ARTHUR TIMOTHY SHAY

THE GOOD TIME COMING

Timothy Arthur

The Good Time Coming

Arthur T.

The Good Time Coming / T. Arthur — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

T. S. Arthur
The Good Time Coming

PREFACE

LIFE is a mystery to all men, and the more profound the deeper the striving spirit is immersed in its own selfish instincts. How earnestly do we all fix our eyes upon the slowly-advancing future, impatiently waiting that good time coming which never comes! How fast the years glide by, beginning in hope and ending in disappointment! Strange that we gain so little of true wisdom amid the sharp disappointments that meet us at almost every turn! How keenly the writer has suffered with the rest, need not be told. It will be enough to say that he, too, has long been an anxious waiter for the "good time coming," which has not yet arrived.

But hope should not die because of our disappointments. There is a good time coming, and for each one of us, if we work and wait for it; but we must work patiently, and look in the right direction. Perhaps our meaning will be plainer after our book is read.

CHAPTER I

THERE was not a cloud in all the bright blue sky, nor a shadow upon the landscape that lay in beauty around the lovely home of Edward Markland; a home where Love had folded her wings, and Peace sought a perpetual abiding-place. The evening of a mild summer day came slowly on, with its soft, cool airs, that just dimpled the shining river, fluttered the elm and maple leaves, and gently swayed the aspiring heads of the old poplars, which, though failing at the root, still lifted, like virtuous manhood, their greenest branches to heaven.

In the broad porch, around every chaste column of which twined jessamine, rose, or honeysuckle, filling the air with a delicious fragrance beyond the perfumer's art to imitate, moved to and fro, with measured step and inverted thought, Edward Markland, the wealthy owner of all the fair landscape spreading for acres around the elegant mansion he had built as the home of his beloved ones.

"Edward." Love's sweetest music was in the voice that uttered his name, and love's purest touch in the hand that lay upon his arm.

A smile broke over the grave face of Markland, as he looked down tenderly into the blue eyes of his Agnes.

"I never tire of this," said the gentle-hearted wife, in whose spirit was a tuneful chord for every outward touch of beauty; "it looks as lovely now as yesterday; it was as lovely yesterday as the day my eyes first drank of its sweetness. Hush!"

A bird had just alighted on a slender spray a few yards distant, and while yet swinging on the elastic bough, poured forth a gush of melody.

"What a thrill of gladness was in that song, Edward! It was a spontaneous thank-offering to Him, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground; to Him who clothes the fields in greenness, beautifies the lily, and provides for every creature its food in season. And this reminds me;" she added in a changed and more sobered voice, "that our thank-offering for infinite mercies lies in deeds, not heart-impulses nor word-utterances. I had almost forgotten poor Mrs. Elder."

And as Mrs. Markland said this, she withdrew her hand from her husband's arm, and glided into the house, leaving his thoughts to flow back into the channel from which they had been turned.

In vain for him did Nature clothe herself, on that fair day, in garments of more than usual beauty. She wooed the owner of Woodbine Lodge with every enticement she could offer; but he saw not her charms; felt not the strong attractions with which she sought to win his admiration. Far away his thoughts were wandering, and in the dim distance Fancy was busy with half-defined shapes, which her plastic hand, with rapid touches, moulded into forms that seemed instinct with a purer life, and to glow with a more ravishing beauty than any thing yet seen in the actual he had made his own. And as these forms became more and more vividly pictured in his imagination, the pace of Edward Markland quickened; and all the changing aspects of the man showed him to be in the ardour of a newly-forming life-purpose.

It was just five years since he commenced building Woodbine Lodge and beautifying its surroundings. The fifteen preceding years were spent in the earnest pursuit of wealth, as the active partner in a large mercantile establishment. Often, during these busy fifteen years, had he sighed for ease and "elegant leisure;" for a rural home far away from the jar, and strife, and toil incessant by which he was surrounded. Beyond this he had no aspiration. That "lodge in the wilderness," as he sometimes vaguely called it, was the bright ideal of his fancy. There, he would often say to himself—

"How blest could I live, and how calm could I die!"

And daily, as the years were added, each bringing its increased burdens of care and business, would he look forward to the "good time coming," when he could shut behind him forever the doors of the warehouse and counting-room, and step forth a free man. Of the strife for gain and the sharp

contests in business, where each seeks advantages over the other, his heart was weary, and he would often sigh in the ears of his loving home-companion, "Oh! for the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest!"

And at length this consummation of his hopes came. A year of unusual prosperity swelled his gains to the sum he had fixed as reaching his desires; and, with a sense of pleasure never before experienced, he turned all his affections and thoughts to the creation of an earthly paradise, where, with his heart and home treasures around him, he could, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot," live a truer, better, happier life, than was possible amid the city's din, or while breathing the ever-disturbed and stifling atmosphere of business.

And now his work of creation at Woodbine Lodge was complete. Everywhere the hand of taste was visible—everywhere. You could change nothing without marring the beauty of the whole. During all the years in which Mr. Markland devoted himself to the perfecting of Woodbine Lodge, there was in his mind just so much of dissatisfaction with the present, as made the looked-for period, when all should be finished according to the prescriptions of taste, one in which there would be for him almost a Sabbath-repose.

How was it with Mr. Markland? All that he had prescribed as needful to give perfect happiness was attained. Woodbine Lodge realized his own ideal; and every one who looked upon it, called it an Eden of beauty. His work was ended; and had he found rest and sweet peace? Peace! Gentle spirit! Already she had half-folded her wings; but, startled by some uncertain sound, she was poised again, and seemed about to sweep the yielding air with her snowy pinions.

The enjoyment of all he had provided as a means of enjoyment did not come in the measure anticipated. Soon mere beauty failed to charm the eye, and fragrance to captivate the senses; for mind immortal rests not long in the fruition of any achievement, but quickly gathers up its strength for newer efforts. And so, as we have seen, Edward Markland, amid all the winning blandishments that surrounded him on the day when introduced to the reader, neither saw, felt, nor appreciated what, as looked to from the past's dim distance, formed the Beulah of his hopes.

CHAPTER II

A FEW minutes after Mrs. Markland left her husband's side, she stepped from the house, carrying a small basket in one hand, and leading a child, some six or seven years old, with the other.

"Are you going over to see Mrs. Elder?" asked the child, as they moved down the smoothly-graded walk.

"Yes, dear," was answered.

"I don't like to go there," said the child.

"Why not, Aggy." The mother's voice was slightly serious.

"Every thing is so mean and poor."

"Can Mrs. Elder help that, Aggy?"

"I don't know."

"She's sick, my child, and not able even to sit up. The little girl who stays with her can't do much. I don't see how Mrs. Elder can help things looking mean and poor; do you?"

"No, ma'am," answered Aggy, a little bewildered by what her mother said.

"I think Mrs. Elder would be happier if things were more comfortable around her; don't you, Aggy?"

"Yes, mother,"

"Let us try, then, you and I, to make her happier."

"What can I do?" asked little Aggy, lifting a wondering look to her mother's face.

"Would you like to try, dear?"

"If I knew what to do."

"There is always a way when the heart is willing. Do you understand that, love?"

Aggy looked up again, and with an inquiring glance, to her mother.

"We will soon be at Mrs. Elder's. Are you not sorry that she is so sick? It is more than a week since she was able to sit up, and she has suffered a great deal of pain."

"Yes, I'm very sorry." And both look and tone confirmed the truth of her words. The child's heart was touched.

"When we get there, look around you, and see if there is nothing you can do to make her feel better. I'm sure you will find something."

"What, mother?" Aggy's interest was all alive now.

"If the room is in disorder, you might, very quietly, put things in their right places. Even that would make her feel better; for nobody can be quite comfortable in the midst of confusion."

"Oh! I can do all that, mother." And light beamed in the child's countenance. "It's nothing very hard."

"No; you can do all this with little effort; and yet, trifling as the act may seem, dear, it will do Mrs. Elder good: and you will have the pleasing remembrance of a kind deed. A child's hand is strong enough to lift a feather from an inflamed wound, even though it lack the surgeon's skill." The mother said these last words half herself.

And now they were at the door of Mrs. Elder's unattractive cottage, and the mother and child passed in. Aggy had not overdrawn the picture when she said that everything was poor and mean; and disorder added to the unattractive appearance of the room in which the sick woman lay.

"I'm sorry to find you no better," said Mrs. Markland, after making a few inquiries of the sick woman.

"I shall never be any better, I'm afraid," was the desponding answer.

"Never! Never is a long day, as the proverb says. Did you ever hear of a night that had no morning?" There was a cheerful tone and manner about Mrs Markland that had its effect; but, ere

replying, Mrs. Elder's dim eyes suddenly brightened, as some movement in the room attracted her attention.

"Bless the child! Look at her!" And the sick woman glanced toward Aggy, who, bearing in mind her mother's words, was already busying herself in the work of bringing order out of disorder.

"Look at the dear creature!" added Mrs. Elder, a glow of pleasure flushing her countenance, a moment before so pale and sad.

Unconscious of observation, Aggy, with almost a woman's skill, had placed first the few old chairs that were in the room, against the wall, at regular distances from each other. Then she cleared the littered floor of chips, pieces of paper, and various articles that had been left about by the untidy girl who was Mrs. Elder's only attendant, and next straightened the cloth on the table, and arranged the mantel-piece so that its contents no longer presented an unsightly aspect.

"Where is the broom, Mrs. Elder?" inquired the busy little one, coming now to the bedside of the invalid.

"Never mind the broom, dear; Betsy will sweep up the floor when she comes in," said Mrs. Elder. "Thank you for a kind, good little girl. You've put a smile on every thing in the room. What a grand housekeeper you are going to make!"

Aggy's heart bounded with a new emotion. Her young cheeks glowed, and her blue eyes sparkled. If the pleasure she felt lacked any thing of pure delight, a single glance at her mother's face made all complete.

"When did you hear from your daughter?" asked Mrs. Markland.

There was a change of countenance and a sigh.

"Oh! ma'am, if Lotty were only here, I would be happy, even in sickness and suffering. It's very hard to be separated from my child."

"She is in Charleston?"

"Yes, ma'am,"

"Is her husband doing well?"

"I can't say that he is. He isn't a very thrifty man, though steady enough."

"Why did they go to Charleston?"

"He thought he would do better there than here; but they haven't done as well, and Lotty is very unhappy."

"Do they talk of returning?"

"Yes, ma'am; they're both sick enough of their new home. But then it costs a heap of money to move about with a family, and they haven't saved any thing. And, more than this, it isn't just certain that James could get work right away if he came back. Foolish fellow that he was, not to keep a good situation when he had it! But it's the way of the world, Mrs. Markland, this ever seeking, through change, for something better than Heaven awards in the present."

