Title: How It All Came Round

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Release date: November 28, 2007 [eBook #23653]
Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Annie McGuire, D Alexander and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive)

HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND

BY

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"A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

HURST & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

MRS. L. T. MEADE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE RICH CHARLOTTE.

The room had three occupants, two were men, the third a woman. The men were middle-aged and gray-haired, the woman on the contrary was in the prime of youth; she was finely made, and well proportioned. Her face was perhaps rather too pale, but the eyes and brow were noble, and the sensitive mouth showed indications of heart as well as intellect.

The girl, or rather young woman, for she was past five and twenty, sat by the fire, a book on her knee. The two men had drawn chairs close to a table. The elder of these men bore such an unmistakable likeness to the girl, that even the most casual observer must have guessed the relationship which existed between them. He was a handsome man, handsomer even than his daughter, but the same individualities marked both faces. While, however, in the woman all was a

profound serenity and calm, the man had some anxious lines round the mouth, and some expression, now coming, now going, in the fine gray eyes, which betokened a long-felt anxiety.

The other and younger man was shrewd-looking and commonplace; but a very close observer of human nature might have said, "He may be commonplace, but do not feel too certain; he simply possesses one of those faces which express nothing, from which not the cleverest detective in Scotland Yard could extract any secret."

He was a man with plenty to say, and much humor, and at the moment this story opens he was laughing merrily and in a heart-whole way, and his older and graver companion listened with evident enjoyment.

The room in which the three sat bore evidence of wealth. It was a library, and handsome books lay on the tables, and rare old folios could have been found by those who cared to look within the carefully locked bookcases. Some manuscripts were scattered about, and by the girl's side, on a small table, lay several carefully revised proofs, and even now she was bending earnestly over a book of reference.

"Well, Jasper," said the elder man, when the younger paused for an instant in his eager flow of words, "we have talked long enough about that fine land you have just come from, for even Australian adventures can keep—I am interested in something nearer home. What do you say to Charlotte there? She was but a baby when you saw her last."

"She was five years old," replied Jasper. "A saucy little imp, bless you! just the kind that would be sure to grow into a fine woman. But to tell the truth I don't much care to look at her, for she makes me feel uncommonly old and shaky."

"You gave me twenty years to grow into a woman, uncle," answered the pleasant voice of Charlotte Harman. "I could not choose but make good use of the time."

"So you have, lass—so you have; I have been growing old and you have been growing beautiful; such is life; but never mind, your turn will come."

"But not for a long, long time, Lottie my pet," interrupted the father. "You need not mind your uncle Jasper. These little speeches were always his way. And I'll tell you something else, Jasper; that girl of mine has a head worth owning on her shoulders, a head she knows how to use. You will not believe me when I say that she writes in this magazine and this, and she is getting a book ready for the press; ay, and there's another thing. Shall I tell it, Charlotte?"

"Yes, father; it is no secret," replied Charlotte.

"It is this, brother Jasper; you have come home in time for a wedding. My girl is going to leave me. I shall miss her, for she is womanly in the best sense of the word, and she is my only one; but there is a comfort—the man she is to marry is worthy of her."

"And there is another comfort, father," said Charlotte; "that though I hope to be married, yet I never mean to leave you. You know that well, I have often told you so," and here this grave young girl came over and kissed her father's forehead.

He smiled back at her, all the care leaving his eyes as he did so. Uncle Jasper had sprung impatiently to his feet.

"As to the lass being married," he said, "that's nothing; all women marry, or if they don't they ought to. But what was that you said, John, about writing, writing in a printed book? You were joking surely, man?"

"No, I was not," answered the father. "Go and show your uncle Jasper that last article of yours, Charlotte."

"Oh, heaven preserve us! no," said uncle Jasper, backing a pace or two. "I'm willing with all my heart to believe it, if you swear it, but not the article. Don't for heaven's sake, confront me with the article."

