant Turnbull. Yet Marston was the one whom the wise world of Testbridge called the hypocrite, and

Turnbull was the plain-spoken, agreeable, honest man of the world, pretending to be no better either than himself or than other people. The few friends, however, that Marston bad, loved him as not many are loved: they knew him, not as he seemed to the careless eye, but as he was. Never did man do less either to conceal or to manifest himself. He was all taken up with what he loved, and that was neither himself nor his business. These friends knew that, when the far-away look was on him, when his face was paler, and he seemed unaware of person or thing about him, he was not indifferent to their presence, or careless of their existence; it was only that his thoughts were out, like heavenly bees, foraging; a word of direct address brought him back in a moment, and his soul would return to them with a smile. He stood as one on the keystone of a bridge, and held communion now with these, now with those: on this side the river and on that, both companies were his own.

He was not a man of much education, in the vulgar use of the word; but he was a good way on in that education, for the sake of which, and for no other without it, we are here in our consciousness—the education which, once begun, will, soon or slow, lead knowledge captive, and teaches nothing that has to be unlearned again, because every flower of it scatters the seed of one better than itself. The main secret of his progress, the secret of all wisdom, was, that with him action was the beginning and end of thought. He was not one of that cloud of false witnesses, who, calling themselves Christians, take no

trouble for the end for which Christ was born, namely, their salvation from unrighteousness—a class that may be divided into the insipid and the offensive, both regardless of obedience, the former indifferent to, the latter contentious for doctrine.

It may well seem strange that such a man should have gone into business with such another as John Turnbull; but the latter had been growing more and more common, while Marston had been growing more and more refined. Still from the first it was an unequal yoking of believer with unbeliever—just as certainly, although not with quite such wretched results, as would have been the marriage of Mary Marston and George Turnbull. And it had been a great trial: punishment had not been spared—with best results in patience and purification; for so are our false steps turned back to good by the evil to which they lead us. Turnbull was ready to take every safe advantage to be gained from his partner's comparative carelessness about money. He drew a larger proportion of the profits than belonged to his share in the capital, justifying himself on the ground that he had a much larger family, did more of the business, and had to keep up the standing of the firm. He made him pay more than was reasonable for the small part of the house yielded from storage to the accommodation of him, his daughter, and their servant, notwithstanding that, if they had not lived there, some one must have been paid to do so. Far more than this, careless of his partner's rights, and insensible to his interests, he had for some time been risking the whole affair by private speculations. After

all, Marston was the safer man of business, even from the worldly point of view. Alone, it is true, he would hardly have made money, but he would have got through, and would have left his daughter the means of getting through also; for he would have left her in possession of her own peace and the confidence of her friends, which will always prove enough for those who confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth—those who regard it as a grand staircase they have to climb, not a plain on which to build their houses and plant their vineyards.

As to the peculiar doctrines of the sect to which he had joined himself, right or wrong in themselves, Marston, after having complied with what seemed to him the letter of the law concerning baptism, gave himself no further trouble. He had for a long time known—for, by the power of the life in him, he had gathered from the Scriptures the finest of the wheat, where so many of every sect, great church and little church, gather only the husks and chaff—that the only baptism of any avail is the washing of the fresh birth, and the making new by that breath of God, which, breathed into man's nostrils, first made of him a living soul. When a man *knows* this, potentially he knows all things. But, *just therefore* , he did not stand high with his sect any more than with his customers, though—a fact which Marston himself never suspected—the influence of his position had made them choose him for a deacon. One evening George had had leave to go home early, because of a party at *the villa* , as the Turnbulls always called their house; and, the boy having also for

some cause got leave of absence, Mr. Marston was left to shut the shop himself, Mary, who was in some respects the stronger of the two, assisting him. When he had put up the last shutter, he dropped his arms with a weary sigh. Mary, who had been fastening the bolts inside, met him in the doorway.

"You look worn out, father," she said. "Come and lie down, and I will read to you."

"I will, my dear," he answered. "I don't feel quite myself to-night. The seasons tell upon me now. I suppose the stuff of my tabernacle is wearing thin."