"Truly spoken, Mrs. Elder. How few of us possess contentment; how few extract from the present that good with which it is ever supplied! We read the fable of the dog and the shadow, and smile at the folly of the poor animal; while, though instructed by reason, we cast aside the substance of to-day in our efforts to grasp the shadowy future. We are always looking for the blessing to come; but when the time of arrival is at hand, what seemed so beautiful in the hazy distance is shorn of its chief attraction, or dwarfed into nothingness through contrast with some greater good looming grandly against the far horizon."

Mrs. Markland uttered the closing sentence half in reverie; for her thoughts were away from the sick woman and the humble apartment in which she was seated. There was an abstracted silence of a few moments, and she said:

"Speaking of your daughter and her husband, Mrs. Elder; they are poor, as I understand you?"

"Oh yes, ma'am; it is hand-to-mouth with them all the time. James is kind enough to Lotty, and industrious in his way; but his work never turns to very good account."

"What business does he follow?"

"He's a cooper by trade; but doesn't stick to any thing very long. I call him the rolling stone that gathers no moss."

"What is he doing in Charleston?"

"He went there as agent for a man in New York, who filled his head with large ideas. He was to have a share in the profits of a business just commenced, and expected to make a fortune in a year or two; but before six months closed, he found himself in a strange city, out of employment, and in debt. As you said, a little while ago, he dropped the present substance in grasping at a shadow in the future."

"The way of the world," said Mrs. Markland.

"Yes, yes; ever looking for the good time coming that never comes," sighed Mrs. Elder. "Ah, me," she added, "I only wish Lotty was with me again."

"How many children has she?"

"Four."

"One a baby?"

"Yes, and but three months old."

"She has her hands full."

"You may well say that, ma'am; full enough."

"Her presence, would not, I fear, add much to your comfort, Mrs. Elder. With her own hands full, as you say, and, I doubt not, her heart full, also, she would not have it in her power to make much smoother the pillow on which your head is lying. Is she of a happy temper, naturally?"

"Well, no; I can't say that she is, ma'am. She is too much like her mother: ever looking for a brighter day in the future."

"And so unconscious of the few gleams of sunshine that play warmly about her feet—"

"Yes, yes; all very true; very true;" said Mrs. Elder, despondingly.

"The days that look so bright in the future, never come."

"They have never come to me." And the sick woman shook her head mournfully. "Long, long ago, I ceased to expect them." And yet, in almost the next breath, Mrs. Elder said:

"If Lotty were only here, I think I would be happy again."

"You must try and extract some grains of comfort even from the present," replied the kind-hearted visitor. "Consider me your friend, and look to me for whatever is needed. I have brought you over some tea and sugar, a loaf of bread, and some nice pieces of ham. Here are half a dozen fresh eggs besides, and a glass of jelly. In the morning I will send one of my girls to put everything in order for you, and clear your rooms up nicely. Let Betsy lay out all your soiled clothing, and I will have it washed and ironed. So, cheer up; if the day opened with clouds in the sky, there is light in the west at its close."

Mrs. Markland spoke in a buoyant tone; and something of the spirit she wished to transfer, animated the heart of Mrs. Elder.

As the mother and her gentle child went back, through the deepening twilight, to their home of luxury and taste, both were, for much of the way, silent; the former musing on what she had seen and heard, and, like the wise bee, seeking to gather whatever honey could be found: the latter, happy-hearted, from causes the reader has seen.

CHAPTER III

"WALKING here yet, Edward?" said Mrs. Markland, as she joined her husband in the spacious portico, after her return from the sick woman's cottage; and drawing her arm within his, she moved along by his side. He did not respond to her remark, and she continued:—

"Italy never saw a sunset sky more brilliant. Painter never threw on canvas colours so full of a living beauty. Deep purple and lucent azure,—crimson and burnished gold! And that far-off island-cloud—

'A Delos in the airy ocean—'

seems it not a floating elysium for happy souls?"

"All lovely as Nature herself," answered Mr. Markland, abstractedly, as his eyes sought the western horizon, and for the first time since the sun went down, he noticed the golden glories of the occident.

"Ah! Edward! Edward!" said Mrs. Markland, chidingly, "You are not only in the world, but of the world."

"Of the earth, earthy, did you mean to say, my gentle monitor?" returned the husband, leaning towards his wife.

"Oh, no, no! I did not mean grovelling or sordid; and you know I did not." She spoke quickly and with mock resentment.

"Am I very worldly-minded?"

"I did not use the term."

"You said I was not only in the world, but of it."

"Well, and so you are; at least in a degree. It is the habit of the world to close its eyes to the real it possesses, and aspire after an ideal good."

"And do you find that defect in me, Agnes?"

"Where was thought just now, that your eyes were not able to bring intelligence to your mind of this glorious sunset?"

"Thought would soon become a jaded beast of burden, Agnes, if always full laden with the present, and the actually existent. Happily, like Pegasus, it has broad and strong pinions—can rise free from the prisoner's cell and the rich man's dainty palace. Free! free! How the heart swells, elated and with a sense of power, at this noble word—Freedom! It has a trumpet-tone."

"Softly, softly, my good husband," said Mrs. Markland. "This is all enthusiasm."

"And but for enthusiasm, where would the world be now, my sweet philosopher?"

"I am no philosopher, and have but little enthusiasm. So we are not on equal ground for an argument. I I don't know where the world would be under the circumstances you allege, and so won't pretend to say. But I'll tell you what I do know."

"I am all attention."

"That if people would gather up each day the blessings that are scattered like unseen pearls about their feet, the world would be rich in contentment."

"I don't know about that, Agnes; I've been studying for the last half hour over this very proposition."

"Indeed! and what is the conclusion at which you have arrived?"

"Why, that discontent with the present, is a law of our being, impressed by the Creator, that we may ever aspire after the more perfect."

"I am far from believing, Edward," said his wife, "that a discontented present is any preparation for a happy future. Rather, in the wooing of sweet Content to-day, are we making a home for her in our hearts, where she may dwell for all time to come—yea, forever and forever."

"Beautifully said, Agnes; but is that man living whose heart asks not something more than it possesses—who does not look to a coming time with vague anticipations of a higher good than he has yet received?"

"It may be all so, Edward—doubtless is so—but what then? Is the higher good we pine for of this world? Nay, my husband. We should not call a spirit of discontent with our mere natural surroundings a law of the Creator, established as a spur to advancement; for this disquietude is but the effect of a deeper cause. It is not change of place, but change of state that we need. Not a going from one point in space to another, but a progression of the spirit in the way of life eternal."

"You said just now, Agnes, that you were no philosopher." Mr. Markland's voice had lost much of its firmness. "But what would I not give to possess some of your philosophy. Doubtless your words are true; for there must be a growth and progression of the spirit as well as of the body; for all physical laws have their origin in the world of mind, and bear thereto exact relations. Yet, for all this, when there is a deep dissatisfaction with what exists around us, should we not seek for change? Will not a removal from one locality to another, and an entire change of pursuits, give the mind a new basis in natural things, and thus furnish ground upon which it may stand and move forward?"

"Perhaps, if the ground given us to stand upon were rightly tilled, it would yield a richer harvest than any we shall ever find, though we roam the world over; and it may be, that the narrow path to heaven lies just across our own fields. It is in the actual and the present that we are to seek a true development of our spiritual life. 'Work while it is to-day,' is the Divine injunction."

"But if we can find no work, Agnes?"

"If the heart be willing and the hands ready," was the earnestly spoken answer, "work enough will be found to do."

"I have a willing heart, Agnes,—I have ready hands—but the heart is wearied of its own fruitless desires, and the hands hang down in idleness. What shall I do? The work in which I have found so much delight for years, is completed; and now the restless mind springs away from this lovely Eden, and pines for new fields in which to display its powers. Here I fondly hoped to spend the remainder of my life—contented—happy. The idea was a dreamy illusion. Daily is this seen in clear light. I reprove myself; I chide the folly, as I call it; but, all in vain. Beauty for me, has faded from the landscape, and the air is no longer balmy with odours. The birds sing for my ears no more; I hear not, as of old, the wind spirits whispering to each other in the tree tops. Dear Agnes!—wife of my heart—what does it mean?"

An answer was on the lip of Mrs. Markland, but words so unlooked for, swelled, suddenly, the wave of emotion in her heart, and she could not speak. A few moments her hand trembled on the arm of her husband. Then it was softly removed, and without a word, she passed into the house, and going to her own room, shut the door, and sat down in the darkness to commune with her spirit. And first, there came a gush of tears. These were for herself. A shadow had suddenly fallen upon the lovely home where she had hoped to spend all the days of her life—a shadow from a storm-boding cloud. Even from the beginning of their wedded life, she had marked in her husband a defect of character, which, gaining strength, had led to his giving up business, and their retirement to the country. That defect was the common one, appertaining to all, a looking away from the present into the future for the means of enjoyment. In all the years of his earnest devotion to business, Mr. Markland had kept his eye steadily fixed upon the object now so completely attained; and much of present enjoyment had been lost in the eager looking forward for this coveted time. And now, that more than all his fondest anticipations were realized, only for a brief period did he hold to his lips the cup full of anticipated delight. Already his hand felt the impulse that moved him to pour its crystal waters upon the ground.

Mrs. Markland's clear appreciation of her husband's character was but a prophecy of the future. She saw that Woodbine Lodge—now grown into her affections, and where she hoped to live and die—even if it did not pass from their possession—bartered for some glittering toy—could not remain their permanent home. For this flowed her first tears; and these, as we have said, were for herself.

But her mind soon regained its serenity; and from herself, her thoughts turned to her husband. She was unselfish enough not only to be able to realize something of his state of mind, but to sympathize with him, and pity his inability to find contentment in the actual. This state of mind she regarded as a disease, and love prompted all self-denial for his sake.

"I can be happy any, where, if only my husband and children are left. My husband, so generous, so noble-minded—my children, so innocent, so loving."

Instantly the fountain of tears were closed. These unselfish words, spoken in her own heart, checked the briny current. Not for an instant did Mrs. Markland seek to deceive herself or hearken to the suggestion that it was but a passing state in the partner of her life. She knew too well the origin of his disquietude to hope for its removal. In a little while, she descended and joined her family in the sitting-room, where the soft astral diffused its pleasant light, and greeted her sober-minded husband with loving smiles and cheerful words. And he was deceived. Not for an instant imagined he, after looking upon her face, that she had passed through a painful, though brief conflict, and was now possessed of a brave heart for any change that might come. But he had not thought of leaving Woodbine Lodge. Far distant was this from his imagination. True—but Agnes looked with a quick intuition from cause to effect. The elements of happiness no longer existed here for her husband; or, if they did exist, he had not the skill to find them, and the end would be a searching elsewhere for the desired possession.

"You did not answer my question, Agnes," said Mr. Markland, after the children had retired for the evening, and they were again alone.