"There's nothing uncommon in my writing for magazines, Uncle Jasper; a great many girls do write now. I have three friends myself who——"

Uncle Jasper's red face had grown positively pathetic in its agitation. "What a place England must have become!" he interrupted with a groan. "Well, lass, I'll believe you, but I have one request to make. Tell me what you like about your wedding; go into all the raptures you care for over your wedding dress, and even over the lucky individual for whom you will wear it; tell me twenty times a day that he's perfection, that you and you alone have found the eighth wonder of the world, but for the love of heaven leave out about the books! The other will be hard to bear, but I'll endeavor to swallow it—but the books, oh! heaven preserve us—leave out about the printed books. Don't mention the unlucky magazines for which you write. Don't breathe to me the thoughts with which you fill them. Oh, if there's an awful creature under the sun 'tis a blue-stocking, and to think I should have come back from England to find such a horror in the person of my own niece!"

CHAPTER II.

THE POOR CHARLOTTE.

While this light and playful scene was being enacted in a wealthy house in Prince's Gate, and Charlotte Harman and her father laughed merrily over the Australian uncle's horror of authors and their works, another Charlotte was going through a very different part, in a different place in the great world's centre.

There could scarcely be a greater contrast than between the small and very shabby house in Kentish Town and the luxurious mansion in Kensington. The parlor of this house, for the drawing-rooms were let to lodgers, was occupied by one woman. She sat by a little shabbily covered table, writing. The whole appearance of the room was shabby: the furniture, the carpet, the dingy window panes, the tiny pretence of a fire in the grate. It was not exactly a dirty room, but it lacked all brightness and freshness. The chimney did not draw well, and now and then a great gust of smoke would come down, causing the busy writer to start and rub her smarting eyes. She was a young woman, as young as Charlotte Harman, with a slight figure and very pale face. There were possibilities of beauty in the face. But the possibilities had come to nothing; the features were too pinched, too underfed, the eyes, in themselves dark and heavily fringed, too often dimmed by tears. It was a very cold day, and sleet was beginning to fall, and the smoking chimney had a vindictive way of smoking more than ever, but the young woman wrote on rapidly, as though for bare life. Each page as she finished it, was flung on one side; some few fell on the floor, but she did not stop even to pick them up.

The short winter daylight had quite faded, and she had stood up to light the gas, when the room door was pushed slightly ajar, and one of those little maids-of-all-work, so commonly seen in London, put in her untidy head.

"Ef you please, 'em, Harold's been and hurt Daisy, and they is quarreling h'ever so, and I think as baby's a deal worse, 'em."

"I will go up to them, Anne, and you may stay down and lay the cloth for tea—I expect your master in early to-night."

She put her writing materials hastily away, and with a light, quick step ran upstairs. She entered a room which in its size and general shabbiness might better have been called an attic, and found herself in the presence of three small children. The two elder ran to meet her with outstretched arms and glad cries. The baby sat up in his cot and gazed hard at his mother with flushed cheeks and round eyes.

She took the baby in her arms and sat down in a low rocking-chair close to the fire. Harold and Daisy went on their little knees in front of her. Now that mother had come their quarrel was quite over, and the poor baby ceased to fret.

Seated thus, with her little children about her there was no doubt at all that Charlotte Home had a pleasant face; the care vanished from her eyes as she looked into the innocent eyes of her babies, and as she nursed the seven-months-old infant she began crooning a sweet old song in a true, delicious voice, to which the other two listened with delight:——

> "In the days when we went gipsying,
> A long time ago."

"What's gipsying, mother?" asked Harold, aged six.

"Something like picnicking, darling. People who live in the country, or who are rich,"—here Mrs. Home sighed—"often, in the bright summer weather, take their dinner or their tea, and they go out into the woods or the green fields and eat there. I have been to gypsy teas; they are great fun. We lit a fire and boiled the kettle over it, and made the tea; it was just the same tea as we had at home, but somehow it tasted much better out-of-doors."

"Was that some time ago, mother?" asked little Daisy.

"It would seem a long, long time to you, darling; but it was not so many years ago."

"Mother," asked Harold, "why aren't we rich, or why don't we live in the country?"

