

**CHARLES
KINGSLEY**

TWO YEARS
AGO, VOLUME II

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Two Years Ago, Volume II

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CHAPTER XV. THE CRUISE OF THE WATERWITCH

The middle of August is come at last; and with it the solemn day on which Frederick Viscount Scoutbush may be expected to revisit the home of his ancestors. Elsley has gradually made up his mind to the inevitable, with a stately sulkiness: and comforts himself, as the time draws near, with the thought that, after all, his brother-in-law is not a very formidable personage.

But to the population of Aberalva in general, the coming event is one of awful jubilation. The shipping is all decked with flags; all the Sunday clothes have been looked out, and many a yard of new ribbon and pound of bad powder bought; there have been arrangements for a procession, which could not be got up; for a speech which nobody would undertake to pronounce; and, lastly, for a dinner, about which last there was no hanging back. Yea, also, they have hired from Carcarrow Church-town, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music; for Frank has put down the old choir band at Aberalva,—another of his mistakes,—and there is but one fiddle and a clarionet now left in all the town. So the said town waits all the day on tiptoe, ready to worship, till out of the soft brown haze the stately Waterwitch comes sliding in, like a white ghost, to fold her wings in Aberalva bay.

And at that sight the town is all astir. Fishermen shake themselves up out of their mid-day snooze, to admire the beauty, as she slips on and on through water smooth as glass, her hull hidden by the vast curve of the balloon-jib, and her broad wings boomed out alow and aloft, till it seems marvellous how that vast screen does not topple headlong, instead of floating (as it seems) self-supporting above its image in the mirror. Women hurry to put on their best bonnets; the sexton toddles up with the church key in his hand, and the ringers at his heels; the Coastguard Lieutenant bustles down to the Manby's mortar, which he has hauled out in readiness on the pebbles. Old Willis hoists a flag before his house, and half-a-dozen merchant skippers do the same. Bang goes the harmless mortar, burning the British nation's powder without leave or licence; and all the rocks and woods catch up the echo, and kick it from cliff to cliff, playing at football with it till its breath is beaten out; a rolling fire of old muskets and bird-pieces crackles along the shore, and in five minutes a poor lad has blown a ramrod through his hand. Never mind, lords do not visit Penalva every day. Out burst the bells above with merry peal; Lord Scoutbush and the Waterwitch are duly "rung in" to the home of his lordship's ancestors; and he is received, as he scrambles up the pier steps from his boat, by the curate, the churchwardens, the Lieutenant, and old Tardrew, backed by half-a-dozen ancient sons of Anak, lineal descendants of the free fishermen to whom six hundred years before, St. Just of Penalva did grant privileges hard to spell, and harder to understand, on the condition of receiving, whensoever he should land at the quay head, three brass farthings from the "free fishermen of Aberalva."

Scoutbush shakes hands with curate, Lieutenant, Tardrew, churchwardens; and then come forward the three farthings, in an ancient leather purse.

"Hope your lordship will do us the honour to shake hands with us too; we are your lordship's free fishermen, as we have been your forefathers'," says a magnificent old man, gracefully acknowledging the feudal tie, while he claims the exemption.

Little Scoutbush, who is the kindest-hearted of men, clasps the great brown fist in his little white one, and shakes hands heartily with every one of them, saying,—"If your forefathers were as much taller than mine, as you are than me, gentlemen, I shouldn't wonder if they took their own freedom, without asking his leave for it!"

A lord who begins his progress with a jest! That is the sort of aristocrat to rule in Aberalva! And all agree that evening, at the Mariners' Rest, that his lordship is as nice a young gentleman as ever trod deal board, and deserves such a yacht as he's got, and long may he sail her!

How easy it is to buy the love of men! Gold will not do it: but there is a little angel, may be, in the corner of every man's eye, who is worth more than gold, and can do it free of all charges: unless a man drives him out, and "hates his brother; and so walks in darkness; not knowing whither he goeth," but running full butt against men's prejudices, and treading on their corns, till they knock him down in despair—and all just because he will not open his eyes, and use the light which comes by common human good-nature!

Presently Tom hurries up, having been originally one of the deputation, but kept by the necessity of binding up the three fingers which the ramrod had spared to poor Jem Burman's hand. He bows, and the Lieutenant—who (Frank being a little shy) acts as her Majesty's representative—introduces him as "deputy medical man to our district of the union, sir: Mr. Thurnall."

"Dr. Heale was to have been hero, by the by. Where is Dr. Heale?" says some one.

"Very sorry, my lord; I can answer for him—professional calls, I don't doubt—nobody more devoted to your lordship."

One need not inquire where Dr. Heale was: but if elderly men will drink much brandy-and-water in hot summer days, after a heavy early dinner, then will those men be too late for deputations and for more important employments.

"Never mind the doctor, daresay he's asleep after dinner: do him good!" says the Viscount, hitting the mark with a random shot; and thereby raising his repute for sagacity immensely with his audience, who laugh outright.

"Ah! Is it so, then? But—Mr. Thurnall, I think you said?—I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir. I have heard your name often: you are my friend Mellot's old friend, are you not?"

"I am a very old friend of Claude Mellot's."

"Well, and there he is on board, and will be delighted to do the honours of my yacht to you whenever you like to visit her. You and I must know each other better, sir."

Tom bows low—his lordship does him too much honour: the cunning fellow knows that his fortune is made in Aberalva, if he chooses to work it out: but he humbly slips into the rear, for Frank has to be supported, not being over popular; and the Lieutenant may "turn crusty," unless he has his lordship to himself, before the gaze of assembled Aberalva.

Scoutbush progresses up the street, bowing right and left, and stopped half-a-dozen times by red-cloaked old women, who curtsy under his nose, and will needs inform him how they knew his grandfather, or nursed his uncle, or how his "dear mother, God rest her soul, gave me this very cloak as I have on," and so forth; till Scoutbush comes to the conclusion that they are a very loving and lovable set of people—as indeed they are—and his heart smites him somewhat for not having seen more of them in past years.

No sooner is Thurnall released, than he is off to the yacht as fast as oars can take him, and in Claude's arms.

"Now!" (after all salutations and inquiries have been gone through), "let me introduce you to Major Campbell." And Tom was presented to a tall and thin personage, who sat at the cabin table, bending over a microscope.

"Excuse my rising," said he, holding out a left hand, for the right was busy. "A single jar will give me ten minutes' work to do again. I am delighted to meet you: Mellot has often spoken to me of you as a man who has seen more, and faced death more carelessly, than most men."

"Mellot flatters, sir. Whatsoever I have done, I have given up being careless about death; for I have some one beside myself to live for."

"Married at last? has Diogenes found his Aspasia?" cried Claude.

Tom did not laugh.

"Since my brothers died, Claude, the old gentleman has only me to look to. You seem to be a naturalist, sir."

"A dabbler," said the major, with eye and hand still busy.

"I ought not to begin our acquaintance by doubting your word: but these things are no dabbler's work;" and Tom pointed to some exquisite photographs of minute corallines, evidently taken under the microscope.

"They are Mellot's."

"Mellot turned man of science? Impossible!"

"No; only photographer. I am tired of painting nature clumsily, and then seeing a sun-picture out-do all my efforts—so I am turned photographer, and have made a vow against painting for three years and a day."

"Why, the photographs only give you light and shade."

"They will give you colour, too, before seven years are over—and that is more than I can do, or any one else. No; I yield to the new dynasty. The artist's occupation is gone henceforth, and the painter's studio, like 'all charms, must fly, at the mere touch of cold philosophy.' So Major Campbell prepares the charming little cockyoly birds, and I call in the sun to immortalise them."

"And perfectly you are succeeding! They are quite new to me, recollect. When I left Melbourne, the art had hardly risen there above guinea portraits of bearded desperadoes, a nugget in one hand and a £50 note in the other: but this is a new, and what a forward step for science!"

"You are a naturalist, then?" said Campbell, looking up with interest.

"All my profession are, more or less," said Tom, carelessly; "and I have been lucky enough here to fall on untrodden ground, and have hunted up a few sea-monsters this summer."

"Really? You can tell one where to search then, and where to dredge, I hope. I have set my heart on a fortnight's work here, and have been dreaming at night, like a child before a Twelfth-night party, of all sorts of impossible hydras, gorgons and chimaeras dire, fished up from your western deeps."

"I have none of them; but I can give you *Turbinolia Milletiana* and *Zoanthus Couchii*. I have a party of the last gentlemen alive on shore."

The major's face worked with almost childish delight.

"But I shall be robbing you."

"They cost me nothing, my dear sir. I did very well, moreover, without them, for five-and-thirty years; and I may do equally well for five-and-thirty more."

"I ought to be able to say the same, surely," answered the Major, composing his face again, and rising carefully. "I have to thank you, exceedingly, my dear sir, for your prompt generosity: but it is better discipline for a man, in many ways, to find things for himself than to have them put into his hands. So, with a thousand thanks, you shall let me see if I can dredge a *Turbinolia* for myself."

This was spoken with so sweet and polished a modulation, and yet so sadly and severely withal, that Tom looked at the speaker with interest. He was a very tall and powerful man, and would have been a very handsome man, both in face and figure, but for the high cheekbone, long neck, and narrow shoulders, so often seen north of Tweed. His brow was very high and full; his eyes—grave, but very gentle, with large drooping eyelids—were buried under shaggy grey eyebrows. His mouth was gentle as his eyes; but compressed, perhaps by the habit of command, perhaps by secret sorrow; for of that, too, as well as of intellect and magnanimity, Thurnall thought he could discern the traces. His face was bronzed by long exposure to the sun; his close-cut curls, which had once been auburn, were fast turning white, though his features looked those of a man under five-and-forty; his cheeks were as smooth shaven as his chin. A right, self-possessed, valiant soldier he looked; one who could be very loving to little innocents, and very terrible to full-grown knaves.

"You are practising at self-denial, as usual," said Claude.

"Because I may, at any moment, have to exercise it in earnest. Mr. Thurnall, can you tell me the name of this little glass arrow, which I just found shooting about in the sweeping net?"

Tom did know the wonderful little link between the fish and the insect; and the two chatted over its strange form, till the boat returned to take them ashore.

"Do you make any stay here?"

"I purpose to spend a fortnight here in my favourite pursuit. I must draw on your kindness and knowledge of the place to point me out lodgings."

Lodgings, as it befell, were to be found, and good ones, close to the beach, and away from the noise of the harbour, on Mrs. Harvey's first floor; for the local preacher, who generally occupied them, was away.

"But Major Campbell might dislike the noise of the school?"

"The school? What better music for a lonely old bachelor than children's voices?"

So, by sunset the major was fairly established over Mrs. Harvey's shop. It was not the place which Tom would have chosen; he was afraid of "running over" poor Grace, if he came in and out as often as he could have wished. Nevertheless, he accepted the major's invitation to visit him that very evening.

"I cannot ask you to dinner yet, sir; for my ménage will be hardly settled: but a cup of coffee, and an exceedingly good cigar, I think my establishment may furnish you by seven o'clock to-night;—if you think them worth walking down for."

Tom, of course, said something civil, and made his appearance in due time. He found the coffee ready, and the cigars also; but the Major was busy, in his shirt sleeves, unpacking and arranging jars, nets, microscopes, and what not of scientific lumber; and Tom proffered his help.

"I am ashamed to make use of you the first moment that you become my guest."

"I shall enjoy the mere handling of your tackle," said Tom; and began breaking the tenth commandment over almost every article he touched; for everything was first-rate of its kind.

"You seem to have devoted money, as well as thought, plentifully to the pursuit."

"I have little else to which to devote either; and more of both than is, perhaps, safe for me."

"I should hardly complain of a superfluity of thought, if superfluity of money was the condition of it."

"Pray understand me. I am no Dives; but I have learned to want so little, that I hardly know how to spend the little which I have."

"I should hardly have called that an unsafe state."

"The penniless Faquir who lives on chance handfuls of rice has his dangers, as well as the rich Parsee who has his ventures out from Madagascar to Canton. Yes, I have often envied the schemer, the man of business, almost the man of pleasure; their many wants at least absorb them in outward objects, instead of leaving them too easily satisfied, to sink in upon themselves, and waste away in useless dreams."

"You found out the best cure for that malady when you took up the microscope and the collecting-box."

"So I fancied once. I took up natural history in India years ago to drive away thought, as other men might take to opium, or to brandy-pawnee: but, like them, it has become a passion now and a tyranny; and I go on hunting, discovering, wondering, craving for more knowledge; and—*cui bono?* I sometimes ask—"

"Why, this at least, sir; that, without such men as you, who work for mere love, science would be now fifty years behind her present standing-point; and we doctors should not know a thousand important facts, which you have been kind enough to tell us, while we have not time to find them out for ourselves."

"*Sic vos non vobis*—"

"Yes, you have the work, and we have the pay; which is a very fair division of labour, considering the world we live in."

"And have you been skilful enough to make science pay you here, in such an out-of-the-way little world as that of Aberalva must be?"

"She is a good stalking-horse anywhere;" and Tom detailed, with plenty of humour, the effect of his microscope and his lecture on the drops of water. But his wit seemed so much lost on Campbell, that he at last stopped almost short, not quite sure that he had not taken a liberty.

"No; go on, I beg you; and do not fancy that I am not interested and amused too, because my laughing muscles are a little stiff from want of use. Perhaps, too, I am apt to take things too much *au grand sérieux*; but I could not help thinking, while you were speaking, how sad it was that people were utterly ignorant of matters so vitally necessary to health."

"And I, perhaps, ought not to jest over the subject: but, indeed, with cholera staring us in the face here, I must indulge in some emotion; and as it is unprofessional to weep, I must laugh as long as I dare."

The Major dropped his coffee-cup upon the floor, and looked at Thurnall with so horrified a gaze, that Tom could hardly believe him to be the same man. Then recollecting himself, he darted down upon the remains of his cup: and looking up again—"A thousand pardons; but—did I hear you aright? cholera staring us in the face?"

"How can it be otherwise? It is drawing steadily on from the eastward week by week; and, in the present state of the town, nothing but some miraculous caprice of Dame Fortune's can deliver us."

"Don't talk of Fortune, sir! at such a moment. Talk of God!" said the Major, rising from his chair, and pacing the room. "It is too horrible!

Intolerable! When do you expect it here?"

"Within the month, perhaps,—hardly before. I should have warned you of the danger, I assure you, had I not understood from you that you were only going to stay a fortnight."

The Major made an impatient gesture.

"Do you fancy that I am afraid for myself? No; but the thought of its coming to—to the poor people in the town, you know. It is too dreadful. I have seen it in India—among my own men—among the natives. Good heavens, I never shall forget—and to meet the fiend again here, of all places in the world! I fancied it so clean and healthy, swept by fresh sea-breezes."

"And by nothing else. A half-hour's walk round would convince you, sir;

I only wish that you could persuade his lordship to accompany you."

"Scoutbush? Of course he will,—he shall,—he must. Good heavens! whose concern is it more than his? You think, then, that there is a chance of staving it off—by cleansing, I mean?"

"If we have heavy rains during the next week or two, yes. If this drought last, better leave ill alone; we shall only provoke the devil by stirring him up."

"You speak confidently," said the Major, gradually regaining his own self-possession, as he saw Tom so self-possessed. "Have you—allow me to ask so important a question—have you seen much of cholera?"