"What question?" inquired Mrs. Markland; and, as she lifted her eyes, he saw that they were dim with tears.

"What troubles you, dear?" he asked, tenderly.

Mrs. Markland forced a smile, as she replied, "Why should I be troubled? Have I not every good gift the heart can desire?"

"And yet, Agnes, your eyes are full of tears."

"Are they?" A light shone through their watery vail. "Only an April shadow, Edward, that is quickly lost in April sunshine. But your question is not so easily answered."

"I ought to be perfectly happy here; nothing seems wanting. Yet my spirit is like a aged bird that flutters against its prison-bars."

"Oh, no, Edward; not so bad as that," replied Mrs. Markland. "You speak in hyperbole. This lovely place, which everywhere shows the impress of your hand, is not a prison. Call it rather, a paradise."

"A paradise I sought to make it. But I am content no longer to be an idle lingerer among its pleasant groves; for I have ceased to feel the inspiration of its loveliness."

Mrs. Markland made no answer. After a silence of some minutes, her husband said, with a slight hesitation in his voice, as if uncertain as to the effect of his words—

"I have for some time felt a strong desire to visit Europe."

The colour receded from Mrs. Markland's face; and there was a look in her eyes that her husband did not quite understand, as they rested steadily in his.

"I have the means and the leisure," he added, "and the tour would not only be one of pleasure, but profit."

"True," said his wife, and, then her, face was bent down so low that he could not see, its expression for the shadows by which it was partially concealed.

"We would both enjoy the trip exceedingly."

"Both! You did not think of taking me?"

"Why, Aggy, dear!—as if I could dream for a moment of any pleasure in which you had not a share!"

So earnestly and tenderly was this said, that Mrs. Markland felt a thrill of joy tremble over her heart-strings. And yet, for all, she could not keep back the overflowing tears, but hid her face, to conceal them, on her husband's bosom.

Her true feelings Mr. Markland did not read: and often, as he mused on what appeared singular in her manner that evening, he was puzzled to comprehend its meaning. Nor had his vision ever penetrated deep enough to see all that was in her heart.

CHAPTER IV

THE memory of what passed between Mr. and Mrs. Markland remained distinct enough in both their minds, on the next morning, to produce thoughtfulness and reserve. The night to each had been restless and wakeful; and in the snatches of sleep which came at weary intervals were dreams that brought no tranquillizing influence.

The mother's daily duty, entered into from love to her children, soon lifted her mind into a sunnier region, and calmed her pulse to an even stroke. But the spirit of Markland was more disturbed, more restless, more dissatisfied with himself and every thing around him, than when first introduced to the reader's acquaintance. He eat sparingly at the breakfast-table, and with only a slight relish. A little forced conversation took place between him and his wife; but the thoughts of both were remote from the subject introduced. After breakfast, Mr. Markland strolled over his handsome grounds, and endeavoured to awaken in his mind a new interest in what possessed so much of real beauty. But the effort was fruitless; his thoughts were away from the scenes in which he was actually present. Like a dreamy enthusiast on the sea-shore, he saw, afar off, enchanted Islands faintly pictured on the misty horizon, and could not withdraw his gaze from their ideal loveliness.

A little way from the house was a grove, in the midst of which a fountain threw upward its refreshing waters, that fell plashing into a marble basin, and then went gurgling musically along over shining pebbles. How often, with his gentle partner by his side, had Markland lingered here, drinking in delight from every fair object by which they were surrounded! Now he wandered amid its cool recesses, or sat by the fountain, without having even a faint picture of the scene mirrored in his thoughts. It was true, as he had said, "Beauty had faded from the landscape; the air was no longer balmy with odours; the birds sang for his ears no more; he heard not, as of old, the wind-spirits whispering to each other in the tree-tops;" and he sighed deeply as a half-consciousness of the change disturbed his reverie. A footfall reached his ears, and, looking up, he saw a neighbour approaching: a man somewhat past the prime of life, who came toward him with a familiar smile, and, as he offered his hand, said pleasantly—

"Good morning, Friend Markland."

"Ah! good morning, Mr. Allison," was returned with a forced cheerfulness; "I am happy to meet you."

"And happy always, I may be permitted to hope," said Mr. Allison, as his mild yet intelligent eyes rested on the face of his neighbour.

"I doubt," answered Mr. Markland, in a voice slightly depressed from the tone in which he had first spoken, "whether that state ever comes in this life."

"Happiness?" inquired the other.

"Perpetual happiness; nay, even momentary happiness."

"If the former comes not to any," said Mr. Allison, "the latter, I doubt not, is daily enjoyed by thousands."

Mr. Markland shook his head, as he replied—

"Take my case, for instance; I speak of myself, because my thought has been turning to myself; there are few elements of happiness that I do not possess, and yet I cannot look back to the time when I was happy."

"I hardly expected this from you, Mr. Markland," said the neighbour; "to my observation, you always seemed one of the most cheerful of men."

"I never was a misanthrope; I never was positively unhappy. No, I have been too earnest a worker. But there is no disguising from myself the fact, now I reflect upon it, that I have known but little true enjoyment as I moved along my way through life."

"I must be permitted to believe," replied Mr. Allison, "that you are not reading aright your past history. I have been something of an observer of men and things, and my experience leads me to this conclusion."

"He who has felt the pain, Mr. Allison, bears ever after the memory of its existence."

"And the marks, too, if the pain has been as prolonged and severe as your words indicate."

"But such marks, in your case, are not visible. That you have not always found the pleasure anticipated—that you have looked restlessly away from the present, longing for some other good than that laid by the hand of a benignant Providence at your feet, I can well believe; for this is my own history, as well as yours: it is the history of all mankind."

"Now you strike the true chord, Mr. Allison. Now you state the problem I have not skill to solve. Why is this?"

"Ah! if the world had skill to solve that problem," said the neighbour, "it would be a wiser and happier world; but only to a few is this given."

"What is the solution? Can you declare it?"

"I fear you would not believe the answer a true one. There is nothing in it flattering to human nature; nothing that seems to give the weary, selfish heart a pillow to rest upon. In most cases it has a mocking sound."

"You have taught me more than one life-lesson, Mr. Allison. Speak freely now. I will listen patiently, earnestly, looking for instruction. Why are we so restless and dissatisfied in the present, even though all of earthly good surrounds us, and ever looking far away into the uncertain future for the good that never comes, or that loses its brightest charms in possession?"

"Because," said the old man, speaking slowly, and with emphasis, "we are mere self-seekers."

Mr. Markland had bent toward him, eager for the answer; but the words fell coldly, and with scarce a ray of intelligence in them, on his ears. He sighed faintly and leaned back in his seat, while a look of disappointment shadowed his countenance.

"Can you understand," said Mr. Allison, "the proposition that man, aggregated, as well as in the individual, is in the human form?"

Markland gazed inquiringly into the questioner's face. "In the human form as to uses?" said Mr. Allison. "How as to uses?"

"Aggregate men into larger or smaller bodies, and, in the attainment of ends proposed, you will find some directing, as the head, and some executing, as the hands."

"True."

"Society, then, is only a man in a larger form. Now, there are voluntary, as well as involuntary associations; the voluntary, such as, from certain ends, individuals form one with another; the involuntary, that of the common society in which we live. Let us look for a moment at the voluntary association, and consider it as man in a larger form. You see how all thought conspires to a single end and how judgment speaks in a single voice. The very first act of organization is to choose a head for direction, and hands to execute the will of this larger man. And now mark well this fact: Efficient action by this aggregated man depends wholly upon the unselfish exercise by each part of its function for the good of the whole. Defect and disorder arise the moment the head seeks power or aggrandizement for itself, the hands work for their good alone, or the feet strive to bear the body alone the paths they only wish to tread. Disease follows, if the evil is not remedied; disease, the sure precursor of dissolution. How disturbed and unhappy each member of such an aggregated man must be, you can at once perceive.

"If it is so in the voluntary man of larger form, how can it be different in the involuntary man, or the man of common society?"

"Of this great body you are a member. In it you are sustained, and live by virtue of its wonderful organization. From the blood circulating in its veins you obtain nutrition, and as its feet move forward, you are borne onward in the general progression. From all its active senses you receive pleasure or

intelligence; and yet this larger man of society is diseased—all see, all feel, all lament this—fearfully diseased. It contains not a single member that does not suffer pain. You are not exempt, favourable as is your position. If you enjoy the good attained by the whole, you have yet to bear a portion of the evil suffered by the whole. Let me add, that if you find the cause of unhappiness in this larger man, you will find it in yourself. Think! Where does it lie?"

"You have given me the clue," replied Mr. Markland, "in your picture of the voluntarily aggregated man. In this involuntary man of common society, to which, as you have said, we all bear relation as members, each seeks his own good, regardless of the good of the whole; and there is, therefore, a constant war among the members."

"And if not war, suffering," said Mr. Allison. "This man is sustained by a community of uses among the members. In the degree that each member performs his part well, is the whole body served; and in the degree that each member neglects his work, does the whole body suffer."

"If each worked for himself, all would be served," answered Mr. Markland. "It is because so many will not work for themselves, that so many are in want and suffering."

"In the very converse of this lies the true philosophy; and until the world has learned the truth, disorder and unhappiness will prevail. The eye does not see for itself, nor the ear hearken; the feet do not walk, nor the hands labour for themselves; but each freely, and from an affection for the use in which it is engaged, serves the whole body, while every organ or member of the body conspires to sustain it. See how beautifully the eyes direct the hands, guiding them in every minute particular, while the heart sends blood to sustain them in their labours, and the feet bear them to the appointed place; and the hands work not for themselves, but that the whole body may be nourished and clothed. Where each regards the general good, each is best served. Can you not see this, Mr. Markland?"

"I can, to a certain extent. The theory is beautiful, as applied to your man of common society. But, unfortunately, it will not work in practice. We must wait for the millennium."

"The millennium?"

"Yes, that good time coming, toward which the Christian world looks with such a pleasing interest."

"A time to be ushered in by proclamation, I suppose?"

"How, and when, and where it is to begin, I am not advised," said' Mr. Markham, smiling. "All Christians expect it; and many have set the beginning thereof near about this time."

"What if it have begun already?"

"Already! Where is the sign, pray? It has certainly escaped my observation. If the Lord had actually come to reign a thousand years, surely the world would know it. In what favoured region has he made his second advent?"

"Is it not possible that the Christian world may be in error as to the manner of this second coming, that is to usher in the millennium?"

"Yes, very. I don't see, that in all prophecy, there is any thing definite on the subject."

"Nothing more definite than there was in regard to the first coming?"

"No."

"And yet, while in their very midst, even though miracles were wrought for them; the Jews did not know the promised Messiah."

"True."