Mary cast an anxious look at him, for, though never a strong man, he seldom complained. But she said nothing, and, hoping a good cup of tea would restore him, led the way through the dark shop to the door communicating with the house. Often as she had passed through it thus, the picture of it as she saw it that night was the only one almost that returned to her afterward: a few vague streaks of light, from the cracks of the shutters, fed the rich, warm gloom of the place; one of them fell upon a piece of orange-colored cotton stuff, which blazed in the dark.

Arrived at their little sitting-room at the top of the stair, she hastened to shake up the pillows and make the sofa comfortable for him. He lay down, and she covered him with a rug; then ran to her room for a book, and read to him while Beenie was getting the tea. She chose a poem with which Mr. Wardour had made her acquainted almost the last tune she was at Thornwick—that was several weeks ago now, for plainly Letty was not so glad to see her

as she used to be—it was Milton's little ode "On Time," written for inscription on a clock—one of the grandest of small poems. Her father knew next to nothing of literature; having pondered his New Testament, however, for thirty years, he was capable of understanding Milton's best—to the childlike mind the best is always simplest and easiest-not unfrequently the *only* kind it can lay hold of. When she ended, he made her read it again, and then again; not until she had read it six times did he seem content. And every time she read it, Mary found herself understanding it better. It was gradually growing very precious.

Her father had made no remark; but, when she lifted her eyes from the sixth reading, she saw that his face shone, and, as the last words left her lips, he took up the line like a refrain, and repeated it after her:

"'Triumphing over death, and chance, and thee, O Time!'

"That will do now, Mary, I thank you," he said. "I have got a good hold of it, I think, and shall be able to comfort myself with it when I wake in the night. The man must have been very like the apostle Paul."

He said no more. The tea was brought, and he drank a cup of it, but could not eat; and, as he could not, neither could Mary.

"I want a long sleep," he said; and the words went to his child's heart—she dared not question herself why. When the tea-things were removed, he called her.

"Mary," he said, "come here. I want to speak to you."

She kneeled beside him,

"Mary," he said again, taking her little hand in his two long, bony ones, "I love you, my child, to that degree I can not say; and I want you, I do want you, to be a Christian."

"So do I, father dear," answered Mary simply, the tears rushing into her eyes at the thought that perhaps she was not one; "I want me to be a Christian."

"Yes, my love," he went on; "but it is not that I do not think you a Christian; it is that I want you to be a downright real Christian, not one that is but trying to feel as a Christian ought to feel. I have lost so much precious time in that way!"

"Tell me—tell me," cried Mary, clasping her other hand over his. "What would you have me do?"

"I will tell you. I am just trying how," he responded. "A Christian is just one that does what the Lord Jesus tells him. Neither more nor less than that makes a Christian. It is not even understanding the Lord Jesus that makes one a Christian. That makes one dear to the Father; but it is being a Christian, that is, doing what he tells us, that makes us understand him. Peter says the Holy Spirit is given to them that obey him: what else is that but just actually, really, doing what he says—just as if I was to tell you to go and fetch me my Bible, and you would get up and go? Did you ever do anything, my child, just because Jesus told you to do it?"

Mary did not answer immediately. She thought awhile. Then she spoke.

"Yes, father," she said, "I think so. Two nights ago, George

was very rude to me—I don't mean anything bad, but you know he is very rough."

"I know it, my child. And you must not think I don't care because I think it better not to interfere. I am with you all the time."

"Thank you, father; I know it. Well, when I was going to bed, I was angry with him still, so it was no wonder I found I could not say my prayers. Then I remembered how Jesus said we must forgive or we should not be forgiven. So I forgave him with all my heart, and kindly, too, and then I found I could pray."

The father stretched out his arms and drew her to his bosom, murmuring, "My child! my Christ's child!" After a little he began to talk again.

"It is a miserable thing to hear those who desire to believe themselves Christians, talking and talking about this question and that, the discussion of which is all for strife and nowise for unity—not a thought among them of the one command of Christ, to love one another. I fear some are hardly content with not hating those who differ from them."

"I am sure, father, I try—and I think I do love everybody that loves him," said Mary.

"Well, that is much—not enough though, my child. We must be like Jesus, and you know that it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us; therefore we must love all men, whether they are Christians or not."

"Tell me, then, what you want me to do, father dear. I will do

whatever you tell me."

