GEORGE MACDONALD

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
BAD WEATHER

It was a gray, windy noon in the beginning of autumn. The sky and the sea were almost of the same color, and that not a beautiful one. The edge of the horizon where they met was an edge no more, but a bar thick and blurred, across which from the unseen came troops of waves that broke into white crests, the flying manes of speed, as they rushed at, rather than ran towards the shore: in their eagerness came out once more the old enmity between moist and dry. The trees and the smoke were greatly troubled, the former because they would fain stand still, the latter because it would fain ascend, while the wind kept tossing the former and beating down the latter. Not one of the hundreds of fishing boats belonging to the coast was to be seen; not a sail even was visible; not the smoke of a solitary steamer ploughing its own miserable path through the rain-fog to London or Aberdeen. It was sad weather and depressing to not a few of the thousands come to Burcliff to enjoy a holiday which, whether of days or of weeks, had looked short to the labor weary when first they

came, and was growing shorter and shorter, while the days that composed it grew longer and longer by the frightful vitality of dreariness. Especially to those of them who hated work, a day like this, wrapping them in a blanket of fog, whence the water was every now and then squeezed down upon them in the wettest of all rains, seemed a huge bite snatched by that vague enemy against whom the grumbling of the world is continually directed out of the cake that by every right and reason belonged to them. For were they not born to be happy, and how was human being to fulfill his destiny in such circumstances?

There are men and women who can be happy in any—even in such circumstances and worse, but they are rare, and not a little better worth knowing than the common class of mortals—alas that they *will* be common! *content* to be common they are not and cannot be. Among these exceptional mortals I do not count such as, having secured the corner of a couch within the radius of a good fire, forget the world around them by help of the magic lantern of a novel that interests them: such may not be in the least worth knowing for their disposition or moral attainment —not even although the noise of the waves on the sands, or the storm in the chimney, or the rain on the windows but serves to deepen the calm of their spirits. Take the novel away, give the fire a black heart; let the smells born in a lodging-house kitchen invade the sitting-room, and the person, man or woman, who can then, on such a day, be patient with a patience pleasant to other people, is, I repeat, one worth knowing—and such there

are, though not many. Mrs. Raymount, half the head and more than half the heart of a certain family in a certain lodging house in the forefront of Burcliff, was one of such.

It was not a large family, yet contained perhaps as many varieties of character and temper as some larger ones, with as many several ways of fronting such a misfortune—for that is what poor creatures, the slaves of the elements, count it—as rainy weather in a season concerning which all men agree that it ought to be fine, and that something is out of order, giving ground of complaint, if it be not fine. The father met it with tolerably good humor; but he was so busy writing a paper for one of the monthly reviews, that he would have kept the house had the day been as fine as both the church going visitors, and the mammon-worshipping residents with income depending on the reputation of their weather, would have made it if they could, nor once said *by your leave*; therefore he had no credit, and his temper must pass as not proven. But if you had taken from the mother her piece of work—she was busy embroidering a lady's pinafore in a design for which she had taken colors and arrangement from a peacock's feather, but was disposing them in the form of a sun which with its rays covered the stomacher, the deeper tints making the shadow between the golden arrows—had you taken from her this piece of work, I say, and given her nothing to do instead, she would yet have looked and been as peaceful as she now looked, for she was not like Doctor Doddridge's dog that did not know who made him.

A longish lad stood in the bow window, leaning his head on the shutter, in a mood of smouldering rebellion against the order of things. He was such a mere creature of moods, that individual judgments of his character might well have proved irreconcilable. He had not yet begun by the use of his will —constantly indeed mistaking impulse for will—to blend the conflicting elements of his nature into one. He was therefore a man much as the mass of flour and raisins, etc., when first put into the bag, is a plum-pudding; and had to pass through something analogous to boiling to give him a chance of becoming worthy of the name he would have arrogated. But in his own estimate of himself he claimed always the virtues of whose presence he was conscious in his good moods letting the bad ones slide, nor taking any account of what was in them. He substituted forgetfulness for repudiation, a return of good humor for repentance, and at best a joke for apology.

Mark, a pale, handsome boy of ten, and Josephine, a rosy girl of seven, sat on the opposite side of the fire, amusing themselves with a puzzle. The gusts of wind, and the great splashes of rain on the glass, only made them feel the cosier and more satisfied.

"Beastly weather!" remarked Cornelius, as with an effort half wriggle, half spring, he raised himself perpendicular, and turned towards the room rather than the persons in it.

"I'm sorry you don't like it, Cornie," said his elder sister, who sat beside her mother trimming what promised to be a pretty bonnet. A concentrated effort to draw her needle through an

accumulation of silken folds seemed to take something off the bloom of the smile with which she spoke.

"Oh, it's all very well for girls!" returned Cornelius. "You don't do anything worth doing; and besides you've got so many things you like doing, and so much time to do them in, that it's all one to you whether you go out or stay at home. But when a fellow has but a miserable three weeks and then back to a rot of work he cares no more for than a felon for the treadmill, then it is rather hard to have such a hole made in it! Day after day, as sure as the sun rises—if he does rise—of weather as abominable as rain and wind can make it!"

"My dear boy!" said his mother without looking up.

"Oh, yes, mother! I know! You're so good you would have had Job himself take it coolly. But I'm not like you. Only you needn't think me so very—what you call it! It's only a breach in the laws of nature I'm grumbling at. I don't mean anything to offend you."

"Perhaps you mean more than you think," answered his mother with a deep-drawn breath, which, if not a sigh, was very nearly one. "I should be far more miserable than any weather could make me, not to be able to join in the song of the three holy children."

"I've heard you say that before, mother," said the youth, in a tone that roused his sister's anger; for much that the mother let pass was by the daughter for her sake resented. "But you see," he went on, "the three holy children, as you call them, hadn't much weather of any sort where they sung their song. Precious tired

one gets of it before the choir's through with it!"

"They would have been glad enough of some of the weather you call beastly," said Hester, again pulling through a stiff needle, this time without any smile, for sometimes that brother was more than she could bear.

"Oh, I dare say! But then, you see, they knew, when they got out, they wouldn't have to go back to a beastly bank, where notes and gold all day went flying about like bats—nothing but the sight and the figures of it coming their way!"

The mother's face grew very sad as it bent over her work. The youth saw her trouble.

"Mother, don't be vexed with a fellow," he said more gently. "I wasn't made good like you."

"I think you were right about the holy children," she said quietly.

"What!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Mother, I never once before heard you say I was right about any mortal thing! Come, this is pleasant! I begin to think strong ale of myself! I don't understand it, though."

"Shall I tell you? Would you care to know what I mean?"

"Oh, yes, mother! if you want to tell me."

"I think you were right when you implied it was the furnace that made them sing about the world outside of it: one can fancy the idea of the frost and the snow and the ice being particularly pleasant to them. And I am afraid, Cornelius, my dear son, you need the furnace to teach you that the will of God, even in

weather, is a thing for rejoicing in, not for abusing. But I dread the fire for your sake, my boy!"

"I should have thought this weather and the bank behind it furnace enough, mother!" he answered, trying to laugh off her words.

"It does not seem to be," she said, with some displeasure. "But then," she added with a sigh, "you have not the same companion that the three holy children had."

"Who was that?" rejoined Cornelius, for he had partly forgotten the story he knew well enough in childhood.

"We will not talk about him now," answered his mother. "He has been knocking at your chamber-door for some time: when he comes to the furnace-door, perhaps you will open that to him."

Cornelius returned no answer; he felt his mother's seriousness awkward, and said to himself she was unkind; why couldn't she make some allowance for a fellow? He meant no harm!

He was still less patient with his mother's not very frequent admonitions, since going into the bank, for, much as he disliked it, he considered himself quite a man of the world in consequence. But he was almost as little capable of slipping like a pebble among other pebbles, the peculiar faculty of the man of the world, as he was of perceiving the kind of thing his mother cared about—and that not from moral lack alone, but from dullness and want of imagination as well. He was like the child so sure he can run alone that he snatches his hand from his mother's and sets off through dirt and puddles, so to act the part

of the great personage he would consider himself.

With all her peace of soul, the heart of the mother was very anxious about her son, but she said no more to him now: she knew that the shower bath is not the readiest mode of making a child friendly with cold water.

Just then broke out the sun. The wind had at last blown a hole in the clouds, and through that at once, as is his wont, and the wont of a greater light than the sun, he shone.

"Come! there's something almost like sunshine!" said Cornelius, having for a few moments watched the light on the sands. "Before it goes in again, as it's sure to do in five minutes at the farthest, get on your bonnet, Hester, and let's have an attempt at a walk."

Before Hester could answer came a sudden spatter of rain on the window.

"There! I told you so! That's always the way! Just my luck! For me to set my heart on a thing is all one with being disappointed of it."

"But if the thing was not worth setting your heart on?" said Hester, speaking with forced gentleness.

"What does that signify? The thing is that your heart is set on it. What you think nothing other people may yet be bold enough to take for something."

"Well, at least, if I had to be disappointed, I should like it to be in something that would be worth having."

"Would you now?" returned Cornelius spitefully. "I hope you

may have what you want. For my part I don't desire to be better than my neighbor. I think it downright selfish."

"Do you want to be as good as your neighbor, Cornie?" said his mother, looking up through a film of tears. "But there is a more important question than that," she went on, having waited a moment in vain for an answer, "and that is, whether you are content with being as good as yourself, or want to be better."

"To tell you the truth, mother, I don't trouble my head about such things. Philosophers are agreed that self consciousness is the bane of the present age: I mean to avoid it. If you had let me go into the army, I might have had some leisure for what you call thought, but that horrible bank takes everything out of a fellow. The only thing it leaves is a burning desire to forget it at any cost till the time comes when you must endure it again. If I hadn't some amusement in between, I should cut my throat, or take to opium or brandy. I wonder how the governor would like to be in my place!"

Hester rose and left the room, indignant with him for speaking so of his father.

"If your father were in your place, Cornelius," said his mother with dignity, "he would perform the duties of it without grumbling, however irksome they might be."

"How do you know that, mother? He was never tried."

"I know it because I know him," she answered.

Cornelius gave a grunt.

"If you think it hard," his mother resumed, "that you have

to follow a way of life not of your own choosing, you must remember that you never could be got to express a preference for one way over another, and that your father had to strain every nerve to send you to college—to the disadvantage, for a time at least, of others of the family. I am sorry to have to remind you also that you did not make it any easier for him by your mode of living while there."

"I didn't run up a single bill!" cried Cornelius with indignation; "and my father knows it!"

"He does; but he knows also that your cousin Robert did not spend above two-thirds of what you did, and made more of his time too."

"He was in *rather* a different set," sneered the youth.

"And you know," his mother went on, "that his main design in placing you in your uncle's bank was that you might gain such a knowledge of business as will be necessary to the proper management of the money he will leave behind him. When you have gained that knowledge, there will be time to look farther, for you are young yet."

Now his father's money was the continuous occasion of annoyance to Cornelius, for it was no secret from his family how he meant to dispose of it. He intended, namely, to leave it under trustees, of whom he wished his son to be one until he married, when it was to be divided equally among his children.

This arrangement was not agreeable to Cornelius, who could not see, he said, what advantage in that case he had from being

the eldest of the family.

He broke out in a tone of expostulation, ready to swell into indignant complaint.

"Now, mother," he said "do you think it fair that I should have to look after the whole family as if they were my own?"

This was by no means his real cause of complaint, but he chose to use it as his grievance for the present.

"You will have the other trustees to advise with," said his mother. "It need not weigh on you very heavily."

"Well, of course, I could do better with it than anybody out of the family."

"If you have your father's love of fair play, Cornelius, you will. What you can do to that end now is to make yourself thoroughly acquainted with business."

"A bank's not the place to get the knowledge of business necessary for that sort of thing."

"Your father has reasons for preferring a general to any special knowledge. The fitness resulting will depend upon yourself. And when you marry you will, as you know, be rid of the responsibility. So far your father and you are of one mind; he does not think it fair that a married man should be burdened with any family but his own."

"What if I should marry before my father's death?"

"I hope, indeed, you will, Cornelius. The arrangements your father has made is one of provision against the unlikely. When you are married, I don't doubt he will make another, to meet the

new circumstances."

"Now," said Cornelius to himself, "I do believe if I was to marry money—as why shouldn't I?—my father would divide my share amongst the rest, and not give me a farthing!"

Full of the injury of the idea, he rose and left the room. His mother, poor woman, wept as he vanished. She dared not allow herself to ask why she wept—dared not allow to herself that her first-born was not a lovely thought to her—dared not ask where he could have got such a mean nature—so mean that he did not know he was mean.

Although the ill-humor in which he had been ever since he came was by himself attributed to the weather, and had been expended on the cooking, on the couches, on the beds, and twenty different things that displeased him, he had nevertheless brought it with him; and her experience gave her the sad doubt that the cause of it might lie in his own conduct—for the consciousness may be rendered uneasy without much rousing of the conscience proper.

He had always been fitful and wayward, but had never before behaved so unpleasantly. Certainly his world had not improved him for his home. Yet amongst his companions he bore the character of the best-natured fellow in the world. To them he never showed any of the peevishness arising from mental discomfort, but kept it for those who loved him a thousand times better, and would have cheerfully parted with their own happiness for his. He was but one of a large herd of youths,

possessing no will of their own, yet enjoying the reputation of a strong one; for moved by liking or any foolish notion, his pettiness made a principle of, he would be obstinate; and the common philosophy always takes obstinacy for strength of will, even when it springs from utter inability to will against liking.

Mr. Raymount knew little of the real nature of his son. The youth was afraid of his father—none the less that he spoke of him with so little respect. Before him he dared not show his true nature. He knew and dreaded the scorn which the least disclosure of his feeling about the intended division of his father's money would rouse in him. He knew also that his mother would not betray him—he would have counted it betrayal—to his father; nor would any one who had ever heard Mr. Raymount give vent to his judgment of any conduct he despised, have wondered at the reticence of either of them.

Whether in his youth he would have done as well in a position like his son's as his worshipping wife believed, may be doubtful; but that he would have done better than his son must seem more than probable.

CHAPTER II.
FATHER, MOTHER, AND SON

Gerald Raymount was a man of an unusual combination of qualities. There were such contradictions in his character as to give ground for the suspicion, in which he certainly himself indulged, that there must be in him at least one strain not far removed from the savage, while on the other hand there were mental conditions apparently presupposing ages of culture. At the university he had indulged in large reading outside the hedge of his required studies, and gained thus an acquaintance with and developed a faculty in literature destined to stand him in good stead.

Inheriting earthly life and a history—nothing more—from a long line of ancestors, and a few thousand pounds—less than twenty—from his father, who was a country attorney, a gentle, quarrelsome man, who yet never, except upon absolute necessity, carried a case into court, he had found, as his family increased, that his income was not sufficient for their maintenance in accustomed ease. With not one expensive personal taste between them, they had neither of them the faculty for saving money—often but another phrase for doing mean things. Neither husband nor wife was capable of *screwing*. Had the latter been, certainly the free-handedness of the former would have driven her to it;

but while Mrs. Raymount would go without a new bonnet till an outcry arose in the family that its respectability was in danger, she could not offer two shillings a day to a sempstress who thought herself worth half-a-crown; she could not allow a dish to be set on her table which was not as likely to encourage hunger as allay it; neither because some richer neighbors gave so little, would she take to herself the spiritual fare provided in church without making a liberal acknowledgment in carnal things. The result of this way of life was the deplorable one that Mr. Raymount was compelled to rouse himself, and, from the chair of a somewhat self-indulgent reader of many books, betake himself to his study-table, to prove whether it were not possible for him to become the writer of such as might add to an income showing scantier every quarter. Here we may see the natural punishment of liberal habits; for this man indulging in them, and, instead of checking them in his wife, loving her the more that she indulged in them also, was for this reason condemned to labor—the worst evil of life in the judgment of both the man about Mayfair and the tramp of the casual ward. But there are others who dare not count that labor an evil which helps to bring out the best elements of human nature, not even when the necessity for it outlasts any impulse towards it, and who remember the words of the Lord: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

For Gerald Raymount, it made a man of him—which he is not who is of no service to his generation. Doubtless he was driven thereto by necessity; but the question is not whether a man works

upon more or less compulsion, but whether the work he is thus taught to do he makes good honest work for which the world is so much the better. In this matter of work there are many first that shall be last. The work of a baker for instance must stand higher in the judgment of the universe than that of a brewer, let his ale be ever so good. Because the one trade brings more money than the other the judgment of this world counts it more honorable, but there is the other judgment at hand.

In the exercise of his calling Raymount was compelled to think more carefully than before, and thus not only his mind took a fresh start, but his moral and spiritual nature as well. He slid more and more into writing out the necessities and experiences of his own heart and history, and so by degrees gained power of the only true kind—that, namely, of rousing the will, not merely the passions, or even the aspirations of men. The poetry in which he had disported himself at college now came to the service of his prose, and the deeper poetic nature, which is the prophetic in every man, awoke in him. Till after they had lived together a good many years the wife did not know the worth of the man she had married, nor indeed was he half the worth when she married him that he had now grown to be. The longer they lived the prouder she grew of him and of his work; nor was she the less the practical wisdom of the house that she looked upon her husband as a great man. He was not a great man—only a growing man; yet was she nothing the worse for thinking so highly of him; the object of it was not such that her admiration caused her to deteriorate.

The daughter of a London barrister, of what is called a good family, she had opportunity of knowing something of what is called life before she married, and from mere dissatisfaction had early begun to withdraw from the show and self-assertion of social life, and seek within herself the door of that quiet chamber whose existence is unknown to most. For a time she found thus a measure of quiet—not worthy of the name of rest; she had not heeded a certain low knocking as of one who would enter and share it with her; but now for a long time he who thus knocked had been her companion in the chamber whose walls are the infinite. Why is it that men and women will welcome any tale of love, devotion, and sacrifice from one to another of themselves, but turn from the least hint at the existence of a perfect love at the root of it all? With such a message to them, a man is a maundering prophet. Is it not that their natures are yet so far from the ideal, the natural, the true, that the words of the prophet rouse in them no vision, no poorest perception of spiritual fact?

Helen Raymount was now a little woman of fifty, clothed in a sweet dignity, from which the contrast she disliked between her plentiful gray hair, and her great, clear, dark eyes, took nothing; it was an opposition without discord. She had but the two daughters and two sons already introduced, of whom Hester was the eldest.

Wise as was the mother, and far-seeing as was the father, they had made the mistake common to all but the wisest parents, of putting off to a period more or less too late the moment of beginning to teach their children obedience. If this be not

commenced at the first possible moment, there is no better reason why it should be begun at any other, except that it will be the harder every hour it is postponed. The spiritual loss and injury caused to the child by their waiting till they fancy him fit to reason with, is immense; yet there is nothing in which parents are more stupid and cowardly, if not stiff-necked, than this. I do not speak of those mere animal parents, whose lasting influence over their progeny is not a thing to be greatly desired, but of those who, having a conscience, yet avoid this part of their duty in a manner of which a good motherly cat would be ashamed. To one who has learned of all things to desire deliverance from himself, a nursery in which the children are humored and scolded and punished instead of being taught obedience, looks like a moral slaughter-house.

The dawn of reason will doubtless help to develop obedience; but obedience is yet more necessary to the development of reason. To require of a child only what he can understand the reason of, is simply to help him to make himself his own God —that is a devil. That some seem so little injured by their bad training is no argument in presence of the many in whom one can read as in a book the consequences of their parents' foolishness.

Cornelius was a youth of good abilities, and with a few good qualities. Naturally kind-hearted, yet full of self and its poor importance, he had an admiration of certain easy and showy virtues. He was himself not incapable of an unthinking generosity; felt pity for picturesque suffering; was tempted to

kindness by the prospect of a responsive devotion. Unable to bear the sight of suffering, he was yet careless of causing it where he would not see it; incapable of thwarting himself, he was full of weak indignation at being thwarted; supremely conceited, he had yet a regard for the habits and judgments of men of a certain stamp which towards a great man would have been veneration, and would have elevated his being. But the sole essentials of life as yet discovered by Cornelius were a good carriage, good manners, self-confidence, and seeming carelessness in spending. That the spender was greedy after the money he yet scorned to work for, made no important difference in Cornelius's estimate of him. In a word, he fashioned a fine gentleman-god in his foolish brain, and then fell down and worshipped him with what worship was possible between them. To all home-excellence he was so far blind that he looked down upon it; the opinion of father or mother, though they had reared such a son as himself, was not to be compared in authority with that of Reginald Vavasor, who, though so poor as to be one of his fellow-clerks, was heir apparent to an earldom.