"They expected a king in regal state, and an assumption of visible power. They looked for marked political changes. And when the Lord said to them, 'My kingdom is not of this world,' they denied and rejected him. Now, is it not a possible case, that the present generation, on this subject, may be no wiser than the Jews?"

"Not a very flattering conclusion," said Markland. "The age is certainly more enlightened, and the world wiser and better than it was two thousand years ago."

"And therefore," answered Mr. Allison, "the better prepared to understand this higher truth, which it was impossible for the Jews to comprehend, that the kingdom of God is within us."

"Within us!—within us!" Markland repeated the words two or three times, as if there were in them gleams of light which had never before dawned upon his mind.

"Of one thing you may be assured," said Mr. Allison, speaking with some earnestness; "the millennium will commence only when men begin to observe the Golden Rule. If there are any now living who in all sincerity strive to repress their selfish inclinations, and seek the good of others from genuine neighbourly love, then the millennium has begun; and it will never be fully ushered in, until that law of unselfish, reciprocal uses that rules in our physical man becomes the law of common society."

"Are there any such?"

"Who seek the good of others from a genuine neighbourly love?"

"Yes."

"I believe so."

"Then you think the millennium has commenced?"

"I do."

"The beginning must be very small. The light hid under a bushel. Now I have been led to expect that this light, whenever it came, would be placed on a candlestick, to give light unto all in the house."

"May it not be shining? Nay, may there not be light in all the seven golden candlesticks, without your eyes being attracted thereby?"

"I will not question your inference. It may all be possible. But your words awaken in my mind but vague conceptions."

"The history of the world, as well as your own observation, will tell you that all advances toward perfection are made with slow steps. And further, that all changes in the character of a whole people simply indicate the changes that have taken place in the individuals who compose that people. The national character is but its aggregated personal character. If the world is better now than it was fifty years ago, it is because individual men and women are becoming better—that is, less selfish, for in self-love lies the germ of all evil. The Millennium must, therefore, begin with the individual. And so, as it comes not by observation—or with a 'lo! here, and lo! there'—men are not conscious of its presence. Yet be assured, my friend, that the time is at hand; and that every one who represses, through the higher power given to all who ask for it, the promptings of self-love, and strives to act from a purified love of the neighbour, is doing his part, in the only way he can do it, toward hastening the time when the 'wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.'"

"Have we not wandered," said Mr. Markland, after a few moments of thoughtful silence, "from the subject at first proposed?"

"I have said more than I intended," was answered, "but not, I think, irrelevantly. If you are not happy, it is because, like an inflamed organ in the human body, you are receiving more blood than is applied to nutrition. As a part of the larger social man, you are not using the skill you possess for the good of the whole. You are looking for the millennium, but not doing your part toward hastening its general advent. And now, Mr. Markland, if what I have said be true, can you wonder at being the restless, dissatisfied man you represent yourself to be?"

"If your premises be sound, your conclusions are true enough," answered Markland, with some coldness and abstraction of manner. The doctrine was neither flattering to his reason, nor agreeable to his feelings. He was too confirmed a lover of himself to receive willingly teaching like this. A type of the mass around him, he was content to look down the dim future for signs of the approaching millennium, instead of into his own heart. He could give hundreds of dollars in aid of missions to convert the heathen, and to bring in the islands of the sea, as means of hastening the expected time; but was not ready, as a surer means to this end, to repress a single selfish impulse of his nature.

The conversation was still further prolonged, with but slight change in the subject. At parting with his neighbour, Markland found himself more disturbed than before. A sun ray had streamed suddenly into the darkened chambers of his mind, disturbing the night birds there, and dimly revealing an inner world of disorder, from which his eyes vainly sought to turn themselves. If the mental disease from which he was suffering had its origin in the causes indicated by Mr. Allison, there seemed little hope of a cure in his case. How was he, who all his life long had regarded himself, and those who were of his own flesh and blood, as only to be thought of and cared for, to forget himself, and seek, as the higher end of his existence, the good of others? The thought created no quicker heart-beat—threw no warmer tint on the ideal future toward which his eyes of late had so fondly turned themselves. To live for others and not for himself—this was to extinguish his very life. What were others to him? All of his world was centred in his little home-circle. Alas! that its power to fill the measure of his desires was gone—its brightness dimmed—its attraction a binding-spell no longer!

And so Markland strove to shut out from his mind the light shining in through the little window opened by Mr. Allison; but the effort was in vain. Steadily the light came in, disturbing the owls and bats, and revealing dust, cankering mould, and spider-web obstructions. All on the outside was fair to the world; and as fair, he had believed, within. To be suddenly shown his error, smote him with a painful sense of humiliation.

"What is the highest and noblest attribute of manhood?" Mr. Allison had asked of him during their conversation.

Markland did not answer the question.

"The highest excellence—the greatest glory—the truest honour must be in God," said the old man.

"All will admit that," returned Markland.

"Those, then, who are most like him, are most excellent—most honourable."

"Yes."

"Love," continued Mr. Allison, "is the very essential nature of God—not love of self, but love of creating and blessing others, out of himself. Love of self is a monster; but love of others the essential spirit of true manhood, and therefore its noblest attribute."

Markland bowed his head, convicted in his own heart of having, all his life long, been a self-worshipper; of having turned his eyes away from the true type of all that was noble and excellent, and striven to create something of his own that was excellent and beautiful. But, alas! there was no life in the image; and already its decaying elements were an offence in his nostrils.

"In the human body," said Mr. Allison, "as in the human soul when it came pure from the hands of God, there is a likeness of the Creator. Every organ and member, from the largest to the most hidden and minute, bears this likeness, in its unselfish regard for the good of the whole body. For, as we have seen, each, in its activity, has no respect primarily to its own life. And it is because the human soul has lost this likeness of its loving Creator, that it is so weak, depraved, and unhappy. There must be the restored image, and likeness, before there be the restored Eden."

The noblest type of manhood! Never in all his after life was Edward Markland able to shut out this light of truth from his understanding. It streamed through the little window, shining very dimly at times; but always strong enough to show him that unselfish love was man's highest attribute, and self-love a human monster.

CHAPTER V

WHILE Mr. Markland was brooding over his own unhappy state, and seeking to shut out the light shining too strongly in upon his real quality of mind, Mrs. Markland was living, in some degree, the very life that seemed so unattractive to him, and receiving her measure of reward. While he wandered, with an unquiet spirit, over his fields, or sat in cool retreats by plashing fountains, his thoughts reaching forward to embrace the coming future, she was active in works of love. Her chief desire was the good of her beloved ones, and she devoted herself to this object with an almost entire forgetfulness of self. Home was therefore the centre of her thoughts and affections, but not the selfish centre: beyond that happy circle often went out her thoughts, laden with kind wishes that died not fruitless.

The family of Mr. Markland consisted of his wife, four children, and a maiden sister—Grace Markland,—the latter by no means one of the worst specimens of her class. With Agnes, in her seventh year, the reader has already a slight acquaintance. Francis, the baby, was two years old, and the pet of every one but Aunt Grace, who never did like children. But he was so sweet a little fellow, that even the stiff maiden would bend toward him now and then, conscious of a warmer heart-beat. George, who boasted of being ten—quite an advanced age, in his estimation—might almost be called a thorn in the flesh to Aunt Grace, whose nice sense of propriety and decorum he daily outraged by rudeness and want of order. George was boy all over, and a strongly-marked specimen of his class—"as like his father, when at his age, as one pea to another," Aunt Grace would say, as certain memories of childhood presented themselves with more than usual vividness. The boy was generally too much absorbed in his own purposes to think about the peculiar claims to respect of age, sex, or condition. Almost from the time he could toddle about the carpeted floor, had Aunt Grace been trying to teach him what she called manners. But he was never an apt scholar in her school. If he mastered the A B C to-day, most probably on her attempt to advance him to-morrow into his a-b ab's, he had wholly forgotten the previous lesson. Poor Aunt Grace! She saw no hope for the boy. All her labour was lost on him.

Fanny, the oldest child, just completing her seventeenth year, was of fair complexion and delicate frame; strikingly beautiful, and as pure in mind as she was lovely in person. All the higher traits of womanhood that gave such a beauty to the mother's character were as the unfolding bud in her. Every one loved Fanny, not even excepting Aunt Grace, who rarely saw any thing in her niece that violated her strict sense of propriety. Since the removal of the family to Woodbine Lodge, the education of Fanny had been under the direction of a highly accomplished governess. In consequence, she was quite withdrawn from intercourse with young ladies of her own age. If, from this cause, she was ignorant of many things transpiring in city life, the purer atmosphere she daily breathed gave a higher moral tone to her character. In all the sounder accomplishments Fanny would bear favourable comparison with any; and as for grace of person and refinement of manners, these were but the expression of an inward sense of beauty.

As Fanny unfolded toward womanhood, putting forth, like an opening blossom, some newer charms each day, the deep love of her parents began to assume the character of jealous fear. They could not long hide from other's eyes the treasure they possessed, and their hearts grew faint at the thought of having it pass into other hands. But very few years would glide away ere wooers would come, and seek to charm her ears with songs sweeter than ever thrilled them in her own happy home. And there would be a spell upon her spirit, so that she could not help but listen. And, mayhap, the song that charmed her most might come from unworthy lips. Such things had been, alas!

Thus it was with the family of Mr. Markland at the time of our introduction to them. We have not described each individual with minuteness, but sufficiently indicated to give them a place in the reader's mind. The lights and shadows will be more strongly marked hereafter.

The effect of Mr. Allison's conversation was, as has been seen, to leave Markland in a still more dissatisfied state of mind. After various fruitless efforts to get interested in what was around him, and thus compel self-forgetfulness, he thought of some little matter in the city that required his attention, and forthwith ordered the carriage.

"I shall not be home till evening," he said, as he parted with his wife.

During the day, Mrs. Markland paid another visit to the humble home of Mrs. Elder, and ministered as well to her mental as to her bodily wants. She made still closer inquiries about her daughter's family; and especially touching the husband's character for industry, intelligence, and trustworthiness. She had a purpose in this; for the earnest desire expressed by Mrs. Elder to have her daughter with her, had set Mrs. Markland to thinking about the ways and means of effecting the wished-for object. The poor woman was made happier by her visit.

It was near sundown when the carriage was observed approaching through the long, shaded avenue. Mrs. Markland and all the children stood in the porch, to welcome the husband and father, whose absence, though even for the briefest period, left for their hearts a diminished brightness. As the carriage drew nearer, it was seen to contain two persons.

"There is some one with your father," said Mrs. Markland, speaking to Fanny.

"A gentleman—I wonder who it can be?"

"Your Uncle George, probably."

"No; it isn't Uncle George," said Fanny, as the carriage reached the oval in front of the house, and swept around towards the portico. "It's a younger man; and he is dressed in black."

