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MAY BROOKE

by

MRS. ANNA H. DORSEY

P. J. KENEDY & SONS

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CONSCIENCE;

OR,

THE TRIALS OF MAY BROOKE.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE STILLINGHAST.

"Do you think they will be here to-night, sir?"

"Don't know, and don't care."

"The road is very bad,"—after a pause, "that skirts the Hazel property."

"Well, what then; what then, little May?"

"The carriage might be overturned, sir; or, the horses might shy a little to the left, and go over the precipice into the creek."

"Is that all?"

"Is it not dreadful to think of, sir?"

"Well, I don't know; I should be sorry to lose the horses—"

"Oh, sir! and my cousin! Did you forget her?"

"I *care* nothing about her. I suppose my forefathers must have committed some crime for which I am to suffer, by being made, willy-nilly, the guardian of two silly, mawkish girls."

"But, sir, you have been very kind to me, and it shall be the endeavor of my life to prove my gratitude."

"Very fine, without being in the least consoling! I'd as lief have two African monkeys under my care—don't laugh—it exasperates, and makes me feel like doing as I should do, if I had the cursed animals—"

"How is that, sir?"

"Beat you. I hate womankind. Most of all do I hate them in their transition stages. They are like sponges, and absorb every particle of evil that the devil sprinkles in the air, until they learn to be young hypocrites—triflers—false—heartless."

"Oh, dear uncle! has such been your experience? Have you ever met with such women?"

"Have I ever met with such women, you holy innocent? I have never met with any other. Now, be still."

"Oh! Uncle Stillinghast—"

"What!"

"I pity you, sir; indeed, I pity you. Something very dreadful must in times past have embittered you—"

"You are a fool, little May. Don't interrupt me again at your peril."

"No, sir."

And so there was a dead silence, except when the rain and sleet lashed the window-panes, or a lump of coal crumbled into a thousand glowing fragments, and opened a glowing abyss in the grate; or the cat uncurled herself on the rug, and purred, while she fixed her great winking eyes on the blaze. The two persons who occupied the room were an old man and a young maiden. He was stern, and sour-looking, as he sat in his high-back leather chair, with a pile of ledgers on the table before him,—the pages of which he examined with the most incomparable patience. A snuff-colored wig sat awry on his head, and a snuff-colored coat, ornamented with large horn buttons, drooped ungracefully from his high, stooping shoulders. His neckcloth was white, but twisted, soiled, and tied carelessly around his thin, sinewy throat. His legs were cased in gray lamb's-wool stockings, over which his small-clothes were fastened at the knees with small silver buckles. His face was not originally cast in such a repulsive mould, but commerce with the world, and a succession of stinging disappointments in his early manhood, had woven an ugly mask over it, from behind which glimpses of his former self, on rare occasions, shone out. Such was Mark Stillinghast at the opening of our story: old, cynical, and rich, but poor in friendship, and without any definite ideas of religion, except, that if such a thing really existed, it was a *terra incognita*, towards which men rather stumbled than ran.

Opposite to him, on a low crimson chair, as antique in its pattern as the owner of the mansion, sat a maiden, who might have passed her seventeenth summer. She was not beautiful, and yet her face had a peculiar charm, which appealed directly to the softer and kindlier emotions of the heart. Her eyes, large, gray and beautifully fringed with long, black lashes, reminded one of calm mountain lakes, into whose very depths the light of sun and stars shine down, until they beam with tender sweetness, and inward repose. There was a glad, happy look in her face, which came not from the fitful, feverish glow of earth, but, like rays from an inner sanctuary, the glorious realities of faith, hope, and love, which possessed her soul, diffused their mysterious influence over her countenance. Thick braids of soft, brown hair, were braided over her round, childlike forehead: and her dress of some dark, rich color, was in admirable harmony with her peculiar style. Her proportions were small and symmetrical, and it was wonderful to see the serious look of dignity with which she sat in that old crimson chair, knitting away on a comfort, as fast as her little white fingers could shuffle the needles. For what purpose could such a fragile small creature have been created? She looked as if it would not be amiss to put her under a glass-case, or exhibit her as a specimen of wax-work; or hire her out, at so much per night, to fashionable parties, to play "*fairy*" in the Tableaux. But the wind howled; the leafless branches of the old trees without were crushed up, shivering and creaking against the house; the frozen snow beat a wild *reville* on the windows, and May's face grew very sad and thoughtful. She dropped her knitting, and with lips apart listened intently.

"Thank God! They are come. I am sure I hear carriage-wheels, uncle!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together.

"Of course; I knew they would come. There was to be no such good luck as their *not* coming," said Mr. Stillinghast, looking annoyed. "One sister ran off—married a papist—died, and left *you* on my hands. I was about sending you off again, when news came that your father had died on his voyage home from Canton, and been buried in the deep: so here you stayed. Brother—spendthrift, shiftless, improvident—marries a West Indian papist; turns one; dies with his wife, or, at least, soon after her leaving another ne'er-do-weel on my hands. I wish you'd all gone to purgatory together. To be shut up in my old days with two wild papists is abominable!" muttered the old man, slamming the ledgers together, until every thing on the table danced. He pushed back his chair, and in another moment the door opened, and a tall, slender, beautiful girl entered, clad in deep mourning, with a wealth of golden curls rolling over her transparently fair cheeks. She came with a graceful, but timid air, towards Mr. Stillinghast; and holding out her hand, said in a low, sweet tone,

"My uncle?"

"Yes, I have the misfortune to be your uncle; how do you do?"

"I am well, sir, I thank you," she replied, whilst she cast down her eyes to conceal the tears which suffused them.

"I won't pretend," he said, at last, "to say you are welcome, or that I am glad to see you, because I should lie; but you are here now, and I can't help it, neither can you, I suppose; therefore, settle yourself as quickly as possible in your new way of living. *She* will show you what is necessary, and both of you keep as much out of my way as possible." He then took his candlestick, lighted his candle, and retired, leaving the poor girl standing with a frightened, heart-broken look, in the middle of the floor. For a moment she looked after him; then a sharp cry burst from her lips, and she turned to rush out

into the wintry storm, when she suddenly felt herself enfolded in some one's arms, who led her to the warmest corner of the sofa, untied her bonnet, folded back the dishevelled curls, and kissed the tears away from her cold, white cheeks. It was May, whose heart had been gushing over with tenderness and sympathy, who had longed to throw her arms around her, and, welcome her home the moment she entered the house, but who dared not interfere with her uncle's peculiar ways, or move until he led.

"Do not mind him, dear Helen; it is his ways: he seems rough and stern, but in reality he is kind and good, dear," she exclaimed.

"You are very kind; but, oh, I did not expect such a reception as this. I hoped for something very, very different. I cannot stay here—it would kill me," she sobbed, struggling to disengage her hand from Mary's.

"Yes you will, dear," pleaded May. "Uncle Stillinghast is like our old clock—it never strikes the hour true, yet the hands are always right to a second. So do try, and not to mind."

"Who are you?"

"I?" asked May, looking with a smile of astonishment at her. "I am your cousin, May Brooke; an orphan like yourself, dear, to whom our uncle has given house and home."

"Are you happy here?"

"Very happy. I have things to contend with sometimes which are not altogether agreeable, but I trip along over them just as I do over muddy places in the street, for fear, you know, of soiling my robe, if I floundered in them!" said May, laughing. Helen did not understand the hidden and beautiful meaning couched under May's expressions; she had heard but little of her baptismal robe since the days of her early childhood, and had almost forgotten that she was "to carry it unspotted to the judgment-seat of Christ."

"I am glad you are here—such a nice, soft-voiced little one," said Helen, passing her long, white hand over May's head.

"I am glad, too; so come with me, and take something warm. Your supper is on the kitchen hearth. Come," said May, rising.

"Where—to the kitchen? Do you eat in the kitchen?"

"I lunch there sometimes; it is a very nice one."

"Excuse me; I do not wish any thing."

"But a cup of hot tea, and some nice toast, after your fatiguing, wet journey," argued May.

"Nothing, I thank you," was the haughty reply.

"Perhaps you wish to retire?"

"Yes! Oh, that I could go to sleep, and never wake again," she cried, bursting into tears.

"You will feel better to-morrow, dear," said May, gently, "and then it will soothe you to reflect that each trial has its heavenly mission; and the thorns which pierce us here give birth to flowers in heaven, which angels weave into the crown for which we contend!"

"I am not a saint!" was the curt reply.

"But you are a Catholic?" asked May, chilled by her cold manner.

"Yes," she replied, languidly, "but I am too ill to talk."

Refusing all aid, after they got into their chamber, Helen disrobed herself; and while May's earnest soul was pouring out at the foot of the cross its adoration and homage, she threw herself on her knees, leaned her head on her arm, and yielded to a perfect storm of grief and fury; which, although unacknowledged, raged none the less, while her burning tears, unsanctified by humility, or resignation, embittered the selfish heart which they should have sweetened and refreshed.

CHAPTER II.

MAY BROOKE.

May slept but little that night. The low sobs and shivering sighs of Helen, disturbed and troubled her, and she longed to go to her, and whisper in her ear all those arguments and hopeful promises which she *felt* would have consoled her under the same circumstances; but it was a wild, defiant kind of grief, which she thought had better exhaust itself, so she lay quite still until towards dawn, when it ceased, and the sound of low regular breathing, assured her that she had fallen asleep. She rose up gently, wrapped her wadded gown about her, lowered the blinds, and closed the shutters, that the light might not disturb Helen; then laid an additional blanket over her, for it was bitter cold, and placed the candle which she had lighted behind an old-timed Chinese screen, that formed a sort of a niche in a corner of the room, which she, in her pious thoughtfulness, had converted into an oratory. A small round table, covered with white drapery, supported a statue of the Immaculate Mother, a porcelain shelf for holy water and her prayer-book. Over it hung an old and rare crucifix of carved ivory, stained with color which time had softened to the hues of life, while the features wore that mingled look of divine dignity and human woe which but few artists, in their delineations of the "thorn-crowned head," can successfully depict. It had been brought from Spain many years before by her father, with a cabinet picture of Mater Dolorosa, which now hung over it. Both were invaluable, not only on account of their artistic excellence and age, but as mementos of her father, and incentives to devotion. Thither she now went to offer the first fruits of the day to heaven in mingled thanksgiving and prayer. Almost numbed with the intense cold, she felt inclined to abridge her devotions, but she remembered the cold, dreary journey of the holy family from Nazareth to Bethlehem—the ruggedness of the road, and the bitter winds which swept through the mountain defiles around them—then she lingered in the poor stable, and knelt with the shepherds beside the manger where Jesus Christ in the humility of his sacred humanity reposed. She pictured to herself the Virgin Mother in the joyful mystery of her maternity, bending over him with a rapture too sublime for words; and St. Joseph—wonderfully dignified as the guardian of divinity, and of her whom the most high had honored, leaning on his staff near them. "Shall I dare complain?" thought May, while these blessed images came into her heart warming it with generous love. "No sweet and divine Lord, let all human ills, discomforts, repinings, and love of self vanish before these sweet contemplations. With thee, in Bethlehem, poverty and sorrow grow light; and the weariness of the rough ways of life no more dismay. Let me follow with thee, sweet mother, after his footsteps, until Calvary is crowned by a sacrifice and victim so divine that angels, men, and earth wonder; let me, with thee, linger by his cross, follow him to his sepulture, and rejoice with thee in his resurrection." Do not let us suppose that May, in the overflowing of her devout soul, forgot others, and thought only of herself; oh, no! that charity, without which, all good works are as "sounding brass," animated her faith; as tenderly and lovingly she plead at the mercy seat for her stern old guardian; and although she knew that he scorned all religion, and would have given her rough jibes and scoffs for her charity, she prayed none the less for his salvation; and now she sought Heaven to strengthen and console the wounded and bereaved stranger who had come amongst them. By the time she left her oratory, she had laid by a store of strength and happiness, more than sufficient for the trials of the day. Yet May was not faultless. She had a quickness and sharpness of temper, which very often tempted her to the indulgence of malice and uncharitableness; and a proud spirit, which could scarcely brook injustice. But these natural defects were in a measure counterbalanced by a high and lofty sense of responsibility to Almighty God—a feeling of compassion and forgiveness for the frailties and infirmities of others, and a generous and discriminating consideration for the errors of all.

When Mr. Stillinghast came down that morning, everything was bright and comfortable in the sitting-room. A clear fire burned in the grate; the toast and coffee sent up an inviting odor; and the table was spread with the whitest of linen, on which the cups and saucers were neatly arranged. The morning paper was drying on a chair by the fire, and over all, flickered the glorious sunshine, as it gushed like a golden flood through the clustering geraniums in the window.

"Good morning, sir!" said May, blithely, as she came in from the kitchen with a covered plate in her hand.

"Good morning," he growled; "give me my breakfast."

"I thought you'd like a relish for your breakfast, sir, and I broiled a few slices of beef; see how very nice it is," said May, uncovering the plate, and placing it before him.

"Humph! well, don't do it again. I cannot afford such extravagance; I must curtail my expenses. 'Gad! if I should have another beggar thrown on my hands, we must starve," he said, bitterly.

May did not relish this speech at all; up rose the demon, *pride*, in her soul, instigating her to a sharp

retort, and vindictive anger; but she thought of Bethlehem, and grew calm.

"I hope not, sir," she said, gently. "You have cast bread on the waters; after many days it will return unto you—perhaps in an hour, and at a time, dear uncle, when it will be much needed."

"Fudge, fudge!" he said, testily; "*I—I* cast bread on the waters, do I? Well, I am doing what is equally as foolish—it *is* truly like throwing bread into a *fish-pond*; but where's what's her name?"

"She slept poorly last night, and I would not awaken her this morning," said May, diverted in spite of herself.

"How do you know she didn't sleep, pray? did she tell you so?"

"No, sir; I heard her weeping all night, and, indeed, sir, I hope you'll speak kindly to Helen when you come in this evening, because she feels so very sorrowful on account of her recent losses, and—and—"

"And what, Miss Pert?"

"Her dependence, sir!" said May, bravely.

"She's no more dependent than you are."

"No, sir; but—but then I am happy somehow. It is the state of life Almighty God has chosen for me, and I should be very ungrateful to him and you if I repined and grumbled," said May, cheerfully.

"If He chose it for you, I suppose he chose it for her too; for *I didn't*. At any rate, don't waste any more candles or coal sitting up to watch people crying, and tell what's-her-name to rise when you do; she's no better than you are; and let her take her share of the duties of the house to-morrow," said Mr. Stillinghast, surlily.

"Helen will soon feel at home, sir, no doubt; only do—do, dear uncle, try and speak kindly to her for a few days, on account of her lonely situation."

"Fudge! eat your breakfast. Hold your plate here for some of this broiled beef, and eat it to prevent its being wasted."

"Thank you, sir," said May, laughing, as he laid a large slice on her plate, which, however she did not touch, but put it aside for Helen; then observing that Mr. Stillinghast had finished his breakfast, she wheeled his chair nearer the fire, handed him his pipe, and the newspaper, and ran upstairs, to see if Helen was awake. But she still slept, and looked so innocently beautiful, that May paused a few moments by her pillow, to gaze at her. "She is like the descriptions which the old writers give us of the Blessed Virgin," thought May; "that high, beautifully chiseled nose; those waves of golden hair; those calm finely cut lips, that high, snowy brow, and those long, shadowy eyelashes, lying so softly on her fair cheeks, oh, how beautiful! It seems almost like a vision, only—only I *know* that this is a poor frail child of earth; but, oh! immaculate Mother, cherish, guard, and guide her, that her spirit may be conformed to thine."

"I suppose," said Mr. Stillinghast, when May came down, "that you'll go trotting presently through the snow and ice to church."

"No, sir; I fear I cannot go this morning," said May.

"Cannot go? well, really! I wonder if an earthquake will swallow me before I get to the wharf today," said Mr. Stillinghast, drawing on his boots.

"I trust not, sir; I'd be happier to go, but Helen is a stranger, and she might awake when I am gone, and want something. To-morrow we will go together."

"So, there's to be a regular popish league in my house, under my very nose," he growled.

"Which will do you no evil, dear uncle, in soul, body, or estate; but you had better wrap this comfort around your throat; I finished knitting it last night for you," said May, in her quiet, cheerful way.

"For me, eh? It is very nice and soft—so—that does very well," said Mr. Stillinghast, while one of those rare gleams, like sunshine, shot over his countenance.

"I shall be very happy all day, sir," said May, gathering up the cups and saucers.

"Why?"

"Because, sir, I thought—you might—"

"Throw it at your head, or in the fire, eh? I shall do neither; I shall wear it. I have not forgot that confounded attack of quinsy I had last winter, nor the doctor's bill that followed it, and which was worse on me than the choking I got," said Mr. Stillinghast, while the old, grim look settled on his face again. He went away, down to his warehouse on the wharf, to grip and wrestle with *gain*, and barter away the last remnants of his best and holiest instincts, little by little; exchanging hopes of heaven for perishable things, and crushing down the angel *conscience*, who would have led him safely to eternal life, for the accumulated and unholy burthen of Mammon.

And May, singing cheerily, cleaned, and swept and rubbed, and polished, and touched up things a little here and there, until the room was arranged with exquisite taste and neatness; then took her work-basket, in which lay a variety of little infant's socks, and fine fleecy under-garments, knit of zephyr worsted, which looked so pure and soft that even she touched them daintily, as she lifted them out to find her needles, and sat down by the fire. "Now for a *nubae*," she said, throwing on stitch after stitch; "ladies who frequent theatres and balls find them indispensable: *this* shall be the handsomest one of the season—worth, at least four dollars."

CHAPTER III.

THE MORNING ERRAND.

After the slender ivory needles had traversed the fleecy mesh backwards and forwards some three or four times, May suddenly bethought herself of Helen, and laying her work carefully down in her basket, she ran upstairs to see if she was awake. Turning the knob of the door softly, she entered with a noiseless step, and went towards the bed; but a low, merry laugh, and a "good morning," assured her that her kind caution had all been needless.

"Dear Helen, how are you to-day?"

"Very well, thank you, little lady, how do you do, and what time is it?"

"Half-past nine. You need your breakfast, I am sure. Shall I fetch it to you?"

"Just tell me, first, have you a fire downstairs?"

"A very nice one!"

"And we can't have one here?"

"Decidedly—no."

"Decidedly, then, I shall accompany you downstairs, if that horrid old man is gone. Oh, I never was so terrified in my life; I thought he'd beat me last night. Is he gone?"

"Uncle Stillinghast has been gone an hour or more," replied May, gravely.

"Do tell me, May, does he always jump and snarl so at folk as he did at me?" inquired Helen; seriously.

"I see that I must initiate you, dear Helen, in the mysteries of our domicile," said May, pleasantly. "I must be plain with you, and hope you will not feel wounded at my speech. Our uncle is very eccentric, and says a great many sharp, disagreeable things; and his manners, generally, do not invite affection. But, on the other hand, I do not think his health is quite sound, and I have heard that in his early life he met with some terrible disappointments, which have doubtless soured him. He knows nothing of the consolations of religion, or of those divine hopes which would sweeten the bitter fountains of his heart, like the leaves which the prophet threw into Marah's wave. His commerce is altogether with and of the world, and he spares no time for superfluous feelings: but notwithstanding all this there is, *I am sure*, a warm, bright spot in his heart, or he never would have taken you and me from the cold charities of the world, to shelter and care for us. Now, dear, you *must* endeavor to fall in with his humor."

"And if I should happen to please him?" inquired Helen, sweeping back the golden curls from her forehead and cheeks.

"You will be happy in the consciousness of duties well done," replied May, looking with her full,

earnest eyes, in Helen's face. "It is a bad thing, dear, to stir up bitterness and strife in a soul which is not moored in the faith and love of God; as it is a good work to keep it, as far as we can, from giving further offence to heaven by provoking its evil instincts, and inciting it, as it were, to fresh rebellions. But I am sure, dear Helen, you will endeavor to do right."

"Yes," said Helen, slowly, "it will be the best policy; but, May Brooke, I feel as if I am in a panther's den, or, better still, it's like Beauty and the Beast, only, instead of an enchanted lover, I have an excessively cross and impracticable old uncle to be amiable to. Does he give you enough to eat?"

"Have I a starved look?" asked May, laughing.

"No; I confess you look in tolerably good plight. Do you ever see company?"

"Not often. My uncle's habits are those of a recluse. When he comes home from the bustle of the city, it would be a great annoyance to have company around him: in *fact*, I do not care for it, and, I dare say, we shall get on merrily without it."

"I dare say I shall die. Have you a piano here?"

May laughed outright, and answered in the negative.

"Well, how in the name of wonder do you manage to get on?" asked Helen, folding her hands together, and looking puzzled.

"Just as you will have to, by and by," she replied; "but come, pin your collar on, and come down to breakfast."

"I must say my prayers first," said Helen, dropping down suddenly on her knees, and carelessly blessing herself, while she hurried over some short devotion, crossed herself, and got up, saying:—

"But you keep servants, don't you?"

"I have heretofore attended to the domestic affairs of the house," replied May, shocked by her cousin's levity.

"Oh, heavens! I shall lose my identity! I shall grow coarse and fat; my hands will become knobby and red; oh, dear! but perhaps you will not expect me to assist you?"

"And why?" asked May, while the indignant blood flushed her cheeks, and her impulse to say something sharp and mortifying to the young worldling's pride, was strong within her; but she thought of the mild and lowly Virgin, and the humility of her DIVINE SON, and added, in a quiet tone, "Uncle Stillinghast will certainly expect you to make yourself useful."

"And if I don't?"

"I fear you will rue it."

"Well, this looks more civilized!" said Helen, after they went down. "What nice antique furniture! how delightful those geraniums are; and how charming the fire looks and feels!"

"Here is your breakfast, dear Helen; eat it while it is warm," said May, coming in with a small tray, which she arranged on a stand behind her.

"Thank you, dear little lady; really this coffee is delicious, and the toast is very nice," said Helen, eating her breakfast with great *gout*.

"I am glad you relish it; and now that you are comfortably fixed, if you will excuse me, I will run out for an hour or so; I have some little matters to attend to down street. You will find a small bamboo tub in the next room, when you finish eating, in which you can wash up your cup and saucer, and plate."

"Yes, dame Trot, I will endeavor to do so!" said Helen, with a droll grimace.

"The tea-towel is folded up on the first shelf in that closet near you; so, good morning," said May, laughing, as she took up her work-basket, and went upstairs to get her bonnet and wrappings, and make other arrangements; then drawing on her walking-boots, and twisting a *nubae* around her throat, she went out, with a bundle in her hand, and walked with a brisk pace down the street. She soon approached a gothic church—a church of the Liguorian Missions, and at the distance of half a square, heard the solemn and heavenly appeals of the organ, rolling in soft aerial billows past her. She quickened her steps, and pushing gently against the massive door, went in. A solemn mass was being offered, and a requiem chanted, for the repose of the soul of a member of the arch-confraternity of the

Immaculate Heart of MARY. "I thank thee, dear Jesus, for giving me this opportunity to adore thee," whispered May, kneeling in the crowd, "for all thy tender mercies, this is the most touching and consoling to me; when thou dost come, clad in the solemn and touching robes of propitiation, to offer THYSELF for the eternal repose of the souls of thy departed children."

The crowd increasing, and finding it impossible to penetrate through the masses in the aisle, she quietly edged her way along, until she came to the steps leading to the side gallery, which she ascended, and happily obtained a place where she had a full view of all that was passing below. On a plain catafalque, covered with black velvet, in front of the sanctuary and altar, rested a coffin. It was made of pine, and painted white. A few white lilies and evergreens were scattered among the lights which burned around it; and May knew that some young virgin had gone to her espousals in the kingdom of the LAMB. Half of the coffin-lid was turned back, and as she looked more attentively on the marble features, turned to strange and marvellous beauty by the great mystery—death—she recognized them. They belonged to a poor crippled girl, who had suffered from her childhood with an incurable disease, and who had been almost dependent on the alms of the faithful for her daily support.

"What a change for thee, poor Magdalen!" whispered May, as she gazed down through her tears. "I look on the pale vestment of clay in which you suffered, and know that for you the awful mystery is solved. Thorns no more wound your heart; poverty and disease have done their worst; while far up, beyond the power of earth and evil, your destiny is accomplished. A poor mendicant no longer, the King of glory himself ushered you into the unrevealed splendors of that region which mortal eye hath never seen. You have beheld the glorious face of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ; your eyes have seen the Queen of heaven; and the veiled vision of the Eternal Father has greeted you. Oh, what cheer! Oh, what hope, to make joyful the purifying sufferings of purgatory! *and now*, on your altar, Jesus, the high-priest and powerful Lord, full of clement mercy and majestic power, offers himself for thy speedy liberation and admission into the beatific vision. Oh, Magdalen! how art thou exalted! how beyond all imperial splendor and royal power art thou lifted up!"

And while the divine mystery approached its consummation, still upward arose the voice of the church in plaintive chants, interceding for the departed, who, in the "*suffering church*" rejoiced with a mournful rapture amidst its patient agony which would ere long be exchanged from dreary Calvary to an eternal Thabor. But now the awful moment arrived; the Lord Jesus had come; and although they saw him veiled under the form of bread, they knew HE was there; they *felt* that august presence thrilling down like a still, small voice, into their souls, *It is I*; and the aspirations of that kneeling crowd went forth in solemn adoration; and returning sweetness filled each devout mind with benediction, which flowing thence again to its divine source, offered worthy homage to the LAMB. A ray of wintry sunlight stole through a curtained window near the altar, and flickered on the silent face of the dead virgin, as she lay an image of heavenly repose. May felt that it was a type of the brightness which would soon crown her; and while a flood of warm and joyful rapture flowed into her soul, she exulted in the thought that she, too, was a member of the household of faith. It was a profitable time to May; for death was suddenly stripped of its thrilling horrors; its gaunt outlines were softened and brightened, and she thought of him as a tireless and faithful guide, who led souls beyond the dark tide, over the lonely and shadowy ways, and through the fathomless abyss, to the very portals of eternal rest. She had almost forgotten the object which brought her out that morning, so absorbed was she in the contemplation of the scene she had witnessed; until on rising to leave the church after the divine rites were over, her bundle fell to her feet. She snatched it up, ashamed of her carelessness, and, slipping through the crowd, emerged once more into the street. Picking her way through snow and ice, she came to a neat fancy store, and went in. Behind the counter stood a neat, pleasant old lady assorting worsteds, who smiled a welcome the moment she saw who it was who had entered.

"Ah, my dear Miss May how do you do? come near the stove and sit down. It is not yet our busy time of day, and we can have a nice chat."

"You will please excuse me now, dear Mrs. Tabb, I have been away much longer from home than I expected, and must hurry off, as I have another errand to do. I have brought more of those little zephyr worsted shirts, four pair of socks, and two or three mats—lamp mats," said May, unfolding her bundle.

"Bless me, dear child! you are making a fortune. I have sold all that you left with me two weeks ago; and after deducting my commission, here is a half eagle for you."

"All sold!" exclaimed May, joyfully.

"Every one, and more ordered. The way was this. Two fine ladies, who both have infants, came in one day, and both wanted the things; but both couldn't have them, and neither would purchase a part; so at last one offered two dollars more than the other, and got them," said Mrs. Tabb, deliberately taking a pinch of snuff.

"Oh, Mrs. Tabb! dear me, it was more than they were worth."

"Not to *her*, my child. She would have given *ten* dollars rather than not get them; and she's so rich she don't know what to do with her money. So these will just do for Mrs. Osmond, who, I expect, will call this very day for them.

"I do not feel quite satisfied," said May; "but as it was all *voluntary* on her part, I suppose there's nothing very wrong in it."

"Bless you—no. She paid the value of the things, then paid for her pride and ostentation, which is the way with *all* worldly people, and which, thank God, *I* am not responsible for."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Tabb; you are very kind to take so much trouble for me. I must run away now. I shall knit up all my worsted this week, so please have another package ready for me when I come again. Good by."

"Good by, Miss May. I declare, if you don't hop about through the snow like a robin; there—she's gone. Now, I should like to know what business old Stillinghast's niece has to be doing such work as this,—the nipping old miser; and I'd like to know what *she* does with the money."

And so should we; therefore, we will leave Mrs. Tabb to her cogitations, follow May, and find out.

CHAPTER IV.

AUNT MABEL.

Fearing she would not have time to accomplish all that she desired, May stepped into a jewelry establishment to ascertain the hour; but it was only half-past twelve, and, with a light heart and fleet step, she treaded her way through the hurrying and busy crowds, crossed B— Street, then in the height of its din, uproar, and traffic, and soon found herself among the dark, narrow thoroughfares, and large gloomy warehouses of the lower part of the city. Turning a corner, she looked up and down, but finding herself at fault, hurried into another street, where she encountered quite a procession of merchants, old, young, and middle-aged, on their way to the Exchange, to learn the latest European news, which a steamer, just arrived, had brought in. Many passed her with a glance of surprise; some laughed, and gazed into her face with looks of insolent curiosity: while others regarded her with unconcern and indifference. "It is strange," thought May, shrinking back into a doorway, "I was *so* sure of the way; but it will never do to stand here, yet how am I to get on? Sir," she said to a benevolent-looking old gentleman, whose white hairs and respectable appearance were a guarantee of protection to her, "will you be so obliging as to direct me to the wood-yard of Carter & Co. I believe I have lost my way."

"Certainly, my dear," said the old man, with a pleasant smile; "I am on my way to the Exchange, and shall be obliged to go right by it, so if you will walk by my side, or take my arm, I will leave you at their office door."

"Thank you," replied May, as with a feeling of safety she laid her little hand on the fatherly arm, so kindly offered. Some ten minutes' walk brought them to the office of Carter & Co., and while May stood an instant, with her veil lifted, to thank her conductor, she saw a face approaching through the crowd—then lost, then visible again, which blanched her cheeks by its sudden appearance. The cold, stern eyes were turned another way, yet she *felt* that they had recognized her; but it passed on, without seeming to notice her. "Uncle Stillinghast!" thought May, while her little fluttering heart felt an icy chill pass over it; "what will Uncle Stillinghast think? Oh, how stupid I was, not to wait until they all got by, then look for the place myself. Oh dear, dear! I hope he did not see me."

"What will you have, ma'am?" asked the clerk, coming forward, more anxious to shut out the cold air from his comfortable snuggerly than to effect sales.

"I wish to purchase a quarter of a cord of wood, sir."

"Oak, hickory, or pine, ma'am?"

"Oak, if you please."

"It is just now six and a half per cord," insinuated the clerk.

"Yes, sir; here is the money. Can you send the wood with me at once?"

"If you can wait until it is carted, ma'am, certainly," replied the young man, taking the half-eagle she offered him, and returning the change.

"I will wait, and you will oblige me by sending a sawyer also."

The young man went out to give the necessary orders, and in a little while a sawyer made his appearance at the door, and announced that "all was ready, if anyone would be after telling them where to go."

"You will follow this lady, Dennis," said the indefatigable clerk, pointing to May.

"Where to, ma'am?" inquired Dennis.

"To the north-western section of the city. I shall stop at one or two stores in Howard Street, but you can go on slowly, and I will overtake you." May then made a few inquiries of the young man ere she bade him good morning, and went away, glad to escape from a portion of the city where she was such an utter stranger, and whose intricate, narrow streets, filled her with apprehension. When they came to Howard Street, May stepped into a shoe-store, and purchased a pair of warm carpet-shoes, nicely wadded inside; then flitted out, and ran into a drygoods emporium, where she bought a cheap, but soft woolen shawl, of a brilliant scarlet yellow, and black palm-leaf pattern, and a pair of long yarn stockings; then gathering her bundles close together on her arm, she hurried away to overtake the wood. When the carter came to Biddle Street, he stopped his horse, and declared "he would not go a step further with such a small load unless she paid him something extra; he had come a mile already."

"You have not much further to go," plead May.

"I won't go another step," he said, with an oath.

"And I will not submit to extortion," said May, speaking gently, but firmly, while she fixed her calm, bright eyes on his. "I know the number of your cart, and informed myself at the office of the charges you are authorized to make, and if you do not proceed, I will complain of you."

Intimidated by her resolute manner, the baffled driver muttered and swore, while he applied the whip to his horse's flanks, and pursued the route indicated by May until they came to the very verge of the city limits, where grand old oaks still waved their broad limbs in primeval vigor over sloping hills and picturesque declivities. Near a rustic bridge, which spanned a frozen stream, stood a few scattered huts, or cottages, towards the poorest of which she directed her footsteps. Standing on one of the broken flags, which formed a rude sort of pathway to the door, she waited until the wood was emptied near by, and paying the man, requested the sawyer to commence sawing it forthwith; then lifting the latch softly, she entered the humble tenement. It contained one small room, poorly furnished, and with but few comforts. An old negro woman sat shivering over a few coals on the hearth, trying in vain to warm her half-frozen extremities.