CHAPTER III.
THE MAGIC LANTERN

Cornelius, leaving his mother, took refuge with his anger in his own room. Although he had occupied it but a fortnight the top of its chest of drawers was covered with yellow novels—the sole kind of literature for which Cornelius cared. Of this he read largely, if indeed his mode of swallowing could be called reading; his father would have got more pleasure out of the poorest of them than Cornelius could from a dozen. And now in this day's dreariness, he had not one left unread, and was too lazy or effeminate or prudent to encounter the wind and rain that beset the path betwixt him and the nearest bookshop. None of his father's books had any attraction for him. Neither science, philosophy, history, nor poetry held for him any interest. A drearier soul in a drearier setting could hardly be imagined than the soul of this youth in that day's weather at Burcliff.

Does a reader remark, "Well, wherein was the poor fellow to blame? No man can make himself like this or like that! The thing that is a passion to one is a bore to another! Some with both ear and voice have no love for music. Most exquisite of sonatas would not to them make up for a game of billiards! They cannot help it: they are made so"?—I answer, It is true no one can by an effort of the will care for this or that; but where a man

cares for nothing that is worth caring for, the fault must lie, not in the nature God made, but in the character the man himself has made and is making. There is a moral reason why he does not and cannot care. If Cornelius had begun at any time, without other compulsion than the urging within him, to do something he knew he ought to do, he would not now have been the poor slave of circumstances he was—at the call and beck of the weather—such, in fact, as the weather willed. When men face a duty, not merely will that duty become at once less unpleasant to them, but life itself will *immediately* begin to gather interest; for in duty, and in duty only, does the individual begin to come into real contact with life; therein only can he see what life is, and grow fit for it.

He threw himself on his bed—for he dared not smoke where his father was—and dozed away the hours till lunch, then returned and dozed again, with more success, till tea time. This was his only resource against the unpleasantness of the day. The others were nowise particularly weighed down by it, and the less that Cornelius was so little in the room, haunting the window with his hands in his pockets.

When tea was over, he rose and sauntered once more to the window, the only outlook he ever frequented.

"Hullo!" he cried, turning from it quickly. "I say, Hester! here's a lark! the sun's shining as if his grandmother had but just taught him how! The rain's over, I declare—at least for a quarter of an hour! Come, let's have a walk. We'll go and hear the band

in the castle-gardens. I don't think there's any thing going on at the theatre, else I would take you there."

The sight of the sun revives both men and midges.

"I would rather walk," said Hester. "It is seldom one sees good acting in the provinces. At best there is but one star. I prefer a jewel to a gem, and a decent play to a fine part."

"Hester," said Cornelius with reproof, "I believe you think it a fine thing to be hard to please! I know a fellow that calls it a kind of suicide. To allow a spot to spoil your pleasure in a beauty is to be too fond of perfection."

"No, Corney," answered his sister, "that is hardly my position. What I would say is rather, that one point of excellence is not enough to make a whole beautiful—a face, or a play—or a character."

Hester had a rather severe mode of speaking, especially to this brother, which, if it had an end, failed of it. She was the only person in the house who could ever have done any thing with him, and she lost her advantage—let me use a figure—by shouting to him from a distance, instead of coming close up to him and speaking in a whisper. But for that she did not love him enough, neither was she yet calm enough in herself to be able for it. I doubt much, however, if he would have been in any degree permanently the better for the best she could have done for him. He was too self-satisfied for any redemption. He was afraid of his father, resented the interference of his mother, was as cross as he pleased with his sister, and cared little whether she was

vexed with him or not. And he regarded the opinion of any girl, just because she was a girl, too little to imagine any reflection on himself in the remark she had just made.

While they talked he had been watching the clouds.

"Do go, Hester," he said. "I give you my word it will be a fine evening."

She went to put on her hat and cloak, and presently they were in the street.

It was one of those misty clearings in which sometimes the day seems to gather up his careless skirts, that have been sweeping the patient, half-drowned world, as he draws nigh the threshold of the waiting night. There was a great lump of orange color half melted up in the watery clouds of the west, but all was dreary and scarce consolable, up to the clear spaces above, stung with the steely stars that began to peep out of the blue hope of heaven. Thither Hester kept casting up her eyes as they walked, or rather somehow her eyes kept travelling thitherward of themselves, as if indeed they had to do with things up there. And the child that cries for the moon is wiser than the man who looks upon the heavens as a mere accident of the earth, with which none but *unpractical* men concern themselves.

But as she walked gazing at "an azure disc, shield of tranquility," over her head, she set her foot down unevenly, and gave her ankle a wrench. She could not help uttering a little cry.

"There now, Hester!" said Cornelius, pulling her up like a horse that stumbled, "that's what you get by your star-gazing!

You are always coming to grief by looking higher than your head!"

"Oh, please, stop a minute, Corney," returned Hester, for the fellow would have walked on as if nothing had happened. "My ankle hurts so!"

"I didn't know it was so bad as that!" he answered stopping. "There! take my arm."

"Now I can go on again," she said, after a few moments of silent endurance. "How stupid of me!—on a plain asphalt pavement!"

He might have excused her with the remark that just on such was an accidental inequality the more dangerous.

"What bright, particular star were you worshipping now?" he asked scoffingly.

"What do you mean by that?" she rejoined in a tone affected by her suffering, which thence, from his lack of sympathy, he took for one of crossness.

"You know quite well," he answered roughly, "that you are always worshipping some paragon or other—for a while, till you get tired of her, and then throw her away for another!"

Hester was hurt and made no answer.

There was some apparent ground for the accusation. She was ready to think extravagantly of any new acquaintances that pleased her. Frank and true and generous, it was but natural she should read others by herself; just as those in whom is meanness or guile cannot help attributing the same to the simplest. Nor was

the result unnatural either, namely, that, when a brief intercourse had sufficed to reveal a nature on the common level, it sufficed also to chill the feeling that had rushed to the surface to welcome a friend, and send the new-found floating far away on the swift ebb of disappointment. Any whom she treats thus, called her, of course, fitful and changeable, whereas it was in truth the unchangeableness of her ideal and her faithfulness to it that exposed her to blame. She was so true, so much in earnest, and, although gentle, had so little softness to drape the sterner outlines of her character that she was looked upon with dislike by not a few of her acquaintance.

"That again comes of looking too high, and judging with precipitation," resumed Cornelius, urged from within to be unpleasant—and the rather that she did not reply.

He was always ready to criticise, and it was so much the easier for him that he had not the least bent towards self-criticism. For the latter supposes some degree of truth in the inward parts, and that is obstructive to the indulgence of the former tendency. As to himself, he would be hand and glove at a moment's notice with any man who looked a gentleman, and made himself agreeable; nor whatever he might find him to be, was he, so long as the man was not looked down upon by others, the least inclined to avoid his company because of moral shadiness. "A man can take care of himself!" he would say.

Hester stopped again.

"Corney," she said, "my ankle feels so weak! I am walking in

terror of twisting it again. You must let me stand a bit. I shall be all right in a minute."

"I'm very sorry," rejoined her brother disagreeably. "We must take the first fly we meet, and go home again. It's just my luck! I thought we were going to have some fun!"

They stood silent, she looking nowhere, and he staring now in this direction, now in that. "Hullo! what's this?" he cried, his gaze fixing on a large building opposite. "The Pilgrim's Progress! The Rake's Progress! Ha! ha! As edifying as amusing, no doubt! I suppose the Pilgrim and the Rake are contrasted with each other. But how, I wonder! Is it a lecture or a magic lantern? Both, I dare say! Let's go in and see! I can't read any more of the bill. We may at least sit there till your ankle is better. 'Admission—front seats sixpence.' Come along. We may get a good laugh, who knows? —a thing cheap at any price—for our sixpence!"

"I don't mind," said Hester, and they crossed the road.

It was a large, dingy, dirty, water-stained and somewhat dilapidated hall to which the stone stair, ascending immediately from the door, led them; and it would have looked considerably worse but for the obscurity belonging to the nature of the entertainment, through which it took some pains to discover the twenty-five or thirty people that formed the company present. It was indeed a dim, but not therefore, a very religious light that pervaded rather than overcame the gloom, issuing chiefly from the crude and discordant colors of a luminous picture on a great screen at the farther end of the hall. There an ill-proportioned

figure, presenting, although his burden was of course gone some time, a still very humpy Christian, was shown extended on the ground, with his sword a yard beyond his reach, and Apollyon straddling across the whole breadth of the way, and taking him in the stride. But that huge stride was the fiend's sole expression of vigor; for, although he held a flaming dart ready to strike the poor man dead, his own dragon countenance was so feebly demoniacal that it seemed unlikely he would have the heart to drive it home. The lantern from which proceeded the picture, was managed by a hidden operator, evidently from his voice, occasionally overheard, a mere boy; and an old man, like a broken-down clergyman, whose dirty white neckcloth seemed adjusted on a secret understanding of moral obliquity, its knot suggesting a gradual approach to the last position a knot on the neck can assume, kept walking up and down the parti-colored gloom, flaunting a pretense of lecture on the scenes presented. Whether he was a little drunk or greatly in his dotage, it was impossible to determine without a nearer acquaintance. If I venture to give a specimen of his mode of lecturing, it will be seen that a few lingering rags of scholastic acquirement, yet fluttered about the poor fellow.

"Here you behold the terrible battle between Christian—or was it Faithful?—I used to know, but trouble has played old Hookey with my memory. It's all here, you know"—and he tapped the bald table-land of his head—"but somehow it ain't handy as it used! In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up: in

the evening it is cut down and withereth. Man that is in honor and abideth not, is like the beast that perisheth—but there's Christian and Apollyon, right afore you, and better him than me. When I was a young one, and that wasn't yesterday, I used to think, but that was before I could read, that Apollyon was one and the same with Bonaparty—Nappoleon, you know. And I wasn't just so far wrong neither, as I shall readily prove to those of my distinguished audience who have been to college like myself, and learned to read Greek like their mother tongue. For what is the very name Apollyon, but an occult prophecy concerning the great conqueror of Europe! nothing can be plainer! Of course the first letter, N, stands for nothing—a mere veil to cover the prophecy till the time of revealing. In all languages it is the sign of negation —*no*, and *none*, and *never*, and *nothing*; therefore cast it away as the nothing it is. Then what have you left but *apoleon*! Throw away another letter, and what have you but *poleon*! Throw away letter after letter, and what do you get but words—*Napoleon, apoleon, poleon, oleon, leon, eon*, or, if you like, *on*! Now these are all Greek words—and what, pray, do they mean? I will give you a literal translation, and I challenge any Greek scholar who may be here present to set me right, that is, to show me wrong: Napoleon the destroyer of cities, being a destroying lion! Now I should like to know a more sure word of prophecy than that! Would any one in the company oblige me? I take that now for an incontrovertible"—he stammered over this word—"proof of the truth of the Bible. But I am wandering from my subject, which

error, I pray you, ladies and gentlemen, to excuse, for I am no longer what I was in the prime of youth's rosy morn—come, I must get on! Change the slide, boy; I'm sick of it. I'm sick of it all. I want to get home and go to bed."

He maundered on in this way, uttering even worse nonsense than I have set down, and mingling with it soiled and dusty commonplaces of religion, every now and then dwelling for a moment or two upon his own mental and physical declension from the admirable being he once was. He reached the height of his absurdity in describing the resistance of the two pilgrims to the manifold temptations of Vanity Fair, which he so set forth as to take from Christian and Faithful the smallest possible appearance of merit in turning their backs upon them.

Cornelius was in fits of laughter, which he scarcely tried to choke. When the dreary old soul drew near where he sat, smelling abominably of strong drink, the only thing that kept his merriment within bounds was the dread that the man might address him personally, and so draw upon him the attention of the audience.

Very different was the mood of Hester. To the astonishment of Cornelius, when at last they rose to go, there were tears in her eyes. The misery of the whole thing was too dreadful to her! The lantern itself must, she thought, have been made when the invention was in its infancy, and its pictured slides seemed the remnants of various outworn series. Those of the Rake's Progress were something too hideous and lamentable to be dwelt upon.

And the ruinous, wretched old man did not merely seem to have taken to this as a last effort, but to have in his dotage turned back upon his life course, and resumed a half-forgotten trade—or perhaps only an accomplishment of which he had made use for the benefit of his people when he was a clergyman—to find that the faculty for it he once had, and on which he had reckoned to carry him through, had abandoned him. Worst of all to the heart of Hester was the fact that so few people were present, many of them children at half-price, some of whom seemed far from satisfied with the amusement offered them. When the hall and the gas—but that would not be much—and the advertising were paid for, what would the poor old scrag-end of humanity, with his yellow-white neckcloth knotted hard under his left ear, have over for his supper? Was there any woman to look after him? and would she give him anything fit to eat? Hester was all but crying to think she could do nothing for him—that he was so far from her and beyond her help, when she remembered the fat woman with curls hanging down her cheeks, who had taken their money at the door. Apparently she was his wife—and seemed to thrive upon it! But alas for the misery of the whole thing!

When they came out and breathed again the blue, clean, rain-washed air instead of the musty smells of the hall, involuntarily Hester's eyes rose to the vault whose only keystone is the will of the Father, whose endless space alone is large enough to picture the heart of God: how was that old man to get up into the high regions and grow clean and wise? For all the look, he must belong

there as well as she! And were there not thousands equally and more miserable in the world—people wrapped in no tenderness, to whom none ministered, left if not driven—so it seemed at the moment to Hester—to fold themselves in their own selfishness? And was there nothing she, a favored one of the family, could do to help, to comfort, to lift up one such of her own flesh and blood?—to rescue a heart from the misery of hopelessness?—to make this one or that feel there was a heart of love and refuge at the centre of things? Hester had a large, though not hitherto entirely active aspiration in her; and now, the moment she began to flutter her weak wings, she found the whole human family hanging upon her, and that she could not rise except in raising them along with her. For the necessities of our deepest nature are such as not to admit of a mere private individual satisfaction. I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was love essential to my nature—the love of me, a man, not of me a person—the love therefore that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men.

But this was not the beginning of Hester's enthusiasm for her kind—only a crystallizing shock it received.

Nor was it likely to be the less powerful in the end that now at the age of three and twenty she had but little to show for it. She was one of the strong ones that grow slowly; and she had now for some years been cherishing an idea, and working for

its realization, which every sight and sound of misery tended to quicken and strengthen.

"There you are again," said Cornelius—"star-gazing as usual! You'll be spraining your other ankle presently!"

"I had forgotten all about my ankle, Corney dear," returned Hester, softened by her sorrowful sympathy; "but I will be careful."

"You had better. Well, I think between us we had the worth of our shilling! Did you ever see such a ridiculous old bloke!"

"I wish you would not use that word, Corney," said Hester, letting her displeasure fall on the word, where she knew the feeling was entrenched beyond assault.

"What's the matter with the word? It is the most respectable old Anglo-Saxon."

Hester said no more, but heaved an inward sigh. Of what consequence were the words her brother used, so long as he recognized no dignity in life, never set himself *to be!* Why should any one be taught to behave like a gentleman, so long as he is no gentleman?

Cornelius burst out laughing.

"To think of those muffs going through the river—sliding along the bottom, and spreading out their feelers above the water, like two rearing lobsters! And the angels waiting for them on the bank like laundresses with their clean shirts! Ha! ha! ha!"

"They seemed to me," answered Hester, "very much like the men, and angels too, in that old edition of the Pilgrim papa thinks

so much of. I couldn't for my part, absurd as they were, help feeling a certain pathos in the figures and faces."

"That came of the fine interpretation the old—hm!—codger gave of their actions and movements!"

"It may have come of the pitiful feeling the whole affair gave me—I cannot tell," said Hester. "That old man made me very sad."

"Now you do strand me, Hester!" replied her brother. "How you could see anything pathetic, or pitiful as you call it, in that disreputable old humbug, I can't even imagine. A more ludicrous specimen of tumble-down humanity it would be impossible to find! A drunken old thief—I'll lay you any thing! Catch me leaving a sov where he could spy the shine of it!"

"And don't you count that pitiful, Cornelius? Can you see one of your own kind, with heart and head and hands like your own, so self-abandoned, so low, so hopeless, and feel no pity for him? Didn't you hear him say to himself as he passed you, 'Come, let's get on! I'm sick of it. I don't know what I'm talking about.' He seemed actually to despise himself!"

"What better or more just could he do? But never you mind: *he's* all right! Don't you trouble your head about *him*. You should see him when he gets home! He'll have his hot supper and his hot tumbler, don't you fear! Swear he will too, and fluently, if it's not waiting him!"

"Now that seems to me the most pitiful of all," returned Hester, and was on the point of adding, "That is just the kind of

pity I feel for you, Corney," but checked herself. "Is it not most pitiful to see a human being, made in the image of God, sunk so low?" she said.

"It's his own doing," returned Cornelius.

"And is not that yet the lowest and worst of it all? If he could not help it, and therefore was not to blame, it would be sad enough; but to be such, and be to blame for being such, seems to me misery upon misery unbearable."

"There I don't agree with you—not at all! So long as a fellow has fair play, and nothing happens to him but what he brings upon himself, I don't see what he has to complain of."

"But that is not the question," interrupted Hester. "It is not whether he has anything to complain of, but whether he has anything to be pitied for. I don't know what I wouldn't do to make that old man clean and comfortable!"

Cornelius again burst into a great laugh. No man was anything to him merely because he was a man.

"A highly interesting protégé you would have!" he said; "and no doubt your friends would congratulate you when you presented him! But for my part I don't see the least occasion to trouble your head about such riffraff. Every manufacture has its waste, and he's human waste. There's misery enough in the world without looking out for it, and taking other people's upon our shoulders. You remember what one of the fellows in the magic lantern said: 'Every tub must stand on its own bottom'!"

Hester held her peace. That her own brother's one mode of

relieving the suffering in the world should be to avoid as much as possible adding to his own, was to her sisterly heart humiliating.

CHAPTER IV.
HESTER ALONE

When the family separated for the night and Hester reached her room, she sat down and fell a thinking, not more earnestly but more continuously.

She was one of those women—not few in number, I have good reason to think, though doubtless few comparatively, who from the first dawn of consciousness have all their lives endeavored, with varying success, with frequent failure of strength, and occasional brief collapse of effort, to do the right thing. Therein she had but followed in the footsteps of her mother, who, though not so cultivated as she, walked no less steady in the true path of humanity. But the very earnestness of Hester's endeavor along with the small reason she found for considering it successful; the frequent irritation with herself because of failure; and the impossibility of satisfying the hard master Self, who, while he flatters some, requires of others more than they can give—all tended to make her less evenly sympathetic with those about her than her heart's theory demanded. Willing to lay down her life for them, a matchless nurse in sickness, and in trouble revealing a tenderness perfectly lovely, she was yet not the one to whom first either of the children was ready to flee with hurt or sorrow: she was not yet all human, because she was not yet at home with

the divine.

Thousands that are capable of great sacrifices are yet not capable of the little ones which are all that are required of them. God seems to take pleasure in working by degrees; the progress of the truth is as the permeation of leaven, or the growth of a seed: a multitude of successive small sacrifices may work more good in the world than many a large one. What would even our Lord's death on the cross have been, except as the crown of a life in which he died daily, giving himself, soul, body and spirit, to his men and women? It is the *Being* that is the precious thing. Being is the mother to all little Doings as well as the grown-up Deeds and the mighty heroic Sacrifice; and these little Doings, like the good children of the house, make the bliss of it. Hester had not had time, neither had she prayed enough to *be* quite yet, though she was growing well towards it. She was a good way up the hill, and the Lord was coming down to meet her, but they had not quite met yet, so as to go up the rest of the way together.

In religious politics, Hester was what is called a good churchwoman, which in truth means a good deal of a sectarian. She not merely recoiled from such as venerated the more primitive modes of church-government rather than those of later expediency, and preferred far inferior extempore prayers to the best possible prayers in print, going therefore to some chapel instead of the church, but she looked down upon them as from a superior social standing—that is, with the judgment of this world, and not that of Christ the carpenter's son. In short, she

had a repugnance to the whole race of dissenters, and would not have soiled her dress with the dust of one of their school-rooms even. She regarded her own conscience as her Lord, but had not therefore any respect for that of another man where it differed from her in the direction of what she counted vulgarity. So she was scarcely in the kingdom of heaven yet, any more than thousands who regard themselves as choice Christians. I do not say these feelings were very active in her, for little occurred to call them out; but she did not love her dissenting neighbor, and felt good and condescending when, brought into contact with one, she behaved kindly to him.