Further conjecture was suspended by the presence of the individual in regard to whom they were in doubt. He was a stranger, and Mr. Markland presented him as Mr. Lyon, son of an old and valued business correspondent, residing in Liverpool. A cordial welcome awaited Mr. Lyon at Woodbine Lodge, as it awaited all who were introduced by the gentlemanly owner. If Mr. Markland thought well enough of any one to present him at home, the home-circle opened smilingly to receive.

The stranger was a young man, somewhere between the ages of twenty-five and thirty; above the medium height; with a well-formed person, well-balanced head, and handsome countenance. His mouth was the least pleasing feature of his face. The lips were full, but too firmly drawn back against his teeth. Eyes dark, large, and slightly prominent, with great depth, but only occasional softness, of expression. His was a face with much in it to attract, and something to repel. A deep, rich voice, finely modulated, completed his personal attractions.

It so happened that Mr. Lyon had arrived from New York that very day, with letters to Mr. Markland. His intention was to remain only until the next morning. The meeting with Mr. Markland was accidental; and it was only after earnest persuasion that the young man deferred his journey southward, and consented to spend a day or two with the retired merchant, in his country home. Mr. Lyon was liberally educated, bad travelled a good deal, and been a close observer and thinker. He was, moreover, well read in human nature. That he charmed the little circle at Woodbine Lodge on the first evening of his visit there, is scarcely a matter of wonder. Nor was he less charmed. Perhaps the only one not altogether pleased was Aunt Grace. By habit a close reader of all who came within range of her observation, she occupied quite as much time in scanning the face of Mr. Lyon, and noting each varying expression of eyes, lips, and voice, as in listening to his entertaining description of things heard and seen.

"I don't just like him." Thus she soliloquized after she had retired to her own room.' "He's deep—any one can see that—deep as the sea. And he has a way of turning his eyes without turning his head that don't please me exactly. Edward is wonderfully taken with him; but he never looks very far below the surface. And Fanny—why the girl seemed perfectly fascinated!"

And Aunt Grace shook her head ominously, as she added—

"He's handsome enough; but beauty's only skin-deep, and he may be as black as Lucifer inside."

A greater part of the next day Mr. Markland and Mr. Lyon spent alone, either in the library or seated in some one of the many shady arbours and cool retreats scattered invitingly over the pleasant estate. The stranger had found the mind of his host hungering for new aliment, and as his own mind was full stored with thought and purpose, he had but to speak to awaken interest. Among other things, he gave Mr. Markland, a minute detail of certain plans for acquiring an immense fortune, in the prosecution of which, in company with some wealthy capitalists, he was now engaged. The result was sure; for every step had been taken with the utmost cautions and every calculation thrice verified.

"And what a dreaming idler I am here!" said Markland, half to himself, in one of the conversational pauses, as there was presented to his mind a vivid contrast of his fruitless inactivity with the vigorous productive industry of others. "I half question, at times, whether, in leaving the busy world, I did not commit a serious error."

"Have you given up all interest in business?" asked Mr. Lyon.

"All."

"Ah!" with slight evidence of surprise. "How do you live?"

"The life of an oyster, I was going to say," replied Markland, with a faint smile.

"I would die if not active. True enjoyment, a wise friend has often said to me, is never found in repose, but in activity. To me a palace would be a prison, if I could find nothing to do; while a prison would be a palace, if mind and hands were fully employed."

"I lack the motive for renewed effort," said Markland. "Wealth beyond my present possession I do not desire. I have more than enough safely invested to give me every comfort and luxury through life."

"But your children?" remarked the guest.

"Will have ample provision."

"There is another motive."

"What?"

"Money is power."

"True."

"And by its proper use a man may elevate himself into almost any position. It is the lever that moves the world."

Markland only shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Have you no ambition?" inquired the other, in a familiar way.

"Ambition!" The question awakened surprise.

"To stand out prominently in the world's eye, no matter for what, so the distinction be honourable," said Mr. Lyon. "Of the thousands and tens of thousands who toil up the steep and often rugged paths to wealth, and attain the desired eminence, how few are ever heard of beyond the small community in which they live! Some of these, to perpetuate a name, establish at death some showy charity, and thus build for themselves a monument not overshadowed by statelier mausoleums amid the rivalries of a fashionable cemetery. Pah! All this ranges far below my aspiring. I wish to make a name while living. Wealth in itself is only a toy. No true man can find pleasure in its mere glitter for a day. It is only the miser who loves gold for its own sake, and sees nothing beautiful or desirable except the yellow earth he hoards in his coffers. Have you found happiness in the mere possession of wealth?"

"Not in its *mere* possession," was answered.

"Nor even in its lavish expenditure?"

"I have great pleasure in using it for the attainment of my wishes," said Mr. Markland.

"The narrower the bound of our wishes, the quicker comes their consummation, and then all is restlessness again, until we enter upon a new pursuit."

"Truly spoken."

"Is it not wise, then, to give a wide sweep to our aspirations? to lift the ideal of our life to a high position; so that, in its attainment, every latent power may be developed? Depend upon it, Mr. Markland, we may become what we will; and I, for one, mean to become something more than a mere money-getter and money-saver. But first the money-getting, as a means to an end. To that every energy must now be devoted."

Mr. Lyon's purpose was to interest Mr. Markland, and he was entirely successful. He drew for him various attractive pictures, and in the contemplation of each, as it stood vividly before him, the retired merchant saw much to win his ardent admiration. Very gradually, and very adroitly, seeming all the while as if he had not the slightest purpose to interest Mr. Markland in that particular direction, did Mr. Lyon create in his mind a strong confidence in the enlarged schemes for obtaining immense wealth in which he was now engaged. And the tempter was equally successful in his efforts to awaken a desire in Mr. Markland to have his name stand out prominently, as one who had shown remarkable public spirit and great boldness in the prosecution of a difficult enterprise.

One, two, three days went by, and still Mr. Lyon was a lingerer at Woodbine Lodge; and during most of that time he was alone and in earnest conference with Mr. Markland. The evenings were always pleasant seasons in the family circle. Fanny's voice had been well cultivated, and she sung with fine taste; and as Mr. Lyon was also a lover of music, and played and sung exquisitely, the two very naturally spent a portion of their time at the piano. If it crossed the father's mind that an attachment might spring up between them, it did not disturb his feelings.

At the end of a week Mr. Lyon found it necessary to tear himself away from the little paradise into which he had been so unexpectedly introduced. Every day that he lingered there diminished the ardour of his ambition, or robbed of some charm the bright ideal he had worshipped. And so he broke the silken bonds that wove themselves around him, at first light as gossamer, but now strong as twisted cords.

Mr. Markland accompanied him to the city, and did not return home until late in the evening. He was then much occupied with his own thoughts, and entered but little into conversation. Fanny was absent-minded, a fact that did not escape the mother's observation. Aunt Grace noted the change which the stranger's coming and departure had occasioned, and, shaking her wise head, spoke thus within herself—

"He may be very handsome, but he casts a shadow, for all that. I don't see what Edward was thinking about. He'd better let Fanny go right into the world, where she can see dozens of handsome young men, and contrast one with another, than hide her away here, until some attractive young Lucifer comes along—a very Son of the Morning! How can the girl help falling in love, if she sees but one man, and he elegant, accomplished, handsome, and full of winning ways, even though his hidden heart be black with selfishness?"

But Aunt Grace always looked at the shadowy side. Even if the sun shone bright above, she thought of the clouds that were gathering somewhere, and destined ere long to darken the whole horizon.

On the day following, Mr. Markland went again to the city, and was gone until late in the evening. His mind was as much occupied as on the evening previous, and he spent the hours from tea-time until eleven o'clock in the library, writing. If Mrs. Markland did not appear to notice any change in her husband since Mr. Lyon came to Woodbine Lodge, it was not that the change had escaped her. No—she was too deeply interested in all that concerned him to fail in noting every new aspect of thought or feeling. He had said nothing of awakened purpose, quickened into activity by long conferences with his guest, but she saw that such purposes were forming. Of their nature she was in entire ignorance. That they would still further estrange him from Woodbine Lodge, she had too good reason, in a knowledge of his character, to fear. With him, whatever became a pursuit absorbed all others; and he looked to the end with a visions so intent, that all else was seen in obscurity. And so, with a repressed sigh, this gentle, true-hearted, loving woman, whose thought rarely turned in upon

herself, awaited patiently the time when her husband would open to her what was in his thoughts. And the time, she knew, was not distant.

CHAPTER VI

BEFORE Mr. Lyon's visit to Woodbine Lodge, Mr. Markland rarely went to the city. Now, scarcely a day passed that he did not order his carriage immediately after breakfast; and he rarely came back until nightfall. "Some matters of business," he would answer to the questions of his family; but he gave no intimation as to the nature of the business, and evidently did not care to be inquired of too closely.

"What's come over Edward? He isn't the same man that he was a month ago," said Miss Grace, as she stood in the portico, beside Mrs. Markland, one morning, looking after the carriage which was bearing her brother off to the city. There had been a hurried parting with Mr. Markland, who seemed more absorbed than usual in his own thoughts.

Mrs. Markland sighed faintly, but made no answer.

"I wonder what takes him off to town, post-haste, every day?"

"Business, I suppose," was the half-absent remark.

"Business! What kind of business, I'd like to know?"

"Edward has not informed me as to that," quietly answered Mrs. Markland.

"Indeed!" a little querulously. "Why don't you ask him?"

"I am not over-anxious on the subject. If he has any thing to confide to me, he will do it in his own good time."

"Oh! you're too patient." The tone and manner of Miss Grace showed that she, at least, was not overstocked with the virtue.

"Why should I be impatient?"

"Why? Goodness me! Do you suppose that if I had a husband—and it's a blessed thing for me that I haven't—that I'd see him going off, day after day, with lips sealed like an oyster, and remain as patient as a pet lamb tied with a blue ribbon? Oh dear! no! Grace Markland's made of warmer stuff than that. I like people who talk right out. *I* always do. Then you know where to place them. But Edward always had a hidden way about him."

"Oh, no, Grace; I will not agree to that for a moment," said Mrs. Markland.

"Won't you, indeed! I'm his sister, and ought to know something about him."

"And I'm his wife," was the gentle response to this.

"I know you are, and a deal too good for him—the provoking man!" said Grace, in her off-hand way, drawing her arm within that of Mrs. Markland, to whom she was strongly attached. "And that's what riles me up so."

"Why, you're in a strange humour, Grace! Edward has done nothing at which I can complain."

"He hasn't, indeed?"

"No."

"I'd like to know what he means by posting off to the city every day for a week at a stretch, and never so much as breathing to his wife the purpose of his visits?"

"Business. He said that business required his attention."

"What business?"

"As to that, he did not think it necessary to advise me. Men do not always explain business matters to their wives. One-half would not understand what they were talking about, and the other half would take little interest in the subject."