"I have worked through three. At Paris, at St. Petersburg, and in the West Indies: and I have been thinking up my old experience for the last six weeks, foreseeing what would come."

"I am satisfied, sir; perhaps I ought to ask your pardon for the question."

"Not at all. How can you trust a man, unless you know him?" "And you expect it within the month? You shall go with me to Lord Scoutbush to-morrow, and—and now we will talk of something more pleasant." And he began again upon the zoophites.

Tom, as they chatted on, could not help wondering at the Major's unexpected passion; and could not help remarking, also, that in spite of his desire to be agreeable, and to interest his guest in his scientific discoveries, he was yet distraught, and full of other thoughts. What could be the meaning of it? Was it mere excess of human sympathy? The countenance hardly betokened that: but still, who can trust altogether the expression of a weather-hardened visage of forty-five? So the Doctor set it down to tenderness of heart, till a fresh vista opened on him.

Major Campbell, he soon found, was as fond of insects as of sea-monsters: and he began inquiring about the woods, the heaths, the climate; which seemed to the Doctor, for a long time, to mean nothing more than the question which he put plainly, "Where have I a chance of rare insects?" But he seemed, after a while, to be trying to learn the geography of the parish in detail, and especially of the ground round Vavasour's house. "However it's no business of mine," thought Thurnall, and told him all he wanted, till—

"Then the house lies quite in the bottom of the glen? Is there a good fall to the stream—for a stream I suppose there is?"

Thurnall shook his head. "Cold boggy stewponds in the garden, such as our ancestors loved, damming up the stream. They must needs have fish in Lent, we know; and paid the penalty of it by ague and fever."

"Stewponds damming up the stream? Scoutbush ought to drain them instantly!" said the Major, half to himself. "But still the house lies high—with regard to the town, I mean. No chance of malaria coming up?"

"Upon my word, sir, as a professional man, that is a thing that I dare not say. The chances are not great—the house is two hundred yards from the nearest cottage: but if there be an east wind—"

"I cannot bear this any longer. It is perfect madness!"

"I trust, sir, that you do not think that I have neglected the matter. I have pointed it all out, I assure you, to Mr. Vavasour."

"And it is not altered?"

"I believe it is to be altered—that is—the truth is, sir, that Mr. Vavasour shrinks so much from the very notion of cholera, that—"

"That he does not like to do anything which may look like believing in its possibility?"

"He says," quoth Tom, parrying the question, but in a somewhat dry tone, "that he is afraid of alarming Mrs. Vavasour and the servants."

The Major said something under his breath, which Tom did not catch, and then, in an appeased tone of voice—

"Well, that is at least a fault on the right side. Mrs. Vavasour's brother, as owner of the place, is of course the proper person to make the house fit for habitation." And he relapsed into silence, while Thurnall, who suspected more than met the ear, rose to depart.

"Are you going? It is not late; not ten o'clock yet."

"A medical man, who may be called up at any moment, must make sure of his 'beauty sleep,'"

"I will walk with you, and smoke my last cigar." So they went out, and up to Heale's. Tom went in: but he observed that his companion, after standing awhile in the street irresolutely, went on up the hill, and, as far as he could see, turned up the lane to Vavasour's.

"A mystery here," thought he, as he put matters to rights in the surgery ere going upstairs. "A mystery which I may as well fathom. It may be of use to poor Tom, as most other mysteries are. That is, though, if I can do it honourably; for the man is a gallant gentleman. I like him, and I am inclined to trust him. Whatsoever his secret is, I don't think that it is one which he need be ashamed of. Still, 'there's a deal of human natur' in man,' and there may be in him:—and what matter if there is?"

Half an hour afterwards the Major returned, took the candle from Grace, who was sitting up for him, and went upstairs with a gentle "good night," but without looking at her.

He sat down at the open window, and looked out leaning on the sill.

"Well, I was too late: I daresay there was some purpose in it. When shall I learn to believe that God takes better care of His own than I can do? I was faithless and impatient to-night. I am afraid I betrayed myself before that man. He looks like one, certainly, who could be trusted with a secret: yet I had rather that he had not mine. It is my own fault, like everything else! Foolish old fellow that you are, fretting and fussing to the end! Is not that scene a message from above, saying, 'Be still, and know that I am God?'"

And the Major looked out upon the summer sea, lit by a million globes of living fire, and then upon the waves which broke in flame upon the beach, and then up to the spangled stars above.

"What do I know of these, with all my knowing? Not even a twentieth part of those medusae, or one in each thousand of those sparks among the foam. Perhaps I need not know. And yet why was the thirst awakened in me, save to be satisfied at last? Perhaps to become more intense, with every fresh delicious draught of knowledge.... Death, beautiful, wise, kind death; when will you come and tell me what I want to know? I courted you once and many a time, brave old Death, only to give rest to the weary. That was a coward's wish, and so you would not come. I ran you close in Afghanistan, old Death, and at Sobraon too, I was not far behind you; and I thought I had you safe among that jungle grass at Aliwal; but you slipped through my hand—I was not worthy of you. And now I will not hunt you any more, old Death: do you bide your time, and I mine; though who knows if I may not meet you here? Only when you come give me not rest, but work. Give work to the idle, freedom to the chained, sight to the blind!—Tell me a little about finer things than zoophytes—perhaps about the zoophytes as well—and you shall still be brave old Death, my good camp-comrade now for many a year."

Was Major Campbell mad? That depends upon the way in which the reader may choose to define the adjective.

Meanwhile Scoutbush had walked into Penalva Court—where an affecting scene of reconciliation took place?

Not in the least. Scoutbush kissed Lucia, shook hands with Elsley, hugged the children, and then settled himself in an arm-chair, and talked about the weather, exactly as if he had been running in and out of the house every week for the last three years, and so the matter was done; and for the first time a *partie carrée* was assembled in the dining-room.

The evening passed off at first as uncomfortably as it could, where three out of the four were well-bred people. Elsley was, of course, shy before Lord Scoutbush, and Scoutbush was equally shy before Elsley, though as civil as possible to him; for the little fellow stood in extreme awe of Elsley's talents, and was afraid of opening his lips before a poet. Lucia was nervous for both their sakes, as well she might be; and Valencia had to make all the talking, and succeeded capitally in drawing out both her brother and her brother-in-law, till both of them found the other, on the whole more like other people than he had expected. The next morning's breakfast, therefore, was easy and gracious enough: and when it was over, and Lucia fled to household matters—

"You smoke, Vavasour?" asked Scoutbush.

Vavasour did not smoke.

"Really? I thought poets always smoked. You will not forbid my having a cigar in your garden, nevertheless, I suppose! Do walk round with me, too, and show me the place, unless you are going to be busy."

Oh no; Elsley was at Lord Scoutbush's service, of course, and had really nothing to do. So out they went.

"Charming old pigeon-hole it is," said its owner, "I have not seen it since I went into the Guards. Campbell says it's a shame of me, and so it is one, I suppose; but how beautiful you have made the garden look!"

"Lucia is very fond of gardening," said Elsley, who was very fond of it also, and had great taste therein; but he was afraid to confess any such tastes before a man who, he thought, would not understand him.

"And that fine old wood—full of cocks it used to be—I hope you worked it well last year."

Elsley did not shoot; but he had heard there was plenty of game there.

"Plenty of cocks," said his guest, correcting him; "but for game, the less we say about that the better. I really wonder you do not shoot; it fills up time so in the winter."

"There is really no winter to fill up here, thanks to this delicious climate; and I have my books."

"Ah! I wish I had. I wish heartily," said he, in a confidential tone, "you, or Campbell, or some of your clever men, would sell me a little of their book-learning; as Valencia says to me, 'brains are so common in the world, I wonder how none fell to your share.'"

"I do not think that they are an article which is for sale, if Solomon is to be believed."

"And if they were, I couldn't afford to buy, with this Irish Encumbered Estates' Bill. But now, this is one thing I wanted to say. Is everything here just as you would wish? Of course no one could wish a better tenant; but any repairs, you know, or improvements which I ought to do of course? Only tell me what you think should be done; for, of course, you know more about these things than I do—can't know less."

"Nothing, I assure you, Lord Scoutbush. I have always left those matters to Mr. Tardrew."

"Ah, my dear fellow, you shouldn't do that. He is such a screw, as all honest stewards are. Screws me, I know, and I dare say has screwed you too."

"Never, I assure you. I never gave him the opportunity, and he has been most civil."

"Well, in future, just order him to do what you like, and just as if you were landlord, in fact; and if the old man haggles, write to me, and I'll blow him up. Delighted to have a man of taste like you here, who can improve the place for me."

"I assure you, Lord Scoutbush, I need nothing, nor does the place. I am a man of very few wants."

"I wish I were," sighed Scoutbush, pulling out another of Hudson's highest-priced cigars.

"And I am bound to say"—(and here Elsley choked a little; but the Viscount's frankness and humility had softened him, and he determined to be very magnanimous)—"I am bound in honour, after owing to your kindness such an exquisite retreat—all that either I or Lucia could have fancied for ourselves, and more—not to trouble you by asking for little matters which we really do not need."

And so Elsley, instead of simply asking to have the house-drains set right, which Lord Scoutbush would have done upon the spot, chose to be lofty-minded, at the risk of killing his wife and children.

"My dear fellow, you really must not 'lord' me any more; I hate it. I must be plain Scoutbush here among my own people, just as I am in the Guards' mess-room. And as for owing me any,—really, it is we that are in your debt—to see my sister so happy, and such beautiful children, and so well too—and altogether—and Valencia so delighted with your poems—and, and altogether—" and there Lord Scoutbush stopped, having hoisted, as he considered, the flag of peace once and for all, and very glad that the thing was over.

Elsley was going to say something in return; but his guest turned the conversation as fast as he could. "And now, I know you want to be busy, though you are too civil to confess it; and I must be with that old fool Tardrew at ten, to settle accounts: he'll scold me if I do not—the precise old pedant—just as if I was his own child. Good-bye."

"Where are you going, Frederick?" called Lucia, from the window; she had been watching the interview anxiously enough, and could see that it had ended well.

"To old Stot-and-kye at the farm: do you want anything?"

"No; only I thought you might be going to the yacht; and Valencia would have walked down with you. She wants to find Major Campbell."

"I want to scold Major Campbell," said Valencia, tripping out on the lawn in her walking dress. "Why has he not been here an hour ago? I will undertake to say that he was up at four this morning."

"He waits to be invited, I suppose," said Scoutbush.

"I suppose I must do it," said Elsley to himself, sighing.

"Just like his primness," said Valencia. "I shall go down and bring him up myself this minute, and Mr. Vavasour shall come with me. Of course you will! You do not know what a delightful person he is, when once you can break the ice."

Elsley, like most vain men, was of a jealous temper; and Valencia's eagerness to see Major Campbell jarred on him. He wanted to keep the exquisite creature to himself, and Headley was

quite enough of an intruder already. Beside, the accounts of the new comer, his learning, his military prowess, the reverence with which all, even Scoutbush, evidently regarded him, made him prepared to dislike the Major; and all the more, now he heard that there was an ice-crust to crack. Impulsive men like Elsley, especially when their self-respect and certainty of their own position is not very strong, have instinctively a defiant fear of the strong, calm, self-contained man, especially if he has seen the world; and Elsley set down Major Campbell as a proud, sarcastic fellow, before whom he must be at the pains of being continually on his guard. He wished him a hundred miles away. However, there was no refusing Valencia anything; so he got his hat, but with so bad a grace, that Valencia saw his chagrin, and from mere naughtiness of heart amused herself with it by talking all the way of nothing but Major Campbell.

"And Lucia," she said at last, "will be so glad to see him again. We knew him so well, you know, in Eaton Square years ago."

"Really," said Elsley, wincing, "I never met him there." He recollected that Lucia had expressed more pleasure at Major Campbell's coming than even, at that of her brother; and a dark, undefined phantom entered his heart, which, though he would have been too proud to confess it to himself, was none other than jealousy.

"Oh—did you not? No; it was the year before we first knew you. And we used to laugh at him together, behind his back, and christened him the wild Indian, because he was so gauche and shy. He was a major in the Indian army then: but a few months afterwards he sold out, went into the line—no one could tell why, for he threw away very brilliant prospects, they say, and might have been a general by now, instead of a mere major still. But he is so improved since then; he is like an elder brother to Scoutbush; guides him in everything. I call him the blind man, and the major his dog!"

"So much the worse," thought Elsley, who disliked the notion of Campbell's having power over a man to whom he was indebted for his house-room: but by this time they were at Mrs. Harvey's door.

Mrs. Harvey opened it, curtseying to the very ground: and Valencia ran upstairs, and knocked at the sitting-room door herself.

"Come in," shouted a pre-occupied voice inside.

"Is that a proper way in which to address a lady, sir?" answered she, putting in her beautiful head.

Major Campbell was sitting, Elsley could see, in his shirt sleeves, cigar in mouth, bent over his microscope: but instead of the unexpected prim voice, he heard a very gay and arch one answer, "Is that a proper way in which to come peeping into an old bachelor's sanctuary, ma'am? Go away this moment, till I make myself fit to be seen."

Valencia shut the door again, laughing.

"You seem very intimate with Major Campbell," said Elsley.

"Intimate? I look on him as my father almost. Now, may we come in?" said she, knocking again in pretty petulance. "I want to introduce Mr. Vavasour."

"I shall be only too happy," said the Major, opening his door (this time with his coat on); "there are few persons in the world whom I have more wished to know than Mr. Vavasour." And he held out his hand, and quite led Elsley in. He spoke in a tone of grave interest, looking intently at Elsley as he spoke. Valencia remarked the interest—Elsley only the compliment.

"It is a great kindness of you to call on me so soon," said he. "I met Mrs. Vavasour several times in years past; and though I saw very little of her, I saw enough to long much for the acquaintance of the man who has been worthy to become her husband."

Elsley blushed, for his conscience smote him a little at that word "worthy," and muttered some commonplace civility in return. Valencia saw it, and attributing it to his usual awkwardness, drew off the conversation to herself.

"Really, Major Campbell! You bring in Mr. Vavasour, and let me walk behind as I can; and then let me sit three whole minutes in your house without deigning to speak to me!"

"Ah! my dear Queen Whims!" answered he, returning suddenly to his gay tone; "and how have you been misbehaving yourself since we met last?"

"I have not been misbehaving myself at all, mon cher Saint Père, as Mr. Vavasour will answer for me, during the most delightful fortnight I ever spent!"

"Delightful indeed!" said Elsley, as he was bound to say: but he said it with an earnestness which made the Major fix his eyes on him. "Why should he not find any and every fortnight as delightful as his last?" said he to himself; but now Valencia began bantering him about his books and his animals; wanting to look through his microscope, pulling off her hat for the purpose, laughing when her curls blinded her, letting them blind her in order to toss them back in the prettiest way, jesting at him about "his old fogies" at the Linnaean Society; clapping her hands in ecstasy when he answered that they were not old fogies at all, but the most charming set of men in England, and that (with no offence to the name of Scoutbush) he was prouder of being an F.L.S., than if he were a peer of the realm, —and so forth; all which harmless pleasantries made Elsley cross, and more cross—first, because he did not mix in it; next, because he could not mix in it if he tried. He liked to be always in the seventh heaven; and if other people were anywhere else, he thought them bores.