I well know that some of my readers will heartily approve of her in this very thing, and that not a few *good dissenters* on the other hand, who are equally and in precisely the same way sectarians, that is bad Christians, will scorn her for it; but for my part I would rather cut off my right hand than be so cased and stayed in a narrow garment of pride and satisfaction, condemned to keep company with myself instead of the Master as he goes everywhere—into the poorest companies of them that love each other, and so invite his presence.

The Lord of truth and beauty has died for us: shall we who, by haunting what we call his courts, have had our sense of beauty, our joy in grace tenfold exalted, gather around us, in the presence of those we count less refined than ourselves, skirts trimmed with the phylacteries of the world's law, turning up the Pharisaical nose, and forgetting both what painful facts self-

criticism has revealed to ourselves, and the eyes upon us of the yet more delicate refinement and the yet gentle breeding of the high countries? May these not see in us some malgrace which it needs the gentleness of Christ to get over and forget, some savagery of which we are not aware, some *gaucherie* that repels though it cannot estrange them? Casting from us our own faults first, let us cast from us and from him our neighbor's also. O gentle man, the common man is yet thy brother, and thy gentleness should make him great, infecting him with thy humility, not rousing in him the echo of a vile unheavenly scorn. Wilt thou, with thy lofty condescension, more intrinsically vulgar than even his ugly self-assertion, give him cause too good to hate thy refinement? It is not thy refinement makes thee despise him; it is thy own vulgarity; and if we dare not search ourselves close enough to discover the low breeding, the bad blood in us, it will one day come out plain as the smitten brand of the *forçat*.

That Hester had a tendency to high church had little or nothing to do with the matter. Such exclusiveness is simply a form of that pride, justify or explain it as you will, which found its fullest embodiment in the Jewish Pharisee—the evil thing that Christ came to burn up with his lovely fire, and which yet so many of us who call ourselves by his name keep hugging to our bosoms —I mean the pride that says, "I am better than thou." If these or those be in any true sense below us, it is of Satan to despise—of Christ to stoop and lay hold of and lift the sister soul up nearer to the heart of the divine tenderness.

But this tenderness, which has its roots in every human heart, had larger roots in the heart of Hester than in most. Whatever her failings, whatever ugly weeds grew in the neglected corners of her nature, the moment she came in contact with any of her kind in whatever condition of sadness or need, the pent-up love of God—I mean the love that came of God and was divine in her—would burst its barriers and rush forth, sometimes almost overwhelming herself in its torrent. She would then be ready to die, nothing less, to help the poor and miserable. She was not yet far enough advanced to pity vulgarity in itself—perhaps none but Christ is able to do that—but she could and did pity greatly its associated want and misery, nor was repelled from them by their accompanying degradation.

The tide of action, in these later years flowing more swiftly in the hearts of women—whence has resulted so much that is noble, so much that is paltry, according to the nature of the heart in which it swells—had been rising in that of Hester also. She must not waste her life! She must *do* something! What should it be? Her deep sense of the misery around her had of course suggested that it must be something in the way of help. But what form was the help to take? "I have no money!" she said to herself—for this the last and feeblest of means for the doing of good is always the first to suggest itself to one who has not perceived the mind of God in the matter. To me it seems that the first thing in regard to money is to prevent it from doing harm. The man who sets out to do good with his fortune is like one who would drive a team of

tigers through the streets of a city, or hunt the fox with cheetahs. I would think of money as Christ thought of it, not otherwise; for no other way is true, however it may recommend itself to good men; and neither Christ nor his apostles did anything by means of money; nay, he who would join them in their labors had to abandon his *fortune*.

This evening, then, the thought of the vulgar, miserable, ruinous old man, with his wretched magic lantern, kept haunting Hester, and made her very pitiful; and naturally, starting from him, her thoughts went wandering abroad over the universe of misery. For was not the world full of men and women who groaned, not merely under poverty and cruelty, weakness and sickness, but under dullness and stupidity, hugged in the paralyzing arms of that devil-fish, The Commonplace, or held fast to the rocks by the crab Custom, while the tide of moral indifference was fast rising to choke them? Was there no prophet, no redemption, no mediator for such as these? Were there not thousands of women, born with a trembling impulse towards the true and lovely, in whom it was withering for lack of nurture, and they themselves continuously massing into common clay, a summer-fall of human flowers off the branches of hope and aspiration? How many young wives, especially linked to the husbands of their choice, and by this very means disenchanted, as they themselves would call it, were doomed to look no more upon life as the antechamber of the infinite, but as the counting-house of the king of the nursery-ballad, where you may, if you

can, eat bread and honey, but where you *must* count your money! At the windows of the husband-house no more looks out the lover but the man of business, who takes his life to consist in the abundance of the things he possesses! He must make money for his children!—and would make money if he had nor chick nor child. Could she do nothing for such wives at least? The man who by honest means made people laugh, sent a fire-headed arrow into the ranks of the beleaguering enemy of his race; he who beguiled from another a genuine tear, made heavenly wind visit his heart with a cool odor of paradise! What was there for her to do?

But possibly Hester might neither have begun nor gone on thinking thus, had it not been for a sense of power within her springing from, or at least associated with, a certain special gift which she had all her life, under the faithful care of her mother, been cultivating. Endowed with a passion for music—what is a true passion but a heavenly hunger?—which she indulged; relieved, strengthened, nor ever sated, by a continuous study of both theoretical and practical music, she approached both piano and organ with eager yet withholding foot, each as a great and effectual door ready to open into regions of delight. But she was gifted also with a fine contralto voice, of exceptional scope and flexibility, whose capacity of being educated into an organ of expression was not thrown away upon one who had a world inside her to express—doubtless as yet not a little chaotic, but in process of assuming form that might demand utterance; and

this angelic instrument had for some years been under careful training. And now this night came to Hester, if not for the first time, yet more clearly than ever before, the thought whether she might not in some way make use of this her one gift for the service she desired—for the comfort, that was, and the uplifting of humanity, especially such humanity as had sunk below even its individual level. Thus instinctively she sought relief from sympathetic pain in the alleviation and removal of its cause.

But pity and instinctive recoil from pain were by no means all the elements of the impulse moving Hester in this direction. An honest and active mind such as hers could not have carried her so often to church and for so long a time, whatever might be the nature of the direct teaching she there received, without gaining some glimpses of the mightiest truth of our being, that we belong to God in actual fact of spiritual property and profoundest relationship. She had much to learn in this direction yet—as who has not who is ages in advance of life?—but this night came back to her, as it had often already returned, the memory of a sermon she had heard some twelve months before on the text, "Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." It was a dull enough sermon, yet not so dull but it enabled her to supply in some degree its own lack; and when she went out of the dark church into the sunshine,—and heard the birds singing as if they knew without any St. Francis to tell them that their bodies and their spirits were God's, a sense awoke in her such as she had not had before, that the grand voice lying like an unborn angel in the

chest and throat of her, belonged not to herself but to God, and must be used in some way for the working of his will in the world which as well as the voice he had made. She had no real notion yet of what is meant by the glory of God. She had not quite learned that simplest of high truths that the glory of God is the beauty of Christ's face. She had a lingering idea—a hideously frightful one, though its vagueness kept it in great measure from injuring her—that the One only good, the One only unselfish thought a great deal of himself, and looked strictly after his rights in the way of homage. Hence she thought first of devoting the splendor and richness of her voice to swell the song of some church-choir. With her notion of God and of her relation to him, how could she yet have escaped the poor pagan fancy—good for a pagan, but beggarly for a Christian, that church and its goings-on are a serving of God? She had not begun to ask how these were to do God any good—or if my reader objects to the phrase, I will use a common one saying the same thing—how these were to do anything for God. She had not begun to see that God is the one great servant of all, and that the only way to serve him is to be a fellow-servant with him—to be, say, a nurse in his nursery, and tend this or that lonely, this or that rickety child of his. She had not yet come to see that it is as absurd to call song and prayer a serving of God, as it would be to say the thief on the cross did something for Christ in consenting to go with him to paradise. But now some dim perception of this truth began to wake in her. Vaguely she began to feel that perhaps God had given her

this voice and this marriage of delight and power in music and song for some reason like that for which he had made the birds the poets of the animal world: what if her part also should be to drive dull care away? what if she too were intended to be a door-keeper in the house of God, and open or keep open windows in heaven that the air of the high places might reach the low swampy ground? If while she sang, her soul mounted on the wings of her song till it fluttered against the latticed doors of heaven as a bird flutters against the wires of its cage; if also God has made of one blood all nations of men—why, then, surely her song was capable of more than carrying merely herself up into the regions of delight! Nay more, might there not from her throat go forth a trumpet-cry of truth among such as could hear and respond to the cry? Then, when the humblest servant should receive the reward of his well-doing, she would not be left outside, but enter into the joy of her Lord. How specially such work might be done by her she did not yet see, but the truth had drawn nigh her that, to serve God in any true sense, we must serve him where he needs service—among his children lying in the heart of lack, in sin and pain and sorrow; and she saw that, if she was to serve at all, it must be with her best, with her special equipment.

I need not follow the gradations, unmarked of herself, by which she at length came to a sort of conclusion: the immediate practical result was, that she gave herself more than ever to the cultivation of her gift, seeing in the distance the possibility of her becoming, in one mode or another, or in all modes perhaps

together, a songstress to her generation.

CHAPTER V.
TRULY THE LIGHT IS SWEET

The cry of the human heart in all ages and in every moment is, "Where is God and how shall I find him?"—No, friend, I will not accept your testimony to the contrary—not though you may be as well fitted as ever one of eight hundred millions to come forward with it. You take it for granted that you know your own heart because you call it yours, but I say that your heart is a far deeper thing than you know or are capable of knowing. Its very nature is hid from you. I use but a poor figure when I say that the roots of your heart go down beyond your knowledge—whole eternities beyond it—into the heart of God. If you have never yet made one discovery in your heart, your testimony concerning it is not worth a tuft of flue; and if you have made discoveries in it, does not the fact reveal that it is but little known to you, and that there must be discoveries innumerable yet to be made in it? To him who has been making discoveries in it for fifty years, the depths of his heart are yet a mystery—a mystery, however, peopled with loveliest hopes. I repeat whether the man knows it or not, his heart in its depths is ever crying out for God.

Where the man does not know it, it is because the unfaithful Self, a would-be monarch, has usurped the consciousness; the demon-man is uppermost, not Christ-man; he is down in the

crying heart, and the demon-man—that is the self that worships itself—is trampling on the heart and smothering it up in the rubbish of ambitions, lusts, and cares. If ever its cry reaches that Self, it calls it childish folly, and tramples the harder. It does not know that a child crying on God is mightier than a warrior dwelling in steel.

If we had none but fine weather, the demon-Self would be too much for the divine-Self, and would always keep it down; but bad weather, misfortune, ill-luck, adversity, or whatever name but punishment or the love of God men may call it, sides with the Christ-self down below, and helps to make its voice heard. On the other hand if we had nothing but bad weather, the hope of those in whom the divine Self is slowly rising would grow too faint; while those in whom the bad weather had not yet begun to work good would settle down into weak, hopeless rebellion. Without hope can any man repent?

To the people at Burcliff came at length a lovely morning, with sky and air like the face of a repentant child—a child who has repented so thoroughly that the sin has passed from him, and he is no longer even ashamed. The water seemed dancing in the joy of a new birth, and the wind, coming and going in gentle conscious organ-like swells, was at it with them, while the sun kept looking merrily down on the glad commotion his presence caused.

"Ah," thought the mother, as she looked from her windows ere she began to dress for this new live day, "how would it be if the Light at the heart of the sun were shining thus on the worlds

made in his image!"

She was thinking of her boy, whom perhaps, in all the world, she only was able to love heartily—there was so little in the personal being of the lad, that is, in the thing he was to himself, and was making of himself, to help anyone to love him! But in the absolute mere existence is reason for love, and upon that God does love—so love, that he will suffer and cause suffering for the development of that existence into a thing in its own full nature lovable, namely, an existence in its own will one with the perfect love whence it issued; and the mother's heart more than any other God has made is like him in power of loving. Alas that she is so seldom like him in wisdom—so often thwarting the work of God, and rendering more severe his measures with her child by her attempts to shield him from His law, and save him from saving sorrow. How often from his very infancy—if she does not, like the very nurse she employs, actively teach him to be selfish—does she get between him and the right consequences of his conduct, as if with her one feeble loving hand, she would stay the fly-wheel of the holy universe. It is the law that the man who does evil shall suffer; it is the only hope for him, and a hope for the neighbor he wrongs. When he forsakes his evil, one by one the dogs of suffering will halt and drop away from his track; and he will find at last they have but hounded him into the land of his nativity, into the home of his Father in heaven.

As soon as breakfast was over, the whole family set out for a walk. Mr. Raymount seldom left the house till after lunch, but

even he, who cared comparatively little for the open air, had grown eager after it. Streets, hills and sands were swarming with human beings, all drawn out by the sun.

"I sometimes wonder," he said, "that so many people require so little to make them happy. Let but the sun break through the clouds, and he sets them all going like ants in an ant-hill!"

"Yes," returned his wife, "but then see how little on the other hand is required to make them miserable! Let the sun hide his head for a day, and they grumble!"

Making the remark, the good woman never thought of her son Cornelius, the one of her family whose conduct illustrated it. At the moment she saw him cheerful, and her love looked upon him as good. She was one of the best of women herself: whatever hour she was called, her lamp was sure to have oil in it; and yet all the time since first he lay in her arms, I doubt if she had ever done anything to help the youth to conquer himself. Now it was too late, even had she known what could be done. But the others had so far turned out well: why should not this one also? The moment his bad humors were over, she looked on him as reformed; and when he uttered worldliness, she persuaded herself he was but jesting. But alas! she had no adequate notion—not a shadow of one—of the selfishness of the man-child she had given to the world. This matter of the black sheep in the white flock is one of the most mysterious of the facts of spiritual generation.

Sometimes, indeed, the sheep is by no means so black as to the whiter ones he seems; perhaps neither are they so much whiter

as their friends and they themselves think; for to be altogether respectable is not to be clean; and the black sheep may be all the better than some of the rest that he looks what he is, and does not dye his wool. But on the other hand he may be a great deal worse than some of his own family think him.

"Then," said Hester, after a longish pause, "those that need more to make them happy, are less easily made unhappy?"

To this question rather than remark, she received no reply. Her father and mother both felt it not altogether an easy one to answer: it suggested points requiring consideration. To Cornelius, it was a mere girl's speech, not worth heeding where the girl was his sister. He turned up at it a mental nose, the merest of snubs; and well he might, for he had not the least notion of what it meant or involved.

As little notion had his father that his son Cornelius was a black sheep. He was not what the world would have called a black sheep, but his father, could he have seen into him, would have counted him a very black sheep indeed—and none the whiter that he recognized in the blackness certain shades that were of paternal origin. It was, however, only to the rest of the family that Cornelius showed his blackness: of his father he was afraid; and that father, being proud of his children, would have found it hard to believe anything bad of them: like his faults they were his own! His faith in his children was in no small measure conceit of that which was his, and blinded him to their faults as it blinded him to some of his own. The discovery of any serious fault in

one of them would be a sore wound to his vanity, a destruction of his self-content.

The co-existence of good and evil in the same person is perhaps the most puzzling of all facts. What a shock it gives one to hear a woman who loves God, and spends both time and money on the betterment of her kind, call a pauper child a *brat*, and see her turn with disgust from the idea of treating any strange child, more especially one of low birth, as her own. "O Christ!" cries the heart, "is this one of the women that follows thee?" And she *is* one of the women that follow him—only she needs such a lesson as he gave his disciples through the Syrophenician woman.

Mr. Raymount had such an opinion of himself, that while he never obtruded his opinions upon others, he never imagined them disregarded in his own family. It never entered his mind that any member of it might in this or that think differently from himself. But both his wife and Hester were able to think, and did think for themselves, as they were bound in the truth of things to do; and there were considerable divergements of the paths in which they walked from that he had trodden. He had indeed always taken too much for granted, and ought to have used more pains to have his notions understood by them, if he laid so much on their intellectual sympathy. He supposed all the three read what he wrote; and his wife and daughter did read the most of it; but what would he think when he came to know that his son not only read next to nothing of it, but read that little with a contempt not altogether unconscious—for no other reason than that it was his

father who wrote it? Nor was the youth quite without justification —for was he not himself a production of his father? But then he looked upon the latter as one of altogether superior quality! It is indeed strange how vulgar minds despise the things they have looked upon and their hands have handled, just because they have looked upon them and their hands have handled them; is there not in the fact a humiliating lesson, which yet they are unable to read, of the degrading power of their own presence upon themselves and their judgments? Whether a man is a hero to his valet or the opposite, depends as much on the valet as on the man: The bond, then, between the father and the son, was by no means so strong as the father thought it. Indeed the selfishness of Cornelius made him almost look upon his father as his enemy, because of his intentions with regard to the division of his property. And selfishness rarely fails of good arguments. Nor can anything destroy it but such a turning of things upside down as only he that made them can work.

CHAPTER VI.
THE AQUARIUM

"Let's go and see the people at the aquarium," said Cornelius.

"Do you mean the fishes?" asked his father.

"No, I don't care about them; I said the people," answered Cornelius stupidly.

"The people of an aquarium must surely be fishes, eh, Saffy?" said the father to the bright child, walking hand in hand with him. It was Josephine. Her eyes were so blue that but for the association he would have called her Sapphira. Between the two he contented himself with the pet name of *Saffy*.

"Ah but, papa," said Hester, "Corney didn't say the people *of* the aquarium, but the people *at* the aquarium!"

"Two of you are too many for me!" returned the father playfully. "Well, then, Saffy, let us go and see the people *of* and the people *at* the aquarium.—Which do you want to see, Hester?"

"Oh, the fishes of course, papa!"

"Why of course?"

"Because they're so much more interesting than the people," said Hester rebuked in herself as she said it—before she knew why.

"Fishes more interesting than people!" exclaimed her father.

"They're so like people, papa!"

"Oh, then surely the people must be the more interesting after all, if it is the likeness of the fishes to people that makes them interesting! Which of all the people you love do you see likest a fish now?"

"Oh, papa!"

"What! is it only people you hate that you see like fishes?"

"I don't hate anybody, papa."

"There's a way of not caring about people, though—looking down on them and seeing them like fishes, that's precious like hating them," said Cornelius, who enjoyed a crowd, and putting his sister in the wrong still better: to that end he could easily say a sensible thing.

"If you mean me, Corney, I think you do me injustice," said Hester. "The worst I do is to look at them the wrong way of the telescope."

"But why do you never see anyone you love like a fish?" persisted her father.

"Perhaps because I could not love anybody that was like a fish."

"Certainly there is something not beautiful about them!" said Mr. Raymount.

"They're beastly ugly," said Cornelius.

"Let us look into it a little," continued his father. "What is it about them that is ugly? Their colors are sometimes very beautiful—and their shapes, too."

"Their heads and faces," said Hester, "are the only parts of them in which they can be like human beings, and those are very ugly."

"I'm not sure that you are right, Hester," said the mother, who had not spoken till now. "There must surely be something human in their bodies as well, for now and then I see their ways and motions so like those of men and women, that I felt for a moment almost as if I understood how they were feeling, and were just going to know what they were thinking."

"I suspect," said Mr. Raymount, "your mother's too much of a poet to be trusted alone in an aquarium. It would have driven Shelley crazy—to judge from his Sensitive Plant."

They had now reached the middle of the descent to the mysteries of the place, when Cornelius, who, with an interest Hester could not understand in him, and which was partly owing to a mere love of transition, had been staring at the ascending faces, uttered a cry of recognition, and darted down to the next landing. With a degree of respect he seldom manifested they saw him there accost a gentleman leaning over the balustrade, and shake hands with him. He was several years older than Cornelius, not a few inches taller, and much better-looking—one indeed who could hardly fail to attract notice even in a crowd. Corney's weakest point, next to his heart, was his legs, which perhaps accounted for his worship of Mr. Vavasor's calves, in themselves nothing remarkable. He was already glancing stolen looks at these objects of his jealous admiration when the rest reached

the landing, and Mr. Raymount, willing to know his son's friend, desired Corney to introduce him.

Cornelius had been now eighteen months in the bank, and had never even mentioned the name of a fellow clerk. He was one of those youths who take the only possible way for emptiness to make itself of consequence—that of concealment and affected mystery. Not even now but for his father's request, would he have presented his bank friend to him or any of the family.