A dark cloud, caused by some deeper emotion than the mere fact of being poor, passed over the mother's face.

"We cannot live in the country," she said, "because your father has a curacy in this part of London. Your father is a brave man, and he must not desert his post."

"Then why aren't we rich?" persisted the boy.

"Because—because—I cannot answer you that, Harold; and now I must run downstairs again. Father is coming in earlier than usual to-night, and you and Daisy may come down for a little bit after tea—that is, if you promise to be very good children now, and not to quarrel. See, baby has dropped asleep; who will sit by him and keep him from waking until Anne comes back?"

"I, mother," said Harold, and, "I, mother," said Daisy.

"That is best," said the gentle-voiced mother; "you both shall keep him very quiet and safe; Harold shall sit on this side of his little cot and Daisy at the other."

Both children placed themselves, mute as mice, by the baby's side, with the proud look of being trusted on their little faces. The mother kissed them and flew downstairs. There was no time for quiet or leisurely movement in that little house; in the dingy parlor, the gas had now been lighted, and the fire burned better and brighter, and Anne with most praiseworthy efforts, was endeavoring to make some toast, which, alas! she only succeeded in burning. Mrs. Home took the toasting-fork out of her hands.

"There, Anne, that will do nicely: I will finish the toast. Now please run away, and take Miss Mitchell's dinner up to her; she is to have a little pie to-night and some baked potatoes; they are all waiting, and hot in the oven, and then please go back to the children."

Anne, a really good-tempered little maid-of-all-work, vanished, and Mrs. Home made some fresh toast, which she set, brown, hot, and crisp, in the china toast-rack. She then boiled a new-laid egg, and had hardly finished these final preparations before the rattle of the latch-key was heard in the hall-door, and her husband came in. He was a tall man, with a face so colorless that hers looked almost rosy by contrast; his voice, however, had a certain ring about it, which betokened that most rare and happy gift to its possessor, a brave and courageous heart. The way in which he now said, "Ah, Lottie!" and stooped down and kissed her, had a good sound, and the wife's eyes sparkled as she sat down by the tea-tray.

"Must you go out again to-night, Angus?" she said presently.

"Yes, my dear. Poor Mrs. Swift is really dying at last. I promised to look in on her again."

"Ah, poor soul! has it really come? And what will those four children do?"

"We must get them into an Orphanage; Petterick has interest. I shall speak to him. Lottie?"

"Yes, dear."

"Beat up that fresh egg I saw you putting into the cupboard when I came in; beat it up, and add a little milk and a teaspoonful of brandy. I want to take it round with me to little Alice. That child has never left her mother's side for two whole days and nights, and I believe has scarcely tasted a morsel; I fear she will sink when all is over."

Lottie rose at once and prepared the mixture, placing it, when ready, in a little basket, which her husband seldom went out without; but as she put it in his hand she could not refrain from saying ——

"I was keeping that egg for your breakfast, Angus; I do grudge it a little bit."

"And to eat it when little Alice wanted it so sorely would choke me, wife," replied the husband; and then buttoning his thin overcoat tightly about him, he went out into the night.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY.

The children were at last in bed, the drawing-room lodger had finished her dinner, the welcome time of lull in the day's occupations had come, and Mrs. Home sat by the dining-room fire. A large basket, filled with little garments ready for mending, lay on the floor at her feet, and her working materials were close by; but, for a wonder, the busy fingers were idle. In vain Daisy's frock pleaded for that great rent made yesterday, and Harold's socks showed themselves most disreputably out at heels. Charlotte Home neither put on her thimble nor threaded her needle; she sat gazing into the fire, lost in reverie. It was not a very happy or peaceful reverie, to judge from the many changes on her expressive face. The words, "Shall I, or shall I not?" came often to her lips. Many things seemed to tear her judgment in divers ways; most of all the look in her little son's eyes when he asked that eager, impatient question, "mother, why aren't we rich?" but other and older voices than little Harold's said to her, and they spoke pleadingly enough, "Leave this thing alone; God knows what is best for you. As you have gone on all these years, so continue, not troubling about what you cannot understand, but trusting to him."