At last,— "Now, if you will be good for five minutes," said the Major, "I will show you something really beautiful."

"I can see that," answered she, with the most charming impudence, "in another glass besides your magnifying one."

"Be it so: but look here, and see what an exquisite world there is, of which you never dream; and which behaves a great deal better in its station than the world of which you do dream!"

When Campbell spoke in that way, Valencia was good at once; and as she went obediently to the microscope, she whispered, "Don't be angry with me, mon Saint Père."

"Don't be naughty, then, *ma chère enfant*" whispered he; for he saw something about Elsley's face which gave him a painful suspicion.

She looked long, and then lifted up her head suddenly—"Do come and look, Mr. Vavasour, at this exquisite little glass fairy, like—I cannot tell what like, but a pure spirit hovering in some nun's dream! Come!"

Elsley came, and looked; and when he looked he started, for it was the very same zoophyte which Thurnall had shown him on a certain memorable day.

"Where did you find the fairy, mon Saint Père?"

"I had no such good fortune. Mr. Thurnall, the doctor, gave it me."

"Thurnall?" said she, while Elsley kept still looking, to hide cheeks which were growing very red. "He is such a clever man, they say. Where did you meet him? I have often thought of asking Mr. Vavasour to invite him up for an evening with his microscope. He seems so superior to the people round him. It would be a charity, really, Mr. Vavasour."

Vavasour kept his eyes fixed on the zoophyte, and said,—

"I shall be only too delighted, if you wish it."

"You will wish it yourself a second time," chimed in Campbell, "if you try it once. Perhaps you know nothing of him but professionally. Unfortunately for professional men, that too often happens."

"Know anything of him—I! I assure you not, save that he attends Mrs. Vavasour and the children," said Vavasour, looking up at last: but with an expression of anger which astonished both Valencia and Campbell.

Campbell thought that he was too proud to allow rank as a gentleman to a country doctor; and despised him from that moment, though, as it happened, unjustly. But he answered quietly,—

"I assure you, that whatever some country practitioners may be, the average of them, as far as I have seen, are cleverer men, and even of higher tone than their neighbours; and Thurnall is beyond the average: he is a man of the world,—even too much of one,—and a man of science; and I fairly confess

that, what with his wit, his *savoir vivre*, and his genial good temper, I have quite fallen in love with him in a single evening; we began last night on the microscope, and ended on all heaven and earth."

"How I should like to make a third!"

"My dear Queen Whims would hear a good deal of sober sense, then; at least on one side: but I shall not ask her: for Mr. Thurnall and I have our deep secrets together."

So spoke the Major, in the simple wish to exalt Tom in a quarter where he hoped to get him practice; and his "secret" was a mere jest, unnecessary, perhaps, as he thought afterwards, to pass off Tom's want of orthodoxy.

"I was a babbler then," said he to himself the next moment; "how much better to have simply held my tongue!"

"Ah; yes; I know men have their secrets, as well as women," said Valencia, for the mere love of saying something: but as she looked at Vavasour, she saw an expression in his face which she had never seen before. What was it?—All that one can picture for oneself branded into the countenance of a man unable to repress the least emotion, who had worked himself into the belief that Thurnall had betrayed his secret.

"My dear Mr. Vavasour," cried Campbell, of course unable to guess the truth, and supposing vaguely that he was 'ill;' "I am sure that—that the sun has overpowered you" (the only possible thing he could think of). "Lie down on the sofa a minute" (Vavasour was actually reeling with rage and terror), "and I will run up to Thurnall's for salvolatile."

Elsley, who thought him the most consummate of hypocrites, cast on him a look which he intended to have been withering, and rushed out of the room, leaving the two staring at each other.

Valencia was half inclined to laugh, knowing Elsley's petulance and vanity: but the impossibility of guessing a cause kept her quiet.

Major Campbell stood for full five minutes; not as one astounded, but as one in deep and anxious thought.

"What can be the matter, mon Saint Père?" asked she at last, to break the silence.

"That there are more whims in the world than yours, dear Queen Whims; and I fear darker ones. Let us walk up together after this man. I have offended him."

"Nonsense! I dare say he wanted to get home to write poetry, as you did not praise what he had written. I know his vanity and flightiness."

"You do?" asked he quickly, in a painful tone. "However, I have offended him, I can see; and deeply. I must go up, and make things right, for the sake of—for everybody's sake."

"Then do not ask me anything. Lucia loves him intensely, and let that be enough for us."

The Major saw the truth of the last sentence no more than Valencia herself did; for Valencia would have been glad enough to pour out to him, with every exaggeration, her sister's woes and wrongs, real and fancied, had not the sense of her own folly with Vavasour kept her silent and conscience-stricken.

Valencia remarked the Major's pained look as they walked up the street.

"You dear conscientious Saint Père, why will you fret yourself about this foolish matter? He will have forgotten it all in an hour; I know him well enough."

Major Campbell was not the sort of person to admire Elsley the more for throwing away capriciously such deep passion as he had seen him show, any more than for showing the same.

"He must be of a very volatile temperament."

"Oh, all geniuses are."

"I have no respect for genius, Miss St. Just; I do not even acknowledge its existence when there is no strength and steadiness of character. If any one pretends to be more than a man, he must begin by proving himself a man at all. Genius? Give me common sense and common decency! Does he give Mrs. Vavasour, pray, the benefit of any of these pretty flights of genius?"

Valencia was frightened. She had never heard her Saint Père speak so severely and sarcastically; and she feared that if he knew the truth he would be terribly angry. She had never seen him angry; but she knew well enough that that passion, when it rose in him in a righteous cause, would be very awful to see; and she was one of those women who always grow angry when they are frightened. So she was angry at his calling her Miss St. Just; she was angry because she chose to think he was talking at her; though she reasonably might have guessed it, seeing that he had scolded her a hundred times for want of steadiness of character. She was more angry than all, because she knew that her own vanity had caused—at least disagreement—between Lucia and Elsley. All which (combined with her natural wish not to confess an unpleasant truth about her sister) justified her, of course, in answering,—

"Miss St. Just does not intrude into the secrets of her sister's married life; and if she did, she would not repeat them."

Major Campbell sighed, and walked on a few moments in silence, then,—

"Pardon, Miss St. Just; I asked a rude question, and I am sorry for it."

"Pardon you, my dear Saint Père?" cried she, almost catching at his hand. "Never! I must either believe you infallible, or hate you eternally. It is I that was naughty; I always am; but you will forgive Queen Whims?"

"Who could help it?" said the Major, in a sad, sweet tone. "But here is the postman. May I open my letters?"

"You may do as you like, now you have forgiven me. Why, what is it, mon Saint Père?"

A sudden shock of horror had passed over the Major's face, as he read his letter: but it had soon subsided into stately calm.

"A gallant officer, whom we and all the world knew well, is dead of cholera, at his post, where a man should die.... And, my dear Miss St. Just, we are going to the Crimea."

"We?—you?"

"Yes. The expedition will really sail, I find."

"But not you?"

"I shall offer my services. My leave of absence will, in any case, end on the first of September; and even if it did not, my health is quite enough restored to enable me to walk up to a cannon's mouth."

"Ah, mon Saint Père, what words are these?"

"The words of an old soldier, Queen Whims, who has been so long at his trade that he has got to take a strange pleasure in it."

"In killing?"

"No; only in the chance of—. But I will not cast an unnecessary shadow over your bright soul. There will be shadows enough over it soon, without my help."

"What do you mean?"

"That you, and thousands more as delicate, if not as fair as you, will see, ere long, what the realities of human life are; and in a way of which you have never dreamed."

And he murmured, half to himself, the words of the prophet,—"*Thou saidst, I shall sit as a lady for ever: but these two things shall come upon thee in one day, widowhood and the loss of children. They shall even come upon thee, '—No! not in their fulness! There are noble elements beneath the crust, which will come out all the purer from the fire; and we shall have heroes and heroines rising up among us as of old, sincere and earnest, ready to face their work, and to do it, and to call all things by their right names once more; and Queen Whims herself will become what Queen Whims might be!*"

Valencia was awed, as well she might have been; for there was a very deep sadness about Campbell's voice.

"You think there will be def—disasters?" said she, at last.

"How can I tell? That we are what we always were, I doubt not. Scoutbush will fight as merrily as I. But we owe the penalty of many sins, and we shall pay it."

It would be as unfair, perhaps, as easy, to make Major Campbell a prophet after the fact, by attributing to him any distinct expectation of those mistakes which have been but too notorious since. Much of the sadness in his tone may have been due to his habitual melancholy; his strong belief that the world was deeply diseased, and that some terrible purgation would surely come, when it was needed. But it is difficult, again, to conceive that those errors were altogether unforeseen by many an officer of Campbell's experience and thoughtfulness.

"We will talk no more of it just now." And they walked up to Penalva Court, seriously enough.

"Well, Scoutbush, any letters from town?" said the Major.

"Yes."

"You have heard what has happened at D— Barracks?"

"Yes."

"You had better take care then, that the like of it does not happen here."

"Here?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all presently. Have you heard from head-quarters?"

"Yes; all right," said Scoutbush, who did not like to let out the truth before Valencia.

Campbell saw it and signed to him to speak out.

"All right?" asked Valencia. "Then you are not going?"

"Ay, but I am! Orders to join my regiment by the first of October, and to be shot as soon afterwards as is fitting for the honour of my country. So, Miss Val, you must be quick in making good friends with the heir-at-law; or else you won't get your bills paid any more."

"Oh, dear, dear!" And Valencia began to cry bitterly. It was her first real sorrow.

Strangely enough, Major Campbell, instead of trying to comfort her, took Scoutbush out with him, and left her alone with her tears. He could not rest till he had opened the whole cholera question.

Scoutbush was honestly shocked. Who would have dreamed it? No one had ever told him that the cholera had really been there before. What could he do? Send for Thurnall?

Tom was sent for; and Scoutbush found, to his horror, that what little he could have ever done ought to have been done three months ago, with Lord Minchampstead's improvements at Pentremochyn.

The little man walked up and down, and wrung his hands. He cursed Tardrew for not telling him the truth; he cursed himself for letting the cottages go out of his power; he cursed A, B, and C, for taking the said cottages off his hands; he cursed up, he cursed down, he cursed all around, things which ought to have been cursed, and things which really ought not—for half of the worst sanatory sinners, in this blessed age of ignorance, yclept of progress and science (how our grandchildren will laugh at the epithets!) are utterly unconscious and guiltless ones.

But cursing leaves him, as it leaves other men, very much where he had started.

To do him justice, he was in one thing a true nobleman, for he was above all pride; as are most men of rank, who know what their own rank means. It is only the upstart, unaccustomed to his new eminence, who stands on his dignity, and "asserts his power."

So Scoutbush begged humbly of Thurnall only to tell him what he could do.

"You might use your moral influence, my lord."

"Moral influence?" in a tone which implied naively enough, "I'd better get a little morals myself before I talk of using the same."

"Your position in the parish—"

"My good sir!" quoth Scoutbush in his shrewd way; "do you not know yourself what these fine fellows who were ready yesterday to kiss the dust off my feet would say, if I asked leave to touch a single hair of their rights?—'Tell you what, my lord; we pays you your rent, and you takes it. You mind your business, and we'll mind our'n.' You forget that times are changed since my seventeenth progenitor was lord of life and limb over man and maid in Aberalva."

"And since your seventeenth progenitor took the trouble to live at Penalva Court," said Campbell, "instead of throwing away what little moral influence he had by going into the Guards, and spending his time between Rotten Row and Cowes."

"Hardly fair, Major Campbell!" quoth Tom; "you forget that in the old times, if the Lord of Aberalva was responsible for his people, he had also by law the power of making them obey him."

"The long and the short of it is, then," said Scoutbush a little tartly, "that I can do nothing."

"You can put to rights the cottages which are still in your hands, my lord. For the rest, my only remaining hope lies in the last person whom one would usually depute on such an errand."

"Who is that?"

"The schoolmistress."

"The who?" asked Scoutbush.

"The schoolmistress; at whose house Major Campbell lodges."

And Tom told them, succinctly, enough to justify his strange assertion.

"If you doubt me, my lord, I advise you to ask Mr. Headley. He is no friend of hers; being a high churchman, while she is a little inclined to be schismatic; but an enemy's opinion will be all the more honest."

"She must be a wonderful woman," said Scoutbush; "I should like to see her."

"And I too," said Campbell, "I passed a lovely girl on the stairs last night, and thought no more of it. Lovely girls are common enough in West Country ports."

"We'll go and see her," quoth his lordship.

Meanwhile, Aberalva pier was astonished by a strange phenomenon. A boat from the yacht landed at the pier-head, not only Claude Mellot, whose beard was an object of wonder to the fishermen, but a tall three-legged box and a little black tent; which, being set upon the pier, became the scene of various mysterious operations, carried on by Claude and a sailor lad.

"I say!" quoth one of the fishing elders, after long suspicious silence; "I say, lads, this won't do. We can't have no outlandish foreigners taking observations here!"

And then dropped out one wild suspicion after another.

"Maybe he's surveying for a railroad?"

"Maybe he's from the Trinity House, going to make a new harbour; or maybe a lighthouse. And then we'd better not meddle wi' him."

"I'll tell you what he be. He's that here government chap as the Doctor said he'd bring down to set our drains right."

"If he goes meddling with our drains, and knocking of our back-yards about, he'll find himself over quay before he's done."

"Steady! Steady. He come with my loord, mind."

"He might a' taken in his loordship, and be a Roossian spy to the bottom of him after all. They mak' munselves up into all manner of disguisements, specially beards. I've seed the Roossians with their beards many a time."

"Maybe 'tis witchcraft. Look to mun, putting mun's head under that black bag now! He'm after no good, I'll warrant. If they ben't works of darkness, what be?"

"Leastwise he'm no right to go spying here on our quay, and never ax with your leave, or by your leave. I'll just goo mak' mun out."

And Claude, who had just retreated into his tent, had the pleasure of finding the curtain suddenly withdrawn, and as a flood of light rushed in, spoiling his daguerreotype plate, hearing a voice as of a sleepy bear—

"Ax your pardon, sir; but what be you arter here?"

"Murder! shut the screen!" But it was too late; and Claude came out, while the eldest-born of Anak stood sternly inquiring,—

"I say, what be you arter here, mak' so boold?"

"Taking sun-pictures, my good sir, and you have spoilt one for me."

"Sun-pictures, saith a?" in a very incredulous tone.

"Daguerreotypes of the place, for Lord Scoutbush."

"Oh!—if it's his lordship's wish, of course! Only things is very well as they are, and needs no mending, thank God. Only, ax pardon, sir. You see, we don't generally allow no interfering on our pier without lave, sir; the pier being ourn, we pays for the repairing. So, if his lordship intends making of alterations, he'd better to have spoken to us first."

"Alterations?" said Claude, laughing; "the place is far too pretty to need any improvement."

"Glad you think so, sir! But whatever be you arter here?"

"Taking views! I'm a painter, an artist! I'll take your portrait, if you like!" said Claude, laughing more and more.

"Bless my heart, what vules we be! 'Tis a painter gentleman, lads!" roared he.

"What on earth did you take me for? A Russian spy?"

