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WE TWO

By Edna Lyall

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CHAPTER I. Brian Falls in Love

Still humanity grows dearer,
Being learned the more. Jean Ingelow.

There are three things in this world which deserve no
quarter—Hypocrisy, Pharisaism, and Tyranny. F. Robertson

People who have been brought up in the country, or in small places where every neighbor is known by sight, are apt to think that life in a large town must lack many of the interests which they have learned to find in their more limited communities. In a somewhat bewildered way, they gaze at the shifting crowd of strange faces, and wonder whether it would be possible to feel completely at home where all the surroundings of life seem ever changing and unfamiliar.

But those who have lived long in one quarter of London, or of any other large town, know that there are in reality almost as many links between the actors of the town life-drama as between those of the country life-drama.

Silent recognitions pass between passengers who meet day after day in the same morning or evening train, on the way to or from work; the faces of omnibus conductors grow familiar; we learn to know perfectly well on what day of the week and at what hour the well-known organ-grinder will make his appearance, and in what street we shall meet the city clerk or the care-worn little daily governess on their way to office or school. It so happened that Brian Osmond, a young doctor who had not been very long settled in the Bloomsbury regions, had an engagement which took him every afternoon down Gower Street, and here many faces had grown familiar to him. He invariably met the same sallow-faced postman, the same nasal-voiced milkman, the same pompous-looking man with the bushy whiskers and the shiny black bag, on his way home from the city. But the only passenger in whom he took any interest was a certain bright-faced little girl whom he generally met just before the Montague Place crossing. He always called her his “little girl,” though she was by no means little in the ordinary acceptation of the word, being at least sixteen, and rather tall for her years. But there was a sort of freshness and naivete and youthfulness about her which made him use that adjective. She usually carried a pile of books in a strap, so he conjectured that she must be coming from school, and, ever since he had first seen her, she had worn the same rough blue serge dress, and the same quaint little fur hat. In other details, however, he could never tell in the least how he should find her. She seemed to have a mood for every day. Sometimes she would be in a great hurry and would almost run past him; sometimes she would saunter along in the most unconventional way, glancing from time to time at a book or a paper; sometimes her eager face would look absolutely bewitching in its brightness; sometimes scarcely less bewitching in a consuming anxiety which seemed unnatural in one so young.

One rainy afternoon in November, Brian was as usual making his way down Gower Street, his umbrella held low to shelter him from the driving rain which seemed to come in all directions. The milkman's shrill voice was still far in the distance, the man of letters was still at work upon knockers some way off, it was not yet time for his little girl to make her appearance, and he was not even thinking of her, when suddenly his umbrella was nearly knocked out of his hand by coming violently into collision with another umbrella. Brought thus to a sudden stand, he looked to see who it was who had charged him with such violence, and found himself face to face with his unknown friend. He had never been quite so close to her before. Her quaint face had always fascinated him, but on nearer view he thought it the loveliest face he had ever seen—it took his heart by storm.

It was framed in soft, silky masses of dusky auburn hair which hung over the broad, white forehead, but at the back was scarcely longer than a boy's. The features, though not regular, were delicate and piquant; the usual faint rose-flush on the cheeks deepened now to carnation, perhaps because of the slight contretemps, perhaps because of some deeper emotion—Brian fancied the latter, for the clear, golden-brown eyes that were lifted to his seemed bright either with indignation or with unshed tears. Today it was clear that the mood was not a happy one.

“I am very sorry,” she said, looking up at him, and speaking in a low, musical voice, but with the unembarrassed frankness of a child. “I really wasn't thinking or looking; it was very careless of me.”

Brian of course took all the blame to himself, and apologized profusely; but though he would have given much to detain her, if only a moment, she gave him no opportunity, but with a slight inclination passed rapidly on. He stood quite still, watching her till she was out of sight, aware of a sudden change in his life. He was a busy hard-working man, not at all given to dreams, and it was no dream that he was in now. He knew perfectly well that he had met his ideal, had spoken to her and she to him; that somehow in a single moment a new world had opened out to him. He had fallen in love.

The trifling occurrence had made no great impression on the “little girl” herself. She was rather vexed with herself for the carelessness, but a much deeper trouble was filling her heart. She soon forgot the passing interruption and the brown-bearded man with the pleasant gray eyes who had apologized for what was quite her fault. Something had gone wrong that day, as Brian had surmised; the eyes grew brighter, the carnation flush deepened as she hurried along, the delicate lips closed with a curiously hard expression, the hands were clasped with unnecessary tightness round the umbrella.

She passed up Guilford Square, but did not turn into any of the old decayed houses; her home was far less imposing. At the corner of the square there is a narrow opening which leads into a sort of blind alley paved with grim flagstones. Here, facing a high blank wall, are four or five very dreary houses. She entered one of these, put down her wet umbrella in the shabby little hall, and opened the door of a barely furnished room, the walls of which were, however, lined with books. Beside the fire was the one really comfortable piece of furniture in the room, an Ikeley couch, and upon it lay a very wan-looking invalid, who glanced up with a smile of welcome. “Why, Erica, you are home early today. How is that?”

“Oh, I don't know,” said Erica, tossing down her books in a way which showed her mother that she was troubled about something. “I suppose I tore along at a good rate, and there was no temptation to stay at the High School.”

“Come and tell me about it,” said the mother, gently, “what has gone wrong, little one?”

“Everything!” exclaimed Erica, vehemently. “Everything always does go wrong with us and always will, I suppose. I wish you had never sent me to school, mother; I wish I need never see the place again!”

“But till today you enjoyed it so much.”

“Yes, the classes and the being with Gertrude. But that will never be the same again. It's just this, mother, I'm never to speak to Gertrude again—to have noting more to do with her.”

“Who said so? And Why?”

“Why? Because I'm myself,” said Erica, with a bitter little laugh. “How I can help it, nobody seems to think. But Gertrude's father has come back from Africa, and was horrified to learn that we were friends, made her promise never to speak to me again, and made her write this note about it. Look!” and she took a crumpled envelope from her pocket.

The mother read the note in silence, and an expression of pain came over her face. Erica, who was very impetuous, snatched it away from her when she saw that look of sadness.

“Don't read the horrid thing!” she exclaimed, crushing it up in her hand. “There, we will burn it!” and she threw it into the fire with a vehemence which somehow relieved her.

“You shouldn't have done that,” said her mother. “Your father will be sure to want to see it.”

“No, no, no,” cried Erica, passionately. “He must not know; you must not tell him, mother.”

“Dear child, have you not learned that it is impossible to keep anything from him? He will find out directly that something is wrong.”

“It will grieve him so; he must not hear it,” said Erica. “He cares so much for what hurts us. Oh! Why are people so hard and cruel? Why do they treat us like lepers? It isn't all because of losing Gertrude; I could bear that if there were some real reason—if she went away or died. But there's no reason! It's all prejudice and bigotry and injustice; it's that which makes it sting so.”

Erica was not at all given to tears, but there was now a sort of choking in her throat, and a sort of dimness in her eyes which made her rather hurriedly settle down on the floor in her own particular nook beside her mother's couch, where her face could not be seen. There was a silence. Presently the mother spoke, stroking back the wavy, auburn hair with her thin white hand.

“For a long time I have dreaded this for you, Erica. I was afraid you didn't realize the sort of position the world will give you. Till lately you have seen scarcely any but our own people, but it can hardly be, darling, that you can go on much longer without coming into contact with others; and then, more and more, you must realize that you are cut off from much that other girls may enjoy.”

“Why?” questioned Erica. “Why can't they be friendly? Why must they cut us off from everything?”

“It does seem unjust; but you must remember that we belong to an unpopular minority.”

“But if I belonged to the larger party, I would at least be just to the smaller,” said Erica. “How can they expect us to think their system beautiful when the very first thing they show us is hatred and meanness. Oh! If I belonged to the other side I would show them how different it might be.”

“I believe you would,” said the mother, smiling a little at the idea, and at the vehemence of the speaker. “But, as it is, Erica, I am afraid you must school yourself to endure. After all, I fancy you will be glad to share so soon in your father's vexations.”

“Yes,” said Erica, pushing back the hair from her forehead, and giving herself a kind of mental shaking. “I am glad of that. After all, they can't spoil the best part of our lives! I shall go into the garden to get rid of my bad temper; it doesn't rain now.”

She struggled to her feet, picked up the little fur hat which had fallen off, kissed her mother, and went out of the room.

The “garden” was Erica's favorite resort, her own particular property. It was about fifteen feet square, and no one but a Londoner would have bestowed on it so dignified a name. But Erica, who was of an inventive turn, had contrived to make the most of the little patch of ground, had induced ivy to grow on the ugly brick walls, and with infinite care and satisfaction had nursed a few flowers and shrubs into tolerably healthy though smutty life. In one of the corners, Tom Craigie, her favorite cousin, had put up a rough wooden bench for her, and here she read and dreamed as contentedly as if her “garden ground” had been fairy-land. Here, too, she invariably came when anything had gone wrong, when the endless troubles about money which had weighed upon her all her life became a little less bearable than usual, or when some act of discourtesy or harshness to her father had roused in her a tingling, burning sense of indignation.

Erica was not one of those people who take life easily; things went very deeply with her. In spite of her brightness and vivacity, in spite of her readiness to see the ludicrous in everything, and her singularly quick perceptions, she was also very keenly alive to other and graver impressions.

Her anger had passed, but still, as she paced round and round her small domain, her heart was very heavy. Life seemed perplexing to her; but her mother had somehow struck the right key-note when she had spoken of the vexations which might be shared. There was something inspiriting in that thought, certainly, for Erica worshipped her father. By degrees the trouble and indignation died away, and a very sweet look stole over the grave little face.

A smutty sparrow came and peered down at her from the ivy-colored wall, and chirped and twittered in quite a friendly way, perhaps recognizing the scatter of its daily bread.

“After all,” though Erica, “with ourselves and the animals, we might let the rest of the world treat us as they please. I am glad they can't turn the animals and birds against us! That would be worse than anything.”

Then, suddenly turning from the abstract to the practical, she took out of her pocket a shabby little sealskin purse.

“Still sixpence of my prize money over,” she remarked to herself; “I'll go and buy some scones for tea. Father likes them.”

Erica's father was a Scotchman, and, though so-called scones were to be had at most shops, there was only one place where she could buy scones which she considered worthy the name, and that was at the Scotch baker's in Southampton Row. She hurried along the wet pavements, glad that the rain was over, for as soon as her purchase was completed she made up her mind to indulge for a few minutes in what had lately become a very frequent treat, namely a pause before a certain tempting store of second-hand books. She had never had money enough to buy anything except the necessary school books, and, being a great lover of poetry, she always seized with avidity on anything that was to be found outside the book shop. Sometimes she would carry away a verse of Swinburne, which would ring in her ears for days and days; sometimes she would read as much as two or three pages of Shelley. No one had every interrupted her, and a certain sense of impropriety and daring was rather stimulating than otherwise. It always brought to her mind a saying in the proverbs of Solomon, “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”

For three successive days she had found to her great delight Longfellow's “Hiawatha.” The strange meter,

the musical Indian names, the delightfully described animals, all served to make the poem wonderfully fascinating to her. She thought a page or two of “Hiawatha” would greatly sweeten her somewhat bitter world this afternoon, and with her bag of scones in one hand and the book in the other she read on happily, quite unconscious that three pair of eyes were watching her from within the shop.

The wrinkled old man who was the presiding genius of the place had two customers, a tall, gray-bearded clergyman with bright, kindly eyes, and his son, the same Brian Osmond whom Erica had charged with her umbrella in Gower Street.

“An outside customer for you,” remarked Charles Osmond, the clergyman, glancing at the shop keeper. Then to his son, “What a picture she makes!”

Brian looked up hastily from some medical books which he had been turning over.

“Why that's my little Gower Street friend,” he exclaimed, the words being somehow surprised out of him, though he would fain have recalled them the next minute.

“I don't interrupt her,” said the shop owner. “Her father has done a great deal of business with me, and the little lady has a fancy for poetry, and don't get much of it in her life, I'll be bound.”

“Why, who is she?” asked Charles Osmond, who was on very friendly terms with the old book collector.

“She's the daughter of Luke Raeburn,” was the reply, “and whatever folks may say, I know that Mr. Raeburn leads a hard enough life.”

Brian turned away from the speakers, a sickening sense of dismay at his heart. His ideal was the daughter of Luke Raeburn! And Luke Raeburn was an atheist leader!

For a few minutes he lost consciousness of time and place, though always seeing in a sort of dark mist Erica's lovely face bending over her book. The shop keeper's casual remark had been a fearful blow to him; yet, as he came to himself again, his heart went out more and more to the beautiful girl who had been brought up in what seemed to him so barren a creed. His dream of love, which had been bright enough only an hour before, was suddenly shadowed by an unthought of pain, but presently began to shine with a new and altogether different luster. He began to hear again what was passing between his father and the shop keeper.

“There's a sight more good in him than folks think. However wrong his views, he believes them right, and is ready to suffer for 'em, too. Bless me, that's odd, to be sure! There is Mr. Raeburn, on the other side of the Row! Fine-looking man, isn't he?”

Brian, looking up eagerly, fancied he must be mistaken for the only passenger in sight was a very tall man of remarkably benign aspect, middle-aged, yet venerable—or perhaps better described by the word “devotional-looking,” pervaded too by a certain majesty of calmness which seemed scarcely suited to his character of public agitator. The clean-shaven and somewhat rugged face was unmistakably that of a Scotchman, the thick waves of tawny hair overshadowing the wide brow, and the clear golden-brown eyes showed Brian at once that this could be no other than the father of his ideal.

In the meantime, Raeburn, having caught sight of his daughter, slowly crossed the road, and coming noiselessly up to her, suddenly took hold of the book she was reading, and with laughter in his eyes, said, in a peremptory voice:

“Five shillings to pay, if you please, miss!”

Erica, who had been absorbed in the poem, looked up in dismay; then seeing who had spoken, she began to laugh.

“What a horrible fright you gave me, father! But do look at this, it's the loveliest thing in the world. I've just got to the 'very strong man Kwasind.' I think he's a little like you!”

Raeburn, though no very great lover of poetry, took the book and read a few lines.

“Long they lived in peace together, Spake with naked hearts together, Pondering much and much contriving How the tribes of men might prosper.”

“Good! That will do very well for you and me, little one. I'm ready to be your Kwasind. What's the price of the thing? Four and sixpence! Too much for a luxury. It must wait till our ship comes in.”

He put down the book, and they moved on together, but had not gone many paces before they were stopped by a most miserable-looking beggar child. Brian standing now outside the shop, saw and heard all that passed.

Raeburn was evidently investigating the case, Erica, a little impatient of the interruption, was remonstrating.

“I thought you never gave to beggars, and I am sure that harrowing story is made up.”

“Very likely,” replied the father, “but the hunger is real, and I know well enough what hunger is. What have you here?” he added, indicating the paper bag which Erica held.

“Scones,” she said, unwillingly.

“That will do,” he said, taking them from her and giving them to the child. “He is too young to be anything but the victim of another's laziness. There! Sit down and eat them while you can.”

The child sat down on the doorstep with the bag of scones clasped in both hands, but he continued to gaze after his benefactor till he had passed out of sight, and there was a strange look of surprise and gratification in his eyes. That was a man who knew! Many people had, after hard begging, thrown him pence, many had warned him off harshly, but this man had looked straight into his eyes, and had at once stopped and questioned him, had singled out the one true statement from a mass of lies, and had given him—not a stale loaf with the top cut off, a suspicious sort of charity which always angered the waif—but his own food, bought for his own consumption. Most wonderful of all, too, this man knew what it was to be hungry, and had even the insight and shrewdness to be aware that the waif's best chance of eating the scones at all was to eat them then and there. For the first time a feeling of reverence and admiration was kindled in the child's heart; he would have done a great deal for his unknown friend.

Raeburn and Erica had meanwhile walked on in the direction of Guilford Square.

“I had bought them for you,” said Erica, reproachfully.

“And I ruthlessly gave them away,” said Raeburn, smiling. “That was hard lines; I though they were only household stock. But after all it comes to the same thing in the end, or better. You have given them to me by giving them to the child. Never mind, 'Little son Eric!'”

This was his pet name for her, and it meant a great deal to them. She was his only child, and it had at first been a great disappointment to every one that she was not a boy. But Raeburn had long ago ceased to regret this, and the nickname referred more to Erica's capability of being both son and daughter to him, able to help him in his work and at the same time to brighten his home. Erica was very proud of her name, for she had been called after her father's greatest friend, Eric Haeberlein, a celebrated republican, who once during a long exile had taken refuge in London. His views were in some respects more extreme than Raeburn's, but in private life he was the gentlest and most fascinating of men, and had quite won the heart of his little namesake.

As Mrs. Raeburn had surmised, Erica's father had at once seen that something had gone wrong that day. The all-observing eyes, which had noticed the hungry look in the beggar child's face, noticed at once that his own child had been troubled.

“Something has vexed you,” he said. “What is the matter, Erica?”

“I had rather not tell you, father, it isn't anything much,” said Erica, casting down her eyes as if all at once the paving stones had become absorbingly interesting.

“I fancy I know already,” said Raeburn. “It is about your friend at the High School, is it not. I thought so. This afternoon I had a letter from her father.”

“What does he say? May I see it?” asked Erica.

“I tore it up,” said Raeburn, “I thought you would ask to see it, and the thing was really so abominably insolent that I didn't want you to. How did you hear about it?”

“Gertrude wrote me a note,” said Erica.

“At her father's dictation, no doubt,” said Raeburn; “I should know his style directly, let me see it.”

“I thought it was a pity to vex you, so I burned it,” said Erica.

Then, unable to help being amused at their efforts to save each other, they both laughed, though the subject was rather a sore one.

“It is the old story,” said Raeburn. “Life only, as Pope Innocent III benevolently remarked, 'is to be left to the children of misbelievers, and that only as an act of mercy.' You must make up your mind to bear the social stigma, child. Do you see the moral of this?”

“No,” said Erica, with something between a smile and a sigh.

“The moral of it is that you must be content with your own people,” said Raeburn. “There is this one good point about persecution—it does draw us all nearer together, really strengthens us in a hundred ways. So, little one, you must forswear school friends, and be content with your 'very strong man Kwasind,' and we will

> *“'Live in peace together Speak with naked hearts together.'*

By the bye, it is rather doubtful if Tom will be able to come to the lecture tonight; do you think you can take notes for me instead?”

This was in reality the most delicate piece of tact and consideration, for it was, of course, Erica's delight and pride to help her father.

CHAPTER II. From Effect to Cause

Only the acrid spirit of the times, Corroded this true
steel. Longfellow.

Not Thine the bigot's partial plea,
Not Thine the zealot's ban;
Thou well canst spare a love of Thee
Which ends in hate of man.
Whittier.

Luke Raeburn was the son of a Scotch clergyman of the Episcopal Church. His history, though familiar to his own followers and to them more powerfully convincing than many arguments against modern Christianity, was not generally known. The orthodox were apt to content themselves with shuddering at the mention of his name; very few troubled themselves to think or inquire how this man had been driven into atheism. Had they done so they might, perhaps, have treated him more considerately, at any rate they must have learned that the much-disliked prophet of atheism was the most disinterested of men, one who had the courage of his opinions, a man of fearless honesty.

Raeburn had lost his mother very early; his father, a well-to-do man, had held for many years a small living in the west of Scotland. He was rather a clever man, but one-sided and bigoted; cold-hearted, too, and caring very little for his children. Of Luke, however, he was, in his peculiar fashion, very proud, for at an early age the boy showed signs of genius. The father was no great worker; though shrewd and clever, he had no ambition, and was quietly content to live out his life in the retired little parsonage where, with no parish to trouble him, and a small and unexacting congregation on Sundays, he could do pretty much as he pleased. But for his son he was ambitious. Ever since his sixteenth year—when, at a public meeting the boy had, to the astonishment of every one, suddenly sprung to his feet and contradicted a false statement made by a great landowner as to the condition of the cottages on his estate—the father had foreseen future triumphs for his

son. For the speech, though unpremeditated, was marvelously clever, and there was a power in it not to be accounted for by a certain ring of indignation; it was the speech of a future orator.

Then, too, Luke had by this time shown signs of religious zeal, a zeal which his father, though far from attempting to copy, could not but admire. His Sunday services over, he relapsed into the comfortable, easy-going life of a country gentleman for the rest of the week; but his son was indefatigable, and, though little more than a boy himself, gathered round him the roughest lads of the village, and by his eloquence, and a certain peculiar personal fascination which he retained all his life, absolutely forced them to listen to him. The father augured great things for him, and invariably prophesied that he would “live to see him a bishop yet.”

It was a settled thing that he should take Holy Orders, and for some time Raeburn was only too happy to carry out his father's plans. In his very first term at Cambridge, however, he began to feel doubts, and, becoming convinced that he could never again accept the doctrines in which he had been educated, he told his father that he must give up all thought of taking Orders.

Now, unfortunately, Mr. Raeburn was the very last man to understand or sympathize with any phase of life through which he had not himself passed. He had never been troubled with religious doubts; skepticism seemed to him monstrous and unnatural. He met the confession, which his son had made in pain and diffidence, with a most deplorable want of tact. In answer to the perplexing questions which were put to him, he merely replied testily that Luke had been overworking himself, and that he had no business to trouble his head with matters which were beyond him, and would fain have dismissed the whole affair at once.

“But,” urged the son, “how is it possible for me to turn my back on these matters when I am preparing to teach them?”

“Nonsense,” replied the father, angrily. “Have not I taught all my life, preached twice a Sunday these thirty years without perplexing myself with your questionings? Be off to your shooting, and your golf, and let me have no more of this morbid fuss.”

No more was said; but Luke Raeburn, with his doubts and questions shut thus into himself, drifted rapidly from skepticism to the most positive form of unbelief. When he next came home for the long vacation, his father was at length awakened to the fact that the son, upon whom all his ambition was set, was hopelessly lost to the Church; and with this consciousness a most bitter sense of disappointment rose in his heart. His pride, the only side of fatherhood which he possessed, was deeply wounded, and his dreams of honorable distinction were laid low. His wrath was great. Luke found the home made almost unbearable to him. His college career was of course at an end, for his father would not hear of providing him with the necessary funds now that he had actually confessed his atheism. He was hardly allowed to speak to his sisters, every request for money to start him in some profession met with a sharp refusal, and matters were becoming so desperate that he would probably have left the place of his own accord before long, had not Mr. Raeburn himself put an end to a state of things which had grown insufferable.

With some lurking hope, perhaps, of convincing his son, he resolved upon trying a course of argument. To do him justice he really tried to prepare himself for it, dragged down volumes of dusty divines, and got up with much pains Paley's “watch” argument. There was some honesty, even perhaps a very little love, in his mistaken endeavors; but he did not recognize that while he himself was unforgiving, unloving, harsh, and self-indulgent, all his arguments for Christianity were of necessity null and void. He argued for the existence of a perfectly loving, good God, all the while treating his son with injustice and tyranny. Of course there could be only one result from a debate between the two. Luke Raeburn with his honesty, his great abilities, his gift of reasoning, above all his thorough earnestness, had the best of it.

To be beaten in argument was naturally the one thing which such a man as Mr. Raeburn could not forgive. He might in time have learned to tolerate a difference of opinion, he would beyond a doubt have forgiven almost any of the failings that he could understand, would have paid his son's college debts without a murmur, would have overlooked anything connected with what he considered the necessary process of “sowing his wild oats.” But that the fellow should presume to think out the greatest problems in the world, should set up his judgment against Paley's, and worst of all should actually and palpably beat HIM in argument—this was an unpardonable offense.

A stormy scene ensued. The father, in ungovernable fury, heaped upon the son every abusive epithet he could think of. Luke Raeburn spoke not a word; he was strong and self-controlled; moreover, he knew that he had had the best of the argument. He was human, however, and his heart was wrung by his father's bitterness. Standing there on that summer day, in the study of the Scotch parsonage, the man's future was sealed. He suffered there the loss of all things, but at the very time there sprung up in him an enthusiasm for the cause of free thought, a passionate, burning zeal for the opinions for which he suffered, which never left him, but served as the great moving impulse of his whole subsequent life.

“I tell you, you are not fit to be in a gentleman's house,” thundered the father. “A rank atheist, a lying infidel! It is against nature that you should call a parsonage your home.”

“It is not particularly home-like,” said the son, bitterly. “I can leave it when you please.”

“Can!” exclaimed the father, in a fury, “you WILL leave it, sir, and this very day too! I disown you from this time. I'll have no atheist for my son! Change your views or leave the house at once.”

Perhaps he expected his son to make some compromise; if so he showed what a very slight knowledge he had of his character. Luke Raeburn had certainly not been prepared for such extreme harshness, but with the pain and grief and indignation there rose in his heart a mighty resoluteness. With a face as hard and rugged as the granite rocks without, he wished his father goodbye, and obeyed his orders.

Then had followed such a struggle with the world as few men would have gone through with. Cut off from all friends and relations by his avowal of atheism, and baffled again and again in seeking to earn his living, he had more than once been on the very brink of starvation. By sheer force of will he had won his way, had risen above adverse circumstances, had fought down obstacles, and conquered opposing powers. Before long he had made fresh friends and gained many followers, for there was an extraordinary magnetism about the man which almost compelled those who were brought into contact with him to reverence him.

It was a curious history. First there had been that time of grievous doubt; then he had been thrown upon the world friendless and penniless, with the beliefs and hopes hitherto most sacred to him dead, and in their place an aching blank. He had suffered much. Treated on all sides with harshness and injustice, it was indeed wonderful that he had not developed into a mere hater, a passionate down-puller. But there was in his character a nobility which would not allow him to rest at this low level. The bitter hostility and injustice which he encountered did indeed warp his mind, and every year of controversy made it more impossible for him to take an unprejudiced view of Christ's teaching; but nevertheless he could not remain a mere destroyer.

In that time of blankness, when he had lost all faith in God, when he had been robbed of friendship and family love, he had seized desperately on the one thing left him—the love of humanity. To him atheism meant not only the assertion—“The word God is a word without meaning, it conveys nothing to my understanding.” He added to this barren confession of an intellectual state a singularly high code of duty. Such a code as could only have emanated from one about whom there lingered what Carlyle has termed a great after-shine of Christianity. He held that the only happiness worth having was that which came to a man while engaged in promoting the general good. That the whole duty of man was to devote himself to the service of others. And he lived his creed.

Like other people, he had his faults, but he was always ready to spend and he spent for what he considered the good of others, while every act of injustice called forth his unsparing rebuke, and every oppressed person or cause was sure to meet with his support at whatever cost to himself. His zeal for what he regarded as the “gospel” of atheism grew and strengthened year by year. He was the untiring advocate of what he considered the truth. Neither illness nor small results, nor loss, could quench his ardor, while opposition invariably stimulated him to fresh efforts. After long years of toil, he had at length attained an influential position in the country, and though crippled by debts incurred in the struggle for freedom of speech, and living in absolute penury, he was one of the most powerful men of the day.

The old bookseller had very truly observed that there was more good in him than people thought, he was in fact a noble character twisted the wrong way by clumsy and mistaken handling.

Brian Osmond was by no means bigoted; he had moreover, known those who were intimate with Raeburn, and consequently had heard enough of the truth about him to disbelieve the gross libels which were constantly being circulated by the unscrupulous among his opponents. Still, as on that November afternoon he watched Raeburn and his daughter down Southampton Row, he was conscious that for the first time he fully regarded the atheist as a fellow-man. The fact was that Raeburn had for long years been the champion of a hated cause; he had braved the full flood of opposition; and like an isolated rock had been the mark for so much of the rage and fury of the elements that people who knew him only by name had really learned to regard him more as a target than as a man. It was he who could hit hardest, who could most effectually baffle and ruin him; while the quieter spirits contented themselves with rarely mentioning his obnoxious name, and endeavoring as far as possible, to ignore his existence. Brian felt that till now he had followed with the multitude to do evil. He had, as far as possible, ignored his existence; had even been rather annoyed when his father had once publicly urged that Raeburn should be treated with as much justice and courtesy and consideration as if he had been a Christian. He had been vexed that his father should suffer on behalf of such a man, had been half inclined to put down the scorn and contempt and anger of the narrow-minded to the atheist's account. The feeling had perhaps been natural, but all was changed now; he only revered his father all the more for having suffered in an unpopular cause. With some eagerness, he went back into the shop to see if he could gather any more particulars from the old bookseller. Charles Osmond had, however, finished his purchases and his conversation, and was ready to go.

“The second house in Guilford Terrace, you say?” he observed, turning at the door. “Thank you. I shall be sure to find it. Good day.” Then turning to his son, he added, “I had no idea we were such near neighbors! Did you hear what he told me? Mr. Raeburn lives in Guilford Terrace.”

“What, that miserable blind alley, do you mean at the other side of the square?”

“Yes, and I am just going round there now, for our friend the 'book-worm' tells me he has heard it rumored that some unscrupulous person who is going to answer Mr. Raeburn this evening, has hired a band of roughs to make a disturbance at the meeting. Fancy how indignant Donovan would be! I only wish he were here to take a word to Mr. Raeburn.”

“Will he not most likely have heard from some other source?” said Brian.

“Possibly, but I shall go round and see. Such abominations ought to be put down, and if by our own side all the better.”

Brian was only too glad that his father should go, and indeed he would probably have wished to take the message himself had not his mind been set upon getting the best edition of Longfellow to be found in all London for his ideal. So at the turning into Guilford Square, the father and son parted.

The bookseller's information had roused in Charles Osmond a keen sense of indignation; he walked on rapidly as soon as he had left his son, and in a very few minutes had reached the gloomy entrance to Guilford Terrace. It was currently reported that Raeburn made fabulous sums by his work, and lived in great luxury; but the real fact was that, whatever his income, few men led so self-denying a life, or voluntarily endured such privations. Charles Osmond could not help wishing that he could bring some of the intolerant with him down that gloomy little alley, to the door of that comfortless lodging house. He rang, and was admitted into the narrow passage, then shown into the private study of the great man. The floor was uncarpeted, the window uncurtained, the room was almost dark; but a red-glow of fire light served to show a large writing table strewn with papers, and walls literally lined with books; also on the hearth-rug a little figure curled up in the most unconventionally comfortable attitude, dividing her attention between making toast and fondling a loud-purring cat.

CHAPTER III. Life From Another Point of View

Toleration an attack on Christianity? What, then, are we to come to this pass, to suppose that nothing can support Christianity but the principles of persecution?... I am persuaded that toleration, so far from being an attack on Christianity, becomes the best and surest support that can possibly be given to it.... Toleration is good for all, or it is good for none... God forbid. I may be mistaken, but I take toleration to be a part of religion. Burke

Erica was, apparently, well used to receiving strangers. She put down the toasting fork, but kept the cat in her arms, as she rose to greet Charles Osmond, and her frank and rather child-like manner fascinated him almost as much as it had fascinated Brian.

“My father will be home in a few minutes,” she said; “I almost wonder you didn't meet him in the square; he has only just gone to send off a telegram. Can you wait? Or will you leave a message?”

“I will wait, if I may,” said Charles Osmond. “Oh, don't trouble about a light. I like this dimness very well, and, please, don't let me interrupt you.”

Erica relinquished a vain search for candle lighters, and took up her former position on the hearth rug with her toasting fork.

“I like the gloaming, too,” she said. “It's almost the only nice thing which is economical! Everything else that one likes specially costs too much! I wonder whether people with money do enjoy all the great treats.”

“Very soon grow blase, I expect,” said Charles Osmond. “The essence of a treat is rarity, you see.”

“I suppose it is. But I think I could enjoy ever so many things for years and years without growing blase,” said Erica.

“Sometimes I like just to fancy what life might be if there were no tiresome Christians, and bigots, and lawsuits.”

Charles Osmond laughed to himself in the dim light; the remark was made with such perfect sincerity, and it evidently had not dawned on the speaker that she could be addressing any but one of her father's followers. Yet the words saddened Him too. He just caught a glimpse through them of life viewed from a directly opposite point.

“Your father has a lawsuit going on now, has he not?” he observed, after a little pause.

“Oh, yes, there is almost always one either looming in the distance or actually going on. I don't think I can ever remember the time when we were quite free. It must feel very funny to have no worries of that kind. I think, if there wasn't always this great load of debt tied round our necks, like a millstone, I should feel almost light enough to fly. And then it IS hard to read in some of those horrid religious papers that father lives an easy-going life. Did you see a dreadful paragraph last week in the 'Church Chronicle?'”

“Yes, I did,” said Charles Osmond, sadly.

“It always has been the same,” said Erica. “Father has a delightful story about an old gentleman who at one of his lectures accused him of being rich and self-indulgent—it was a great many years ago, when I was a baby, and father was nearly killing himself with overwork—and he just got up and gave the people the whole history of his day, and it turned out that he had had nothing to eat. Mustn't the old gentleman have felt delightfully done? I always wonder how he looked when he heard about it, and whether after that he believed that atheists are not necessarily everything that's bad.”

“I hope such days as those are over for Mr. Raeburn,” said Charles Osmond, touched both by the anecdote and by the loving admiration of the speaker.

“I don't know,” said Erica, sadly. “It has been getting steadily worse for the last few years; we have had to give up thing after thing. Before long I shouldn't wonder if these rooms in what father calls 'Persecution alley' grew too expensive for us. But, after all, it is this sort of thing which makes our own people love him so much, don't you think?”

“I have no doubt it is,” said Charles Osmond, thoughtfully.

And then for a minute or two there was silence. Erica, having finished her toasting, stirred the fire into a blaze, and Charles Osmond sat watching the fair, childish face which looked lovelier than ever in the soft glow of the fire light. What would her future be, he wondered. She seemed too delicate and sensitive for the stormy atmosphere in which she lived. Would the hard life embitter her, or would she sink under it? But there was a certain curve of resoluteness about her well-formed chin which was sufficient answer to the second question, while he could not but think that the best safeguard against the danger of bitterness lay in her very evident love and loyalty to her father.

Erica in the meantime sat stroking her cat Friskarina, and wondering a little who her visitor could be. She liked him very much, and could not help responding to the bright kindly eyes which seemed to plead for confidence; though he was such an entire stranger she found herself quite naturally opening out her heart to him.

“I am to take notes at my father's meeting tonight,” she said, breaking the silence, “and perhaps write the account of it afterward, too, and there's such a delightfully funny man coming to speak on the other side.”

“Mr. Randolph, is it not?”

“Yes, a sort of male Mrs. Malaprop. Oh, such fun!” and at the remembrance of some past encounter, Erica's eyes positively danced with laughter. But the next minute she was very grave.

“I came to speak to Mr. Raeburn about this evening,” said Charles Osmond. “Do you know if he has heard of a rumor that this Mr. Randolph has hired a band of roughs to interrupt the meeting?”

Erica made an indignant exclamation.

“Perhaps that was what the telegram was about,” she continued, after a moment's thought. “We found it

here when we came in. Father said nothing, but went out very quickly to answer it. Oh! Now we shall have a dreadful time of it, I suppose, and perhaps he'll get hurt again. I did hope they had given up that sort of thing."

She looked so troubled that Charles Osmond regretted he had said anything, and hastened to assure her that what he had heard was the merest rumor, and very possibly not true.

"I am afraid," she said, "it is too bad not to be true."

It struck Charles Osmond that that was about the saddest little sentence he had ever heard.

Partly wishing to change the subject, party from real interest, he made some remark about a lovely little picture, the only one in the room; its frame was lighted up by the flickering blaze, and even in the imperfect light he could see that the subject was treated in no ordinary way. It was a little bit of the Thames far away from London, with a bank of many-tinted trees on one side, and out beyond a range of low hills, purple in the evening light. In the sky was a rosy sunset glow, melted above into saffron color, and this was reflected in the water, gilding and mellowing the foreground of sedge and water lilies. But what made the picture specially charming was that the artist had really caught the peculiar solemn stillness of evening; merely to look at that quiet, peaceful river brought a feeling of hush and calmness. It seemed a strange picture to find as the sole ornament in the study of a man who had all his life been fighting the world.

Erica brightened up again, and seemed to forget her anxiety when he questioned her as to the artist.

"There is such a nice story about that picture," she said, "I always like to look at it. It was about two years ago, one very cold winter's day, and a woman came with some oil paintings which she was trying to sell for her husband, who was ill; he was rather a good artist, but had been in bad health for a long time, till at last she had really come to hawking about his pictures in this way, because they were in such dreadful distress. Father was very much worried just then, there was a horrid libel case going on, and that morning he was very busy, and he sent the woman away rather sharply, and said he had no time to listen to her. Then presently he was vexed with himself because she really had looked in great trouble, and he thought he had been harsh, and, though he was dreadfully pressed for time, he would go out into the square to see if he couldn't find her again. I went with him, and we had walked all round and had almost given her up, when we caught sight of her coming out of a house on the opposite side. And then it was so nice, father spoke so kindly to her, and found out more about her history, and said that he was too poor to buy her pictures; but she looked dreadfully tired and cold, so he asked her to come in and rest, and she came and sat by the fire, and stayed to dinner with us, and we looked at her pictures, because she seemed so proud of them and liked us to. One of them was that little river scene, which father took a great fancy to, and praised a great deal. She left us her address, and later on, when the libel case was ended, and father had got damages, and so had a little spare money, he sent some to this poor artist, and they were so grateful; though, do you know, I think the dinner pleased them more than the money, and they would insist on sending this picture to father. I'll light the gas, and then you'll see it better."

She twisted a piece of paper into a spill, and put an end to the gloaming. Charles Osmond stood up to get a nearer view of the painting, and Erica, too, drew nearer, and looked at it for a minute in silence.

"Father took me up the Thames once," she said, by and by. "It was so lovely. Some day, when all these persecutions are over, we are going to have a beautiful tour, and see all sorts of places. But I don't know when they will be over. As soon as one bigot—" she broke off suddenly, with a stifled exclamation of dismay.

Charles Osmond, in the dim light, with his long gray beard, had not betrayed his clerical dress; but, glancing round at him now, she saw at once that the stranger to whom she had spoken so unreservedly was by no means one of her father's followers.

"Well!" he said, smiling, half understanding her confusion.

"You are a clergyman!" she almost gasped.

"Yes, why not?"

"I beg your pardon, I never thought—you seemed so much too—"

"Too what?" urged Charles Osmond. Then, as she still hesitated, "Now, you must really let me hear the end of that sentence, or I shall imagine everything dreadful."

"Too nice," murmured Erica, wishing that she could sink through the floor.

But the confession so tickled Charles Osmond that he laughed aloud, and his laughter was so infectious that Erica, in spite of her confusion, could not help joining in it. She had a very keen sense of the ludicrous, and the position was undoubtedly a laughable one; still there were certain appalling recollections of the past conversation which soon made her serious again. She had talked of persecutions to one who was, at any rate, on the side of persecutors; had alluded to bigots, and, worst of all, had spoken in no measured terms of "tiresome Christians."

She turned, rather shyly, and yet with a touch of dignity, to her visitor, and said:

"It was very careless of me not to notice more, but it was dark, and I am not used to seeing any but our own people here. I am afraid I said things which must have hurt you; I wish you had stopped me."

The beautiful color had spread and deepened in her cheeks, and there was something indescribably sweet and considerate in her tone of apology. Charles Osmond was touched by it.

"It is I who should apologize," he said. "I am not at all sure that I was justified in sitting there quietly, knowing that you were under a delusion; but it is always very delightful to me in this artificial world to meet any one who talks quite naturally, and the interest of hearing your view of the question kept me silent. You must forgive me, and as you know I am too nice to be a clergyman—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon. How rude I have been," cried Erica, blushing anew; "but you did make me say it."

"Of course, and I take it as a high compliment from you," said Charles Osmond, laughing again at the recollection. "Come, may we not seal our friendship? We have been sufficiently frank with each other to be something more than acquaintances for the future."

Erica held out her hand and found it taken in a strong, firm clasp, which somehow conveyed much more

than an ordinary handshake.

“And, after all, you ARE too nice for a clergyman!” she thought to herself. Then, as a fresh idea crossed her mind, she suddenly exclaimed: “But you came to tell us about Mr. Randolph's roughs, did you not? How came you to care that we should know beforehand?”

“Why, naturally I hoped that a disturbance might be stopped.”

“Is it natural?” questioned Erica. “I should have thought it more natural for you to think with your own party.”

“But peace and justice and freedom of speech must all stand before party questions.”

“Yet you think that we are wrong, and that Christianity is right?”

“Yes, but to my mind perfect justice is part of Christianity.”

“Oh,” said Erica, in a tone which meant unutterable things.

“You think that Christians do not show perfect justice to you?” said Charles Osmond, reading her thoughts.

“I can't say I think they do,” she replied. Then, suddenly firing up at the recollection of her afternoon's experiences, she said: “They are not just to us, though they preach justice; they are not loving, though they talk about love. If they want us to think their religion true, I wonder they don't practice it a little more and preach it less. What is the use of talking of 'brotherly kindness and charity,' when they hardly treat us like human beings, when they make up wicked lies about us, and will hardly let us sit in the same room with them!”

“Come, now, we really are sitting in the same room,” said Charles Osmond, smiling.

“Oh, dear, what am I to do!” exclaimed Erica. “I can't remember that you are one of them! You are so very unlike most.”

“I think,” said Charles Osmond, “you have come across some very bad specimens.”

Erica, in her heart, considered her visitor as the exception which proved the rule; but not wishing to be caught tripping again, she resolved to say no more upon the subject.

“Let us talk of something else,” she said.

“Something nicer?” said Charles Osmond, with a little mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

“Safer,” said Erica, laughing. “But stop, I hear my father.”

She went out into the passage to meet him. Charles Osmond heard her explaining his visit and the news he had brought, heard Raeburn's brief responses; then, in a few moments, the two entered the room, a picturesque looking couple, the clergyman thought; the tall, stately man, with his broad forehead and overshadowing masses of auburn hair; the little eager-faced, impetuous girl, so winsome in her unconventional frankness.

The conversation became a trifle more ceremonious, though with Erica perched on the arm of her father's chair, ready to squeeze his hand at every word which pleased her, it could hardly become stiff. Raeburn had just heard the report of Mr. Randolph's scheme, and had already taken precautionary measures; but he was surprised and gratified that Charles Osmond should have troubled to bring him word about it. The two men talked on with the most perfect friendliness; and by and by, to Erica's great delight, Charles Osmond expressed a wish to be present at the meeting that night, and made inquiries as to the time and place.

“Oh, couldn't you stay to tea and go with us?” she exclaimed, forgetting for the third time that he was a clergyman, and offering the ready hospitality she would have offered to any one else.

“I should be delighted,” he said, smiling, “if you can really put up with one of the cloth.”

Raeburn, amused at his daughter's spontaneous hospitality, and pleased with the friendly acceptance it had met with, was quite ready to second the invitation. Erica was delighted; she carried off the cat and the toast into the next room, eager to tell her mother all about the visitor.

“The most delightful man, mother, not a bit like a clergyman. I didn't find out for ever so long what he was, and said all sorts of dreadful things; but he didn't mind, and was not the least offended.”

“When will you learn to be cautious, I wonder,” said Mrs. Raeburn, smiling. “You are a shocking little chatter-box.”

And as Erica flitted busily about, arranging the tea table, her mother watched her half musedly, half anxiously. She had always been remarkably frank and outspoken, and there was something so transparently sincere about her, that she seldom gave offense. But the mother could not help wondering how it would be as she grew older and mixed with a greater variety of people. In fact, in every way she was anxious about the child's future, for Erica's was a somewhat perplexing character, and seemed very ill fitted for her position.

Eric Haeberlein had once compared her to a violin, and there was a good deal of truth in his idea. She was very sensitive, responding at once to the merest touch, and easily moved to admiration and devoted love, or to strong indignation. Naturally high-spirited, she was subject, too, to fits of depression, and was always either in the heights or the depths. Yet with all these characteristics was blended her father's indomitable courage and tenacity. Though feeling the thorns of life far more keenly than most people, she was one of those who will never yield; though pricked and wounded by outward events, she would never be conquered by circumstances. At present her capabilities for adoration, which were very great, were lavished in two directions; in the abstract she worshipped intellect, in the concrete she worshipped her father.

From the grief and indignation of the afternoon she had passed with extraordinary rapidity to a state of merriment, which would have been incomprehensible to one who did not understand her peculiarly complex character. Mrs. Raeburn listened with a good deal of amusement to her racy description of Charles Osmond.

“Strange that this should have happened so soon after our talk this afternoon,” she said, musingly. “Perhaps it is as well that you should have a glimpse of the other side, against which you were inveighing, or you might be growing narrow.”

“He is much too good to belong to them!” said Erica enthusiastically.

As she spoke Raeburn entered, bringing the visitor with him, and they all sat down to their meal, Erica pouring out tea and attending to every one's wants, fondling her cat, and listening to the conversation, with all the time a curious perception that to sit down to table with one of her father's opponents was a very novel experience. She could not help speculating as to the thoughts and impressions of her companions. Her mother was, she thought, pleased and interested for about her worn face there was the look of contentment which invariably came when for a time the bitterness of the struggle of life was broken by any sign of friendliness. Her father was—as he generally was in his own house—quiet, gentle in manner, ready to be both an attentive and an interested listener. This gift he had almost as markedly as the gift of speech; he at once perceived that his guest was no ordinary man, and by a sort of instinct he had discovered on what subjects he was best calculated to speak, and wherein they could gain most from him. Charles Osmond's thoughts she could only speculate about; but that he was ready to take them all as friends, and did not regard them as a different order of being, was plain.

The conversation had drifted into regions of abstruse science, when Erica, who had been listening attentively, was altogether diverted by the entrance of the servant, who brought her a brown-paper parcel. Eagerly opening it, she was almost bewildered by the delightful surprise of finding a complete edition of Longfellow's poems, bound in dark blue morocco. Inside was written: “From another admirer of 'Hiawatha.'”

She started up with a rapturous exclamation, and the two men paused in their talk, each unable to help watching the beautiful little face all aglow with happiness. Erica almost danced round the room with her new treasure.

“What HEAVENLY person can have sent me this?” she cried. “Look, father! Did you ever see such a beauty?”

Science went to the winds, and Raeburn gave all his sympathy to Erica and Longfellow. “The very thing you were wishing for. Who could have sent it?”

“I can't think. It can't be Tom, because I know he's spent all his money, and auntie would never call herself an admirer of 'Hiawatha,' nor Herr Haeberlein, nor Monsieur Noirol, nor any one I can think of.”

“Dealings with the fairies,” said Raeburn, smiling. “Your beggar-child with the scones suddenly transformed into a beneficent rewarder.”

“Not from you, father?”

Raeburn laughed.

“A pretty substantial fairy for you. No, no, I had no hand in it. I can't give you presents while I am in debt, my bairn.”

“Oh, isn't it jolly to get what one wants!” said Erica, with a fervor which made the three grown-up people laugh.

“Very jolly,” said Raeburn, giving her a little mute caress.

“But now, Erica, please to go back and eat something, or I shall have my reporter fainting in the middle of a speech.”

She obeyed, carrying away the book with her, and enlivening them with extracts from it; once delightedly discovering a most appropriate passage.

“Why, of course,” she exclaimed, “you and Mr. Osmond, father, are smoking the Peace Pipe.” And with much force and animation she read them bits from the first canto.

> *Raeburn left the room before long to get ready for his meeting, but Erica still lingered over her new treasure, putting it down at length with great reluctance to prepare her notebook and sharpen her pencil. “Isn't that a delightful bit where Hiawatha was angry,” she said; “it has been running in my head all day—*
>
> > *“'For his heart was hot within him,*
> > *Like a living coal his heart was.'*

That's what I shall feel like tonight when Mr. Randolph attacks father.”

She ran upstairs to dress, and, as the door closed upon her, Mrs. Raeburn turned to Charles Osmond with a sort of apology.

“She finds it very hard not to speak out her thoughts; it will often get her into trouble, I am afraid.”

“It is too fresh and delightful to be checked, though,” said Charles Osmond; “I assure you she has taught me many a lesson tonight.”

The mother talked on almost unreservedly about the subject that was evidently nearest her heart—the difficulties of Erica's education, the harshness they so often met with, the harm it so evidently did the child—till the subject of the conversation came down again much too excited and happy to care just then for any unkind treatment. Had she not got a Longfellow of her very own, and did not that unexpected pleasure make up for a thousand privations and discomforts?

Yet, with all her childishness and impetuosity, Erica was womanly, too, as Charles Osmond saw by the way she waited on her mother, thinking of everything which the invalid could possibly want while they were gone, brightening the whole place with her sunshiny presence. Whatever else was lacking, there was no lack of love in this house. The tender considerateness which softened Erica's impetuosity in her mother's presence, the loving comprehension, between parent and child, was very beautiful to see.

CHAPTER IV. “Supposing it is true!”

A man who strives earnestly and perseveringly to convince others, at least convinces us that he is convinced himself. Guesses at Truth.

The rainy afternoon had given place to a fine and starlit night. Erica, apparently in high spirits, walked between her father and Charles Osmond.

“Mother won't be anxious about us,” she said. “She has not heard a word about Mr. Randolph's plans. I was so afraid some one would speak about it at tea time, and then she would have been in a fright all the evening, and would not have liked my going.”

“Mr. Randolph is both energetic and unscrupulous,” said Raeburn. “But I doubt if even he would set his roughs upon you, little one, unless he has become as blood thirsty as a certain old Scotch psalm we used to sing.”

“What was that?” questioned Erica.

“I forget the beginning, but the last verse always had a sort of horrible fascination for us—

“'How happy should that trooper be Who, riding on a naggie, Should take thy little children up, And dash them 'gin the craggie!'”

Charles Osmond and Erica laughed heartily.

“They will only dash you against metaphorical rocks in the nineteenth century,” continued Raeburn. “I remember wondering why the old clerk in my father's church always sung that verse lustily; but you see we have exactly the same spirit now, only in a more civilized form, barbarity changed to polite cruelty, as for instance the way you were treated this afternoon.”

“Oh, don't talk about that,” said Erica, quickly, “I am going to enjoy my Longfellow and forget the rest.”

In truth, Charles Osmond was struck with this both in the father and daughter; each had a way of putting back their bitter thoughts, of dwelling whenever it was possible on the brighter side of life. He knew that Raeburn was involved in most harassing litigation, was burdened with debt, was confronted everywhere with bitter and often violent opposition, yet he seemed to live above it all, for there was a wonderful repose about him, an extraordinary serenity in his aspect, which would have seemed better fitted to a hermit than to one who has spent his life in fighting against desperate odds. One thing was quite clear, the man was absolutely convinced that he was suffering for the truth, and was ready to endure anything in what he considered the service of his fellow men. He did not seem particularly anxious as to the evening's proceedings. On the whole, they were rather a merry party as they walked along Gower Street to the station.

But when they got out again at their destination, and walked through the busy streets to the hall where the lecture was to be given, a sort of seriousness fell upon all three. They were each going to work in their different ways for what they considered the good of humanity, and instinctively a silence grew and deepened.

Erica was the first to break it as they came in sight of the hall.

“What a crowd there is!” she exclaimed. “Are these Mr. Randolph's roughs?”

“We can put up with them outside,” said Raeburn; but Charles Osmond noticed that as he spoke he drew the child nearer to him, with a momentary look of trouble in his face, as though he shrunk from taking her through the rabble. Erica, on the other hand, looked interested and perfectly fearless. With great difficulty they forced their way on, hooted and yelled at by the mob, who, however, made no attempt at violence. At length, reaching the shelter of the entrance lobby, Raeburn left them for a moment, pausing to give directions to the door keepers. Just then, to his great surprise, Charles Osmond caught sight of his son standing only a few paces from them. His exclamation of astonishment made Erica look up. Brian came forward eagerly to meet them.

“You here!” exclaimed his father, with a latent suspicion confirmed into a certainty. “This is my son, Miss Raeburn.”

Brian had not dreamed of meeting her, he had waited about curious to see how Raeburn would get on with the mob; it was with a strange pang of rapture and dismay that he had seen his fair little ideal. That she should be in the midst of that hooting mob made his heart throb with indignation, yet there was something so sweet in her grave, steadfast face that he was, nevertheless, glad to have witnessed the scene. Her color was rather heightened, her eyes bright but very quiet, yet as Charles Osmond spoke, and she looked at Brian, her face all at once lighted up, and with an irresistible smile she exclaimed, in the most childlike of voices:

“Why, it's my umbrella man!” The informality of the exclamation seemed to make them at once something more than ordinary acquaintances. They told Charles Osmond of their encounter in the afternoon, and in a very few minutes Brian, hardly knowing whether he was not in some strange dream, found himself sitting with his father and Erica in a crowded lecture hall, realizing with an intensity of joy and an intensity of pain how near he was to the queen of his heart and yet how far from her.

The meeting was quite orderly. Though Raeburn was addressing many who disagreed with him, he had evidently got the whole and undivided attention of his audience; and indeed his gifts both as rhetorician and orator were so great that they must have been either willfully deaf or obtuse who, when under the spell of his extraordinary earnestness and eloquence, could resist listening. Not a word was lost on Brian; every sentence which emphasized the great difference of belief between himself and his love seemed to engrave itself on his heart; no minutest detail of that evening escaped him.

He saw the tall, commanding figure of the orator, the vast sea of upturned faces below, the eager attention imprinted on all, sometimes a wave of sympathy and approval sweeping over them, resulting in a storm of applause, at times a more divided disapproval, or a shout of “No, no,” which invariably roused the speaker to a more vigorous, clear, and emphatic repetition of the questioned statement. And, through all, he was ever conscious of the young girl at his side, who, with her head bent over her notebook, was absorbed in her work. While the most vital questions of life were being discussed, he was yet always aware of that hand traveling rapidly to and fro, of the pages hurriedly turned, of the quick yet weary-looking change of posture.

Though not without a strong vein of sarcasm, Raeburn's speech was, on the whole, temperate; it certainly

should have been met with consideration. But, unfortunately, Mr. Randolph was incapable of seeing any good in his opponent; his combative instincts were far stronger than his Christianity, and Brian, who had winced many times while listening to the champion of atheism, was even more keenly wounded by the champion of his own cause. Abusive epithets abounded in his retort; at last he left the subject under discussion altogether, and launched into personalities of the most objectionable kind. Raeburn sat with folded arms, listening with a sort of cold dignity. He looked very different now from the genial-mannered, quiet man whom Charles Osmond had seen in his own home but an hour or two ago. There was a peculiar look in his tawny eyes hardly to be described in words, a look which was hard, and cold, and steady. It told of an originally sensitive nature inured to ill treatment; of a strong will which had long ago steeled itself to endure; of a character which, though absolutely refusing to yield to opposition, had grown slightly bitter, even slightly vindictive in the process.

Brian could only watch in silent pain the little figure beside him. Once at some violent term of abuse she looked up, and glanced for a moment at the speaker; he just caught a swift, indignant flash from her bright eyes, then her head was bent lower than before over her notebook, and the carnation deepened in her cheek, while her pencil sped over the paper fast and furiously. Presently came a sharp retort from Raeburn, ending with the perfectly warrantable accusation that Mr. Randolph was wandering from the subject of the evening merely to indulge his personal spite. The audience was beginning to be roused by the unfairness, and a storm might have ensued had not Mr. Randolph unintentionally turned the whole proceedings from tragedy to farce.

Indignant at Raeburn's accusation, he sprung to his feet and began a vigorous protest.

“Mr. Chairman, I denounce my opponent as a liar. His accusation is utterly false. I deny the allegation, and I scorn the alligator—”

He was interrupted by a shout of laughter, the whole assembly was convulsed, even Erica's anger changed to mirth.

“Fit for 'Punch,'” she whispered to Brian, her face all beaming with merriment.

Raeburn, whose grave face had also relaxed into a smile, suddenly stood up, and, with a sort of dry Scotch humor, remarked:

“My enemies have compared me to many obnoxious things, but never till tonight have I been called a crocodile. Possibly Mr. Randolph has been reading of the crocodiles recently dissected at Paris. It has been discovered that they are almost brainless, and, being without reason, are probably animated by a violent instinct of destruction. I believe, however, that the power of their 'jaw' is unsurpassed.”

Then, amid shouts of laughter and applause, he sat down again, leaving the field to the much discomfited Mr. Randolph.

Much harm had been done that evening to the cause of Christianity. The sympathies of the audience could not be with the weak and unmannerly Mr. Randolph; they were Englishmen, and were, of course, inclined to side with the man who had been unjustly dealt with, who, moreover, had really spoken to them—had touched their very hearts.

The field was practically lost when, to the surprise of all, another speaker came forward. Erica, who knew that their side had had the best of it, felt a thrill of admiration when she saw Charles Osmond move slowly to the front of the platform. She was very tired, but out of a sort of gratitude for his friendliness, a readiness to do him honor, she strained her energies to take down his speech verbatim. It was not a long one, it was hardly, perhaps, to be called a speech at all, it was rather as if the man had thrown his very self into the breach made by the unhappy wrangle of the evening.

He spoke of the universal brotherhood and of the wrong done to it by bitterness and strife; he stood there as the very incarnation of brotherliness, and the people, whether they agreed with him or not, loved him. In the place where the religion of Christ had been reviled as well by the Christians as by the atheist, he spoke of the revealer of the Father, and a hush fell on the listening men; he spoke of the Founder of the great brotherhood, and by the very reality, by the fervor of his convictions, touched a new chord in many a heart. It was no time for argument, the meeting was almost over; he scarcely attempted to answer to many of the difficulties and objections raised by Raeburn earlier in the evening. But there was in his ten minutes' speech the whole essence of Christianity, the spirit of loving sacrifice to self, the strength of an absolute certainty which no argument, however logical, can shake, the extraordinary power which breathes in the assertion: “I KNOW Him whom I have believed.”

To more than one of Raeburn's followers there came just the slightest agitation of doubt, the questioning whether these things might not be. For the first time in her life the question began to stir in Erica's heart. She had heard many advocates of Christianity, and had regarded them much as we might regard Buddhist missionaries speaking of a religion that had had its day and was now only fit to be discarded, or perhaps studied as an interesting relic of the past, about which in its later years many corruptions had gathered.

Raeburn, being above all things a just man, had been determined to give her mind no bias in favor of his own views, and as a child he had left her perfectly free. But there was a certain Scotch proverb which he did not call to mind, that “As the auld cock crows the young cock learns.” When the time came at which he considered her old enough really to study the Bible for herself, she had already learned from bitter experience that Christianity—at any rate, what called itself Christianity—was the religion whose votaries were constantly slandering and ill-treating her father, and that all the privations and troubles of their life were directly or indirectly due to it. She, of course, identified the conduct of the most unfriendly and persecuting with the religion itself; it could hardly be otherwise.

But tonight as she toiled away, bravely acting up to her lights, taking down the opponent's speech to the best of her abilities, though predisposed to think it all a meaningless rhapsody, the faintest attempt at a question began to take shape in her mind. It did not form itself exactly into words, but just lurked there like a cloud-shadow—“supposing Christianity were true?”

All doubt is pain. Even this faint beginning of doubt in her creed made Erica dreadfully uncomfortable. Yet she could not regret that Charles Osmond had spoken, even though she imagined him to be greatly mistaken,

and feared that that uncomfortable question might have been suggested to others among the audience. She could not wish that the speech had not been made, for it had revealed the nobility of the man, his broad-hearted love, and she instinctively reverenced all the really great and good, however widely different their creeds.

Brian tried in vain to read her thoughts, but as soon as the meeting was over her temporary seriousness vanished, and she was once more almost a child again, ready to be amused by anything. She stood for a few minutes talking to the two Osmonds; then, catching sight of an acquaintance a little way off, she bade them a hasty good night, much to Brian's chagrin, and hurried forward with a warmth of greeting which he could only hope was appreciated by the thickset, honest-looking mechanic who was the happy recipient. When they left the hall she was still deep in conversation with him.

The fates were kind, however, to Brian that day; they were just too late for a train, and before the next one arrived, Raeburn and Erica were seen slowly coming down the steps, and in another minute had joined them on the platform. Charles Osmond and Raeburn fell into an amicable discussion, and Brian, to his great satisfaction, was left to an uninterrupted tete-a-tete with Erica. There had been no further demonstration by the crowd, and Erica, now that the anxiety was over, was ready to make fun of Mr. Randolph and his band, checking herself every now and then for fear of hurting her companion, but breaking forth again and again into irresistible merriment as she recalled the “alligator” incident and other grotesque utterances. All too soon they reached their destination. There was still, however, a ten minutes' walk before them, a walk which Brian never forgot. The wind was high, and it seemed to excite Erica; he could always remember exactly how she looked, her eyes bright and shining, her short, auburn hair, all blown about by the wind, one stray wave lying across the quaint little sealskin hat. He remembered, too, how, in the middle of his argument, Raeburn had stepped forward and had wrapped a white woolen scarf more closely round the child, securing the fluttering ends. Brian would have liked to do it himself had he dared, and yet it pleased him, too, to see the father's thoughtfulness; perhaps in that “touch of nature,” he, for the first time, fully recognized his kinship with the atheist.

Erica talked to him in the meantime with a delicious, childlike frankness, gave him an enthusiastic account of her friend, Hazeldine, the working man whom he had seen her speaking to, and unconsciously reveled in her free conversation a great deal of the life she led, a busy, earnest, self-denying life Brian could see. When they reached the place of their afternoon's encounter, she alluded merrily to what she called the “charge of umbrellas.”

“Who would have thought, now, that in a few hours' time we should have learned to know each other!” she exclaimed. “It has been altogether the very oddest day, a sort of sandwich of good and bad, two bits of the dry bread of persecution, put in between, you and Mr. Osmond and my beautiful new Longfellow.”

Brian could not help laughing at the simile, and was not a little pleased to hear the reference to his book; but his amusement was soon dispelled by a grim little incident. Just at that minute they happened to pass an undertaker's cart which was standing at the door of one of the houses; a coffin was born across the pavement in front of them. Erica, with a quick exclamation, put her hand on his arm and shrank back to make room for the bearers to pass. Looking down at her, he saw that she was quite pale. The coffin was carried into the house and they passed on.

“How I do hate seeing anything like that!” she exclaimed. Then looking back and up to the windows of the house: “Poor people! I wonder whether they are very sad. It seems to make all the world dark when one comes across such things. Father thinks it is good to be reminded of the end, that it makes one more eager to work, but he doesn't even wish for anything after death, nor do any of the best people I know. It is silly of me, but I never can bear to think of quite coming to an end, I suppose because I am not so unselfish as the others.”

“Or may it not be a natural instinct, which is implanted in all, which perhaps you have not yet crushed by argument.”

Erica shook her head.

“More likely to be a little bit of one of my covenanting ancestors coming out in me. Still, I own that the hope of the hereafter is the one point in which you have the better of it. Life must seem very easy if you believe that all will be made up to you and all wrong set right after you are dead. You see we have rather hard measure here, and don't expect anything at all by and by. But all the same, I am always rather ashamed of this instinct, or selfishness, or Scottish inheritance, whichever it is!”

“Ashamed! Why should you be?”

“It is a sort of weakness, I think, which strong characters like my father are without. You see he cares so much for every one, and thinks so much of making the world a little less miserable in this generation, but most of my love is for him and for my mother; and so when I think of death—of their death—” she broke off abruptly.

“Yet do not call it selfishness,” said Brian, with a slightly choked feeling, for there had been a depth of pain in Erica's tone. “My father, who has just that love of humanity of which you speak, has still the most absolute belief in—yes, and longing for—immortality. It is no selfishness in him.”

“I am sure it is not,” said Erica, warmly, “I shouldn't think he could be selfish in any way. I am glad he spoke tonight; it does one good to hear a speech like that, even if one doesn't agree with it. I wish there were a few more clergymen like him, then perhaps the tolerance and brotherliness he spoke of might become possible. But it must be a long way off, or it would not seem such an unheard-of thing that I should be talking like this to you. Why, it is the first time in my whole life that I have spoken to a Christian except on the most every-day subjects.”

“Then I hope you won't let it be the last,” said Brian.

“I should like to know Mr. Osmond better,” said Erica, “for you know it seems very extraordinary to me that a clever scientific man can speak as he spoke tonight. I should like to know how you reconcile all the contradictions, how you can believe what seems to me so unlikely, how even if you do believe in a God you

can think Him good while the world is what it is. If there is a good God why doesn't He make us all know Him, and end all the evil and cruelty?”

Brian did not reply for a moment. The familiar gas-lit street, the usual number of passengers, the usual care-worn or vice-worn faces passing by, damp pavements, muddy roads, fresh winter wind, all seemed so natural, but to talk of the deepest things in heaven and earth was so unnatural. He was a very reserved man, but looking down at the eager, questioning face beside him his reserve all at once melted. He spoke very quietly, but in a voice which showed Erica that he was, at least, as she expressed it “honestly deluded.” Evidently he did from his very heart believe what he said.

“But how are we to judge what is best?” he replied. “My belief is that God is slowly and gradually educating the world, not forcing it on unnaturally, but drawing it on step by step, making it work out its own lessons as the best teachers do with their pupils. To me the idea of a steady progression, in which man himself may be a co-worker with God, is far more beautiful than the conception of a Being who does not work by natural laws at all, but arbitrarily causes this and that to be or not to be.”

“But then if your God is educating the world, He is educating many of us in ignorance of Himself, in atheism. How can that be good or right? Surely you, for instance, must be rather puzzled when you come across atheists, if you believe in a perfect God, and think atheism the most fearful mistake possible?”

“If I could not believe that God can, and does, educate some of us through atheism, I should indeed be miserable,” said Brian, with a thrill of pain in his voice which startled Erica. “But I do believe that even atheism, even blank ignorance of Him, may be a stage through which alone some of us can be brought onward. The noblest man I ever knew passed through that state, and I can't think he would have been half the man he is if he had not passed through it.”

“I have only known two or three people who from atheists became theists, and they were horrid,” said Erica, emphatically. “People always are spiteful to the side they have left.”

“You could not say that of my friend,” said Brian, musingly, “I wish you could meet him.”

They had reached the entrance to Guilford Terrace, Raeburn and Charles Osmond overtook them, and the conversation ended abruptly. Perhaps because Erica had made no answer to the last remark, and was conscious of a touch of malice in her former speech, she put a little additional warmth into her farewell. At any rate, there was that which touched Brian's very heart in the frank innocence of her hand clasp, in the sweet yet questioning eyes that were raised to his.

He turned away, happier and yet sadder than he had ever been in his life. Not a word passed between him and his father as they crossed the square, but when they reached home they instinctively drew together over the study fire. There was a long silence even then, broken at last by Charles Osmond.

“Well, my son?” he said.

“I cannot see how I can be of the least use to her,” said Brian, abruptly, as if his father had been following the whole of his train of thought, which, indeed, to a certain extent, he had.

“Was this afternoon your first meeting?”

“Our first speaking. I have seen her many times, but only today realized what she is.”

“Well, your little Undine is very bewitching, and much more than bewitching, true to the core and loyal and loving. If only the hardness of her life does not embitter her, I think she will make a grand woman.”

“Tell me what you did this afternoon,” said Brian; “you must have been some time with them.”

Charles Osmond told him all that had passed; then continued:

“She is, as I said, a fascinating, bright little Undine, inclined to be willful, I should fancy, and with a sort of warmth and quickness about her whole character, in many ways still a child, and yet in others strangely old for her years; on the whole I should say as fair a specimen of the purely natural being as you would often meet with. The spiritual part of her is, I fancy, asleep.”

“No, I fancy tonight has made it stir for the first time,” said Brian, and he told his father a little of what had passed between himself and Erica.

“And the Longfellow was, I suppose, from you,” said Charles Osmond. “I wish you could have seen her delight over it. Words absolutely failed her. I don't think any one else noticed it, but, her own vocabulary coming to an end, she turned to ours, it was 'What HEAVENLY person can have sent me this?'”

Brian smiled, but sighed too.

“One talks of the spiritual side remaining untouched,” he said, “yet how is it ever to be otherwise than chained and fettered, while such men as that Randolph are recognized as the champions of our cause, while injustice and unkindness meet her at every turn, while it is something rare and extraordinary for a Christian to speak a kind word to her. If today she has first realized that Christians need not necessarily behave as brutes, I have realized a little what life is from her point of view.”

“Then, realizing that perhaps you may help her, perhaps another chapter of the old legend may come true, and you may be the means of waking the spirit in your Undine.”

“I? Oh, no! How can you think of it! You or Donovan, perhaps, but even that idea seems to me wildly improbable.”

There was something in his humility and sadness which touched his father inexpressibly.

“Well,” he said, after a pause, “if you are really prepared for all the suffering this love must bring you, if you mean to take it, and cherish it, and live for it, even though it brings you no gain, but apparent pain and loss, then I think it can only raise both you and your Undine.”

Brian knew that not one man in a thousand would have spoken in such a way; his father's unworldliness was borne in upon him as it had never been before. Greatly as he had always reverenced and loved him, tonight his love and reverence deepened unspeakably—the two were drawn nearer to each other than ever.

It was not the habit in this house to make the most sacred ties of life the butt for ill-timed and ill-judged joking. No knight of old thought or spoke more reverently or with greater reserve of his lady love than did

Brian of Erica. He regarded himself now as one bound to do her service, consecrated from that day forward as her loyal knight.

CHAPTER V. Erica's Resolve

Men are tattooed with their special beliefs like so many South Sea Islanders; but a real human heart, with Divine love in it, beats with the same glow under all the patterns of all earth's thousand tribes. O. Wendell Holmes.

For the next fortnight Brian and Erica continued to pass each other every afternoon in Gower Street, as they had done for so long, the only difference was that now they greeted each other, that occasionally Brian would be rendered happy for the rest of the day by some brief passing remark from his Undine, or by one of her peculiarly bright smiles. One day, however, she actually stopped; her face was radiant.

“I must just tell you our good news,” she said. “My father has won his case, and has got heavy damages.”

“I am very glad,” said Brian. “It must be a great relief to you all to have it over.”

“Immense! Father looks as if a ton's weight had been taken off his mind. Now I hope we shall have a little peace.”

With a hasty good bye she hurried on, an unusual elasticity in her light footsteps. In Guilford Square she met a political friend of her father's, and was brought once more to a standstill. This time it was a little unwillingly, for M. Noirol teased her unmercifully, and at their last meeting had almost made her angry by talking of a friend of his at Paris who offered untold advantages to any clever and well-educated English girl who wished to learn the language, and who would in return teach her own. Erica had been made miserable by the mere suggestion that such a situation would suit her; the slightest hint that it might be well for her to go abroad had roused in her a sort of terror lest her father might ever seriously think of the scheme. She had not quite forgiven M. Noirol for having spoken, although the proposal had not been gravely made, and probably only persevered in out of the spirit of teasing. But today M. Noirol looked very grave.

“You have heard our good news?” said Erica. “Now don't begin again about Madame Lemercier's school; I don't want to be made cross today of all days, when I am so happy.”

“I will tease you no more, dear mademoiselle,” said the Frenchman; but he offered no congratulations, and there was something in his manner which made Erica uneasy.

“Is anything wrong? Has anything happened?” she asked quickly.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

“Who knows! It is an evil world, Mademoiselle Erica, as you will realize when you have lived in it as long as I have. But I detain you. Good bye. AU REVOIR!”

He took off his hat with a flourish, and passed on.

Erica, feeling baffled and a little cross, hurried home. M. Noirol had not teased her today, but he had been inscrutable and tiresome, and he had made her feel uneasy. She opened the front door, and went at once to her father's study, pausing for a moment at the sound of voices within. She recognized, however, that it was her cousin, Tom Craigie, who was speaking, and without more delay she entered. Then in a moment she understood why M. Noirol had been so mysterious. Tom was speaking quickly and strongly, and there was a glow of anger on his face. Her father was standing with his back to the mantlepiece, and there was a sort of cold light in his eyes, which filled Erica with dismay. Never in the most anxious days had she seen him look at once so angry, yet as weighed down with care.

“What is the matter?” she questioned, breathlessly, instinctively turning to Tom, whose hot anger was more approachable.

“The scamp of a Christian has gone bankrupt,” he said, referring to the defendant in the late action, but too furious to speak very intelligibly.

“Mr. Cheale, you mean?” asked Erica.

“The scoundrel! Yes! So not a farthing of costs and damages shall we see! It is the most fiendish thing ever heard of!”

“Will the costs be very heavy?”

“Heavy! I should think they would indeed!” He named the probable sum; it seemed a fearful addition to the already existing burden of debts.

A look of such pain and perplexity came over Erica's face that Raeburn for the first time realizing what was passing in the room, drew her toward him, his face softening, and the cold, angry light in his eyes changing to sadness.

“Never mind, my child,” he said, with a sigh. “'Tis a hard blow, but we must bear up. Injustice won't triumph in the end.”

There was something in his voice and look which made Erica feel dreadfully inclined to cry; but that would have disgraced her forever in the eyes of stoical Tom, so she only squeezed his hand hard and tried to think of that far-distant future of which she had spoken to Charles Osmond, when there would be no tiresome Christians and bigots and lawsuits.

There was, however, one person in the house who was invariably the recipient of all the troubled confidences of others. In a very few minutes Erica had left the study and was curled up beside her mother's couch, talking out unreservedly all her grief, and anger, and perplexity.

Mrs. Raeburn, delicate and invalided as she was, had nevertheless a great deal of influence, though

perhaps neither Raeburn, nor Erica, nor warm-hearted Tom Craigie understood how much she did for them all. She was so unassuming, so little given to unnecessary speech, so reticent, that her life made very little show, while it had become so entirely a matter of course that every one should bring his private troubles to her that it would have seemed extraordinary not to meet with exactly the sympathy and counsel needed. Today, however, even Mrs. Raeburn was almost too despondent to cheer the others. It comforted Erica to talk to her, but she could not help feeling very miserable as she saw the anxiety and sadness in her mother's face.

“What more can we do, mother?” she questioned. “I can't think of a single thing we can give up.”

“I really don't know, dear,” said her mother with a sigh. “We have nothing but the absolute necessaries of life now, except indeed your education at the High School, and that is a very trifling expense, and one which cannot be interfered with.”

Erica was easily depressed, like most high-spirited persons; but she was not used to seeing either her father or her mother despondent, and the mere strangeness kept her from going down to the very deepest depths. She had the feeling that at least one of them must try to keep up. Yet, do what she would, that evening was one of the saddest and dreariest she had ever spent. All the excitement of contest was over, and a sort of dead weight of gloom seemed to oppress them. Raeburn was absolutely silent. From the first Erica had never heard him complain, but his anger, and afterward his intense depression, spoke volumes. Even Tom, her friend and play fellow, seemed changed this evening, grown somehow from a boy to a man; for there was a sternness about him which she had never seen before, and which made the days of their childhood seem far away. And yet it was not so very long ago that she and Tom had been the most light-hearted and careless beings in the world, and had imagined the chief interest of life to consist in tending dormice, and tame rats, and silk worms! She wondered whether they could ever feel free again, whether they could ever enjoy their long Saturday afternoon rambles, or whether this weight of care would always be upon them.

With a very heavy heart she prepared her lessons for the next day, finding it hard to take much interest in Magna Charta and legal enactments in the time of King John, when the legal enactments of today were so much more mind-engrossing. Tom was sitting opposite to her, writing letters for Raeburn. Once, notwithstanding his grave looks, she hazarded a question. “Tom,” she said, shutting up her 'History of the English People,' “Tom, what do you think will happen?”

Tom looked across at her with angry yet sorrowful eyes.

“I think,” he said, sternly, “that the chieftain will try to do the work of ten men at once, and will pay off these debts or die in the attempt.”

The “chieftain” was a favorite name among the Raeburnites for their leader, and there was a great deal of the clan feeling among them. The majority of them were earnest, hard-working, thoughtful men, and their society was both powerful and well-organized, while their personal devotion to Raeburn lent a vigor and vitality to the whole body which might otherwise have been lacking. Perhaps comparatively few would have been enthusiastic for the cause of atheism had not that cause been represented by a high-souled, self-denying man whom they loved with all their hearts.

The dreary evening ended at length, Erica helped her mother to bed, and then with slow steps climbed up to her little attic room. It was cold and comfortless enough, bare of all luxuries, but even here the walls were lined with books, and Erica's little iron bedstead looked somewhat incongruous surrounded as it was with dingy-looking volumes, dusky old legal books, works of reference, books atheistical, theological, metaphysical, or scientific. On one shelf, amid this strangely heterogeneous collection, she kept her own particular treasures—Brian's Longfellow, one or two of Dickens's books which Tom had given her, and the beloved old Grimm and Hans Andersen, which had been the friends of her childhood and which for “old sakes' sake” she had never had the heart to sell. The only other trace of her in the strange little bedroom was in a wonderful array of china animals on the mantlepiece. She was a great animal lover, and, being a favorite with every one, she received many votive offerings. Her shrine was an amusing one to look at. A green china frog played a tuneless guitar; a pensive monkey gazed with clasped hands and dreadfully human eyes into futurity; there were sagacious looking elephants, placid rhinoceroses, rampant hares, two pug dogs clasped in an irrevocable embrace, an enormous lobster, a diminutive polar bear, and in the center of all a most evil-looking jackdaw about half an inch high.

But tonight the childish side of Erica was in abeyance; the cares of womanhood seemed gathering upon her. She put out her candle and sat down in the dark, racking her brain for some plan by which to relieve her father and mother. Their life was growing harder and harder. It seemed to her that poverty in itself was bearable enough, but that the ever-increasing load of debt was not bearable. As long as she could remember, it had always been like a mill-stone tied about their necks, and the ceaseless petty economies and privations seemed of little avail; she felt very much as if she were one of the Danaids, doomed forever to pour water into a vessel with a hole in it.

Yet in one sense she was better off than many, for these debts were not selfish debts—no one had ever known Raeburn to spend an unnecessary sixpence on himself; all this load had been incurred in the defense of what he considered the truth—by his unceasing struggles for liberty. She was proud of the debts, proud to suffer in what she regarded as the sacred cause; but in spite of that she was almost in despair this evening, the future looked so hopelessly black.

Tom's words rang in her head—“The chieftain will try to do the work of ten men!” What if he overworked himself as he had done once a few years ago? What if he died in the attempt? She wished Tom had not spoken so strongly. In the friendly darkness she did not try to check the tears which would come into her eyes at the thought. Something must be done! She must in some way help him! And then, all at once, there flashed into her mind M. Noirol's teasing suggestion that she should go to Paris. Here was a way in which, free of all expense, she might finish her education, might practically earn her living! In this way she might indeed help to lighten the load, but it would be at the cost of absolute self-sacrifice. She must leave home, and father and mother, and country!

Erica was not exactly selfish, but she was very young. The thought of the voluntary sacrifice seemed quite

unbearable, she could not make up her mind to it.

“Why should I give up all this? Why should prejudice and bigotry spoil my whole life?” she thought, beginning to pace up and down the room with quick, agitated steps. “Why should we suffer because that wretch has gone bankrupt? It is unfair, unjust, it can't be right.”

She leaned her arms on the window sill and looked out into the silent night. The stars were shining peacefully enough, looking down on this world of strife and struggle; Erica grew a little calmer as she looked; Nature, with its majesty of calmness, seemed to quiet her troubled heart and “sweep gradual-gospels in.”

From some recess of memory there came to her some half-enigmatical words; they had been quoted by Charles Osmond in his speech, but she did not remember where she had heard them, only they began to ring in her ears now:

“There is no gain except by loss, There is no life except by death, Nor glory but by bearing shame, Nor justice but by taking blame.”

She did not altogether understand the verse, but there was a truth in it which could hardly fail to come home to one who knew what persecution meant. What if the very blame and injustice of the present brought in the future reign of justice! She seemed to hear her father's voice saying again, “We must bear up, child; injustice won't triumph in the end.”

“There is no gain except by loss!”

What if her loss of home and friends brought gain to the world! That was a thought which brought a glow of happiness to her even in the midst of her pain. There was, after all, much of the highest Christianity about her, though she would have been very much vexed if any one had told her so, because Christianity meant to her narrow-mindedness instead of brotherly love. However it might be, there was no denying that the child of the great teacher of atheism had grasped the true meaning of life, had grasped it, and was prepared to act on it too. She had always lived with those who were ready to spend all in the promotion of the general good; and all that was true, all that was noble in her creed, all that had filled her with admiration in the lives of those she loved, came to her aid now.

She went softly down the dark staircase to Raeburn's study; it was late, and, anxious not to disturb the rest of the house, she opened the door noiselessly and crept in. Her father was sitting at his desk writing; he looked very stern, but there was a sort of grandeur about his rugged face. He was absorbed in his work and did not hear her, and for a minute she stood quite still watching him, realizing with pain and yet with a happy pride how greatly she loved him. Her heart beat fast at the thought of helping him, lightening his load even a little.

“Father,” she said, softly.

Raeburn was the sort of a man who could not be startled, but he looked up quickly, apparently returning from some speculative region with a slight effort. He was the most practical of men, and yet for a minute he felt as if he were living in a dream, for Erica stood beside him, pale and beautiful, with a sort of heroic light about her whole face which transformed her from a merry child to a high-souled woman. Instinctively he rose to speak to her.

“I will not disturb you for more than a minute, father,” she said, “it is only that I have thought of a way in which I think I could help you if you would let me.”

“Well, dear, what is it?” said Raeburn, still watching half dreamily the exceeding beauty of the face before him. Yet an undefined sense of dread chilled his heart. Was anything too hard or high for her to propose? He listened without a word to her account of M. Noirol's Parisian scheme, to her voluntary suggestion that she should go into exile for two years. At the end he merely put a brief question. “Are you ready to bear two years of loneliness?”

“I am ready to help you,” she said, with a little quiver in her voice and a cloud of pain in her eyes.

Raeburn turned away from her and began to pace up and down the little room, his eyes not altogether free from tears, for, pachydermatous as he was accounted by his enemies, this man was very tender over his child, he could hardly endure to see her pain. Yet after all, though she had given him a sharp pang, she had brought him happiness which any father might envy. He came back to her, his stern face inexpressibly softened.

“And I am ready to be helped, my child; it shall be as you say.”

There was something in his voice and in the gentle acceptance of help from one so strong and self-reliant which touched Erica more than any praise or demonstrative thanks could have done. They were going to work together, he had promised that she should fight side by side with him.

“Lawsuits may ruin us,” said Raeburn, “but, after all, the evil has a way of helping out the good.” He put his arm round her and kissed her. “You have taught me, little one, how powerless and weak are these petty persecutions. They can only prick and sting us! Nothing can really hurt us while we love the truth and love each other.”

That was the happiest moment Erica had ever known, already her loss had brought a rapturous gain.

“I shall never go to sleep tonight,” she said. “Let me help you with your letters.”

Raeburn demurred a little, but yielded to her entreaties, and for the next two hours the father and daughter worked in silence. The bitterness which had lurked in the earlier part of the pamphlet that Raeburn had in hand was quite lacking in its close; the writer had somehow been lifted into a higher, purer atmosphere, and if his pen flew less rapidly over the paper, it at any rate wrote words which would long outlive the mere overflow of an angry heart.

Coming back to the world of realities at last somewhere in the small hours, he found his fire out, a goodly pile of letters ready for his signature, and his little amanuensis fast asleep in her chair. Reproaching himself for having allowed her to sit up, he took her in his strong arms as though she had been a mere baby, and carried her up to her room so gently that she never woke. The next morning she found herself so swathed in plaids and rugs and blankets that she could hardly move, and, in spite of a bad headache, could not help beginning the day with a hearty laugh.

Raeburn was not a man who ever let the grass grow under his feet, his decisions were made with thought, but with very rapid thought, and his action was always prompt. His case excited a good deal of attention; but long before the newspapers had ceased to wage war either for or against him, long before the weekly journals had ceased to teem with letters relating to the lawsuit, he had formed his plans for the future. His home was to be completely broken up, Erica was to go to Paris, his wife was to live with his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and her son, Tom, who had agreed to keep on the lodgings in Guilford Terrace, while for himself he had mapped out such a programme of work as could only have been undertaken by a man of “Titanic energy” and “Herculean strength,” epithets which even the hostile press invariably bestowed on him. How great the sacrifice was to him few people knew. As we have said before, the world regarded him as a target, and would hardly have believed that he was in reality a man of the gentlest tastes, as fond of his home as any man in England, a faithful friend and a devoted father, and perhaps all the more dependent on the sympathies of his own circle because of the bitter hostility he encountered from other quarters. But he made his plans resolutely, and said very little about them either one way or the other, sometimes even checking Erica when she grumbled for him, or gave vent to her indignation with regard to the defendant.

“We work for freedom, little one,” he used to say; “and it is an honor to suffer in the cause of liberty.”

“But every one says you will kill yourself with overwork,” said Erica, “and especially when you are in America.”

'“They don't know what stuff I'm made of,” said Raeburn; “and, even if it should use me up, what then? It's better to wear out than to rust out, as a wise man once remarked.”

“Yes,” said Erica, rather faintly.

“But I've no intention of wearing out just yet,” said Raeburn, cheerfully. “You need not be afraid, little son Eric; and, if at the end of those two years you do come back to find me gray and wrinkled, what will that matter so long as we are free once more. There's a good time coming; we'll have the coziest little home in London yet.”

“With a garden for you to work in,” said Erica, brightening up like a child at the castle in the air. “And we'll keep lots of animals, and never bother again about money all our lives.”

Raeburn smiled at her ides of felicity—no cares, and plenty of dogs and cats! He did not anticipate any haven of rest at the end of the two years for himself. He knew that his life must be a series of conflicts to the very end. Still he hoped for relief from the load of debt, and looked forward to the reestablishment of his home.

Brian Osmond heard of the plans before long, but he scarcely saw Erica; the Christmas holidays began, and he no longer met her each afternoon in Gower Street, while the time drew nearer and nearer for her departure for Paris. At length, on the very last day, it chanced that they were once more thrown together.

Raeburn was a great lover of flowers, and he very often received floral offerings from his followers. It so happened that some beautiful hot-house flowers had been sent to him from a nursery garden one day in January, and, unwilling to keep them all, he had suggested that Erica should take some to the neighboring hospitals. Now there were two hospitals in Guilford Square; Erica felt much more interested in the children's hospital than in the one for grown-up people; but, wishing to be impartial she arranged a basketful for each, and well pleased to have anything to give, hastened on her errand. Much to her delight, her first basket of flowers was not only accepted very gratefully, but the lady superintendent took her over the hospital, and let her distribute the flowers among the children. She was very fond of children, and was as happy as she could be passing up and down among the little beds, while her bright manner attracted the little ones, and made them unusually affectionate and responsive.

Happy at having been able to give them pleasure, and full of tender, womanly thoughts, she crossed the square to another small hospital; she was absorbed in pitiful, loving humanity, had forgotten altogether that the world counted her as a heretic, and wholly unprepared for what awaited her, she was shown into the visitors' room and asked to give her name. Not only was Raeburn too notorious a name to pass muster, but the head of the hospital knew Erica by sight, and had often met her out of doors with her father. She was a stiff, narrow-minded, uncompromising sort of person, and, in her own words was “determined to have no fellowship with the works of darkness.” How she could consider bright-faced Erica, with her loving thought for others and her free gift, a “work of darkness,” it is hard to understand. She was not at all disposed, however, to be under any sort of obligation to an atheist, and the result of it was that after a three minutes' interview, Erica found herself once more in the square, with her flowers still in her hand, “declined WITHOUT thanks.”

No one ever quite knew what the superintendent had said to her, but apparently the rebuff had been very hard to bear. Not content with declining any fellowship with the poor little “work of darkness,” she had gone on in accordance with the letter of the text to reprove her; and Erica left the house with burning cheeks, and with a tumult of angry feeling stirred up in her heart. She was far too angry to know or care what she was doing; she walked down the quiet square in the very opposite direction to “Persecution Alley,” and might have walked on for an indefinite time had not some one stopped her.

“I was hoping to see you before you left,” said a pleasant quiet voice close by her. She looked up and saw Charles Osmond.

Thus suddenly brought to a standstill, she became aware that she was trembling from head to foot. A little delicate, sensitive thing, the unsparing censure and the rude reception she had just met with had quite upset her.

Charles Osmond retained her hand in his strong clasp, and looked questioningly into her bright, indignant eyes.

“What is the matter, my child?” he asked.

“I am only angry,” said Erica, rather breathlessly; “hurt and angry because one of your bigots has been rude to me.”

“Come in and tell me all about it,” said Charles Osmond; and there was something so irresistible in his

manner that Erica at once allowed herself to be led into one of the tall, old-fashioned houses, and taken into a comfortable and roomy study, the nicest room she had ever been in. It was not luxurious; indeed the Turkey carpet was shabby and the furniture well worn, but it was home-like, and warm and cheerful, evidently a room which was dear to its owner. Charles Osmond made her sit down in a capacious arm chair close to the fire.

“Well, now, who was the bigot?” he said, in a voice that would have won the confidence of a flint.

Erica told as much of the story as she could bring herself to repeat, quite enough to show Charles Osmond the terrible harm which may be wrought by tactless modern Christianity. He looked down very sorrowfully at the eager, expressive face of the speaker; it was at once very white and very pink, for the child was sorely wounded as well as indignant. She was evidently, however, a little vexed with herself for feeling the insult so keenly.

“It is very stupid of me,” she said laughing a little; “it is time I was used to it; but I never can help shaking in this silly way when any one is rude to us. Tom laughs at me, and says I am made on wire springs like a twelfth-cake butterfly! But it is rather hard, isn't it, to be shut out from everything, even from giving?”

“I think it is both hard and wrong,” said Charles Osmond. “But we do not all shut you out.”

“No,” said Erica. “You have always been kind, you are not a bit like a Christian. Would you”—she hesitated a little—“would you take the flowers instead?”

It was said with a shy grace inexpressibly winning. Charles Osmond was touched and gratified.

“They will be a great treat to us,” he said. “My mother is very fond of flowers. Will you come upstairs and see her? We shall find afternoon tea going on, I expect.”

So the rejected flowers found a resting place in the clergyman's house; and Brian, coming in from his rounds, was greeted by a sight which made his heart beat at double time. In the drawing room beside his grandmother sat Erica, her little fur hat pushed back, her gloves off, busily arranging Christmas roses and red camellias. Her anger had died away, she was talking quite merrily. It seemed to Brian more like a beautiful dream than a bit of every-day life, to have her sitting there so naturally in his home; but the note of pain was struck before long.

“I must go home,” she said. “This is my last day, you know. I am going to Paris tomorrow.”

A sort of sadness seemed to fall on them at the words; only gentle Mrs. Osmond said, cheerfully:

“You will come to see us again when you come back, will you not?”

And then, with the privilege of the aged, she drew down the young, fresh face to hers and kissed it.

“You will let me see you home,” said Brian. “It is getting dark.”

Erica laughingly protested that she was well used to taking care of herself, but it ended in Brian's triumphing. So together they crossed the quiet square. Erica chattered away merrily enough, but as they reached the narrow entrance to Guilford Terrace a shadow stole over her face.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “this is the last time I shall come home for two whole years.”

“You go for so long,” said Brian, stifling a sigh. “You won't forget your English friends?”

“Do you mean that you count yourself our friend?” asked Erica, smiling.

“If you will let me.”

“That is a funny word to use,” she replied, laughing. “You see we are treated as outlaws generally. I don't think any one ever said 'will you let' to me before. This is our house; thank you for seeing me home.” Then with a roguish look in her eyes, she added demurely, but with a slight emphasis on the last word, “Good bye, my friend.”

Brian turned away sadly enough; but he had not gone far when he heard flying footsteps, and looking back saw Erica once more.

“Oh, I just came to know whether by any chance you want a kitten,” she said; “I have a real beauty which I want to find a nice home for.”

Of course Brian wanted a kitten at once; one would have imagined by the eagerness of his manner that he was devoted to the whole feline tribe.

“Well, then, will you come in and see it?” said Erica. “He really is a very nice kitten, and I shall go away much happier if I can see him settled in life first.”

She took him in, introduced him to her mother, and ran off in search of the cat, returning in a few minutes with a very playful-looking tabby.

“There he is,” she said, putting the kitten on the table with an air of pride. “I don't believe he has an equal in all London.

“What do you call him?” asked Brian.

“His name is St. Anthony,” said Erica. “Oh, I hope, by the bye, you won't object to that; it was no disrespect to St. Anthony at all, but only that he always will go and preach to my gold fish. We'll make him do it now to show you. Come along Tony, and give them a sermon, there's a good little kit!”

She put him on a side table, and he at once rested his front paws on a large glass bowl and peered down at the gold fish with great curiosity.

“I believe he would have drowned himself sooner or later, like Gray's cat, so I dare say it is a good thing for him to leave. You will be kind to him, won't you?”

Brian promised that he should be well attended to, and, indeed there was little doubt that St. Anthony would from that day forth be lapped in luxury. He went away with his new master very contentedly, Erica following them to the door with farewell injunctions.