"I want you to be just like that to the Lord Christ, Mary. I want you to look out for his will, and find it, and do it. I want you not only to do it, though that is the main thing, when you think of it, but to look for it, that you may do it. I need not say to you that this is not a thing to be *talked* about much, for you don't do that. You may think me very silent, my love; but I do not talk always when I am inclined, for the fear I might let my feeling out that way, instead of doing something he wants of me with it. And how repulsive and full of offense those generally are who talk most! Our strength ought to go into conduct, not into talk—least of all, into talk about what they call the doctrines of the gospel. The man who does what God tells him, sits at his Father's feet, and looks up in his Father's face; and men had better leave him alone, for he can not greatly mistake his Father, and certainly will not displease him. Look for the lovely will, my child, that you may be its servant, its priest, its sister, its queen, its slave—as Paul calls himself. How that man did glory in his Master!"

"I will try, father," returned Mary, with a burst of tears. "I do want to be good. I do want to be one of his slaves, if I may."

"*May!* my child? You are bound to be. You have no choice but choose it. It is what we are made for—freedom, the divine nature, God's life, a grand, pure, open-eyed existence! It is what Christ died for. You must not talk about *may;* it is all *must.* "

Mary had never heard her father talk like this, and, notwithstanding the endless interest of his words, it frightened

her. An instinctive uneasiness crept up and laid hold of her. The unsealing hand of Death was opening the mouth of a dumb prophet.

A pause followed, and he spoke again.

"I will tell you one thing now that Jesus says: he is unchangeable; what he says once he says always; and I mention it now, because it may not be long before you are specially called to mind it. It is this: *'Let not your heart be troubled.'* "

"But he said that on one particular occasion, and to his disciples—did he not?" said Mary, willing, in her dread, to give the conversation a turn.

"Ah, Mary!" said her father, with a smile, "*will* you let the questioning spirit deafen you to the teaching one? Ask yourself, the first time you are alone, what the disciples were not to be troubled about, and why they were not to be troubled about it.—I am tired, and should like to go to bed."

He rose, and stood for a moment in front of the fire, winding his old double-cased silver watch. Mary took from her side the little gold one he had given her, and, as was her custom, handed it to him to wind for her. The next moment he had dropped it on the fender.

"Ah, my child!" he cried, and, stooping, gathered up a dying thing, whose watchfulness was all over. The glass was broken; the case was open; it lay in his hand a mangled creature. Mary heard the rush of its departing life, as the wheels went whirring, and the hands circled rapidly.

They stopped motionless. She looked up in her father's face with a smile. He was looking concerned.

"I am very sorry, Mary," he said; "but, if it is past repair, I will get you another.—You don't seem to mind it much!" he added, and smiled himself.

"Why should I, father dear?" she replied. "When one's father breaks one's watch, what is there to say but 'I am very glad it was you did it'? I shall like the little thing the better for it."

He kissed her on the forehead.

"My child, say that to your Father in heaven, when he breaks something for you. He will do it from love, not from blundering. I don't often preach to you, my child—do I? but somehow it comes to me to-night."

"I will remember, father," said Mary; and she did remember.

She went with him to his bedroom, and saw that everything was right for him. When she went again, before going to her own, he felt more comfortable, he said, and expected to have a good night. Relieved, she left him; but her heart would be heavy. A shapeless sadness seemed pressing it down; it was being got ready for what it had to bear.

When she went to his room in the middle of the night, she found him slumbering peacefully, and went back to her own and slept better. When she went again in the morning, he lay white, motionless, and without a breath.

It was not in Mary's nature to give sudden vent to her feelings. For a time she was stunned. As if her life had rushed to overtake

her departing parent, and beg a last embrace, she stood gazing motionless. The sorrow was too huge for entrance. The thing could not be! Not until she stooped and kissed the pale face, did the stone in her bosom break, and yield a torrent of grief. But, although she had left her father in that very spot the night before, already she not only knew but felt that was not he which lay where she had left him. He was gone, and she was alone. She tried to pray, but her heart seemed to lie dead in her bosom, and no prayer would rise from it. It was the time of all times when, if ever, prayer must be the one reasonable thing—and pray she could not. In her dull stupor she did not hear Beenie's knock. The old woman entered, and found her on her knees, with her forehead on one of the dead hands, while the white face of her master lay looking up to heaven, as if praying for the living not yet privileged to die. Then first was the peace of death broken. Beenie gave a loud cry, and turned and ran, as if to warn the neighbors that Death was loose in the town. Thereupon, as if Death were a wild beast yet lurking in it, the house was filled with noise and tumult; the sanctuary of the dead was invaded by unhallowed presence; and the poor girl, hearing behind her voices she did not love, raised herself from her knees, and, without lifting her eyes, crept from the room and away to her own.