"Why, Aunt Mabel, have you no fire?" said May, going close to her, and laying her hand on her shoulder.

"Oh, Miss May! Lord bless you, honey! You come in like a sperrit. No, indeed, honey; I ain't had none to speak on these two days."

"And your feet are almost frozen," said May, with a pitying glance.

"They's mighty cold, misses; but sit down, and let me look at you; it will warm me up," said the old woman, trying to smile.

"Let me put these on your poor old feet first," said May, kneeling down, and drawing off the tattered shoes from her feet, while she chafed them briskly with her hands; then slipped the soft warm stockings and slippers on them, ere the old creature could fully comprehend her object; then opening the shawl, she folded it about the bowed and shivering form. With a blended expression of gratitude and amazement, old Mabel looked at her feet, then at the shawl, then at May, who stood off enjoying it, and finally covered her face with her hand, and wept outright.

"Now, indeed, Aunt Mabel, this is not right; why, I thought you'd be pleased," said May, lifting up her paralyzed hand, which lay helplessly on her knees, and smoothing it gently between her own.

"*Pleased*, honey! I am so full I'm chokin', I b'lieve. What you do all this for Miss May? I'm only a poor

old nigger; I got no friends; I can never do nuffin for you. What you do it for?" she sobbed.

"Just because you *are* poor, because you *are* friendless, because you *are* old and black, Aunt Mabel. And more than that, I shall be well paid for my pains. Oho, you don't know every thing," said May, cheerfully.

"I used to hear buckra parson read out of the Book, when I was down in the plantation, that whomsoever give to the poor lend it to the Lord; is that it, honey?" she asked, wiping the tears from the furrows of her swarthy cheeks.

"That is just it, my dear old aunty, so you have found out how selfish I am, after all. You are the creature of God as well as I; in *His* sight *your* soul is as precious as mine. We are truly brethren in our eternal interests. Then you are very old and helpless, which makes me pity you. Now, let me have some wood in here, and make you a fire—a regular, rousing fire."

"Maybe so—maybe so," said old Mabel, thoughtfully; "but, look here, Miss May, what that you say 'bout wood, eh? You gwine out to cut some of the trees down in Howard's Park, I reckon?" she said, laughing and chuckling, highly diverted at the idea.

"No, ma'am, for there is a load of good wood at your door, which is now being sawed for your benefit."

"Did you do that too, Miss May?"

"Never mind who did it," said May, who ran out and gathered up a few small pieces of wood, which she hurried in with, and soon kindled a bright blaze on the hearth: after which, she requested the sawyer to bring in two large logs to lay behind.

"Now, Aunt Mabel, are you comfortable?" she inquired, as she drew a low chair up by the old woman's side, and seated herself in it.

"Ah, honey, if you could only know how good the warm blood feels creeping up to my shaky old heart, you wouldn't ask me; and this beautiful shawl, Miss May! it 'minds me so of the bright swamp flowers in old Ca'lina, that it takes me clean back thar. I had good times then, honey; but I can't say nuffin. I feel it all here, and I hope your heavenly Father will make it out, and pay you back ten thousand times," said old Mabel, laying her shrivelled hand on her heart.

"*Your* Father and God too, Aunt Mabel," said May, leaning towards her, and lifting her sunshiny face close to hers.

"No, missis; I ain't good enough. He don't think of the likes of me."

"Oh, Aunt Mabel, you must not say that. You are his creature, and from him proceeded your life and soul: for you, as well as me, his divine Son died that we might inherit eternal life. *He* knows no distinction in the distribution of his divine charity; the humblest slave, and the most powerful king, are alike the objects of his tender solicitude. And if I, a poor frail child of earth, pity and love you in your low estate, how much more does He, the sweet and merciful Jesus, regard with tender compassion the soul for whose salvation he has shed his precious blood."

"Do *your* religion teach the same to every body, honey; or is you only sayin' so of your own 'cord?" inquired old Mabel, wistfully.

"Our holy religion teaches it to all. Into her safe and ancient fold she invites all; and when we know that this fold is the kingdom established on earth by Jesus Christ himself, how we ought to fly, and never rest until we are gathered in. In this divine faith we are taught to 'love one another,' without regard to race, color, or nation, and bring forth fruits unto righteousness; which, if we fail to do, we disobey,—we bring scandal on it, and the love of God is not in us," said May, earnestly.

"Fruits unto righteousness, which mean good works, I reckon, honey!" said the old creature, musingly. "Well, I dunno, but it *do* seem like 'tinkling cymbals,' and 'sounding brass' to go preaching the gospel to poor sufferin' folks like me, and telling of 'em to be patient and resigned, and suffer the will of Heaven, and all that, if they don't give the naked clothes to cover 'em, and the hungry food to nourish 'em, and to the frozen fire to warm 'em. I tell you what, Miss May, such religion aint no 'count it 'pears to me, and jest minds me of a apple-tree used to grow in ole mass'r's garden; it would get its leaf and blossom; like the rest on 'em, but never a sign of apple did it bear; so one day ole missis tells him he better cut it down for firewood—and so it was, and split up, and sent to my cabin; and I tell you what, honey, I was glad, 'cause somehow it seemed to 'cumber the airth."

"Yes, Aunt Mabel, if the true love of God is not in us, we are like fruit-trees cursed with barrenness—

only fit to be cast into the fire," said May, sighing.

"Well, honey, I never was a professor, 'cause I never yet heard professors agreein'. The Baptists hated the Methodists; the Methodists hated the Presbyterians; the *Protestants* looked down, like, on all of 'em, and they all hated each other. I never could understand it, so I thought I'd go to heaven my own way."

"Well, Aunt Mabel, leaving these to their discords," said May, smiling at her rude but truthful description, "did the thought never enter your mind that *Jesus Christ* might have established a faith and rule on earth to guide souls, which would be upheld and governed by His Holy Spirit until the end of time?"

"I often thought he *ought* to, honey; but I'm a poor ignorant creetur—what do I know?" was the *naive* reply.

"*He did*, Aunt Mabel; and from the time he established it until now, during eighteen hundred years it has *never* changed; it will never change until it exchanges for eternity its reign upon earth. All other religions were founded by *men*,—wicked, blood-thirsty, ambitious *men*, who wanted a broad license to *sin*, and who reserved only such fragments of our divine faith, as would give plausibility to their new doctrines without fettering theirs with responsibilities to spiritual tribunals. This is *why* all these discords, exist among *professors*. In leaving the one faith which acknowledges one Lord and one baptism, they have hewn out for themselves 'broken cisterns which hold no water.' But do you understand me?"

"Yes, honey, that I do. But I'm too old and ignorant to hear larning and argumentation. I want the faith of Jesus Christ; and it 'pears to me that I never he'erd the true story until now. Whatever it is, *your* religion suits me, if you will jest show me the way. I'm gwine down, honey, to the valley and shadow of death, and the way'll be mighty dark without the help of the Lord."

"He will be your guide and staff, Aunt Mabel, when the dark hour comes," said May, dashing a tear from her cheek. "But I must go away now, and I want you to think a great deal about Almighty God, until I come again; then tell me if you think His word and promise are worthy of belief. Turn it over in your mind; view it in every way, and let me hear the result. I see your grandchild coming with a bundle of faggots; here is a little change to buy something—tea, or whatever you want."

"Good by, missis. Lord bless you and reward you." But May was out of the cot, going at full speed towards home, which was not very far distant.

Mr. Stillinghast had purchased the house some thirty years before, when it stood three quarters of a mile from the city. It was then a villa, and had been built by a French refugee, who, in those days of courtly customs, was famed for his elegant hospitality. One of the old noblesse, and but little acquainted with the practical management of business affairs, he became embarrassed, and was finally compelled to dispose of his elegant house and furniture, and retire to a life of obscurity and poverty. But the city was growing around it rapidly; in a few more years it would be hemmed in and walled around by streets and houses. Mr. Stillinghast fretted and chafed; then calculated its increased value, and grew almost savage at the idea that he would be dead and forgotten when heaps of gold would be paid down for the few feet of earth it covered.

When May went in, glowing with exercise and happiness, she found Helen moping over the grate, in which the fire was nearly extinguished.

"Why, Helen, it is very cold here, is it not?"

"I am nearly frozen."

"Why on earth did you not step into the next room and get coal? There is a hod full on the hearth."

"I am not in the habit of fetching coal and building fires," she said, haughtily.

"And supposing that I was, I presume you waited for me," said May, with a feeling of exasperation she could not control. Then laying off her bonnet and wrappings, she went out and brought in the hod, emptied it into the grate, let down the ashes, and put up the blower; and by the time she finished, the recollection of the fire which she had kindled that morning in old Mabel's cottage came like a sweet memory into her heart, and the bitterness passed away.

"When do we dine? I suppose the ogre of the castle will be in soon!" said Helen.

"My uncle generally dines down town; and I beg, Helen, that you will speak more respectfully of him," said May.

"And shall we get nothing until *he* comes?" screamed Helen.

"Yes," said May, laughing at her cousin's consternation. "We can dine now. I have some cold roast beef, bread and butter, and a pie, left from yesterday."

"Oh, heavens! what a bill of fare; but let us have it, for I am famishing."

"Before you get even that, my dear, you must help about a little. Here, spread the cloth, and cut the bread; I will do the rest."

"Spread the cloth, and cut the bread! I don't know how!"

"Learn," said May, half diverted, half angry with the selfish one, as she handed her the tablecloth, which was put on one-sided, while the bread was cut in *chunks*. When May came in from the pantry, a butler's room as it used to be in the time of the old marquis, Helen was crying over a bleeding finger, which she had cut in her awkward attempts to slice the bread.

"This is a bad business," said May, binding it up. "Helen, I really feel very sorry for you. You will have so many disheartening trials in your new way of life; but keep a brave heart—I will learn you all that I know, if you are only willing."

"Thank you, May, that is very nice. I don't care much about learning such low pursuits; but give me something to eat," was her polite reply.

May crossed herself when she sat down, and asked the blessing of God on the food she was to partake of. Helen fell to, without a thought of anything but the cravings of hunger. They conversed cheerfully together; and while Helen rallied her cousin on her long absence. May thought, more than once, with sad forebodings, of her encounter with her uncle down town that morning. But she determined to keep her own secrets; for she well knew that if he discovered it, he would forbid her exertions in behalf of old Mabel, her visits, and be perhaps furiously angry at the traffic she was carrying on with Mrs. Tabb.

CHAPTER V.

PAST AND PRESENT.

The day waned; and that soft, silent hour, which the Scotch so beautifully call the "*gloaming*" was over the earth. Subdued shadows crept in through the windows, and mingled with the red glow which the fire-light diffused throughout the room, and together they formed a phantasmagoria, which seemed to ebb and flow like a noiseless tide. And with the shadows, memories of the past floated in, and knocked with their spirit-hands softly and gently against the portals of those two hearts which life's tempest had thrown together. Helen wept.

"Do you remember your mother, dear Helen?" asked May, while she folded her hand in her own.

"No and yes. If it is a memory, it is so indistinct that it *seems* like a dream; and yet, how often at this hour does a vision come to my mind of a dark-eyed, soft-voiced woman, holding kneeling child against her bosom, to whom she taught a whispered prayer to the madonna! And the child seems *me*—and the lady, my mother; but it flits away, and then I think it is a dream of long ago."

"Angel mothers! Oh, how beautiful the thought—angel mothers!" said May, in a low, earnest tone. "Do you know, I think with so much pleasure of going to mine! Even when I was a little child, it was sufficient for my old maummy to say, 'Ah, how grieved your poor mamma would be, if she was here!'"

"Do you remember her?"

"Not at all. She died when I was a little wailing infant. Four months afterwards, my father, who was an officer in the navy, died at Canton. He never saw me."

"And you have been here ever since?"

"Ever since. A faithful servant of my mother's, who had been many years in the family, brought me in my helplessness to my uncle for protection. But he, unused to interruptions, would not have received me, only the news which came of my father's death, left him no alternative; so my old maummy

remained to nurse me, and keep house for him. I can never express how much I owe her. She was ignorant in worldly knowledge, and only a poor slave; but in her simple and earnest faith, she knew much of the science of the saints. With a mother's tenderness, she shielded me from spiritual ignorance and error, and led my soul to the green pastures of the fold of Christ."

"Had you no other instructor?" inquired Helen.

"Oh yes. Father Fabian. He instructed me in the divine mysteries of our holy faith. He has been my director ever since I was a little child. But how was it with you, dear Helen?"

"I have lived a great deal with Protestants, May," replied Helen, after a short pause. "*My* father was a major in the army—the only brother of the old man here. He was a Catholic, but he was always so full of official business that he had very little time to attend to religion, and all that kind of thing. His official duties engrossed his time entirely. But he always impressed it on my mind that it would be extremely dishonorable not to avow myself a Catholic when occasions demanded it; and I believe he would have been pleased to see me practise my faith. I was sent to a convent school in Louisiana when I was ten years of age, but was suddenly removed, to accompany my father to Boston, to which place he was ordered. *There* I was surrounded by persons of fashion and position, who made eyes at me when I told them I was a Catholic, and declared I would lose *caste* if I went to a church which was attended only by the 'low Irish, and servant girls.' Then I heard Catholics derided as superstitious and ignorant, until, I must confess it, I grew *ashamed* of being one. My father was too busy to think of me,—he always saw me well-dressed and in good company, and imagined that all else was going well with me; while *I*, proud, flattered, and enjoying the world, fancied that it was of little importance while I was so young. My poor father was a brave and gallant officer; and I think when he sometimes declared with a dignified air that 'he and his daughter were Catholics,' it was more from the feeling which makes a soldier swear by his flag, than any higher motive. This has been my religious training; but my dear, indulgent father is dead—gone for ever, and I am *here*—here—Oh, May!" and Helen wept on May's shoulder.

"And *how*, dear Helen, did my uncle die?" said May, in a tone of tender sympathy.

"Very suddenly. He was not conscious from the moment he was taken ill until he died," she replied.

May could not utter a word. Her heart was filled with a strange horror at the idea of that sudden and unprovided death. She could have cried out with anguish for that soul, which, in the midst of its careless pride and criminal indifference, had been summoned by an inexorable decree to the tribunal of judgment! where it appeared *alone—alone—alone*, to be weighed in the balance of justice. "But, perhaps, sweet Jesus!" she whispered; "oh, perhaps, Thou didst in the last struggle hear it from its abyss of misery plead for mercy; perhaps, through thy bitter passion and death Thou didst rescue him from eternal woe—"

"What are you saying, May! No doubt I have shocked you; you are so very pious!"

"*Pained* me, dear Helen; but you will do better now. You *feel*, I am very sure, that a life of prevarication and indifference does not answer for a Catholic; and now there will be nothing to hinder you."

"Perhaps so, dear May. I really wish to do right—but what, in the name of mercy, is that noise!" cried Helen, starting up.

"It is Uncle Stillinghast coming in. He is beating the snow from his feet," said May, lighting the candles. By this time Mr. Stillinghast had thrown off his wrappings, hung up his hat, and come in. He was evidently in no amiable mood, and to the greetings of his nieces condescended no reply.

"It is colder this evening, Sir, is it not?" said May, flitting around the tea-table.

"Yes."

"Shall I get your tea now, uncle?"

"Yes."

"Here it is, sir; it is very nice and hot; every thing is ready. Come, Helen," said May, placing the chairs. They took their seats in silence.

"What's your name?" Mr. Stillinghast said abruptly, turning to Helen.

"Helen."

"Can you make bread?"

"No, sir," replied Helen, in trembling tones.

"*Learn*, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you sweep—make a shirt—wash—iron?" he burst out.

"No, sir," she said, trembling.

"What *are* you good for, then?" he inquired, sternly.

"I don't know, sir; I can play on the harp," faltered Helen.

"Play the devil! You are a pretty, curly wax doll—good for nothing, and cumbering the very earth that you live on."

Helen said nothing, but tears rolled over her cheeks.

"But I will have no idlers about me. You shall learn to be useful and industrious. D'ye understand?"

"I will try, sir."

"Very well. And now, miss, what were *you* doing parading about with old Copeland down town?" he said, turning suddenly to May; "a man I detest with all my soul."

"I do not know any individual of that name, sir. I missed my way this morning, and inquired of an old gentleman who was passing the address of a person I had business with. Then he offered to show me, as he was going past the place," said May, lifting her clear, truthful eyes, to his face.

"And *what* business, pray, led you to a part of the city so little frequented by the respectable of your sex?"

"If you will excuse me, sir, I would prefer not telling you," she said, gently.

"I insist on knowing," he exclaimed, angrily.

"You will excuse me, sir, when I tell you that it was quite a little affair of my own," replied May, in a low voice.

"Very well, madam!" said Mr. Stillinghast, bowing with a sneer; "but depend on't I shall sift this matter—it shall not rest here."

"I am grieved, dear uncle, to have offended you," began May.

"Be silent! You are full of popish tricks; I suppose you were engaged in one this morning. Go, answer the bell!" Glad to escape, May stepped the hall to open the door, and ushered in a tall, fine-looking man, who said he had business with Mr. Stillinghast. He bowed with a well-bred air to May and Helen, then to Mr. Stillinghast, who invited him to be seated.

"My name is Jerrold, sir—Walter Jerrold, and I have come to bring you rents due for the property belonging to you which I occupy."

"Which of my houses is it?" inquired Mr. Stillinghast, gruffly.

"One on C— Street, sir; and the warehouse on Bolton's Wharf. Here are the bills, which I hope you will find satisfactory," replied the young man, handing him a roll of notes, which he inspected carefully one by one.

"All right, sir: but the fact is, Mr. Jerrold, this is a very irregular way of doing business. The next time we can settle our matters better at my counting-room," said the old man, folding the notes away; after which he wrote a receipt, and handed to him. "Many things might happen: you *might*, have been robbed on your way hither; I *may* be robbed to-night."

"We young fellows are sadly deficient in prudence, Mr. Stillinghast, but your suggestions shall not be lost on me," replied Mr. Jerrold, pleasantly. Although Mr. Jerrold's visit was ostensibly one of business, he was not at all inattentive to the presence of the cousins. His eye lingered on the faultless face of Helen, until she lifted her large brown eyes, and caught his glance, when a soft blush tinted her cheeks, and the long fringed lids drooped over them. May dropped her handkerchief, which he picked up, and

handed to her with a courteous bow.

"I fear, ladies, that my awkward visit has interrupted some domestic arrangement," he said, observing the tea-table.

"Not at all, sir," replied May, frankly.

"I beg a thousand pardons if I have; but good evening—good evening, Mr. Stillinghast. I shall beg your permission, sir, to-morrow to consult you about the investment of some funds I have lying idle."

"Of course, sir;" said Mr. Stillinghast, following him to the door. "A rising young man! Come, come, make haste, and clear off the table; I have accounts to look over."

"Come, dear Helen, it will be better for you to help a little," whispered May. "Here is the evening paper, sir, and your pipe when you are ready," she said to her uncle.

"Humph!" was the only reply she received. When every thing was finished, they bade him good night, and ran up to their chamber.

"*Where* were you to-day, May?" inquired Helen, as soon as May closed the door.

"I was at church—down town—up town—then I came home," said May, cheerfully; "and more than that I do not think proper to disclose. But let us prepare for bed. Dear Helen; we shall have to rise early in the morning, and you must get all the sleep you can."

"May, my firm impression is that this sort of life will extinguish me," said Helen, solemnly; "that horrid old man will certainly tear me to pieces, or bite off my head. Indeed—indeed, I am more afraid of him than any thing I ever saw."

"What nonsense! It will do you good. You will soon learn to have an aim in life; it will drive you for comfort where only comfort can be found, and you will learn patience, forbearance and meekness, long-suffering, and charity."

"Like yourself, I presume!" said Helen, with a slight sneer.

"Oh, no! oh no, dear Helen; did I say any thing like that? I did not mean it, for I am very often angered and impatient, and on the very eve of breaking out; but I don't."

"And why don't you? Do you expect to inherit the old man's gold?"

"Helen, I never think of it. I have a higher motive, I trust. My peculiar trials give me so many opportunities of learning the rudiments of Christian virtue; therefore, after the first sting is over, I feel thankful and happy."

"Help us all! I shall never attain such perfection."

"Nor do I ever expect to arrive at perfection. Oh, no! I am too imperfect; too full of infirmities and faults!" said May, earnestly. "But shall I read the night prayers, or do you prefer reading them alone?"

"Oh, read them by all means; but don't begin until I get on my cloak—it is freezing cold here," said Helen, shivering.

May read the beautiful prayers and litany of our Blessed Lady with such fervor and piety that Helen was touched in spite of herself, and responded with heartfelt earnestness; and at the *De Profundis*, she thought of her dead father, and wept bitterly.

"I am very, very sad, May," said Helen, when May kissed her good-night.

"To-morrow, dear Helen, we will seek a heavenly physician; He who comes to the lowly and repentant, and dispenses healing and divine gifts from his throne—the altar!" whispered May.

Helen sighed deeply, but made no reply.

CHAPTER VI.

HELEN.

The great bell of the cathedral was just tolling the *Angelus*, when May, laying her hand softly on Helen, awoke her.

"Rise, dear Helen; it is six o'clock."

"It is not daylight yet, and I shan't rise, I assure you," she said, in a fretful tone.

"Yes you will, I am sure. Uncle Stillinghast will be quite displeased if you do not. He said yesterday morning that you should rise when I do, and lo! you have slept an hour later. Come! it is hard I know to get up in the cold, but you'll soon become accustomed to it."

"I declare, May, you are as bad as your uncle. Heavens! what a pair to live with. One as exacting as a Jew, the other obedient as a saint, and obstinate as a mule! I never was so persecuted in my life!" exclaimed Helen, rising very unwillingly.

"That is right," said May, laughing, "be brisk now, for there is a great deal to do."

"What is it, May? Are you going to build a house before breakfast?"

"Come and see, and I promise you a nice time. The fire is already made in the kitchen-stove. Hurry down, I want you to grind the coffee."

"Grind the coffee! What is that?" asked Helen, with amazement.

"I will show you. Really, I would not ask you, only I have rolls to make."

"Coffee to grind, and rolls to bake, for that horrid old man—"

"And ourselves. I tell you what, Helen, he could get on vastly well without us, but how we should manage without him I cannot tell," said May, gravely, for when occasion offered, she could so inflate and expand her little form with dignity, and throw such a truthful penetrating light into her splendid eyes, that it was quite terrifying.

"Go on, then; I shall follow you in a few moments. I have some prayers to say." Helen's prayers were soon over. Religion was no vital principle in her mind. It is true she held the germs of faith in her soul, but they were like those bulbs and grains which are so often found on the breast of mummies—which, unless exhumed, and exposed to sunlight and air, never develop their latent life. So with her; swathed, and wrapped, and crusted over with evil associations, artificial feelings, and the maxims of the world, the germ was hidden—buried—until the angel of repentance should reveal to her the pearl she held, and lead her *beyond* the vestibule of faith. She had looked no farther; poor Helen; to the splendors, the consolations, and rapture beyond, she was a stranger. It is not remarkable, then, that when she encountered the stern changes and trials of life, the burden galled and fretted her.

"How are you, ma'am; you are very welcome!" laughed May, when Helen came down; "come near the fire, and while you warm yourself, take this coffee-mill on your knees—turn the handle so, until all the grains disappear, then begin the second stage."

"The what?" asked Helen, tugging at the handle, which she turned with difficulty. Her hands, unaccustomed to work of any kind, held it awkwardly; while May, with her hands in the dough, which she worked vigorously, laughed outright at her fruitless efforts.

"It's no use, May," at last she broke out, "I can't do it; and I've a mind to throw the thing out of the window and run away."

"Where, dear Helen?"

"I don't know. I will hire out as lady's-maid, companion, governess—any thing is preferable to this sort of life!" she exclaimed, flushing up.

"You would find greater difficulties than a harmless coffee-mill to contend with, I imagine!" said May, quietly, while she shaped her rolls, and placed them in a pan.

"What *shall* I do?" cried Helen, in a tone of despair, after another fruitless effort.

"Grind the coffee. Come, you are quite strong enough; put it on the table, here—steady it with one hand, and turn with the other—so; now it goes," said May, pleasantly.

"How ridiculous! what now?" said Helen, laughing.

"The second stage!" replied May, looking mysterious; "pull out that little drawer, and empty the powder you will find in it into the coffee-pot, which I have just scalded—that is it; now pour on a little *cold* water; put in this fish-sound; fill up with boiling water—there, that is enough. Now comes the third, and last stage. Set the pot on the stove, and watch it; when it boils up the third time, throw in a small cup full of cold water, and take it off to settle. It is ready then for immediate use."

"Gracious! what an indefatigable, old-fashioned little thing you are, May," said Helen, obeying her directions, and, after all, rather enjoying the novelty of the thing, than otherwise. May's cheerful face flitting about; the bright sunshine gushing in; the warmth of the room, and the feeling that she had really done something useful, inspired her with a healthful sentiment of enjoyment which she had never experienced before. Breakfast was ready; the rolls were light, and nicely browned; the coffee was clear and fragrant, and the idea of a good breakfast was no mean consideration with Helen.

"My uncle has not yet returned from market, and we can run in and arrange the sitting-room," said May.

And they flitted round, dusting, brushing, and polishing up, until they were both as merry as crickets. The morning paper was opened, and spread on the back of a chair to air; the cushioned arm-chair was wheeled into its accustomed corner; and, just as every thing was complete in their arrangements, Mr. Stillinghast came in. Helen was in the hall when he came in with a well-filled basket on his arm.

"Shall I help to draw off your coat, sir?" she asked, timidly.

He looked up a moment, and she seemed such a vision of loveliness that his cold, dull eye, opened and brightened with astonishment. It was the first time he had really looked at her. A low, chuckling laugh, burst from his lips, which Helen thought frightful, and he handed her the basket, saying, "I can do it myself; take this to the kitchen." She dared not excuse herself, but holding it with both hands, and feeling as if her wrists were breaking, she passed through the sitting-room with such a doleful countenance, while a red angry spot burned on her forehead, that May could not forbear laughing even while she went to assist her.

Mr. Stillinghast's humor was not quite so rasping as usual that morning, although he cast more than one angry look towards May, and scarcely noticed the remarks she made to him. When she told him that Helen had made the coffee, he nodded towards her, and with a grim smile told her that "she had made a good beginning;" but to May, never a word was uttered. Notwithstanding which, it was very evident that a pleasant thought, by some rare chance, had taken possession of his bleak heart, like birds, which, sometimes in flying, drop from their beaks the seeds of beautiful and gorgeous flowers into the crevice of some bare grey rock. He did not again advert to May's adventure down town, and she *hoped* he had forgotten it; but he was one of those who *never forget*.

At half-past eight, all her domestic affairs in order, May and Helen prepared to attend the 9 o'clock mass at the cathedral. Helen's worldly heart was pleased with the grandeur of the building, the dignity with which the ceremonies were conducted, and the appearance of the congregation, who appeared to belong to a better class than she had been accustomed to see in the Catholic churches North. And so they did. They were mostly individuals of fortune and leisure, who had their time in command. And there were those whose age and infirmities would not permit them to come out at an earlier hour; feeling thankful to know that He, the wonderful and humble Jesus, would be there to receive their homage, and dispense His blessings to their waiting hearts. Her old feelings would have triumphed, had she attended the earlier masses, when the artisan, the toil-worn, the laborer, with his habiliments covered with the moil and toil of earth; the tattered poor, who were ashamed to come out into the full light of day; the halt, the cripple, and the blind, led by little ones; the widow and orphan, the bereaved, who seek to hide their anguish from all eyes but His who can heal it; the dark children of Ethiopia, the slave, the outcast, had congregated there; all equal in HIS eyes, as they will be in the valley of Jehosaphat when the judgment is, to receive the divine manna and the vital heavenliness which His presence afforded; when, like pilgrims refreshed by pure water in the desert, they went forth to encounter again the heat, the simoon, the thirst and weariness of the way, but with renewed courage.

"Shall we go in to see Father Fabian a moment?" said May, after mass.

"No, not now, May. I think, perhaps I shall go to confession soon; and I do not wish to know him, or be known to him," she replied, shrinking back.

"Let it be soon, very soon, dearest Helen!" said May, pressing her hand.

"Perhaps," she answered, vaguely.

"Now, dear Helen, can you find your way back? I have to go a little way on business," said May, when they came within two squares of home.

"Oh, yes; but really, you seem to have a great many mysterious visits on hand!" observed Helen, rather sharply.

"You shall come with me soon, if you wish to;" replied May. Then they separated; Helen dissatisfied, and a little angry, and May rejoicing like a miser who goes to visit his treasure. Full of happy thoughts, she went on until she came to old Mabel's cottage, at the door of which stood a small, close carriage. The door was ajar, and she went in. There were two ladies in silks, velvets, and plumes, standing before Aunt Mabel, and both were speaking in an excited tone.

"A Roman Catholic!" they exclaimed.

"Yes, misses," was the meek reply.

"Why, don't you know you peril your eternal salvation, by becoming a papist?"

"No, misses, I don't know it, neither does you. I been living on and on, and never was a professor, and I'm gwine to do jest what is right at the 'leventh hour. It's a 'ligion that's older than all, and was know'd and practised afore any of yourn was ever thought on."

"Did you ever hear such preposterous ignorance!" exclaimed one; "why, old aunty, *who* has been tampering with you?"

"Nobody, honey, only them that's got a 'ligion that larns them to give bread to the hungry, warm clothes to the freezing, and fire to keep life in their bodies; and tells the poor ole nigger that God loves her soul as well as he do buckra folks. So I'm gwine to be one," replied old Mabel, striking her stick on the hearth.

"You are a poor, benighted creature, and I hope God will pity you on the score of your ignorance," said one of the well-meaning ladies.

"I hope he will, misses, I hope he will," she said, humbly.

"We had some things for you; but, of course, we cannot leave them now; the papists must take care of their own poor—we have enough of our own," observed one.

"Thank'ee, misses."

"Downright impudence!" they muttered, flouncing out to their carriage, without seeing May, who had taken refuge behind the bed, which was hung round with some faded patchwork, to keep out air.

"And so you're bearing testimony for Christ already, Aunt Mabel," said May, coming towards her with outstretched hands.

"Bless your dear face, honey, it seems best for me. I ben so long without sarving God, that I shall 'quire all the help I can get in this world and the next. Them ladies, honey, is well-meaning, I reckon. They 'tended me a little while last winter, but they wanted to send me out yonder—I wouldn't go; I'm mighty poor and helpless, Miss May, and was friendless then, but I couldn't go thar!"

"Where, Aunt Mabel?"

"To the poor-house, my child. But, honey, arter you went away yesterday, I all at once remembered a Catholic woman—she was a half-Indian, half-nigger, from the West Indies—that I used to do a good turn for now and then. She was dying with consumption, and she used to talk to me about the saints in glory praying for us, the blessed mother of Jesus Christ, and purgatory, in her broken lingo, till I b'lieved every word she said. I was trying to recollect, arter you left me, and it all come pat into my head at once."

"These are consoling, helpful, and holy doctrines, Aunt Mabel; but tell me if you are satisfied that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church of God?" said May, smoothing her withered hand.

"I can't 'splain myself, honey; but thar's something in here that tells me *it is*," said the simple old creature, laying her hand on her breast.

"And that *something* is a great and glorious gift, Aunt Mabel—the gift of FAITH. But hear what our dear Lord said, before he ascended to his Father; here is your old Protestant Bible, which your good mistress used to read to you so long ago. I will find it in this," said May, taking down the shattered old copy of the Scriptures from its shelf. "First of all, our Lord established his Church on earth. It was the object of his divine mission. Then he endowed his apostles with heavenly gifts and authority to do even as he had done; and declared that his Church was 'founded on a rock, against which the gates of hell should never prevail.'"

"And his word and his promise never fail, honey, because he is the Lord God," said the old woman.

"No, never, never fail," said May, fervently; "and now listen. Here He, Infinite Truth, tells us himself *why* this Church can never be overcome, or err, or do wrong: 'I will pray the Father!' said Jesus Christ to his disciples, 'and he will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever—even the SPIRIT OF TRUTH;' and again he says: 'When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you in all truth.' And this spirit was the Holy Ghost—the Spirit of God! Oh, Aunt Mabel, only think! the Spirit of the Eternal God—promised not only to the disciples, but to the *Church for ever!* Do you understand me?"