“And you'll be sure to butter his feet well or else he won't stay with you. Good bye, dear Tony. Be a good little cat!”

Brian was pleased to have this token from his Undine, but at the same time he could not help seeing that

she cared much more about parting with the kitten than about saying good bye to him. Well, it was something to have that lucky St. Anthony, who had been fondled and kissed. And after all it was Erica's very childishness and simplicity which made her so dear to him.

As soon as they were out of sight, Erica, with the thought of the separation beginning to weigh upon her, went back to her mother. They knew that this was the last quiet time they would have together for many long months. But last days are not good days for talking. They spoke very little. Every now and then Mrs. Raeburn would make some inquiry about the packing or the journey, or would try to cheer the child by speaking of the house they would have at the end of the two years. But Erica was not to be comforted; a dull pain was gnawing at her heart, and the present was not to be displaced by any visions of a golden future. “If it were not for leaving you alone, mother, I shouldn't mind so much,” she said, in a choked voice. “But it seems to me that you have the hardest part of all.”

“Aunt Jean will be here, and Tom,” said Mrs. Raeburn.

“Aunt Jean is very kind,” said Erica, doubtfully. “But she doesn't know how to nurse people. Tom is the one hope, and he has promised always to tell me the whole truth about you; so if you get worse, I shall come home directly.”

“You mustn't grudge me my share of the work,” said Mrs. Raeburn. “It would make me very miserable if I did hinder you or your father.”

Erica sighed. “You and father are so dreadfully public-spirited! And yet, oh, mother! What does the whole world matter to me if I think you are uncomfortable, and wretched, and alone?”

“You will learn to think differently, dear, by and by,” said her mother, kissing the eager, troubled face. “And, when you fancy me lonely, you can picture me instead as proud and happy in thinking of my brave little daughter who has gone into exile of her own accord to help the cause of truth and liberty.”

They were inspiriting words, and they brought a glow to Erica's face; she choked down her own personal pain. No religious martyr went through the time of trial more bravely than Luke Raeburn's daughter lived through the next four and twenty hours. She never forgot even the most trivial incident of that day, it seemed burned in upon her brain. The dreary waking on the dark winter morning, the hurried farewells to her aunt and Tom, the last long embrace from her mother, the drive to the station, her father's recognition on the platform, the rude staring and ruder comments to which they were subjected, then the one supreme wrench of parting, the look of pain in her father's face, the trembling of his voice, the last long look as the train moved off, and the utter loneliness of all that followed. Then came dimmer recollections, not less real, but more confused; of a merry set of fellow passengers who were going to enjoy themselves in the south of France; of a certain little packet which her father had placed in her hand, and which proved to be “Mill on Liberty;” of her eager perusal of the first two or three chapters; of the many instances of the “tyranny of the majority” which she had been able to produce, not without a certain satisfaction. And afterward more vividly she could recall the last look at England, the dreary arrival at Boulogne, the long weary railway journey, and the friendly reception at Mme Lemercier's school. No one could deny that her new life had been bravely begun.

CHAPTER VI. Paris

But we wake in the young morning when the light is breaking forth; And look out on its misty gleams, as if the moon were full; And the Infinite around, seems but a larger kind of earth Ensphering this, and measured by the self-same handy rule. Hilda among the Broken Gods.

Not unfrequently the most important years of a life, the years which tell most on the character, are unmarked by any notable events. A steady, orderly routine, a gradual progression, perseverance in hard work, often do more to educate and form than a varied and eventful life. Erica's two years of exile were as monotonous and quiet as the life of the secularist's daughter could possibly be. There came to her, of course, from the distance the echoes of her father's strife; but she was far removed from it all, and there was little to disturb her mind in the quiet Parisian school. There is no need to dwell on her uneventful life, and a very brief description of her surroundings will be sufficient to show the sort of atmosphere in which she lived.

The school was a large one, and consisted principally of French provincial girls, sent to Paris to finish their education. Some of them Erica liked exceedingly; every one of them was to her a curious and interesting study. She liked to hear them talk about their home life, and, above all things, to hear their simple, naive remarks about religion. Of course she was on her honor not to enter into discussions with them, and they regarded all English as heretics, and did not trouble themselves to distinguish between the different grades. But there was nothing to prevent her from observing and listening, and with some wonder she used to hear discussions about the dresses for the “Premiere Communion,” remarks about the various services, or laments over the confession papers. The girls went to confession once a month, and there was always a day in which they had to prepare and write out their misdemeanors. One day, a little, thin, delicate child from the south of France came up to Erica with her confession in her hand.

“Dear, good Erica,” she said, wearily, “have the kindness to read this and to correct my mistakes.”

Erica took the little thing on her knee, and began to read the paper. It was curiously spelled. Before very long she came to the sentence, “J'ai trop mange.”

“Why, Ninette,” exclaimed Erica, “you hardly eat enough to feed a sparrow; it is nonsense to put that.”

“Ah, but it was a fast day,” signed Ninette. “And I felt hungry, and did really eat more than I need have.”

Erica felt half angry and contemptuous, half amused, and could only hope that the priest would see the

pale, thin face of the little penitent, and realize the ludicrousness of the confession.

Another time all the girls had been to some special service; on their return, she asked what it had been about.

“Oh,” remarked a bright-faced girl, “it was about the seven joys—or the seven sorrows—of Mary.”

“Do you mean to say you don't know whether it was very solemn or very joyful?” asked Erica, astonished and amused.

“I am really not sure,” said the girl, with the most placid good-tempered indifference.

On the whole, it was scarcely to be wondered at that Erica was not favorably impressed with Roman Catholicism.

She was a great favorite with all the girls; but, though she was very patient and persevering, she did not succeed in making any of them fluent English speakers, and learned their language far better than they learned hers. Her three special friends were not among the pupils, but among the teachers. Dear old Mme. Lemercier, with her good-humored black eyes, her kind, demonstrative ways, and her delightful stories about the time of the war and the siege, was a friend worth having. So was her husband, M. Lemercier the journalist. He was a little dried-up man, with a fierce black mustache; he was sarcastic and witty, and he would talk politics by the hour together to any one who would listen to him, especially if they would now and then ask a pertinent and intelligent question which gave him scope for an oration.

Erica made a delightful listener, for she was always anxious to learn and to understand, and before long she was quite AU FAIT, and understood a great deal about that exceedingly complicated thing, the French political system. M. Lemercier was a fiery, earnest little man, with very strong convictions; he had been exiled as a communist but had now returned, and was a very vigorous and impassioned writer in one of the advanced Republican journals. He and his wife became very fond of Erica, Mme. Lemercier loving her for her brightness and readiness to help, and monsieur for her beauty and her quickness of perception. It was surprising and gratifying to meet with a girl who, without being a femme savante, was yet capable of understanding the difference between the Extreme Left and the Left Center, and who took a real interest in what was passing in the world.

But Erica's greatest friend was a certain Fraulein Sonnenthal, the German governess. She was a kind-eyed Hanoverian, homely and by no means brilliantly clever, but there was something in her unselfishness and in her unassuming humility that won Erica's heart. She never would hear a word against the fraulein.

“Why do you care so much for Fraulein Sonnenthal?” she was often asked. “She seems uninteresting and dull to us.”

“I love her because she is so good,” was Erica's invariable reply.

She and the fraulein shared a bedroom, and many were the arguments they had together. The effect of being separated from her own people was, very naturally, to make Erica a more devoted secularist. She was exceedingly enthusiastic for what she considered the truth and not unfrequently grieved and shocked the Lutheran fraulein by the vehemence of her statements. Very often they would argue far on into the night; they never quarreled, however hot the dispute, but the fraulein often had a sore time of it, for, naturally, Luke Raeburn's daughter was well up in all the debatable points, and she had, moreover, a good deal of her father's rapidity of thought and gift of speech. She was always generous, however, and the fraulein had in some respects the advantage of her, for they spoke in German.

One scene in that little bedroom Erica never forgot. They had gone to bed one Easter-eve, and had somehow fallen into a long and stormy argument about the resurrection and the doctrine of immortality. Erica, perhaps because she was conscious of the “weakness” she had confessed to Brian Osmond, argued very warmly on the other side; the poor little fraulein was grieved beyond measure, and defended her faith gallantly, though, as she feared, very ineffectually. Her arguments seemed altogether extinguished by Erica's remorseless logic; she was not nearly so clever, and her very earnestness seemed to trip her up and make all her sentences broken and incomplete. They discussed the subject till Erica was hoarse, and at last from very weariness she fell asleep while the Lutheran was giving her a long quotation from St. Paul.

She slept for two or three hours; when she woke, the room was flooded with silvery moonlight, the wooden cross which hung over the German's bed stood out black and distinct, but the bed was empty. Erica looked round the room uneasily, and saw a sight which she never forgot. The fraulein was kneeling beside the window, and even the cold moonlight could not chill or hide the wonderful brightness of her face. She was a plain, ordinary little woman, but her face was absolutely transformed; there was something so beautiful and yet so unusual in her expression that Erica could not speak or move, but lay watching her almost breathlessly. The spiritual world about which they had been speaking must be very real indeed to Thekla Sonnenthal! Was it possible that this was the work of delusion? While she mused, her friend rose, came straight to her bedside, and bent over her with a look of such love and tenderness that Erica, though not generally demonstrative, could not resist throwing her arms round her neck.

“Dear Sunnyvale! You look just like your name!” she exclaimed, “all brightness and humility! What have you been doing to grow so like Murillo's Madonna?”

“I thought you were asleep,” said the fraulein. “Good night, Herzolattchen, or rather good morning, for the Easter day has begun.”

Perhaps Erica liked her all the better for saying nothing more definite, but in the ordinary sense of the word she did not have a good night, for long after Thekla Sonnenthal was asleep, and dreaming of her German home, Luke Raeburn's daughter lay awake, thinking of the faith which to some was such an intense reality. Had there been anything excited or unreal about her companion's manner, she would not have thought twice about it; but her tranquillity and sweetness seemed to her very remarkable. Moreover, Fraulein Sonnenthal was strangely devoid of imagination; she was a matter-of-fact little person, not at all a likely subject for visions and delusions. Erica was perplexed. Once more there came to her that uncomfortable question: “Supposing Christianity were true?”

The moonlight paled and the Easter morn broke, and still she tossed to and fro, haunted by doubts which

would not let her sleep. But by and by she returned to the one thing which was absolutely certain, namely, that her German friend was lovable and to be loved, whatever her creed.

And, since Erica's love was of the practical order, it prompted her to get up early, dress noiselessly, and steal out of the room without waking her companion; then, with all the church bells ringing and the devout citizens hurrying to mass, she ran to the nearest flower stall, spent one of her very few half-francs on the loveliest white rose to be had, and carried it back as an Easter offering to the fraulein.

It was fortunate in every way that Erica had the little German lady for her friend, for she would often have fared badly without some one to nurse and befriend her.

She was very delicate, and worked far too hard; for, besides all her work in the school, she was preparing for an English examination which she had set her heart on trying as soon as she went home. Had it not been for Fraulein Sonnenthal, she would more than once have thoroughly overworked herself; and indeed as it was, the strain of that two years told severely on her strength.

But the time wore on rapidly, as very fully occupied time always does, and Erica's list of days grew shorter and shorter, and the letters from her mother were more and more full of plans for the life they would lead when she came home. The two years would actually end in January; Erica was, however, to stay in Paris till the following Easter, partly to oblige Mme. Lemercier, partly because by that time her father hoped to be in a great measure free from his embarrassments, able once more to make a home for her.

CHAPTER VII. What the New Year Brought

A voice grows with the growing years;
Earth, hushing down her bitter cry,
Looks upward from her graves, and hears,
“The Resurrection and the Life am I.”

O love Divine,—whose constant beam
Shines on the eyes that will not see,
And waits to bless us, while we dream
Thou leavest us because we turn from Thee!

Nor bounds, nor clime, nor creed Thou know'st,
Wide as our need Thy favors fall;
The white wings of the Holy Ghost
Stoop, seen or unseen, o'er the heads of all. Whittier

It was the eve of the new year, and great excitement prevailed in the Lemerciers' house. Many of the girls whose homes were at a distance had remained at school for the short winter holiday, and on this particular afternoon a number of them were clustered round the stove talking about the festivities of the morrow and the presents they were likely to have.

Erica, who was now a tall and very pretty girl of eighteen, was sitting on the hearth rug with Ninette on her lap; she was in very high spirits, and kept the little group in perpetual laughter, so much so indeed that Fraulein Sonnenthal had more than once been obliged to interfere, and do her best to quiet them.

“How wild thou art, dear Erica?” she exclaimed. “What is it?”

“I am happy, that is all,” said Erica. “You would be happy if the year of freedom were just dawning for you. Three months more and I shall be home.”

She was like a child in her exultant happiness, far more child-like, indeed, than the grave little Ninette whom she was nursing.

“Thou art not dignified enough for a teacher,” said the fraulein, laughingly.

“She is no teacher,” cried the girls. “It is holiday time and she need not talk that frightful English.”

Erica made a laughing defense of her native tongue, and such a babel ensued that the fraulein had to interfere again.

“Liebe Erica! Thou art beside thyself! What has come to thee?”

“Only joy, dear Thekla, at the thought of the beautiful new year which is coming,” cried Erica. “Father would say I was 'fey,' and should pay for all this fun with a bad headache or some misfortune. Come, give me the French 'David Copperfield,' and let me read you how 'Barkis Veut Bien,' and 'Mrs. Gummidge a Pense de l'Ancien.'”

The reading was more exquisitely ludicrous to Erica herself than to her hearers. Still the wit of Charles Dickens, even when translated, called forth peals of laughter from the French girls, too. It was the brightest, happiest little group imaginable; perhaps it was scarcely wonderful that old Mme. Lemercier, when she came to break it up, should find her eyes dim with tears.

“My dear Erica—” she said, and broke off abruptly.

Erica looked up with laughing eyes.

“Don't scold, dear madame,” she said, coaxingly. “We have been very noisy; but it is New year's eve, and we are so happy.”

“Dear child, it is not that,” said madame. “I want to speak to you for a minute; come with me, cherie.”

Still Erica noticed nothing; did not detect the tone of pity, did not wonder at the terms of endearment which were generally reserved for more private use. She followed madame into the hall, still chattering gayly.

“The 'David Copperfield' is for monsieur's present tomorrow,” she said, laughingly. “I knew he was too lazy to read it in English, so I got him a translation.”

“My dear,” said madame, taking her hand, “try to be quiet a moment. I—I have something to tell you. My poor little one, monsieur your father is arrived—”

“Father! Father here!” exclaimed Erica, in a transport of delight. “Where is he, where? Oh, madame, why didn't you tell me sooner?”

Mme. Lemercier tried in vain to detain her, as with cheeks all glowing with happiness and dancing eyes, she ran at full speed to the salon.

“Father!” she cried, throwing open the door and running to meet him. Then suddenly she stood quite still as if petrified.

Beside the crackling wood fire, his arms on the chimney piece, his face hidden, stood a gray-haired man. He raised himself as she spoke. His news was in his face; it was written all too plainly there.

“Father!” gasped Erica in a voice which seemed altogether different from the first exclamation, almost as if it belonged to a different person.

Raeburn took her in his arms.

“My child—my poor little Eric!” he said.

She did not speak a word, but clung to him as though to keep herself from falling. In one instant it seemed as though her whole world had been wrecked, her life shattered. She could not even realize that her father was still left to her, except in so far as the mere bodily support was concerned. He was strong; she clung to him as in a hurricane she would have clung to a rock.

“Say it,” she gasped, after a timeless silence, perhaps of minutes, perhaps of hours, it might have been centuries for aught she knew. “Say it in words.”

She wanted to know everything, wanted to reduce this huge, overwhelming sorrow to something intelligible. Surely in words it would not be so awful—so limitless.

And he said it, speaking in a low, repressed voice, yet very tenderly, as if she had been a little child. She made a great effort to listen, but the sentences only came to her disjointedly and as if from a great distance. It had been very sudden—a two hours' illness, no very great suffering. He had been lecturing at Birmingham—had been telegraphed for—had been too late.

Erica made a desperate effort to realize it all; at last she brought down the measureless agony to actual words, repeating them over and over to herself—“Mother is dead.”

At length she had grasped the idea. Her heart seemed to die within her, a strange blue shade passed over her face, her limbs stiffened. She felt her father carry her to the window, was perfectly conscious of everything, watched as in a dream, while he wrenched open the clumsy fastening of the casement, heard the voices in the street below, heard, too, in the distance the sound of church bells, was vaguely conscious of relief as the cold air blew upon her.

She was lying on a couch, and, if left to herself, might have lain there for hours in that strange state of absolute prostration. But she was not alone, and gradually she realized it. Very slowly the re-beginning of life set in; the consciousness of her father's presence awakened her, as it were, from her dream of unmitigated pain. She sat up, put her arms round his neck, and kissed him, then for a minute let her aching head rest on his shoulder. Presently, in a low but steady voice, she said: “What would you like me to do, father?”

“To come home with me now, if you are able,” he said; “tomorrow morning, though, if you would rather wait, dear.”

But the idea of waiting seemed intolerable to her. The very sound of the word was hateful. Had she not waited two weary years, and this was the end of it all? Any action, any present doing, however painful, but no more waiting. No terrible pause in which more thoughts and, therefore, more pain might grow. Outside in the passage they met Mme. Lemercier, and presently Erica found herself surrounded by kind helpers, wondering to find them all so tearful when her own eyes felt so hot and dry. They were very good to her, but, separated from her father, her sorrow again completely overwhelmed her; she could not then feel the slightest gratitude to them or the slightest comfort from their sympathy. She lay motionless on her little white bed, her eyes fixed on the wooden cross on the opposite wall, or from time to time glancing at Fraulein Sonnenthal, who, with little Ninette to help, was busily packing her trunk. And all the while she said again and again the words which summed up her sorrow: “Mother is dead! Mother is dead!”

After a time her eyes fell on her elaborately drawn paper of days. Every evening since her first arrival she had gone through the almost religious ceremony of marking off the day; it had often been a great consolation to her. The paper was much worn; the weeks and days yet to be marked were few in number. She looked at it now, and if there can be a “more” to absolute grief, an additional pang to unmitigated sorrow, it came to her at the sight of that visible record of her long exile. She snatched down the paper and tore it to pieces; then sunk back again, pale and breathless. Fraulein Sonnenthal saw and understood. She came to her, and kissed her.

“Herzbluttchen,” she said, almost in a whisper, and, after a moment's pause: “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott.”

Erica made an impatient gesture, and turned away her head.

“Why does she choose this time of all others to tell me so,” she thought to herself. “Now, when I can't argue or even think! A sure tower! Could a delusion make one feel that anything is sure but death at such a time as this! Everything is gone—or going. Mother is dead!—mother is dead! Yet she meant to be kind, poor Thekla, she didn't know it would hurt.”

Mme. Lemercier came into the room with a cup of coffee and a brioche.

“You have a long journey before you, my little one,” she said; “you must take this before you start.”

Yes, there was the journey; that was a comfort. There was something to be done, something hard and tiring—surely it would blunt her perceptions. She started up with a strange sort of energy, put on her hat and cloak, swallowed the food with an effort, helped to lock her trunk, moved rapidly about the room, looking for any chance possession which might have been left out. There was such terrible anguish in her tearless eyes

that little Ninette shrunk away from her in alarm. Mme. Lemercier, who in the time of the siege had seen great suffering, had never seen anything like this; even Thekla Sonnenthal realized that for the time she was beyond the reach of human comfort.

Before long the farewells were over. Erica was once more alone with her father, her cheeks wet with the tears of others, her own eyes still hot and dry. They were to catch the four o'clock train; the afternoon was dark, and already the streets and shops were lighted; Paris, ever bright and gay, seemed tonight brighter and gayer than ever. She watched the placid-looking passengers, the idle loungers at the cafes; did they know what pain was? Did they know that death was sure? Presently she found herself in a second-class carriage, wedged in between her father and a heavy-featured priest; who diligently read a little dogs-eared breviary. Opposite was a meek, weasel-faced bourgeois, with a managing wife, who ordered him about; then came a bushy-whiskered Englishman and a newly married couple, while in the further corner, nearly hidden from view by the burly priest, lurked a gentle-looking Sister of Mercy, and a mischievous and fidgety school boy. She watched them all as in a dream of pain. Presently the priest left off muttering and began to snore, and sleep fell, too, upon the occupants of the opposite seat. The little weasel-faced man looked most uncomfortable, for the Englishman used him as a prop on one side and the managing wife nearly overwhelmed him on the other; he slept fitfully, and always with the air of a martyr, waking up every few minutes and vainly trying to shake off his burdens, who invariably made stifled exclamations and sunk back again.

“That would have been funny once,” thought Erica to herself. “How I should have laughed. Shall I always be like this all the rest of my life, seeing what is ludicrous, yet with all the fun taken out of it?”

But her brain reeled at the thought of the “rest of life.” The blank of bereavement, terrible to all, was absolute and eternal to her, and this was her first great sorrow. She had known pain, and privation, and trouble and anxiety, but actual anguish never. Now it had come to her suddenly, irrevocably, never to be either more or less; perhaps to be fitted on as a garment as time wore on, and to become a natural part of her life; but always to be the same, a blank often felt, always present, till at length her end came and she too passed away into the great Silence.

Despair—the deprivation of all hope—is sometimes wild, but oftener calm with a deathly calmness. Erica was absolutely still—she scarcely moved or spoke during the long weary journey to Calais. Twice only did she feel the slightest desire for any outward vent. At the Amiens station the school boy in the corner, who had been growing more restless and excited every hour, sprung from the carriage to greet a small crowd of relations who were waiting to welcome him. She saw him rush to his mother, heard a confused affectionate babel of inquiries, congratulations, laughter. Oh! To think of that happy light-heartedness and the contrast between it and her grief. The laughter seemed positively to cut her; she could have screamed from sheer pain. And, as if cruel contrasts were fated to confront her, no sooner had her father established her in the cabin on board the steamer, than two bright looking English girls settled themselves close by, and began chatting merrily about the new year, and the novel beginning it would be on board a Channel steamer. Erica tried to stop her ears that she might not hear the discussion of all the forthcoming gayeties. “Lady Reedham's dance on Thursday, our own, you know, next week,” etc., etc. But she could not shut out the sound of the merry voices, or that wounding laughter.

Presently an exclamation made her look and listen.

“Hark!” said one of her fellow passengers. “We shall start now; I hear the clock striking twelve. A happy new year to you, Lily, and all possible good fortune.”

“Happy new year!” echoed from different corners of the cabin; the little Sister of Mercy knelt down and told her beads, the rest of the passengers talked, congratulated, laughed. Erica would have given worlds to be able to cry, but she could not. The terrible mockery of her surroundings was too great, however, to be borne; her heart seemed like ice, her head like fire; with a sort of feverish strength she rushed out of the cabin, stumbled up the companion, and ran as if by instinct to that part of the deck where a tall, solitary figure stood up darkly in the dim light.

“It's too cold for you, my child,” said Raeburn, turning round at her approach.

“Oh, father, let me stay with you,” sobbed Erica, “I can't bear it alone.”

Perhaps he was glad to have her near him for his own sake, perhaps he recognized the truth to which she unconsciously testified that human nature does at times cry out for something other than self, stronger and higher.

He raised no more objections, they listened in silence till the sound of the church bells died away in the distance, and then he found a more sheltered seat and wrapped her up closely in his own plaid, and together they began their new year. The first lull in Erica's pain came in that midnight crossing; the heaving of the boat, the angry dashing of the waves, the foam-laden wind, all seemed to relieve her. Above all there was comfort in the strong protecting arm round her. Yet she was too crushed and numb to be able to wish for anything but that the end might come for her there, that together they might sink down into the painless silence of death.

Raeburn only spoke once throughout the passage; instinctively he knew what was passing in Erica's mind. He spoke the only word of comfort which he had to speak: a noble one, though just then very insufficient:

“There is work to be done.”

Then came the dreary landing in the middle of the dark winter's night, and presently they were again in a railway carriage, but this time alone. Raeburn made her lie down, and himself fell asleep in the opposite corner; he had been traveling uninterruptedly for twenty hours, had received a shock which had tried him very greatly, now from sheer exhaustion he slept. But Erica, to whom the grief was more new, could not sleep. Every minute the pain of realization grew keener. Here she was in England once more, this was the journey she had so often thought of and planned. This was going home. Oh, the dreariness of the reality when compared with those bright expectations. And yet it was neither this thought nor the actual fact of her mother's death which first brought the tears to her burning eyes.

Wearily shifting her position, she looked across to the other side of the carriage, and saw, as if in a picture, her father. Raeburn was a comparatively young man, very little over forty; but his anxieties and the almost incredible amount of hard work of the past two years had told upon him, and had turned his hair gray. There was something in his stern set face, in the strong man's reserved grief, in the pose of his grand-looking head, dignified, even in exhaustion, that was strangely pathetic. Erica scarcely seemed to realize that he was her father. It was more as if she were gazing at some scene on the stage, or on a wonderfully graphic and heart-stirring picture. The pathos and sadness of it took hold of her; she burst into a passion of tears, turned her face from the light, and cried as if no power on earth could ever stop her, her long-drawn sobs allowed to go unchecked since the noise of the train made them inaudible. She was so little given to tears, as a rule, that now they positively frightened her, nor could she understand how, with a real and terrible grief for which she could not weep, the mere pathetic sight should have brought down her tears like rain. But the outburst brought relief with it, for it left her so exhausted that for a brief half hour she slept, and awoke just before they reached London, with such a frightful headache that the physical pain numbed the mental.

“How soon shall we be—” home she would have said, but the word choked her. “How soon shall we get there?” she asked faintly. She was so ill, so weary, that the mere thought of being still again—even in the death-visited home—was a relief, and she was really too much worn out to feel very acutely while they drove through the familiar streets.

At last, early in the cold, new year's morning, they were set down in Guilford Square, at the grim entrance to Persecution Alley. She looked round at the gray old houses with a shudder, then her father drew her arm within his, and led her down the dreary little cul-de-sac. There was the house, looking the same as ever, and there was Aunt Jean coming forward to meet them, with a strange new tenderness in her voice and look, and there was Tom in the background, seeming half shy and afraid to meet her in her grief, and there, above all, was the one great eternal void.

To watch beside the dying must be anguish, and yet surely not such keen anguish as to have missed the last moments, the last farewells, the last chance of serving. For those who have to come back to the empty house, the home which never can be home again, may God comfort them—no one else can.

Stillness, and food, and brief snatches of sleep somewhat restored Erica. Late in the afternoon she was strong enough to go into her mother's room, for that last look so inexpressibly painful to all, so entirely void of hope or comfort to those who believe in no hereafter. Not even the peacefulness of death was there to give even a slight, a momentary relief to her pain; she scarcely even recognized her mother. Was that, indeed, all that was left? That pale, rigid, utterly changed face and form? Was that her mother? Could that once have been her mother? Very often had she heard this great change wrought by death referred to in discussions; she knew well the arguments which were brought forward by the believers in immortality, the counter arguments with which her father invariably met them, and which had always seemed to her conclusive. But somehow that which seemed satisfactory in the lecture hall did not answer in the room of death. Her whole being seemed to flow out into one longing question: Might there not be a Beyond—an Unseen? Was this world indeed only

> *“A place to stand and love in for an hour,*
> *With darkness and the death-hour rounding it?”*

She had slept in the afternoon, but at night, when all was still, she could not sleep. The question still lurked in her mind; her sorrow and loneliness grew almost unbearable. She thought if she could only make herself cry again perhaps she might sleep, and she took down a book about Giordano Bruno, and read the account of his martyrdom, an account which always moved her very much. But tonight not even the description of the valiant unshrinking martyr of Free-thought ascending the scaffold to meet his doom could in the slightest degree affect her. She tried another book, this time Dickens's “Tale of Two Cities.” She had never read the last two chapters without feeling a great desire to cry, but tonight she read with perfect unconcern of Sydney Carton's wanderings through Paris on the night before he gave himself up—read the last marvelously written scene without the slightest emotion. It was evidently no use to try anything else; she shut the book, put out her candle, and once more lay down in the dark.

Then she began to think of the words which had so persistently haunted Sydney Carton: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” She, too, seemed to be wandering about the Parisian streets, hearing these words over and over again. She knew that it was Jesus of Nazareth who had said this. What an assertion it was for a man to make! It was not even “I BRING the resurrection,” or “I GIVE the resurrection,” but “I AM the Resurrection.” And yet, according to her father, his humility had been excessive, carried almost to a fault. Was he the most inconsistent man that ever lived, or what was he? At last she thought she would get up and see whether there was any qualifying context, and when and where he had uttered this tremendous saying.

Lighting her candle, she crept, a little shivering, white-robed figure, round the book-lined room, scanning the titles on every shelf, but bibles were too much in use in that house to be relegated to the attics, she found only the least interesting and least serviceable of her father's books. There was nothing for it but to go down to the study; so wrapping herself up, for it was a freezing winter's night, she went noiselessly downstairs, and soon found every possible facility for Biblical research.

A little baffled and even disappointed to find the words in that which she regarded as the least authentic of the gospels, she still resolved to read the account; she read it, indeed, in two or three translations, and compared each closely with the others, but in all the words stood out in uncompromising greatness of assertion. This man claimed to BE the resurrection, of as Wyclif had it, “the agen risying and lyf.”

And then poor Erica read on to the end of the story and was quite thrown back upon herself by the account of the miracle which followed. It was a beautiful story, she said to herself, poetically written, graphically described, but as to believing it to be true, she could as soon have accepted the “Midsummer Night's Dream” as having actually taken place.

Shivering with cold she put the books back on their shelf, and stole upstairs once more to bear her comfortless sorrow as best she could.

CHAPTER VIII. “Why Do You Believe It?”

Then the round of weary duties, cold and formal, came to meet her, With the life within departed that had given them each a soul; And her sick heart even slighted gentle words that came to greet her, For grief spread its shadowy pinions like a blight upon the whole. A. A. Proctor

The winter sunshine which glanced in a side-long, half-and-half way into Persecution Alley, and struggled in at the closed blinds of Erica's little attic, streamed unchecked into a far more cheerful room in Guilford Square, and illumined a breakfast table, at which was seated one occupant only, apparently making a late and rather hasty meal. He was a man of about eight-and-twenty, and though he was not absolutely good-looking, his face was one which people turned to look at again, not so much because it was in any way striking as far as features went, but because of an unusual luminousness which pervaded it. The eyes, which were dark gray, were peculiarly expressive, and their softness, which might to some have seemed a trifle unmasculine, was counterbalanced by the straight, dark, noticeable eyebrows, as well as by a thoroughly manly bearing and a general impression of unfailing energy which characterized the whole man. His hair, short beard, and mustache were of a deep nut-brown. He was of medium height and very muscular looking.

On the whole it was as pleasant a face as you would often meet with, and it was not to be wondered at that his old grandmother looked up pretty frequently from her arm chair by the fire, and watched him with that beautiful loving pride which in the aged never seems exaggerated and very rarely misplaced.

“You were out very late, were you not, Brian?” she observed, letting her knitting needles rest for a minute, and scrutinizing the rather weary-looking man.

“Till half-past five this morning,” he replied, in a somewhat preoccupied voice.

There was a sad look in his eyes, too, which his grandmother partly understood. She knitted another round of her sock and then said:

“Have you seen Tom Craigie yet?”

“Yes, last night I came across him,” replied Brian. “He told me she had come home. They traveled by night and got in early yesterday morning.”

“Poor little thing!” sighed old Mrs. Osmond. “What a home-coming it must have been?”

“Grannie,” said Brian, pushing back his chair and drawing nearer to the fire “I want you to tell me what I ought to do. I have a message to her from her mother, there was no one else to take it, you know, except the landlady, and I suppose she did not like that. I want to know when I might see her; one has no right to keep it back, and yet how am I to know whether she is fit to bear it? I can't write it down, it won't somehow go on to paper, yet I can hardly ask to see her.”

“We cannot tell that the message might not comfort her,” said Mrs. Osmond. Then, after a few minutes' thought she added: “I think, Brian, if I were you, I would write her a little note, tell her why you want to see her, and let her fix her own time. You will leave it entirely in her own hands in that way.”

He mused for a minute, seemed satisfied with the suggestion, and moving across to the writing table, began his first letter to his love. Apparently it was hard to write, for he wasted several sheets and much time that he could ill afford. When it was at length finished, it ran as follows:

“Dear Miss Raeburn,—I hardly like to ask to see you yet for fear you should think me intrusive, but a message was entrusted to me on Tuesday night which I dare not of myself keep back from you. Will you see me? If you are able to, and will name the time which will suit you best, I shall be very grateful. Forgive me for troubling you, and believe me, Yours faithfully, Brian Osmond.”

He sent it off a little doubtfully, by no means satisfied that he had done a wise thing. But when he returned from his rounds later in the day the reply set his fears at rest.

It was written lengthways across a sheet of paper; the small delicate writing was full of character, but betrayed great physical exhaustion.

“It is good of you to think of us. Please come this afternoon if you are able. Erica.”

That very afternoon! Now that his wish was granted, now that he was indeed to see her, Brian would have given worlds to have postponed the meeting. He was well accustomed to visiting sorrow-stricken people, but from meeting such sorrow as that in the Raeburns' house he shrunk back feeling his insufficiency. Besides, what words were delicate enough to convey all that had passed in that death scene? How could he dare to attempt in speech all that the dying mother would fain have had conveyed to her child? And then his own love! Would not that be the greatest difficulty of all? Feeling her grief as he did, could he yet modify his manner to suit that of a mere outsider—almost a stranger? He was very diffident; though longing to see Erica, he would yet have given anything to be able to transfer his work to his father. This, however, was of course impossible.

Strange though it might seem, he—the most unsuitable of all men in his own eyes—was the man singled out to bear this message, to go to the death-visited household. He went about his afternoon work in a sort of steady, mechanical manner, the outward veil of his inward agitation. About four o'clock he was free to go to Guilford Terrace.

He was shown into the little sitting room; it was the room in which Mrs. Raeburn had died, and the mere sight of the outer surroundings, the well-worn furniture, the book-lined walls made the whole scene vividly

present to him. The room was empty, there was a blazing fire but no other light, for the blinds were down, and even the winter twilight shut out. Brian sat down and waited. Presently the door opened, he looked up and saw Erica approaching him. She was taller than she had been when he last saw her, and now grief had given her a peculiar dignity which made her much more like her father. Every shade of color had left her face, her eyes wee full of a limitless pain, the eyelids were slightly reddened, but apparently rather from sleeplessness than from tears, the whole face was so altered that a mere casual acquaintance would hardly have recognized it, except by the unchanged waves of short auburn hair which still formed the setting as it were to a picture lovely even now. Only one thing was unchanged, and that was the frank, unconventional manner. Even in her grief she could not be quite like other people.

“It is very good of you to let me see you,” said Brian, “you are sure you are doing right; it will not be too much for you today.”

“There is no great difference in says, I think,” said Erica, sitting down on a low chair beside the fire. “I do not very much believe in degrees in this kind of grief. I do not see why it should be ever more or ever less. Perhaps I am wrong, it is all new to me.”

She spoke in a slow, steady, low-toned voice. There was an absolute hopelessness about her whole aspect which was terrible to see. A moment's pause followed, then, looking up at Brian, she fancied that she read in his face, something of hesitation, of a consciousness that he could ill express what he wished to say, and her innate courtesy made her even now hasten to relieve him.

“Don't be afraid of speaking,” she said, a softer light coming into her eyes. “I don't know why people shrink from meeting trouble. Even Tom is half afraid of me. I am not changed, I am still Erica; can't you understand how much I want every one now?

“People differ so much,” said Brian, a little huskily, “and then when one feels strongly words do not come easily.”

“Do you think I would not rather have your sympathy than an oration from any one else! You who were here to the end! You who did everything for—for her. My father has told me very little, he was not able to, but he told me of you, how helpful you were, how good, not like an outsider at all!”

Evidently she clung to the comforting recollection that at least one trustable, sympathetic person had been with her mother at the last. Brian could only say how little he had done, how much more he would fain have done had it been possible.

“I think you do comfort me by talking,” said Erica. “And now I want you, if you don't mind, to tell me all from the very first. I can't torture my father by asking him, and I couldn't hear it from the landlady. But you were here, you can tell me all. Don't be afraid of hurting me; can't you understand, if the past were the only thing left to you, you would want to know every tiniest detail!”

He looked searchingly into her eyes, he thought she was right. There were no degrees to pain like hers! Besides, it was quite possible that the lesser details of her mother's death might bring tears which would relieve her. Very quietly, very reverently, he told her all that had passed—she already knew that her mother had died from aneurism of the heart—he told her how in the evening he had been summoned to her, and from the first had known that it was hopeless, had been obliged to tell her that the time for speech even was but short. He had ordered a telegram to be sent to her father at Birmingham, but Mrs. Craigie and Tom were out for the evening, and no one knew where they were to be found. He and the landlady had been alone.

“She spoke constantly of you,” he continued. “The very last words she said were these, 'Tell Erica that only love can keep from bitterness, that love is stronger than the world's unkindness.' Then, after a minute's pause, she added, 'Be good to my little girl, promise to be good to her.' After that, speech became impossible, but I do not think she suffered. Once she motioned to me to give her the frame off the mantlepiece with your photograph; she looked at it and kept it near her—she died with it in her hand.”

Erica hid her face; that one trifling little incident was too much for her, the tears rained down between her fingers. That it should have come to that! No one whom she loved there at the last—but she had looked at the photograph, had held it to the very end, the voiceless, useless picture had been there, the real Erica had been laughing and talking at Paris! Brian talked on slowly, soothingly. Presently he paused; then Erica suddenly looked up, and dashing away her tears, said, in a voice which was terrible in its mingled pain and indignation.

“I might have been here! I might have been with her! It is the fault of that wretched man who went bankrupt; the fault of the bigots who will not treat us fairly—who ruin us!”

She sobbed with passionate pain, a vivid streak of crimson dyed her cheek, contrasting strangely with the deathly whiteness of her brow.

“Forgive me if I pain you,” said Brian; “but have you forgotten the message I gave you? 'It is only love that can keep from bitterness!'”

“Love!” cried Erica; she could have screamed it, if she had not been so physically exhausted. “Do you mean I am to love our enemies?”

“It is only the love of all humanity that can keep from bitterness,” said Brian.

Erica began to think over his reply, and in thinking grew calm once more. By and by she lifted up her face; it was pale again now, and still, and perfectly hopeless.

“I suppose you think that only Christians can love all humanity,” she said, a little coldly.

“I should call all true lovers of humanity Christians,” replied Brian, “whether they are consciously followers of Christ or not.”

She thought a little; then with a curiously hard look in her face, she suddenly flashed round upon him with a question, much as her father was in the habit of doing when an adversary had made some broad-hearted statement which had baffled him.

“Some of you give us a little more charity than others; but what do you mean by Christianity? You ask us to believe what is incredible. WHY do you believe in the resurrection: What reason have you for thinking it true?”

She expected him to go into the evidence question, to quote the number of Christ's appearances, to speak of the five hundred witnesses of whom she was weary of hearing. Her mind was proof against all this; what could be more probable than that a number of devoted followers should be the victims of some optical delusion, especially when their minds were disturbed by grief. Here was a miracle supported on one side by the testimony of five hundred and odd spectators all longing to see their late Master, and contradicted on the other side by common sense and the experience of the remainder of the human race during thousands of years! She looked full at Brian, a hard yet almost exultant expression in her eyes, which spoke more plainly than words her perfect conviction:

"You can't set your evidences against my counter-evidences! You can't logically maintain that a few uneducated men are to have more weight than all the united experience of mankind."

Never would she so gladly have believed in the doctrine of immortality as now, yet with characteristic honesty and resoluteness she set herself into an attitude of rigid defense, lest through strong desire or mere bodily weariness she should drift into the acceptance of what might be, what indeed she considered to be error. But to her surprise, half to her disappointment, Brian did not even mention the evidences. She had braced herself up to withstand arguments drawn from the five hundred brothers, but the preparation was useless.

"I believe in the resurrection," said Brian, "because I cannot doubt Jesus Christ. He is the most perfectly lovable and trustable being I know, or can conceive of knowing. He said He should rise again, I believe that He did rise. He was perfectly truthful, therefore He could not mislead; He KNEW, therefore He could not be misled."

"We do not consider Him to be all that you assert," said Erica. "Nor do His followers make one inclined to think that either He or His teaching were so perfect as you try to make out. You are not so hard-hearted as some of them—"

She broke off, seeing a look of pain on her companion's face. "Oh, what am I saying!" she cried in a very different tone, "you who have done so much—you who were always good to us—I did not indeed mean to hurt you, it is your creed that I can't help hating, not you. You are our friend, you said so long ago."

"Always," said Brian; "never doubt that."

"Then you must forgive me for having wounded you," said Erica, her whole face softening. "You must remember how hard it all is, and that I am so very, very miserable."

He would have given his life to bring her comfort, but he was not a very great believer in words, and besides, he thought she had talked quite as long as she ought.

"I think," he said, "that, honestly acted out, the message intrusted to me ought to comfort your misery."

"I can't act it out," she said.

"You will begin to try," was Brian's answer; and then, with a very full heart, he said goodbye and left his Undine sitting by the fire, with her head resting on her hands, and the words of her mother's message echoing in her ears. "It is only love that can keep from bitterness; love is stronger than the world's unkindness."

Presently, not daring to dwell too much on that last scene which Brian had described, she turned to his strange, unexpected reason for his belief in the resurrection, and mused over the characteristics of his ideal. Then she thought she would like to see again what her ideal man had to say about his, and she got up and searched for a small book in a limp red cover, labeled "Life of Jesus of Nazareth—Luke Raeburn." It was more than two years since she had seen it; she read it through once more. The style was vigorous, the veiled sarcasms were not unpleasant to her, she detected no unfairness in the mode of treatment, the book satisfied her, the conclusion arrived at seemed to her inevitable—Brian Osmond's ideal was not perfect.

With a sigh of utter weariness she shut the book and leaned back in her chair with a still, white, hopeless face. Presently Friskarina sprung up on her knee with a little sympathetic mew; she had been too miserable as yet to notice even her favorite cat very much, now a scarcely perceptible shade of relief came to her sadness, she stroked the soft gray head. But scarcely had she spoken to her favorite, when the cat suddenly turned away, sprung from her knee and trotted out of the room. It seemed like actual desertion, and Erica could ill bear it just then.

"What, you too, Friskie," she said to herself, "are even you glad to keep away from me?"

She hid her face in her hands; desolate and miserable as she had been before, she now felt more completely alone.

In a few minutes something warm touching her feet made her look up, and with one bound Friskarina sprung into her lap, carrying in her mouth a young kitten. She purred contentedly, looking first at her child and then at her mistress, saying as plainly as if she had spoken:

"Will this comfort you?"

Erica stroked and kissed both cat and kitten, and for the first time since her trouble a feeling of warmth came to her frozen heart.

CHAPTER IX. Rose

A life of unalloyed content,
A life like that of land-locked seas.
J. R. Lowell

"Elspeth, you really must tell me, I'm dying of curiosity, and I can see by your face you know all about it! How is it that grandpapa's name is in the papers when he has been dead all these years? I tell you I saw it, a

little paragraph in today's paper, headed, 'Mr. Luke Raeburn.' Is this another namesake who has something to do with him?”

The speaker was a tall, bright-looking girl of eighteen, a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired blond, with a saucy little mouth, about which there now lurked an expression of undisguised curiosity. Rose, for that was her name, was something of a coax, and all her life long she had managed to get her own way; she was an only child, and had been not a little spoiled; but in spite of many faults she was lovable, and beneath her outer shell of vanity and self-satisfaction there lay a sterling little heart.

Her companion, Elspeth, was a wrinkled old woman, whose smooth gray hair was almost hidden by a huge mob-cap, which, in defiance of modern custom, she wore tied under her chin. She had nursed Rose and her mother before her and had now become more like a family friend than a servant.

“Miss Rose,” she replied, looking up from her work, “if you go on chatter-magging away like this, there'll be no frock ready for you tonight,” and with a most uncommunicative air, the old woman turned away, and gave a little impressive shake to the billowy mass of white tarletan to which she was putting the finishing touches.

“The white lilies just at the side,” said Rose, her attention diverted for a moment. “Won't it be lovely! The prettiest dress in the room, I'm sure.” Then, her curiosity returning, “But, Elspeth, I sha'nt enjoy the dance a bit unless you tell me what Mr. Luke Raeburn has to do with us? Listen, and I'll tell you how I found out. Papa brought the paper up to Mamma, and said, 'Did you see this?' And then mamma read it, and the color came all over her face, and she did not say a word, but went out of the room pretty soon. And then I took up the paper, and looked at the page she had been reading, and saw grandpapa's name.”

“What was it about?” asked old Elspeth.

“That's just what I couldn't understand; it was all about secularists. What are secularists? But it seems that this Luke Raeburn, whoever he is, has lost his wife. While he was lecturing at Birmingham on the soul, it is said, his wife died, and this paragraph said it seemed like a judgment, which was rather cool, I think.”

“Poor laddie!” signed old Elspeth.

“Elspeth,” cried Rose, “do you know who the man is?”

“Miss Rose,” said the old woman severely, “in my young days there was a saying that you'd do well to lay to heart, 'Ask no questions, and you'll be told no stories.'”

“It isn't your young days now, it's your old days, Elsie,” said the imperturbable Rose. “I will ask you questions as much as I please, and you'll tell me what this mystery means, there's a dear old nurse! Have I not a right to know about my own relations?”

“Oh, bairn, bairn! If it were anything you'd like to hear, but why should you know what is all sad and gloomful? No, no, go to your balls, and think of your fine dresses and gran' partners, though, for the matter of that, it is but vanity of vanities—”

“Oh, if you're going to quote Ecclesiastes, I shall go!” said Rose, pouting. “I wish that book wasn't in the Bible! I'm sure such an old grumbler ought to have been in the Apocrypha.”

Elspeth shook her head, and muttered something about judgment and trouble. Rose began to be doubly curious.

“Trouble, sadness, a mystery—perhaps a tragedy! Rose had read of such things in books; were there such things actually in the family, and she had never known of them? A few hours ago and she had been unable to think of anything but her first ball, her new dress, her flowers; but she was seized now with the most intense desire to fathom this mystery. That it bid fair to be a sad mystery only made her more eager and curious. She was so young, so ignorant, there was still a halo of romance about those unknown things, trouble and sadness.

“Elspeth, you treat me like a child!” she exclaimed; “it's really too bad of you.”

“Maybe you're right, bairn,” said the old nurse; “but it's no doing of mine. But look here, Miss Rose, you be persuaded by me, go straight to your mamma and ask her yourself. Maybe there is a doubt whether you oughtn't to know, but there is no doubt that I mustn't tell you.”

Rose hesitated, but presently her curiosity overpowered her reluctance.

Mrs. Fane-Smith, or, as she had been called in her maiden days, Isabel Raeburn, was remarkably like her daughter in so far as features and coloring were concerned, but she was exceedingly unlike her in character, for whereas Rose was vain and self-confident, and had a decided will of her own, her mother was diffident and exaggeratedly humble. She was a kind-hearted and a good woman, but she was in danger of harassing herself with the question, “What will people say?”

She looked up apprehensively as her daughter came into the room. Rose felt sure she had been crying, her curiosity was still further stimulated, and with all the persuasiveness at her command, she urged her mother to tell her the meaning of the mysterious paragraph.

“I am sorry you have asked me,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, “but, perhaps, since you are no longer a child, you had better know. It is a sad story, however, Rose, and I should not have chosen to tell it to you today of all days.”

“But I want to hear, mamma,” said Rose, decidedly. “Please begin. Who is this Mr. Raeburn?”

“He is my brother,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, with a little quiver in her voice.

“Your brother! My uncle!” cried Rose, in amazement.

“Luke was the oldest of us,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, “then came Jean, and I was the youngest of all, at least of those who lived.”

“Then I have an aunt, too, an Aunt Jean?” exclaimed Rose.

“You shall hear the whole story,” replied her mother. She thought for a minute, then in rather a low voice she began: “Luke and Jean were always the clever ones, Luke especially; your grandfather had set his heart on his being a clergyman, and you can fancy the grief it was to us when he threw up the whole idea, and declared that he could never take Orders. He was only nineteen when he renounced religion altogether; he

and my father had a great dispute, and the end of it was that Luke was sent away from home, and I never have seen him since. He has become a very notorious infidel lecturer. Jean was very much unsettled by his change of views, and I believe her real reason for marrying old Mr. Craigie was that she had made him promise to let her see Luke again. She married young and settled down in London, and when, in a few years, her husband died, she too, renounced Christianity."

To tell the truth, Rose was not deeply interested in the story, it fell a little flat after her expectations of a tragedy. It had, moreover, a sort of missionary flavor, and she had till the last few months lived in India, and had grown heartily tired of the details of mission work, in which both her father and mother had been interested. Conversions, relapses, heathenism, belief and unbelief were words which had sounded so often in her ears that now they bored her; as they were the merest words to her it could hardly be otherwise. But Rose's best point was her loyalty to her own family, she had the "clan" feeling very strongly, and she could not understand how her mother could have allowed such a complete estrangement to grow up between her and her nearest relations.

"Mamma," she said, quickly, "I should have gone to see Uncle Luke if I had been you."

"It is impossible, dear," replied Mrs. Fane-Smith. "Your father would not allow it for one thing, and then only think what people would say! This is partly my reason for telling you, Rose; I want to put you upon your guard. We heard little or nothing of your uncle when we were in India, but you will find it very different here. He is one of the most notorious men in England; you must never mention his name, never allude to him, do you understand me?"

"Is he then so wicked?"

"My dear, consider what his teaching is, that is sufficient; I would not for the whole world allow our Greyshot friends to guess that we are connected with him in any way. It might ruin all your prospects in life."

"Mamma," said Rose, "I don't think Mr. Raeburn will injure my prospects—of course you mean prospects of marrying. If a man didn't care enough for me to take me whether I am the niece of the worst man in England or not, do you think I would accept him?"

There was an angry ring in her voice as she spoke, her little saucy mouth looked almost grand. After a moment's pause, she added, more quietly, but with all the force of the true woman's heart which lay hidden beneath her silliness and frivolity, "Besides, mamma, is it quite honest?"

"We are not bound to publish our family history to the world, Rose. If any one asked me, of course I should tell the truth; if there was any way of helping my brother or his child I would gladly serve them, even though the world would look coldly on me for doing so; but while they remain atheists how is it possible?"

"Then he has a child?"

"One only, I believe, a girl of about your own age."

"Oh, mamma, how I should like to know her!"

"My dear Rose, how can you speak of such a thing? You don't realize that she is an atheist, has not even been baptized, poor little thing!"

"But she is my cousin, and she is a girl just like me," said Rose. "I should like to know her very much. I wonder whether she has come out yet. I wonder how she enjoyed her first ball."

"My dear! They are not in society."

"How dull! What does she do all day, I wonder?"

"I cannot tell, I wish you would not talk about her, Rose; I should not wish you even to think about her, except, indeed, to mention her in your prayers."

"Oh, I'd much rather have her here to stay," said Rose, with a little mischievous gleam in her eyes.

"Rose!"

"Why mamma, if she were a black unbeliever you would be delighted to have her; it is only because she is white that you won't have anything to do with her. You would have been as pleased as possible if I had made friends with any of the ladies in the Zenanas."

Mrs. Fane-Smith looked uncomfortable, and murmured that that was a very different question. Rose, seeing her advantage, made haste to follow it up.

"At any rate, mamma, you will write to Uncle Luke now that he is in trouble, and you'll let me send a note to his daughter? Only think, mamma, she has lost her mother so suddenly! Just think how wretched she must be! Oh, mamma, dear, I can't think how she can bear it!" and Rose threw her arms round her mother's neck. "I should die too if you were to die! I'm sure I should."

Rose was very persuasive, Mrs. Fane-Smith's motherly heart was touched; she sat down there and then, and for the first time since the summer day when Luke Raeburn had been turned out of his father's house, she wrote to her brother. Rose in the meantime had taken a piece of paper from her mother's writing desk, and with a fat volume of sermons by way of a desk was scribbling away as fast as she could. This was her letter:

"My dear cousin,—I don't know your name, and have only just heard anything about you, and the first thing I heard was that you were in dreadful trouble. I only write to send you my love, and to say how very sorry I am for you. We only came to England in the autumn. I like it very much. I am going to my first ball tonight, and expect to enjoy it immensely. My dress is to be white tarle—Oh, dear! How horrid of me to be writing like this to you. Please forgive me. I don't like to be so happy when you are unhappy; but, you see, I have only just heard of you, so it is a little difficult. With love, I remain, your affectionate cousin, Rose Fane-Smith."

That evening, while Erica, with eyes dim with grief and weariness, was poring over the books in her father's study, Rose was being initiated into all the delights of the ballroom. She was in her glory. Everything was new to her; she enjoyed dancing, she knew that she looked pretty, knew that her dress was charming, knew that she was much admired, and of course she liked it all. But the chaperons shook their heads; it was whispered that Miss Fane-Smith was a terrible flirt, she had danced no less than seven dances with Captain Golightly. If her mother erred by thinking too much of what people said, perhaps Rose erred in exactly the opposite way;

at any rate, she managed to call down upon her silly but innocent little head an immense amount of blame from the mothers and elderly ladies.

“A glorious moonlight night,” said Captain Golightly. “What do you say, Miss Fane-Smith? Shall we take a turn in the garden? Or are you afraid of the cold?”

“Afraid! Oh, dear no,” said Rose; “it's the very thing I should enjoy. I suppose I must get my shawl, though; it is upstairs.”

They were in the vestibule.

“Have my ulster,” said Captain Golightly. “Here it is, just handy, and it will keep you much warmer.”

Rose laughed and blushed, and allowed herself to be put into her partner's coat, rather to the detriment of her billowy tarletan. After a while they came back again from the dim garden to the brightly lighted vestibule, and as ill luck would have it, chanced to encounter a stream of people going into the supper room. Every one stared at the apparition of Miss Fane-Smith in Captain Golightly's coat. With some difficulty she struggled out of it, and with very hot cheeks sought shelter in the ballroom.

“How dreadfully they looked! Do you think it was wrong of me?” she half whispered to her partner.

“Oh, dear, no! Sensible and plucky, and everything delightful! You are much too charming to be bound down to silly conventionalities. Come, let us have this dance. I'm sure you are engaged to some one in the supper room who can't deserve such a delightful partner. Let us have this TROIS TEMPS, and hurl defiance at the Greyshot chaperons.”

Rose laughed, and allowed herself to be borne off. She had been excited before, now she was doubly excited, and Captain Golightly had the most delicious step imaginable.

CHAPTER X. Hard at Work

Longing is God's fresh heavenward will
With our poor earthward striving;
We quench it that we may be still
Content with merely living;
But, would we learn that heart's full scope
Which we are hourly wronging,
Our lives must climb from hope to hope
And realize our longing. J. R. Lowell

Perhaps it was only natural that there should be that winter a good deal of communication between the secularist's house in Guilford Terrace and the clergyman's house in Guilford Square.

From the first Raeburn had taken a great fancy to Charles Osmond, and now that Brian had become so closely connected with the memory of their sudden bereavement, and had made himself almost one of them by his silent, unobtrusive sympathy, and by his numberless acts of delicate considerateness, a tie was necessarily formed which promised to deepen into one of those close friendships that sometimes exist between two entire families.

It was a bleak, chilly afternoon in March, when Charles Osmond, returning from a long round of parish work, thought he would look in for a few minutes at the Raeburns'; he had a proposal to make to Erica, some fresh work which he thought might interest her. He rang the bell at the now familiar door and was admitted; it carried him back to the day when he had first called there and had been shown into the fire-lit room, with the book-lined walls, and the pretty little girl curled up on the rug, with her cat and her toasting fork. Time had brought many changes since then. This evening he was again shown into the study, but this time the gas was lighted, and there was no little girl upon the hearth rug. Erica was sitting at her desk hard at work. Her face lighted up at the sight of her visitor.

“Every one is out except me,” she said, more brightly than he had heard her speak since her return. “Did you really come to see me. How good of you.”

“But you are busy?” said Charles Osmond, glancing at the papers on the desk. “Press work?”

“Yes, my first article,” said Erica, “it is just finished; but if you'll excuse me for one minute, I ought to correct it; the office boy will call for it directly.”

“Don't hurry; I will wait and get warm in the meantime,” said Charles Osmond, establishing himself by the fire.

There was a silence broken only by the sound of Erica's pen as she crossed out a word or a line. Charles Osmond watched her and mused. This beautiful girl, whose development he could trace now for more than two years back, what would she grow into? Already she was writing in the “Idol Breaker.” He regretted it. Yet it was obviously the most natural employment for her. He looked at her ever-changing face. She was absorbed in her work, her expression varying with the sentences she read; now there was a look of triumphant happiness as she came to something which made her heart beat quickly; again, a shade of dissatisfaction at the consciousness of her inability to express what was in her mind. He could not help thinking that it was one of the noblest faces he had ever seen, and now that the eyes were downcast it was not so terribly sad; there was, moreover, for the first time since her mother's death, a faint tinge of color in her cheeks. Before five minutes could have passed, the bell rang again.

“That is my boy,” she exclaimed, and hastily blotting her sheets, she rolled them up, gave them to the servant, closed her desk, and crossing the room, knelt down in front of the fire to warm her hands, which were stiff and chilly.

“How rude I have been to you,” she said, smiling a little; “I always have been rude to you since the very first time we met.”

“We were always frank with each other,” said Charles Osmond; “I remember you gave me your opinion as to bigots and Christians in the most delightfully open way. So you have been writing your first article?”

“Yes,” and she stretched herself as though she were rather tired and cramped. “I have had a delicious afternoon. Yesterday I was in despair about it, but today it just came—I wrote it straight off.”

“And you are satisfied with it?”

“Satisfied? Oh, no! Is anybody ever satisfied? By the time it is in print I shall want to alter every sixth line. Still, I dare say it will say a little of what I want said?”

“Oh, you do want something said?”

“Of course!” she replied, a little indignantly. “If not, how could I write.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Charles Osmond, “and you mean to take this up as your vocation?”

“If I am thought worthy,” said Erica, coloring a little.

“I see you have high ideas of the art,” said Charles Osmond; “and what is your reason for taking it up?”

“First of all, though it sounds rather illogical,” said Erica, “I write because I MUST; there is something in me which will have its way. Then, too, it is part of our creed that every one should do all in his power to help on the cause, and of course, if only for my father's sake, it would be my greatest pleasure. Then, last of all, I write because I must earn my living.”

“Good reasons all,” said Charles Osmond. “But I don't feel sure that you won't regret having written when you look back several years hence.”

“Oh! I dare say it will all seem crude and ridiculous then, but one must make a beginning,” said Erica.

“And are you sure you have thought out these great questions so thoroughly and fairly that you are capable of teaching others about them?”

“Ah! Now I see what you mean!” exclaimed Erica; “you think I write in defense of atheism, or as an attacker of Christianity. I do nothing of the kind; father would not allow me to, he would not think me old enough. Oh! No, I am only to write the lighter articles which are needed every now and then. Today I had a delightful subject—'Heroes—what are they?'”

“Well, and what is your definition of a hero, I wonder; what are the qualities you think absolutely necessary to make one?”

“I think I have only two absolutely necessary ones,” said Erica; “but my heroes must have these two, they must have brains and goodness.”

“A tolerably sweeping definition,” said Charles Osmond, laughing, “almost equal to a friend of mine who wanted a wife, and said there were only two things he would stipulate for—1,500 a year, and an angel. But it brings us to another definition, you see. We shall agree as to the brains, but how about goodness! What is your definition of that very wide, not to say vague, term?”

“I don't think I can define it,” she said; “but one knows it when one sees it.”

“Do you mean by it unselfishness, courage, truthfulness, or any other virtue?”

“Oh, it isn't any one virtue, or even a parcel of virtues, it will not go into words.”

“It is then the nearest approach to some perfect ideal which is in your mind?”

“I suppose it is,” she said, slowly.

“How did that ideal come into your mind?”

“I don't know; I suppose I got it by inheritance.”

“From the original moneron?”

“You are laughing at me. I don't know how of course, but I have it, which, as far as I can see, is all that matters.”

“I am not sure of that,” said Charles Osmond. “The explanation of that ideal of goodness which more or less clearly exists in all our minds, seems to me to rest only in the conviction that all are children of one perfect Father. And I can give you our definition of goodness without hesitation, it is summed up for us in one word—'Christlikeness.'”

“I cannot see it; it seems to me all exaggerated,” said Erica. “I believe it is only because people are educated to believe and predisposed to think it all good and perfect that there are so many Christians. You may say it is we who are prejudiced. If we are, I'm sure you Christians have done enough to make us so! How could I, for instance, be anything but an atheist? Shall I tell you the very first thing I can remember?”

Her eyes were flashing with indignant light.

“I was a little tiny child—only four years old—but there are some scenes one never forgets. I can see it all as plainly as possible, the room in a hotel, the very doll I was playing with. There was a great noise in the street, trampling, hissing, hooting. I ran to the window, an immense crowd was coming nearer and nearer, the street was black with the throng, they were all shouting and yelling—'Down with the infidel!' 'Kill the atheist!' Then I saw my father, he was there strong and fearless, one man against a thousand! I tell you I saw him, I can see him now, fighting his way on single-handed, not one creature brave enough to stand up for him. I saw him pushed, struck, spit upon, stoned. At last a great brick struck him on the head. I think I must have been too sick or too angry to see any more after that. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor sobbing, and hearing father come into the room and say: 'Why, little son Eric, did you think they'd killed me?' And he picked me up and let me sit on his knee, but there was blood on his face, and as he kissed me it dropped upon my forehead. I tell you, you Christians baptized me into atheism in my own father's blood. They were Christians who stoned him, champions of religion, and they were egged on by the clergy. Did I not hear it all then in my babyhood? And it is true; it is all fact; ask anybody you like; I have not exaggerated.”

“My dear child, I know you have not,” said Charles Osmond, putting his strong hand upon hers. He could feel that she was all trembling with indignation. Was it to be wondered at? “I remember those riots perfectly well,” he continued. “I think I felt and feel as indignant about them as yourself. A fearful mistake was made—

Mr. Raeburn was shamefully treated. But, Erica”—it was the first time he had called her by her name—“you who pride yourself upon fairness, you who make justice your watchword must be careful not to let the wrong doing of a few Christians prejudice you against Christianity. You say that we are all predisposed to accept Christ; but candidly you must allow, I think, that you are trebly prejudiced against the very name of Christian. A Christian almost inevitably means to you only one of your father's mistaken persecutors.”

“Yes, you are so much of an exception that I always forget you are one,” said Erica, smiling a little. “Yet you are not like one of us—quite—you somehow stand alone, you are unlike any one I ever met; you and Thekla Sonnenthal and your son make to me a sort of new variety.”

Charles Osmond laughed, and changed the subject. “You are busy with your examination work, I suppose?” And the question led to a long talk about books and lectures.

In truth, Erica had plunged into work of all kinds, not merely from love of it, but because she felt the absolute need of fresh interests, the great danger of dwelling unduly on her sorrow. Then, too, she had just grasped a new idea, an idea at once noble and inspiriting. Hitherto she had thought of a happy future for herself, of a home free from troubles and harassing cares. That was all over now, her golden dream had come to an end, “Hope dead lives nevermore.” The life she had pictured to herself could never be, but her nature was too strong to be crushed by the sorrow; physically the shock had weakened her far more than any one knew, but, mentally, it had been a wonderful stimulant. She rose above herself, above her trouble, and life began to mean something broader and deeper than before.

Hitherto her great desire had been to be free from care, and to be happy; now the one important thing seemed not so much to be happy, as to know. To learn herself, and to help others to learn, became her chief object, and, with all the devotion of an earnest, high-souled nature, she set herself to act out these convictions. She read hard, attended lectures, and twice a week taught in the night school attached to the Institute.

Charles Osmond could not help smiling as she described her days to him. She still retained something of the childishness of an Undine, and as they talked she had taken up her old position on the hearth rug, and Friskarina had crept on to her knee. Here, undoubtedly, was one whom ignorant people would stigmatize as “blue” or as a “femme savante;” they would of course be quite wrong and inexpressively foolish to use such terms, and yet there was, perhaps, something a little incongruous in the two sides, as it were, of Erica's nature, the keen intellect and the child-like devotion, the great love of learning and the intense love of fun and humor. Charles Osmond had only once in all his long years of experience met with a character which interested him so much.

“After all,” he said, when they had talked for some time, “I have never told you that I came on a begging errand, and I half fear that you will be too busy to undertake any more work.”

Erica's face brightened at the word; was not work what she lived for?

“Oh! I am not too busy for anything!” she exclaimed. “I shall quote Marcus Aurelius to you if you say I haven't time! What sort of work?”

“Only, when you can, to come to us in the afternoon and read a little to my mother. Do you think you could? Her eyes are failing, and Brian and I are hard at work all day; I am afraid she is very dull.”

“I should like to come very much,” said Erica, really pleased at the suggestion. “What sort of books would Mrs. Osmond like?”

“Oh, anything! History, travels, science, or even novels, if you are not above reading them!”

“I? Of course not,” said Erica, laughing. “Don't you think we enjoy them as much as other people? When there is time to read them, at least, which isn't often.”

Charles Osmond laughed.

“Very well then, you have a wide field. From Carlyle to Miss Bird, and from Ernst Haeckel to Charles Reade. I should make them into a big sandwich if I were you.”

He said goodbye, and left Erica still on the hearth rug, her face brighter than it had been for months.

“I like that man,” she said to herself. “He's honest and thorough, and good all through. Yet how in the world does he make himself believe in his creed? Goodness, Christlikeness. He looked so grand, too, as he said that. It is wonderful what a personal sort of devotion those three have for their ideal.”

She wandered away to recollections of Thekla Sonnenthal, and that carried her back to the time of their last parting, and the recollection of her sorrow. All at once the loneliness of the present was borne in upon her overwhelmingly; she looked around the little room, the Ilkley couch was pushed away into a corner, there was a pile of newspapers upon it. A great sob escaped her. For a minute she pressed her hands tightly together over her eyes, then she hurriedly opened a book on “Electricity,” and began to read as if for her life.

She was roused in about an hour's time by a laughing exclamation. She started, and looking up, saw her cousin Tom.

“Talk about absorption, and brown studies!” he cried, “why, you eat everything I ever saw. I've been looking at you for at least three minutes.”

Tom was now about nineteen; he had inherited the auburn coloring of the Raeburns, but otherwise he was said to be much more like the Craigies. He was nice looking, but somewhat freckled, and though he was tall and strongly built, he somehow betrayed that he had led a sedentary life and looked, in fact, as if he wanted a training in gymnastics. For the rest he was shrewd, business-like, good-natured, and at present very conceited. He had been Erica's friend and playfellow as long as she could remember; they were brother and sister in all but the name, for they had lived within a stone's throw of each other all their lives, and now shared the same house.

“I never heard you come in,” she said, smiling a little. “You must have been very quiet.”

“I don't believe you'd hear a salute fired in the next room if you were reading, you little book worm! But look here; I've got a parody on the chieftain that'll make you cry with laughing. You remember the smashed windows at the meeting at Rilchester last week?”

Erica remembered well enough, she had felt sore and angry about it, and the comments in the newspapers had not been consolatory. She had learned to dread even the comic papers; but there was nothing spiteful in the one which Tom produced that evening. It was headed:

Scotch song (Tune—"Twas within a mile of Edinboro'town")

"Twas within a hall of Rilchester town,
In the bleak spring-time of the year,
Luke Raeburn gave a lecture on the soul of man,
And found that it cost him dear.
Windows all were smashed that day,
They said: 'The atheist can pay.'
But Scottish Raeburn, frowning cried:
'Na, na, it winna do,
I canna, canna, winna, winna, munna pay for you.'"

The parody ran on through the three verses of the song, the conclusion was really witty, and there was no sting in it. Erica laughed over it as she had not laughed for weeks. Tom, who had been trying unsuccessfully to cheer her ever since her return, was quite relieved.

"I believe the sixpence a day style suits you," he said. "But, I say, isn't anything coming up? I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Their elders being away for a few days, Tom and Erica were amusing themselves by trying to live on the rather strange diet of the man who published his plan for living at the smallest possible cost. They were already beginning to be rather weary of porridge, pea soup and lentils. This evening pea soup was in the ascendant, and Erica, tired with a long afternoon's work, felt as if she could almost as soon have eaten Thames mud.

"Dear me," she said, "it never struck me, this is our Lenten penance! Now, wouldn't any one looking in fancy we were poor Romanists without an indulgence?"

"Certainly without any self-indulgence," said Tom, who never lost an opportunity of making a bad pun.

"It would be a great indulgence to stop eating," said Erica, sighing over the soup yet to be swallowed.

"Do you think it is more inspiriting to fast in order to save one's soul than it is to pay the chieftain's debts? I wish I could honestly say, like the little French girl in her confession: 'J'ai trop mang.'"

Tom dearly loved that story, he was exceeding fond of getting choice little anecdotes from various religious newspapers, especially those which dealt in much abuse of the Church of Rome, and he retailed them CON AMORE. Erica listened to several, and laughed a good deal over them.

"I wonder, though, they don't see how they play into our hands by putting in these things," she said after Tom had given her a description of some ludicrous attack made by a ritualist on an evangelical. "I should have thought they would have tried to agree whenever they could, instead of which they seem almost as spiteful to each other as they are to us."

"They'd know better if they'd more than a grain of sense between them," said Tom, sweepingly, "but they haven't; and as they're always playing battledoor and shuttlecock with that, it isn't much good to either. Of course they play into our hands. I believe the spiteful ultra-high paper, and the spiteful ultra-low paper do more to promote atheism than the 'Idol-Breaker' itself."

"How dreadful it must be for men like Mr. Osmond, who see all round, and yet can't stop what they must think the mischief. Mr. Osmond has been here this afternoon."

"Ah, now, he's a stunning fellow, if you like," said Tom. "He's not one of the pig-headed narrow-minded set. How he comes to be a parson I can't make out."

"Well, you see, from their point of view it is the best thing to be; I mean he gets plenty of scope for work. I fancy he feels as much obliged to speak and teach as father does."

"Pity he's not on our side," said Tom; "they say he's a first-rate speaker. But I'm afraid he is perfectly crazy on that point; he'll never come over."

"I don't think we've a right to put the whole of his religiousness down to a mania," said Erica. "Besides, he is not the sort of man to be even a little mad, there's nothing the least fanatical about him."

"Call it delusion if you like it better. What's in a name? The thing remains the same. A man can't believe what is utterly against reason without becoming, as far as that particular belief is concerned, unreasonable, beyond the pale of reason, therefore deluded, therefore mad."

Erica looked perplexed; she did not think Tom's logic altogether good, but she could not correct it. There was, however, a want of generosity about the assertion which instantly appealed to her fine sense of honor.

"I can't argue it out," she said at last, "but it doesn't seem to me fair to put down what we can't understand in other people to madness; it never seemed to me quite fair for Festus to accuse Paul of madness when he really had made a splendid defense, and it doesn't seem fair that you should accuse Mr. Osmond of being mad."

"Only on that one point," said Tom. "Just a little touched, you know. How else can you account for a man like that believing what he professes to believe?"

"I don't know," said Erica, relapsing into perplexed silence.

"Besides," continued Tom, "you cry out because I say they must be just a little touched, but they accuse us of something far worse than madness, they accuse us of absolute wickedness."

"Not all of them," said Erica.

"The greater part," said Tom. "How often do you think the chieftain meets with really fair treatment from the antagonists?"

Erica had nothing to say to this. The harshness and intolerance which her father had constantly to encounter was the great grief of her life, the perpetual source of indignation, her strongest argument against

Christianity.

“Have you much to do tonight?” she asked, not anxious to stir up afresh the revolt against the world's injustice which the merest touch would set working within her. “I was thinking that, if there was time to spare, we might go to see the professor; he has promised to show me some experiments.”

“Electricity?” Tom pricked up his ears. “Not half a bad idea. If you'll help me we can polish off the letters in an hour or so, and be free by eight o'clock.”

They set to work, and between them disposed of the correspondence.

It was a great relief to Erica after her long day's work to be out in the cool evening air. The night was fine but very windy, indeed the sudden gusts at the street corners made her glad to take Tom's arm. Once, as they rather slackened their speed, half baffled by the storm, a sentence from a passer-by fell on their ears. The speaker looked like a countryman.

“Give me a good gas-burner with pipes and a meter that a honest man can understand! Now this 'ere elective light I say it's not canny; I've no belief in things o' that kind, it won't never—”

The rest of the speech died away in the distance. Tom and Erica laughed, but the incident set Erica thinking. Here was a man who would not believe what he could not understand, who wanted “pipes and a meter,” and for want of comprehensible outward signs pooh-poohed the great new discovery.

“Tom,” she said slowly, and with the manner of one who makes a very unpleasant suggestion, reluctantly putting forward an unwelcome thought, “suppose if, after all, we are like that man, and reject a grand discovery because we don't know and are too ignorant to understand! Tom, just suppose if, after all, Christianity should be true and we in the wrong!”

“Just suppose if, after all, the earth should be a flat plain with the sun moving round it!” replied Tom scornfully.

They were walking down the Strand; he did not speak for some minutes, in fact he was looking at the people who passed by them. For the first time in his life a great contrast struck him. Disreputable vulgarity, wickedness, and vice stared him in the face, then involuntarily he turned to Erica and looked down at her scrutinizingly as he had never looked before. She was evidently wrapped in thought but it was not the intellect in her face which he thought of just then, though it was ever noticeable, nor was it the actual beauty of feature which struck him, it was rather an undefined consciousness that here was a purity which was adorable. From that moment he became no longer a boy, but a man with a high standard of womanhood. Instantly he thought with regret of his scornful little speech—it was contemptible.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, abruptly, as if she had been following his whole train of thought. “Of course one is bound to study the question fairly, but we have done that, and all that remains for us is to live as usefully as we can and as creditably to the cause as may be.”

They had turned down one of the dingy little streets leading to the river, and now stood outside Professor Gosse's door. Erica did not reply. It was true she had heard arguments for and against Christianity all her life, but had she ever studied it with strict impartiality? Had she not always been strongly biased in favor of secularism? Had not Mr. Osmond gone unpleasantly near the mark when he warned her against being prejudiced by the wrong-doing of a few modern Christians against Christianity itself! She was coming now for special instruction in science from one who was best calculated to teach; she would not have dreamed of asking instruction from one who was a disbeliever in science. Would the same apply in matters of religious belief? Was she bound actually to ask instruction from Charles Osmond, for instance, even though she believed that he taught error—harmful error? Yet who was to be the judge of what was error, except by perfectly fair consideration of both sides of the case. Had she been fair? What was perfect fairness?

But people must go on living, and must speak and act even though their minds are in a chaos of doubts and questionings. They had reached Professor Gosse's study, or as he himself called it, his workshop, and Erica turned with relief to the verifiable results of scientific inquiry.

CHAPTER XI. The Wheels Run Down

Great grace, as saith Sir Thomas More,
To him must needs be given,
Who heareth heresy, and leaves
The heretic to Heaven. Whittier.

The clock in a neighboring church tower was just striking five on a warm afternoon in June. The pillar box stood at the corner of Guilford Square nearest the church, and on this particular afternoon there chanced to be several people running at the last moment to post their letters. Among others were Brian and Erica. Brian, with a great bundle of parish notices, had just reached the box when running down the other side of the square at full speed he saw his Undine carrying a bagful of letters. He had not met her for some weeks, for it happened to have been a busy time with him, and though she had been very good in coming to read to old Mrs. Osmond, he had always just missed her.

“This is a funny meeting place,” she exclaimed, rather breathlessly. “It never struck me before what a truly national institution the post office is—a place where people of all creeds and opinions can meet together, and are actually treated alike!”

Brian smiled.

“You have been very busy,” he said, glancing at the innumerable envelopes, which she was dropping as fast as might be into the narrow receptacle. He could see that they were directed in her small, clear, delicate handwriting.

“And you, too,” she said, looking at his diminished bundle. “Mine are secularist circulars, and yours, I suppose, are the other kind of thing, but you see the same pillar eats them up quite contentedly. The post office is beautifully national, it sets a good example.”

She spoke lightly, but there was a peculiar tone in her voice which betrayed great weariness. It made Brian look at her more attentively than he had yet done—less from a lover's point of view, more from a doctor's. She was very pale. Though the running had brought a faint color to her cheeks, her lips were white, her forehead almost deathly. He knew that she had never really been well since her mother's death, but the change wrought within the last three weeks dismayed him; she was the mere shadow of her former self.

“This hot weather is trying you,” he said.

“Something is,” she replied. “Work, or weather, or worry, or the three combined.”

“Come in and see my father,” said Brian, “and be idle for a little time; you will be writing more circulars if you go home.”

“No, they are all done, and my examination is over, and there is nothing special going on just now; I think that is why I feel so like breaking down.”

After a little more persuasion, she consented to go in and see Mr. Osmond. The house always had a peculiarly restful feeling, and the mere thought of rest was a relief to her; she would have liked the wheels of life to stop for a little while, and there was rest in the mere change of atmosphere. On the doorstep Brian encountered a patient, much to his vexation; so he could only take Erica into the study, and go in search of his father. He lingered however, just to tell him of his fears.

“She looks perfectly worn out; you must find out what is wrong, father, and make her promise to see some one.”

His tone betrayed such anxiety that his father would not smile although he was secretly amused at the task deputed to him. However, clergyman as he was, he had a good deal of the doctor about him, and he had seen so much of sickness and disease during his long years of hard work among the poor that he was after all about as ready an observer and as good a judge as Brian could have selected.

Erica, leaning back in the great easy chair, which had been moved into summer quarters beside the window, heard the slow soft step she had learned to know so well, and before she had time to get up, found her hand in Charles Osmond's strong clasp.

“How comfortable your chair is,” she said, smiling; “I believe I was nearly asleep.”

He looked at her attentively, but without appearing to study her face in any way. She was very pale and there was an indefinable look of pain in her eyes.

“Any news of the examination?” he asked, sitting down opposite her.

“No, it is too soon yet,” she replied. “I thought I should have felt so anxious about it, but do you know, now that it is over, I can't make myself care a bit. If I have failed altogether, I don't believe I shall mind very much.”

“Too tired to care for anything?”

“Yes, I seem to have come to the end. I wish I were a watch, and could run down and rest for a few days and be wound up again.”

He smiled. “What have you been doing with yourself to get so tired?”

“Oh, nothing particular; it has been rather a long day. Let me see! In the morning there were two delegates from Rilchester who had to be kept in a good temper till my father was ready for them; then there was father's bag to be packed, and a rush to get him off in time for the morning express to Longstaff. Then I went to a lecture at South Kensington, and then by train to Aldersgate Street to see Hazeldine's wife, who is unconscionable enough to live at the top of one of the model lodging houses. Then she told me of another of our people whose child is ill, and they lived in another row of Compton buildings up a hundred more steps, which left my back nearly broken. And the poor little child was fearfully ill, and it is so dreadful to see pain you can do nothing for; it has made me feel wretched ever since. Then—let me think—oh, I got home and found Aunt Jean with a heap of circulars to get off, and there was a great rush to get them ready by post time.”

She paused; Charles Osmond withdrew his eyes from the careful scrutiny of her face, and noticed the position she had taken up in his chair. She was leaning back with her arms resting on the arms of the chair; not merely stretched out upon them, but rather as if she used them for support. His eyes wandered back again to her face. After a short silence, he spoke.

“You have been feeling very tired lately; you have had unaccountable pains flying about all over you, but specially your back has felt, as you just said, somewhat 'broken.' You have generally noticed this when you have been walking, or bending over your desk writing for the 'Idol-Breaker.'”

She laughed.

“Now please don't turn into a clairvoyant; I shall begin to think you uncanny; and, besides, it would be an argument for Tom when we quarrel about you.”

“Then my surmises are true?”

“Substitute first person singular for second plural, and it might have come from my own lips,” said Erica, smiling. “But please stop; I'm afraid you will try to turn prophet next, and I'm sure you will prophesy something horrid.”

“It would need no very clear-sighted prophet to prophesy that you will have to let your wheels run down for a little while.”

“Do you mean that you think I shall die?” asked Erica, languidly. “It wouldn't be at all convenient just now; father couldn't spare me. Do you know,” and her face brightened, “he is really beginning to use me a good deal?”

“I didn't mean that I thought your wheels would run down in that way,” said Charles Osmond, touched by

the pathos of her words. “I may even be wrong, but I think you will want a long rest, and I am quite sure you mustn't lose a day before seeing a doctor. I should like my brother to see you; Brian is only junior partner, you know.”

“What, another Mr. Osmond! How muddled we shall get between you all!” said Erica, laughing.

“I should think that Brian might be Brian by this time,” said Charles Osmond; “that will dispose of one; and perhaps you would like to follow the example of one of my servants, who, I hear, invariably speaks of me as the 'dear rev.'”

Erica laughed.

“No, I shall call you my 'prophet,' though it is true you have begun by being a prophet of evil! By the bye, you can not say again that I am not impartial. What do you think Tom and I did last week?”

“Read the New Testament backward?”

“No, we went to a Holy Scripture Society meeting at Exeter Hall.”

“Hope you were edified,” said Charles Osmond, with a little twinkle in his eye; but he sighed, nevertheless.

“Well,” said Erica, “it was rather curious to hear everything reversed, and there was a good deal of fun altogether. They talked a great deal about the numbers of bibles, testaments, and portions which had been sent out. There was one man who spoke very broadly, and kept on speaking of the 'PORTIONS,' and there was another whom we called the 'Great Door,' because eight times in his speech he said that a great door had been opened for them in Italy and other places. Altogether, I thought them rather smug and self-satisfied, especially one man whose face shone on the slightest provocation, and who remarked, in broad Lincolnshire, that they had been 'aboondantly blessed.' After his speech a little short, sleek oily man got up, and talked about Providence. Apparently it had been very kind to him, and he thought the other sort of thing did best for those who got it. But there were one or two really good speakers, and I dare say they were all in earnest. Still, you know, Tom and I felt rather like fish out of water, and especially when they began to sing, 'Oh, Bible, blessed Bible!' and a lady would make me share her hymn book. Then, too, there was a collection, and the man made quite a pause in front of us, and of course we couldn't give anything. Altogether, I felt rather horrid and hypocritical for being there at all.”

“Is that your only experience of one of our meetings?”

“Oh, no, father took me with him two or three times to Westminster Abbey a good many years ago. We heard the dean; father admired him very much. I like Westminster Abbey. It seems to belong a little to us, too, because it is so national. And then it is so beautiful, and I liked hearing the music. I wonder, though, that you are not little afraid of having it so much in your worship. I remember hearing a beautiful anthem there once, which just thrilled one all through. I wonder that you don't fear that people should mistake that for what you call spiritual fervor.”

“I think, perhaps, there is a danger in any undue introduction of externals, but any one whose spirit has ever been awakened will never mistake the mere thrill of sensuous rapture for the quickening of the spirit by the Unseen.”

“You are talking riddles to me now!” said Erica; “but I feel sure that some of the people who go to church regularly only like it because of that appeal to the senses. I shall never forget going one afternoon into Notre Dame with Mme. Lemercier. A flood of crimson and purple light was shining in through the south transept windows. You could see the white-robed priests and choristers—there was one boy with the most perfect voice you can conceive. I don't know what they were singing, something very sweet and mournful, and, as that one voice rang up into the vaulted roof, I saw Mme. Lemercier fall down on her knees and pray in a sort of rapture. Even I myself felt the tears come to my eyes, just because of the loveliness, and because the blood in one's veins seemed to bound. And then, still singing, the procession passed into the nave, and the lovely voice grew more and more distant. It was a wonderful effect; no doubt, the congregation thought they felt devout, but, if so, then I too felt devout—quite as religious as they. Your spiritual fervor seems to me to resolve itself into artistic effect produced by an appeal to the senses and emotions.”

“And I must repeat my riddle,” said Charles Osmond, quietly. “No awakened spirit could ever mistake the one for the other. It is impossible! How impossible you will one day realize.”

“One evil prophesy is enough for today!” said Erica laughing. “If I stay any longer, you will be prophesying my acceptance of Christianity. No, no, my father will be grieved enough if your first prediction comes true, but, if I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart!”

She rose to go, and Charles Osmond went with her to the door, extracting a promise that she would discuss things with her aunt, and if she approved send for Mr. Osmond at once. He watched her across the square, then turning back into his study paced to and fro in deep thought. Erica's words rang in his ears. “If I were to turn Christian, I think it would break his heart.” How strangely this child was situated! How almost impossible it seemed that she could ever in this world come to the light! And yet the difficulty might perhaps be no hindrance to one so beautifully sincere, so ready to endure anything and everything for the sake of what she now considered truth. She had all her father's zeal and self-devotion; surely the offering up of self, even in a mistaken cause, must sooner or later lead to the Originator of all self-sacrifice. Surely some of those who seem only to thwart God, honestly deeming Christianity a mischievous delusion, are really acting more in His spirit, unconsciously better doing His will than many who openly declare themselves on His side! Yet, as Charles Osmond mused over the past lives of Luke Raeburn and his daughter, and pictured their probable future, a great grief filled his heart. They wee both so lovable, so noble! That they should miss in a great measure the best of life seemed such a grievous pity! The chances that either of them would renounce atheism were, he could not but feel, infinitesimally small. Much smaller for the father than for the child.

It was true, indeed, that she had never fairly grasped any real idea of the character of Christ. He had once grasped it to a certain extent, and had lost the perception of its beauty and truth. It was true also that Erica's transparent sincerity, her quick perception of the beautiful might help very greatly to overcome her deeply ingrained prejudices. But even then what an agony—what a fearful struggle would lie before her; “I think it would break his heart!” Charles Osmond felt his breath come fast and hard at the mere thought of such a

difference between the father and daughter! Could human strength possibly be equal to such a terrible trial? For these two were everything to each other. Erica worshipped her father, and Raeburn's fatherhood was the truest, deepest, tenderest part of his character. No, human strength could not do it, but—

“I am; nyle ye drede!”

His eye fell on a little illuminated scroll above his mantelpiece, Wycliff's rendering of Christ's reassuring words to the fearful disciples. Yes, with the revelation of Himself, He would give the strength, make it possible to dread nothing, not even the infliction of grief to one's nearest and dearest. Much pain, much sacrifice there would be in his service, but dread—never. The strength of the “I am,” bade it forever cease. In that strength the weakest could conquer.

But he had wondered on into a dim future, had pictured a struggle which in all probability would not take place. Even were that the case, however, he needed these words of assurance all the more himself. They wove themselves into his reverie as he paced to an fro; they led him further and further away from perplexed surmises as to the future of Raeburn and Erica, but closer to their souls, because they took him straight to the “God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”

The next morning as he was preparing a sermon for the following Sunday, there came a knock at his study door. His brother came in. He was a fine looking man of two or three-and-fifty.

“I can't stay,” he said, “I've a long round, but I just looked in to tell you about your little heretic.”

Charles Osmond looked up anxiously.

“It is as you thought,” continued his brother. “Slight curvature of the spine. She's a brave little thing; I don't wonder you are interested in her.”

“It means a long rest, I suppose?”

“Yes, I told her a year in a recumbent posture; for I fancy she is one of those restless beings who will do nothing at all unless you are pretty plain with them. It is possible that six or eight months may be sufficient.”

“How did she take it?”

“Oh, in the pluckiest way you can conceive! Tried to laugh at the prospect, wanted me to measure her to see how much she grew in the time, and said she should expect at least three inches to reward her.”

“A Raeburn could hardly be deficient in courage. Luke Raeburn is without exception the bravest man I ever met.”

“And I'd back his daughter against any woman I know,” said the doctor.

He left the room, but the news he had brought caused a long pause in his brother's sermon.

CHAPTER XII. Raeburn's Homecoming

He is a man both loving and severe,
A tender heart, a will inflexible. Longfellow

Luke Raeburn had been lecturing in one of the large manufacturing towns. It was the hottest part of a sultry day in June. He was returning home, and sat in a broiling third-class carriage reading a paper. Apparently what he read was the reverse of gratifying for there was a look of annoyance on his usually serene face; he was displeased with the report of his lecture given in the local papers, it was calculated to mislead very greatly.

Other matters, too, were harassing him just then and he was, moreover, paying the penalty of his two years' campaign, in which his almost superhuman exertions and the privations he had voluntarily endured had told severely upon his health. Possessed of a singularly well-regulated mind, and having in an unusual degree the inestimable gift of common sense, he nevertheless often failed to use it in his personal affairs. He had no idea of sparing himself, no idea of husbanding his strength; this was indeed great, but he treated himself as if it were inexhaustible. The months of trouble had turned his hair quite white; he was now a more noticeable-looking man than ever.

Not unfrequently he made friends with the men with whom he traveled; he was always studying life from the workingman's point of view, and there was such a charm in his genial manner and ready sympathy that he invariably succeeded in drawing people out. But on this day he was not in the humor for it; instead, he thought over the abusive article and the mangled report in the “Longstaff Mercury,” and debated within himself whether it were worth an action for libel. His love of fighting said yes, his common sense said no; and in the end common sense won the day, but left him doubly depressed. He moved to the shady side of the carriage and looked out of the window. He was a great lover of Nature, and Nature was looking her loveliest just then. The trees, in all the freshness of early June, lifted their foliage to the bluest of skies, the meadows were golden with buttercups, the cattle grazed peacefully, the hay fields waved unmown in the soft summer air, which, though sparing no breath for the hot and dusty traveler, was yet strong enough to sweep over the tall grasses in long, undulating waves that made them shimmer in the sunlight.

Raeburn's face grew serene once more; he had a very quick perception of the beautiful. Presently he retired again behind a newspaper, this time the “Daily Review,” and again his brow grew stern, for there was bad news from the seat of war; he read the account of a great battle, read the numbers of his slain countrymen, and of those who had fallen on the enemy's side. It was an unrighteous war, and his heart burned within him at the thought of the inhuman havoc thus caused by a false ambition. Again, as if he were fated that day to be confronted with the dark side of life, the papers gave a long account of a discovery made in some charity school, where young children had been hideously ill-treated. Raeburn, who was the most fatherly of men, could hardly restrain the expression of his righteous indignation. All this mismanagement, this reckless waste of life, this shameful cruelty, was going on in what was called “Free England.” And here was he, a middle-

aged man, and time was passing on with frightful rapidity, and though he had never lost an opportunity of lifting up his voice against oppression, how little had he actually accomplished!

“So many worlds, so much to do, So little done, such things to be!”

That was the burden of the unuttered cry which filled his whole being. That was the point where his atheism often brought him to a noble despair. But far from prompting him to repeat the maxim “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” it spurred him rather to a sort of fiery energy, never satisfied with what it had accomplished. Neither the dissatisfaction, however, nor even the despair ever made him feel the need of any power above man. On the contrary, the unaccountable mystery of pain and evil was his strongest argument against the existence of a God. Upon that rock he had foundered as a mere boy, and no argument had ever been able to reconvince him. Impatience of present ill had in this, as in many other cases, proved the bane of his life.

He would write and speak about these cases of injustice, he would hold them up to the obloquy they so richly deserved.

Scathing sentences already took shape in his brain, but deeper investigation would be necessary before he could write anything. In the meantime to cool himself, to bring himself into a judicial frame of mind, he took a Hebrew book from his bag, and spent the rest of the journey in hard study.

Harassed, and tired, and out of spirits as he was, he nevertheless felt a certain pleasurable sensation as he left St. Pancras, driving homeward through the hot crowded streets. Erica would be waiting for him at home, and he had a comparatively leisure afternoon. There was the meeting on the Opium Trade at eight, but he might take her for a turn in one of the parks beforehand. She had always been a companion to him since her very babyhood, but now he was able to enjoy her companionship even more than in the olden times. Her keen intellect, her ready sympathy, her eagerness to learn, made her the perfection of a disciple, while not unnaturally he delighted in tracing the many similarities of character between himself and his child. Then, too, in his hard, argumentative, fighting life it was an unspeakable relief to be able to retire every now and then into a home which no outer storms could shake or disturb. Fond as he was of his sister, Mrs. Craigie, and Tom, they constituted rather the innermost circle of his friends and followers; it was Erica who made the HOME, though the others shared the house. It was to Erica's pure child-like devotion that he invariably turned for comfort.

Dismissing the cab at the corner of Guilford Square, he walked down the dreary little passage, looking up at the window to see if she were watching for him as usual. But today there was no expectant face; he recollected, however, that it was Thursday, always a busy day with them.

He opened the door with his latch key, and went in; still there was no sound in the house; he half paused for an instant, thinking that he should certainly hear her quick footsteps, the opening of a door, some sign of welcome, but all was as silent as death. Half angry with himself for having grown so expectant of that loving watch as to be seriously apprehensive at its absence, he hastily put down his bag and walked into the sitting room, his calm exterior belying a nameless fear at his heart.