The elder shook his head; grinned solemnly; and peace was concluded. "We'm old-fashioned folks here, you see, sir; and don't like no new-fangled meddlecomes. You'll excuse us; you'm very welcome to do what you like, and glad to see you here." And the old fellow made a stately bow, and moved away.

"No, no! you must stay and have your portrait taken; you'll make a fine picture."

"Hum; might ha', they used to say, thirty years agone; I'm over old now. Still, my old woman might like it. Make so bold, sir, but what's your charge?"

"I charge nothing. Five minutes' talk with an honest man will pay me."

"Hum: if you'd a let me pay you, sir, well and good; but I maunt take up your time for nought; that's not fair."

However, Claude prevailed, and in ten minutes he had all the sailors on the quay round him; and one after another came forward blushing and grinning to be "taken off." Soon the children gathered round, and when Valencia and Major Campbell came on the pier, they found Claude in the midst of a ring of little dark-haired angels; while a dozen honest fellows grinned when their own visages appeared, and chaffed each other about the sweethearts who were to keep them while they were out at sea. And in the midst little Claude laughed and joked, and told good stories, and gave himself up, the simple, the sunny-hearted fellow, to the pleasure of pleasing, till he earned from one and all the character of "the pleasantest-spokenest gentleman that was ever into the town."

"Here's her ladyship! make room for her ladyship!" But Claude held up a warning hand. He had just arranged a masterpiece,—half-a-dozen of the prettiest children, sitting beneath a broken boat, on spars, sails, blocks, lobster-pots, and what not, arranged in picturesque confusion; while the black-bearded sea-kings round were promising them rock and bulls-eyes, if they would only sit still like "gude maids."

But at Valencia's coming the children all looked round, and jumped up and curtsied, and then were afraid to sit down again.

"You have spoilt my group, Miss St. Just, and you must mend it!"

Valencia caught the humour, regrouped them all forthwith; and then placed herself in front of them by Claude's side.

"Now, be good children! Look straight at me, and listen!" And lifting up her finger, she began to sing the first song of which she could think, "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers."

She had no need to bid the children look at her and listen; for not only they, but every face upon the pier was fixed upon her; breathless, spell-bound, at once by her magnificent beauty and her magnificent voice, as up rose, leaping into the clear summer air, and rolling away over the still blue sea, that glorious melody which has now become the national anthem to the nobler half of the New World. Honour to woman, and honour to old England, that from Felicia Hemans came the song which will last, perhaps, when modern Europe shall have shared the fate of ancient Rome and Greece!

Valencia's singing was the reflex of her own character; and therefore, perhaps, all the more fitted to the song, the place, and the audience. It was no modest cooing voice, tender, suggestive, trembling with suppressed emotion, such as, even though narrow in compass, and dull in quality, will touch the deepest fibres of the heart, and, as delicate scents will sometimes do, wake up long-forgotten dreams, which seem memories of some antenatal life.

It was clear, rich, massive, of extraordinary compass, and yet full of all the graceful ease, the audacious frolic, of perfect physical health, and strength, and beauty; had there been a trace of effort in it, it might have been accused of "bravura:" but there was no need of effort where nature had bestowed already an all but perfect organ, and all that was left for science was to teach not power, but control. Above all, it was a voice which you trusted; after the first three notes you felt that that perfect ear, that perfect throat, could never, even by the thousandth part of a note, fall short of melody; and you gave your soul up to it, and cast yourself upon it, to bear you up and away, like a fairy steed, whither it would, down into the abysses of sadness, and up to the highest heaven of joy; as did those wild and rough, and yet tenderhearted and imaginative men that day, while every face spoke new delight, and hung upon those glorious notes,—

"As one who drinks from a charmed cup
Of sparkling, and foaming, and murmuring wine"—

and not one of them, had he had the gift of words, but might have said with the poet:—

"I have no life, Constantia, now but thee,
While, like the world-surrounding air, thy song
Flows on, and fills all things with melody.
Now is thy voice tempest swift and strong,
On which, like one in a trance upborne,
Secure o'er rocks and waves I sweep,
Rejoicing like a cloud of morn.
Now 'tis the breath of summer night,
Which, when the starry waters sleep
Round western isles, with incense-blossoms bright,
Lingering, suspends my soul in its voluptuous flight."

At last it ceased: and all men drew their breaths once more; while a low murmur of admiration ran through the crowd, too well-bred to applaud openly, as they longed to do.

"Did you ever hear the like of that, Gentleman Jan?"

"Or see? I used to say no one could hold a candle to our Grace but she— she looked like a born queen all the time!"

"Well, she belongs to us, too, so we've a right to be proud of her. Why, here's our Grace all the while!"

True enough; Grace had been standing among the crowd all the while, rapt, like them, her eyes fixed on Valencia, and full, too, of tears. They had been called up first by the melody itself, and then, by a chain of thought peculiar to Grace, by the faces round her.

"Ah! if Grace had been here!" cried one, "we'd have had her dra'ed off in the midst of the children."

"Ah! that would ha' been as nat'ral as life!"

"Silence, you!" says Gentleman Jan, who generally feels a mission to teach the rest of the quay good manners, "'Tis the gentleman's pleasure to settle who he'll dra' off, and not wer'n."

To which abnormal possessive pronoun, Claude rejoined,—

"Not a bit! whatever you like. I could not have a better figure for the centre. I'll begin again."

"Oh, do come and sit among the children, Grace!" says Valencia.

"No, thank your ladyship."

Valencia began urging her; and many a voice round, old as well as young, backed the entreaty.

"Excuse me, my lady," and she slipped into the crowd; but as she went she spoke low, but clear enough to be heard by all: "No: it will be time enough to flatter me, and ask for my picture, when you do what I tell you—what God tells you!"

"What's that, then, Grace dear?"

"You know! I've asked you to save your own lives from cholera, and you have not the common sense to do it. Let me go home and pray for you!"

There was an awkward silence among the men, till some fellow said,—

"She'm gone mad after that doctor, I think, with his muck-hunting notions."

And Grace went home, to await the hour of afternoon school.

"What a face!" said Mellot.

"Is it not? Come and see her in her school, when the children go in at two o'clock. Ah! there are Scoutbush and St. Père."

"We are going to the school, my lord. Don't you think that, as patron of things in general here, it would look well if you walked in, and signified your full approbation of what you know nothing about?"

"So much so, that I was just on my way there with Campbell. But I must just speak to that lime-burning fellow. He wants a new lease of the kiln, and I suppose he must have it. At least, here he comes, running at me open-mouthed, and as dry as his own waistband. It makes one thirsty to look at him. I'll catch you up in five minutes!"

So the three went off to the school.

* * * * *

Grace was telling, in her own sweet way, that charming story of the Three Trouts, which, by the by, has been lately pirated (as many things are) by a religious author, whose book differs sufficiently from the liberal and wholesome morality of the true author of the tale.

"What a beautiful story, Grace!" said Valencia. "You will surpass Hans Anderssen some day."

Grace blushed, and was silent a moment.

"It is not my own, my lady."

"Not your own? I should have thought that no one but you and Anderssen could have made such an ending to it."

Grace gave her one of those beseeching, half-reproachful looks, with which she always answered praise; and then,— "Would you like to hear the children repeat a hymn, my lady?"

"No. I want to know where that story came from."

Grace blushed, and stammered.

"I know where," said Campbell. "You need not be ashamed of having read the book, Miss Harvey. I doubt not that you took all the good from it, and none of the harm, if harm there be."

Grace looked at him; at once surprised and relieved.

"It was a foolish romance-book, sir, as you seem to know. It was the only one which I ever read, except Hans Anderssen's,—which are not romances, after all. But the beginning was so full of God's truth, sir, —romance though it was,—and gave me such precious new light about educating children, that I was led on unawares. I hope I was not wrong."

"This schoolroom proves that you were not," said Campbell. "'To the pure, all things are pure.'"

"What is this mysterious book? I must know!" said Valencia.

"A very noble romance, which I made Mellot read once, containing the ideal education of an English nobleman, in the middle of the last century."

"The Fool of Quality?" said Mellot. "Of course! I thought I had heard the story before. What a well-written book it is, too, in spite of all extravagance and prolixity. And how wonderfully ahead of his generation the man who wrote it, in politics as well as in religion!"

"I must read it," said Valencia. "You must lend it me, Saint Père."

"Not yet, I think."

"Why?" whispered she, pouting. "I suppose I am not as pure as Grace Harvey?"

"She has the children to educate, who are in daily contact with coarse sins, of which you know nothing—of which she cannot help knowing. It was written in an age when the morals of our class (more shame to us) were on the same level with the morals of her class now. Let it alone. I often have fancied I should edit a corrected edition of it. When I do, you shall read that."

"Now, Miss Harvey," said Mellot, who had never taken his eyes off her face, "I want to turn schoolmaster, and give your children a drawing lesson. Get your slates, all of you!"

And taking possession of the black board and a piece of chalk, Claude began sketching them imps and angels, dogs and horses, till the school rang with shrieks of delight.

"Now," said he, wiping the board, "I'll draw something, and you shall copy it."

And, without taking off his hand, he drew a single line; and a profile head sprang up, as if by magic, under his firm, unerring touch.

"Somebody?" "A lady!" "No, 'taint; 'tis schoolmistress!"

"You can't copy that; I'll draw you another face." And he sketched a full face on the board.

"That's my lady." "No, it's schoolmistress again!" "No it's not!"

"Not quite sure, my dears?" said Claude, half to himself. "Then here!" and wiping the board once more, he drew a three-quarters face, which elicited a shout of approbation.

"That's schoolmistress, her very self!"

"Then you cannot do anything better than try and draw it. I'll show you how." And going over the lines again, one by one, the crafty Claude pretended to be giving a drawing lesson, while he was really studying every feature of his model.

"If you please, my lady," whispered Grace to Valencia; "I wish the gentleman would not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, madam, I do not judge any one else: but why should this poor perishing flesh be put into a picture? We wear it but for a little while, and are blessed when we are rid of its burden. Why wish to keep a copy of what we long to be delivered from?"

"It will please the children, Grace," said Valencia, puzzled. "See how they are all trying to copy it, from love of you."

"Who am I? I want them to do things from love of God. No, madam, I was pained (and no offence to you) when I was asked to have my likeness taken on the quay. There's no sin in it, of course: but let those who are going away to sea, and have friends at home, have their pictures taken: not one who wishes to leave behind her no likeness of her own, only Christ's likeness in these children; and to paint Him to other people, not to be painted herself. Do ask him to rub it out, my lady!"

"Why, Grace, we were all just wishing to have a likeness of you. Every one has their picture taken for a remembrance."

"The saints and martyrs never had theirs, as far as I ever heard, and yet they are not forgotten yet. I know it is the way of great people like you. I saw your picture once, in a book Miss Heale had; and did not wonder, when I saw it, that people wished to remember such a face as yours: and since I have seen you, I wonder still less."

"My picture? where?"

"In a book—'The Book of Beauty,' I believe they called it."

"My dear Grace," said Valencia, laughing and blushing, "if you ever looked in your glass, you must know that you are quite as worthy of a place in 'The Book of Beauty' as I am."

Grace shook her head with a serious smile. "Every one in their place, madam. I cannot help knowing that God has given me a gift: but why, I cannot tell. Certainly not for the same purpose as He gave it to you for,—a simple country girl like me. If He have any use for it, He will use it, as He does all His creatures, without my help. At all events it will not last long; a few years more, perhaps a few months, and it will be food for worms; and then people will care as little about my looks as I care now. I wish, my lady, you would stop the gentleman!"

"Mr. Mellot, draw the children something simpler, please;—a dog or a cat." And she gave Claude a look which he obeyed.

Valencia felt in a more solemn mood than usual as she walked home that day.

"Well," said Claude, "I have here every line and shade, and she cannot escape me. I'll go on board and paint her right off from memory, while it is fresh. Why, here come Scoutbush and the Major."

"Miss Harvey," said Scoutbush, trying, as he said to Campbell, "to look as grand as a sheep-dog among a pack of fox-hounds, and very thankful all the while he had no tail to be bitten off"—"Miss Harvey, I—we— have heard a great deal in praise of your school; and so I thought I should like to come and see it."

"Would your lordship like to examine the children?" says Grace, curtsying to the ground.

"No—thanks—that is—I have no doubt you teach them all that's right, and we are exceedingly gratified with the way in which you conduct the school.—I say Val," cried Scoutbush, who could support the part of patron no longer, "what pretty little ducks they are, I wish I had a dozen of them! Come you here!" and down he sat on a bench, and gathered a group round him.

"Now, are you all good children? I'm sure you look so!" said he, looking round into the bright pure faces, fresh from Leaven, and feeling himself the nearer heaven as he did so. "Ah! I see Mr. Mellot's been drawing you pictures. He's a clever man, a wonderful man, isn't he? I can't draw you pictures, nor tell you stories, like your schoolmistress. What shall I do?"

"Sing to them, Fred!" said Valencia.

And he began warbling a funny song, with a child on each knee, and his arms round three or four more, while the little faces looked up into his, half awe-struck at the presence of a live lord, half longing to laugh, but not sure whether it would be right.

Valencia and Campbell stood close together, exchanging looks.

"Dear fellow!" whispered she, "so simple and good when he is himself!"

And he must go to that dreadful war!"

"Never mind. Perhaps by this very act he is earning permission to come back again, a wiser and a more useful man."

"How then?"

"Is he not making friends with angels who always behold our Father's face? At least he is showing capabilities of good, which God gave; and which therefore God will never waste."

"Now, shall I sing you another song?"

"Oh yes, please!" rose from a dozen little mouths.

"You must not be troublesome to his lordship," says Grace.

"Oh no, I like it. I'll sing them one more song, and then—I want to speak to you, Miss Harvey."

Grace curtsied, blushed, and shook all over. What could Lord Scoutbush want to say to her?

That indeed was not very easy to discover at first; for Scoutbush felt so strongly the oddity of taking a pretty young woman into his counsel on a question of sanitary reform, that he felt mightily inclined to laugh, and began beating about the bush, in a sufficiently confused fashion.

"Well, Miss Harvey, I am exceedingly pleased with—with what I have seen of the school—that is, what my sister tells, and the clergyman—"

"The clergyman?" thought Grace, surprised, as she well might be, at what was entirely an impromptu invention of his lordship's.

"And—and—there is ten pounds toward the school, and—and, I will give an annual subscription the same amount."

"Mr. Headley receives the subscriptions, my lord," said Grace, drawing back from the proffered note.

"Of course," quoth Scoutbush, trusting again to an impromptu: "but this is for yourself—a small mark of our sense of your—your usefulness."