The manners and approach of Mr. Vavasor were such as at once to recommend him to the friendly reception of all, from Mr. Raymount to little Saffy, who had the rare charm of being shy without being rude. If not genial, his manners were yet friendly, and his carriage if not graceful was easy; both were apt to be abrupt where he was familiar. It was a kind of company bearing he had, but dashed with indifference, except where he desired to commend himself. He shook hands with little Saffy as respectfully as with her mother, but with neither altogether respectfully; and immediately the pale-faced, cold, loving boy, Mark, unwillingly, therefore almost unconsciously, disliked him. He was beyond question handsome, with a Grecian nose nearly perfect, which had its large part in the aristocratic look he bore. This was favored also by the simplicity of his dress. He turned with them, and re-descended the stairs.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming, Mr. Vavasor? I could have met you," said Cornelius, with just a little stretch of the degree of familiarity in use between them.

"I didn't know myself till the last minute," answered Vavasor. "It was a sudden resolve of my aunt's. Neither had I the remotest idea you were here."

"Have you been seeing the fishes?" asked Hester, at whose side their new acquaintance was walking now they had reached the subterranean level.

"I have just passed along their cages," he answered. "They are not well kept; the glass is dirty, and the water, too. I fancied they looked unhappy, and came away. I can't bear to see creatures pining. It would be a good deed to poison them all."

"Wouldn't it be better to give them some fresh water?" said little Saffy, "that would make them glad."

To this wisdom there was no response.

When they came to the door of the concert-room, Cornelius turned into it, leaving his "friend" with his "people" to go and look at the fishes. Mr. Vavasor kept his place by the side of Hester.

"We were just talking, when we had the pleasure of meeting you, about people and fishes—comparing them in a way," said Hester. "I can't make it clear to myself why I like seeing the fishes better than the people."

"I fancy it must be because you call them fishes and not fish," replied Vavasor. "If the fishes were a shoal of herrings or mackerel, I doubt if you would—at least for many times. If, on the other hand, the men and women in the concert-room were as oddly distinguished one from another as these different fishes,

you would prefer going with your brother."

"I'm sure I shouldn't" said Saffy to Mark.

"Phizzes is best on fishes," answered Mark sententiously. "I like faces best; only you don't *always* want to look at what you like best!—I wonder why."

"And yet I suspect," said Mrs. Raymount to Vavasor, "many of the people are as much distinguished from each other in character as the fishes are in form."

"Possibly," interjected her husband, "they are as different in their faces also, only we are too much of their kind to be able to read the differences so clearly."

"Surely you do not mean," said Vavasor respectfully, "that any two persons in the concert-room can be as much unlike each other as that flounder shuddering along the sandy bottom, and that yard of eel sliding through the water like an embodied wickedness?"

Hester was greatly struck with the poetic tone of the remark.

"I think you may find people as different," replied her father, "if you take into the account the more delicate as well as the more striking differences—the deeper as well as the surface diversities. Now you make me think of it, I begin to doubt whether all these live grotesques may not have been made to the pattern of different developments of humanity."

"Look at that dog-fish," said Vavasor, pointing to the largest in the tank. "What a brute! Don't you hate him, Miss Raymount?"

"I am not willing to hate any live thing," answered Hester with

a smile, "—from selfish motives, perhaps; I feel as if it would be to my own loss, causing me some kind of irreparable hurt."

"But you would kill such a creature as that—would you not?" he rejoined.

"In possible circumstances," she answered; "but killing and hating have nothing necessarily to do with each other. He that hates his brother is always a murderer, not always he that kills him."

"This is another sort of girl from any I've met yet!" said Vavasor to himself. "I wonder what she's really like!"

He did not know that what she was really like was just what he, with all his fancied knowledge of women both in life and literature, was incapable of seeing—so different was she in kind from poor-gentleman Vavasor.

"But just look at the head, eyes and mouth of the fiend!" he persisted.

Hester, forcing herself a little, did regard the animal for two or three minutes. Then a slight shudder passed through her, and she turned away her eyes.

"I see you've caught the look of him!" said Vavasor. "Is he not a horror?"

"He is. But that was not what made me turn away: I found if I looked a moment longer I should hate him in spite of myself."

"And why shouldn't you hate him? You would be doing the wretch no wrong. Even if he knew it, it would be only what he deserved."

"That you cannot tell except you knew all about his nature, and every point of his history from the beginning of the creation till now. I dare not judge even a dog-fish. And whatever his deserts, I don't choose to hate him, because I don't choose to hate."

She turned away, and Vavasor saw she wanted no more of the dog-fish.

"Oh!" cried Saffy, with a face of terror, "look, look, mamma! It's staring at me!"

The child hid her face in her mother's gown, yet turned immediately to look again.

Mr. Raymount looked also, following her gaze, and was fascinated by the sight that met his eyes. Through the glass, high above his head, and not far from the surface, he saw a huge thornback, bending toward them and seeming to look down on them, as it flew slowly through the water—the action of the two sides of its body fringed with fins, and its consequent motion, were much more like the act of flying than that of swimming. Behind him floated his long tail, making him yet more resemble the hideously imagined kite which he at once suggested. But the terrible thing about him was the death's-head look of the upper part of him. His white belly was of course toward them, and his eyes were on the other side, but there were nostrils that looked exactly like the empty sockets of eyes, and below them was a hideous mouth. These made the face that seemed to Saffy to be hovering over and watching them.

"Like an infernal angel of death!" thought Mr. Raymount, but

would not rouse yet more the imagination of the little one by saying it. Hester gazed with steadfast mien at the floating spectre.

"You seem in no danger from that one," said Vavasor.

"I don't think I understand you," said Hester. "What danger can there be from any of them?"

"I mean of hating him."

"You are right; I do not feel the smallest inclination to hate him."

"Yet the ray is even uglier than the dog-fish."

"That may be—I think not—but who hates for ugliness? I never should. Ugliness only moves my pity."

"Then what do you hate for?" asked Vavasor. "—But I beg your pardon: you never hate! Let me ask then, what is it that makes you feel as if you might hate?"

"If you will look again at the dog-fish, and tell me the expression of its mouth, I may be able to answer you," she returned.

"I will," said Vavasor; and, betaking himself to a farther portion of the tank, he stood there watching a little shoal of those sharks of the northern seas. While he was gone Cornelius rejoined them.

"I wish I knew why God made such ugly creatures," said Saffy to Mark.

The boy gave a curious half-sad smile, without turning his eyes from the thornback, and said nothing.

"Do you know why God made any creatures, pet?" said

Hester.

"No, I don't. Why did he, Hessy?"

"I am almost afraid to guess. But if you don't know why he made any, why should you wonder that he made those?"

"Because they are so ugly.—Do tell me why he made them?" she added coaxingly.

"You had better ask mamma."

"But, Hessy, I don't like to ask mamma."

"Why don't you like to ask mamma, you little goose?"

"Because," said Saffy, who was all the time holding her mother's hand, and knew she was hearing her, "mamma mightn't know what to say."

Hester thought with herself, "I am sometimes afraid to pray lest I should have no answer!"

The mother's face turned down toward her little one.

"And what if I shouldn't know what to say, darling?" she asked.

"I feel so awkward when Miss Merton asks me a question I can't answer," said the child.

"And you are afraid of making mamma feel awkward? You pet!" said Hester.

Cornelius burst into a great laugh, and Saffy into silent tears, for she thought she had made a fool of herself. She was not a priggish child, and did not deserve the mockery with which her barbarian brother invaded her little temple. She was such a true child that her mother was her neighbor, and present to all her

being—not her eyes only or her brain, but her heart and spirit as well.

The mother led her aside to a seat, saying,

"Come, darling; we must look into this, and try to understand it. Let me see—what is it we have got to understand? I think it is this—why you should be ashamed when you cannot answer the questions of one who knows so much more than you, and I should not be ashamed when I cannot answer the questions of my own little girl who knows so much less that I do. Is that it?"

"I don't know," sobbed Saffy.

"You shouldn't laugh at her, Corney: it hurts her!" said Hester.

"The little fool! How could that hurt her? It's nothing but temper!" said Cornelius with vexation. He was not vexed that he had made her cry, but vexed that she cried.

"You should have a little more sympathy with childhood, Cornelius," said his father. "You used to be angry enough when you were laughed at."

"I was a fool then myself!" answered Cornelius sulkily.

He said no more, and his father put the best interpretation upon his speech.

"Do you remember, Hester," he said, "how you were always ready to cry when I told you I did not know something you had asked me?"

"Quite well, papa," replied Hester; "and I think I could explain it now. I did not know then why I cried. I think now it was because it seemed to bring you down nearer to my level. My heaven of

wisdom sank and grew less."

"I hope that is not what Saffy is feeling now; your mother must be telling her she doesn't know why God made the animals. But no! She is looking up in her face with hers radiant!"

And yet her mother had told her she did not know why God made the animals! She had at the same time, however, made her own confessed ignorance a step on which to set the child nearer to the knowledge of God; for she told her it did not matter that she did not know, so long as God knew. The child could see that her mother's ignorance did not trouble her; and also that she who confessed ignorance was yet in close communication with him who knew all about everything, and delighted in making his children understand.

And now came Vavasor from his study of the dog-fish. His nature was a poetic one, though much choked with the weeds of the conventional and commonplace, and he had seen and felt something of what Hester intended. But he was not alive enough to understand hate. He was able to hate and laugh. He could not feel the danger of hate as Hester, for hate is death, and it needs life to know death.

"He is cruel, and the very incarnation of selfishness," he said. "I should like to set my heel on him."

"If I were to allow myself to hate him," returned Hester, "I should hate him too much to kill him. I should let him live on in his ugliness, and hold back my hate lest it should wither him in the cool water. To let him live would be my revenge, the worst

I should know. I must not look at him, for it makes me feel as wicked as he looks."

She glanced at Vavasor. His eyes were fixed on her. She turned away uncomfortable: could it be that he was like the dog-fish?

"I declare." said Cornelius, coming between them, "there's no knowing you girls! Would you believe it, Mr. Vavasor—that young woman was crying her eyes out last night over the meanest humbug of a Chadband I ever set mine on! There ain't one of those fishes comes within sight of him for ugliness. And she would have it he was to be pitied—sorrowed over—loved, I suppose!"

The last words of his speech he whined out in a lackadaisical tone.

Hester flushed, but said nothing. She was not going to defend herself before a stranger. She would rather remain misrepresented—even be misunderstood. But Vavasor had no such opinion of the brother as to take any notion of the sister from his mirror. When she turned from Cornelius next, in which movement lay all the expression she chose to give to her indignation, he passed behind him to the other side of Hester, and there stood apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a huge crustacean. Had Cornelius been sensitive, he must have felt he was omitted.

"Why, can it be?" she said—to herself, but audibly—after a moment of silence, during which she also had been apparently absorbed in the contemplation of some inhabitant of the watery

cage. But she had in truth been thinking of nothing immediately before her eyes, though they had rested first upon a huge crayfish, balancing himself on stilts innumerable, then turned to one descending a rocky incline—just as a Swiss horse descends a stair in a mountain-path.

"Yes, the fellow bristles with *whys*," said Vavasor, whose gaze was still fixed on one of them. "Every leg seems to ask 'Why am I a leg?'"

"I should have thought it was asking rather, 'What am I? Am I a leg or a failure?'" rejoined Hester. "But I was not thinking of the crayfish. He is odd, but there is no harm in him. He looks, indeed, highly respectable. See with what a dignity he fans himself!"

"And for the same reason," remarked her father, who had come up and stood behind them, "as the finest lady at the ball: he wants more air. I wonder whether the poor fellow knows he is in a cage?"

"I think he does," said Saffy, "else he would run away from us."

"Are you thinking of the dog-fish still?" asked Vavasor.

The strangeness, as it seemed to him, of the handsome girl's absorption, for such it veritably appeared, in questions of no interest in themselves—so he judged them—attracted him even more than her beauty, for he did not like to feel himself unpossessed of the entrée to such a house. Also he was a writer of society verses—not so good as they might have been, but in their way not altogether despicable—and had already begun to

turn it over in his mind whether something might not be made of—what shall I call it?—the situation?

"I *was* thinking of him," Hester answered, "but only as a type of the great difficulty—why there should be evil or ugliness in the world. There must be an answer to it! Is it possible it should be one we would not like?"

"I don't believe there is any answer," said Vavasor. "The ugly things are ugly just because they are ugly. It is a child's answer, but not therefore unphilosophical. We must take things as we find them. We are ourselves just what we are, and cannot help it. We do this or that because it is in us. We are made so."

"You do not believe in free will, then, Mr. Vavasor?" said Hester coldly.

"I see no ground for believing in it. We are but forces—bottled up forces—charged Leyden jars. Every one does just what is in him—acts as he is capable."

He was not given to metaphysics, and, indeed, had few or no opinions in that department of inquiry; but the odd girl interested him, and he was ready to meet her on any ground. He had uttered his own practical unbelief, however, with considerable accuracy. Hester's eyes flashed angrily.

"I say *no*. Every one is capable of acting better than he does," she replied; and her face flushed.

"Why does he not then?" asked Vavasor.

"Ah, why?" she responded.

"How can he be made for it if he does not do it?" insisted

Vavasor.

"How indeed? That is the puzzle," she answered. "If he were not capable there would be none."

"I should do better, I am sure, if I could," said Vavasor. Had he known himself, he ought to have added, "without trouble."

"Then you think we are all just like the dog-fish—except that destiny has made none of us quite so ugly," rejoined Hester.

"Or so selfish," implemented Vavasor.

"That I can't see," returned Hester. "If we are merely borne helpless hither and thither on the tide of impulse, we can be neither more nor less selfish than the dog-fish. We are, in fact, neither selfish nor unselfish. We are pure nothings, concerning which speculation is not worth the trouble. But the very word *selfish* implies a contrary judgment on the part of humanity itself."

"Then you believe we can make ourselves different from what we are made?"

"Yes; we are made with the power to change. We are meant to take a share in our own making. We are made so and so, it is true, but not made so and so only; we are made with a power in ourselves beside—a power that can lay hold on the original power that made us. We are not made to remain as we are. We are bound to grow."

She spoke rapidly, with glowing eyes, the fire of her utterance consuming every shadow of the didactic.

"You are too much of a philosopher for me, Miss Raymount,"

said Vavasor with a smile. "But just answer me one question. What if a man is too weak to change?"

"He must change," said Hester.

Then first Vavasor began to feel the conversation getting quite too serious.

"Ah, well!" he said. "But don't you think this is rather—ah—rather—don't you know?—for an aquarium?"

Hester did not reply. Nothing was too serious for her in any place. She was indeed a peculiar girl—the more the pity for the many that made her so!

"Let us go and see the octopus," said Vavasor.

They went, and Mr. Raymount slowly followed them. He had not heard the last turn of their conversation.

"You two have set me thinking," he said, when he joined them; "and brought to my mind an observation I had made—how seldom you find art succeed in representing the hatefully ugly! The painter can accumulate ugliness, but I do not remember a demon worth the name. The picture I can best recall with demons in it is one of Raphael's—a St. Michael slaying the dragon—from the Purgatorio, I think, but I am not sure; not one of the demons in that picture is half so ugly as your dog-fish.—What if it be necessary that we should have lessons in ugliness?"

"But why?" said Hester. "Is not the ugly better let alone? You have always taught that ugliness is the natural embodiment of evil!"

"Because we have chosen what is bad, and do not know how

ugly it is—that is why," answered her father.

"Isn't that rather hard on the fish, though?" said Vavasor. "How can innocent creatures be an embodiment of evil?"

"But what do you mean by *innocent*?" returned Mr. Raymount. "The nature of an animal may be low and even hateful, and its looks correspondent, while no conscience accuses it of evil. I have known half a dozen cows, in a shed large enough for a score, and abundantly provisioned, unite to keep the rest of the herd out of it. Many a man is a far lower and worse creature in his nature that his conscience tells him. It is the conscience educated by strife and failure and success that is severe upon the man, demanding of him the all but unattainable."

Talk worse and worse for an aquarium! But happily they had now reached the tank of the octopods.

Alas, there had been some mismanagement of the pipes, and the poor devil-fishes had been boiled, or at least heated to death! One small, wretched, skinny thing, hardly distinguishable from a discolored clout, was all that was left of a dozen. Cornelius laughed heartily when informed of the mischance.

"It's a pity it wasn't the devil himself instead of his fish!" he said. "Wouldn't it be a jolly lark, Mr. Vavasor, if some of the rascals down below were to heat that furnace too hot, and rid us of the whole potful at one fell swoop!"

"What is that you are saying, Corney?" said his mother, who had but just rejoined them.

"I was only uttering the pious wish that the devil was dead,"

answered Cornelius; "—boiled like an octopus! ha! ha! ha!"

"What good would that do?" said his father. "The human devils would be no better, and the place would soon be re-occupied. The population of the pit must be kept up by immigration. There may be babies born in heaven, for any thing I know, but certain I am there can be none in the other place. This world of ours is the nursery of devils as well as of saints."

"And what becomes of those that are neither?" asked Vavasor.

"It were hard to say," replied Mr. Raymount with some seriousness.

"A confoundedly peculiar family!" said Vavasor to himself. "There's a bee in every bonnet of them! An odd, irreverent way the old fellow has with him—for an old fellow pretending to believe what he says!"

Vavasor was not one of the *advanced* of the age; he did not deny there was a God: he thought that the worse form that it was common in the bank; the fellows he associated with never took the trouble to deny him; they took their own way, and asked no questions. When a man has not the slightest intention that the answer shall influence his conduct, why should he inquire whether there be a God or not? Vavasor cared more about the top of his cane than the God whose being he did not take the trouble to deny. He believed a little less than the maiden aunt with whom he lived; she believed less than her mother, and her mother had believed less than hers; so that for generations the faith, so called, of the family had been dying down, simply because all

that time it had sent out no fresh root of obedience. It had in truth been no faith at all, only assent. Miss Vavasor went to church because it was the right thing to do: God was one of the heads of society, and his drawing-rooms had to be attended. Certain objections not altogether unreasonable might be urged against doing so: several fictions were more or less countenanced in them—such as equality, love of your neighbor, and forgiveness of your enemy, but then nobody really heeded them: religion had worked its way up to a respectable position, and no longer required the support of the unwashed—that is, those outside the circle whose center is May-fair. As to her personal religion, why, God had heard her prayers, and might again: he did show favor occasionally. That she should come out of it all as well as other people when this life of family and incomes and match-making was over, she saw no reason to doubt. Ranters and canters might talk as they pleased, but God knew better than make the existence of thoroughly respectable people quite unendurable! She was kind-hearted, and treated her maid like an equal up to the moment of offense—then like a dog of the east up to that of atonement. She had the power of keeping her temper even in family differences, and hence was regarded as a very model of wisdom, prudence and *tact*, the last far the first in the consideration of her judges. The young of her acquaintance fled to her for help in need, and she gave them no hard words, but generally more counsel than comfort—always, however, the best she had, which was of Polonius' kind, an essence of wise

selfishness, so far as selfishness can be wise, with a strong dash of self-respect, nowise the more sparing that it was independent of desert. The good man would find it rather difficult to respect himself were he to try; his gaze is upward to the one good; but had it been possible for such a distinction to enter Miss Vavasor's house, it would have been only to be straightway dismissed. She was devoted to her nephew, as she counted devotion, but would see that he made a correspondent return.

When Vavasor reached their encampment in the Imperial Hotel, he went to his own room, got out his Russia-leather despatch-box, half-filled with songs and occasional verses, which he never travelled without, and set himself to see what he could do with the dog-fish—in what kind of poetic jelly, that is, he could enclose his shark-like mouth and evil look. But prejudiced as he always was in favor of whatever issued from his own brain —as yet nothing had come from his heart—he was anything but satisfied with the result of his endeavor. It was, in fact, an utter failure so far as the dog-fish was concerned, for he was there unnamed, a mere indistinguishable presence among many monsters. But notwithstanding the gravity of this defect, and the distance between his idea and its outcome, he yet concluded the homage to Hester which it embodied of a value to justify the presentation of the verses. And poor as they were they were nearly as good as anything he had done hitherto. Here they are:

To H.R.

Lo, Beauty climbs the watery steep,
Sets foot on many a slimy stair;
Treads on the monsters of the deep,
And rising seeks the earth and air.

On every form she sets her foot,
She lifts it straight and passes on;
With flowers and trees she takes no root,
This, that caresses, and is gone.