What the French call expressively a “serrement de coeur” seized him when he saw that Erica was indeed at home, but that she was lying on the couch. She did not even spring up to greet him.

“Is anything the matter, dear? Are you ill?” he asked, hurriedly crossing the little room.

“Oh, have you not seen Aunt Jean? She was going to meet you at St. Pancras,” said Erica, her heart failing her a little at the prospect of telling her own bad news. But the exceeding anxiety of her father's face helped her to rise to the occasion. She laughed, and the laugh was natural enough to reassure him.

“It is nothing so very dreadful, and all this time you have never even given me a kiss, father.” She drew down the grand-looking white head, and pressed her fair face to his. He sat down beside her.

“Tell me, dear, what is wrong with you?” he repeated.

“Well, I felt rather out of order, and they said I ought to see some one, and it seems that my tiresome spine is getting crooked, and the long and the short of it is that Mr. Doctor Osmond says I shall get quite well again if I'm careful; but” she added, lightly, yet with the gentleness of one who thinks merely of the hearer's point of view “I shall have to be a passive verb for a year, and you will have to be my very strong man Kwasind.'”

“A year?” he exclaimed in dismay.

“Brian half gave me hope that it might not be so long,” said Erica, “if I'm very good and careful, and of course I shall be both. I am only sorry because it will make me very useless. I did hope I should never have been a burden on you again, father.”

“Don't talk of such a thing, my little son Eric,” he said, very tenderly. “Who should take care of you if not your own father? Besides, if you never wrote another line for me, you would help me by just being yourself. A burden!”

“Well, I've made you look as grave as half a dozen lawsuits,” said Erica, pretending to stroke the lines of care from his forehead. “I've had the morning to ruminate over the prospect, and really now that you know, it is not so very dreadful. A year will soon pass.”

“I look to you, Eric,” said her father, “to show the world that we secularists know how to bear pain. You won't waste the year if you can do it.”

Her face lighted up.

“It was like you to think of that!” she said; “that would indeed be worth doing.”

Still, do what she would, Erica could not talk him back to cheerfulness. He was terribly distressed at her news, and more so when he found that she was suffering a good deal. He thought with a pang of the difference of the reality to his expectations. No walk for them in the park that evening, nor probably for many years to come. Yet he was ignorant of these matters, perhaps he exaggerated the danger or the duration; he would go across and see Brian Osmond at once.

Left once more to herself, the color died out of Erica's cheeks; she lay there pale and still, but her face was almost rigid with resoluteness.

“I am not going to give way!” she thought to herself. “I won't shed a single tear. Tears are wasteful luxuries, bad for body and mind. And yet yet oh, it is hard just when I wanted to help father most! Just when I wanted to keep him from being worried. And a whole year! How shall I bear it, when even six hours has seemed half a life time! This is what Thekla would call a cross, but I only call it my horrid, stupid, idiotic old spine. Well, I must try to show them that Luke Raeburn's daughter knows how to bear pain; I must be patient, however much I boil over in private. Yet is it honest, I wonder, to keep a patient outside, while inside you are all one big grumble? Rather Pharisaical outside of the cup and platter; but it is all I shall be able to do, I'm sure. That is where Mr. Osmond's Christianity would come in; I do believe that goes right through his life, privatest thoughts and all. Odd, that a delusion should have such power, and over such a man! There is Sir Michael Cunningham, too, one of the greatest and best men in England, yet a Christian! Great intellects and much study, and still they remain Christians 'tis extraordinary. But a Christian would have the advantage over me in a case like this. First of all, I suppose, they would feel that they could serve their God as well on their backs as upright, while all the help I shall be able to give the cause is dreadfully indirect and problematical. Then certainly they would feel that they might be getting ready for the next world where all wrong is, they believe, to be set right, while I am only terribly hindered in getting ready for this world a whole year without the chance of a lecture. And then they have all kinds of nice theories about pain, discipline, and that sort of thing, which no doubt make it more bearable, while to me it is just the one unmitigated evil. But, oh! They don't know what pain means! For there is no death to them no endless separation. What a delusion it is! They ought to be happy enough. Oh, mother! mother!”

After all, what she really dreaded in her enforced pause was the leisure for thought. She had plunged into work of all kinds, had half killed herself with work, had tried to hold her despair at arms' length. But now there was no help for it. She must rest, and the thoughts must come.

CHAPTER XIII. Losing One Friend to Gain Another

For toleration had its griefs,
And charity its trial. Whittier

“Well, Osmond, you got into hot water a few years ago for defending Raeburn in public, and by this time you will find it not merely hot, but up to boiling point. The fellow is more notorious than ever.”

The speaker was one of Charles Osmond's college friends, a certain Mr. Roberts, who had been abroad for a good many years, but, having returned on account of his health, had for a few months been acting as curate to his friend.

“A man who works as indefatigably as Mr. Raeburn has done can hardly avoid being noticed,” replied Charles Osmond.

“You speak as if you admired the fellow!”

“There is a good deal to admire in Mr. Raeburn. However greatly mistaken he is, there is no doubt that he is a brave man, and an honest man.”

“You can speak in such a way of a man who makes his living by speaking and writing against God.”

“I hope I can speak the truth of every man, whether his creed agrees with mine or not.”

“A man who grows rich on blasphemy! Who sows poison among the people and reaps the harvest!” exclaimed Mr. Roberts.

“That he teaches fearful error, I quite allow,” said Charles Osmond, “but it is the grossest injustice to say that he does it for gain. His atheism brought him to the very brink of starvation some years ago. Even now he is so crippled by the endless litigation he has had that he lives in absolute penury.”

“But that letter you sent to the 'Church Chronicle' was so uncalled for, you put the comparison so broadly.”

“I put it in plain 'English',” said Charles Osmond, “I merely said, as I think, that he puts many of us to shame by his great devotion. The letter was a reply to a very unfair article about the Rilchester riot; it was absolutely necessary that some one should speak. I tell you, Roberts, if you knew the man, you could not speak so bitterly of him. It is not true that he leads a selfish, easy-going life; he has spent thousands and thousands of pounds in the defense of his cause. I don't believe there is a man in England who has led a more self-denying life. It may be very uncomfortable news for us, but we've no right to shut our ears to it. I wish that man could stir up an honest sense of shame in every sleepy Christian in the country. I believe that, indeed, to be his rightful mission. Raeburn is a grand text for a sermon which the nation sorely needs. Here is a man who spends his whole strength in propagating his so-called gospel of atheism. Do you spend your whole strength in spreading the gospel of Christ? Here is a man, willing to leave his home, willing to live without one single luxury, denying himself all that is not necessary to actual health. Have you ever denied yourself anything? Here is a man who spends his whole living all that he has on what he believes to be the truth. What meager tithe do you bestow upon the religion of which you speak so much? Here is a man who dares to stand up alone in defense of what he holds true, a man who never flinches. How far are you brave in the defense of your faith? Do you never keep a prudent silence? Do you never 'howl with the wolves?'”

“Thank Heaven you are not in the pulpit!” ejaculated Mr. Roberts.

“I wish those words could be sent through the length and breadth of the land,” said Charles Osmond.

“No doubt Mr. Raeburn would thank you,” said his friend, with a sharp-edged smile. “It would be a nice little advertisement for him. Why, from a Church of England parson it would make his fortune! My dear Osmond, you are the best fellow in the world, but don't you see that you are playing into the enemy's hands.”

“I am trying to speak the words that God has given me to speak,” said Charles Osmond. “The result I can well trust to Him. An uncomfortable truth will never be popular. The words of our Lord Himself were not popular; but they sunk into men's hearts and bore fruit, though He was put to death as a blasphemer and a revolutionary.”

“Well, at least then, if you must take up the cudgels in his defense, do not dishonor the clerical profession by personal acquaintance with the man. I hear that he has been seen actually in your house, that you are even intimate with his family.”

“Roberts, I didn't think our beliefs were so very different. In fact, I used to think we were nearer to each other on these points than most men. Surely we both own the universal Fatherhood of God?”

“Of course, of course,” said Mr. Roberts, quickly.

“And owning that, we cannot help owning the universal brotherhood of men. Why should you then cut yourself off from your brother, Luke Raeburn?”

“He's no brother of mine!” said Mr. Roberts, in a tone of disgust.

Charles Osmond smiled.

“We do not choose our brothers, we have no voice in the growth of the family. There they are.”

“But the man says there is no God.”

“Excuse me, he has never said that. What he says is, that the word God conveys no meaning to him. If you think that the best way to show your belief in the All-Father and your love to all His children lies in refusing so much as to touch those who don't know Him, you are of course justified in shunning every atheist or agnostic in the world. But I do not think that the best way. It was not Christ's way. Therefore, I hail every possible opportunity of meeting Mr. Raeburn or his colleagues, try to find all the points we have in common, try as far as possible to meet them on their own ground.”

“And the result will be that people will call you an atheist yourself!” broke in Mr. Roberts.

“That would not greatly matter,” said Charles Osmond. “It would be a mere sting for the moment. It is not what men call us that we have to consider, but how we are fulfilling the work God has given us to do.”

“'Pon my life, it makes me feel sick to hear you talk like this about that miserable Raeburn!” exclaimed Mr. Roberts, hotly. “I tell you, Osmond, that you are ruining your reputation, losing all chance of preferment, just because of this mistaken zeal. It makes me furious to think that such a man as you should suffer for such a creature as Raeburn.”

“Have you forgotten that such creatures as you and I and Luke Raeburn had such a Saviour as Jesus Christ? Come, Roberts, in your heart you know you agree with me. If one is indeed our Father, then indeed we are all brethren.”

“I do not hold with you!” retorted Mr. Roberts, the more angrily because he had really hoped to convince his friend. “I wouldn't sit in the same room with the fellow if you offered me the richest living in England. I wouldn't shake hands with him to be made an archbishop. I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs.”

“Even less charitable than St. Dunstan to the devil,” said Charles Osmond, smiling a little, but sadly. “Except in that old legend, however, I don't think Christianity ever mentions tongs. If you can't love your enemies, and pray for them, and hold out a brotherly hand to them, perhaps it were indeed better to hold aloof and keep as quiet as you can.”

“It is clearly impossible for us to work together any longer, Osmond,” said Mr. Roberts, rising. “I am sorry that such a cause should separate us, but if you will persist in visiting an outcast of society, a professed atheist, the most bitter enemy of our church, I cannot allow my name to be associated with yours it is impossible that I should hold office under you.”

So the two friends parted.

Charles Osmond was human, and almost inevitably a sort of reaction began in his mind the instant he was alone. He had lost one of his best friends, he knew as well as possible that they could never be on the same footing as before. He had, moreover, lost in him a valuable co-worker. Then, too, it was true enough that his defense of Raeburn was bringing him into great disfavor with the religious world, and he was a sensitive and naturally a proud man, who found blame, and reproach, and contemptuous disapproval very hard to bear. Years of hard fighting, years of patient imitation of Christ had wonderfully ennobled him, but he had not yet attained to the sublime humility which, being free from all thought of self, cares nothing, scarcely even pauses to think of the world's judgment, too absorbed in the work of the Highest to have leisure for thought of the lowest, too full of love for the race to have love to spare for self. To this ideal he was struggling, but he had not yet reached it, and the thought of his own reputation, his own feelings would creep in. He was not a selfishly ambitious man, but every one who is conscious of ability, every one who feels within him energies lying fallow for want of opportunity, must be ambitious for a larger sphere of work. Just as he was beginning to dare to allow himself the hope of some change in his work, some wider field, just as he was growing sure enough of himself to dare to accept any greater work which might have been offered to him, he must, by bringing himself into evil repute, lose every chance of preferment. And for what? For attempting to obtain a just judgment for the enemy of his faith; for holding out a brotherly hand to a man who might very probably not care to take it; for consorting with those who would at best regard him as an amiable fanatic. Was this worth all it would cost? Could the exceedingly problematical gain make up for the absolutely certain loss?

He took up the day's newspaper. His eye was at once attracted to a paragraph headed: “Mr. Raeburn at Longstaff.” The report, sent from the same source as the report in the “Longstaff Mercury,” which had so greatly displeased Raeburn that morning, struck Charles Osmond in a most unfavorable light. This bitter opponent of Christianity, this unsparing denouncer of all that he held most sacred, THIS was the man for whom he was sacrificing friendship, reputation, advancement. A feeling of absolute disgust rose within him. For a moment the thought came: “I can't have any more to do with the man.”

But he was too honest not to detect almost at once his own Pharisaical, un-Christlike spirit.

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you

which was also in Christ Jesus."

He had been selfishly consulting his own happiness, his own ease. Worse still, he, of all men in the world, had dared to set himself up as too virtuous forsooth to have anything to do with an atheist. Was that the mind which was in Christ? Was He a strait-laced, self-righteous Pharisee, too good, too religious to have anything to say to those who disagreed with Him? Did He not live and die for those who are yet enemies to God? Was not the work of reconciliation the work he came for? Did He calculate the loss to Himself, the risk of failure? Ah, no, those who would imitate God must first give as a free gift, without thought of self, perfect love to all, perfect justice through that love, or else they are not like the Father who "maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Charles Osmond paced to and fro, the look of trouble gradually passing from his face. Presently he paused beside the open window; it looked upon the little back garden, a tiny strip of ground, indeed, but just now bright with sunshine and fresh with the beauty of early summer. The sunshine seemed to steal into his heart as he prayed.

"All-Father, drive out my selfish cowardice, my self-righteous conceit. Give me Thy spirit of perfect love to all, give me Thy pure hatred of sin. Melt my coldness with Thy burning charity, and if it be possible make me fit to be Luke Raeburn's friend."

While he still stood by the window a visitor was announced. He had been too much absorbed to catch the name, but it seemed the most natural thing that on turning round he should find himself face to face with the prophet of atheism.

There he stood, a splendid specimen of humanity; every line in his rugged Scottish face bespoke a character of extraordinary force, but the eyes which in public Charles Osmond had seen flashing with the fire of the man's enthusiasm, or gleaming with a cold metallic light which indicated exactly his steely endurance of ill treatment, were now softened and deepened by sadness. His heart went out to him. Already he loved the man, only hitherto the world's opinions had crept into his heart between each meeting, and had paralyzed the free God-like love. But it was to do so no longer. That afternoon he had dealt it a final blow, there was no more any room for it to rear its fair-speaking form, no longer should its veiled selfishness, its so-called virtuous indignation turn him into a Pharisaical judge.

He received him with a hand shake which conveyed to Raeburn much of the warmth, the reality, the friendliness of the man. He had always liked Charles Osmond, but he had generally met him either in public, or when he was harassed and preoccupied. Now, when he was at leisure, when, too, he was in great trouble, he instinctively perceived that Osmond had in a rare degree the broad-hearted sympathy which he was just now in need of. From that minute a life-long friendship sprung up between the two men.

"I came really to see your son," said Raeburn, "but they tell me he is out. I wish to know the whole truth about Erica." It was not his way to speak very much where he felt deeply, and Charles Osmond could detect all the deep anxiety, the half-indulged hope which lay hidden behind the strong reserved exterior. He had heard enough of the case to be able to satisfy him, to assure him that there was no danger, that all must be left to time and patience and careful observance of the doctor's regulations. Raeburn sighed with relief at the repeated assurance that there was no danger, that recovery was only a question of time. Death had so recently visited his home that a grisly fear had taken possession of his heart. Once free of that, he could speak almost cheerfully of the lesser evil.

"It will be a great trial to her, such absolute imprisonment; she is never happy unless she is hard at work. But she is brave and strong-willed. Will you look in and see her when you can?"

"Certainly," said Charles Osmond. "We must do our best to keep up her spirits."

"Yes, luckily she is a great reader, otherwise such a long rest would be intolerable, I should fancy."

"You do not object to my coming to see her?" said Charles Osmond, looking full into his companion's eyes. "You know that we discuss religious questions pretty freely."

"Religious questions always are freely discussed in my house," said Raeburn. "It will be the greatest advantage to her to have to turn things well over in her mind. Besides, we always make a point of studying our adversaries' case even more closely than our own, and, if she has a chance of doing it personally as well as through books, all the better."

"But supposing that such an unlikely thing were to happen as that she should see reason to change her present views? Supposing, if you can suppose anything so unlikely, she should ever in future years come to believe in Christianity?"

Raeburn smiled, not quite pleasantly.

"It is as you say such a very remote contingency!" He paused, grew grave, then continued with all his native nobility: "Yet I like you the better for having brought forward such an idea, improbable as I hope it may be considered. I feel very sure of Erica. She has thought a great deal, she has had every possible advantage. We never teach on authority; she has been left perfectly free and has learned to weigh evidences and probabilities, not to be led astray by any emotional fancies, but to be guided by reason. She has always heard both sides of the case; she has lived as it were in an atmosphere of debate, and has been, and of course always will be, quite free to form her own opinion on every subject. It is not for nothing that we call ourselves Freethinkers. Absolute freedom of thought and speech is part of our creed. So far from objecting to your holding free discussions with my daughter, I shall be positively grateful to you, and particularly just now. I fancy Erica has inherited enough of my nature to enjoy nothing better than a little opposition."

"I know you are a born fighter," said Charles Osmond. "We sympathize with each other in that. And next to the bliss of a hard-won victory, I place the satisfaction of being well conquered."

Raeburn laughed.

"I am glad we think alike there. People are very fond of describing me as a big bull dog, but if they would think a little, they would see that the love of overcoming obstacles is deeply rooted in the heart of every true man. What is the meaning of our English love of field sports? What the explanation of the mania for Alpine climbing? It is no despicable craving for distinction, it is the innate love of fighting, struggling, and

conquering.”

“Well, there are many obstacles which we can struggle to remove, side by side,” said Charles Osmond. “We should be like one man, I fancy on the question of the opium trade, for instance.”

In a few vigorous words Raeburn denounced this monstrous national sin.

“Are you going to the meeting tonight?” he added, after a pause.

“Yes, I had thought of it. Let us go together. Shall you speak?”

“Not tonight,” said Raeburn, a smile flickering about his usually stern lips. “The Right Reverend Father, etc., etc., who is to occupy the chair, might object to announcing that 'Mr. Raeburn would now address the meeting.' No, this is not the time or place for me. So prejudiced are people that the mere connection of my name with the question would probably do more harm than good. I should like, I confess, to get up without introduction, to speak not from the platform but from among the audience incognito. But that is impossible for a man who has the misfortune to be five inches above the average height, and whose white hair has become a proverb, since some one made the unfortunate remark, repeated in a hundred newspapers, that the 'hoary head was only a crown of glory when found in the way of righteousness.'”

Charles Osmond could not help laughing.

“The worst of these newspaper days is that one never can make an end of anything. That remark has been made to me since at several meetings. At the last, I told the speaker that I was so tired of comments on my personal appearance that I should soon have to resort either to the dyer or the wigmaker. But here am I wasting your time and my own, and forgetting the poor little maid at home. Goodbye. I'll call in passing, then, at a quarter to eight. Tom Craigie will probably be with me, he is very rabid on the subject.”

“Craigie and I are quite old friends,” said Charles Osmond.

And then, as on the preceding night he had stood at the door while Erica crossed the square, so now involuntarily his eyes followed Raeburn. In his very walk the character of the man was indicated firm, steady, imperturbable, straightforward.

CHAPTER XIV. Charles Osmond Speaks His Mind

Fiat justitia ruat coelum. Proverb

Justice, the miracle worker among men. John Bright (July 14, 1868.)

“I thought you were never coming to see me,” said Erica, putting down a newspaper and looking up with eager welcome at Charles Osmond, who had just been announced.

“It has not been for want of will,” he replied, sitting down near her couch, “but I have been overwhelmed with work the last few days. How are you getting on? I'm glad you don't altogether refuse to see your prophet of evil.”

“It would have been worse if you hadn't spoken,” she said, in the tone of one trying hard to make the best of things. “I was rather rash though to say that I should like my wheels to run down; I didn't know how terrible it is to be still. One does so grudge all the lost time.”

“But you will not let this be lost time you will read.”

“Oh, yes, happily I can do that. And Mrs. McNaughton is going to give me physiology lessons, and dear old Professor Gosse has promised to come and teach me whenever he can. He is so devoted to father, you know, I think he would do anything for me just because I am his child. It is a comfort that father has so many real good friends. What I do so hate though is the thought of having to be a passive verb for so long. You've no idea how aggravating it is to lie here and listen to all that is going on, to hear of great meetings and not to be able to go, to hear of work to be done and not to be able to do it. And I suppose one notices little things more when one is ill, for just to lie still and watch our clumsy little servant lay the table for dinner, clattering down the knives and forks and tossing down the plates, makes me actually cross. And then they let the room get so untidy; just look at that stack of books for reviewing, and that chaos of papers in the corner. If I could but get up for just five minutes I shouldn't mind.”

“Poor child,” said Charles Osmond, “this comes very hard on you.”

“I know I'm grumbling dreadfully, but if you knew how horrid it is to be cut off from everything! And, of course, it happens that another controversy is beginning about that Longstaff report. I have been reading half a dozen of today's newspapers, and each one is worse than the last. Look here! Just read that, and try to imagine that it's your father they are slandering! Oh, if I could but get up for one minute and stamp!”

“And is this untrue?” asked Charles Osmond, when he had finished the account in question.

“There is just enough truth in it to make it worse than a direct lie,” said Erica, hotly. “They have quoted his own words, but in a sense in which he never meant them, or they have quite disregarded the context. If you will give me those books on the table, I'll just show you how they have misrepresented him by hacking out single sentences, and twisting and distorting all he says in public.”

Charles Osmond looked at the passages referred to, and saw that Erica had not complained without reason.

“Yes, that is very unfair shamefully unfair,” he said. Then, after a pause, he added, abruptly: “Erica, are you good at languages?”

“I am very fond of them,” she said, surprised at the sudden turn he had given to the conversation.

“Supposing that Mr. Raeburn's speeches and doings were a good deal spoken of in Europe, as no doubt

they are, and that a long time after his death one of his successors made some converts to secularism in Italy, and wrote in Italian all that he could remember of the life and words of his late teacher. Then suppose that the Italian life of Raeburn was translated into Chinese, and that hundreds of years after, a heathen Chinee sat down to read it. His Oriental mind found it hard to understand Mr. Raeburn's thoroughly Western mind; he didn't see anything noble in Mr. Raeburn's character, couldn't understand his mode of thought, read through the life, perhaps studied it after a fashion, or believed he did; then shut it up, and said there might possibly have been such a man, but the proofs were very weak, and, even if he had lived, he didn't think he was any great shakes, though the people did make such a fuss about him. Would you call that heathen Chinee fair?”

Erica could not help smiling, though she saw what he was driving at.

But Charles Osmond felt much too keenly to continue in such a light strain. He was no weak-minded, pleasant conversationalist, but a prophet, who knew how to speak hard truths sometimes.

“Erica,” he said, almost sternly, “you talk much about those who quote your father's words unfairly; but have you never misquoted the words of Christ? You deny Him and disbelieve in Him, yet you have never really studied His life. You have read the New Testament through a veil of prejudice. Mind, I am not saying one word in defense of those so-called Christians who treat you unfairly or uncharitably; but I do say that, as far as I can see, you are quite as unfair to Christ as they are to your father. Of course, you may reply that Jesus of Nazareth lived nearly nineteen hundred years ago, and that your father is still living; that you have many difficulties and doubts to combat, while our bigots can verify every fact or quotation with regard to Mr. Raeburn with perfect ease and certainty. That is true enough. But the difficulties, if honestly faced, might be surmounted. You don't honestly face them; you say to yourself, 'I have gone into all these matters carefully, and now I have finally made up my mind; there is an end of the matter!' You are naturally prejudiced against Christ; every day your prejudices will deepen unless you strike out resolutely for yourself as a truth-seeker, as one who insists on always considering all sides of the question. At present you are absolutely unfair, you will not take the trouble to study the life of Christ.”

Few people like to be told of their faults. Erica could just endure it from her father, but from no one else. She was, besides, too young yet to have learned even the meaning of the word humility. Had Charles Osmond been a few years younger, she would not even have listened to him. As it was, he was a gray-haired man, whom she loved and revered; he was, moreover, a guest. She was very angry with him, but she restrained her anger.

He had watched her attentively while he spoke. She had at first only been surprised; then her anger had been kindled, and she gave him one swift flash from eyes which looked like live coals. Then she turned her face away from him, so that he could only see one crimson cheek. There was a pause after he had said his say. Presently, with a great effort, Erica faced him once more, and in a manner which would have been dignified had it not been a trifle too frigid, made some casual remark upon a different subject. He saw that to stay longer was mere waste of time.

When the door had closed behind him, Erica's anger blazed up once more. That he should have dared to accuse her of unfairness! That he should have dared actually to rebuke her! If he had given her a good shaking she could not have felt more hurt and ruffled. And then to choose this day of all others, just when life was so hard to her, just when she was condemned to a long imprisonment. It was simply brutal of him! If any one had told her that he would do such a thing she would not have believed them. He had said nothing of the sort to her before, though they had known each other so long; but, now that she was ill and helpless and unable to get away from him, he had seen fit to come and lecture her. Well, he was a parson! She might have known that sooner or later the horrid, tyrannical, priestly side of him would show! And yet she had liked him so much, trusted him so much! It was indescribably bitter to think that he was no longer the hero she had thought him to be. That, after all, he was not a grand, noble, self-denying man, but a fault-finding priest!

She spent the rest of the afternoon in alternate wrath and grief. In the evening Aunt Jean read her a somewhat dry book which required all her attention, and, consequently, her anger cooled for want of thoughts to stimulate it. Her father did not come in till late; but, as he carried her upstairs to bed, she told him of Charles Osmond's interview.

“I told him you like a little opposition,” was his reply.

“I don't know about opposition, but I didn't like him, he showed his priestly side.”

“I am sorry,” replied Raeburn. “For my part I genuinely like the man; he seems to me a grand fellow, and I should have said not in the least spoiled by his Christianity, for he is neither exclusive, nor narrow-minded, nor opposed to progress. Infatuated on one point, of course, but a thorough man in spite of it.”

Left once more alone in her little attic room, Erica began to think over things more quietly. So her father had told him that she liked opposition, and he had doled out to her a rebuke which was absolutely unanswerable! But why unanswerable? She had been too angry to reply at the time. It was one of the few maxims her father had given her, “When you are angry be very slow to speak.” But she might write an answer, a nice, cold, cutting answer, respectful, of course, but very frigid. She would clearly demonstrate to him that she was perfectly fair, and that he, her accuser, was unfair.

And then quite quietly, she began to turn over the accusations in her mind. Quoting the words of Christ without regard to the context, twisting their meaning. Neglecting real study of Christ's character and life. Seeing all through a veil of prejudice.

She would begin, like her father, with a definition of terms. What did he mean by study? What did she mean by study? Well such searching analysis, for instance, as she had applied to the character of Hamlet, when she had had to get up one of Shakespeare's plays for her examination. She had worked very hard at that, had really taken every one of his speeches and soliloquies, and had tried to gather his true character from them as well as from his actions.

At this point she wandered away from the subject a little and began to wonder when she should hear the result of the examination, and to hope that she might get a first. By and by she came to herself with a sudden and very uncomfortable shock. If the sort of work she had given to Hamlet was study, HAD she ever studied the character of Christ?

She had all her life heard what her father had to say against Him, and what a good many well-meaning, but not very convincing, people had to say for Him. She had heard a few sermons and several lectures on various subjects connected with Christ's religion. She had read many books both for and against Him. She had read the New Testament. But could she quite honestly say that she had STUDIED the character of Christ? Had she not been predisposed to think her father in the right? He would not at all approve of that. Had she been a true Freethinker? Had she not taken a good deal to be truth because he said it? If so, she was not a bit more fair than the majority of Christians who never took the trouble to go into things for themselves, and study things from the point of view of an outsider.

In the silence and darkness of her little room, she began to suspect a good many unpleasant and hitherto unknown facts about herself.

“After all, I do believe that Mr. Osmond was right,” she confessed at length. “I am glad to get back my belief in him; but I've come to a horrid bit of lath and plaster in myself where I thought it was all good stone.” She fell asleep and dreamed of the heathen Chinee, reading the translation of the translation of her father's words, and disbelieving altogether in “that invented demagogue, Luke Raeburn.”

The next day Charles Osmond, sitting at work in his study, and feeling more depressed and hopeless than he would have cared to own even to himself, was roused by the arrival of a little three-cornered note. It was as follow:

“Dear Mr. Osmond, You made me feel very angry yesterday, and sad, too, for of course it was a case of 'Et tu, Brute.' But last night I came to the unpleasant conclusion that you were quite right, and that I was quite wrong. To prove to you that I am no longer angry, I am going to ask you a great favor. Will you teach me Greek? Your parable of the heathen Chinee has set me thinking. Yours very sincerely, Erica Raeburn.”

Charles Osmond felt the tears come to his eyes. The straightforward simplicity of the letter, the candid avowal of having been “quite wrong,” an avowal not easy for one of Erica's character to make, touched him inexpressibly. Taking a Greek grammar from his book shelves, he set off at once for Guilford Terrace.

He found Erica looking very white and fragile, and with lines of suffering about her mouth; but, though physically weary, her mind seemed as vigorous as ever. She received him with her usual frankness, and with more animation in her look than he had seen for some weeks.

“I did think you perfectly horrid yesterday!” she exclaimed. “And was miserable, besides, at the prospect of losing one of my heroes. You can be very severe.”

“The infliction of pain is only justified when the inflictor is certain, or as nearly certain as he can be, that the pain will be productive of good,” said Charles Osmond.

“I suppose that is the way you account for the origin of evil,” said Erica, thoughtfully.

“Yes,” replied Charles Osmond, pleased that she should have thought of the subject, “that to me seems the only possible explanation, otherwise God would be either not perfectly good or not omnipotent. His all-wisdom enables Him to overrule that pain which He has willed to be the necessary outcome of infractions of His order. Pain, you see, is made into a means of helping us to find out where that order has been broken, and so teaching us to obey it in the long run.”

“But if there is an all-powerful God, wouldn't it have been much better if He had made it impossible for us to go wrong?”

“It would have saved much trouble, undoubtedly; but do you think that which costs us least trouble is generally the most worth having? I know a noble fellow who has fought his way upward through sins and temptations you would like him, by the way, for he was once an atheist. He is, by virtue of all he has passed through, all he has overcome, one of the fines men I have ever known.”

“That is the friend, I suppose, whom your son mentioned to me. But I don't see your argument, for if there was an all-powerful God, He could have caused the man you speak of to be as noble and good without passing through pain and temptation.”

“But God does not work arbitrarily, but by laws of progression. Nor does His omnipotence include the working of contradictions. He cannot both cause a thing to be and not to be at the same time. If it is a law that that which has grown by struggle and effort shall be most noble, God will not arbitrarily reverse that law or truth because the creation of sinless beings would involve less trouble.”

“It all seems to me so unreal!” exclaimed Erica. “It seems like talking of thin air!”

“I expect it does,” said Charles Osmond, trying to realize to himself her position.

There was a silence.

“How did this man of whom you speak come to desert our side?” asked Erica. “I suppose, as you say he was one of the finest men you ever knew, he must, at least, have had a great intellect. How did he begin to think all these unlikely, unreal things true?”

“Donovan began by seeing the grandeur of the character of Christ. He followed his example for many years, calling himself all the time an atheist; at last he realized that in Christ we see the Father.”

“I am sorry we lost him if he is such a nice man,” was Erica's sole comment. Then, turning her beautiful eyes on Charles Osmond, she said, “I hope my note did not convey to you more than I intended. I asked you if you would teach me Greek, and I mean to try to study the character of Christ; but, quite to speak the truth, I don't really want to do it. I only do it because I see I have not been fair.”

“You do it for the sake of being a truth-seeker, the best possible reason.”

“I thought you would think I was going to do it because I hoped to get something. I thought one of your strong points was that people must come in a state of need and expecting to be satisfied. I don't expect anything. I am only doing it for the sake of honesty and thoroughness. I don't expect any good at all.”

“Is it likely that you can expect when you know so little what is there? What can you bring better than an hones mind to the search? Erica, if I hadn't known that you were absolutely sincere, I should not have dared to give you the pain I gave you yesterday. It was my trust in your perfect sincerity which brought you that strong accusation. Even then it was a sore piece of work.”

“Did you mind it a little,” exclaimed Erica. But directly she had spoken, she felt that the question was absurd, for she saw a look in Charles Osmond's eyes that made the word “little” a mockery.

“What makes that man so loving?” she thought to herself. “He reminded me almost of father, yet I am no child of his. I am opposed to all that he teaches. I have spoken my mind out to him in a way which must sometimes have pained him. Yet he cares for me so much that it pained him exceedingly to give me pain yesterday.”

His character puzzled her. The loving breath, the stern condemnation of whatever was not absolutely true, the disregard of what the world said, the hatred of shams, and most puzzling of all, the often apparent struggle with himself, the unceasing effort to conquer his chief fault. Yet this noble, honest, intellectual man was laboring under a great delusion, a delusion which somehow gave him an extraordinary power of loving! Ah, no! It could not be his Christianity, though, which made him loving, for were not most Christians hard and bitter and narrow-minded?

“I wish,” she said, abruptly, “you would tell me what makes you willing to be friends with us. I know well enough that the 'Church Chronicle' has been punishing you for your defense of my father, and that there must be a thousand disagreeables to encounter in your own set just because you visit us. Why do you come?”

“Because I care for you very much.”

“But you care, too, perhaps, for other people who will probably cut you for flying in the face of society and visiting social outcasts.”

“I don't think I can explain it to you yet,” he replied. “You would only tell me, as you told me once before, that I was talking riddles to you. When you have read your Greek Testament and really studied the life of Christ, I think you will understand. In the meantime, St. Paul, I think, answers your question better than I could, but you wouldn't understand even his words, I fancy. There they are in the Greek,” he opened a Testament and showed her a passage. “I believe you would think the English almost as great gibberish as this looks to you in its unknown characters.”

“Do you advise every one to learn Greek?”

“No, many have neither time nor ability, and those who are not apt at languages would spend their time more usefully over good translations, I think. But you have time and brains, so I am very glad to teach you.”

“I am afraid I would much rather it were for any other purpose!” said Erica. “I am somehow weary of the very name of Christianity. I have heard wrangling over the Bible till I am tired to death of it, and discussions about the Atonement and the Incarnation, and the Resurrection, till the very words are hateful to me. I am afraid I shock you, but just put yourself in my place and imagine how you would feel. It is not even as if I had to debate the various questions; I have merely to sit and listen to a never-ending dispute.”

“You sadden me; but it is quite natural that you should be weary of such debates. I want you to realize, though, that in the stormy atmosphere of your father's lecture hall, in the din and strife of controversy, it is impossible that you should gain any true idea of Christ's real character. Put aside all thought of the dogmas you have been wearied with, and study the life of the Man.”

Then the lesson began. It proved a treat to both teacher and pupil. When Charles Osmond had left, Erica still worked on.

“I should like, at any rate, to spell out his riddle,” she thought to herself, turning back to the passage he had shown her. And letter by letter, and word by word, she made out “For the love of Christ—”

The verb baffled her, however, and she lay on the sofa, chafing at her helplessness till, at length, Tom happened to come in, and brought her the English Testament she needed. Ah! There it was! “For the love of Christ constraineth us.”

Was THAT what had made him come? Why, that was the alleged reason for half the persecutions they met with! Did the love of Christ constrain Charles Osmond to be their friend, and at the same time constrain the clergy of X_____ not many years before to incite the people to stone her father, and offer him every sort of insult? Was it possible that the love of Christ constrained Mr. Osmond to endure contempt and censure on their behalf, and constrained Mr. Randolph to hire a band of roughs to interrupt her father's speeches?

“He is a grand exception to the general rule,” she said to herself. “If there were many Christians like him, I should begin to think there must be something more in Christianity than we thought. Well, if only to please him I must try to study the New Testament over again, and as thoroughly as I can. No, not to please him, though, but for the sake of being quite honest. I would much rather be working at that new book of Tyndall's.”

CHAPTER XV. An Interval

How can man love but what he yearns to help? R. Browning

During the year of Erica's illness, Brian began to realize his true position toward her better than he had hitherto done.

He saw quite well that any intrusion of his love, even any slight manifestation of it, might do untold harm. She was not ready for it yet why, he could not have told.

The truth was, that his Undine, although in many respects a high-souled woman, was still in some respects a child. She would have been merely embarrassed by his love; she did not want it. She liked him very much as an acquaintance; he was to her Tom's friend, or her doctor, or perhaps Mr. Osmond's son. In this way she liked him, was even fond of him, but as a lover he would have been a perplexing embarrassment.

He knew well enough that her frank liking boded ill for his future success; but in spite of that he could not

help being glad to obtain any footing with her. It was something even to be “Tom's friend Brian.” He delighted in hearing his name from her lips, although knowing that it was no good augury. He lived on from day to day, thinking very little of the doubtful future as long as he could serve her in the present. A reserved and silent man, devoted to his profession, and to practical science of every kind, few people guessed that he could have any particular story of his own. He was not at all the sort of man who would be expected to fall hopelessly in love at first sight, nor would any one have selected him as a good modern specimen of the chivalrous knight of olden times; he was so completely a nineteenth-century man, so progressive, so scientific. But, though his devotion was of the silent order, it was, perhaps for that reason, all the truer. There was about him a sort of divine patience. As long as he could serve Erica, he was content to wait any number of years in the hope of winning her love. He accepted his position readily. He knew that she had not the slightest love for him. He was quite secondary to his father, even, who was one of Erica's heroes. He liked to make her talk of him; her enthusiastic liking was delightful perhaps all the more so because she was far from agreeing with her prophet. Brian, with the wonderful self-forgetfulness of true love, liked to hear the praises of all those whom she admired; he liked to realize what were her ideals, even when conscious how far he fell short of them.

For it was unfortunately true that his was not the type of character she was most likely to admire. As a friend she might like him much, but he could hardly be her hero. His wonderful patience was quite lost upon her; she hardly counted patience as a virtue at all. His grand humility merely perplexed her; it was at present far beyond her comprehension. While his willingness to serve every one, even in the most trifling and petty concerns of daily life, she often attributed to mere good nature. Grand acts of self-sacrifice she admired enthusiastically, but the more really difficult round of small denials and trifling services she did not in the least appreciate. Absorbed in the contemplation, as it were, of the Hamlets in life, she had no leisure to spare for the Horatios.

She proved a capital patient; her whole mind was set on getting well, and her steady common sense and obedience to rules made her a great favorite with her elder doctor. Really healthy, and only invalided by the hard work and trouble she had undergone, seven or eight months' rest did wonders for her. In the enforced quiet, too, she found plenty of time for study. Charles Osmond had never had a better pupil. They learned to know each other very well during those lessons, and many were the perplexing questions which Erica started. But they were not as before, a mere repetition of the difficulties she had been primed with at her father's lecture hall, nor did she bring them forward with the triumphant conviction that they were unanswerable. They were real, honest questions, desiring and seeking everywhere for the true answer which might be somewhere.

The result of her study of the life of Christ was at first to make her a much better secularist. She found to her surprise that there was much in His teaching that entirely harmonized with secularism; that, in fact, He spoke a great deal about the improvement of this world, and scarcely at all about that place in the clouds of which Christians made so much. By the end of a year she had also reached the conviction that, whatever interpolations there might be in the gospels, no untrue writer, no admiring but dishonest narrator COULD have conceived such a character as that of Christ. For she had dug down to the very root of the matter. She had left for the present the, to her, perplexing and almost irritating catalogue of miracles, and had begun to perceive the strength and indomitable courage, the grand self-devotion, the all-embracing love of the man. Very superficial had been her former view. He had been to her a shadowy, unreal being, soft and gentle, even a little effeminate, speaking sometimes what seemed to her narrow words about only saving the lost sheep of the house of Israel. A character somehow wanting in that Power and Intellect which she worshipped.

But on a really deep study she saw how greatly she had been mistaken. Extraordinarily mistaken, both as to the character and the teaching. Christ was without doubt a grand ideal! To be as broad-hearted as he was, as universally loving it would be no bad aim. And, as in daily life Erica realized how hard was the practice of that love, she realized at the same time the loftiness of the ideal, and the weakness of her own powers.

“But, though I do begin to see why you take this man as your ideal,” she said, one day, to Charles Osmond, “I can not, of course, accept a great deal that He is said to have taught. When He speaks of love to men, that is understandable, one can try to obey; but when he speaks about God, then, of course, I can only think that He was deluded. You may admire Joan of Arc, and see the great beauty of her character, yet at the same time believe that she was acting under a delusion; you may admire the character of Gotama without considering Buddhism the true religion; and so with Christ, I may reverence and admire His character, while believing Him to have been mistaken.”

Charles Osmond smiled. He knew from many trifling signs, unnoticed by others, that Erica would have given a great deal to see her way to an honest acceptance of that teaching of Christ which spoke of an unseen but everywhere present Father of all, of the everlastingness of love, of a reunion with those who are dead. She hardly allowed to herself that she longed to believe it, she dreaded the least concession to that natural craving; she distrusted her own truthfulness, feared above all things that she might be deluded, might imagine that to be true which was in reality false.

And happily, her prophet was too wise to attempt in any way to quicken the work which was going on within her; he was one of those rare men who can be, even in such a case, content to wait. He would as soon have thought of digging up a seed to see whether he could not quicken its slow development of root and stem as of interfering in any way with Erica. He came and went, taught her Greek, and always, day after day, week after week, month after month, however much pressed by his parish work, however harassed by private troubles, he came to her with the genial sympathy, the broad-hearted readiness to hear calmly all sides of the question, which had struck her so much the very first time she had met him.

The other members of the family liked him almost as well, although they did not know him so intimately as Erica. Aunt Jean, who had at first been a little prejudiced against him, ended by singing his praises more loudly than any one, perhaps conquered in spite of herself by the man's extraordinary power of sympathy, his ready perception of good even in those with whom he disagreed most.

Mrs. Craigie was in many respects very like her brother, and was a very useful worker, though much of her work was little seen. She did not speak in public; all the oratorical powers of the family seemed to have

concentrated themselves in Luke Raeburn; but she wrote and worked indefatigably, proving a very useful second to her brother. A hard, wearing life, however, had told a good deal upon her, and trouble had somewhat imbittered her nature. She had not the vein of humor which had stood Raeburn in such good stead. Severely mater-of-fact, and almost despising those who had any poetry in their nature, she did not always agree very well with Erica. The two loved each other sincerely, and were far too loyal both to clan and creed to allow their differences really to separate them; but there was, undoubtedly, something in their natures which jarred. Even Tom found it hard at times to bear the strong infusion of bitter criticism which his mother introduced into the home atmosphere. He was something of a philosopher, however, and knowing that she had been through great trouble, and had had much to try her, he made up his mind that it was natural therefore inevitable therefore to be borne.

The home life was not without its frets and petty trials, but on one point there was perfect accord. All were devoted to the head of the house would have sacrificed anything to bring him a few minutes' peace.

As for Raeburn, when not occupied in actual conflict, he lived in a sort of serene atmosphere of thought and study, far removed from all the small differences and little cares of his household. They invariably smoothed down all such roughnesses in his presence, and probably in any case he would have been unable to see such microscopic grievances; unless, indeed, they left any shade of annoyance on Erica's face, and then his fatherhood detected at once what was wrong.

It would be tedious, however, to follow the course of Erica's life for the next three years, for, though the time was that of her chief mental growth, her days were of the quietest. Not till she was two-and-twenty did she fully recover from the effects of her sudden sorrow and the subsequent overwork. In the meantime, her father's influence steadily deepened and spread throughout the country, and troubles multiplied.

CHAPTER XVI. Hyde Park

Who spouts his message to the wilderness,
Lightens his soul and feels one burden less;
But to the people preach, and you will find
They'll pay you back with thanks ill to your mind.
Goethe. Translated by J.S.B.

Hyde Park is a truly national property, and it is amusing and perhaps edifying to note the various uses to which it is often put. In the morning it is the rendezvous of nurses and children; in the afternoon of a fashionable throng; on Sunday evenings it is the resort of hard-working men and women, who have to content themselves with getting a breath of fresh air once a week. But, above all, the park is the meeting place of the people, the place for mass meetings and monster demonstrations.

On a bright day in June, when the trees were still in their freshest green, the crowd of wealth and fashion had beaten an ignominious retreat before a great political demonstration to be held that afternoon.

Every one knew that the meeting would be a very stormy one, for it related to the most burning question of the day, a question which was hourly growing more and more momentous, and which for the time had divided England into two bitterly opposed factions.

These years which Erica had passed so quietly had been eventful years for the country, years of strife and bloodshed, years of reckless expenditure, years which deluded some and enraged others, provoking most bitter animosity between the opposing parties. The question was not a class question, and a certain number of the working classes and a large number of the London roughs warmly espoused the cause of that party which appealed to their love of power and to a selfish patriotism. The Hyde Park meeting would inevitably be a turbulent one. Those who wished to run no risk remained at home; Rotten Row was deserted; the carriage road almost empty; while from the gateways there poured in a never ending stream of people some serious-looking, some eager and excited, some with a dangerously vindictive look, some merely curious. Every now and then the more motley and disorderly crowd was reinforced by a club with its brass band and banners, and gradually the mass of human beings grew from hundreds to a thousand, from one thousand to many thousands, until, indeed, it became almost impossible to form any idea of the actual numbers, so enormous was the gathering.

“We shall have a bad time of it today,” remarked Raeburn to Brian, as they forced their way on. “If I'm not very much mistaken, too, we are vastly outnumbered.”

He looked round the huge assembly from his vantage ground of six foot four, his cool intrepidity not one whit shaken by the knowledge that, by what he was about to say, he should draw down on his own head all the wrath of the roughest portion of the crowd.

“'Twill be against fearful odds!” said Tom, elbowing vigorously to keep up with his companion.

“We fear nae foe!” said Raeburn, quoting his favorite motto. “And, after all, it were no bad end to die protesting against wicked rapacity, needless bloodshed.”

His eye kindled as he thought of the protest he hoped to make; his heart beat high as he looked round upon the throng so largely composed of those hostile to himself. Was there not a demand for his superabundant energy? A demand for the tremendous powers of endurance, of influence, of devotion which were stored up within him? As an athlete joys in trying a difficult feat, as an artist joys in attempting a lofty subject, so Raeburn in his consciousness of power, in his absolute conviction of truth, joyed in the prospect of a most dangerous conflict.

Brian, watching him presently from a little distance, could not wonder at the immense influence he had gained in the country. The mere physique of the man was wonderfully impressive the strong, rugged Scottish face, the latent power conveyed in his whole bearing. He was no demagogue, he never flattered the people;

he preached indeed a somewhat severe creed, but, even in his sternest mood, the hold he got over the people, the power he had of raising the most degraded to a higher level was marvelous. It was not likely, however, that his protest of today would lead to anything but a free fight. If he could make himself effectually heard, he cared very little for what followed. It was necessary that a protest should be made, and he was the right man to make it; therefore come ill or well, he would go through with it, and, if he escaped with his life so much the better!

The meeting began. A moderate speaker was heard without interruption, but the instant Raeburn stood up, a chorus of yells arose. For several minutes he made no attempt to speak; but his dignity seemed to grow in proportion with the indignities offered him. He stood there towering above the crowd like a rock of strength, scanning the thousands of faces with the steady gaze of one who, in thinking of the progress of the race, had lost all consciousness of his own personality. He had come there to protest against injustice, to use his vast strength for others, to spend and be spent for millions, to die if need be! Raeburn was made of the stuff of which martyrs are made; standing there face to face with an angry crowd, which might at any moment break loose and trample him to death or tear him to pieces, his heart was nevertheless all aglow with the righteousness of his cause, with the burning desire to make an availing protest against an evil which was desolating thousands of homes.

The majesty of his calmness began to influence the mob; the hisses and groans died away into silence, such comparative silence, that is, as was compatible with the greatness of the assembly. Then Raeburn braced himself up; dignified before, he now seemed even more erect and stately. The knowledge that for the moment he had that huge crowd entirely under control was stimulating in the highest degree. In a minute his stentorian voice was ringing out fearlessly into the vast arena; thousands of hearts were vibrating to his impassioned appeal. To each one it seemed as if he individually were addressed.

“You who call yourselves Englishmen, I come to appeal to you today! You, who call yourselves freemen, I come to tell you that you are acting like slaves.”

Then with rare tact, he alluded to the strongest points of the British character, touching with consummate skill the vulnerable parts of his audience. He took for granted that their aims were pure, their standard lofty, and by the very supposition raised for a time the most abject of his hearers, inspired them with his own enthusiasm.

Presently, when he felt secure enough to venture it, when the crowd was hanging on his words with breathless attention, he appealed no longer directly to the people, but drew, in graphic language, the picture of the desolations brought by war. The simplicity of his phrases, his entire absence of showiness or bombast, made his influence indescribably deep and powerful. A mere ranter, a frothy mob orator, would have been silenced long before.

But this man had somehow got hold of the great assembly, had conquered them by sheer force of will; in a battle of one will against thousands the one had conquered, and would hold its own till it had administered the hard home-thrust which would make the thousands wince and retaliate.

Now, under the power of that “sledge-hammer Saxon,” that marvelously graphic picture of misery and bereavement, hard-headed, and hitherto hard hearted men were crying like children. Then came the rugged unvarnished statement shouted forth in the speaker's sternest voice.

“All this is being done in your name, men of England! Not only in your name, but at your cost! You are responsible for this bloodshed, this misery! How long is it to go on? How long are you free men going to allow yourselves to be bloody executioners? How long are you to be slavish followers of that grasping ambition which veils its foulness under the fair name of patriotism?”

Loud murmurs began to arise at this, and the orator knew that the ground swell betokened the coming storm. He proceeded with tenfold energy, his words came down like hailstones, with a fiery indignation he delivered his mighty philippic, in a torrent of forceful words he launched out the most tremendous denunciation he had ever uttered.

The string had been gradually worked up to its highest possible tension; at length when the strain was the greatest it suddenly snapped. Raeburn's will had held all those thousands in check; he had kept his bitterest enemies hanging on his words; he had lashed them into fury, and still kept his grip over them; he had worked them up, gaining more and more power over them, till at length, as he shouted forth the last words of a grand peroration, the bitterness and truth of his accusations proved keener than his restraining influence.

He had foreseen that the spell would break, and he knew the instant it was broken. A moment before, and he had been able to sway that huge crowd as he pleased; now he was at their mercy. No will power, no force of language, no strength of earnestness or truth would avail him now. All that he had to trust to was his immense physical strength, and what was that when measured against thousands?

He saw the dangerous surging movement in the sea of heads, and knew only too well what it betokened. With a frightful yell of mingled hatred and execration, the seething human mass bore down upon him! His own followers and friends did what they could for him, but that was very little. His case was desperate. Desperation, however, inspires some people with an almost superhuman energy. Life was sweet, and that day he fought for his life. The very shouting and hooting of the mob, the roar of the angry multitude, which might well have filled even a brave man with panic, stimulated him, strengthened him to resist to the uttermost.

He fought like a lion, forcing his way through the furious crowd, attacked in the most brutal way on every side, yet ever struggling on if only by inches. Never once did his steadfastness waver, never for a single instant did his spirit sink. His unfailing presence of mind enabled him to get through what would have been impossible to most men, his great height and strength stood him in good stead, while the meanness and the injustice of the attack, the immense odds against which he was fighting nerved him for the struggle.

It was more like a hideous nightmare than a piece of actual life, those fierce tiger faces swarming around, that roar of vindictive anger, that frightful crushing, that hail storm of savage blows! But, whether life or nightmare, it must be gone through with. In the thick of the fight a line of Goethe came to his mind, one of his favorite mottoes; “Make good thy standing place and move the world.”

And even then he half smiled to himself at the forlornness of the hope that he should ever need a standing place again.

With renewed vigor he fought his way on, and with a sort of glow of triumph and new-born hope had almost seen his way to a place of comparative safety, when a fearful blow hopelessly maimed him. With a vain struggle to save himself he fell to the earth a vision of fierce faces, green leaves, and blue sky flashed before his eyes, an inward vision of Erica, a moment's agony, and then the surging crowd closed over him, and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XVII. At Death's Door

Sorrow and wrong are pangs of a new birth;
All we who suffer bleed for one another;
No life may live alone, but all in all;
We lie within the tomb of our dead selves,
Waiting till One command us to arise. Hon. Boden Noel.

Knowing that Erica would have a very anxious afternoon, Charles Osmond gave up his brief midday rest, snatched a hasty lunch at a third-rate restaurant, finished his parish visits sooner than usual, and reached the little house in Guilford Terrace in time to share the worst part of her waiting. He found her hard at work as usual, her table strewn with papers and books of reference. Raeburn had purposely left her some work to do for him which he knew would fully occupy her; but the mere fact that she knew he had done it on purpose to engross her mind with other matters entirely prevented her from giving it her full attention. She had never felt more thankful to see Charles Osmond than at that moment.

“When your whole heart and mind are in Hyde Park, how are you to drag them back to what some vindictive old early Father said about the eternity of punishment?” she exclaimed, with a smile, which very thinly disguised her consuming anxiety.

They sat down near the open window, Erica taking possession of that side which commanded the view of the entrance of the cul-de-sac. Charles Osmond did not speak for a minute or two, but sat watching her, trying to realize to himself what such anxiety as hers must be. She was evidently determined to keep outwardly calm, not to let her fears gain undue power over her; but she could not conceal the nervous trembling which beset her at every sound of wheels in the quiet square, nor did she know that in her brave eyes there lurked the most visible manifestation possible of haggard, anxious waiting. She sat with her watch in her hand, the little watch that Eric Haeberlein had given her when she was almost a child, and which, even in the days of their greatest poverty, her father had never allowed her to part with. What strange hours it had often measured for her. Age-long hours of grief, weary days of illness and pain, times of eager expectation, times of sickening anxiety, times of mental conflict, of baffling questions and perplexities. How the hands seemed to creep on this afternoon, at times almost to stand still.

“Now, I suppose if you were in my case you would pray,” said Erica, raising her eyes to Charles Osmond. “It must be a relief, but yet, when you come to analyze it, it is most illogical a fearful waste of time. If there is a God who works by fixed laws, and who sees the whole maze of every one's life before hand, then the particular time and manner of my father's death must be already appointed, and no prayer of mine that he may come safely through this afternoon's danger can be of the least avail. Besides, if a God could be turned round from His original purpose by human wills and much speaking, I hardly think He would be worth believing in.”

“You are taking the lowest view of prayer mere petition; but even that, I think, is set on its right footing as soon as we grasp the true conception of the ideal father. Do you mean to say that, because your father's rules were unwavering and his day's work marked out beforehand, he did not like you to come to him when you were a little child, with all your wishes and longings and requests, even though they were sometimes childish and often impossible to gratify? Would he have been better pleased if you had shut up everything in your own heart, and never of your own accord told him anything about your babyish plans and wants?”

“Still, prayer seems to me a waste of time,” said Erica.

“What! If it brings you a talk with your Father? If it is a relief to you and a pleasure because a sign of trust and love to Him? But in one way I entirely agree with you, unless it is spontaneous it is not only useless but harmful. Imagine a child forced to talk to its father. And this seems to me the truest defense of prayer; to the 'natural man' it always will seem foolishness, to the 'spiritual man' to one who has recognized the All-Father it is the absolute necessity of life. And I think by degrees one passes from eager petition for personal and physical good things into the truer and more Christlike spirit of prayer. 'These are my fears, these are my wishes, but not my will but Thine be done.' Shakespeare had got hold of a grand truth, it seems to me, when he said:

“'So find we profit by losing of our prayers.'”

“And yet your ideal man distinctly said: 'Ask and ye shall receive'” said Erica. “There are no limitations. For aught we know, some pig-headed fanatic may be at this moment praying that God in His mercy would rid the earth of that most dangerous man, Luke Raeburn; while I might be of course I am not, but it is conceivable that I might be praying for his safety. Both of us might claim the same promise, 'Ask and ye shall receive.'”

“You forget one thing,” said Charles Osmond. “You would both pray to the Father, and His answer which you, by the way, might consider no answer would be the answer of a father. Do you not think the fanatic would certainly find profit in having his most unbrotherly request disregarded? And the true loss or gain of prayer would surely be in this: The fanatic would, by his un-Christlike request, put himself further from God; you, by your spontaneous and natural avowal of need and recognition of a Supreme loving will, would draw nearer to God. Nor do we yet at all understand the extraordinary influence exerted on others by any steady,

earnest concentration of thought; science is but just awakening to the fact that there is an unknown power which we have hitherto never dreamed of. I have great hope that in this direction, as in all others, science may show us the hidden workings of our Father."

Erica forgot her anxiety for a moment; she was watching Charles Osmond's face with mingled curiosity and perplexity. To speak to one whose belief in the Unseen seemed stronger and more influential than most people's belief in the seen, was always very strange to her, and with her prophet she was almost always conscious of this double life (SHE considered it double a real outer and an imaginary inner.) His strong conviction; the every-day language which he used in speaking of those truths which most people from a mistaken notion of reverence, wrap up in a sort of ecclesiastical phraseology; above all, the carrying out in his life of the idea of universal brotherhood, with so many a mere form of words all served to impress Erica very deeply. She knew him too well and loved him too truly to pause often, as it were, to analyze his character. Every now and then, however, some new phase was borne in upon her, and some chance word, emphasizing the difference between them, forced her from sheer honesty to own how much that was noble seemed in him to be the outcome of faith in Christ.

They went a little more deeply into the prayer question. Then, with the wonder growing on her more and more, Erica suddenly exclaimed: "It is so wonderful to me that you can believe without logical proof believe a thing which affects your whole life so immensely, and yet be unable to demonstrate the very existence of a God."

"Do you believe your father loves you?" asked Charles Osmond.

"My father! Why, of course."

"You can't logically prove that his love has any true existence."

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Erica. "Not a day passes without some word, look, thought, which would prove it to any one. If there is one thing that I am certain of in the whole world, it is that my father loves me. Why, you who know him so well, you must know that! You must have seen that."

"All his care of you may be mere self-interest," said Charles Osmond. "Perhaps he puts on a sort of appearance of affection for you just for the sake of what people would say not a very likely thing for Mr. Raeburn to consider, I own. Still, you can't demonstrate to me that his love is a reality."

"But I KNOW it is!" cried Erica, vehemently.

"Of course you know, my child; you know in your heart, and our hearts can teach us what no power of intellect, no skill in logic can every teach us. You can't logically prove the existence of your father's love, and I can't logically prove the existence of the all-Father; but in our hearts we both of us know. The deepest, most sacred realities are generally those of heart-knowledge, and quite out of the pale of logic."

Erica did not speak, but sat musing. After all, what COULD be proved with absolute certainty? Why, nothing, except such bare facts as that two and two make four. Was even mathematical proof so absolutely certain? Were they not already beginning to talk of a possible fourth dimension of space when even that might no longer be capable of demonstration.

"Well, setting aside actual proof," she resumed, after a silence, "how do you bring it down even to a probability that God is?"

"We must all of us start with a supposition," said Charles Osmond. "There must on the one hand either be everlasting matter or everlasting force, whether these be two real existences, or whether matter be only force conditioned, or, on the other hand, you have the alternative of the everlasting 'He.' You at present base your belief on the first alternative. I base mine on the last, which, I grant you, is at the outset the most difficult of the two. I find, however, that nine times out of ten the most difficult theory is the truest. Granting the everlasting 'He,' you must allow self-consciousness, without which there could be no all powerful, all knowledge-full, and all love-full. We will not quarrel about names; call the Everlasting what you please. 'Father' seems to me at once the highest and simplest name."

"But evil!" broke in Erica, triumphantly. "If He originates all, he must originate evil as well as good."

"Certainly," said Charles Osmond, "He has expressly told us so. 'I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things.'"

"I recollect now, we spoke of this two or three years ago," said Erica. "You said that the highest good was attained by passing through struggles and temptations."

"Think of it in this way," said Charles Osmond. "The Father is educating His children; what education was ever brought about without pain? The wise human father does not so much shield his child from small pains, but encourages him to get wisdom from them for the future, tries to teach him endurance and courage. Pain is necessary as an element in education, possibly there is no evolution possible without it. The father may regret it, but, if he is wise, knows that it must be. He suffers twice as much as the child from the infliction of the pain. The All-Father, being at once all-knowing and all-loving, can see the end of the education while we only see it in process, and perhaps exclaim: 'What a frightful state of things,' or like your favorite 'Stephen Blackpool,' 'It's all a muddle.'"

"And the end you consider to be perfection, and eternal union with God. How can you think immortality probable?"

"It is the necessary outcome of belief in such a God, such a Father as we have spoken of. What! Could God have willed that His children whom He really loves should, after a time, fade utterly away? If so, He would be less loving than an average earthly father. If He did indeed love them, and would fain have had them ever with Him, but could not, then He would not be all-powerful."

"I see you a universalist, a great contrast to my Early Father here, who gloats over the delightful prospect of watching from his comfortable heaven the tortures of all unbelievers. But, tell me, what do you think would be our position in your unseen world? I suppose the mere realization of having given one's life in a mistaken cause would be about the most terrible pain conceivable?"

"I think," said Charles Osmond, with one of his grave, quiet smiles, "that death will indeed be your 'gate of

life,' that seeing the light you will come to your true self, and exclaim, 'Who'd have thought it?'"

The every day language sounded quaint, it made Erica smile; but Charles Osmond continued, with a brightness in his eyes which she was far from understanding: "And you know there are to be those who shall say: 'Lord when saw we Thee in distress and helped Thee?' They had not recognized Him here, but He recognized them there? They shared in the 'Come ye blessed of my Father.'"

"Well," said Erica, thoughtfully, "if any Christianity be true, it must be your loving belief, not the blood-thirsty scheme of the Calvinists. If THAT could by any possibility be true, I should greatly prefer, like Kingsley's dear old 'Wulf,' to share hell with my own people."

The words had scarcely left her lips when, with a startled cry, she sprung to her feet and hurried to the door. The next moment Charles Osmond saw Tom pass the window; he was unmistakably the bearer of bad news.

His first panting words were reassuring "Brian says you are not to be frightened;" but they were evidently the mere repetition of a message. Tom himself was almost hopeless; his wrath and grief become more apparent every minute as he gave an incoherent account of the afternoon's work.

The brutes, the fiends, had half killed the chieftain, had set on him like so many tigers. Brian and Hazeldine were bringing him home had sent him on to prepare.

Erica had listened so far with a colorless face, and hands tightly clasped, but the word "prepare" seemed to bring new life to her. In an instant she was her strongest self.

"They will never try to take him up that steep narrow staircase. Quick, Tom! Help me to move this couch into the study."

The little Irish servant was pressed into the service, too, and sent upstairs to fetch and carry, and in a very few minutes the preparations were complete, and Erica had at hand all the appliances most likely to be needed. Just as all was done, and she was beginning to feel that a minute's pause would be the "last straw," Tom heard the sound of wheels in the square, and hurried out. Erica stood in the doorway watching, and presently saw a small crowd of helpers bearing a deathly looking burden. Whiteness of death redness of blood. The ground seemed rocking beneath her feet, when a strong hand took hers and drew her into the house.

"Don't be afraid," said a voice, which she knew to be Brian's though a black mist would not let her see him. "He was conscious a minute ago; this is only from the pain of moving. Which room?"

"The study," she replied, recovering herself. "Give me something to do, Brian, quickly."

He saw that in doing lay her safety, and kept her fully employed, so much so, indeed, that from sheer lack of time she was able to stave off the faintness which had threatened to overpower her. After a time her father came to himself, and Erica's face, which had been the last in his mind in full consciousness, was the first which now presented itself to his awakening gaze. He smiled.

"Well, Erica! So, after all, they haven't quite done for me. Nine lives like a cat, as I always told you."

His voice was faint, but with all his wonted energy he raised himself before they could remonstrate. He was far more injured, however, than he knew; with a stifled groan he fell back once more in a swoon, and it was many hours before they were able to restore him.

After that, fever set in, and a shadow as of death fell on the house in Guilford Terrace. Doctors came and went; Brian almost lived with his patient; friends Raeburn had hosts of them came with help of every description. The gloomy little alley admitted every day crowds of inquirers, who came to the door, read the bulletin, glanced up at the windows, and went away looking graver than when they came.

Erica lost count of time altogether. The past seemed blotted out; the weight of the present was so great that she would not admit any thought of the future, though conscious always of a blank dread which she dared not pause to analyze, sufficient indeed for her day was the evil thereof. She struggled on somehow with a sort of despairing strength; only once or twice did she even recollect the outside world.

It happened that on the first Wednesday after the Hyde Park meeting some one mentioned the day of the week in her hearing. She was in the sick-room at the time, but at once remembered that her week's work was untouched, that she had not written a line for the "Idol-Breaker." Every idea seemed to have gone out of her head; for a minute she felt that to save her life she could not write a line. But still she conscientiously struggled to remember what subject had been allotted her, and in the temporary stillness of the first night-watch drew writing materials toward her, and leaned her head on her hands until, almost by an effort of will, she at length recalled the theme for her article.

Of course! It was to be that disgraceful disturbance in the church at Z_____. She remembered the whole affair now, it all rose up before her graphically not a bad subject at all! Their party might make a good deal by it. Her article must be bright, descriptive, sarcastic. Yet how was she to write such an article when her heart felt like lead? An involuntary "I can't" rose to her lips, and she glanced at her father's motionless form, her eyes filling with tears. Then one of his sayings came to her mind: "No such word as 'Can't' in the dictionary," and began to write rapidly almost defiantly. No sooner had she begun than her very exhaustion, the lateness of the hour, and the stress of circumstance came to her aid she had never before written so brilliantly.

The humor of the scene struck her; little flashes of mirth at the expense of both priest and people, delicate sarcasms, the more searching from their very refinement, awoke in her brain and were swiftly transcribed. In the middle of one of the most daring sentences Raeburn stirred. Erica's pen was thrown down at once; she was at his side absorbed once more in attending to his wants, forgetful quite of religious controversy, of the "Idol-Breaker," of anything in fact in the whole world but her father. Not till an hour had passed was she free to finish her writing, but by the time her aunt came to relieve guard at two o'clock the article was finished and Erica stole noiselessly into the next room to put it up.

To her surprise she found that Tom had not gone to bed. He was still toiling away at his desk with a towel round his head; she could almost have smiled at the ludicrous mixture of grief and sleepiness on his face, had not her own heart been so loaded with care and sadness. The post brought in what Tom described as

“bushels” of letters every day, and he was working away at them now with sleepy heroism.

“How tired you look,” said Erica. “See! I have brought in this for the 'Idol.'”

“You've been writing it now! That is good of you. I was afraid we should have to make up with some wretched padding of Blank's.”

He took the sheets from her and began to read. Laughter is often only one remove from grief, and Tom, though he was sad-hearted enough, could not keep his countenance through Erica's article. First his shoulders began to shake, then he burst into such a paroxysm of noiseless laughter that Erica, fearing that he could not restrain himself, and would be heard in the sick-room, pulled the towel from his forehead over his mouth; then, conquered herself by the absurdity of his appearance, she was obliged to bury her own face in her hands, laughing more and more whenever the incongruousness of the laughter occurred to her. When they had exhausted themselves the profound depression which had been the real cause of the violent reaction returned with double force. Tom sighed heavily and finished reading the article with the gravest of faces. He was astonished that Erica could have written at such a time an article positively scintillating with mirth.

“How did you manage anything so witty tonight of all nights?” he asked.

“Don't you remember Hans Andersen's clown Punchinello,” said Erica. “He never laughed and joked so gayly as the night when his love died and his own heart was broken.”

There was a look in her eyes which made Tom reply, quickly: “Don't write any more just now; the professor has promised us something for next week. Don't write any more till till the chieftain is well.”

After that she wished him good night rather hastily, crept upstairs to her attic, and threw herself down on her bed. Why had he spoken of the future? Why had his voice hesitated? No, she would not think, she would not.

So the article appeared in that week's “Idol-Breaker”, and thousands and thousands of people laughed over it. It even excited displeased comment from “the other side,” and in many ways did a great deal of what in Guilford Terrace was considered “good work.” For Erica herself, it was long before she had time to give it another thought; it was to her only a desperately hard duty which she had succeeded in doing. Nobody every guessed how much it had cost her.

The weary time dragged on, days and weeks passed by; Raeburn was growing weaker, but clung to life with extraordinary tenacity. And now very bitterly they felt the evils of this voluntarily embraced poverty, for the summer heat was for a few days almost tropical, and the tiny little rooms in the lodging-house were stifling. Brian was very anxious to have the patient moved across to his father's house; but, though Charles Osmond said all he could in favor of the scheme, the other doctors would not consent, thinking the risk of removal too great. And, besides, it would be useless, they maintained the atheist was evidently dying. Brian, who was the youngest, could not carry out his wishes in defiance of the others, but he would not deny himself the hope of even yet saving Erica's father. He devised punkahs, became almost nurse and doctor in one, and utterly refused to lose heart. Erica herself was the only other person who shared his hopefulness, or perhaps her feeling could hardly be described by that word; she was not hopeful, but she had so resolutely set herself to live in the present that she had managed altogether to crowd out the future, and with it the worst fear.

One day, however, it broke upon her suddenly. Some one had left a newspaper in the sick-room; it was weeks since she had seen one, and in a brief interval, while her father slept, or seemed to sleep, she took it up half mechanically. How much it would have interested her a little while ago, how meaningless it all seemed to her now. “Latest Telegrams,” “News from the Seat of War,” “Parliamentary Intelligence” a speech by Sir Michael Cunningham, one of her heroes, on a question in which she was interested. She could not read it, all the life seemed gone out of it, today the paper was nothing to her but a broad sheet with so many columns of printed matter. But as she was putting it down their own name caught her eye. All at once her benumbed faculties regained their power, her heart began to beat wildly, for there, in clearest print, in short, choppy, unequivocal sentences, was the hideous fear which she had contrived so long to banish.

“Mr. Raeburn is dying. The bulletins have daily been growing less and less hopeful. Yesterday doctor R_____, who had been called in, could only confirm the unfavorable opinion of the other doctors. In all probability the days of the great apostle of atheism are numbered. It rests with the Hyde Park rioters, and those who by word and example have incited them, to bear the responsibility of making a martyr of such a man as Mr. Luke Raeburn. Emphatically disclaiming the slightest sympathy with Mr. Raeburn's religious views, we yet—”

But Erica could read no more. Whatever modicum of charity the writer ventured to put forth was lost upon her. The opening sentence danced before her eyes in letters of fire. That morning she met Brian in the passage and drew him into the sitting room. He saw at once how it was with her.

“Look,” she said, holding the newspaper toward him, “is that true? Or is it only a sensation trap or written for party purposes?”

Her delicate lips were closed with their hardest expression, her eyes only looked grave and questioning. She watched his face as he read, lost her last hope, and with the look of such anguish as he had never before seen, drew the paper from him, and caught his hand in hers in wild entreaty.

“Oh, Brian, Brian! Is there no hope? Surely you can do something for him. There MUST be hope, he is so strong, so full of life.”

He struggled hard for voice and words to answer her, but the imploring pressure of her hands on his had nearly unnerved him. Already the grief that kills lurked in her eyes he knew that if her father died she would not long survive him.

“Don't say what is untrue,” she continued. “Don't let me drive you into telling a lie but only tell me if there is indeed no hope no chance.”

“It may be,” said Brian. “You must not expect, for those far wiser than I say it can not be. But I hope yes, I still hope.”

On that crumb of comfort she lived, but it was a weary day, and for the first time she noticed that her father, who was free from fever, followed her everywhere with his eyes. She knew intuitively that he thought

himself dying.

Toward evening she was sitting beside him, slowly drawing her fingers through his thick masses of snow-white hair in the way he liked best, when he looked suddenly right into her eyes with his own strangely similar ones, deep, earnest eyes, full now of a sort of dumb yearning.

“Little son Eric,” he said, faintly, “you will go on with the work I am leaving.”

“Yes, father,” she replied firmly, though her heart felt as if it would break.

“A harmful delusion,” he murmured, half to himself, “taking up our best men! Swallowing up the money of the people. What's that singing, Erica?”

“It is the children in the hospital,” she replied. “I'll shut the window if they disturb you, father.”

“No,” he said. “One can tolerate the delusion for them if it makes their pain more bearable. Poor bairns! Poor bairns! Pain is an odd mystery.”

He drew down her hand and held it in his, seeming to listen to the singing, which floated in clearly through the open window at right angles with the back windows of the hospital. Neither of them knew what the hymn was, but the refrain which came after every verse as if even the tinies were joining in it was quite audible to Luke Raeburn and his daughter.

“Through life's long day, and death's dark night, Oh, gentle Jesus, be our light.”

Erica's breath came in gasps. To be reminded then that life was long and that death was dark!

She thought she had never prayed, she had never consciously prayed, but her whole life for the past three years had been an unspoken prayer. Never was there a more true desire entirely unexpressed than the desire which now seemed to possess her whole being. The darkness would soon hide forever the being she most loved. Oh, if she could but honestly think that He who called Himself the Light of the world was indeed still living, still ready to help!

But to allow her distress to gain the mastery over her would certainly disturb and grieve her father. With a great effort she stifled the sobs which would rise in her throat, and waited in rigid stillness. When the last notes of the hymn had died away into silence, she turned to look at her father. He had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII. Answered or Unanswered?

“Glory to God to God!” he saith,
“Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And life is perfected by death.” E. B. Browning

“Mr. Raeburn is curiously like the celebrated dog of nursery lore, who appertained to the ancient and far-famed Mother Hubbard. All the doctors gave him up, all the secularists prepared mourning garments, the printers were meditating black borders for the 'Idol-Breaker,' the relative merits of burial and cremation were already in discussion, when the dog we beg pardon the leader of atheism, came to life again.

“'She went to the joiners to buy him a coffin,
But when she came back the dog was laughing.'

“History,” as a great man was fond of remarking, “'repeats itself.'”

Raeburn laughed heartily over the accounts of his recovery in the comic papers. No one better appreciated the very clever representation of himself as a huge bull-dog starting up into life while Britannia in widow's weeds brought in a parish coffin. Erica would hardly look at the thing; she had suffered too much to be able to endure any jokes on the subject, and she felt hurt and angry that what had given her such anguish should be turned into a foolish jest.

At length, after many weeks of weary anxiety, she was able to breathe freely once more, for her father steadily regained his strength. The devotion of her whole time and strength and thought to another had done wonders for her, her character had strangely deepened and mellowed. But no sooner was she free to begin her ordinary life than new perplexities beset her on every side.

During her own long illness she had of course been debarred from attending any lectures or meetings whatever. In the years following, before she had quite regained her strength, she had generally gone to hear her father, but had never become again a regular attendant at the lecture hall. Now that she was quite well, however, there was nothing to prevent her attending as many lectures as she pleased, and naturally, her position as Luke Raeburn's daughter made her presence desirable. So it came to pass one Sunday evening in July that she happened to be present at a lecture given by a Mr. Masterman.

He was a man whom they knew intimately. Erica liked him sufficiently well in private life, and he had been remarkably kind and helpful at the time of her father's illness. It was some years, however, since she had heard him lecture, and this evening, by the virulence of his attack on the character of Christ, he revealed to her how much her ground had shifted since she had last heard him. It was not that he was an opponent of existing Christianity her father was that, she herself was that, and felt bound to be as long as she considered it a lie but Mr. Masterman's attack seemed to her grossly unfair, almost willfully inaccurate, and, in addition, his sarcasm and pleasantries seemed to her odiously vulgar. He was answered by a most miserable representative of Christianity, who made a foolish, weak, blustering speech, and tried to pay the atheist back in his own coin. Erica felt wretched. She longed to get up and speak herself, longing flatly to contradict the champion of her own cause; then grew frightened at the strength of her feelings. Could this be mere love of fair play and justice? Was her feeling merely that of a barrister who would argue as well on one side as the other? And yet her displeasure in itself proved little or nothing. Would not Charles Osmond be displeased and indignant if he heard her father unjustly spoken of? Yes, but then Luke Raeburn was a living man, and Christ

was she even sure that he had ever lived? Well, yes, sure of that, but of how much more?

When the assembly broke up, her mind was in a miserable chaos of doubt.

It was one of those delicious summer evenings when even in East London the skies are mellow and the air sweet and cool.

“Oh, Tom, let us walk home!” she exclaimed, longing for change of scene and exercise.

“All right,” he replied, “I'll take you a short cut, if you don't mind a few back slums to begin with.”

Now Erica was familiar enough with the sight of poverty and squalor; she had not lived at the West End, where you may entirely forget the existence of the poor. The knowledge of evil had come to her of necessity much earlier than to most girls, and tonight, as Tom took her through a succession of narrow streets and dirty courts, misery, and vice, and hopeless degradation met her on every side. Swarms of filthy little children wrangled and fought in the gutters, drunken women shouted foul language at one another everywhere was wickedness everywhere want. Her heart felt as if it would break. What was to reach these poor, miserable fellow creatures of hers? Who was to raise them out of their horrible plight? The coarse distortion and the narrow contraction of Christ's teaching which she had just heard, offered no remedy for this evil. Nor could she think that secularism would reach these. To understand secularism you meed a fair share of intellect what intellect would these poor creatures have? Why, you might talk forever of the “good of humanity,” and “the duty of promoting the general good,” and they would not so much as grasp the idea of what “good” was they would sink back to their animal-like state. Instinctively her thoughts turned to the Radical Reformer who, eighteen hundred years ago, had lived among people just as wicked, just as wretched. How had He worked? What had He done? All through His words and actions had sounded the one key-note, “Your Father.” Always He had led them to look up to a perfect Being who loved them, who was present with them.

Was it possible that if Christians had indeed followed their Leader and not obscured His teaching with hideous secretions of doctrine which He had assuredly never taught was it possible that the Christ-gospel in its original simplicity would indeed be the remedy for all evil?

They were coming into broader thoroughfares now. A wailing child's voice fell on her ear. A small crowd of disreputable idlers was hanging round the closed doors of a public-house, waiting eagerly for the opening which would take place at the close of service-time. The wailing child's voice grew more and more piteous. Erica saw that it came from a poor little half-clad creature of three years old who was clinging to the skirts of a miserable-looking woman with a shawl thrown over her head. Just as she drew near, the woman, with a fearful oath, tried to shake herself free of the child; then, with uplifted arms, was about to deal it a heavy blow when Erica caught her hand as it descended, and held it fast in both her hands.

“Don't hurt him,” she said, “please don't hurt him.”

She looked into the prematurely wrinkled face, into the half-dim eyes, she held the hand fast with a pressure not of force but of entreaty. Then they passed on, the by-standers shouting out the derisive chorus of “Come to Jesus!” with which London roughs delight in mocking any passenger whom they suspect of religious tendencies. In all her sadness, Erica could not help smiling to herself. That she, an atheist, Luke Raeburn's daughter, should be hooted at as a follower of Jesus!

In the meantime the woman she had spoken to stood still staring after her. If an angel had suddenly appeared to her, she could not have been more startled. A human hand had given her coarse, guilty, trembling hand such a living pressure as it had never before received; a pure, loving face had looked at her; a voice, which was trembling with earnestness and full of the pathos of restrained tears, had pleaded with her for her own child. The woman's dormant motherhood sprung into life. Yes, he was her own child after all. She did not really want to hurt him, but a sort of demon was inside her, the demon of drink and sometimes it made her almost mad. She looked down now with love-cleared eyes at the little crying child who still clung to her ragged skirt. She stooped and picked him up, and wrapped a bit of her shawl round him. Presently after a fearful struggle, she turned away from the public-house and carried the child home to bed.

The jeering chorus was soon checked, for the shutters were taken down, and the doors thrown wide, and light, and cheerfulness, and shelter, and the drink they were all craving for, were temptingly displayed to draw in the waiting idlers.

But the woman had gone home, and one rather surly looking man still leaned against the wall looking up the street where Tom and Erica had disappeared.

“Blowed if that ain't a bit of pluck!” he said to himself, and therewith fell into a reverie.

Tom talked of temperance work, about which he was very eager, all the way to Guilford Terrace. Erica, on reaching home, went at once to her father's room. She found him propped up with pillows in his arm chair; he was still only well enough to attempt the lightest of light literature, and was looking at some old volumes of “Punch” which the Osmonds had sent across.

“You look tired, Eric!” he exclaimed. “Was there a good attendance?”

“Very,” she replied, but so much less brightly than usual that Raeburn at once divined that something had annoyed her.

“Was Mr. Masterman dull?”

“Not dull,” she replied, hesitatingly. Then, with more than her usual vehemence, “Father, I can't endure him! I wish we didn't have such men on our side! He is so flippant, so vulgar!”

“Of course he never was a model of refinement,” said Raeburn, “but he is effective very effective. It is impossible that you should like his style; he is, compared with you, what a theatrical poster is to a delicate tete-de-greuze. How did he specially offend you tonight?”

“It was all hateful from the very beginning,” said Erica. “And sprinkled all through with doubtful jests, which of course pleased the people. One despicable one about the Entry into Jerusalem, which I believe he must have got from Strauss. I'm sure Strauss quotes it.”

“You see what displeases an educated mind, wins a rough, uncultured one. We may not altogether like it, but we must put up with it. We need our Moodys and Sankeys as well as the Christians.”

“But, father, he seems to me so unfair.”

Raeburn looked grave.

“My dear,” he said, after a minute's thought, “you are not in the least bound to go to hear Mr. Masterman again unless you like. But remember this, Eric, we are only a struggling minority, and let me quote to you one of our Scottish proverbs: 'Hawks shouldna pick out hawks' een.' You are still a hawk, are you not?”

“Of course,” she said, earnestly.

“Well, then be leal to your brother hawks.”

A cloud of perplexed thought stole over Erica's face. Raeburn noted it and did his best to divert her attention.

“Come,” he said, “let us have a chapter of Mark Twain to enliven us.”

But even Mark Twain was inadequate to check the thought-struggle which had begun in Erica's brain. Desperate earnestness would not be conquered even by the most delightful of all humorous fiction.

During the next few days this thought-struggle raged. So great was Erica's fear of having biased either one way or the other that she would not even hint at her perplexity either to her father or to Charles Osmond. And now the actual thoroughness of her character seemed a hindrance.

She had imagination, quick perception of the true and beautiful, and an immense amount of steady common sense. At the same time she was almost as keen and quite as slow of conviction as her father. Honestly dreading to allow her poetic faculty due play, she kept her imagination rigidly within the narrowest bounds. She was thus honestly handicapped in the race; the honesty was, however, a little mistaken and one-sided, for not the most vivid imagination could be considered as a set-off to the great, the incalculable counter-influence of her whole education and surroundings. How she got through that black struggle was sometimes a mystery to her. At last, one evening, when the load had grown intolerable, she shut herself into her own room, and, forgetful of all her logical arguments, spoke to the unknown God. Her hopelessness, her desperation, drove her as a last resource to cry to the possibly Existent.

She stood by the open window of her little room, with her arms on the window sill, looking out into the summer night, just as years before she had stood when making up her mind to exile and sacrifice. Then the wintery heavens had been blacker and the stars brighter, now both sky and stars were dimmer because more light. Over the roofs of the Guilford Square houses she could see Charles' Wain and the Pole-star, but only faintly.

“God!” she cried, “I have no reason to think that Thou art except that there is such fearful need of Thee. I can see no single proof in the world that Thou art here. But if what Christ said was true, then Thou must care that I should know Thee, for I must be Thy child. Oh, God, if Thou art oh, Father, if Thou art help us to know Thee! Show us what is true!”

She waited and waited, hoping for some sort of answer, some thought, some conviction. But she found, as many have found before her, that “the heavens were as brass.”

“Of course it was no use!” she exclaimed, impatiently, yet with a blankness of disappointment which in itself proved the reality of her expectations.

Just then she heard Tom's voice at the foot of the stairs calling; it seemed like the seal to her impatient “of course.” There was no Unseen, no Eternal of course not! But there was a busy every-day life to be lived.

“All right,” she returned impatiently, to Tom's repeated calls; “don't make such a noise or else you'll disturb father.”

“He is wide awake,” said Tom, “and talking to the professor. Just look here, I couldn't help fetching you down did you ever see such a speech in your life? A regular brick he must be!”

He held an evening paper in his hand. Erica remembered that the debate was to be on a question affecting all free-thinkers. During the discussion of this, some one had introduced a reference to the Hyde Park meeting and to Mr. Raeburn, and had been careful not to lose the opportunity of making a spiteful and misleading remark about the apostle of atheism. Tom hurried her through this, however, to the speech that followed it.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “Who is Mr. Farrant? I never heard of him before.”

“Member for Greyshot, elected last spring, don't you remember? One of the by-elections. Licked the Tories all to fits. This is his maiden speech, and that makes it all the more plucky of him to take up the cudgels in our defense. Here! Let me read it to you.”

With the force of one who is fired with a new and hearty admiration, he read the report. The speech was undoubtedly a fine one; it was a grand protest against intolerance, a plea for justice. The speaker had not hesitated for an instant to raise his voice in behalf of a very unpopular cause, and his generous words, even when read through the medium of an indifferent newspaper report, awoke a strange thrill in Erica's heart. The utter disregard of self, the nobility of the whole speech struck her immensely. The man who had dared to stand up for the first time in Parliament and speak thus, must be one in a thousand. Presently came the most daring and disinterested touch of all.

“The honorable member for Rilchester made what I can not but regard as a most misleading and unnecessary remark with reference to the recent occurrence in Hyde Park, and to Mr. Raeburn. I listened to it with pain, for, if there can be degrees in the absolute evil of injustice and lack of charity, it seems to me that the highest degree is reached in that uncharitableness which tries to blacken the character of an opponent. Since the subject has been introduced, the House will, I hope, bear with me if for the sake of justice I for a moment allude to a personal matter. Some years ago I myself was an atheist, and I can only say that, speaking now from the directly opposite standpoint, I can still look back and thank Mr. Raeburn most heartily for the good service he did me. He was the first man who ever showed me, by words and example combined, that life is only noble when lived for the race. The statement made by the honorable member for Rilchester seems to me as incorrect as it was uncalled for. Surely this assembly will best prove its high character not by loud religious protestations, not by supporting a narrow, Pharisaical measure, but by

impartiality, by perfect justice, by the manifestation in deed and word of that broad-hearted charity, that universal brotherliness, which alone deserves the name of Christianity."

The manifestation of the speaker's generosity and universal brotherliness came like a light to Erica's darkness. It did not end her struggle, but it did end her despair. A faint, indefinable hope rose in her heart.

Mr. Farrant's maiden speech made a considerable stir; it met with some praise and much blame. Erica learned from one of the papers that he was Mr. Donovan Farrant, and at once felt convinced that he was the "Donovan" whom both Charles Osmond and Brian had mentioned to her. She seemed to know a good deal about him. Probably they had never told her his surname because they knew that some day he would be a public character. With instinctive delicacy she refrained from making any reference to his speech, or any inquiry as to his identity with the "Donovan" of whose inner life she had heard. Very soon after that, too, she went down to the sea side with her father, and when they came back to town the Osmonds had gone abroad, so it was not until the autumn that they again met.

Her stay at Codrington wonderfully refreshed her; it was the first time in her life that she had taken a thorough holiday, with change of scene and restful idleness to complete it. The time was outwardly uneventful enough, but her father grew strong in body and she grew strong in mind.

One absurd little incident she often laughed over afterward. It happened that in the "On-looker" there was a quotation from some unnamed medieval writer; she and her father had a discussion as to whom it could be, Raeburn maintaining that it was Thomas a Kempis. Wishing to verify it, Erica went to a bookseller's and asked for the "Imitation of Christ." A rather prim-looking dame presided behind the counter.

"We haven't that book, miss," she said, "it's quite out of fashion now."

"I agree with you," said Erica, greatly amused. "It must be quite out of fashion, for I scarcely know half a dozen people who practice it." However, a second shop appeared to think differently, for it had Thomas a Kempis in every conceivable size, shape, and binding. Erica bought a little sixpenny copy and went back to the beach, where she made her father laugh over her story.

They verified the quotation, and by and by Erica began to read the book. On the very first page she came to words which made her pause and relapse into a deep reverie.

"But he who would fully and feelingly understand the words of Christ, must study to make his whole life conformable to that of Christ."

The thought linked itself in her mind with some words of John Stuart Mill's which she had heard quoted till she was almost weary of them.

"Nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation for the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life."

While she was still musing, a sound of piteous crying attracted her notice. Looking up she saw a tiny child wandering along the beach, trailing a wooden spade after her, and sobbing as if her heart would break. In a moment Erica was beside her coaxing and consoling, but at last, finding it impossible to draw forth an intelligible word from the sobs and tears, she took the little thing in her arms and carried her to her father. Raeburn was a great child lover, and had a habit of carrying goodies in his pocket, much to the satisfaction of all the children with whom he was brought in contact. He produced a bit of butterscotch, which restored the small maiden's serenity for a minute.

"She must have lost her way," he said, glancing from the lovely little tear-stained face to the thinly shod feet and ungloved hands of the little one. The butterscotch had won her heart. Presently she volunteered a remark.

"Dolly putted on her own hat. Dolly wanted to dig all alone. Dolly ran away."

"Where is your home?" asked Erica.

"Me don't know! Me don't know!" cried Dolly, bursting into tears again, and hiding her face on Raeburn's coat. "Father! Father, Dolly wants father."

"We will come and look for him," said Erica, "but you must stop crying, and you know your father will be sure to come and look for you."

At this the little one checked her tears, and looked up as if expecting to see him close by.

"He isn't there," she said, piteously.

"Come and let us look for him," said Erica.

Dolly jumped up, thrust her little hand into Erica's, and toiled up the steep beach. They had reached the road, and Erica paused for a moment, wondering which direction they had better take, when a voice behind her made her start.

"Why Dorothy little one we've been hunting for you everywhere!"

Dolly let go Erica's hand, and with a glad cry rushed into the arms of a tall, dark, rather foreign-looking man, who caught her up and held her closely.

He turned to Erica and thanked her very warmly for her help. Erica thought his face the noblest she had ever seen.

CHAPTER XIX. At The Museum

Methought I heard one calling: "Child,"
And I replied: 'My Lord!'"
George Herbert

A favorite pastime with country children is to watch the gradual growth of the acorn into the oak tree. They

will suspend the acorn in a glass of water and watch the slow progress during long months. First one tiny white thread is put forth, then another, until at length the glass is almost filled with a tangle of white fibers, a sturdy little stem raises itself up, and the baby tree, if it is to live, must be at once transplanted into good soil. The process may be botanically interesting, but there is something a little sickly about it, too there is a feeling that, after all, the acorn would have done better in its natural ground hidden away in darkness.

And, if we have this feeling with regard to vegetable growth, how much more with regard to spiritual growth! To attempt to set up the gradually awakening spirit in an apparatus where it might be the observed of all observers would be at once repulsive and presumptuous. Happily, it is impossible. We may trace influences and suggestions, just as we may note the rain or drought, the heat or cold that affect vegetable growth, but the actual birth is ever hidden.

To attempt even to shadow forth Erica's growth during the next year would be worse than presumptuous. As to her outward life it was not greatly changed, only intensified. October always began their busiest six months. There was the night school at which she was able to work again indefatigably. There were lectures to be attended. Above all there was an ever-increasing amount of work to be done for her father. In all the positive and constructive side of secularism, in all the efforts made by it to better humanity, she took an enthusiastic share. Naturally she did not see so much of Charles Osmond now that she was strong again. In the press of business, in the hard, every-day life there was little time for discussion. They met frequently, but never for one of their long tete-a-tetes. Perhaps Erica purposely avoided them. She was strangely different now from the little impetuous girl who had come to his study years ago, trembling with anger at the lady superintendent's insult. Insults had since then, alas, become so familiar to her, that she had acquired a sort of patient dignity of endurance, infinitely sad to watch in such a young girl.

One morning in early June, just a year after the memorable Hyde Park meeting, Charles Osmond happened to be returning from the death bed of one of his parishioners when, at the corner of Guilford Square, he met Erica. It might have been in part the contrast with the sad and painful scene he had just quitted, but he thought she had never before looked so beautiful. Her face seemed to have taken to itself the freshness and the glow of the summer morning.

“You are early abroad,” he said, feeling older and grayer and more tired than ever as he paused to speak to her.

“I am off to the museum to read,” she said, “I like to get there by nine, then you don't have to wait such an age for your books; I can't bear waiting.”

“What are you at work upon now?”

“Oh, today for the last time I am going to hunt up particulars about Livingstone. Hazeldine was very anxious that a series of papers on his life should be written for our people. What a grand fellow he was!”

“I heard a characteristic anecdote of him the other day,” said Charles Osmond. “He was walking beside one of the African lakes which he had discovered, when suddenly there dawned on him a new meaning to long familiar words: 'The blood of Christ,' he exclaimed. 'That must be Charity! The blood of Christ that must be Charity!' A beautiful thought, too seldom practically taught.”