"A compliment to wives, certainly!" said Grace Markland, with a rather proud toss of her head. "One of your lords of creation would find different stuff in me. But I'm not satisfied with Edward's goings on, if you are, Agnes. It's my opinion that your Mr. Lee Lyon is at the bottom of all this."

A slight shade dimmed the face of Mrs. Markland. She did not reply; but looked, with a more earnest expression, at her sister-in-law.

"Yes—your Mr. Lee Lyon." Grace was warming again. "He's one of your men that cast shadows wherever they go. I felt it the moment his foot crossed our threshold—didn't you?"

Grace gave thought and words to what, with Mrs. Markland, had only been a vague impression. She had felt the shadow of his presence without really perceiving from whence the shadow came. Pausing only a moment for an answer to her query, Grace went on:—

"Mr. Lyon is at the bottom of all this, take my word for it; and if he doesn't get Edward into trouble before he's done with him, my name's not Grace Markland."

"Trouble! What do you mean, Grace?" Another shade of anxiety flitted over the countenance of Mrs. Markland.

"Don't you suppose that Edward's going to town every day has something to do with this Mr. Lyon?"

"Mr. Lyon went South nearly two weeks ago," was answered.

"That doesn't signify. He's a schemer and an adventurer—I could see it in every lineament of his face—and, there's not a shadow of doubt in my mind, has got Edward interested in some of his doings. Why, isn't it as plain as daylight? Were not he and Edward all-absorbed about something while he was here? Didn't he remain a week when he had to be urged, at first, to stay a single day? And hasn't Edward been a different man since he left, from what he was before he came?"

"Your imagination is too active, Grace," Mrs. Markland replied, with a faint smile. "I don't see any necessary connection between Mr. Lyon and the business that requires Edward's attention in the city. The truth is, Edward has grown weary of an idle life, and I shall not at all regret his attention to some pursuit that will occupy his thoughts. No man, with his mental and bodily powers in full vigour, should be inactive."

"That will altogether depend on the direction his mind takes," said Grace.

"Of course. And I do not see any good reason you have for intimating that in the present case the right direction has not been taken." There was just perceptible a touch of indignation in the voice of Mrs. Markland, which, being perceived by Grace, brought the sententious remark,—

"Fore-warned, fore-armed. If my suspicion is baseless, no one is injured."

Just then, Fanny, the oldest daughter, returned from a short walk, and passed her mother and aunt on the portico, without looking up or speaking. There was an air of absent-mindedness about her.

"I don't know what has come over Fanny," said Mrs. Markland. "She isn't at all like herself." And as she uttered these words, not meaning them for other ears than her own, she followed her daughter into the house.

"Don't know what's come over Fanny!" said Aunt Grace to herself, as she moved up and down the vine-wreathed portico—"well, well,—some people *are* blind. This is like laying a block in a man's way, and wondering that he should fall down. Don't know what's come over Fanny? Dear! dear!"

Enough had been said by her sister-in-law to give direction to the vague anxieties awakened in the mind of Mrs. Markland by the recent deportment of her husband. He was not only absent in the city every day, but his mind was so fully occupied when at home, that he took little interest in the family circle. Sometimes he remained alone in the library until a late hour at night; and his sleep, when he did retire, was not sound; a fact but too well known to his wakeful partner.

All through this day there was an unusual pressure on the feelings of Mrs. Markland. When she inquired of herself as to the cause, she tried to be satisfied with assigning it wholly to the remarks of her sister-in-law, and not to any really existing source of anxiety. But in this she was far from being successful; and the weight continued to grow heavier as the hours moved on. Earlier than she had expected its return, the carriage was announced, and Mrs. Markland, with a suddenly-lightened heart, went tripping over the lawn to meet her husband at the outer gate. "Where is Mr. Markland?" she exclaimed, growing slightly pale, on reaching the carriage, and seeing that it was empty.

"Gone to New York," answered the coachman, at the same time handing a letter.

"To New York! When did he go?" Mrs. Markland's thoughts were thrown into sudden confusion.

"He went at five o'clock, on business. Said he must be there to-morrow morning. But he'll tell you all about it in the letter, ma'am."

Recovering herself, Mrs. Markland stepped from the side of the carriage, and as it passed on, she broke the seal of her letter, which she found to contain one for Fanny, directed in a hand with which she was not familiar.

"A letter for you, dear," she said; for Fanny was now by her side.

"Who is it from? Where is father?" asked Fanny in the same breath.

"Your father has gone to New York," said Mrs. Markland, with forced composure.

Fanny needed no reply to the first question; her heart had already given the answer. With a flushed cheek and quickening pulse, she bounded away from her mother's side, and returning into the house, sought the retirement of her own chamber.

"Dear Agnes,"—so ran the note of Mr. Markland to his wife,—"I know that you will be surprised and disappointed at receiving only a letter, instead of your husband. But some matters in New York require my attention, and I go on by the evening train, to return day after to-morrow. I engaged to transact some important business for Mr. Lyon, when he left for the South, and in pursuance of this, I am now going away. In a letter received from Mr. Lyon, to-day, was one for Fanny. I do not know its contents. Use your own discretion about giving it to her. You will find it enclosed. My mind has been so much occupied to-day, that I could not give the subject the serious consideration it requires. I leave it with you, having more faith in your intuitions than in my own judgment. He did not hint, even remotely, at a correspondence with Fanny, when he left; nor has he mentioned the fact of enclosing a letter for her in the one received from him to-day. Thus, delicately, has he left the matter in our hands. Perhaps you had better retain the letter until I return. We can then digest the subject more thoroughly. But, in order to furnish your mind some basis to rest upon, I will say, that during the time Mr. Lyon was here I observed him very closely; and that every thing about him gave me the impression of a pure, high-minded, honourable man. Such is the testimony borne in his favour by letters from men of standing in England, by whom he is trusted with large interests. I do not think an evidence of prepossession for our daughter, on his part, need occasion anxiety, but rather pleasure. Of course, she is too young to leave the home-nest for two or three years yet. But time is pressing, and my mind is in no condition, just now, to think clearly on a subject involving such important results. I think, however, that you had better keep the letter until my return. It will be the most prudent course."

Keep the letter! Its contents were already in the heart of Fanny!

"Where's Edward? What's the matter?" queried Aunt Grace, coming up at this moment, and seeing that all colour had left the cheeks of Mrs. Markland.

Scarcely reflecting on what she did, the latter handed her husband's letter in silence to her sister-in-law, and tottered, rather than walked, to a garden chair near at hand.

"Well, now, here is pretty business, upon my word!" exclaimed Aunt Grace, warmly. "Sending a letter to our Fanny! Who ever heard of such assurance! Oh! I knew that some trouble would come of his visit here. I felt it the moment I set my eyes on him. Keep the letter from Fanny? Of course you will; and when you have a talk with Edward about it, just let me be there; I want my say."

"It is too late," murmured the unhappy mother, in a low, sad voice.

"Too late! How? What do you mean, Agnes?"

"Fanny has the letter already."

"What!" There was a sharp, thrusting rebuke in the voice of Aunt Grace, that seemed like a sword in the heart of Mrs. Markland.

"She stood by me when I opened her father's letter, enclosing the one for her. I did not dream from whence it came, and handed it to her without a thought."

"Agnes! Agnes! What have you done?" exclaimed Aunt Grace, in a troubled voice.

"Nothing for which I need reproach myself," said Mrs. Markland, now grown calmer. "Had the discretion been left with me, I should not have given Fanny the letter until Edward returned. But it passed to her hands through no will of mine. With the Great Controller of events it must now be left."

"Oh dear! Don't talk about the Controller of events in a case of this kind. Wise people control such things through the wisdom given them. I always think of Jupiter and the wagoner, when I hear any one going on this way."

Aunt Grace was excited. She usually was when she thought earnestly. But her warmth of word and manner rarely disturbed Mrs. Markland, who knew her thoroughly, and valued her for her good qualities and strong attachment to the family. No answer was made, and Aunt Grace added, in a slightly changed voice,—

"I don't know that you are so much to blame, Agnes, seeing that Fanny saw the letter, and that you were ignorant of its contents. But Edward might have known that something like this would happen. Why didn't he put the letter into his pocket, and keep it until he came home? He seems to have lost his common sense. And then he must go off into that rigmarole about Mr. Lyon, and try to make him out a saint, as if to encourage you to give his letter to Fanny. I've no patience with him! Mr. Lyon, indeed! If he doesn't have a heart-scald of him before he's done with him, I'm no prophet. Important business for Mr. Lyon! Why didn't Mr. Lyon attend to his own business when he was in New York? Oh! I can see through it all, as clear as daylight. He's got his own ends to gain through Edward, who is blind and weak enough to be led by him."

"Hasty in judgment as ever," said Mrs. Markland, with a subdued, resigned manner, as she arose and commenced moving toward the house, her sister-in-law walking by her side,—"and quick to decide upon character. But neither men nor women are to be read at a glance."

"So much the more reason for holding strangers at arms' length," returned Aunt Grace.

But Mrs. Markland felt in no mood for argument on so fruitless a subject. On entering the house, she passed to her own private apartment, there to commune with herself alone.

CHAPTER VII

ONLY a few minutes had Mrs. Markland been in her room, when the door opened quietly, and Fanny's light foot-fall was in her ears. She did not look up; but her heart beat with a quicker motion, and her breath was half-suspended.

"Mother!"

She lifted her bowed head, and met the soft, clear eyes of her daughter looking calmly down into her own.

"Fanny, dear!" she said, in half-surprise, as she placed an arm around her, and drew her closely to her side.

An open letter was in Fanny's hand, and she held it toward her mother. There was a warmer hue upon her face, as she said,—

"It is from Mr. Lyon."

"Shall I read it?" inquired Mrs. Markland.

"I have brought it for you to read," was the daughter's answer.

The letter was brief:

> "To MISS FANNY MARKLAND:
>
> "As I am now writing to your father, I must fulfil a half promise, made during my sojourn at Woodbine Lodge, to write to you also. Pleasant days were those to me, and they will ever make a green spot in my memory. What a little paradise enshrines you! Art, hand in hand with Nature, have made a world of beauty for you to dwell in. Yet, all is but a type of moral beauty—and its true enjoyment is only for those whose souls are attuned to deeper harmonies.
>
> "Since leaving Woodbine Lodge, my thoughts have acquired a double current. They run backward as well as forward. The true hospitality of your manly-hearted father; the kind welcome to a stranger, given so cordially by your gentle, good mother; and your own graceful courtesy, toward one in whom you had no personal interest, charmed—nay, touched me with a sense of gratitude. To forget all this would be to change my nature. Nor can I shut out the image of Aunt Grace, so reserved but lady-like in her deportment; yet close in observation and quick to read character. I fear I did not make a good impression on her—but she may know me better one of these days. Make to her my very sincere regards.
>
> "And now, what more shall I say? A first letter to a young lady is usually a thing of shreds and patches, made up of sentences that might come in almost any other connection; and mine is no exception to the rule. I do not ask an answer; yet I will say, that I know nothing that would give me more pleasure than such a favour from your hand.
>
> "Remember me in all kindness and esteem to your excellent parents.
>
> "Sincerely yours,
>
> LEE LYON."