Imperfect, poorly lovely things
On all sides round she sighing sees;
She flies, nor for her flying wings
Finds any refuge, rest, or ease!

At last, at last, on Burcliff's shore,
She spies a thoughtful wanderer;
She speeds—she lights for evermore,
Incorporated, one with her!

CHAPTER VII.
AMY AMBER

Some gentle crisis must have arrived in the history of Hester, for in these days her heart was more sensitive and more sympathetic than ever before. The circumvolant troubles of humanity caught upon it as it it had been a thorn-bush, and hung there. It was not greatly troubled, neither was its air murky, but its very repose was like a mother's sleep which is no obstacle between the cries of her children and her sheltering soul: it was ready to wake at every moan of the human sea around her. Unlike most women, she had not needed marriage and motherhood to open the great gate of her heart to her kind: I do not mean there are not many like her in this. Why the tide of human affection should have begun to rise so rapidly in her just at this time, there is no need for conjecturing: much of every history must for the long present remain inexplicable. No man creates his history any more than he creates himself; he only modifies it—sometimes awfully; gathers to him swift help, or makes intervention necessary. But the tide of which I speak flowed yet more swiftly from the night of the magic lantern. That experience had been as a mirror in which she saw the misery of the low of her kind, including, alas! her brother Cornelius. He had never before so plainly revealed to her his heartlessness,

and the painful consequence of the revelation was, that now, with all her swelling love for human beings, she felt her heart shrink from him as if he were of another nature. She could never indeed have loved him as she did but that, being several years his elder, she had had a good deal to do with him as baby and child: the infant motherhood of her heart had gathered about him, and not an eternity of difference could after that destroy the relation between them. But as he grew up, the boy had undermined and weakened her affection, though hardly her devotion; and now the youth had given it a rude shock. So far was she, however, from yielding to this decay of feeling that it did not merely cause her much pain but gave rise in her to much useless endeavor; while every day she grew more anxious and careful to carry herself toward him as a sister ought.

The Raymounts could not afford one of the best lodgings in Burcliff, and were well contented with a floor in an old house in an unfashionable part of the town, looking across the red roofs of the port, and out over the flocks of Neptune's white sheep on the blue-gray German ocean. It was kept by two old maids whose hearts had got flattened under the pressure of poverty—no, I am wrong, it was not poverty, but *care*; pure poverty never flattened any heart; it is the care which poverty is supposed to justify that does the mischief; it gets inside it and burrows, as well as lies on the top of it; of mere outside poverty a heart can bear a mountainous weight without the smallest injury, yea with inestimable result of the only riches. Our Lord never mentions

poverty as one of the obstructions to his kingdom, neither has it ever proved such; riches, cares and desires he does mention. The sisters Witherspin had never yet suffered from the lack of a single necessary; not the less they frayed their mornings, wore out their afternoons, scorched their evenings, and consumed their nights, in scraping together provision for an old age they were destined never to see. They were a small meager pair, with hardly a smile between them. One waited and the other cooked. The one that waited had generally her chin tied up with a silk handkerchief, as if she had come to life again, but not quite, and could not do without the handkerchief. The other was rarely seen, but her existence was all day testified by the odors that ascended from the Tartarus of her ever-recurrent labors. It was a marvel how from a region of such fumes could ascend the good dinners she provided. The poor things of course had their weight on the mind of Hester, for, had they tried, they could not have hidden the fact that they lived to save: every movement almost, and certainly every tone betrayed it. And yet, unlike so many lodging-house keepers, resembling more the lion-ant than any other of the symbolic world of insects, they were strictly honest. Had they not been, I doubt if Hester would have been able, though they would then have needed more, to give them so much pity as she did, for she had a great scorn of dishonesty. Her heart, which was full of compassion for the yielding, the weak, the erring, was not yet able to spend much on the actively vicious—the dishonest and lying and traitorous. The honor she paid the

honesty of these women helped her much to pity the sunlessness of their existence, and the poor end for which they lived. It looked as if God had forgotten them—toiling for so little all day long, while the fact was they forgot God, and were thus miserable and oppressed because they would not have him interfere as he would so gladly have done. Instead of seeking the kingdom of heaven, and trusting him for old age while they did their work with their might, they exhausted their spiritual resources in sending out armies of ravens with hardly a dove among them, to find and secure a future still submerged in the waves of a friendly deluge. Nor was Hester's own faith in God so vital yet as to propagate itself by division in the minds she came in contact with. She could only be sorry for them and kind to them.

The morning after the visit to the aquarium, woeful Miss Witherspin, as Mark had epitheted her, entered to remove the ruins of breakfast with a more sad and injured expression of countenance than usual. It was a glorious day, and she was like a live shadow in the sunshine. Most of the Raymounts were already in the open air, and Hester was the only one in the room. The small, round-shouldered, cadaverous creature went moving about the table with a motion that suggested bed as fitter than labor, though she was strong enough to get through her work without more than occasional suffering: if she could only have left pitying herself and let God love her she would have got on well enough. Hester, who had her own share of the same kind of fault, was rather moodily trimming her mother's

bonnet with a new ribbon, glancing up from which she at once perceived that something in particular must have exceeded in wrongness the general wrongness of things in the poor little gnome's world. Her appearance was usually that of one with a headache; her expression this morning suggested a mild indeed but all-pervading toothache.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Witherspin?" asked Hester.

"Indeed, miss, there never come nothing to sister and me but it's matter, and now it's a sore matter. But it's the Lord's will and we can't help it; and what are we here for but to have patience? That's what I keep saying to my sister, but it don't seem to do her much good."

She ended with a great sigh; and Hester thought if the unseen sister required the comfort of the one before her, whose evangel just uttered was as gloomy as herself, how very unhappy she must be.

"No doubt we are here to learn patience," said Hester; "but I can hardly think patience is what we are made for. Is there any fresh trouble—if you will excuse me?"

"Well, I don't know, miss, as trouble can anyhow be called fresh—leastways to us it's stale enough; we're that sick of it! I declare to you, miss, I'm clean worn out with havin' patience! An' now there's my sister gone after her husband an' left her girl, brought up in her own way an' every other luxury, an' there she's come on our hands, an' us to take the charge of her! It's a responsibility will be the death of me."

"Is there no provision for her?"

"Oh, yes, there's provision! Her mother kep a shop for fancy goods at Keswick—after John's death, that is—an' scraped together a good bit o' money, they do say; but that's under trustees—not a penny to be touched till the girl come of age!"

"But the trustees must make you a proper allowance for bringing her up! And anyhow you can refuse the charge."

"No, miss, that we can't. It was always John's wish when he lay a dyin', that if anything was to happen to Sarah, the child should come to us. It's the trouble of the young thing, the responsibility—havin' to keep your eyes upon her every blessed moment for fear she do the thing she ought not to—that's what weighs upon me. Oh, yes, they'll pay so much a quarter for her! it's not that. But to be always at the heels of a young, sly puss after mischief—it's more'n I'm equal to, I do assure you, Miss Raymount."

"When did you see her last?" inquired Hester.

"Not once have I set eyes on her since she was three years old!" answered Miss Witherspin, and her tone seemed to imply in the fact yet additional wrong.

"Then perhaps she may be wiser by this time," Hester suggested. "How old is she now?"

"Sixteen out. It's awful to think of!"

"But how do you know she will be so troublesome? She mayn't want the looking after you dread. You haven't seen her for thirteen years!"

"I'm sure of it. I know the breed, miss! She's took after her

mother, you may take your mortal oath! The sly way she got round our John!—an' all to take him right away from his own family as bore and bred him! You wouldn't believe it, miss!"

"Girls are not always like their mothers," said Hester. "I'm not half as good as my mother."

"Bless you, miss! if she ain't half as bad as hers—the Lord have mercy upon us! How I'm to attend to my lodgers and look after her, it's more than I know how to think of it with patience."

"When is she coming?"

"She'll be here this blessed day as I'm speakin' to you, miss!"

"Perhaps, your house being full, you may find her a help instead of a trouble. It won't be as if she had nothing to employ her!"

"There's no good to mortal creature i' the bones or blood of her!" sighed Miss Witherspin, as she put the tablecloth on the top of the breakfast-things.

That blessed day the girl did arrive—sprang into the house like a rather loud sunbeam—loud for a sunbeam, not for a young woman of sixteen. She was small, and bright, and gay, with large black eyes which sparkled like little ones as well as gleamed like great ones, and a miniature Greek face, containing a neat nose and a mouth the most changeable ever seen—now a mere negation in red, and now long enough for sorrow to couch on at her ease—only there was no sorrow near it, nor in its motions and changes much of any other expression than mere life. Her hair was a dead brown, mistakable for black, with a burnt quality in it,

and so curly, in parts so obstinately crinkly, as to suggest wool—and negro blood from some far fount of tropic ardor. Her figure was, if not essentially graceful yet thoroughly symmetrical, and her head, hands and feet were small and well-shaped. Almost brought up in her mother's shop, one much haunted by holiday-makers in the town, she had as little shyness as forwardness, being at once fearless and modest, gentle and merry, noiseless and swift—a pleasure to eyes, nerves and mind. The sudden apparition of her in a rose-bud print, to wait upon the Raymounts the next morning at breakfast, startled them all with a sweet surprise. Every time she left the room the talk about her broke out afresh, and Hester's information concerning her was a welcome sop to the Cerberus of their astonishment. A more striking contrast than that between her and her two aunts could hardly have been found in the whole island. She was like a star between two gray clouds of twilight. But she had not so much share in her own cheerfulness as her poor aunts had in their misery. She so lived because she was so made. She was a joy to others as well as to herself, but as yet she had no merit in her own peace or its rippling gladness. So strong was the life in her that, although she cried every night over the loss of her mother, she was fresh as a daisy in the morning, opening like that to the sun of life, and ready not merely to give smile for smile, but to give smile for frown. In a word she was one of those lovely natures that need but to recognize the eternal to fly to it straight; but on the other hand such natures are in general very hard to wake to a

recognition of the unseen. They assent to every thing good, but for a long time seem unaware of the need of a perfect Father. To have their minds opened to the truth, they must suffer like other mortals less amiable. Suffering alone can develop in such any spiritual insight, or cause them to care that there should be a live God caring about them.

She was soon a favorite with every one of the family. Mrs. Raymount often talked to her. And on her side Amy Amber, which name, being neither crisp nor sparkling, but soft and mellow, did not seem quite to suit her, was so much drawn to Hester that she never lost an opportunity of waiting on her, and never once missed going to her room, to see if she wanted anything, last of all before she went to bed. The only one of the family that professed not to "think much of her," was the contemptuous Cornelius. Even Vavasor, who soon became a frequent caller, if he chanced to utter some admiring word concerning the pretty deft creature that had just flitted from the room like a dark butterfly, would not in reply draw from him more than a grunt and a half sneer. Yet now and then he might have been caught glowering at her, and would sometimes, seemingly in spite of himself, smile on her sudden appearance.

CHAPTER VIII.
CORNELIUS AND VAVASOR

From what I have written of him it may well seem as if such a cub were hardly worth writing about; but if my reader had chanced to meet him first in other company than that of his own family, on every one of whom he looked down with a contempt which although slight was not altogether mild, he would have taken him for at least an agreeable young man. He would then have perceived little or nothing of the look of doggedness and opposition he wore at home; that would have been, all unconsciously, masked in a just unblown smile of general complaisance, ready to burst into full blossom for anyone who should address him; while the rubbish he would then talk to ladies had a certain grace about it—such as absolutely astonished Hester once she happened to overhear some of it, and set her wondering how the phenomenon was to be accounted for of the home-cactus blossoming into such a sweet company-flower—wondering also which was the real Cornelius, he of the seamy side turned always to his own people, or he of the silken flowers and arabesques presented to strangers. Analysis of anything he said would have certified little or nothing in it; but that little or nothing was pleasantly uttered, and served perhaps as well as something cleverer to pass a faint electric flash between common

mind and mind. The slouch, the hands-in-pocket mood, the toe-and-heel oscillation upon the hearth-rug—those flying signals that self was at home to nobody but himself, had for the time vanished; desire to please had tied up the black dog in his kennel, and let the white one out. By keeping close in the protective shadow of the fashion, he always managed to be well-dressed. Ever since he went to the same tailor as Vavasor his coats had been irreproachable; and why should not any youth pay just twice as much for his coats as his father does for his? His shirt-studs were simplicity itself—single pearls; and he was very particular about both the quantity and the quality of the linen showing beyond his coat-cuffs. Altogether he was nicely got up and pleasant to look upon. Stupid as the conventional European dress is, its trimness and clear contrast of white and black tends to level up all to the appearance of gentlemen, and I suspect this may be the real cause of its popularity.

But I beg my reader to reflect before he sets Cornelius down as an exceptionally disagreeable young man because of the difference between his behavior at home and abroad. I admit that his was a bad case, but in how many a family, the members of which are far from despising each other, does it not seem judged unnecessary to cultivate courtesy! Surely this could not be if a tender conscience of the persons and spiritual rights of others were not wanting. If there be any real significance in politeness, if it be not a mere empty and therefore altogether hypocritical congeries of customs, it ought to have its birth, cultivation and

chief exercise at home. Of course there are the manners suitable to strangers and those suitable to intimates, but politeness is the one essential of both. I would not let the smallest child stroke his father's beard roughly. Watch a child and when he begins to grow rough you will see an evil spirit looking out of his eyes. It is a mean and bad thing to be ungentle with our own. Politeness is either a true face or a mask. If worn at one place and not at another, which of them is it? And there were no mask if there ought not to be a face. Neither is politeness at all inconsistent with thorough familiarity. I will go farther and say, that no true, or certainly no profound familiarity is attainable without it. The soul will not come forth to be roughly used. And where truth reigns familiarity only makes the manners strike deeper root in the being, and take a larger share in its regeneration.

Amongst the other small gifts over which Cornelius was too tender to exhibit them at home, was a certain very small one of song. How he had developed it would have been to the home-circle a mystery, but they did not even know that he possessed it, and the thought that they did not was a pleasant one to him. For all his life he had loved vulgar mystery—mystery, that is, without any mystery in it except what appearance of it may come of barren concealment. He never came out with anything at home as to where he had been or what he was going to do or had done. And he gloried specially in the thought that he could and did this or that of which neither the governor, the mater, nor Hester knew his capability. He felt large and powerful and wise

in consequence! and if he was only the more of a fool, what did it matter so long as he did not know it? Rather let me ask what better was he, either for the accomplishment or the concealment of it, so long as it did nothing to uncover to him the one important fact, that its possessor was neither more nor less than a fool?

He had been now some eighteen months in the bank, and from the first Mr. Vavasor, himself not the profoundest of men, had been taken with the easy manners of the youth combined with his evident worship of himself, and having no small proclivity towards patronage, had allowed the aspirant to his favor to enter by degrees its charmed circle. Gathering a certain liking for him, he began to make him an occasional companion for the evening, and at length would sometimes take him home with him. There Cornelius at once laid himself out to please Miss Vavasor, and flattery went a long way with that lady, because she had begun to suspect herself no longer young or beautiful. Her house was a dingy little hut in Mayfair, full of worthless pictures and fine old-fashioned furniture. Any piece of this she would for a long time gladly have exchanged for a new one in the fashion, but as soon as she found such things themselves the fashion, her appreciation of them rose to such fervor that she professed an unchangeable preference for them over things of any modern style whatever. Cornelius soon learned what he must admire and what despise if he would be in tune with Miss Vavasor, to the false importance of being one of whose courtiers he was so much alive that he counted it one of the most precious of his secrets; none of his

family had heard of Mr. Vavasor even, before the encounter at the aquarium.

From Miss Vavasor's Cornelius had been invited to several other houses, and the consequence was that he looked from an ever growing height upon his own people, judging not one of them fit for the grand company to which his merits, unappreciated at home, had introduced him. He began to take private lessons in dancing and singing, and as he possessed a certain natural grace, invisible when he was out of humor, but always appearing when he wanted to please, and a certain facility of imitation as well, he was soon able to dance excellently, and sing with more or less dullness a few songs of the sort fashionable at the time. But he took so little delight in music or singing for its own sake that in any allusion to his sister's practicing he would call it *an infernal row*.

He was not a little astonished, was perhaps a little annoyed at the impression made by his family in general, and Hester in particular, upon one in whose judgment he had placed unquestioning confidence. Nor did he conceal from Vavasor his dissent from his opinion of them, for he felt that his friend's admiration gave him an advantage—not as member of such a family, but as the pooh-pooher of what his friend admired. For did not his superiority to the admiration to which his friend yielded, stamp him in that one thing at least the superior of him who was his superior in so many other things? To be able to look down where he looked up—what was it but superiority?

"My mother's the best of the lot," he said: "—she's the best woman in the world, I do believe; but she's nobody except at home—don't you know? Look at her and your aunt together! Pooh! Because she's my mother, that's no reason why I should think royalty of her!"

"What a cub it is!" said Vavasor to himself, almost using a worse epithet of the same number of letters, and straightway read him a lecture, well meant and shallow, on what was good form in a woman. According to him, not the cub's mother only, but Hester also possessed the qualities that went to the composition of this strange virtue in eminent degrees. Cornelius continued his opposition, but modified it, for he could not help feeling flattered, and began to think a little more of his mother and of Hester too.

"She's a very good girl—of her sort—is Hester," he said; "I don't require to be taught that, Mr. Vavasor. But she's too awfully serious. She's in such earnest about everything—you haven't an idea! One half-hour of her in one of her moods is enough to destroy a poor beggar's peace of mind for ever. And there's no saying when the fit may take her."

Vavasor laughed. But he said to himself "there was stuff in her: what a woman might be made of her!" To him she seemed fit—with a little developing aid—to grace the best society in the world. It was not polish she needed but experience and insight, thought Vavasor, who would have her learn to look on the world and its affairs as they saw them who by long practice

had disqualified themselves for seeing them in any other than the artificial light of fashion. Thus early did Vavasor conceive the ambition of having a hand in the worldly education of this young woman, such a hand that by his means she should come to shine as she deserved in the only circle in which he thought shining worth any one's while; his reward should be to see her so shine. Through his aunt he could gain her entrance where he pleased. In relation to her and her people he seemed to himself a man of power and influence.

I wonder how Jesus Christ would carry himself in Mayfair. Perhaps he would not enter it. Perhaps he would only call to his own to come out of it, and turn away to go down among the money-lenders and sinners of the east end. I am only wondering.

Hester took to Vavasor from the first, in an external, meet-and-part sort of fashion. His bearing was so dignified yet his manner so pleasing, that she, whose instinct was a little repellent, showed him nothing of that phase of her nature. He roused none of that inclination to oppose which poor foolish Corney always roused in her. He could talk well about music and pictures and novels and plays, and she not only let him talk freely, but was inclined to put a favorable interpretation upon things he said which she did not altogether like, trying to see only humor where another might have found heartlessness or cynicism. For Vavasor, being in his own eyes the model of an honorable and well-behaved gentleman, had of course only the world's way of regarding and judging things. Had he been a man of fortune

he would have given to charities with some freedom; but, his salary being very moderate, and his aunt just a little stingy as he thought, he would not have denied himself the smallest luxury his means could compass, for the highest betterment of a human soul. He would give a half-worn pair of gloves to a poor woman in the street, but not the price of the new pair he was on his way to buy to get her a pair of shoes.

It would have enlightened Hester a little about him to watch him for half an hour where he stood behind the counter of the bank: there he was the least courteous of proverbially discourteous bank-clerks, whose manners are about of the same breed with those of hotel-clerks in America. It ought to be mentioned, however, that he treated those of his own social position in precisely the same way as less distinguished callers. But he never forgot to take up his manners with his umbrella as he left the bank, and his airy, cheerful way of talking, which was more natural to him than his rudeness, coming from the same source that afforded the rimes he delighted in, sparkling pleasantly against the more somber texture of Hester's consciousness. She suspected he was no profound, but that was no reason why she should not be pleasant to him, and allow him to be pleasant to her. So by the time Vavasor had spent three evenings with the Raymounts, Hester and he were on a standing of external intimacy, if there be such a relation.

CHAPTER IX.
SONGS AND SINGERS

The evening before the return of Cornelius to London and the durance vile of the bank, Vavasor presented himself at the hour of family-tea. Mr. Raymount's work admitting of no late dinner, the evening of the rest of the family was the freer. They occupied a tolerably large drawing-room, and as they had hired for the time a tolerably good piano, to it, when tea was over, Hester generally betook herself. But this time Cornelius, walking up to it with his hands in his pockets, dropped on the piano-stool as if he had taken a fancy to it for a seat, and began to let his hands run over the keys as if to give the idea he could play if he would. Amy Amber was taking away the tea-things and the rest were here and there about the room, Mr. Raymount and Vavasor talking on the hearth-rug—for a moment ere the former withdrew to his study.