If any one has expected that Grace is about to conduct herself, during this interview, in any wise like a prophetess, tragedy queen, or other exalted personage; to stand upon her native independence, and scorning the bounty of an aristocrat, to read the said aristocrat a lecture on his duties and responsibilities, as landlord of Aberalva town; then will that person be altogether disappointed. It would have looked very well, doubtless: but it would have been equally untrue to Grace's womanhood, and to her notions of Christianity. Whether all men were or were not equal in the sight of Heaven, was a notion which, had never crossed her mind. She knew that they would all be equal in heaven, and that was enough for her. Meanwhile, she found lords and ladies on earth, and seeing no open sin in the fact of their being richer and more powerful than she was, she supposed that God had put them where they were; and she accepted them simply as facts of His kingdom. Of course they had their duties, as every one has: but what they were she did not know, or care to know. To their own master they stood or fell; her business was with her own duties, and with her own class, whose good and evil she understood by practical experience. So when a live lord made his appearance in her school, she looked at him with vague wonder and admiration, as a being out of some other planet, for whom she had no gauge or measure: she only believed that he had vast powers of doing good unknown to her; and was delighted by seeing him condescend to play with her children. The truth may be degrading, but it must be told. People, of course, who know the hollowness of the world, and the vanity of human wealth and honour, and are accustomed to live with lords and ladies, see through all that, just as clearly as any American republican does; and care no more about walking down Pall-Mall with the Marquis of Carabas, who can get them a place or a living, than with Mr. Two-shoes, who can only borrow ten pounds of them; but Grace was a poor simple West-country girl; and as such we must excuse her, if, curtsying to the very ground, with tears of gratitude in her eyes, she took the ten-pound note, saying to herself, "Thank the Good Lord! This will just pay mother's account at the mill."

Likewise we must excuse her if she trembled a little, being a young woman—though being also a lady, she lost no jot of self-possession— when his lordship went on in as important a tone as he could—

"And—and I hear, Miss Harvey, that you have a great influence over these children's parents."

"I am afraid some one has misinformed your lordship," said Grace, in a low voice.

"Ah!" quoth Scoutbush, in a tone meant to be reassuring; "it is quite proper in you to say so. What eyes she has! and what hair! and what hands, too!" (This was, of course, spoken mentally.) "But we know better; and we want you to speak to them, whenever you can, about keeping their houses clean, and all that, in case the cholera should come." And Scoutbush stopped. It was a quaint errand enough; and besides, as he told Mellot frankly, "I could think of nothing but those wonderful eyes of hers, and how like they were to La Signora's."

Grace had been looking at the ground all the while. Now she threw upon him one of her sudden, startled looks, and answered slowly, as her eyes dropped again:

"I have, my lord; but they will not listen to me."

"Won't listen to you? Then to whom will they listen?"

"To God, when He speaks Himself," said she, still looking on the ground. Scoutbush winced uneasily. He was not accustomed to solemn words, spoken so solemnly.

"Do you hear this, Campbell? Miss Harvey has been talking to these people already, and they won't hear her."

"Miss Harvey, I dare say, is not astonished at that. It is the usual fate of those who try to put a little common sense into their fellow-men."

"Well, and I shall, at all events, go off and give them my mind on the matter; though I suppose (with a glance at Grace) I can't expect to be heard where Miss Harvey has not been."

"Oh, my lord," cried Grace, "if you would but speak—" And there she stopped; for was it her place to tell him his duty? No doubt he had wiser people than her to counsel him.

But the moment the party left the school, Grace dropped into her chair; her head fell on the table, and she burst into an agony of weeping, which brought the whole school round her.

"Oh, my darlings! my darlings!" cried she at last, looking up, and clasping them to her by twos and threes; "Is there no way of saving you? No way! Then we must make the more haste to be good, and be all ready when Jesus comes to take us." And shaking off her passion with one strong effort, she began teaching those children as she had never taught them before, with a voice, a look, as of Stephen himself when he saw the heavens opened.

For that burst of weeping was the one single overflow of long pent passion, disappointment, and shame.

She had tried, indeed. Ever since Tom's conversation and Frank's sermon had poured in a flood of new light on the meaning of epidemics, and bodily misery, and death itself, she had been working as only she could work; exhorting, explaining, coaxing, warning, entreating with tears, offering to perform with her own hands the most sickening offices; to become, if no one else would, the common scavenger of the town. There was no depth to which, in her noble enthusiasm, she would not have gone down. And behold, it had been utterly in vain! Ah! the bitter disappointment of finding her influence fail her utterly, the first time that it was required for a great practical work! They would let her talk to them about their souls, then!—They would even amend a few sins here and there, of which they had been all along as well aware as she. But to be convinced of a new sin; to have their laziness, pride, covetousness, touched; that, she found, was what they would not bear; and where she had expected, if not thanks, at least a fair hearing, she had been met with peevishness, ridicule, even anger and insult.

Her mother had turned against her. "Why would she go getting a bad name from every one, and driving away customers?" The preachers, who were (as is too common in West-country villages) narrow, ignorant, and somewhat unscrupulous men, turned against her. They had considered the cholera, if it was to come, as so much spiritual capital for themselves; an occasion which they could "improve" into a sensation, perhaps a "revival;" and to explain it upon mere physical causes was to rob them of their harvest. Coarse viragos went even farther still, and dared to ask her "whether it was the curate or the doctor she was setting her cap at: for she never had anything in her mouth now but what they had said?" And those words went through her heart like a sword. Was she disinterested? Was not love for Thurnall, the wish to please him, mingling with all her earnestness? And again, was not self-love mingling with it? and mingling, too, with the disappointment, even indignation, which she felt at having failed? Ah—what hitherto hidden spots of self-conceit, vanity, pharisaic pride, that bitter trial laid bare, or seemed to lay, till she learned to thank her unseen Guide even for it!

Perhaps she had more reason to be thankful for her humiliation than she could suspect, with her narrow knowledge of the world. Perhaps that sudden downfall of her fancied queenship was needed, to shut her out, once and for all, from that downward path of spiritual intoxication, followed by spiritual knavery, which, as has been hinted, was but too easy for her.

But meanwhile the whole thing was but a fresh misery. To bear the burden of Cassandra day and night, seeing in fancy—which yet was truth—the black shadow of death hanging over that doomed place; to dream of whom it might sweep off;—perhaps, worst of all, her mother, unconfessed and impenitent!

Too dreadful! And dreadful, too, the private troubles which were thickening fast; and which seemed, instead of drawing her mother to her side, to estrange her more and more, for some mysterious reason. Her mother was heavily in debt. This ten pounds of Lord Scoutbush's would certainly clear off the miller's bill. Her scanty quarter's salary, which was just due, would clear off a little more. But there was a long-standing account of the wholesale grocer's for five-and-twenty pounds, for which Mrs. Harvey had given a two months' bill. That bill would become due early in September: and how to meet it, neither mother nor daughter knew; it lay like a black plague-spot on the future, only surpassed in horror by the cholera itself.

It might have been three or four days after, that Claude, lounging after breakfast on deck, was hailed from a dingy, which contained Captain Willis and Gentleman Jan.

"Might we take the liberty of coming aboard to speak with your honour?"

"By all means!" and up the side they came; their faces evidently big with some great purpose, and each desirous that the other should begin.

"You speak, Captain," says Jan, "you'm oldest;" and then he began himself. "If you please, sir, we'm come on a sort of deputation—Why don't you tell the gentleman, Captain?" Willis seemed either doubtful of the success of his deputation, or not over desirous thereof; for, after trying to put John Beer forward as spokesman, he began:—

"I'm sorry to trouble you, sir, but these young men will have it so—and no shame to them—on a matter which I think will come to nothing. But the truth is, they have heard that you are a great painter, and they have taken it into their heads to ask you to paint a picture for them."

"Not to ask you a favour, sir, mind!" interrupted Jan; "we'd scorn to be so forward; we'll subscribe and pay for it, in course, any price in reason. There's forty and more promised already."

"You must tell me, first, what the picture is to be about," said Claude, puzzled and amused.

"Why didn't you tell the gentleman, Captain?"

"Because I think it is no use; and I told them all so from the first. The truth is, sir, they want a picture of my—of our schoolmistress, to hang up in the school or somewhere—"

"That's it, dra'ed out all natural, in paints, and her bonnet, and her shawl, and all, just like life; we was a going to ax you to do one of they garrytypes; but she would have'n noo price; besides tan't cheerful looking they sort, with your leave; too much blackamoor wise, you see, and over thick about the nozzes, most times, to my liking; so we'll pay you and welcome, all you ask."

"Too much blackamoor wise, indeed!" said Claude, amused. "And how much do you think I should ask?"

No answer.

"We'll settle that presently. Come down into the cabin with me."

"Why, sir, we couldn't make so hold. His lordship—"

"Oh, his lordship's on shore, and I am skipper for the time; and if not, he'd be delighted to see two good seamen here. So come along."

And down they went.

"Bowie, bring these gentlemen some sherry!" cried Claude, turning over his portfolio. "Now then, my worthy friends, is that the sort of thing you want?"

And he spread on the table a water-colour sketch of Grace.

The two worthies gazed in silent delight, and then looked at each other, and then at Claude, and then at the picture.

"Why, sir," said Willis; "I couldn't have believed it! You've got the very smile of her, and the sadness of her too, as if you'd known her a hundred year!"

"'Tis beautiful!" sighed Jan, half to himself. Poor fellow, he had cherished, perhaps, hopes of winning Grace after all.

"Well, will that suit you?"

"Why, sir, make so bold:—but what we thought on was to have her drawn from head to foot, and a child standing by her like, holding to her hand, for a token as she was schoolmistress; and the pier behind, maybe, to signify as she was our maid, and belonged to Aberalva."

"A capital thought! Upon my word, you're men of taste here in the West; but what do you think I should charge for such a picture as that?"

"Name your price, sir," said Jan, who was in high good humour at Claude's approbation.

"Two hundred guineas?"

Jan gave a long whistle.

"I told you so, Captain Beer," said Willis, "or ever we got into the boat."

"Now," said Claude, laughing, "I've two prices, ore's two hundred, and the other is just nothing; and if you won't agree to the one, you must take the other."

"But we wants to pay, we'd take it an honour to pay, if we could afford it."

"Then wait till next Christmas."

"Christmas?"

"My good friend, pictures are not painted in a day. Next Christmas, if I live, I'll send you what you shall not be ashamed of, or she either, and do you club your money and put it into a handsome gold frame."

"But, sir," said Willis, "this will give you a sight of trouble, and all for our fancy."

"I like it, and I like you! You're fine fellows, who know a noble creature when God sends her to you; and I should be ashamed to ask a farthing of your money. There, no more words!"

"Well, you are a gentleman, sir!" said Gentleman Jan.

"And so are you," said Claude. "Now I'll show you some more sketches."

"I should like to know, sir," asked Willis, "how you got at that likeness. She would not hear of the thing, and that's why I had no liking to come troubling you about nothing."

Claude told them, and Jan laughed heartily, while Willis said,—

"Do you know, sir, that's a relief to my mind. There is no sin in being drawn, of course; but I didn't like to think my maid had changed her mind, when once she'd made it up."

So the deputation retired in high glee, after Willis had entreated Claude and Beer to keep the thing a secret from Grace.

It befell that Claude, knowing no reason why he should not tell Frank Headley, told him the whole story, as a proof of the chivalry of his parishioners, in which he would take delight.

Frank smiled, but said little; his opinion of Grace was altering fast. A circumstance which occurred a few days after altered it still more.

Scoutbush had gone forth, as he threatened, and exploded in every direction, with such effect as was to be supposed. Everybody promised his lordship to do everything. But when his lordship's back was turned, everybody did just nothing. They knew very well that he could not make them do anything; and what was more, in some of the very worst cases, the evil was past remedy now, and better left alone. For the drought went on pitiless. A copper sun, a sea of glass, a brown easterly blight, day after day, while Thurnall looked grimly aloft and mystified the sailors with—

"Fine weather for the Flying Dutchman, this!"

"Coffins sail fastest in a calm."

"You'd best all out to the quay-head, and whistle for a wind: it would be an ill one that would blow nobody good just now!"

But the wind came not, nor the rain; and the cholera crept nearer and nearer: while the hearts of all in Aberalva were hardened, and out of very spite against the agitators, they did less than they would have done otherwise. Even the inhabitants of the half-a-dozen cottages, which Scoutbush, finding that they were in his own hands, whitewashed by main force, filled the town with lamentations over his lordship's tyranny. True—their pig-styes were either under their front windows; or within two feet

of the wall: but to pull down a poor man's pig-stye!—they might ever so well be Rooshian slaves!—and all the town was on their side; for pigs were the normal inhabitants of Aberalva back-yards.

Tardrew's wrath, of course, knew no bounds; and meeting Thurnall standing at Willis's door, with Frank and Mellot, he fell upon him open-mouthed.

"Well, sir! I've a crow to pick with you."

"Pick away!" quoth Tom.

"What business have you meddling between his lordship and me?"

"That is my concern," quoth Tom, who evidently was not disinclined to quarrel. "I am not here to give an account to you of what I choose to do."

"I'll tell you what, sir; ever since you've been in this parish you've been meddling, you and Mr. Headley too,—I'll say it to your faces,—I'll speak the truth to any man, gentle or simple; and that ain't enough for you, but you must come over that poor half-crazed girl, to set her plaguing honest people, with telling 'em they'll all be dead in a month, till nobody can eat their suppers in peace: and that again ain't enough for you, but you must go to my lord with your—"

"Hold hard!" quoth Tom. "Don't start two hares at once. Let's hear that about Miss Harvey again!"

"Miss Harvey? Why, you should know better than I."

"Let's hear what you know."

"Why, ever since that night Trebooze caught you and her together—"

"Stop!" said Tom, "that's a lie."

"Everybody says so."

"Then everybody lies, that's all; and you may say I said so, and take care you don't say it again yourself. But what ever since that night?"

"Why, I suppose you come over the poor thing somehow, as you seem minded to do over every one as you can. But she's been running up and down the town ever since, preaching to 'em about windilation, and drains, and smells, and cholera, and its being a judgment of the Lord against dirt, till she's frightened all the women so, that many's the man as has had to forbid her his house.—But you know that as well as I."

"I never heard a word of it before: but now I have, I'll give you my opinion on it. That she is a noble, sensible girl, and that you are all a set of fools who are not worthy of her; and that the greatest fool of the whole is you, Mr. Tardrew. And when the cholera comes, it will serve you exactly right if you are the first man carried off by it. Now, sir, you have given me your mind, and I have given you mine, and I do not wish to hear anything more of you. Good morning!"

"You hold your head mighty high, to be sure, since you've had the run of his lordship's yacht."

"If you are impertinent, sir, you will repent it. I shall take care to inform his lordship of this conversation."

"My dear Thurnall," said Headley, as Tardrew withdrew, muttering curses, "the old fellow is certainly right on one point."

"What then?"

"That you have wonderfully changed your tone. Who was to eat any amount of dirt, if he could but save his influence thereby?"

"I have altered my plans. I shan't stay here long: I shall just see this cholera over, and then vanish."

"No?"

"Yes. I cannot sit here quietly, listening to the war-news. It makes me mad to be up and doing. I must eastward-ho, and see if trumps will not turn up for me at last. Why, I know the whole country, half-a-dozen of the languages,—oh, if I could get some secret-service work! Go I must. At worst I can turn my hand to doctoring Bashi-bazouks."

"My dear Tom, when will you settle down like other men?" cries Claude.

"I would now, if there was an opening at Whitbury, and low as life would be, I'd face it for my father's sake. But here I cannot stay."

Both Claude and Headley saw that Tom had reasons which he did not choose to reveal. However, Claude was taken into his confidence that very afternoon.

"I shall make a fool of myself with that schoolmistress. I have been near enough to it a dozen times already; and this magnificent conduct of hers about the cholera has given the finishing stroke to my brains. If I stay on here, I shall marry her: I know I shall! and I won't—I'd go to-morrow, if it were not that I'm bound, for my own credit, to see the cholera safe into the town, and out again."