"Follow her, George," said his father, in a loud, eager whisper. "You've got to comfort her now. That's your business, George. There's your chance!"

The last words he called from the bottom of the stair, as George sped up after her. "Mary! Mary, dear," he called as he ran.

But Mary had the instinct—it was hardly more—to quicken her pace, and lock the door of her room the moment she entered. As she turned from it, her eye fell upon her watch—where it lay, silent and disfigured, on her dressing-table; and, with the sight, the last words of her father came back to her. She fell again on her knees with a fresh burst of weeping, and, while the foolish youth was knocking unheard at her door, cried, with a strange mixture of agony and comfort, "O my Father in heaven, give me back William Marston!" Never in his life had she thought of her father by his name; but death, while it made him dearer than ever, set him away from her so, that she began to see him in his larger individuality, as a man before the God of men, a son before the Father of many sons: Death turns a man's sons and daughters into his brothers and sisters. And while she kneeled, and, with exhausted heart, let her brain go on working of itself, as it seemed, came a dreamy vision of the Saviour with his disciples about him, reasoning with them that they should not give way to grief. "Let not your heart be troubled," he seemed to be saying, "although I die, and go out of your sight. It is all well. Take my word for it."

She rose, wiped her eyes, looked up, said, "I will try, Lord," and, going down, called Beenie, and sent her to ask Mr. Turnbull to speak with her. She knew her father's ideas, and must do her

endeavor to have the funeral as simple as possible. It was a relief to have something, anything, to do in his name.

Mr. Turnbull came, and the coarse man was kind. It went not a little against the grain with him to order what he called a pauper's funeral for the junior partner in the firm; but, more desirous than ever to conciliate Mary, he promised all that she wished.

"Marston was but a poor-spirited fellow," he said to his wife when he told her; "the thing is a disgrace to the shop, but it's fit enough for him.—It will be so much money saved," he added in self-consolation, while his wife turned up her nose, as she always did at any mention of the shop.

Mary returned to her father's room, now silent again with the air of that which is not. She took from the table the old silver watch. It went on measuring the time by a scale now useless to its owner. She placed it lovingly in her bosom, and sat down by the bedside. Already, through love, sorrow, and obedience, she began to find herself drawing nearer to him than she had ever been before; already she was able to recall his last words, and strengthen her resolve to keep them. And, sitting thus, holding vague companionship with the merely mortal, the presence of that which was not her father, which was like him only to remind her that it was not he, and which must so soon cease to resemble him, there sprang, as in the very footprint of Death, yet another flower of rarest comfort—a strong feeling, namely, of the briefness of time, and the certainty of the messenger's return to fetch herself. Her soul did not sink into peace, but a

strange peace awoke in her spirit. She heard the spring of the great clock that measures the years rushing rapidly down with a feverous whir, and saw the hands that measure the weeks and months careering around its face; while Death, like one of the white-robed angels in the tomb of the Lord, sat watching, with patient smile, for the hour when he should be wanted to go for her. Thus mingled her broken watch, her father's death, and Jean Paul's dream; and the fancy might well comfort her.

I will not linger much more over the crumbling time. It is good for those who are in it, specially good for those who come out of it chastened and resolved; but I doubt if any prolonged contemplation of death is desirable for those whose business it now is to live, and whose fate it is ere long to die. It is a closing of God's hand upon us to squeeze some of the bad blood out of us, and, when it relaxes, we must live the more diligently—not to get ready for death, but to get more life. I will relate only one thing yet, belonging to this twilight time.

CHAPTER XII.
MARY'S DREAM

That night, and every night until the dust was laid to the dust, Mary slept well; and through the days she had great composure; but, when the funeral was over, came a collapse and a change. The moment it became necessary to look on the world as unchanged, and resume former relations with it, then, first, a fuller sense of her lonely desolation declared itself. When she said good night to Beenie, and went to her chamber, over that where the loved parent and friend would fall asleep no more, she felt as if she went walking along to her tomb.