"What a rose-diamond you have to wait on you, Mr. Raymount!" said Vavasor. "If I were a painter I would have her sit to me."

"And ruin the poor thing for any life-sitting!" remarked Mr. Raymount rather gruffly, for he found that the easier way of speaking the truth. He had thus gained a character for uncompromising severity, whereas it was but that a certain sort of cowardice made him creep into spiky armor. He was a good

man, who saw some truths clearly, and used them blunderingly.

"I don't see why that should follow," said Vavasor, in a softly drawling tone, the very reverse of his host's. Its calmness gave the impression of a wisdom behind it that had no existence. "If the girl is handsome, why shouldn't she derive some advantage from it—and the rest of the world as well?"

"Because, I say, she at least would derive only ruin. She would immediately assume to herself the credit of what was offered only to her beauty. It takes a lifetime, Mr. Vavasor, to learn where to pay our taxes. If the penny with the image and superscription of Caesar has to be paid to Caesar, where has a face and figure like that of Amy Amber to be paid?"

Vavasor did not reply: Mr. Raymount's utterance may perhaps seem obscure to a better thinker. He concluded merely that his host was talking for talk's sake, so talking rubbish. The girl came in again, and the conversation dropped. Mr. Raymount went to his writing, Vavasor toward the piano. Willing to please Cornelius, whom he almost regarded with a little respect now that he had turned out brother to such a sister.

"Sing the song you gave us the other night at our house," he said carelessly.

Hester could hardly credit her hearing. Still more astonished was she when Cornelius actually struck a few chords and began to sing. The song was one of those common drawing-room ones more like the remnants of a trifle the day after a party than any other dish for human use. But there was one mercy in it: the

words and the music went together in a perfect concord of weak worthlessness; and Hester had not to listen, with the miserable feeling that rude hands were pulling at the modest garments of her soul, to a true poem set to the music of a scrannel pipe of wretched straw, whose every tone and phrase choked the divine bird caged in the verse.

Cornelius sang like a would-be singer, a song written by a would-be poet, and set by a would-be musician. Verve was there none in the whole ephemeral embodiment. When it died a natural death, if that be possible where never had been any life, Vavasor said, "Thank you, Raymount." But Hester, who had been standing with her teeth clenched under the fiery rain of discords, wrong notes, and dislocated rhythm, rushed to the piano with glowing cheeks and tear-filled eyes, and pushed Cornelius off the stool. The poor weak fellow thought she was acting the sentimental over the sudden outburst of his unsuspected talent, and recovering himself stood smiling at her with affected protest.

"Corney!" she cried—and the faces of the two were a contrast worth seeing—"you disgrace yourself! any one who can sing at all should be ashamed to sing no better than that!"

Then feeling that she ought not to be thus carried away, or quench with such a fierce lack of sympathy the smoking flax of any endowment, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. He received her embrace like the bear he was; the sole recognition he showed was a comically appealing look to Vavasor intended to say, "You see how the women use me! They trouble

me, but I submit!"

"You naughty boy!" Hester went on, much excited, and speaking with great rapidity, "you never let me suspect you could sing any more than a frog—toad, I mean, for a frog does sing after his own rather monotonous fashion, and you don't sing much better! Listen to me, and I will show you how the song ought to have been sung. It's not worth a straw, and it's a shame to sing it, but if it be sung at all, it might as well be sung as well as it might!"

So saying she seated herself at the piano.

This convulsion was in Hester's being a phenomenon altogether new, for never before had she been beside herself in the presence of another.

She gazed for a moment at the song on the rest before her, then summoned as with a command the chords which Corney had seemed to pick up from among his feet, and began. The affect of her singing upon the song was as if the few poor shivering plants in the garden of March had every one blossomed at once. The words and music both were in truth as worthless as she had said; but they were words, and it was music, and words have always some meaning, and tones have always some sweetness; all the meaning and all the sweetness in the song Hester laid hold of, drew out, made the best of; while all the feeble element of the dramatic in it she forced, giving it an expression far beyond what could have been in the mind of the writer capable of such inadequate utterance—with the result that it was a different song altogether from that which Cornelius had sung. She gave the

song such a second birth, indeed, that a tolerable judge might have taken it, so hearing it for the first time, for what it was not—a song with some existence of its own, some distinction from a thousand other wax flowers dipped in sugar-water for the humming-birds of society. The moment she ended, she rose ashamed, and going to the window looked out over the darkening sea.

Vavasor had not heard her sing before. He did not even know she cared for music; for Hester, who did not regard her faculty as an accomplishment but as a gift, treated it as a treasure to be hidden for the day of the Lord rather than a flag to be flaunted in a civic procession—was jealously shy over it, as a thing it would be profanation to show to any but loving eyes. To utter herself in song to any but the right persons, except indeed it was for some further and higher end justifying the sacrifice, appeared to her a kind of immodesty, a taking of her heart from its case, and holding it out at arm's length. He was astonished and yet more delighted. He was in the presence of a power! But all he knew of power was in society-relations. It was not a spirit of might he recognized, for the opening of minds and the strengthening of hearts, but an influence of pleasing for self-aggrandizement. Feeling it upon himself, he thought of it in its operation upon others, and was filled with a respect rising almost to the height of what reverence he was capable of. He followed her swiftly to the window, and through the gathering shadows of the evening she saw his eyes shine as he addressed her.

"I hardly know what I am about, Miss Raymount," he said, "except that I hear my own voice daring to address the finest non-professional singer I have ever yet heard."

Hester, to her own disgust and annoyance, felt her head give itself a toss she had never intended; but it was a true toss nevertheless, for she neither liked having attracted his admiration by such a song, nor the stress he laid on the word *non-professional*: did it not imply that she was not songstress enough for the profession of song?

"Excuse me, Mr. Vavasor, but how do you know I am not a professional singer?" she said with some haughtiness.

"Had you been," answered Vavasor with concealed caution, "I should have learned the fact from your brother."

"Have you learned from him that I could sing at all?"

"To confess the strange truth, he never told me you were musical."

"Very well?"

"I beg your pardon."

"I mean, how then do you know I am not a professional singer?"

"All London would have known it."

This second reply, better conceived, soothed Hester's vanity —of which she had more than was good for her, seeing the least speck of it in the noblest is a fly in the cream.

"What would you say," she rejoined, "if Corney were to tell to you that the reason of his silence was that, while I was in training,

we judged it more prudent, with possible failure ahead, to be silent?"

"I should say you cherished a grand ambition, and one in which you could not fail of success," replied Vavasor, who began to think she was leading him gently to the truth.

But Hester was in a wayward mood, and inclined to *prospect*.

"Suppose such was not really Corney's reason," she resumed, "but that he thought it degraded him to be the brother of an intended professional—what would you say to that?"

"I should tell him he was a fool. He cannot know his Burke," he added laughingly, "to be ignorant of the not inconsiderable proportion of professional blood mixed with the blue in our country."

It was not in Vavasor's usual taste: he had forgotten his best manners. But in truth he never had any best manners: comparatively few have anything but second-best, as the court of the universe will one day reveal. Hester did not like the remark, and he fancied from her look she had misunderstood him.

"Many a singer and actress too has married a duke or a marquis," he supplemented in explanation.

"What sort of a duke or marquis?" asked Hester, in a studiedly wooden way. "It was the more shame to them," she added.

"Pardon me. I cannot allow that it would be any shame to the best of our nobility—"

"I beg your pardon—I meant to the professionals," interrupted Hester.

Vavasor was posed. To her other eccentricities it seemed Miss Raymount added radicalism—and that not of the palest pink! But happily for him, Cornelius, who had been all the time making noises on the piano, at this point appeared at the window.

"Come, Hetty," he said, "sing that again. I shall sing it ever so much better after! Come, I will play the accompaniment."

"It's not worth singing. It would choke me—poor, vapid, vulgar thing!"

"Hullo, sis!" cried Cornelius; "it's hardly civil to use such words about any song a fellow cares to sing!"

Hester's sole answer was a smile, in which, and I am afraid it was really there, Vavasor read contempt, and liked her none the worse for it. Cornelius turned in offense, went back to the piano, and sang the song again—not one hair better—in just the same nerveless, indifferent fashion as before; for how shall one who has no soul, put soul into a song?

Mrs. Raymount was sitting at the fireside with her embroidery. She had not spoken since tea, but now she called Hester, and said to her quietly—

"Don't provoke him, Hester. I am more than delighted to find he has begun to take an interest in music. It is a taste that will grow upon him. Coax him to let you teach him—and bear with him if he should sing out of tune.—It is nothing wicked!" she added with a mother-smile.

Hester was silent. Her conscience rebuked her more than her heart. She went up to him and said—

"Corney, dear, let me find you a song worth singing."

"A girl can't choose for a man. You're sure to fix on some sentimental stuff or other not fit to sing!"

"My goodness, Corney!" cried Hester, "what do you call the song you've just been singing?"

> In the days when my heart was aching
> Like the shell of an overtuned lyre.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

She laughed prettily, not scornfully, then striking an attitude of the mock heroic, added, on the spur of the moment—

> "And the oven was burning, not baking,
> The tarts of my soul's desire!"

—for at the moment one of those fumes the kitchen was constantly firing at the drawing-room, came storming up as if a door had been suddenly opened in yet lower regions. Cornelius was too much offended and self-occupied to be amused, but both Mrs. Raymount and Vavasor laughed, the latter recognizing in Hester's extemporization a vein similar to his own. But Hester was already searching, and presently found a song to her mind—one, that was, fit for Cornelius.

"Come now, Corney," she said; "here is a song I should like you to be able to sing!"

With that she turned to the keys, and sang a spirited ballad, of

which the following was the first stanza:

> This blow is for my brother:
> You lied away his life;
> This for his weeping mother,
> This for your own sweet wife;
> For you told that lie of another
> To pierce her heart with its knife.

And now indeed the singer was manifest; genius was plainly the soul of her art, and her art the obedient body to the informing genius. Vavasor was utterly enchanted, but too world-eaten to recognize the soul she almost waked in him for any other than the old one. Her mother thought she had never heard her sing so splendidly before.

The ballad was of a battle between two knights, a good and a bad—something like Browning's *Count Gismond*: the last two lines of it were—

> So the lie went up in the face of heaven
> And melted in the sun.

When Hester had sung these, she rose at once, her face white, her mouth set and her eyes gleaming. Vavasor felt *almost* as if he were no longer master of himself, *almost* as if he would have fallen down to kiss the hem of her garment, had he but dared to go near her. But she walked from the room vexed with the

emotion she was unable to control, and did not again appear.

The best thing in Vavasor was his love of music. He had cultivated not a little what gift he had, but it was only a small power, not of production, but of mere reproduction like that of Cornelius, though both finer and stronger in quality. He did not really believe in music—he did not really believe in anything except himself. He professed to adore it, and imagined he did, because his greatest pleasure lay in hearing his own verses well sung by a pretty girl who would now and then steal, or try to steal, a glance at the poet from under her eyelids as she sang. On his way home he brooded over the delight of having his best songs sung by such a singer as Hester; and from that night fancied he had received a new revelation of what music was and could do, confessing to himself that a similar experience within the next fortnight would send him over head and ears in love with Hester—which must not be! Cornelius went half way with him, and to his questions arising from what Miss Raymount had said about the professional, assured him, 'pon honor, that that was all Hester's nonsense!

"*She* in training for a public singer!—But there's nothing she likes better than taking a rise out of a fellow," said Cornelius. "She would as soon think of singing in public as of taking a bar-maid's place in a public-house!"

"But why did you never tell me your sister was such an awful swell of a singer?" asked Vavasor.

"Do you think so? She ought to feel very much flattered! Why

I didn't tell you?—Oh, I don't know! I never heard her sing like that before. Upon my word I never did. I suppose it was because you were there. A brother's nobody, don't you know?"

This flattered Vavasor, as how should it not? and without the least idea of whither the spirit in the feet of his spirit was leading him, he went as often to the Raymounts' lodging as for very shame of intrusion he dared—that is, all but every night. But having, as he thought, discovered and learned thoroughly to understand her special vein, as he called it, he was careful not to bring any of his own slight windy things of leaf-blowing songs under Hester's notice—not, alas! that he thought them such, but that he judged it prudent to postpone the pleasure: she would require no small amount of training before she could quite enter into the spirit and special merit of them!

In the meantime as he knew a good song sometimes when he saw it, always when he heard her sing it, never actually displeased her with any he did bring under her notice, had himself a very tolerable voice, and was capable of managing it with taste and judgment, also of climbing upon the note itself to its summit, and of setting right with facility any fault explained to him, it came about by a scale of very natural degrees, that he found himself by and by, not a little to his satisfaction, in the relation to her of a pupil to a teacher. Hester in truth gave herself a good deal of trouble with him, in the endeavor, by no means an unsuccessful one, to improve the quality of his singing—his style, his expression, and even his way of modeling his tones. The

relation between them became therefore one which, had it then lasted, might have soon led to something like genuine intimacy —at least to some truer notion on the part of each of the kind of being the other was. But the day of separation arrived first; and it was only on his way back to London that Vavasor began to discover what a hold the sister of his fellow-clerk had taken of his thoughts and indeed of his heart—of the existence of which organ he had never before had any very convincing proof.

All the time he had not once brought his aunt and the Raymounts together.

CHAPTER X.
HESTER AND AMY

Hester did not miss Vavasor quite so much as he hoped she might, or as perhaps he believed she did. She had been interested in him mainly because she found him both receptive and capable of development in the matter of music—ready to understand, that is, and willing to be taught. To have such a man listen with respect to every word she said, never denying, defending or justifying what she might point out as a fault, but setting himself at once to the correction of the same, and in general with some measure of immediate success, could not fail to be not merely pleasant but flattering to her. Brothers, I suspect, have a good deal to answer for in the estimation of men by their sisters; their behavior at home leads them to prize the civilities of other men more highly than they deserve; brothers, I imagine, have therefore more to do than they will like to learn, with the making of those inferior men acceptable to their sisters, whose very presence is to themselves an annoyance. Women so seldom see a noble style of behavior at home!—so few are capable of distinguishing between ceremony and courtesy between familiarity and rudeness—of dismissing ceremony and retaining courtesy, of using familiarity and banishing rudeness! The nearer persons come to each other, the greater is the

room and the more are the occasions for courtesy; but just in proportion to their approach the gentleness of most men diminishes. Some will make the poor defense that it is unmanly to show one's feelings: it is unmanly, because conceited and cowardly to hide them, if, indeed, such persons have anything precious to hide. Other some will say, "Must I weigh my words with my familiar friend as if I had been but that moment presented to him?" I answer, It were small labor well spent to see that your coarse-grained evil self, doomed to perdition, shall not come between your friend and your true, noble, humble self, fore-ordained to eternal life. The Father cannot bear rudeness in his children any more than wrong:—my comparison is unfit, for rudeness is a great and profound wrong, and that to the noblest part of the human being, while a mere show of indifference is sometimes almost as bad as the rudest words. And these are of those faults of which the more guilty a man is, the less is he conscious of the same.

Vavasor did not move the deepest in Hester. How should he? With that deepest he had no developed relation. There were worlds of thought and feeling already in motion in Hester's universe, while the vaporous mass in him had hardly yet begun to stir. To use another simile, he was living on the surface of his being, the more exposed to earthquake and volcanic eruption that he had never yet suspected the existence of the depths profound whence they rise, while she was already a discoverer in the abysses of the nature gradually yet swiftly unfolding in her—

every discovery attended with fresh light for the will, and a new sense of power in the consciousness. When Vavasor was gone she turned with greater diligence to her musical studies.

Amy Amber continued devoted to her, and when she was practicing would hover about her as often and as long as she could. Her singing especially seemed to enchant and fascinate the girl. But a change had already begun to show itself in her. The shadow of an unseen cloud was occasionally visible on her forehead, and unmistakable pools were left in her eyes by the ebb-tide of tears. In her service, notwithstanding, she was nowise less willing, scarcely less cheerful. The signs of her discomfort grew deeper, and showed themselves oftener as the days went on. She moved about her work with less elasticity, and her smile did not come so quickly. Both Hester and her mother saw the change, and marked even an occasional frown. In the morning, when she was always the first up, she was generally cheerful, but as the day passed the clouds came. Happily, however, her diligence did not relax. Sound in health, and by nature as active as cheerful, she took a positive delight in work. Doing was to her as natural as singing to the birds. In a household with truth at the heart of it she would have been invaluable, and happy as the day was long. As it was, she was growing daily less and less happy.

One night she appeared in Hester's room as usual before going to bed. The small, neat face had lost for the time a great part of its beauty, and was dark as a little thunder-cloud. Its black, shadowy brows were drawn together over its luminous black eyes; its red

lips were large and pouting, and their likeness to a rosebud gone.

Its cheeks were swollen, and its whole aspect revealed the spirit of wrath roused at last, and the fire alight in the furnace of the bosom. She tried to smile, but what came was the smile of a wound rather than a mouth.

"My poor Amy! what is the matter?" cried Hester, sorry, but hardly surprised; for plainly things had been going from bad to worse.

The girl burst into a passionate fit of weeping. She threw herself in wild abandonment on the floor, and sobbed; then, as if to keep herself from screaming aloud, stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, kicked with her little feet, and beat her little hands on the floor. She was like a child in a paroxysm of rage—only that with her its extravagance came of the effort to overcome it.

"Amy, dear, you mustn't be naughty!" said Hester, kneeling down beside her and taking hold of her arm.

"I'm not naughty, miss—at least I am doing all I can to get over it," she sobbed.

Thereupon she ceased suddenly, and sitting up on the floor, her legs doubled under her in eastern fashion, looked straight at Hester, and said thoughtfully, as if the question had just come, with force to make her forget the suffering she was in—

"I *should* like to know how you would do in my place—that I should, miss!"

The words spoken, her eyes fell, and she sat still as a statue,

seeming steadfastly to regard her own lap.

"I am afraid, if I were in your place, I should do nothing so well as you, Amy," said Hester. "But come, tell me what is the matter. What puts you in such a misery?"

"Oh, it's not one thing nor two things nor twenty things!" answered Amy, looking sullen with the feeling of heaped-up wrong. "What *would* my mother say to see me served so! *She* used to trust me everywhere and always! I don't understand how those two prying suspicious old maids *can* be *my* mother's sisters!"

She spoke slowly and sadly, without raising her eyes.

"Don't they behave well to you, my poor child?" said Hester.

"It's not," returned Amy, "that they watch every bit I put in my mouth—I don't complain of that, for they're poor—at least they're always saying so, and of course they want to make the most of me; but not to be trusted one moment out of their sight except they know exactly where I am—to be always suspected, and followed and watched, and me working my hardest—that's what drives me wild, Miss Raymount. I'm afraid they'll make me hate them out and out—and them my own flesh and blood, too, which can't but be wicked! I bore it very well for a while, for at first it only amused me. I said to myself, 'They'll soon know me better!' But when I found they only got worse, I got tired of it altogether; and when I got tired of it I got cross, and grew more and more cross, till now I can't *bear* it. I'm not used to be cross, and my own crossness is much harder to bear than theirs.

If I could have kept the good temper people used to praise me for to my mother, I shouldn't mind; but it *is* hard to lose it this way! I don't know how to get on without it! If there don't come a change somehow soon, I shall run away—I shall indeed, Miss Raymount. There are many would be glad enough to have me for the work I can get through."

She jumped to her feet, gave a little laugh, merry-sad, and before Hester could answer her, said—

"You're going away so soon, miss! Let me do your hair to-night. I want to brush it every night till you go."

"But you are tired, my poor child!" said Hester compassionately.

"Not too tired for that: it will rest me, and bring back my good temper, It will come to me again through your hair, miss."

"No, no, Amy," said Hester, a little conscience-stricken, "you can't have any of mine. I have none to spare. You will rather brush some into me, Amy. But do what you like with my hair."

As Amy lovingly combed and brushed the long, wavy overflow of Hester's beauty, Hester tried to make her understand that she must not think of good-temper and crossness merely as things that could be put into her and taken out of her. She tried to make her see that nothing really our own can ever be taken from us by any will or behavior of another; that Amy had had a large supply of good-temper laid ready to her hand, but that it was not hers until she had made it her own by choosing and willing to be good-tempered when she was disinclined—holding

it fast with the hand of determination when the hand of wrong would snatch it from her.