Erica looked grave.

“Characteristic, certainly, of his broad-heartedness, but I don't think that anecdote will do for the readers of the 'Idol-Breaker.'” Then, looking up at Charles Osmond, she added in a rather lower tone: “Do you know, I had no idea when I began what a difficult task I had got. I thought in such an active life as that there would be little difficulty in keeping the religious part away from the secular, but it is wonderful how Livingstone contrives to mix them up.”

“You see, if Christianity be true, it must, as you say, 'mix up' with everything. There should be no rigid distinction between secular and religious,” said Charles Osmond.

“If it is true,” said Erica, suddenly, and with seeming irrelevance, “then sooner or later we must learn it to be so. Truth MUST win in the end. But it is worse to wait for perfect certainty than for books at the museum,” she added, laughing. “It is five minutes to nine I shall be late.”

Charles Osmond walked home thoughtfully; the meeting had somehow cheered him.

“Absolute conviction that truth must out that truth must make itself perceptible. I've not often come across a more beautiful faith than that. Yes, little Undine, right you are. 'Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Here or there, here or there

'All things come round to him who will but wait.'

There's one for yourself, Charles Osmond. None of your hurrying and meddling now, old man; you've just got to leave it to your betters.”

Soliloquizing after this fashion he reached home, and was not sorry to find his breakfast awaiting him, for he had been up the greater part of the night.

The great domed library of the British Museum had become very home-like to Erica, it was her ideal of comfort; she went there whenever she wanted quiet, for in the small and crowded lodgings she could never be secure from interruptions, and interruptions resulted in bad work. There was something, too, in the atmosphere of the museum which seemed to help her. She liked the perfect stillness, she liked the presence of all the books. Above all, too, she liked the consciousness of possession. There was no narrow exclusiveness about this place, no one could look askance at her here. The place belonged to the people, and therefore belonged to her; she heretic and atheist as she was had as much share in the ownership as the highest in the land. She had her own peculiar nook over by the encyclopedias, and, being always an early comer, seldom failed to secure her own particular chair and desk.

On this morning she took her place, as she had done hundreds of times before, and was soon hard at work. She was finishing her last paper on Livingstone when a book she had ordered was deposited on her desk by one of the noiseless attendants. She wanted it to verify one or two dates, and she half thought she would try to hunt up Charles Osmond's anecdote. In order to write her series of papers, she had been obliged to study

the character of the great explorer pretty thoroughly. She had always been able to see the nobility even of those differing most widely from herself in point of creed, and the great beauty of Livingstone's character had impressed her very much. Today she happened to open on an entry in his journal which seemed particularly characteristic of the man. He was in great danger from the hostile tribes at the union of the Zambesi and Loangwa, and there was something about his spontaneous utterance which appealed very strongly to Erica.

“Felt much turmoil of spirit in view of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and teeming population knocked on the head by savages tomorrow. But I read that Jesus came and said: 'All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor, and there's an end on't. I will not cross furtively by night as I intended... Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though they may be the last.”

The courage, the daring, the perseverance, the intense faith of the man shone out in these sentences. Was it indeed a delusion, such practical faith as that?

Blackness of darkness seemed to hem her in. She struggled through it once more by the one gleam of certainty which had come to her in the past year. Truth must be self-revealing. Sooner or later, if she were honest, if she did not shut her mind deliberately up with the assurance “You have thought out these matters fully and fairly; enough! Let us now rest content” and if she were indeed a true “Freethinker,” she MUST know. And even as that conviction returned to her the words half quaint, half pathetic, came to her mind: “It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor, and there's an end on't.”

Yes, there would “be an end on't,” if she could feel sure that he, too, was not deluded.

She turned over the pages of the book, and toward the end found a copy of the inscription on Livingstone's tomb. Her eye fell on the words: “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice.”

Somehow the mention of the lost sheep brought to her mind the little lost child on the beach at Codrington Dolly, who had “putted on” her own hat, who had wanted to be independent and to dig by herself. She had run away from home, and could not find the way back. What a steep climb they had had up the beach how the little thing's tiny feet had slipped and stumbled over the stones, and just when they were most perplexed, the father had found them.

Exactly how it all came to her Erica never knew, nor could she ever put into words the story of the next few moments. When “God's great sunrise” finds us out we have need of something higher than human speech there ARE no words for it. At the utmost she could only say that it was like coming out of the twilight, that it seemed as if she were immersed in a great wave of all pervading light.

All in a moment the Christ who had been to her merely a noble character of ancient history seemed to become to her the most real and living of all living realities. Even her own existence seemed to fade into a vague and misty shadow in comparison with the intensity of this new consciousness this conviction of His being which surrounded her which she knew, indeed, to be “way, and truth, and life. They shall hear My voice.” In the silence of waiting, in the faithfulness of honest searching, Erica for the first time in her life heard it. Yes, she had been right truth was self-revealing. A few minutes ago those words had been to her an unfulfilled, a vain promise the speaker, broad-hearted and loving as he was, had doubtless been deluded. But now the voice spoke to her, called her by name, told her what she wanted.

“Dolly,” became to her a parable of life. She had been like that little child; for years and years she had been toiling up over rough stones and slippery pebbles, but at last she had heard the voice. Was this the coming to the Father?

That which often appears sudden and unaccountable is, if we did but know it, a slow, beautiful evolution. It was now very nearly seven years since the autumn afternoon when the man “too nice to be a clergyman,” and “not a bit like a Christian,” had come to Erica's home, had shown her that at least one of them practiced the universal brotherliness which almost all preached. It was nearly seven years since words of absolute conviction, words of love and power, had first sounded forth from Christian lips in her father's lecture hall, and had awakened in her mind that miserably uncomfortable question “supposing Christianity should be true?”

All the most beautiful influences are quiet; only the destructive agencies, the stormy wind, the heavy rain and hail, are noisy. Love of the deepest sort is wordless, the sunshine steals down silently, the dew falls noiselessly, and the communion of spirit with spirit is calmer and quieter than anything else in the world quiet as the spontaneous turning of the sunflower to the sun when the heavy clouds have passed away, and the light and warmth reveal themselves. The subdued rustle of leaves, the hushed footsteps sounded as usual in the great library, but Erica was beyond the perception of either place or time.

Presently she was recalled by the arrival of another student, who took the chair next to hers a little deformed man, with a face which looked prematurely old, and sad, restless eyes. A few hours before she would have regarded him with a sort of shuddering compassion; now with the compassion there came to her the thought of compensation which even here and now might make the poor fellow happy. Was he not immortal? Might he not here and now learn what she had just learned, gain that unspeakable joy? And might not the knowledge go on growing and increasing forever? She took up her pen once more, verified the dates, rolled up her manuscript, and with one look at Livingstones's journal, returned it to the clerk and left the library.

It was like coming into a new world; even dingy Bloomsbury seemed beautiful. Her face was so bright, so like the face of a happy child, that more than one passer-by was startled by it, lifted for a moment from sordid cares into a purer atmosphere. She felt a longing to speak to some one who would understand her new happiness. She had reached Guilford Square, and looked doubtfully across to the Osmonds' house. They would understand. But no she must tell her father first. And then, with a fearful pang, she realized what her new conviction meant. It meant bringing the sword into her father's house; it meant grieving him with a life-long grief; it meant leaving the persecuted minority and going over to the triumphant majority; it meant unmitigated pain to all those she loved best.

Erica had had her full share of pain, but never had she known anything so agonizing as that moment's sharp revulsion. Mechanically she walked on until she reached home; nobody was in. She looked into the little sitting room but, only Friskarina sat purring on the rug. The table was strewn with the Saturday papers; the midday post had just come. She turned over the letters and found one for herself in her father's handwriting. It was the one thing needed to complete the realization of her pain. She snatched it up with a stifled sob, ran upstairs to her room, and threw herself down on the bed in silent agony.

A new joy had come to her which her father could not share; a joy which he would call a delusion, which he spent a great part of his life in combating. To tell him that she was convinced of the truth of Christianity why, it would almost break his heart.

And yet she must inflict this terrible pain. Her nature was far too noble to have dreamed for a single instant of temporizing, of keeping her thoughts to herself. A Raeburn was not likely to fail either in courage or in honesty; but with her courage and honesty, Erica had the violin-like sensitiveness of nature which Eric Haeberlein had noticed even in her childhood. She saw in the future all the pain she must bring to her father, intensified by her own sensitiveness. She knew so well what her feelings would have been but a short time ago, if any one she greatly loved had “fallen back” into Christianity. How could she tell him? How COULD she!

Yet it was a thing which must be done. Should she write to him? No, the letter might reach him when he was tired and worried yet, to speak would be more painful.

She got up and went to the window, and let the summer wind blow on her heated forehead. The world had seemed to her just before one glorious presence-chamber full of sunshine and rejoicing. But already the shadow of a life-long pain had fallen on her heart. A revealed Christ meant also a revealed cross, and a right heavy one.

It was only by degrees that she grew strong again, and Livingstone's text came back to her once more, “I am with you always.”

By and by she opened her father's letter. It ran as follows:

“I have just remembered that Monday will be your birthday. Let us spend it together, little son Erica. A few days at Codrington would do us both good, and I have a tolerably leisure week. If you can come down on Saturday afternoon, so much the better. I will meet you there, if you will telegraph reply as soon as you get this. I have three lectures at Helmstone on Sunday, but you will probably prefer a quiet day by the sea. Bring me Westcott's new book, and you might put in the chisel and hammer. We will do a little geologizing for the professor, if we have time. Meeting here last night a great success. Your loving father, Luke Raeburn.”

“He is only thinking how he can give me pleasure,” sighed Erica. “And I have nothing to give him but pain.”

She went at once, however, for the “Bradshaw,” and looked out the afternoon trains to Codrington.

CHAPTER XX. Storm

And seems she mid deep silence to a strain
To listen, which the soul alone can know,
Saying: “Fear naught, for Jesus came on earth,
Jesus of endless joys the wide, deep sea,
To ease each heavy load of mortal birth.
His waters ever clearest, sweetest be
To him who in a lonely bark drifts forth
On His great deeps of goodness trustfully.”
From Vittoria Colonna

Codrington was one of the very few sea-side places within fairly easy reach of London which had not been vulgarized into an ordinary watering place. It was a primitive little place with one good, old-established hotel, and a limited number of villas and lodging houses, which only served as a sort of ornamental fringe to the picturesque little fishing town.

The fact was that it was just midway between two large and deservedly popular resorts, and so it had been overlooked, and to the regret of the thrifty inhabitants and the satisfaction of the visitors who came there for quiet, its peaceful streets and its stony beach were never invaded by excursionists. No cockneys came down for the Sunday to eat shrimps; the shrimps were sent away by train to the more favored watering places, and the Codrington shop keepers shook their heads and gave up expecting to make a fortune in such a conservative little place. Erica said it reminded her of the dormouse in “Alice In Wonderland,” tyrannized over by the hatter on one side and the March hare on the other, and eventually put head foremost into the teapot. Certainly Helmstone on the east and Westport on the west had managed to eclipse it altogether, and its peaceful sleepiness made the dormouse comparison by no means inapt.

It all looked wonderfully unchanged as she walked from the station that summer afternoon with her father. The square, gray tower of St. Oswald's Church, the little, winding, irregular streets, the very shop windows seemed quite unaltered, while at every turn familiar faces came into sight. The shrewd old sailor with the telescope, the prim old lady at the bookseller's, who had pronounced the “Imitation of Christ” to be quite out of fashion, the sturdy milkman, with white smock-frock, and bright pails fastened to a wooden yoke, and the coast-guardsman, who was always whistling “Tom Bowling.”

The sea was as calm as a mill pond; Raeburn suggested an hour or two on the water and Erica, who was fond of boating, gladly assented. She had made up her ind not to speak to her father that evening; he had a very hard day's work before him on the Sunday; they must have these few hours in peace. She did not in the least dread any subject coming up which might put her into difficulty, for, on the rare days when her father allowed himself any recreation, he entirely banished all controversial topics from his mind. He asked no

single question relating to the work or to business of any kind, but gave himself up to the enjoyment of a much-needed rest and relaxation. He seemed in excellent spirits, and Erica herself would have been rapturously happy if she had not been haunted by the thought of the pain that awaited him. She knew that this was the last evening she and her father should ever spend together in the old perfect confidence; division the most painful of all divisions lay before them.

The next day she was left to herself. She would not go to the old gray-towered church, though as an atheist she had gone to one or two churches to look and listen, she felt that she could not honorably go as a worshiper till she had spoken to her father. So she wandered about on the shore, and in the restful quiet learned more and grew stronger, and conquered the dread of the morrow. She did not see her father again that day for he could not get back from Helmstone till a late train, and she had promised not to sit up for him.

The morning of her twenty-third birthday was bright and sunshiny; she had slept well, but awoke with the oppressive consciousness that a terrible hard duty lay before her. When she came down there was a serious look in her eyes which did not escape Raeburn's keen observation. He was down before her, and had been out already, for he had managed somehow to procure a lovely handful of red and white roses and mignonette.

“All good wishes for your birthday, and 'sweets to the sweet' as some one remarked on a more funereal occasion,” he said, stooping to kiss her. “Dear little son Eric, it is very jolly to have you to myself for once. No disrespect to Aunt Jean and old Tom, but two is company.” “What lovely flowers!” exclaimed Erica. “How good of you! Where did they come from?”

“I made love to old Nicolls, the florist, to let me gather these myself; he was very anxious to make a gorgeous arrangement done up in white paper with a lace edge, and thought me a fearful Goth for preferring this disorderly bunch.”

They sat down to breakfast; afterward the morning papers came in, and Raeburn disappeared behind the “Daily Review,” while the servant cleared the table. Erica stood by the open French window; she knew that in a few minutes she must speak, and how to get what she had to say into words she did not know. Her heart beat so fast that she felt almost choked. In a sort of dream of pain she watched the passers-by happy looking girls going down to bathe, children with spades and pails. Everything seemed so tranquil, so ordinary while before her lay a duty which must change her whole world.

“Not much news,” said Raeburn, coming toward her as the servant left the room. “For dullness commend me to a Monday paper! Well, Eric, how are we to spend your twenty-third birthday? To think that I have actually a child of twenty-three! Why, I ought to feel an old patriarch, and, in spite of white hair and life-long badgering, I don't, you know. Come, what shall we do. Where would you like to go?”

“Father,” said Erica, “I want first to have a talk with you. I—I have something to tell you.”

There was no longer any mistaking that the seriousness meant some kind of trouble. Raeburn put his arm round her.

“Why, my little girl,” he said, tenderly. “You are trembling all over. What is the matter?”

“The matter is that what I have to say will pain you, and it half kills me to do that. But there is no choice tell you I must. You would not wish me not to be true, not to be honest.”

Utter perplexity filled Raeburn's mind. What phantom trouble was threatening him? Had she been commissioned to tell him of some untoward event? Some business calamity? Had she fallen in love with some one he could not permit her to marry? He looked questioningly at her, but her expression only perplexed him still more; she was trembling no longer, and her eyes were clear and bright, there was a strong look about her whole face.

“Father,” she said, quietly, “I have learned to believe in Jesus Christ.”

He wrenched away his arm; he started back from her as if she had stabbed him. For a minute he looked perfectly dazed.

At last, after a silence which seemed to each of them age-long, he spoke in the agitated voice of one who has just received a great blow.

“Do you know what you are saying, Erica? Do you know what such a confession as you have made will involve? Do you mean that you accept the whole of Christ's teaching?

“Yes,” she replied, firmly, “I do.”

“You intend to turn Christian?”

“Yes, to try to.”

“How long have you and Mr. Osmond been concocting this?”

“I don't know what you mean,” said Erica, terribly wounded by his tone.

“Did he send you down here to tell me?”

“Mr. Osmond knows nothing about it,” said Erica. “How could I tell any one before you, father?”

Raeburn was touched by this. He took several turns up and down the room before speaking again, but the more he grasped the idea the deeper grew his grief and the hotter his anger. He was a man of iron will, however, and he kept both under. When at length he did speak, his voice was quiet and cold and repressed.

“Sit down,” he said, motioning her to a chair. “This is not a subject that we can dismiss in five minutes' talk. I must hear your reasons. We will put aside all personal considerations. I will consider you just as an ordinary opponent.”

His coldness chilled her to the heart. Was it always to be like this? How could she possibly endure it? How was she to answer his questions how was she to vindicate her faith when the mere tone of his voice seemed to paralyze her heart? He was indeed treating her with the cold formality of an opponent, but never for a single instant could she forget that he was her father the being she loved best in the whole world.

But Erica was brave and true; she knew that this was a crisis in their lives, and, thrusting down her own personal pain, she forced herself to give her whole heart and mind to the searching and perplexing questions with which her father intended to test the reality of her convictions. Had she been unaccustomed to his mode

of attack he would have hopelessly silenced her, as far as argument goes in half an hour; but not only was Erica's faith perfectly real, but she had, as it were, herself traversed the whole of his objections and difficulties. Though far from imagining that she understood everything, she had yet so firmly grasped the innermost truth that all details as yet outside her vision were to her no longer hindrances and bugbears, but so many new possibilities other hopes of fresh manifestations of God.

She held her ground well, and every minute Raeburn realized more keenly that whatever hopes he had entertained of reconvincing her were futile. What made it all the more painful to him was that the thoroughness of the training he had given her now only told against him, and the argument which he carried on in a cold, metallic voice was really piercing his very heart, for it was like arguing against another self, the dearest part of himself gone over to the enemy's side.

At last he saw that argument was useless, and then, in his grief and despair, he did for a time lose his self-control. Erica had often felt sorry for the poor creatures who had to bear the brunt of her father's scathing sarcasm. But platform irony was a trifle to the torrent which bore down upon her today. When a strong man does lose his restraint upon himself, the result is terrific. Raeburn had never sufficiently cared for an adversary as to be moved beyond an anger which could be restricted and held within due bounds; he of course cared more for the success of his cause and his own dignity. But now his love drove him to despair; his intolerable grief at the thought of having an opponent in his own child burst all restraining bonds. Wounded to the quick, he who had never in his life spoken a harsh word to his child now poured forth such a storm of anger, and sarcasm, and bitter reproach, as might have made even an uninterested by-stander tremble.

Had Erica made any appeal, had she even begun to cry, his chivalry would have been touched; he would have recognized her weakness, and regained his self control. But she was not weak, she was strong she was his other self gone over to the opposite side; that was what almost maddened him. The torrent bore down upon her, and she spoke not a word, but just sat still and endured. Only, as the words grew more bitter and more wounding, her lips grew white, her hands were locked more tightly together. At last it ended.

“You have cheated yourself into this belief,” said Raeburn, “you have given me the most bitter grief and disappointment of my whole life. Have you anything else you wish to say to me?”

“Nothing,” replied Erica, not daring to venture more; for, if she had tried to speak, she knew she must have burst into tears.

But there was as much pain expressed in her voice as she spoke that one word as there had been in all her father's outburst. It appealed to him at once. He said no more, but stepped out of the French window, and began to pace to an fro under the veranda.

Erica did not stir; she was like one crushed. Sad and harassed as her life had been, it yet seemed to her that she had never known such indescribably bitter pain. The outside world looked bright and sunshiny; she could see the waves breaking on the shore, while beyond, sailing out into the wide expanse was a brown-sailed fishing boat. Every now and then her vision was interrupted by a tall, dark figure pacing to and fro; every now and then the sunlight glinted on snow-white hair, and then a fresh stab of pain awoke in her heart.

The brown-sailed fishing boat dwindled into a tiny dark spot on the horizon, the sea tossed and foamed and sparked in the sunshine. Erica turned away; she could not bear to look at it, for just now it seemed to her merely the type of the terrible separation which had arisen between herself and her father. She felt as if she were being borne away in the little fishing boat, while he was left on the land, and the distance between them slowly widened and widened.

All through that grievous conversation she had held in her hand a little bit of mignonette. She had held it unconsciously; it was withered and drooping, its sweetness seemed to her now sickly and hateful. She identified it with her pain, and years after the smell of mignonette was intolerable to her. She would have thrown it away, but remembered that her father had given it her. And then, with the recollection of her birthday gift, came the realization of all the long years of unbroken and perfect love, so rudely interrupted today. Was it always to be like this? Must they drift further and further apart?

Her heart was almost breaking; she had endured to the very uttermost, when at length comfort came. The sword had only come to bring the higher peace. No terrible sea of division could part those whom love could bind together. The peace of God stole once more into her heart.

“How loud soe'er the world may roar, We know love will be conqueror.”

Meanwhile Raeburn paced to and fro in grievous pain The fact that his pain could scarcely perhaps have been comprehended by the generality of people did not make it less real or less hard to bear. A really honest atheist, who is convinced that Christianity is false and misleading, suffers as much at the sight of what he considers a mischievous belief as a Christian would suffer while watching a service in some heathen temple. Rather his pain would be greater, for his belief in the gradual progress of his creed is shadowy and dim compared with the Christian's conviction that the “Saviour of all men” exists.

Once, some years before, a very able man, one of his most devoted followers, had “fallen back” into Christianity. That had been a bitter disappointment; but that his own child whom he loved more than anything in the world, should have forsaken him and gone over to the enemy, was a grief well-nigh intolerable. It was a grief he had never for one moment contemplated.

Could anything be more improbable than that Erica, carefully trained as she had been, should relapse so strangely? Her whole life had been spent among atheists; there was not a single objection to Christianity which had not been placed before her. She had read much, thought much; she had worked indefatigably to aid the cause. Again and again she had braved personal insult and wounding injustice as an atheist. She had voluntarily gone into exile to help her father in his difficulties. Through the shameful injustice of a Christian, she had missed the last years of her mother's life, and had been absent from her death bed. She had borne on behalf of her father's cause a thousand irritating privations, a thousand harassing cares; she had been hard-working, and loyal, and devoted; and now all at once she had turned completely round and placed herself in the opposing ranks!

Raeburn had all his life been fighting against desperate odds, and in the conflict he had lost well-nigh

everything. He had lost his home long ago, he had lost his father's good will, he had lost the whole of his inheritance; he had lost health, and strength, and reputation, and money; he had lost all the lesser comforts of life; and now he said to himself that he was to lose his dearest treasure of all, his child.

Bitter, hopeless, life-long division had arisen between them. For twenty-three years he had loved her as truly as ever father loved child, and this was his reward! A miserable sense of isolation arose in his heart. Erica had been so much to him how could he live without her? The muscles of his face quivered with emotion; he clinched his hands almost fiercely.

Then he tortured himself by letting his thoughts wander back to the past. That very day years ago, when he had first learned what fatherhood meant; the pride of watching his little girl as the years rolled on; the terrible anxiety of one long and dangerous illness she had passed through how well he remembered the time! They were very poor, could afford no expensive luxuries; he had shared the nursing with his wife. One night he remembered toiling away with his pen while the sick child was actually on his knee; he always fancied that the pamphlet he had then been at work on was more bitterly sarcastic than anything he had ever written. Then on once more into years of desperately hard work and disappointingly small results, imbittered by persecution, crippled by penalties and never-ending litigation; but always there had been the little child waiting for him at home, who by her baby-like freedom from care could make him smile when he was overwhelmed with anxiety. How could he ever have endured the bitter obloquy, the slanderous attacks, the countless indignities which had met him on all sides, if there had not been one little child who adored him, who followed him about like a shadow, who loved him and trusted him utterly?

Busy as his life had been, burdened as he had been for years with twice as much work as he could get through, the child had never been crowded out of his life. Even as a little thing of four years old, Erica had been quite content to sit on the floor in his study by the hour together, quietly amusing herself by cutting old newspapers into fantastic shapes, or by drawing impossible cats and dogs and horses on the margins. She had never disturbed him; she used to talk to herself in whispers.

“Are you happy, little one?” he used to ask from time to time, with a sort of passionate desire that he should enjoy her unconscious childhood, foreseeing care and trouble for her in the future.

“Yes, very happy,” had been the invariable response; and generally Erica would avail herself of the interruption to ask his opinion about some square-headed cat, with eyes askew and an astonishing number of legs, which she had just drawn. Then would come what she called a “bear's hug,” after which silence reigned again in the study, while Raeburn would go on writing some argumentative pamphlet, hard and clear as crystal, his heart warmed by the little child's love, the remains of a smile lingering about his lips at the recollection of the square-headed cat.

And the years passed on, and every year deepened and strengthened their love. And by slow degrees he had watched the development of her mind; had gloried in her quick perception, had learned to come to her for a second opinion every now and then; had felt proud of her common sense, her thoughtful judgments; had delighted in her enthusiastic, loving help. All this was ended now. Strange that, just as he hoped most from her, she should fail him! It was a repetition of his own early history exactly reversed. His thoughts went back to his father's study in the old Scottish parsonage. He remembered a long, fierce argument; he remembered a storm of abusive anger, and a furious dismissal from the house. The old pain came back to him vividly.

“And she loves me fifty thousand times more than I ever loved my father,” he reflected. “And, though I was not abusive, I was hard on her. And, however mistaken, she was very brave, very honest. Oh, I was cruel to her harsh, and hateful! My little child! My poor little child! It shall not it cannot divide us. I am hers, and she is mine nothing can ever alter that.”

He turned and went back into the room. Never had he looked grander than at that minute; this man who could hold thousands in breathless attention this man who was more passionately loved by his friends, more passionately hated by his enemies than almost any man in England! He was just the ideal father.

Erica had not stirred, she was leaning back in her chair, looking very still and white. He came close to her.

“Little son Eric!” he said, with a whole world of love in his tone.

She sprang up and wreathed her arms round his neck.

By and by, they began to talk in low tones, to map out and piece together as well as they could the future life, which was inevitably severed from the past by a deep gulf. They spoke of the work which they could still share, of the interests they should still have in common. It was very sad work for Erica infinitely sadder for Raeburn; but they were both of them brave and noble souls, and they loved each other, and so could get above the sadness. One thing they both agreed upon. They would never argue about their opinions. They would, as far as possible, avoid any allusion to the grave differences that lay between them.

Late in the afternoon, a little group of fishermen and idlers stood on the beach. They were looking out seaward with some “anxiety, for a sudden wind had arisen, and there was what they called 'an ugly sea.'”

“I tell you it was madness to let 'em go alone on such a day,” said the old sailor with the telescope.

“And I tell you that the old gentleman pulls as good an oar as any of us,” retorted another man, in a blue jersey and a sou'wester.

“Old gentleman, indeed!” broke in the coast guardsman. “Better say devil at once! Why, man alive! Your old gentleman is Luke Raeburn, the atheist.”

“God forbid!” exclaimed the first speaker, lowering his telescope for a moment. “Why, he be mighty friendly to us fishermen.”

“Where be they now, gaffer? D'ye see them?” asked a keen-looking lad of seventeen.

“Ay, there they be! There they be! God have mercy on 'em! They'll be swamped sure as fate!”

The coast guardsman, with provoked sang-froid and indifference, began to sing:

“For though his body's under hatches, His soul is gone alo-o-ft.”

And then breaking off into a sort of recitative.

“Which is exactly the opposite quarter to what Luke Raeburn's soul will go, I guess.”

“Blowed if I wouldn't pull an oar to save a mate, if I were so mighty sure he was going to the devil!” observed a weather-beaten seaman, with gold earrings and a good deal of tattooing on his brawny arms.

“Would you now!” said the coast guardsman, with a superior and sardonic smile. “Well, in my 'umble opinion, drowning's too good for him.”

With which humane utterance, the coast guardsman walked off, singing of Tom who

“Never from his word departed,
Whose heart was kind and soft.”

“Well, I, for one, will lend a hand to help them. Now then, mates! Which of you is going to help to cheat the devil of his due?” said the man with the earrings.

Three men proffered their services, but the old seaman with the telescope checked them.

“Bide a bit, mates, bide a bit; I'm not sure you've a call to go.” He wiped the glasses of his telescope with a red handkerchief, and then looked out seaward once more.

In the meantime, while their fate was being discussed on the shore, Raeburn and Erica were face to face with death. They were a long way from land before the wind had sprung up so strongly. Raeburn, who in his young days had been at once the pride and anxiety of the fishermen round his Scottish home, and noted for his readiness and daring, had now lost the freshness of his experience, and had grown forgetful of weather tokens. The danger was upon them before he had even thought of it. The strong wind blowing upon them, the delicious salt freshness, even the brisk motion, had been such a relief to them after the pain and excitement of the morning. But all at once they began to realize that their peril was great. Their little boat tossed so fearfully that Erica had to cling to the seat for safety; one moment they were down in the hollow of a deep green wave, the next they would be tossed up upon its crest as though their boat had been a mere cockle shell.

“I'm afraid we've made a mistake, Eric,” said Raeburn. “I ought to have seen this storm coming up.”

“What?” cried Erica, for the dashing of the waves made the end of the sentence inaudible.

He looked across the boat at her, and an almost paralyzing dread filled his heart. For himself he could be brave, for himself death had no terrors but for his child!

A horrible vision rose before him. He saw her lying stiff and cold, with glazed eyes and drenched hair. Was there to be a yet more terrible separation between them? Was death to snatch her from him? Ah, no that should never be! They would at least go down together.

The vision faded; he saw once more the fair, eager face, no longer pallid, but flushed with excitement, the brave eyes clear and bright, but somewhat anxious. The consciousness that everything depended on him helped him to rise above that overmastering horror. He was once more his strongest self.

The rudder had been left on the beach, and it was only possible to steer by the oars. He dismissed even the thought of Erica, and concentrated his whole being on the difficult task before him. So grand did he look in that tremendous endeavor that Erica almost forgot her anxiety; there was something so forceful in his whole aspect that she could not be afraid. Her heart beat quickly indeed, but the consciousness of danger was stimulating.

Yet the waves grew more and more furious, rolling, curling, dashing up in angry, white foam “raging horribly.” At length came one which broke right over the little boat, blinding and drenching its occupants.

“Another like that will do for us,” Said Raeburn, in a quiet voice.

The boat was half full of water. Erica began to bale out with her father's hat, and each knew from the other's face that their plight was hopeless.

Raeburn had faced death many times. He had faced it more than once on a sick bed, he had faced it surrounded by yelling and furious mobs, but he had never faced it side by side with his child. Again he looked at the angry gray-green waves, at the wreaths of curling white foam, again that awful vision rose before him, and, brave man as he was, he shuddered.

Life was sweet even though he was harassed, persecuted, libeled. Life was sweet even though his child had deserted his cause, even though she had “cheated herself into a belief.” Life was infinitely worth living, mere existence an exquisite joy, blank nothingness a hideous alternative.

“Bale out!” he cried, despair in his eyes, but a curve of resoluteness about his lips.

A few more strokes warily pulled, another huge wave sweeping along, rearing itself up, dashing down upon them. The boat reeled and staggered. To struggle longer was useless. Raeburn threw his oars inboard, caught hold of Erica, and held her fast. When they could see once more, they found the boat quite three parts full.

“Child!” he said, “child!” But nothing more would come. For once in his life words failed him; the orator was speechless. Was it a minute or an eternity that he waited there through that awful pause waited with his arm round Erica, feeling the beating of her heart, the heart which must soon cease beating forever, feeling her warm breath on his cheek alas! How few more breaths would she draw! How soon would the cold water grave close over all that he—

His thoughts were abruptly checked. That eternal minute of waiting was over. It was coming death was coming riding along with mocking scorn on the crest of a giant wave. Higher and higher rose the towering, sea-green wall, mockingly it rushed forward, remorselessly swooped down upon them! This time the boat was completely swamped.

“I will at least die fighting!” thought Raeburn, a despairing, defiant courage inspiring him with almost superhuman strength.

“Trust to me!” he cried. “Don't struggle!” And Erica who would naturally have fallen into that frantic and vain convulsion which seizes most people when they find themselves in peril of drowning, by a supreme effort of will made no struggle at all, but only clung to her father.

Raeburn was a very strong man, and an expert swimmer, but it was a fearful sea. They were dashed hither and thither, they were buffeted, and choked, and blinded, but never once did he lose his presence of mind. Every now and then he even shouted out a few words to Erica. How strange his voice sounded in that chaos, in that raging symphony of winds and waves.

“Tell me when you can't hold any longer,” he cried.

“I can't leave go,” returned Erica.

And even then, in that desperate minute, they both felt a momentary thrill of amusement. The fact was, that her effort of will had been so great when she had obeyed him, and clung with all her might to him, that now the muscles of her hands absolutely would not relax their hold.

It seemed endless! Over the cold green and white of the waves Raeburn seemed to see his whole life stretched out before him, in a series of vivid pictures. All the long struggles, all the desperate fights wreathed themselves out in visions round this supreme death struggle. And always there was the consciousness that he was toiling for Erica's life, struggling, agonizing, straining every fiber of his being to save her.

But what was this paralyzing cold creeping over his limbs? What this pressure at his heart? This dimness of his eyes? Oh! Was his strength failing him? Was the last hope, indeed, gone? Panting, he struggled on.

“I will do thirty more strokes!” he said to himself. And he did them.

“I will do ten more!”

And he forced himself to keep on.

“Ten more!”

He was gasping now. Erica's weight seemed to be dragging him down, down, into nothingness.

Six strokes painfully made! Seven! After all nothingness would mean rest. Eight! No pain to either, since they were together. Nine! He should live on in the hearts of his people. Ten! Agony of failure! He was beaten at last!

What followed they neither of them knew, only there was a shout, an agony of sinking, a vision of a dark form and a something solid which they grasped convulsively.

When Erica came to herself they were by no means out of danger, but there was something between them and the angry sea. She was lying down at the bottom of a boat in close proximity to some silvery-skinned fishes, and her father was holding her hand.

Wildly they tossed for what seemed to her a very long time; but at length fresh voices were heard, the keel grated on the shore, she felt herself lifted up and carried on to the beach. Then, with an effort, she stood up once more, trembling and exhausted, but conscious that mere existence was rapture.

Raeburn paused to reward and thank the men who had rescued them in his most genial manner, and Erica's happiness would have been complete had not the coast guardsman stepped up in an insolent and officious way, and observed:

“It is a pity, Mr. Luke Raeburn, that you don't bring yourself to offer thanks to God almighty!”

“Sir,” replied Raeburn, “when I ask your opinion of my personal and private matters, it will be fitting that you should speak not before!”

The man looked annihilated, and turned away.

Raeburn grasped the rough hands of his helpers and well-wishers, gave his arm to Erica, and led her up the steep beach.

Later on in the evening they sat over the fire, and talked over their adventure. June though it was, they had both been thoroughly chilled.

“What did you think of when we were in the water?' asked Erica.

“I made a deep calculation,” said Raeburn, smiling, “and found that the sale of the plant and of all my books would about clear off the last of the debts, and that I should die free. After that I thought of Cicero's case of the two wise men struggling in the sea with one plank to rescue them sufficient only for one. They were to decide which of their lives was most useful to the republic, and the least useful man was to drop down quietly into the deep. It struck me that you and I should hardly come to such a calculation. I think we would have gone down together, little one! What did you think of?”

But Erica's thoughts could not so easily be put into words.

“For one thing,” she said, “I thought we should never be divided any more.”

She sighed a little; for, after all, the death they had so narrowly escaped would have been so infinitely easier than the life which lay before her.

“Clearly we are inseparable!” said Raeburn. “In that sense, little son Eric, we can still say, 'We fear nae foe!'”

Perhaps the gentle words, and the sadness which he could not entirely banish from his tone, moved Erica almost more than his passionate utterances in the morning.

The day was no bad miniature of her whole life. Very sad, very happy, full of danger, conflict and strife, warmed by outside sympathy, wounded by outside insolence.

CHAPTER XXI. What it Involved

Stronger than steel
Is the sword of the spirit;
Swifter than arrows

The life of the truth is;
Greater than anger
Is love, and subdueth. Longfellow

The two or three days at Codrington lengthened out into a week, for both Raeburn and Erica felt a good deal exhausted after the eventful Monday. Raeburn, anxious to spare her as much as possible, himself wrote to Mrs. Craigie, and told her of Erica's change of views.

“It is a great grief,” he wrote, “and she will be a serious loss to our cause, but I am determined that we will not enact over again the course of action which drove both you and me from home. Odd! That she should just reverse our story! Anyhow, you and I, Jean, have been too much persecuted to turn into persecutors. The child is as much in earnest for her delusion as we for our truth. Argument and remonstrance will do no good, and you must understand, and make Tom understand, that I'll not have her bullied. Don't think that I am trying to make her mistaken way all easy for her. She won't find it easy. She will have a miserable time of it with our own set, and how many Christians, do you imagine, will hold out a hand to Luke Raeburn's daughter, even though her views have changed? Maybe half a dozen! Not more, I fancy, unless she renounced us with atheism, and that she never will do! She will be between two fires, and I believe between the two she will be worried to death in a year unless we can keep the peace at home. I don't blame Osmond for this, though at first I did suspect it was his doing; but this has been no cram-work. Erica has honestly faced the questions herself, and has honestly arrived at this mistaken conclusion. Osmond's kindness and generosity of course influenced her, but for the rest they have only had the free discussions of which from the first I approved. Years ago he said to me plainly, 'What if she should see reasons to change her mind?' I scouted the notion then, it seemed and still seems almost INCREDIBLE. He has, you see, acted quite honorably. It is Erica's own doing. I remember telling him that our name of freethinkers was a reality, and so it shall still be! She shall be free to think the untrue is true; she shall be free to confess herself a Christian before the whole world, though it deal me the hardest of blows.”

This letter soon spread the news. Aunt Jean was too much vexed and not deeply grieved enough to keep silence. Vexation finds some relief in talking, deep grief as a rule prefers not to speak. Tom, in his odd way, felt the defection of his favorite cousin as much as anybody, except Raeburn himself. They had been play-fellows, they had always been like brother and sister together, and he was astounded to think that Erica, of all people in the world, should have deserted the cause. The letter had come by one of the evening posts. He went out and paced up and down the square in the soft midsummer twilight, trying to realize the facts of the case. Presently he heard rapid steps behind him; no one walked at that pace excepting Brian, and Tom was quite prepared to feel an arm link itself within his.

“Hallo, old fellow!” exclaimed Brian. “Moonlight meditations?”

“Where did you drop from?” said Tom, evasively.

“Broken leg, round the corner a public-house row. What brutes men are!” exclaimed the young doctor, hotly.

“Disappointing world altogether,” said Tom with a sigh. “What do you think we have just heard about Erica?”

Brian's heart almost stopped beating; he hardly knew what he feared.

“How can I tell?” he answered, hoarsely. “No bad news, I hope?”

“She's gone and turned Christian,” said Tom, in a tone of deep disgust.

Brian started.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, under his breath.

“Confound it!” cried Tom. “I'd forgot you'd be triumphant. Good night,” and he marched off in high dudgeon.

Brian did not even miss him. How could he at such a time? The weight of years had been lifted off his soul. A consuming happiness took possession of him; his whole being was a thanksgiving. By and by he went home, found his father in the study, and was about to speak, when Charles Osmond put an open letter into his hand. While Raeburn had written to his sister, Erica had written to her “prophet” a sad, happy, quaint letter exactly like herself. Its straightforward simplicity brought the tears to Brian's eyes.

“It will be a fearful life for her now!” he exclaimed. “She will never be able to endure it. Father, now at last I may surely speak to her.”

He spoke very eagerly. Charles Osmond looked grave.

“My dear old fellow, of course you must do as you think best,” he replied, after a minute's pause; “but I doubt if it is wise just now.”

“Why, it is the very time of all others when she might be glad of me,” said Brian.

“But can't you see,” returned his father, “that Erica is the last girl in the world to marry a man because she was unhappy, or because she had got a difficult bit of life in front of her? Of course, if you really think she cares for you, it is different; but—”

“She does not care for me,” said Brian quickly; “but in time I think she would. I think I could make her happy.”

“Yes, I think you could, but I fancy you will make shipwreck of your hopes if you speak to her now. Have patience.”

“I am sick of patience!” cried Brian desperately. “Have I not been patient for nearly seven years? For what would you have me wait? Am I to wait till, between our injustice to secularists and their injustice to Christians, she is half badgered out of life? If she could but love me, if she would marry me now, I could save her from what must be a life of misery.”

“If I could but get you to see it from what I am convinced is Erica's point of view!” exclaimed Charles Osmond. “Forget for a minute that you are her knight and champion, and try to see things as she sees them. Let us try to reverse things. Just imagine for a minute that you are the child of some leading man, the head

and chief of a party or association we'll say that you are the child of an Archbishop of Canterbury. You are carefully educated, you become a zealous worker, you enter into all your father's interests, you are able to help him in a thousand ways. But, by slow degrees, we will say that you perceive a want in the system in which you have been educated, and, after many years of careful study and thought, you are obliged to reject your former beliefs and to accept that other system which shall most recommend itself to you. We will suppose for the sake of analogy that you become a secularist. Knowing that your change of views will be a terrible grief to your father the archbishop, it takes your whole strength to make your confession, and you not only feel your father's personal pain, but you feel that his pain will be increased by his public position. To make it worse, too, we must suppose that a number of people calling themselves atheists, and in the name of atheism, have at intervals for the last thirty years been annoying and insulting your father, that in withstanding their attacks he has often received bodily injury, and that the atheists have so often driven him into the law courts that he has been pretty nearly beggared. All his privations you have shared for instance, you went with him and lived for years in a poky little lodging, and denied yourself every single luxury. But now you have, in spite of all these persecutions carried on in the name of secularism, learned to see that the highest form of secularism is true. The archbishop feels this terribly. However, being a very loving father, he wisely refuses to indulge in perpetual controversy with his child. You agree still to live together, and each try with all your might to find all the possible points of union still left you. Probably, if you are such a child as I imagine, you love your father ten times more than you did before. Then just as you have made up your mind to try to be more to him, when all you care about in life is to comfort and help him, and when your heart is much occupied with your new opinions, a friend of yours a secularist comes to you, and says: 'A miserable life lies before you. The atheists will never thoroughly take up with you while you live with your father the archbishop, and of course it is wretched for you to be surrounded by those of another creed. Come with me. I love you I will make you happy, and save you from persecution."

In spite of himself Brian had smiled many times at this putting of an Archbishop of Canterbury into the position of Luke Raeburn. But the conclusion arrived at seemed to him to admit of only one answer, and left him very grave.

"You may be right," he said, very sadly. "But to stand still and watch her suffer—"

He broke off, unable to finish his sentence.

Charles Osmond took it up.

"To stand still and watch her suffer will be the terribly hard work of a brave man who takes a true, deep view. To rush in with offers of help would be the work of an impetuous man who took a very superficial view. If Erica were selfish, I would say go and appeal to her selfishness, and marry her at once; for selfishness will never do any good in Guilford Terrace. But she is one of the most devoted women I know. Your appeal would be rejected. I believe she will feel herself in the right place there, and, as long as that is the case, nothing will move her."

"Father," said Brian, rather desperately, "I would take your opinion before any other opinion in the world. You know her well far better than I do. Tell me honestly do you think she could ever love me?"

"You have given me a hard task," said Charles Osmond. "But you have asked for my honest opinion, and you must have it. As long as her father lives I don't believe Erica will ever love a man well enough to marry him. I remember, in my young days, a beautiful girl in our neighborhood, the belle of the whole county; and years went by, and she had countless offers, but she rejected them all. People used to remonstrate with her, and ask her how it was. 'Oh,' she used to reply, 'that is very easily explained.. I never see a man I think equal to my own brothers!' Now, whatever faults Raeburn has, we may be sure Erica sees far less plainly than we see, and nobody can deny that he is a grand fellow. When one bears in mind all that he has had against him, his nobility of character seems to me marvelous. He puts us to shame. And that is why he seems to me the wholesome though powerful medicine for this nineteenth century of ours, with its great professions and its un-Christlike lives."

"What is the use of patience what is the use of love," exclaimed Brian, "if I am never to serve her?"

"Never! Who said so?" said his father smiling. "Why, you have been serving her every blessed day since you first loved her. Is unspoken love worth nothing? Are prayers useless? Is it of no service to let your light shine? But I see how it is. As a doctor, you look upon pain as the one great enemy to be fought with, to be bound down, to be conquered. You want to shield Erica from pain, which she can't be shielded from, if she is to go on growing.

"'Knowledge by suffering entereth!'

No one would so willingly indorse the truth of that as she herself. And it will be so to the end of the chapter. You can't shut her up in a beautiful casket, and keep her from all pain. If you could she would no longer be the Erica you love. As for the rest, I may be wrong. She may have room for wifely love even now. I have only told you what I think. And whether she ever be your wife or not and from my heart I hope she may be your love will in no case be wasted. Pure love can't be wasted; it's an impossibility."

Brian sighed heavily, but made no answer. Presently he took up his hat and went out. He walked on and on without the faintest idea of time or place, occupied only with the terrible struggle which was going on in his heart, which seemed only endurable with the help of rapid and mechanical exercise. When at length he came to himself, he was miles away from home, right down at Shepherd's Bush, and he heard the church clocks striking twelve. Then he turned back, and walked home more quietly, his resolution made.

If he told Erica of his love, and she refused him now, he should not only add to her troubles, but he should inevitably put an end to the comfort of the close friendship which now existed between the two families. He would keep silence.

Erica and her father returned on the Saturday, and then began a most trying time. Tom seemed to shrink from her just as he had done at the time of her mother's death. He was shy and vexed, too, and kept as much out of her way as possible. Mrs. Craigie, on the contrary, could not leave her alone. In spite of her brother's words, she tried every possible argument and remonstrance in the hope of reconvincing her niece. With the

best intentions, she was often grossly unfair, and Erica, with a naturally quick temper, and her Raeburn inheritance of fluency and satire, found her patience sorely tried. Raeburn was excessively busy, and they saw very little of him; perhaps he thought it expedient that Erica should fight her own battles, and fully realize the seriousness of the steps she had taken.

“Have you thought,” urged Mrs. Craigie, as a last argument “have you thought what offense you will give to our whole party? What do you think they will slay when they learn that you of all people have deserted the cause?”

The tears started to Erica's eyes, for naturally she did feel this a great deal. But she answered bravely, and with a sort of ring in her voice, which made Tom look up from his newspaper.

“They will know that Luke Raeburn's daughter must be true to her convictions at whatever cost.”

“Will you go on writing in the 'Idol'?” asked Tom, for the first time making an observation to her which was not altogether necessary.

“No,” said Erica “how can I?”

Tom shrugged his shoulders, and made no further remark.

“Then how do you mean to live? How else can you support yourself?” asked Aunt Jean.

“I don't know,” said Erica. “I must get some other work somewhere.”

But her heart failed her, though she spoke firmly. She knew that to find work in London was no easy matter.

“Offer yourself to the 'Church Chronicle,'” said Mrs. Craigie sarcastically, “or, better still, to the 'Watch Dog.' They always make a good deal of capital out of a convert.”

Erica colored and had to bite her lip hard to keep back the quick retort which occurred to her all too naturally.

By and by Mr. Masterman and another well-known secularist walked in. They both knew of Erica's defection. Mr. Masterman attacked her at once in a sort of bantering way.

“So Miss Raeburn, now I understand why some time ago you walked out in the middle of my lecture one evening.”

And then followed a most irritating semi-serious remonstrance, in questionable taste. Erica writhed under it. A flippant canvassing of her most private and sacred thoughts was hard to bear, but she held her ground, and, being not without a touch of her father's dignity, Mr. Masterman presently beat a retreat, not feeling quite so well satisfied with himself as usual. His companion did not allude directly to her change of views, but treated her with a sort of pitying condescension, as if she had been a mild lunatic.

There was some sort of committee being held in the study that evening. The next person to arrive was Professor Gosse and almost immediately after came Mr. Harmston, a charming old man, whom Erica had known from her childhood. They came in and had some coffee before going into the study. Mrs. Craigie talked to Mr. Harmston. Erica, looking her loveliest waited on them. Tom watched them all philosophically from the hearth rug.

“I am sorry to hear you have deserted your colors,” said the professor, looking more grave than she had ever seen him look before. Then, his voice softening a little as he looked at her, “I expect it all comes of that illness of yours. I believe religion is just an outgrowth of bad health mens sana in corpore sano, you know. Never mind, you must still come to my workshop, and I shall see if science won't reconvert you.”

He moved away with his good-humored, shaggy-looking face, leaving Erica to old Mr. Harmston.

“I am much grieved to hear this of you, Erica,” he said, lowering his voice, and bringing his gray head near to hers “as grieved as if you were my own child. You will be a sore loss to us all.”

Erica felt this keenly, for she was very fond of the old man.

“Do you think it does not hurt me to grieve you all?” she said, piteously. “But one must be honest.”

“Quite right, my dear,” said the old man, “but that does not make our loss the less heavy. We had hoped great things of you, Erica. It is grievous to me that you should have fallen back to the miserable superstitions against which your father has fought so bravely.”

“Come, Mr. Harmston,” said the professor; “we are late, I fancy.”

And before Erica could make any reply Mrs. Craigie and the two visitors had adjourned to the committee room, leaving her alone with Tom.

Now, for two or three days Erica had been enduring Tom's coldness and Mrs. Craigie's unceasing remonstrances; all the afternoon she had been having a long and painful discussion with her friend, Mrs. MacNaughton; this evening she had seen plainly enough what her position would be for the future among all her old acquaintances, and an aching sense of isolation filled her heart. She was just going to run upstairs and yield to her longing for darkness and quiet, when Tom called her back. She could not refuse to hear, for the coldness of her old playmate had made her very sad, but she turned back rather reluctantly, for her eyes were brimming with tears.

“Don't go,” said Tom, quite in his natural voice. “Have you any coffee for me, or did the old fogies finish it?”

Erica went back to the table and poured him out a cup of coffee, but her hand trembled, and, before she could prevent it, down splashed a great tear into the saucer.

“Come!” said Tom, cheerfully. “Don't go and spoil my coffee with salt water! All very well for David, in a penitential psalm, to drink tears, but in the nineteenth century, you know—”

Erica began to laugh at this, a fatal proceeding, for afterward came a great sob, and the tears came down in good earnest. Philosophical Tom always professed great contempt for tears, and he knew that Erica must be very much moved indeed to cry in his presence, or, indeed, to cry at all; for, as he expressed it: “It was not in her line.” But somehow, when for the first time he saw her cry, he did not feel contemptuous; instead, he began to call himself a “hard-hearted brute,” and a narrow-minded fool, and to feel miserable and out of conceit with himself.

“I say, Erica, don't cry,” he pleaded. “Don't, I say, I can't bear to see you. I've been a cold-blooded wretch I'm awfully sorry!”

“It's very cowardly of me,” sobbed Erica. “But—but—” with a rush of tears, “you don't know how I love you all it's like being killed by inches.”

“You're not cowardly,” said Tom, warmly. “You've been brave and plucky; I only wish it were in a better cause. Look here, Erica, only stop crying, and promise me that you'll not take this so dreadfully to heart. I'll stand by you I will, indeed, even though I hate your cause. But it sha'n't come between us any longer, the hateful delusion has spoiled enough lives already. It sha'n't spoil ours.”

“Oh, don't!” cried Erica, wounded anew by this.

“Well,” said Tom, gulping down his longing to inveigh against Christianity, “it goes hard with me not to say a word against the religion that has brought us all our misery, but for your sake I'll try not when talking with you. Now let us begin again on the old footing.”

“Not quite on the old footing either,” said Erica, who had conquered her tears. “I love you a thousand times more, you dear old Tom.”

And Tom, who was made of sterling stuff, did from that day forward stand by her through everything, and checked himself when harsh words about religious matters rose to his lips, and tried his best to smooth what could not fail to be a rough bit of walking.

The first meeting between Charles Osmond and Erica, after her return from Codrington, did not come about till the morning after her conversation with Tom. They had each called on the other, but had somehow managed to miss. When at length Erica was shown into the study, connected in her mind with so many warm discussions, she found it empty. She sat down in the great arm chair by the window, wondering if she were indeed the same Erica who had sat there years before, on the day when her “prophet” had foretold her illness. What changes had come about since then!

But her “Prophet” was unchanged, his brisk, “Well Erica!” was exactly what it had been when she had come to him in the days of her atheism. It had always been full of welcome and sympathy, and now the only difference was that a great happiness shone in his eyes as he came forward with his soft, steady tread and took her hand in both his.

They sat silent for awhile, then talked a little but reservedly, for both felt that the subject which filled their thoughts was at once too sacred and too personal to be altogether put into words. Then by and by they began to discuss the practical consequences of the change, and especially the great difficulty as to Erica's means of supporting herself.

“Could you not try teaching?” said Charles Osmond.

“The market is already overstocked.”

“True, but I should think that your brains and certificates ought to secure you work in spite of that.”

“I should like it in many ways,” said Erica, “but, you see, except at the night school it is out of the question, and I could not live upon my grant even if every one of my class passed the examination. For any other sort of teaching who do you imagine would have the courage to employ any one bearing the name of Raeburn? Why, I can't give an order in a shop without being looked all over by the person who takes the address. No, governessing would be all very well if one might assume a nom de guerre, but that would not do, you see.”

“You couldn't find work of that sort among your own set, I suppose?”

“Not now,” said Erica. “You see, naturally enough, I am very much out of favor with them all.”

“Falling between two stools,” said Charles Osmond, half to himself. “But don't lose heart, Erica: 'A stone that is fit for the wall will not be left in the way;' there is work for you somewhere. By the way, I might see old Crutchley he knows all the literary folk, and might get you an introduction to some one, at any rate.”

Just as Erica was leaving Brian came in from his rounds, and they met at the door. Had he known her trouble and perplexity as to work, no power on earth could have induced him to keep silence any longer; but he knew nothing. She looked a little pale, but that was natural enough, and in her eyes he could see a peace which he had never seen there before. Then deep unselfish happiness filled his heart again, and Erica recognized in his greeting a great deal more than an ordinary by-stander would have seen. She went away feeling bettered by that handclasp.

“That is a downright good man!” she thought to herself. “Perhaps by the time he's fifty-five, he'll be almost equal to his father.”

CHAPTER XXII. An Editor

Socrates How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite; for they never come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. They are two, and yet they grow together out of one head or stem; and I can not help thinking that, if Aesop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their strife, and when he could not, he fastened their heads together; and this is the reason why when one comes the other follows. Plato

That Erica should live any longer upon the money which her father chiefly made by the dissemination of views with which she disagreed was clearly impossible, at least impossible to one of her sincere and thorough nature. But to find work was very difficult, indeed. After an anxious waiting and searching, she was one day

surprised by receiving through Charles Osmond's friend, Mr. Crutchley, an introduction to the editor of a well-known and widely read paper. Every one congratulated her, but she could not feel very hopeful, it seemed too good to prove true it was, in fact, so exactly the position which she would herself have chosen that it seemed unlikely it should ever really be hers. Still of course she hoped, and arrangements were made for an interview with Mr. Bircham, editor and part proprietor of the “Daily Review.”

Accordingly, one hot summer morning Erica dressed herself carefully, tried to look old and serious, and set off with Tom to the city.

“I'll see you safe to the door of the lion's den,” said Tom as they made their way along the crowded streets. “I only wish I could be under the table during the interview; I should like to see you doing the dignified journalist.”

“I wouldn't have you for the world!” said Erica, laughing. Then, growing grave again, “Oh, Tom! How I wish it were over! It's worse than three hundred visits to a dentist rolled into one.”

“Appalling prospect!” said Tom. “I can exactly picture what it will be. BIRCHAM! Such a forbidding name for an editor. He'll be a sort of editorial Mr. Squeers; he'll talk in a loud, blustering way, and you'll feel exactly like a journalistic Smike.”

“No,” said Erica, laughing. “He'll be a neat little dapper man, very smooth and bland, and he'll talk patronizingly and raise my hopes, and then, in a few days' time will send me a polite refusal.”

“Tell him at once that you hero-worship Sir Michael Cunningham, the statesman of the age, the most renowned 'Sly Bacon!'”

“Tom, do be quiet!” said Erica. “I wish you had never thought of that horrid name.”

“Horrid! I mean to make my fortune out of it. If you like, you can offer the pun on reasonable terms to Mr. Bircham.”

“Why, this is Fleet Street! Doesn't it lead out of this?” said Erica, with an indescribable feeling in the back of her neck. “We must be quite near.”

“Nearer than near,” said Tom. “Now then, left wheel! Here we are, you see. It's a mercy that you turn pink with fright, not green like the sea-green Robespierre. Go in looking as pretty as that, and Mr. Squeers will graciously accept your services, unless he's sand-blind.”

“What a tease you are. Do be quiet!” implored Erica. And then, in what seemed to her an alarmingly short time she was actually left by herself to beard the lion, and a clerk was assuring her that Mr. Bircham was in, and would she walk upstairs.

For reasons best known to himself, the editor of the “Daily Review” had his private room at the very top of the house. A sedate clerk led the way up a dingy staircase, and Erica toiled after him, wondering how much breath she should have left by the time she reached the end. On one of the landings she caught sight of a sandy cat and felt a little reassured at meeting such an every-day creature in this grim abode; she gave it a furtive stroke as she passed, and would have felt it a protection if she could have picked it up and taken it with her. That would have been undignified, however, and by the time she reached the editor's room only a very observant person could have discovered in her frank, self-possessed manner any trace of nervousness.

So different was Mr Bircham from their preconceived notions that she could almost have laughed at the contrast. He was very tall and pompous, he wore a lank brown wig which looked as if it might come off at any moment, he had little keen gray eyes which twinkled, and a broad mouth which shut very closely; whether it was grim or humorous she could not quite decide. He was sitting in a swivel chair, and the table strewn with letters, and the desk with its pigeon holes crammed with papers, looked so natural and so like her father's that she began to feel a reassuring sense of fellowship with this entire stranger. The inevitable paste-pot and scissors, the piles of newspapers, the books of reference, all looked homelike to her.

Mr. Bircham rose and bowed rather formally, motioned her to a seat, and swung round his own seat so that they faced one another. Then he scanned her from head to foot with the sort of appraising glance to which she was only too well accustomed a glance which said as plainly as words: “Oh! So you are that atheist's daughter are you?”

But whatever impression Erica made upon Mr. Bircham, not a muscle of his face altered, and he began to discuss business in a most formal and business-like way. Things did not seem very hopeful, and Erica began to doubt more and ore whether she had the smallest chance of acceptance. Something in the dry formal manner of the editor struck a chill to her heart. So much, so very much depended on this interview, and already the prospect seemed far from hopeful.

“I should like to see some of your work,” observed Mr. Bircham. “How long have you been in the habit of writing in Mr. Raeburn's organ?”

“For the last five years,” said Erica.

Mr. Bircham lifted his shaggy eyebrows at this, for Erica looked even younger than she really was. However, he made no comment, but took up the end of a speaking tube.

“Send up Jones with the file of 'Idol-Breakers' I ordered.”

Erica's color rose. Presently the answer from the lower regions appeared in the shape of the sedate clerk carrying a great bundle of last year's 'Idol-Breakers.'

“Perhaps you will show me one or two of your average articles,” said Mr. Bircham, and, while Erica searched through the bundle of papers, he took up one of the copies which she had put aside, and studied the outside page critically. “'The Idol-Breaker:' Advocate of Freethought and Secularism. Edited by Luke Raeburn.”

“They are slaves who dare not be In the right with two or three.”

Mr. Bircham put it down and began to watch her attentively. She was absorbed in her search, and was quite unconscious of his scrutiny. Even had she noticed him, she would not have understood what was passing in his mind. His little gray eyes grew bright; then he pushed back his wig impatiently; then he cleared his throat; finally he took snuff, sneezed violently, and walked to the window. When he returned he was even

more dry and formal than before.

“These, I think, are fairly representative,” said Erica. “I have marked them on the margin.”

He took the three or four copies she handed to him, and began to look through one of the articles, muttering a sentence half aloud every now and then, and making little ejaculations which might have been either approval or disapproval.

Finally the interview ended. Mr. Bircham put down the papers with a sigh of utter weariness, Erica thought.

“Well, Miss Raeburn,” he remarked, “I will look at one or two of your other articles, and will communicate with you in a few days' time.”

Then he shook hands with her with frigid politeness, and in another minute she was slowly making her way down the dingy staircase. Partly from the reaction after her excitement, partly from mental worry and physical weariness, she felt by the time she was fairly out of the office as if she could hardly drag herself along. Her heart was like lead, blank loss of hope and weary anxiety as to the next effort to be made were weighing her down. She was naturally high-spirited, but when high-spirited people do get depressed, they go down to the very deepest depths; and her interview with Mr. Bircham, by its dry cheerlessness, by its lack of human interest, had chilled her all through. If he had even made a remark on the weather, she thought she could have liked him better; if he had expressed an opinion on any subject, even if she had disagreed with him, it would have been a relief; as it was, he seemed to her more like a hard steel pen dressed in broadcloth than a man.

As to his last remark, that could only mean one thing. He did not like to tell her to her face that she would not suit him, but, he would communicate with her in a few days, and say it comfortably on paper.

She had never felt quite so desolate and forlorn and helpless as she felt that day when she left the “Daily Review” office, and found herself in the noise and bustle of Fleet Street. The midday sun blazed down upon her in all its strength; the pavements seemed to scorch her feet; the weary succession of hurrying, pushing, jostling passengers seemed to add to her sense of isolation. Presently a girl stopped her, and asked the way to Basinghall Street. She knew it well enough, but felt too utterly stupid to direct her.

“You had better ask a policeman,” she replied, wearily.

Then, recollecting that she had several commissions to do for her father, besides a great deal to do at the stores, she braced herself up, and tried to forget Mr. Bircham, and to devote her whole mind to the petty details of shopping.

The next evening she was in the study with her father when Tom brought in a bundle of letters. One of them was for Erica. She at once recognized Mr. Bircham's writing, and a new pang of disappointment shot through her, though she had really lost all hope on the previous day. This very speedy communication could only mean that his mind had been practically made up before. She began to think of her next chance, of the next quarter she must try, and slowly opened the unwelcome letter. But in a moment she had sprung to her feet in an ecstasy of happiness.

“Oh, father! Oh, Tom! He will have me!”

Raeburn looked up from his correspondence, and together they read Mr. Bircham's letter. It was quite as business-like as he himself had been at the interview.

“Dear Madame, Having fully considered the matter, we are prepared to offer you a place on our staff. The work required was explained to you yesterday. For this we offer a salary of 200 pounds per annum. Should you signify your acceptance of these terms, we will send you our usual form of agreement. I am yours faithfully, Jacob Bircham.

“To Miss Raeburn.”

“Commend me to people who don't raise one's expectations!” said Erica, rapturously. “Three cheers for my dear, stiff old editor!”

So that anxiety was over, and Erica was most thankful to have such a load taken off her mind. The comfort of it helped her through a very trying summer.

CHAPTER XXIII. Erica to the Rescue

Isabel: I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul
in the truth of my spirit.

Duke: Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful.
Measure for Measure

It was the first of September. Watering places were crowded with visitors, destruction had begun among the partridges, and a certain portion of the hard-working community were taking their annual holiday.

Raeburn, whose holidays were few and far between, had been toiling away all through the summer months in town. This evening, as he sat in his stifling little study, he had fallen into a blank fit of depression. He could neither work nor read. Strong as his nature was, it was not always proof against this grim demon, which avenged itself on him for overtasking his brain, shortening his hours of sleep, and in other ways sacrificing himself to his work. Tonight, however, there was reason for his depression; for while he sat fighting his demon at home, Erica had gone to Charles Osmond's church it was the evening of her baptism.

Of course it was the necessary sequence of the confession she had made a few months before, and Raeburn had long known that it was inevitable; but none the less did he this evening suffer more acutely than he had yet suffered, realizing more fully his child's defection The private confession had startled, shocked, grieved

him inexpressibly; but the public profession, with its sense of irrevocableness, filled his heart with a grief for which he could find no single ray of comfort.

Erica's brave endurance of all the trials and discomforts involved in her change of faith had impressed him not a little, and even when most hurt and annoyed by her new views, he had always tried to shield her; but it had been a hard summer, and the loss of the home unity had tried him sorely.

Moreover, the comparative quiet of the last year was now ended. A new foe had arisen in the person of a certain retired cheesemonger, who had sworn war to the knife against the apostle of atheism. Unfortunately, Mr. Pogson's war was not undertaken in a Christ-like spirit; his zeal was fast changing into personal animosity, and he had avowed the he would crush Raeburn, though it should cost him the whole of his fortune. This very day he had brought into action the mischievous and unfair blasphemy laws, and to everybody's amazement, had commenced a prosecution against Raeburn for a so-called “blasphemous libel” in one of his recent pamphlets. An attack on the liberty of the press was to Raeburn what the sound of the trumpet is to the war horse. Yet, now that the first excitement was over, he had somehow sunk into a fit of black depression. How was it? Was his strength failing? Was he growing old unfit for his work?

He was roused at length by a knock at his door. The servant entered with a number of letters. He turned them over mechanically until some handwriting which reminded him of his mother's made him pause. The letter bore the Greyshot postmark; it must be from his sister Isabel. He opened it with some eagerness; there had been no communication between them since the time of his wife's death, and though he had hoped that the correspondence once begun might have been continued, nothing more had come of it. The letter proved short, and not altogether palatable. It began with rejoicings over Erica's change of views, the report of which had reached Mrs. Fane-Smith. It went on to regret that he did not share in the change. Raeburn's lip curled as he read. Then came a request that Erica might be allowed to visit her relations, and the letter ended with a kindly-meant but mistaken offer.

“My husband and I both feel that there are many objections to Erica's remaining in her present home. We should be much pleased if she would live with us at any rate, until she has met with some situation which would provide her with a suitable and permanent residence.”

The offer was not intended to be insulting, but undoubtedly, to such a father as Raeburn, it was a gross insult. His eyes flashed fire, and involuntarily he crushed the letter in his hand; then, a little ashamed of the passionate act, he forced himself deliberately to smooth it out again, and, folding it accurately, put it in his pocket. A note for Erica remained in the envelope; he placed it on the mantel piece, then fell back in his chair again and thought.

After all, might not the visit to Greyshot be a very good thing for her? Of course she would never dream of living with her aunt, would indeed be as angry at the proposal as he had been. But might not a visit of two or three weeks open her eyes to her new position, and prove to her that among Christians such people as the Osmonds were only in the minority! He knew enough of society to be able to estimate the position it would accord to Erica. He knew that her sensitiveness would be wounded again and again, that, that her honesty would be shocked, her belief in the so-called Christian world shaken. Might not all this be salutary? And yet he did not like the thought; he could not bear sending her out alone to fight her own battles, could not endure the consciousness that she was bearing his reproach. Oh, why had this miserable, desolating change ever occurred? At this very moment she was making public profession of a faith which could only place her in the most trying of positions; at this very moment she was pledging herself to a life of bondage and trouble; while he, standing aside, could see all the dangers and difficulties of her future, and could do absolutely nothing!

It reminded him of one of the most horrible moments of his life. Walking up Regent Street one afternoon, years ago, Erica, walking with Mrs. Craigie on the opposite side, had caught sight of him, and regardless of the fourfold chain of carriages, had rushed across to him with the fearless daring of a six-year-old child, to whom the danger of horses' hoofs was a mere nothing when compared with the desire to get a walk with her father. His heart beat quicker even now as he thought of the paralyzing dread of long ago, nor had Miss Erica ever been scolded for her loving rashness; in his relief he had been unable to do anything but clasp the little hand in his as though nothing should ever part them again.

But her loving disregard of all danger and difficulty was no longer inspired by love of him, but by love of what Raeburn considered a myth and a delusion.

In that lay the real sting. He courage, her suffering, all seemed to him wasted, altogether on the wrong side. Once more black gloom fell upon him. The room grew dusk then dark, but still he remained motionless.

Again he was interrupted by a knock at his door.

“Signor Civita wished to speak to him.”

He braced himself up for an interview with some stranger, and in walked a foreigner wrapped in a long cloak, and looking exceedingly like a stage brigand.

He bowed, the brigand bowed too, and said something rapid and unintelligible in Italian. Then glanced at the door to see that it was safely closed, he made a bound to the open window and shut it noiselessly. Raeburn quietly reached down a loaded revolver which hung about the mantel piece, and cocked it, whereupon the brigand fell into a paroxysm of laughter, and exclaimed in German:

“Why, my good friend! Do you not know me?”

“Haeberlein!” exclaimed Raeburn, in utter amazement, submitting to a German embrace.

“Eric himself and no other!” returned the brigand. “Draw your curtains and lock your door and you shall see me in the flesh. I am half stifled in this lordly wig.”

“Wait,” said Raeburn. “Be cautious.”

He left him for a minute, and Haeberlein heard him giving orders that no one else was to be admitted that evening. Then he came back, quietly bolted the door, closed the shutters, and lighted the gas. In the meantime his friend threw off his cloak, removed the wig of long, dark hair, and the drooping mustache and shaggy eyebrows, revealing his natural face and form. Raeburn grasped his hand once more.

“Now I feel that I've got you, Eric!” he exclaimed. “What lucky chance has brought you so unexpectedly?”

“No lucky one!” said Haeberlein, with an expressive motion of the shoulders. “But of that anon; let me look at you, old fellow why you're as white as a miller! Call yourself six-and-forty! You might pass for my grandfather!”

Raeburn, who had a large reserve fund of humor, caught up his friend's black wig from the table and put it on above his own thick, white hair, showing plainly enough that in face and spirits he was as young as ever. It was seven years since they had met, and they fell to talk of reminiscences, and in the happiness of their meeting put off the more serious matters which must be discussed before long. It was a good half hour before Haeberlein alluded to the occasion of his present visit.

“Bring actually in London, I couldn't resist looking in upon you,” he said, a cloud of care coming over his face. “I only hope it won't get you into a scrape. I came over to try to avert this deplorable business about poor Kellner too late, I fear. And the worst of it is, I must have blundered somehow for my coming leaked out, and they are on the watch for me. If I get safe across to France tonight, I shall be lucky.”

“Incautious as ever,” sighed Raeburn. “And that Kellner richly deserves his fate. Why should you meddle?”

“I was bound to,” said Haeberlein. “He did me many a good turn during my exile, and though he has made a grave mistake, yet—”

“Yet you must run your chivalrous head into a halter for his sake!” exclaimed Raeburn. “You were ever Quixote. I shall live to see you hanged yet.”

Haeberlein laughed.

“No, I don't think you will,” he said, cheerfully. “I've had some bad falls, but I've always fallen on my feet. With a good cause, a man has little to fear.”

“If this WERE a good cause,” said Raeburn, with significant emphasis.

“It was the least I could do,” said Haeberlein, with the chivalrous disregard of self which was his chief characteristic. “I only fear that my coming here may involve you in it which Heaven forfend! I should never forgive myself if I injured your reputation.”

Raeburn smiled rather bitterly.

“You need not fear that. My reputation has long been at the mercy of all the lying braggarts in the country. Men label me socialist one day, individualist the next. I become communist or egotist, as is most convenient to the speaker and most damaging to myself. But there,” he exclaimed, regaining the tranquil serenity which characterized him, “why should I rail at the world when I might be talking to you? How is my old friend Hans?”

The sound of a key in the latch startled them.

“It is only Erica,” said Raeburn. “I had forgotten she was out.”

“My pretty little namesake! I should like to see her. Is she still a zealous little atheist?”

“No, she has become a Christian,” said Raeburn, speaking with some effort.

“So!” exclaimed Haeberlein, without further comment. He himself was of no particular creed; he was just indifferent, and the zeal of his friend often surprised him.

Raeburn went out into the passage, drew Erica into the front sitting room, and closed the door.

“There is an old friend of yours in my study,” he said. “He wishes to see you, but you must promise secrecy, for he is in danger.”

“Is it Herr Haeberlein?” asked Erica.

“Yes, on one of his rash, kindly errands, but one of which I don't approve. However, his work is over, and we must try to get him safely off to France. Come in with me if you will, but I wanted to tell you about it first, so that you should not be mixed up with this against your will, which would be unfair!”

“Would it?” said Erica, smiling, as she slipped her hand into his.

Haeberlein had taken a newspaper out of his pocket, and was searching for something. The gas light fell on his clean-shaven face, revealing a sweet-tempered mouth, keen blue eyes, a broad German forehead, and closely cropped iron-gray hair. Erica thought him scarcely altered since their last meeting. He threw down his newspaper as she approached.

“Well, my Herzblattchen!” he exclaimed, saluting her with a double kiss, “so you are not ashamed of your old friend? So,” holding her at arms' length and regarding her critically, “Potztausend! The English girls do beat ours all to nothing. Well, my Liebchen, dost thou remember the day when thou carried the Casati dispatches in thy geography book under the very nose of a spy? It was a brave deed that, and it saved a brave man's life.”

Erica smiled and colored. “I was not so brave as I seemed,” she said. “My heart was beating so loud, I thought people must hear it.”

“Has thou never heard the saying of the first Napoleon, 'The bravest man is he who can conceal his fear?' I do not come under that category, for I never had fear never felt it. Thou wouldst not dream, Herzblattchen, that spies are at this moment dogging my steps while I jest here with thee?”

“Is that indeed true?” exclaimed Erica.

They explained to her a little more of Haeberlein's errand and the risk he ran; he alluded to his hopes that Raeburn might not be involved in any unpleasant consequences. Erica grew pale at the bare suggestion.

“See,” exclaimed Haeberlein, “the little one cares more for your reputation than you do yourself, my friend. See what it is to have a daughter who can be afraid for you, though she can not be afraid for herself! But, Liebchen, Thou must not blame me for coming to see him. Think! My best friend, and unseen for seven years!”

“It is worth a good deal of risk,” said Erica, brightly. But as the terror or having her father's name mentioned in connection with Herr Kellner's once more returned to her, she added, pleadingly, “And you WILL be careful when you leave the house?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Haeberlein. “See what a disguise I have.”

He hastily donned the black wig, mustache and eyebrows, and the long Italian cloak.

Erica looked at him critically.

“Art thou not satisfied?” he asked.

“Not a bit,” she said, promptly. “In London every one would turn to look twice at such a dress as that, which is what you want to avoid. Besides, those eyebrows are so outrageous, so evidently false.”

She thought for a minute.

“My brown Inverness,” suggested Raeburn.

“Too thick for a summer night,” said Erica, “and” glancing from her father to Haeberlein “too long to look natural. I think Tom's ulster and traveling hat would be better.”

“Commend me to a woman when you want sound advice!” cried Haeberlein.

Erica went to search Tom's room for the ulster, and in the meantime Haeberlein showed his friend a paragraph in one of the evening papers which proved to Raeburn that the risk was indeed very great. They were discussing things much more gravely when Erica returned.

“The stations will be watched,” Haeberlein was saying.

“What station do you go to?” asked Erica.

“I thought of trying Cannon Street,” replied the German.

“Because,” continued Erica, “I think you had better let me see you off. You will look like a young Englishman, and I shall do all the talking, so that you need not betray your accent. They would never dream of Herr Haeberlein laughing and talking with a young girl.”

“They would never dream that a young girl would be brave enough to run such a risk!” said Haeberlein. “No, my sweet Herzblattchen, I could not bring thee into danger.”

“There will be none for me,” said Erica, “and it may save you from evil and my father from suspicion. Father, if you will let me, it would be more of a disguise than anything.”

“You might meet some one you know,” said Raeburn.

“Very unlikely,” she replied. “And even if I did, what would it matter? I need not tell them anything, and Herr Haeberlein would get off all the same.”

He saw that she was too pure and too unconventional to understand his objection, but his whole heart rebelled against the idea of letting her undertake the task, and it was only after much persuasion that she drew from him a reluctant consent. After all, it would be a great safeguard to Haeberlein, and Haeberlein was his dearest friend. For no one else could he have risked what was so precious to him. There was very little time for discussion. The instant his permission was given, Erica ran upstairs to Tom's private den, lighted his gas stove, and made a cup of chocolate, at the same time blackening a cork very carefully. In a few minutes she returned to the study, carrying the chocolate and a plate of rusks, which she remembered were a particular weakness of Herr Haeberlein's. She found that in her absence the two had been discussing matters again, for Haeberlein met her with another remonstrance.

“Liebe Erica,” he began, “I yielded just now to thy generous proposal; but I think it will not do. For myself I can be rash, but not for thee. Thou art too frail and lovely, my little one, to get mixed up with the grim realities of such a life as mine.”

She only laughed. “Why, I have been mixed up with them ever since I was a baby!”

“True; but now it is different. The world might judge thee harshly, people might say things which would wound thee.”

“They say! 'LET them say!'” quoted Erica, smiling, “mens conscia recti will carry one through worse things than a little slander. No, no, you must really let me have my own way. It is right, and there's an end of it!”

Raeburn let things run their course; he agreed with Erica all the time, though his heart impelled him to keep her at home. And as to Eric Haeberlein, it would have needed a far stronger mind than that of the sweet-tempered, quixotic German to resist the generous help offered by such a lovely girl.

There was no time to lose; the latest train for the Continent left at 9:25, and before Haeberlein had adjusted his new disguise the clock struck nine. Erica very carefully blackened his eyebrows and ruthlessly sheared the long black wig to an ordinary and unnoticeable length, and, when Tom's ulster and hat were added, the disguise was so perfect, and made Haeberlein look so absurdly young, that Raeburn himself could not possibly have recognized him.

In past years Raeburn had often risked a great deal for his friend. At one time his house had been watched day and night in consequence of his well-known friendship with the Republican Don Quixote. Unfortunately, therefore, it was only too probable that Haeberlein in risking his visit this evening might have run into a trap. If he were being searched for, his friend's house would almost inevitably be watched.

They exchanged farewells, not without some show of emotion on each side, and just at the last Raeburn hastily bent down and kissed Erica's forehead, at his heart a sickening sense of anxiety. She too was anxious, but she was very happy to have found on the evening of her baptism so unusual a service to render to her father, and, besides, the consciousness of danger always raised her spirits.

When, as they had half expected, they found the would-be natural-looking detective prowling up and down the cul-de-sac, it was no effort to her to begin at once a laughing account of a school examination which Charles Osmond had told her about, and so naturally and brightly did she talk that, though actually brushing past the spy under the full light of the street lamp., she entirely disarmed suspicion.

It was a horrible moment, however. Her heart beat wildly as they passed on, and every moment she thought she should hear quick steps behind them. But nothing came of it, and in a few minutes they were walking down Southampton Row. When this was safely passed, she began to feel comparatively at ease. Haeberlein thought they might take a cab.

“Not a hansom,” she said, quickly, as he was on the point of hailing one. “You would be so much more exposed, you know!”

Haeberlein extolled her common sense, and they secured a four-wheeler and drove to Cannon Street.

Talking now became more possible. Haeberlein leaned far back in the corner, and spoke in low tones.

“Thou has been my salvation, Erica,” he said, pressing her hand. “That fellow would never have let me pass in the Italian costume. Thou wert right as usual, it was theatrical how do you call stagey, is it not?

“I am a little troubled about your mouth,” said Erica, smiling, “the mustache doesn't disguise it, and it looks so good-tempered and like itself. Can't you feel severe just for half an hour?”

Haeberlein smiled his irresistibly sweet smile, and tried to comply with her wishes, but not very successfully.

“I think,” said Erica, presently, “it will be the best way, if you don't mind, for you just to stroll through the booking office while I take your ticket. I can meet you by the book stall and I will still talk for us both in case you betray your accent.”

“HERZBLATTCHEN!” exclaimed Haeberlein, “how shall I ever repay thee! Thou art a real canny little Scot! I only wish I had half thy caution and forethought!”

“Don't look like that!” said Erica, laughing, as the benignant expression once more came over his lips. “You really must try to turn down the corners! Your character is a silent, morose misanthrope. I am the chatter box, pure and simple.”

They were both laughing when they drew near to the station, but a sense of the risk sobered Haeberlein, and Erica carried out her programme to perfection. It was rather a shock to her, indeed, to find a detective keenly inspecting all who went to the ticket office. He stood so close to the pigeon hole that Erica doubted whether Herr Haeberlein's eyebrows, improved though they were, could possibly have escaped detection. It required all her self command to prevent her color from rising and her fingers from trembling as she received the ticket and change under that steady scrutiny. Then she passed out on to the platform and found that Herr Haeberlein had been wise enough to buy the paper which least sympathized with his views, and in a few minutes he was safely disposed in the middle of a well-filled carriage.

Erica took out her watch. There were still three minutes before the train started, three long, interminable minutes! She looked down the platform, and her heart died within her; for, steadily advancing toward them, she saw two men making careful search in every carriage.

Herr Haeberlein was sitting with his back to the engine. Between him and the door sat a lady with a copy of the “Graphic” on her knee. If she could only have been persuaded to read it, it might have made an effectual screen. She tried to will her to take it up, but without success. And still the detectives moved steadily forward with their keen scrutiny.

Erica was in despair. Herr Haeberlein imagined himself safe now, and she could not warn him without attracting the notice and rousing the suspicion of the passengers. To complete her misery, she saw that he had pushed his wig a little on one side, and through the black hair she caught a glimpse of silver gray.

Her heart beat so fast that it almost choked her, but still she forced herself to talk and laugh, though every moment the danger drew nearer. At the very last moment an inspiration came to her. The detectives were examining the next carriage.

“They are taking things in the most leisurely way tonight!” she exclaimed. “I'm tired of waiting. I shall say goodbye to you, and go home, I think.”

As she spoke, she opened the carriage door stepped in, and demonstratively kissed her silent companion, much to the amusement of the passengers, who had been a good deal diverted by her racy conversation and the grumpy replies of the traveler. There was a smile on every face when one of the detectives looked in. He glanced to the other side of the carriage and saw a dark-haired young man in an ulster, and a pretty girl taking leave of her lover. Erica's face entirely hid Herr Haeberlien's from view and the man passed on with a shrug and a smile. She had contrived to readjust his wig, and with many last words, managed to spin out the remaining time, till at last the welcome signal of departure was given.

Haeberlein's mouth relaxed into a benignant smile, as he nodded a farewell; then he discreetly composed himself into a sleeping posture, while Erica stood on the platform and waved her handkerchief.

As she moved away the two detectives passed by her.

“Not there! At any rate,” she heard one of them say. “Maybe they got him by the nine o'clock at Waterloo.”

“More likely trapped him in Guilford Terrace,” replied the other.

Erica, shaking with suppressed laughter, saw the men leave the station; and then, springing into a cab, drove to a street in the neighborhood of Guildford Square.

Now that her work was over, she began to feel what a terrible strain it had been. At first she lay back in the corner of the cab in a state of dreamy peace, watching the gas-lighted streets, the hurrying passengers, with a comfortable sense of security and rest. But when she was set down near Guilford Square, her courage, which in real danger had never failed her, suddenly ebbed away, and left her merely a young girl, with aching back and weary limbs, with a shrinking dislike of walking alone so late in the evening. Worse of all, her old childish panic had taken hold of her once more; her knees trembled beneath her, as she remembered that she must pass the spy, who would assuredly still be keeping watch in Guilford Terrace. The dread of being secretly watched had always been a torment to her. Spies, sometimes real, sometimes imaginary, had been the terror of her childhood had taken the place of the ghost and bogy panics which assail children brought up in other creeds.

The fact was, she had been living at very high pressure, and she was too much exhausted to conquer her unreasonable fright, which increased every moment, until she was on the point of going to the Osmonds, willing to frame any excuse for so late a visit if only she could get one of them to walk home with her. Honesty and shame hindered her, however, With a great effort of will she forced herself to pass the door, horrified to find how nearly selfish cowardice had induced her to draw her friends into suspicion. Echoes of

the hymns sung at her baptism, and at the subsequent confirmation rang in her ears. She walked on more bravely.

By the time she reached Guilford Terrace, she had herself quite in hand. And it was well; for, as she walked down the dreary little alley, a dark form emerged from the shadow, and suddenly confronted her.

Any one might reasonably be a little startled by having a sudden pause made before them by an unknown person on a dark night. Erica thought she could exactly sympathize with a shying horse; she felt very much inclined to swerve aside. Fortunately she betrayed no fear, only a little surprise, as she lifted her head and looked the man full in the face, then moved on with quiet dignity. She felt him follow her to the very door, and purposely she took out her latch key with great deliberation, and allowed him, if he pleased, to take a quiet survey of the passage while she rubbed her boots on the mat; then, with a delicious sense of safety, she closed the door on the unfriendly gaze..

In the meantime, Raeburn had spent a miserably anxious evening, regretting his rash permission for Erica to go, regretting his own enforced inaction, regretting his well-known and undisguisable face and form, almost regretting that his friend had visited him. Like Erica, he was only personally brave; he could not be brave for other people. Actual risk he would have enjoyed, but this anxious waiting was to him the keenest torture.

When at length the age-long hour had passed, and he heard the front door close, he started up with an exclamation of relief, and hurried out into the passage. Erica greeted him with her brightest smile.

“All safe,” she said, following him into the study. “He is well on his way to Folkestone, and we have eluded three spies.”

Then, with a good deal of humor, she related the whole of the adventure, at the same time taking off her hat and gloves.

“And you met no one you knew?” asked Raeburn.

“Only the bishop who baptized and confirmed me this evening, and he of course did not recognize me.”

As she spoke, she unbuttoned her ulster, disclosing beneath it her white serge dress.

Raeburn sighed. Words and sight both reawakened a grief which he would fain have put from him.

But Erica came and sat down on the hearth rug, and nestled up to him just as usual. “I am so tired, padre mio!” she exclaimed. “But it has been well worth it.”

Raeburn did not answer. She looked up in his face.

“What are you thinking?”

“I was thinking that few people had such an ending to their confirmation day,” said Raeburn.

“I thank God for it,” said Erica. “Oh, father! There is so much, so very much we still have in common! And I am so glad this happened tonight of all nights!”

He stroked her hair caressingly, but did not speak.

CHAPTER XXIV. The New Relations

For all men live and judge amiss
Whose talents jump not just with his. Hudibras

Comfortable moles, whom what they do
Teaches the limit of the just and true.
(And for such doing they require not eyes). Matthew Arnold

One bright afternoon about a week after this, Erica found herself actually in the train, and on her way to Greyshot. At first she had disliked the idea, but her father had evidently wished her to accept the invitation, and a hope of uniting again the two families would have stimulated her to a much more formidable undertaking than a visit of a few weeks to perfect strangers. She knew nothing of the proposal made to her father; her own letter had been most kind, and after all, though she did not like the actual leaving home, she could not but look forward to a rest and change after the long summer months in town. Moreover, Aunt Jean had just returned, after a brief holiday, and the home atmosphere for the last two or three days had been very trying; she felt as if a change would make her better able to bear the small daily frets and annoyances, and not unnaturally looked forward to the delicious rest of unity. A Christian home ought to be delightful; she had never stayed in one, and had a high ideal.

It was about six o'clock by the time she reached her journey's end, and, waiting for her on the platform, she had no difficulty in recognizing her aunt, a taller and fairer edition of Mrs. Craigie, who received her with a kind, nervous diffident greeting, and seemed very anxious indeed about her luggage, which was speedily brought to light by the footman, and safely conveyed to the carriage. Erica, used to complete independence, felt as if she were being transformed into a sort of grown-up baby, as she was relieved of her bag and umbrella and guided down the steps, and assisted into the open landau, and carefully tucked in with a carriage rug.

“I hope you are not overtired with the journey?” inquired her aunt with an air of the kindest and most anxious solicitude.

Accustomed to a really hard life in London, Erica almost laughed at the idea of being overtired by such a short journey.

“Oh, I have enjoyed it, thank you,” she replied. “What a lovely line it is!”

“Is it?” said her aunt, a little surprised. “I didn't know it was considered specially pretty, and I myself am never able to look much at the scenery in traveling; it always gives me a headache.”

“What a pity!” said Erica. “It is such a treat, I think. In fact, it is the only way in which I have seen what people call scenery. I never stayed in the country in my life.”

“My dear, is it possible,” exclaimed Mrs. Fane-Smith, in a horrified voice. “Yet you do not look pale. Do you mean that you have spent your whole life in town?”

“I was at Paris for two years,” said Erica; “and twice I have spent a little time at the sea-side; and, years and years ago, father was once taken ill at Southampton, and we went to him there that was almost like the country I mean, one could get country walks. It was delightful; there was a splendid avenue, you know, and oh, such a common! It was in the spring time. I shall never forget the yellow gorse and the hawthorns, and such beautiful velvety grass.”

Her enthusiasm pleased her aunt; moreover, it was a great relief to find the unknown niece well-bred and companionable, and not overburdened with shyness. Already Mrs. Fane-Smith loved her, and felt that the invitation, which she had given really from a strong sense of duty, was likely to give her pleasure instead of discomfort. All the way home, while Erica admired the Greyshot streets, and asked questions about the various buildings, Mrs. Fane-Smith was rejoicing that so fair a “brand,” as she mentally expressed it, had been “plucked from the burning,” and resolving that she would adopt her as a second daughter, and, if possible, induce her to take their name and drop the notorious “Raeburn.” The relief was great, for on the way to the station, Mrs. Fane-Smith had been revolving the unpleasant thought in her mind that “really there was no knowing, Erica might be 'anything' since her mother was a 'nobody.'”

At last they drew up before a large house in the most fashionable of the Greyshot squares, the windows and balconies of which were gay with flowers.

“We shall find Rose at home, I expect,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, leading Erica across a marble-paved hall, and even as she spoke a merry voice came from the staircase, and down ran a fair-haired girl, with a charmingly eager and naive manner.

Erica had guessed what she must be from the quaint and kindly meant letter which she had sent her years before, and though five years in society had somewhat artificialized Rose, she still retained much of her childishness and impetuous honesty. She slipped her arm into her cousin's, and took her off to her room at once.

“I am so glad you have come!” she exclaimed. “I have been longing to see you for years and years. Mamma has been talking so much about your cleverness and my stupidity that just at the last I felt quite in a fright lest you should be too dreadfully 'blue.' I looked out of the drawing room window for you, and if you had been very forbidding I should have received you in state in the drawing room, but you were so charmingly pretty that I was obliged to rush down headlong to meet you.”

Erica laughed and blushed, not being used to such broad compliments. In the meantime, they had traversed several flights of stairs, and Rose, opening a door, showed her into a spacious bedroom, most luxuriously fitted up.

“This great big room for me!” exclaimed Erica.

“It isn't at all ghostly,” said Rose, reassuringly. “Will you be afraid if you have a night light?”

Erica laughed at the idea of being afraid; she was merely amused to think of herself established in such a palatial bedroom, such a contrast to the little book-lined room at home. There was a dainty little book case here, however, with some beautifully bound books, and in another minute she was delightedly scanning their titles, and, with a joyous exclamation, had caught up Browning's “Christmas-eve and Easter-day,” when a sound of dismay from her cousin made her laughingly put it down again.

“Oh, dear me!” said Rose, in a despairing voice, “I am afraid, after all, you are dreadfully blue. Fancy snatching up a Browning like that!”

Erica began to unlock her trunk.

“Do you want your things out?” said Rose. “I'll ring for Gemma; she'll unpack for you.”

“Oh, thank you,” said Erica, “I would much rather do it myself.”

“But it is nearly dinner time, we are dining early this evening, and you will want Gemma to help you to dress.”

“Oh, no,” said Erica, laughing, “I never had a maid in my life.”

“How funny,” said Rose, “I shouldn't know what to do without one. Gemma does everything for me, at least everything that Elspeth will let her.”

“Is she Italian?” asked Erica.

“Oh, no, her name is really Jemima; but that was quite too dreadfully ugly, you know, and she is such a pretty girl.”

She chattered on while Erica unpacked and put on her white serge, then they went down to the drawing room where Erica was introduced to her host, a small elderly man, who looked as if the Indian sun had partially frizzled him. He received her kindly, but with a sort of ceremonious stiffness which made her feel less perfectly at her east than before, and after the usual remarks about the length of the journey, and the beauty of the weather, he relapsed into silence, surveying every one from his arm chair as though he were passing mental judgments on every foolish or trifling remark uttered. In reality, he was taking in every particular about Erica. He looked at her broad forehead, overshadowed by the thick smooth waves of short auburn hair, observed her golden-brown eyes which were just now as clear as amber; noted the creamy whiteness and delicate coloring of her complexion, which indeed defied criticism even the criticism of such a critical man as Mr. Fane-Smith. The nose was perhaps a trifle too long, the chin too prominent, for ideal beauty, but greater regularity of feature could but have rendered less quaint, less powerful, and less attractive the strangely winsome face. It was only the mouth which he did not feel satisfied with it added character to the face, but he somehow felt that it betokened a nature not easily led, not so gentle and pliable as he could have wished. It shut so very firmly and the under lip was a little thinner and straighter than the other and receded a little from it, giving the impression that Erica had borne much suffering, and had

exercised great self-restraint.

Mrs. Fane-Smith saw in her a sort of miniature and feminine edition of the Luke Raeburn whom she remembered eight-and-twenty years before in their Scottish home. When Rose had gone into the back drawing room to fetch her crewels, she drew Erica toward her, and kissing her again, said in a low, almost frightened voice:

“You are very like what your father was.”