Tom did not hint a word of the lost money, or of the month's delay which Grace had asked of him. The month was drawing fast to a close now, however: but no sign of the belt. Still, Tom had honour enough in him to be silent on the point, even to Claude.

"By the by, have you heard from the wanderers this week?"

"I heard from Sabina this morning. Marie is very poorly, I fear. They have been at Kissingen, bathing; and are going to Bertrich: somebody has recommended the baths there."

"Bertrich! Where's Bertrich?"

"The most delicious little nest of a place, half way up the Moselle, among the volcano craters."

"Don't know it. Have they found that Yankee?"

"No."

"Why, I thought Sabina had a whole detective force of pets and protégés, from Boulogne to Rome."

"Well, she has at least heard of him at Baden; and then again at Stuttgart: but he has escaped them as yet."

"And poor Marie is breaking her heart all the while? I'll tell you what, Claude, it will be well for him if he escapes me as well as them."

"What do you mean?"

"I certainly shan't go to the East without shaking hands once more with Marie and Sabina; and if in so doing I pass that fellow, it's a pity if I don't have a snap shot at him."

"Tom! Tom! I had hoped your duelling days were over."

"They will be, over, when one can get the law to punish such puppies; but not till then. Hang the fellow! What business had he with her at all, if he didn't intend to marry her?"

"I tell you, as I told you before, it is she who will not marry him."

"And yet she's breaking her heart for him. I can see it all plain enough, Claude. She has found him out only too late. I know him—luxurious, selfish, blazé; would give a thousand dollars to-morrow, I believe, like the old Roman, for a new pleasure: and then amuses himself with her till he breaks her heart! Of course she won't marry him: because she knows that if he found out her Quadroon blood—ah, that's it! I'll lay my life he has found it out already, and that is why he has bolted!"

Claude had no answer to give. That talk at the Exhibition made it only too probable.

"You think so yourself, I see! Very well. You know that whatever I have been to others, that girl has nothing against me."

"Nothing against you? Why, she owes you honour, life, everything."

"Never mind that. Only when I take a fancy to begin, I'll carry it through. I took to that girl, for poor Wyse's sake; and I'll behave by her to the last as he would wish; and he who insults her, insults me. I won't go out of my way to find Stangrave: but if I do, I'll have it out!"

"Then you will certainly fight. My dearest Tom, do look into your own heart, and see whether you have not a grain or two of spite against him left. I assure you you judge him too harshly."

"Hum—that must take its chance. At least, if we fight, we fight fairly and equally. He is a brave man—I will do him that justice—and a cool one; and used to be a sweet shot. So he has just as good a chance of shooting me, if I am in the wrong, as I have of shooting him, if he is."

"But your father?"

"I know. That is very disagreeable; and all the more so because I am going to insure my life—a pretty premium they will make me pay!—and if I'm killed in a duel, it will be forfeited. However, the only answer to that is, that either I shan't fight, or if I do, I shan't be killed. You know I don't believe in being killed, Claude."

"Tom! Tom! The same as ever!" said Claude sadly.

"Well, old man, and what else would you have me? Nobody could ever alter me, you know; and why should I alter myself? Here I am, after all, alive and jolly; and there is old daddy, as comfortable as he ever can be on earth: and so it will be to the end of the chapter. There! let's talk of something else."

CHAPTER XVI. COME AT LAST

Now, as if in all things Tom Thurnall and John Briggs were fated to take opposite sides, Campbell lost ground with Elsley as fast as he gained it with Thurnall. Elsley had never forgiven himself for his passion that first morning. He had shown Campbell his weak side, and feared and disliked him accordingly. Beside, what might not Thurnall have told Campbell about him? And what use might not the Major make of his secret? Besides, Elsley's dread and suspicion increased rapidly when he discovered that Campbell was one of those men who live on terms of peculiar intimacy with many women; whether for his own good or not, still for the good of the women concerned. For only by honest purity, and moral courage superior to that of the many, is that dangerous post earned; and women will listen to the man who will tell them the truth, however sternly; and will bow, as before a guardian angel, to the strong insight of him whom they have once learned to trust. But it is a dangerous office, after all, for layman as well as for priest, that of father-confessor. The experience of centuries has shown that they must needs exist, wherever fathers neglect their daughters, husbands their wives; wherever the average of the women cannot respect the average of the men. But the experience of centuries should likewise have taught men, that the said father-confessors are no objects of envy; that their temptations to become spiritual coxcombs (the worst species of all coxcombs), if not intriguers, bullies, and worse, are so extreme, that the soul which is proof against them must be either very great, or very small indeed. Whether Campbell was altogether proof, will be seen hereafter. But one day Elsley found out that such was Campbell's influence, and did not love him the more for the discovery.

They were walking round the garden after dinner; Scoutbush was licking his foolish lips over some commonplace tale of scandal.

"I tell you, my dear fellow, she's booked; and Mellot knows it as well as I. He saw her that night at Lady A's."

"We saw the third act of the comi-tragedy. The fourth is playing out now. We shall see the fifth before the winter."

"Non sine sanguine!" said the Major.

"Serve the wretched stick right, at least," said Scoutbush. "What right had he to marry such a pretty woman?"

"What right had they to marry her up to him?" said Claude. "I don't blame poor January. I suppose none of us, gentlemen, would have refused such a pretty toy, if we could have afforded it as he could."

"Whom do you blame then?" asked Elsley.

"Fathers and mothers who prate hypocritically about keeping their daughters' minds pure; and then abuse a girl's ignorance, in order to sell her to ruin. Let them keep her mind pure, in heaven's name; but let them consider themselves all the more bound in honour to use on her behalf the experience in which she must not share."

"Well," drawled Scoutbush, "I don't complain of her bolting; she's a very sweet creature, and always was: but, as Longreach says,—and a very witty fellow he is, though you laugh at him,—'If she'd kept to us, I shouldn't have minded: but as Guardsmen, we must throw her over. It's an insult to the whole Guards, my dear fellow, after refusing two of us, to marry an attorney, and after all to bolt with a plunger.'"

What bolting with a plunger might signify, Elsley knew not: but ere he could ask, the Major rejoined, in an abstracted voice—

"God help us all! And this is the girl I recollect, two years ago, singing there in Cavendish Square, as innocent as a nestling thrush!"

"Poor child!" said Mellot, "sold at first—perhaps sold again now. The plunger has bills out, and she has ready money. I know her settlements."

"She shan't do it," said the Major quietly: "I'll write to her to-night."

Elsley looked at him keenly. "You think, then, sir, that you can, by simply writing, stop this intrigue?"

The Major did not answer. He was deep in thought.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did," said Scoutbush; "two to one on his baulking the plunger!"

"She is at Lord —'s now, at those silly private theatricals. Is he there?"

"No," said Mellot; "he tried hard for an invitation—stooped to work me and Sabina. I believe she told him that she would sooner see him in the Morgue than help him; and he is gone to the moors now, I believe."

"There is time then: I will write to her to-night;" and Campbell took up his hat and went home to do it.

"Ah," said Scoutbush, taking his cigar meditatively from his mouth, "I wonder how he does it! It's a gift, I always say, a wonderful gift! Before he has been a week in a house, he'll have the confidence of every woman in it,—and 'gad, he does it by saying the rudest things!—and the confidence of all the youngsters the week after."

"A somewhat dangerous gift," said Elsley, drily.

"Ah, yes; he might play tricks if he chose: but there's the wonder, that he don't. I'd answer for him with my own sister. I do every day of my life—for I believe he knows how many pins she puts into her dress—and yet there he is. As I said once in the mess-room—there was a youngster there who took on himself to be witty, and talked about the still sow supping the milk—the snob! You recollect him, Mellot? the attorney's son from Brompton, who sold out;—we shaved his mustachios, put a bear in his bed, and sent him home to his ma—And he said that Major Campbell might be very pious, and all that: but he'd warrant—they were the fellow's own words,—that he took his lark on the sly, like other men—the snob! so I told him, I was no better than the rest, and no more I am; but if any man dared to say that the Major was not as honest as his own sister, I was his man at fifteen paces. And so I am, Claude!"

All which did not increase Elsley's love to the Major, conscious as he was that Lucia's confidence was a thing which he had not wholly; and which it would be very dangerous to him for any other man to have at all.

Into the drawing-room they went. Frank Headley had been asked up to tea; and he stood at the piano, listening to Valencia's singing.

As they came in, the maid came in also. "Mr. Thurnall wished to speak to Major Campbell."

Campbell went out, and returned in two minutes somewhat hurriedly.

"Mr. Thurnall wishes Lord Scoutbush to be informed at once, and I think it is better that you should all know it—that—it is a painful surprise:—but there is a man ill in the street, whose symptoms he does not like, he says."

"Cholera?" said Elsley.

"Call him in," said Scoutbush.

"He had rather not come in, he says."

"What! is it infectious?"

"Certainly not, if it be cholera, but—"

"He don't wish to frighten people, quite right:" (with a half glance at Elsley;) "but is it cholera, honestly?"

"I fear so."

"Oh, my children!" said poor Mrs. Vavasour.

"Will five pounds help the poor fellow?" said Scoutbush.

"How far off is it?" asked Elsley.

"Unpleasantly near. I was going to advise you to move at once."

"You hear what they are saying?" asked Valencia of Frank.

"Yes, I hear it," said Frank, in a quiet meaning tone.

Valencia thought that he was half pleased with the news. Then she thought him afraid; for he did not stir.

"You will go instantly, of course?"

"Of course I shall. Good-bye! Do not be afraid. It is not infectious."

"Afraid? And a soldier's sister?" said Valencia, with a toss of her beautiful head, by way of giving force to her somewhat weak logic.

Frank left the room instantly, and met Thurnall in the passage.

"Well, Headley, it's here before we sent for it, as bad luck usually is."

"I know. Let me go! Where is it? Whose house?" asked Frank in an excited tone.

"Humph!" said Thurnall, looking intently at him, "that is just what I shall not tell you."

"Not tell me?"

"No, you are too pale, Headley. Go back and get two or three glasses of wine, and then we will talk of it."

"What do you mean? I must go instantly! It is my duty,—my parishioner!"

"Look here, Headley! Are you and I to work together in this business, or are we not?"

"Why not, in heaven's name?"

"Then I want you, not for cure, but for prevention. You can do them no good when they have once got it. You may prevent dozens from having it in the next four-and-twenty hours, if you will be guided by me."

"But my business is with their souls, Thurnall."

"Exactly;—to give them the consolations of religion, as they call it. You will give them to the people who have not taken it. You may bring them safe through it by simply keeping up their spirits; while if you waste your time on poor dying wretches—"

"Thurnall, you must not talk so! I will do all you ask: but my place is at the death-bed, as well as elsewhere. These perishing souls are in my care."

"And how do you know, pray, that they are perishing?" answered Tom, with something very like a sneer. "And if they were, do you honestly believe that any talk of yours can change in five minutes a character which has been forming for years, or prevent a man's going where he ought to go,— which, I suppose, is the place to which he deserves to go?"

"I do," said Frank, firmly.

"Well. It is a charitable and hopeful creed. My great dread was, lest you should kill the poor wretches before their time, by adding to the fear of cholera the fear of hell. I caught the Methodist parson at that work an hour ago, took him by the shoulders and shot him out into the street. But, my dear Headley" (and Tom lowered his voice to a whisper), "wherever poor Tom Beer deserved to go to, he is gone to it already. He has been dead this twenty minutes."

"Tom Beer dead? One of the finest fellows in the town! And I never sent for?"

"Don't speak so loud, or they will hear you. I had no time to send for you; and if I had, I should not have sent, for he was past attending to you from the first. He brought it with him, I suppose, from C—. Had had warnings for a week, and neglected them. Now listen to me: that man was but two hours ill; as sharp a case as I ever saw, even in the West Indies. You must summon up all your good sense, and play the man for a fortnight; for it's coming on the poor souls like hell!" said Tom between his teeth, and stamped his foot upon the ground. Frank had never seen him show so much feeling; he fancied he could see tears glistening in his eyes.

"I will, so help me God!" said Frank.

Tom held out his hand, and grasped Frank's.

"I know you will. You're all right at heart. Only mind three things: don't frighten them; don't tire yourself; don't go about on an empty stomach; and then we can face the worst like men. And now go in, and say nothing to these people. If they take a panic we shall have some of them down to-night as sure as fate. Go in, keep quiet, persuade them to bolt anywhere on earth by daylight to-morrow. Then go home, eat a good supper, and come across to me; and if I'm out, I'll leave word where."

Frank went back again; he found Campbell, who had had his cue from Tom, urging immediate removal as strongly as he could, without declaring the extent of the danger. Valencia was for sending instantly for a fly to the nearest town, and going to stay at a watering-place some forty miles off. Elsley was willing enough at heart, but hesitated; he knew not, at the moment, poor fellow, where to find the money. His wife knew that she could borrow of Valencia; but she, too, was against the place. The cholera would be in the air for miles round. The journey in the hot sun would make the children sick and ill; and watering-place lodgings were such horrid holes, never ventilated, and full of smells—people caught fevers at them so often. Valencia was inclined to treat this as "mother's nonsense;" but Major Campbell said gravely, that Mrs. Vavasour was perfectly right as to fact, and her arguments full of sound reason; whereon Valencia said that "of course if Lucia thought it, Major Campbell would prove it; and there was no arguing with such Solons as he—"

Which Elsley heard, and ground his teeth. Whereon little Scoutbush cried joyfully,—

"I have it; why not go by sea? Take the yacht, and go! Where? Of course I have it again. 'Pon my word I'm growing clever, Valencia, in spite of all your prophecies. Go up the Welsh coast. Nothing so healthy and airy as a sea-voyage: sea as smooth as a mill-pond, too, and likely to be. And then land, if you like, at Port Madoc, as I meant to do; and there are my rooms at Beddgelert lying empty. Engaged them a week ago, thinking I should be there by now; so you may as well keep them aired for me. Come, Valencia, pack up your millinery! Lucia, get the cradles ready, and we'll have them all on board by twelve. Capital plan, Vavasour, isn't it? and, by Jove, what stunning poetry you will write there under Snowdon!"

"But will you not want your rooms yourself, Lord Scoutbush?" said Elsley.

"My dear fellow, never mind me. I shall go across the country, I think, see an old friend, and get some otter-hunting. Don't think of me, till you're there, and then send the yacht back for me. She must be doing something, you know; and the men are only getting drunk every day here. Come—no arguing about it, or I shall turn you all out of doors into the lane, eh?"

And the little fellow laughed so good-naturedly, that Elsley could not help liking him: and feeling that he would be both a fool, and cruel to his family, if he refused so good an offer, he gave in to the scheme, and went out to arrange matters: while Scoutbush went out into the hall with Campbell, and scrambled into his pea-jacket, to go off to the yacht that moment.

"You'll see to them, there's a good fellow," as they lighted their cigars at the door. "That Vavasour is greener than grass, you know, *tant pis* for my poor sister."

"I am not going."

"Not going?"

"Certainly not; so my rooms will be at their service; and you had much better escort them yourself. It will be much less disagreeable for Vavasour, who knows nothing of commanding sailors," or himself, thought the Major, "than finding himself master of your yacht in your absence, and you will get your fishing as you intended."