"Because I have a book on my shelves," she said, "it is not therefore mine; when I have read and understood it, then it is a little mine; when I love it and do what it tells me, then it is altogether mine: it is like that with a good temper: if you have it sometimes, and other times not, then it is not yours; it lies in you like that book on my table—a thing priceless were it your own, but as it is, a thing you can't keep even against your poor weak old aunts."

As she said all this, Hester felt like a hypocrite, remembering her own sins. Amy Amber listened quietly, brushing steadily all the time, but scarcely a shadow of Hester's meaning crossed her mind. If she was in a good temper, she was in a good temper; if she was in a bad temper, why there she was, she and her temper! She had not a notion of the possibility of having a hand in the making of her own temper—not a notion that she was in any manner or measure accountable in regard to the temper she might find herself in. Could she have been persuaded to attempt to overcome it, the moment she failed, as of course every one will many times, Amy would have concluded the thing required an impossibility. Yet the effort she made, and with success, to restrain the show of her anger, was far from slight. But for this, there would, long ere now, have been rain and wind, thunder and lightning between her and her aunts. She was alive without the law, not knowing what mental conflict was; the moment she

recognized that she was bound to conquer herself, she would die in conscious helplessness, until strength and hope were given her from the well of the one pure will.

Hester kissed her, and though she had not understood, she went to bed a little comforted. When the Raymounts departed, two or three days after, they left her at the top of the cliff-stair, weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.
AT HOME

When the Raymounts reached London, hardly taking time to unpack her box, Hester went to see her music-mistress, and make arrangement for re-commencing study with her.

Miss Dasomma was one of God's angels; for if he makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flaming fire, much more are those live fountains which carry his gifts to their thirsting fellows his angels. Meeting not very rarely with vulgar behavior in such as regarded her from the heights of rank or money, she was the more devoted to a pupil who looked up to her as she deserved, recognizing in her a power of creation. Of Italian descent, of English birth, and of German training, she had lived in intimacy with some of the greatest composers of her day, but the enthusiasm for her art which possessed her was mainly the outcome of her own genius. Hence it was natural that she should exercise a forming influence on every pupil at all worthy of her, and without her Hester could never have become what she was. For not merely had she opened her eyes to a vision of Music in something of her essential glory, but, herself capable of the hardest and truest work, had taught her the absolute necessity of labor to one who would genuinely enjoy, not to say cause others to enjoy, what the masters in the art had brought out of the infinite.

Hester had doubtless heard and accepted the commonplaces so common concerning the dignity and duty of labor—as if labor mere were anything irrespective of its character, its object and end! but without Miss Dasomma she would not have learned that Labor is grand officer in the palace of Art; that at the root of all ease lies slow, and, for long, profitless-seeming labor, as at the root of all grace lies strength; that ease is the lovely result of forgotten toil, sunk into the spirit, and making it strong and ready; that never worthy improvisation flowed from brain of poet or musician unused to perfect his work with honest labor; that the very disappearance of toil is by the immolating hand of toil itself. He only who bears his own burden can bear the burden of another; he only who has labored shall dwell at ease, or help others from the mire to the rock.

Miss Dasomma was ready to begin at once, and Hester gradually increased her hours of practice, till her mother interfered lest she should injure her health. But there was in truth little danger, for Hester was forcing nothing—only indulging to the full her inclination, eager to perfect her own delight, and the more eager that she was preparing delight for others.

They had not been home more than a week, when one Sunday morning, that is at four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Vavasor called—which was not quite agreeable to Mrs. Raymount, who liked their Sundays kept quiet. He was shown to Mr. Raymount's study.

"I am sorry," he said, "to call on a Sunday, but I am not so

enviably situated as you, Mr. Raymount; I have not my time at my command. When other people make their calls. I am a prisoner."

He spoke as if his were an exceptional case, and the whole happy world beside reveled in morning calls.

Mr. Raymount was pleased with him afresh, for he spoke modestly, with implicit acknowledgment of the superior position of the elder man. They fell to talking of the prominent question of the day, and Mr. Raymount was yet more pleased when he found the young aristocrat ready to receive enlightenment upon it. But the fact was that Vavasor cared very little about the matter, and had a facility for following where he was led; and, always preferring to make himself agreeable where there was no restraining reason, why should he not gratify the writer of articles by falling in with what he advanced? He had a light, easy way of touching on things, as if all his concessions, conclusions, and concurrences were merest matter of course; and thus making himself appear master of the situation over which he merely skimmed on insect-wing. Mr. Raymount took him not merely for a man of thought but one of some originality even—capable at least of forming an opinion of his own, as is, he was in the habit of averring, not one in ten thousand.

In relation to the wider circle of the country, Mr. Vavasor was so entirely a nobody, that the acquaintance of a writer even so partially known as Mr. Raymount was something to him. There is a tinselly halo about the writer of books that affects many minds the most *practical*, so called; they take it to indicate

power, which, with most, means ability in the direction of one's own way, or his party's, and so his own in the end. Since his return he had instituted inquiries concerning Mr. Raymount, and finding both him and his family in good repute, complained of indeed as exclusive, he had told his aunt as much concerning them as he judged prudent, hinting it would give him pleasure if she should see fit to call upon Mrs. Raymount. Miss Vavasor being, however, naturally jealous of the judgment of young men, pledged herself to nothing, and made inquiries for herself. Learning thereby at length, after much resultless questioning—for her world but just touched in its course the orbit of that of the Raymounts—that there was rather a distinguished-looking girl in the family, and having her own ideas for the nephew whose interests she had, for the sake of the impending title made her own, she delayed and put off and talked the thing over, and at last let it rest; while he went the oftener to see the people she thus declined calling upon.

On this his first visit he stayed the evening, and was afresh installed as a friend of the family. Although it was Sunday, and her ideas also a little strict as to religious proprieties, Hester received him cordially where her mother received him but kindly; and falling into the old ways, he took his part in the hymns, anthems, and what other forms of sacred music followed the family-tea: and so the evening passed without irksomeness—nor the less enjoyably that Cornelius was spending it with a friend.

The tone, expression, and power of Hester's voice astonished Vavasor afresh. He was convinced, and told her so, that even in the short time since he heard it last, it had improved in all directions. And when, after they had had enough of singing, she sat down and extemporized in a sacred strain, turning the piano almost into an organ with the sympathy of her touch, and weaving holy airs without end into the unrolling web of her own thought, Vavasor was so moved as to feel more kindly disposed toward religion—by which he meant "going to church, and all that sort of thing, don't you know? "—than ever in his life before. He did not call the next Sunday, but came on the Saturday; and the only one present who was not pleased with him was Miss Dasomma, who happened also to spend the evening there.

I have already represented Hester's indebtedness to her teacher as such that therein she would be making discoveries all her life. Devout as well as enthusiastic, human as well as artistic, she was not an angel of music only, but had for many years been a power in the family for good—as indeed in every family in which she counted herself doing anything worth doing. Much too generous and helpful to have saved money, she was now, in middle age, working as hard as she had ever worked in her youth. Not a little experienced in the ways of the world, and possessing a high ideal in the memories of a precious friendship, against which to compare the ways of smaller mortals, she did not find her atmosphere gladdened by the presence of Mr. Vavasor's. With tact enough to take his cue from the family, he treated her with

studious politeness; but Miss Dasomma did not like Mr. Vavasor. She had to think before she could tell why, for there is a spiritual instinct also, which often takes the lead of the understanding, and has to search and analyze itself for its own explanation. But the question once roused, she prosecuted it, and in the shadow of a curtain, while Hester was playing, watched his countenance, trying to read it—to read, that is, what the owner of that face never meant to write, but could no more help writing there than he could help having a face. What a man is lies as certainly upon his countenance as in his heart, though none of his acquaintance may be able to read it. Their very intercourse with him may have rendered it more difficult.

Miss Dasomma's conclusion was, that Vavasor was a man of good instincts—as perhaps who is not?—but without moral development, pleased with himself, and not undesirous of pleasing others consistently with his idea of dignity—at present more than moderately desirous of pleasing Hester Raymount, therefore showing to the best possible advantage. "But," thought Miss Dasomma, "if this be his best, what may not his worst be?" That he had no small capacity for music was plain, but if, as she judged, the faculty was unassociated in him with truth of nature, that was so much to the other side of his account, inasmuch as it rendered him the more dangerous. For, at Hester's feet in the rare atmosphere and faint twilight of music, how could he fail to impress her with an opinion of himself more favorable than just? To interfere, however, where was no solid ground,

would be to waste the power that might be of use; but she was confident that if for a moment Hester saw him as she did, she could no more look on him with favor. At the same time she did not think he could be meaning more than the mere passing of his time agreeably; she knew well the character of his aunt, and the relation in which he stood to her. In any case she could for the present only keep a gentle watch over the mind of her pupil. But that pupil had a better protection in the sacred ambition stirring in her. Concerning that she had not as yet held communication even with the one best able to understand it. For Hester had already had sufficient experience to know that it is a killing thing to talk about what you mean to do. It is to let the wind in upon a delicate plant, requiring a long childhood under glass, open to sun and air, closed to wind and frost.

CHAPTER XII.
A BEGINNING

The Raymounts lived in no fashionable or pseudo-fashionable part of London, but in a somewhat peculiar house, though by no means such outwardly, in an old square in the dingy, smoky, convenient, healthy district of Bloomsbury. One of the advantages of this position to a family with soul in it, that strange essence which *will* go out after its kind, was, that on two sides at least it was closely pressed by poor neighbors. Artisans, small tradespeople, out-door servants, poor actors and actresses lived in the narrow streets thickly branching away in certain directions. Hence, most happily for her, Hester had grown up with none of that uncomfortable feeling so many have when brought even into such mere contact with the poor as comes of passing through their streets on foot—a feeling often in part composed of fear, often in part of a false sense of natural superiority, engendered of being better dressed, better housed, and better educated. It was in a measure owing to her having been from childhood used to the sight of such, that her sympathies were so soon and so thoroughly waked on the side of suffering humanity. With parents like hers she had never been in danger of having her feelings or her insight blunted by the assumption of such a relation to the poor as that of spiritual police-agent, one who arrogates the right of

walking into their houses without introduction, and with at best but faint apology: to show respect if you have it, is the quickest way to teach reverence; if you do not show respect, do not at least complain should the recoil of your own behavior be more powerful than pleasant: if you will shout on the mountain side in spring, look out for avalanches.

Those who would do good to the poor must attempt it in the way in which best they could do good to people of their own standing. They must make their acquaintance first. They must know something of the kind of the person they would help, to learn if help be possible from their hands. Only man can help man; money without man can do little or nothing, most likely less than nothing. As our Lord redeemed the world by being a man, the true Son of the true Father, so the only way for a man to help men is to be a true man to this neighbor and that. But to seek acquaintance with design is a perilous thing, nor unlikely to result in disappointment, and the widening of the gulf both between the individuals, and the classes to which they belong. It seems to me that, in humble acceptance of common ways, we must follow the leadings of providence, and make acquaintance in the so-called lower classes by the natural working of the social laws that bring men together. What is the divine intent in the many needs of humanity, and the consequent dependence of the rich on the poor, even greater than that of the poor on the rich, but to bring men together, that in far-off ways at first they may be compelled to know each other? The man who treats his fellow

as a mere mean for the supply of his wants, and not as a human being with whom he has to do, is an obstructing clot in the human circulation.

Does any one ask for rules of procedure? I answer, there are none to be had; such must be discovered by each for himself. The only way to learn the rules of any thing practical is to begin to do the thing. We have enough of knowledge in us—call it insight, call it instinct, call it inspiration, call it natural law, to begin any thing required of us. The sole way to deal with the profoundest mystery that is yet not too profound to draw us, is to begin to do some duty revealed by the light from the golden fringe of its cloudy vast. If it reveal nothing to be done, there is nothing there for us. No man can turn his attention in the mere direction of a thing, without already knowing enough of that thing to carry him further in the knowledge of it by the performance of what it involves of natural action. Let every simplest relation towards human being, if it be embodied but in the act of buying a reel of cotton or a knife, be recognized as a relation with, a meeting of that human soul. In its poor degree let its outcome be in truth and friendliness. Allow nature her course, and next time let the relation go farther. To follow such a path is the way to find both the persons to help and the real modes of helping them. In fact, to be true to a man in any way is to help him. He who goes out of common paths to look for opportunity, leaves his own door and misses that of his neighbor. It is by following the path we are in that we shall first reach somewhere. He who does as I say will

find his acquaintance widen and widen with growing rapidity; his heart will fill with the care of humanity, and his hands with its help. Such care will be death to one's own cares, such help balm to one's own wounds. In a word, he must cultivate, after a simple human manner, the acquaintance of his neighbors, who would be a neighbor where a neighbor may be wanted. So shall he fulfil the part left behind of the work of the Master, which He desires to finish through him.

Of course I do not imagine that Hester understood this. She had no theory of carriage towards the poor, neither confined her hope of helping to them. There are as many in every other class needing help as among the poor, and the need, although it wear different dresses, is essentially the same in all. To make the light go up in the heart of a rich man, if a more difficult task, is just as good a deed as to make it go up in the heart of a poor man. But with her strong desire to carry help where it was needed, with her genuine feeling of the blood relationship of all human beings, with her instinctive sense that one could never begin too soon to do that which had to be done, she was in the right position to begin; and from such a one opportunity will not be withheld.

She went one morning into a small shop in Steevens's Road, to buy a few sheets of music-paper. The woman who kept it had been an acquaintance almost from the first day of their abode in the neighborhood. In the course of their talk Mrs. Baldwin mentioned that she was in some anxiety about a woman in the house who was far from well, and in whom she thought Mrs.

Raymount would be interested.

"Mamma is always ready," said Hester, "to help where she can. Tell me about her."

"Well, you see, miss," replied Mrs. Baldwin, "we're not in the way of having to do with such people, for my husband's rather particular about who he lets the top rooms to; only let them we must to one or another, for times is hard an' children is many, an' it's all as we can do to pay our way an' nothing over; only thank God we've done it up to this present; an' the man looked so decent, as well as the woman, an' that pitiful-like—more than she did—that I couldn't have the heart to send them away such a night as it was, bein' a sort o' drizzly an' as cold as charity, an' the poor woman plainly not in a state to go wanderin' about seekin' a place to lay her head; though to be sure there's plenty o' places for such like, only as the poor man said himself, they did want to get into a decent place, which it wasn't easy to get e'er a one as would take them in. They had three children with them, the smallest o' them pickaback on the biggest; an' it's strange, miss—I never could compass it, though I atten' chapel reg'lar—how it goes to yer heart I mean, to see one human bein' lookin' arter another! But my husban', as was natural, he bein' a householder, an' so many of his own, was shy o' children; for children, you know, miss, 'cep' they be yer own, ain't nice things about a house; an' them poor things wouldn't be a credit nowheres, for they're ragged enough—an' a good deal more than enough—only they were pretty clean, as poor children go, an' there was nothing, as

I said to him, in the top-rooms, as they could do much harm to. The man said theirs weren't like other children, for they had been brought up to do the thing as they were told, an' to remember that things that belonged to other people was to be handled as sich; an', said he, they were always too busy earnin' their bread to be up to tricks, an' in fact were always too tired to have much spare powder to let off; so the long an' short on it was, we took 'em in, an' they've turned out as quiet an' well-behaved a family as you could desire; an' if they ain't got jest the most respectable way o' earnin' their livelihood, that may be as much their misfortin as their fault, as my husband he said. An' I'm sure it's not lettin' lodgin's to sich I ever thought I should come to—though, for the matter o' that, I never could rightly understand what made one thing respectable an' another not."

"What is their employment then?" asked Hester.

"Something or other in the circus-way, as far as I can make out from what they tell me. Anyway they didn't seem to have no engagement when they come to the door, but they paid the first week down afore they entered. You see, miss, the poor woman she give me a kind of a look up into the face that reminded me of my Susie, as I lost, you know, miss, a year ago—it was that as made me feel to hate the thought of sending her away. Oh, miss, ain't it a mercy everybody ain't so like your own! We'd have to ruin ourselves for them—we couldn't help it!"

"It will come to that one day, though," said Hester to herself, "and then we sha'n't he ruined either."

"So then!" Mrs. Baldwin went on, "the very next day as was, the doctor had to be sent for, an' there was a babby! The doctor he come from the 'ospital, as nice a gentleman as you'd wish to see, miss, an' waited on her as if she'd been the first duchess in the land. 'I'm sure,' said my good husban' to me, 'it's a lesson to all of us to see how he do look after her as'll never pay him a penny for the care as he's takin' of her!' But my husban' he's that soft hearted, miss, where anything i' the baby-line's a goin' on! an' now the poor thing's not at all strong, an' ain't a-gettin' back of her stren'th though we do what we can with her, an' send her up what we can spare. You see they pay for their house-room, an' then ain't got much over!" added the good woman in excuse of her goodness. "But I fancy it's more from anxiety as to what's to come to them, than that anything's gone wrong with her. They're not out o' money yet quite, I'm glad to say, though he don't seem to ha' got nothing to do yet, so far as I can make out; they're rather close like. That sort o' trade, ye see, miss, the demand's not steady in it. It's not like skilled labor, as my husban' says; though to see what them young ones has to go through, it's labor enough an' to spare; an' if it ain't just what they call skilled, it's what no one out o' the trade can make a mark at. Would you mind goin' up an' havin' a look at her, miss?"

Hester begged Mrs. Baldwin to lead the way, and followed her up the stairs.

The top-rooms were two poor enough garret ones, nowise too good, it seemed to Hester, for the poorest of human kind. In

the largest, the ceiling sloped to the floor till there was but just height enough left for the small chest of drawers of painted deal to stand back to the wall. A similar washstand and a low bed completed the furniture. The last was immediately behind the door, and there lay the woman, with a bolster heightened by a thin petticoat and threadbare cloak under her head. Hester saw a pale, patient, worn face, with eyes large, thoughtful, and troubled.

"Here's a kind lady come to see you, Mrs.!" said her landlady.

This speech annoyed Hester. She hated to be called kind, and perhaps spoke the more kindly to the poor woman that she was displeased with Mrs. Baldwin's patronizing of her.

"It's dreary for you to lie here alone, I'm afraid," she said, and stroked the thin hand on the coverlid. "May I sit a few minutes beside you? I was once in bed for a whole month, and found it very wearisome. I was at school then. I don't mind being ill when I have my mother."

The woman gazed up at her with eyes that looked like the dry wells of tears.

"It's very kind of you, miss!" she said. "It's a long stair to come up."

She lay and gazed, and said nothing more. Her life was of a negative sort just at present. Her child lay asleep on her arm, a poor little washed-out rag of humanity, but evidently dear from the way she now and then tried to look at it, which was not easy to her.

Hester sat down and tried to talk, but partly from the fear

of tiring one too weak to answer more than a word now and then, she found it hard to get on. Religion she could not talk off-hand. Once in her life she had, from a notion of duty, made the attempt, with the consequence of feeling like a hypocrite. For she found herself speaking so of the things she fed on in her heart as to make them look to herself the merest commonplaces in the world! Could she believe in them, and speak of them, with such dull dogmatic stupidity? She came to the conclusion that she had spoken without a message, and since then she had taken care not to commit the offence again.

A dead silence came.

"What can be the good of a common creature like me going to visit people?" she said to herself. "I have nothing to say—feel nothing in me—but a dull love that would bless if it could! And what would words be if I had them?"

For a few moments she sat thus silent, growing more and more uncomfortable. But just ere the silent became unendurable, a thought appeared in the void.

"What a fool I am!" she said again to herself. "I am like little Mark when he cried because he had only a shilling and saw a boy spend a penny on a lovely spotted horse! Here have I been all my life wanting to give my fellow-creatures a large share of my big cake, and the first time I have an opportunity, I forget all about it! Here it lies locked in my chest, like a dead bird in its cage!"

A few more moments she sat silent but no longer embarrassed thinking how to begin. The baby woke and began to whimper.

The mother, who rarely let him off her arm, because then she was not able to take him till help came, drew him to her, and began to nurse him; and the heart of the young, strong woman was pierced to the quick at sight of how ill fitted was the mother for what she had to do. "Can God be love?" she said to herself. "If I could help her! It will go on like this for weeks and months, I suppose!"