The deep breath taken by Mrs. Markland was one of relief. And yet, there was something in the letter that left her mind in uncertainty as to the real intentions of Mr. Lyon. Regret that he should have written at all mingled with certain pleasing emotions awakened by the graceful compliments of their late guest.

"It's a beautiful letter, isn't it, mother?"

"Yes, love," was answered almost without reflection.

Fanny re-folded the letter, with the care of one who was handling something precious.

"Shall I answer it?" she inquired.

"Not now. We must think about that. You are too young to enter into correspondence with a gentleman—especially with one about whom we know so little. Before his brief visit to Woodbine Lodge, we had never so much as heard of Mr. Lyon."

A slight shade of disappointment crossed the bright young face of Fanny Markland—not unobserved by her mother.

"It would seem rude, were I to take no notice of the letter whatever," said she, after reflecting a moment.

"Your father can acknowledge the receipt for you, when he writes to Mr. Lyon."

"But would that do?" asked Fanny, in evident doubt.

"O yes, and is, in my view, the only right course. We know but little, if any thing, about Mr. Lyon. If he should not be a true man, there is no telling how much you might suffer in the estimation of right-minded people, by his representation that you were in correspondence with him. A young girl can never be too guarded, on this point. If Mr. Lyon is a man worthy of your respect, he will be disappointed in you, if he receive an answer to his letter, under your own hand."

"Why, mother? Does he not say that he knows of nothing that would give him more pleasure than to receive an answer from me?" Fanny spoke with animation.

"True, my child, and that part of his letter I like least of all."

"Why so?" inquired the daughter.

"Have you not gathered the answer to your own question from what I have already said? A true man, who had a genuine respect for a young lady, would not desire, on so slight an acquaintance, to draw her into a correspondence; therefore the fact that Mr. Lyon half invites you to a correspondence, causes doubts to arise in my mind. His sending you a letter at all, when he is yet to us almost an entire stranger, I cannot but regard as a breach of the hospitalities extended to him."

"Is not that a harsh judgment?" said Fanny, a warmer hue mantling her face.

"Reflect calmly, my child, and you will not think so."

"Then I ought not to answer this letter?" said Fanny, after musing for some time.

"Let your father, in one of his letters, acknowledge the receipt for you. If Mr. Lyon be a true man, he will respect you the more."

Not entirely satisfied, though she gave no intimation of this, Fanny returned to the seclusion of her own room, to muse on so unexpected a circumstance; and as she mused, the beating of her heart grew quicker. Again she read the letter from Mr. Lyon, and again and again conned it over, until every sentence was imprinted on her memory. She did not reject the view taken by her mother; nay, she even tried to make it her own; but, for all this, not the shadow of a doubt touching Mr. Lyon could find a place in her thoughts. Before her mental vision he stood, the very type of noble manhood.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT an error had been committed! How painfully was this realized by Mrs. Markland. How often had she looked forward, with a vague feeling of anxiety, to the time, yet far distant—she had believed—when the heart-strings of her daughter would tremble in musical response to the low-breathed voice of love—and now that time had come. Alas! that it had come so soon—ere thought and perception had gained matured strength and wise discrimination. The voice of the charmer was in her ears, and she was leaning to hearken.

Fanny did not join the family at the tea-table on that evening; and on the next morning, when she met her mother, her face was paler than usual, and her eyes drooped under the earnest gaze that sought to read her very thoughts. It was plain, from her appearance, that her sleep had been neither sound nor refreshing.

Mrs. Markland deemed it wisest to make no allusion to what had occurred on the previous evening. Her views in regard to answering Mr. Lyon's letter had been clearly expressed, and she had no fear that her daughter would act in opposition to them. Most anxiously did she await her husband's return. Thus far in life they had, in all important events, "seen eye to eye," and she had ever reposed full confidence in his judgment. If that confidence wavered in any degree now, it had been disturbed through his seeming entire trust in Mr. Lyon.

Aunt Grace had her share of curiosity, and she was dying, as they say, to know what was in Fanny's letter. The non-appearance of her niece at the tea-table had disappointed her considerably; and it was as much as she could do to keep from going to her room during the evening. Sundry times she tried to discover whether Mrs. Markland had seen the letter or, not, but the efforts were unsuccessful; the mother choosing for the present not to enter into further conversation with her on the subject.

All eye and all ear was Aunt Grace on the next morning, when Fanny made her appearance; but only through the eye was any information gathered, and that of a most unsatisfactory character. The little said by Fanny or her mother, was as a remote as possible from the subject that occupied most nearly their thoughts. Aunt Grace tried in various ways to lead them in the direction she would have them go; but it was all in vain that she asked questions touching the return of her brother, and wondered what could have taken him off to New York in such a hurry; no one made any satisfactory reply. At last, feeling a little chafed, and, at the same time, a little malicious, she said—

"That Mr. Lyon's at the bottom of this business."

The sentence told, as she had expected and intended. Fanny glanced quickly toward her, and a crimson spot burned on her cheek. But no word passed her lips. "So much gained," thought Aunt Grace; and then she said aloud—

"I've no faith in the man myself."

This, she believed, would throw Fanny off of her guard; but she was mistaken. The colour deepened on the young girl's cheeks, but she made no response.

"If he doesn't get Edward into trouble before he's done with him, I'm no prophet," added Aunt Grace, with a dash of vinegar in her tones.

"Why do you say that?" asked Mrs. Markland, who felt constrained to speak.

"I've no opinion of the man, and never had from the beginning, as you are very well aware," answered the sister-in-law.

"Our estimate of character should have a sounder basis than mere opinion, or, to speak more accurately—prejudice," said Mrs. Markland.

"I don't know what eyes were given us for, if we are not to see with them," returned Aunt Grace, dogmatically. "But no wonder so many stumble and fall, when so few use their eyes. There

isn't that man living who does not bear, stamped upon his face, the symbols of his character. And plainly enough are these to be seen in the countenance of Mr. Lyon."

"And how do you read them, Aunt Grace?" inquired Fanny, with a manner so passionless, that even the sharp-sighted aunt was deceived in regard to the amount of feeling that lay hidden in her heart.

"How do I read them? I'll tell you. I read them as the index to a whole volume of scheming selfishness. The man is unsound at the core." Aunt Grace was tempted by the unruffled exterior of her niece to speak thus strongly. Her words went deeper than she had expected. Fanny's face crimsoned instantly to the very temples, and an indignant light flashed in her soft blue eyes.

"Objects often take their colour from the medium through which we see them," she said quickly, and in a voice considerably disturbed, looking, as she spoke, steadily and meaningly at her aunt.

"And so you think the hue is in the medium, and not in the object?" said Aunt Grace, her tone a little modified.

"In the present instance, I certainly do," answered Fanny, with some ardour.

"Ah, child! child!" returned her aunt, "this may be quite as true in your case as in mine. Neither of us may see the object in its true colour. You will, at least, admit this to be possible."

"Oh, yes."

"And suppose you see it in a false colour?"

"Well?" Fanny seemed a little bewildered.

"Well? And what then?" Aunt Grace gazed steadily upon the countenance of Fanny, until her eyes drooped to the floor. "To whom is it of most consequence to see aright?"

Sharp-seeing, but not wise Aunt Grace! In the blindness of thy anxiety for Fanny, thou art increasing her peril. What need for thee to assume for the maiden, far too young yet to have the deeper chords of womanhood awakened in her heart to love's music, that the evil or good in the stranger's character might be any thing to her?

"You talk very strangely, Grace," said Mrs. Markland, with just enough of rebuke in her voice to make her sister-in-law conscious that she was going too far. "Perhaps we had better change the subject," she added, after the pause of a few moments.

"As you like," coldly returned Aunt Grace, who soon after left the room, feeling by no means well satisfied with herself or anybody else. Not a word had been said to her touching the contents of Fanny's letter, and in that fact was indicated a want of confidence that considerably annoyed her. She had not, certainly, gone just the right way about inviting confidence; but this defect in her own conduct was not seen very clearly.

A constrained reserve marked the intercourse of mother, daughter, and aunt during the day; and when night came, and the evening circle was formed as usual, how dimly burned the hearth-fire, and how sombre were the shadows cast by its flickering blaze! Early they separated, each with a strange pressure on the feelings, and a deep disquietude of heart.

Most of the succeeding day Fanny kept apart from the family; spending a greater portion of the time alone in her room. Once or twice it crossed the mother's thought, that Fanny might be tempted to answer the letter of Mr. Lyon, notwithstanding her promise not to do so for the present. But she repelled the thought instantly, as unjust to her beautiful, loving, obedient child. Still, Fanny's seclusion of herself weighed on her mind, and led her several times to go into her room. Nothing, either in her manner or employment, gave the least confirmation to the vague fear which had haunted her.

The sun was nearly two hours above the horizon, when Fanny left the house, and bent her steps towards a pleasant grove of trees that stood some distance away. In the midst of the grove, which was not far from the entrance-gate to her father's beautiful grounds, was a summer-house, in Oriental style, close beside an ornamental fountain. This was the favourite resort of the maiden, and thither she now retired, feeling certain of complete seclusion, to lose herself in the bewildering mazes of love's young dream. Before the eyes of her mind, one form stood visible, and that a form of manly

grace and beauty,—the very embodiment of all human excellence. The disparaging words of her aunt had, like friction upon a polished surface, only made brighter to her vision the form which the other had sought to blacken. What a new existence seemed opening before her, with new and higher capacities for enjoyment! The half-closed bud had suddenly unfolded itself in the summer air, and every blushing petal thrilled with a more exquisite sense of life.

Every aspect of nature—and all her aspects were beautiful there—had a new charm for the eyes of Fanny Markland. The silvery waters cast upward by the fountain fell back in rainbow showers, ruffling the tiny lake beneath, and filling the air with a low, dreamy murmur. Never had that lovely creation of art, blending with nature, looked so like an ideal thing as now—a very growth of fairy-land. The play of the waters in the air was as the glad motions of a living form.

Around this fountain was a rosary of white and red roses, encircled again by arbor-vitae; and there were statues of choice workmanship, the ideals of modern art, lifting their pure white forms here and there in chastened loveliness. All this was shut in from observation by a stately grove of elms. And here it was that the maiden had come to hide herself from observation, and dream her waking dream of love. What a world of enchantment was dimly opening before her, as her eye ran down the Eden-vistas of the future! Along those aisles of life she saw herself moving, beside a stately one, who leaned toward her, while she clung to him as a vine to its firm support. Even while in the mazes of this delicious dream, a heavy footfall startled her, and she sprang to her feet with a suddenly-stilled pulsation. In the next instant a manly form filled the door of the summer-house, and a manly voice exclaimed:

"Miss Markland! Fanny! do I find you here?"