"I understand, honey; and it's the same now it was then, and will be for ever. Oh, no, Satan, *you* can't break up your master's inheritance! You may worry His sheep, and steal off His stray lambs now and then, but, bless God, you'll get no furdur, 'cause the Master is thar hisself. Oh, Miss May, lead me in, quick as you please!" cried the old woman, while tears streamed over her face.

"Dear Aunt Mabel, your wish will soon be gratified. I will see Father Fabian to-morrow morning, after mass, and he will come to visit and instruct you in many things, which it is necessary for you to understand. Were you ever baptized?"

"No, honey; my mother was a Baptist, and they don't baptize babies; and after I grewed up, I didn't like 'em, somehow, and so it's never been done."

"In this case, I am glad it was not done," said May; "for now, when, after due preparation, you receive holy baptism, your soul will be washed white and stainless as that of a Christian babe. You will have a clean and beautiful banqueting room to receive the Lord Jesus when he comes to you, under the sacramental veil; and, being near the end of your pilgrimage, it is not likely that it will be again defiled by sin. Oh, how happy is the thought of going up through faith and repentance, without a stain, into the presence of our divine Lord!"

"*Me*, Miss May! *all* that for an old crippled nigger like me?" exclaimed Aunt Mabel, wiping her eyes.

"Yes, all that, and more—ten thousand times more. But now, Aunt Mabel, you must begin to examine carefully your past life; to remember the sins which have blotted it, and beg of Almighty God the grace of true repentance, sincere, humble repentance, that you may make a good general confession. And here," continued May, taking off her own medal, and hanging it around Aunt Mabel's neck, "say the little prayer on this a hundred times a day, if you can remember it: '*Oh, Mary, conceived without sin, pity me, a poor sinner, who have recourse to thee.*' It is a medal of our Blessed Lady, who will obtain from her divine Son, for you, all that you may need. Can you say the prayer?"

"Oh, Mary, conceived without sin, pity me, a poor sinner, who have recourse to thee," repeated the old woman.

"Say it over and over again, until you know it perfectly," said May.

"I got it in here, honey, fast," replied the old woman, pointing to her heart.

"That is right. Now, can I do any thing for you?"

"No, my misses, only call my grandchild as you go 'long. I let her go out to have a run in the sunshine this morning."

"I will send her to you; and to-morrow I think you will see Father Fabian," said May, before she closed the door. And she went away, wrapped as with a royal mantle, *in the blessings of the poor.*

CHAPTER VII.

THINGS OF TIME AND ETERNITY.

In a small and elegant *boudoir*, which opened into a conservatory, and was crowded with articles of taste and *vertu*,—the gleanings of a tour through Europe,—a lady, somewhat past the prime of life, leaned over an *Or-molu* table, arranging with exquisite touches, a quantity of splendid flowers in a

basket of variegated mosses which stood on it. There was a look of high-bred indolence about her, and an expression of pride on her countenance *so* earthly, that even the passing stranger shrunk from it. And, while with a fine eye for the harmony of colors, she blended the gorgeous flowers together, weaving the dark mosses amidst them, until they looked like a rare Flemish painting, the door opened, and a distinguished-looking young gentleman came in—called her mother—kissed her on the cheek, and threw himself with an easy air into a *fauteuil*.

"You see how busy I am, Walter, and until I am disengaged, look over these new engravings. They are just from Paris," said the lady.

"I see, dear mother, that you have the affairs of a nation on your shoulders. I hope, for your health's sake, you have no other momentous concerns to look after this morning," he said, playfully.

"One more, Walter; my goldfinch is half-starved, and the mocking-bird is really on his dignity, because he has not had egg and lettuce for his breakfast; but, *apropos*, what success had you with old Stillinghast?"

"Faith, mother, it is hard to tell. He is a tough personage to deal with. I got in, however, and saw the two nieces."

"Well?"

"One of them is extremely beautiful. I shall have no objections to making her Mrs. Jerrold, provided —"

"The old miser makes her his heiress," interrupted Mrs. Jerrold.

"Exactly. The other one is a nice, graceful, little thing, with *such* a pair of eyes! She has a spirit of her own, too, I fancy."

"I have been thinking over our plan to-day, and it really seems to be a feasible one, Walter, if you can only win Mr. Stillinghast's confidence. How do they live?"

"I presume they consider it comfortable;—it would be miserable to me. The old man appeared quite flattered this morning, when I got him to invest that money for me; and shook my hand warmly when I inveighed against the present mania for speculating in fancy stocks."

"You have *tact* enough, Walter, if you will only use it properly and *prudently*. The mortgage on Cedar Hall has nearly expired; I have not a solitary dollar to pay it, and the consequence will be—a foreclosure, unless some miracle occurs to redeem it. *Your* business must not be broken down, by drawing on your capital!" said Mrs. Jerrold, pressing the yolk of a hard-boiled egg through the gilded wires of her mocking-bird's cage.

"I'll move heaven and earth, mother, before Cedar Hall shall go out of the family. If I can bring things to pass with old Stillinghast, I might, on the credit of marrying one of his heiresses raise the money at a ruinous interest. At any rate, Cedar Hall, goes not from the Jerrolds," he exclaimed.

"But, Walter, I understand that both of those girls are Catholics?"

"That's bad; but I fancy I shall be able to put down all that sort of thing, in case I win the lady," he said, twirling an opal seal.

"And *who* are they? I have a horror of low families."

"Make yourself easy on that score, they are our equals, I imagine. I am very certain that none of them have been hung, or sent to the penitentiary; and I presume there have been more *gentlemen* in the family, than self-made men, from the simple fact, that both of those girls have been left quite penniless, and dependent on their uncle. I believe, however, that the father of one was a major in the army; the other, a captain in the navy," said Mr. Jerrold, laughing.

"I am glad to hear it. I assure you that *family* is no unimportant consideration with me," observed the lady.

"Dear lady mother, I had not the remotest suspicion that it was; but I must be off," he replied, while he consulted his watch. "I got a private despatch this morning from New York, giving me the very pleasant information of a failure in the coffee crop; and I am going to attend a sale at *ten* o'clock, and expect to purchase largely at the present prices. At *one*, my investment will double its value."

"You were fortunate, indeed," said Mrs. Jerrold. He kissed her cheek once more, said "good-by," and was gone. Neither mother nor son imagined they had been saying or doing any thing contrary to the

laws of honor or morality. Had any one suggested such an idea, *he* would have felt grossly insulted; and that red spot of pride on *her* forehead would have glowed into a flame of resentment. They were only keeping a sharp eye on their interests. Thus, at least, they would have defined their plans. Protestants, practical and nominal, think of the judgment as an idea too remote to influence the acts of their daily life. They have no confessionals for ever reminding them of the right principles of a true rule of faith; and no spiritual guides, whose duty it is to probe the erring conscience, and heal, with divine gifts, the repentant soul. But we will leave Mrs. Jerrold's *recherché boudoir*, and accompany May from the Cathedral to Father Fabian's parlor. She was disappointed at not finding him there, but determined to wait, as the servant informed her that he had been sent for just as mass was over, to carry the Holy Viaticum to a laborer who had fallen from a scaffolding in the next square, and was dying from the effect of his injuries.

"I will go into the church and wait. Will you please to call me when Father Fabian comes in? I have something of importance to say to him," said May, while awe and tender charity filled her heart.

"I shall certainly call you, ma'am," replied the respectable domestic.

And May went back and knelt in her accustomed place near the altar—that altar, which, to her clear faith, was a throne of majestic and clement love, where the Shepherd of souls was for ever present, to make intercession for those who, through His bitter passion and death, hoped for eternal life. Earnestly she besought His mercy for that soul in its last sudden agony. She besought the Queen of Sorrows, by the pangs she endured on Calvary, to come to his aid and obtain from her divine Son the grace of a good death! She implored the saints, who had gone up through much tribulation, and who pity those who suffer and weep in this valley of tears, to pray for him, that he might not be overcome in the hour of trial by the enemy of souls. In her earnest charity she took no heed of time, and was startled when the servant, kneeling beside her, informed her that Father Fabian had returned, and would see her. When she went in, he was taking a cup of coffee and some toast, which it was very evident, from his pale, excited countenance, he needed. His breviary was lying open near him.

"Ah, my dear child!" he said, holding out his hand to May, "I am very glad to see you. How are you?"

"Quite well, father. But do not let me disturb you; you need refreshment after the late melancholy scene," she replied.

"Melancholy, indeed; but oh, so full of consolation!" observed Father Fabian, while his eyes filled up. "We priests, like physicians, are called on to witness a great many distressing scenes, which many a time appal our weak human nature, and almost overcome our charity by terror. This affair was truly heart-rending. When I arrived at the spot, I found the poor man lying on the sidewalk, crushed, and almost speechless. A crowd, collected together by curiosity, surrounded him. I asked a physician, who was examining the extent of his injuries, 'whether or not he could be removed?' 'He has not fifteen minutes to live, poor fellow,' was his reply! I threw on my stole, requested the crowd to stand back a little, and knelt on the bricks beside him, and bowed my ear close to his lips. He had recognized me, and his eyes already dim, lit up with joy; and in faltering and whispered words, he made his short confession. Happily, his conscience was not burdened with mortal sin. He was one of my penitents, and I knew how regular and pious his daily life had been. Quickly I gave him absolution, after which I administered the Holy Viaticum, which he received with great fervor. 'I am resigned; but, sweet Jesus, pity my little ones,' he whispered. Then, in a little while, with our dear Lord to conduct him, he passed into eternity. I doubt not that his sentence was full of mercy." There was a pause of several moments, during which May dashed more than one tear from her cheek.

"But who, think you, I saw, when I lifted my eyes from that dying countenance?"

"I cannot imagine, father."

"Your uncle. Yes, indeed! he stood watching the scene with a most intent and singular expression of countenance," said Father Fabian.

"It is, I believe, one of the first *practical* fruits of the Catholic faith he ever saw," said May, quite forgetting her own humble, patient example.

"Probably!" said Father Fabian, smiling; "but tell me now what is it you want. I have to run away out to the north-western limits of the city."

"That will suit precisely, dear father. It is a poor, paralytic old woman, I wish to direct you. She has determined to become a Catholic, and wishes to see you. She needs instruction; but her faith is so docile, that I do not think you will hesitate long to grant the ardent desire of her soul, which is, admission into the church of God."

"And where does our neophyte live?" asked Father Fabian.

"In the first of those small cottages west of Howard's Woods; but please, Father Fabian, don't mind any thing she may say about me," said May, blushing, and looking embarrassed. "She is so very grateful, that she imagines that I have done a great deal for her, and really makes me ashamed of the trifling amount of good I have extended to her. Will you give me your blessing, father?"

"I shall certainly go, my dear child—meanwhile, pray for me," said Father Fabian, as she rose up from receiving his blessing.

"Will you pray for my uncle's conversion, father? and, oh! I had almost forgotten! My cousin has arrived; shall I bring her to see you soon?" said May, standing at the door.

"Whenever you please to;" and May went away, feeling quite happy.

Mr. Stillinghast had not forgotten May's refusal to explain the cause of her appearance, the day before, on the wharf; and being determined to discover it, he stopped, on his way down to his counting-house, at the wood-yard office, and inquired "if a young lady had been in there to purchase wood yesterday?"

"Well, sir, I hardly know how to reply to your question;—but I believe there were several young ladies in here to buy wood yesterday," said the young man, looking highly amused.

"But there was one who came with old Copeland; she had on a purple merino dress—and—something, I don't know what else she had on," said Mr. Stillinghast, *feeling* ridiculous.

"Was she very small, sir, with bright hazel eyes?"

"I know nothing about the color of her eyes, but she's something higher than my walking stick," replied the irascible old man.

"The same, sir. *She* came with Mr. Copeland; and if her eyes didn't make me dance in and out, it's a wonder!" observed the clerk.

"Well, what in the deuce did she want here?"

"She bought a quarter of a cord of oak wood, and paid for it!"

"What did *she* want with oak wood?" cried Mr. Stillinghast, becoming more impatient every moment.

"To burn, I presume," replied the young man, paring off a chew of tobacco; "but the fact is, sir, we didn't ask her. We always take it for granted that people buy wood to burn."

"*Who* does know any thing about it?" was the sharp response.

"The sawyer, I fancy, if he can be found. I have not seen him about to-day, however," said the young man, with a broad grin, which he speedily changed, when his strange visitor burst out with,

"When he comes, send him to me.—My name is Stillinghast."

"Certainly, Mr. Stillinghast, certainly. Excuse me, sir, for not recognizing you," stammered the clerk.

"I'm determined," muttered the old man, going out and slamming to the door, without noticing the young man's apologies, "I'm determined to sift this matter. If I had a feeling of humanity left, it was for that girl—papist though she be; if I loved or cared a tithe for any living being, it was she! I intended—but never mind *what* I intended. She has been doing wrong and I'll find it out. She has tried to deceive me, but *I'll* convince her that she has mistaken her dupe. Where did she get the *money* to buy wood with?" And at that thought, such a fierce, sudden suspicion tore through that old, half ossified heart, that he paused on the flags, and gasped for breath. "My God!" he murmured, "has she robbed me?" And during the remainder of that miserable day, his ledgers were almost neglected. Foul and ungenerous suspicion held possession of his mind; and inflamed with a malicious anger, he plotted and schemed his revenge until he had defined a plan that well suited his present mood. "If she plots," he muttered, rubbing his dry, yellow hands together, with grim delight, "I will *counter*-plot. It is not the wrong, *but the person who inflicts it*, that stings me. But the *serpent's tooth* has been gnawing these many years at my heart—why complain now?"

But several days passed, and he had obtained no clue to the mystery, which increased his anxiety, and made him more fretful and testy than usual. He allowed no opportunity to escape, to make May feel his displeasure. Bitter and contemptuous speeches, coarse allusions to her religion, fault-finding with all she did, and sudden outbursts of unprovoked fury, were now the daily trials of her life. Trials which

were sore temptations, and full of humiliation to a proud, high spirit, like May's; and sharp were the struggles, and earnest the prayers, and many the scalding tears she shed, ere she subdued the storm of wild and indignant resentment, which swept like whirlwinds through her soul. But her talisman—the Cross of Jesus Christ—was her safeguard. Its splinters inflicted many a sharp wound; but none so sharp, that the balm it distilled could not heal and beautify them.

Helen, in a fright, kept as much as possible out of sight. Towards her, Mr. Stillinghast's manner was inconsistent, and variable in the extreme. At one time almost kind, at another, captious and surly. Sometimes he called on her for every thing, and perhaps the next moment threatened to throw whatever he had ordered, at her head. Once he told her, in bitter tones and language, that "but for wishing to make use of her to effect certain ends, he would turn her into the street." He had a new lock and key, of a peculiar construction, fitted on his chamber door, which he locked every morning carefully, and carried the key away with him.

"This is awful, May. *How* can you bear it as you do, for you do not seem the least afraid of him?" said Helen, one morning.

"I am afraid of offending our Lord by spitefulness, and returning injuries to one who is my benefactor," replied May.

"You *do* feel spiteful, then, sometimes? Really, it is quite refreshing to know that you are not perfect," said Helen, in her sneering way.

"Yes I *feel* so very often. I am full of imperfections. I am *not* patient, or humble, or even forgiving. I am only *outwardly*—outwardly calm and silent, because I do not think it right to fan up resentments, and malice, and bitterness, all so antagonistic to the love of God. I hope! oh, I hope my motive is, singly and purely to avoid offending Him," said May, humbly and earnestly.

"I heartily wish the old wretch would die!" exclaimed Helen.

"Oh, Helen! so unprovided as he is for another world! Unsay that, won't you?" cried May, clasping her hands together.

"No, May; I mean it. I think he is as much fit to die now as he ever will be. He has doubtless spent his life in tormenting others, and it will only be fair when he is tormented in his turn. But, spare those looks of horror, and tell me, who do you think passed by here this morning, and looked in, and bowed?"

"I cannot tell," said May, sadly.

"That handsome Jerrold. I hope he may prove a knight-errant, and deliver me from Giant Despair's castle," said the frivolous girl, while she twisted her long, shining curls around her fingers.

"Take care, Helen. Romance does very well in books, but it is a mischievous thing to mix up in the real concerns of life."

"My dearest May, I shall never want a skull to grin ghastly lessons of morality at me, while I have you," replied Helen, with a scornful laugh.

"Pardon me, Helen; I fear that I do say too much; but let my good intention be my excuse," said May.

"Yes, it is intolerable. My old Tartar of an uncle swearing and scolding down stairs, and you preaching and praying, up. It is more than human nature can bear.—Where are you going?"

"To confession," replied May, in a low tone.

"Very well; but, my dear 'wee wee woman,' don't stay long, for I believe this rambling, musty old house is haunted."

"Come with me, then?"

"Not to-day; I have an idea of exploring it, and should like, of all things, to get into the very room which Blue Beard keeps locked up. Is there any possible way of getting in?"

"Yes."

"How? tell me, quick!"

"Ask Uncle Stillinghast for the key," said May, while a flash of merriment lit up her eyes.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said Helen, curtsying:

"I leave all such exploits to people who are anxious to become martyrs. *I* have no such ambition."

CHAPTER VIII.

TROUBLED WATERS.

"Where are you gadding to now?" said Mr. Stillinghast, who had encountered May and Helen at the hall-door, on their way out to church. "Where are you both going?"

"We are going to mass, sir," said May, in her usual quiet, pleasant way.

"One of you stay in. I won't have the house left so; do *you* stay, for you are for ever gadding," he said sharply to May.

"I will remain at home, Uncle Stillinghast," said Helen, quickly; "do *you* go, May."

"Do *you* go, miss, and let her stay at home; d'ye hear me?" he exclaimed.

"Indeed, sir, I wish to remain at home. I have no desire at all to go this morning," expostulated Helen.

"Ar'n't you a papist?" he inquired, turning suddenly, and confronting her.

"I am a Catholic, sir, but—but," she stammered.

"But *what*?" he asked, sharply.

"I do not care so much about going to church as May does," she replied, lifting her handsome brown eyes to his angry countenance.

"Oh, Helen!" exclaimed May, with an imploring look.

"This is quite my affair," said Helen, with a haughty air.

"You've got more sense than I gave you credit for," said Mr. Stillinghast, with a low, peculiar laugh. "Don't go any more unless you choose."

"No, sir."

"Oh, uncle!" cried May, losing all dread of her uncle's displeasure, and laying her hand on his arm; "you are tampering with her soul! Helen! Helen, you are trampling under foot your birthright in the Church of Christ!"

"Fool!" exclaimed Mr. Stillinghast, shaking her off. "Be silent. Go your ways, but dare not interfere with her."

"I can only pray, sir, for *you* and for her," said May, after her first wild and indignant emotions had subsided.

Another low mocking laugh sounded in her ears, then she found herself alone. "This is dreadful, and hard to bear," she murmured, as she went out; "but Father Fabian says, that *trials* are divine and royal gifts! If I lived only for *this* life I would never—I could *not* bear it, but living for eternity, I cannot afford to lose a single lesson of the rudiments of perfection."

"That girl," thought Mr. Stillinghast, "is a mystery. She is either a profound hypocrite, or an honest Christian. This scene, however, has fixed my resolves. That Helen may be a fool, but she's not much of a papist. Odds, it will hardly require the temptation of a handsome husband, and a splendid settlement, to make her forswear her creed. I will see Jerrold this very day." When he arrived at his counting-house, he went directly to his desk, and penned a note, which he directed and sealed, then handed it to his porter to take to Mr. Jerrold. Then he perched himself on his high writing-stool, and opening his books, attempted to go on as usual with the business of the day. But there was something unquiet tugging at his conscience, which did not allow him to do so. He paused frequently, with his pen poised over his inkstand, or paper, and fell into reveries, which ended with expressions which burst out like shots from a revolver. It was now "Pshaw!" then, "I hate it worse than I do the synagogue;" or, "it is *not* injustice! Have I not a right to do as I please with my own property?" and "I'll do it as sure as my name

is Mark Stillinghast."

"Mr. Jerrold was away at bank, sir," said the porter, who had returned; "and, sir, I left the note."

"All right, Michael. *Business* is the master we must serve first, and best. Hoist out those bales there ready to ship."

"The devil 'll fly away wid that ould haythen some of these days! I should like to know intirely if he ever hard of the day of judgment and the Master that's to take an account of how *he's* been sarved. I reckon, bedad, he'll find out thin, if not sooner, that he's the one that ought to had a little waitin' on," muttered Michael, rolling out a heavy bale of cotton.

Ere long Mr. Jerrold, anxious to conciliate the millionaire, and full of curiosity, did not lose a minute after he read the note in going to him.

"Good morning sir. I hope I have not kept you waiting," he said, holding out his hand to Mr. Stillinghast.

"No, sir; you are in very good time," he replied, shaking hands, and offering his guest a chair. "I see that you are not one who will let grass grow under your feet."

"I have my fortune to make, sir," replied the young man, laughing; "but can I serve you in any way, Mr. Stillinghast?"

"Michael! No, sir—no— Here Michael!" cried Mr. Stillinghast.

"Here, sir," answered the porter at the door.

"I wish to have a private conversation with this gentleman, and do not want to be interrupted; do you hear?"

"Bedad, sir, I'm not deaf no more than the next one; but suppose somebody comes to pay up rents, et cetera?"

"Well—well, they can wait," he replied.

"And supposin' they *won't*?" persisted Michael.

"In that case, rap at my door, and I will come out. Now, be off."

"I never waste time, Mr. Jerrold," said Mr. Stillinghast, after he had closed the door, and resumed his seat; "I never waste any thing—time or words. I am blunt and candid, and aboveboard. I hate the world generally, because I have been deceived in every thing I ever placed faith in. I am a bitter, harsh, penurious old man."

"Your life has been without reproach, sir," observed Mr. Jerrold, who wondered what strange revelation was to be made.

"No compliments; they nauseate me. I sent for you this morning to propose something which you may, or may not, accede to, there being a condition annexed that may not be altogether agreeable. But however it may be, I wish you to understand distinctly that I do it to suit my own ends and pleasure, and if I could do otherwise I would."

"I am very confident, sir, that you will not propose any thing to me incompatible with honor and integrity," said Walter Jerrold.

"No, sir. No; it is a fair bargain—a fair, honest, business transaction I offer, by which you will gain not only credit, but profit. In view of this object, I have been for two days engaged in an investigation of your character."

"Really, Mr. Stillinghast!" began the young man, with a haughty look.

"Investigating your character, sir. I have made inquiries of your friends and foes concerning your habits, your business associations, your antecedents—"

"For what purpose, sir?" inquired Walter Jerrold, flushing up.

"*To see if I might trust you.*"

"And the result of this strange procedure?"

"Is favorable throughout. I congratulate you, sir, on being without reproach in your business relations. You will suit me to a nicety. I lost two years ago the old man who sat at this desk for the last forty years. He was the only friend I had in the wide earth. He was my prop and support, and now that he is gone, I feel tottering and weak. I want some one to assist me in the cares of my immense business; a partner, young, active, and possessed of just the requisites which you have."

Walter Jerrold's eyes lit up with an expression of wild triumph. He could scarcely believe his own ears; he thought it was a cheating dream that the millionaire, Stillinghast—the bitter, inaccessible old man, should offer him something so far beyond his most sanguine hopes; advantages which he had intended to intrigue, and toil unceasingly for, but which were now thrown into his very hands.

"Do you understand me, Mr. Jerrold?"

"I hear you, sir, but really fear you are jesting at my expense."

"*I never jest*, sir. It has been so long since I jested that the word has become meaningless to me. But, as I said, there is a condition—"

"Allow me to hear it, Mr. Stillinghast," said Walter Jerrold, fearing at least it might be something dreadful and impossible.

"I have," said the old man, as if talking to himself, "I have gathered together large sums. I scarcely know the exact amount myself. There is principal, interest, and compound interest, still heaping up the pile. I do not intend it shall be squabbled over when I am in the dust, or left open to the rapacity of lawyers. I shall dispose of my concerns while I have reason and health, in such a way, by Heaven! as Heaven itself cannot interfere with my plans!"

Why did not that boastful, gold-withered, shrivelled up old man, pause? How dare he throw such defiance in the face of Almighty God over his unrighteous gains!—yes, unrighteous gains, for mammon held them in trust. None had ever gone into the treasure-house of God to relieve the suffering, or aid the indignant. The few good acts of his life had been *wrested* from him, and the recollection of them filled him with bitterness instead of joy.

"That is wise and prudent, sir," observed Mr. Jerrold.

"Of course it is. But now to the point. I will take you into partnership on condition that you, as my successor, marry my niece, Helen Stillinghast, and promise on your honor to endeavor to overcome her Catholic tendencies. She is not very strong in her faith, but as I intend to leave her a considerable amount of property, I do not wish it to go to the support of a creed I detest—not one copper of it. What do you say?"

"What amount of capital do you require, Mr. Stillinghast?"

"Whatever you have, sir. If it is much, well; if nothing, it makes no difference: but, do you hesitate? I suppose the girl is an obstacle."

"None in the least, sir. But I am overwhelmed by your generosity, sir; the advantages you offer place me in a position which it would have taken me years of toil to attain, and I must confess, that I am quite thrown off my balance. Will you allow me at least a few hours to *think*?" said Walter Jerrold, highly excited.

"Your caution is no discredit to you. I see that I am not deceived," said Mr. Stillinghast, with a grim smile. "To-morrow evening I shall expect an answer; at which time you can come to my house, and take your tea, and look at my niece."

"You will certainly see me then, sir, and hear my decision." And the young man, with steps that scarcely felt the earth he trod on, hurried away, nor paused an instant, until he reached home. Mrs. Jerrold was standing on her marble carriage-step, just ready to get into her luxurious coach to take a drive. He whispered a word or two to her; the carriage was dismissed, and mother and son went up stairs to analyze the sudden promise of fortune which had burst, like the bow of heaven, around them. And together we will leave them—the worldly mother and the worldly son, to grow elate, and almost wild, at the prospect which Mr. Stillinghast's eccentric liberality had opened to their view. At any rate, it was eligible in every respect, with, or without a matrimonial appendage; and Cedar Hall was secured to the Jerrolds.

Father Fabian, true to his promise, had visited old Mabel, and found her so well disposed, and of such docile faith, that he had promised, as soon as he finished her general confession, to give her holy baptism. Two or three times a week he dropped in, and was much edified by the fervor and humility

with which she received his instructions. It all seemed like a new world dawning around her, as if through the chinks of her lowly dwelling bright visions of heaven stole in to gladden her, while her soul in its humble love traversed back and forth with angel messengers. May had not seen her for some days, and now went to take her money to pay the rent of her poor cottage, and purchase a supply of provisions. Mrs. Tabb had disposed of her fancy knitting, and sent her son early that morning with the proceeds, some six or seven dollars, to May. Rejoicing in the power to do good, and leaving all her vexations and trials at home, she sought old Mabel's lowly dwelling, to impart and receive consolation.

"That's Miss May! Here, Nellie, fetch that stool over thar for Miss May," exclaimed the old woman, as soon as the door opened. "How is you, honey?"

"I am quite well, Aunt Mabel. I think you are looking better," replied May, sitting down beside her.

"Oh, honey, it's blessed times with me now. I bin blind all my life; I never see nuffin till now. Ah, honey, that good priest you send me aint like the buckra parsons I used to know. *He* aint too proud to sit down by a poor nigger, an' take her lame hand in his'n, and rub it with some sort of liniment he fotch. And thar's a bottle of wine he left 'cause the doctor said I must have some. *He* don't stand off as if he was afeard I would pizen him, and fling the gospel at me like stingy people throws bones to dogs. He makes me *feel* that I'm a child of God as well as white folks, by *treating* me like one, honey."

"I'm very glad, Aunt Mabel, that you are comforted by Father Fabian's visits," said May, smiling at her unsophisticated statement.

"Yes, he comforts me mightily, Miss May; and he talk so simple and beautiful, that I understand every word he says."

"What does Father Fabian tell you, Aunt Mabel?"

"He read one thing to me out of my ole Bible thar. You know I can't read myself, Miss May, but I keep it 'cause it belonged to my missis. He asked me if I ever been baptized?' I told him, 'No, sir.' Then he ask me how I knew, and I tell him that too. Then he read what Jesus Christ said, 'Unless you be born again, of water and the Holy Ghost, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven;' and, honey, it was enough, for me to know he said it. And then he told me about the power our Lord left with his Church to forgive sins, and I didn't dar doubt it, 'cause who can be so presumptuous as to contradict Jesus Christ when he lays down the way and the truth? But oh, Miss May, when the day comes for me to receive in my ole heart the dear Lord hisself—my poor ole tired, aching heart—then I lived long enough, 'cause the glory of God will be with me."

"It will be a most happy day, Aunt Mabel," said May, dashing a tear from her cheek. "Now tell me something about our Immaculate Mother. Do you ever think of her?"

"Oh, Miss May! how can I think of *Jesus Christ*—how can I love him, without thinking of, and loving her? If I go down to the manger, thar she is, watching over him, or holding him on her bosom; if I go through Salem's marble city, honey, thar she is, close by her divine Son; if I go to Calvary, what do I see?" said old Mabel, lifting her shrivelled hand, and dim eyes to heaven, while tears flowed over her swarthy cheeks; "I see the Son of God, and the Son of Mary—Jesus Christ, hanging on the rough wood; his head, his hands, his feet, his side, dropping blood from the torn flesh. I see him dying for me; and down at his feet, his mother suffering with him. Ah, honey, it was a heavy burden she bore that dark day! The suffering of her son—her own pangs—the sins of the world, for which both suffered, as it 'pears to me, was too much for one human heart. Oh, don't any body talk to me 'bout not loving the Blessed Virgin! With one breath, I say, 'Have mercy on me, sweet Jesus!' with the other, I say, 'Pray for me, Virgin mother, without sin!' It's the last thing I say at night, and the first I say in the morning."

"But you don't worship the Blessed Virgin, Aunt Mabel?" said May, with a smile.

"Worship her, honey? No! but God honored and loved her. SHE was the mother of the dear Jesus; the 'mount of her sufferings was for him and us, and *I* love her—I honor her, and I go to her like a little child, and ask her to *pray for me*, and ask Him, who never refused her any thing, for what I want."

"She is a tender friend—the refuge of sinners—the health of the weak—the help of Christians!" said May, astonished at old Mabel's language; "and I am glad you have recourse to her. She will lead you along until all is well with you. Shall I read to you now? Father Fabian requested me to read over the catechism to you. To-day I will read the instructions on Confession and Baptism."

"I can't hear too much, Miss May," said the old woman, leaning forward to listen, with an eager and anxious expression. May read, and explained, until she heard the cathedral bell toll the Angelus. It was time for her to go; so kneeling down, she said with heartfelt devotion the beautiful prayer, which

celebrates so worthily and continually the wondrous mystery of the Incarnation. After which she left her purse with old Mabel, containing the amount of her rent, which would be due the next day, and promising to send her tea, sugar, and other necessaries, called little Nellie in, and telling her to sit with her grandmother, hurried away with a lighter heart than when she came out. She made her purchases on her way home, and left directions where they were to be sent. After assuring herself that there would be no mistake, and obtaining a promise from the clerk who weighed the groceries that they should be delivered in the course of an hour, she proceeded homewards. She found Helen haughty and silent, evidently determined to avoid all conversation on the event of the morning. Two or three times May endeavored to expostulate with her, but found herself rudely repulsed.

That night, when Mr. Stillinghast came in, Helen officiously placed his chair in its usual corner, and handed him his slippers. May made two or three observations to him in her own cheerful way, but he barely replied, and desired her not to interrupt him again. Her heart swelled, and her cheeks flushed, but she remembered the *aim of her life*, and was silent.

"Do you play on the piano?" said Mr. Stillinghast, abruptly, to Helen.

"No, sir; I play on the harp," she replied, amazed.

"Do you play well?"

"My master thought so, sir."

"I will order one for you to-morrow. I expect company to tea to-morrow evening, so put on any fandangos you have got."

"Yes, sir," she replied, while her face sparkled with delight; "I can never thank you, sir."

"I don't want you to, so be quiet, and do as I bid you," he replied, roughly.

"Poor Helen!" thought May; "poor—poor Helen! 'they seek after her soul,' and she, oh, weak one! *how* will she resist without the sacraments?"

After Mr. Stillinghast retired, and they were left alone, Helen again opened a French novel to resume her reading, without exchanging a word with her cousin. Thoughts and emotions were flooding May's soul with impulses she dared not resist. She must warn her. She must stretch out her arm, weak though it was, to save her.