But just at that moment Mr. Fane-Smith asked some sudden question, and his wife, starting and coloring, as though she had been detected in wrong-doing, hurriedly and nervously devoted herself to what seemed to Erica a distractingly round-about answer. By the time it was fairly ended, dinner was announced, and the strangeness of the atmosphere of this new home struck more and more upon Erica and chilled her a little. The massive grandeur of the old oak furniture, the huge oil paintings, which she wanted really to study, the great silver candelabra, even the two footmen and the solemn old butler seemed to oppress her. The luxury was almost burdensome. It was a treat indeed to see and use beautiful glass and china, and pleasant to have beautiful fruit and flowers to look at, but Erica was a bohemian and hated stiff ceremony Her heart failed her when she thought of sitting down night after night to such an interminable meal. Worse still, she had taken a dislike to her host. Her likes and dislikes were always characterized by Highland intensity, and something in her aunt's husband seemed to rub her the wrong way. Mr. Fane-Smith was a retired Indian judge, a man much respected in the religious world, and in his way a really good man; but undoubtedly his sympathies were narrow and his creed hard. Closely intwined with much true and active Christianity, he had allowed to spring up a choking overgrowth of hard criticism, of intolerance, of domineering dogmatism. He was one of those men who go about the world, trying, not to find points of union with all men, but ferreting out the most trifling points of divergence. He did this with the best intentions, no doubt, but as Erica's whole view of life, and of Christian life in particular, was the direct opposite of his, their natures inevitably jarred.

She knew that it was foolish to expect every Christian household to be equal to the Osmonds', but nevertheless a bitter sense of disappointment stole over her that evening. Where was the sense of restful unity which she had looked forward to? The new atmosphere felt strange, the new order of life this luxurious easy life was hard to comprehend.

To add to her dislike Mr. Fane-Smith was something of an epicure and had a most fastidious palate. Now, Erica's father thought scarcely anything about what he ate it was indeed upon record that he had once in a fit of absence dined upon a plate of scraps intended for Friskarina, while engaged in some scientific discussion with the professor. Mr. Fane-Smith, on the other hand, though convinced that the motto of all atheists was “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die,” criticized his food almost as severely as he criticized human beings. The mulligatawny was not to his taste. The curry was too not. He was sure the jelly was made with that detestable stuff gelatine; he wished his wife would forbid the cook to use it if she had seen old horses being led into a gelatine manufactory as he had seen, she would be more particular.

Interspersed between these compliments was conversation which irritated Erica even more. It was chiefly about the sayings and doings of people whom she did not know, and the doings of some clergyman in a neighboring town seemed to receive severe censure, for Mr. Fane-Smith stigmatized him as “A most dangerous man, a Pelagian in disguise.” However, he seemed to be fond of labeling people with the names of old heresies, for, presently, when Rose said something about Mr. Farrant, her father replied contemptuously:

Every one knows, my dear, that Mr. Farrant holds unorthodox views. Why, a few years ago he was an atheist, and now he's a mere Photinian.

As no one but Mr. Fane-Smith had the faintest idea what a “Photinian” meant, the accusation could neither be understood nor refuted. Mrs. Fane-Smith looked very uncomfortable, fearing that her niece might feel hurt at the tone in which “He was an atheist,” had been spoken; and indeed Erica's color did rise.

“Is that Mr. Farrant the member?” she asked.

“Yes,” replied her aunt, apprehensively. “Do you know him?”

“Not personally, but I shall always honor him for the splendid speech he made last year on religious toleration,” said Erica.

Mr. Fane-Smith raised his eyebrows for the same speech had made him most indignant. However, he began to realize that, before Erica could become a patient recipient of his opinions, like his wife and daughter, he must root out the false ideas which evidently still clung to her.

“Mr. Farrant is no doubt a reformed character now,” he admitted. “But he is far from orthodox; far from orthodox! At one time I am told that he was one of the wildest young fellows in the neighborhood, no decent person would speak to him, and though no doubt he means well, yet I could never have confidence in such a man.”

“I have heard a good deal about him from my friends the Osmonds,” said Erica, stimulated as usual to side with the abused. “Mr. Osmond thinks him the finest character he ever knew.”

“Is that the clergyman you told me of?” interposed Mrs. Fane-Smith, anxious to turn the conversation.

But her husband threw in a question, too.

“What, Charles Osmond, do you mean the author of 'Essays on Modern Christianity?”

“Yes,” replied Erica.

“I don't know that he is much more orthodox than Mr. Farrant,” said Mr. Fane-Smith; “I consider that he has Noetian tendencies.”

Erica's color rose and her eyes flashed.

“I do not know whether he is what is called orthodox or not,” she said; “but I do know that he is the most Christ-like man I ever met.”

Mr. Fane-Smith looked uncomfortable. He would name any number of heresies and heretics, but, except at grace, it was against his sense of etiquette to speak the name of Christ at table.. Even Rose looked surprised, and Mrs. Fane-Smith colored, and at once made the move to go.

On the plea of fetching some work, Erica escaped to her own room, and there tried to cool her cheeks and her temper; but the idea of such a man as Mr. Fane-Smith sitting in judgment on such men as Mr. Farrant and Charles Osmond had thoroughly roused her, and she went down still in a dangerous state a touch would make her anger blaze up.

“Are you fond of knitting?” asked her aunt, making room for her on the sofa, and much relieved to find that her niece was not of the unfeminine “blue” order.

“I don't really like any work,” said Erica, “but, of course, a certain amount must be done, and I like to knit my father's socks.”

Mr. Fane-Smith, who had just joined them, took note of this answer, and it seemed to surprise and displease him, though he made no remark.

“Did he think that atheists didn't wear socks? Or that their daughters couldn't knit?” thought Erica to herself, with a little resentful inward laugh.

The fact was that Mr. Fane-Smith saw more and more plainly that the niece whom his wife was so anxious to adopt was by no means his ideal of a convert. Of course he was really and honestly thankful that she had adopted Christianity, but it chafed him sorely that she had not exactly adopted his own views. He was a man absolutely convinced that there is but one form of truth, and an exceedingly narrow form he made it, for all mankind. He Mr. Fane-Smith had exactly grasped the whole truth, and whoever swerved to the right or to the left, if only by a hair's breadth, was, he considered, in a dangerous and lamentable condition. Ah! He thought to himself, if only he had had from the beginning the opportunity of influencing Erica, instead of that dangerously broad Charles Osmond. It did not strike him that he HAD had the opportunity ever since his return to England, but had entirely declined to admit an atheist to his house. Other men had labored, and he had entered into the fruit of their labors, and not finding it quite to his taste, fancied that he could have managed much better.

There are few sadder things in the world than to see really good and well-intentioned men fighting for what they consider the religious cause with the devil's weapons. Mr. Fane-Smith would have been dismayed if any one could have shown him that all his life he had been struggling to suppress unbelief by what was infinitely worse than sincere unbelief denunciation often untrue, always unjust, invariably uncharitable. He would have been almost broken-hearted could he ever have known that his hard intolerance, his narrowness, his domineering injustice had not deterred one soul from adopting the views he abhorred, but had, on the contrary, done a great deal to drive into atheism those who were wavering. And this evening, even while lamenting that he had not been able to train up his niece exactly in the opinions he himself held, he was all the time trying her faith more severely than a whole regiment of atheists could have tried it.

The time passed heavily enough. When two people in the room are unhappy and uncomfortable, a sense of unrest generally falls upon the other occupants. Rose yawned, talked fitfully about the gayeties of the coming week, worked half a leaf on an antimacassar, and sang three or four silly little coquettish songs which somehow jarred on every one.

Mrs. Fane-Smith, feeling anxious and harassed, afraid alike of vexing her husband and offending her niece, talked kindly and laboriously. Erica turned the heel of her sock and responded as well as she could, her sensitiveness recoiling almost as much from the labored and therefore oppressive kindness, as from the irritating and narrow censure which Mr. Fane-Smith dealt out to the world.

Family prayers followed. It was the first time she had ever been present at such a household gathering, and the idea seemed to her a very beautiful one. But the function proved so formal and lifeless that it chilled her more than anything. Yet her relations were so very kind to her personally that she blamed herself for feeling disappointed, and struggled hard to pierce through the outer shell, which she knew only concealed their real goodness. She knew, too, that she had herself to blame in part; her oversensitiveness, her quick temper, her want of deep insight had all had their share in making that evening such a blank failure.

Mrs. Fane-Smith went with her into her bedroom to see that she had all she wanted. Though the September evening was mild, a fire blazed in the grate, much to Erica's astonishment. Not on the most freezing of winter nights had she ever enjoyed such a luxury. Her aunt explained that the room looked north, and, besides, she thought a fire was cheerful and home-like.

“You are very kind,” said Erica, warmly; “but you know I mustn't let you spoil me, or I shall not be fit to go back to the home life, and I want to go home much more fit for it.”

Something in the spontaneous warmth and confidence of this speech cheered Mrs. Fane-Smith. She wished above all things to win her niece's love and confidence, and she wisely reserved her proposal as to the matter of a home for another time. It was necessary, however, that she should give Erica a hint as to the topics likely to irritate Mr. Fane-Smith.

“I think, dear,” she began, “it would be as well if, when my husband and Rose are present, you are careful not to speak of your father. You won't mind my saying this; but I know it displeases my husband, and I think you will understand that there are objections, society, you know, and public opinion; we must consult it a little.”

Mrs. Fane-Smith grew nervous and incoherent, threw her arms round her niece's neck, kissed her most affectionately, and wished her good night.

When she left the room, Erica's repressed indignation blazed up. We fear it must be recorded that she fairly stamped with anger.

Wounded in her tenderest part, indignant at the insult to her father, ashamed of her own want of control, miserably perplexed by her new surroundings, it was long before she could compose herself. She paced up and down the richly furnished room, struggling hard to conquer her anger. At length, by a happy impulse, she caught up her prayer book, checked her longing to walk rapidly to and fro, sat down on the Indian rug before the fire, and read the evening psalm. It happened to be the thirty-seventh. Nothing could have calmed her so effectually as its tender exhortation, its wonderful sympathy with human nature. “Fret not thyself, else shalt thou be moved to do evil. Put thou thy trust in the Lord, and be doing good. Put thy trust in Him, and He will

bring it to pass."

She closed the book, and sat musing, her anger quite passed away.

All at once she recollected old Elspeth, the nurse. Her father had charged her with many messages to the faithful old servant, and so had her aunt. She felt ashamed to think that she had been several hours in the house without delivering them. Rose's room was close to hers. She went out, and knocked softly at the door.

"I just came to see whether Elspeth was here," she said, rather dismayed to find the candles out, and the room only lighted up by the red glow from the fire.

Rose who had had no temper to conquer, was already in bed. "Still in your dress!" she exclaimed. "I believe you've been at that Browning again. But did no one come to help you? I sent Gemma."

"I didn't want help, thank you," said Erica. "I only wanted to see Elspeth because I have a message for her."

"How conscientious you are!" said Rose, laughing. "I always make a point of forgetting messages when I go from home. Well, you will find Elspeth in the little room on the next half landing, the work room. She was here not two minutes ago. Good night! Breakfast is at nine, you know; and they'll bring you a cup of tea when they call you."

A little shyly, Erica made her way to the work room where Elspeth was tacking frilling into one of Rose's dresses. The old woman started up with a quick exclamation when she appeared in the doorway.

"May I come in?" said Erica, with all the charm of manner which she had inherited from her father. "'Tis very late, but I didn't like to go to bed without seeing you."

"I hope missie has everything she wants?" asked Elspeth, anxiously.

"Yes, indeed!" said Erica. "All I want is to see you, and to give you my father's love, to ask how you are. He and Aunt Jean have often told me about you. You have not forgotten them?"

"Forgotten! No, indeed!" cried old Elspeth. "When I saw you at 'Takin' the book,' and saw you so like your poor father, I could have cried. You are Mr. Luke's bairn, and no mistake, my bonny lassie! Ah, I mind the day well when he came to my room the auld nursery in the parsonage, where I had reared him and told me that master had ordered him out of the house. I pray God I may never again see a face look as his looked then!"

Tears started to her eyes at the recollection. Erica threw her arms round her neck, and kissed her.

"You love him still. I see you love him!" she exclaimed, all her feeling of isolation melting in the assurance of the old servant's sympathy.

So, after all, Erica had a maid in attendance, for Elspeth insisted on seeing her to bed, and, since they talked all the time about the old Scotch days, she was well content to renounce her independence for a little while.

But, whether because of the flickering fire light, or because of the strangeness of the great brass bedstead, with its silken hangings and many-colored Indian rezai, Erica slept very little that night. Perhaps the long talk about her father's early days had taken too great a hold of her. At any rate, she tossed about very restlessly in her luxurious quarters, and when, for brief intervals, she slept, it was only to dream of her father taking leave of his Scottish home, and always he bore that flint-like face, that look of strong endurance and repressed passion which Elspeth had described, and which, in times of trouble and injustice, Erica had learned to know so well.

CHAPTER XXV. Lady Caroline's Dinner

The blank of amaze of your haughty gaze,
The cold surprise of patrician eyes. Lewis Morris

But the paucity of Christians is astonishing, considering
the number of them. Leigh Hunt.

The irritation, or, at any rate, the novelty of the luxury in the Fane-Smith's household wore off after Erica had spent a few days at Greyshot. She became accustomed to the great rooms, and being artistic by nature and the reverse by education, she began very much to enjoy the pictures, the charming variety of foreign treasures, and particularly all the lovely things of Indian workmanship with which the drawing room was crowded. The long, formal meals she learned to endure. The absurdly large retinue of servants ceased to oppress her; she used to amuse herself by speculating as to the political views of the men-servants! while the luxury of a daily drive with her aunt she very much appreciated.

But, though the mere externals were soon familiar enough, she found that every day increased the difficulty she felt in becoming accustomed to the atmosphere of this family. She had lived all her life with people who were overwhelmed with work, and in a home where recreation was only the rare concession to actual health. Here recreation seemed to be the business of life, while work for the public was merely tacked on as a sort of ornamental fringe.

Mr. Fane-Smith had, indeed, a few committee meetings to attend; Mrs. Fane-Smith visited her district once a fortnight, and distributed tracts, and kind words, and soup tickets, and blanket tickets, besides the most lavish gifts from her own purse. Rose, to please her mother, taught a class of little girls on Sunday afternoon that is to say, she did NOT teach them, but she sat in a chair and heard them say collects, and enforced orderly behavior upon them, and read them a good little story book. But these were merely rather tiresome duties which came in very often as provoking interruptions to the great business of life, namely eating, drinking, dining out, giving dinners, or attending the endless succession of at-homes, dances, musical evenings, amateur theatricals, by which Greyshot people tried to kill time.

As to taking any intelligent interest in the political world, no one seemed to dream of such a thing, except

Mr. Fane-Smith, who read the paper at breakfast, and hurled anathemas at all the statesmen whom Erica had learned to love and revere. It taxed her patience to the utmost to sit through the daily diatribe against Sir Michael Cunningham, her hero of heroes. But even the violent opposition seemed preferable to the want of interest shown by the others. Mrs. Fane-Smith had time to fritter away at least half an hour after breakfast in the most desultory conversation, the most fruitless discussions with Rose as to some detail of dress; but she always made the excuse that she “had no time” to read the papers, and amused Erica not a little by asking her husband if “anything particular had been happening lately,” when they were just starting for a dinner party. Out of his little rechauffe of the week's news she probably extracted enough information to enable her to display that well-bred interest, that vague and superficial acquaintance with the subject which will pass muster in society, and which probably explains alike the very vapid talk and the wildly false accusations which form the staple of ordinary conversation.

Rose was even more perplexing. She was not only ignorant, but she boasted of her ignorance. Again and again Erica heard her deprecate the introduction of any public question.

“Oh, don't begin to talk of that!” she would exclaim. “I know nothing about it, and never mean to know anything.”

Or there would be an imploring appeal.

“Why do you waste your time in talking politics when you have never told me a word about so-and-so's wedding?”

She occasionally read the “Court Circular,” and was rather fond of one or two of the “society” papers from which she used to glean choice little paragraphs of personal gossip.

Once one of these papers gave Erica an uncomfortable experience. The elders of the party being out for the evening, Rose and Erica had the drawing room to themselves, and Erica was really enjoying the rare novelty of talking with a girl of her own age. Rose, although the most arrant little flirt, was fond, too, of her girl friends, and she really liked Erica, and enjoyed the fun of initiating her into all the mysteries and delights of society.

“How did you get your name?” she asked, suddenly. “It is so pretty and so uncommon.”

“Oh,” said Erica, without thinking, “I was called after my father's friend, Eric Haeberlein.”

“Eric Haeberlein?” exclaimed Rose. “Why, I was reading something about him this afternoon. Here it is look!” And after searching the columns of her favorite “society” paper, she pointed to the following paragraph:

“It is now known as a positive fact that the notorious Eric Haeberlein was actually in London last week in connection with the disgraceful Kellner business. ON DIT that he escaped detection through the instrumentality of one of the fair sex, whose audacity outweighed her modesty.”

Erica could hardly have restrained her indignation had not two real dangers drawn off her attention from her own wounded feelings. Her father was there any hateful hint that he was mixed up with Herr Kellner? She glanced anxiously down the page. No, at least that falsehood had not been promulgated. She breathed more freely, but there was danger still, for Rose was watching her, and feminine curiosity is hard to baffle.

“Did you know about it?” she asked.

Erica did not reply for a moment, but read on, to gain time; then she threw down the paper with an exclamation of disgust.

“How can you read such stuff?”

“Yes, but is that the Eric Haeberlein you were named after? Did he really come to London and escape?”

“There is only one Eric Haeberlein in the world that I know of,” said Erica. “But I think, Rose, I was wrong and foolish to mention him. I can't tell you anything about him, and, even if I could, there is my promise to Aunt Isabel. If I am not to talk to you about my father, I certainly ought not to talk about his friends.”

Rose acquiesced, and never suspected any mystery. She chatted on happily for the rest of the evening, brought down a great collection of old ball-cards, and with a sort of loving recollection described each very minutely, just as some old nurses have a way of doing with the funeral cards of their deceased friends. This paved the way for a spontaneous confession that she really preferred Mr. Torn, the curate of St. Matthew's, to Captain Golightly, though people were so stupid, and would say she was in love with him just because they flirted a little sometimes. Rose had already imagined herself in love with at least a dozen people, and was quite ready to discuss every one of her flirtations, but she was disappointed to find that her cousin was either very reserved on the subject, or else had nothing to say.

Erica sat listening with a sort of wonder, not unmixed with disgust. Perhaps she might have shown her disapprobation had she not been thankful to have the conversation diverted from the dangerous topic; besides, the cruel words were still rankling in her heart, and woven in with Rose's chatter she heard continually, “whose audacity outweighed her modesty.” For the first time she fully understood why her father had so reluctantly consented to her scheme; she began to feel the sting which lay beneath the words, the veiled “hints,” the implied evil, more wounding, more damaging than an outspoke lie. Now that she understood the ways of society better, she saw, too, that what had seemed to her an unquestionable duty would be regarded as a grave breach of custom and etiquette. She began to question herself. Had she been right? It mattered very little what the writer of a “society” paper said of her, if she had done the really right thing. What had she done? To save her father's friend from danger, to save her father from unmerited suspicion, she had gone out late in the evening with a man considerably over fifty, whom she had known from her babyhood. He had, it is true, been in the disguise of a young man. She had talked to him on the platform much as she would have talked to Tom, and to save his almost certain detection, had sprung into the carriage, thrown her arms round his neck, and kissed him. HAD audacity outweighed her modesty? Why, all the time she had been thanking God for having allowed her to undertake the difficult task for her father on that particular evening. She had done it in the sight of God, and should she now make herself miserable because the world was wanting in that charity which “thinketh no evil?” No, she had been right of that she was certain. Nevertheless, she understood well enough that society would condemn her action, and would

with a smile condone Rose's most outrageous flirtation.

The first week in a new place always seems long, and Erica felt as if she had been away from home for months by the time it was over. Every one had been very kind to her so far, but except when she was playing lawn-tennis she was somehow far from happy., Her happiest moments were really those which she spent in her own room before breakfast, writing; and the “Daily Review” owed some very lively articles to the Greyshot visit. Beyond a sort of clan feeling for her aunt, and a real liking for Rose who, in spite of her follies, was good-humored and very lovable she had not yet found one point of union with her new relations. Even possible topics of conversation were hard to find. They cared nothing for politics, they cared nothing for science, they were none of them book lovers, and it was against their sense of etiquette to speak of anything but the externals of religion. Worst of all, any allusion to home matters, any mention of her father had to be avoided. Little was left but the mere gossip of the neighborhood, which, except as a social study, could not interest Erica.

Greyshot was an idle place; the church seemed asleep, a drowsy indifference hung about the richer inhabitants, while the honest workers not unnaturally banded themself together against the sleepily respectable church-goers, and secularism and one or two other “isms” made rapid advances. Then sleepy orthodoxy lifted its drowsy head for a minute, noted the evil, and abused Mr. Raeburn and his fellow workers, lamenting in many-syllable words the depravity of the working classes and the rapid spread of infidelity. But nothing came of the lament; it never seemed to strike them that they must act as well as talk, that they must renounce their useless, wasteful, un-Christian lives before they had even a right to lift up their voices against secularism, which certainly did in some measure meet the needs of the people. It never seemed to strike them that THEY were the real promoters of infidelity that they not only dishonored the name of Christ, but by their inconsistent lives disgusted people with Christianity, and then refused to have anything more to do with them. Luke Raeburn, if he pulled down with the one hand, at any rate, tried hard to build up with the other; but the people of Greyshot caused in a great degree the ruin and down fall, and then exclaimed, “How shocking!” and turned their backs, thinking to shift their blame on to the secularist leaders.

As far as society goes, they succeeded in thus shifting the blame; the world laid it all on Luke Raeburn, he was a most convenient scapegoat, and so widely does conventional Christianity differ from the religion founded by Christ it soon became among a certain set almost equivalent to a religious act to promulgate bits of personal scandal about him, flavored, of course, with wordy lamentations as to the views he entertained. Thus, under the name of defenders of religion, conventional Christians managed to appear very proper and orthodox, and at the same time to dispose comfortably of all their sense of responsibility. There was a meanness about their way of doing it which might have made the very angels weep! Happily the judgments of society are not the judgments of God.

One of the leaders of society was a certain Lady Caroline Kiteley; she was a good-natured, hospitable creature, very anxious that every one should enjoy life, and a great favorite with all the young people, because she made much of them and gave delightful dances. The elders, too, liked her, and were not oblivious to the fact that she was the daughter of an earl, and the widow of a distinguished general. Erica had seen her more than once during her visit, and had been introduced to her by Mrs. Fane-Smith, as “my niece.”

Now it happened that Mr. And Mrs. Fane-Smith and Rose were to dine with Lady Caroline the week after Erica's arrival. On the very day of the dinner party, however, Rose was laid up with a bad cold, and her mother was obliged to write and make her excuses. Late in the afternoon there came in reply one of Lady Caroline's impulsive notes.

“Dear Mrs. Fane-Smith, Scold that silly daughter of yours for catching cold; give her my love, and tell her that I was counting on her very much. Please bring your pretty niece instead. Yours sincerely, Caroline Kiteley.”

Mrs. Fane-Smith was glad and sorry at the same time, and very much perplexed. Such a peremptory but open-hearted invitation could not be declined, yet there were dangers in the acceptance. If Erica's name should transpire, it might be very awkward, but she had not broached the suggested change of name to her, and every day her courage dwindled every day that resolute mouth frightened her more. She was quite aware that Erica's steady, courageous honesty would unsparingly condemn all her small weaknesses and little expedients.

Erica, when told of the invitation, was not particularly anxious to go, for she and Rose had been planning a cozy evening at home over a new novel upon which their tastes really agreed. However, Rose assured her that Lady Caroline's parties were always delightful, and hunted her off to dress at least an hour before there was any necessity. Rose was a great authority on dress and, when her cousin returned, began to study her attire critically.

She wore a very simply made dress of moss-green velveteen, high to the throat, and relieved by a deep falling collar of old point. Elspeth had brought her a spray of white banksia roses, but otherwise she wore no ornament. Her style was very different from her cousin's; but Rose could not help approving of it, its severity suited Erica.

“You look lovely!” she exclaimed. “Lady Caroline will quite lose her heart to you! I think you should have that dress cut low in front, though. It is a shame not to show such a pretty neck as you must have.”

“Oh, no!” said Erica, quickly; “father can't endure low dresses.”

“One can't always dress to please one's father,” said Rose. “For the matter of that, I believe papa doesn't like them; but I always wear them. You see it is more economical, one must dress much more expensively if one goes in for high dresses. A little display of neck and arms, and any old rag will look dressy and fashionable, and though I don't care about economy, mamma does.”

“You don't have an allowance, then?”

“No; papa declared I ought to dress on eighty pounds a year, but I never could make both ends meet, and I got a tiresome long bill at Langdon's, and that vexed him, so now I get what I like and mamma pays.”

Erica made no comment, but was not a little amazed. Presently Mrs. Fane-Smith came in, and seemed well

pleased with her niece's appearance.

“You have the old point!” she exclaimed.

“Aunt Jean gave it to me,” said Erica. “She never would part with it because it was grandmamma's at least, she did sell it once, when father was ill years ago, and we were at our wit's end for money, but she got it back again before the end of the year.”

Mrs. Fane-Smith colored deeply, partly at the idea of her mother's lace being taken to a pawnbroker's, partly to hear that her brother and sister had ever been reduced to such straits. She made an excuse to take Erica away to her room, and there questioned her more than she had yet done about her home.

“I thought your father was so strong,” she said. “Yet you speak as if he had had several illnesses.”

“He has,” replied Erica. “Twice I can remember the time when they thought him dying, besides after the riot last year. Yes, he is strong, but, you see, he has such a hard life. It is bad enough now, and I doubt if any one knows how fearfully he overworked himself during the year in America. The other day I had to look something up in his diary for him, and not till then did I find out how terribly he must have taxed his strength. On an average he got one night's rest in the week, on the others he slept as well as he could in the long cars, which are wretchedly uncomfortable; the sleeping cars being expensive, he wouldn't go in them.”

Mrs. Fane-Smith sighed. Her brother was becoming more of a living reality to her; she thought of him less as a type of wickedness. The recollection, too, that she had been all her life enjoying the money which he and her sister Jean had forfeited by their opinions, made her grieve the more over the little details of poverty and privation. Old Mr. Raeburn had left all his money to her, bequeathing to his other daughter and his reprobate son the sum of one shilling, with the hope that Heaven would bring them to a better mind. It was some comfort to learn from Erica that at last the terrible load of debt had been cleared off, and that they were comparatively free from trouble just at present.

With these thoughts in her mind, Mrs. Fane-Smith found herself on her way to Lady Caroline's; but her developing breadth of view was destined to receive a severe shock. They were the last guests to arrive, and at the very moment of their entrance Lady Caroline was talking in her most vivacious way to Mr. Cuthbert, a young clergyman, the vicar of one of the Greyshot churches.

“I am going to give you a treat, Mr. Cuthbert,” she said laughingly. “I know you are artistic, and so I intend you to take down that charming niece of Mrs. Fane-Smith's. I assure you she is like a Burne-Jones angel!”

Mr. Cuthbert smiled a quietly superior smile, and coolly surveyed Erica as she came in. Dinner was announced almost immediately, and it was not until Mrs. Fane-Smith had been taken down that Lady Caroline brought Mr. Cuthbert to Erica's side to introduce him. “Why, your aunt has never told me your name,” she said, smiling.

“My name is Erica Raeburn,” said Erica, quite unconscious that this was a revelation to every one, and that her aunt had purposely spoken of her everywhere as “my niece.”

Lady Caroline gave a scarcely perceptible start of surprise, and there was a curious touch of doubt and constraint in her voice as she pronounced the “Mr. Cuthbert, Miss Raeburn.” Undoubtedly that name sounded rather strangely in her drawing room, and awoke uncomfortable suggestions.

“Raeburn! Erica Raeburn!” thought Mr. Cuthbert to himself. “Uncommon name in England. Connection, I wonder! Aunt hadn't given her name! That looks odd. I'll see if she has a Scotch accent.”

“Are you staying in Greyshot?” he asked as they went down the broad staircase, with its double border of flowering plants.

“Yes,” said Erica; “I came last week. What lovely country it is about here!”

“Country,” with its thrilled “r,” betrayed her nationality, though her accent was of the slightest. Mr. Cuthbert chuckled to himself, for he thought he had caught Mrs. Fane-Smith tripping, and he was a man who derived an immense amount of pleasure from making other people uncomfortable. As a child, he had been a tease; as a big boy, he had been a bully; as a man, he had become a malicious gossip monger. Tonight he thought he saw a chance of good sport, and directly he had said grace, in the momentary pause which usually follows, he turned to Erica with an abrupt, though outwardly courteous question, carried off with a little laugh.

“I hope you are no relation to that despicable infidel who bears your name, Miss Raeburn?”

Erica's color deepened; she almost annihilated him with a flash from her bright indignant eyes.

“I am Luke Raeburn's daughter,” she said, in her clearest voice, and with a dignity which, for the time, spoiled Mr. Cuthbert's enjoyment.

Many people had heard the vicar's question during the pause, and not a few listened curiously for the answer which, though quietly spoken, reached many ears, for nothing gives so much penetrating power to words as concentrated will and keen indignation. Before long every one in the room knew that Mrs. Fane-Smith's pretty niece was actually the daughter of “that evil and notorious Raeburn.”

Mr. Cuthbert had certainly got his malicious wish; he had succeeded in making Mrs. Fane-Smith miserable, in making his hostess furious, in putting his little neighbor into the most uncomfortable of positions. Of course he was not going to demean himself by talking to “that atheist's daughter.” He enjoyed the general discomfiture to his heart's content, and then devoted himself to the lady on his other side.

As for Erica her blood was up. Forced to sit still, forced even to eat at a table where she was an unwelcome guest, her anger got the mastery of her for the time. She was indignant at the insult to her father, indignant, too, that her aunt had ever allowed her to get into such a false position. The very constraint she was forced to put upon herself made her wrath all the deeper. She was no angel yet, though Mr. Burne-Jones might have taken her for a model. She was a quick-tempered little piece of humanity; her passions burned with Highland intensity, her sense of indignation was strong and keen, and the atmosphere of her home, the hard struggle against intolerable bigotry and malicious persecution had from her very babyhood tended to increase this. She had inherited all her father's passion for justice and much of his excessive pride, while her delicate physical frame made her far more sensitive. Moreover, though since that June morning in the museum she

had gained a peace and happiness of which in the old days she had never dreamed, yet the entire change had in many ways increased the difficulties of her life. Such a wrench, such an upheaval as it had involved, could not but tell upon her immensely. And, besides, she had in every way for the last three months been living at high pressure.

The grief, the disapproval, the contemptuous pity of her secularist friends had taxed her strength to the utmost, but she had stood firm, and had indeed been living on the heights.

Now the months of Charles Osmond's careful preparation were over, her baptism was over, and a little weary and overdone with all that she had lived through that summer, she had come down to Greyshot expecting rest, and behold, fresh vexations had awaited her!

A nice Christian world! A nice type of a clergyman! she thought to herself, as bitterly as in the old days, and with a touch of sorrow added. The old lines from “Hiawatha,” which had been so often on her lips, now rang in her head:

“For his heart was hot within him, Like a living coal his heart was.”

She longed to get up and go, but that would have put her aunt in a yet more painful position, and might have annoyed Lady Caroline even more than her presence. She would have given anything to have fainted after the convenient fashion of the heroines of romance, but never had she felt so completely strung up, so conscious of intense vitality. There was nothing for it but endurance. And for two mortal hours she had to sit and endure! Mr. Cuthbert never spoke to her; her neighbor on the other side glanced at her furtively from time to time, but preserved a stony silence; there was an uncomfortable cloud on her hostess's brow; while her aunt, whom she could see at some distance on the other side of the table, looked very white and wretched.

It is wonderful how rude people can be, even in good society, and the looks of “blank amaze,” “cold surprise,” and “cool curiosity” which Erica received would hardly be credited. A greater purgatory to a sensitive girl, whose pride was by no means conquered, can hardly be conceived.

She choked down a little food, unable to reject everything, but her throat almost refused to swallow it. The glare of the lights, the oppressive atmosphere, the babel of tongues seemed to beat upon her brain, and a sick longing for home almost overmastered her. Oh, to get away from these so-called Christians, with their cruel judgments, their luxuries, their gayeties these hard, rich bigots, who yet belonged to the body she had just joined, with who, in the eyes of her old friends, she should be identified! Oh, for the dear old book-lined study at home! For one moment with her father! One word from a being who loved and trusted her! Tears started to her eyes, but the recollection that even home was no longer a place of refuge checked them. There would be Aunt Jean's wearing remonstrances and sarcastic remarks; there would be Mr. Masterman's patronizing contempt, and Tom's studious avoidance of the matters she had most at heart. Was it worse to be treated as a well-meaning idiot, or as an outcast and semi-heretic? Never till now had she so thoroughly realized her isolation, and she felt so bruised and buffeted and weary that the realization at that particular time was doubly trying.

Isolation is perhaps the greatest of all trials to a sensitive and warm-hearted nature, and nothing but the truest and deepest love for the whole race can possibly keep an isolated person from growing bitter. Erica knew this, had known it ever since Brian had brought her the message from her mother; “It is only love that can keep from bitterness.” All through these years she had been struggling hard, and though there had been constant temptations, though the harshness of the bigoted, the insults offered to her father in the name of religion, the countless slights and slanders had tried her to the utmost, she had still struggled upward, and in spite of all had grown in love. But now, for the first time, she found herself completely isolated. The injustice, the hardness of it proved too much for her. She forgot that those who would be peace-makers reconcilers, must be content to receive the treatment which the Prince of Peace received; she forgot that these rich, contemptuous people were her brothers and sisters, and that their hard judgment did not and could not alter their relationship; she forgot all in a burning indignation, in an angry revolt against the injustice of the world.

She would study these people, she would note all their little weaknesses and foibles. Mr. Bircham had given her carte blanche for these three weeks; she would write him a deliciously sarcastic article on modern society. The idea fixed her imagination, she laughed to herself at the thought; for, however sad the fact, it is nevertheless true that to ordinary mortals “revenge is sweet.” Had she given herself time to think out matters calmly, she would have seen that boh Christianity and the rules of art were opposed to her idea. It is true that Michael Angelo and other painters used to revenge themselves on the cardinals or enemies they most hated by painting them in the guise of devils, but both they and their art suffered by such a concession to an animal passion. And Erica fell grievously that evening. This is one of the evils of social ostracism. It is unjust, unnatural, and selfish. To preserve what it considers the dignity of society, it drives human beings into an unnatural position; it fosters the very evils which it denounces. And society is grossly unfair. A word, a breath, a false libel in a newspaper is quite sufficient. It will never trouble itself to inquire minutely into the truth, but will pronounce its hasty judgment, and then ostracize.

Erica began to listen attentively to the conversation, and it must be owned that it was not very edifying. Then she studied the faces and manners of her companions, and, being almost in the middle of the table, she had a pretty good view. Every creature she studied maliciously, keenly, sarcastically, until she came to the end of the table, and there a most beautiful face brought her back to herself for a minute with a sort of shock. Where had she seen it before? A strong, manly face of the Roman type, clean-shaven, save for a very slight mustache, which did not conceal the firm yet sensitive mouth; dark eyes, which even as she wondered met hers fully for an instant, and gave her a strange feeling of protection. She knew that at least one person in the room did not shudder at the idea of sitting at table with Luke Raeburn's daughter.

Better thoughts returned to her, she grew a little ashamed of her malice, and began to wonder who that ideal man could be. Apparently he was one of the distinguished guests, for he had taken down Lady Caroline herself. Erica was just too far off to hear what he said, and in another moment she was suddenly recalled to Mr. Cuthbert. He was talking to the old gentleman on her left hand, who had been silently surveying her at intervals as though he fancied she could not be quite human.

“Have you been following this Kellner trial?” asked Mr. Cuthbert. “Disgraceful affair, isn't it?”

Then followed references to Eric Haeberlein, and veiled hints about his London friends and associates more dangerous to the country than say foreigners, “traitors, heady, high-minded,” etc., etc. Such evil-doers always managed to keep within the letter of the law; but, for his part, he thought they deserved to be shut up, more than most of those who get penal servitude for life.

Erica's wrath blazed up again. Of course the veiled hints were intended to refer to her father, and the cruelty and insolence of the speaker who knew that she understood his allusions scattered all her better thoughts. It required a strong effort of will to keep her anger and distress from becoming plainly visible. Her unwillingness to give Mr. Cuthbert such a gratification could not have strengthened her sufficiently, but love and loyalty to her father and Eric Haeberlein had carried her through worse ordeals than this.

She showed no trace of embarrassment, but moved a very little further back in her chair, implying by a sort of quiet dignity of manner, that she thought Mr. Cuthbert exceedingly ill-mannered to talk across her.

Feeling that his malicious endeavor had entirely failed, and stung by her dignified disapproval, Mr. Cuthbert struck out vindictively. Breaking the silence he had maintained toward her, he suddenly flashed round upon her with a question.

“I suppose you are intimately acquainted with Eric Haeberlein?”

He tried to make his tone casual and seemingly courteous, but failed.

“What makes you suppose that?” asked Erica, in a cool, quiet voice.

Her perfect self-control, and her exceedingly embarrassing counter-question, quite took him aback. At that very minute, too, there was the pause, and the slight movement, and the glance from Lady Caroline which reminded him that he was the only clergyman present, and had to return thanks. He bent forward, and went through the usual form of “For what we have received,” though all the time he was thinking of the “counter-check quarrelsome” he had received from his next-door neighbor. When he raised his head again he found her awaiting his answer, her clear, steady eyes quietly fixed on his face with a look which was at once sad, indignant, and questioning.

His question had been an insulting one. He had meant it to prick and sting, but it is one thing to be indirectly rude, and another to give the “lie direct.” Her quiet return question, her dignity, made it impossible for him to insult her openly. He was at her mercy. He colored a little, stammered something incoherent about “thinking it possible.”

“You are perfectly right,” replied Erica, still speaking in her quietly dignified voice. “I have known Herr Haeberlein since I was a baby, so you will understand that it is quite impossible for me to speak with you about him after hearing the opinions you expressed just now.”

For once in his life Mr. Cuthbert felt ashamed of himself. He did not feel comfortable all through dessert, and gave a sigh of relief when the ladies left the room.

As for Erica's other neighbor, he could not help reflecting that Luke Raeburn's daughter had had the best of it in the encounter. And he wondered a little that a man, whom he had known to do many a kindly action, should so completely have forgotten the rules of ordinary courtesy.

CHAPTER XXVI. A Friend

Then, my friend, we must not regard what the many say of us; but what he, the one man who has understanding of just and unjust, will say, and what the truth will say. And therefore you begin in error when you suggest that we should regard the opinion of the many about just and unjust, good and evil, honorable and dishonorable.—Plato.

In the drawing room Erica found the ostracism even more complete and more embarrassing. Lady Caroline who was evidently much annoyed, took not the slightest notice of her, but was careful to monopolize the one friendly looking person in the room, a young married lady in pale-blue silk. The other ladies separated into groups of two and threes, and ignored her existence. Lady Caroline's little girl, a child of twelve, was well bred enough to come toward her with some shy remark, but her mother called her to the other side of the room quite sharply, and made some excuse to keep her there, as if contact with Luke Raeburn's daughter would have polluted her.

A weary half hour passed. Then the door opened, and the gentlemen filed in. Erica, half angry, half tired, and wholly miserable, was revolving in her brain some stinging sentences for her article when the beautiful face again checked her. Her “Roman,” as she called him, had come in, and was looking round the room, apparently searching for some one. At last their eyes met, and, with a look which said as plainly as words: “Oh, there you are! It was you I wanted,” he came straight towards her.

“You must forgive me, Miss Raeburn, for dispensing with an introduction,” he said; “but I hardly think we shall need any except the name of our mutual fried, Charles Osmond.”

Erica's heart gave a bound. The familiar name, the consciousness that her wretched loneliness was at an end, and above all, the instantaneous perception of the speaker's nobility and breadth of mind, scattered for the time all her resentful thoughts made her again her best self.

“Then you must be Donovan!” she exclaimed, with the quaint and winsome frankness which was one of her greatest charms. “I knew I was sure you were not like other people.”

He took her hand in his, and no longer wondered at Brian's seven years' hopeless waiting. But Erica began to realize that her exclamation had been appallingly unconventional, and the beautiful color deepened in her

cheeks.

“I beg your pardon,” she said, remembering with horror that he was not only a stranger but an M.P., “I I don't know what made me say that, but they have always spoken of you by your Christian name, and you have so long been 'Donovan' in my mind that somehow it slipped out you didn't feel like a stranger.”

“I am glad of that,” he said, his dark and strangely powerful eyes looking right into hers. Something in that look made her feel positively akin to him. Like a stranger! Of course he had not felt like one. Never could be like anything but a friend. “You see,” he continued, “we have known of each other for years, and we know that we have one great bond of union which others have not. Don't retract the 'Donovan' I like it. Let it be the outward sign of the real and unusual likeness in the fight we have fought.”

She still half hesitated. He was a man of five-and-thirty, and she could not get over the feeling that her impulsive exclamation had been presumptuous. He saw her uncertainty, and perhaps liked her the better for it, though the delicious naturalness, the child-like recognition of a real though scarcely known friend, had delighted him.

“We are a little more brother and sister than the rest of the world,” he said, with the chivalrous manner which seemed to belong naturally to his peculiarly noble face. “And if I were to confess that I had not always thought of you as 'Miss Raeburn'—”

He paused, and Erica laughed. It was absurd to stand on ceremony with this kindred spirit.

“Have you seen the conservatory?” he asked. “Shall we come in there? I want to hear all about the Osmonds.”

The relief of speaking with one who knew and loved Charles Osmond, and did not, for want of real knowledge, brand him with the names of half a dozen heresies, was very great. It was not for some time that Erica even glanced at the lovely surroundings, though she had inherited Raeburn's great love of flowers. At last, however, an exquisite white flower attracted her notice, and she broke off in the middle of a sentence.

“Oh, how lovely! I never saw anything like that before. What is it?”

“It is the EUCHARIS AMAZONICA,” replied her companion “About the most exquisite flower in the world, I should think the 'dove flower,' as my little ones call it. Ir you look at it from a distance the stamens really look like doves bending down to drink.”

“It is perfect! How I wish my father could see it!”

“We have a fairly good one at Oakdene, though not equal to this. We must persuade you and Mr. Raeburn to come and stay with us some day.”

The tears came into Erica's eyes, so great was the contrast between his friendliness and the chilling discourtesy she had met with from others that evening.

“You are very good,” she said. “If you only knew how hard it is to be treated as if one were a sort of semi-criminal!”

“I do know,” he said. “It was this very society which goaded me into a sort of wild rebellion years ago. I deserved its bad opinion in a measure, and you do not, but it was unfair enough to make one pretty desperate.”

“If they were actual saints one might endure it,” cried Erica. “But to have such a man as my father condemned just as hearsay by people who are living lazy, wasteful lives is really too much. I came to Greyshot expecting at least unity, at least, peace in a Christian atmosphere, and THIS is what I get.”

Donovan listened in silence, a great sadness in his eyes. There was a pause; then Erica continued: “You think I speak hotly. I cannot help it. I think I do not much mind what they do to me, but it is the injustice of the thing that makes one wild, and worst of all, the knowing that this is what drives people into atheism this is what dishonors the name of Christ.”

“You are right,” he replied, with a sigh; “that IS the worst of it. I have come to the conclusion that to be tolerant to the intolerant is the most difficult thing in life.”

“You must have plenty of practice in this dreadful place,” said Erica.

He smiled a little.

“Why, to be seen talking to ME will make people say all sorts of evil of you,” she added. “I wish I had thought of that before.”

“You wouldn't have spoken to me?” asked Donovan, laughing. “Then I am very glad it didn't occur to you. But about that you may be quite easy; nothing could make them think much worse of me than they do already. I began life as the black sheep of the neighborhood, and it is easier for the Ethiopian to change his skin than for a man to live down the past in public opinion. I shall be, at any rate, the dusky gray sheep of the place to the end of my life.”

There was no bitterness, no shade of complaint in his tone; he merely stated a fact. Erica was amazed; she knew that he was about the only man who attempted to grapple with the evil and degradation and poverty of Greyshot.

“You see,” he continued, with a bright look which seemed to raise Erica into purer atmosphere, “it is not the public estimation which makes a man's character. There is one question, which I think we ought never to ask ourselves, and that is 'What will people think of me?' It should be instead: 'How can I serve?'”

“But if they take away your power, how can you serve?”

“They can't take it away; they may check and hinder for a time, that is all. I believe one may serve always and everywhere.”

“You don't mean that I can serve that roomful of enemies in there?”

“That is exactly what I do mean,” he answered, smiling a little.

In the meantime, Lady Caroline was apologizing to Mr. Cuthbert.

“I don't know when I have been so vexed!” she exclaimed. “It is really too bad of Mrs. Fane-Smith. I had no

idea that the Burne-Jones angel I promised you was the daughter of that disgraceful man. What a horrible satire, is it not?"

"Pray, don't apologize," said Mr. Cuthbert. "It was really rather amusing than otherwise, and I fancy the young lady will be in no great hurry to force her way into society again."

He laughed a soft, malicious, chuckling laugh.

"I should hope not, indeed," said Lady Caroline, indignantly. "Where has she disappeared to?"

"Need you ask?" said Mr. Cuthbert, smiling. "Our revered member secured her at once, and has been talking to her in the conservatory for at least half an hour, hatching radical plots, I dare say, and vowing vengeance on all aristocrats."

"Really it is too shocking!" said Lady Caroline. "Mr. Farrant has no sense of what is fitting; it is a trait which I have always noticed in Radicals. He ought, at least to have some respect for his position."

"Birds of a feather flock together," suggested Mr. Cuthbert, with his malicious smile.

"Well, I don't often defend Mr. Farrant," said Lady Caroline. "But he comes of a good old family, and, though a Radical, he is at least respectable."

Lady Caroline knew absolutely nothing about Erica, but uttered the last sentence, with its vague, far-reaching, and most damaging hint, without even a pricking of conscience.

"You will try to rescue the M.P.?" asked Mr. Cuthbert.

"For the sake of his position, yes," said Lady Caroline, entering the conservatory.

"Oh! Mr. Farrant," she said, with her most gracious smile, "I came to see whether you couldn't induce your wife to sing to us. Now, is it true that she has given up her music? I assure you she and I have been battling the point ever since you came up. Can't you persuade her to give us just one song? I am really in despair for some music."

"I am afraid my wife is quite out of voice," said Donovan. "Are there no other musical people?"

"Not one. It is really most astonishing. I was counting on Miss Fane-Smith, but she has disappointed me, and there is not another creature who will play or sing a note. Greyshot is a terrible unmusical place."

"You do not belong to Greyshot, so perhaps you may be able to come to the rescue," said Donovan to Erica. "Scotch people can, at any rate, always play or sing their own national airs as no one else can."

Lady Caroline did not really in the least care whether there were music or not, but she had expressed herself very strongly, and that tiresome Mr. Farrant had taken her at her word, and was trying to beat up recruits recruits that she did not want. He had now, whether intentionally or not, put her in such a position that, unless she were positively rude, she must ask Erica to play or sing.

"Have you brought any music, Miss Raeburn?" she asked, turning to Erica with a chilling look, as though she had just become aware of her presence.

"I have none to bring," said Erica. "I do not profess to sing; I only sing our own Scotch airs."

"Exactly what I said!" exclaimed Donovan. "And Scotch singing of Scotch airs is like nothing else in the world."

Whether he mesmerized them both, or whether his stronger will and higher purpose prevailed, it would be hard to say. Certainly Erica was quite as unwilling to sing as Lady Caroline was to favor her with a request. Both had to yield, however, and Erica, whether she would or not, had to serve her roomful of enemies and a great deal of good it did her.

Out of the quiet conservatory they came into the heat and glare and babel of voices; Lady Caroline feeling as if she had been caught in her own trap, Erica wavering between resentful defiance and the desire to substitute Donovan's "How can I serve?" for "What do they think?"

She sat down to the piano, which was in a far-away corner, and soon she had forgotten her audience altogether. Although she had had little time or opportunity for a thorough musical education, she had great taste, and was musical by nature; she sang her national airs, as very few could have sung them, and so wild and pathetic was the air she had chosen, "The Flowers of the Forest," that the roar of conversation at once ceased. She knew nothing whatever about the listeners; the air had taken her back to her father's recovery at Codrington the year before. She was singing to him once more.

The old gentleman who had sat on her right hand at dinner came up now with his first remark.

"Thank you, that was a real treat, and a very rare treat. I wonder whether you would sing an old favorite of mine 'Oh, why did ye gang, lassie?'"

Erica at once complied, and there was such pathos in her low, clear voice, that tears stood in the eyes of more than one listener. She had never dared to sing that song at home since one evening some weeks before, when her father had just walked out of the room, unable to bear the mournful refrain "I never, never thought ye wad leave me!" The song was closely associated with the story of that summer, and she sang it to perfection.

Donovan Farrant came toward her again at the close.

"I want to introduce my wife to you," he said.

And Erica found that the young married lady in the pale-blue silk, whom she had singled out as the one approachable lady in the room, was Mrs. Farrant. She was very bright, and sunshiny, and talkative. Erica liked her, and would have liked her still better had not the last week shown her so much of the unreality and insincerity of society that she half doubted whether any one she met in Greyshot could be quite true. Mrs. Farrant's manner was charming, but charming manners had often turned out to be exceedingly artificial, and Erica, who was in rather a hard mood, would not let herself be won over, but held her judgment in suspension, responding brightly enough to her companion's talk, but keeping the best part of herself in reserve.

At length the evening ended, and the guests gradually dispersed. Mr. Cuthbert walked across the road to his vicarage, still chuckling to himself as he thought of the general discomfiture caused by his question. The

musical old gentleman returned to his home revolving a startling new idea; after all, might not the Raeburns and such people be very much like the rest of the world? Were they not probably as susceptible to pain and pleasure, to comfort and discomfort, to rudeness and civility? He regretted very much that he had not broken the miserably uncomfortable silence at dinner.

Donovan Farrant and his wife were already far from Greyshot, driving along the quiet country road to Oakdene Manor.

“A lovely girl,” Mrs. Farrant was saying. “I should like to know her better. Tonight I had the feeling somehow that she was purposely keeping on the surface of things, one came every now and then to a sort of wall, a kind of hard reserve.”

“Who can wonder!” exclaimed Donovan. “I am afraid, Gladys, the old proverb will have a very fair chance of being fulfilled. That child has come out seeking wool, and as likely as not she'll go home shorn.”

“Society can be very cruel!” signed Gladys. “I did so long to get to her after dinner; but Lady Caroline kept me, I do believe, purposely.”

“Lady Caroline and Mr. Cuthbert will little dream of the harm they have done,” said Donovan. “I think I understand as I never understood before the burning indignation of that rebuke to the Pharisees 'Full well ye reject the commandment of god that ye may keep your own traditions.'”

In the meantime there was dead silence in the Fane-Smiths' carriage, an ominous silence. There was an unmistakable cloud on Mr. Fane-Smith's face; he had been exceedingly annoyed at what had taken place, and with native perversity, attributed it all to Erica. His wife was miserable. She felt that her intended kindness had proved a complete failure; she was afraid of her husband's clouded brow, still more afraid of her niece's firmly closed mouth, most afraid of all at the thought of Lady Caroline's displeasure. Nervous and overwrought, anxious to conciliate all parties, and afraid of making matters worse, she timidly went into Erica's room, and after beating about the bush for a minute or two, plunged rashly into the sore subject.

“I am so sorry, dear, about tonight,” she said. “I wish it could have been prevented.”

Erica, standing up straight and tall in her velveteen dress, with a white shawl half thrown back from her shoulders, looked to her aunt terribly dignified and uncompromising.

“I can't say that I thought them courteous,” she replied.

“It was altogether unfortunate,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, hurriedly. “I hoped your name would not transpire; I ought to have suggested the change to you before, but—”

“What change?” asked Erica, her forehead contracting a little.

“We thought we hoped that perhaps, if you adopted our name, it might prevent unpleasantness. Such things are done, you know, and then, too, we might make some arrangement about your grandfather's money, a part of which I feel is now yours by right. Even now the change would show people the truth, would save many disagreeables.”

During this speech Erica's face had been a study; an angry glow of color rushed to her cheeks, her eyes flashed dangerously. She was a young girl, but there was a good deal of the lion about her at that minute, and her aunt trembled listening perforce to the indignant outburst.

“What truth would it show?” she cried. “I don't believe there is such a thing as truth among all these wretched shams! I will never change my name to escape from prejudice and bigotry, or to win a share in my grandfather's property! What! Give up my father's name to gain the money which might have kept him from pain and ruin and semi-starvation? Take the money that might have brought comfort to my mother that might have kept me with her to the end. I couldn't take it. I would rather die than touch one penny of it. It is too late now. If you thought I would consent if that is the reason you asked me here, I can go at once. I would not willingly have brought shame upon you, but neither will I dishonor myself nor insult my father by changing my name. Why, to do so would be to proclaim that I judged him as those Pharisees did tonight. The hypocrites! Which of them can show one grain of love for the race, to set against my father's life of absolute devotion? They sit over their champagne and slander atheists, and then have the face to call themselves Christians.”

“My dear!” said Mrs. Fane-Smith, nervously. “Our only wish is to do what is best for you; but you are too tired and excited to discuss this now. I will wish you good night.”

“I never wish to discuss it again, thank you,” said Erica, submitting to a particularly warm embrace.

Mrs. Fane-Smith was right in one way. Erica was intensely excited. When people have been riding rough-shod over one's heart, one is apt to be excited, and Luke Raeburn's daughter had inherited that burning sense of indignation which was so strongly marked a characteristic in Raeburn himself. Violins can be more sweet and delicate in tone than any other instrument, but they can also wail with greater pathos, and produce a more fearful storm of passion.

Declining any assistance from Gemma, Erica locked her door, caught up some sheets of foolscap, snatched up her pen, and began to write rapidly. She knew well enough that she ought not to have written. But when the heart is hot with indignation, when the brain produces scathing sentences, when the subject seems to have taken possession of the whole being, to deny its utterance is quite the hardest thing in the world.

Erica struggled to resist, but at length yielded, and out rushed sarcasms, denunciations, return blows innumerable! The relief was great. However, her enjoyment was but short for by the time her article was rolled up for the post, stamped and directed, her physical powers gave way; such blank exhaustion ensuing that all she could do was to drag herself across the room, throw herself, half dressed, on the bed, draw the rezai over her, and yield to the heavy, overpowering slumber of great weariness.

It seemed to her that she slept about five minutes, and was then roused by a knocking at her door. She started up, and found that it was morning. Then she recollected bolting her door, and sprung out of bed to undo it, but was reminded at once that she had a spine. She had quite recovered from the effects of her illness, but over-fatigue always brought back the old pain, and warned her that she must be more careful in the future. The house maid seemed a little surprised not to find her up and dressed as usual, for Erica

generally got through an hour's writing before the nine o'clock breakfast.

“Are you ill, miss?” she asked, glancing at the face which seemed almost as colorless as the pillow.

“Only very tired, thank you,” said Erica, glad enough today of the cup of tea and the thin bread and butter which before had seemed to her such an absurd luxury.

“Letters for the early post, miss, I suppose?” said the house maid, taking up the fiery effusion.

“Please,” replied Erica, not turning her head, and far too weary to give a thought to her last night's work. All she could think of just then was the usual waking reflection of a sufferer “How in the world shall I get through the day?”

The recollection, however, of her parting conversation with her aunt made her determined to be down to breakfast. Her absence might be misconstrued. And though feeling ill-prepared for remonstrance or argument, she was in her place when the gong sounded for prayers, looking white and weary indeed, but with a curve of resoluteness about her mouth. Nobody found out how tired she was. Mr. Fane-Smith was as blind as a bat, and Mrs. Fane-Smith was too low-spirited and too much absorbed with her own cares to notice. The events of last night looked more and more disagreeable, and she was burdened with thoughts of what people would say; moreover, Rose's cold was much worse, and as her mother was miserable if even her little finger ached, she was greatly disturbed, and persuaded herself that her child was really in a most dangerous state.

Breakfast proved a very silent meal that morning, quite oppressively silent; Erica felt like a child in disgrace. Every now and then the grimness of it appealed to her sense of the ludicrous, and she felt inclined to scream or do something desperate just to see what would happen. At length the dreary repast came to an end, and she had just taken up a newspaper, with a sort of gasp of relief at the thought of escaping for a moment into a larger world, when she was recalled to the narrow circle of Greyshot by a word from Mr. Fane-Smith.

“I wish to have a talk with you, my dear; will you come to the library at ten o'clock?”

An interview by appointment! That sounded formidable! When the time came, Erica went rather apprehensively to the library, fearing that she was in for an argument, and wishing that Mr. Fane-Smith had chosen a day on which she felt a little more up to things.

He received her very kindly, and drew an easy chair up to the fire for her, no doubt doing as he would be done by, for he was a chilly Indian mortal. Erica had never been into the library before. It was a delightful room, furnished with old carved oak and carpeted with soft Indian rugs. Though dignified by the name of library, it was not nearly so crowded with books as the little study at home; all the volumes were beautifully bound in much-begilt calf or morocco, but they had not the used, loved look of her father's books. On the mantel piece there were some models of Indian idols exquisitely carved in soft, greenish-gray soapstone, and behind these, as if in protest, lurked the only unornamental thing in the room, a very ordinary missionary box, covered with orange-colored paper and impressively black negroes.

“I am sure, my dear,” said Mr. Fane-Smith, “that after what occurred last night you will see the desirability of thinking seriously about your plans for the future. I have been intending to speak to you, but waited until we had learned to know each other a little. However, I regret now that I delayed. It is naturally far from desirable that you should remain an inmate of your father's house, and my wife and I should be very glad if you would make your home with us. Of course when it was fully understood in Greyshot that you had utterly renounced your father and your former friends, such unpleasantness as you encountered last night would not again occur; indeed, I fancy you would become exceedingly popular. It would perhaps have been wiser if you would have taken our name, but your aunt tells me you object to that.”

“Yes,” said Erica, who was writhing with anger, and relieved herself by the slight sarcasm, “I do object to be Miss Feign-Fane-Smith.”

“Well, that must be as you please,” he resumed; “but I really think if you will accept our offer it will be for your ultimate good.”

He proceeded to enumerate all the benefits which would accrue to her; then paused.

Erica was silent for a minute. When she spoke it was in the low voice of one who is struggling to restrain passion.

“I am sure you mean this very kindly,” she said. “I have tried to listen to your offer patiently, though, of course, the moment you began, I knew that I must entirely emphatically, decline it. I will NEVER leave my father!”

The last words were spoken with a sort of half-restrained outburst, as if the pent-up passion must find some outlet.

Mr. Fane-Smith was startled. He so seldom thought of Luke Raeburn as a fellow-being at all that perhaps it had never occurred to him that the love of parent to child, and child to parent, is quite independent of creed.

“But, my dear,” he said, “you have been baptized.”

“I have.”

“You promised to renounce the devil and all his works.”

“I did.”

“Then how can you hesitate to renounce everything connected with your former life?”

“Do you mean to imply that my father is the devil or one of his works?”

Mr. Fane-Smith was silent. Erica continued:

“God's Fatherhood does not depend on our knowledge of it, or acceptance of it, it is a fact a truth! How then can any one dare to say that such a man as my farther is a work of the devil? I thought the sin of sins was to attribute to the devil what belongs to God!”

“You are in a very peculiar position,” said Mr. Fane-Smith, uneasily. “And I have no doubt it is difficult for you to see things as they really are. But I, who can look at the matter dispassionately, can see that your remaining in your old home would be most dangerous, and not only that, but most painful! To live in a house

where you hear all that you most reverence evil spoken of; why, the pain would be unspeakable!”

“I know that,” said Erica, in a low voice, “I have found that I admit that it is and always will be harder to bear than any one can conceive who has not tried. But to shirk pain is not to follow Christ. As to danger, if you will forgive my saying so, I should find a luxurious life in a place like Greyshot infinitely more trying.”

“Then could you not take up nursing? Or go into some sisterhood? Nothing extreme, you know, but just a working sisterhood.”

Erica smiled, and shook her head.

“Why should I try to make another vocation when God has already given me one?”

“But, my dear, consider the benefit to your own soul.”

“A very secondary consideration!” exclaimed Erica, impetuously.

“I should have thought,” continued Mr. Fane-Smith, “that under such strange circumstances you would have seen how necessary it was to forsake all. Think of St. Matthew, for instance; he rose up at once, forsook all, and followed Him.”

“Yes,” said Erica. “And what was the very first thing he was impelled to do by way of 'following?' Why, to make a great feast and have in all his old friends, all the despised publicans.”

“My dear Erica,” said Mr. Fane-Smith, feeling his theological arguments worsted, “we must discuss this matter on practical grounds. In plain words, your father is a very bad man, and you ought to have nothing more to do with him.”

Erica's lips turned white with anger; but she answered, calmly:

“That is a very great accusation. How do you know it is true?”

“I know it well enough,” said Mr. Fane-Smith. “Why, every one in England knows it.”

“If you accept mere hearsay evidence, you may believe anything of any one. Have you ever read any of my father's books?”

“No.”

“Or heard him lecture?”

“No, indeed; I would not hear him on any account.”

“Have you ever spoken with any of his intimate friends?”

“Mr. Raeburn's acquaintances are not likely to mix with any one I should know.”

“Then,” cried Erica, “how can you know anything whatever about him? And how how DARE you say to me, his child, that he is a wicked man?”

“It is a matter of common notoriety.”

“No,” said Erica, “there you are wrong. It is notorious that my father teaches conscientiously teaches much that we regard as error, but people who openly accuse him of evil living find to their cost in the law courts that they have foully libeled him.”

She flushed even now at the thought of some of the hateful and wicked accusations of the past. Then, after a moment's pause, she continued more warmly:

“It is you people in society who get hold of some misquoted story, some ridiculous libel long ago crushed at the cost of the libeler it is you who do untold mischief! Only last summer I remember seeing in a paper the truest sentence that was ever written of my father, and it was this, 'Probably no one man has ever had to endure such gross personal insults, such widespread hostility, such perpetual calumny.' Why are you to judge him? Even if you had a special call to it, how could you justly judge him when you will not hear him, or know him, or fairly study his writings, or question his friends? How can you know anything whatever about him? Why, if he judged you and your party as you judge him, you would be furious!”

“My dear, you speak with so much warmth; if you would only discuss things calmly!” said Mr. Fane-Smith. “Remember what George Herbert says: 'Calmness is a great advantage.' You bring too much feeling to the discussion.”

“How can I help feeling when you are slandering my father?” exclaimed Erica. “I have tried to be calm, but there are limits to endurance! Would you like Rose to sit silently while my father told her without any ground that you were a wicked man?”

When matters were reversed in this crude way, Mr. Fane-Smith winced a little.

“The cases are different,” he suggested.

“Do you think atheists don't love their children as much as Christians?” cried Erica, half choked with indignant anger. A vision of the past, of her dead mother, of her father's never-failing tenderness brought a cloud of tears to her eyes. She brushed them away. “The cases are different, as you say; but does a man care less for his home, when outside it he is badgered and insulted, or does he care infinitely more? Does a man care less for his child because, to get her food, he has had to go short himself, or does he care more? I think the man who has had to toil with all his might for his family loves it better than the rich man can. You say I speak with too much warmth, too much feeling. My complaint is the other way I can't find words strong enough to give you any idea of what my father has always been to me. To leave him would be to wrong my conscience, and to forsake my duty; and to distrust God. I will NEVER leave him!”

With that she got up and left the room, and Mr. Fane-Smith leaned back in his chair with a sigh, his eyes fixed absently upon a portrait of Napoleon above his mantel piece, his mind more completely shaken out of its ordinary grooves than it had been for years. He was a narrow-minded man, but he was honest. He saw that he had judged Raeburn very unfairly. But perhaps what occupied his thoughts the most was the question “Would Rose have been able to say of him all that Erica had said of her father?” He sighed many times, but after awhile slid back into the old habits of thought.

“Erica is a brave, noble, little thing,” he said to himself, “but far from orthodox far from orthodox! Socinian tendencies.”

CHAPTER XXVII. At Oak Dene Manor

Ah! To how many faith has been
No evidence of things unseen,
But a dim shadow that recasts the creed of the Phantasiasts.

* * * * *

For others a diviner creed
Is living in the life they lead.
The passing of their beautiful feet
Blesses the pavement of the street,
And all their looks and words repeat
Old Fuller's saying wise and sweet,
Not as a vulture, but a dove,
The Holy Ghost came from above.

Tales of a Wayside Inn. Longfellow

During the interview Erica had braced herself up to endure, but when it was over her strength all at once evaporated. She dragged herself upstairs somehow, and had just reached her room, when Mrs. Fane-Smith met her. She was preoccupied with her own anxieties, or Erica's exhaustion could not have escaped her notice.

“I am really quite unhappy about Rose!” she exclaimed. “We must send for Doctor L——. Her cough seems so much worse, I fear it will turn to bronchitis. Are you learned in such things?”

“I helped to nurse Tom through a bad attack once,” said Erica.

“Oh! Then come and see her,” said Mrs. Fane-Smith.

Erica went without a word. She would not have liked Mrs. Fane-Smith's fussing, but yet the sight of her care for Rose made her feel more achingly conscious of the blank in her own life that blank which nothing could ever fill. She wanted her own mother so terribly, and just now Mrs. Fane-Smith had touched the old wound roughly.

Rose seemed remarkably cheerful, and not nearly so much invalided as her mother thought.

“Mamma always thinks I am going to die if I'm at all out of sorts,” she remarked, when Mrs. Fane-Smith had left the room to write to the doctor. “I believe you want doctoring much more than I do. What is the matter? You are as white as a sheet!”

“I am tired and rather worried, and my back is troublesome,” said Erica.

“Then you'll just lie down on my sofa,” said Rose, peremptorily. “If you don't, I shall get out of bed and make you.”

Erica did not require much compulsion for every inch of her seemed to have a separate ache, and she was still all quivering and tingling with the indignant anger stirred up by her interview with Mr. Fane-Smith. She let Rose chatter away and tried hard to school herself into calmness. By and by her efforts were rewarded; she not only grew calm, but fell asleep, and slept like any baby till the gong sounded for luncheon.

Luncheon proved a very silent meal; it was, if possible, more trying that breakfast had been. Mrs. Fane-Smith had heard all about the interview from her husband, and they were both perplexed and disturbed. Erica felt uncertain of her footing with them, and could only wait for them to make the first move. But the grim silence tickled her fancy.

“Really,” she thought to herself, “we might be so many horses munching away at mangers, for all we have said to each other.”

But in spite of it she did not feel inclined to make conversation.

Later on she went for a drive with her aunt; the air revived her, and she began to feel more like herself again. They went out into the country, but on the way home Mrs. Fane-Smith stopped at one of the shops in High Street, leaving Erica in the carriage. She was leaning back restfully, watching a beautiful chestnut horse which was being held by a ragged boy at the door of the bank just opposite, when her attention was suddenly aroused by an ominous howling and barking. The chestnut horse began to kick, and the boy had as much as he could to hold him. Starting forward, Erica saw that a fox terrier had been set upon by another and larger dog, and that the two were having a desperate fight. The fox terrier was evidently fighting against fearful odds, for he was an old dog, and not nearly so strong as his antagonist; the howls and barks grew worse and worse; some of the passengers ran off in a fright, others watched from a safe distance, but not one interfered.

Now Erica was a great lover of animals, and a passionate lover of justice. Furious to see men and boys looking on without attempting to stop the mischief, she sprang out of the carriage, and, rushing up to the combatants, belabored the big dog with her parasol. It had a strong stick, but she hit so vehemently that it splintered all to bits, and still the dog would not leave its victim. Then, in her desperation, she hit on the right remedy; with great difficulty she managed to grasp him by the throat, and, using all her force, so nearly suffocated him that he was obliged to loosen his hold. At that moment, too, a strong man rushed forward and dealt him such a blow that he bounded off with a yell of pain, and ran howling down the street. Erica bent over the fox terrier then; the big dog had mangled it frightfully, it was covered with blood, and moaned piteously.

“Waif! My poor waif!” exclaimed a voice which she seemed to know. “Has that brute killed you?”

She looked up and saw Donovan Farrant; he recognized her, but they were both too much absorbed in the

poor dog's condition to think of any ordinary greeting.

“Where will you take him?” asked Erica.

Donovan stooped down to examine poor Waif's injuries.

“I fear there is little to be done,” he said. “But we might take him across to the chemist's opposite. Will you hold my whip for me?”

She took it, and with infinite skill and tenderness Donovan lifted the fox terrier, while Erica hurried on in front to tell the chemist. They took Waif into a little back room, and did all they could for him; but the chemist shrugged his shoulders.

“Better kill the poor brute at once, Mr. Farrant,” he said, blandly.

Donovan looked up with a strange gleam in his eyes.

“Not for the world!” he exclaimed, with a touch of indignation in his tone.

And after that he only spoke to Erica, who, seeing that the chemist had annoyed him undertook all the fetching and carrying, never once shrinking though the sight was a horrible one. At length the footman brought word that Mrs. Fane-Smith was waiting, and she was obliged to go, reluctantly enough.

“You'll let me know how he gets on?” she said.

“Yes, indeed,” he replied, not thanking her directly for her help, but somehow sending her away with the consciousness that they had passed the bounds of mere acquaintanceship, and were friends for life.

She found that her aunt had been waylaid by Mr. Cuthbert.

“If I were the owner of the dog, I should have up our honorable member for assault. I believe Miss Raeburn broke her umbrella over the poor thing.”

Erica was just in time to hear this.

“Were you watching it?” she exclaimed. “And you did nothing to help the fox terrier?”

“I do not feel bound to champion every fighting cur who is getting the worst of it,” said Mr. Cuthbert. “What has become of Mr. Farrant's favorite? I suppose he is fussing over it instead of studying the affairs of the nation.”

“I am afraid the dog is dying,” said Erica.

A curious change passed over Mr. Cuthbert's face; he looked a little shocked, and turned away somewhat hastily.

“Come,” thought Erica to herself, “I am glad to have discovered a grain of good in you.”

The next day was Sunday; it passed by very quietly. But on the Monday, when Erica opened the “Daily Review,” there was her “Society” article staring her in the face. It was clever and eminently readable, but it was bitterly sarcastic; she could not endure it. It seemed to her that she had written what was positively bad, calculated to mislead and to awaken bitterness, not in the least likely to mend matters. The fact was she had written it in a moment of passion and against her conscience, and she regretted it now with far more compunction than she felt for anything she had written in former times in the “Idol-Breaker.” Then, though indirectly and sometimes directly attacking Christianity, she had written conscientiously, now for the first time she felt that she had dishonored her pen. She went down into the very deepest depths.

The midday post brought her a letter from her stiff old editor, who understood her better, and thought more of her than she dreamed. It informed her that another member of the staff had returned from his holiday, and if she pleased she could be exempted from writing for a fortnight. As usual Mr. Bircham “begged to remain hers faithfully.”

She hardly knew whether to regard this as a relief or as a punishment. With a sigh she opened a second letter; it was from Charles Osmond, in reply to a despairing note which she had sent off just before her Saturday interview with Mr. Fane-Smith.

It was one of his short, characteristic letters.

“Dear Erica, 'It all comes in the day's work,' as the man said when the lion ate him! You should have a letter, but I'm up to the eyes in parish maters. All I can say is pray for that charity which covers the multitude of sins, and then I think you'll find the Greyshot folk become more bearable. So you have met Donovan at last. I am right glad! Your father and I had a long walk together yesterday; he seems very well. Yours ever, C. O.”

This made her smile, and she opened a third letter which ran as follows:

“My dear Miss Raeburn, I should have called on you last Saturday, but was not well enough to come in to Greyshot. My husband told me all about your help and your kindness to our Waif. I know you will be glad to hear that he is going on well; he is much more to us all than an ordinary favorite, some day you shall hear his story. I am writing now to ask, sans ceremonie, if you will come and spend a few days with us. It will be a great pleasure to us if you will say yes. My husband will be in Greyshot on Monday afternoon, and will call for your answer; please come if you can. Yours very sincerely, Gladys Farrant.”

Erica showed this letter to her aunt, and of course there was nothing to prevent her going; indeed, Mrs. Fane-Smith was really rather relieved, for she thought a few days' absence might make things more comfortable for Erica, and, besides, Rose's illness made the days dull for her.

It was about four o'clock when Donovan Farrant arrived. Erica felt as though she were meeting an old friend when she went into the drawing room, and found him standing on the hearth rug.

“You have had my wife's note?” he asked, taking her hand.

“Yes,” she replied.

“And you will come?”

“If you will have me.”

“That's right; we had set our hearts on it. You are looking very tired. I hope Saturday did not upset you?”

“No,” said Erica. “But there have been a good many worries, and I have not yet learned the art of taking life quietly.”

“You are overdone, you want a rest,” said Donovan, whose keen and practiced observation had at once noticed her delicate physique and peculiar temperament. “You are a poet, you see, and as a wise man once remarked: 'The poetic temperament is one of singular irritability of nerve.'”

Erica laughed.

“I am no poet!”

“Not a writer of verses, but a poet in the sense of a maker, an artist. As a reader of the 'Daily Review,' you must allow me to judge. Brian once showed me one of your articles, and I always recognize them now by the style.”

“I don't deserve the name of artist one bit,” said Erica, coloring. “I would give all I have to destroy my article of today. You have not seen that, or you would not have given me such a name.

“Yes, I have seen it; I read it this morning at breakfast, and made up my mind that you wrote it on Friday evening, after Lady Caroline's dinner. I can understand that you hate the thing now. One gets a sharp lesson every now and then, and it lasts one a life time.”

Erica signed.. He resumed.

“Well! Are you coming to Oakdene with me?”

“Did you mean now at once today?”

“If you will.”

“Oh, I should so like to!” she cried. “But will Mrs. Farrant be expecting me?”

“She will be hoping for you, and that is better.”

Erica was noted for the speed with which she could pack a portmanteau, and it could not have been more than ten minutes before she was ready. Mrs. Fane-Smith wished her goodbye with a sort of affectionate relief; then Donovan helped her into the pony carriage, and drove briskly off through the Greyshot streets.

“That is the place where I first heard your father,” he said, indicating with his whip the town Hall. “It must be sixteen years ago; I was quite a young fellow.”

“Sixteen years! Did you hear him so long ago as that?” said Erica, thoughtfully. “Why, that must have been about the time of the great Stockborough trial.”

“It was; I remember reference being made to it, and how it stirred me up to think of Mr. Raeburn's gallant defense of freedom, and all that it was costing him. How well I remember, too, riding home that night along this very road, with the thoughts of the good of the race, the love of humanity, touched into life for the first time. When a selfish cynic first catches a glimpse of an honest man toiling for what he believes the good of humanity, it is a wonderful moment for him! Mr. Raeburn was about the only man living that I believed in. You can understand that I owe him an immense debt of gratitude.”

“That is what you referred to in the House last year!” said Erica. “How curiously lives are linked together! Words spoken by my father years ago set thoughts working in you you make a speech and refer to them. I read a report of your speech in a time of chaotic wretchedness, and it comes like an answer to a prayer!”

“Another bond between us,” said Donovan.

After that they were silent; they had left the high road and were driving along winding country lanes, catching glimpses every now and then of golden corn fields still unreaped, or of fields just beginning to be dotted with sheaves, where the men were at work. It was a late harvest that year, but a good one. Presently they passed the tiny little village church which nestled under the brow of the hill, and then came a steep ascent, which made Donovan spring out of the pony chaise. Erica's words had awakened a long train of thought, had carried him back to the far past, and had brought him fresh proof of that wonderful unity of Nature which, though often little dreamed of, binds man to man. He gave the ponies a rest half way up the hill, and, stretching up into the high hedge, gathered a beautiful spray of red-berried briony for Erica.

“Do you remember that grand thought which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Henry V.”

> *“'There is some soul of goodness in things evil.'*
> *'Tis wonderful to look back in life and trace it out.”*

He spoke rather abruptly, but Erica's thoughts had been following much the same bent, and she understood him.

“Trust is easy on such a day as this and in such a place,” she said, looking down to the beautiful valley and up to the green, encircling hills.

Donovan smiled, and touched up the ponies.

It seemed to Erica that they had turned their backs on bigotry, and annoyance, and care of every description, and were driving right into a land of rest. Presently they turned in at some iron gates, and drove down a long approach, bordered with fir trees. At the end of this stood the manor, a solid, comfortable, well-built country house, its rather plain exterior veiled with ivy and creepers. Donovan led her into the hall, where stately old high-backed chairs and a suit or two of old armor were intermixed with modern appliances, fishing tackle, a lawn-tennis box, and a sprinkling of toys, which indicated that there were children in the house.

This fact was speedily indicated in another way, for there came a rush and a scamper overhead, and a boy of five or six years old ran down the broad oak staircase.

“Oh, father! May I ride round to the stables on Speedwell?” he cried, in a desperate hurry to attract his father's attention away from the servant and the portmanteau; then, catching sight of Erica, he checked himself, and held out his hand with a sort of shy courtesy. He was exactly what Donovan must have been as a child, as far as looks went.

“To the stables, Ralph?” replied his father, looking round. “Yes, if you like. Put on your hat though. Where's your mother?”

“In the garden with Mr. Cunningham; he came a few minutes ago; and he's got such a horse, father! A real beauty just like cocoa.”

“A roan,” said Donovan, laughing; then, as Ralph disappeared through the open door, he turned to the servant.

“Is it Mr. Cunningham of Blachingbury?”

“No, sir; Mr. Leslie Cunningham.”

Erica listened, not without interest, for she knew that Leslie Cunningham was the recently elected member for East Mountshire, the eldest son of Sir Michael Cunningham.

“We must come and find them,” said Donovan; and together they went out into the garden.

Here, on one of the broad, grassy terraces, under the shade of a copper-beech, was afternoon tea on a wicker table. Gladys was talking to Mr. Cunningham, but catching sight of her husband and Erica at the other end of the terrace, she hurried forward to greet them.

“This is delightful!” she exclaimed. “I hoped that Donovan might unceremoniously carry you off today, but hardly dared to expect it. You are just in time for tea.”

“Your arrival has caused quite a sensation in the nursery,” said Donovan to Leslie Cunningham. “My small boy is in raptures over your horse 'just like cocoa!'”

Leslie gave rather an absent laugh. He was watching Erica, who was still at a little distance talking to Gladys.

“May I be introduced to your guest?” he said.

“Certainly,” said Donovan. “She is the daughter of Mr. Raeburn.”

Leslie started.

“Indeed! I have heard about her from old Bircham, the editor. He can't say enough of her.”

Apparently Leslie Cunningham could not look enough at her.

Donovan, thinking of Brian, was perhaps a little vexed at the meeting. However, putting himself into his guest's position, he felt that the admiration was but natural, and as to Brian if he chose to lose his heart to such a lovely girl, he must expect to have many rivals.

Erica's first thought, as she glanced at Leslie Cunningham, was one of disappointment. He was not the least like his father. However, by degrees she began to like him—for his own sake. He could not have been more than five-and-twenty, and looked even younger; for he was fair-complexioned and clean-shaven. His thick, flaxen hair, and rather pallid face were decidedly wanting in color, but were relieved by very dark gray eyes. His features were well cut and regular, and the face was altogether a clever as well as an attractive one.

Erica felt as if she had got into a very delicious new word. The novelty of a meal AL FRESCO, the lovely view, the beautifully laid out grounds were charming externals; and then there were the deeper enjoyments the lovability of her host and hostess; the delightful atmosphere of broad-hearted sympathy in which they seemed to live and move, and, above all, the restfulness, the freedom of not living in momentary expectation of being rubbed the wrong way by a vexing conversation on religious, or political, or personal topics. It was like a beautiful dream quite unlike any part of real, waking existence that she had ever before known. The conversation was bright and lively. They talked because they had something to say, and wished to say it, and the artificial element so prevalent in society talk was entirely absent.

Presently Ralph came out of the house, leading a fairy-like little girl of four years old.

“Here come the children,” said Gladys. “The hour before dinner is their special time. You have not seen Dolly, have you?”

“Dolly!” The name awoke some recollection of the past in Erica, and, as she kissed the little girl, she looked at her closely. Yes, it was the same fascinating little baby face, with its soft, pink cheeks and little pointed chin, its innocent, blue-gray eyes, its tiny, sweet-tempered mouth. The sunny brown hair was longer and Dolly was an inch or two taller, but she was undoubtedly the same.

“Now I know why I always felt that I knew your face!” exclaimed Erica, turning to Donovan. “Was not Dolly lost at Codrington last year?”

“On the beach,” replied Donovan. “Yes! Why, could it have been you who brought her back? Of course it was! Now it all comes back to me. I had exactly the same feeling about knowing your face the other evening at Lady Caroline's, but put it down to your likeness to Mr. Raeburn. There is another bond between us.”

They both laughed. Donovan took Dolly upon his knee.

“Do you remember, Dolly, when you were lost on the beach once?”

“Yes,” said Dolly, promptly, “I clied.”

“Who found you?”

“Farver,” said Dolly.

“Who brought you to father?”

Dolly searched her memory.

“An old gentleman gave Dolly sweets!”

“My father,” said Erica, smiling.

“And who helped you up the beach?” asked Gladys.

“A plitty lady did,” said Dolly.

“Was it this lady, do you think?” said Donovan, indicating Erica.

Dolly trotted round with her dear little laughing face to make the scrutiny.

“I fink vis one is plittier,” she announced. Whereupon every one began to laugh.

“The most charming compliment I ever heard!” said Leslie Cunningham. “Dolly ought to be patted on the back.”

Erica smiled and colored; but as she looked again at Donovan and little Dolly, her thoughts wandered away to that June day in the museum when they had been the parable which shadowed forth to her such a wonderful reality. Truly, there were links innumerable between her and Donovan.

Leslie Cunningham seemed as if he intended to stay forever; however, every one was quite content to sit out on the lawn talking and watching the children at their play. It was one of those still, soft September evenings when one is glad of any excuse to keep out of doors.

At last the dressing bell rang, and Leslie took out his watch with an air of surprise.

“The afternoon has flown!” he exclaimed. “I had no idea it was so late. I wanted to ask you, by the bye, whether I could see the coffee tavern at Greyshot. We are going to start one down at our place, and I want to see one or two well-managed ones first. Whereabouts is it? I think I'll ride on now, and have a look at it.”

“Dine with us first,” said Donovan, “and I'll ride over with you between eight and nine, that is the best time for seeing it in full swing.”

So Leslie Cunningham stayed to dinner, and talked a great deal about temperance work, but did not succeed in blinding his host, who knew well enough that Erica had been the real cause of his desire to go over to Greyshot.

Temperance, however, proved a fortunate subject, for it was, of course, one in which she was deeply interested, all the more so now that it formed one of the strongest bonds remaining between herself and her father's followers. A large number of the Raeburnites were either teetotalers or very strong temperance advocates, and Erica, who was constantly out and about in the poorer parts of London, had realized forcibly the terrible national evil, and was an enthusiastic temperance worker.

Donovan, perhaps out of malice prepense, administered a good many dry details about the management of coffee taverns, personal supervision, Etzenberger's machines, the necessity of a good site and attractive building, etc., etc. Erica only wished that Tom could have been there, he would have been so thoroughly in his element. By and by the conversation drifted away to other matters. And as Leslie Cunningham was a good and very amusing talker, and Gladys the perfection of a hostess, the dinner proved very lively, an extraordinary contrast to the dreary, vapid table talk to which Erica had lately been accustomed. After the ladies had left the room, Donovan, rather to his amusement, found the talk veering round to Luke Raeburn. Presently, Leslie Cunningham hazarded a direct question about Erica in a would-be indifferent tone. In reply, Donovan told him briefly and without comment what he knew of her history, keeping on the surface of things and speaking always with a sort of careful restraint. He was never very fond of discussing people, and perhaps in this case the realization of the thousand objections to any serious outcome of Leslie's sudden admiration strengthened his reserve. However, fate was apparently kinder though perhaps really more cruel than the host, for Donovan was summoned into the library to interview an aggrieved constituent, and Leslie finding his way to the drawing room, was only too delighted to meet Gladys going upstairs to see her children.

The lamps were lighted in the drawing room, but the curtains were not drawn, and beside the open window he saw a slim, white-robed figure. Erica was looking out into the gathering darkness. He crossed the room, and stood beside her, his heart beating quickly, all the more because she did not move or take any notice of his presence. It was unconventional, but perhaps because he was so weary of the ordinary young ladies who invariably smiled and fluttered the moment he approached them, and were so perfectly ready to make much of him, this unconventionality attracted him. He watched her for a minute in silence. She was very happy, and was looking her loveliest. Presently she turned.

“I think it is the stillness which is so wonderful!” she exclaimed.

It was spoken with the frankness of a child, with the spontaneous confidence of the pure child-nature, which instinctively recognizes all the lovable and trustable. The clear, golden eyes looked right into his for a moment. A strange reverence awoke within him. He had seen more beautiful eyes before, but none so entirely wanting in that unreality of expression arising from a wish to produce an effect, none so beautifully sincere.

“The country stillness, you mean?” he replied.

“Yes; it is rest in itself. I have never stayed in the country before.”

“Is it possible!” he exclaimed.

He had often languidly discussed the comparative advantages of Murren and Zermatt with girls who took a yearly tour abroad as naturally as their dinner, but to talk to one who had spent her whole life in towns, who could enjoy a country evening so absolutely and unaffectedly, was a strange and delightful novelty.

“You are one of those who can really enjoy,” he said. “You are not blasee you are one of the happy mortals who keep the faculty of enjoyment as strongly all through life as in childhood.”

“Yes, I think I can enjoy,” said Erica. “But I suppose we pay for our extra faculty of enjoyment.

“You mean by being more sensitive to pain?”

“Yes, though that sounds rather like Dickens's Mrs. Gummidge, when she thought she felt smoky chimneys more than other people.”

He laughed.

“How I wish you could turn over your work to me, and go to Switzerland tomorrow in my place! Only I should wish to be there, too, for the sake of seeing you enjoy it.”

“Do you go tomorrow?”

“Yes, with my father.”

“Ah! How delightful! I confess I do envy you a little. I do long to see snow mountains. Always living in London makes me—”

He interrupted her with a sort of exclamation of horror.

“Oh! Don't abuse London!” she said, laughing. “If one must live all the year round in one place, I would rather be there than anywhere. When I hear people abusing it, I always think they don't know how to use

their eyes. What can be more lovely, for instance, than the view from Greenwich Park by the observatory? Don't you know that beautiful clump of Scotch firs in the foreground, and then the glimpse of the river through the trees? And then there is that lovely part by Queen Elizabeth's oak. The view in Hyde Park, too, over the Serpentine, how exquisite that is on a summer afternoon, with the Westminster towers standing up in a golden haze. Or Kensington Gardens in the autumn, when the leaves are turning, and there is blue mist in the background against the dark tree trunks. I think I love every inch of London!”

Leslie Cunningham would have listened to the praises of the Black Country, if only for the sake of hearing her voice.

“Well, as far as England goes, you are in the right place for scenery now; I know a few lovelier parts than this.”

“What are those lights on the lower terrace?” asked Erica, suddenly.

“Glow worms. Have you never seen them? Come and look at them nearer.”

“Oh, I should like to!” she said, with the charming enthusiasm and eagerness which delighted him so much.

To guide her down the steps in the dusky garden, to feel her hand on his arm, to hear her fresh, naive remarks, and then to recall what Donovan Farrant had just told him about her strange, sad story, all seemed to draw him on irresistibly. He had had three or four tolerably serious flirtations, but now he knew that he had never before really loved.

Erica was delighted with the glow worms, and delighted with the dewy fragrance of the garden, and delighted with the soft, balmy stillness of the night. She was one of those who revel in Nature, and all that she said was evidently the overflow of a rapturous happiness, curiously contrasting with the ordinary set remarks of admiration, or falsely sentimental outbursts too much in vogue. But Leslie Cunningham found that the child-likeness was not only in manner, but that Erica had no idea of flirting; she was bright, and merry, and talkative, but she had no thought, no desire of attracting his attention. She had actually and literally come out into the garden to see the glow worms, not to monopolize the much-run-after young M.P, and as soon as she had seen them she said she felt cold, and suggested going back again.

He was disappointed, but the words were so perfectly sincere, so free from suspicion of mere conventionality, that there was nothing for it but to return. Half amused, half piqued, but wholly in love, he speedily forgot himself in real anxiety.

“I hope you haven't taken cold,” he said, with great solicitude.

“Oh, no,” said Erica; “but I want to be careful for the night-school work will be beginning soon, and I must go home fresh for that.”

Something in her words broke the spell of perfect happiness which had hitherto held him. Was it the mention of her every-day life, with its surroundings unknown to him? Or was it some faint perception that in the world of duty to which she referred their paths could not rightly converge? A cold chill crept over him.

“You were quite right,” he said with an involuntary shiver. “It is decidedly cold out here; the mist rises from the river, I expect, or else your reference to the working-day world has recalled me from fairy-land. You should not speak of work in such a place as this it is incongruous.”

She smiled.

“Ernst ist das leben,” she replied quietly. “One can't forget that even at such a time as this, and in such a place.”

“How is it that some never forget that for a moment, while others never remember it at all?” he said musingly.

“Some of us have no excuse for ever forgetting,” she answered “hardly a chance either.”

And though the words were vague, they shadowed out to him much of her life a life never free from sorrow, burdened with constant care and anxiety, and ever confronted by some of the most perplexing world problems. A longing to shield, and protect, and comfort her rose in his heart, yet all the time he instinctively knew that hers was the stronger nature.

It seemed that the seriousness of life was to be borne in upon them specially that evening, for, returning to the drawing room, they found Donovan released from his interview, and relating with some indignation the pitiable story he had just heard. It only reached Leslie Cunningham in fragments, however over crowding, children sleeping six in a bed, two of them with scarlet fever, no fever hospital, no accommodation for them, an inspector, medical officer, the board how drearily dry all the details seemed to him. He could do nothing but watch Erica's eager face with its ever-varying play of expression. He hardly knew whether to be angry with Donovan Farrant for alluding to matters which brought a look of sadness to her eyes, or to thank him for the story which made her face light up with indignation and look, if possible, more beautiful than before.

“Don't offer to put up a fever shanty on the lawn,” said Gladys when her husband paused.

“I wish we had an empty cottage where we could put them” said Donovan; “but I am afraid all I can do is to bring pressure to bear upon the authorities. We'll ride over together, Cunningham, and Jack Trevethan, our manager, shall show you the tavern while I rout out this medical officer.”

They had had tea; there was no longer any excuse for delaying. Leslie, with an outward smile and an inward sigh, turned to take leave of Erica. She was bending over a basket in which was curled up the invalid fox terrier. For a moment she left off stroking the white and tan head, and held out her hand.

“Goodbye,” she said frankly.

That was all. And yet it made Leslie's heart bound. Was he indeed to go to Switzerland tomorrow? He MUST manage to get out of it somehow.

And all the way to Greyshot he listened to schemes for the work to be done next session from the ardent sanitary reformer, though just then the devastation of all England would scarcely have roused him so long as he was assured of the safety of Luke Raeburn's daughter.

CHAPTER XXVIII. The Happiest of Weeks

He went in the strength of dependence
To tread where his Master trod,
To gather and knit together The Family of God.

With a conscience freed from burdens,
And a heart set free from care,
To minister to every one
Always and everywhere.
Author of Chronicles of the Schonberg Cotta Family

After this came a happy, uneventful week at the manor. Erica often thought of the definition of happiness which Charles Osmond had once given her “Perfect harmony with your surroundings.” She had never been so happy in her life. Waif, who was slowly recovering, grew pathetically fond of his rescuer. The children were devoted to her, and she to them. She learned to love Gladys very much, and from her she learned a good deal which helped her to understand Donovan's past life. Then, too, it was the first time in her life that she had ever been in a house where there were little children, and probably Ralph and Dolly did more for her than countless sermons or whole libraries of theology could have done.

Above all, there was Donovan, and the friendship of such a man was a thing which made life a sort of wordless thanksgiving. At times even in those she loved best, even in her father or Charles Osmond, she was conscious of something which jarred a little, but so perfect was her sympathy with Donovan, so closely and strangely were their lives and characters linked together, that never once was the restfulness of perfect harmony broken Nature and circumstances had, as it were turned them to each other. He could understand, as no one else could understand, the reversal of thought and feeling which she had passed through during the last few months.