"I cannot; I am so tired sometimes," sighed the poor young wife.

She was still undetermined when her husband returned. There was a great contrast in their faces —a greater almost in their voices, in the tone of her dispirited, "Well, Angus," and his almost triumphant answer,——

"Well, Lottie, that hard fight has ended bravely. Thank God!"

"Ah! then the poor soul has gone," said the wife, moving her husband's chair into the warmest corner.

"She has truly gone; I saw her breathe her last. But there is no need to apply the word 'poor' to her; she has done with all that. You know what a weakly, troubled creature she always was, how temptation and doubt seemed to wrap her round like a mist, and prevent her seeing any of the shining of the blue sky. Well, it all passed away at the last, and there was nothing but a steadfast

looking into the very face of her Lord. He came for her, and she just stretched out her arms and went to Him. Thank God for being privileged to witness such a death; it makes life far more easy."

A little weariness had crept perceptibly into the brave voice of the minister as he said these last words. His wife laid her hand sympathizingly on his. They sat silent for a few moments, then he spoke on a different subject,——

"How is baby to-night, Lottie?"

"Better, I think; his tooth is through at last. He will have rest now for a bit, poor little darling."

"We must be careful to keep him from catching another cold. And how is Anne getting on?"

"As well as we can expect from such an ignorant little mite. And oh! Angus, the nursery is such a cold, draughty room, and I do—I do wish we were rich."

The last words were tumbled out with a great irrepressible burst of tears.

"Why, my Lottie, what has come to you?" said her husband, touched and alarmed by this rare show of feeling "What is it, dear? You wish we were rich, so do not I; I am quite content. I go among so very much poorer people than myself, Lottie, that it always seems to me I have far more than my fair share of life's good things; but, at any rate my Lottie, crying won't make us rich, so don't waste your strength over it."

"I can't help it sometimes, Angus; it goes to my heart to see you shivering in such a great-coat as you have just taken off, and then I know you want better food, and wine; you are so tired this moment you can scarcely speak. What a lot of good some port wine would do you!"

"And what a lot of good, wishing for it will do me! Come Lottie, be sensible; we must not begin to repine for what we have not got, and cannot get. Let us think of our mercies."

"You make me ashamed of myself, Angus. But these thoughts don't come to me for nothing; the fact is—yes, I will tell you at last, I have long been making up my mind. The truth is, Angus, I can't look at the children—I can't look at you and see you all suffering, and hold my peace any longer. We are poor, very—very—dreadfully poor, but we ought to be rich."

"Lottie!"

Such a speech, so uttered, would have called for reproof from Angus Home, had it passed the lips of another. But he knew the woman he had married too well not to believe there was reason in her words.

"I am sorry you have kept a secret from me," he said. "What is this mystery, Lottie?"

"It was my mother, Angus. She begged of me to keep it to myself, and she only told me when she was dying. But may I just tell you all from the very beginning?"

"Yes, dear. If it is a romance, it will just soothe me, for though I am, I own, tired, I could not sleep for a long time to come."

"First, Angus, I must confess to a little bit of deceit I practised on you."

"Ah, Lottie!" said her husband playfully, "no wonder you cried, with such a heavy burden on your soul; but confess your sins, wife."