"Helen! dear Helen, listen to me!" she said, kneeling before her, and throwing an arm around her neck, while she laid her hand on her cousin's. Helen, astonished, dropped her book, and remained passive, while May besought her by her hopes of heaven to accompany her the next morning to confession, or go alone, as both could not leave home together; then set before her in eloquent and soul-touching language the peril into which her prevarications were leading her.

"You are mad, May.—decidedly mad; I intend to better my condition if I can, and be a Catholic too. I am only conciliating this crusty old wretch, who has us both in his power; then, you know, we may bring him around after awhile," she said, carelessly.

"Oh, Helen! we *cannot* serve two masters, even for a season; nor can we handle pitch without becoming defiled. Believe me, this kind of conciliation, as it is called, is fraught with evil," said May, earnestly.

"You are right about the pitch, May. He is truly as disagreeable as pitch; but, indeed, I will endeavor to handle him with gloves on," said Helen, laughing; "and I *won't* go to confession until I am ready."

"I alluded to my uncle's opinions and principles, for, Helen, he is an unbeliever!" said May, sighing, as she turned away to go up to bed.

"Don't make any more scenes, little dear; really, you startle one almost into spasms," continued the heartless and beautiful one. "I have a very strong, high spirit, and a *will*; no iron or rock is harder."

"Be warned, Helen! I have a will, too, and shall not cease to admonish you—to warn you—to pray for you, until life ceases."

"Pshaw! you are a fanatic. Good night, my dear."

CHAPTER IX.

TRIALS.

When May awoke the next morning at her usual hour, she discovered, to her great surprise, that Helen was up and dressed; but how occupied she could not conceive, until rising, she saw her sitting beside her open trunk, with a lighted candle on a chair near her, looking over various ornaments and articles of dress which it contained. With a small hand-glass she tried the effect of jet and pearls in her ears; of black velvet, or satin rosettes, in her soft wavy brown hair; of white crape and illusion on her throat and wrists—glancing all the time with an expression of pleased triumph at the reflection on her faultlessly beautiful face.

"Thank God, I am *not* beautiful," thought May, without a dash of envy. "I might—yes, I am so weak—I might worship myself instead of God." But she said nothing, and performed her morning devotions, and made her meditations as usual; then dressed quickly and neatly, and asked Helen if she was ready to go down.

"I declare, May, you are a perfect little mouse. I did not know you were up. Yes; I am ready now. I had quite forgotten that it was my morning to make breakfast," she replied, returning the things to the trunk without the least possible hurry.

"If you have any thing else to do, dear Helen; I mean—if—you have not said your prayers yet, I will go down and get things in train for you," said May, timidly.

"Thank you, May, but I keep my own conscience. I have no time for my prayers now—after breakfast will do," she replied, carelessly.

"Dear Helen, consider—"

"Dear May, I *won't* consider," she interrupted her, "for I am in such a ferment of delight, what with the idea of company, and having a harp once more, I am really half wild, and could not pray for the life of me—at least, as people *ought* to pray. Oh, what different times we shall have! Really, May, I have an idea that I shall have our old savage dancing the Tarantula before to-morrow night," she exclaimed, almost shrieking with laughter.

"Helen," began May, but checked herself, and burst into tears, which she endeavored to conceal—such tears as angels shed over the derelictions of the souls they are appointed to guard. Helen did not observe them; giddy and selfish, she derived amusement from that which was luring her soul further away from God; and, while May wept over her peril, she thought only of the transient and fleeting enjoyments of the present. Gayly humming the *Tarantula*, she ran down to the kitchen, where she got breakfast, or, rather claimed the reputation of getting it, by assisting May, who was really the practical cause of its being made at all tolerably.

"What sort of gimcracks must one have for supper? I have invited a friend with whom I have business relations of some importance, to tea, and I wish to know what is usual," said Mr. Stillinghast, addressing Helen, after breakfast.

"I don't know, sir," she said, looking down, with the half-frightened expression her face always wore when he addressed her; "people generally have cake, and other nice things."

"Very well, make a supper to suit yourself," said Mr. Stillinghast, tossing her a five dollar note.

"We *ought* to have silver forks, sir," she suggested.

"Silver devils! well, wait—" He went up to his chamber, and returned with a package, which he laid carefully on the table, saying, "There they are—be careful with them," and went out without noticing May even by a look, who felt the neglect more keenly than any trial he had ever caused her. To find that Helen, who hated as much as she feared him—whose life was so aimless and useless—preferred before her, caused sharp and bitter emotions. The flagrant injustice of his treatment galled, as much as his unmerited contempt humiliated her. For a little while her feelings bore her along on their rough but silent torrent, while the hot winds of evil heated her veins with fire, and caused a hot flush to burn on either cheek. Ho! how exulted the tempter now; he had long laid in wait for her soul, and now, while it oscillated and wavered, how triumphant he was; how defiantly he lifted his lurid brow towards the Almighty, while he spread out the snare for that tempted, trembling one! but let us listen—for angels guard her, and watch, with sorrowful eyes, the dread conflict, while they pray for heavenly strength to sustain her—let us listen to the words which go up from that heart, so stilly and whispered that they

scarcely reach our ears, while in Heaven they ring out clear, and sweet, and sorrowful,—“Sweet Jesus! merciful Jesus! suffering, calumniated dying Jesus, pity me—rescue me,” she murmured, folding her cold hands together. Far away fled the powers of darkness, and left only the sweetness and peace of that potent deliverer, JESUS, in her soul. Once more the angels of her life looked up rejoicing, and spread their wings of light about her way. *Without*, there had been an exterior calm; but it was like that gray, sad stillness, which mantles the storm. Now there was sunshine as well as calm.

“What shall I do, May?” said Helen, who had been reading the paper.

“We must try and make a nice supper, as my uncle wishes, Helen. I will make waffles and tea-biscuits, if you wish it, and we can order cake from Delaro’s. I think this, with chipped ham, tea, and coffee, will be sufficient.”

“Thank you, May. I am so ignorant; if you will only do it all for me, I shall be so obliged to you. You know I shall have to dress, and it takes me so long to arrange my hair gracefully. I wish, sometimes, that I had none—it is so troublesome,” said the selfish girl.

“Yes,” said May, after a little while, “I will attend to it. My dress is such an every day affair, that I shall be able to have every thing ready, to take the head of the table in time.”

“The head of the table! I rather expect Mr. Stillinghast intends me to preside.”

“Possibly. If my uncle wishes it, Helen, I will certainly resign it to you; but, as I have always sat there, I shall continue to do so until he requests me to do otherwise,” said May, with becoming firmness.

“Oh, of course! It is quite indifferent to me, my dear;—but what have we here?” said Helen, taking up the bundle which Mr. Stillinghast had laid on the table. “See, May, what splendidly chased silver forks! How heavy they are; and see! here is a crest on them.”

“They are very old, I presume,” said May, examining them with interest.

“As old as the hills! Where on earth has the old curmudgeon kept them all this time?” exclaimed Helen. “Do you think he bought, or inherited them?”

“Inherited them, doubtless. My mother had the same crest on her silver. Our grandfather was an Englishman of good lineage; but see, Helen, they require a good cleansing and rubbing. I will go to mass now, after which I will attend to your commissions. While I am out, you had better get down the old china, which you will find on that closet shelf, with some cut glass goblets. You can wash them up with the breakfast things; or, if you would rather wait until I return, I will assist you,” said May.

“Oh, no! I like such work; but, May, could we not hunt up your old maummy, if she is not too old, to come and wait?” asked Helen.

“She died two years ago, Helen,” said May, turning away her head with a quivering lip.

“How unfortunate! But, May, have you any fine table linen?”

“Yes; a number of fine damask tablecloths.”

“And napkins?”

“None.”

“Thank fortune, I have some four dozen East India napkins; they will look quite splendid on the table this evening. But hurry on, May, I wish to clear up to make room for my harp; I expect it every moment.”

That evening, if Mr. Stillinghast had looked around him, he would scarcely have recognized the sitting-room as the one he had left in the morning. The round table, just large enough to seat four comfortably, was elegantly spread with fine white damask, and crimson and old gold china, of an antique and elegant pattern; sparkling cut glass, and silver. Two wax candles burned in the old-fashioned silver *candelabras* in the centre, on each side of which stood two clusters of geranium leaves and winter roses, arranged in small rich vases. The grate looked resplendent, and a harp, of a magnificent pattern, heavily carved and gilded, stood in a conspicuous place. Helen looked exquisitely lovely. Her dress was the perfection of good taste, and well did its elaborate simplicity suit her style of beauty. A single white rose, and a few geranium leaves in her hair, with a pearl and jet brooch, which fastened the velvet around her throat, were the only ornaments she wore. But Mr. Stillinghast came in growling and lowering as usual, and without noticing any one, or any thing, threw himself in his arm-chair, which May had taken care should be in its place; drew off his boots, and replaced them with the

soft warm slippers she had worked for him some months before; then called for the evening paper, and was soon immersed in the news from Europe, and the rise and fall of stocks. About a quarter of an hour afterwards the front door-bell rung, and May, who happened to be in the hall, went to admit the visitor, who was no other than Mr. Jerrold. He bowed courteously, and "presumed he had the pleasure of speaking to Miss Stillinghast?"

"My name is May Brooke," said May, with one of her clear smiles.

"And mine is Jerrold—Walter Jerrold; not so harmonious as yours, certainly!" he replied, throwing off the large Spanish cloak which was folded gracefully around him.

"Life would be a sad monotone if every thing in creation resembled each other; there would be no harmony. But walk in, Mr. Jerrold, my uncle expects you," said May, throwing open the door.

"How are you, sir?" said Mr. Stillinghast, turning his head, but not rising. "My niece, Helen Stillinghast. Take a chair." He did not introduce May, or notice her, except by a frown. Feeling the tears rush to her eyes at this new mark of her uncle's displeasure, she flitted back to the kitchen, and commenced operations with her waffle irons. While engaged with her domestic preparations, she heard the gay, manly voice of Mr. Jerrold, in an animated conversation with Helen, who now, in her right element, laughed and talked incessantly. Again welled up the bitter fountain in her heart, but that talismanic word dispersed it, and it was gone, like spray melting on the sunny shores of the sea. When she placed the supper on the table, she moved around with such calm self-possession—such an airy, light motion of modest grace, that Walter Jerrold, who had seen much of the world, and lived in the best company, was struck by the anomaly which combined so much real grace with what, he considered, domestic drudgery. And May's appearance justified his remarks. A dark, rich merino dress; a small, finely embroidered collar, with cuffs of the same; a breast-knot of crimson and black ribbon; and her waving, glossy hair, falling in broad bands on her fair cheeks, and gathered up at the back of her head, beneath a jet comb, completed her attire. It was her usual holiday dress, and did not embarrass her. Her eyes looked larger, brighter, and darker than usual, and a faint tinge of rose stole through the transparent fairness of her cheeks. But, with all, May was no beauty in the ordinary acceptance of the term. She was one of those rare mortals who steal into the soul like a pleasant, beneficent idea, and satisfy its longings with something calmer and holier than mere worldly friendship; for there was that within May's soul—the hidden mystery of faith and religion—which, like a lamp in a vase of alabaster, shone out from her countenance with an influence which none could withstand; it won—it led—it blessed those who yielded to its power. She presided at the head of the table that evening with quiet grace, and attempted once or twice to converse with her uncle, but his looks and replies were so harsh that she turned to Helen and Mr. Jerrold, and in a short time found herself amused at his *persiflage* and Helen's repartees.

"I have writing to do, Jerrold," said Mr. Stillinghast, after tea; "and if you will excuse me, I will go up to my room. You can drop in, and look over those papers before you go. However, stay as late as it is agreeable for you to do so." Walter Jerrold understood him. Already captivated by Helen's beauty and worldliness, his decision was made.

Very soon was heard through the silent mansion strains of music, which startled the echoes in its silent and deserted rooms, accompanied by a voice of such thrilling sweetness and volume of tone, that the solitary old man, in his cold and cheerless apartment, threw down his pen, and sprung to his feet, to listen. It was Helen singing wild cavatinas from *Norma*, and solos from *Der Freischutz*, and looking so splendidly beautiful the while, that Walter Jerrold thought with pride and exultation of introducing so much loveliness to the world as his bride. May was silent, and wondered at it all, and *felt*, rather than reasoned that somehow Helen was bartering away her eternal interests for gain, and that these scenes were integral parts of the ruinous scheme.

So she was not much surprised when Mr. Jerrold, on taking leave, asked permission to call the next day with his mother; to which Helen assented graciously, and May, having no decided reason to do otherwise, said, "they would be pleased to see Mrs. Jerrold."

"Where shall I find Mr. Stillinghast, Miss Brooke?"

"In the room, sir, just at the head of the staircase. It is the first door, a little to the left."

"Thank you. Good night, again, fair ladies," he said, bounding up the steps.

"Come in," said the voice of Mr. Stillinghast, in answer to his low tapping.

"Aha! well?"

"Have you the necessary papers ready, sir?" inquired the young man, eagerly.

"Here they are. Are you ready to sign them?"

"This moment, sir. Give me the pen."

"No, sir; read them first. I'll have no such head-over-heels doings in any transactions in which I am concerned. Here they are!" said Mr. Stillinghast, in his saturnine, rough way.

Walter Jerrold read the papers, which were worded according to the strictest legal forms, slowly and attentively, and felt more than satisfied.

"All right, Mr. Stillinghast. 'Faith, sir, your niece requires no golden chains to her chariot. She is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld—accomplished, and elegant in form and manners. Give me the pen!" he said, earnestly, as he spread out the parchment, and prepared to sign his name thereto.

"Clouds are beautiful with the sunshine on them," said the old man, with a sneer; "so is a mirage in the desert; so are the apples on the shores of the Dead Sea. But she is yours. You'll find no trouble in winning her, even at the sacrifice of her creed. She is of the earth earthy, and will willingly escape from such a miserable home as this."

"Mr. Stillinghast, I do not wish to feel that this is quite a *barter*. Your niece would grace a throne, and I am vain enough to think that I have qualities which may win her regard."

"Bosh! fool! All mankind are fools! But leave me—goodnight. Make your arrangements to move to my counting-house to-morrow."

"My fortune is made. The 'Cedars' will not pass into other hands," thought Walter Jerrold, as he left the house.

The next day May went to see old Mabel, who was quite sick; and while she was gone, Mrs. Jerrold called with her son. The proud, worldly woman, was enchanted with the elegance and beauty of Helen, and, ere she left her, had engaged her in a round of engagements; soirées—the opera, and dinner parties, rung like music in Helen's ears, who, half wild with joy, could scarcely repress her emotions from breaking out in some ill-bred expressions of delight. Without a moment's reflection, she consented to attend St. Paul's Church the next Sunday morning, at eleven o'clock, and hear the well-meaning Protestant clergyman who officiated there. "You will see the best people in town there; it is considered one of the most elegant congregations in the city." By the *best* people, Mrs. Jerrold meant the leaders of the town, and had not the remotest idea that she was holding out a false inducement, or saying any thing at all incompatible with the spirit of Christianity.

"I will call for you in my carriage, Miss Stillinghast, with Walter," continued the lady, touching Helen's cheek with her lips.

And after this Helen quite withdrew herself from the domestic cares of the house to attend exclusively to her toilette—her music—her walks and drives with Jerrold, and visits to his mother. Mr. Stillinghast seemed not to observe what was going on, and May, anxious to shield her from his displeasure, which she supposed would be excited by this neglect, went on in her old routine, as if nothing had ever occurred to interrupt it. Thus weeks rolled by, and Helen was the affianced wife of Walter Jerrold; forgetful of the demands of religion, and turning a deaf ear to the whispers of conscience, and a cold, proud eye on the practical works of faith; and scornfully hushing May's expostulations, she thought only of the realization of her ambitious and worldly dreams, and plunged into the gayeties of life with a zest worthy of a better cause.

May, all this time, was cheerfully climbing step by step; sometimes fainting—sometimes stumbling—sometimes falling, but ever rising with renewed strength up the steep and narrow way of Calvary. Her uncle's distrustful manner—his harsh language—his angry looks, with Helen's apparent apostasy, and haughty demeanor, were trials which required the constant replenishing of grace in her soul, to bear with patience. But Father Fabian bid her to be of good cheer; the divine sacraments of the Church strengthened and consoled her by their sweet and mighty power; and like waters returning cool and purified to their source, or dews gently falling to the earth from which they had risen, in blessing and refreshment, her daily visits to old Mabel, so full of charity and good-will, filled her with indescribable happiness.

Mrs. Jerrold insisted on furnishing Helen's *trousseau*, while she was occupied every day in selecting expensive furniture for a house her uncle had settled on her, with permission to furnish it without regard to cost, on condition that she was married by a Protestant minister. She was telling May, with great glee and pride, about her purchases, when she suddenly paused, and exclaimed,

"You need not look so grave, May. I presume my marriage will be as legal and respectable as if the

ceremony was performed by a priest."

"As legal as any other civil rite. But, Helen, you know that the Church acknowledges no such marriages amongst her children. Her precepts teach that marriage, to be legal, must also be sacramental. It *is* a sacrament; one which is held in high esteem and respect by the Church, and no Catholic can contract it otherwise, without censure. In case you persist, your marriage will not be recognized by the Church as valid, or your offspring legitimate."

"I shall have a great many to keep me in countenance," replied Helen, coldly. "I have no idea of submitting to every thing; Jerrold would not, I am sure, consent to being married by a Catholic priest, and I do not intend to thwart him, as I consider it a matter of very little importance."

"Helen, listen to me. You must listen to me. It shall be the last time, if you will only be patient. There is an hour coming, if you persist in your present course, when you will wish you had never been born; an hour when all human aid must fail, and all human interests and splendor drop away from you like rotten rags; when your soul, affrighted and shrinking, will go forth, obeying the inexorable laws, of the Creator, to meet its Almighty Judge. When the shadows will fall darkly around your way, Helen, and phantoms of darkness lie in wait, until the irrevocable sentence is spoken, which will consign you to utter woe; when, stripped of all, you will stand shivering and *alone* before an awful tribunal, to give evidence against *yourself*. Oh, Helen! dear Helen! *how* will it be with you then? *how* will you escape, oh faithless daughter of the Church!"

"May!" cried Helen, while her face grew deadly white, and she grasped her cousin's arm; "hush! how *dare* you speak thus to me? It is cruel! Henceforth utter no such language to me while we both live. If I am on the brink of perdition, *I* alone am responsible for my acts—not you."

"I will try to obey you, Helen, so far; but I *will* pray for you—I *will* do penance for you—I *will* offer frequent communions for you—I *will* intercede with our tender and Immaculate Mother for you. I will fly to Calvary, and at the foot of the cross beseech our suffering Jesus, by his bitter passion and death to have mercy on you. You cannot stop me—you cannot hinder me in this, for, oh Helen! it is an awful thing to see a soul tearing off its baptismal robe, trampling underfoot the seals of the Church, and rushing away from her fold of safety to eternal—eternal woe!" cried May, wringing her hands, while big tears rolled over her face.

Helen turned away to brush off a single tear that moistened her eyes, but through it she saw the glitter of a diamond bracelet, which Walter Jerrold had just sent her, with a bouquet of hot-house flowers—all rare and costly, and the poor tear was dashed off with impatience, and a haughty curl of the lip.

"You act finely, May, but drop all this, and tell me what you will wear at my bridal," said Helen, clasping the bracelet on her arm, to try its effect.

"I shall not be there, Helen. I cannot even wish you joy, for there can no joy ever come in disobeying the Church, whose voice is the voice of God himself."

"As you please," she replied, coldly; "but croak no more to-night. You are like a bird of ill-omen to me."

May sighed, and retired to her oratory, to say her night prayers.

CHAPTER X.

THE WARNING.

One morning Mr. Stillinghast was sitting alone in his counting-room, when Michael, the porter, came in, and informed him that a man wished to speak to him.

"Tell him to come in," he replied, moodily.

"Here he is, sir," said Michael, returning in a few minutes with a man, who had a saw slung over his arm.

"What is your business with me?" said Mr. Stillinghast.

"And didn't your honor sind afther me?"

"I never heard of you in my life before," he stormed.

"And then, sir, you may blame the *ommadhauns* that sent me; for, by this and by that, they tould me at the wood-yard, foreninst, that your honor was inquiring for me," replied the man, slinging his saw up over his shoulder.

"At the wood-yard? I remember; but it is too late, now—it makes no difference," said Mr. Stillinghast, speaking slowly, and frowning.

"I'd have come before, only the day afther the young lady took me to saw wood for the ould nagur, I got the pleurisy, and didn't lave my bed these five weeks," said the man, lingering about the door.

"Come in here, and close the door," said Mr. Stillinghast, while his stern, forbidding countenance wore a strange look of anxiety; "do you remember the young lady; and can you direct me to the place where you sawed the wood?"

"Oh, yes, your honor. I shall never forget her to my dying day. She was a little, bright-eyed lady, with a smile of an angel on her, by dad!"

"May," muttered the old man, "there is only one May. But I have a reason," he said, turning to the man, "for wishing to see this old woman; can you conduct me to the place?"

"I'm at your service intirely, sir. It's a good stretch, though," said the man, who looked weak from his recent illness.

"Is it near an omnibus route?"

"Yes, your honor, it is close by where they stop. You'll not have to walk far."

"Leave your saw here, then, and let us go. I have no time to spare on walks," said Mr. Stillinghast, in his peremptory way. His real object, however, was not so much to save time, as to afford the man an opportunity to avoid a long and fatiguing walk. "Tell Mr. Jerrold I will be back in the course of an hour," he said to Michael, as he passed out.

"Very well," replied Michael, heaving, with Titan strength, a bale on the truck; "and there goes a pair of 'em. My boss can afford to walk with a poor wood-sawyer; he looks like one hisself, and it's hard to tell 'tother from which;" and he planted his brawny hands on his thighs, and looked after them, with a broad smile on his honest countenance, until they got into the omnibus, and were whirled out of sight. At the *depôt*, which is in the northern part of the city, they got out, and the two men pursued their way in silence. It was one of those cold, but calm, bright days in winter, when the very air seems filled with silent ripples of gladness; when the sunshine rests like a glory on the leafless trees, and bright-eyed robins chirp and peck the moss, as they hop from bough to bough; when the light of heaven is so over all, that even the dun-colored earth, the decayed leaves and rotten branches, which the autumn blast has laid low, look beautiful, and seem to whisper *resurgam*; when a cold, bracing wind sends the warm blood bounding through our hearts—tinting our cheeks, and warming our extremities, until we bless it, as we do the strong hand which leads us in childhood; and we listen, with docile tenderness, to its teachings, for it tells with pathos, of suffering in the hovels of the poor, and want, and poverty, and bids us thither like a winged angel. Down, beneath the rustic bridge, boys were shouting and skating on the frozen stream, their laughter echoing like music through the old woods; anon, the sharp crack of rifle, or the distant barking of dogs, rung on the still air, while the bells of the city, and the hum rising up from its crowded streets, blending with the clear echoes, made a concert of merry and harmonious sounds. Mr. Stillinghast paused on a knoll, and looked around him. There lay the rolling country, with its undulations of hill and vale, all interspersed, and adorned with picturesque cottages and elegant villas. Towards the east, up rose the splendid city, with up-hill and down-hill streets; its marble monuments, commemorative of great men and great deeds; its magnificent domes, raised in honor of the Most High God; its lofty towers, its princely mansions; while far beyond, stretching to the verge of the horizon, slumbered the quiet and beautiful bay, sparkling like a sea of *ultramarine* and diamonds, over whose waters hundreds of sails were hovering like white sea-fowl.

Towards the north-western boundary of the city, he saw the dark, massive founderies and manufactories, which, from their palatial-looking walls, sent out the never-ceasing clang of labor, and the tireless song of steam, to which thousands of stout arms and brawny sinews kept time. And far beyond these, out on the quiet hills, the scene terminated in a Marble City,[1] where, beneath trees of centuries growth, its inhabitants slumber silently through the long, cold night of death, until the revivifying beams of the resurrection day shall dawn on the earth-mantle that wraps their clay. But over all shone the glad beauty of the day. It poured down its effulgence alike on the city of the dead and the

city of the living! Mr. Stillinghast had not looked on the like for years, long, dusty, dreary years; and he felt a tingling in his heart—a presence of banished memories, an expansion of soul, which softened and silenced him, while gradually it lifted from his countenance the harsh, ugly mask he usually wore.

"Here we are," said the man, pointing to old Mabel's cottage; "this is the place."

Then it occurred to Mr. Stillinghast, for the first time, that he had come there without any particular object in view—he had obeyed an impulse which he did not pause to analyze, and now, somewhat embarrassed he stood still, uncertain what to do.

"You may return," he said to the man, to whom he gave a dollar; "this will pay you for the time you have lost." The man thanked him, and went his way, rejoicing in the reward of such pleasant and easy labor.

"Why not go in?" he murmured, "I am here on a fool's errand, after all. But why not enter? If this old beggar is so destitute, I can leave her something to buy a loaf; but what business is it of mine? A plague on it all! What do I here—*why* are you here, Mark Stillinghast?" Then he opened the door very softly, and, as he did so, he heard these words repeated in a clear, sweet voice,—"*For what shall it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul!*" then he saw May seated beside the old negro, reading from some pious, instructive book, of Christian doctrine. And those words came ringing down into his soul like the blast of ten thousand trumpets! He staggered back; his old, withered cheek, grew pallid, and he turned away and fled—but they pursued him. "Profit—gain—loss. Profit—gain—loss. Profit—gain—loss. I understand them!" he gasped. "*I have heaped up gains; of earthly profit I have my share; and now, at the eleventh hour, it is summed up, and what is it—yes, what is it? IT IS LOSS. For all that is mortal, I have toiled my best hours away; for all that is immortal, not one hour have I spared. It is loss—loss—eternal loss.*" And so he went on muttering—back to his den in the city, where the leaden waves of business again came surging, breast high, around him; but through the dull, heavy sounds, the warning still rung, like distant knells, through his soul.

On his homeward way that night, the farther he receded from the noise of the city, the more it distinctly sounded, with its requiem wail, through the dreary chambers of his heart; and, somehow, he suddenly remembered, as he paused to rest, that it was on this very spot that he had seen Father Fabian administering the last rites of the church to a dying penitent; and he trembled, and hurried on, until he came to his own door. May was sitting up alone for him; and when she opened the door, and the rays from the hall lamp fell on his features, she saw that he looked ill and weary.

"Let me assist you, dear uncle," said May, taking his hat and returning to help him draw off his coat. "I fear you are not well."

"It is very cold," he replied, shivering, and yielding to her wishes.

"You will soon feel better, sir; see what a nice fire here is—and I have a piping-hot cup of tea and hot muffins for your supper."

"May Brooke," said the strange old man, while he laid his cold, heavy hand on her shoulder, "stop; answer the questions I shall ask you, truly and honestly."

"I will endeavor to do so, sir," replied May, lifting her clear, bright eyes to his.

"You can, and *must*. What object have you in providing for that old negro woman, on the outskirts of the city?"

"I pity her, sir, because she is poor and helpless, and do it, I hope, for the love of God," she said, amazed, but quiet.

"Very well. And now, for the love of God, answer *this*," he said, with anxiety; "tell me *how*, you provide for her—*how* you get means to buy wood and necessaries?"

"Dear uncle, I am sorry you have found it out. I do not like to speak of it—indeed, I would prefer not—it seems—so—yes—it seems like boasting, or talking too much about myself," said May, while her cheeks flushed crimson.

"Go on; I will know!" he said, harshly.

"Yes, sir. I earn a trifle every two or three weeks by knitting fancy articles, which Mrs. Tabb on C—Street, disposes of for me—"

"And then—"

"And then, sir, I take care of old Mabel with the proceeds; but please, dear, dear uncle, do not forbid me to continue doing so; pray allow me the privilege of earning a trifle for her benefit while she lives; and then, sir, *never*—never speak of it to me or any one else, after this," she implored.

"I shall not hinder you, child," said Mr. Stillinghast, repressing a groan of anguish which struggled up from his heart. They went together into the sitting-room; and May spread his supper before him, but he only drank his tea, and pushing his plate away, came and sat in his armchair beside the fire.

"You have taken nothing, sir; pray try and eat this, it is very nice."

"I have such an infernal singing in my ears, that I cannot eat. I can hardly see. Ding, dong—ding, dong. Great Lord! if this should be eternal!" he exclaimed, forgetting the presence of May.

"You are not well, sir. Sit here near the fire; put your feet upon this cushion, so that the soles will be towards the fire, and while you smoke, I will read the paper to you," said May.

"For what?" he asked, turning his fierce, gray eyes upon her.

"Because you are not well, sir," she said, looking calmly into them.

"Do you know that I have made my will,—cut you off with a few paltry dollars, not enough to feed you, and left that Helen—that trifler—that waif, a princely fortune?" he asked, savagely.

"You have a right, sir, to do as you please with your own. You have sheltered, schooled, and fed me—I have no right to expect more," she said, gently.

"And if I should be sick—die—what then?" he asked, impatiently.

"Dear uncle, you alarm me. Do you feel ill? If so, oh, dearest uncle, attend first of all to your eternal concerns—make your peace with God while it is yet day, and enter into that fold whose Shepherd is Jesus Christ; where one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism reign!" exclaimed May, grasping his hand.

"Be silent, you incorrigible papist; what need is there of flying off at such a tangent?" said Mr. Stillinghast, with a grim smile; "I did not mean *that*, but what will become of you when I am dead?"

"I have a head, sir, and hands, and great faith in Him, who has promised to be a father to the orphan. I shall never want. In honest exertion I shall be happy and content," she said, earnestly.

"And you do not regret or envy the fortune?"

"Not on my own account, sir."

"On whose, then?"

"There are many, sir, who might be benefited by it, if properly applied. I think, *now*, if I had a fortune, I could do a great deal of good with it."

"You'd do harm, May Brooke—you'd do harm. You'd squander it—you'd encourage pauperism, and worthlessness, and beggary!" he burst out.

"I shall never have it to do good or evil with, uncle; but if I had, I would *endeavor*, for God's sake, to bestow it where it was needed; and because it would be offered for the love of Him, my works would not fall useless or fruitless to the earth. HE would bless and aid me."

"Profit—gain—loss," again muttered the old man. "But, as you will never inherit a fortune, I suppose your good intentions must suffice."

"Yes, sir, for the present."

"And, now that you have nothing to expect from me, of course you will feel quite independent of me and my wishes. If I should be ill, I suppose you'd take off and leave me to my fate," he said, bitterly.

"No, sir," she said, calmly; "but words and professions are mere sentences written in sand—the first wave washes them out. I don't want a fortune. I would not have gold, as I live, sir, except as the minister of my good purposes, the slave on which I could set my heel, unless it served me to lay up treasure in heaven. And should you be ill, dear uncle, I trust you will find no disposition in me to shrink from my duty."

"There it is again," he murmured, as he got up, and walked to and fro. "Profit—loss—gain. Give me my candle; I must go to bed—I feel very weary and tired."

"Shall I get anything for you, sir?"

"No," he replied.

"I shall wait for Helen, sir, and if you want anything, just rap on the floor, or call, and I will come up instantly."

"Go to bed—go to bed, child," he said, in his old, rough way, as he went out into the hall to go up to his room.

[1] Greenmount Cemetery.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT MESSENGER.

May listened, and heard Mr. Stillinghast moving to and fro in his room with slow and regular footsteps for a while, then all was silent, and she supposed he had gone to bed. Still waiting for Helen, she recited the rosary for his conversion. She knew that all things are possible with Almighty God, and that dear to him, and precious in his sight, is the conversion of sinners. She also knew that Jesus Christ ever turns a propitious ear to the intercession of his Immaculate Mother, and it was with tender confidence, and earnest faith, that she implored her to obtain from her Divine Son the conversion of her uncle. At last a carriage stopped, and May heard Helen's voice at the door conversing gayly with Walter Jerrold. She wrapped her shawl about her, and went out to admit her. She sprang into the hall, singing wild thrills from *Lucia de Lammermoor*, and without stopping, flew to her harp, and ran her fingers over the strings, preluding brilliantly,

"Oh, May, you should have been there—the most divine opera! Sontag sung like an angel."

"Dear Helen," said May, interrupting her, and laying her hand on her arm, "don't! you will disturb Uncle Stillinghast; he is not well."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Helen, turning her face towards her, while a gleam of almost ferocious pleasure shone in her eyes. "Oh, you don't say so! Is he very sick?"

"A slight cold, I believe; at any rate, do not let us disturb him," said May, surprised and shocked at her evident pleasure.

"What nonsense!" cried Helen, laughing hysterically; "he'll live until you and I are both dead, May. He's as tough as gutta percha. But, would it not be a nice thing if he'd pop off suddenly, and leave us his money?"