The colour left the maiden's cheeks for an instant. Then they flushed to deep crimson. But her lips were sealed. Surprise took away, for a time, the power of speech.

"I turned aside," said the intruder, "as I came up the avenue, to have a look at this charming spot, so well remembered; but dreamed not of finding you here."

He had already approached Fanny, and was holding one of her hands tightly in his, while he gazed upon her face with a look of glowing admiration.

"Oh, Mr. Lyon! How you have startled me!" said Fanny, as soon as she could command her voice.

"And how you tremble! There, sit down again, Miss Markland, and calm yourself. Had I known you were here, I should not have approached so abruptly. But how have you been since my brief absence? And how is your good father and mother?"

"Father is in New York," replied Fanny.

"In New York! I feared as much." And a slight shade crossed the face of Mr. Lyon, who spoke as if off of his guard. "When did he go?"

"Yesterday."

"Ah! Did he receive a letter from me?"

"Yes, sir." Fanny's eyes drooped under the earnest gaze that was fixed upon her.

"I hoped to have reached here as soon as my letter. This is a little unfortunate." The aspect of Mr. Lyon became grave.

"When will your father return?" he inquired.

"I do not know."

Again Mr. Lyon looked serious and thoughtful. For some moments he remained abstracted; and Fanny experienced a slight feeling of timidity, as she looked upon his shadowed face. Arousing himself, he said:

"This being the case, I shall at once return South."

"Not until to-morrow," said Fanny.

"This very night," answered Mr. Lyon.

"Then let us go to the Lodge at once," and Fanny made a motion to rise. "My mother will be gratified to see you, if it is only for a few moments."

But Mr. Lyon placed a hand upon her arm, and said:

"Stay, Miss Markland—that cannot now be. I must return South without meeting any other member of your family. Did you receive my letter?" he added, abruptly, and with a change of tone and manner.

Fanny answered affirmatively; and his quick eye read her heart in voice and countenance.

"When I wrote, I had no thought of meeting you again so soon. But a few hours after despatching the letter to your father, enclosing yours—a letter on business of importance, to me, at least—I received information that led me to wish an entire change in the programme of operations about to be adopted, through your father's agency. Fearing that a second letter might be delayed in the mails, I deemed it wisest to come on with the greatest speed myself. But I find that I am a day too late. Your father has acted promptly; and what he has done must not be undone. Nay, I do not wish him even to know that any change has been contemplated. Now, Miss Markland," and his voice softened as he bent toward the girlish form at his side, "may one so recently a stranger claim your confidence?"

"From my father and my mother I have no concealments," said Fanny.

"And heaven forbid that I should seek to mar that truly wise confidence," quickly answered Mr. Lyon. "All I ask is, that, for the present, you mention to no one the fact that I have been here. Our meeting in this place is purely accidental—providential, I will rather say. My purpose in coming was, as already explained, to meet your father. He is away, and on business that at once sets aside all necessity for seeing him. It will now be much better that he should not even know of my return from the South—better for me, I mean; for the interests that might suffer are mine alone. But let me explain a little, that you may act understandingly. When I went South, your father very kindly consented to transact certain business left unfinished by me in New York. Letters received on my arrival at Savannah, advised me of the state of the business, and I wrote to your father, in what way to arrange it for me; by the next mail other letters came, showing me different aspect of affairs and rendering a change of plan very desirable. It was to explain this fully to your father, that I came on. But as it is too late, I do not wish him even to know, for the present, that a change was contemplated. I fear it might lessen, for a time, his confidence in my judgment—something I do not fear when he knows me better. Your since, for the present, my dear Miss Markland, will nothing affect your father, who has little or no personal interest in the matter, but may serve me materially. Say, then, that, until you hear from me again, on the subject, you will keep your own counsel."

"You say that my father has no interest in the business, to which you refer?" remarked Fanny. Her mind was bewildered.

"None whatever. He is only, out of a generous good-will, trying to serve the son of an old business friend," replied Mr. Lyon, confidently. "Say, then, Fanny,"—his voice was insinuating, and there was something of the serpent's fascination in his eyes—"that you will, for my sake, remain, for the present, silent on the subject of this return from the South."

As he spoke, he raised one of her hands to his lips, and kissed it. Still more bewildered—nay, charmed—Fanny did not make even a faint struggle to withdraw her hand. In the next moment, his hot lips had touched her pure forehead—and in the next moment, "Farewell!" rung hurriedly in her ears. As the retiring form of the young adventurer stood in the door of the summer-house, there came to her, with a distinct utterance, these confidently spoken words—"I trust you without fear."—And "God bless you!" flung toward her with a heart-impulse, found a deeper place in her soul, from whence, long afterwards, came back their thrilling echoes. By the time the maiden had gathered up her scattered thoughts, she was alone.

CHAPTER IX

THE maiden's thoughts were yet bewildered, and her heart beating tumultuously, when her quick ears caught the sound of other footsteps than those to whose retreating echoes she had been so intently listening. Hastily retreating into the summer-house, she crouched low upon one of the seats, in order, if possible, to escape observation. But nearer and nearer came the slow, heavy foot-fall of a man, and ere she had time to repress, by a strong effort, the agitation that made itself visible in every feature, Mr. Allison was in her presence. It was impossible for her to restrain an exclamation of surprise, or to drive back the crimson from her flushing face.

"Pardon the intrusion," said the old gentleman, in his usual mild tone. "If I had known that you were here, I would not have disturbed your pleasant reveries."

Some moments elapsed, ere Fanny could venture a reply. She feared to trust her voice, lest more should be betrayed than she wished any one to know. Seeing how much his presence disturbed her, Mr. Allison stepped back a pace or two, saying, as he did so, "I was only passing, my child; and will keep on my way. I regret having startled you by my sudden appearance."

He was about retiring, when Fanny, who felt that her manner must strike Mr. Allison as very singular, made a more earnest effort to regain her self-possession, and said, with a forced smile:

"Don't speak of intrusion; Mr. Allison. Your sudden coming did startle me. But that is past."

Mr. Allison, who had partly turned away, now advanced toward Fanny, and, taking her hand, looked down into her face, from which the crimson flush had not yet retired, with an expression of tender regard.

"Your father is still absent, I believe?" said he.

"Yes, sir."

"He will be home soon."

"We hope so. His visit to New York was unexpected."

"And you therefore feel his absence the more."

"Oh, yes," replied Fanny, now regaining her usual tone of voice and easy address; "and it seems impossible for us to be reconciled to the fact."

"Few men are at home more than your father," remarked Mr. Allison. "His world, it might be said, is included in the circle of his beloved ones."

"And I hope it will always be so."

Mr. Allison looked more earnestly into the young maiden's face. He did not clearly understand the meaning of this sentence, for, in the low tones that gave it utterance, there seemed to his ear a prophecy of change. Then he remembered his recent conversation with her father, and light broke in upon his mind. The absence of Mr. Markland had, in all probability, following the restless, dissatisfied state, which all had observed, already awakened the concern of his family, lest it should prove only the beginning of longer periods of absence.

"Business called your father to New York," said Mr. Allison.

"Yes; so he wrote home to mother. He went to the city in the morning, and we expected him back as usual in the evening, but he sent a note by the coachman, saying that letters just received made it necessary for him to go on to New York immediately."

"He is about entering into business again, I presume."

"Oh, I hope not!" replied Fanny.

Mr. Allison remained silent for some moments, and then said—

"I thought your visitor, Mr. Lyon, went South several days ago."

"So he did," answered Fanny, in a quickened tone of voice, and with a manner slightly disturbed.

"Then I was in error," said Mr. Allison, speaking partly to himself. "I thought I passed him in the road, half an hour ago. The resemblance was at least a very close one. You are certain he went South?"

"Oh! yes, sir," replied Fanny, quickly.

Mr. Allison looked intently upon her, until her eyes wavered and fell to the ground. He continued to observe her for some moments, and only withdrew his gaze when he saw that she was about to look up. A faint sigh parted the old man's lips. Ah! if a portion of his wisdom, experience, and knowledge of character, could only be imparted to that pure young spirit, just about venturing forth into a world where mere appearances of truth deceive and fascinate!

"Does Mr. Lyon design returning soon from the South?"

"I heard him say to father that he did not think he would be in this part of the world again for six or eight months."

And again the eyes of Fanny shunned the earnest gaze of Mr. Allison.

"How far South does he go?"

"I am not able to answer you clearly; but I think I heard father say that he would visit Central America."

"Ah! He is something of a traveller, then?"

"Yes, sir; he has travelled a great deal."

"He is an Englishman?"

"Yes, sir. His father is an old business friend of my father's."

"So I understood."

There was a pause, in which Mr. Allison seemed to be thinking intently.

"It is a little singular, certainly," said he, as if speaking only to himself.

"What is singular?" asked Fanny, looking curiously at her companion.

"Why, that I should have been so mistaken. I doubted not, for a moment, that the person I saw was Mr. Lyon."

Fanny did not look up. If she had done so, the gaze fixed upon her would have sent a deeper crimson to her cheek than flushed it a few moments before.

"Have you any skill in reading character, Fanny?" asked Mr. Allison, in a changed and rather animated voice, and with a manner that took away the constraint that had, from the first, oppressed the mind of the young girl.

"No very great skill, I imagine," was the smiling answer.

"It is a rare, but valuable gift," said the old man. "I was about to call it an art; but it is more a gift than an art; for, if not possessed by nature, it is too rarely acquired. Yet, in all pure minds, there is something that we may call analogous—a perception of moral qualities in those who approach us. Have you never felt an instinctive repugnance to a person on first meeting him?"

"Oh, yes."

"And been as strongly attracted in other cases?"

"Often."

"Have you ever compared this impression with your subsequent knowledge of the person's character?"

Fanny thought for a little while, and then said—

"I am not sure that I have, Mr. Allison."

"You have found yourself mistaken in persons after some acquaintance with them?"

"Yes; more than once."

"And I doubt not, that if you had observed the impression these persons made on you when you met them for the first time, you would have found that impression a true index to their character. Scarcely noticing these first impressions, which are instinctive perceptions of moral qualities, we are apt to be deceived by the exterior which almost every one assumes on a first acquaintance; and then,

if we are not adepts at reading character, we may be a long time in finding out the real quality. Too often this real character is manifested, after we have formed intimate relations with the person, that may not be dissolved while the heart knows a life-throb. Is that not a serious thought, Fanny?"

"It is, Mr. Allison,—a very serious, and a solemn thought."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.