"You know how it has always fretted me, our being poor," said Charlotte. "Your income is only just sufficient to put bread into our mouths, and, indeed, we sometimes want even that. I have often lain awake at night wondering how I could make a little money, and this winter, when it set in so very severe, set my thoughts harder to work on this great problem than ever. The children did want so much, Angus—new boots, and little warm dresses—and so—and so—one day about a month ago, Mrs. Lisle, who reads and writes so much, called, and I was very low, and she was kind and sympathizing; somehow, at last out it all came, I did so wish to earn money. She asked me if I could write a good clear hand, a hand easily read. I showed her what I could do, and she was good enough to call it excellent. She said no more then, but the next day she came early. She brought me a MS. written by a friend of hers; very illegible it was. She would not tell me the name of her friend, but she said she was a lady very desirous of seeing herself in print. If I would copy this illegible writing in my own good clear hand, the lady would give me five pounds. I thought of the children's boots and their winter dresses, and I toiled over it. I confess now that it was weary work, and tired me more than I cared to own. I finished it to-day; this evening, just before you came home, that task was done; but this morning I did something else. You know Miss Mitchell is always kind enough to let me see the *Times*. This morning Anne brought it down as usual, and, as I ran my eyes over it I was struck by an advertisement, 'A young lady living at Kensington wished for the services of an amanuensis, for so many hours daily. Remuneration good.' I could not help it, Angus, my heart seemed to leap into my mouth. Then and there I put on my bonnet, and with a specimen of my handwriting in my pocket, went off to answer the advertisement in person. The house was in Prince's Gate, Kensington: the name of the young lady who had advertised for my services was Harman."

"Harman! how strange, wife! your own name before you married."

"Yes, dear; but such a different person from me, so rich, while I am so poor; so very, very

beautiful, and graceful, and gracious: she may have been a year or so younger than I, she was not much. She had a thoughtful face, a noble face. I could have drawn tears from her eyes had I described the little children, but I did not. It was delightful to look upon her calm. Not for worlds would I disturb it; and, Angus, I found out another thing—her name was not only Harman, but Charlotte Harman."

There was no doubt at all that the other Charlotte was excited now, the color had come into her cheeks, her eyes sparkled. Her husband watched her with undisguised surprise.

"I made a good thing of it Angus," she continued. "I am to go to Prince's Gate every morning, I am to be there at ten, and give my services till one o'clock. I am then to have lunch with the young lady, and for all this, and the enjoyment of a good dinner into the bargain, I am to receive thirty shillings a week. Does not it sound too good to be true?"

"And that is how we are to be rich, Lottie. Well, go on and prosper. I know what an active little woman you are and how impossible it is for you to let the grass grow under your feet. I do not object to your trying this thing, if it is not too much for your strength, and if you can safely leave the children."

"I have thought of the children, Angus; this is so much for their real interest, that it would be a pity to throw it away. But, as you say, they must not be neglected. I shall ask that little Alice Martin to come in to look after them until I am back every day; she will be glad to earn half-a-crown a week."

"As much in proportion, as your thirty shillings is to you—eh, Lottie? See how rich we are in reality."

Mrs. Home sighed, and the bright look left her face. Her husband perceived the change.

"That is not all you have got to tell me," he said.

"No, it is only leading up to what I want to tell you. It is what has set me thinking so hard all day that I can keep it to myself no longer. Angus, prepare for a surprise; that beautiful young lady, who bears the same name I bore before I was married—is—is—she is my near relation."

"Your near relation, Charlotte? But I never knew you had any near relations."

"No, dear, I never told you; my mother thought it best that you should not know. She only spoke to me of them when she was dying. She was sorry afterwards that she had even done that; she begged of me, unless great necessity arose, not to say anything to you. It is only because it seems to me the necessity has really come that I speak of what gave my mother such pain to mention."

"Yes, dear, you have wealthy relations. I don't know that it matters very greatly. But go on."

"There is more than that, Angus, but I will try to tell you all. You know how poor I was when you found me, and gave me your love and yourself."

"We were both poor, Lottie; so much so that we thought two hundred a year, which was what we had to begin housekeeping on, quite riches."

"Yes, Angus; well, I had been poor all my life, I could never do what rich girls did, I was so accustomed to wearing shabby dresses, and eating plain food, and doing without the amusements which seem to come naturally into the lives of most young girls, that I had ceased to miss them. I was sent to a rather good school, and had lessons in music and painting, and I sometimes wondered how my mother had money even to give me these. Then I met you, and we were married. It was just after our little Harold was born that my mother died."

"Yes, you went down into Hertfordshire; you were away for six weeks."