He could understand the perplexities of her present position, suddenly confronted with the world of wealth and fashion and conventional religion, and fresh from a circle where, whatever the errors held and promulgated, the life was so desperately earnest, often so nobly self-denying. He knew that Mr. Fane-Smith, good man as he was, must have been about the severest of trials to a new-born faith. He understood how Mr. Cuthbert's malice would tend to reawaken the harsh class judgment against which, as a Christian, Erica was bound to struggle. He could fully realize the irritated, ruffled state she was in she was overdone, and wanted perfect rest and quiet, perfect love and sympathy. He and his wife gave her all these, took her not only to their house, but right into their home, and how to do this no one knew so well as Donovan, perhaps because he had once been in much the same position himself. It was his most leisure month, the time he always devoted to home and wife and children, so that Erica saw a great deal of him. He seemed to her the ideal head of an ideal yet real home. It was one of those homes and thank God there are such! where belief in the Unseen reacts upon the life in the seen, making it so beautiful, so lovable, that, when you go out once more into the ordinary world you go with a widened heart, and the realization that the kingdom of Heaven of which Christ spoke does indeed begin upon earth.

It is strange, in tracing the growth of spontaneous love, to notice how independent it is of time. Love annihilates time with love, as with God, time is not. Like the miracles, it brings into use the aeonial measurement in which “one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day.” A week, even a few hours, may give us love and knowledge and mutual sympathy with one which the intercourse of many years fails to give with another.

The week at Oakdene was one which all her life long Erica looked back to with the loving remembrance which can gild and beautify the most sorrowful of lives. It is surely a mistake to think that the memory of past delights makes present pain sharper. If not, why do we all so universally strive to make the lives of children happy? Is it not because we know that happiness in the present will give a sort of reflected happiness even in the saddest future? Is it not because we know how in life's bitterest moments, its most barren and desolate paths, we feel a warmth about our heart, a smile upon our lips, when we remember the old home days with their eager childish interests and hopes, their vividly recollected pleasures, their sheltered luxuriance of fatherly and motherly love? For how many thousands did the poet speak when he wrote

“The thought of our past years in me doth breed Perpetual benediction.”

A benediction which outlives the cares and troubles of later life which we may carry with us to our dying day, and find perfected indeed in that Unseen, where

“All we have willed, or hoped, or dreamed of good shall exist, Not its semblance, but itself.”

There was only one bit of annoyance during the whole time; it was on the Sunday, the day before Erica was to go back to Greyshot. Gladys was not very well and stayed at home, but Donovan and Erica went to church with the children, starting rather early that they might enjoy the lovely autumn morning, and also that they might put the weekly wreaths on two graves in the little church yard. Donovan himself put the flowers upon the first, Ralph and Dolly talking softly together about “little Auntie Dot,” then running off hand in hand to make the “captain's glave plitty,” as Dolly expressed it. Erica, following them, glanced at the plain white headstone and read the name: “John Frewin, sometimes captain of the 'Metora.'”

Then they went together into the little country church, and all at once a shadow fell on her heart; for, as they entered at the west end, the clergy and the choristers entered the chancel, and she saw that Mr. Cuthbert was to take the service. The rector was taking his holiday, and had enlisted help from Greyshot.

Happily no man has it in his power to mar the Church of England service, but by and by came the sermon. Now Mr. Cuthbert cordially detested Donovan; he made no secret of it. He opposed and thwarted him on every possible occasion, and it is to be feared that personal malice had something to do with his choice of a subject for that morning's sermon.

He had brought over to Oakdene a discourse on the eternity of punishment. Perhaps he honestly believed that people could be frightened to heaven, at any rate he preached a most ghastly sermon, and, what was worse, preached it with vindictive energy. The poor, mangled, much-distorted text about the tree lying as it falls was brought to the fore once again, and, instead of bearing reference to universal charity and almsgiving as it was intended to do, was ruthlessly torn from its context and turned into a parable about the state of the soul at death. The words “damned” and “damnation,” with all their falsely theologized significance, rang through the little church and made people shudder, though all the time the speaker knew well enough that there were no such words in the New Testament. Had he been there himself to see he could not have described his material hell more graphically. Presently, leaning right over the pulpit, his eyes fixed on the manor pew just beneath him, he asked in thundering tones “My brethren, have you ever realized what the word LOST means?” Then came a long catalogue of those who in Mr. Cuthbert's opinion would undoubtedly be “lost,” in which of course all Erica's friends and relatives were unhesitatingly placed.

Now to hear what we sincerely believe to be error crammed down the throats of a congregation is at all times a great trial; but, when our nearest and dearest are remorselessly thrust down to the nethermost hell, impatience is apt to turn to wrath. Erica thought of her gentle, loving, unselfish mother, and though nothing could alter her conviction that long ere now she had learned the truths hidden from her in life, yet she could not listen to Mr. Cuthbert's horrible words without indignant emotion. A movement from Donovan recalled her. Little Dorothy was on his knees fast asleep; he quietly reached out his hand, took up Erica's prayer book which was nearest to him, and wrote a few words on the fly leaf, handling the book to her. She read them. “Definition of LOST: not found yet.” Then the anger and grief and pain died away, and, though the preacher still thundered overhead, God's truth stole into Erica's heart once more by means of one of his earliest consecrated preachers a little child. Once more Dolly and her father were to her a parable; and presently, glancing away through the sunny south window, her eye fell upon a small marble tablet just below it that she had not before noticed, and this furnished her with thoughts which outlasted the sermon.

> *At the top was a medallion, the profile of the same fine, soldierly looking man whose portrait hung in Donovan's study, and which was so wonderfully like both himself and little Ralph. Beneath was the following inscription:*
>
> > *“In loving Memory of RALPH FARRANT,*
> > *Who died at Porthkerran, Cornwall,*
> > *May 3, 18—, Aged 45*
> >
> > *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”*

The date was sixteen years back, but the tablet was comparatively new, and could not have been up more than six years at the outside. Erica was able partly to understand why Donovan had chosen for it that particular text, and nothing could more effectually have counteracted Mr. Cuthbert's sermon than the thoughts which it awoke in her.

Nevertheless, she did not quite get over the ruffled feeling, which was now in a great measure physical, and it was with a sense of relief that she found herself again in the open air, in the warmth, and sunshine, and gladness of the September day. Donovan did not say a word. They passed through the little church yard, and walked slowly up the winding lane; the children, who had stopped to gather a fine cluster of blackberries, were close behind them. In the silence, every word of their talk could be distinctly heard.

“I don't like God!” exclaimed Ralph, abruptly.

“Oh, you naughty!” exclaimed Dolly, much shocked.

“No, it isn't naughty. I don't think He's good. Why, do you think father would let us be shut up in a horrid place for always and always? Course he wouldn't. I 'spects if we'd got to go, he'd come, too.”

Donovan and Erica looked at each other. Donovan turned round, and held out his hand, at which both children rushed.

“Ralph,” he said, “if any one told you that I might some day leave off loving you, leave off being your father what would you do?”

“I'd knock them down!” said Ralph, clinching his small fist.

Donovan laughed a little, but did not then attempt to prove the questionable wisdom of such a proceeding.

“Why would you feel inclined to knock them down?” he asked.

“Because it would be a wicked lie!” cried Ralph. “Because I know you never could, father.”

“You are quite right. Of course I never could. You would never believe any one who told you that I could, because you would know it was impossible. But just now you believed what some one said about God, though you wouldn't have believed it of me. Never believe anything which contradicts 'Our Father.' It will be our father punishing us now and hereafter, and you may be sure that He will do the best possible for all His children. You are quite sure that I should only punish you to do you good, and how much more sure may you be that God, who loves you so much more, will do the same, and will never give you up.”

Ralph looked hard at his bunch of blackberries, and was silent. Many thoughts were working in his childish brain. Presently he said, meditatively:

“He did shout it out so loud and horrid! I s'pose he had forgotten about 'Our Father.' But, you see, Dolly, it was all a mistake. Come along, let's race down the drive.”

Off they ran. Erica fancied that Donovan watched them rather sadly.

“I thought Ralph was listening in church,” she said. “Fancy a child of his age thinking it all out like that!”

“Children think much more than people imagine,” said Donovan. “And a child invariably carries out a doctrine to its logical conclusion. 'Tis wonderful the fine sense of justice which you always find in them!”

“Ralph inherits that from you, I should think. How exactly like you he is, especially when he is puzzling out some question in his own mind.”

A strange shadow passed over Donovan's face. He was silent for a moment.

“'Tis hard to be brave for one's own child,” he said at last. “I confess that the thought that Ralph may have to live through what I have lived through is almost unendurable to me.”

“How vexed you must have been that he heard today's sermon,” said Erica.

“Not now,” he replied. “He has heard and taken in the other side, and has instinctively recognized the truth. If I had had some one to say as much to me when I was his age, it might have saved me twenty years of atheism.”

“It is not only children who are repulsed by this,” said Erica. “Or learned men like James Mill. I know well enough that hundreds of my father's followers were driven away from Christianity merely by having this view constantly put before them. How were they to know that half the words about it were mistranslations? How were they to study when they were hard at work from week's end to week's end? It seems to me downright wicked of scholars and learned men to keep their light hidden away under a bushel, and then pretend that they fear the 'people' are not ready for it.”

“As though God's truth needed bolstering up with error!” exclaimed Donovan. “As though to believe a hideous lie could ever be right or helpful! There's a vast amount of Jesuitry among well-meaning Protestants.”

“And always will be, I should think,” said Erica. “As long as people will think of possible consequences, instead of the absolutely true. But I could forgive them all if their idea of the danger of telling the people were founded on real study of the people. But is it? How many of the conservers of half truths, who talk so loudly about the effect on the masses, have personally known the men who go to make up the masses?”

“Yes, you are right,” said Donovan. “As a rule I fancy the educated classes know less about the working classes than they do about the heathen, and I am afraid, care less about them. You have an immense advantage there both as a writer and a worker, for I suppose you really have been brought into contact with them.”

“Yes,” said Erica, “all my life. How I should like to confront Mr. Cuthbert with a man like Hazeldine, or with dozens of others whom I could name!”

“Why?” asked Donovan.

“Because no one could really know such men without learning where the present systems want mending. If Hazeldine could be shut into Mr. Cuthbert's study for a few hours, and induced to tell the story of his life, I believe he would have the effect of the ancient mariner on the wedding guest. Only, the worst of it is, I'm afraid the very look of Mr. Cuthbert would quite shut him up.”

“Tell me about him,” said Donovan.

“It is nothing at second hand,” said Erica. “He is a shoe maker, as grand-looking a fellow as you ever saw, fond of reading, and very thoughtful, and with more quiet common sense than almost any I ever met. He had been brought up to believe in verbal inspiration that had been thoroughly crammed down his throat; but no one had attempted to touch upon the contradictions, the thousand and one difficulties which of course he found directly he began to study the Bible. So he puzzled and puzzled, and got more and more dissatisfied, and never in church heard anything which explained his difficulties. At last one day in his workshop a man lent him a number of the 'Idol Breaker,' and in it was a paper by my father on the Atonement. It came to him like a great light in his darkness; he says he shall never forget the sudden conviction that the man who wrote that article understood every one of his difficulties, and would be able to clear them right away. The next Sunday he went to hear my father lecture. I believe it would make the veriest flint cry to hear his account of it, to see the look of reverent love that comes over his face when he says, 'And there I found Mr. Raeburn ready to answer all my difficulties, not holding one at arm's length and talking big and patronizing for all he was so clever, but just like a mate.' That man would die for my father any day hundreds of them would.”

“I can well believe it,” said Donovan. Then, after a pause, he added, “To induce Christians to take a fair, unprejudiced look at true secularism and to induce secularists to take a fair, unprejudiced view of true Christ-following, seems to me to be the great need of today.”

“If one could!” said Erica, with a long-drawn sigh.

“If any one can, you can,” he replied.

She looked up at him quickly, awed by the earnestness of his tone. Was she a young girl, conscious of so many faults and failings, conscious of being at the very threshold herself to dare even to attempt such a task? Yet was it a question of daring to attempt? Was it not rather the bit of work mapped out for her, to undertake, perhaps to fail in, but still bravely to attempt? He heart throbbed with eager yearning, as the vision rose before her. What was mere personal pain? What was injustice? What was misunderstanding? Why, in such a cause she could endure anything.

“I would die to help on that!” she said in a low voice.

“Will you live for it?” asked Donovan, with his rare, beautiful smile. “Live, and do something more than endure the Lady Carolines and Mr. Cuthberts?”

Few things are more inspiriting that the realization that we are called to some special work which will need our highest faculties, our untiring exertions which will demand all that is good in us, and will make growth in good imperative. With the peacefulness of that country Sunday was interwoven a delicious perception that hard, beautiful work lay beyond. Erica wandered about the shady Mountshire woods with Gladys and the children, and in the cool restfulness, in the stillness and beauty, got a firm hold on her lofty ideal, and rose about the petty vexations and small frictions which had been spoiling her life at Greyshot.

The manor grounds were always thrown open to the public on Sunday, and a band in connection with one of

the temperance societies played on the lawn. Donovan had been much persecuted by the Sabbatarians for sanctioning this; but, though sorry to offend any one, he could not allow what he considered mistaken scruples to interfere with such a boon to the public. Crowds of workingmen and women came each week away from their densely packed homes into the pure country; the place was for the time given up to them, and they soon learned to love it, to look upon it as a property to which they had a real and recognized share.

Squire Ward, who owned the neighboring estate, grumbled a good deal at the intrusion of what he called the “rabble” into quiet Oakdene.

“That's the worst of such men as Farrant,” he used to say. “They begin by rushing to one extreme, and end by rushing to the other. Such a want of steady conservative balance! He's a good man; but, poor fellow, he'll never be like other people, never!”

Mrs. Ward was almost inclined to think that he had been less obnoxious in the old times. As a professed atheist, he could be shunned and ignored, but his uncomfortably practical Christianity had a way of shaking up the sleepy neighborhood, and the neighborhood did not at all like being shaken!

CHAPTER XXIX. Greyshot Again

To what purpose do you profess to believe in the unity of the human race, which is the necessary consequence of the unity of God, if you do not strive to verify it by destroying the arbitrary divisions and enmities that still separate the different tribes of humanity? Why do we talk of fraternity while we allow any of our brethren to be trampled on, degraded or despised? The earth is our workshop. We may not curse it, we are bound to sanctify it. ... We must strive to make of humanity one single family.
Mazzini

Erica's appearance at Lady Caroline's dinner party had caused a sort of storm in a tea cup; the small world of Greyshot was in a state of ferment, and poor Mrs. Fane-Smith suffered a good deal from the consciousness that she and her family were the subject of all the gossip of the place. Her little expedients had failed, and she began to reflect ruefully that perfect sincerity, plain honesty, would have been the best policy, after all. By the time that a week had passed, however, censure and harsh comments began to give place to curiosity, and the result of this was that on Monday, which was Mrs. Fane-Smith's “at home” day, Greyshot found it convenient to call in large numbers.

Erica, returning from Oakdene in the afternoon, found her work awaiting her. Her heart beat rather quickly when, on entering the drawing room she found it full of visitors; she half smiled to herself to find such an opportunity of beginning Donovan's work. And very bravely she set about it. Those who had come from curiosity not unmixed with malice were won in spite of themselves; even Mr. Cuthbert, who bore down upon her with the full intention of making her uncomfortable, found himself checkmated as effectually as at Lady Caroline's dinner table, though in a very different way.

“I think I saw you in church yesterday morning!” he remarked, by way of introducing a discordant subject.

“Yes,” replied Erica, “I have been staying at Oakdene Manor, and had a most delicious time.”

“Sharing Mr. Farrant's philanthropic labors?” asked Mr. Cuthbert, with his unpleasant smile.

She laughed.

“No; I have been thoroughly lazy, and September is their holiday month, too. You would have been amused to see us the other evening all hard at work making paper frogs like so many children.”

“Paper frogs!” said Mr. Cuthbert, with an intonation that suggested sarcasm.

“Yes; have you ever seen them?” asked Erica. “I don't think many people know how to make them. Feltrino taught me when I was a little girl I'll show you, if you like.”

“Did you ever meet Feltrino?” asked Lady Caroline.

She knew very little of the Italian patriot. In his life time he had been despised and rejected, but he was now dead; his biography a well-written one was in all the circulating libraries, and even those who were far from agreeing with his political views, had learned something of the nobility of his character. So there was both surprise and envy in Lady Caroline's tone; she had a weakness for celebrities.

“I saw him once when I was seven years old,” said Erica. “He knew my father, and one day we were overtaken by a tremendous shower, and happened to meet Feltrino, who made us come into his rooms and wait till it was over. And while they talked Italian politics I sat and watched him. He had the most wonderful eyes I ever saw, and presently, looking up and seeing me, he laughed and took me on his knee, saying that politics must not spoil my holiday, and that he would show me how to make Japanese frogs. Once, when he was imprisoned, and was hardly allowed to have any books, the making of those frogs kept him from going mad, he said.”

While she spoke she had been deftly folding a sheet of paper, and several people were watching curiously. “Before very long, the frog was completed, and the imitation proved so clever that there was an unanimous chorus of approval and admiration. Every one wanted to learn how to make them; the Feltrino frogs became the topic of the afternoon, and Erica fairly conquered the malicious tongues. She was superintending Lady Caroline's first attempt at a frog, when a familiar name made her look up.

“Mr. Cunningham Mr. Leslie Cunningham.”

“I thought you were in Switzerland!” she exclaimed, as he crossed the room and shook hands with her.

“I never got further than Paris,” he said, smiling. “My brother has gone instead, and I am going to follow

your example and study the beauties of English scenery."

Perhaps Greyshot opinion was more conciliated by the long talk with Mr. Leslie Cunningham, M.P., than even by the Feltrino frogs. To have Luke Raeburn's daughter suddenly thrust into the midst of their select society at Lady Caroline's dinner was one thing they had one and all shunned her. But when she proved to be, after all, clever and fascinating, and original, when they knew that she had sat on Feltrino's knee as a little child, above all, when they saw that Leslie Cunningham was talking to her with mingled friendliness and deference, they veered round. Politically, they hated Sir Michael Cunningham, but in society they were pleased enough to meet him, and in Greyshot, naturally enough, his son was a "lion." Greyshot made much of him during his stay at Blachingbury, and he found it very convenient just then to be made much of.

Hardly a day of that week passed in which he did not in some way meet Erica. He met her in the park with her aunt; he sat next to her at an evening concert; he went to the theater and watched her all through "Hamlet," and came to the Fane-Smith's box between the acts. Yet, desperately as he was in love, he could not delude himself with the belief that she cared for him. She was always bright, talkative, frank, even friendly, but that was all. Yet her unlikeness to the monotonously same girls, whom he was in the habit of meeting, fascinated him more and more each day. She was to go back to town on the Monday; on Friday it so happened that she met Leslie Cunningham at a great flower show, and with perfect unconsciousness piqued him almost beyond endurance. Now at last he hoped to make her understand his admiration. They discussed "Hamlet," and he had just brought the conversation adroitly round to the love scene in the third act, when Erica suddenly dashed his hopes to the ground.

"Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, pausing before a beautiful exotic. "Surely that must be an orchid?"

And the reluctant Leslie found the conversation drifting round to botany, about which he knew little and cared less. Once more his hopes were raised only to be frustrated. He was sitting besides Mrs. Fane-Smith and Erica, and had managed to stem the tide of the botany. The band was playing. Erica, half listening to the music and half attending to his talk, looked dreamily peaceful; surely now was the time! But all at once the clear eyes looked up with their perfectly wide-awake interest, and she exclaimed:

"I do wish the Farrants would come! They certainly meant to be here. I can't make it out."

Leslie patiently talked about the member for Greyshot; but, just when he hoped he was quit of the subject, Erica gave an exclamation of such unfeigned delight that a consuming envy took possession of him.

"Oh, there he is! And Ralph and Dolly, too!"

And in a moment the Oakdene party had joined them, and Leslie saw that his chances for that day were over. Before long he had made his escape, leaving the grounds not moodily, but with the light of a new and eager determination in his eye.

Erica, returning from the flower show late in the afternoon, found a note awaiting her, and opened it unconcernedly enough on her way up to her room. But the first glance at it brought a glow of color to her face and a nameless fear to her heart. She ran on quickly, locked her door, and by the ruddy firelight read in a sort of dumb dismay her first offer of marriage. This then was the meaning of it all. This was the cause of his hurried return to England; this had brought her the long talks which had been so pleasant, yes, strangely, unaccountably pleasant. Yet, for all that, she knew well enough that she had nothing to give in return for the love revealed in every word of the letter. She liked him, liked to talk to him, thought him clever and interesting, but that was all. His wife! Oh, no! Impossible! That could never be! And then, as usual, even in the midst of her strange sense of discomfort and perplexity, there came a flash of humor which made her laugh noiselessly in the dim light. "Tom would call me Mrs. Sly Bacon!"

But a second reading of the letter made her look grave. She was very much puzzled to know how to answer it; how, in refusing, to give him least pain. There was nothing else to hesitate about, of her own mind she was quite sure. There was only an hour till post time. She must write at once, and she must write in a way which could not be mistaken. There was not a grain of coquetry about Erica. After some thought she wrote the following lines:

"Dear Mr. Cunningham, Your letter surprised me very much and pained me, too, because in replying I fear I must give you pain. I thank you for the honor you have done me, but I can never be your wife. Even if I could return your love, which I can not, it could never be right. People are so prejudiced that the connection of our names might greatly injure your public work, and, besides, you could not live in the circle in which I live, and nothing could ever make it right for me to leave my own people. I can not write as I should like to I can not say what I would, or thank you as I would but please understand me, and believe me yours very sincerely, Erica Raeburn."

Strange enough the writing of that letter, the realization of the impossibility of accepting Leslie Cunningham's offer, opened out to Erica a new region, started her upon a new stage of her life progress. In spite of her trouble at the thought of the pain she must give, there was an indefinable sense that life and love meant much more than she had hitherto dreamed of; and, though for the next few days she was a little grave and silent, there rang in her ears the refrain:

"Oh, life, oh, beyond, Thou art strange, thou art sweet."

She was not sorry that her visit was drawing to a close, although the last week had gone much more smoothly. Her vigorous nature began to long to return to the working day world, and though she could very honestly thank Mr. Fane-Smith for his kindness, she turned her back on his house with unmixed satisfaction.

"And you cannot change your ind as to my suggestion?" he asked sending off one parting arrow.

"I can not," said Erica, firmly, "he is my father."

"You must of course make your own choice," he said with a sigh. "But you are sadly wrong, sadly wrong! In my opinion your father is—"

"Forgive me for interrupting you," said Erica, "but by your own showing you have no right to have any opinion whatever about my father. Until you have either learned to know him personally, heard him speak, or fairly and carefully studied his writings, you have no grounds to form an opinion upon."

"But the current opinion is—"

“The current opinion is no more an opinion than yours! It is the view of most bitter opponents. And, candidly, WOULD you accept the current opinion held of any prominent statesman by his adversaries? Why, the best men living are represented as fiends in human shape by their enemies! And if this is so in political matters, how much more in such a case as my father's!”

Mr. Fane-Smith, who was a well-meaning though narrow man, sighed again; it was always very painful to him to listen to views which did not coincide with his own.

“Well,” he said at length, “there is, after all, the hope that you may convert him.”

“I hope you do not want me to turn into one of those hateful little prigs, who go about lamenting over their unregenerate parents,” said Erica, naughtily. Then, softening down, she added, “I think I know what you mean perhaps I was wrong to speak like that, only somehow, knowing what my father is, it does grate so to put it in that way. But don't think I would not give my life for him to come to the light here and now for I would! I would!”

She clasped her hands tightly together, and turned quickly away.

Mr. Fane-Smith was touched.

“Well, my dear,” he said. “You may be right, after all, and I may be wrong. All my anxiety is only for your ultimate good.”

The train was on the point of starting, he gave her a warm hand shake, and in spite of all that jarred in their respective natures, Erica ended by liking him the best of her new relations.

CHAPTER XXX. Slander Leaves a Slur

For slander lives upon succession,
Forever housed, where it once
gets possession. Comedy of Errors.

Not out of malice, but mere zeal,
Because he was an infidel.
Hudibras

“Blessed old London, how delightful it is to come back to it!” exclaimed Erica, as she and Tom drove home from Paddington on the afternoon of her return from Greyshot. “Tell the man not to go through the back streets, there's a good boy! Ah, he's doing it of his own accord! Why, the park trees are much browner than the Mountshire ones!”

“We have been prophesying all manner of evil about your coming back,” said Tom looking her over critically from head to foot. “I believe mother thought you would never come that the good Christians down at Greyshot having caught you would keep you, and even the chieftain was the least bit in the world uneasy.”

“Nonsense,” said Erica, laughing, “he knows better.”

“But they did want to keep you?”

“Yes.”

“How did you get out of it?”

“Said, 'Much obliged to you, but I'd rather not.' Enacted Mrs. Micawber, you know, 'I never will, no I never will leave Mr. Micawber.'”

“Mr. Fane-Smith must have been a brute ever to have proposed such a thing!”

“Oh, no! Not at all! Within certain limits he is a kind-hearted man, only he is one of those who believe in that hateful saying, 'Men without the knowledge of God are cattle.' And, believing that, would treat atheists as I should be sorry to treat Friskarina.”

“And what is the world of Greyshot like?”

“It is very lukewarm about public questions, and very boiling hot about its own private affairs,” said Erica. “But I have learned now how people in society can go on contentedly living their easy lives in the midst of such ignorance and misery. They never investigate, and when any painful instance is alluded to, they say, 'Oh! But it CAN'T be true!' The other day they were speaking of Kingsley's pamphlet, 'Cheap clothes and nasty,' and one lady said that was quite an evil of the past, that the difficulty nowadays was to get things at reasonable prices. When I told her that women only get twopence for doing all the machine work of an ulster, and have to provide their machine, cotton, food, light, and fuel, she exclaimed, 'Oh, that is incredible! It must be exaggerated! Such things couldn't be now!' When Aunt Isabel heard that I had known cases of men being refused admission to a hospital supported by public subscriptions, on the ground of their atheism, she said it was impossible. And as to physical ill treatment, or, in fact, any injustice having ever been shown by Christian to atheist, she would not hear of it. It was always 'My dear, the atmosphere in which you have lived has distorted your vision,' or, 'You have been told, my dear, that these things were so!' To tell her that they were facts which could be verified was not the smallest good, for she wouldn't so much as touch any publication connected with secularism.”

“None are so blind as those who will not see,” said Tom. “They will go on in this way till some great national crisis, some crash which they can't ignore, wakes them up from their comfortable state. 'It can't be true,' is no doubt a capital narcotic.”

“Father is at home, I suppose? How do you think he is?”

“Oh, very well, but fearfully busy. The 'Miracles' trial will probably come on in November.”

Erica sighed. There was a silence. She looked out rather sadly at the familiar Oxford Street shops.

“You have not come back approving of the Blasphemy Laws, I hope?” said Tom, misinterpreting her sigh.

Her eyes flashed.

“Of course not!” she said, emphatically.

“Mr. Osmond has, as usual, been getting into hot water for speaking a word on the chieftain's behalf.”

“Did he speak? I am glad of that,” said Erica, brightening. “I expect Mr. Pogson's conduct will stir up a good many liberal Christians into showing their disapproval of bigotry and injustice. Ah! Here is the dear old square! The statue looks ten degrees moldier than when I left!”

In fact everything looked, as Erica expressed it, “moldier!” “Persecution Alley,” the lodging house, the very chairs and tables seemed to obtrude their shabbiness upon her. Not that she cared in the least; for, however shabby, it was home the home that she had longed for again and again in the luxury and ease of Greyshot.

Raeburn looked up from a huge law book as she opened the door of his study.

“Why, little son Eric!” he exclaimed. “You came so quietly that I never heard you. Glad to have you home again, my child! The room looks as if it needed you, doesn't it?”

Erica laughed for the study was indeed in a state of chaos. Books were stacked up on the floor, on the mantel piece, on the chairs, on the very steps of the book ladder. The writing table was a sea of papers, periodicals, proofs, and manuscripts, upon which there floated with much difficulty Raeburn's writing desk and the book he was reading, some slight depression in the surrounding mass of papers showing where his elbows had been.

“About equal to Teufelsdroch's room, isn't it?” he said, smiling. “Everything united in a common element of dust.' But, really, after the first terrible day of your absence, when I wasted at least an hour in hunting for things which the tidy domestic had carefully hidden, I could stand it no longer, and gave orders that no one was to bring brush or duster or spirit of tidiness within the place.”

“We really must try to get you a larger room,” said Erica, looking round. “How little and poky everything looks.”

“Has Greyshot made you discontented?”

“Only for you,” she replied, laughing. “I was thinking of Mr. Fane-Smith's great study; it seems such a pity that five foot three, with few books and nothing to do, should have all that space, and six foot four, with much work and many books, be cramped up in this little room.”

“What would you say to a move?”

“It will be such an expensive year, and there's that dreadful Mr. Pogson always in the background.”

“But if a house were given to us? Where's Tom? I've a letter here which concerns you both. Do either of you remember anything about an old Mr. Woodward who lived at 16 Guilford Square?”

“Why, yes! Don't you remember, Tom? The old gentleman whose greenhouse we smashed.”

“Rather!” said Tom. “I've the marks of the beastly thing now.”

“What was it? Let me hear the story,” said Raeburn, leaning back in his chair with a look of amusement flickering about his rather stern face.

“Why, father, it was years ago; you were on your first tour in America, I must have been about twelve, and Tom fourteen. We had only just settled in here, you know; and one unlucky Saturday we were playing in the garden at 'King of the Castle.'”

“What's that?” asked Raeburn.

“Why, Tom was king, and I was the Republican Army; and Tom was standing on the top of the wall trying to push me down. He had to sing:

“'I'm the king of the castle! Get down, you dirty rascal!'

And somehow I don't know how it was instead of climbing up, I pushed him backward by mistake, and he went down with an awful crash into the next garden. We knew it was the garden belonging to No. 16 quite a large one it is for the hospital hasn't any. And when at last I managed to scramble on to the wall, there was Tom, head downward, with his feet sticking up through the roof of a greenhouse, and the rest of him all among the flower pots.”

Raeburn laughed heartily.

“There was a brute of a cactus jammed against my face, too,” said Tom. “How I ever got out alive was a marvel!”

“Well, what happened?” asked Raeburn.

“Why, we went round to tell the No. 16 people. Tom waited outside, because he was so frightfully cut about, and I went in and saw an old, old man a sort of Methusaleh who would ask my name, and whether I had anything to do with you.”

“What did you say to him?”

“I can't remember except that I asked him to let us pay for the glass by installments, and tried to assure him that secularists were not in the habit of smashing other people's property. He was a very jolly old man, and of course he wouldn't let us pay for the glass though he frightened me dreadfully by muttering that he shouldn't wonder if the glass and the honesty combined cost him a pretty penny.”

“Did you ever see him again?”

“Not to speak to, but we always nodded to each other when we passed in the square. I've not seen him for ages. I thought he must be dead.”

“He is dead,” said Raeburn; “and he has left you three hundred pounds, and he has left me his furnished house, with the sole proviso that I live in it.”

“What a brick!” cried Tom and Erica, in a breath. “Now fancy, if we hadn't played at 'King of the Castle' that day!”

“And if Erica had not been such a zealous little Republican?” said Raeburn, smiling.

“Why, father, the very greenhouse will belong to you; and such a nice piece of garden! Oh, when can we go and see it, and choose a nice room for your study?”

“I will see Mr. Woodward's executor tomorrow morning,” said Raeburn. “The sooner we move in the better for there are rocks ahead.”

“The 'we' refers only to you and Erica,” said Aunt Jean, who had joined them. “Tom and I shall of course stay on here.”

“Oh, no, auntie!” cried Erica in such genuine dismay that Aunt Jean was touched.

“I don't want you to feel at all bound to have us,” she said. “Now that the worst of the poverty is over, there is no necessity for clubbing together.”

“And after you have shared all the discomforts with us, you think we should go off in such a dog-in-the-mangerish way as that!” cried Erica. “Besides, it really was chiefly owing to Tom, who was the one to get hurt into the bargain. If you won't come, I shall—” she paused to think of a threat terrible enough, “I shall think again about living with the Fane-Smiths.”

This led the conversation back to Greyshot, and they lingered so long round the fire talking that Raeburn was for once unpunctual, and kept an audience at least ten minutes waiting for him.

No. 16 Guilford Square proved to be much better inside than a casual passer in the street would have imagined. Outside, it was certainly a grim-looking house, but within it was roomy and comfortable. The lower rooms were wainscoted in a sort of yellowish-brown color, the upper wainscoted in olive-green. There was no such thing as a wall paper in the whole house, and indeed it was hard to imagine, when once inside it, that you were in nineteenth-century London at all.

Raeburn, going over it with Erica the following evening, was a little amused to think of himself domiciled in such an old-world house. Mr. Woodward's housekeeper, who was still taking care of the place, assured them that one of the leaden pipes outside bore the date of the seventeenth century, though the two last figures were so illegible that they might very possibly have stood for 1699.

Erica was delighted with it all, and went on private voyages of discovery, while her father talked to the housekeeper, taking stock of the furniture, imagining how she would rearrange the rooms, and planning many purchases to be made with her three hundred pounds. She was singing to herself for very lightness of heart when her father called her from below. She rand down again, checking her inclination to sing as she remembered the old housekeeper, who had but recently lost her master.

“I've rather set my affections on this room,” said Raeburn, leading her into what had formerly been the dining room.

“The very place where I came in fear and trembling to make my confession,” said Erica, laughing. “This would make a capital study.”

“Yes, the good woman has gone to fetch an inch tape; I want to measure for the book shelves. How many of my books could I comfortably house in here, do you think?”

“A good many. The room is high, you see; and those two long, unbroken walls would take several hundred. Ah! Here is the measuring tape. Now we can calculate.”

They were hard at work measuring when the door bell rang, and Tom's voice was heard in the passage, asking for Raeburn.

“This way, Tom!” called Erica. “Come and help us!”

But a laughing reference to the day of their childish disaster died on her lips when she caught sight of him for she knew that something was wrong. Accustomed all her life to live in the region of storms, she had learned to a nicety the tokens of rough weather.

“Hazeldine wishes to speak to you,” said Tom, turning to Raeburn. “I brought him round here to save time.”

“Oh! All right,” said Raeburn, too much absorbed in planning the arrangement of his treasures to notice the unusual graveness of Tom's face. “Ask him in here. Good evening, Hazeldine. You are the first to see us in our new quarters.”

Hazeldine bore traces of having lived from his childhood a hard but sedentary life. He was under-sized and narrow chested. But the face was a very striking one, the forehead finely developed, the features clearly cut, and the bright, dark eyes looking out on the world with an almost defiant honesty, a clearness bordering on hardness.

Raeburn, entirely putting aside for the time his own affairs, and giving to his visitor his whole and undivided attention, saw in an instant that the man was in trouble.

“Out of work again?” he asked. “Anything gone wrong?”

“No sir,” replied Hazeldine; “but I came round to ask if you'd seen that circular letter. 'Twas sent me this morning by a mate of mine who's lately gone to Longstaff, and he says that this Pogson is sowing them broadcast among the hands right through all the workshops in the place, and in all England, too, for aught he knows. I wouldn't so much as touch the dirty thing, only I thought maybe you hadn't heard of it.”

Without a word, Raeburn held out his hand for the printed letter. Erica, standing at a little distance, watched the faces of the three men Tom, grave, yet somewhat flushed; Hazeldine, with a scornful glitter in his dark eyes; her father? Last of all she looked at him and looking, learned the full gravity of this new trouble. For, as he read, Raeburn grew white, with the marble whiteness which means that intense anger has interfered with the action of the heart. As he hastily perused the lines, his eyes seemed to flash fire; the hand which still held the measuring tape was clinched so tightly that the knuckle looked like polished ivory.

Erica could not ask what was the matter, but she came close to him. When he had finished reading, the first thing his eye fell upon was her face turned up to his with a mute appeal which, in spite of the anxiety in it, made her look almost like a child. He shrank back as she held out her hand for the letter; it was so foul a libel that it seemed intolerable to him that his own child should so much as read a line of it.

“What is it?” she asked at length, speaking with difficulty.

“A filthy libel circulated by that liar Pogson! A string of lies invented by his own evil brain! Why should I keep it from you? It is impossible! The poisonous thing is sown broadcast through the land. You are of age there read it, and see how vile a Christian can be!”

He was writhing under the insult, and was too furious to measure his words. It was only when he saw Erica's brave lip quiver that he felt with remorse that he had doubled her pain.

She had turned a little away from him, ostensibly to be nearer to the gas, but in reality that he might not see the crimson color which surged up into her face as she read. Mr. Pogson was as unscrupulous as fanatics invariably are. With a view of warning the public and inducing them to help him in crushing the false doctrine he abhorred, he had tried to stimulate them by publishing a sketch of Raeburn's personal character and life, drawn chiefly from his imagination, or from distorted and misquoted anecdotes which had for years been bandied about among his opponents, losing nothing in the process. Hatred of the man Luke Raeburn was his own great stimulus, and we are apt to judge others by ourselves. The publication of this letter really seemed to him likely to do great good, and the evil passions of hatred and bigotry had so inflamed his mind, that it was perfectly easy for him to persuade himself that the statements were true. Indeed, he only followed with the multitude to do evil in this instance, for not one in a thousand took the trouble to verify their facts, or even their quotations, when speaking of, or quoting Raeburn. The libel, to put it briefly, represented Raeburn as a man who had broken every one of the ten commandments.

Erica read steadily on, though every pulse in her beat at double time. It was long before she finished it, for a three-fold chorus was going on in her brain Mr. Pogson's libelous charges; the talk between her father and Hazeldine, which revealed all too plainly the harm already done to the cause of Christianity by this one unscrupulous man; and her own almost despairing cry to the Unseen: “Oh, Father! How is he ever to learn to know Thee, when such things as these are done in Thy name?”

That little sheet of paper had fallen among them like a thunderbolt.

“I have passed over a great deal,” Raeburn was saying when Erica looked up once more. “But I shall not pass over this! Pogson shall pay dearly for it! Many thanks, Hazeldine, for bringing me word; I shall take steps about it at once.”

He left the room quickly, and in another minute they heard the street door close behind him.

“That means an action for libel,” said Tom, knitting his brows. “And goodness only knows what fearful work and worry for the chieftain.”

“But good to the cause in the long run,” said Hazeldine. “And as for Mr. Raeburn, he only rises the higher the more they try to crush him. He's like the bird that rises out of its own ashes the phenix, don't they call it?”

Erica smiled a little at the comparison, but sadly.

“Don't judge Christianity by this one bad specimen,” she said, as she shook hands with Hazeldine.

“How do Christians judge us, Miss Erica?” he replied, sternly.

“Then be more just than you think they are as generous as you would have them be.”

“It's but a working-day world, miss, and I'm but a working-day man. I can't set up to be generous to them who treat a man as though he was the dirt in the street. And if you will excuse me mentioning it, miss, I could wish that this shameful treatment would show to you what a delusion it is you've taken up of late.”

“Mr. Pogson can hurt me very much, but not so fatally as that,” said Erica, as much to herself as to Hazeldine.

When he had gone she picked up the measure once more, and turned to Tom.

“Help me just to finish this, Tom,” she said. “We must try to move in as quickly as may be.”

Tom silently took the other end of the tape, and they set to work again; but all the enjoyment in the new house seemed quenched and destroyed by that blast of calumny. They knew only too well that this was but the beginning of troubles.

Raeburn, remembering his hasty speech, called Erica into the study the moment he heard her return. He was still very pale, and with a curiously rigid look about his face.

“I was right, you see, in my prophecy of rocks ahead,” he exclaimed, throwing down his pen. “You have come home to a rough time, Erica, and to an overharassed father.”

“The more harassed the father, the more reason that he should have a child to help him,” said Erica, sitting down on the arm of his chair, and putting back the masses of white hair which hung over his forehead.

“Oh, child!” he said, with a sigh, “if I can but keep a cool head and a broad heart through the years of trouble before us!”

“Years!” exclaimed Erica, dismayed.

“This affair may drag on almost indefinitely, and a personal strife is apt to be lowering.”

“Yes,” said Erica, musingly, “to be libeled does set one's back up dreadfully, and to be much praised humbles one to the very dust.”

“What will the Fane-Smiths say to this? Will they believe it of me?”

“I can't tell,” said Erica, hesitatingly.

“'He that's evil deemed is half hanged,'” said Raeburn bitterly. “Never was there a truer saying than that.”

“'Blaw the wind ne'er so fast, it will lown at the last'” quoted Erica, smiling. “Equally true, PADRE MIO.”

“Yes, dear,” he said quietly, “but not in my life time. You see if I let this pass, the lies will be circulated, and they'll say I can't contradict them. If I bring an action against the fellow, people will say I do it to flaunt my opinions in the face of the public. As your hero Livingstone once remarked, 'Isn't it interesting to get blamed for everything?' However, we must make the best of it. How about the new house? When can we settle in? I feel a longing for that study with its twenty-two feet o' length for pacing!”

“What are your engagements?” she asked, taking up a book from the table. “Eleventh, Newcastle; 12th, Nottingham; 13th and 14th, Plymouth. Let me see, that will bring you home on Monday, the 15th, and will

leave us three clear days to get things straight; that will do capitally."

"And you'll be sure to see that the books are carefully moved," said Raeburn. "I can't have the markers displaced."

Erica laughed. Her father had a habit of putting candle lighters in his books to mark places for references, and the appearance of the book shelves all bristling with them had long been a family joke, more especially as, if a candle lighter happened to be wanted for its proper purpose, there was never one to be found.

"I will pack them myself," she said.

CHAPTER XXXI. Brian as Avenger

A paleness took the poet's cheek;
"Must I drink here?" he seemed to seek
The lady's will with utterance meek.

"Ay, ay," she said, "it so must be,"
(And this time she spake cheerfully)
"Behooves thee know world's cruelty." E. B. Browning

The trial of Luke Raeburn, on the charge of having published a blasphemous libel in a pamphlet entitled "Bible Miracles," came on in the Court of Queen's Bench early in December. It excited a great deal of interest. Some people hoped that the revival of an almost obsolete law would really help to check the spread of heterodox views, and praised Mr. Pogson for his energy and religious zeal. These were chiefly well-meaning folks, not much given to the study of precedents. Some people of a more liberal turn read the pamphlet in question, and were surprised to see that matter quite as heterodox might be found in many high-class reviews which lay about on drawing room tables, the only difference being that the articles in the reviews were written in somewhat ambiguous language by fashionable agnostics, and that "Bible Miracles" was a plain, blunt, sixpenny tract, avowedly written for the people by the people's tribune.

This general interest and attention, once excited, gave rise to the following results: to an indiscriminate and wholesale condemnation of "that odious Raeburn who was always seeking notoriety;" to an immense demand for "Bible Miracles," which in three months reached its fiftieth thousand; and to a considerable crowd in Westminster Hall on the first day of the trial, to watch the entrance and exit of the celebrities.

Erica had been all day in the court. She had written her article for the "Daily Review: in pencil during the break for luncheon; but, as time wore on, the heated atmosphere of the place, which was crammed to suffocation, became intolerable to her. She grew whiter and whiter, began to hear the voices indistinctly, and to feel as if her arms did not belong to her. It would never do to faint in court, and vexed as she was to leave, she took the first opportunity of speaking to her father.

"I think I must go," she whispered, "I can't stand this heat."

"Come now, then," said Raeburn, "and I can see you out. This witness has nothing worth listening to. Take notes for me, Tom. I'll be back directly."

They had only just passed the door leading into Westminster Hall, however, when Tom sent a messenger hurrying after them. An important witness had that minute been called, and Raeburn, who was, as usual, conducting his own case, could not possibly miss the evidence.

"I can go alone," said Erica. "Don't stop."

But even in his haste, Raeburn, glancing at the crowd of curious faces, was thoughtful for his child.

"No," he said, hurriedly. "Wait a moment, and I'll send some one to you."

She would have been wiser if she had followed him back into the court; but, having once escaped from the intolerable atmosphere, she was not at all inclined to return to it. She waited where he had left her, just within Westminster Hall, at the top of the steps leading from the entrance to the court. The grandeur of the place, its magnificent proportions, terminating in the great, upward sweep of steps, and the mellow stained window, struck her more than ever after coming from the crowded and inconvenient little court within. The vaulted roof, with its quaintly carved angels, was for the most part dim and shadowy, but here and there a ray of sunshine, slanting in through the clerestory windows, changed the sombre tones to a golden splendor. Erica, very susceptible to all high influences, was more conscious of the ennobling influence of light, and space, and beauty than of the curious eyes which were watching her from below. But all at once her attention was drawn to a group of men who stood near her, and her thoughts were suddenly brought back to the hard, every-day world, from which for a brief moment she had escaped. With a quick, apprehensive glance, she noted that among them was a certain Sir Algernon Wyte, a man who never lost an opportunity of insulting her father.

"Did you see the fellow?" said one of the group. "He came to the door just now."

"And left his fair daughter to be a spectacle to men and angels?" said Sir Algernon.

Then followed words so monstrous, so intolerable, that Erica, accustomed as she was to discourtesies, broke down altogether. It was so heartless, so cruelly false, and she was so perfectly defenseless! A wave of burning color swept over her face. If she could but have gone away have hidden herself from those cruel eyes. But her knees trembled so fearfully that, had she tried to move, she must have fallen. Sick and giddy, the flights of steps looked to her like a precipice. She could only lean for support against the gray-stone moldings of the door way, while tears, which for once she could not restrain, rushed to her eyes. Oh! If Tom or the professor, or some one would but come to her! Such moments as those are not measured by earthly time; the misery seemed to her agelong though it was in reality brief enough for Brian, coming into Westminster Hall, had actually heard Sir Algernon's shameful slander, and pushing his way through the

crowd, was beside her almost immediately.

The sight of his face checked her tears. It positively frightened her by its restrained yet intense passion.

“Miss Raeburn,” he said, in a clear, distinct voice, plainly heard by the group below, “this is not a fit place for you. Let me take you home.”

He spoke much more formally than was his wont, yet in his actions he used a sort of authority, drawing her hand within his arm, leading her rapidly through the crowd, which opened before them. For that one bitter-sweet moment she belonged to him. He was her sole, and therefore her rightful, protector. A minute more, and they stood in Palace Yard. He hastily called a hansom.

In the pause she looked up at him, and would have spoken her thanks, but something in his manner checked her. He had treated her so exactly as if she belonged to him, that, to thank him seemed almost as absurd as it would have done to thank her father. Then a sudden fear made her say instead:

“Are you coming home?”

“I will come to see that you are safely back presently,” he said, in a voice unlike his own. “But I must see that man first.”

“No, no,” she said, beginning to tremble again. “Don't go back. Please, please don't go!”

“I must,” he said, putting her into the hansom. Then, speaking very gently. “Don't be afraid; I will be with you almost directly.”

He closed the doors, gave the address to the driver, and turned away.

Erica was conscious of a vague relief as the fresh winter wind blew upon her. She shut her eyes, that she might not see the passers-by, only longing to get away right away, somewhere beyond the reach of staring eyes and cruel tongues. One evening years ago, she remembered coming out of St. James's Hall with Tom, and having heard a woman in Regent Street insulted in precisely the same language that had been used to her today. She remembered how the shrill, passionate cry had rung down the street: “How dare you insult me!” And remembered, too, how she had wondered whether perfect innocence would have been able to give that retort. She knew now that her surmise had been correct. The insult had struck her dumb for the time. Even now, as the words returned to her with a pain intolerable, her tears rained down. It seemed to her that for once she could no more help crying than she could have helped bleeding when cut.

Then once more her thoughts returned to Brian with a warmth of gratitude which in itself relieved her. He was a man worth knowing, a friend worth having. Yet how awful his face had looked as he came toward her. Only once in her whole life had she seen such a look on a man's face. She had seen it in her childhood on her father's face, when he had first heard of a shameful libel which affected those nearest and dearest to him. She had been far too young to understand the meaning of it, but she well remembered that silent, consuming wrath; she remembered running away by herself with the sort of half-fearful delight of a child's new discovery “Now I know how men look when they KILL!”

All at once, in the light of that old recollection, the truth dashed upon her. She smiled through her tears, a soft glow stole over her face, a warmth found its way to her aching heart. For at last the love of seven years had found its way to her.

She felt all in a glad tumult as that perception came to her. It had, in truth, been an afternoon of revelations. She had never until now in the least understood Brian's character, never in the least appreciated him. And as to dreaming that his friendship had been love from the very first, it had never occurred to her.

The revelation did not bring her unalloyed happiness for there came a sharp pang as she recollected what he had gone back to do. What if he should get into trouble on her behalf? What if he should be hurt? Accustomed always to fear for her father actual physical injury, her thoughts at once flew to the same danger for Brian. But, however sick with anxiety, she was obliged, on reaching home, to try and copy out her article, which must be in type and upon thousands of breakfast tables by the next morning whether her heart ached or not, whether her life were rough or smooth.

In the meantime, Brian, having watched her cab drive off, turned back into Westminster Hall. He could see nothing but the one vision which filled his brain the face of the girl he loved, a lovely, pure face suffused with tears. He could hear nothing but that intolerable slander which filled his heart with a burning, raging indignation. Straight as an arrow and as if by instinct, he made his way to the place where Sir Algernon and three or four companions were pacing to and fro. He confronted them, bringing their walk to an enforced pause.

“I am here to demand an apology for the words you spoke just now about Miss Raeburn,” he said, speaking in a voice which was none the less impressive because it trembled slightly as with a wrath restrained only by a great effort.

Sir Algernon, a florid, light-haired man of about thirty, coolly stared at him for a moment.

“Who may you be, sir, who take up the cudgels so warmly in Miss Raeburn's defense?”

“A man who will not hear a defenseless girl insulted,” said Brian, his voice rising. “Apologize!”

“Defenseless girl!” repeated the other in a tone so insufferable that Brian's passion leaped up like wild fire.

“You vile blackguard!” he cried, “what you said was an infernal lie, and if you don't retract it this moment, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life.”

Sir Algernon laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“'Pon my life!” he exclaimed, turning to one of his companions, “if I'd know that Miss Raeburn—”

But the sentence was never ended for, with a look of fury, Brian sprung at him, seized him by the collar of his coat, and holding him like a vise with one hand, with the other brought down his cane upon the slanderer's shoulders with such energy that the wretch writhed beneath it.

The on-lookers, being gentlemen and fully aware that Sir Algernon deserved all he was getting, stood by, not offering to interfere, perhaps in their hearts rather sympathizing with the stranger whose righteous indignation had about it a manliness that appealed to them. Presently Sir Algernon ceased to kick, his

struggles grew fainter. Brian let his right arm pause then, and with his left flung his foe into the corner as if he had been a mere chattel.

“There!” he exclaimed, “summons me for that when you please.” And, handing his card to one of Sir Algernon's companions, he strode out of the hall.

By the time he reached Guilford Square he was almost himself again, a little paler than usual but outwardly quite calm. He went at once to No. 16. The Raeburns had now been settled in their new quarters for some weeks, and the house was familiar enough to him; he went up to the drawing room or, as it was usually called, the green room. The gas was not lighted, but a little reading lamp stood upon a table in one of the windows, and the fire light made the paneled walls shine here and there though the corners and recesses were all in dusky shadow. Erica had made this the most home-like room in the house; it had the most beguiling easy chairs, it had all Mr. Woodward's best pictures, it had fascinating little tables, and a tempting set of books. There was something in the sight of the familiar room which made Brian's wrath flame up once more. Erica's guileless life seemed to rise before him the years of patient study, the beautiful filial love, the pathetic endeavor to restrain her child-like impatience of conventionalities lest scandalmongers should have even a shadow of excuse for slandering Luke Raeburn's daughter. The brutality of the insult struck him more than ever. Erica, glancing up from her writing table, saw that his face again bore that look of intolerable pain which had so greatly startled her in Westminster Hall.

She had more than half dreaded his arrival, had been wondering how they should meet after the strange revelation of the afternoon, had been thinking of the most trite and commonplace remark with which she might greet him. But when it actually came to the point, she could not say a word, only looked up at him with eyes full of anxious questioning.

“It is all right,” he said, answering the mute question, a great joy thrilling him as he saw that she had been anxious about him. “You should not have been afraid.”

“I couldn't help it,” she said, coloring, “he is such a hateful man! A man who might do anything. Tell me what happened.”

“I gave him a thrashing which he'll not soon forget,” said Brian. “But don't let us speak of him any more.”

“Perhaps he'll summons you!” said Erica.

“He won't dare to. He knows that he deserved it. What are you writing? You ought to be resting.”

“Only copying out my article. The boy will be here before long.”

“I am your doctor,” he said, feeling her pulse, and again assuming his authoritative manner; “I shall order you to rest on your couch at once. I will copy this for you. What is it on?”

“Cremation,” said Erica, smiling a little. “A nice funereal subject for a dreary day. Generally, if I'm in wild spirits, Mr. Bircham sends me the very gloomiest subject to write on, and if I'm particularly blue, he asks for a bright, lively article.”

“Oh! He tells you what to write on?”

“Yes, did you think I had the luxury of choosing for myself? Every day, about eleven o'clock a small boy brings me my fate on a slip of paper. Let me dictate this to you. I'm sure you can't read that penciled scribble.”

“Yes, I can,” said Brian. “You go and rest.”

She obeyed him, thankful enough to have a moment's pause in which to think out the questions that came crowding into her mind. She hardly dared to think what Brian might be to her, for just now she needed him so sorely as friend and adviser, that to admit that other perception, which made her feel shy and constrained with him, would have left her still in her isolation. After all, he was a seven years' friend, no mere acquaintance, but an actual friend to whom she was her unreserved and perfectly natural self.

“Brian,” she said presently when he had finished her copying, “you don't think I'm bound to tell my father about this afternoon, do you?”

A burning, painful blush, the sort of blush that she never ought to have known, never could have known but for that shameful slander, spread over her face and neck as she spoke.

“Perhaps not,” said Brian, “since the man has been properly punished.”

“I think I hope it need never get round to him in any other way,” said Erica. “He would be so fearfully angry, and just now scarcely a day passes without bringing him some fresh worry.”

“When will the Pogson affair come on?”

“Oh! I don't know. Not just yet, I'm afraid. Things in the legal world always move at the rate of a fly in a glue pot.”

“What sort of man is Mr. Pogson?”

“He was in court today, a little, sleek, narrow-headed man with cold, gray eyes. I have been trying to put myself in his place, and realize the view he takes of things; but it is very, very hard. You don't know what it is to live in this house and see the awful harm his intolerance is bringing about.”

“In what way did you specially mean?”

“Oh! In a thousand ways. It is bringing Christianity into discredit, it is making them more bitter against it, and who can wonder. It is bringing hundreds of men to atheism, it is enormously increasing the demand for all my father's books, and already even in these few months it has doubled the sale of the 'Idol-Breakers.' In old times that would have been my consolation. Oh! It is heart-breaking to see how religious people injure their own cause. Surely they might have learned by this time that punishment for opinion is never right, that it brings only bitterness, and misery, and more error! How is one to believe that this is right that God means all this bigotry and injustice to go on producing evil?”

“Surely it will teach the sharp lesson that all pain teaches,” said Brian. “We Christians have broken His order, have lost the true idea of brotherly love, and from this arises pain and evil, which at last, when it touches our own selfish natures, will rouse us, wake us up sharply, drive us back of necessity to the true

Christ-following. Then persecution and injustice will die. But we are so terribly asleep that the evil must grow desperate before we become conscious of it. It seems to me that bigotry has at least one mortal foe, though. You are always here; you must show them by your life what the Father is THAT is being a Christian!”

“I know,” said Erica, a look of almost passionate longing dawning in her eyes. “Oh! What a thing it is to be crammed full of faults that hinder one from serving! And all these worries do try one's temper fearfully. If they had but a Donovan to live with them now! But, as for me, I can't do much, except love them.”

Brian loved her too truly to speak words of praise and commendation at such a time.

“Is not the love the crux of the whole?” he said quietly.

“I suppose it is,” said Erica, pushing back her hair from her forehead in the way she always did when anything perplexed her. “But just at present my life is a sort of fugue on Browning's line

'How very hard it is to be a Christian?'

Sometimes I can't help laughing to think that there was a time when I thought the teaching of Christ unpractical! Do you mind ringing the bell for me; the others will be in directly, and will be glad of tea after that headachy place.”

“Is there nothing else I can do for you?” asked Brian.

“Yes, one thing more help me to remember the levers of the second order. It's my physiology class tonight, and I feel, as Tom would express it, like a 'boiled owl.'”

“Let me take the class for you.”

“Oh, no, thank you,” she replied. “I wouldn't miss it for the world.”

It was not till Brian had left that Erica, taking up the article on cremation, was struck by some resemblance in the handwriting. She must have seen Brian's writing before, but only this afternoon did she make that fresh discovery. Crossing the room she took from one of the book shelves a dark blue morocco volume, and compared the writing on the fly leaf with her MS.

“From another admirer of 'Hiawatha.'” There could be no doubt that Brian had written that. Had he cared for her so long? Had he indeed loved her all these years? She was interrupted by the maid bringing in the tea.

“Mr. Bircham's boy is here, miss, and if you please, can cook speak to you a minute?”

Erica put down the Longfellow and rolled up “Cremation.”

“I'm sure she's going to give warning!” she thought to herself. “What a day to choose for it! That's what I call an anti-climax.”

Her forebodings proved all too true. In a minute more in walked the cook, with the sort of conscious dignity of bearing which means “I am no longer in your service.”

“If you please, miss, I wish to leave this day month.”

“I shall be sorry to lose you,” said Erica; “what are your reasons for leaving?”

“I've not been used, miss, to families as is in the law courts. I've been used to the best West End private families.”

“I don't see how it can affect you,” said Erica, feeling, in spite of her annoyance, much inclined to laugh.

“Indeed, miss, and it do. There's not a tradesman's boy but has his joke or his word about Mr. Raeburn,” said the cook in an injured voice. “And last Sunday when I went to the minister to show my lines, he said a member ought to be ashamed to take service with a hatheist and that I was in an 'ouse of 'ell. Those was his very words, miss, an 'ouse of 'ell, he said.”

“Then it was exceedingly impertinent of him,” said Erica, “for he knew nothing whatever about it.”

After that there was nothing for it but to accept the resignation, and to begin once more the weary search for that rara avis, “a good plain cook.”

Her interview had only just ended when she heard the front door open. She listened intently, but apparently it was only Tom; he came upstairs singing a refrain with which just then she quite agreed:

“LAW, law Rhymes very well with jaw,
If you're fond of litigation,
And sweet procrastination,
Latin and botheration,
I advise you to go to law.”

“Halloo!” he exclaimed. “So you did get home all right? I like your way of acting Casabianca! The chieftain sent me tearing out after you, and when I got there, you had vanished!”

“Brian came up just then,” said Erica, “and I thought it better not to wait. Oh, here comes father.”

Raeburn entered as she spoke. No one who saw him would have guessed that he was an overworked, overworried man, for his face was a singularly peaceful one, serene with the serenity of a strong nature convinced of its own integrity.

“Got some tea for us, Eric?” he asked, throwing himself back in a chair beside the fire.

Some shade of trouble in her face, invisible to any eye but that of a parent, made him watch her intently, while a new hope which made his heart beat more quickly sprang up within him. Christians had not shown up well that day; prosecuting and persecuting Christians are the most repulsive beings on earth! Did she begin to feel a flaw in the system she had professed belief in? Might she by this injustice come to realize that she had unconsciously cheated herself into a belief? If such things might win her back to him, might bridge over that miserable gulf between them, then welcome any trouble, any persecution, welcome even ruin itself.

But had he been able to see into Erica's heart, he would have learned that the grief which had left its traces on her face was the grief of knowing that such days as these strengthened and confirmed him in his atheism. Erica was indeed ever confronted with one of the most baffling of all baffling mysteries. How was it that a

man of such grand capacities, a man with so many noble qualities, yet remained in the darkness? One day she put that question sadly enough to Charles Osmond.

“Not darkness, child, none of your honest secularists who live up to their creed are in darkness,” he replied. “However mistakenly, they do try to promote what they consider the general good. Were you in such absolute blackness before last summer?”

“There was the love of Humanity,” said Erica musingly.

“Yes, and what is that but a ray of the light of life promised to all who, to any extent, follow Christ? It is only the absolutely selfish who are in the black shadow. The honest atheist is in the penumbra, and in his twilight sees a little bit of the true sun, though he calls it Humanity instead of Christ.”

“Oh, if the shadows would but go!” exclaimed Erica.

“Would!” he said, laughing gently. “Why, child, they will, they must!”

“But now, I mean! 'Here down,' as Mazzini would have said.”

“You were ever an impatient little mortal.”

“How can one help being impatient for this,” she said with a quick sigh.

“That is what I used to say myself seven years ago over you,” he said smiling. “But I learned that the Father knew best, and that if we would work with Him we must wait with Him too. You musn't waste your strength in impatience, child, you need every bit of it for the life before you.”

But patience did not come by nature to a Raeburn, and Erica did not gain it in a day even by grace.

CHAPTER XXXII. Fiesole

And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face. E. B. Browning.

Much has been said and written about the monotony of unalloyed pleasure, and the necessity of shadows and dark places in life as well as in pictured landscape. And certainly there can be but few in this world of stern realities who would dispute the fact that pleasure is doubled by its contrast with preceding pain. Perhaps it was the vividness of this contrast that made Raeburn and Erica enjoy, with a perfect rapture of enjoyment, a beautiful view and a beautiful spring day in Italy. Behind them lay a very sombre past; they had escaped for a brief moment from the atmosphere of strife, from the world of controversy, from the scorching breath of slander, from the baleful influences of persecution and injustice. Before them lay the fairest of all the cities of Italy. They were sitting in the Boboli gardens, and from wooded heights looked down upon that loveliest of Italian valleys.

The silver Arno wound its way between the green encircling hills; then between the old houses of Florence, its waters spanned now by a light suspension bridge token of modern times now by old brown arches strengthened and restored, now by the most venerable looking of all the bridges, the Ponte Vecchio, with its double row of little shops. Into the cloudless blue sky rose the pinnacles of Santa Croce, the domes of San Spirito, of the Baptistery, of the Cathedral; sharply defined in the clear atmosphere were the airy, light Campanile of Giotto, the more slender brown tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, the spire of Santa Maria Novella. Northward beyond the city rose the heights of Fiesole, and to the east the green hills dotted all over with white houses, swept away into the unseen distance.

Raeburn had been selected as the English delegate to attend a certain political gathering held that year at Florence. He had at first hesitated to accept the post for his work at home had enormously increased; but the long months of wearing anxiety had so told upon him that his friends had at length persuaded him to go, fully aware that the only chance of inducing him to take any rest was to get him out of the region of work.

The “Miracles” trial was at length over, but Mr. Pogson had not obtained the desire of his heart, namely, the imprisonment and fining of Luke Raeburn. The only results of the trial were the extensive advertisement of the pamphlet in question, a great increase of bitterness on each side, and a great waste of money. Erica's sole consolation lay in the fact that a few of the more liberal thinkers were beginning to see the evil and to agitate for a repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. As for the action for libel, there was no chance of its coming on before June, and in the meantime Mr. Pogson's letter was obtaining a wider circulation, and perhaps, on the whole, Luke Raeburn was just at that time the best-abused man in all England.

There had been a long silence between the father and daughter who understood each other far too well to need many words at such a time; but at length a sudden ejaculation from Raeburn made Erica turn her eye from Fiesole to the shady walk in the garden down which he was looking.

“Does any Italian walk at such a pace?” he exclaimed. “That must surely be Brian Osmond or his double in the shape of an English tourist.”

“Oh, impossible!” said Erica, coloring a little and looking intently at the pedestrian who was still at some little distance.

“But it is,” said Raeburn “height, way of walking, everything! My dear Eric, don't tell me I can't recognize the man who saved my life. I should know him a mile off!”

“What can have brought him here?” said Erica, a certain joyous tumult in her heart checked by the dread of evil tidings a dread which was but natural to one who had lived her life.

“Come and meet him,” said Raeburn. “Ha, Brian, I recognized you ever so far off, and couldn't persuade this child of your identity.”

Brian, a little flushed with quick walking, looked into Erica's face searchingly, and was satisfied with what he read there satisfied with the soft glow of color that came to her cheeks, and with the bright look of happiness that came into her eyes which, as a rule, were grave, and when in repose even sad in expression.

“I owe this to a most considerate patient who thought fit to be taken ill at Genoa and to telegraph for me,” he said in explanation; “and being in Italy, I thought I might as well take my yearly outing now.”

“Capital idea!” said Raeburn. “You are the very man we wanted. What with the meetings and interviews, I don't get much peace even here, and Erica is much in need of an escort sometimes. How did you find us?”

“They told me at the hotel that I should probably find you here, though, if I had known what a wilderness of a place it is I should have been rather hopeless.”

Erica left most of the talking to her father; just then she felt no wish to put a single thought into words. She wanted only to enjoy the blissful dream-like happiness which was so new, and rare, and wonderful that it brought with it the feeling that any very definite thought or word must bring it to an end. Perfect harmony with your surroundings. Yes, that was indeed a very true definition of happiness; and of late the surroundings had been so grim and stormy. She seemed to tread upon air as they roamed about the lovely walks. The long, green vistas were to her a veritable paradise. Her father looked so happy, too, and had so entirely shaken off his cares, and Brian, who was usually rather silent, seemed today a perfect fountain of talk.

Since that December day in Westminster Hall a great change had come over Erica. Not a soul besides Brian and herself knew anything about the scene with Sir Algernon Wyte. Not a word had passed between them since upon the subject; but perhaps because of the silence, that day was all the more in the thoughts of each. The revelation of Brian's love revealed also to Erica much in his character which had hitherto perplexed her simply because she had not seen it in the true light. There had always been about him a wistfulness bordering on sadness which had sometimes almost angered her. For so little do even intimate friends know each other, that lives, which seem all peaceful and full of everything calculated to bring happiness, are often the ones which are preyed upon by some grievous trouble or anxiety unknown to any outsider. If he had indeed loved her all those seven years he must have suffered fearfully. What the suffering had been Erica could, from her present position, understand well enough. The thought of it touched her inexpressibly, seemed to her, as indeed it was, the shadow of that Divine Love which had loved her eternally had waited for her through long years had served her and shielded her, though she never recognized its existence till at length, in one flash of light, the revelation had come to her, and she had learned the glory of Love, the murky gloom of those past misunderstandings.

Those were wonderful days that they spent together at Florence, the sort of days that come but once in a life time; for the joy of dawn is quite distinct from the bright noon day or the calm evening, distinct, too, from that second and grander dawn which awaits us in the Unseen when the night of life is over. Together they wandered through the long corridors of the Uffizzi; together they returned again and again to the Tribune, or traversed that interminable passage across the river which leads to the Pitti Gallery, or roamed about among the old squares and palaces which are haunted by so many memories. And every day Brian meant to speak, but could not because the peace, and restfulness, and glamour of the present was so perfect, and perhaps because, unconsciously, he felt that these were “halcyon days.”

On Sunday he made up his mind that he certainly would speak before the day was over. He went with Erica to see the old monastery of San Marco before morning service at the English church. But, though they were alone together, he could not bring himself to speak there. They wandered from cell to cell, looking at those wonderful frescoes of the Crucifixion in each of which Fra Angelico seemed to gain some fresh thought, some new view of his inexhaustible subject. And Brian, watching Erica, thought how that old master would have delighted in the pure face and perfect coloring, in the short auburn hair which was in itself a halo, but could not somehow just then draw her thoughts away from the frescoes. Together they stood in the little cells occupied once by Savonarola; looked at the strange, stern face which Bastianini chiseled so effectively; stood by the old wooden desk where Savonarola had written and read, saying very little to one another, but each conscious that the silence was one of perfect understanding and sympathy. Then came the service in a hideous church, which yet seemed beautiful to them, with indifferent singing, which was somehow sweeter to them than the singing of a trained choir elsewhere.

But, on returning to the hotel, Brian found that his chances for that day were over for all the afternoon Erica had to receive a constant succession of visitors who, as she said, turned her father for the time being into the “British lion.” In the evening, too, when they walked in the Cascine, they were no longer alone. Raeburn went with then, and as they paced along the broad avenue with the Arno gleaming through the fresh green of the trees, talking of the discussions of the past week, he inadvertently touched the note of pain in an otherwise cloudless day.

“The work is practically over now,” he said. “But I think I must take a day or two to see a little of Florence. I must be at Salsburg to meet Hasenbalg by Wednesday week. Can you be ready to leave here on Wednesday, Eric?”

“Oh, yes, father,” she said without hesitation or comment but with something in her voice which told Brian that she, too, felt a pang of regret at the thought that their days in that city of golden dreams were so soon to be ended.

The Monday morning, however, proved so perfect a day that it dispelled the shadow that had fallen on them. Raeburn wished to go to Fiesole, and early in the morning Brian, having secured a carriage and settled the terms with the crafty-looking Italian driver, they set off together. The sunny streets looked sunnier than ever; the Tornabuoni was as usual lively and bustling; the flower market at the base of the Palazza Strozzi was gay with pinks and carnations and early roses. They drove out of the city, passed innumerable villas, out into the open country where the only blot upon the fair landscape was a funeral train, the coffin borne by those gruesome beings, the Brothers of the Misericordia, with their black robes and black face cloths pierced only with holes for the eyes.

“Is it necessary to make death so repulsive?” said Raeburn. “Our own black hearses are bad enough, but upon my word, I should be sorry to be carried to my grave by such grim beings!”

He took off his hat, however, as they passed, and that not merely out of deference to the custom of the country but because of the deep reverence with which he invariably regarded the dead a reverence which in his own country was marked by the involuntary softening of his voice when he alluded to the death of others, the token of a nature which, though strangely twisted, was in truth deeply reverential.

Then began the long ascent, the road, as usual, being lined with beggars who importunately followed the carriage; while, no sooner had they reached the village itself than they were besieged by at least a dozen women selling the straw baskets which are the specialty of Fiesole.

“Ecco, signor! Ecco signorina! Vary sheep! Vary sheep!” resounded on all sides, each vendor thrusting her wares forward so that progress was impossible.

“What a plague this is!” said Raeburn. “They'll never leave you in peace, Erica; they are too well used to the soft hearted signorina Inglese.”

“Well, then, I shall leave you to settle them,” said Erica, laughing, “and see if I can't sketch a little in the amphitheatre. They can't torment us there because there is an entrance fee.”

“All right, and I will try this bird's eye view of Florence,” said Raeburn, establishing himself upon the seat which stands on the verge of the hill looking southward. He was very fond of making pen-and-ink sketches, and by his determined, though perfectly courteous manner, he at last succeeded in dismissing the basket women.

Erica and Brian, in the meantime, walked down the steep little path which leads back to the village, on their way encountering a second procession of Brothers bearing a coffin. In a few minutes they had found their way to a quiet garden at the remote end of which, far from the houses of Fiesole and sheltered on all sides by the green Apennines, was an old Roman amphitheatre. Grass and flowers had sprung up now on the arena where in olden times had been fearful struggles between men and beasts. Wild roses and honeysuckle drooped over the gray old building, and in between the great blocks of stone which formed the tiers of seats for the spectators sprung the yellow celandine and the white star of Bethlehem.

Erica sat down upon one of the stony seats and began to sketch the outline of the hills and roughly to draw in the foreground the further side of the amphitheatre and broken column which lay in the middle.

“Would you mind fetching me some water?” she said to Brian.

There was a little trickling stream close by, half hidden by bramble bushes. Brian filled her glass and watched her brush as she washed in the sky.

“Is that too blue, do you think?” she asked, glancing up at him with one of her bright looks.

“Nothing could be too deep for such a sky as this,” he replied, half absently. Then, with a sudden change of tone, “Erica, do you remember the first day you spoke to me?”

“Under murky London skies very unlike these,” she said, laughing a little, but nervously. “You mean the day when our umbrellas collided!”

“You mustn't abuse the murky skies,” said Brian, smiling. “If the sun had been shining, the collision would never have occurred. Oh, Erica! What a life time it seems since that day in Gower Street! I little thought then that I should have to wait more than seven years to tell you of my love, or that at last I should tell you in a Roman amphitheatre under these blue skies. Erica, I think you have known it of late. Have you, my darling? Have you known how I loved you?”

“Yes,” she said, looking down at her sketch book with glowing cheeks.

“Oh! If you knew what a paradise of hope you opened to me that day last December and how different life has been ever since! Those were gray years, Erica, when I dared not even hope to gain your love. But lately, darling, I have hoped. Was I wrong?”

“No,” she said with a little quiver in her voice.

“You will love me?”

She looked up at him for a moment in silence, a glorious light in her eyes, her whole face radiant with joy.

“I do love you,” she said softly.

He drew nearer to her, held both her hands in his, waiting only for the promise which would make her indeed his own.

“Will you be my wife, darling?”

But the words had scarcely passed his lips when a look of anguish swept over Erica's face; she snatched away her hands.

“Oh! God help me!” she cried. “What have I done? I've been living in a dream! It's impossible, Brian! Impossible!”

A gray look came over Brian's face.

“How impossible?” he asked in a choked voice.

“I can't leave home,” she said, clasping her hands tightly together. “I never can leave my father.”

“I will wait,” said Brian, recovering his voice. “I will wait any time for you only give me hope.”

“I can't,” she sobbed. “I daren't!”

“But you have given it me!” he exclaimed. “You have said you loved me!”

“I do! I do!” she cried passionately. “But, oh, Brian! Have pity on me don't make me say it again I must not think of it I can never be your wife.”

Her words were broken with sobs which she could not restrain.

“My darling,” he said growing calm and strong again at the sight of her agitation, and once more possessing himself of her hand, “you have had a great many troubles lately, and I can quite understand that just now you could not leave your father. But I will wait till less troubled times; then surely you will come to me?”

“No,” she said quickly as if not daring to pause, “It will always be the same; there never will be quiet times

for us. I can't leave my father. It isn't as if he had other children I am the only one, and must stay."

"Is this then to be the end of it all?" cried Brian. "My darling, you can not be so cruel to me. It can not be the end there is no end to love and we know that we love each other. Erica, give me some future to look to some hope."

The terrible pain expressed in every line of his face wrung her heart.

"Oh, wait," she exclaimed. "Give me one moment to think."

She buried her face in her hands, shutting out the sunny Italian landscape, the very beauty of which seemed to weaken her powers of endurance. Truly she had been living lately in a golden dream, and the waking was anguish. Oh, if she had but realized before the meaning of it all, then she would have hidden her love so that he never would have guessed it. She would have been to him the Erica of a year ago, just a friend and nothing more. But now she must give him the worst of pain, perhaps ruin his whole life. If she might but give him some promise. What was the right? How were love and duty to be reconciled?

As she sat crouched up in her misery, fighting the hardest battle of her life, the bell in the campanile of the village church began to ring. It was twelve o'clock. All through the land, in remembrance of the hour when the true meaning of love and sacrifice was revealed to the human race, there swept now the music of church bells, bidding the people to pause in their work and pray. Many a peasant raised his thoughts for a moment from sordid cares or hard labor, and realized that there was an unseen world. And here in the Roman amphitheatre, where a conflict more painful than those physical conflicts of old time was going on, a soul prayed in agony for the wisdom to see the right and the strength to do it.

When at length Erica lifted her face she found that Brian was no longer beside her, he was pacing to and fro in the arena; waiting had grown unbearable to him. She went down to him, moving neither quickly nor hurriedly, but at the steady "right onward" pace which suited her whole aspect.

"Brian," she said in a low voice, "do you remember telling me that day that I must try to show them what the Father is? You must help me now, not hinder. You will help me just because you do indeed love me?"

"You will give me no promise even for the most distant future?"

"I can't," she replied, faltering a little as she saw him turn deadly white. "If there were any engagement between us, I should have to tell my father of it; and that would only make our trouble his and defeat my whole object. Oh, Brian, forgive me, and just leave me. I can have given you nothing but pain all these years. Don't let me spoil your whole life!"

His face caught something of the noble purpose which made hers shine in spite of the sadness.

"Darling," he said quickly, "I can thank God for you though you are never to be mine. God bless you, Erica."

There was a moment's pause; he still kept her hands in his.

"Tell your father I've gone for a walk over to those hills that I shall not be home till evening." He felt her hands tremble, and knew that he only tortured her by staying. "Will you kiss me once, Erica?" he said.

She lifted a pale steadfast face and quivering lips to his, and after that one long embrace they parted. When he turned away Erica stood quite still for a minute in the arena listening to his retreating footsteps. Her heart, which had throbbed painfully, seemed now only to echo his steps, to beat more faintly as they grew less audible. At last came silence, and then she crept up to the place where she had left her sketch book and paint box.

The whole world seemed sliding away aching desolation overwhelmed her. Brian's face with its passion and pain rose before her dry, burning eyes. Then darkness came, blotting out the sunshine; the little stream trickling into its stony basin seemed to grow into a roaring cataract, the waters to rush into her ears with a horrid gurgling; while the stones of the amphitheatre seemed to change into blocks of ice and to freeze her as she lay.

A few minutes later she gasped her way painfully back to life. All was very peaceful now; the water fell with its soft tinkling sound, there was a low hum of insects; beside her stony pillow grew some stars of Bethlehem, and in between their delicate white and green she could see the arena and the tiers of seats opposite, and out beyond the green encircling hills. Golden sunshine lighted up the dark pines and spirelike cypresses; in the distance there was an olive garden, its soft, gray-green foliage touched into silvery brightness.

The beauty of the scene, which in her struggle had seemed to weaken and unnerve her, stole now into her heart and comforted her; and all the time there rang in her ears the message that the bells had brought her "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross."

"Taking a siesta?" said a voice above her. She looked up and saw her father.

"I've rather a headache," she replied.

"Enough to give you one, my child, to lie there in the sun without an umbrella," he said, putting up his own to shelter her. "Such a May noonday in Italy might give you a sunstroke. What was your doctor thinking of to allow it?"

"Brian? Oh, he has gone over to those hills; we are not to wait for him, he wanted a walk."

"Quite right," said Raeburn. "I don't think he ought to waste his holiday in Italian cities, he wants fresh air and exercise after his London life. Where's your handkerchief?"

He took it to the little stream, put aside the overhanging bushes, dipped it in the water, and bringing it back laid it on her burning forehead.

"How you spoil me, PADRE MIO," she said with a little laugh that was sadder than tears; and as she spoke she slipped down to a lower step and rested her head on his knee, drawing down one of his strong hands to shade her eyes. He talked of his sketch, of his word-skirmish with the basket women, of the view from the amphitheatre; but she did not much hear what he said, she was looking at the hand that shaded her eyes. That strong hand which had toiled for her when she was a helpless baby, the hand to which she had clung when every out her support had been wrenched away by death, the hand which she had held in hers when she thought he was dying, and the children had sung of "Life's long day and death's dark night."

All at once she drew it down and pressed it to her lips with a child's loving reverence. Then she sat up with a sudden return of energy.

“There, now, let us go home,” she exclaimed. “My head aches a little still, but we won't let it spoil our last day but one in Florence. Didn't we talk of San Miniato for this afternoon?”

It was something of a relief to find, on returning, an invitation to dinner for that evening which Raeburn could not well refuse. Erica kept up bravely through the afternoon, but when she was once more alone her physical powers gave way. She was lying on her bed sick and faint and weary, and with the peculiarly desolate feeling which comes to most people when they are ill in a hotel with all the unheeding bustle going on around them. Then came a knock at her door.

“Entrate,” she said quickly, welcoming any fresh voice which would divert her mind from the weary longing for her mother. A sort of wild hope sprung up within her that some woman friend would be sent to her, that Gladys Farrant, or old Mrs. Osmond, or her secularist friend Mrs. MacNaughton, whom she loved best of all, would suddenly find themselves in Florence and come to her in her need.

There entered a tall, overworked waiter. He looked first at her, then at the note in his hand, spelling out the direction with a puzzled face.

“Mess Rabi Rabi Rabi Rabi an?” he asked hesitatingly.

“Grazie,” she replied, almost snatching it from him. The color rushed to her cheeks as she saw the writing was Brian's, and the instant the waiter had closed the door she tore open the envelope with trembling hands.

It was a last appeal, written after he had returned from wandering among the Apennines, worn out in body and shaken from the noble fortitude of the morning. The strong passionate words woke an answering thrill in Erica's heart. He asked her to think it all over once more, he had gone away too hastily. If she could change her mind, could see any possible hope for the future, would she write to him? If he heard nothing from her, he would understand what the silence meant. This was in brief the substance of the letter, but the words had a passionate, unrestrained intensity which showed they had been written by a man of strong nature overwrought by suffering and excitement.

He was here, in the very hotel. Might she not write to him? Might she not send him some sort of message write just a word of indefinite hope which would comfort and relieve herself as well as him? “If I do not hear from you, I shall understand what your silence means.” Ah! But would he understand? What had she said this morning to him? Scarcely anything the merest broken bits of sentences, the poorest, coldest confession of love.

Her writing case lay open on the table beside the bed with an unfinished letter to Aunt Jean, begun before they had started for Fiesole. She snatched up paper and pen, and trembling so much that she could scarcely support herself she wrote two brief lines.

“Darling, I love you, and always must love you, first and best.”

Then she lay back again exhausted, looking at the poor little weak words which would not contain a thousandth part of the love in heart. Yet, though the words were true, would they perhaps convey a wrong meaning to him? Ought she to send them? On the other hand would he indeed understand the silence the silence which seemed now intolerable to her? She folded the note and directed it, the tumult in her heart growing wilder as she did so. Once more there raged the battle which she had fought in the amphitheatre that morning, and she was not so strong now; she was weakened by physical pain, and to endure was far harder. It seemed to her that her whole life would be unbearable if she did not send him that message. And to send it was so fatally easy; she had merely to ring, and then in a few minutes the note would be in his hands.

It was a little narrow slip of a room; all her life long she could vividly recall it. The single bed pushed close to the wall, the writing table with its gay-patterned cloth, the hanging wardrobe with glass doors, the walls trellised with roses, and on the ceiling a painting of some white swans eternally swimming in an ultra-marine lake. The window, unshuttered, but veiled by muslin curtains, looked out upon the Arno; from her bed she could see the lights on the further bank. On the wall close beside her was a little round wooden projection. If it had been a rattlesnake she could not have gazed at it more fixedly. Then she looked at the printed card above, and the words written in French and English, German, and Italian, seemed to fall mechanically on her brain, though burning thoughts seethed there, too.

“Ring once for hot water, twice for the chamber maid, three times for the waiter.”

Merely to touch that ivory knob, and then by the lightest pressure of the finger tips a whole world of love and happiness and rest might open for her, and life would be changed forever.

Again and again she was on the point of yielding, but each time she resisted, and each resistance made her stronger. At length, with a fearful effort, she turned her face away and buried it in the pillow, clinging with all her might to the ironwork of the bed.

For at least an hour the most frightful hour of her life she did not dare to stir. At last when her hands were stiff and sore with that rigid grasping, when it seemed as if her heart had been wrenched out of her and had left nothing but an aching void, she sat up and tore both Brian's note and her reply into a thousand pieces; then, in a weary, lifeless way, made her preparations for the night.

But sleep was impossible. The struggle was over forever, but the pain was but just begun, and she was still a young girl with the best part of her life stretching out before her. She did not toss about restlessly, but lay very still, just enduring her misery, while all the every-day sounds came to her from without laughter in the next room from two talkative American girls, doors opening and shutting, boots thrown down, electric bells rung, presently her father's step and voice.

“Has Miss Raeburn been up long?”

“Sairtenlee, sair, yes,” replied the English-speaking waiter. “The signorina sleeps, doubtless.”

Then came a pause, and in another minute her father's door was closed and locked.

Noisy parties of men shouting out some chorus sung at one of the theatres passed along the Lung' Arno, and twanging mandolins wandered up and down in the moonlight. The sound of that harshest and most

jarring of all musical instruments was every after hateful to her. She could not hear one played without a shudder.

Slowly and wearily the night wore on. Sometimes she stole to the window, and looked out on the sleeping city, on the peaceful Arno which was bathed in silvery moonlight, and on the old, irregular houses, thinking what struggles and agonies this place had witnessed in past times, and realizing what an infinitesimal bit of the world's sufferings she was called to bear. Sometimes she lighted a candle and read, sometimes prayed, but for the most part just lay still, silently enduring, learning, though she did not think it, the true meaning of pain.

Somewhat later than usual she joined her father the next morning in the coffee room.

“Brian tells me he is off today,” was Raeburn's greeting. “It seems that he must see that patient at Genoa again, and he wants to get a clear fortnight in Switzerland.”

“Is it nor rather early for Switzerland?”

“I should have thought so, but he knows more about it than I do. He has written to try to persuade your friend, Mr. Farrant, to join him in the Whitsuntide recess.”

“Oh, I am glad of that,” said Erica, greatly relieved.

Directly after breakfast she went out with her father, going first of all to French's bank, where Raeburn had to change a circular note.

“It is upstairs,” he said as they reached the house. “Don't you trouble to come up; you'll have stairs enough presently at the Uffizzi.”

“Very well,” she replied, “I will wait for you here.”

She stood in the doorway looking out thoughtfully at the busy Tornabuoni and its gay shops; but in a minute a step she knew sounded on the staircase, and the color rushed to her cheeks.

“I have just said goodbye to your father,” said Brian. “I am leaving Florence this morning. You must forgive me for having written last night. I ought not to have done it, and I understood your silence.”

He spoke calmly, in the repressed voice of a man who holds “passion in a leash.” Erica was thankful to have the last sight of him thus calm and strong and self-restrained. It was a nobler side of love than that which had inspired his letter nobler because freer from thought of self.

“I am so glad you will have Donovan,” she said. “Goodbye.”

He took her hand in his, pressed it, and turned away without a word.

CHAPTER XXXIII. “Right Onward”

Therefore my Hope arose
From out her swound and gazed upon Thy face.
And, meeting there that soft subduing look
Which Peter's spirit shook
Sunk downward in a rapture to embrace
Thy pierced hands and feet with kisses close,
And prayed Thee to assist her evermore
To “reach the things before.” E. B. Browning

“I'm really thankful it is the last time I shall have to get this abominable paper money,” said Raeburn, coming down the stairs. “Just count these twos and fives for me, dear; fifteen of each there should be.”

At that moment Brian had just passed the tall, white column disappearing into the street which leads to the Borgo Ogni Santi. Erica turned to begin her new chapter of life heavily handicapped in the race for once more that deadly faintness crept over her, a numbing, stifling pressure, as if Pain in physical form had seized her heart in his cold clasp. But with all her strength she fought against it, forcing herself to count the hateful little bits of paper, and thankful that her father was too much taken up with the arrangement of his purse to notice her.

“I am glad we happened to meet Brian,” he remarked; “he goes by an earlier train that I thought. Now, little son Eric, where shall we go? We'll have a day of unmitigated pleasure and throw care to the winds. I'll even forswear Vieusseux; there won't be much news today.”

“Let us take the Pitti Palace first,” said Erica, knowing that the fresh air and the walk would be the only chance for her.

She walked very quickly with the feeling that, if she were still for a single moment, she should fall down. And, luckily, Raeburn thought her paleness accounted for by yesterday's headache and the wakeful night, and never suspected the true state of the case. On they went, past fascinating marble shops and jewelers' windows filled with Florentine mosaics, across the Ponte Vecchio, down a shady street, and into the rough-hewn, grim-looking palace. It was to Erica like a dream of pain, the surroundings were so lovely, the sunshine so perfect, and her own heart so sore.

But within that old palace she found the true cure for sore hearts. She remembered having looked with Brian at an “Ecce Home,” by Carlo Dolci and thought she would like to see it again. It was not a picture her father would have cared for, and she left him looking at Raphael's “Three Ages of Man,” and went by herself into the little room which is called the “Hall of Ulysses.” The picture was a small one and had what are considered the usual faults of the painter, but it was the first “Ecce Homo” that Erica had ever cared for; and, whatever the shortcomings of the execution, the ideal was a most beautiful one. The traces of physical pain were not brought into undue prominence, appearing not at all in the face, which was full of unutterable calm and dignity. The deep, brown eyes had the strange power which belongs to some pictures; they followed you

all over the room there was no escaping them. They were hauntingly sad eyes, eyes in which there lurked grief unspeakable; not the grief which attends bodily pain, but the grief which grieves for others the grief which grieves for humanity, for its thousand ills and ignorances, its doubts and denials, its sins and sufferings. There was no bitterness in it, no restlessness, no questioning. It was the grief of a noble strong man whose heart is torn by the thought of the sin and misery of his brothers, but who knows that the Father can, and will, turn the evil into the means of glorious gain.

As Erica looked, the true meaning of pain seemed to flash upon her. Dimly she had apprehended it in the days of her atheism, had clung to the hope that the pain of the few brought the gain of the many; but now the hope became certainty, the faith became open vision. For was it not all here, written in clearest characters, in the life of the Ideal Man? And is not what was true for him, true for us too? We talk much about “Christ our example,” and struggle painfully along the uphill road of the “Imitation of Christ,” meaning by that too often a vague endeavor to be “good,” to be patient, to be not entirely absorbed in the things which are seen. But when pain comes, when the immense misery and evil in the world are borne in upon us, we too often stumble, or fail utterly, just because we do not understand our sonship; because we forget that Christians must be sin-bearers like their Master, pain bearers like their Master; because we will let ourselves be blinded by the mystery of evil and the mystery of pain, instead of fixing our eyes as Christ did, on the joy that those mysteries are sure to bring. “Lo, I come to do Thy will.” And what is the will of even a good earthly father but the best possible for all his children?

Erica saw for the first time that no pain she had ever suffered had been a wasted thing, nor had it merely taught her personally some needful lesson; it had been rather her allotted service, her share of pain-bearing, sin-bearing, Christ-following; her opportunity of doing the “Will” not self-chosen, but given to her as one of the best of gifts by the Father Himself.

“Oh, what a little fool I've been!” she thought to herself with the strange pang of joy which comes when we make some discovery which sweetens the whole of life, and which seems so self-evident that we can but wonder and wonder at our dense stupidity in not seeing it sooner. “I've been grudging Brian what God sees he most wants! I've been groaning over the libels and injustices which seem to bring so much pain and evil when, after all, they will be, in the long run, the very things to show people the need of tolerance, and to establish freedom of speech.”

Even this pain of renunciation seemed to gain a new meaning for her though she could not in the least fathom it; even the unspeakable grief of feeling that her father was devoting much of his life to the propagation of error, lost its bitterness though it retained its depth. For with the true realization of Fatherhood and Sonship impatience and bitterness die, and in their place rises the peace which “passeth understanding.”

“We will have a day of unmitigated pleasure,” her father had said to her, and the words had at the time been like a sharp stab. But, after all, might not this pain, this unseen and dimly understood work for humanity, be in very truth the truest pleasure? What artist is there who would not gratefully receive from the Master an order to attempt the loftiest of subjects? What poet is there whose heart would not bound when he knew he was called to write on the noblest of themes? All the struggles, all the weary days of failure, all the misery of conscious incompleteness, all the agony of soul these were but means to the end, and so inseparably bound up with the end that they were no more evil, but good, their darkness over flooded with the light of the work achieved.

Raeburn, coming into the room, saw what she was looking at, and turned away. Little as he could understand her thoughts, he was not the sort of man to wound unnecessarily one who differed from him. His words in public were sharp and uncompromising; in debate he did not much care how he hit as long as he hit hard. But, apart from the excitement of such sword play, he was, when convinced that his hearers were honest Christians, genuinely sorry to give them pain.

Erica found him looking at a Sevres china vase in which he could not by any possibility have been interested.

“I feel Mr. Ruskin's wrathful eye upon me,” she said, laughing. “Now after spending all that time before a Carlo Dolci, we must really go to the Uffizzi and look at Botticelli's 'Fortitude'. Brian and I nearly quarreled over it the last time we were there.”

So they wandered away together through the long galleries, Erica pointing out her favorite pictures and hearing his opinion about them. And indeed Raeburn was as good a companion as could be wished for in a picture gallery. The intense development of the critical faculty, which had really been the bane of his existence, came here to his aid for he had a quick eye for all that was beautiful both in art and nature, and wonderfully keen powers of observation. The refreshment, too, of leaving for a moment his life of excessive toil was great; Erica hoped that he really did find the day, for once, “unmitigated pleasure.”

They went to Santa Croce, they walked through the crowded market, they had a merry dispute about ascending the campanile.

“Just this one you really must let me try,” said Erica, “they say it is very easy.”

“To people without spines perhaps it may be,” said Raeburn.

“But think of the view from the top,” said Erica, “and it really won't hurt me. Now, padre mio, I'm sure it's for the greatest happiness of the greatest number that I should go up!”