"Do not say *us*, Helen. I expect nothing, and desire nothing. As for you, be satisfied; you are handsomely provided for."

"I know it; I know it. *I have read the will!*" exulted Helen.

"*Read the will*, Helen! How? When?"

"Oh, I did not mean *that* exactly," said Helen, much confused; "you really take me up so quick, that it is terrible. I should have said that Walter told me something of the old man's intentions."

"May it be blessed to you, Helen, come when it will; but while *he* lives, let his generous intentions in your favor purchase at *least* your respect," said May, in a tone of bitter reproof, for at the moment she recollected Helen's threat some weeks before to get into her uncle's chamber, if possible, and she feared that she had accomplished her object at the expense of all that was honorable in feeling, and just in principle.

"May, you won't say anything—about—about what I just blundered out concerning the—" said Helen, confused and stammering.

"No, Helen; I have nothing to say. It was natural, though not delicate, for Mr. Jerrold to impart such information to you. No doubt he thought it would enhance your happiness," said May, settling herself in

her uncle's chair.

"That's a good May. Oh, May, if you were not such a little fanatic how I should love you," said Helen, stooping over to kiss May's forehead; but she put up her hand, and the kiss fell on the tips of her fingers. But her very indignation, although just, humbled her, for with a flash of thought, she was in Gethsemane, and saw the meek and Divine Jesus receive the kiss of Judas. "Why, then," she thought, "should I shrink back from one who needs my pity more than my hate?"

"I shall sit up a little longer, Helen. I feel quite uneasy about Uncle Stillinghast. Good night," she said, holding out her hand to Helen.

"What a curious little one you are, May," said Helen, holding the tiny hand a moment in her own; "but do come up soon, for really I am afraid to be up there alone."

And Helen went up to their chamber, and closed the door. She was alone, and had inadvertently placed her candle on May's table before the old Spanish crucifix. A small circle of light was thrown around it, from the midst of which the sorrowful face, in its depicted agony of blood and tears, and the measure of a world's woe stamped on its divine lineaments, looked on her. Terrified and silent, she stood gazing on it—her hands clasped—her lips apart, and trembling. The crown of thorns—the transfixed hands and feet, from which the blood seemed flowing—the wounded side—the sorrowful eyes, appealed to her. "For thee!" whispered the angel conscience; "it was all for thee!—this ignominy—this suffering—this death—oh, erring one! It was all for thee Divine Jesus assumed the anguish and bitterness of the cross! Oh, wanderer! why add new thorns to that awful crown of agony? Why insult the son of God, who suffers for you, by your derelictions and betrayal?"

Stricken and afraid, she would have fled from the spot, but she could not move; her temples throbbed and her limbs trembled, when, lifting her eyes, she beheld a portrait of the mother of Sorrows, whose countenance, sublime in its blended tenderness and grief, seemed to look down with pity on her. She sunk weeping to the floor, and murmured, "Intercede for me, oh, Lady of Sorrows! I have wounded thy Divine Son by my transgressions; I fear to approach Him, who is my terrible Judge; pity me, then, that I may not become utterly cast away!" Then she wept softly, and it seemed that, in this hour of keen repentance, the errors of the past would be atoned for—that a new life would dawn around her; that in prodigal's attire of repentance and tears, she would return humbly to her Father's house. But the spirit of the world had wound its deadly fetters too closely around her; the time of her return and purification, and welcome—if it ever came, was veiled in the future; but that passionate soul-felt appeal to the Refuge of Sinners was registered where it would return in benedictions when the soul weary of its wanderings, sought for forgiveness and peace—if it ever did. And, after all, ere sleep visited her eyelids, she was plunged again in plans of petty ambition, vanity, and the pride of life,—so impotent is the human heart, unsupported by the grace of God.

Twelve o'clock chimed from the old French clock over the mantel, and May, all unconscious of Helen's struggle with conscience, still waited to hear any sound that might come from Mr. Stillinghast's chamber: but everything remained quiet, and she was wrapping her shawl around her to go up to bed, when she thought she heard a groan—then footsteps, followed by a peculiar muffled sound. In a moment she was in the hall, where she heard it more distinctly, and springing up the staircase, rushed into her uncle's room. By some rare forgetfulness, or bewilderment, he had left his door unfastened. The candle was still burning, and May saw him lying on the floor, where he had fallen in his endeavor to reach the door to call for assistance; his face purple and swollen, and his breath gurgling up with a choking, spasmodic sound.

"Great God, help me!" cried May, throwing up her arms wildly. "He will die before I can obtain help!" But she was not the one to stand lamenting when aught was to be done, so, collecting her scattered senses, she bethought herself of the watchman, who was just at that moment crying the hour at the corner. She flew down, unlocked the hall-door, and springing out into the freezing mist and darkness, she found him, seized his hand, and told her story. "Go, for God's sake! for the nearest doctor; do not delay an instant."

"Who are you, you wild witch, grabbing a fellow like a cat! Who are you?" cried the watchman, shaking her off.

"I am the niece of old Mark Stillinghast. He is dying, I fear," she cried, wringing her hands.

"Zounds! the old man dying! Yes, I'll go directly," said the watchman, moving off. He had been on the beat twenty years, and felt an individual interest in all those whose property and lives he guarded. Then May, thankful for his promptness, remembered to have heard that ice applications to the head were good in cases like this, and rushing back into the yard, she groped her way to the rain-barrel, and

stooping over, seized the jagged edges of the ice, which she had broken that very day, and tearing it away from the sides, hastened back, and up to the chamber of death, with her prize in her bleeding hands. Stripping a case from a pillow, she threw in the ice—pounded it with the tongs—shook it together, and lifting up her uncle's insensible head, laid the icy pillow under it, and gathered the ends over his forehead, as well as she could. Then she chafed his hands, exclaiming all the time, "Merciful Jesus, pity him! Merciful Jesus, help me, and strengthen me!" But his breathing became more and more difficult, and his limbs began to be agitated with horrible convulsions. A sudden thought suggested itself. She untied her silk apron, tore off the strings—ripped up the sleeve of Mr. Stillinghast's shirt, and wound the ribbon tightly around his arm above the elbow; and while waiting for the vein to swell, she took a small penknife from her pocket, and opened the blade—it was thin, keen, and pointed. She had found it among her father's papers years ago, and kept it about her to scrape the points of her ivory knitting-needles. In another moment, invoking the aid of Heaven, she had made an incision in the vein. A few black drops of blood trickled down—then more; then fast and faster flowed the dark stream over her dress, on the floor, for she could not move—her strength was ebbing away. Presently the brain of the stricken man, relieved of the pressure on it, began to resume its functions; the spasms and convulsions ceased, and a low moan escaped his lips. At that moment the watchman, accompanied by a physician, entered the room, and May remembered nothing more.

CHAPTER XII.

REPENTANCE.

When May recovered, she looked around her with an alarmed and bewildered feeling. The darkened, tossed-up room; the stranger watching beside her; the pale, silent form on the bed, so motionless that the bed-clothes had settled around it like a winding-sheet, were all so much like the continuation of a dreadful dream, that she shuddered, and lifted herself up on her elbow.

"You are better?" inquired a kind voice.

"Have I been ill?" she asked.

"Not ill, exactly," replied the doctor; "you fainted just as I came in with the watchman to your assistance." Then she remembered it all.

"How is my uncle now, sir?" said May, sitting up, and with a modest blush gathering up the masses of dark hair which had fallen from her comb.

"He is doing well now. He is indebted to your energy and presence of mind for his life," said the doctor.

"Oh, thank God! thank God, that he is better! Do you think, sir, that he will recover?"

"He may, but it is doubtful. I shall not be able to decide until he awakes. Meanwhile, lady, lie down, and rest. I will watch."

"I could not sleep, sir; if I could, I would obey your directions; but I will rest my head on the sofa here, that I may be better able to attend to my duties to-day," said May, in her earnest, matter-of-fact sort of way. And the doctor, a young man who was rising rapidly in his profession—a son of the people, who, through difficulties and rugged obstacles, and calumny and opposition, had emerged purified, and conscious of power from it all, and attained an honorable position professionally and socially, looked at that fragile form, and paid homage to the right-thinking and right-acting spirit it contained. Her conduct had been heroic, noble, and evinced so much strength of character that even he, accustomed to phenomena, mental and physical, wondered. He knew not *whence* she derived her strength; he had no idea of that divine charity which gives Titan power to the weak, and considers life itself of little worth when it does battle for the salvation of souls. It was a mystery, the effects of which he had witnessed, but could trace no further than the comparative harmony of physiology. Towards sunrise, Mr. Stillinghast turned uneasy on his pillow, and opened his eyes. He looked around him with a puzzled, angry look; his bound-up arm—his garments clotted with blood—the confusion into which his room was thrown—the strange man watching by his bedside—May resting on the old sofa—what meant it all? He tried to call out, but could only whisper.

"What's all this? Have I been robbed? Who are *you*?"

"I hope you feel a great deal better, Mr. Stillinghast. You have been quite ill, sir," said the doctor, soothingly. "I am Dr. Burrell; allow me to feel your pulse."

"For what? I never was sick in my life. I never had my pulse felt," he said, doggedly.

"How does your head feel, sir?"

"My head! ah, my head feels shaky. Call *her* here."

May was beside him in a moment, holding his hand, and looking down into his white pinched features with commiseration.

"What's all this, child? Why are you here?"

"You have been very ill, dear uncle. You know you were poorly last night. I felt uneasy about you, and sat up to listen if you should call for any thing, until I heard you fall," said May, in a low, clear, and distinct voice.

"Fall?"

"Then, sir, I ran up here, and found you on the floor, so ill—so very ill," said May, hesitating, always unwilling to speak of her own acts.

"What then?"

"I did all that I could, sir, until the doctor came," she said.

"And that means *every thing*, Mr. Stillinghast. She saved your life. She used the best remedies; she put ice about your head, and bled you. When I came you were out of danger; but be calm, sir; let me beseech you to be calm," said the doctor.

"Did you do all this, little May?" he asked, looking earnestly at her with his piercing gray eyes.

"Yes, sir; I had read that such remedies were necessary."

"*Why* did you do it, little one? My life or death is of no interest to *you*. Tell me *why* you did it?" he whispered.

"Oh, dear uncle, forgive me!" said May, while her tears dripped like rain-drops on her wan cheek; "I knew that you had made no preparation for death. I would have died that you might live long enough to effect a reconciliation with Heaven."

"Profit—gain—loss—loss—loss!" he murmured; then suddenly he put up his feeble hand, and drawing May's face closer to him, kissed her cheek. "If it is not too late, pray for me!" he whispered, in tones so low that she scarcely heard them.

"Not too late. Oh no, dear uncle, it is not too late," said May, smoothing back the tangled gray hair from his sunken temples.

"Mr. Stillinghast, my dear sir, I fear that you are exciting yourself. I would recommend quiet, composure; indeed, sir, it is absolutely necessary in your case," said the doctor, looking on uneasily.

"It will make no difference, sir. I know full well whose finger has touched me. Do you know that I cannot move my left side?" said the old man in his firm, stern way.

"I feared it," said the doctor, turning away to conceal the expression of pain which this information caused him; "but it *may* pass off, *you may* quite recover yet, sir. A cup of weak tea would be good for our patient," he said to May.

May glided out of the room, followed by the gaze of the stricken old man, to prepare it for him. She ran up to awaken Helen, and told her that their uncle was dangerously ill. "Dress, dear Helen, and go to him immediately, while I get a cup of tea for him."

"How very pale you are, May! Is he in danger?" exclaimed Helen, starting up, quite awakened by the news.

But May was gone. When she went up again with the cup and saucer in her hand, Mr. Stillinghast greeted her with a look of welcome.

"Do not leave me again," he whispered, as he sipped the tea; "it will not be long, little one, that I shall

keep you. Take this away now, and send for Mr. Fielding."

"Perhaps you know Mr. Fielding, sir?" said May, to Dr. Burrell.

"He is my neighbor. Can I be of service?" he replied.

"My uncle wishes to see him as early as possible. He is his man of business, I think," replied May, who felt anxious that Mr. Stillinghast should attend to his worldly concerns, and wind them up as soon as possible, that all the energies of his soul might be directed to higher objects.

"Here is a prescription, sir," said the doctor, "which I would advise you to take immediately."

"Will it cure me?"

"It may relieve you very much."

"Will it cure me, I say?" said the old man, sharply.

"I cannot say; I can only promise temporary relief from its use."

"I won't take it. I thank you for your patience, and shall be glad to see you again; but I won't take your medicine."

"If you were a child, sir, I would compel you to take it; but as it is, I can only recommend the continual application of cold bandages to your head. I will call in this evening," said the doctor, kindly, as he left the room.

"May!"

"I am here by you, sir."

"It is not too late to do you an act of justice."

"Oh, dear, dear uncle!" said May, earnestly, "forget me; forget the affairs of earth, and think of the judgment beyond the grave! Oh, sir! indeed—indeed, I fear, that the time is too short to be wasted on perishing things."

"Listen to me!" said the old man, gathering up his failing energies, and speaking in a low, distinct voice; "I wish to save my soul, but fear it is too late. My life has been one long, dark, dismal blank. There is nothing which I can remember—not one single thine, to cheer this dreary hour. I have gained the world, and lost—heaven. Until yesterday, I derided and scorned *all* religions. It has been my lot in life to become entangled and betrayed by hypocrites of various professions. They disgusted and embittered me with all religion. I tried to think you a hypocrite, and cursed your patience and good works as so many snares for gain. But my eyes were opened. I followed you yesterday, out to that old negro's hut; I wrung the tale of your charities from your unwilling lips, and know and understand all. And now, in return for all my harshness, my neglect, my cruel unkindness, you save my life; you tend me, nurse me, watch me, and for what? *For the love of God.*

"Don't interrupt me, little one. *You have proved the truth* of the faith you profess by your works. It suits me. I need no doctrinal arguments, no theological and abstruse disquisitions, to convince me that it is right. I believe it, May, even at the eleventh hour, when I have but little to hope. I believe—perhaps as devils do—for, child, I tremble."

"Oh, dear uncle, the grace of contrition is never given to devils. It is Almighty God who has touched your heart. He pities, and would save you. 'I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; return ye, and live.'"

"Does he say that?"

"Yes; that, and ten thousand times more. Think of Him, dear uncle, 'who was wounded for our transgressions, who was bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed.'"

"What must I do besides?"

"Believe, and be baptized."

"Baptized! I was raised in the belief of the Friends, and have never been baptized," he said, musingly.

"Better so, sir, for now you can receive properly the waters of regeneration, and experience, when you so much need them, all the graces that flow from baptism into the believing soul," said May.

"I know the doctrines of your faith, May. I have read—I studied it in my days of *vision* and *unreality* as an admirable system of human philosophy; but *you*, child, in your humility—in your patience and long-suffering—in your cheerful docility, have taught me that it is divine."

"Oh, uncle, not me—*not me!* I have done nothing but duty," said May, covered with confusion. "It is the mysterious hand of Almighty God, leading you, guiding you to the truth."

"It can never—never be now! It is too late. I have wasted the hours—I have buried the talents—I have derided time—now the night cometh when no man shall work," he said, with an expression of anguish.

"Shall I bring Father Fabian? *He* can strengthen and cheer you with the promises of Christ; *he* has the power and authority from a divine source to absolve and prepare you for your passage into eternity. Oh, sir, let me go."

"Do with me what you please, strange—strong—wise little one! Only never leave me. Send your cousin for him." Just then Helen made her appearance, elaborately and beautifully dressed, as usual, and was shocked at the change in her uncle's appearance, which a few hours had made. She inquired "how he felt?"

"I believe I am ill. I wish you to take a note from May Brooke to her confessor. She must remain with me," he said, in his old way.

"I will go instantly," she said, glad to escape from such a scene, and wondering what the strange old man could have to do with a priest. May scribbled a few lines on the blank leaf of a book, tore it out, directed it to Father Fabian, and gave it to Helen.

"Try to sleep a little, sir," said May, gently.

"I have no time for sleep—tell me of Jesus Christ!"

And May took down from the shelf an old, mouldy Testament, which had not been opened for years, and read, in clear, steady tones, and with sweet pathos, the Passion of our Lord from Gethsamane to Calvary. When she finished, and looked up, the lips of that pale visage were firmly set, and from his cold, dim eyes, tears were falling apace—the first he had shed for long, dreary years—the first of *contrition* that had ever welled up from his soul.

He did not fear death—the mere act of dying, even the thought of annihilation, would not have stirred a ripple of fear in his heart, because, physically, he was bold, reckless, and defiant of personal danger—but the eternal instincts of his soul, developed by the providence of God, at the eleventh hour, sought their true destiny; they shrunk, with dread, from the scrutiny of Divine Purity, yet longed for immortal life, and immortal progress. Suddenly the veil had been torn from his eyes; suddenly he felt all the gnawing, hungry needs of his soul; suddenly his weakness, his wanderings, his infirmities, his tacit unbelief and indifference, were revealed, in all their frightful deformity,—and how? By a still, calm voice—the voice of a child, which had rung down the warning into his soul like thunder. "*What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" it had said; and earth and earthly affairs had assumed the shape of nothingness; the tough, hard work of years was scattered—like a potent lever it lifted away the demoniac weight of darkness and pride from his soul, as it rung down into its frozen depths. And the strong angel of God, who had been contending with the powers of evil, to wrest it from eternal loss, bore up the glad news to heaven, that the hoary sinner repented at the eleventh hour; and there was great joy among the angels of His presence, before Him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW WILL.

Father Fabian came. Miracles such as this never amazed *him*. He knew too well that the Spirit of the Eternal God, which abides with His Church for ever, was as powerful then as it had been in ages past, and that He still condescended to add miracles to the testimony of revelation, to glorify the faith He planted. With the angels, he only "rejoiced, and was exceeding glad," giving thanks to God for this new manifestation of His clement love. Long, and earnest, and touching, was the interview between the priest of God and the dying penitent. He saw the depths of an old and embittered heart broken up; he heard its plaintive cry, as it floated out towards the dark ocean of death, of, "Save, Lord, or I perish!"

and its imploring prayer for the waters of regeneration, and the sacraments of the Church. All earth had failed him in this his hour of need; and from the deep abyss of his misery he expected no deliverance but through them. But at last, Peace was whispered, and into his soul was breathed the holy sentence of absolution; and on his hoary head was poured the baptismal stream; his eyes and ears had been opened by divine power; and, like Siloa's wave, it washed him clean. What was the leprosy of those men of old, to the corroding infection of SIN, which had for so many weary years diseased and defaced his spirit? They were healed by a miracle of power,—he, by a miracle of grace. Mr. Stillinghast was much exhausted, but calm and humble; he had suddenly become like a little child, so sincere and entire was his repentance.

"I will come again in a few hours, and administer to you, my poor friend, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction; and if I find that you are sinking, will bring the Holy Viaticum for your refreshment and consolation in the dark and trying hour. I would advise you now to settle all your worldly concerns, so that nothing may interfere between your soul and God."

"How is it with you now, dear uncle?" said May, who came in as Father Fabian left the room.

"Unworthy, child—all and utterly unworthy, but hoping humbly, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ," he whispered.

"Mr. Fielding and Doctor Burrell are here!" said Helen, coming in.

"Is Father Fabian still here?"

"He is, sir."

"Request him to come back." Soon after the three gentlemen came in together. "Leave me a little while," he said, unclasping his fingers from May's hand.

"I fear that you feel very feeble, Mr. Stillinghast," said the doctor.

"I feel it, sir, but I have a work to do, and the 'day is far spent.' Could you ascertain, in any way, so that you could swear to it, that I am in my sane mind?" he asked, eagerly.

"The subject requires no investigation, sir. I have not the least doubt of your sanity. Your mind has been quite—nay, uncommonly clear since your recovery," replied the doctor.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing the other, "I am perfectly and entirely in my senses; I have not a single obscure or confused idea. All is clear and calm. Fielding, I made a will a short time ago; I wish to change it—to make another. Open that desk, and you will find parchment, pens, and ink. Now, come sit near me—so. Begin and write the usual preamble and formula."

"It is done, sir," said Mr. Fielding, after writing rapidly some ten minutes.

"I wish to devise to my niece, May Brooke, two hundred thousand dollars in bank and city stock, subject to her entire and free control, without condition; and with the hope that she will accept and use it, as a memorial of my gratitude for the great and incalculable good she has done me. To Helen Stillinghast, I bequeath the sum of fifty thousand dollars, the harp I purchased for her, and the house, goods, and chattles I have devised to her elsewhere."

"It is all written out, sir, in due legal form," said Mr. Fielding.

"To my Irish porter, Michael Neal, who has served me faithfully these twenty years, an annuity of two hundred dollars—to be settled on him for life. To a certain wood-sawyer, introduced to me on the 25th by said Michael Neal, who will identify the man, the sum of one hundred dollars, annually, while he lives, as a small compensation for having conducted me, on that day, to a place where I learned something of the first importance to me." Then followed a magnificent bequest for the establishment and support of a Catholic asylum for boys; another for a standing fund for the support of young men preparing for the priesthood, who were destitute of means, and anxious to enter holy orders. The residue of his princely fortune, he wished applied to furnishing capital for a bank for the poor, where, by making small deposits in seasons of health and prosperity, they would be entitled to loans without interest, in ill-health, sickness, or hard times. To Walter Jerrold, in the event of his marrying Helen Stillinghast, his warehouse, then occupied by Stillinghast & Co., and whatever merchandise it contained. It was all put into legal form by the attorney—no technicality was omitted that might endanger the prompt execution of his wishes—not a letter or dot left out. Mr. Fielding read it aloud.

"Add a codicil, Fielding—a codicil. I wish my legacies to the church to be placed in the hands, and under the control, and at the will of, the Archbishop of Baltimore. For the rest, I name you sole

executor. Have you finished? Let me sign it; then ask those gentlemen," he said, pointing to Father Fabian and Dr. Burrell, who had been engaged in a low-toned conversation at the window, to "witness it."

They came forward, saw him sign his name in full, clear characters, then appended their own signatures; after which, Mr. Stillinghast fell back exhausted on his pillow, and, while an expression of rest settled on his pale, time-worn features, he exclaimed,

"It is all right, now, Fielding. Now, my God, I am free; my burden, under which I have toiled through misspent years, is cast away. I am free!"

"Courage, my friend; you have done a good work—a work worthy of a dying Christian, and may the blessing of Almighty God rest on it and you," said Father Fabian, who made over him the sign of the cross, while he blessed him in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Mr. Fielding placed the will in a large white envelope, which he laid on the bed beside Mr. Stillinghast, and took leave, hoping that when he saw him in the morning he would be much better. The doctor prevailed on him to swallow a restorative which he had brought, after which, he grew more composed, and gave the will to May, and directed her to lay it on the shelf of a small, narrow closet, on the left side of the fireplace. As she did so, she saw another envelope like it, marked "*Will*;" also a number of packages—bonds, deeds, mortgages, and receipts, tied up in small; compact bundles, packed in between the shelves. But she felt no interest there; and quickly returning to her uncle's pillow, was glad to see that he had fallen into a profound sleep. Helen, who had been hovering about the door, and around the room, in and out, for the last half hour, came in again, and asked May if "she should not relieve her by taking her post, while her uncle slept?"

"No, dear Helen, he might awake and miss me; and he has requested me not to leave him until death releases his soul. Do you attend to the affairs of the house—I will watch here."

"There's something going on," thought Helen. "She's a deep one, with all her quiet piety; but she shall never stand between me and my aims. I have read one will—I shall not sleep until I read the other." Then, turning to May, she spoke aloud. "It will suit me better to be down stairs; I am so very nervous, that I am a poor nurse;" and glad to be released from a scene too uncongenial to her nature and feelings, she hastily withdrew.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SECRET SIN.

"This is shocking news, Walter!" said Mrs. Jerrold to her son, when he imparted to her the news of Mr. Stillinghast's illness. "Do you know—has he—did he send—"

"I don't know, indeed," said the young man, abstractly.

"I mean, has he altered his will?" said the lady, speaking out.

"I do not know; Helen tells me that a lawyer has been with him, and a priest."

"A priest!" shrieked the lady. "Order the carriage instantly, Walter; I must see Helen."

"I have not seen her since the morning," said the young man, after having delivered the order, and returned to the sofa. "She looks harassed and ill, poor girl."

"I am sorry we have been so precipitate in this affair, Walter," said Mrs. Jerrold, fuming. "After all, this eccentric old person may change his mind, and it will be so awkward to break off the match, for you cannot afford to marry a poor woman."

"I do not apprehend any thing of the kind, mother. Helen's beauty and accomplishments are dower enough," he replied, calmly.

"Walter, I will never consent to this marriage if Helen is portionless," exclaimed the lady.

"My dear mother, you sometimes forget, do you not, that I have reached the mature age of thirty-one?"

Really, where my happiness is concerned, I shall submit to no control," he said, calmly.

"Happiness!" repeated the lady, scornfully.

"The carriage is at the door, madam," said a servant, at the door.

"Very well. Tell Rachael to bring down my bonnet and wrappings."

Soon accoutred for her drive, Mrs. Jerrold took her son's arm, and went down to her carriage. He handed her in, and stepped in after her.

"Why do you go, Walter?" she asked, looking annoyed.

"I wish to inquire after Mr. Stillinghast's health," he said, quietly.

A few minutes' drive brought them to Mr. Stillinghast's door. Helen heard the carriage stop, and her toilette, as usual, being very becomingly and carefully made—for Helen never forgot her *self-homage*—she met them at the door. Her countenance had assumed a sad and mournful expression, and in answer to their inquiries, she spoke in an agitated and subdued tone.

"It is horrible. I did not hear a word of it until to-day. I was dreadfully shocked," said Mrs. Jerrold, kissing her cheek.

"How is Mr. Stillinghast now, dear Helen?" asked Walter Jerrold, folding her hand closer in his own.

"They fear he is sinking," said Helen, in the same tone of counterfeit feeling.

"How melancholy!" said Mrs. Jerrold, taking possession of the corner of the sofa, almost dying with curiosity.

"Has he inquired after me, do you know Helen?"

"I have not heard."

"I thought, perhaps, he might wish to see me in relation to the firm, and its concerns; though every thing has been conducted with such strict regularity, that I do not suppose it is necessary."

"Perhaps as May has been with him all the time, she can give you some information," said Helen, with one of her cold, haughty glances towards May, who just then came in.

"I will not detain you one moment," said Mr. Jerrold, bowing to May. "I am anxious to know particularly how Mr. Stillinghast is, and if he has inquired for me?"

"But this moment, Mr. Jerrold, he awoke, and requested to see you. I thought you were here, and ran down to see. He is very low indeed, sir, and I will just let him know that you are waiting to see him."

"It may not be important; but if he is not too ill, I should be glad to see him a moment."

"I will come down for you immediately. Excuse me, Mrs. Jerrold," said May, who hurrying out, was met by Father Fabian. He spoke kindly to Helen, bowed courteously to the strangers, and went up stairs.

"Who is that, dear?" asked Mrs. Jerrold, whose attention had been arrested by the dignified courtesy of Father Fabian's manner.

"A Catholic clergyman," said Helen, blushing.

"Your uncle is not a Catholic?"

"He was not, but he is now."

A look of ineffable scorn spread over Mrs. Jerrold's handsome face, while a low, contemptuous laugh from her son, was the response.

"Dear Helen," said Mrs. Jerrold, taking the weak girl's hand in her own, with a caress, "excuse me, for no doubt you still feel some hankering after those mysterious idolatries which you have wisely abandoned; but this is so absurd. How came it about?"

"I cannot imagine," she replied, in a faltering voice; for at that moment the thorn-crowned head of Jesus Christ—his sorrowful face stained with drops of blood, until its divinely beautiful lineaments were almost covered—was visioned in her soul with such distinctness, that she almost shrieked; then it faded

away, and she went on:

"I have seen very little of my uncle since his illness. He keeps my cousin May by his side, and is uneasy if she leaves him an instant."

"And she is a Catholic?" asked Mrs. Jerrold, anxiously.

"Yes, a perfect devotee," replied Helen, bitterly.

"An infatuation! He is weak; his nerves and senses are shattered by this attack. He has been influenced by her and the priest. My dear Helen, I fear *your* interests will suffer."

"Do you really think so?" said Helen, growing pale.

"Mr. Jerrold, you will please to come up for a moment. My uncle desires to see you particularly," said May, appearing at the door.

"That is a designing girl, depend on it," whispered Mrs. Jerrold, as her son left the room; "and now, Helen, I must warn you. Be on your guard, and do not feel hurt when I say, that if she should have succeeded in cozening your uncle to revoke his will in her favor, my poor son's happiness will be wrecked for ever. He is not rich, you know, and is too proud to marry a woman whom he cannot support in good style; consequently, this marriage, which, under existing circumstances, gives us so much pleasure, would then have to be broken off."

"Mr. Fielding was with him, and I heard them talking about a will, but whether it was the old, or a new one, I could not determine," said Helen, becoming very white.

"Hush! not another word; Walter is coming down. But remember what I tell you. Well, dear Walter?"

"I think Mr. Stillinghast is sinking, but he is perfectly himself," said the young man, in a low tone, as he seated himself. "He is much changed, and speaks in broken sentences."

"He knew you?" asked Mrs. Jerrold.

"Perfectly. He told me that our recent engagement was all secured, and begged me to keep up the credit of the old house; spoke of our marriage, dear Helen, and gave me some advice, which I could not understand, about faith and baptism, and truth, and all that kind of thing, peculiar to old men who are dying," said the young man, with a light smile.

"Then he has not made another will?" asked Mrs. Jerrold.

"No, I fancy not; merely a codicil, if any thing. But be careful of yourself, Helen; don't sit up at night—it will hurt your eyes and good looks. May Brooke is an indefatigable nurse," said the worldly man.

"Farewell, sweet Helen," whispered Mrs. Jerrold, embracing her. "We shall soon have you to ourselves. But be on the *qui vive*; there *may* be something, you know, under all this."

"*Another will!*" thought Helen, after they went away; "if another exists, different from the first—well—I see no reason why a whim should wreck my happiness." Then, tempted and scheming, she sat motionless for hours. Alas! for the soul which of its own free will, unmoors itself from the Rock of Ages, to drift away on dark and uncertain seas; who, lured away by the sun-gilt mirage, throws down the cross, scorns the thorny crown, and despises Calvary, to perish at last miserably in the arid desert! Although Helen had never been a pious Catholic, she had always declared herself one, and resisted every open attack on her faith; but now, insidious scorn, worldly interests, and human love had entered her soul, and poisoned it, and for a season they would triumph.

"Uncle Stillinghast wants you, dear Helen," said May, tapping her on the shoulder.

"Me!" she exclaimed, starting up like a guilty thing.

"Yes, dear. He will receive the Holy Viaticum soon, and he wishes to speak with you before," said May, winding her arm around Helen's waist, and wishing, in the charity that filled her soul, that she could as easily lead her back, weeping and penitent, to the foot of the cross.

"Come hither, child," said the old man, turning his feeble eyes towards her. "I fear—I have—assisted—*encouraged* you—to forsake your faith. God—forgive me—for my ignorance and sin. But hear me. I am dying—hear me testify to the saving and divine truths of that faith—and repent you—repent ere—it is—too late for ever. It is an awful thing—girl—to live away—from—the—true fold of Jesus Christ;—but how horrible—is it—to *forsake it!* Father Fabian—come closer," he said, feebly, while he placed Helen's hand in that of the clergyman, "bring—watch her—guide her, until she is saved."

"My poor child! you will not forsake your religion; you dare not peril your salvation by severing, with sacrilegious hand, the ties which unite you to JESUS CHRIST, as a member of His glorious body?" asked the priest, in a tone of blended pity and authority.

"Oh, no, no!" sobbed Helen, quite overcome by the scene. "I am very young, and love the world. I have never intended to forsake my religion entirely. I intend, at some early day, to go to confession. I have only procrastinated."

"Of course, my dear child, you will return to your duty," said Father Fabian; "you cannot do otherwise, unless you wish to seal deliberately your eternal perdition."

"You will marry—marry Jerrold," gasped Mr. Stillinghast; "but do—not—forget—that your prevarications—may ruin his soul—with your own. Are—you willing—to assume the responsibility?"

"Oh, sir, this is horrible!" exclaimed Helen, falling on her knees beside the bed.