That night was the first herald of the coming winter, and blew a cold blast from his horn. All day the wind had been out. Wildly in the churchyard it had pulled at the long grass, as if it would tear it from its roots in the graves; it had struck vague sounds, as from a hollow world, out of the great bell overhead in the huge tower; and it had beat loud and fierce against the corner-buttresses which went stretching up out of the earth, like arms to hold steady and fast the lighthouse of the dead above the sea which held them drowned below; despairingly had the gray clouds drifted over the sky; and, like white clouds pinioned below, and shadows that could not escape, the surplice of the ministering priest and the garments of the mourners had flapped and fluttered as in

captive terror; the only still things were the coffin and the church —and the soul which had risen above the region of storms in the might of Him who abolished death. At the time Mary had noted nothing of these things; now she saw them all, as for the first time, in minute detail, while slowly she went up the stair and through the narrowed ways, and heard the same wind that raved alike about the new grave and the old house, into which latter, for all the bales banked against the walls, it found many a chink of entrance. The smell of the linen, of the blue cloth, and of the brown paper—things no longer to be handled by those tender, faithful hands—was dismal and strange, and haunted her like things that intruded, things which she had done with, and which yet would not go away. Everything had gone dead, as it seemed, had exhaled the soul of it, and retained but the odor of its mortality. If for a moment a thing looked the same as before, she wondered vaguely, unconsciously, how it could be. The passages through the merchandise, left only wide enough for one, seemed like those she had read of in Egyptian tombs and pyramids: a sarcophagus ought to be waiting in her chamber. When she opened the door of it, the bright fire, which Beenie undesired had kindled there, startled her: the room looked unnatural, *uncanny* , because it was cheerful. She stood for a moment on the hearth, and in sad, dreamy mood listened to the howling swoops of the wind, making the house quiver and shake. Now and then would come a greater gust, and rattle the window as if in fierce anger at its exclusion, then go shrieking and wailing through the dark

heaven. Mechanically she took her New Testament, and, seating herself in a low chair by the fire, tried to read; but she could not fix her thoughts, or get the meaning of a sentence: when she had read it, there it lay, looking at her just the same, like an unanswered riddle.

The region of the senses is the unbelieving part of the human soul; and out of that now began to rise fumes of doubt and question into Mary's heart and brain. Death was a fact. The loss, the evanishment, the ceasing, were incontrovertible—the only incontrovertible things: she was sure of them: could she be sure of anything else? How could she? She had not seen Christ rise; she had never looked upon one of the dead; never heard a voice from the other bank; had received no certain testimony. These were not her thoughts; she was too weary to think; they were but the thoughts that steamed up in her, and went floating about before her; she looked on them calmly, coldly, as they came, and passed, or remained—saw them with indifference—there they were, and she could not help it—weariedly, believing none of them, unable to cope with and dispel them, hardly affected by their presence, save with a sense of dreariness and loneliness and wretched company. At last she fell asleep, and in a moment was dreaming diligently. This was her dream, as nearly as she could recall it, when she came to herself after waking from it with a cry.

She was one of a large company at a house where she had never been before—a beautiful house with a large garden behind. It was a summer night, and the guests were wandering in and out

at will, and through house and garden, amid lovely things of all colors and odors. The moon was shining, and the roses were in pale bloom. But she knew nobody, and wandered alone in the garden, oppressed with something she did not understand. Every now and then she came on a little group, or met a party of the guests, as she walked, but none spoke to her, or seemed to see her, and she spoke to none.

She found herself at length in an avenue of dark trees, the end of which was far off. Thither she went walking, the only living thing, crossing strange shadows from the moon. At the end of it she was in a place of tombs. Terror and a dismay indescribable seized her; she turned and fled back to the company of her kind. But for a long time she sought the house in vain; she could not reach it; the avenue seemed interminable to her feet returning. At last she was again upon the lawn, but neither man nor woman was there; and in the house only a light here and there was burning. Every guest was gone. She entered, and the servants, soft-footed and silent, were busy carrying away the vessels of hospitality, and restoring order, as if already they prepared for another company on the morrow. No one heeded her. She was out of place, and much unwelcome. She hastened to the door of entrance, for every moment there was a misery. She reached the hall. A strange, shadowy porter opened to her, and she stepped out into a wide street.