She had yet to learn that the love of God is so deep he can be satisfied with nothing less than getting as near as it is possible for the Father to draw nigh to his children—and that is into absolute contact of heart with heart, love with love, being with being. And as that must be wrought out from the deepest inside, divine law working itself up through our nature into our consciousness and will, and claiming us as divine, who can tell by what slow certainties of approach God is drawing nigh to the most suffering of his creatures? Only, if we so comfort ourselves with such thoughts as to do nothing, we, when God and they meet, shall find ourselves out in the cold—cold infinitely worse than any trouble this world has to show. The baby made no complaint against the slow fountain of his life, but made the best he could of it, while his mother every now and then peered down on him as lovingly as ever happy mother on her first-born. The same God is at the heart of all mothers, and all sins against children are against the one Father of children, against the Life itself.

A few moments only, and Hester began to sing—low and soft. Having no song sought out for the occasion, she took a common

hymn, sung in all churches and chapels, with little thought or feeling in it, the only one she could think of. I need not say she put into it as much of sweetness and smoothing strength as she could make the sounds hold, and so perhaps made up a little for its lack. It is a curious question why sacred song should so often be dull and commonplace. With a trembling voice she sang, and with more anxiety and shyness than she remembered having ever felt. It was neither a well-instructed nor critically disposed audience she had, but the reason was that never before had she been so anxious for some measure of success. Not daring to look up, she sat like one rebuked, with the music flowing over her lips like the slow water from the urn of some naiad of stone fountain. She had her reward; for when the hymn was done, and she at length ventured to raise her eyes, she saw both mother and babe fast asleep. Her heart ascended on a wave of thanks to the giver of song. She rose softly, crept from the house, and hastened home to tell her mother what she had heard and seen. The same afternoon a basket of nice things arrived at the shop for the poor lodger in the top-room.

The care of the Raymounts did not relax till she was fairly on her feet again; neither till then did a day pass on which Hester did not see her, and scarcely one on which she did not sing to her and her baby. Several times she dressed the child, singing to him all the time. It was generally in the morning she went, because then she was almost sure to find them alone. Of the father she had seen next to nothing. On the few occasions when he happened

to be at home, the moment she entered he crept out, with a shy, humble salutation, as if ashamed of himself. All she had ever had time to see was that he was a man of middle height, with a strong face and frame, dressed like a workman. The moment he rose to go, his three boys rose also, and following him from the room seemed to imitate his salutation as they passed her—all but the youngest, who made her a profound bow accompanied by a wonderful smile. The eldest was about the age of twelve, the youngest about seven. They were rather sickly looking, but had intelligent faces and inoffensive expressions.

Mrs. Baldwin continued to bear the family good witness. She confessed they never seemed to have much to eat, but said they paid their lodgings regularly, and she had nothing to complain of. The place had indeed been untidy, not to say dirty, at first, but as soon as the mother was about again, it began to amend, and now, really, for people in their position, it was wonderfully well.

CHAPTER XIII.
A PRIVATE EXHIBITION

Hester had not been near them for two or three days. It was getting dusk, but she would just run across the square and down the street, and look in upon them for a moment. She had not been brought up to fear putting her foot out of doors unaccompanied. It was but a few steps, and she knew almost every house she had to pass. To-morrow was Sunday, and she felt as if she could not go to church without having once more seen the little flock committed in a measure to her humble charge. Not that she imagined anything sole in her relation towards them; for she had already begun to see that we have to take care of *parts* of each other, those parts, namely, which we can best help. From the ambition both of men and women to lord it over individuals have arisen worse evils perhaps than from a wider love of empery. When a man desires personal influence or power over any one, he is of the thieves and robbers who enter not in by the door. But the right and privilege of ministering belongs to every one who has the grace to claim it and be a fellow-worker with God.

Hester found Mrs. Baldwin busy in the shop, and with a nod passed her, and went up the stair. But when she opened the door, she stood for a moment hesitating whether to enter, or close it again with an apology and return, for it seemed as if preparations

for a party had been made. The bed was pushed to the back of the room, and the floor was empty, except for a cushion or two, like those of an easy chair, lying in the middle of it. The father and the three boys were standing together near the fire, like gentlemen on the hearth-rug expecting visitors. She glanced round in search of the mother. Some one was bending over the bed in the farther corner; the place was lighted with but a single candle, and she thought it was she, stooping over her baby; but a moment's gaze made it plain that the back was that of a man: could it be the doctor again? Was the poor woman worse? She entered and approached the father, who then first seeing who it was that had knocked and looked in, pulled off the cap he invariably wore, and came forward with a bashful yet eager courtesy.

"I hope your wife is not worse," said Hester.

"No', miss, I hope not. She's took a bit bad. We can't always avoid it in our profession, miss."

"I don't understand you," she answered, feeling a little uneasy. —Were there horrors to be revealed of which she had surmised nothing?

"If you will do us the honor to take a seat, miss, we shall be only too happy to show you as much as you may please to look upon with favor."

Hester shuddered involuntarily, but mastered herself. The man saw her hesitate, and resumed.

"You see, miss, this is how it was. Dr. Christopher—that's the gentleman there, a lookin' after mother—he's been that kind to

her an' me an' all on us in our trouble, an' never a crown-piece to offer him—which I'm sure no lady in the land could ha' been better attended to than she've been—twixt him an' you, miss—so we thought as how we'd do our best for him, an' try an' see whether amongst us we couldn't give him a pleasant evenin' as it were, just to show as we was grateful. So we axed him to tea, an' he come, like the gen'leman he be, an' so we shoved the bed aside an' was showin' him a bit on our craft, just a trick or two, miss—me an' the boys here—stan' forward, Robert an' the rest of you an' make your bows to the distinguished company as honors you with their presence to cast an eye on you an' see what you can show yourselves capable of."

Here Mr. Christopher—Hester had not now heard his name for the first time, though she had never seen him before—turned, and approached them.

"She'll be all right in a minute or two, Franks," he said.

"You told her, doctor, the boy ain't got the smallest hurt? It 'ud break my heart nigh as soon as hers to see the Sarpint come to grief."

"She knows that well enough; only, you see, we can't always help letting the looks of things get a hold of us in spite of the facts. That's how so many people come to go out of their wits. But I think for the present it will be better to drop it."

Franks turned to Hester to explain.

"One of the boys, miss—that's him—not much of him—the young Sarpint of the Prairie, we call him in the trade—he don't

seem to ha' much amiss with him, do he now, miss?—he had a bit of a fall—only on them pads—a few minutes ago, the more shame to the Sarpint, the rascal!" Here he pretended to hit the Sarpint, who never moved a coil in consequence, only smiled. "But he ain't the worse, never a hair—or a scale I should rather say, to be kensistent. Bless you, we all knows how to fall equally as well's how to get up again! Only it's the most remarkable thing, an' you would hardly believe it of any woman, miss, though she's been married fourteen years come next Candlemas, an' use they say's a second natur', it's never proved no second nor no third natur' with her, for she's got no more used to seein' the children, if it's nothin' but standin' on their heads, than if it was the first time she'd ever heard o' sich a thing. An' for standin' on my head—I don't mean me standin' on my own head, that she don't mind no more'n if it was a pin standin' on its head, which it's less the natur' of a pin to do, as that's the way she first made acquaintance with me, seein' me for the first time in her life upside down, which I think sometimes it would be the better way for women to choose their husbands in general, miss, for it's a bad lot we are! But as to seein' of her own flesh an' blood, that's them boys, all on 'em, miss, a standin' on my head, or it might be one on my head an' the other two on my shoulders, that she never come to look at fair. She can't abide it, miss. By some strange okylar delusion she takes me somehow for somewheres about the height of St. Paul's, which if you was to fall off the ball, or even the dome of the same, you *might* break your neck an' a few bones besides, miss.

But bless you, there ain't no danger, an' she knows too, there ain't, only, as the doctor says, she can't abide the look o' the thing. You see, miss, we're all too much taken wi' the appearance o' things—the doctor's right there!—an' if it warn't for that, there's never a juggler could get on with his tricks, for it's when you're so taken up with what he wants you to see, that he does the thing he wants you not to see. But as the doctor thinks it better to drop it, it's drop it we will, an' wait till a more convenient time—that is, when mother'll be a bit stronger. For I hope neither you, miss, nor the doctor, won't give us up quite, seem' as how we have a kind of a claim upon you—an' no offense, miss, to you, or Mr. Christopher, sir!"

Hester, from whose presence the man had hitherto always hastened to disappear, was astonished at this outpouring; but Franks was emboldened by the presence of the doctor. The moment, however, that his wife heard him give up thus their little private exhibition in honor of the doctor, she raised herself on her elbow.

"Now, you'll do no such a thing, John Franks!" she said with effort. "It's ill it would become me, for my whims, as I can't help, no more nor the child there, to prewent you from showin' sich a small attention to the gentleman as helped me through my trouble—God bless him, for it can't be no pleasure! So I'm not agoin' to put on no airs as if I was a fine lady. I've got to get used to't—that's the short an' the long of it!—Only I'm slow at it!" she added with a sigh, "Up you go, Moxy!"

Franks looked at the doctor. The doctor nodded his head as much as to say, "You had better do as she wishes;" but Hester saw that the eyes of the young man were all the time more watchful of the woman than of the performance.

Immediately Franks, with a stage-bow, offered Hester a chair. She hesitated a moment, for she felt shy of Mr. Christopher: but as she had more fear of not behaving as she ought to the people she was visiting, she sat down, and became for the first time in her life a spectator of the feats of a family of acrobats.

There might have seemed little remarkable in the display to one in the occasional habit of seeing such things, and no doubt to Mr. Christopher it had not much that was new; but to Hester what each and all of them were capable of was astonishing—more astonishing than pleasant, for she was haunted for some time after with a vague idea of prevailing distortion and dislocation. It was satisfactory nevertheless to know that much labor of a very thorough and persevering sort must have been expended upon their training before they could have come within sight of the proficiency they had gained. She believed this proficiency bore strong witness to some kind of moral excellence in them, and that theirs might well be a nobler way of life than many in which money is made more rapidly, and which are regarded as more respectable. There were but two things in the performance she found really painful: one, that the youngest seemed hardly equal to the physical effort required in those tricks, especially which he had as yet mastered but imperfectly: and it was very plain

this was the chief source of trial to the nerves of the mother. He was a sweet-looking boy, with a pale interesting face, bent on learning his part, but finding it difficult. The other thing that pained Hester, was, that the moment they began to perform, the manner of the father toward his children changed; his appearance also, and the very quality of his voice changed, so that he seemed hardly the same man. Just as some men alter their tone and speak roughly when they address a horse, so the moment Franks assumed the teacher, he assumed the tyrant, and spoke in a voice between the bark of a dog and the growl of a brown bear. But the roughness had in it nothing cruel, coming in part of his having had to teach other boys than his own, whom he found this mode of utterance assist him in compelling to give heed to his commands; in part from his idea of the natural embodiment of authority. He ordered his boys about with sternness, sometimes even fiercely, swore at them indeed occasionally, and made Hester feel very uncomfortable.

"Come, come, Franks!" said Mr. Christopher, on one of these outbreaks.

The man stood silent for a moment "like one forbid," then turning to Miss Raymount first, and next to his wife, said, taking of his cap,

"I humbly beg your pardon, ladies. I forgot what company I was in. But bless you, I mean nothing by it! It's only my way. Ain't it now, mates—you as knows the old man?"

"Yes, father; 'tain't nothin' more'n a way you've got,"

responded the boys all, the little one loudest.

"You don't mind it, do you—knowin' as it's only to make you mind what you're about?"

"No, father, *we* don't mind it. Go ahead, father," said the eldest.

"But," said Franks, and here interjected an imprecation, vulgarly called an oath, "if ever I hear one o' you a usin' of sich improper words, I'll break every bone in his carcase."

"Yes, father," answered the boys with one accord,

"It's all very well for fathers," he went on; "an' when you're fathers yourselves, an' able to thrash me—not as I think you'd want to, kids—I sha'nt ha' no call to meddle with you. So here goes!"

Casting a timid glance at Hester, in the assurance that he had set himself thoroughly right with her, showing himself as regardful of his boys' manners as could justly be expected of any parent, he proceeded with his lesson from the point where he had left off.

As to breaking the boys' bones, there hardly seemed any bones in them to break; gelatine at best seemed to be what was inside their muscles, so wonderful were their feats, and their pranks so strange. But their evident anxiety to please, their glances full of question as to their success in making their offering acceptable, their unconscious efforts to supply the lacking excitement of the public gaze, and, more than all, the occasional appearance amidst the marvels of their performance, in which their bodies seemed

mere india-rubber in response to their wills, of a strangely mingled touch of pathos, prevailed chiefly to interest Hester in their endeavor. This last would appear in the occasional suffering it caused Moxy, the youngest, to do as his father required, but oftener in the incongruity between the lovely expression of the boy's face, and the oddity of it when it became the field of certain comicalities required of him—especially when, stuck through between his feet, it had to grin like a demon carved on the folding seat of a choir-stall. Its sweet innocence, and the veil of suffering cast over its best grin, suggesting one of Raphael's cherubs attempting to play the imp, Hester found almost discordantly pathetic. She could have caught the child to her bosom, but alas! she had no right. She was already beginning to become aware of the difficulty of the question as to when or how much you may interfere with the outward conditions of men, or help them save through the channels of the circumstance in which you find them. The gentle suffering face seemed far from its own sphere, that of a stray boy-angel come to give her a lesson in the heavenly patience. His mother, whose yellow hair and clear gray eyes were just like his, covered her eyes with her hand, though she could not well see him from where she lay, every time he had to do anything by himself.

All at once the master of the ceremonies drew 'himself up, and wiping his forehead, gave a deep sigh, as much as to say, "I have done my best, and if I have not pleased you, the more is my loss, for I have tried hard," and the performance was over.

The doctor rose, and in a manly voice, whose tones were more pleasing to Hester than the look of the man, which she did not find attractive, proceeded to point out to Franks one or two precautions which his knowledge of anatomy enabled him to suggest, with regard to the training especially of the little Moxy. At the same time he expressed himself greatly pleased with what his host had been so kind as to show him, remarking that the power to do such things implied labor more continuous and severe than would have sufficed to the learning of two or three trades. In reply, Franks, mistaking the drift of the remark, and supposing it a gentle remonstrance with what the doctor counted a waste of labor, said, in a tone that sounded sad in the ears of Hester,

"What's a fellow to do, sir, when he 'ain't got no dinner? He must take to the work as takes to him. There was no other trade handy for me. My father he was a poor laborer, an' died early, o' hard work an' many mouths. My mother lived but a year after him an' I had to do for the kids whatever came first to hand. There was two on 'em dead 'atwixt me an' the next alive, so I was a long way ahead o' the rest, an' I couldn't ha' seen them goin' to the dogs for want o' bread while I was learnin' a trade, even if I had had one in my mind more than another, which I never had. I always was a lively lad, an' for want of anything better to do, for my father wouldn't have us go to work till we was strong enough, he said—an' for that matter it turned out well when the hard time came—I used to amuse myself an' the rest by standin' on my head

an' twistin' of my body into all sorts o' shapes—more'n it could well ha' been meant for to take. An' when the circus come round, I would make friends wi' the men, helpin' of 'em to look after their horses, an' they would sometimes, jest to amuse theirselves, teach me tricks I was glad enough to learn; an' they did say for a clod-hopper I got on very well. But that, you see, sir, set my monkey up, an' I took a hoath to myself I would do what none o' them could do afore I died—an' some thinks, sir," he added modestly, "as how I've done it—but that's neither here nor there. The p'int is, that, when my mother followed my father, an' the rest come upon my hands, I was able at once, goin' about an' showin' off, to gather a few coppers for 'em. But I soon found it was precious little I could get, no matter what I could do so long as my clothes warn't the right thing. So long as I didn't look my trade, they regarded my best as nothing but a clumsy imitation of my betters, an' laughed at what circus Joe said he couldn't do no better hisself. So I plucks up heart an' goes to Longstreet, as was the next market-town, an' into a draper's shop, an' tells 'em what I wanted, an' what it was for, promisin' to pay part out o' the first money I got, an' the rest as soon after as I could. The chaps in the shop, all but one on em', larfed at me; there's always one, or two p'raps, leastways sech as has been my expearence, sir an' miss, as is better'n most o' the rest, though it's a good thing everybody's not so soft-hearted as my wife there, or the world would soon be turned topsy turvey, an' the rogues have all the money out o' the good folk's pockets, an' them turned beggars

in their turn, an' then the rogues wouldn't give them nothink, an' so the good ones would die out, an' the world be full o' nothing but damned rascals—I beg your pard'n, miss. But as I was sayin', though I fared no better at the next shop nor the next, there was one good woman I come to in a little shop in a back street, an' she was a resemblin' of yourself, miss, an' she took an' set me up in my trade, a givin' of me a few remnants o' colored calico, God bless her! I set to with my needle, an' I dressed myself as like a proper clown as I could, an' painted my face beautiful, an' from that time till they was able to do some'at for theirselves, I managed to keep the kids in life. It wasn't much more, you see, but life's life though it bean't tip-top style. An' if they're none o' them doin' jest so well as they might, there's none o' them been in pris'n yet, an' that's a comfort as long as it lasts. An' when folk tells me I'm a doin' o' nothink o' no good, an' my trade's o' no use to nobody, I says to them, says I, 'Beggin' your pardon, sir, or ma'am, but do you call it nothink to fill—leastways to *nigh* fill four hungry little bellies at home afore I wur fifteen?' An' after that, they ain't in general said nothink; an' one gen'leman he give me 'alf-a-crown."

"The best possible answer you could have given, Franks," rejoined Mr. Christopher. "But I think perhaps you hardly understood what such objectors meant to say. They might have gone on to explain, only they hadn't the heart after what you told them, that most trades did something on both sides—not only fed the little ones at home, but did good to the persons for whom the

work was done; that the man, for instance, who cobbled shoes, gave a pair of dry feet to some old man at the same time that he filled his own child's hungry little stomach."

Franks was silent for a moment, thinking.

"I understand you, sir," he said. "But I think I knows trades as makes a deal o' money, an' them they makes it out on's the worse an' not the better. It's better to stand on a fellow's own head than to sell gin; an' I 'most think it's as good as the fire-work trade."

"You are quite right: there's not a doubt of it," answered Mr. Christopher. "But mind you," he went on, "I don't for a moment agree with those who tell you your trade is of no use. I was only explaining to you what they meant; for it's always best to know what people mean, even where they are wrong."

"Surely, sir, and I thank you kindly. Everybody's not so fair."

Here he broke into a quiet laugh, so pleased was he to have the doctor take his part.

"I think," Mr. Christopher went on, "to amuse people innocently is often the only good you can do them. When done lovingly and honestly, it is a Christian service."

This rather shocked Hester:—acrobatics a Christian service. With her grand dawning idea mingled yet some foolish notional remnants. She still felt as if going to church and there fixing your thoughts on the prayers and the lessons and the hymns and the sermon was the *serving* of God. She turned rather sharply towards the doctor, with a feeling that honesty called on her to speak; but not a word came to her lips, for the best of reasons—

that not a thought had arisen in answer to his bold assertion. She was one of the few who know when they have nothing to say. But Christopher had observed the movement of dissent.

"Suppose," he went on, but without addressing her more than before, still turning himself almost exclusively to Franks —"Suppose somebody walking along Oxford Street, brooding over an injury, and thinking how to serve the man out that had done it to him. All the numberless persons and things pass him on both sides and he sees none of them—takes no notice of anything. But he spies a man in Berners Street, in the middle of a small crowd, showing them some tricks—we won't say so good as yours, Mr. Franks, but he stops, and stares, and forgets for a moment or two that there is one brother-man he hates and would kill if he could."

Here Hester found words, and said, though all but inaudibly,

"He would only go away as soon as he had had enough of it, and hate him all the same!"

"I know very well," answered Christopher, turning now to her, "it would not make a good man of him: but, except the ways of the world, its best ways and all, are to go for nothing in God's plans, it must be something to have the bad mood in a man stopped for a moment, just as it is something to a life to check a fever. It gives the godlike in the man, feeble, perhaps nearly exhausted, a fresh opportunity of revival. For the moment at least, the man is open to influences from another source than his hate. If the devil may catch a man at unawares when he is in

an evil or unthinking mood, why should not the good Power take his opportunity when the evil spirit is asleep through the harping of a David or the feats of a Franks? I sometimes find, as I come from a theatre where I have been occupied with the interests of a stirring play, that, with a sudden rush of intelligence, I understand the things best worth understanding better than before."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.