"But true," added Father Fabian, at a sign from Mr. Stillinghast, who leaned back exhausted. "It is a perilous thing, under the most favorable circumstances, for a Catholic to wed with a Protestant. If the Catholic has not the patience of a saint, and the constancy of a martyr, scandal must come. Concessions must be made—vital principles too often yielded, and at last the unbeliever triumphs—not over the mere human will, and the weak nature of his victim, but over religion—and exultingly thinks how frail are the defences of this faith, which is called divine. Then, *confirmed* in his errors by your betrayal, his whole life is a scoff at Eternal Truth; while you, bringing forth children, who, instead of becoming heirs of Christ, become aliens from His fold, while *your sin—your treachery—your apostasy* will, like an onward billow, roll through future generations, until it dashes itself, with its black abominations, at the feet of the Eternal Judge. But, my dear child, through the mercy of God, and your own example, you may win this wandering soul to embrace the truth: at any rate, you may, by your pious constancy, plant the seeds of a better life in his soul, which may bear the fruits of salvation."

"It was—my act. I would undo it—but—it is too late—too late.
Helen—forgive me."

"Dear uncle, do not say so.—I have nothing to forgive," she sobbed.

"Time will come, I fear—when—you will not think so. Go, now—I—have provided—for you—see—that you provide—for the eternal future," he said, with difficulty.

Helen kissed the hand already shadowed by the approach of death, and left the room, weeping.

"It is horrible!" she exclaimed, almost shrieking, as she threw herself on the bed, after she reached her apartment. "I hope he will not send for me again. I never loved this harsh, bitter old man, nor do I intend to risk my happiness by promising impossibilities. I'll go to confession, and all that, when I am ready, and not before. Walter detests Catholics; and if he thought I was still one, he'd never wed me. But it cannot last long—I shall soon be free; and, once Jerrold's wife, I can practise my religion if I choose. At any rate, I shall *die a Catholic!*"

It was midnight. All was silent in the death-chamber. The night-taper was placed behind a screen; and the fire-light flickered with a tremulous motion on the richly-carved, antique furniture, black and polished by age, and creeping upwards, threw long, wavering shadows on the wall. Amidst this solemn twilight, a table spread with white, which supported a crucifix, wax lights, and flowers, stood near the sick man's bed. A guest was expected ere long—a divine and honored guest was coming into the shadowy room where death held his awful presence, to strengthen and console that penitent spirit on its passage to eternity, when, like Elias, after his miraculous repast, strengthened and courageous, it would walk with humble, but sure steps towards its eternal Horeb!

May knelt by her uncle's side, with his hand clasped in hers, praying, and whispering sweet words of cheer. A footstep sounded on the pavement; it ascended the steps, and Father Fabian, accompanied by Helen and Doctor Burrell, who had been waiting in the parlor below, came in, bearing with him the Lord of Life. May lit the candles on the temporary altar, and retired with the rest for a few moments, while Father Fabian held a brief conversation with the penitent old man, touching the affairs of his conscience; then he summoned them in; and while they knelt, he arranged himself in surplice and stole, and in a solemn, impressive manner, began the sacramental rite. "*Behold him—behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,*" he said, holding up the sacred host. "*He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,*" says the Redeemer, "*hath ever-lasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*" The day of life was almost spent, when you came to him; night was coming on, but He, in the plenitude of His divine compassion, turned you not away, but gives you a princely reward—even Himself. Like the Prodigal, destitute and naked, you return, and receiving you, He spreads a mystic feast, in which He gives you heavenly food; and while the shadow of death falls around you, lo! He

comes to go with you towards those dismal portals, and admit you to a region of probation and everlasting hope. Humbly confiding, and strong in faith, receive Him, not as a representation or mere memorial of the Son of God, but Jesus Christ himself. 'Corpus Domini nostri Jesu;' and, as Father Fabian pronounced the words, he administered the bread of Eternal Life to the dying man. What could have changed that dark, repulsive face so entirely, that it looked an image of humility? Was it death? Was it memory? Or was it the effect of new and divine influences? It was surely nothing mortal. He lifted his eyes to Father Fabian's face—then turned them in search of May. She was by his side in a moment.

"Unworthy—unworthy," he whispered; then they saw his lips moving in silent and earnest prayer. Dr. Burrell had regarded the whole scene with interest and awe. The whole scene preached to his inmost soul. Doctrinal arguments and learned polemics, he could have tilted with, word for word; but here were facts, and realities and influences, which disarmed and defied all that was skeptical in his nature. The dying man—the priest of God—that young and fragile girl, illustrated by their acts a faith which, though mysterious to him, could be nothing less than divine; but Father Fabian, ignorant of the thoughts which were passing, like ripples of light, through his mind, approached, and asked him in a low voice, "how long he supposed Mr. Stillinghast might linger?"

"He may live until noon to-morrow," said the doctor.

"He may," said Father Fabian, "but I fear not, however, God's holy will be done!"

During the night Mr. Stillinghast's mind wandered. May, overcome by fatigue, had leaned her head on the bed-side, and fallen into a profound sleep. Helen, timid, and startling at every sound, sat near him, fearing to move, lest it should rouse him.—Her guilty, selfish thoughts, terrified and haunted her like phantoms.

"There are—some papers," murmured the old man, without turning his head, and thinking he spoke to May, "papers which I wish burnt."

"Shall I get them, sir?" whispered Helen, while every bad, avaricious, and selfish instinct in her nature, started to sudden life; "where shall I find them?"

"On the second shelf—of the closet—where the *wills* are. They are records—of sorrows—and bitterness; but be careful, child—those two wills—the last one, which concerns you—is in—a white—envelope; the old one—in a brown wrapper. On the—second shelf; mind—the wills."

"Yes, sir!" whispered Helen, while her heart throbbed almost to bursting, and a wild gleam of triumph shot across her visage, giving it the fearful beauty of a demon. She would throw the new will amongst the condemned papers—it would be consumed with them; *he* would be silent and cold when it was missed, and could tell nothing; but then, might not *she* be suspected? No! she would not burn it—she would secrete it, and only destroy it in case she was disinherited. These thoughts rushed through her mind with a strange velocity, while she went towards the closet; and, just as she laid her hand on a package of papers, Mr. Stillinghast, suddenly turning, discovered his mistake.

"Come away—come away," he cried, with strange energy, "how dare *you* go there? Come away."

It was the work of an instant to snatch up the new will, thrust it into her bosom, and return, pale, trembling, and almost fainting, to his side.

"I thought you were May; call her here, Helen, then go away," he said, gently.

"Uncle Stillinghast wants you, May," said Helen, stooping over, and touching her.

"What can I do for you, uncle?" she said, instantly roused.

"I wish—you to burn—some papers—quick—quick—child. On the second shelf—there—in the small closet—where the wills are. *Is she gone?*"

"Helen? yes, sir; shall I bring all the papers—or are those you wish me to burn, numbered?" asked May, taking the candle with her.

"Yes, yes; numbered—1, 2, 3,—1796—1799—1800."

"Here they are, sir."

"Lay them there—under the blaze—so—so—so—perish—so blot out—so farewell the past. Forgive me the sins of my pride—of my ignorance—of my avarice—through, the bitter passion of Jesus Christ—forgive me—as I forgive—all," he murmured, as he watched the rapid destruction of these records of his

life.

"Take a spoonful of this," said May, holding some brandy to his lips. He drank it, and cast a long, earnest, loving look on her, drew her face towards his, and kissed her forehead.

"The blessing of Almighty God abide with you, little one; hand me *that*, now," he said, looking towards the crucifix, "lay it here—where my eyes can rest on it—so." He never spoke again; but, with the image of the CRUCIFIED in view, his failing eyes gradually and softly closed. May thought he slept. So he did, but he slept the sleep of death.

Helen had fled up to her room, locked the door, and, with a white, pallid face, and trembling fingers, took the will from her bosom and opened it.

"To May—to May—to May—beloved niece—I *knew* it; but May shall never have it," she said, through her set teeth, as her eye ran rapidly over it. "They will think *she* burned it with those papers. I am saved—I shall marry Jerrold!" A mouse gnawing in her wainscot near her, caused her to start up and look around; and *there*, looking down from the cross, where the sins of the world had hung Him, was the image of His divine and woeful face. In the flickering light, the drops of blood appeared to flow from those cruel wounds, and the thorn-crowned head seemed to droop towards her. With a shuddering cry, she fell heavily to the floor. But the paroxysm passed away—she remembered her crime, and, fearful of detection—for already had *conscience* begun to scourge her—she flew to her trunk, and touching a spring in the side, a secret compartment slid back, revealing a narrow interstice between the body of the trunk and the exterior. In this she dropped the will, and fastened it securely. *What* and *who* instigated her to evil? Shall any dare say it was religion? She was a Catholic by birthright—but an alien from the practices of her holy faith by choice, and through human pride and worldliness—did its spirit lead her into crime? Judge of its effects by May's humble and earnest life. *She* was true and practical in her character, and acted out the precepts of her faith. Judge it, by the wonderful change it effected in the harsh and bitter nature of that hoary man, whom it excited to acts of perfect Christian virtue, and who, full of humble hope, had just breathed his last.

Who would measure the patriotism and purity of Washington, by the treason of Arnold? Dare not then, be guilty of the manifest injustice of judging the Church by the conduct of those, who, although bearing her sign on their foreheads, become traitors to her holy precepts, and scandalize her in their lives.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISCOVERY.

The old man was far down in the shadow of the mountain; the day was well-nigh spent, when, by the grace of God, he fled into the fold of Faith for safety; and now, when all was over, the Church, like a loving mother, more tender of the repentant prodigal, who had fallen at her feet, and died, than of those who had never sullied, or torn their robes, and squandered their substance in the world's wild wilderness, poured out the riches of its solemnities around the altar, where the Divine Sacrifice was offered, with touching prayers, for his eternal repose.

Father Fabian officiated, and spoke eloquently of the nothingness of the world, the uncertainty of life, and the emptiness of riches. The cathedral was crowded by persons whom the news of Mr. Stillinghast's conversion had brought together, and who, regarding it as an extraordinary event, were desirous of witnessing the funeral ceremonies, and at the same time testify their respect for his memory. The most influential and wealthy of the class to which he belonged were present, and habituated as they were to look at every thing in a commercial point of view, their general opinion was that their old companion in trade had made a good bargain. "He was stern and harsh," they said, "but honest and upright; and too shrewd altogether to make a bad speculation in the end, and doubtless he had sought only his best interests in the step he had taken."

But in all that crowd there was only one heart which felt an emotion of grief, or had a single tear to drop on his coffin-lid. After a long life of toil, and solitude, and unlovingness, only one. May felt this while she wept, and wished she had been more patient and persevering in her love while he lived; but such regrets were useless now, except to kindle charity. She could do nothing which would be available to make up the deficiencies of the past, but incessantly beseech Jesus Christ, through which his bitter passion and death, and the Immaculate Mother, by the union she bore, body and soul, in the

unspeakable agonies of the CROSS, to grant him a speedy release from suffering probation, to eternal refreshment, and light, and peace.

It was late when the funeral *cortege* returned to the city, and Mr. Fielding, perceiving that May was much overcome, and looked ill, declined going in, or attending to business that evening.

"I will be here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. I know that my deceased client's affairs are all in such order, that there will be no delay in carrying out his wishes."

"Just as you think best, Mr. Fielding," replied May, wearily.

"What say you, Miss Stillinghast?" he said, addressing Helen.

"To-morrow will be quite time enough, sir," replied Helen, in a low tone.

Time enough, indeed! Well might she feel a sense of relief at its being deferred, when she knew that from the moment it was discovered that the will was missing, the temptations which had led her so deeply into sin would become demons of vengeance to torture and disturb her. As she went up with a heavy step to her room, an angel whisper suggested that there was time enough yet to undo the wrong she had committed. It startled and agitated her. "Can I bear these chains?" was the question. Weak, but never hardened in wickedness, she trembled, and was afraid of the penalties of her offence; and when she looked up, and saw by the flickering candlelight the image of the CRUCIFIED, and the sorrowful face of his Virgin Mother, both bending on her looks of tenderness and woe, which said, as plain as looks could say, "Child of my passion! soul, ransomed by my death! why wound me so deeply?" With a low cry, she threw herself on her pillow. "I shall never know peace again," her heart whispered; "I already feel the anguish of guilt; I begin to taste on earth the pangs of ever-lasting woe. This sin, with the human shame it will bring, will be an abyss between me and the Sacraments of the Church. Where shall I turn for peace? I can never bear this burden; it will madden me. I feel even now so guilty that I dare not lift my eyes to Walter's, for whose sake I do it. I feel an awe and dread steal over me when May comes near me as if she had Ithuriel's spear with which to touch me. I will do it," she said, with sudden resolution, and got up, and opened her trunk with the almost determined purpose of restoring the will to the place from which she had taken it. But oh, human frailty! the light falling on an open case of rare jewels, and some costly articles of her bridal trousseau, met her eye; then followed visions of splendor—of such power as wealth gives—of equipages and luxury, which swept away, like ocean-tides, the thoughts which her angel-guardian had written on her conscience. Hesitating no longer, a smile of triumph lit her face, and crowning the spectre with roses, and wrapping a drapery of pale illusions around it, she offered herself to a martyrdom of sin, to secure her worldly advancement.

"I suppose," said Mr. Fielding, the next morning to May, "that I shall find the will in that little closet, where your uncle kept his most important papers?"

"I presume so, sir. I placed it there at his request, in the place he designated, after you went away, the day it was written," replied May.

"That closet could tell strange things," said the lawyer, "if it could speak; but I believe I have come a half hour before the time appointed, as the others are not here."

"They are coming now. I see Mr. Jerrold and Father Fabian walking this way, and I think that is Dr. Burrell's carriage down the street," said May, looking out.

"All right. May, suppose you had Aladdin's lamp?" said the lawyer, rubbing his hands.

"I wouldn't have such a thing, sir," said May, quietly.

"Why, young lady?"

"I should be afraid of the monster it might evoke. Poor Aladdin had a miserable time of it from the beginning, in my opinion," said May.

"Riches have their cares," said Mr. Fielding.

"Cares without much peace," replied May.

Just then Mr. Jerrold, Dr. Burrell, and Father Fabian came in; and after exchanging the compliments of the day with the ladies and Mr. Fielding, prepared to execute the business which had brought them together. Mr. Fielding, accompanied by Mr. Jerrold, went up to get the will. He had long held the most intimate business relations with Mr. Stillinghast, and was the only man living who had ever been in his confidence. He knew the contents of every parcel and package of writing in the old desk and bureau, and could just tell where he was at fault now. There was only one will to be found, and that was the one

which the deceased had declared should be null and void. The group below who were conversing on some interesting topic, were soon amazed to hear Mr. Fielding's voice in loud and excited tones at the head of the staircase. Clearing two or three steps at a time, he bounded into the room, followed by Mr. Jerrold, who was pale and silent. He was usually a grave and quiet person, and so governed by system, that the very hairs on his head might have been said to be arranged numerically.

"Here's a pretty thing come to pass!" he exclaimed, throwing a bundle of papers on the table; "a most beautiful kettle of fish. The last will and testament of the deceased is missing. Yes, sirs! can't be found. May, who was in your uncle's room the last night he lived? I say *then*, because the closet in which the will was placed was locked then, and the key has been in my pocket ever since. Who was there?"

"I was there, sir," said May, astonished at the uproar.

"Who else?"

"Helen was there for a little while."

"Who else?"

"The doctor came at eleven o'clock."

"The doctor didn't steal the will. Are you sure no one else came in afterwards?"

"Father Fabian administered the Holy Viaticum to my uncle. After that, no one except Helen and myself were there."

"Were you awake all the time?"

"I think not, sir. I believe I slept about ten minutes."

"Why didn't you sleep ten years, May?" exclaimed the irritated lawyer. "And you, Miss Stillinghast, please to state what occurred while your cousin slept. I suppose you kept awake, as you have heavy interests at stake?"

"Mr. Fielding, this lady is my affianced wife; oblige me by assuming a more gentle tone," said Walter Jerrold, taking his stand beside Helen.

"If she was your grandmother, sir, this matter must be sifted; and let me tell you, not only sifted here, but in open court, whither I shall carry it, unless the will is forthcoming. What occurred, Miss Stillinghast, during the ten minutes that little fool slept?"

"Only this, sir," said Helen, who felt supported by Mr. Jerrold's protection; "my uncle roused himself a little, and told me to take some packages of paper out of the closet, and put them under the grate. He said 'they were records of the past which he wished to perish with him.'"

"So—so!" said the lawyer, significantly.

"But," continued Helen, speaking in a clearer, and more assured tone, "I had just laid my hand on the knob to open the door, when he discovered that it was not May to whom he had been speaking, and in harsh tones he ordered me back, and commanded me to awaken May, and leave the room, which I did, for his terrible looks alarmed me so dreadfully that I could not remain."

"And you, May?"

"I got out the papers, sir, as my uncle directed, and burnt them, as he desired. Helen is right," replied May.

"And what did you burn?"

"Papers. Some in packages, and some in large envelopes, like that you hold in your hand," replied May, calmly.

"Why the deuce, then, didn't you put your head under the grate, and burn that too? You have burnt the will, that's clear: the will which would have made you the richest woman in Maryland. With those 'records of the past,' which my old friend Stillinghast ought to have *eaten* up years ago, you have burnt up legacies to orphans, benefactions to widows, and many noble charities with it—*if it was burnt*," added Mr. Fielding.

"Mr. Fielding," said May, lifting her hands with an earnest gesture, "If I thought I had through a careless, or heedless act, injured the interests of any living being, I should be truly miserable. I cannot

comprehend the charges, or the cause of your unusual and ungentle excitement."

"You miserably innocent child! You poor, unworldly infant! I will endeavor to beat it into your comprehension, if you will listen. Your deceased uncle made *two wills*; one a few months ago, leaving the bulk of his fortune to his niece, Miss Helen Stillinghast, and to his other niece, May Brooke, the splendid life annuity of one hundred and fifty dollars. But on Thursday last having felt, by the judgment and grace of God, that so unequal a division was unjust, and being convinced that the said May Brooke would squander his gains precisely as he wished at that moment he had been doing all his life, viz., amongst the poor, destitute, and afflicted, he made *another will*, in which he devised the handsome sum of fifty thousand dollars, and some real estate, to Helen Stillinghast; and to May Brooke, his well-beloved niece and heiress, two hundred thousand dollars, this house, lot, and furniture, and other properties. But this will is missing—burnt up, it is supposed; and the first one is good in law, and I will read it, although I protest against its being executed until a thorough investigation is made, and I am well assured that there has been no foul play in the case," said the lawyer, impressively.

"Mr. Fielding," said Walter Jerrold, speaking out from the most honorable motives, "I feel as you do; and before reading the will, let us make a more patient and thorough search. We may have over-looked it. Neither Helen, nor myself, could ever feel satisfied, or happy, in the possession of property which, in the sight of Heaven, belongs to another."

"Sir, your sentiments do you honor. I accept of your suggestions," said Mr. Fielding, fixing a penetrating gaze on Walter Jerrold's countenance. "Come, May, you go with us, and help us to search high and low through the closet and bureau."

Father Fabian, who had come at the request of Mr. Fielding, had been a silent, but not unconcerned witness of this strange and unexpected scene, and looked for its issue with the deepest interest. Dr. Burrell exploded every now and then in opinions, which contained more feeling than legal reasoning, and consequently were of no importance. Helen's presence restrained all conversation on the subject while the others were absent from the room, and Father Fabian, having no time to drift idly on a single moment of his life, took a seat in one of the deep embrasures of the windows, and read portions of his "office" from the well-worn Breviary, which he drew from his pocket.

But the search for the lost will was in vain. Assisted zealously by Walter Jerrold and May, Mr. Fielding left no corner of the room unexplored. The bed and mattress—the tester and curtains, were turned, shaken, and unfolded. Every drawer and nook was inspected. The shelves of the little closet were removed, and the panel at the back and sides pried off, but in vain; and Mr. Fielding sat down quite exhausted, and folding his hands, exclaimed, or rather growled, "I congratulate you, May. It has all turned out precisely as your humility hoped it would, no doubt."

"Sir," said May, gently, "I am no worse off now than I was yesterday. I should have felt much encumbered by so large a fortune. I'm afraid it would have made me dizzy and foolish; indeed, sir, I feel quite unequal to the responsibility of such a stewardship. I feel deeply grateful to my poor uncle, and also to you, for your kind wishes in my regard, but, believe me, I am quite content for matters to stand just as they are, so far as *I* am concerned." Then breaking down, May broke out into a regular womanly fit of crying.

"May," said the lawyer, more gently, "when you took those papers out of that infer—that closet there, did you see those two wills lying together?"

"I saw nothing, sir, except the papers I went to get."

"And which you burned?"

"Which I burned up to the last scrap."

"Very well. You burned up the will too. You have been purified by fire with a vengeance. Do you still believe in guardian angels?"

"Just as firmly as ever, sir," she replied, fixing her clear eyes on him.

"Where was *yours*, pray, while you was doing just what the devil would have you?"

"Guarding me from evils to come, I trust. Oh, sir, it is very perilous to one's soul to be rich!" she exclaimed, with one of her sunlit expressions.

"Very well, again! 'Gad, how Plato would have loved you! But see here, you most uncommon of little bodies! I want just such a daughter as you are. My heart is desolate. All that I loved have passed away! Will you—will you come and keep house for me, like you did for old Stillinghast? Come—come, tell me

at once; I am old and tottering," said the lawyer, trying to twinkle away a tear from his large gray eyes.

"Oh, dear me! dear, kind Mr. Fielding!" cried May, weeping on Mr. Fielding's shoulder; "I hope Heavenly Father will bless you for your kind intentions to a friendless orphan; but, indeed, sir, I cannot say—I don't think it would suit me to be dependent."

"Who wants you to be dependent?" roared out Mr. Fielding; "I'll *hire* you, if that will suit you better, to keep house, mend my stockings, and make tea for me; *that* will board you, and your splendid annuity will clothe you."

"I will tell you in a few days, sir. I have not quite decided what I shall do. I am so tossed and worried now I can think of nothing clearly," sobbed May.

"Let us go down, sir, and go on with the business which brought us here," said Mr. Fielding, while he lifted May's head gently up from his shoulder. "Whatever you decide on, May Brooke, remember that I am *your protector, defender, and friend.*"

And so May was blamed for the loss of the will. Grieving more for the solid benefits which were lost to the poor and destitute,—for the alms which would have sent up incense to heaven in behalf of the soul of the giver,—May thought not of herself, only so far as to vow her energies, her labors, her life, to the good of those who, through her heedlessness, had been injured. She was not clear that she did not burn the will; she *thought* she had not done so, but she would not, for the world, have taken an oath to that effect. It is not to be supposed, however, that so shrewd a man as Mr. Fielding, and a man so experienced in all the devious and sinuous windings of the human heart as Father Fabian, were without their suspicions, but the one through policy, and the other through charity, forebore to express in words what they were not prepared to prove by legal facts.

May kept her plans to herself, and in her matter-of-fact way set the house in order, and arranged, day after day, every article in its particular place; and was scrupulously exact that not a scrap of old lumber, cracked china, broken spoons, or half-worn linen, should be missing on the day of the sale. Helen, quite unconcerned about such homely matters, dashed about in Mrs. Jerrold's carriage from morning until night, making splendid purchases, and indulged in all those expensive tastes which her natural love for the beautiful, and her undisciplined will, made so necessary to her happiness. Happiness! Could she in whose soul the poison of a hidden sin was already doing its work of restless fever, and unceasing torture, be happy? Alas! no; she *felt* that hence forth she was to know not rest on earth—*beyond*, she dared not look.

One evening—the eve of her bridal, she and May were together, once more, in the antique parlor. Helen, flushed, and splendidly beautiful;—May, calm, and pleasant, her cheeks and brow a little pale, but very lovely from the inner light reflected on them.

"May, are you still determined not to witness my marriage?" asked Helen, abruptly.

"Yes, Helen. The same barrier to my being present exists, I presume?"

"If my being married by a Protestant minister, is the apology for your absence, it does," replied Helen, with a decided air.

"Do not say apology, Helen; I do not pretend to offer one. It is your privilege to make your marriage, as far as you are concerned, sacramental; as a Catholic, it is *your duty* to do so. By acting otherwise, you disobey the Church, and place yourself in a position of great danger; and I do not choose to be implicated, by being present at the ceremonial."

"You are a most obstinate person;—but just as you please. What are your plans, if I may ask?" said Helen, feeling ill at ease.

"Very plain and honest ones, Helen," said May, measuring out the tea.

"I should not suspect *you*, May, of any other," said Helen, with a sarcastic manner; "but let us hear them, if you are not ashamed of them!"

"I am ashamed of nothing, Helen, but the guilt of sin. As to my plans, I do not know that you feel any genuine interest in them; and, as we shall not meet often, I suppose, it is scarcely necessary to unfold them."

"I have a motive in asking you, May—a good one, too. I wish to assist you," said Helen.

"I thank you, dear Helen, but I really do not require the least assistance. The sum my uncle left me,

added to what I shall earn, will support me nicely," she replied.

"Earn! how? Shall you take in sewing?" screamed Helen.

"No. I have rented a nice room from my old friend Mrs. Tabb, who keeps the trimming store, and she has engaged to sell all the fancy knitting I can do. I am very well provided for, you perceive."

"I perceive nothing of the kind. It is positively ridiculous and disgraceful. What will the world say?" exclaimed Helen.

"The world, dear Helen! What business has the world with me? I owe it nothing but its just tribute of good citizenship. Oh, Helen! the world can soothe no pang when sorrow comes;—it can bring us no peace when death touches our hearts with his inexorable hand. No, no; there are no interests in common between the world and me."

"Gracious! what a fanatic!" said Helen, keeping down the wrestling and struggling of her heart; and, with a careless air, throwing back the long, bright curls, from her faultless face. "But listen to reason, May. You have been unfairly dealt with. I cannot reconcile the thing to either my pride or conscience. Walter feels as I do; and I can tell you we are extremely anxious to have you become an inmate of our family—to be in it, like myself, and feel free to act, and think, as you please. I can assure you, Walter has a prodigiously high opinion of you."

"Helen," said May, fixing those clear luminous eyes on the shifting countenance of her cousin, "your offer is, no doubt, kindly meant—but I cannot accept it. I *would not*, Helen, if you offered me half your fortune, live in a house so unblessed, as I *fear*—as I fear yours will be."

"And why such predictions?" asked Helen, haughtily.

"Can one who defies the spirit of God by disobedience—and—yes, I must say it—*apostasy*, expect blessings? And could I, who daily implore Heavenly Father to save me from temptation, thrust myself under its influence? Oh, no! no, Helen. Enjoy life after your fashion—whirl through its giddy circles, if such is your choice—but leave me in obscurity, to follow out the path which leads to something beyond the grave. But, dear Helen, let us part in peace—my prayers shall follow you; and I do beseech you, by the memory of the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, and the Dolors of His Immaculate Mother, to reflect, *sometimes*, on what should be the aims of an immortal soul!"

"You are a strange creature, May," said Helen, with a quivering lip, and a momentary impulse to throw herself at May's feet, and confess her guilt, which flitted away. "You will visit me sometimes, May?"

"*If you are sick, or sorrowful, or repentant*, send for me."

"But you will come and see how very happy I am.—Just once?"

"I cannot promise, Helen. Events will determine me," replied May, in a gentle tone.

"I have a favor to ask, May, which you cannot refuse!" said Helen, with a degree of timidity unusual to her; "will you grant it?"

"I hope so, Helen. What is it?"

"There is a picture in our room—a valuable old painting of the *Mater Dolorosa*. I always fancied there was a look of my mother, particularly about the eyes, in the countenance. I should like to have it copied by some first-rate artist to hang up in my chamber."

"Certainly, dear Helen. I would offer you the picture as a keep-sake, only it was highly prized by my father; and there are so many associations connected with it, which makes it very precious to me. Whenever you wish it, let me know, and I will go with it myself to the artist."

The next day they parted. Helen, arrayed in costly silks, laces, and jewelry, went forth a bride, and pronounced irrevocable vows, which made her the wife of a man, who, highly honorable in a worldly sense, was the professed enemy of the creed she professed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEATH DREAM.

While the splendid festivities which succeeded Helen's marriage afforded a topic of conversation for the *bon ton* of three cities, May was quietly preparing to leave the old house, beneath whose roof she had learned so many lessons of self-denial, patience, and constancy; while she found time, each day, to pay her accustomed visit to old Mabel, who was approaching nearer and nearer her eternal rest. In serving her, May felt richly rewarded by the edification she derived from her simple piety, and the perfect resignation and joyful submission she evinced to the Divine Will. She was frequently astonished at the untaught eloquence of her expressions, and the beautiful humility of her language, when she spoke of the mercy of Almighty God, and lifted up her heart in joyful aspirations and effusions of love, to JESUS and MARY. The sacred and crucified, Humanity of ONE, and the suffering and anguish of the Humanity of the OTHER, seemed to condescend so entirely to her low estate, that the divinity of JESUS, and the measureless love of MARY, His Mother, were folded like a garment around her, and strengthened, and consoled, and brightened her path, as she approached the shadow through which she was to pass. And while May's inmost heart united its pure emotions in harmony with the mysteries of faith and grace, the words of an old English poet rippled through her mind in sweet accord with them.

"If bliss had lay in art or strength,
None but the wise or strong had gained it;
Where now by faith, all arms are of a length,
One size doth all conditions fit.
A peasant may believe as much
As a great clerk, and reach the highest stature;
Thus dost Thou make proud knowledge bend and crouch,
While grace fills up uneven nature." [1]

When May had proposed to Mrs. Tabb to live, or, rather, lodge with her, nothing of its kind could exceed the enthusiastic reception she met. She poured out a torrent of exclamations and superlatives, which set all the rules of grammar at defiance. Then she broke out in the vociferous indignation at "the old miser's meanness," and last, and more outrageous than all, were her reflections on "upstartish misses, who drop from the clouds when no one expects them, and get all and every thing that them ought to had, who had been waiting, and bearing with people's meanness and ill-humor from their cradels up." And if, at that moment, she had not tilted her snuff-box, which was filled with Scotch snuff, over, under May's nose, whereupon both were seized with a paroxysm of sneezing, which was an effectual interruption to her tirade, she would have been silenced by a few charitable explanations.

When May returned home, she found Mr. Jerrold waiting in the parlor. He offered his hand; and there was such an air of sincerity in his manner, that it dispelled all May's reserve.

"I have brought Helen's love," he said, while he uncovered a magnificent bouquet, "and these roses and violets. They are the first of the season."

"These are *very, very* beautiful and fragrant, and I thank you most heartily for them. How is Helen?"

"She is looking well, but she falls occasionally into fits of despondency, which is either the result of much fatigue and excitement, or some cause which she does not wish to explain. I wish you would come and live with us. Helen needs a sister," said the young man.

"Dear Mr. Jerrold," said old-fashioned May, "I have tried to find my way to Helen's heart, but, to be frank with you, our ways lie too differently. Helen will have none of my friendship on those terms on which I alone can give it. But you do not understand it all.—You are a Protestant, and wish to see Helen one; therefore, *I* should be a discord in your house, because, if there, *my duty* would not allow me to hold my peace."

"Helen is too young and beautiful to mope about religion," he said, carelessly. "When she gets older, and is more tied down by domestic cares, it will be necessary and respectable for her to be religious; and then, egad, if she wishes it, I'd as lief she'd be a Catholic as any thing else."

"Helen will be ill-prepared, I fear, for a life of pious example, if she devotes all of her energies now to the world. *Grace*, you know, sir, is not a human thing which can be bought with money, or worldly eloquence," replied May, earnestly.

"Helen has no truer friend, I believe, on my honor, May, than yourself; but, really, she must enjoy life a little longer; then I will turn her over to you and her father confessor;—but I came for a purpose, to-day."

"A friendly one, I am sure!" said May.

"Yes. I saw Mr. Fielding this morning, and consulted him about the expediency of your remaining *here*, as you wont live with us. We wish the place kept up;—it is a *curioso* in its way—an *antique* with all its appurtenances; and I do not know any one more in keeping with it, than cousin May."

May laughed. "You think that, as we harmonize so exactly, we should be a mutual protection to each other?"

"Precisely. Will you remain?"

"No. It would be pleasant on some accounts, but would not be at all suitable on others. A residence here would very materially interrupt the objects and aims of my life, in which pursuit I can alone be happy."

"Dodona's Cave! How oracular!" said Mr. Jerrold, laughing outright. "Explain, dear Sopho, your argument!"

"Will you understand? But *how* can you, a Protestant, understand the motive power of a Catholic heart?" said May.

"Proceed. I will give you oracle for oracle. I am a Protestant in principle, but not in fact," was the light reply.