"I took Harold with me; mother was so proud of him. Whenever she had an easy moment, she used to like to have him placed on her knee. She told me then that she had a little son older than I, who died, and that our Harold reminded her of him. One night, I remember so well, I was sitting up with her. She had been going through great pain, but towards the morning she was easier. She was more inclined, however, to talk than to sleep. She began again speaking about the likeness between our Harold and my little brother who died.

"'I shall give you little Edgar's christening robe for Harold,' she said. 'I never could bear to part with it before but I don't mind his having it. Open my wardrobe, Charlotte, and you will find it folded away in a blue paper, in the small wooden box.'

"I did so, and took out a costly thing, yellow, it is true, with age, but half covered with most valuable lace.

"'Why, mother,' I exclaimed, 'how did you ever get such a valuable dress as this? Why, this lace would be cheap at a guinea a yard!'

"'It cost a great deal more than that,' replied mother, stroking down the soft lace and muslin with her thin fingers; 'but we were rich then, Lottie.'

"'Rich!' I said, 'rich! I never, never thought that you and I had anything to say to money, mother.'

"'You don't remember your father, child?'

"'No, mother,' I said; 'how could I? I was only two years old when he died.'

"Mother was silent after that, and I think she went into a doze, but my curiosity and wonder were excited, and I could not help seeking to know more.

"'I never knew that we were rich,' I said again the next day. 'Why did you never tell me before? The next best thing to enjoying riches would be to hear about them.'

"'I did not want to make you discontented, Lottie. I thought what you had never known or thought of you would never miss. I feared, my dear, to make you discontented.'

"'But I have thought of money,' I owned, 'I have thought of it lately a great deal. When I look at Angus I long to get him every luxury, and I want my little Harold to grow up surrounded by those things which help to develop a fine and refined character.

"'But they don't, Lottie; they don't indeed,' answered my dear dying mother. 'Riches bring a snare —they debase the character, they don't ennoble it.'

"'Mother,' I said, 'I see plainly that you are well acquainted with this subject. You will tell me, mother, what you know?'

"'Yes,' replied my mother; 'it won't do you the least good; but as I have said so much to you I may as well tell the rest.'

"Then, Angus, my mother told me the following story; it is not very long.

"She was an orphan and a governess when my father found her and married her—she was my father's second wife. She was much younger than he—he had grown-up sons—two grown-up sons at the time of his marriage; and they were very deeply offended at his thinking of a second marriage. So indignant were they that my father and they came to quite an open quarrel, and mother said that during the five years that my father lived she never saw either of her stepsons until just at the close. She was very happy as my father's wife; he loved her dearly, and as he had plenty of money she wanted for nothing. My father was an old man, as I have said, and he was tired of fuss, and also of much society; so though they were so rich mother lived rather a lonely life—in a large and beautiful place in Hertfordshire. She said the place was called the Hermitage, and was one of the largest and best in the neighborhood. At last my father fell ill, very ill, and the doctors said he must die. Then for the first time there came hastening back to the Hermitage the two elder sons—their names were John and Jasper—the eldest John, my mother said, was very handsome, and very kind and courteous to her. He was a married man, and he told mother that he had a little daughter much about my age, who was also called Charlotte. My father and his two sons seemed quite reconciled in these last days, and they spent most of their time with him. On the evening, however, before he died, he had mother and me with him alone. I sat on the bed, a little baby child of two, and my father held mother's hand. He told mother how much he loved her, and he spoke a very little about money matters.

"'John will make it all right for you, Daisy,' he said. 'John knows all about my wishes with regard to you and little Charlotte. I should like this little Charlotte and his to be friends; they are both called after my own mother, the best woman I ever met. You will bring up little Charlotte with every comfort and refinement, dear wife.'