That, too, was silent. No carriage rolled along the center, no footfarer walked on the side. Not a light shone from window or

door, save what they gave back of the yellow light of the moon. She was lost—lost utterly, with an eternal loss. She knew nothing of the place, had nowhere to go, nowhere she wanted to go, had not a thought to tell her what question to ask, if she met a living soul. But living soul there could be none to meet. She had nor home, nor direction, nor desire; she knew of nothing that she had lost, nor of anything she wished to gain; she had nothing left but the sense that she was empty, that she needed some goal, and had none. She sat down upon a stone between the wide street and the wide pavement, and saw the moon shining gray upon the stone houses. It was all deadness.

Presently, from somewhere in the moonlight, appeared, walking up to her, where she sat in eternal listlessness, the one only brother she had ever had. She had lost him years and years before, and now she saw him; he was there, and she knew him. But not a throb went through her heart. He came to her side, and she gave him no greeting. "Why should I heed him?" she said to herself. "He is dead. I am only in a dream. This is not he; it is but his pitiful phantom that comes wandering hither—a ghost without a heart, made out of the moonlight. It is nothing. I am nothing. I am lost. Everything is an empty dream of loss. I know it, and there is no waking. If there were, surely the sight of him would give me some shimmer of delight. The old time was but a thicker dream, and this is truer because more shadowy." And, the form still standing by her, she felt it was ages away; she was divided from it by a gulf of very nothingness. Her only life was,

that she was lost. Her whole consciousness was merest, all but abstract, loss.

Then came the form of her mother, and bent over that of her brother from behind. "Another ghost of a ghost! another shadow of a phantom!" she said to herself. "She is nothing to me. If I speak to her, she is not there. Shall I pour out my soul into the ear of a mist, a fume from my own brain? Oh, cold creatures, ye are not what ye seem, and I will none of you!"

With that, came her father, and stood beside the others, gazing upon her with still, cold eyes, expressing only a pale quiet. She bowed her face on her hands, and would not regard him. Even if he were alive, her heart was past being moved. It was settled into stone. The universe was sunk in one of the dreams that haunt the sleep of death; and, if these were ghosts at all, they were ghosts walking in their sleep.

But the dead, one of them seized one of her hands, and another the other. They raised her to her feet, and led her along, and her brother walked before. Thus was she borne away captive of her dead, neither willing nor unwilling, of life and death equally careless. Through the moonlight they led her from the city, and over fields, and through valleys, and across rivers and seas—a long journey; nor did she grow weary, for there was not life enough in her to be made weary. The dead never spoke to her, and she never spoke to them. Sometimes it seemed as if they spoke to each other, but, if it were so, it concerned some shadowy matter, no more to her than the talk of grasshoppers in the field,

or of beetles that weave their much-involved dances on the face of the pool. Their voices were even too thin and remote to rouse her to listen.

They came at length to a great mountain, and, as they were going up the mountain, light began to grow, as if the sun were beginning to rise. But she cared as little for the sun that was to light the day as for the moon that had lighted the night, and closed her eyes, that she might cover her soul with her eyelids.

Of a sudden a great splendor burst upon her, and through her eyelids she was struck blind—blind with light and not with darkness, for all was radiance about her. She was like a fish in a sea of light. But she neither loved the light nor mourned the shadow.

Then were her ears invaded with a confused murmur, as of the mingling of all sweet sounds of the earth—of wind and water, of bird and voice, of string and metal—all afar and indistinct. Next arose about her a whispering, as of winged insects, talking with human voices; but she listened to nothing, and heard nothing of what was said: it was all a tiresome dream, out of which whether she waked or died it mattered not.

Suddenly she was taken between two hands, and lifted, and seated upon knees like a child, and she felt that some one was looking at her. Then came a voice, one that she never heard before, yet with which she was as familiar as with the sound of the blowing wind. And the voice said, "Poor child! something has closed the valve between her heart and mine." With that came a

pang of intense pain. But it was her own cry of speechless delight that woke her from her dream.