“It's the old story,” said Raeburn, smiling,

'Vain is the hope, by any force or skill,
To stem the current of a woman's will;
For if she will, she will, you may depend on't,
And if she won't, she won't, and there's an end on't.'

However, since this is probably the last time in our lives that we shall have the chance, perhaps, I'll not do the tyrannical father.”

They had soon climbed the steep staircase and were quite rewarded by the magnificent view from the top, a

grand panorama of city and river and green Apennines. Erica looked northward to Fiesole with a fast-throbbing heart. Yet it seemed as if half a life time lay between the passion-tossed yesterday and the sad yet peaceful present. Nor was the feeling a mere delusion; she had indeed in those brief hours lived years of the spirit life.

She did not stay long at that northern parapet; thoughts of her own life or even of Brian's would not do just then. She had to think of her father, to devote herself to him. And somehow, though her heart was sad, yet her happiness was real as they tried together to make out the various buildings; and her talk was unrestrained, and even her laughter natural, not forced; for it is possible to those who really love to throw themselves altogether into the life of another, and to lay aside all thought of self.

Once or twice that day she half feared that her father must guess all that had happened. He was so very careful of her, so considerate; and for Raeburn to be more considerate meant a great deal for in private he was always the most gentle man imaginable. His opponents, who often regarded him as a sort of “fiend in human shape,” were strangely mistaken in their estimate of his character. When treated with discourtesy or unfairness in public, it was true that he hit back again, and hit hard; and, since even in the nineteenth century we are so foolish as to use these weapons against the expression of opinions we deem mischievous, Raeburn had had a great deal of practice in this retaliation. He was a very proud and a very sensitive man, not blessed with overmuch patience. But he held his opinions honestly and had suffered much for them; he had a real love for humanity and an almost passionate desire to better his generation. To such a man it was no light thing to be deemed everything that is vile; like poor Shelley, he found it exceedingly bitter to let “murderers and traitors take precedence of him in public opinion.” People in general took into account all his harsh utterances (and some of them were very harsh), but they rarely thought anything about the provocation received, the excessively hard life that this man had lived, the gross personal insults which he had had to put up with, the galling injustice he had had to fight against. Upon this side of the question they just turned their backs, pooh-poohed it, or, when it was forced upon their notice, said (unanswerable argument!): “It wouldn't be so!”

When, as they were making the descent, Erica found the strong hand stretched out for hers the moment the way grew dark, when she was warned of the slightest difficulty by, “Take care, little one, a narrow step,” or, “'Tis rather broken here,” she almost trembled to think that, in spite of all her efforts, he might have learned how matters really were. But by and by his serenity reassured her; had he thought that she was in trouble his face would not have been so cloudless.

And in truth Raeburn, spite of his keen observation, never thought for a moment of the true state of the case. He was a very literal unimaginative man, and having once learned to regard Brian as an old family friend and as his doctor, he never dreamed of regarding him in the light of his daughter's lover. Also, as is not unfrequently the case when a man has only one child, he never could take in the fact that she was quite grown up. Even when he read her articles in the “Daily Review,” or discussed the most weighty topics with her, she was always “little son Eric,” or his “little one.” And Erica's unquenchable high spirits served to keep up the delusion. She would as often as not end a conversation on Darwinism by a romp with Friskarina, or write a very thoughtful article on “Scrutin de Liste,” and then spring up from her desk and play like any child with an India-rubber ball nominally kept for children visitors.

She managed to tide over those days bravely and even cheerfully for her father's sake. It was easier when they had left Florence with its overbright and oversad memories. Peaceful old Verona was more in accordance with her state of mind; and from thence they went to Trento, and over the Brenner, passing Botzen and Brixen in their lovely valley, gaining a brief glimpse of the spire-like Dolomito, and gradually ascending the pass, leaving the river and its yellow reeds, and passing through the rich pasture land where the fields were bright with buttercups and daisies gold and silver of the people's property as Raeburn called them. Then on once more between crimson and purple porphyry mountains, nearer and nearer to the snowy mountain peaks; and at last, as the day drew to an end, they descended again, and saw down below them in the loveliest of valleys a little town, its white houses suffused by a crimson sunset glow.

“Innsbruck, madame, Innsbruck!” said a fat old Tyrolean man who had been showing them all the beauties of his beloved country throughout the journey.

And, though nothing could ever again have for Erica the sweet glamour of an Italian city, yet she was glad now to have seen the last of that sunny land, and welcomed the homely little place with its matter-of-fact houses and prosperous comfort. She felt somehow that it would be easier to endure now that she was fairly out of Italy.

The day after their arrival at Innsbruck was Sunday. There was no English service as yet for the season had not begun, but Erica went to the little Lutheran church, and Raeburn, who had never been to a Lutheran service, went with her for the sake of studying the congregation, the preacher, and the doctrine. Also, perhaps, because he did not want her to feel lonely in a foreign place.

All her life long Erica remembered that Sunday. The peaceful little church with its high pews, where they sat to sing and stood to pray, the homely German pastor with his plain yet forcible sermon on “Das Gebet,”: the restful feeling of unity which so infinitely outweighed all the trifling differences, and the comfort of the sweet old German chorales. The words of one of them lingered always in her memory.

“Fuhlt Seel und Leib ein Wohl ergehen So treib es mich zum Dank dafur; Last du mich deine Werke sehen, So sey mein Ruhmen stets von dir; Und find ich in der Welt nicht Ruh, So steig mein Schmen Hinmel zu.”

After the service was ended, they wandered out into the public gardens where birds were singing round the statue of Walter von der Vogelveice, and a sparrow, to Erica's great delight, perched on his very shoulder. Then they left the town altogether and roamed out into the open country, crossing the river by a long and curiously constructed plank bridge, and sauntering along the valley beneath the snowy mountains, the river flowing smoothly onward, the birds singing, and a paradise of flowers on every side. It was quite the hottest day they had had, and they were not sorry to rest in the first shady place they came to.

“This is the right way to take pleasure,” said Raeburn, enjoying as only an ardent lover of Nature can enjoy a mountain view. “Brief snatches in between hard work. More than that is hardly admissible in such times as

ours.” His words seemed to them prophetic later on for their pleasure was destined to be even briefer than they had anticipated. The hotel at which they were staying was being painted, Erica had a room on the second floor, but Raeburn had been put at the top of the house. They had just returned from a long drive and were quietly sitting in Erica's room writing letters, thinking every moment that the gong would sound for the six-o'clock TABLE D'HOTE, when a sound of many voices outside made Raeburn look up. He went to the window.

“Haloo! A fire engine!” he exclaimed.

Erica hastily joined him; a crowd was gathering beneath the window, shouting, waving, gesticulating.

“Why, they are pointing up here!” cried Erica. “The fire must be here!”

She rushed across the room and opened the door; the whole place was in an uproar, people rushing to and fro, cries of “FEUER! FEUER!” a waiter with scared face hurrying from room to room with the announcement in broken English, “The hotel is on fire!” or, sometimes in his haste and confusion, “The fire is on hotel!” For a moment Erica's heart stood still; the very vagueness of the terror, the uncertainty as to the extent of the danger or the possibility of escape, was paralyzing. Then with the natural instinct of a book lover she hastily picked up two or three volumes from the table and begged her father to come. He made her put on her hat and cloak, and shouldering her portmanteau, led the way through the corridors and down the staircase, steadily forcing a passage through the confused and terrified people, and never pausing for an instant, not even asking the whereabouts of the fire, till he had got Erica safely out into the little platz and had set down her portmanteau under one of the trees.

They looked up then and saw that the whole of the roof and the attics of the hotel were blazing. Raeburn's room was immediately below and was in great danger. A sudden thought seemed to occur to him, a look of dismay crossed his face, he felt hurriedly in his pocket.

“Where did I change my coat, Erica?” he asked.

“You went up to your room to change it just before the drive,” she replied.

“Then, by all that's unlucky, I've left in it those papers for Hasenbalg! Wait here; I'll be back in a minute.”

He hurried off, looking more anxious than Erica had ever seen him look before. The papers which he had been asked to deliver to Herr Hasenbalg in no way concerned him, but they had been intrusted to his care and were, therefore, of course more to be considered than the most valuable private property. Much hindered by the crowd and by the fire engine itself which had been moved into the entrance hall, he at length succeeded in fighting his way past an unceasing procession of furniture which was being rescued from the flames, and pushing his way up the stairs, had almost gained his room when a pitiful cry reached his ears. It was impossible to a man of Raeburn's nature not to turn aside; the political dispatches might be very important, but a deserted child in a burning house outweighed all other considerations. He threw open the door of the room whence the cry had come; the scaffolding outside had caught fire, and the flames were darting in at the window. Sitting up in a little wooden cot was a child of two or three years old, his baby face wild with fright.

“Poor bairn!” exclaimed Raeburn, taking him in his strong arms. “Have they forgotten you?”

The child was German and did not understand a word, but it knew in a moment that this man, so like a fairy-tale giant, was a rescuer.

“Guter Riese!” it sobbed, appealingly.

The “good giant” snatched a blanket from the cot, rolled it round the shivering little bit of humanity, and carried him down into the platz.

“Keep this bairnie till his belongings claim him,” he said, putting his charge into Erica's arms. And then he hurried back again, once more ran the gantlet of the descending wardrobes and bedsteads, and at last reached his room. It was bare of all furniture; the lighter things his coat among them had been thrown out of the window, the more solid things had been carried down stairs. He stood there baffled and for once in his life bewildered.

Half-choked with the smoke, he crossed the room and looked out of the window, the hot breath of the flames from the scaffolding scorching his face. But looking through that frame of fire, he saw that a cordon had been drawn round the indiscriminate piles of rescued property, that the military had been called out, and that the most perfect order prevailed. There was still a chance that he might recover the lost papers! Then, as there was no knowing that the roof would not fall in and crush him, he made the best of his way down again among the still flowing stream of furniture.

An immense crowd had gathered in the square outside; the awe-struck murmurs and exclamations sounded like the roar of distant thunder, and the shouts of “WASSER! WASSER!” alternated with the winding of bugles as the soldiers moved now in one direction, now in another, their bright uniforms and the shining helmets of the fire brigade men flashing hither and thither among the dark mass of spectators. Overhead the flames raged while the wind blew down bits of burning tinder upon the crowd. Erica, wedged in among the friendly Tyrolese people, watched anxiously for her father, not quite able to believe his assurance that there was no danger. When at length she saw the tall commanding figure emerge from the burning hotel, the white head towering over the crowd, her heart gave a great bound of relief. But she saw in a moment that he had been unsuccessful.

“It must have been thrown out of the window,” he said, elbowing his way up to her. “The room was quite bare, carpet and all gone, nothing to be found but these valuables,” and with a smile, he held up the last number of the “Idol-Breaker,” and a tooth brush.

“They are taking great care of the things,” said Erica. “Perhaps we shall find it by and by.”

“We must find it,” said Raeburn, his lips forming into the curve of resoluteness which they were wont to assume when any difficulty arose to be grappled with. “What has become of the bairn?”

“A nurse came up and claimed it and was overwhelmingly grateful to you for your rescue. She had put the child to bed early and had gone for a walk in the gardens. Oh, look, how the fire is spreading!”

“The scaffolding is terribly against saving it, and the wind is high, too,” said Raeburn, scanning the place all over with his keen eyes. Then, as an idea seemed to strike him, he suddenly hurried forward once more, and Erica saw him speaking to two fire brigade men. In another minute the soldiers motioned the crowd further back, Raeburn rejoined Erica, and, picking up her portmanteau, took her across the road to the steps of a neighboring hotel. “I've suggested that they should cut down the scaffolding,” he said; “it is the only chance of saving the place.”

The whole of the woodwork was now on fire; to cut it down was a somewhat dangerous task, but the men worked gallantly, and in a few minutes the huge blazing frame, with its poles and cross poles, ladders and platforms, swayed, quivered, then fell forward with a crash into the garden beyond.

Raeburn had, as usual, attracted to himself the persons most worth talking to in the crowd, a shrewd-looking inhabitant of Innsbruck, spectacled and somewhat sallow, but with a face which was full of intellect. He learned that, although no one could speak positively as to the origin of the fire, it was more than probable that it had been no mere accident. The very Sunday before, at exactly the same hour, a large factory had been entirely destroyed by fire, and it needed no very deep thinker to discover that a Sunday evening, when every one would be out-of-doors keeping holiday, and the fire brigade men scattered and hard to summon, was the very time for incendiarism. They learned much from the shrewd citizen about the general condition of the place, which seemed outwardly too peaceful and prosperous for such wild and senseless outbreaks.

“If, as seems probable, this is the act of some crazy socialist, he has unwittingly done harm to the cause of reform in general,” said Raeburn to Erica when the informant had passed on. “Those papers for Hasenbalg were important ones, and, if laid hold of by unfriendly hands, might do untold harm. Socialism is the most foolish system on earth. Inevitably it turns to this sort of violence when the uneducated have seized on its main idea.

“After all, I believe they will save the house,” said Erica. “Just look at those men on the top, how splendidly they are working!”

It was, in truth, a grand, though a very horrible sight to see the dark forms toiling away, hewing down the burning rafters with an absolute disregard to their personal safety. These were not firemen, but volunteers chimney-sweeps, as one of the crowd informed Raeburn and it was in the main owing to their exertions that the fire was at length extinguished.

After the excitement was over, they went into the neighboring hotel, where there was some difficulty in obtaining rooms, as all the burned-out people had taken refuge there. However, the utmost hospitality and friendliness prevailed, and even hungry Englishmen, cheated of their dinner, were patient for once, while the overtaxed waiters hurried to and fro, preparing for the second and quite unexpected table d'hote. Everyone had something to tell either of his escape or his losses. One lady had seen her night gown thrown out of the window, and had managed adroitly to catch it; some one else on rushing up to find his purse had been deluged by the fire engine, and Raeburn's story of the little German boy excited great interest. The visitors were inclined to make a hero of him. Once, when he had left the room, Erica heard a discussion about him with no little amusement.

“Who is the very tall, white-haired man?”

“The man who saved the child? I believe he must be the Bishop of Steneborough; he is traveling in the Tyrol, I know, and I'm sure that man is a somebody. So much dignity, and such power over everybody! Didn't you see the way the captain of the fire brigade deferred to him?”

“Well, now I think of it,” replied the other, “he has an earnest, devotional sort of face, perhaps you're right. I'll speak to him when he comes back. Ah!” in a lower voice, “there he is! And Confound it! He's got no gaiters! Goodbye to my visions of life-long friendship and a comfortable living for Dick!”

In spite of his anxiety about the lost packet, Raeburn laughed heartily over Erica's account of this conversation. He had obtained leave to search the deserted hotel, and a little before ten o'clock they made their way across the square, over planks and charred rafters, broken glass, and pools of water, which were hard to steer through in the darkness. The fire was now quite out, and they were beginning to move the furniture in again, but the place had been entirely dismantled, and looked eerie and forlorn. On the staircase was a decapitated statue, and broken and crushed plants were strewn about. Erica's room was quite bare of furniture, nor could she find any of the things she wanted. The pen with which she had been writing lay on the floor, and also a Japanese fan soaked with water, but neither of these were very serviceable articles to a person bereft of every toilet requisite.

“I shall have to lie down tonight like a dog, and get up in the morning, and shake myself,” she said, laughing.

And probably a good many people in Innsbruck were that evening in like case.

Notwithstanding the discomforts, however, and the past excitement, that was the first night in which Erica had really slept since the day at Fiesole, the first night unbroken by dreams about Brian, unhaunted by that blanched, rigid face, which had stamped its image indelibly upon her brain in the amphitheatre. She awoke, too, without that almost intolerable dread of the coming day which had hitherto made early morning hateful to her. It was everything to have an actual and practicable duty ready to hand, everything to have a busy present which would crowd out past and future, if only for a few hours. Also, the disaster had its comic side. Through the thin partition she could hear distinctly the complaints of the people in the next room.

“How ARE we to get on with no soap? Do go and see if James has any.”

Then came steps in the passage, and a loud knock at the opposite door.

“James!”

No answer. A furiously loud second knock.

“JAMES!”

“What's the matter? Another fire?”

“Have you any soap?”

“Any what?” sleepily.

“Any SOAP?”

Apparently James was not the happy possessor of that necessary of life for the steps retreated, and the bell was violently rung.

“'What, no soap?'” exclaimed Erica, laughing; “'so he died, and she very imprudently married the barber, etc.'”

The chamber maid came to answer the bell.

“Send some one to the nearest shop, please, and get me some soap.”

“And a sponge,” said another.

“And a brush and comb,” said the first.

“Oh! And some hair pins,” echoed the other. “Why, destruction! She doesn't understand a word! What's the German for soap? Give me 'Travel Talk.'”

“It's burned.”

“Well, then, show her the soap dish! Brush your hair with your hands! This is something between Drum Crambo and Mulberry Bush!”

The whole day was not unlike a fatiguing game of hide-and-seek, and had it not been for Raeburn's great anxiety, it would have been exceedingly amusing. Everything was now inside the hotel again, but of course in the wildest confusion. The personal property of the visitors was placed, as it came to light, in the hall porter's little room; but things were to be met with in all directions. At ten o'clock, one of Raeburn's boots was found on the third story; in the evening, its fellow turned up in the entrance hall. Distracted tourists were to be seen in all directions, burrowing under heaps of clothes, or vainly opening cupboards and drawers, and the delight of finding even the most trifling possession was great. For hours Raeburn and Erica searched for the lost papers in vain. At length, in the evening, the coat was found; but, alas! The pocket was empty.

“The envelope must have been taken out,” said Erica. “Was it directed?”

> *“Unfortunately, yes,” said Raeburn. “But, after all, there is still a chance that it may have tumbled out as the coat fell. If so, we may find it elsewhere. I've great faith in the honesty of these Innsbruck people, notwithstanding the craze of some of them that property is theft. That worthy man yesterday was right, I expect. I hear that the proprietor had had a threatening letter not long ago to this effect:*
>
> > *“'Sein thun unser Dreissig,*
> > *Schuren thun wir fleissig.*
> > *Dem Armen that's nichts*
> > *Dem Reichen schad's nichts.*

That is tolerably unmistakable, I think. I'll have it in next week's 'Idol,' with an article on the folly of socialism.”

Judicious offers of reward failed to bring the papers to light, and Raeburn was so much vexed about it, and so determined to search every nook and cranny of the hotel, that it was hard to get him away even for meals. Erica could not help feeling that it was hard that the brief days of relaxation he had allowed himself should be so entirely spoiled.

“Now, if I were a model daughter, I should dream where to find the thing,” she said, laughingly, as she wished him good night.

She did not dream at all, but she was up as soon as it was light, searching once more with minute faithfulness in every part of the hotel. At length she came to a room piled from floor to ceiling with linen, blankets, and coverlets.

“Have all these been shaken?” she asked of the maid servant who had been helping her.

“Well, not shaken, I think,” owned the servant. “We were in a hurry, you see; but they are all fresh folded.”

“It might have slipped into one of them,” said Erica. “Help me to shake every one of these, and I will give you two gulden.”

It was hard work, and somewhat hopeless work; but Erica set about it with all the earnestness and thoroughness of her Raeburn nature, and at length came her reward. At the very bottom of the huge pile they came to a counterpane, and, as they opened it, out fell the large, thick envelope directed to Herr Hasenbalg. With a cry of joy, Erica snatched it up, pressed double the reward into the hands of the delighted servant, and flew in search of her father. She found him groping in a great heap of miscellaneous goods in the porter's room.

“I've found my razors,” he said, looking up, “and every twopenny-halfpenny thing out of my traveling bag; but the papers, of course, are nowhere.”

“What's your definition of 'nowhere'?” asked Erica, laughingly covering his eyes while she slipped the envelope into his hand.

His look of relief made her happier than she had been for days. He stood up quickly, and turned the envelope over to see that it had not been tampered with.

“This is my definition of a dear, good bairn,” he said, putting his hand on her head. “You have taken a hundred-weight off my heart, Eric. Where did you find it?”

She described her search to him.

“Well, now, nothing will satisfy me but a mountain,” said Raeburn. “Are you too tired? We could have a good climb before dinner.”

“Oh, let us!” she exclaimed. “I have had such a longing to get nearer the snow.”

Each felt that the holiday had now begun. They threw care to the winds, and gave themselves up altogether to the enjoyment of the loveliest walk they had ever taken. Crossing the Kreuzer bridge, they made their way

past little wooden chalets, through groves of oak where the sunlight came flickering in between the leaves, through pine woods whose long vistas were solemn as cathedral aisles, until at last they gained the summit of the lower range of hills, from which was a glorious view on every hand. Down below lay the little town which would be forever memorable to them; while above them rose the grand chain of snowy mountains which still seemed as lofty and unapproachable as ever, though they themselves were on high ground. Soft and velvety and green lay that great upward sweep in the sunshine, shaded in some places by a dark patch of pines, or gleaming with a heap of fallen snow. Here and there some deep rugged cleft would be filled from top to bottom with the gleaming whiteness, while above, crowning the steep and barren height, the snow reigned supreme, unmelted as yet even by the hot May sun.

And Erica was, in spite of her sorrow, unfeignedly happy. She could not be sad when her father was so thoroughly enjoying himself, when for once he was altogether removed from the baleful influences of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Here instead of sweeping denunciations, which invariably drove him, as they drove even the patient Job, to an assertion of his own righteousness there was the silent yet most real teaching of Nature; and he must be a small-souled man, indeed, who, in the presence of grand mountain scenery, can not forget his own personality, realizing the infinite beauty and the unspeakable greatness of nature. Erica's father was unquestionably a large-souled man, in every sense of the word, a great man; but the best man in the world is to a great extent dependent on circumstance, and the circumstances of Raeburn's life had been exceptionally hard. Only two things on earth acted as a check upon the one great fault which marred an otherwise fine character. Beauty of scenery made him for the time being as humble as a child, and the devotion of his own followers sometimes made him ask himself whether he were worthy of such love.

The following day the papers, which had caused them so much trouble and anxiety, were safely delivered to Herr Hasenbalg at Salzburg; and then came one more perfect holiday. In the months that followed, Erica loved just to shut her eyes and forget a sad or stormy present, to call up once more the remembrance of that time. To the minutest details she always remembered it. The start in the early morning, which had seemed cloudy and unpromising, the long, beautiful drive to Berchtesgaden, and on beyond to the Konigsee. The perfect and unbroken calm of that loveliest of lakes, so jealously guarded by its chain of mountains that only in two places is it possible to effect a landing. The dark pines and silvery birches clothing the sides of the mountains; the gray limestone cliffs rising step and sheer from the water, in which their slim, green skiff glided swiftly on, the oars, which were more like long, brown spades, pulled by a man and woman, who took it in turns to sit and stand; the man with gay tie and waistband, Tyrolese hat and waving feather; the woman wearing a similar hat over a gayly embroidered head-dress, ample white sleeves, a square-cut bodice, and blue plaid skirt.

Here and there a group of light-green larches just caught the sunshine, or a little boat coming in the opposite direction would suddenly glide round one of the bends in the lake, its oars splashing a wide line of silvery brightness in the calm water, in vivid contrast to the dark-blue prow. Then, as they rounded one of the abrupt curves came a glorious view of snow mountains blue shadows below, and above, in the sunshine, the most dazzling whiteness, while close to the water from the sheer precipice of gray rock, sprung here and there a hardy pine.

They landed beside a quaint little church with cupolas, and had an exquisite walk through the woods just at the foot of the mountains where the wealth of gentians and other Alpine flowers made Raeburn's felicity complete.

Presently came the return to the little boat, and a quiet row back to the landing place where their carriage awaited them. And then followed the delightful drive home, past the river which tossed its green waters here and there into snow-like wreaths of foam, over quaint and shaky wooden bridges, between gray rocks and groves of plane trees whose trunks were half veiled in golden-brown moss. Then on beneath a hill catching faraway glimpses of a darkened and mysterious sky through the forest of stems. Then past larger and taller pine trees which, standing further apart, let in more sky, and left space for the brown earth to be flecked with sunshine. And here, in the most peaceful of all country regions, they met a handsome-looking peasant in gay Tyrolean attire much adorned with silver chains since it was Ascension day and a festival. He was leading by the hand his little daughter.

“That is a peaceful lot,” said Raeburn glancing at them. “Would we like to change places with them, little son Eric?”

She laughed and shook her head and fell, nevertheless, into a reverie, wondering what such a character as her father's would have been under less hard circumstances, trying to picture a possible life in that sheltered green valley. All was so perfectly peaceful; the very river grew broader and calmer, cattle grazed by the road side, women walked slowly along with their knitting in their hands, the fruit trees were white with blossom. As they reached the pretty village of Berchtesgaden the sun was setting, the square comfortable-looking white houses with their broad, dark eaves and balconies were bathed in a rosy glow, the two spires of the little church stood out darkly against the evening sky; in the platz women were filling their pitchers at a stone fountain made in the shape of a rampant lion while others were kneeling before the calvary at the entrance to the village, praying with the reverence which is one of the characteristics of the Tyrolese. Towering above all in the background rose the two Wartzmann peaks, standing there white and majestic like guardian angels.

“What foolish being called seven the perfect number?” said Raeburn, turning back from a last look at the twin mountains which were now assuming their cloud caps. “Two is the perfect number, is it not, little one?”

She smiled and slipped her hand into his.

Then came a wild, desolate part of the road, which passed through a valley shut in on all sides by mountains, some of them snowy, all wild and precipitous, and looking strangely desolate in the falling light. Erica could not help contrasting it with the view from the amphitheatre at Fiesole, of that wider amphitheatre of green hills all glowing with light and love. But presently came more peaceful glimpses; pretty little Schellenburg with its serpentine river winding again and again through the village street, and the happy-looking peasants chatting at their doors with here and there a white-capped baby made much of by all.

At last in the cool of the evening they reached Salsburg once more. But the pleasures of the day were not yet over for as they drew up at the door of their hotel a well-known figure suddenly emerged from the porch and hurried toward the carriage.

“Unexpected as a meteor,” said a hearty voice in slightly foreign accents. “Well, my good friend, well my guardian angel, how are you both? We meet under more auspicious circumstances this time!”

It was Eric Haeberlein.

CHAPTER XXXIV. The Most Unkindest Cut of All

Those who persecuted them supposed of course that they were defending Christianity, but Christianity can be defended in no such way. It forbids all persecution all persecution for the sake of religion. Force cannot possibly propagate the truth or produce the faith, or promote the love in which the gospel consists.... Persecution can never arise from zeal for the Gospel as truth from zeal for the Gospel properly understood. If ever due to zeal in any measure, and not to pride, selfishness, anger, ambition, and other hateful lusts ... It must be to a zeal which is in alliance with error. ... The men (atheists) therefore, who, by their courage and endurance were specially instrumental in convincing their countrymen that persecution for the avowal and advocacy even of atheism is a folly and a crime, have really rendered a service to the cause of Christian truth, and their names will not be recorded without honor when the history of our century is impartially written. Baird Lectures, 1877. R. Flint, D.D., Professor of Divinity, Edinburgh.

A few days later the brief holiday ended, and father and daughter were both hard at work again in London. They had crossed from Antwerp by night and had reached home about ten o'clock to find the usual busy life awaiting them.

Tom and Aunt Jean, who had been very dull in their absence, were delighted to have them back again; and though the air was thick with coming troubles, yet it was nevertheless a real home coming, while Erica, in spite of her hidden sorrow, had a very real enjoyment in describing her first foreign tour. They were making a late breakfast while she talked, Raeburn being more or less absorbed in the “Daily Review.”

“You see, such an early newspaper is a luxury now,” said Erica. “Not that he's been behaving well abroad. He promised me when we started that he'd eschew newspapers altogether and give his brain an entire rest; but there is a beguiling reading room at Florence, and there was no keeping him away from it.”

“What's that? What are you saying?” said Raeburn, absently.

“That very soon, father, you will be as absent-minded as King Stars-and-Garters in the fairy tale, who one day, in a fit of abstraction, buttered his newspaper and tried to read his toast.”

Raeburn laughed and threw down the “Daily Review.”

“Saucier than ever, isn't she, Tom? Well, we've come back to a few disagreeables; but then we've come back, thank man! To roast beef and Turkey towels, and after kickshaws and table napkins, one knows how to appreciate such things.”

“We could have done with your kickshaws here,” said Tom. “If you hadn't come back soon, Erica, I should have gone to the bad altogether, for home life, with the cook to cater for one, is intolerable. That creature has only two ideas in her head. We rang the changes on rice and stewed rhubarb. The rhubarb in its oldest stage came up four days running. We called it the widow's curse! Then the servants would make a point of eating onions for supper so that the house was insufferable. And at last we were driven from pillar to post by a dreadful process called house cleaning in which, undoubtedly, life is not worth living. In the end, Mr. Osmond took pity on me and lent me Brian's study. Imagine heretical writings emanating from that room!”

This led the conversation round to Brian's visit to Florence, and Erica was not sorry to be interrupted by a note from Mr. Bircham, requesting her to write an article on the Kilbeggan murder. She found that the wheels of the household machinery would need a good deal of attention before they would move as smoothly as she generally contrived to make them. Things had somehow “got to wrongs” in her absence. And when at length she thought everything was in train and had got thoroughly into the spirit of a descriptive article on the Irish tragedy, the cook of two ideas interrupted her with what seemed, in contract, the most trivial matters.

“If you please, miss,” she said, coming into the green room, just as the three villains in black masks were in the act of killing their victim, “I thought you'd wish to know that we are wanting a new set of kitchen cloths; and if you'll excuse me mentioning it, miss, there's Jane, miss, using glass cloths as tea cloths, and dusters as knife cloths.”

Erica looked slightly distracted, but diverted her mind from the state of Ireland to the state of the household linen, and, when left alone once more, laughed to herself at the incongruity of the two subjects.

It was nearly a fortnight before Brian returned from Switzerland. Erica knew that he was in the well-known house on the opposite side of the square, and through the trees in the garden, they could see each the other's place of residence. It was a sort of nineteenth-century version of the Rhine legend, in which the knight of Rolandseek looked down upon Nomenwerth where his lady love was immured in a convent.

She had rather dreaded the first meeting, but, when it came, she felt nothing of what she had feared. She was in the habit of going on Sunday morning to the eight o'clock service at the church in the square. It was nearer than Charles Osmond's church, and the hour interfered less with household arrangements. Just at the corner of the square on the morning of Trinity Sunday, she met Brian. Her heart beat quickly as she shook hands with him, but there was something in his bearing which set her entirely at her ease after just the first minute. He looked much older, and a certain restlessness in look and manner had quite left him, giving place to a peculiar calm not unlike his father's expression. It was the expression which a man wears when he has lost the desire of his heart, yet manfully struggles on, allowing no bitterness to steal in, facing unflinchingly the grayness of a crippled life. Somehow, joining in that thanksgiving service seemed to give them the true key-note for their divided lives. As they came out into the porch, he asked her a question.

“You are an authority on quotations, I know; my father wants to verify one for his sermon this morning. Can you help him? It is this:

'Revealed in love and sacrifice,
The Holiest passed before thine eyes,
One and the same, in threefold guise.'”

“It is Whittier, I know,” said Erica, promptly; “and I think it is in a poem called 'Trinitas.' Come home with me, and we will hunt for it.”

So they walked back together silently, and found the poem, and at Raeburn's request Brian stayed to breakfast, and fell back naturally into his old place with them all.

The following day Raeburn had to attend a meeting in the north of England; he returned on the Tuesday afternoon, looking, Erica fancied, tired and overdone.

“Railway journeys are not quite the rest they once were to me,” he confessed, throwing himself down in a chair by the open window while she brought him some tea. “This is very beguiling, little one; but see, I've all these letters to answer before five.”

“Your train must have been very late.”

“Yes, there was a block on the line, and we stopped for half an hour in the middle of a bean field bliss that a Londoner can't often enjoy.”

“Did you get out?”

“Oh, yes, and sat upon the fence and meditated to the great delectation of my olfactory nerves.”

Erica's laugh was checked by a knock at the door. The servant announced that a gentleman wanted to see Miss Raeburn.

“Some message from Mr. Bircham, I expect,” said Erica to her father. “Ask him upstairs, please. I only hope he doesn't want me to write another article at the eleventh hour. If it's the little Irish sub-editor, you must be very polite to him, father, for he has been kind to me.”

But it was no message from the “Daily Review” office; a perfect stranger was shown into the room.

He bowed slightly as he entered.

“Are you Miss Erica Raeburn?” he asked, coming toward her.

“I am,” she replied. “What is your business with me?”

“I have to place this document in your hands.”

He gave her a paper which she rapidly unfolded. To her dying day she could always see that hateful bit of foolscap with its alternate printing and writing. The words were to this effect:

Writ Subpoena Ad Test, at Sittings of High Court. IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE, QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION. Between Luke Raeburn, Plaintiff, and William Henry Pogson, Defendant VICTORIA, by the Grace of God, of the United kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, To Erica Raeburn, greeting. We command you to attend at the sittings of the Queen's Bench division of our High Court of Justice to be holden at Westminster on Tuesday, the Twentieth day of June, 18__, at the hour of half past Ten in the forenoon, and so from day to day during the said sittings, until the above cause is tried, to give evidence on behalf of the Defendant. Witness, etc., etc.

Erica read the paper twice before she looked up; she had grown white to the very lips. Raeburn, recognizing the form of a subpoena, came hastily forward, and in the merest glance saw how matters were. By no possibility could the most malicious of opponents have selected a surer means of torturing him.

“Is this legal?” asked Erica, lifting to him eyes that flashed with righteous indignation.

“Oh, it is legal,” he replied bitterly “the pound of flesh was legal. A wife need not appear against her husband, but a daughter may be dragged into court and forced to give evidence against her father.”

As he spoke, such anger flashed from his eyes that the clerk shivered all down his backbone. He thought he would take his departure as quickly as might be, and drawing a little nearer, put down a coin upon the table beside Erica.

“This fee is to cover your expenses, madame,” he said.

“What!” exclaimed Erica, her anger leaping up into a sudden flame, “do you think I shall take money from that man?”

She had an insane desire to snatch up the sovereign and fling it at the clerk's head, but restraining herself merely flicked it back across the table to him, just touching it with the back of her hand as though it had been polluted.

“You can take that back again,” she said, a look of scorn sweeping over her face. “Tell Mr. Pogson that, when he martyrs people he need not say: 'The martyrdom will make you hungry here is luncheon money,' or 'The torture will tire you here is your cab fare!'”

“But, madame, excuse me,” said the clerk, looking much embarrassed. “I must leave the money, I am bound to leave it.”

“If you leave it, I shall just throw it into the fireplace before your eyes,” said Erica. “But if indeed it can't be sent back, then give it to the first gutter child you meet do anything you like with it! Hang it on your watch chain as a memento of the most cruel case your firm every had to do with!”

Her color had come back again, her cheeks were glowing, in her wrath she looked most beautiful; the clerk would have been less than human if he had not felt sorry for her. There was a moment's silence; he glanced from the daughter to the father, whose face was still pale and rigid. A great pity surged up in the clerk's heart. He was a father himself; involuntarily his thoughts turned to the little home at Kilburn where Mary and Kitty would be waiting for him that evening. What if they should ever be forced into a witness box to confirm a libel on his personal character? A sort of moisture came to his eyes at the bare idea. The counsel for the defense, too, was that Cringer, Q. C., the greatest bully that ever wore silk. Then he glanced once more at the silent, majestic figure with the rigid face, who, though an atheist, was yet a man and a father.

“Sir,” he said, with the ring of real and deep feeling in his voice, “sir, believe me, if I had known what bringing this subpoena meant, I would sooner have lost my situation!”

Raeburn's face relaxed; he spoke a few courteous, dignified words, accepting with a sort of unspoken gratitude the man's regret, and in a few moments dismissing him. But even in these few moments the clerk, though by no means an impressionable man, had felt the spell, the strange power of fascination which Raeburn invariably exercised upon those he talked with that inexplicable influence which made cautious, hard-headed mechanics ready to die for him, ready to risk anything in his cause.

The instant the man was gone, Raeburn sat down at Erica's writing table and began to answer his letters. His correspondents got very curt answers that day. Erica could tell by the sound of his pan how sharp were the down strokes, how short the rapidly written sentences.

“Can I help you?” she asked, drawing nearer to him.

He hastily selected two or three letters not bearing on his anti-religious work, gave her directions, then plunged his pen in the ink once more, and went on writing at lightning speed. When at length the most necessary ones were done, he pushed back his chair, and getting up began to pace rapidly to and fro. Presently he paused and leaned against the mantel piece, his face half shaded by his hand.

Erica stole up to him silently.

“Sometimes, Eric,” he said abruptly, “I feel the need of the word 'DEVIL!' My vocabulary has nothing strong enough for that man.”

She was too heartsick to speak; she drew closer to him with a mute caress.

“Eric!” he said, holding her hands between his, and looking down at her with an indescribably eager expression in his eyes, “Eric, surely NOW you see that this persecuting religion, this religion which has been persecuting innumerable people for hundreds of years, is false, worthless, rotten to the core. Child! Child! Surely you can't believe in a God whose followers try to promote His glory by sheer brutality like this?”

It was the first time he had spoken to her on this subject since their interview at Codrington. They had resolved never to touch upon it again; but a sort of consciousness that some good must come to him through this new bitterness, a hope that it must and would reconvince his child, impelled Raeburn to break his resolution.

“I could sooner doubt that you are standing here, father, with your arm round me,” said Erica, “than I could doubt the presence of your Father and mine the All-Father.”

“Even though his followers are such lying scoundrels as that Pogson? What do you make of that? What do you think of that?”

“I think,” she replied quietly, “that my father is too just a man to judge Christianity by the very worst specimen of a Christian to be met with. Any one who does not judge secularism by its very best representatives, dead or living, is unfair and what is unfair in one case is unfair in another.”

“Well, if I judged it by you, perhaps I might take a different view of it,” said Raeburn. “But then you had the advantage of some years of secularism.”

“Not by me!” cried Erica. “How can it seem anything but very faulty when you judge it only by faulty people? Why not judge it by the life and character of Christ?”

Raeburn turned away with a gesture of impatience.

“A myth! A poetic creation long ago distorted out of its true proportions! There, child, I see we must stop. I only pain you and torture myself by arguing the question.”

“One more thing,” said Erica, “before we go back to the old silence. Father, if you would only write a life of Christ I mean, a really complete life; the one you wrote years ago was scarcely more than a pamphlet.”

He smiled, knowing that she thought the deep study necessary for such an undertaking would lead to a change in his views.

“My dear,” he said, “perhaps I would; but just see how I am overdone. I couldn't write an elaborate thing now. Besides, there is the book on the Pentateuch not half finished though it was promised months ago. Perhaps a year or two hence when Pogson gives me time to draw a long breath, I'll attempt it; but I have an idea that one or other of us will have to be 'kilt intirely' before that happy time arrives. Perhaps we shall mutually do for each other, and reenact the historical song.” And, with laughter in his eyes, he repeated:

“There once were two cats of Kilkenny, Each thought there was one cat too many, So they quarreled and spit, and they scratched and they bit, Till, excepting their nails and the tips of their tails, Instead of two cats, there weren't any.”

Erica smiled faintly, but sighed the next minute.

“Well, there! It's too grave a matter to jest about,” said Raeburn. “Oh, bairn! If I could but save you from that brute's malice, I should care very little for the rest.”

“Since you only care about it for my sake, and I only for yours, I think we may as well give up caring at all,” said Erica, looking up at him with a brave smile. “And, after all, Mr. Cringer, Q. C. can only keep me in

purgatory for a few hours at the outside. Don't you think, too, that such a cruel thing will damage Mr. Pogson in the eyes of the jury?”

“Unfortunately, dear, juries are seldom inclined to show any delicate considerateness to an atheist,” said Raeburn.

And Erica knew that he spoke truly enough.

No more was said just then. Raeburn began rapidly to run through his remaining correspondence a truly miscellaneous collection. Legal letters, political letters, business letters requests for his autograph, for his help, for his advice a challenge from a Presbyterian minister in the north of Scotland to meet him in debate; the like from a Unitarian in Norfolk; a coffin and some insulting verses in a match box, and lastly an abrasive letter from a clergyman, holding him responsible for some articles by Mr. Masterman, which he had nothing whatever to do with, and of which he in fact disapproved.

“What would they think, Eric, if I insisted on holding the Bishop of London responsible for every utterance of every Christian in the diocese?” said Raeburn.

“They would think you were a fool,” said Erica, cutting the coffin into little bits as she spoke.

Raeburn smiled and penciled a word or two on the letter the pith of a stinging reply.

CHAPTER XXXV. Raeburn v. Pogson

Oh, God of mountains, stars, and boundless spaces!
Oh, God of freedom and of joyous hearts!
When Thy face looketh forth from all men's faces
There will be room enough in crowded marts.
Brood Thou around me, and the noise is o'er;
Thy universe my closet with shut door.

Heart, heart, awake! The love that loveth all
Maketh a deeper calm than Horeb's cave.
God in thee, can His children's folly gall?
Love may be hurt, but shall not love be brave?
Thy holy silence sinks in dews of balm;
Thou art my solitude, my mountain calm. George MacDonald

When a particularly unpleasant event has long been hanging over one's head, sure to come at some time, though the precise date is unknown, people of a certain disposition find it quite possible to live on pretty comfortably through the waiting time. But when at length the date is fixed, when you know that that which you dread will happen upon such and such a day, then the waiting begins all at once to seem intolerable. The vague date had been awaited calmly, but the certain date is awaited with a wearing anxiety which tells fearfully on physical strength. When Erica knew that the action for libel would begin in a fortnight's time, the comparative calmness of the nine months which had passed since the outset of the matter gave place to an agony of apprehension. Night after night she had fearful dreams of being cross-examined by Mr. Cringer, Q.C., who always forced her to say exactly what she did not mean. Night after night coldly curious eyes stared down at her from all parts of a crowded court; while her misery was completed by being perfectly conscious of what she ought to have said directly it was too late.

By day she was too wise to allow herself to dwell on the future; she worked doubly hard, laid in a stock of particularly interesting books, and threw herself as much as possible into the lives of others. Happily, the Farrants were in town, and she was able to see a great deal of them; while on the very day before the trial came a substantial little bit of happiness.

She was sitting in the study doing some copying for her father when a brougham stopped at the door. Erica, who never failed to recognize a horse if she had once seen it before, who even had favorites among the dozens of omnibus horses which she met daily in Oxford Street, at once knew that either Donovan or Gladys had come to see her.

She ran out into the hall to meet them, but had no sooner opened the study door than the tiniest of dogs trotted into the room and began sniffing cautiously at her father's clothes.

“Tottie has made a very unceremonious entrance,” said a clear, mellow voice in the passage. “May we come in, or are you too busy today?”

“Oh, please come in. Father is home, and I do so want you to meet,” said Erica. “You have brought Dolly, too! That is delightful. We are dreadfully in want of something young and happy to cheer us up.”

The two men shook hands with the momentary keen glance into each other's eyes which those give who have heard much of one another but have never been personally acquainted.

“As to Dolly,” said Donovan, “she requires no introduction to Mr. Raeburn.”

“No,” said Erica, laughing, “she cried all over his coat two years ago.”

Dolly did not often wait for introductions unless she disliked people. And no child could have found it in its heart to dislike anything so big and kind and fatherly as Luke Raeburn.

“We blought a little dog for Elica,” she said, in her silvery treble.

And the next moment she was established on Raeburn's knee, encouraged to thrust a little, dimpled hand into his pocket for certain Edinburgh dainties.

“Dolly does not beat about the bush,” said Donovan, smiling. “Would you at all care to have this small animal? I knew you were fond of dogs, and Gladys and I saw this little toy Esquimanx the other day and fell in love with him. I find though that another dog rather hurts Waif's feelings, so you will be doing a kindness to him as well if you will accept 'Tottie.'”

“Oh, how delightful of you! It was kind of you to think of it,” said Erica. “I have always so longed to have a dog of my own. And this is such a little beauty! Is it not a very rare breed?”

“I believe it is, and I think he's a loving little beggar, too,” replied Donovan. “He is making himself quite at home here, is he not?”

And in truth the small dog seemed deeply interested in his new residence. He was the tiniest of his kind, and was covered with long black hair which stood straight up on end; his pointed nose, bright brown eyes, and cunning little ears, set in the frame work of bushy hair, gave him a most sagacious appearance. And just now he was brimful of curiosity, pattering all over the room, poking his nose into a great pile of “Idol-Breakers,” sniffing at theological and anti-theological books with perfect impartiality, rubbing himself against Raeburn's foot in the most ingratiating way, and finally springing up on Erica's lap with the oddest mixture of defiance and devotion in his eyes which said as plainly as if he had spoken: “People may say what they like about you, but I'm your faithful dog from this day forward!”

Raeburn was obliged to go out almost directly as he had an appointment in the city, but Erica knew that he had seen enough of Donovan to realize what he was and was satisfied.

“I am so glad you have just met,” she said when he had left the room. “And, as to Dolly, she's been a real god-send. I haven't seen my father smile before for a week.”

“Strange, is it not, how almost always children instinctively take to those whom the world treats as outcasts. I have a great belief that God lets the pure and innocent make up in part by their love for the uncharitableness of the rest of us.”

“That's a nice thought,” said Erica. “I have never had much to do with children, except with this one.” And as she spoke she lifted Dolly on her lap beside Tottie.

“I have good reason to believe in both this kind and that,” said Donovan, touching the dusky head of the dog and the sunny hair of the child. As he spoke there was a look in his eyes which made Erica feel inclined almost to cry. She knew that he was thinking of the past though there was no regret in his expression, only a shade of additional gravity about his lips and an unusual light about his brow and eyes. It was the face of a man who had known both the evil and the good, and had now reached far into the Unseen.

By and by they talked of Switzerland and of Brian, Donovan telling her just what she wanted to know about him though he never let her feel that he knew all about the day at Fiesole. And from that they passed to the coming trial of which he spoke in exactly the most helpful way, not trying to assure her, as some well-meaning people had done, that there was really nothing to be grieved or anxious about; but fully sympathizing with the pain while he somehow led her on to the thought of the unseen good which would in the long run result from it.

“I do believe that now, with all my heart.” she said.

“I knew you did,” he replied, smiling a little. “You have learned it since you were at Greyshot last year. And once learned it is learned forever.”

“Yes,” she said musingly. “But, oh! How slowly one learns in such little bits. It's a great mistake to think that we grasp the whole when the light first comes to us, and yet it feels then like the whole.”

“Because it was the whole you were then capable of,” said Donovan. “But, you see, you grow.”

“Want to grow, at any rate,” said Erica. “Grow conscious that there is an Infinite to grow to.”

Then, as in a few minutes he rose to go:

“Well, you have done me good, you and Dolly, and this blessed little dog. Thank you very much for coming.”

She went out with them to the door and stood on the steps with Tottie in her arms, smiling a goodbye to little Dolly.

“That's the bravest woman I know,” thought Donovan to himself, “and the sweetest save one. Poor Brian! Though, after all, it's a grand thing to love such as Erica even without hope.”

And all the afternoon there rang in his ears the line

“A woman's soul, most soft, yet strong.”

The next day troubles began in good earnest. They were all very silent at breakfast. Raeburn looked anxious and preoccupied, and Erica, not feeling sure that conversation would not worry him, did not try to talk. Once Aunt Jean looked up for a moment from her paper with a question.

“By the bye, what are you going to wear, Erica?”

“Sackcloth, I think,” said Erica; “it would be appropriate.”

Raeburn smiled a little at this.

“Something cool, I should advise,” he said. “The place will be like a furnace today.”

He pushed back his chair as he spoke and went away to his study. Tom had to hurry away, too, being due at his office by nine o'clock; and Erica began to rack her brains to devise the nicest of dinners for them that evening. She dressed in good time, and was waiting for her father in the green room when just before ten o'clock the front door opened, quick steps came up the stairs, and, to her amazement, Tom entered.

“Back again!” she exclaimed. “Have you got a holiday?”

“I've got my conge',” he said in a hoarse voice, throwing himself down in a chair by the window.

“Tom! What do you mean?” she cried, dismayed by the trouble in his face.

“Got the sack,” he said shortly.

“What! Lost your situation? But how? Why?”

“I was called this morning into Mr. Ashgrove's private room; he informed me that he had just learned with great annoyance that I was the nephew of that (you can supply his string of abusive adjectives) Luke Raeburn. Was it true? I told him I had that honor. Was I, then, an atheist? Certainly. A Raeburnite? Naturally. After which came a long oration, at the end of which I found myself the wrong side of the office door with orders never to darken it again, and next month's salary in my hand. That's the matter in brief, CUGINA.”

His face settled into a sort of blank despair so unlike its usual expression that Erica's wrath flamed up at the sight.

“It's a shame!” she cried “a wicked shame! Oh, Tom dear, I am so sorry for you. I wish this had come upon me instead.”

“I wouldn't care so much,” said poor Tom huskily, “if he hadn't chosen just this time for it; but it will worry the chieftain now.”

Erica was on the verge of tears.

“Oh, what shall we do what can we do?” she cried almost in despair. “I had not thought of that. Father will feel it dreadfully.”

But to conceal the matter was now hopeless for, as she spoke, Raeburn came into the room.

“What shall I feel dreadfully?” he said, smiling a little. “If any man ought to be case-hardened, I ought to be.”

But as he drew nearer and saw the faces of the two, his own face grew stern and anxious.

“You at home, Tom! What's the matter?”

Tom briefly told his tale, trying to make as light of it as possible, even trying to force a little humor into his account, but with poor success. There was absolute silence in the green room when he paused. Raeburn said not a word, but he grew very pale, evidently in this matter being by no means case-hardened. A similar instance, further removed from his immediate circle, might have called forth a strong, angry denunciation; but he felt too deeply anything affecting his own family or friends to be able in the first keenness of his grief and anger to speak.

“My boy,” he said at last, in a low, musical voice whose perfect modulations taxed Tom's powers of endurance to the utmost, “I am very sorry for this. I can't say more now; we will talk it over tonight. Will you come to Westminster with us?”

And presently as they drove along the crowded streets, he said with a bitter smile:

“There's one Biblical woe which by no possibility can ever befall us.”

“What's that?” said Tom.

“'Woe unto you when all men speak well of you,'” said Raeburn.

A few minutes later, and the memorable trial of Raeburn v. Pogson had at length begun. Raeburn's friends had done their best to dissuade him from conducting his own case, but he always replied to them with one of his Scotch proverbs “A man's a lion in his ain cause.” His opening speech was such an exceedingly powerful one that all felt on the first day that he had been right though inevitably it added not a little to the disagreeableness of the case.

As soon as the court had risen, Erica went home with her aunt and Tom, thankful to feel that at least one day was well over; but her father was closeted for some hours with his solicitor and did not rejoin them till late that evening. He came in then, looking fearfully tired, and scarcely spoke all through dinner; but afterward, just as Tom was leaving the room, he called him back.

“I've been thinking things over,” he said. “What was your salary with Mr. Ashgrove?”

“One hundred pounds a year,” replied Tom, wondering at what possible hour the chieftain had found a spare moment to bestow upon his affairs.

“Well, then, will you be my secretary for the same?”

For many years Tom had given all his spare time to helping Raeburn with his correspondence, and for some time he had been the practical, though unrecognized, sub-editor of the “Idol-Breaker,” but all his work had been done out of pure devotion to the “cause.” Nothing could have pleased him more than to give his whole time to the work while his great love and admiration for Raeburn eminently qualified him for the service of a somewhat autocratic master.

Raeburn, with all his readiness to help those in any difficulty, with all his geniality and thoroughness of character, was by no means the easiest person to work with. For, in common with other strong and self-reliant characters, he liked in all things to have his own way, and being in truth a first-rate organizer, he had scant patience with other people's schemes. Erica was very glad that he had made the proposal to Tom for, though regretting that he should give his life to the furtherance of work, much of which she strongly disapproved, she could not but be relieved at anything which would save her father in some degree from the immense strain of work and anxiety, which were now altogether beyond the endurance of a single man, and bid fair to overtax even Raeburn's giant strength.

Both Charles Osmond and Brian appeared as voluntary witnesses on behalf of the plaintiff, and naturally the first few days of the trial were endurable enough. But on the Friday the defense began, and it became evident that the most bitter spirit would pervade the rest of the proceedings. Mr. Pogson had spared neither trouble nor expense; he had brought witnesses from all the ends of the earth to swear that, in some cases twenty years ago, they had heard the plaintiff speak such and such words, or seen him do such and such deeds. The array of witnesses appeared endless; there seemed no reason why the trial ever should come to an end. It bid fair to be a CAUSE CELEBRE, while inevitably Raeburn's notoriety made the public take a great interest in the proceedings. It became the topic of the day. Erica rarely went in any public conveyance without hearing it discussed.

One day she heard the following cheering sentiment:

“Oh, of course you know the jury will never give a verdict for such a fellow as Raeburn.”

“I suppose they can't help being rather prejudiced against him because of his views; but, upon my word, it seems a confounded shame.” “Oh, I don't see that,” replied the first speaker. “If he holds such views, he must expect to suffer for them.”

Day after day passed and still the case dragged on. Erica became so accustomed to spending the day in court that at last it seemed to her that she had never done anything else all her life. Every day she hoped that

she might be called, longing to get the hateful piece of work over. But days and weeks passed, and still Mr. Cringer and his learned friends examined other witnesses, but kept her in reserve. Mr. Bircham had been exceedingly kind to her, and in the “Daily Review” office, where Erica was treated as a sort of queen, great indignation had been caused by Mr. Pogson's malice. “Our little lady” (her sobriquet there) received the hearty support and sympathy of every man in the place from the editor himself to the printer's devil. Every morning the office boy brought her in court the allotted work for the day, which she wrote as well as she could during the proceedings or at luncheon time, with the happy consciousness that all her short comings would be set right by the little Irish sub-editor who worshipped the ground she trod on and was always ready with courteous and unofficious help.

There were many little pieces of kindness which served to heighten that dreary summer for Mr. Pogson's ill-advised zeal had stimulated all lovers of justice into a protest against a most glaring instance of bigotry and unfair treatment. Many clergymen spoke out bravely and denounced the defendant's intolerance; many non-conformist ministers risked giving dire offense to their congregations by saying a good word for the plaintiff. Each protest did its modicum of good, but still the weary case dragged on, and every day the bitterness on either side seemed to increase.

Mr. Pogson had, by fair means or foul, induced an enormous number of witnesses to come forward and prove the truth of his statement, and day after day there were the most wearisome references to old diaries, to reports of meetings held in obscure places, perhaps more than a dozen years ago, or to some hashed and mangled report of a debate which, incredible though such meanness seems, had been specially constructed by some unscrupulous opponent in such a way as to alter the entire meaning of Raeburn's words—a process which may very easily be effected by a judicious omission of contexts. Raeburn was cheered and encouraged, however, in spite of all the thousand cares and annoyances of that time by the rapidly increasing number of his followers, and by many tokens of most touching devotion from the people for whom, however mistakenly, he had labored with unwearying patience and zeal. Erica saw only too plainly that Mr. Pogson was, in truth, fighting against Christianity, and every day brought fresh proofs of the injury done to Christ's cause by this modern instance of injustice and religious intolerance.

It was a terribly trying position, and any one a degree less brave and sincere would probably have lost all faith; but the one visible good effected by that miserable struggle was the strange influence it exerted in developing her character. She was one of those who seem to grow exactly in proportion to the trouble they have had to bear. And so it came to pass that, while evil was wrought in many quarters, in this one good resulted good not in the least understood by Raeburn, or Aunt Jean, or Tom, who merely knew that Erica was less hot and hasty than in former times, and found it more of a relief than ever to come home to her loving sympathy.

“After all,” they used to say, “the miserable delusion hasn't been able to spoil her.”

One day, just after the court had reassembled in the afternoon, Erica was putting the finishing touches to a very sprightly criticism on a certain political speech, when suddenly she heard the name, for which she had waited so long, called in the clerk's most sonorous tones “Erica Raeburn!”

She was conscious of a sudden white flash as every face in the crowded court turned towards her, but more conscious of a strong Presence which seemed to wrap her in a calm so perfect that the disagreeable surroundings became a matter of very slight import. Here were hostile eyes, indeed; but she was strong enough to face all the powers of evil at once. A sort of murmur ran through the court as she entered the witness box, but she did not heed it any more than she would have heeded the murmur of the summer wind without. She just stood there, strong in her truth and purity, able, if need be, to set a whole world at defiance.

“Pogson's made a mistake in calling her,” said a briefless barrister to one of his companions in adversity; they both spent their lives in hanging about the courts, thankful when they could get a bit of “deviling.”

“Right you are!” replied the other, putting up his eyeglass to look at Erica, and letting it drop after a brief survey. “I'd bet twenty to one that girl loses him his case. And I'm hanged if he doesn't deserve to.”

“Well, it is rather a brutal thing to make a man's own child give evidence against him. Halloo! Just look at Raeburn! That man's either a consummate actor, or else a living impersonation of righteous anger.”

“No acting there,” replied the other, putting up his eyeglass again. “It's lucky dueling is a thing of the past or I expect Pogson would have a bullet in his heart before the day was over. I don't wonder he's furious, poor fellow! Now, then here's old Cringer working himself up into his very worst temper!”

The whispered dialogue was interrupted for a few minutes but was continued at intervals.

“By Jove, what a voice she's got! The jury will be flints if they are not influenced by it. Ah, you great brute! I wouldn't have asked her that question for a thousand pounds! How lovely she looks when she blushes! He'll confuse her, though, as sure as fate. No, not a bit of it! That was dignified, wasn't it? How the words rang, 'Of course not!' I say, Jack, this will be as good as a lesson in elocution for us!”

“Raeburn looks up at that for the first time. Well, poor devil! However much baited, he can, at any rate, feel proud of his daughter.”

Then came a long pause. For the fire of questions was so sharp that the two would not break the thread by speaking. Once or twice some particularly irritating question was ruled by the judge to be inadmissible, upon which Mr. Cringer looked, in a hesitatingly courteous manner, toward him, and obeyed orders with a smiling deference; then, facing round upon Erica, with a little additional venom, he visited his annoyance upon her by exerting all his unrivaled skill in endeavoring to make her contradict herself.

“You'll make nothing of this one, Cringer,” one of his friends had said to him at the beginning of Erica's evidence. And he had smiled confidently by way of reply. All the more was he now determined not to be worsted by a young girl whom he ought to be able to put out of countenance in ten minutes.

The result of this was that, in the words of the newspaper reports, “the witness's evidence was not concluded when the court rose.” This was perhaps the greatest part of the trial to Erica. She had hoped, not only for her own, but for her father's sake, that her evidence might all be taken in one day, and Mr. Cringer, while really harming his own cause by prolonging her evidence, inflicted no slight punishment on the most

troublesome witness he had ever had to deal with.

The next morning it all came over again with increased disagreeableness.

“Erica always was the plucky one,” said Tom to his mother as they watched her enter the witness box. “She always did the confessing when we got into scrapes. I only hope that brute of a Cringer won't put her out of countenance.”

He need not have feared, though in truth Erica was tried to the utmost. To begin with, it was one of the very hottest of the dog-days, and the court was crowded to suffocation. This was what the public considered the most interesting day of the trial for it was the most personal one, and the English have as great a taste for personalities as the Americans though it is not so constantly gratified. Apparently Mr. Cringer, being a shrewd man, had managed in the night watches to calculate Erica's one vulnerable point. She was fatally clear-headed; most aggravatingly and palpably truthful; most unfortunately fascinating; and, though naturally quick-tempered, most annoyingly self-controlled. But she was evidently delicate. If he could sufficiently harass and tire her, he might make her say pretty much what he pleased.

This, at least, was the conclusion at which he had arrived. And if it was indeed his duty to the defendant to exhaust both fair means and foul in the endeavor to win him his case, then he certainly fulfilled his duty. For six long hours, with only a brief interval for luncheon, Erica was baited, badgered, tormented with questions which in themselves were insults, assured that she had said what she had not said, tempted to say what she did not mean, involved in fruitless discussions about places and dates and, in fact, so thoroughly tortured, that most girls would long before have succumbed. She did not succumb, but she grew whiter and whiter save when some vile insinuation brought a momentary wave of crimson across her face.

Tom listened breathlessly to the examination which went on in a constant crescendo of bitterness.

“The plaintiff was in the habit of doing this?”

“Yes.”

“Your suspicion was naturally excited, then?”

“Certainly not.”

“Not excited?” incredulously.

“Not in the least.”

“You are an inmate of the plaintiff's house, I believe?”

“I am.”

“But this has not always been the case?”

“All my life with the exception of two years.”

“Your reason for the two years' absence had a connection with the plaintiff's mode of life, had it not?”

“Not in the sense you wish to imply. It had a connection with our extreme poverty.”

“Though an inmate of you father's house, you are often away from home?”

“No, very rarely.”

“Oblige me by giving a straightforward answer. What do you mean by rarely?”

“Very seldom.”

“This is mere equivocation; will you give me a straightforward reply?”

“I can't make it more so,” said Erica, keeping her temper perfectly and replying to the nagging interrogatories. “Do you mean once a year, twice a year?” etc., etc., with a steady patience which foiled Mr. Cringer effectually. He opened a fresh subject.

“Do you remember the 1st of September last year?”

“I do.”

“Do you remember what happened then?”

“Partridge shooting began.”

There was much laughter at this reply; she made it partly because even now the comic side of everything struck her, partly because she wanted to gain time. What in the world was Mr. Cringer driving at?

“Did not something occur that night in Guilford Terrace which you were anxious to conceal?”

For a moment Erica was dumfounded. It flashed upon her that he knew of the Haeberlein adventure and meant to serve his purpose by distorting it into something very different. Luckily she was almost as rapid a thinker as her father; she saw that there was before her a choice of two evils. She must either allow Mr. Cringer to put an atrocious construction on her unqualified “yes” or she must boldly avow Haeberlein's visit.

“With regard to my father there was nothing to conceal,” she replied.

“Will you swear that there was NOTHING to conceal?”

“With regard to my father there was nothing to conceal,” she replied.

“Don't bandy words with me. Will you repeat my formula 'Nothing to conceal?'”

“No, I will not repeat that.”

“You admit that there WAS something to conceal?”

“If you call Eric Haeberlein 'something' yes.”

There was a great sensation in the court at these words. But Mr. Cringer was nonplused. The mysterious “something,” out of which he had intended to make such capital, was turned into a boldly avowed reality a reality which would avail him nothing. Moreover, most people would now see through his very unworthy maneuvers. Furiously he hurled question upon question at Erica. He surpassed himself in sheer bullying. By this time, too, she was very weary. The long hours of standing, the insufferable atmosphere, the incessant stabs at her father's character made the examination almost intolerable. And the difficulty of answering the fire of questions was great. She struggled on, however, until the time came when Raeburn stood up to ask whether a certain question was allowable. She looked at him then for the first time, saw how terribly he was

feeling her interminable examination, and for a moment lost heart. The rows of people grew hazy and indistinct. Mr. Cringer's face got all mixed up with his wig, she had to hold tightly to the railing. How much longer could she endure?

“Yet you doubtless thought this probable?” continued her tormentor.

“Oh, no! On the contrary, quite the reverse,” said Erica with a momentary touch of humor.

“Are you acquainted with the popular saying: 'None are so blind as those who will not see?'”

The tone was so insulting that indignation restored Erica to her full strength; she was stung into giving a sharp retort.

“Yes,” she said very quietly. “It has often occurred to me during this action as strangely applicable to the defendant.”

Mr. Cringer looked as if he could have eaten her. There was a burst of applause which was speedily suppressed.

“Yet you do not, of course, mean to deny the whole allegation?”

“Emphatically!”

“Are you aware that people will think you either a deluded innocent or an infamous deceiver?”

“I am not here to consider what people may think of me, but to speak the truth.”

And as she spoke she involuntarily glanced toward those twelve fellow-countrymen of hers upon whose verdict so much depended. Probably even the oldest, even the coldest of the jurymen felt his heart beat a little faster as those beautiful, sad honest eyes scanned the jury box. As for the counsel for the defense, he prudently accepted his defeat and, as Raeburn would not ask a single question of his daughter in cross-examination, another witness was called.

Long after, it was a favorite story among the young barristers of how Mr. Cringer was checkmated by Raeburn's daughter.

The case dragged on its weary length till August. At last, when two months of the public time had been consumed, when something like 20,000 pounds had been spent, when most bitter resentment had been stirred up among the secularists, Mr. Pogson's defense came to an end. Raeburn's reply was short, but effective; and the jury returned a verdict in his favor, fixing the damages, however, at the very lowest sum, not because they doubted that Raeburn had been most grossly libeled, but because the plaintiff had the misfortune to be an atheist.

CHAPTER XXXVI. Rose's Adventure

If Christians would teach Infidels to be just to
Christianity, they should themselves be just to infidelity.
John Stuart Mill

The green room was one of those rooms which show to most advantage on a winter evening; attractive and comfortable at all times, it nevertheless reached its highest degree of comfort when the dusky green curtains were drawn, when the old wainscoted walls were lighted up by the red glow from the fire, and the well-worn books on the shelves were mellowed by the soft light into a uniform and respectable brown. One November evening, when without was the thickest of London fogs, Erica was sitting at her writing table with Friskarina on her lap, and Tottie curled up at her feet, preparing for one of her science classes, when she was interrupted by the sound of a cab drawing up, speedily followed by a loud ring at the bell.

“Surely Monsieur Noirol can't have come already!” she said to herself, looking at her watch. It was just six o'clock, a whole hour before dinner time. Steps were approaching the door, however, and she was just inhospitably wishing her guest elsewhere, when to her intense amazement the servant announced “Miss Fane-Smith.”

She started forward with an exclamation of incredulity for it seemed absurd to think of Rose actually coming to see her in her father's house. But incredulity was no longer possible when Rose herself entered, in ulster and traveling hat, with her saucy laughing face, and her invariable content with herself and the world in general.

“Why, Erica!” she cried, kissing her on both cheeks, “I don't believe you're half properly glad to see me! Did you think it was my wraith? I assure you it's my own self in the flesh, and very cold flesh, too. What a delightful room! I'd no idea atheists' homes were so much like other people's. You cold-hearted little cousin, why don't you welcome me?”

“I am very glad to see you,” said Erica, kissing her again. “But, Rose, what did bring you here?”

“A fusty old cab, a four-wheeler, a growler, don't you call them? But, if you knew why I have come to you in this unexpected way, you would treat me like the heroine I am, and not stand there like an incarnation of prudent hesitation. I've bee treated like the man in the parable, I've fallen among thieves, and am left with my raiment, certainly, but not a farthing besides in the world. And now, of course, you'll enact the good Samaritan..”

“Come and get warm,” said Erica, drawing a chair toward the fire, but still feeling uncomfortable at the idea of Mr. Fane-Smith's horror and dismay could he have seen his daughter's situation.

“How do you come to be in town, Rose, and where were you robbed?”

“Why, I was going to stay with the Alburys at Sandgale, and left home about three, but at Paddington, when I went to get my ticket, lo and behold my purse had disappeared, and I was left lamenting, like Lord Ullin in the song.”

“Have you any idea who took it?”

“Yes, I rather think it must have been a man on the Paddington platform who walked with a limp. I remember his pushing up against me very roughly, and I suppose that was when he took it. The porters were all horrid about it, though, I could get no one to help me, and I hadn't even the money to get my ticket. At last an old lady, who had heard of my penniless condition, advised me to go to any friends I might happen to have in London, and I bethought me of my cousin Erica. You will befriend me, won't you? For it is impossible to get to Sandgale tonight; there is no other train stopping there.”

“I wish I knew what was right,” said Erica, looking much perplexed. “You see, Rose, I'm afraid Mr. Fane-Smith would not like you to come here.”

“Oh, nonsense,” said Rose, laughing. “He couldn't mind in such a case as this. Why, I can't stay in the street all night. Besides, he doesn't know anything about your home, how should he?”

This was true enough, but still Erica hesitated.

“Who was that white-haired patriarchal-looking man whom I met in the hall?” asked Rose. “A sort of devotional quaker-kind of man.”

Erica laughed aloud at this description.

“That's my father!” she said; and, before she had quite recovered her gravity, Raeburn came into the room with some papers which he wanted copied.

“Father,” said Erica, “this is Rose, and she has come to ask our help because her purse has been stolen at Paddington, and she is stranded in London with no money.”

“It sounds dreadfully like begging,” said Rose, looking up into the brown eyes which seemed half kindly, half critical.

They smiled at this, and became at once only kind and hospitable.

“Not in the least,” he said; “I am very glad you came to us.”

And then he began to ask her many practical questions about her adventure, ending by promising to put the matter at once into the hands of the police. They were just discussing the impossibility of getting to Sandgale that evening when Tom came into the room.

“Where is mother?” he asked. “She has kept her cab at the door at least ten minutes; I had to give the fellow an extra sixpence.”

“That wasn't auntie's cab,” said Erica, “she came home half an hour ago; it was Rose's cab. I hope you didn't send away her boxes?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Tom, looking much surprised and a little amused. “The boxes are safe in the hall, but I'm afraid the cab is gone beyond recall.”

“You see it is evidently meant that I should quarter myself upon you!” said Rose, laughing.

Upon which Raeburn, with a grave and slightly repressive courtesy, said they should be very happy if she would stay with them.

“That will make my adventure perfect!” said Rose, her eyes dancing.

At which Raeburn smiled again, amused to think of the uneventful life in which such a trifling incident could seem an “adventure.”

“It seems very inhospitable,” said Erica, “but don't you think, Rose, you had better go back to Greyshot?”

“No, you tiresome piece of prudence, I don't,” said Rose perversely. “And what's more, I won't, as Uncle Luke has asked me to stay.”

Erica felt very uncomfortable; she could have spoken decidedly had she been alone with any of the three, but she could not, before them all, say: “Mr. Fane-Smith thinks father an incarnation of wickedness and would be horrified if he knew that you were here.”

Tom had in the meantime walked to the window and drawn aside the curtain.

“The weather means to settle the question for you,” he said. “You really can't go off in such a fog as this; it would take you hours to get to Paddington, if you ever did get there, which is doubtful.”

They looked out and saw that he had not exaggerated matters; the fog had grown much worse since Rose's arrival, and it had been bad enough then to make traveling by no means safe. Erica saw that there was no help for it. Mr. Fane-Smith's anger must be incurred, and Rose must stay with them. She went away to see that her room was prepared, and coming back a little later found that in that brief time Rose had managed to enthrall poor Tom who, not being used to the genus, was very easily caught, his philosophy being by no means proof against a fair-haired, bright-looking girl who in a very few moments made him feel that she thought most highly of him and cared as no one had ever cared before for his opinion. She had not the smallest intention of doing harm, but admiration was what she lived for, and to flirt with every man she met had become almost as natural and necessary to her as to breathe.

Erica, out of loyalty to Mr. Fane-Smith and regard for Tom's future happiness, felt bound to be hard-hearted and to separate them at dinner. Tom used to sit at the bottom of the table as Raeburn did not care for the trouble of carving; Erica was at the head with her father in his usual place at her right hand. She put Rose in between him and the professor who generally dined with them on Saturday; upon the opposite side were Aunt Jean and M. Noirol. Now Rose, who had been quite in her element as long as she had been talking with Tom in the green room, felt decidedly out of her element when she was safely ensconced between her white-haired uncle and the shaggy-looking professor. If Erica had felt bewildered when first introduced to the gossip and small “society” talk of Greyshot, Rose felt doubly bewildered when for the first time in her life she came into a thoroughly scientific atmosphere. She realized that there were a few things which she had yet to learn. She was not fond of learning so the discovery was the reverse of pleasant; she felt ignorant and humbled, liking to be AU FAIT at everything and to know things and do things just a little better than other people. Having none of the humility of a true learner, she only felt annoyed at her own ignorance, not raised and bettered and stimulated by a glimpse of the infinite greatness of science.

Raeburn, seeing that she was not in the least interested in the discussion of the future of electricity, left the professor to continue it with Tom, and began to talk to her about the loss of her purse, and to tell her of various losses which he had had. But Rose had the mortifying consciousness that all the time he talked he was listening to the conversation between Erica and M. Noirol. As far as Rose could make out it was on French politics; but they spoke so fast that her indifferent school French was of very little service to her. By and by Raeburn was drawn into the discussion and Rose was left to amuse herself as well as she could by listening to a rapid flow of unintelligible French on one side, and to equally unintelligible scientific talk on the other. By and by this was merged into a discussion some recent book. They seemed to get deeply interested in a dispute as to whether Spinoza was or was not at any time in his life a Cartesian.

Rose really listened to this for want of something better to do, and Raeburn, thinking that he had been neglecting her, and much relieved at the thought that he had at length found some point of mutual interest, asked her whether she had read the book in question.

“Oh, I have no time for reading,” said Rose.

He looked a little amused at this statement. Rose continued:

“Who was Spinoza? I never heard any of his music.”

“He was a philosopher, not a composer,” said Raeburn, keeping his countenance with difficulty.

“What dreadfully learned people you are!” said Rose with one of her arch smiles. “But do tell me, how can a man be a Cartesian? I've heard of Cartesian wells, but never—”

She broke off for this was quite too much for Raeburn's gravity; he laughed, but so pleasantly that she laughed too.

“You are thinking of artesian wells, I fancy,” he said in his kindly voice; and he began to give her a brief outline of Descartes' philosophy, which it is to be feared she did not at all appreciate. She was not sorry when Erica appealed to him for some disputed fact, in which they all seemed most extraordinarily interested, for when the discussion had lasted some minutes, Tom went off in the middle of dinner and fetched in two or three bulky books of reference; these were eagerly seized upon, to the entire disregard of the pudding which was allowed to get cold.

Presently the very informal meal was ended by some excellent coffee in the place of the conventional dessert, after which came a hurried dispersion as they were all going to some political meeting at the East End. Cabs were unattainable and, having secured a couple of link-boys, they set off, apparently in excellent spirits.

“Fancy turning out on such a night as this!” said Rose, putting her arm within Erica's. “I am so glad you are not going for now we can really have a cozy talk. I've ever so much to tell you.”

Erica looked rather wistfully after the torches and the retreating forms as they made their way down the steps; she was much disappointed at being obliged to miss this particular meeting, but luckily Rose was not in the least likely to find this out for she could not imagine for a moment that any one really cared about missing a political meeting, particularly when it would have involved turning out on such a disagreeable night.

Erica had persuaded Rose to telegraph both to her friends at Sandgale and to her mother to tell of her adventure and to say that she would go on to Sandgale on the Monday. For, unfortunately, the next day was Sunday, and Rose looked so aghast at the very idea of traveling then that Erica could say nothing more though she surmised rightly enough that Mr. Fane-Smith would have preferred even Sunday traveling to a Sunday spent in Luke Raeburn's house. There was evidently, however, no help for it. Rose was there, and there she must stay; all that Erica could do was to keep her as much as might be out of Tom's way, and to beg the others not to discuss any subjects bearing on their anti-religious work; and since there was not the smallest temptation to try to make Rose a convert to secularism, they were all quite willing to avoid such topics.

But, in spite of all her care, Erica failed most provokingly that day. To begin with, Rose pleaded a headache and would not go with her to the early service. Erica was disappointed; but when, on coming home, she found Rose in the dining room comfortably chatting over the fire to Tom, who was evidently in the seventh heaven of happiness, she felt as if she could have shaken them both. By and by she tried to give Tom a hint, which he did not take at all kindly.

“Women never like to see another woman admired,” he replied with a sarcastic smile.

“But, Tom,” she pleaded, “her father would be so dreadfully angry if he saw the way you go on with her.”

“Oh, shut up, do, about her father!” said Tom crossly. “You have crammed him down our throats quite enough.”

It was of no use to say more; but she went away feeling sore and ruffled. She was just about to set off with Rose to Charles Osmond's church when the door of the study was hastily opened.

“Have you seen the last 'Longstaff Mercury'?” said Raeburn in the voice which meant that he was worried and much pressed for time.

“It was in here yesterday,” said Erica.

“Then, Tom, you must have moved it,” said Raeburn sharply. “It's a most provoking thing; I specially wanted to quote from it.”

“I've not touched it,” said Tom. “It's those servants; they never can leave the papers alone.”

He was turning over the contents of a paper rack, evidently not in the best of tempers. Rose sprang forward.

“Let me help,” she said with one of her irresistible smiles.

Erica felt more provoked than she would have cared to own. It was very clear that those two would never find anything.

“Look here, Erica,” said Raeburn, “do see if it isn't upstairs. Tom is a terrible hand at finding things.”

So she searched in every nook and cranny of the house and at last found the torn remains of the paper in

the house maid's cupboard. The rest of it had been used for lighting a fire.

Raeburn was a good deal annoyed.

“Surely, my dear, such things might be prevented,” he said, not crossly but in the sort of forbearing expostulatory tone which a woman dislikes more than anything, specially if she happens to be a careful housekeeper.

“I told you it was your servants!” said Tom triumphantly.

“They've orders again and again not to touch the newspapers,” said Erica.

“Well, come along Tom,” said Raeburn, taking up his hat. “We are very late.”

They drove off, and Erica and Rose made the best of their way to church, to find the service begun, and seats unattainable. Rose was very good-natured, however, about the standing. She began faintly to perceive that Erica did not lead the easiest of lives; also she saw, with a sort of wonder, what an influence she was in the house and how, notwithstanding their difference in creed, she was always ready to meet the others on every point where it was possible to do so. Rose could not help thinking of a certain friend of hers who, having become a ritualist, never lost an opportunity of emphasizing the difference between her own views and the views of her family; and of Kate Righton at Greyshot who had adopted the most rigid evangelical views, and treated her good old father and mother as “worldly” and “unconverted” people.

In the afternoon Tom had it all his own way. Raeburn was in his study preparing for his evening lecture; Mrs. Craigie had a Bible class at the East End, in which she showed up the difficulties and contradictions of the Old and New Testaments; Erica had a Bible class in Charles Osmond's parish, in which she tried to explain the same difficulties. Rose was therefore alone in the green room and quite ready to attract Tom and keep him spellbound for the afternoon. It is possible, however, that no great harm would have been done if the visit had come to a natural end the following day; Rose would certainly have thought no more of Tom, and Tom might very possibly have come to his senses when she was no longer there to fascinate him. But on the Sunday evening when the toils of the day were over, and they were all enjoying the restful home quiet which did not come very often in their busy lives, Rose's visit was brought to an abrupt close.

Looked at by an impartial spectator, the green room would surely have seemed a model of family peace and even of Sunday restfulness. Rose was sitting at the piano playing Mendelssohn's “Christmas Pieces,” and giving great pleasure to every one for art was in this house somewhat overshadowed by science, and it did not very often happen that they could listen to such playing as Rose's which was for that reason a double pleasure. Tom was sitting near her looking supremely peaceful. On one side of the fireplace Mrs. Craigie and Mrs. MacNaughton were playing their weekly game of chess. On the other side Raeburn had his usual Sunday evening recreation, his microscope. Erica knelt beside him, her auburn head close to his white one as they arranged their specimens or consulted books of reference. The professor, who had looked in on his way home from the lecture to borrow a review, was browsing contentedly among the books on the table with the comfortable sense that he might justifiably read in a desultory holiday fashion.

It was upon this peaceful and almost Sabbatical group that a disturbing element entered in the shape of Mr. Fane-Smith. He stood for an instant at the door, taking in the scene, or rather taking that superficial view which the narrow-minded usually take. He was shocked at the chessmen; shocked at that profane microscope, and those week-day sections of plants; shocked at the music, though he must have heard it played as a voluntary on many church organs, and not only shocked, but furious, at finding his daughter in a very nest of secularists.

Every one seemed a little taken aback when he entered. He took no notice whatever of Raeburn, but went straight up to Rose.

“Go and put on your things at once,” he said; “I have come to take you home.”

“Oh, papa,” began Rose, “how you—”

“Not a word, Rose. Go and dress, and don't keep me waiting.”

Erica, with a vain hope of making Mr. Fane-Smith behave at least civilly, came forward and shook hands with him.

“I don't think you have met my father before,” she said.

Raeburn had come a few steps forward; Mr. Fane-Smith inclined his about a quarter of an inch; Raeburn bowed, then said to Erica:

“Perhaps Mr. Fane-Smith would prefer waiting in my study.”

“Thanks, I will wait where I am,” said Mr. Fane-Smith, pointedly, ignoring the master of the house and addressing Erica. “Thank you,” as she offered him a chair, “I prefer to stand. Have the goodness to see that Rose is quick.”

“Thinks the chair's atheistical!” remarked Tom to himself.

Raeburn, looking a degree more stately than usual, stood on the hearth rug with his back to the fire, not in the least forgiving his enemy, but merely adopting for himself the most dignified role. Mr. Fane-Smith a few paces off with his anger and ill-concealed contempt did not show to advantage. Something in the relative sizes of the two struck the professor as comically like Landseer's “Dignity and Impudence.” He would have smiled at the thought had he not been very angry at the discourteous treatment his friend was receiving. Mrs. MacNaughton sat with her queen in her hand as though meditating her next move, but in reality absorbed in watching the game played by the living chess-men before her. Tom at last broke the uncomfortable silence by asking the professor about some of Erica's specimens, and at length Rose came down, much to every one's relief, followed by Erica, who had been helping her to collect the things.

“Are you ready?” said her father. “Then come at once.”

“Let me at least say goodbye, papa,” said Rose, very angry at being forced to make this undignified and, as she rightly felt, rude exit.

“Come at once,” said Mr. Fane-Smith in an inexorable voice. As he left the room he turned and bowed stiffly.

“Go down and open the door for them, Tom,” said Raeburn, who throughout Mr. Fane-Smith's visit had maintained a stern, stately silence.

Tom, nothing loth, obeyed. Erica was already half way downstairs with the guests, but he caught them up and managed to say goodbye to Rose, even to whisper a hope that they might meet again, to which Rose replied with a charming blush and smile which, Tom flattered himself, meant that she really cared for him. Had Rose gone quietly away the next morning, he would not have been goaded into any such folly. A cab was waiting; but, when Rose was once inside it, her father recovered his power of speech and turned upon Erica as they stood by the front door.

“I should have thought,” he said in an angry voice, “that after our anxiety to persuade you to leave your home, you might have known that I should never allow Rose to enter this hell, to mix with blaspheming atheists, to be contaminated by vile infidels!”

Erica's Highland hospitality and strong family loyalty were so outraged by the words that to keep silent was impossible.

“You forget to whom you are speaking,” she said quickly. “You forget that this is my father's house!”

“I would give a good deal to be able to forget,” said Mr. Fane-Smith. “I have tried to deal kindly with you, tried to take you from this accursed place, and you repay me by tempting Rose to stay with you!”

Erica had recovered herself by this time. Tom, watching her, could not but wonder at her self-restraint. She did not retaliate, did not even attempt to justify her conduct; at such a moment words would have been worse than useless. But Tom, while fully appreciating the common sense of the non-resistance, was greatly astonished. Was this his old playmate who had always had the most deliciously aggravating retort ready? Was this hot-tempered Erica? That Mr. Fane-Smith's words were hurting her very much he could see; he guessed, too, that the consciousness that he, a secularist, was looking on at this unfortunate display of Christian intolerance, added a sting to her grief.

“It is useless to profess Christianity,” stormed Mr. Fane-Smith, “if you openly encourage infidelity by consorting with these blasphemers. You are no Christian! A mere Socinian a Latitudinarian!”

Erica's lips quivered a little at this; but she remembered that Christ had been called harder names still by religious bigots of His day, and she kept silence.

“But understand this,” continued Mr. Fane-Smith, “that I approve less than ever of your intimacy with Rose, and until you come to see your folly in staying here, your worse than folly your deliberate choice of home and refusal to put religious duty first there had better be no more intercourse between us.”

“Can you indeed think that religious duty ever requires a child to break the fifth commandment?” said Erica with no anger but with a certain sadness in her tone. “Can you really think that by leaving my father I should be pleasing a perfectly loving God?”

“You lean entirely on your own judgment!” said Mr. Fane-Smith; “if you were not too proud to be governed by authority, you would see that precedent shows you to be entirely in the wrong. St. John rushed from the building polluted by the heretic Cerinthus, a man who, compared with your father, was almost orthodox!”

Erica smiled faintly.

“If that story is indeed true, I should think he remembered before long a reproof his intolerance brought him once. 'Ye know not what spirit ye are of.” And really, if we are to fall back upon tradition, I may quote the story of Abraham turning the unbeliever out of his tent on a stormy night. 'I have suffered him these hundred years,' was the Lord's reproof, 'though he dishonored Me, and couldst thou not endure him for one night?' I am sorry to distress you, but I must do what I know to be right.

“Don't talk to me of right,” exclaimed Mr. Fane-Smith with a shudder. “You are wilfully putting your blaspheming father before Christ. But I see my words are wasted. Let me pass! The air of this house is intolerable to me!”

He hurried away, his anger flaming up again when Tom followed him, closing the door of the cab with punctilious politeness. Rose was frightened.

“Oh, papa,” she said, trembling, “why are you so angry? You haven't been scolding Erica about it? If there was any fault anywhere, the fault was mine. What did you say to her, papa? What have you been doing?”

Mr. Fane-Smith was in that stage of anger when it is pleasant to repeat all one's hot words to a second audience and, moreover, he wanted to impress Rose with the enormity of her visit. He repeated all that he had said to Erica, interspersed with yet harder words about her perverse self-reliance and disregard for authority.

Rose listened, but at the end she trembled no longer. She had in her a bit of the true Raeburn nature with its love of justice and its readiness to stand up for the oppressed.

“Papa,” she said, all her spoiled-child manners and little affectations giving place to the most perfect earnestness, “papa, you must forgive me for contradicting you, but you are indeed very much mistaken. I may have been silly to go there. Erica did try all she could to persuade me to go back to Greyshot yesterday; but I am glad I stayed even though you are so angry about it. If there is a noble, brave girl on earth, it is Erica! You don't know what she is to them all, and how they all love her. I will tell you what this visit has done for me. It has made me ashamed of myself, and I am going to try to be wiser, and less selfish.”

It was something of an effort to Rose to say this, but she had been very much struck with the sight of Erica's home life, and she wanted to prove to her father how greatly he had misjudged her cousin. Unfortunately, there are some people in this world who, having once got an idea into their heads, will keep it in the teeth of the very clearest evidence to the contrary.

In the meantime, Tom had rejoined Erica in the hall.

“How can such a brute have such a daughter?” he said. “Never mind, Cugina, you were a little brick, and treated him much better than he deserved. If that is a Christian, and this a Latitudinarian and all the other heresies he threw at your head, all I can say is, commend me to your sort, and may I never have the misfortune to encounter another of his!”

Erica did not reply; she felt too sick at heart. She walked slowly upstairs, trying to stifle the weary longing for Brian which, though very often present, became a degree less bearable when her isolated position between two fires, as it were had been specially emphasized.

“That's a nice specimen of Christian charity!” said Aunt Jean as they returned to the green room.

“And he set upon Erica at the door and hurled hard names at her as fast as he could go,” said Tom, proceeding to give a detailed account of Mr. Fane-Smith's parting utterances.

Erica picked up Tottie and held him closely, turning, as all lovers of animals do in times of trouble, to the comforting devotion of those dumb friends who do not season their love with curiosity or unasked advice, or that pity which is less sympathetic than silence, and burdens us with the feeling that our sad “case” will be gossiped over in the same pitying tones at afternoon teas and morning calls. Tottie could not gossip, but he could talk to her with his bright brown eyes, and do something to fill a great blank in her life.

Tom's account of the scene in the hall made every one angry.

“And yet,” said Mrs. MacNaughton, “these Christians, who used to us such language as this, own as their Master one who taught that a mere angry word which wounded a neighbor should receive severe punishment!”

Raeburn said nothing, only watched Erica keenly. She was leaning against the mantel piece, her eyes very sad-looking, and about her face that expression of earnest listening which is characteristic of those who are beginning to learn the true meaning of humility and “righteous judgment.” She had pushed back the thick waves of hair which usually overshadowed her forehead, and looked something between a lion with a tangled mane and a saint with a halo.

“Never mind,” said the professor, cheerfully, “it is to bigotry like this that we shall owe our recovery of Erica. And seriously, what can you think of a religion which can make a man behave like this to one who had never injured him, who, on the contrary, had befriended his child?”

“It is not Christ's religion which teaches him to do it,” said Erica, “it is the perversion of that religion.”

“Then in all conscience the perversion is vastly more powerful and extended than what you deem the reality.”

“Unfortunately yes,” said Erica, sighing. “At present it is.”

“At present!” retorted the professor; “why, you have had more than eighteen hundred years to improve it.”

“You yourself taught me to have patience with the slow processes of nature,” said Erica, smiling a little. “If you allow unthinkable ages for the perfecting of a layer of rocks, do you wonder that in a few hundred years a church is still far from perfect?”

“I expect perfection in no human being,” said the professor, taking up a Bible from the table and turning over the pages with the air of a man who knew its contents well; “when I see Christians in some sort obeying this, I will believe that their system is the true system; but not before.” He guided his finger slowly beneath the following lines: “'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice.' There is the precept, you see, and a very good precept, to be found in the secularist creed as well; but now let us look at the practice. See how we secularists are treated! Why, we live as it were in a foreign land, compelled to keep the law yet denied the protection of the law! 'Outlaws of the constitution, outlaws of the human race,' as Burke was kind enough to call us. No! When I see Christians no longer slandering our leaders, no longer coining hateful lies about us out of their own evil imaginations, when I see equal justice shown to all men of whatever creed, then, the all-conquering love. Christianity has yet to prove itself the religion of love; at present it is the religion of exclusion.”

Mrs. MacNaughton, who was exceedingly fond of Erica, looked sorry for her.

“You see, Erica,” she said, “the professor judges by averages. No one would deny that some of the greatest men in the world have been, and are even in the present day, Christians; they have been brought up in it, and can't free themselves from its trammels. You have a few people like the Osmonds, a few really liberal men; but you have only to see how they are treated by their confreres to realize the illiberality of the religion as a whole.”

“I think with you,” said Erica, “that if the revelation of God's love, and His purpose for all, be only to be learned from the lives of Christians, it is a bad lookout for us. But God HAS given us one perfect revelation of Himself, and the Perfect Son can make us see plainly even when the imperfect sons are holding up to us a distorted likeness of the Father.”

She had spoken quietly, but with the tremulousness of strong feeling, and, moreover, she was so sensitive that the weight of the hostile atmosphere oppressed her, and made speaking a great difficulty. When she had ended, she turned away from the disapproving eyes to the only sympathetic eyes in the room the dog's. They looked up into hers with that wistful endeavor to understand the meaning of something beyond their grasp, which makes the eyes of animals so pathetic.

There was a silence; her use of the adjective “perfect” had been very trying to all her hearers, who strongly disapproved of the whole sentence; but then she was so evidently sincere and so thoroughly lovable that no one liked to give her pain.

Aunt Jean was the only person who thought there was much chance of her ever returning to the ranks of secularism; she was the only one who spoke now.

“Well, well,” she said, pityingly, “you are but young; you will think very differently ten years hence.”

Erica kept back an angry retort with difficulty, and Raeburn, whose keen sense of justice was offended, instantly came forward in her defense, though her words had been like a fresh stab in the old wound.

“That is no argument, Jean,” he said quickly. “It is the very unjust extinguisher which the elders use for the suppression of individuality in the young.”

As he spoke, he readjusted a slide in his microscope, making it plain to all that he intended the subject to be dropped. He had a wonderful way of impressing his individuality on others, and the household settled down once more into the Sabbatical calm which had been broken by a bigoted Sabbatarian.

Nothing more was heard of Rose, nor did Erica have an opportunity of talking over the events of that Sunday with her father for some days for he was exceedingly busy; the long weeks wasted during the summer in the wearisome libel case having left upon his hands vast arrears of provincial work. In some of the large iron foundries you may see hundreds of different machines all kept in action by a forty horse-power engine; and Raeburn was the great motive-power which gave life to all the branches of Raeburnites which now stretched throughout the length and breadth of the land. Without him they would have relapsed, very probably, into that fearfully widespread mass of indifference which is not touched by any form of Christianity or religious revival, but which had responded to the practical, secular teaching of the singularly powerful secularist leader. He had a wonderful gift of stirring up the heretofore indifferent, and making them take a really deep interest in national questions. This was by far the happiest part of his life because it was the healthy part of it. The sameness of his anti-theological work, and the barrenness of mere down-pulling, were distasteful enough to him; he was often heartily sick of it all, and had he not thought it a positive duty to attack what he deemed a very mischievous delusion, he would gladly have handed over this part of his work to some one else, and devoted himself entirely to national work.

He had been away from home for several days, lecturing in the north of England. Erica was not expecting his return till the following day, when one evening a telegram was brought in to her. It was from her father to this effect:

“Expect me home by mail train about two A.M. Place too hot to hold me.”