"But why are you going to stay?"

"Oh, I have not half done with the sea-beasts here. I found too new ones yesterday."

"Quaint old beetle-hunter you are, for a man who has fought in half-a-dozen battles!" and Scoutbush walked on silently for five minutes.

Suddenly he broke out—

"I cannot! By George, I cannot; and what's more, I won't!"

"What?"

"Run away. It will look so—so cowardly, and there's the truth of it, before those fine fellows down there: and just as I am come among them, too! The commander-in-chief to turn tail at the first shot! Though I can't be of any use, I know, and I should have liked a fortnight's fishing so," said he in a dolorous voice, "before going to be eaten up with flies at Varna—for this Crimean expedition is all moonshine."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Campbell. "We shall go; and some of us who go will never come back, Freddy. I know those Russians better than many, and I have been talking them over lately with Thurnall, who has been in their service."

"Has he been at Sevastopol?"

"No. Almost the only place on earth where he has not been: but from all he says, and from all I know, we are undervaluing our foes, as usual, and shall smart for it!"

"We'll lick them, never fear!"

"Yes; but not at the first round. Scoutbush, your life has been child's play as yet. You are going now to see life in earnest,—the sort of life which average people have been living, in every age and country, since Adam's fall; a life of sorrow and danger, tears and blood, mistake, confusion, and perplexity; and you will find it a very new sensation; and, at first, a very ugly one. All the more reason for doing what good deeds you can before you go; for you may have no time left to do any on the other side of the sea."

Scoutbush was silent awhile.

"Well; I'm afraid of nothing, I hope: only I wish one could meet this cholera face to face, as one will those Russians, with a good sword in one's hand, and a good horse between one's knees; and have a chance of giving him what he brings, instead of being kicked off by the cowardly Rockite, no one knows how; and not even from behind a turf dyke, but out of the very clouds."

"So we all say, in every battle, Scoutbush. Who ever sees the man who sent the bullet through him? And yet we fight on. Do you not think the greatest terror, the only real terror, in any battle, is the chance shot? which come from no one knows where, and hit no man can guess whom? If you go to the Crimea, as you will, you will feel what I felt at the Cape, and Cabul, and the Punjab, twenty times,—the fear of dying like a dog, one knew not how."

"And yet I'll fight, Campbell!"

"Of course you will, and take your chance. Do so now!"

"By Jove, Campbell—I always say it—you're the most sensible man I ever met; and, by Jove, the doctor comes the next. My sister shall have the yacht, and I'll go up to Penalva."

"You will do two good deeds at once, then," said the Major. "You will do what is right, and you will give heart to many a poor wretch here. Believe me, Scoutbush, you will never repent of this."

"By Jove, it always does one good to hear you talk in that way, Campbell! One feels—I don't know—so much of a man when one is with you; not that I shan't take uncommonly good care of myself, old fellow; that is but fair: but as for running away, as I said, why—why—why I can't, and so I won't!"

"By the by," said the Major, "there is one thing which I have forgotten, and which they will never recollect. Is the yacht victualled—with fresh meat and green stuff, I mean?"

"Whew—w—"

"I will go back, borrow a lantern, and forage in the garden, like an old campaigner. I have cut a salad with my sword before now."

"And made it in your helmet, with macassar sauce?" And the two went their ways.

Meanwhile, before they had left the room, a notable conversation had been going on between Valencia and Headley.

Headley had re-entered the room so much paler than he went out, that everybody noticed his altered looks. Valencia chose to attribute them to fear.

"So! Are you returned from the sick man already, Mr. Headley?" asked she, in a marked tone.

"I have been forbidden by the doctor to go near him at present, Miss St. Just," said he quietly, but in a sort of under-voice, which hinted that he wished her to ask no more questions. A shade passed over her forehead, and she began chatting rather noisily to the rest of the party, till Elsley, her brother, and Campbell went out.

Valencia looked up at him, expecting him to go too. Mrs. Vavasour began bustling about the room, collecting little valuables, and looking over her shoulders at the now unwelcome guest. But Frank leaned back in a cosy arm-chair, and did not stir. His hands were clasped on his knees; he seemed lost in thought; very pale: but there was a firm set look about his lips which attracted Valencia's attention. Once he looked up in Valencia's face, and saw that she was looking at him. A flush came over his cheeks for a moment, and then he seemed as impassive as ever. What could he want there! How very gauche and rude of him; so unlike him, too! And she said, civilly enough, to him, "I fear, Mr. Headley, we must begin packing up now."

"I fear you must, indeed," answered he, as if starting from a dream. He spoke in a tone, and with a look, which made both the women start; for what they meant it was impossible to doubt.

"I fear you must. I have foreseen it a long time; and so, I fear (and he rose from his seat), must I, unless I mean to be very rude. You will at least take away with you the knowledge, that you have given to one person's existence, at least for a few weeks, pleasure more intense than he thought earth could hold."

"I trust that pretty compliment was meant for me," said Lucia, half playful, half reproofing.

"I am sure that it ought not to have been meant for me," said Valencia, more downright than her sister. Both could see for whom it was meant, by the look of passionate worship which Frank fixed on a face which, after all, seemed made to be worshipped.

"I trust that neither of you," answered he, quietly, "think me impertinent enough to pretend to make love, as it is called, to Miss St. Just. I know who she is, and who I am. Gentleman as I am, and the descendant of gentlemen" (and Frank looked a little proud, as he spoke, and very handsome), "I see clearly enough the great gulf fixed between us; and I like it; for it enables me to say truth which I otherwise dare not have spoken; as a brother might say to a sister, or a subject to a queen. Either analogy will do equally well and equally ill."

Frank, without the least intending it, had taken up the very strongest military position. Let a man once make a woman understand, or fancy, that he knows that he is nothing to her; and confess boldly that there is a great gulf fixed between them, which he has no mind to bridge over: and then there is little that he may not see or do, for good or for evil.

And therefore it was that Lucia answered gently, "I am sure you are not well, Mr. Headley. The excitement of the night has been too much for you."

"Do I look excited, my dear madam?" he answered quietly. "I assure you that I am as calm as a man must be who believes that he has but a few days to live, and trusts, too, that when he dies, he will be infinitely happier than he ever has been on earth, and lay down an office which he has never discharged otherwise than ill; which has been to him a constant source of shame and sorrow."

"Do not speak so!" said Valencia, with her Irish impetuous generosity; "you are unjust to yourself. We have watched you, felt for you, honoured you, even when we differed from you"—What more she would have said, I know not, but at that moment Elsley's peevish voice was heard calling over the stairs, "Lucia! Lucia?"

"Oh dear! He will wake the children!" cried Lucia, looking at her sister, as much as to say, "How can I leave you!"

"Run, run, my dear creature!" said Valencia, with a self-confident smile: and the two were left alone.

The moment that Mrs. Vavasour left the room, there vanished from Frank's face that intense look of admiration which had made even Valencia uneasy. He dropped his eyes, and his voice faltered

as he spoke again. He acknowledged the change in their position, and Valencia saw that he did so, and liked him the better for it.

"I shall not repeat, Miss St. Just, now that we are alone, what I said just now of the pleasure which I have had during the last month. I am not poetical, or given to string metaphors together; and I could only go over the same dull words once more. But I could ask, if I were not asking too much, leave to prolong at least a shadow of that pleasure to the last moment. That I shall die shortly, and of this cholera, is with me a fixed idea, which nothing can remove. No, madam—it is useless to combat it! But had I anything, by which to the last moment I could bring back to my fancy what has been its sunlight for so long; even if it were a scrap of the hem of your garment, aye, a grain of dust off your feet— God forgive me! He and His mercy ought to be enough to keep me up: but one's weakness may be excused for clinging to such slight floating straws of comfort."

Valencia paused, startled, and yet affected. How she had played with this deep pure heart! And yet, was it pure? Did he wish, by exciting her pity, to trick her into giving him what he might choose to consider a token of affection?

And she answered coldly enough—

"I should be sorry, after what you have just said, to chance hurting you by refusing. I put it to your own good feeling—have you not asked somewhat too much?"

"Certainly too much, madam, in any common case," said he, quite unmoved. "Certainly too much, if I asked you for it, as I do not, as the token of an affection which I know well you do not, cannot feel. But—take my words as they stand—were you to—It would be returned if I die, in a few weeks; and returned still sooner if I live. And, madam," said he lowering his voice, "I vow to you, before Him who sees us both, that, as far as I am concerned, no human being shall ever know of the fact."

Frank had at last touched the wrong chord.

"What, Mr. Headley? Can you think that I am to have secrets in common with you, or with any other man? No, sir! If I granted your request, I should avow it as openly as I shall refuse it."

And she turned sharply toward the door.

Frank Headley was naturally a shy man: but extreme need sometimes bestows on shyness a miraculous readiness—(else why, in the long run, do the shy men win the best wives? which is a fact, and may be proved by statistics, at least as well as anything else can) so he quietly stepped to Valencia's side, and said in a low voice—

"You cannot avow the refusal half as proudly as I shall avow the request, if you will but wait till your sister's return. Both are unnecessary, I think: but it will only be an honour to me to confess, that, poor curate as I am—"

"Hush!" and Valencia walked quietly up to the table, and began turning over the leaves of a book, to gain time for her softened heart and puzzled brain.

In five minutes Frank was beside her again. The book was Tennyson's "Princess." She had wandered—who can tell why?—to that last exquisite scene, which all know; and as Valencia read, Frank quietly laid a finger on the book, and arrested her eyes at last—

"If you be, what I think you, some sweet dream.
Stoop down, and seem to kiss me ere I die!"

Valencia shut the book up hurriedly and angrily. A moment after she had made up her mind what to do, and with the slightest gesture in the world, motioned Frank proudly and coldly to follow her back into the window. Had she been a country girl, she would have avoided the ugly matter; but she was a woman of the world enough to see that she must, for her own sake and his, talk it out reasonably.

"What do you mean, Mr. Headley? I must ask! You told me just now that you had no intention of making love to me."

"I told you the truth," said he, in his quiet impassive voice. "I fixed on these lines as a *pis aller*; and they have done all and more than I wished, by bringing you back here for at least a moment."

"And do you suppose—you speak like a rational man, therefore, I must treat you as one—that I can grant your request?"

"Why not? It is an uncommon one. If I have guessed your character aright, you are able to do uncommon things. Had I thought you enslaved by etiquette, and by the fear of a world which you can make bow at your feet if you will, I should not have asked you. But,"—and here his voice took a tone of deepest earnestness—"grant it—only grant it, and you shall never repent it. Never, never, never will I cast one shadow over a light which has been so glorious, so life-giving; which I watched with delight, and yet lose without regret. Go your way, and God be with you! I go mine; grant me but a fortnight's happiness, and then, let what will come!"

He had conquered. The quiet earnestness of the voice, the child-like simplicity of the manner, of which every word conveyed the most delicate flattery—yet, she could see, without intending to flatter, without an after-thought—all these had won the impulsive Irish nature. For all the dukes and marquises in Belgravia she would not have done it; for they would have meant more than they said, even when they spoke more clumsily: but for the plain country curate she hesitated, and asked herself, "What shall I give him?"

The rose from her bosom? No. That was too significant at once, and too commonplace; besides, it might wither, and he find an excuse for not restoring it. It must be something valuable, stately, formal, which he must needs return. And she drew off a diamond hoop, and put it quietly into his hand.

"You promise to return it?"

"I promised long ago."

He took it, and lifted it—she thought that he was going to press it to his lips. Instead, he put it to his forehead, bowing forward and moved it slightly. She saw that he made with it the sign of the Cross.

"I thank you," he said, with a look of quiet gratitude. "I expected as much, when you came to understand my request. Again, thank you!" and he drew back humbly, and left her there alone; while her heart smote her bitterly for all the foolish encouragement which she had given to one so tender and humble, and delicate and true.

And so did Frank Headley get what he wanted; by that plain earnest simplicity, which has more power (let worldlings pride themselves as they will on their knowledge of women) than all the cunning wiles of the most experienced rake; and only by aping which, after all, can the rake conquer. It was a strange thing for Valencia to do, no doubt: but the strange things which are done in the world (which are some millions daily) are just what keep the world alive.

CHAPTER XVII. BAALZEBUB'S BANQUET

The next day there were three cholera cases: the day after there were thirteen.

He had come at last, Baalzebub, God of flies, and of what flies are bred from; to visit his self-blinded worshippers, and bestow on them his own Cross of the Legion of Dishonour. He had come suddenly, capriciously, sportively, as he sometimes comes; as he had come to Newcastle the summer before, while yet the rest of England was untouched. He had wandered all but harmless about the West country that summer; as if his maw had been full glutted five years before, when he sat for many a week upon the Dartmoor hills, amid the dull brown haze, and sun-burnt bents, and dried-up watercourses of white dusty granite, looking far and wide over the plague-struck land, and listening to the dead-bell booming all day long in Tavistock churchyard. But he was come at last, with appetite more fierce than ever, and had darted aside to seize on Aberalva, and not to let it go till he had sucked his fill.

And all men moved about the streets slowly, fearfully; conscious of some awful unseen presence, which might spring on them from round every corner; some dreadful inevitable spell, which lay upon them like a nightmare weight; and walked to and fro warily, looking anxiously into each other's faces, not to ask, "How are you?" but "How am I?" "Do I look as if—?" and glanced up ever and anon restlessly, as if they expected to see, like the Greeks, in their tainted camp, by Troy, the pitiless Sun-god shooting his keen arrows down on beast and man.

All night long the curdled cloud lay low upon the hills, wrapping in its hot blanket the sweltering breathless town; and rolled off sullenly when the sun rose high, to let him pour down his glare, and quicken into evil life all evil things. For Baalzebub is a sunny fiend; and loves not storm and tempest, thunder, and lashing rains; but the broad bright sun, and broad blue sky, under which he can take his pastime merrily, and laugh at all the shame and agony below; and, as he did at his great banquet in New Orleans once, madden all hearts the more by the contrast between the pure heaven above and the foul hell below.

And up and down the town the foul fiend sported, now here now there; snapping daintily at unexpected victims, as if to make confusion worse confounded: to belie Thurnall's theories and prognostics, and harden the hearts of fools by fresh excuses for believing that he had nothing to do with drains and water; that he was "only"—such an only!—"the Visitation of God."

He has taken old Beer's second son; and now he clutches at the old man himself; then across the street to Gentleman Jan, his eldest: but he is driven out from both houses by chloride of lime and peat dust, and the colony of the Beers has peace awhile.

Alas! there are victims enough and to spare beside them, too ready for the sacrifice, and up the main street he goes unabashed, springing in at one door and at another, on either side of the street, but fondest of the western side, where the hill slopes steeply down to the house-backs.

He fleshes his teeth on every kind of prey. The drunken cobbler dies, of course: but spotless cleanliness and sobriety does not save the mother of seven children, who has been soaking her brick floor daily with water from a poisoned well, defiling where she meant to clean. Youth does not save the buxom lass, who has been filling herself, as girls will do, with unripe fruit: nor innocence the two fair children who were sailing their feather-boats yesterday in the quay-pools, as they have sailed them for three years past, and found no hurt; piety does not save the bed-ridden old dame, bed-ridden in the lean-to garret, who moans, "It is the Lord!" and dies. It is "the Lord" to her, though Baalzebub himself be the angel of release.