CHAPTER XIII.
THE HUMAN SACRIFICE

The same wind that rushed about the funeral of William Marston in the old churchyard of Testbridge, howled in the roofless hall and ruined tower of Durnmelling, and dashed against the plate-glass windows of the dining-room, where the three ladies sat at lunch. Immediately it was over, Lady Malice rose, saying:

"Hesper, I want a word with you. Come to my room."

Hesper obeyed, with calmness, but without a doubt that evil awaited her there. To that room she had never been summoned for anything she could call good. And indeed she knew well enough what evil it was that to-day played the Minotaur. When they reached the boudoir, rightly so called, for it was more in use for *sulking* than for anything else, Lady Margaret, with back as straight as the door she had just closed, led the way to the fire, and, seating herself, motioned Hesper to a chair. Hesper again obeyed, looking as unconcerned as if she cared for nothing in this world or in any other. Would we were all as strong to suppress hate and fear and anxiety as some ladies are to suppress all show of them! Such a woman looks to me like an automaton, in which a human soul, somewhere concealed, tries to play a good game of life, and makes a sad mess of it.

"Well, Hesper, what do you think?" said her mother, with a dull attempt at gayety, which could nowise impose upon the experience of her daughter.

"I think nothing, mamma," drawled Hesper.

"Mr. Redmain has come to the point at last, my dear child."

"What point, mamma?"

"He had a private interview with your father this morning."

"Indeed!"

"Foolish girl! you think to tease me by pretending indifference!"

"How can a fact be pretended, mamma? Why should I care what passes in the study? I was never welcome there. But, if you wish, I will pretend. What important matter was settled in the study this morning?"

"Hesper, you provoke me with your affectation!"

Hesper's eyes began to flash. Otherwise she was still—silent—not a feature moved. The eyes are more untamable than the tongue. When the wild beast can not get out at the door, nothing can keep him from the windows. The eyes flash when the will is yet lord even of the lines of the mouth. Not a nerve of Hesper's quivered. Though a mere child in the knowledge that concerned her own being, even the knowledge of what is commonly called the heart, she was yet a mistress of the art of self-defense, socially applied, and she would not now put herself at the disadvantage of taking anything for granted, or accept the clearest hint for a plain statement. She not merely continued silent, but looked so utterly

void of interest, or desire to speak, that her mother, recognizing her own child, and quailing before the evil spirit she had herself sent on to the generations to come, yielded and spoke out.

"Mr. Redmain has proposed for your hand, Hesper," she said, in a tone as indifferent in her turn as if she were mentioning the appointment of a new clergyman to the family living.

For one moment, and one only, the repose of Hesper's faultless upper lip gave way; one writhing movement of scorn passed along its curves, and left them for a moment straightened out —to return presently to a grander bend than before. In a tone that emulated, and more than equaled, the indifference of her mother's, she answered:

"And papa?"

"Has referred him to you, of course," replied Lady Margaret.

"Meaning it?"

"What else? Why not? Is he not a *bon parli?* "

"Then papa did not mean it?"

"I do not understand you," elaborated the mother, with a mingled yawn, which she was far from attempting to suppress, seeing she simulated it.

"If Mr. Redmain is such a good match in papa's eyes," explained Hesper, "why does papa refer him to me?"

"That you may accept him, of course."

"How much has the man promised to pay for me?"

"*Hesper!* "

"I beg your pardon, mamma. I thought you approved of calling

things by their right names!"

"No girl can do better than follow her mother's example," said Lady Margaret, with vague sequence. "If *you* do, Hesper, you will accept Mr. Redmain."

Hesper fixed her eyes on her mother, but hers were too cold and clear to quail before them, let them flash and burn as they pleased.

"As you did papa?" said Hesper.

"As I did Mr. Mortimer."

"That explains a good deal, mamma."

"We are *your* parents, anyhow, Hesper."

"I suppose so. I don't know which to be sorrier for—you or me. Tell me, mamma: would *you* marry Mr. Redmain?"

"That is a foolish question, and ought not to be put. It is one which, as a married woman, I could not consider without impropriety. Knowing the duty of a daughter, I did not put the question to *you* . You are yourself the offspring of duty."

"If you were in my place, mamma," reattempted Hesper, but her mother did not allow her to proceed.

"In any place, in every place, I should do my duty," she said.