"I have always felt that while I ate no idle bread I was of some use on earth. I have always been accustomed to an active life. Labor gives one an opportunity of learning many virtues;—*patience* amongst them, and not the least, humility. I should have nothing to do, here. The necessity for exertion would be gone; and, really, I am too much afraid of *myself*, to trust to exigencies. No, no! I must have an aim which will require the exercise of my most active energies. Dependence will not suit me."

"That is it," broke in Mr. Jerrold. "Pride is at the bottom of the whole argument. May! this moment you are as proud as the devil!"

"Oh, sir! pray do not think that. I really feel extremely grateful for your kind intentions," said May, looking distressed. "I have other reasons, which I cannot very well explain, for choosing the way of life that I have. Only please to understand this, that I should be very miserable, if I were placed, *now*, in a situation which would leave me without responsibility."

"You are a paradox. You ought to be ten feet high, May, with such a will as yours. You won't live with us, because we are so wicked that you'd have to preach to us about our sins; and you won't live here, because you're afraid you'll get as bad as we are. Well, well! be happy your own way, and come and see Helen when you can," said Mr. Jerrold, laughing, as he got up to leave.

"I feel your kindness deeply, Mr. Jerrold. I hope you are not hurt or offended?"

"Not in the least. I think you are bearing your wrongs like a saint; and I wish I was only half as good," replied Mr. Jerrold, shaking hands with her.

"Tell Helen that I am thankful for the flowers, and will offer them this evening, with a prayer for her conversion, to OUR MOTHER," said May.

"I thought her mother was dead and buried!" thought Mr. Jerrold, as he walked down the street. "What a curious little soul she is!"

After dinner, May went to inform Father Fabian that she had declined Mr. Fielding's offer, and would remove to Mrs. Tabb's in the course of a day or two. But she saw him in the garden walk in the rear of the house, walking to and fro, reading his office, and went into the church, where she offered the rich bouquet Helen had sent her, on the shrine of *Our Lady, the refuge*; after which, she said, with great devotion, a decade of the rosary, for her conversion. Father Fabian was standing in the door when she returned, and watched her, as she approached, with a grave, but quizzical, expression of countenance.

"I am glad to see you, my child, in your long dresses yet," he said, holding out his hand, kindly.

"Sir," said May, looking perplexed.

"I did not feel sure but that you had adopted the new school so much in favor with your sex, judging from all that I have heard," he replied, laughing.

"What new school? What have you heard, Father?" she asked, anxiously.

"The strong-minded women's-school!"

"I see that you have some jest at my expense, and I must be patient until it is explained," said May, sitting down.

"Yes, yes; be patient."

"Will you not tell me, Father, what I have done?"

"May, do you believe that you burned the will the night your uncle lay dying?" asked Father Fabian, abruptly.

"I do not think I did. I may, however, have done so."

"Mr. Fielding intends to endeavor to set aside the will which was found. He had good legal reasons to expect that he can secure you an equal share of your uncle's estate with your cousin."

"I hope he will do no such thing, sir. I am quite satisfied."

"But he and the witnesses to the *other will* are not, because there are very important public and religious interests involved in its loss."

"If that is the case, I can only object so far as I am individually concerned," said May; "but I hope most earnestly that Mr. Fielding will let the matter rest a short time longer—a few months, for the longer I think of it that I did not burn the will, and I feel a presentiment that it will come to light," said May, earnestly.

"And you will not give your consent, as one of the heirs, to go to law?"

"Not yet—not yet, Father. Let us wait a little. If it is mislaid, it may be found; if any one has wronged me by secreting it, they may repent."

"Was there ever such a wild goose on earth?" said Father Fabian, laughing. "You know as much about the world *now*, May, as you did eighteen years ago, when you were just two months old."

"But, Father, you have always taught me to have faith in God, and told me in all difficulties to have recourse to him and the Blessed Virgin. If it is for his glory, and the good of his creatures, the lost will will be found," she said, earnestly.

"You are right, my child. God's holy will be done," said Father Fabian, lifting his *bounet-carre* from his brow. "But, having turned a theological point against me, can you explain your most obstinate refusal to accept of Mr. Fielding's and Mr. Jerrold's kind offers of a home, where ease, luxury, and elegance would attend you? You seem determined to take a stand against your interests in every way. What rational objection can you oppose to their offers?"

"Dear Father, are you displeased with your poor child?" asked May, with humility.

"To be frank, my dear child, I consider your conduct a little unusual," said Father Fabian, looking down to conceal the smile that brightened his eyes. "How could you act so?"

"Simply and frankly because I wished to be *free*."

"Woman's rights! As I suspected, woman's rights!" exclaimed Father Fabian, lifting his hands with horror.

"*Soul's rights*, Father! *Soul's rights!*" said May, in an impassioned manner. "I could not live with Helen in peace without spiritual bondage. Her way of life would leave me no neutral ground to stand on. She has forsaken her religion; every act of hers is therefore open rebellion against God, and I must have raised my voice in one incessant clamor had I lived with her. Had I gone to dear, kind Mr. Fielding, he might have made demands on time which I have devoted to religion, which my gratitude might have disposed me to yield to. But I am grateful to them all for their kind intentions, and I am sure, if their friendship is real, they will be happier to know that I am happy in my own way."

"Is this all, May?" asked Father Fabian, who suspected her of entertaining other reasons still.

"I had hoped to keep it secretly, but I have another reason. You know that I am blamed for the loss of that will, which made noble bequests to the poor and destitute. I may be guilty; I cannot pretend to say that I am not, therefore, as a sort of reparation to those afflicted ones, who would have been relieved by my uncle's bounty, of which I perhaps, by an act of carelessness have deprived them, I have made a vow to dedicate my life, my energies, and will, to the service of the poor in active and laborious works," said May, with a grave and humble manner.

"Your motives are good, my child; only let us be careful not to seek our own gratification too much, either temporal or spiritual, in our works. I certainly acquit you of all *modern chivalry*. I will see Mr. Fielding about that affair this evening, and request him to postpone it."

"If you please, Father," said May, over whose countenance a shadow had fallen.

"What is the trouble now, little one?" asked Father Fabian.

"Have I been presumptuous, Father? Have I been lifting up my hands to heaven like the Pharisee, and thanking God that I am not like others? Oh, Father, I think I should rather die than be self-righteous!"

"I think not, my child. Only we must not rely too much on our intentions, which may be, morally speaking, good, but spiritually bad, if they are not united with great humility. I should be false to your soul's interests if I dealt not plainly with you. But go now to your old pensioner. I administered to her this morning the last rites of the Church, and think it more than possible that before another sunrise she will have passed away from this life of mourning and gloom."

"I thought yesterday evening, when I was there, that her sufferings were nearly at an end," said May, wiping off a tear.

"Her dispositions are perfect," continued Father Fabian. "Oh, in the last hour, if the soul is right before God, how vain appears all human learning! how little the wisdom of ages! how less than nothing the splendor and grandeur of riches! Soon—very soon, that ignorant and poverty-stricken old negro, who, like Lazarus, has been lying at the door of the rich, great world, humbly thankful for the crumbs she has received, will be endowed with knowledge and wisdom; she will read and have solved mysteries which the greatest sages of antiquity, and the profoundest philosophers of modern times have shrunk from, overwhelmed with the vastness of their conception. She will have looked on the face of Him who suffered for her, and be, through his divine mercy, and the merits of his bitter passion, admitted into eternal rest. Oh faith, mistress of learning! Oh humility, without which the learned shall not enter heaven! Possess our hearts—reign in our souls for ever. But go now; tell her I will see her in the morning, unless she is beyond my reach."

It was a clear, soft evening. The sky, as the sun declined, was filled as with the brightness of flashing wings, while the golden light broke in ripples around the isles of cloud that hung over the deep. The flute-like whistle of the blue-bird, and the odor of violets, and young budding leaves, were in the air together—music, light, and fragrance, like harmonies from the spirit-land, blending softly together. The earth was clothed in its new garment, for spring had risen from the grave, and its resurrection was glorious. Over the ways of the city, and in the suburban lanes; in the glens and dells of the forest, and the distant slopes of the blue hills; over the mounds of the silent dead, where the germs of infinite life are planted,—where, like pearls, lying beneath the earth-billows, they will sleep in their sealed shells until, from the eastern gates of heaven, springs the eternal dawn, which shall gather them in, clothed with new light, to be set amongst the crown-jewels of God,—the sweet clover, the tender grass, and wild flowers were springing together. In flowed all this sweetness down to the depths of May's soul, as she walked along, and led her feelings sweetly up to that clime of which the fairest and purest of earth-born things are only the gray shadows; and rejoicing in nature and high hope, she came in sight of Mabel's cottage. She saw the child who lived with her, and called her grandmother, playing about the door, and beckoning to her, inquired "how she was?"

"I'se right well, missy. Granny's asleep."

"How is she?" again, asked May.

"She's heap better, missy; she bin sleep dis ever so long."

"Very well. You can play out here a little longer; but don't go away, and I will go in and wait until Aunt Mabel wakes," said May, giving her some ginger-bread she had bought for her. The child, glad of its freedom, remained watching the birds and clouds.

May opened the door, and entered softly. She went towards the bed, and saw that the mysterious and awful change, which tells that the inexorable decree is gone forth, and the "arrow fastened," was fast settling on old Mabel's features. Yet there was nothing uncouth or grotesque in that shrivelled and swarthy face, because FAITH, which leads death captive, had shed over them a supernatural calm, which ennobled them with a solemn sweetness. Her poor old hand, so long withered and helpless, dropped beside her; the other, around which her rosary was wrapped, lay on her breast. May took off her bonnet and scarf, and knelt down to say the dolorous mysteries of the rosary. "Remember, oh most loving Mother, by these, thy own dolours, the soul of thy poor servant, who will soon be engaged in her last earthly conflict. Rescue, oh Mother of Sorrows, through thy intercession, and the bitter passion and death of thy Divine Son, from the foes who lie in wait for her soul, and conduct her under thy safeguard

to eternal light and peace." Thus prayed the Christian maiden by the dying slave; *caste*, *race*, and *fetters* were falling together into the deep abyss of death. She would soon know the glorious freedom of one of the heirs of Christ.

"Oh, lady! oh, beautiful missis! this is a mean place for your crowned head and shining robes to come into. And who are those beside you, glorious and fair?" murmured the old woman, suddenly stretching out *both* arms towards the door, and looking earnestly beyond May at something unseen.

"Queen of Heaven! how is it that you come to me? I am not worthy to lift my eyes to yours, yet you are here," she continued, while an awe, unspeakable and sweet, fell on May, who did not move.

"To deliver my soul, and conduct me to the feet of your Divine Son?" she said, after a short pause, as if some one had answered her, and she repeated the words.

"Oh grace! oh splendor! oh sweetness! oh clemency! oh hope!" she exclaimed. "If I could, I would be worthy of such love—I would spread gold and precious things at your feet; but I am only a poor old negro, covered with patches and shreds. But fill my heart with all the love it can hold, and take that—it's all I've got to offer." Again, as if listening, she paused, then, with a smile of rapture, cried out, "Love Jesus! love Mary! Oh, Jesus! oh, Mary! my soul is filled with Jesus and Mary!" Then her eyes closed, her hands sunk down, and she seemed to sleep again.

"Was it a vision? Was it a dream?" thought May; "or had she been in the presence of MARY and the angels of heaven? Had they surrounded her, as she watched and prayed by the side of the dying woman? She could not tell, but she *felt* that the air had been stirred by heavenly visitants. Ere long old Mabel awoke, and looked wildly and eagerly around her; then her eyes settled on May's countenance.

"How do you feel, Aunt Mabel, now?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Honey, I've had a dream! Such a glorious dream! I thought the door opened, and the Blessed Virgin, surrounded by bright spirits, came in, and stood around me; and it seemed to me that I was so full of joy, that I lifted up my old shrivelled arm to welcome her. Oh, my dear missis! I never see so much brightness and beauty together before, and never heard such joyful sounds. It seemed like music talking. And, honey, what is stranger than all, I saw you there, and I thought the Blessed Virgin took a white lily out of her bosom, and laid it on your head, and smiled. Oh, missy, wasn't it comforting to have such a dream?"

"It was a glorious dream, Aunt Mabel!" said May, while the blood, with rapturous motion, bounded through her veins, and filled her face with a glowing hue. "You seemed to *see* it all. Your eyes were open, and your lame arm was really stretched out towards the door, as if to welcome some bright company. Oh may that white flower, which you saw laid on my head, go down, and take deep root in my heart."

"It will, honey. Let me kiss your hand, and lay mine on your head, little missy. You've been my earthly helper, and your Heavenly Father will be yours. My blessing aint of no account, but I give it to you with all my feeble powers. May you be blessed in every thing in this world and the next. It's growing mighty dark now, honey; hold my hand, till it grows light again." With a last effort, she lifted May's hand to her lips, and kissed it; then a deep lethargy stole over her. May said the prayers for the departing soul, and recommended the dying one to the tender care of the Immaculate Mother of Jesus. A ray from the setting sun, stealing through the trees without, flowed into the shaded room, and rested on her pillow in flickering radiance; and ere it passed away, her spirit had sped from its tenement of clay to undergo the judgment which, after death, every soul must stand. It was a sweet falling asleep with her, so gently had death released her from the bonds of flesh. An hour passed by, and still May knelt, absorbed in prayer, and earnest intercession for the departed. It was growing dark, and rising up, she straightened and composed old Mabel's limbs; and covering her face, went out and called the child, and bid her go for one of the neighboring women to come in, and prepare the body for interment. She looked in the chest for the grave-clothes which the old woman had kept and guarded as her only treasure for years and years; and finding every thing needful in the parcel, gave it to the woman, with strict injunctions to arrange every thing with the greatest decency, and watch by her through the night. Promising to be there early in the morning to pay and relieve her, she hurried to Father Fabian to leave word with him, and request him to make the necessary arrangements for the interment—the expenses of which she wished to defray herself. It was quite dark when she got home, and feeling wearied and overcome, she retired early, filled with gratitude for the privilege she had enjoyed, of seeing one so good and humble as old Mabel die. Death had assumed to her a benign and holy aspect; she almost felt,

"There is no Death. What seems so is Transition.

This life of mortal breath

Is but the suburbs of that Life Elysian,

The next day Father Fabian, in the presence of a few poor neighbors, performed the last touching rites of the Church over the inanimate body of old Mabel—the body which, "sown in dishonor, would be raised in honor" to eternal life. May walked beside the coffin as it was borne to the grave, nor left the spot until the last clod of earth was thrown on it; then, when it was deserted by all else, as constant in death as she had been in life, she kneeled down beside it, and offered up fervent prayers for her eternal repose.

[1] Herbert.

[2] Longfellow.

CHAPTER XVII.

REMORSE.

It was near day-dawn. A splendid carriage, drawn by a span of thorough-paced horses, whose black coats shone in the moonlight like jet, while they champed their silver bits, and blew the white froth with the breath of their proud nostrils out like spray over the rich trappings of their harness, rolled with a rapid, but almost noiseless motion, through one of the broad streets of a fashionable quarter of the city. The light which flickered down from the silver coach-lamps revealed magnificent hangings of brocade and velvet, looped back with twisted cords of silk and silver thread. The driver and footman were clad in livery which corresponded with the elegant style of the equipage. They turned in a broad, aristocratic-looking square, and drew up in front of a handsome and spacious mansion. The officious footman sprung to the pavement, swung back the carriage-door, and held out his gloved hand to assist a lady, who was within to get out.

"No need, sirrah," she said, haughtily, as she stepped lightly out, and ran up the broad marble steps of the mansion, where, heedless of her stainless and delicate gloves, she seized the bell-knob, and rung violently. During the few moments she waited for admission, her foot, clad in white satin, beat the threshold with a light, but restless motion. Her brocade-robe about which costly laces hung in gossamer clouds, rustled down in rich folds to the marble floor of the vestibule, while with every pulsation of her heart, and movement of her body, gems flashed out in the moonlight. Long, shining curls, slightly tossed by the night breeze, floated down over her cheeks and bosom, half concealing the rare beauty of her face. It was Helen! The door was at length opened, and attended by her drowsy maid, she hurried up to her chamber. It was a lofty, and beautifully proportioned room, filled with every thing the most luxurious fancy could desire, and arranged with fastidious taste and elegance. Flowers were heaped up in Eastern vases, near the open window, and deep-cushioned chairs, and softly pillowed lounges, covered with pale, saffron-colored silk, were arranged here and there throughout the gorgeous room. The low, and exquisitely carved French bedstead was half hidden by a flowing drapery of embroidered lace, which, depending from a small hoop of mother-of-pearl in the ceiling, hung like a tent over it. The toilette-table was elaborately furnished. Between its twisted rosewood pillars, which were inlaid with pearl, in graceful device, swung an immense oval mirror, set in a frame of the same materials. Near it stood a small marble table, supported by an alabaster Psyche, around which were strewn perfumes, jewel-cases, and various costly articles for toilette uses. On each side of the mirror projected gas-burners in the form of clusters of lilies—the flowers being of the purest porcelain, and the rest highly gilt and embossed. Helen threw herself down wearily in a large chair, while her maid turned up the light, which was burning dimly, to a brighter flame, which revealed more minutely the splendors of the room. Over the toilette-glass hung a picture—there were no others on the frescoed walls; it was set far back in a superb oval frame of ivory and gold, and as the brilliant glare of lights shot upwards, an exquisite painting of the *Mater Dolorosa* could be distinctly seen—a strange companion, or presiding genius, or ornament for the shrine for pride and vanity.

"You can go now, Elise," said Helen languidly.

"Shall I not undress madame's hair, and put her jewels away?" inquired the Frenchwoman with an air of amazement.

"No—leave me at once," she replied, impatiently.

"Deshabillez-vous," muttered the woman. "To tell me go! I who was *fille-de-chambre* to une Grande Duchesse! Mon dieu! la chaleur est tres-incommode! *Ingrat—parvenu! Un—deux—trois!* Il est temps de se coucher." Helen had just touched her repeater, and with its soft, silvery chime, it struck three. Elise hurried away from the door, where she had lingered, in hopes of being recalled, to comfort herself with a glass of *eau-de-sucre*, ere she returned to her pillow. Helen got up and locked her door, and began to walk to and fro. By and by the past, mingling with the present, made such a torrent of bitter memories seethe and sweep through her desolate soul, that she wrung her hands, and rushed backwards and forwards like one mad. In her wild mood, she saw the glitter of her jewels, as she swept by the large mirror of her toilette. She paused, gazed at herself a moment, then, with a frantic gesture, tore the diamonds from her hair and neck, and with a bitter laugh dashed them from her. Her beautiful face, as white as the alabaster Psyche near her, was full of wild and demoniac expressions, which chased each other with the velocity of clouds over her countenance. Remorse, anguish, and despair settled like a brooding tempest on her forehead; then wringing her hands, she again commenced her walk.

"A lie," she muttered, "a splendid, living lie. Widows and orphans wronged—the poor defrauded—the church wounded and robbed by thee, Helen! A husband who trusts me—who believes me—honorable and true himself—confiding in a nature *utterly* false—and leaning on a heart rotten to the core! Oh, Helen! eternal loss will surely be thine—so it is better to *die* ere madness comes, and divulges the dark secret. Walter is away; he will be here at sunrise. Better for him to find thee, Helen, calm and cold in the beauty of which he is so proud, than live to know that thou art *all a lie*—which he would tear away from his honest heart, and throw to the very dogs!"

While these dark thoughts swept through the heart of the tempted and despairing one, she unlocked a secret drawer in her jewel-case, and took from it a small silver casket, which she opened. It contained a crystal *flacon*, filled with a liquid, transparent, and of a pale rose-color. "One drop of it," she whispered, "one single drop, and without a pang, this unrest and anguish will be over. That which is *beyond* cannot be worse!" Just then a strong current of air rushed in through the open window, and blew the jet of gas, in a stream of brilliance, up towards the picture of the *Mater Dolorosa*. The sudden glare arrested the attention of the wretched, sin-stained one. She looked up, and her eyes, glaring with the frenzy of evil, met the ineffably tender and sorrowful face of MARY; which, with its tears, and expression of submissive and sublime woe, its folded hands, its meek brow, seemed bowed towards her. She paused, while, with the distinctness of a whisper, these thoughts passed through her soul. "Wretched one, forbear! Wound not again my Divine Son, whose body is already covered with stripes and bruises for thee. Open not my heart again, which is already pierced for thy salvation! Hope! It was for such as thee that my Son, Jesus, suffered on the cross; for such as thee, that I immolated my soul, my nature, my maternal love, on that bloody altar with Him."

"Was it the wind? No! the sweetest winds of earth could not have drawn such language from the corrupt and frenzied chords of my spirit. No demon whispered it!" exclaimed Helen, still gazing upwards. "Was it a heavenly warning *for me*, the most miserable outcast on the wide earth?" The mad tempest was dispersed; it rolled back its sullen clouds from her soul; and, with a trembling cry for mercy, she staggered towards a large chair, into which she fell, fainting and exhausted.

As the sun was rising, Walter Jerrold, who had travelled all night from New York, whither he had been on business of importance, opened his house-door with a private key, and entered without disturbing the servants. He ran up to Helen's door, and finding it locked, opened his dressing-room, which adjoined hers, with the same key, and pushing back the silk draperies which hung between them, went in, and, to his alarm and amazement, saw her, still arrayed in her festal robes sleeping in the chair, into which she had fallen. Her face was as white as the drooping roses on her bosom, and her countenance wore an expression of pain.

"Helen!" he whispered, as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Helen, are you ill?"

"Will! It was burnt. Will!" she cried, starting up, and looking wildly around her. "Oh, Walter! I am so glad you are here at last. I have had a frightful dream."

"Helen, you are ill, I fear. What means this unwonted confusion;—have you been out, and just come in? What is the meaning of it all—and *what is this?*" he said, while he stooped down to pick up the crystal *flacon* which had dropped out of its case on the floor.

"Dear Walter, don't open it, for the world! It is a cosmetic. I am too white, sometimes, and touch my cheeks with it," exclaimed Helen, starting up; "do give it to me."

"No, Helen; my wife must be *real* in all things. I do not approve of artificial coloring; so, to save you from temptation, I shall put it out of your reach!" replied her husband, throwing the *flacon* out into the street. A lean, hungry dog, prowling about in search of food, rushed to the spot—hoping, no doubt, that it was a morsel from the rich man's table—but no sooner had his nose touched the spot, then, uttering a

loud howl, he fell dead.

"Helen! explain this mystery!" he exclaimed, grasping her hand, and drawing her to the window. "Are your cosmetics all poisons as deadly as that?"

"Walter! this is horrible! Poison? Why, Walter, it might have killed me!" she gasped, hiding her pallid face in his bosom.

"Helen, answer me, by the love and trust I bear you, did you know that the contents of that *flacon* were poisonous? Look up, dear Helen, and answer me, yes or no."

"No, Walter—on my honor, no. You have saved me from a horrible death," she replied, raising her head, and looking, with a strong effort into his eyes.

Thus was Helen driven, with scourges, by her task-master, the great tempter of souls, into slough after slough, from which, there was but one escape, and that lay through a rugged way, called REPENTANCE. But repentance, to her vision, was like a shoreless ocean, or a fierce deity to whose exacting nature she must sacrifice all that she held dear on earth, or perish. But her husband's love and esteem—her ill-gotten riches—her position—her luxuries! Could she live without them? *If she could repent without making restitution*, she would. But she well knew that such repentance would be fruitless. And thus, while, to the world, she moved calmly in her proud beauty, and was envied by the miserable, for the apparent happiness and splendor of her lot, a fierce beast was tugging at her heart-strings, more savage than that which tore the vitals of the boy of Lacedaemon. It was remorse.

"Helen!" said Walter Jerrold, calmly, "have you any grief or mystery hidden from me, my wife? I am like a helpless child, now in your hands; you may deceive me, and triumph in your concealment—but do not—do not, Helen, for God's sake, do it. Open your whole heart to me. I love you well enough to lift the burden, if there be one, from it, to my strong shoulders; and if—if—if—you have ever erred, let me hear it from no lips but your own."

Helen would have cast herself at his feet and told him all, but she feared he would spurn her—she longed to deserve the love of his manly and honest heart, but too weak, too much a coward, she shrunk from the agony and peril of a confession of her guilt. And Jerrold! was he not mad to expect to find a true and loving spouse in one who had cast off her allegiance to God?

"You are mistaken, Walter. Really, you have made quite a scene! I fear that you are romantic! For, really except when my nervous moods come over me, I am not aware that there is any thing unusual in my conduct. I am excessively nervous and excitable. I was dancing all night. I went with your mother to Mrs. Woodland's ball, which was a most brilliant affair. It was after two o'clock when I came home. You may be sure I was tired. Then I concluded to give you a little surprise by waiting up for you; and, as I looked very haggard, took out that precious cosmetic to tint my cheeks—all, dear Walter, to welcome you; but I was too much fagged, and went off into a sound, vulgar sleep!" said Helen, going to her toilette-table to adjust her hair, while she laughed as if the whole thing had been an amusing adventure. "It will learn you to run off again," she continued.

"Well, well—perhaps I am exacting; but understand one thing, Helle, about me," said Walter Jerrold, gravely, "I can bear with, and forgive *errors*—but deception, *never*."

"Walter!" said Helen, reproachfully, while tears suffused her fine eyes.

"Forgive me, Helle, if my words grate on your feelings. It is best for married folk to understand each other's peculiarities as early as possible. Shall I ring for Elise, for you are tangling and tearing your hair to pieces?"

"If you please. I will soon join you, if you will tell me where to find you," she replied, with assumed composure.

"At the breakfast table, I trust," he said, pleasantly; "I am thirsting for a cup of mocha, after my long journey."

"I suspect you will find it ready. I ordered them to have it ready early;—but see, Walter! have you any special engagement this forenoon?"

"Nothing *very* particular after ten, Helen. Why?"

"Why, you know that *Matinéés* are all the rage now. I hold my first one to-day.—All the world have promised to come!"

"You don't want me, then?" he said, laughing.

"Of course I do. It will look proper for you to be present at the *first*. People can't be ill-natured then. I've heard a great many queer stories about the *Matinées*."

"It is well to be prudent in these fashionable follies, Helle—touch some of them with gloves on. I do not like this new style of thing, but if it's the fashion, we must fall in. I'll come, provided there is no scandal and high play," he said, laughing.

As the hour for the *Matinée* approached, Helen's drawing-rooms presented a *coup d'oeil* of splendor and elegance. Daylight was carefully excluded; and alabaster lamps threw a soft, moon-lit radiance, through flowers and garlands, over the scene. The costly mirrors, the magnificent furniture, of the time of *Louis le Grande*, the lofty, frescoed ceiling, the exquisite statuary, and rare paintings, were all in fine keeping with each other, and gave, what an artist would call, tone and harmony to the scene. Attired in white crape and pearls, Helen had never looked more lovely; and of all who crowded with compliments around her, there was not one to rival her. Group after group of the *beau monde* made their way to the head of the room, where she, with her high-bred worldly air, received them with a smile and pleasant passing words.

"Your *Matinée* is the most brilliant of the season, Mrs. Jerrold," said a fashionable old lady, with a dowager air—such a one as we meet with constantly in society, who, tangled up in laces, false hair, and a modish style of dress, look like old faries at a christening, and who impress the young and inexperienced by their affected zest that the fleeting pleasures of life are immortal. "Your *matinée* is really splendid! Such a fashionable company—so much beauty—really, it reminds me of old times. But, my dear creature, did you know there is the greatest sensation in town now about religion?"

"How?" asked Helen, smiling.

"The Romanists are holding something they call a *mission* at the cathedral, and really, I am told, that the performances are very impressive. It is quite the fashion to go for an hour."

"It is never considered *outré* to go to the cathedral, as the very *élite* of our society are Catholic, and attend there; but *entre nous*, shall you go, Mrs. Jerrold?" observed a lady near them.

"Yes," continued the dowager, with a spiteful air; "and very few parvenues amongst them. Most of them sprung from something better than low trades-people."

"Granted. No doubt they enjoy their pedigree as much as I do the substantial fortune my grandfather acquired by trade," said the lady, pleasantly. "But, Mrs. Jerrold, the music is fine, the preacher superbly eloquent, and every body goes now, instead of attending the opera!"

This grated on Helen's ears. Classing the Church with the opera! But what right had she, who trampled it under foot, to complain?

"Really, I have heard nothing of this mission before!" she said, with an indifferent air. "What is it?"

"I really cannot tell exactly. Thousands go, and thousands come away because they can't be accommodated with seats. Altogether with the music, the eloquent preaching, and the crowd, it is quite a *spectacle*."

"Yes," put in the dowager; "and that is all. It is a *spectacle*!"

"Judge Craven's wife and Major Boyd are amongst the converts; and the Rev. Allan Baily," said the lady, with a wink at Helen.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the dowager; "Mr. Baily! It must be a lie—I declare it must!"

"Will you have my *sal-volatile*, madam?" said the malicious lady, enjoying the scene, while she offered her vinaigrette.

"I won't believe it. Who told you, Mrs. Grayson?"

"Himself," replied Mrs. Grayson, calmly.

"He's crazy! He's been flighty these two years, with his long coats, and fast-days, and confession," cried the dowager, fanning herself violently, and snuffing the *sal-volatile*, until she grew purple in the face. "As to the others, they are doting. I'll go this moment, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Jerrold, and make my coachman drive me there; and if he has done so, I'll rouse him, as sure as I have a tongue in my head. I knew him when he was a boy, and I protest against it," she said, screaming like an angry macaw, as she fluttered out.

"The town's crazy about Mr. Baily's conversion. I am not surprised at Mrs. Fanshaw's excitement. But

let us make up a party, and go tonight, Mrs. Jerrold. The gentleman who conducts this thing, and pulls the wires, is a man of irresistible eloquence. He was one of us a few years ago."

"It would be dangerous to venture, I should think," said Helen, with a dim smile; "but if Mr. Jerrold has no other engagement—"

"Is it of the famous 'Mission' you are speaking, Helen?" interrupted her mother-in-law, rustling in silk and jewels, "Yes; of course we must go. We shall be quite out of the fashion, if we do not. The most *distingué* persons in town are to be there this evening."

"I fear the opera and assembly will have but a slim attendance," said Walter Jerrold in his pleasant, sarcastic way.

"Oh, we shall get away in time for the assembly, which, by the by, is the last of the season," replied Mrs. Jerrold. "Helen, you look charmingly this morning. I declare you are the happiest couple I know of in the world."

Cards, scandal, chocolate, and ices, filled up the routine of the *Matinée*; then the guests rolled away in their carriages to dress for dinner, or leave cards at the doors of people, who they knew were out. It is the way of the world.

"I should prefer not to go, Walter," said Helen that evening at tea.

"Nonsense. I have better faith in you, Helen, than to think *one* evening will put you in peril. Come, don't be a coward. I wish you to hear this eloquent, half-crazy enthusiast preach; then we can drop into the opera, or assembly, whichever you wish."

"In my hat and white *pegnoir*—how ridiculous, said Helen, with a faint smile.

"No; come back and dress, if you choose. It will look ill for us to stay away when the others expect us and to be frank with you, Helle, I want to convince the world that my wife is not a *Romanist*."

"Is any one so foolish as to suspect it now, Walter?" she said, bitterly.

"Of course they do. And they'll be disappointed when they see that you neither bow down, nor cross yourself." It was not meant, but every word her husband said told down like drops of fire, into Helen's heart. "Come, shall we go?"

"Yes," replied the sin-enslaved Helen.

When the gay company arrived at the cathedral door, although it was early, they could scarcely make their way through the dense crowds which thronged the isles; but by patiently and gradually moving up towards the transept of the church, they were at last successful in finding seats, which commanded a view of the altars and pulpit. Lights in massive candelabra, and masses of flowers, of rare and rich dyes, covered the high altar. The tabernacle, which stood amidst this marble throne, was draped with cloth of gold, and surrounded by clusters of tube-roses and lilies. Above all, the objects which arrested every wandering eye, was the carved image of the MAN OF SORROWS—the suffering son of God! But it was not towards these that every Catholic soul was drawn. They were only signs, which designated the spot where the real presence of Jesus lay; where, enshrined in the fairest of earth's offerings, he invited their adoration. On each side the altar of the Madonna and the "Good Shepherd" were gorgeously decorated with lights and flowers.