And yet all the while sots and fools escape where wise men fall; weakly women, living amid all wretchedness, nurse, unharmed, strong men who have breathed fresh air all day. Of one word of Scripture at least Baalzebub is mindful; for "one is taken and another left."

Still, there is a method in his seeming madness. His eye falls on a blind alley, running back from the main street, backed at the upper end by a high wall of rock. There is a God-send for him—a devil's-send, rather, to speak plain truth: and in he dashes; and never leaves that court, let brave Tom wrestle with him as he may, till he has taken one from every house.

That court belonged to Treluddra, the old fish-jowder. He must do something. Thurnall attacks him; Major Campbell, Headley; the neighbours join in the cry; for there is no mistaking cause and effect there, and no one bears a great love to him; besides, terrified and conscience-stricken men are glad of a scapegoat; and some of those who were his stoutest backers in the vestry are now, in their terror, the loudest against him, ready to impute the whole cholera to him. Indeed, old Beer is ready to declare that it was Treluddra's fish-heaps which poisoned him and his: so, all but mobbed, the old sinner goes up—to set the houses to rights? No; to curse the whole lot for a set of pigs, and order them to clean the place out themselves, or he will turn them into the street. He is one of those base natures, whom fact only lashes into greater fury,—a Pharaoh whose heart the Lord himself can only harden; such men there are, and women, too, grown grey in lies, to reap at last the fruit of lies. But he carries back with him to his fish-heaps a little invisible somewhat which he did not bring; and ere nightfall he is dead hideously; he, his wife, his son:—and now the Beers are down again, and the whole neighbourhood of Treluddra's house is wild with disgusting agony.

Now the fiend is hovering round the fish-curing houses: but turns back, disgusted with the pure scent of the tan-yard, where not hides, but nets are barked; skips on board of a brig in the quay-pool; and a poor collier's 'prentice dies, and goes to his own place. What harm has he done? Is it his sin that, ill-fed and well-beaten daily, he has been left to sleep on board, just opposite the sewer's mouth, in a berth some four feet long by two feet high and broad?

Or is it that poor girl's sin who was just now in Heale's shop, talking to Miss Heale safe and sound, that she is carried back into it, in half-an-hour's time, fainting, shrieking? One must draw a veil over the too hideous details.

No, not her fault: but there, at least, the curse has not come without a cause. For she is Tardrew's daughter.

But whither have we got? How long has the cholera been in Aberalva? Five days, five minutes, or five years? How many suns have risen and set since Frank Headley put into his bosom Valencia's pledge!

It would be hard for him to tell; and hard for many more: for all the days have passed as in a fever dream. To cowards the time has seemed endless; and every moment, ere their term shall come, an age of terror, of self-reproach, of superstitious prayers, and cries, which are not repentance. And to some cowards, too, the days have seemed but as a moment; for they have been drunk day and night.

Strange and hideous, yet true.

It has now become a mere commonplace, the strange power which great crises, pestilences, famines, revolutions, invasions, have to call out in their highest power, for evil and for good alike, the passions and virtues of man; how, during their stay, the most desperate recklessness, the most ferocious crime, side by side with the most heroic and unexpected virtue, are followed generally by a collapse and a moral death, alike of virtue and of vice. We should explain this now-a-days, and not ill, by saying that these crises put the human mind into a state of exaltation: but the truest explanation, after all, lies in the old Bible belief, that in these times there goes abroad the unquenchable fire of God, literally kindling up all men's hearts to the highest activity, and showing, by the light of their own strange deeds, the inmost recesses of their spirits, till those spirits burn down again, self-consumed, while the chaff and stubble are left as ashes, not valueless after all, as manure for some future crop; and the pure gold, if gold there be, alone remains behind.

Even so it was in Aberalva during that fearful week. The drunkards drank more; the swearers swore more than ever; the unjust shopkeeper clutched more greedily than ever at the last few scraps of mean gain which remained for him this side the grave; the selfish wrapped themselves up more brutally than ever in selfishness; the shameless woman mingled desperate debauchery with fits of frantic superstition; and all base souls cried out together, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

But many a brave man and many a weary woman possessed their souls in patience, and worked on, and found that as their day their strength should be. And to them the days seemed short indeed; for there was too much to be done in them for any note of time.

Headley and Campbell, Grace and old Willis, and last, but not least, Tom Thurnall,—these and three or four brave women, organised themselves into a right-gallant and well-disciplined band, and commenced at once a visitation from house to house, saving thereby, doubtless, many a life: but ere eight-and-forty hours were passed, the house visitation languished. It was as much as they could do to attend to the acute cases.

And little Scoutbush? He could not nurse, nor doctor: but what he could, he did. He bought, and fetched all that money could procure. He galloped over to the justices, and obtained such summary powers as he could; and then, like a true Irishman, exceeded them recklessly, breaking into premises right and left, in an utterly burglarious fashion; he organised his fatigue-party, as he called them, of scavengers, and paid the cowardly clods five shillings a day each to work at removing all removable nuisances; he walked up and down the streets for hours, giving the sailors cigars from his own case, just to show them that he was not afraid, and therefore they need not be: and if it was somewhat his fault that the horse was stolen, he at least did his best after the event to shut the stable-door. The five real workers toiled on, meanwhile, in perfect harmony and implicit obedience to the all-knowing Tom, but with the most different inward feelings. Four of them seemed to forget death and danger; but each remembered them in his own fashion.

Major Campbell longed to die, and courted death. Frank believed that he should die, and was ready for death. Grace longed to die, but knew that she should not die till she had found Tom's belt, and was content to wait. Willis was of opinion that an "old man must die some day, and somehow,—as good one way as another;" and all his concern was to run about after his maid, seeing that she did not tire herself, and obeying all her orders with sailor-like precision and cleverness.

And Tom? He just thought nothing about death and danger at-all. Always smiling, always cheerful, always busy, yet never in a hurry, he went up and down, seemingly ubiquitous. Sleep he got when he could, and food as often as he could; into the sea he leapt, morning and night, and came out fresher every time; the only person in the town who seemed to grow healthier, and actually happier, as the work went on.

"You really must be careful of yourself," said Campbell, at last. "You carry no charmed life."

"My dear sir, I am the most cautious and selfish man in the town. I am living by rule; I have got—and what greater pleasure?—a good stand-up fight with an old enemy; and be sure I shall keep myself in condition for it. I have written off for help to the Board of Health, and I shall not be shoved against the ropes till the Government man comes down."

"And then?"

"I shall go to bed and sleep for a month. Never mind me; but mind yourself: and mind that curate; he's a noble brick;—if all parsons in England were like him, I'd—What's here now?"

Miss Heale came shrieking down the street.

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall! Miss Tardrew! Miss Tardrew!"

"Screaming will only make you ill, too, Miss. Where is Miss Tardrew?"

"In the surgery,—and my mother!"

"I expected this," said Tom. "The old man will go next."

He went into the surgery. The poor girl was in collapse already. Mrs. Heale was lying on the sofa, stricken. The old man hanging over her, brandy bottle in hand.

"Put away that trash!" cried Tom; "you've had too much already."

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall, she's dying, and I shall die too!"

"You! you were all right this morning."

"But I shall die; I know I shall, and go to hell!"

"You'll go where you ought; and if you give way to this miserable cowardice, you'll go soon enough. Walk out, sir! Make yourself of some use, and forget your fear! Leave Mrs. Heale to me."

The wretched old man obeyed him, utterly cowed, and went out: but not to be of use: he had been hopelessly boozy from the first—half to fortify his body against infection, half to fortify his heart against conscience. Tom had never reproached him for his share in the public folly. Indeed, Tom had never reproached a single soul. Poor wretches who had insulted him had sent for him, with abject shrieks. "Oh, doctor, doctor, save me! Oh, forgive me! oh, if I'd minded what you said! Oh, don't think of what I said!" And Tom had answered cheerfully, "Tut-tut; never mind what might have been; let's feel your pulse."

But though Tom did not reproach Heale, Heale reproached himself. He had just conscience enough left to feel the whole weight of his abused responsibility, exaggerated and defiled by superstitious horror; and maudlin tipsy, he wandered about the street, moaning that he had murdered his wife, and all the town, and asking pardon of every one he met; till seeing one of the meeting-houses open, he staggered in, in the vain hope of comfort which he knew he did not deserve.

In half-an-hour Tom was down the street again to Headley's. "Where is Miss Harvey?"

"At the Beers'."

"She must go up to Heale's instantly. The mother will die. Those cases of panic seldom recover. And Miss Heale may very likely follow her. She has shrieked and sobbed herself into it, poor fool! and Grace must go to her at once; she may bring her to common sense and courage, and that is the only chance."

Grace went, and literally talked and prayed Miss Heale into life again.

"You are an angel," said Tom to her that very evening, when he found the girl past danger.

"Mr. Thurnall!" said Grace, in a tone of sad and most meaning reproof.

"But you are! And these owls are not worthy of you."

"This is no time for such language, sir! After all, what am I doing more than you?" And Grace went upstairs again, with a cold hard countenance which belied utterly the heart within.

That was the critical night of all. The disease seemed to have done its worst in the likeliest spots: but cases of panic increased all the afternoon; and the gross number was greater than ever.

Tom did not delay inquiring into the cause: and he discovered it. Headley, coming out the next morning, after two hours' fitful sleep, met him at the gate: his usual business-like trot was exchanged for a fierce and hurried stamp. When he saw Frank, he stopped short, and burst out into a story which was hardly intelligible, so interlarded was it with oaths.

"For Heaven's sake! Thurnall, calm yourself, and do not swear so frightfully; it is so unlike you! What can have upset you thus?"

"Why should I not curse and swear in the street," gasped he, "while every fellow who calls himself a preacher is allowed to do it in the pulpit with impunity! Fine him five shillings for every curse, as you might if people had courage and common sense, and then complain of me! I am a fool, I know, though. But I cannot stand it! To have all my work undone by a brutal ignorant fanatic!—It is too much! Here, if you will believe it, are those preaching fellows getting up a revival, or some such invention, just to make money out of the cholera! They have got down a great gun from the county town. Twice a-day they are preaching at them, telling them that it is all God's wrath against their sins; that it is impious to interfere, and that I am fighting against God, and the end of the world is coming, and they and the devil only know what. If I meet one of them, I'll wring his neck, and be hanged for it! Oh, you parsons! you parsons!" and Tom ground his teeth with rage.

"Is it possible? How did you find this out?"

"Mrs. Heale had been in, listening to their howling, just before she was taken. Heale went in when I turned him out of doors; came home raving mad, and is all but blue now. Three cases of women have I had this morning, all frightened into cholera, by their own confession, by last night's tomfoolery.—Came home howling, fainted, and were taken before morning. One is dead, the other two will die. You must stop it, or I shall have half-a-dozen more to-night. Go into the meeting, and curse the cur to his face!"

"I cannot," cried Frank, with a gesture of despair, "I cannot!"

"Ah, your cloth forbids you, I suppose, to enter the non-conformist opposition shop."

"You are unjust, Thurnall! What are such rules at a moment like this? I'd break them, and the bishop would hold me guiltless. But I cannot speak to these people. I have no eloquence—no readiness—they do not trust me—would not believe me—God help me!" and Frank covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

"Not that, for Heaven's sake!" said Tom, "or we shall have you blue next, my good fellow. I'd go myself, but they'd not hear me, for certain; I am no Christian, I suppose: at least, I can't talk their slang:—but I know who can! We'll send Campbell!"

Frank hailed the suggestion with rapture, and away they went: but they had an hour's good search from sufferer to sufferer before they found the Major.

He heard them quietly. A severe gloom settled over his face. "I will go," said he.

At six o'clock that evening, the meeting-house was filling with terrified women, and half-curious, half-sneering, men; and among them the tall figure of Major Campbell, in his undress uniform (which he had put on, wisely, to give a certain dignity to his mission), stalked in, and took his seat in the back benches.

The sermon was what he expected. There is no need to transcribe it. Such discourses may be heard often enough in churches as well as chapels. The preacher's object seemed to be—for some purpose or other which we have no right to judge—to excite in his hearers the utmost intensity of selfish fear, by language which certainly, as Tom had said, came under the law against profane cursing and swearing. He described the next world in language which seemed a strange jumble of Virgil's Aeneid, the Koran, the dreams of those rabbis who crucified our Lord, and of those mediaeval inquisitors who tried to convert sinners (and on their own ground, neither illogically nor over-harshly) by making this world for a few hours as like as possible to what, so they held, God was going to make the world to come for ever.

At last he stopped suddenly, when he saw that the animal excitement was at the very highest; and called on all who felt "convinced" to come forward and confess their sins.

In another minute there would have been (as there have been ere now) four or five young girls raving and tossing upon the floor, in mad terror and excitement; or, possibly, half the congregation might have rushed out (as a congregation has rushed out ere now) headed by the preacher himself, and ran headlong down to the quay-pool, with shrieks and shouts, declaring that they had cast the devil out of Betsey Pennington, and were hunting him into the sea: but Campbell saw that the madness must be stopped at once; and rising, he thundered, in a voice which brought all to their senses in a moment—

"Stop! I, too, have a sermon to preach to you; I trust I am a Christian man, and that not of last year's making, or the year before. Follow me outside, if you be rational beings, and let me tell you the truth—God's truth! Men!" he said, with an emphasis on the word, "you at least, will give me a fair hearing, and you too, modest married women! Leave that fellow with the shameless hussies who like to go into fits at his feet."

The appeal was not in vain. The soberer majority followed him out; the insane minority soon followed, in the mere hope of fresh excitement; while the preacher was fain to come also, to guard his flock from the wolf. Campbell sprang upon a large block of stone, and taking off his cap, opened his mouth, and spake unto them.

* * * * *

Readers will doubtless desire to hear what Major Campbell said: but they will be disappointed; and perhaps it is better for them that they should be. Let each of them, if they think it worth while, write for themselves a discourse fitting for a Christian man, who loved and honoured his Bible too much to find in a few scattered texts, all misinterpreted, and some mistranslated, excuses for denying fact, reason, common justice, the voice of God in his own moral sense, and the whole remainder of the Bible from beginning to end.

Whatsoever words he spoke they came home to those wild hearts with power. And when he paused, and looked intently into the faces of his auditory, to see what effect he was producing, a murmur of assent and admiration rose from the crowd, which had now swelled to half the population of the town. And no wonder; no wonder that, as the men were enchained by the matter, so were the women by the manner. The grand head, like a grey granite peak against the clear blue sky; the tall figure, with all its martial stateliness and ease; the gesture of his long arm, so graceful, and yet so self-restrained; the tones of his voice which poured from beneath that proud moustache, now tender as a girl's, now ringing like a trumpet over roof and sea. There were old men there, old beyond the years of man, who said they had never seen nor heard the like: but it must be like what their fathers had told them of, when John Wesley, on the cliffs of St. Ives, out-thundered the thunder of the gale. To Grace he seemed one of the old Scotch Covenanters of whom she had read, risen from the dead to preach there from his rock beneath the great temple of God's air, a wider and a juster creed than theirs. Frank drew Thurnall's arm through his, and whispered, "I shall thank you for this to my dying day:" but Thurnall held down his head. He seemed deeply moved. At last, half to himself,—

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