It was not only born in Lady Malice's blood, but from earliest years, had been impressed on her brain, that her first duty was to her family, and mainly consisted in getting well out of its way —in going peaceably through the fire to Moloch, that the rest might have good places in the Temple of Mammon. In her turn, she had trained her children to the bewildering conviction that

it was duty to do a certain wrong, if it should be required. That wrong thing was now required of Hesper—a thing she scorned, hated, shuddered at; she must follow the rest; her turn to be sacrificed was come; she must henceforth be a living lie. She could recompense herself as the daughters who have sinned by yielding generally do when they are mothers, with the sin of compelling, and thus make the trespass round and full. There is in no language yet the word invented to fit the vileness of such mothers; but, as time flows and speech grows, it may be found, and, when it is found, it will have action retrospective. It is a frightful thing when ignorance of evil, so much to be desired where it can contribute to safety, is employed to smooth the way to the unholiest doom, in which love itself must ruthlessly perish, and those, who on the plea of virtue were kept ignorant, be perfected in the image of the mothers who gave them over to destruction. Some, doubtless, of the innocents thus immolated pass even through hideous fires of marital foulness to come out the purer and the sweeter; but whither must the stone about the neck of those that cause the little ones to offend sink those mothers? What company shall in the end be too low, too foul for them? Like to like it must always be.

Hesper was not so ignorant as some girls; she had for some time had one at her side capable of casting not a little light of the kind that is darkness.

"*Duty* , mamma!" she cried, her eyes flaming, and her cheek flushed with the shame of the thing that was but as yet the merest

object in her thought; "can a woman be born for such things? How *could* I—mamma, how could any woman, with an atom of self-respect, consent to occupy the same—*room* with Mr. Redmain?"

"Hesper! I am shocked. *Where* did you learn to speak, not to say *think* , of such things? Have I taken such pains—good God! you strike me dumb! Have I watched my child like a very—angel, as anxious to keep her mind pure as her body fair, and is *this* the result?" Upon what Lady Margaret founded her claim to a result more satisfactory to her maternal designs, it were hard to say. For one thing, she had known nothing of what went on in her nursery, positively nothing of the real character of the women to whom she gave the charge of it; and—although, I dare say, for worldly women, Hesper's schoolmistresses were quite respectable—what did her mother, what could she know of the governesses or of the flock of sheep—all presumably, but how certainly *all* white?—into which she had sent her?

"Is *this* the result?" said Lady Margaret.

"Was it your object, then, to keep me innocent, only that I might have the necessary lessons in wickedness first from my husband?" said Hesper, with a rudeness for which, if an apology be necessary, I leave my reader to find it.

"Hesper, you are vulgar!" said Lady Margaret, with cold indignation, and an expression of unfeigned disgust. She was, indeed, genuinely shocked. That a young lady of Hesper's birth and position should talk like this, actually objecting to a man

as her husband because she recoiled from his wickedness, of which she was not to be supposed to know, or to be capable of understanding, anything, was a thing unheard of in her world-a thing unmaidenly in the extreme! What innocent girl would or could or dared allude to such matters? She had no right to know an atom about them!

"You are a married woman, mamma," returned Hesper, "and therefore must know a great many things I neither know nor wish to know. For anything I know, you may be ever so much a better woman than I, for having learned not to mind things that are a horror to me. But there was a time when you shrunk from them as I do now. I appeal to you as a woman: for God's sake, save me from marrying that wretch!"

She spoke in a tone inconsistently calm.

"Girl! is it possible you dare to call the man, whom your father and I have chosen for your husband, a wretch!"

"Is he not a wretch, mamma?"

"If he were, how should I know it? What has any lady got to do with a man's secrets?"

"Not if he wants to marry her daughter?"

"Certainly not. If he should not be altogether what he ought to be—and which of us is?—then you will have the honor of reclaiming him. But men settle down when they marry."

"And what comes of their wives?"

"What comes of women. You have your mother before you, Hesper."

"O mother!" cried Hesper, now at length losing the horrible affectation of calm which she had been taught to regard as *de rigueur* , "is it possible that you, so beautiful, so dignified, would send me on to meet things you dare not tell me—knowing they would turn me sick or mad? How dares a man like that even desire in his heart to touch an innocent girl?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.