Helen did not kneel. She did not cross herself. She merely sat down, and looked with a haughty, tired air, around her. She did not observe the priest as he came from the sanctuary, and ascended the pulpit, until she saw the attention of others directed towards him; then she lifted her glasses, gazed a few moments at him, thought him a rather distinguished-looking person, and piqued by her husband's observation, turned away to watch the movements of a party who were compelled to resort to walking over the backs of the pews to get to their seats. But while her eyes roved around in search of novel and amusing sights—while she nodded to one acquaintance, and smiled at another—what words are those which ring down into her soul? Why pale her cheeks, and why tremble the gem-decked fingers of her fair hand? Why do *tears—tears*—strange visitants to that haughty visage, roll over her cheeks? "*And there stood by the cross of Jesus, Mary, his mother!*" Again the clear sonorous voice of the speaker, filled with a tender cadence and solemn sweetness, enunciated the words. Why does Helen think of her picture at home—of the pitying glance it cast on her the night she committed that crime, which had almost wrecked her soul? Why does she think of her interposition that very morning which had saved her from self-murder? It was from no voluntary will of her own; but these visions came, subduing and touching the rind of her weary heart, until it heaved with the throes of a new birth. She listens now. She cannot do otherwise, for the powerful voice of the preacher rings out clear, distinct, and

impressive. His eloquence enchains every heart; in burning words, he assails every soul. Unbelievers, heretics, infidels, and lukewarm Catholics, hang on every sentence; nor disdain the tears which flow, while he tells of the dolours of Mary. Almost fainting, Helen leaned forward, and shaded her face; there was a pent-up agony in her heart, her brain ached, and the throbbing of her pulses almost suffocated her; and when the preacher ceased, she leaned back with a sigh of relief. But it was not over yet. The organ in deep-toned thunders, and notes of liquid music, wailed forth the dolorous harmony of *Stabat Mater*, while voices of surpassing sweetness sung the words.

"I am ill, Walter—take me home," gasped Helen. "I am overcome by the heat and crowd."

"We must wait a little, Helen. The throng is so great that we cannot move. Dry your face, and let me fan you. Every body is crying, I believe—don't let that trouble you. See, Helle, even I have dropped a tear in memory of those stupendous sorrows," said Walter Jerrold, half playfully, and half in earnest.

Then Helen leaned her face on her hands, while torrents of tears dripped over the diamonds and rubies that decked her fingers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

REPENTANCE.

May was sitting in her neat little parlor, knitting and singing, when there came a curt, sharp rap on the door.

"Come in," she said, looking up; and Mr. Fielding walked in, heated and flurried. "I am very glad to see you, sir. Give me your hat, and let me fetch you a drink of cool water."

"No, ma'am; I am not in a sufficiently pleasant mood with you to accept your hospitalities. I came on legal business," he said, pursing up his mouth, and looking around.

"I am sorry that you are offended with me, sir. What shall I do to obtain your forgiveness?" replied May, with a grave smile.

"Do? What shall you do?" he said, mimicking her. "Do as you always do, and that is just what suits you, ma'am."

"No; I'll do better. I will beg your pardon, and tell you that I am *really* sorry to have grieved so kind a friend. And begging pardons *don't* suit me, Mr. Fielding, for you must know I am very proud."

"No doubt of it. You look proud here—living like a Parisian grisette in a garret, and delving from morning until night for your daily bread," he said, testily.

"Dear sir, I do not think I am like a *grisette*, and this is not a garret. Look around, and see if I am not very nice here. What can be purer and cleaner than this matting, which still smells of the sweet groves of Ceylon. See my chairs and sofa—did you ever see such incomparable chintz? the white ground covered with roses and blue-bells! Here are my books, there my flowers, and this—you know *this*, do you not?" said May, leading him up to her little oratory.

"No; I only know that the commandments order us not to worship graven images," he said, gruffly.

"You only say that, sir, for I am well assured that you believe no such monstrous thing. Oh no! no more than we worship the stars, which, in their sparkling beauty, lead our thoughts to God. In these sacred delineations we are reminded of our great examples, Jesus and Mary; they tell us better than books can do—better than our unfaithful hearts can, whenever our eyes rest on them, that for us the Divine Son and Immaculate Mother assumed the sin-offering of the world. These white hyacinths and violets are emblems of her purity and humility; and carved crucifix, the image of incarnate patience and undying love. Oh, dear Mr. Fielding, I should be worse than a pagan, if I did not keep these memorials of Jesus and Mary ever before me; if I did not let a shadow of my poor love for their infinite clemency and love express itself in veneration for those images which remind me continually of them."

"I didn't come here to talk polemics," said Mr. Fielding, turning away abruptly, and sitting down.

"And will you please, most grave sir, to open the business which has procured me the honor of this

visit?" said May, seating herself primly in a chair opposite to him, and folding her little hands together with an air of dignity. Mr. Fielding coughed, to hide a laugh.

"Where is Dr. Burrell?" he inquired.

"Attending to his patients, I presume," she replied, while her face flushed up.

"So. When did your ladyship see him last?"

"I am not aware that it concerns you especially to know," she said, confused.

"Yes it does. I have a right to know every thing about you *per fas et nefas*. Any one who will burn up a *will*, which would have secured to her a half million in funds and real estate, or, in case she did not burn the will, won't consent to set one aside, which the testator declared on his death-bed was null and void; who refused to come and keep house for a childless old man, who would have treated her in every respect as an honored guest; who flew off like a fussy little wren, when her affluent cousin offered to provide for her; and who, last of all, rejects one of nature's noblemen—the best match in the city—the deuce knows for what; *I consider non compos mentis*, and quite unable to take care of herself."

May's countenance was a study while Mr. Fielding poured out this vial of wrath on her head. Smiles, and tears, and blushes flitted in bright tides over it, making it very radiant and beautiful; but when he summed up the evidence, and the true cause of his ire burst on her, she laughed outright, with such a clear, merry peal, that Mr. Fielding was obliged to yield to its influence.

"You are an incorrigible little wretch, May! But tell me, soberly, *why* you rejected Dr. Burrell?"

"Simply, sir, because I have not the remotest idea of marrying; and if I had, I do not think I should find those sympathies, affinities, and qualities in Dr. Burrell which would secure my happiness."

"Whew! whew!" exclaimed Mr. Fielding, waving his hat around his head; "*Ne quid nimis!*"

"Don't abuse me, sir, in an unknown tongue," said May, seriously.

"Child, do you expect to find so much excellence in one character on earth, as you desire?" said the old lawyer, putting his hat down.

"I fear not, sir: but until I do, I shall remain single."

"Well, you deserve to. If any one ever deserved the fate of an old maid, *you do*. But I want you to understand one thing. I have not given up my point about that will. According to your express commands, I have made no movement in the affair, but *nem. con.* I shall present the case at the present term of the Orphan's Court as a fraud. I have waited long enough for your prayers and novenas, or whatever it is you call them. It is very clear to me that the powers on high do not intend to trouble themselves about courts and questions of equity, and all that."

"You won't dare to do so yet, sir. I shall protest against it so far as I am concerned. *I have faith in prayer*, and shall wait," exclaimed May. "It is because every thing is draped in materialism that we do not receive more aid from the heavenly powers."

The door opened suddenly, and Walter Jerrold came in, looking pale and haggard. He grasped May's hand, and bowed to Mr. Fielding, who, muttering and angry, made his exit.

"What is the matter, Mr. Jerrold?" inquired May, kindly.

"Helen seems ill, and I have brought the carriage for you, May. She asks continually for you, and fears you will not come."

"I will go with you instantly," she said, and ran into her dressing closet to put on her hat and scarf. "What ails Helen?"

"That is more than I can tell you. She has feverish nights, and is silent and depressed. We made up a party last week to go to the cathedral, during the 'Mission,' to hear a celebrated preacher. Helen went very unwillingly, and since then she has been moping and starting, and altogether in a strange mood, for one who *ought* to be happy," replied Mr. Jerrold, with a gloomy air. By this time they had got down stairs, and May was seated in the splendid carriage, on her way to Upperton-square.

"Poor Helen! I hope it may be in my power to save her. What does her physician say?"

"That is the most singular part of the thing. She positively refuses to see one. Indeed, May, to be frank with you, I fear there is something dreadful preying on Helen's mind. She sees no company; and

although she had prepared to go to Newport with my mother, she declined going: in fact, it's all a mist, and I am puzzled to death to find out the end of it."

"Mr. Jerrold," said straightforward May, "these are all the signs of a troubled conscience. Did you know that Helen was once a Catholic, and in virtually abandoning her religion, she is only suffering the pangs of a soul which cannot be at rest in its apostasy?"

"Do you really believe this, May?" he asked, eagerly.

"I really do. Religion is a *vital principle*. It cannot be torn from the soul without inflicting the most incurable wounds," she replied, while her eyes filled up with tears; "and these wounds give birth to an anguish, which is the prelude of eternal woe!"

"*Why* did she do it, May? *I* did not require it. It is true I was better pleased to have her a Protestant, but I thought she was exercising her own free will in the matter. Do you know it would grieve me sincerely if I thought I had influenced her? It would not a month ago, but now—hang it all!" said Mr. Jerrold, taking off his hat, and running his fingers through his hair.

"And why *now*, and not *then*?" inquired May, with interest.

"Why, you see, May, I was so delighted with the eloquence of the preacher the night we went to the 'Mission,' that I stepped in several times afterwards, and was considerably enlightened on some points; in fact, a great deal of prejudice and ignorance were removed by the clear, close, cogent arguments I heard. It would be a terrible thing, May—a devilish thing, to be guilty of *soul-murder*!"

"Terrible indeed. I cannot believe now that you would on any account oppose Helen in the practice of her faith?"

"No, unless it makes her gloomy and moping. But here we are, do you run up to her room. I will drive down to the post-office, and be back in a quarter of an hour," said Mr. Jerrold, handing May out, and opening the hall-door for her.

May ran through the gorgeous hall, and up the marble staircase, with its statues and vases; but so intent was she on her errand of charity that she noticed nothing of the rich splendors around her. She encountered Elise at the head of the staircase.

"*Où allez-vous, mademoiselle?*" she said, with an elegant courtesy.

"I am Mrs. Jerrold's cousin, and have come to see her. Show me her room," said May, with an air of dignity.

"*Je vous demande pardon. Madame Jerrold est un peu indisposée. Entrez!*" said Elise, throwing open Helen's door, without however, making the least noise. And there, amidst her almost oriental luxuries, she reclined; her heaped-up silken cushions—her *ormolu* tables—her Eastern vases, filled with spices and rose-leaves, until the air was heavy with fragrance—her rich and grotesque furniture—her rose-colored draperies, through which the light flowed in softly and radiantly—her jewels—her costly attire; amidst it all she reclined—faded, conscience-stricken, and trembling. There was a wild, feverish light in her eyes, and her white lips quivered incessantly.

"Helen—dear Helen!" said May, holding out her hands.

"*'If you are sick, or sorrowful, or repentant, send for me.'* You said this to me some time ago, May. The promise is claimed," she said, feebly.

"And I am here, dear Helen. How can I aid you?"

"First go and close that door. I have a most inconveniently zealous French waiting-maid, who pretends not to understand English, that she may gather as much information about one's private affairs as possible."

"I encountered her on the stairs," said May, closing the door carefully.

"Now, lay off your things, little woman. Sit here where I can see you, and tell me if you are not dazzled by all this splendor, and if you do not think I ought to be the happiest woman on earth?"

"No, dear Helen; it is very rich and beautiful, but it does not dazzle me. And so far from thinking you ought to be the happiest woman on earth, I think you ought to be the most miserable, until contrition and repentance lead you back, humble and weeping, to the sacraments you have deserted," said May, bravely.

"Just the same ridiculous little thing!" said Helen, with a faint smile. "But, May, suppose even that I *felt* those dispositions, do you know what it would cost me to practice them?"

"A few worldly pleasures, perhaps, which are so fleeting that they are not worth a thought—a few vain triumphs, full of envy—heart-burnings and aspirations, which, while they waste the energies of an immortal soul, rise no higher than your head, and fall like black, misshapen lava at your feet."

"Think you this is all, May Brooke? If it were, I could fling them from me as I do these leaves," said Helen, tearing to pieces a rich japonica, which she snatched from a vase near her, and scattering the soft, pure petals around her. "No, May, these would be trifles. I should have to tear up my heart with a burning ploughshare—put it under foot to be spurned and crushed! The storm it would raise would rage so wildly that I should become like a piece of drift-wood, at the mercy of wind and waves."

"If your eternal interests are at stake, let the burning ploughshare go over it, Helen, for it is better to suffer here than where the fire of wrath is everlasting; but, indeed, dear Helen, all this sounds exaggerated and impassioned to me! These obstacles which you dread must be temptations to deter you from the holiest duties. If you anticipate any difficulties from Mr. Jerrold's opposition, make your heart easy. He is quite miserable about you, and declares that he has not the least objection to you practising your Faith."

"Did he say that, May?"

"He did, indeed. I suggested that your happiness might be involved in these momentous questions, when he expressed not only his willingness, but his anxiety for you to do whatever your conscience demanded."

"Oh, May! Oh, little woman! simple—good soul!" cried Helen, bursting into tears. "I cannot tell you *all*. You do not understand. There is a terrible mystery, which, like an incubus, is brooding day and night in my soul, and drives back all good angels who would enter. I am its slave, May."

"What is it, Helen?" asked May, while the color faded from her cheeks, and she looked with mingled sorrow and dread on the miserable one.

"Hush! there is Walter's footsteps!" she exclaimed, starting. "Oh, May, I could not bear to lose my husband's affection—to be spurned by him."

"How are you now, Helle? Better, I hope, now that May is with you?" said her husband, coming in. "And ready to pardon me for my insensibility to your happiness?"

"Oh, Walter!" said Helen, covering her face with her hands.

"I had hoped that these clouds would all be dispelled by the time I returned home. May and I were talking about you as we came along, and if she had not succeeded in making you believe that I wish you to be happy your own way, let this be a *gage* between us," said Mr. Jerrold, unfolding a small parcel he held in his hand, and handing her a Catholic prayer-book. It was bound in ivory, with an exquisite miniature painting of "*Ecce Homo*" on one back and "*Mater Dolorosa*" on the other. The paintings were covered with crystals, and set with a rim of gold and pearls. The edges and clasps were of the same exquisite finish. "If you will only promise to be happy, dear Helen, I will buy a pew in the cathedral for you, and escort you thither whenever you wish to go."

"Dear Walter, why bring me so costly a gift?" said Helen, looking at the sorrowful and sacred faces on the covers of the book, with a shudder. "Indeed, I am not worthy of such tender and restless affection."

"Look up, Helen—look up, my love! I am prouder of you this day than any king could be of his crown, but if religion is going to make you abject and tame, and mistrustful, I will have none of it," said the worldly man, in an impatient tone.

"Religion gives birth to nothing gloomy. Even in her penitential tears, there are rainbows," cried May, "She is the mother of all that is lovely, cheerful, amiable, and perfect. Even our tribulations must be borne with joy, because the divine hope which sanctifies them leads the soul up to God its Father."

"That seems right—it sounds right. I know positively nothing about it, and wish I did. If I could only get Helen out once more, I should be the happiest fellow on earth," said Mr. Jerrold, with a sad and puzzled expression on his fine face. "I suspected all along that perhaps some religious crank had got into Helle's head, from the circumstances of her allowing no picture but that *Mater Dolorosa* to come into her room. It was a queer fancy in one so devoted to paintings as she is. I have been wishing ever since she got it to buy a *pendant* for it. I found a splendid '*Niobe in Tears*'—paid an exorbitant price for it—brought it home, thinking Helen would be charmed, but she banished it to the library. Then I

purchased a 'Hecate'—a wonderfully beautiful thing, but that was also condemned, and sent into banishment. Was it not so Helen?"

"Dear Walter—dear May!" said Helen, lifting her white face up from the pillows, "the struggle is over. I must now, or never, yield to these impulses and warnings. Oh, Mother—oh, Mother!" she exclaimed, turning a look of agony towards the picture; "aid me in this mortal struggle! I can bear this no longer—this mystery and burden—this mantle of hypocrisy must be torn off, if it costs me your love, Walter, and my life! *I must be free*. I thought I was strong; I thought I could walk steadily along the way I have hewn out, but I have been haunted by a remorse which is inexorable, and that—that sacred, sorrowful face over which my sins forced so many bitter torrents. It has never left me day or night. In my revels and worldliness—in my dreams—in my solitude, it has followed me. I believe if my heart were opened, it would be found graven there," she gasped out.

"Oh, dear Helen, respond at once to that tender love which has so patiently pursued you. Remember that no one was ever lost who had recourse to her. She has placed herself between you and divine justice, by adopting—taking possession, as it were, of your heart; and uniting her dolours with those of her Divine Son, has given you no rest, until you seek it at the foot of the cross!" broke out May, with ardor. "Oh, Mother of Sorrows! pity this, thy poor child, who flies wounded and weeping to thy bosom."

Helen wept convulsively. A dark cloud had gathered on her husband's face. Her words had fallen like cold drops of lead into his heart. He knew not to what she alluded, and imagined strange and horrible things.

"Helen," he said, at last, "your words have a dark meaning! your language is strange for a wife, who has been so loved and trusted, to use!"

"There is the sting, Walter. I have been loved and trusted without deserving it; and what breaks down my proud nature most of all, is, to think that Heaven, who knows all my guilt, still bears with me," she said, while every feature worked with the agony this trial was causing her.

"You will set me mad, woman! Let me hear what this guilt is, of which you so often accuse yourself. By Heavens! all the wealth of India shall never cloak dishonor! I will tear it away, and throw it—with one who has dared to bring a stain on my name—off, as I would a soiled garment. Do you understand me?" he said, in a fury.

Helen started up, the red blood rushing in crimson tides to her cheeks and bosom, dyeing her arms down to the very tips of her fingers, at the imputation. "It is not *that*, Walter, thank God!" she said, in a firmer voice. "But there is no true repentance without restitution. In a few moments you shall know *all* my sin." She went into her dressing-closet; when she came back, she held a small package in her hand, which she laid on May's knee. "Take it, May—it is yours. I stole it from the closet the night Uncle Stillinghast was dying, while you slept."

"Helen, what is it?" said May, almost overcome, while she took the package up, and looked at it.

"It is the *lost will*, May, which it was supposed you had burnt. *This* is my guilt, Walter," she said, turning to her husband; "this is the barrier which has lifted itself, like a wall of lead, between my soul and heaven. Now spurn me, my husband—despise me, May; then, perhaps, loaded with disgrace, and forsaken and desolate, my Father in heaven may receive me once more."

"Base woman!" exclaimed her husband, turning from her.

"Sir," said May, grasping his hand; "Helen, whatever her faults may have been, is worthy of you now. As to the will, except certain bequests, legacies, and annuities to the poor, over which I have no control, I want none of it. Only promise to deal kindly with her in this her hour of genuine humility and repentance. But, see—she is falling."

"Unworthy, dishonorable Helen, how dare you wed me with this wicked act on your conscience?" said the outraged man, looking coldly down on the pale and prostrate form at his feet. "I will leave her with you, May."

"Where are you going, sir?" said May, kneeling down, and lifting Helen's burning head to her breast.

"To destruction!" he replied, in a low, bitter tone.

"Do not dare leave us, sir," said May, in a commanding tone. "Help me to lift this penitent woman—so deserving now of your tender support—to the bed, and go for a physician and Father Fabian. Bring both immediately, for I believe a brain fever is coming on."

"Would that she had died before! Would that she had died ere my trust and love were so cruelly shaken!" he exclaimed wildly, as he raised her lifeless form from the floor, and laid it on the bed.

"Oh, Walter Jerrold! are you mad? To wish she had died without repentance—without proving that her nature, by rising through grace above the guilt of sin, is worthy of your highest esteem and love? Go, sir, unless you wish your servants to become acquainted with the whole affair, and to-morrow hear it recited at the corners of the streets by every newsboy in the city. I shall have to ring for assistance."

"Give me that will," he said, moodily.

"For what?"

"To place it in Mr. Fielding's hands, and tell him the disgraceful story, lest he afterwards think I have been an accessory to Helen's guilt," he replied.

"No, sir. It is entirely my affair, and I wish no interference. I will arrange it all myself, and be more tender of you and yours than you, in your savage mood, could be," replied May, holding the will firmly to her bosom.

When the physician came, he, after a careful examination, pronounced the case to be a violent attack of brain-fever. Helen was at times in a raving delirium; then she would lie for hours without sense or motion. Sometimes she implored in moving terms her husband's forgiveness; then, when the violence of the paroxysm was passing away, she would whisper, "Lead me, Mother! Lead me through this howling wilderness. Oh, save—save me! I am pursued. Hold me, my Mother—my sorrowful Mother!"

May could only follow implicitly the doctor's directions, and weep and pray. Father Fabian came—heard the story of her repentance, and desire to return to God; then returned to wrestle in earnest prayer at the altar that she—the penitent one—might be restored long enough to be purified and consoled by the Sacraments of the Church. For long weary days and nights her life was despaired of. Her husband, the shadow of his former self, never left her bedside. He had loved her well, with all his worldliness and pride. But now the crisis of the disease came on. Her life hung upon the most attenuated thread. The doctor gave them no hope of a favorable change.

It was past midnight. May, with Father Fabian, who had staid, hoping that a short interval of reason would occur before her agony came on—for they thought she was sinking—knelt, praying and imploring the mercy of heaven for her helpless soul. Mr. Jerrold, unmanned, and filled with bitter anguish, had gone out into the balcony, which overhung the garden, where, bowed down, he wept like a child.

A low moan escaped Helen's white lips, a quivering motion convulsed her limbs. Her long golden hair was thrown back in dishevelled curls from her marble face. She gasped for breath.

"Her agony is coming on!" whispered Father Fabian.

But suddenly there was a calm; the struggle ceased, and like one exhausted, she whispered, "Thanks, oh, my Mother!" and her large eyes, from which the film passed away, closed in a sweet and refreshing slumber.

"She will live," said Father Fabian; "but be silent—shade the light, and let in more air."

May wanted to kneel, and sing the glories of MARY; she would like to have declared to all the earth the power and tenderness of that Immaculate Heart, which pursues with importunity and tears those who fly from her Divine Son. Loving him, she cannot bear that those for whom he suffered should be recreant to their high destiny; but May could only commune with the unseen guardians of her soul, and through them declare her rapture, which ebbed and flowed in sweet numbers, like a life-tide through her soul.

Father Fabian followed Mr. Jerrold out on the balcony, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said, "Let us give thanks to God; your wife will live. Nay, sir, do not go in; the slightest agitation, before the equilibrium of nature is restored, might destroy her. Come with me into another room, and follow the advice which I shall give you, which is to lie down and sleep." Subdued and humble, the proud man was led like a child into another apartment, where, throwing himself on a lounge, exhausted with long and anxious watching, he fell into a profound sleep.

When Helen awoke the next day, she looked around her with a bewildered air—then gradually remembered all; and though a feeling of deep tribulation came over her, she felt a peace within herself that she had never known before. She breathed a prayer to JESUS and MARY for strength and patience in her desolation, for she thought that she was forsaken by all earthly love—but not friendship, because she saw May kneeling a little way off saying her rosary.

"A drop of water, dear May," she said.

May started as the clear, liquid tones of that voice, so long silent, fell upon her ear, and hastened to give her wine-and-water, which the doctor had ordered.

"How kind in you, May, to forgive me so entirely," she said, gently.

"Hush, dearest Helen! Do not speak. We are so anxious for your recovery, that we do not wish to hear the sound of your voice," said May, leaning over to kiss her forehead.

"*We*, May! Who?"

"*We*!" said May, pointing to Jerrold, who at that moment had entered the room, stepping so softly, that he was almost beside her before she saw him. Neither of them spoke; but after a long, earnest look into Helen's eyes, which were now lifted with a clear and unclouded, but humble expression to his, he stooped over and kissed her, while he murmured comforting words of forgiveness, and regret for his harshness.

"No more secrets, Walter," she said, in a calm, low voice.

"No, Helen. Together we will seek the Kingdom of Heaven—that kingdom of which I heard strange truths at the 'Mission.' We will be united from henceforth in soul, body, and estate."

"Come away now," said May, wiping away the fast falling tears; "she must not be agitated."

"And *you*, most determined little woman," said Mr. Jerrold, going away from the bedside, "have left me no rest. You have preached to me in actions of Faith, Hope, and Charity, ever since I first knew you. Doctrinal arguments I should have regarded as mere priestly sophisms if I had never known you—our good genius."

"Oh, Mr. Jerrold," said May, deeply wounded in her humility, "the grace of our powerful God needed no such poor instrument as I. His ways and designs are wonderful, and the operations of his divine mercy past all human comprehension. Give him the glory for evermore!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

Mr. Fielding was alone in his office. Perched on a high stool, with spectacles on his nose, pouring over Blackstone's views on certain questions of equity, sat the lawyer at his desk, with a look of wisdom supernal. The door opened, but it did not disturb him.

"Good morning, Mr. Fielding!" said a small voice, somewhere below him.

"I am engaged!" he growled.

"But I have come on legal business," persisted the voice.

"Who in the world are you—a kobold—or—or—May Brooke! What on earth brought you here?" he exclaimed, pushing back his glasses.

"I have come about that will of my uncle's, sir," said May, demurely.

"Come to your senses at last," said the lawyer, chuckling with triumph.

"I wish to take the most decided measures to set aside my uncle's first will, having in my possession the most decided proof that I did not burn the last one," she said, in her quiet way.

"Proof, eh! I wonder if your proof will stand the test of the law?"

"I should think so. But I can impart nothing more on the subject until you promise me, on your word of honor, to ask me no questions. I will promise you, on the other hand, to tell you all that is necessary on the subject," said May, earnestly.

"Heaven save us, when women begin with law! My dear little foolish child, *I* am not the Law; I am

only its minister, and am bound, under oath, to perform its functions faithfully," said Mr. Fielding, opening his eyes wide with astonishment at May's strange proposition.

"All of which I am perfectly aware; but as your honor, or the honor of the law will not be in the least involved in this affair, I must persevere in my request."

"You'll have your way there's not the slightest doubt—if you can get it. But can't you trust my discretion—my judgment—my—my ahem! friendship for you, *pendente lite*."

"No, sir; I can trust to nothing but a promise such as I require from you; a promise which, if you knew all, you would voluntarily, from the best and most generous impulses of your heart, offer," said May, standing up on a chair, that she might converse more at her ease, by bringing her face to a level with his.

"I will promise this, and no more," he replied, after thinking some minutes. "If, on producing your proof, I find it irrefragable, and can proceed in this matter without carrying it to court, or bringing in additional counsel—that is, if I can manage it all myself, which I doubt, I will be silent. Men—even lawyers, are not apt to die of ungratified curiosity. Will that answer you, ma'am?"

"I think so," said May, after some deliberation.

"Now produce your proof?"

"Here it is, sir. Here is my uncle's will, which has been so long mislaid. I presume this is proof sufficient," said May, spreading out the lost will before him. But such was his surprise, and so great his eagerness to take it to the window to examine it, that he upset his desk, and losing his balance, plunged head foremost after it, and lay amidst the ruins covered with books, ink, and papers.

"Indeed, sir, I hope you are not hurt, and beg of you to excuse me," said May, trying to raise him up, while she laughed until tears ran down her cheeks. "There, sir, sit in the arm-chair, and let me wipe the ink from your face."

"Let the ink be, May. Only tell me how this will has been so unexpectedly recovered, for it is, I am willing to swear on the Holy Evangely, the identical one I drew up the day your uncle died," he said, quite unruffled by the accident, and examining the document with a close scrutinizing look.

"Are you perfectly satisfied?" asked May, gravely.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"Then I can only tell you that it is a case of conscience which I am not at liberty to reveal; indeed, I would rather tear that will into fragments than reveal its history. Heaven has interposed in answer to prayer in this matter; an immortal soul has been led back to God. Justice is satisfied. The widow, the orphan, the destitute will be comforted—"

"And you will be as rich as Croesus!" said Mr. Fielding, with a delighted look.

"Oh, sir! Oh, Mr. Fielding, what shall I do?" exclaimed May, bursting into a fit of crying.

"What is the matter? What in the world are you crying about?"

"I don't want to be rich, sir; indeed, I never thought of myself. Oh, dear! I shall be so trammelled, so tempted with all this. I don't want it, sir."

"You are a fool. What do you want, boy?" said Mr. Fielding angrily to a boy, who was standing at the door, laughing immoderately, though in a suppressed manner.

"I have a note from Father Fabian, sir," said the urchin, who gave him the note, and rushed out of the office, while his laughter, unsuppressed, made the street echo with its mirthful sound.

Mr. Fielding tore open the note, and read:—

"DEAR SIR: I find that it will be impossible for me to see you, as I wished to do, to-day. Ere this you have been informed, no doubt, by May Brooke of the recovery of the lost will. I can only say, with the permission of the penitent, who, through the fear of the Judgment of Almighty God, and a sincere desire for salvation, restored it; that it is the same which you drew up the day Mr. Stillinghast was taken ill; which declaration has been made to me under an oath of the most solemn character. You may, therefore, feel quite safe in making such business arrangements in connection with it as your discretion may suggest.

"Very sincerely yours,

"STEPHEN FABIAN."

"Of course," said the lawyer, looking hurt, "it must be a most delicate case where such secrecy is observed. But one cannot control his suspicions."

Just then Mr. Jerrold came in. He looked so little like a man that was going to lose the bulk of a princely fortune, that Mr. Fielding was amazed—so amazed, that he could not imagine the cause of Mr. Jerrold's laughter, who, although highly diverted at the grave lawyer's blackened visage, endeavored in the most polite manner to suppress it.

"He doesn't know the will is found," thought Mr. Fielding.

"I have called, Mr. Fielding, to say that I am ready to give an account of the stewardship of Mr. Stillinghast's property, which I have managed for the last nine months. My wife and myself are perfectly satisfied that the will now in your hand is genuine, and are too happy to see every thing restored to its equilibrium, to wish an hour's delay in resigning all right and title to every thing except what is legally and honestly ours."

"Give me your hand, Mr. Jerrold. I honor your sentiments, and the prompt and honorable manner with which you meet this emergency," said honest Mr. Fielding. "Take May home, and comfort her between you all, for the poor child is breaking her heart because she is rich."

And so it was settled. After receiving with true humility the Sacraments of the Church, Helen, so altered and changed in all her views of life and eternity, accompanied her husband to Europe. They spent the winter in Rome, where, among other converts, who made their abjuration of error and first communion at the "*Gesu*," was an American gentleman named Jerrold. We may easily imagine who this Jerrold was.

As to May, with the advice of Father Fabian and Mr. Fielding to aid her in the distribution of her wealth, she became gradually reconciled to the idea of being rich, because it afforded her an unfailing source of happiness in the reflection that she could now, in an extended view, become the benefactor of her kind. And from that day to this she has been the busiest—the most untiring—the most loving friend of the poor and afflicted. Decorating the sanctuary—visiting the widow and orphan—relieving distresses, not only by alms, but by words of cheer—raising up the fallen, and soothing the broken-hearted, was the business of her life; a business sweetened by such ample consolations, that she sometimes dreaded lest she should seek more her own comfort than the kingdom of heaven. And then she often paused, and wondered and feared, because no wild torrents swept across her way, and no ruggedness wounded her feet in life's pathway. But she need not. The love of God—a perfect charity, smoothed and brightened all. Where others would have made gloom, she made sunshine; where others found the waters of life bitter, she sweetened them by her perfect union with the divine will.

And better than all, her practical works of charity were continually adding members to the Church of Christ. But we must bid her adieu. She is growing old, but her step is light, and her cheeks still tinted with the hue of health; and, perchance, in some future sketch of life, we may meet her again in her ceaseless round of charity. Helen was one of her consolations. A truly Christian wife and mother; though timid and humble in her spiritual life, her unobtrusive piety, amidst temptation and worldly associations, made her an example and edification to all who knew her. Mr. Fielding, always devoted to May, and admiring the indomitable and cheerful energy of her character, was at last persuaded that, as there is but one God, so there was but ONE FAITH, and ONE BAPTISM, the fruits of which he sought with great humility and steadfastness. We regret to add, that the benevolent and warm-hearted Mrs. Tabb was so profuse in her charitable belief of the right of all to be saved, that she easily fell in with the New Light of the day—Spiritualism; and got her head so filled with "circles," and "progression" and "manifestations," that not recognizing the demoniac origin of it all, she became hopelessly insane. Mrs. Jerrold, enraged at the loss of Mr. Stillinghast's fortune, and the conversion of her son and Helen, retired to the "Cedars," where between "whist" and opium she drags out a lengthened and miserable existence—refusing all spiritual aid, and denouncing May in no measured terms, as the cause and prime mover of all her reverses. We should like to have told all this in our own way, but our limits, already transgressed, warn us to silence, while the night-lamp, burning low in its socket, and the watch ticking faintly, like the last pulses of the dying, tell us, in emphatic language, that the "*good-night*" hour has come.

THE END.

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