He had now to a great extent lived down the opposition which had made lecturing in his younger days a matter of no small risk to life and limb; but Erica knew that there were reasons which made the people of Ashborough particularly angry with him just now. Ashborough was one of those strange towns which can never be depended upon. It was renowned for its riots, and was, in fact (to use a slang word) a “rowdy” place. More than once in the old days Raeburn had been roughly handled there, and Erica bore a special grudge to it, for it was the scene of her earliest recollection one of those dark pictures which, having been indelibly traced on the heart of a child, influence the whole character and the future life far more than some people think.

It was perhaps old memory which made her waiting so anxious that evening. Moreover, she had at first no one to talk to, which made it much worse. Aunt Jean had gone to bed with a bad toothache, and must on no account be disturbed; and Tom had suddenly announced his intention that morning of going down to Brighton on his bicycle, and had set off, rather to Erica's dismay, since, in a letter to Charles Osmond, Donovan happened to have mentioned that the Fane-Smiths had taken a house there for six weeks. She hated herself for being suspicious; but Tom had been so unlike himself since Rose's visit, and it was such an unheard-of thing that he should take a day's holiday during her father's absence, that it was scarcely possible to avoid drawing the natural inference. She was very unhappy about him, but did not of course feel justified in saying a word to any one else about the matter. Charles Osmond happened to look in for a few minutes later on, expecting to find Raeburn at home, and then in her relief she did give him an account of the unfortunate Sunday though avoiding all mention of Tom.

“It was just like you to come at the very time I was wanting some one to talk to,” she said, sitting down in her favorite nook on the hearth rug with Friskie on her lap. “Not a word has been said of that miserable Sunday since though I'm afraid a good deal has been thought. After all, you know, there was a ludicrous side to it as well. I shall never forget the look of them all when Rose and I came down again: Mr. Fane-Smith standing there by the table, the very incarnation of contemptuous anger, and father just here, looking like a tired thunder cloud! But, though one laughs at one aspect of it, one could cry one's eyes out over the thing as a whole indeed, just now I find myself agreeing with Mr. Tulliver that it's a 'puzzling world.'”

“The fact is,” said Charles Osmond, “that you consent patiently enough to share God's pain over those who don't believe in Him; but you grumble sorely at finding a lack of charity in the world; yet that pain is God's too.”

“Yes,” sighed Erica; “but somehow from Christians it seems so hard!”

“Quite true, child,” he replied, half absently. “It is hard most hard. But don't let it make you uncharitable, Erica. You are sharing God's pain, but remember it is only His perfect love which makes that pain bearable.”

“I do find it hard to love bigots,” said Erica, sighing. “They! What do they know about the thousand difficulties which have driven people into secularism? If they could but see that they and their narrow theories and their false distortions of Christ's Gospel are the real cause of it all, there would be some hope! But they either can't see it or won't.”

“My dear, we're all a lot of blind puppies together,” said Charles Osmond. “We tumble up against each other just for want of eyes. We shall see when we get to the end of the nine days, you know.”

“You see now,” said Erica; “you never hurt us, and rub us the wrong way.”

“Perhaps not,” he replied, laughing. “But Mr. Roberts and some of my other brethren would tell a different tale. By the bye, would you care to help another befogged mortal who is in the region you are safely out of? The evolution theory is the difficulty, and, if you have time to enter into his trouble, I think you could help him much better than I can. If I could see him, I might tackle him; but I can't do it on paper. You could, I think; and, as the fellow lives at the other side of the world, one can do nothing except by correspondence.”

Erica was delighted to undertake the task, and she was particularly well fitted for it. Perhaps no one is really qualified for the post of a clearer of doubts who has not himself faced and conquered doubts of a similar nature.

So there was a new interest for her on that long, lonely evening, and, as she waited for her father's return, she had time to think out quietly the various points which she would first take up. By and by she slept a little, and then, in the silence of the night, crept down to the lower regions to add something to the tempting little supper which she had ready in the green room. But time crept on, and in the silence she could hear dozens of clocks telling each hour, and the train had been long due, and still her father did not come.

At last she became too anxious to read or think to any purpose; she drew aside the curtain, and, in spite of

the cold, curled herself upon the window seat with her face pressed close to the glass. Watching, in a literal sense, was impossible, for there was a dense fog, if possible, worse than the fog of the preceding Saturday, but she had the feeling that to be by the window made her in some unaccountable way nearer to her father, and it certainly had the effect of showing her that there was a very good reason for unpunctuality.

The old square was as quiet as death. Once a policeman raised her hopes for a minute by pacing slowly up the pavement, but he passed on, and all was still once more except that every now and then the furniture in the room creaked, making the eerie stillness all the more noticeable. Erica began to shiver a little, more from apprehension than from cold. She wished the telegram had come from any other town in England, and tried in vain not to conjure up a hundred horrible visions of possible catastrophes. At length she heard steps in the distance, and straining her eyes to penetrate the thick darkness of the murky night, was able to make out just beneath the window a sort of yellow glare. She ran downstairs at full speed to open the door, and there upon the step stood a link-boy, the tawny light from his torch showing up to perfection the magnificent proportions of the man in a shaggy brown Inverness, who stood beside him, and bringing into strong relief the masses of white hair and the rugged Scottish face which, spite of cold and great weariness, bore its usual expression of philosophic calm.

“I thought you were never coming,” said Erica. “Why, you must be half frozen! What a night it is!”

“We've been more than an hour groping our way from the station,” said Raeburn; “and cabs were unattainable.” Then, turning to the link-boy, “Come in, you are as cold and hungry as I am. Have you got something hot, Eric?”

“Soup and coffee,” said Erica. “Which would he like best?”

The boy gave his vote for soup, and, having seen him thoroughly satisfied and well paid, they sent him home, and to his dying day he was proud to tell the story of the foggy night when the people's tribune had given him half of his own supper. The father and daughter were soon comfortably installed beside the green room fire, Raeburn making a hearty meal though it was past three o'clock.

“I never dreamed of finding you up, little son Eric,” he said when the warmth and the food had revived him. “I only telegraphed for fear you should lock up for the night and leave me to shiver unknown on the doorstep.”

“But what happened?” asked Erica. “Why couldn't you lecture?”

“Ashborough had worked itself up into one of its tumults, and the fools of authorities thought it would excite a breach of the peace, which was excited quite as much and probably more by my not lecturing. But I'm not going to be beaten! I shall go down there again in a few weeks.”

“Was there any rioting?”

“Well, there was a roughish mob, who prevented my eating my dinner in peace, and pursued me even into my bedroom; and some of the Ashborough lambs were kind enough to overturn my cab as I was going to the station. But, having escaped with nothing worse than a shaking, I'll forgive them for that. The fact is they had burned me in effigy on the 5th and had so much enjoyed the ceremony that, when the original turned up, they really couldn't be civil to him, it would have been so very tame. I'm told the effigy was such a fearful-looking monster that it frightened the bairnies out of their wits, specially as it was first carried all round the place on a parish coffin!”

“What a hateful plan that effigy-burning is!” said Erica. “Were you not really hurt at all when they upset your cab?”

“Perhaps a little bruised,” said Raeburn, “and somewhat angry with my charitable opponents. I didn't so much mind being overturned, but I hate being balked. They shall have the lecture, however, before long; I'm not going to be beaten. On the whole, they couldn't have chosen a worse night for their little game. I seriously thought we should never grope our way home through that fog. It has quite taken me back to my young days when this sort of thing met one on every hand; and there was no little daughter to cheer me up then, and very often no supper either!”

“That was when you were living in Blank Street?”

“Yes, in a room about the size of a sentry box. It was bearable all except the black beetles! I've never seen such beetles before or since twice the size of the ordinary ones. I couldn't convince the landlady that they even existed; she always maintained that they never rose to the attics; but one night I armed myself with Cruden's Concordance and, thanks to its weight and my good aim, killed six at a time, and produced the corpses as evidence. I shall never forget the good lady's face! 'You see, sir,' she said, 'they never come by day; they 'ates the light because their deeds is evil.'”

“Were the beetles banished after that?” asked Erica, laughing.

“No, they went on to the bitter end,” said Raeburn with one of his bright, humorous looks. “And I believe the landlady put it all down to my atheistical views a just retribution for harboring such a notorious fellow in her house! But there, my child, we mustn't sit up any longer gossiping; run off to bed. I'll see that the lights are all out.”

CHAPTER XXXVII. Dreeing Out the Inch

Skepticism for that century we must consider as the decay of old ways of believing, the preparation afar off for new, better, and wider ways an inevitable thing. We will not blame men for it; we will lament their hard fate. We will understand that destruction of old forms is not destruction of everlasting substances; that skepticism, as sorrowful and

hateful as we see it, is not an end but a beginning.
Carlyle

One June evening, an elderly man with closely cropped iron-gray hair, might have been seen in a certain railway carriage as the Folkestone train reached its destination. The Cannon Street platform was, as usual, the scene of bustle and confusion, most of the passengers were met by friends or relatives, others formed a complete party in themselves, and, with the exception of the elderly man, there was scarcely a unit among them. The fact of his loneliness would not, of course, have been specially remarkable had it not been that he was evidently in the last stage of some painful illness; he was also a foreigner and, not being accustomed to the English luggage system, he had failed to secure a porter as the train drew up and so, while the others were fighting their way to the van, he, who needed assistance more than any of them, was left to shift for himself. He moved with great difficulty, dragging down from the carriage a worn black bag, and occasionally muttering to himself, not as a peevish invalid would have done, but as if it were a sort of solace to his loneliness.

“The hardest day I've had, this! If I had but my Herzblattchen now, how quickly she would pilot me through this throng. Ah well! Having managed to do the rest, I'll not be beaten by this last bit. Potztausend! These English are all elbows!”

He frowned with pain as the self-seeking crowd pushed and jostled him, but never once lost his temper, and at length, after long waiting, his turn came and, having secured his portmanteau, he was before long driving away in the direction of Bloomsbury. His strength was fast ebbing away, and the merciless jolting of the cab evidently tried him to the utmost, but he bore up with the strong endurance of one who knows that at the end of the struggle relief awaits him.

“If he is only at home,” he muttered to himself, “all will be well. He'll know where I ought to go; he'll do it all for me in the best way. ACH! Gott in himmel! But I need some one!”

With an excruciating jerk the cab drew up before a somewhat grim-looking house; Had he arrived at the himmel he had just been speaking of, the traveler could not have given an exclamation of greater relief. He crawled up the steps, overruled some question on the part of the servant, and was shown into a brightly lighted room. At one glance he had taken in the whole of that restful picture so welcome to his sore need. It was a good sized room, lined with books, which had evidently seen good service, many of them had been bought with the price of foregone meals, almost all of them embodied some act of denial. Above the mantel piece hung a little oil painting of a river scene, the sole thing not strictly of a useful order, for the rest of the contents of this study were all admirably adapted for working purposes, but were the reverse of luxurious.

Seated at the writing table was the master of the house, who had impressed his character plainly enough on his surroundings. He looked up with an expression of blank astonishment on hearing the name of his visitor, then the astonishment changed to incredulity; but, when the weary traveler actually entered the room, he started up with an exclamation of delight which very speedily gave place to dismay when he saw how ill his friend was.

“Why, Haeberlein!” he said, grasping his hand, “what has happened to you?”

“Nothing very remarkable,” replied Haeberlein, smiling. “Only a great wish to see you before I die.” Then, seeing that Raeburn's face changed fearfully at these words, “Yes, it has come to that, my friend. I've a very short time left, and I wanted to see you; can you tell me of rooms near here, and of a decent doctor?”

“Of a doctor, yes,” said Raeburn, “of one who will save your life, I hope; and for rooms there are none that I know of except in this house, where you will of course stay.”

“With the little Herzblattchen to nurse me?” said Haeberlein with a sigh of weary content as he sank back in an arm chair. “That would be a very perfect ending; but think what the world would say of you if I, who have lent a hand to so much that you disapprove, died in your house; inevitably you would be associated with my views and my doings.”

“May be!” said Raeburn. “But I hope I may say that I've never refused to do what was right for fear of unpleasant consequences. No, no, my friend, you must stay here. A hard life has taught me that, for one in my position, it is mere waste of time to consider what people will say; they will say and believe the worst that can be said and believed about me; and thirty years of this sort of thing has taught me to pay very little regard to appearances.”

As he spoke he took up the end of a speaking tube which communicated with the green room, Haeberlein watching his movements with the placid, weary indifference of one who is perfectly convinced that he is in the right hands. Presently the door opened and Erica came in. Haeberlein saw now what he had half fancied at Salzburg that, although loving diminutives would always come naturally to the lips when speaking of Erica, she had in truth lost the extreme youthfulness of manner which had always characterized her. It had to a great extent been crushed out of her by the long months of wearing anxiety, and though she was often as merry and kittenish as ever her habitual manner was that of a strong, quick temperament kept in check. The restraint showed in everything. She was much more ready to hear and much less ready to criticize, her humorous talk was freer from sarcasm, her whole bearing characterized by a sort of quiet steadfastness which made her curiously like her father. His philosophical calm had indeed been gained in a very different way, but in each the calmness was the direct result of exceptionally trying circumstances brought to bear on a noble nature.

“Herr Haeberlein has come here to be nursed,” said Raeburn when the greetings were over. “Will you see that a room is got ready, dear?”

He went out into the hall to dismiss the cab, and Haeberlein seized the opportunity to correct his words.

“He thinks I shall get better, but it is impossible, my Herzblattchen; it is only a question of weeks now, possibly only of days. Was I wrong to come to you?”

“Of course not,” she said with the sort of tender deference with which she always spoke to him. “Did you think father would let you go anywhere else?”

“I didn't think about it,” said Haeberlein wearily; “but he wouldn't, you see.”

Raeburn returned while he was speaking, and Erica went away quickly to see to the necessary preparations. Herr Haeberlein had come, and she did not for a moment question the rightness of her father's decision; but yet in her heart she was troubled about it, and she could see that both her aunt and Tom were troubled too. The fact was that for some time they had seen plainly enough that Raeburn's health was failing, and they dreaded any additional anxiety for him. A man can not be involved in continual and harassing litigation and at the same time agitate perseveringly for reform, edit a newspaper, write books, rush from Land's End to John O'Groat's, deliver lectures, speak at mass meetings, teach science, befriend every unjustly used person, and go through the enormous amount of correspondence, personal supervision, and inevitable interviewing which falls to the lot of every popular leader, without sooner or later breaking down.

Haeberlein had come, however, and there was no help for it. They all did their very utmost for him, and those last weeks of tender nursing were perhaps the happiest of his life. Raeburn never allowed any one to see how the lingering expectation, the dark shadow of the coming sorrow, tried him. He lived his usual busy life, snatching an hour whenever he could to help in the work of nursing, and bringing into the sick room the strange influence of his strength and serenity.

The time wore slowly on. Haeberlein, though growing perceptibly weaker, still lingered, able now and then to enter into conversation, but for the most part just lying in patient silence, listening with a curious impartiality to whatever they chose to read to him, or whatever they began to talk about. He had all his life been a man of no particular creed, and he retained his curious indifference to the end, though Erica found that he had a sort of vague belief in a First Cause, and a shadowy expectation of a personal existence after death. She found this out through Brian, who had a way of getting at the minds of his patients.

One very hot afternoon she had been with him for several hours when about five o'clock her father came into the room. Another prosecution under the blasphemy Laws had just commenced. He had spent the whole day in a stifling law court, and even to the dying man his exhaustion was apparent.

“Things gone badly?” he asked.

“Much as I expected,” said Raeburn, taking up a Marechal Niel rose from the table and studying it abstractedly. “I've had a sentence of Auerbach's in my head all day, 'The martyrdom of the modern world consists of a long array of thousands of trifling annoyances.' These things are in themselves insignificant, but multiplication makes them a great power. You have been feeling this heat, I'm afraid. I will relieve guard, Erica. Is your article ready?”

“Not quite,” she replied, pausing to arrange Haeberlein's pillows while her father raised him.

“Thank you, little Herzblattchen,” he said, stroking her cheek, “auf wiedersehen.”

“Auf wiedersehen,” she replied brightly and, gathering up some papers, ran downstairs to finish her work for the “Daily Review.”

A few minutes later Brian came in for his second visit.

“Any change?” he asked.

“None, I think,” she answered, and went on with her writing with an apprehensive glance every now and then at the clock. The office boy was mercifully late however, and it must have been quite half an hour after she had left Haeberlein's room that she heard his unwelcome ring. Late as it was, she was obliged to keep him waiting a few minutes for it was exceedingly difficult in those days to get her work done. Not only was the time hard to obtain, but the writing itself was a difficulty; her mind was occupied with so many other things, and her strength was so overtasked that it was often an effort almost intolerable to sit down and write on the appointed subject.

She was in the hall giving her manuscript to the boy when she saw her father come downstairs; she followed him into the study, and one look at his face told her what had happened. He was leaning back in the chair in which but a few weeks before she had seen Haeberlein himself; it came over her with a shudder that he looked almost as ill now as his friend had looked. She sat down on the arm of his chair, and slipped her hand into his, but did not dare to break the silence. At last he looked up.

“I think you know it,” he said. “It is all over, Erica.”

“Was Brian there?” she asked.

“Happily, yes; but there was nothing to be done. The end was strangely sudden and quite painless, just what one would have wished for him. But oh, child! I can ill spare such a friend just now!”

His voice failed, and great tears gathered in his eyes. He let his head rest for a minute on Erica's shoulder, conscious of a sort of relief in the clasp of arms which had so often, in weak babyhood, clung to him for help, conscious of the only comfort there could be for him as his child's kisses fell on his lips, and brow, and hair.

“I am overdone, child,” he said at length as though to account for breaking down, albeit, by the confession, which but a short time before he would never have made, that his strength was failing.

All through the dreary days that followed, Erica was haunted by those words. The work had to go on just as usual, and it seemed to tell on her father fearfully. The very cay after Haeberlein's death it was necessary for him to speak at a mass meeting in the north of England, and he came back from it almost voiceless and so ill that they were at their wits' end to know what to do with him. The morrow did not mend matters for the jury disagreed in the blasphemy trial, and the whole thing had to be gone through again.

A more trying combination of events could hardly have been imagined, and Erica, as she stood in the crowded cemetery next day at the funeral, thought infinitely less of the quixotic Haeberlein whom she had, nevertheless, loved very sincerely than of her sorely overtasked father. He was evidently in dread of breaking down, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he got through his oration. To all present the sight was a most painful one and, although the musical voice was hoarse and strained, seeming, indeed, to tear out each sentence by sheer force of will, the orator had never carried his audience more completely with him. Their tears were, however, more for the living than for the dead; for the man who was struggling with all his might to restrain his emotion, painfully spurring on his exhausted powers to fulfill the duty in hand. More than once Erica thought he would have fainted, and she was fully prepared for the small crowd of friends who gathered round her afterward, begging her to persuade him to rest. The worst of it was that she could see no prospect

of rest for him, though she knew how sorely he longed for it. He spoke of it as they drove home.

“I've an almost intolerable longing for quiet,” he said to her. “Do you remember Mill's passage about the two main constituents of a satisfied life excitement and tranquillity? How willingly would I change places today with that Tyrolese fellow whom we saw last year!”

“Oh! If we could but go to the Tyrol again!” exclaimed Erica; but Raeburn shook his head.

“Out of the question just now, my child; but next week when this blasphemy trial is over, I must try to get a few days' holiday that is to say, if I don't find myself in prison.”

She sighed the sigh of one who is burdened almost beyond endurance. For recent events had proved to her, only too plainly, that her confidence that no jury would be found to convict a man under the old blasphemy laws was quite mistaken.

That evening, however, her thoughts were a little diverted from her father. For the first time for many months she had a letter from Rose. It was to announce her engagement to Captain Golightly. Rose seemed very happy, but there was an undertone of regret about the letter which was uncomfortably suggestive of her flirtation with Tom. Also there were sentences which, to Erica, were enigmatical, about “having been so foolish last summer,” and wishing that she “could live that Brighton time over again.” All she could do was to choose the time and place for telling Tom with discrimination. No opportunity presented itself till late in the evening when she went down as usual to say good night to him, taking Rose's letter with her. Tom was in his “den,” a small room consecrated to the goddess of disorder books, papers, electric batteries, crucibles, chemicals, new temperance beverages, and fishing rods were gathered together in wild confusion. Tom himself was stirring something in a pipkin over the gas stove when Erica came in.

“An unfallible cure for the drunkard's craving after alcohol,” he said, looking up at her with a smile. “'A thing of my own invention,' to quote the knight in 'Through the Looking Glass.' Try some?”

“No, thank you,” said Erica, recoiling a little from the very odoriferous contents of the pipkin. “I have had a letter from Rose this evening.”

Tom started visibly.

“What, has Mr. Fane-Smith relented?” he asked.

“Rose had something special to tell me,” said Erica, unfolding the letter.

But Tom just took it from her hands without ceremony, and began to read it. A dark flush came over his face Erica saw that much, but afterward would not look at him, feeling that it was hardly fair. Presently he gave her the letter once more.

“Thank you,” he said in a voice so cold and bitter that she could hardly believe it to be his. “As you probably see, I have been a fool. I shall know better how to trust a woman in the future.”

“Oh, Tom,” she cried. “Don't let it—”

He interrupted her.

“I don't wish to talk,” he said. “Least of all to one who has adopted the religion which Miss Fane-Smith has been brought up in a religion which of necessity debases and degrades its votaries.”

Her eyes filled with tears, but she new that Christianity would in this case be better vindicated by silence than by words however eloquent. She just kissed him and wished him good night. But as she reached the door, his heart smote him.

“I don't say it has debased you,” he said; “but that that is its natural tendency. You are better than your creed.”

“He meant that by way of consolation,” thought Erica to herself as she went slowly upstairs fighting with her tears.

But of course the consolation had been merely a sharper stab; for to tell a Christian that he is better than his creed is the one intolerable thing.

What had been the extent of the understanding with Rose, Erica never learned, but she feared that it must have been equivalent to a promise in Tom's eyes, and much more serious than mere flirtation in Rose's, otherwise the regret in the letter was, from one of Rose's way of thinking, inexplicable. From that time there was a marked change in Tom; Erica was very unhappy about him, but there was little to be done except, indeed, to share all his interests as much as she could, and to try to make the home life pleasant. But this was by no means easy. To begin with, Raeburn himself was more difficult than ever to work with, and Tom, who was in a hard, cynical mood, called him overbearing where, in former times, he would merely have called him decided. The very best of men are occasionally irritable when they are nearly worked to death; and under the severe strain of those days, Raeburn's philosophic calm more than once broke down, and the quick Highland temper, usually kept in admirable restraint, made itself felt.

It was not, however, for two or three days after Haeberlein's funeral that he showed any other symptoms of illness. One evening they were all present at a meeting at the East End at which Donovan Farrant was also speaking. Raeburn's voice had somewhat recovered, and he was speaking with great force and fluency when, all at once in the middle of a sentence, he came to a dead pause. For half a minute he stood motionless; before him were the densely packed rows of listening faces, but what they had come there to hear he had not the faintest notion. His mind was exactly like a sheet of white paper; all recollection of the subject he had been speaking on was entirely obliterated. Some men would have pleaded illness and escaped, others would have blundered on. But Raeburn, who never lost his presence of mind, just turned to the audience and said quietly: “Will some one have the goodness to tell me what I was saying? My memory has played me a trick.”

“Taxation!” shouted the people.

A short-hand writer close to the platform repeated his last sentence, and Raeburn at once took the cue and finished his speech with perfect ease. Every one felt, however, that it was an uncomfortable incident, and, though to the audience Raeburn chose to make a joke of it, he knew well enough that it boded no good.

“You ought to take a rest,” said Donovan to him when the meeting was over.

“I own to needing it,” said Raeburn. “Pogson's last bit of malice will, I hope, be quashed in a few days and, after that, rest may be possible. He is of opinion that 'there are mony ways of killing a dog though ye dinna hang him,' and, upon my word, he's not far wrong.”

He was besieged here by two or three people who wanted to ask his advice, and Donovan turned to Erica.

“He has been feeling all this talk about Herr Haeberlein; people say the most atrocious things about him just because he gave him shelter at the last,” she said. “Really sometimes the accusations are so absurd that we ourselves can't help laughing at them. But though I don't believe in being 'done to death by slanderous tongues,' there is no doubt that the constant friction of these small annoyances does tell on my father very perceptibly. After all, you know the very worst form of torture is merely the perpetual falling of a drop of water on the victim's head.”

“I suppose since last summer this sort of thing has been on the increase?”

“Indeed it has,” she replied. “It is worse, I think, than you have any idea of. You read your daily paper and your weekly review, but every malicious, irritating word put forth by every local paper in England, Scotland, or Ireland comes to us, not to speak of all that we get from private sources.”

On their way home they did all in their power to persuade Raeburn to take an immediate holiday, but he only shook his head.

“'Dree out the inch when ye have thol'd the span,'” he said, leaning back wearily in the cab but taking care to give the conversation an abrupt turn before relapsing into silence.

At supper, as ill luck would have it, Aunt Jean relieved her fatigue and anxiety by entering upon one of her old remonstrances with Erica. Raeburn was not sitting at the table; he was in an easy chair at the other side of the room, and possibly she forgot his presence. But he heard every word that passed, and at last started up with angry impatience.

“For goodness' sake, Jean, leave the child alone!” he said. “Is it not enough for me to be troubled with bitterness and dissension outside without having my home turned into an arguing shop?”

“Erica should have thought of that before she deserted her own party,” said Aunt Jean; “before, to quote Strauss, she had recourse to 'religious crutches.' It is she who has introduced the new element into the house.”

Erica's color rose, but she said nothing. Aunt Jean seemed rather baffled by her silence. Tom watched the little scene with a sort of philosophic interest. Raeburn, conscious of having spoken sharply to his sister and fearing to lose his temper again, paced the room silently. Finally he went off to his study, leaving them to the unpleasant consciousness that he had been driven out of his own dining room. But when he had gone, the quarrel was forgotten altogether; they forgot differences of creed in a great mutual anxiety. Raeburn's manner had been so unnatural, he had been so unlike himself, that in their trouble about it they entirely passed over the original cause of his anger. Aunt Jean was as much relieved as any one when before long he opened his door and called for Erica.

“I have lost my address book,” he said; “have you seen it about?”

She began to search for it, fully aware that he had given her something to do for him just out of loving consideration, and with the hope that it would take the sting from her aunt's hard words. When she brought him the book, he took her face between both his hands, looked at her steadily for a minute, and then kissed her.

“All right, little son Eric,” he said, with a sigh. “We understand each other.”

But she went upstairs feeling miserable about him, and an hour or two later, when all the house was silent, her feeling of coming trouble grew so much that at length she yielded to one of those strange, blind impulses which come to some people and crept noiselessly out on to the dark landing. At first all seemed to her perfectly still and perfectly dark; but, looking down the narrow well of the staircase, she could see far below her a streak of light falling across the tiles in the passage. She knew that it must come from beneath the door of the study, and it meant that her father was still at work. He had owned to having a bad headache, and had promised not to be late. It was perplexing. She stole down the next flight of stairs and listened at Tom's door; then, finding that he was still about, knocked softly. Tom, with his feet on the mantel piece, was solacing himself with a pipe and a novel; he started up, however, as she came in.

“What's the matter?” he asked, “is any one ill?”

“I don't know,” said Erica, shivering a little. “I came to know whether father had much to do tonight; did he tell you?”

“He was going to write to Jackson about a situation for the eldest son of that fellow who died the other day, you know; the widow, poor creature, is nearly worried out of her life; she was here this afternoon. The chieftain promised to see about it at once; he wouldn't let me write, and of course a letter from himself will be more likely to help the boy.”

“But it's after one o'clock,” said Erica, shivering again; “he can't have been all this time over it.”

“Well, perhaps he is working at something else,” said Tom. “He's not been sleeping well lately, I know. Last night he got through thirty-three letters, and the night before he wrote a long pamphlet.”

Erica did not look satisfied.

“Lend me your stove for a minute,” she said; “I shall make him a cup of tea.”

They talked a little about the curious failure of memory noticed for the first time that evening. Tom was more like himself than he had been for several days; he came downstairs with her to carry a light, but she went alone into the study. He had not gone up the first flight of stairs, however, when he heard a cry, then his own name called twice in tones that made him thrill all over with a nameless fear. He rushed down and pushed open the study door. There stood Erica with blanched face; Raeburn sat in his customary place at the writing table, but his head had fallen forward and, though the face was partly hidden by the desk, they could see that it was rigid and deathly pale.

“He has fainted,” said Tom, not allowing the worse fear to overmaster him. “Run quick, and get some

water, Erica.”

She obeyed mechanically. When she returned, Tom had managed to get Raeburn on to the floor and had loosened his cravat; he had also noticed that only one letter lay upon the desk, abruptly terminating at “I am, yours sincerely.” Whether the “Luke Raeburn” would ever be added, seemed to Tom at that moment very doubtful. Leaving Erica with her father, he rushed across the square to summon Brian, returning in a very few minutes with the comforting news that he was at home and would be with them immediately. Erica gave a sigh of relief when the quick, firm steps were heard on the pavement outside. Brian was so closely associated with all the wearing times of illness and anxiety which had come to them in the last six years that, in her trouble, she almost forgot the day at Fiesole regarding him not as her lover, but as the man who had once before saved her father's life. His very presence inspired her with confidence, the quiet authority of his manner, the calm, business-like way in which he directed things. Her anxiety faded away in the consciousness that he knew all about it, and would do everything as it should be done. Before very long Raeburn showed signs of returning consciousness, sighed uneasily; then, opening his eyes, regained his faculties as suddenly as he had lost them.

“Halloo!” he exclaimed, starting up. “What's all this coil about? What are you doing to me?”

They explained things to him.

“Oh! Fainted, did I!” he said musingly. “I have felt a little faint once or twice lately. What day is it? What time is it?” Tom mentioned the meeting of the previous evening, and Raeburn seemed to recollect himself. He looked at his watch, then at the letter on his desk. “Well, it's my way to do things thoroughly,” he said with a smile; “I must have been off for a couple of hours. I am very sorry to have disturbed your slumbers in this way.”

As he spoke, he sat down composedly at his desk, picked up the pen and signed his name to the letter. They stood and watched him while he folded the sheet and directed the envelope; his writing bore a little more markedly than usual the tokens of strong self-restraint.

“Perhaps you'll just drop that in the pillar on your way home,” he said to Brian. “I want Jackson to get it by the first post. If you will look in later on, I should be glad to have a talk with you. At present I'm too tired to be overhauled.”

Then, as Brian left the room, he turned to Erica.

“I am sorry to have given you a fright, my child; but don't worry about me, I am only a little overdone.”

Again that fatal admission, which from Raeburn's lips was more alarming than a long catalogue of dangerous symptoms from other men!

There followed a disturbed night and a long day in a crowded law court, then one of the most terrible hours they had ever had to endure while waiting for the verdict which would either consign Raeburn to prison or leave him to peace and freedom. So horrible was the suspense that to draw each breath was to Erica a painful effort. Even Raeburn's composure was a little shaken as those eternal minutes dragged on.

The foreman returned. The court seemed to throb with excitement. Raeburn lifted a calm, stern face to hear his fate. He knew what no one else in the court knew, that this was to him a matter of life and death.

“Are you agreed, gentlemen?”

“Yes.”

People listened breathlessly.

“Do you find the defendant guilty, or not?”

“Not guilty.”

The reaction was so sharp as to be almost overpowering. But poor Erica's joy was but short-lived. She looked at her father's face and knew that, although one anxiety was ended, another was already begun.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. Halcyon Days

There is a sweetness in autumnal days,
Which many a lip doth praise;
When the earth, tired a little, and grown mute
Of song, and having borne its fruit,
Rests for a little ere the winter come.
It is not sad to turn the face toward home,
Even though it show the journey nearly done;
It is not sad to mark the westering sun,
Even though we know the night doth come,
Silence there is, indeed, for song,
Twilight for noon,
But for the steadfast soul and strong
Life's autumn is as June. From the “Ode of Life”

“Anything in the papers this evening?” asked a young clergyman, who was in one of the carriages of the Metropolitan Railway late in the afternoon of an August day.

“Nothing of much interest,” replied his wife, handing him the newspaper she had been glancing through. “I see that wretched Raeburn is ill. I wish he'd die.”

“Oh! Broken down at last, has he?” said the other. “Where is it? Oh, yes, I see. Ordered to take immediate and entire rest. Will be paralyzed in a week if he doesn't. Pleasant alternative that! Result of excessive overwork. Fancy calling this blasphemous teaching work! I could hang that man with my own hands!”

Erica had had a long and harassing day. She was returning from the city where she had gone to obtain leave of absence from Mr. Bircham; for her father was to go into the quietest country place that could be found, and she of course was to accompany him. At the “Daily Review” office she had met with the greatest kindness, and she might have gone home cheered and comforted had it not been her lot to overhear this conversation. Tom was with her. She saw him hastily transcribing the uncharitable remarks, and knew that the incident would figure in next week's “Idol-Breaker.” It was only a traceable instance of the harm done by all such words.

“Will you change carriages?” asked Tom.

“Yes,” she said; and as she rose to go she quietly handed her card to the lady, who, it is to be hoped, learned a lesson thereby.

But it would be unjust to show only the dark side of the picture. Great sympathy and kindness was shown them at that time by many earnest and orthodox Christians, and though Raeburn used to accept this sympathy with the remark: “You see, humanity overcomes the baleful influences of religion in the long run,” yet he was always touched and pleased by the smallest signs of friendliness; while to Erica such considerateness was an inestimable help. The haste and confusion of those days, added to the anxiety, told severely on her strength; but there is this amount of good in a trying bit of “hurrying life,” the rest, when it comes, is doubly restful.

It was about six o'clock on an August evening when Raeburn and Erica reached the little country town of Firdale. They were to take up their abode for the next six weeks at a village about three miles off, one of the few remaining places in England which maintained its primitive simplicity, its peaceful quiet having never been disturbed by shriek of whistle or snort of engine.

The journey from town had been short and easy, but Raeburn was terribly exhausted by it; he complained of such severe headache that they made up their minds to stay that night at Firdale, and were soon comfortably established in the most charming old inn, which in coaching days had been a place of note. Here they dined, and afterward Raeburn fell asleep on a big old-fashioned sofa, while Erica sat by the open window, able in spite of her anxiety to take a sort of restful interest in watching the traffic in the street below. Such a quiet, easy-going life these Firdale people seemed to lead. They moved in such a leisurely way; bustle and hurry seemed an unknown thing. And yet this was market day, as was evident by the country women with their baskets, and by occasional processions of sheep or cattle. One man went slowly by driving a huge pig; he was in sight for quite five minutes, dawdling along, and allowing the pig to have his own sweet will as far as speed was concerned, but occasionally giving him a gentle poke with a stick when he paused to burrow his nose in the mud. Small groups of men stood talking at the corner of the market place; a big family went by, evidently returning from a country walk; presently the lamps were lighted, and then immense excitement reigned in the little place for at the corner where the two main streets crossed each other at right angles a cheap-jack had set up his stall and, with flaring naptha lamps to show his goods, was selling by auction the most wonderful clocks at the very lowest prices in fact, the most superior glass, china, clothing, and furniture that the people of Firdale had ever had the privilege of seeing. Erica listened with no little amusement to his fervid appeals to the people not to lose this golden opportunity, and to the shy responses of the small crowd which had been attracted and which lingered on, tempted yet cautious, until the cheap-jack had worked himself up into a white heat of energetic oratory, and the selling became brisk and lively.

By and by the silvery moonlight began to flood the street, contrasting strangely with the orange glare of the lamps. Erica still leaned her head against the window frame, still looked out dreamily at the Firdale life, while the soft night wind lightly lifted the hair from her forehead and seemed to lull the pain at her heart.

It was only in accordance with the general peacefulness when by and by her father crossed the room, looking more like himself than he had done for some days.

“I am better, Eric,” he said cheerfully “better already. It is just the consciousness that there is nothing that need be done. I feel as if I should sleep tonight.” He looked out at the moonlit street. “What a perfect night it is!” He exclaimed. “What do you say, little one; shall we drive over to this rural retreat now? The good folks were told to have everything ready, and they can hardly lock up before ten.”

She was so glad to see him take an interest in anything, and so greatly relieved by his recovery of strength and spirits, that she gladly fell in with the plan, and before long they set off in one of the wagonettes belonging to the Shrub Inn.

Firdale wound its long street of red-roofed houses along a sheltered valley in between fir-crowned heights; beyond the town lay rich, fertile-looking meadows, and a winding river bordered by pollard willows. Looking across these meadows, one could see the massive tower of the church, its white pinnacles standing out sharp and clear in the moonlight. As Raeburn and Erica crossed the bridge leading out of the town, the clock in the tower struck nine, and the old chimes began to play the tune which every three hours fell on the ears of the inhabitants of Firdale.

“'Life let us cherish,'” said Raeburn with a smile. “A good omen for us, little one.”

And whether it was the mere fact that he looked so much more cheerful already, or whether the dear old tune, with its resolute good humor and determination to make the best of things, acted upon Erica's sensitive nature, it would be hard to say, but she somehow shook off all her cares and enjoyed the novelty of the moonlight drive like a child. Before long they were among the fir trees, driving along the sandy road, the sweet night laden with the delicious scent of pine needles, and to the overworked Londoners in itself the most delicious refreshment. All at once Raeburn ordered the driver to stop and, getting out, stooped down by the roadside.

“What is it?” asked Erica.

“Heather!” he exclaimed, tearing it up by handfuls and returning to the carriage laden. “There! Shut your eyes and bury your face in that, and you can almost fancy you're on a Scottish mountain. Brian deserves anything for sending us to the land of heather; it makes me feel like a boy again.”

The three miles were all too short to please them, but at last they reached the little village of Milford and

were set down at a compact-looking white house known as Under the Oak.

“That direction is charming,” said Raeburn, laughing; “imagine your business letters sent from the 'Daily Review' office to 'Miss Raeburn, Under the Oak, Milford!' They'll think we're living in a tent. You'll be nicknamed Deborah!”

It was not until the next morning that they fully understood the appropriateness of the direction. The little white house had been built close to the grand old oak which was the pride of Milford. It was indeed a giant of its kind; there was something wonderfully fine about its vigorous spread of branches and its enormous girth. Close by was a peaceful-looking river, flowing between green banks fringed with willow and marestail and pink river-herb. The house itself had a nice little garden, gay with geraniums and gladiolus, and bounded by a hedge of sunflowers which would have gladdened the heart of an aesthete. All was pure, fresh, cleanly, and perfectly quiet.

From the windows nothing was to be seen except the village green with its flocks of geese and its tall sign post; the river describing a sort of horseshoe curve round it, and spanned by two picturesque bridges. In the distance was a small church and a little cluster of houses, the “village” being completed by a blacksmith's forge and a post office. To this latter place they had to pay a speedy visit for, much to Raeburn's amusement, Erica had forgotten to bring any ink.

“To think that a writer in the 'Daily Review' should forget such a necessary of life!” he said, smiling. “One would think you were your little 'Cartesian-well' cousin instead of a journalist!”

However, the post office was capable of supplying almost anything likely to be needed in the depths of the country; you could purchase there bread, cakes, groceries, hob-nailed boots, paper, ink, and most delectable toffee!

The relief of the country quiet was unlike anything which Erica had known before. There was, indeed, at first a good deal of anxiety about her father. His acquiescence in idleness, his perfect readiness to spend whole days without even opening a book, proved the seriousness of his condition. For the first week he was more completely prostrated than she had ever known him to be. He would spend whole days on the river, too tired even to speak, or would drag himself as far as the neighboring wood and stretch himself at full length under the trees while she sat by sketching or writing. Bur Brian was satisfied with his improvement when he came down on one of his periodical visits, and set Erica's mind at rest about him.

“You father has such a wonderful constitution,” he said as they paced to and fro in the little garden. “I should not be surprised if, in a couple of months, he is as strong as ever; though most men would probably feel such an overstrain to the end of their days.”

After that, the time at Milford was pure happiness. Erica learned to love every inch of that lovely neighborhood, from the hill of Rocksbury with its fir-clad heights, to Trencharn Lake nestled down among the surrounding heath hills. In after years she liked to recall all those peaceful days, days when time had ceased to exist at any rate, as an element of friction in life. There was no hurrying here, and the recollection of it afterward was a perpetual happiness. The quiet river where they had one day seen an otter, a marked event in their uneventful days; the farm with its red gables and its crowd of gobbling turkeys; the sweet-smelling fir groves with their sandy paths; and their own particular wood where beeches, oaks, and silvery birch trees were intermingled, with here and there a tall pine sometimes stately and erect, sometimes blown aslant by the wind.

Here the winding paths were bordered with golden moss, and sheltered by a tangled growth of bracken and bramble with now and then a little clump of heather or a patch of blue harebells. Every nook of that place grew familiar to them and had its special associations. There was the shady part under the beeches where they spent the hot days, and this was always associated with fragments of “Macbeth” and “Julius Caesar.” There was the cozy nook on the fir hill where in cool September they had read volume after volume of Walter Scott, Raeburn not being allowed to have anything but light literature, and caring too little for “society” novels to listen to them even now. There was the prettiest part of all down below, the bit of sandy cliff riddled with nest holes by the sand martins; here they discovered a little spring, the natural basin scooped out in the rock, festooned with ivy and thickly coated with the pretty green liverwort. Never surely was water so cold and clear as that which flowed into the basin with its ground of white sand, and overflowed into a little trickling stream; while in the distance was heard the roar of the river as it fell into a small waterfall. There was the ford from which the place was named and which Erica associated with a long happy day when Brian had come down to see her father. She remembered how they had watched the carts and horses splashing though the clear water, going in muddy on one side and coming out clean on the other. She had just listened in silence to the talk between Brian and her father which happened to turn on Donovan Farrant.

They discussed the effect of early education and surroundings upon the generality of men, and Raeburn, while prophesying great things for Donovan's future and hoping that he might live to see his first Budget, rather surprised them both by what he said about his tolerable well-known early life. He was a man who found it very difficult to make allowances for temptations he had never felt, he was convinced that under Donovan's circumstances he should have acted very differently, and he made the common mistake of judging others by himself. His ruggedly honest nature and stern sense of justice could not get over those past failings. However, this opinion about the past did not interfere with his present liking of the man. He liked him much; and when, toward the end of their six weeks' stay at Milford, Donovan invited them to Oakdene, he was really pleased to accept the invitation. He hoped to be well enough to speak at an important political meeting at Ashborough about the middle of October, and as Ashborough was not far from Oakdene, Donovan wrote to propose a visit there en route.

At length the last evening came. Raeburn and Erica climbed Rocksbury for the last time, and in the cool of the evening walked slowly home.

“I have always dreaded old age,” he said. “But I shall dread it no more. This has been a foretaste of the autumn of life, and it has been very peaceful. I don't see why the winter should not be the same if I have you with me, little one.”

“You shall have me as long as I am alive,” she said, giving his strong hand a little loving squeeze.

“Truth to tell,” said Raeburn, “I thought a few weeks ago that it would be a case of 'Here lies Luke Raeburn, who died of litigation!' But, after all, to be able to work to the last is the happiest lot. Tis an enviable thing to die in harness.”

They were walking up a hill, a sort of ravine with steep high banks on either side, and stately pines stretching their blue-green foliage up against the evening sky. A red glow of sunset made the dark stems look like fiery pillars, and presently as they reached the brow of the hill the great crimson globe was revealed to them. They both stood in perfect silence watching till it sunk below the horizon.

And a great peace filled Erica's heart though at one time her father's wish would have made her sad and apprehensive. In former times she had set her whole heart on his learning before death that he was teaching error. Now she had learned to add to “Thy will be done,” the clause which it takes some of us a life time to say, “Not my will.”

CHAPTER XXXIX. Ashborough

There's a brave fellow!
There's a man of pluck!
A man who is not afraid to say his say,
Though a whole town's against him.
Longfellow

A man's love is the measure of his fitness for good or bad
company here or elsewhere. Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The week at Oakdene proved in every way a success; Raeburn liked his host heartily, and the whole atmosphere of the house was a revelation to him. The last morning there had been a little clouded for news had reached them of a terrible colliery accident in the north of England. The calamity had a special gloom about it for it might very easily have been prevented, the owners having long known that the mine was unsafe.

“I must say it is a little hard to see how such a horrible sin as carelessness of the lives of human beings can ever bring about the greater good which we believe evil to do,” said Erica, as she took her last walk in the wood with Donovan.

“'Tis hard to see at the time,” he replied. “But I am convinced that it is so. The sin is never good, never right; but when men will sin, then the result of the sin, however frightful, brings about more good that the perseverance in sin with no catastrophe would have done. A longer-deferred good, of course, than the good which would have resulted by adhering from the first to the right, and so far inferior.”

“Of course,” said Erica, “I can see that a certain amount of immediate good may result from this disaster. It will make the owners of other mines more careful.”

“And what of the hundred unseen workings that will result from it?” said Donovan, smiling. “In the first shock of horror one can not even glimpse the larger view, but later on—”

He paused for a minute; they were down in the valley close to the little church; he opened the gate and led the way to a bench under the great yew tree. Sitting here, they could see the recumbent white cross with its ever-fresh crown of white flowers. Erica knew something of the story it told.

“Shall I tell you what turned me from an anti-theist to an atheist?” said Donovan. “It was the horror of knowing that a little child's life had been ruined by carelessness. I had been taught to believe in a terrific phantom who was severely just; but when it seemed that the one quality of justice was gone, then I took refuge in the conviction that there could be no God at all. That WAS a refuge for the time, for it is better to believe in no God than to believe in an immoral God and it was long years before a better refuge found me. Yet, looking back now over these seven-and-twenty years, I see how that one little child's suffering has influenced countless lives! How it was just the most beautiful thing that could have happened to her!”

Erica did not speak for a moment, she read half dreamily the words engraved on the tombstone. Nearly sixteen years since that short, uneventful life had passed into the unseen, and yet little Dot was at this moment influencing the world's history.

She was quite cheerful again as they walked home, and, indeed, her relief about her father's recovery was so great that she could not be unhappy for long about anything. They found Raeburn on the terrace with Ralph and Dolly at his heels, and the two-year-old baby, who went by the name of Pickle, on his shoulder.

“I shall quite miss these bairnies,” he said as Donovan joined them.

“Gee up, horsey! Gee up!” shouted Pickle from his lofty perch.

“And oh, daddy, may we go into Gleyshot wiv you?” said Dolly, coaxingly. “Elica's father's going to give me a playcat.”

“And me a whip,” interposed Ralph. “We may come with you, father, mayn't we?”

“Oh! Yes,” said Donovan, smiling; “if Mr. Raeburn doesn't mind a crowded carriage.”

Erica had gone into the house.

“I don't know how to let you go,” said Gladys, “We have so much enjoyed having you. I think you had much better stay here will Monday and leave those two to take care of themselves at Ashborough.”

“Oh, no,” said Erica, smiling, “that would never do! You don't realize what an event this is to me. It is the first time father has spoken since his illness. Besides, I have not yet quite learned to think him well enough to look after himself though, of course, he is getting quite strong again.”

“Well, since you will go, come and choose a book for your journey,” said Gladys.

“Oh, I should like that,” said Erica; “a nice homish sort of book, please, where the people lived in Arcadia and never heard of law courts!”

Early in the afternoon they drove to Greyshot, stopping first of all at the toy shop. Raeburn, who was in excellent spirits, fully entered into the difficulties of Dolly's choice. At length a huge toy cat was produced.

“Oh, I should like that one!” said Dolly, clapping her hands. “What a 'normous, gleat big cat it is!”

“I shouldn't have known what it was meant for,” said Raeburn, scrutinizing the rather shapeless furry quadruped. “How is it that you can't make them more like cats than this?”

“I don't know, sir, how it is,” said the shopwoman; “we get very good dogs and rabbits, and donkeys, but they don't seem to have attained to the making of cats.”

This view of the matter so tickled Raeburn that he left Ralph and Dolly to see the “'normous gleat big cat” wrapped up, and went out of the shop laughing.

But just outside, a haggard, wild-looking man came up to him and began to address him in excited tones.

“You are the vile atheist, Luke Raeburn!” he cried, “Oh, I know you well enough. I tell you, you have lost my son's soul; do you hear, wretched infidel, you destroyed my son's soul! His guilt is upon you! And I will have vengeance! Vengeance!”

“My friend,” said Raeburn quietly, “supposing your son had what you call a soul, do you think that I, a man, should be able to destroy it?”

“You have made him what you are yourself,” cried the man, “an accursed infidel, an incarnate devil! But I tell you I will have vengeance, vengeance!”

“Have the goodness not to come so near my daughter,” said Raeburn for the man was pushing up roughly against Erica, who had just come out of the shop. The words were spoken in such an authoritative manner that the man shrunk back awed, and in another minute the children had rejoined them, and they drove off to the station.

“What was that man saying?” asked Erica.

“Apparently his son has become a secularist, and he means to revenge himself on me,” said Raeburn. “If it wouldn't have lost me this train, I would have given him in charge for using threatening language. But no doubt the poor fellow was half-witted.”

Donovan had walked on to the station and so had missed this incident, and though for the time it saddened Erica, yet she speedily forgot it in talking to the children. The arrival at Ashborough, too, was exciting, and she was so delighted to see her father once more in the enjoyment of full health and strength that she could not long be disquieted about anything else. It was a great happiness to her to hear him speak upon any subject on which they were agreed, and his reception that evening at the Ashborough Town Hall was certainly a most magnificent one. The ringing cheers made the tears start to her eyes. The people had been roused by his late illness and, though many of them disliked his theological views, they felt that in political matters he was a man whom they could very ill spare. His speech was a remarkably powerful one, and calculated to do great good. Erica's spirits rose to their very highest pitch and, as they went back together to their hotel, she kept both Raeburn and Donovan in fits of laughter. It was long months since her father had seen her so brilliant and witty.

“You are 'fey,' little one,” he said. “I prophesy a headache for you tomorrow.”

And the prophecy came true for Erica awoke the next morning with a sense of miserable oppression. The day, too, was gray and dreary-looking, it seemed like a different world altogether. Raeburn was none the worse for his exertions; he took a quiet day, however, went for a walk with Donovan in the afternoon, and set off in good time for his evening lecture. It was Sunday evening, Erica was going to church with Donovan, and had her walking things on when her father looked into the room to say goodbye.

“What, going out?” he said. “You don't look fit for it, Eric.”

“Oh!” she said, “it is no use to give way to this sort of headache; it's only one's wretched nerves.”

“Well, take carte of yourself,” he said, kissing her. “I believe you are worn out with all these weeks of attendance on a cantankerous old father.”

She laughed and brightened up, going out with him to the head of the stairs, and returning to watch him from the window. Just as he left the door of the hotel, a small child fell face downward on the pavement on the opposite side of the road and began to cry bitterly. Raeburn crossed over and picked up the small elf; they could hear him saying: “There, there, more frightened than hurt, I think,” as he brushed the dust from the little thing's clothes.

“How exactly like father!” said Erica, smiling; “he never would let us think ourselves hurt. I believe it is thanks to him that Tom has grown up such a Stoic, and that I'm not a very lachrymose sort of being.”

A little later they started for church, but toward the end of the Psalms Donovan felt a touch on his arm. He turned to Erica; she was a white as death, and with a strange, glassy look in her eyes.

“Come,” she said in a hoarse whisper, “come out with me.”

He thought she felt faint, but she walked steadily down the aisle. When they were outside she grasped his arm and seemed to make a great effort to speak naturally.

“Forgive me for disturbing you,” she said, “but I have such a dreadful feeling that something is going to happen. I feel that I must go to my father.”

Donovan thought that she was probably laboring under a delusion. He knew that she was always very anxious about her father and that Ashborough, owing to various memories, was exactly the place where this anxiety would be likely to weigh upon her. He thought, too, that Raeburn was very likely right and that she was rather overdone by the strain of those long weeks of solitary attendance. But he was much too wise to attempt to reason away her fears; he knew that nothing but her father's presence would set her at rest, and they walked as fast as they could to the Town Hall. He was just turning down a street which led into the High Street when Erica drew him instead in the direction of a narrow byway.

“Down here,” she said, walking straight on as though she held some guiding clew in her hand.

He was astonished as she could not possibly have been in this part of the town before. Moreover, her whole bearing was very strange; she was still pale and trembling, and her ungloved hands felt as cold as ice while, although he had given her his arm, he felt all the time that she was leading him.

At length a sound of many voices was heard in the distance. Donovan felt a sort of thrill pass through the hand that rested on his arm, and Erica began to walk more quickly than ever. A minute more, and the little byway led them out into the market place. It was lighted with the electric light, and tonight the light was concentrated at one end, the end at which stood the Town Hall. Instinctively Donovan's eyes were turned at once toward that brightest point and also toward the sound, the subdued roar of the multitude which they had heard on their way. There was another sound, too a man's ringing voice, a stentorian voice which reached them clearly even at that distance. Raeburn stood alone, facing an angry, tumultuous throng, with his back to the closed door of the building and his tawny eyes scanning the mass of hostile faces below.

“Every Englishman has a right to freedom of speech. You shall not rob me or any other man of a right. I have fought for this all my life, and I will fight as long as I've breath.”

“That shall not be long!” shouted another speaker. “Forward, brothers! Down with the infidel! Vengeance, vengeance.”

The haggard, wild-looking man who had addressed Raeburn the day before at Greyshot now sprang forward; there was a surging movement in the crowd like wind in a corn field. Donovan and Erica, hurrying forward, saw Raeburn surrounded on every side, forced away from the door, and at length half stunned by a heavy blow from the fanatical leader; then, taken thus at a disadvantage, he was pushed backward. They saw him fall heavily down the stone steps.

With a low cry Erica rushed toward him, breaking away from Donovan and forcing a way through that rough crowd as if by magic. Donovan, though so much taller and stronger, was longer in reaching the foot of the steps, and when at length he had pushed his way through the thickest part of the throng he was hindered for the haggard-looking man who had been the ringleader in the assault ran into his very arms. He was evidently struck with horror at the result of his mad enterprise and now meditated flight. But Donovan stopped him.

“You must come with me, my friend,” he exclaimed, seizing the fanatic by the collar.

Nor did he pause till he had handed him over to a policeman. Then once more he forced a passage through the hushed crowd and at last reached the foot of the steps. He found Erica on the ground with her father's head raised on her knees. He was perfectly unconscious, but it seemed as if his spirit and energy had been transmitted to his child. Erica was giving orders so clearly and authoritatively that Donovan could only marvel at her strength and composure.

“Stand back!” she was saying as he approached. “How can he come to while you are shutting out the air? Some one go quickly and fetch a door or a litter. You go, and you.”

She indicated two or three more respectable-looking men, and they at once obeyed her. She looked relieved to see Donovan.

“Won't you go inside and speak to the people?” she said. “I have sent for a doctor. If some one doesn't go soon, they will come out, and then there might be a riot. Tell them if they have any feeling for my father to separate quietly. Don't let them all out upon these people; there is sure to be fighting if they meet.”

Donovan could not bear to leave her in such a position, but just then a doctor came up, and the police began to drive back the crowd; and since the people were rather awed by what had happened, they dispersed meekly enough. Donovan went into the Town Hall then, and gradually learned what had taken place. It seemed that soon after the beginning of Raeburn's lecture, a large crowd had gathered outside, headed by a man named Drosser, a street preacher, well-known in Ashborough and the neighborhood. This crowd had stormed the doors of the hall and had created such an uproar that it was impossible to proceed with the lecture. The doors had been quite unequal to the immense pressure from without, and Raeburn, foreseeing that they would give way and knowing that, if the insurgents met his audience, there would be serious risk to the lives of many, had insisted on trying to dismiss the crowd without, or, at any rate, to secure some sort of order. Several had offered to go with him, but he had begged the audience to keep still and had gone out alone the crowd being so astonished by this unexpected move that they fell back for a moment before him. Apparently his plan would have succeeded very well had it not been for Drosser's deliberate assault. He had gained a hearing from the people and would probably have dispersed them had he not been borne down by brute force.

It was no easy task to tell the audience what had happened; but Donovan was popular and greatly respected and, thanks to his tact, their wrath, though very great, was restrained. In fact, Raeburn was so well known to disapprove of any sort of violence that Donovan's appeal to them to preserve order for his sake met with a deep, suppressed murmur of assent. When all was safe he hurried back to the hotel where they were glad enough of his services. Raeburn had recovered his senses for a minute but only to sink almost immediately into another swoon. For many hours this went on; he would partly revive, even speak a few words, and then sink back once more. Every time Erica thought it would end in death, nor could she gather comfort from the looks of either of the doctors or of Donovan.

“This is not the first time I've been knocked down and trampled on,” said Raeburn, faintly, in one of his intervals of consciousness, “but it will be the last time.”

And though the words were spoken with a touch of his native humor and might have borne more than one interpretation, yet they answered painfully to the conviction which lay deep in Erica's heart.

“Then let me send a telegram from the 'Ashborough Times' office,” said Donovan to her in one of the momentary pauses. “I have sent for your cousin and Mrs. Craigie and for Brian.”

For the first time Erica's outward composure gave way. Her mouth began to quiver and her eyes to fill.

“Oh! Thank you,” she said; and there was something in her voice that went to Donovan's heart.

CHAPTER XL. Mors Janua Vitae

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fullness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?
R. Browning

Early on the Monday morning three anxious-looking travelers arrived by the first train from London, and drove as fast as might be to the Park Hotel at Ashborough. They were evidently expected for the moment their cab stopped a door on one of the upper floors was opened, and some one ran quickly down the stairs to meet them.

“Is he better?” asked Aunt Jean.

Erica shook her head and, indeed, her face told them much more than the brief words of the telegram. She was deathly white, and had that weighed-down look which people wear when they have watched all night beside one who is hovering between life and death. She seemed to recover herself a little as her hand rested for a moment in Brian's.

“He has been asking for you,” she said. “Do go to him. The faintness has quite passed off, and they say inflammation has set in; he is in frightful pain.”

Her lips grew a shade whiter as she spoke and, with an effort, she seemed to turn away from some horrible recollection.

“There is some breakfast ready for you in here,” she said to her aunt. “You must have something before you see him. Oh, I am so glad you have come, auntie!”

Aunt Jean kissed her and cried a little; trouble always brought these two together however much they disagreed at other times. Tom did not say a word, but began to cut a loaf to pieces as though they had the very largest appetites; the great pile of slices lay untouched on the trencher, but the cutting had served its purpose of a relief to his pent-up feelings.

Later on there was a consultation of doctors; their verdict was perhaps a little more hopeful than Erica had dared to expect. Her father had received a fearful internal injury and was in the greatest danger, but there was still a chance that he might recover, it was just possible; and knowing how his constitution had rallied when every one had thought him dying three years before, she grew very hopeful. Without hope she could hardly have got through those days for the suffering was terrible. She hardly knew which she dreaded most, the nights of fever and delirium when groans of anguish came from the writhing lips, or the days with their clear consciousness when her father never uttered a word of complaint but just silently endured the torture, replying always, if questioned as to the pain, “It's bearable.”

His great strength and vigor made it seem all the more piteous that he should now be lying in the very extremity of suffering, unable to bear even the weight of the bed clothes. But all through that weary time his fortitude never gave way, and the vein of humor which had stood him in such good stead all his life did not fail him even now. On the Monday when he was suffering torments, they tried the application of leeches. One leech escaped, and they had a great hunt for it, Raeburn astonishing them all by coming out with one of his quaint flashes of wit and positively making them laugh in spite of their anxiety and sorrow.

The weary days dragged on, the torture grew worse, opium failed to deaden the pain, and sleep, except in the very briefest snatches, was impossible. But at last on the Thursday morning a change set in, the suffering became less intense; they knew, however, that it was only because the end was drawing near and the life energy failing.

For the second time Sir John Larkom came down from London to see the patient, but every one knew that there was nothing to be done. Even Erica began to understand that the time left was to be measured only by hours. She learned it in a few words which Sir John Larkom said to Donovan on the stairs. She was in her own room with the door partly open, eagerly waiting for permission to go back to her father.

“Oh, it's all up with the poor fellow,” she heard the London doctor say. “A wonderful constitution; most men would not have held out so long.”

At the time the words did not convey any very clear meaning to Erica; she felt no very sharp pang as she repeated the sentence to herself; there was only a curious numb feeling at her heart and a sort of dull consciousness that she must move, must get away somewhere, do something active. It was at first almost a relief to her when Donovan returned and knocked at her door.

“I am afraid we ought to come to the court,” he said. “They will, I am sure, take your evidence as quickly as possible.”

She remembered then that the man Drosser was to be brought up before the magistrates that morning; she and Donovan had to appear as witnesses of the assault. She went into her father's room before she started; he had specially asked to see her. He was quite clear-minded and calm, and began to speak in a voice which, though weak and low, had the old musical ring about it.

“You are going to give evidence, Eric,” he said, holding her hand in his. “Now, I don't forgive that fellow for having robbed me of life, but one must be just even to one's foes. They will ask you if you ever saw Drosser before; you will have to tell them of that scene at Greyshot, and you must be sure to say that I said, as we drove off: 'No doubt the poor fellow is half-witted.' Those were my words, do you remember?”

“Yes,” she said, repeating the words after him at his request. “I remember quite well.”

“Those words may affect Drosser's case very much, and I don't wish any man to swing for me I have always disapproved of the death penalty. Probably, though, it will be brought in as manslaughter yes, almost certainly. There go, my child, and come back to me as soon as you can.”

But the examination proved too much for Erica's physical powers; she was greatly exhausted by the terrible strain of the long days and nights of nursing, and when she found herself in a hot and crowded court, pitilessly stared at, confronted by the man who was in fact her father's murderer, and closely questioned by the magistrate about all the details of that Sunday evening, her overtasked strength gave way suddenly.

She had told clearly and distinctly about the meeting at Greyshot, and had stated positively that in the Ashborough market place she had seen Drosser give her father a heavy blow and then push him down the Town Hall steps.

“Can you recollect whether others pushed your father at the same time?” asked the magistrate. “Don't answer hurriedly; this is an important matter.”

All at once the whole scene came vividly before Erica the huge crowd, the glare of the lights, her father standing straight and tall, as she should never see him again, his thick white hair stirred by the wind, his whole attitude that of indignant protest; then the haggard face of the fanatic, the surging movement in the black mass of people, and that awful struggle and fall. Was it he who was falling? If so she was surely with him, falling down, down, endlessly down.

There was a sudden stir and commotion in the court, a murmur of pity, for Luke Raeburn's daughter had fallen back senseless.

When she came to herself, she was lying on the floor of an office-like room, with her head on Mrs. MacNaughton's lap. Brian was bending over her, chafing her hands. A clock in the building struck one, and the sound seemed to recall things to her mind. She started up.

“Oh!” she cried, “why am I not with my father? Where have you taken me to?”

“It's all right, dear,” said Mrs. MacNaughton soothingly; “you shall come back directly you are well enough.”

“I remember it all now,” she said; “did I finish? Must I go back there?”

It was some relief to know that Donovan had been able to supplement her evidence, and that the examination was in fact over, Drosser having been remanded for a week. She insisted on going back to the hotel at once, and spent the whole of the afternoon and evening with her father. He was not in great pain now, but very restless, and growing weaker every hour. He was able, however, to see several of his friends, and though the farewells evidently tried him, he would not refuse to see those who had come hundreds of miles for that last glimpse.

“What does it matter if I am exhausted?” he said when some one remonstrated with him. “It will make no difference at all as far as I am concerned, and it will be a happiness to them for the rest of their lives. Besides, I shall not die today, perhaps not tomorrow; depend upon it, I shall die hard.”

They persuaded Erica to rest for the first part of the night. She left Tom and Brian to watch, and went to her room, making them promise to call her if there were any signs of change.

At last the full realization had come to her; though she hated leaving her father, it was yet a sort of relief to get away into the dark, to be able to give way for a moment.

“Anything but this, oh, God,” she sobbed, “anything but this!”

All else would have been easy enough to bear, but that he should be killed by the violence and bigotry of one who at any rate called himself a Christian, this seemed to her not tolerable. The hope of years had received its death blow, the life she most loved was sinking away in darkness, the work which she had so bravely taken as her life work was all but over, and she had failed. Yes, in spite of all her efforts, all her longings, all her love, she had failed, or at any rate apparently failed, and in moments of great agony we do not in fact can not distinguish between the real and the apparent. Christ Himself could not do it.

She did not dare to let her sobs rise for it was one of the trials of that time that they were not in their own home but in a busy hotel where the partitions were thin and every sound could be heard in the adjoining rooms. Moreover, Aunt Jean was sleeping with her and must not be disturbed. But as she lay on the floor, trying to stifle the restrained sobs which shook her from head to foot trying to check the bitter tears which would come, her thoughts were somehow lifted quite away from the present; strange little memories of her childish days returned to her, days when her father had been to her the living incarnation of all that was noble and good. Often it is not the great events of a child's life which are so vividly remembered; memory seems to be strangely capricious and will single out some special word or deed, some trifling sign of love which has stamped itself indelibly upon the grain to bear its golden harvest of responding love through a life time. Vividly there came back to her now the eager happiness with which she had awaited a long promised treat, as a little thing of seven years old. Her father was to take her on some special excursion, she had long ago forgotten what the particular occasion was, only it was something that could come but once, the day lost, the treat would be lost. But the evening before, when she was on the very tiptoe of expectation, a celebrated action for libel had come to an end much sooner than was expected, and when her father returned in the evening he had to tell her that his case was to come on the next day, and that he could not possibly take her. Even now she could recall the bitterness of the disappointment, but not so vividly as the look in her father's face as he lifted her off the floor where she had thrown herself in the abandonment of her grief. He had not said a word then about the enormity of crying, he had just held her closely in his arms, feeling the disappointment a thousand times more than she felt it herself, and fully realizing that the loss of such a long-looked-for happiness was to a child what the loss of thousands of pounds would be to a man. He had been patient with her though she had entirely failed to see why he could not put off the case just for that day.

“You'll understand one day, little one,” he had said, “and be glad that you have had your share of pain in a day that will advance the cause of liberty.”

She remembered protesting that that was impossible, that she should always be miserable; at which he had

only smiled.

Then it came to Erica that the life upon earth was, after all, as compared with the eternal life, what the day is in the life of a child. It seemed everything at the time, but was in truth such a fragment. And as she lay there in the immeasurably greater agony of later life, once more sobbing: “I had hoped, I had planned, this is more than I can bear!” a Comforter infinitely grater, a Father whose love was infinitely stronger, drew her so near that the word “near” was but a mockery, and told her, as the earthly father had told her with such perfect truth: “One day you will understand, child; one day you will be glad to have shared the pain!”

In the next room there was for some time quiet. Poor Tom, heavy with grief and weariness, fell asleep beside the fire; Raeburn was for the most part very still as if wrapped in thought. At length a heavy sigh made Brian ask if he were in pain.

“Pain of mind,” he said, “not of body. Don't misunderstand me,” he said after a pause, with the natural fear least Brian should fancy his secularism failed him at the near approach of death. “For myself I am content; I have had a very full life, and I have tried always yes, I think I may say always—to work entirely for the good of Humanity. But I am wretched about Erica. I do not see how the home can be a very happy one for her when I am gone.”

For a minute Brian hesitated; but it seemed to him when he thought out the matter, that a father so loving as Raeburn would find no jealousy at the thought that the love he had deemed exclusively his own might, after all, have been given to another.

“I do not know whether I am right to tell you,” he said. “Would it make you happier to know that I love Erica that I have loved her for nearly nine years?”

Raeburn gave an ejaculation of astonishment. There was a long silence; for the idea, once suggested to him, he began to see what a likely thing it was and to wonder that he had not thought of it before.

“I think you are well suited to each other,” he said at last. “Now I understand your visit to Florence. What took you away again so suddenly?”

Brian told him all about the day at Fiesole. He seemed greatly touched; all the little proofs and coincidences which had never struck him at the time were so plain now. They were still discussing it when, at about five o'clock, Erica returned. She was pale and sad, but the worn, harassed, miserable look had quite gone. It was a strange time and place for a betrothal.

“Brian has been telling me about the day at Fiesole,” said Raeburn, letting his weak, nerveless hands play about in her hair as she knelt beside the bed. “You have been a leal bairn to me, Eric; I don't think I could have spared you then even though Brian so well deserved you. But now it makes me very happy to leave you to him; it takes away my only care.”

Erica had colored faintly, but there was an absence of responsiveness in her manner which troubled Raeburn.

“You do still feel as you did at Fiesole?” he asked. “You are sure of your own mind? You think you will be happy?”

“I love Brian,” she said in a low voice. “But, oh, I can't think now about being happy!” She broke off suddenly and hid her face in the bed clothes.

There was silence in the room. In a minute she raised herself and turned to Brian who stood beside her.

“You will understand,” she said, looking right into his eyes. “There is only one thing that I can feel just now. You do understand, I know.”

With a sudden impulse she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

And Brian did understand. He knew, too, that she wanted to have her father to herself. Even in the very fulfillment of his desire he was obliged to stand aside, obliged even yet to be patient. Never surely had an impulsive, impetuous man a longer training.

When he had gone Raeburn talked for some time of Erica's future, talked for so long, indeed, that she grew impatient. How trifling now seemed the sacrifice she had made at Fiesole to which he kept on referring.

“Oh, why do you waste the time in talking of me?” she said at last.

“Why?” he said smiling. “Because you are my bairn of what else should I speak or think? For myself, I am very content, dear, though I should have liked a few more years of work. It was not to be, you see; and, in the end, no doubt this will work good to the cause of—” he broke off, unwilling to pain her.

“Ah, child!” he said after a pause, “How miserable you and I might have been for these two years if we had not loved each other. You are not to think, little one, that I have not known what your wishes have been for me. You, and Brian, and Osmond, and of late that noble fellow Farrant, have often made me see that Christianity need not necessarily warp the intellect and cripple the life. I believe that for you, and such as you, the system is not rooted in selfishness. But, dear, you are but the exceptions, the rare exceptions. I know that you have wished with all your heart that I should come to think as you do, while I have been wishing you back into the ranks of secularism. Well! It wasn't to be. We each of us lost our wish. But there is this left, that we each know the other to be honest; each deem it a case of honest mistake. I've felt that all along. We've a common love of truth and a common love of humanity. Oh, my child! Spite of all the creeds, we are very near to each other!”

“Very near,” she whispered. And words which Charles Osmond had spoken years ago returned to her memory. “I think death will be your gate of life. You will wake up and exclaim: 'Who'd have thought it?'”

After all, death would in a sense make them yet nearer! But human nature is weak, and it is hard for us to realize the Unseen. She could not then feel that it was anything but hard, bitter, heart-breaking that he should be leaving her in this way.

The pain had now almost entirely ceased, and Raeburn, though very restless, was better able to talk than on the previous day. He asked for the first time what was passing in the world, showed special interest in the accounts of the late colliery accident, and was greatly touched by the gallant efforts of the rescuers who had to some extent been successful. He insisted, too, on hearing what the various papers had to say about his own

case, listening sometimes with a quiet smile, sometimes with a gleam of anger in his eyes. After a very abusive article, which he had specially desired to hear, he leaned back with an air of weariness.

“I'm rather tired of this sort of thing!” he said with a sigh. “What will the 'Herald' do when it no longer has me to abuse?”

Of Drosser and of the events of that Sunday evening he spoke strangely little. What he did say was, for the most part, said to Professor Gosse.

“You say I was rash to go alone,” he replied when the professor had opened the subject. “Well, that may be. It is not, perhaps, the first time that in personal matters I've been lacking in due caution. But I thought it would prevent a riot. I still think it did so.”

“And what is your feeling about the whole matter?” asked the professor. “Do you forgive Drosser for having given you this mortal injury?”

“One must bow to necessity,” said Raeburn quietly. “When you speak of forgiving I don't quite understand you; but I don't intend to hand down a legacy of revenge to my successors. The law will duly punish the man, and future atheists will reap the benefit of my death. There is, after all, you know, a certain satisfaction in feeling that I died as I have lived, in defending the right of free speech. I can't say that I could not have wished that Drosser had made an end of me at nine-and-seventy rather than at nine-and-forty. I shall live on in their hearts, and that is a glorious immortality! The only immortality I have ever looked for.”

In the afternoon to the astonishment of all, Mr. Fane-Smith came over from Greyshot, horrified to hear that the man who he had once treated with scant justice and actual discourtesy was lying on his death bed, a victim to religious fanaticism. Spite of his very hard words to her, Erica had always respected Mr. Fane-Smith, and she was glad that he had come at the last. Her aunt had not come; she had hesitated long, but in the end the recollection that Greyshot would be greatly scandalized, and that, too, on the very eve of her daughter's wedding turned the scale. She sent affectionate messages and a small devotional book, but stayed at home.

Mr. Fane-Smith apologized frankly and fully to Raeburn for his former discourtesy and then plunged at once into eager questions and eager arguments. He could not endure the thought that the man in whom at the last he was able to recognize a certain nobility of character, should be sinking down into what he considered everlasting darkness. Bitterly did he now regret the indifference of former years, and the actual uncharitableness in which he had of late indulged.

Raeburn lay very passively listening to an impassioned setting forth of the gospel, his hands wandering about restlessly, picking up little bits of the coverlet in that strange way so often noticed in dying people.

“You are mistaken,” he said when at length Mr. Fane-Smith ceased. “Had you argued with me in former years, you would never have convinced me, your books and tracts could never have altered my firm convictions. All my life I have had tracts and leaflets showered down upon me with letters from pious folks desiring my conversion. I have had innumerable letters telling me that the writers were praying for me. Well, I think they would have done better to pray for some of my orthodox opponents who are leading immoral lives; but, insofar as prayers show a certain amount of human interest, I am very willing that they should pray for me though they would have shown better taste if they had not informed me of their supplications. But don't mistake me; it is not in this way that you will ever prove the truth of your religion. You must show justice to your opponents first. You must put a different spirit into your pet word, 'Charity.' I don't think you can do it. I think your religion false. I consider that it is rooted in selfishness and superstition. Being convinced of this when I was still young, I had to find some other system to take its place. That system I found in secularism. For thirty years I have lived as a secularist and have been perfectly content notwithstanding that my life has been a very hard one. As a secularist I now die content.”

Mr. Fane-Smith shuddered. This was of course inexpressibly painful to him. He could not see that what had disgusted Raeburn with religion had been the distortion of Christ's teaching, and that in truth the secularist creed embodied much of the truest and loftiest Christianity.

Once more he reiterated his arguments, striving hard to show by words the beauty of his religion. But Christianity can only be vindicated by deeds, can only be truly shown forth in lives. The country, the “Christian Country,” as it was fond of styling itself, had had thirty years in which to show to Raeburn the loving kindness, the brotherhood, the lofty generosity which each professed follower of Christ ought to show in his life. Now the time was over, and it was too late.

The dying man bent forward, and a hard look came into his eyes, and a sternness overspread his calm face.

“What has Christianity done for me?” he asked. “Look at my life. See how I have been treated.”

And Mr. Fane-Smith was speechless. Conscience-stricken, he knew that to this there was no reply that HE could honestly make, and a question dawned upon his mind Was his own “Christianity” really that of Christ?

As evening drew on, Raeburn's life was slowly ebbing away. Very slowly, for to the last he fought for breath. All his nearest friends were gathered round him, and to the end he was clearly conscious and, as in life, calmly philosophical.

“I have been well 'friended' all my life,” he said once, looking round at the faces by his bedside.

They were all too broken-hearted to respond, and there were long silences, broken only by the laboring breath and restless movements of the dying man.

Toward midnight there was a low roll of distant thunder, and gradually the storm drew nearer and nearer. Raeburn asked to be raised in bed that he might watch the lightning which was unusually beautiful. It was a strange, weird scene the plainly furnished hotel room, sparsely lighted by candles, the sad group of watchers, the pale, beautiful face of the young girl bending over the pillow, and the strong, rugged Scotchman with his white hair and keen brown eyes, upon whose face death had already set his pale tokens. From the uncurtained window could be seen the dark outline of the adjacent houses and the lights lower down the hill scattered here and there throughout the sleeping city. Upon all this the vivid lightning played, and the distant thunder followed with its mighty crash, rolling and echoing away among the surrounding hills.

“I am glad to have seen one more storm,” said Raeburn.

But soon he grew weary, tired just with the slight exertion of looking and listening. He sighed. To a strong, healthy man in the very prime of life, this failing of the powers was hard to bear. Death was very near; he knew it well enough knew it by this slow, sure, painless sinking.

He held Erica's hand more closely, and after that lay very still, once or twice asking for more coverings over his feet. The night wore on. After a long silence, he looked up once more and said to Tom:

“I promised Hazeldine a sovereign toward the fund for—” he broke off with a look of intense weariness, adding after an interval “He'll tell you. See that it's paid.”

The storm had passed, and the golden-red dawn was just breaking when once more the silence was broken.

“Come nearer, Eric,” he whispered “nearer!”

Then came a long pause.

There was stillness that fearful stillness when the watchers begin to hush their very breath, that they may catch the last faint breathings. Poor Tom could stand it no longer; he just buried his face in his hands and sobbed. Perhaps Erica envied him. Violent grief would surely have been more endurable than this terrible sinking, this dread of not keeping up to the end. Was she falling with him down those horrible steps? Was she sinking with him beneath the cold, green waves? Oh, death cruel death! Why had he not taken them together on that summer day?

Yet what was she saying? The death angel was but God's messenger, and her father could never, never be beyond the care of One who loved him infinitely eternally. If He the Father were taking him from her, why, she would trust Him, though it should crush her whole world.

“Nearer, Eric nearer.” How those last words rang in her ears as she waited there with her hands in his. She knew they would be the last for he was sinking away into a dreamily passive state just dying because too tired to live.

“Nearer, nearer!” Was this agony indeed to heal the terrible division between them? Ah, mystery of evil, mystery of pain, mystery of death! Only the love of the Infinitely Loving can fathom you only the trust in that Love give us a glimpse of your meaning.

She felt a tightening of the fingers that clasped hers. He was still conscious; he smiled just such a smile as he used to give her when, as a little thing, she had fretted about his leaving home.

She pressed her quivering lips to his, clung to him, and kissed him again and again. There was a sigh. A long interval, and another sigh. After that, silence.

CHAPTER XLI. Results Closely Following

But that one man should die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy. Carlyle

Not what I think, but what Thou art, makes sure. George MacDonald

A wave of strangely varied feeling swept through the country in the next four-and-twenty hours.

From the Raeburnites came a burst of mingled wrath and grief, and a bitter outcry against the religion which inevitably they thought tended to produce such fanatics as Drosser. From the poor and oppressed came a murmur of blank despair; they had looked upon Raeburn as the deliverer from so much that now weighed upon them, and were so perfectly conscious that he understood their wants and difficulties in a way which others failed to do, that his death in the very prime of manhood simply stunned them. The liberal-minded felt a thrill of horror and indignation at the thought that such deeds as this could take place in the nineteenth century; realizing, however, with a shudder that the rash act of the ignorant fanatic was, in truth, no worse than the murder of hatred, the perpetual calumny and injustice which thousands of professing Christians had meted out to Raeburn. In nothing had the un-Christlikeness of the age been more conspicuous than in the way in which Raeburn had all his life been treated.

The fashionable world felt a sort of uncomfortableness. The news reached them at their laziest time of year; they came in from shooting parties to read the account in the papers; they discussed it in ball rooms and at evening parties at Brighton and Greyshot and the other autumnal resorts. “So he was dead! Well, really they were tired of hearing his name! It was rather horrible, certainly, that his daughter should have seen it all, but such infamous creatures as Raeburn had no business to have daughters. No doubt she would stand it very well anything, you know, for a little notoriety. Such people lived for notoriety. Of course the papers had put in a lot of twaddle that he had said on his death bed 'always had tried to work entirely for the good of humanity,' and that sort of nonsense. This coffee ice is excellent. Let me get you another,” after which the subject would be dropped, and the speakers would return to the ball room to improve upon Raeburn's life, which they presumed so severely to criticize, by a trois temps enlivened by a broad flirtation.

Here and there a gleam of good was effected inasmuch as some of the excessively narrow began to see what narrowness leads to. Mr. Cuthbert, coming home from his annual Swiss tour, was leaning back sleepily in a first-class carriage at the Folkestone station when the voice of a newsboy recalled him to the every-day world with a slight shock. There was the usual list of papers; he was sleepy and thought he would not get one, but then came the loud voice, not a couple of yards from his ear, “Death of Mr. Raeburn! Death of Luke Raeburn this da-ay!”

Mr. Cuthbert had his head out of the window in a moment.

“Here, paper!”

“These boys will call anything to sell their papers,” he remarked to his companion; “I dare say it's nothing more than a rumor.”

“Precious good thing for the country if it was true,” replied the other, a young fellow of two-and-twenty who dawdled through life upon an income of 5,000 pounds a year, and found it quite possible to combine the enjoyment of lax living with the due expression of very orthodox sentiments.

Mr. Cuthbert did not answer; his eye was traveling down a column of the newspaper, and he felt a curious pricking of remorse as he read. He had once been rude to Erica Raeburn; he had all his life retailed dubious stories about her father, knowing all the time that had any one believed such stories of himself upon such shaky evidence, he would have used very strong language about them. And now this fellow was dead! Curiously enough, Mr. Cuthbert, who had many times remarked that “Raeburn ought to be shut up, or better still, hung,” was now the one to wish him alive again. Ugh! It was a horrible story. He quite shivered as he read the account of those days of torture.

But in a room at the Park Hotel, Ashborough, two very different men were discussing the same subject. Mr. Fane-Smith, with all his faults, had always been well-intentioned, and though frightful harm may be done by people with good intentions, they can never stand upon the same level as those who wilfully and maliciously offend. All too plainly now he saw how grievously he had failed with regard to Raeburn, and patiently did he listen to Donovan's account of the really good work which Raeburn had effected in many instances.

“Much as you may hate his views, you must at least see that, as some one has well expressed it, 'It takes a high-souled man to move the masses even to a cleaner sty.' And I say that a man who worked as he worked, striving hard to teach the people to live for the general good, advocating temperance, promoting the spread of education, and somehow winning those whom no one else had ever touched to take an intelligent interest in politics, in science, and in the future of the race, that such a man claims our respect however much we may disagree with him.”

“But that he should have died ignorant like this!” exclaimed Mr. Fane-Smith with a shudder.

“'Tis in truth a tragedy,” said Donovan, sighing. “But I can well believe that in another world the barriers which he allowed to distort his vision will be removed; the very continuance of existence would surely be sufficient.”

“You are a universalist?” said Mr. Fane-Smith, not in the condemnatory tone he would once have assumed, but humbly, anxiously, like one who gropes his way in a dark place.

“Yes,” replied Donovan. “Believing in a universal Father, I am naturally that. Upon any other system, what do you make of the good which exists in so many of those who deny all in which you believe? Where does the good go to? I stood beside the death bed of that noble man this morning. At the very last I saw most touching proofs of his strong sense of justice, his honesty, his desire to promote the good of others, his devotion to his child. Can you believe that all that goodness, which of necessity comes from God, is to go down into what you call everlasting punishment? Don't mistake me. Thank God there is a punishment which no one would wish to forego, such punishment, such drawing forth of the native good, such careful help in the rooting out of what is evil as all good fathers give to their children.”

They were interrupted by the opening of the door. Mr. Fane-Smith started and almost trembled when, on turning round, he saw Erica. She was pale, but preternaturally calm looking, however, they all felt, as if in her father's death, she had received her own death blow.

“I thought I heard you,” she said in that strangely “gravened” voice which is sometimes one of the consequences of great and sudden trouble. “Has Donovan taken you into the next room? Will you come?”

For his life Mr. Fane-Smith could not have refused anything which she asked him; there was something in her manner that made the tears rush to his eyes though he was not, as a rule, easily moved.

He followed her obediently though with a sort of reluctance; but when he was once there he was glad. Ever since the previous day he had not been able to rid himself of that stern, hard look with which Raeburn had so terribly rebuked him; it had persistently haunted him. There was nothing stern in this dead face. It was still and passionless, bearing the look of repose which, spite of a harassed life, it had always borne in moments of leisure. He hardly looked as though he were dead. Erica could almost have fancied that he was but resting after the toils of a hard day, having fallen asleep for a few minutes, as she had often seen him in his arm chair on a Sunday evening.

Mr. Fane-Smith did not say a word, his eyes wandered from the calm face to the still hands which clasped some sprigs of his native heather, the heather which Donovan's children had sent only the day before, but just in time to win one of his last smiles. Donovan and Erica spoke together in low tones, but something in the sound of that “gravened” voice arrested Mr. Fane-Smith's attention. He had not heard what had passed before, and there was nothing special in the words that fell now upon his ear; it was rather that his own soul was in a state of receptivity, and so through the first channel that came to hand he was able to receive a new truth.

“I am only his child; God is his Father.”

And there, by the lifeless body of Luke Raeburn, one, who during his life had judged him with the very hardest judgment, learned for the first time what Fatherhood means.

As long as there was anything to be done, Erica struggled on although the days were terribly hard and were rendered infinitely harder by the sort of publicity which attended them. There was the necessity of appearing at the inquest; there was the necessity of reading every word that was written about her father. She could not help reading the papers, could not keep her hands off them, though even now most cruel things were said. There was the necessity of attending the great public funeral in London, of seeing the thousands of grief-stricken people, of listening to the professor's words so broken with sobs that they could hardly be heard. A week later there was the necessity of going down to the Ashborough assizes to appear as a witness in the trial of Drosser.

“What do you feel toward this man?” some one asked her once.

“A great pity,” she replied. “It is not nearly so hard for me to forgive this poor fanatic as to forgive those who have taught him his dark creed, or to forgive those who, while calling themselves Christians, have hated my father with the hatred that is quite as bad as murder.”

But when the trial was over and there was no longer any necessity to do anything, Erica suddenly broke down. She had never till now yielded though not a night had passed in which she had not been haunted by the frightful recollections of that Sunday evening and the days following. But the evening she returned from Ashborough she could hold out no longer.

Very quietly she bore that sad return to the empty house, going into all the familiar rooms and showing no sign of grief, because those she loved were with her, watching her with the anxious solicitude which people cannot help showing at such a time though it is usually more of a trial than a comfort. Erica longed inexpressibly to be alone, and when at length, deceived by her unnatural calm, they were persuaded to leave her, she crept down to the study and shut herself in, and no longer tried to resist the inevitable, the mere surroundings were quite sufficient to open the flood gates of her grief; the books which her father had loved, the table, the empty chair, the curious cactus which they had brought back from Italy, and in the growth of which they had taken such an interest! the desk at which her father had toiled for so many long years. She hid her face from the light and broke into a passionate fit of weeping. Then exhausted, nerveless, powerless, she could no longer cope with that anguish of remembrance which was her nightly torment. Once more there rose before her that horrible scene in the Ashborough market place; once more she could see the glare of light, the huge crowd, the sudden treacherous movement, the fall; once more she heard the crash, the hushed murmur; once more felt the wild struggle to get through that pushing, jostling throng that she might somehow reach him. That nightmare recollection only gave place to a yet more painful one, to the memory of days of such agony that to recall them was almost to risk her reason. She had struggled bravely not to dwell upon these things, but this night her strength was gone, she could do nothing, and Brian, coming at last to seek her, found that the climax he had long foreseen had come.

“Oh,” she sobbed, “if you love me, Brian, be willing to let me go! Don't pray for me to live! Promise that you will not!”

A shade came over Brian's face. Was the dead father still to absorb all her love? Must he even now resign all to him? Lose Erica at last after these long years of waiting! There was a look of agony in his eyes, but he answered quietly and firmly:

“I will pray only that God's will may be done, darling.”

A sort of relief was apparent in Erica's flushed, tear-stained face as though he had given her leave to be ill.

After that, for long, weary weeks, she lay at the very gate of death, and those who watched by her had not the heart to wish her back to life again.

CHAPTER XLII. A New Year's Dawn

And the murky planets, I perceived, were but cradles for the infant spirits of the universe of light.... And in sight of this immeasurability of life no sadness could endure.... And I exclaimed, Oh! How beautiful is death, seeing that we die in a world of life and of creation without end! And I blessed God for my life upon earth, but much more for the life in those unseen depths of the universe which are comprised of all but the Supreme Reality, and where no earthly life or perishable hope can enter. Richter

For many weeks Erica had scarcely a conscious interval. Now and then she had been dimly aware that Brian was in the room, or that Aunt Jean, and Mrs. MacNaughton, and her many secularist friends were nursing her; but all had been vague, dream-like, seen through the distorting fever-mist. On night, however, she woke after a sleep of many hours to see things once more as they really were. There was her little room with its green-paneled walls, and its familiar pictures, and familiar books. There was Aunt Jean sitting beside the fire, turning over the pages of an “Idol-Breaker,” while all the air seemed to be ringing and echoing with the sound of church bells.

“Auntie,” she said, “what day is it?”

Aunt Jean came at once to her bedside.

“It is New Year's day,” she said; “it struck twelve about five minutes ago, dear.”

Erica made no comment though the words brought back to her the sense of her desolation brought back to her, too, the remembrance of another New Year's day long ago when she had stood beside her father on the deck of the steamer, and the bells of Calais had gayly pealed in spite of her grief. She took the food her aunt brought her, and promised to go to sleep once more.

“I shall have to wake up again in this misery!” she thought to herself. “Oh, if one could only sleep right on!”

But God sometimes saves us from what we have most dreaded; and when at sunrise Erica woke once more, before any recollection returned to her mind, she became conscious of One who said to her, “Lo, I am with you always! Behold, I make all things new!”

Streaks of golden light were stealing in between the window curtains. She lay quite still, able to face life once more in the strength of that Inner Presence; able to endure the well-known sights and sounds because she could once more realize that there was One who made even “the wrath of man to praise” Him; who, out of blackest evil and cruelest pain, could at length bring good. Presently, passing from the restfulness of that conscious communion, she remembered a strange dream she had had that night.

She had dreamed that she was sitting with Donovan in the little church yard at Oakdene; in her hand she held a Greek Testament, but upon the page had only been able to see one sentence. It ran thus, “Until the times of the Restitution of all things.” Donovan had insisted that the word should rightly be “restoration.” She had clung to the old rendering. While they discussed the distinction between the words, a beautiful girl had

all at once stood before them. Erica knew in an instant who it must be by the light which shone in her companion's face.

“You are quite right,” she had said, turning her beautiful eyes upon him. “It is not the mere giving back of things that were, it is the perfecting of that which was here only in ideal; it is the carrying out of what might have been. All the time there has been progress, all the time growth, and so restoration is better, wider, grander than anything we could dream of here!”

And, as she left them, there had come to both a sort of vision of the Infinite, in sight of which the whole of earthly existence was but as an hour, and the sum of human suffering but as the pin prick to a strong man, and yet both human suffering and human existence were infinitely worth while. And over them stole a wonderful peace as they realized the greatness of God's universe, and that in it was no wasted thing, no wasted pain, but order where there seemed confusion, and a soul of goodness where there seemed evil.

And, after all, what was this dream compared with the reality which she knew to exist? Well, it was perhaps a little fragment, a dim shadow, a seeing through the glass darkly; but mostly it was a comfort because she was all the time conscious that there was an infinitely Better which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Brian came in for his morning visit with a face so worn and anxious that it made her smile.

“Oh!” she said, looking up at him with quiet, shining eyes, “how I have been troubling you all these weeks! But you are not to be troubled any more, darling. I am going to get better.”

And with a sort of grateful, loving tenderness, she drew his face down to hers and kissed him.

“Where is Tom?” she asked presently, beginning for the first time to take an interest in the world again.

“Tom has gone to Oakdene for a day or two,” said Brian. “He is going to be Donovan's private secretary.”

“How glad I am!” she said. “Dear old Tom, he does so deserve to be happy!”

“They want you to go there as soon as you are well enough to be moved,” said Brian.

“I should like that,” she said with a touch of her old eagerness of manner. “I want to get well quickly; there is so much work for us to do you know. Oh, Brian! I feel that there is work which HE would wish me to do, and I'm so glad, so glad to be left to do it!”

Brian thought of the enormous impetus given to the cause of secularism by Raeburn's martyrdom. The momentary triumph of bigotry and intolerance had, as in all other ages, been followed by this inevitable consequence a dead loss to the persecuting side. Would people at length learn the lesson? Would the reign of justice at length dawn? Would the majority at length believe that the All Father needs not to be supported by persecuting laws and unjust restrictions?

Yet it was not these thoughts which brought the tears to his eyes it was the rapture caused by Erica's words.

“My darling will live, and is glad to live!” he thought. “Who could bear witness to the truth so well? Who be so sweet a reconciler?”

“Why, Brian! Brian!” exclaimed Erica as the great drops fell on her hand lying clasped in his.

And there was that in tone and look and touch which made Brian more than content.

works

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