"The next day my father died, and John and Jasper went to London. They did not even wait for the funeral, though Jasper came back for it. John, he told mother, was kept by the sudden dangerous illness of his wife. Jasper said that John felt our father's death most dreadfully. Mother had liked John, who was always very civil to her, but she could not bear Jasper: she said he seemed a cleverer man than his brother, but she never could get over a feeling of distrust towards him. The will was never read to my mother, but Jasper came back again from London to tell her of its contents, and then judge of her surprise—her name was not even mentioned, neither her name nor mine. She had been married without settlements, and every farthing of all my father's great wealth was left to his two sons, John and Jasper. Jasper expressed great surprise; he even said it was a monstrously unfair thing of his father to do, and that certainly he and his brother would try to rectify it in a measure. He then went back to London, and mother was left alone in the great empty house. She said she felt quite stunned, and was just then in such grief for my father that she scarcely heeded the fact that she was left penniless. Two days afterwards a lawyer from London came down to see her. He came with a message from her two stepsons. They were much concerned for her, and they were willing to help her. They would allow her, between them, as long as she lived the interest on three thousand pounds—on one condition. The condition was this: she was never to claim the very least relationship with them; she was to bring up her daughter as a stranger to them. They had never approved of their father's marrying her; they would allow her the money on condition that all connection between them be completely dropped. The day it was renewed by either mother or daughter, on that day the interest on the three thousand pounds would cease to be paid. My mother was too young, too completely inexperienced, and too bowed down with grief, to make the least objection. Only one faint protest did she make. 'My husband said,' she faltered, 'on the very last day of his life, he said that he wished my little Charlotte and that other Charlotte in London to be friends.' But the lawyer only shook his head. On this point his clients were firm. 'All communication between the families must cease.'

"That is the story, Angus," continued Charlotte Home, suddenly changing her voice, and allowing her eyes, which had been lowered during her brief recital, to rise to her husband's face. "My dear

mother died a day or two afterwards. She died regretting having to own even what she did, and begging me not to think unkindly of my father, and not to unsettle your mind by telling you what could do no good whatever.

"'I do not think unkindly of my father, mother,' I answered, 'and I will not trouble my husband's mind, at least, not yet, never, perhaps, unless fitting opportunity arises. But I know what I think, mother—what, indeed, I know. That was not my father's real will; my brothers John and Jasper have cheated you. Of this I am very sure.'

"Mother, though she was so weak and dying, got quite a color into her cheeks when I said this. 'No, no,' she said, 'don't harbor such a thought in your heart—my darling, my darling. Indeed it is utterly impossible. It was a real, real will. I heard it read, and your brothers, they were gentlemen. Don't let so base a thought of them dwell in your heart. It is, I know it is, impossible.'

"I said no more to trouble my dear mother and shortly afterwards she died. That is six years ago."

CHAPTER IV.

TWO WAYS OF LOOKING AT IT.

After the story was finished the husband and wife sat for a long time side by side, in absolute silence. Both pairs of eyes were fixed on the glowing embers in the fire; the wife's reflected back both the lights and the shadows; they were troubled eyes, troubled with possible joy, troubled also with the dark feelings of anger. The husband's, on the contrary, were calm and steady. No strong hope was visiting them, but despair, even disquietude, seemed miles away. Presently the wife's small nervous fingers were stretched out to meet her husband's, his closed over them, he turned his head, met her anxious face, smiled and spoke.

"So it seems on the cards that you might have been rich, Lottie. Well, it was unjust of your father not to have made some provision for your mother and you, but—but—he has long been dead, the whole thing is over. Let it pass."

"Angus! do you know what I should like?" asked his wife.

"No. What?"

"I should like to meet those two men, John and Jasper Harman, face to face, and ask them without the least preamble or preparation, what they have done with my father's real will?"

"Dear Lottie, you must get this strange idea out of your head. It is not right of you to harbor such thoughts of any men."

"I should like to look so hard at them," continued Charlotte, scarcely heeding her husband's words. "I know their eyes would flinch, they would be startled, they would betray themselves. Angus, I can't help it, the conviction that is over me is too strong to be silenced. For years, ever since my mother told me that story, I have felt that we have been wronged, nay, robbed of our own. But when I entered that house to-day and found myself face with my half-brother's daughter, when I found myself in the house that I had been forbidden to enter, I felt—I knew, that a great wrong had been committed. My father! Why should I think ill of my father, Angus? Is it likely that he would have made no provision for my mother whom he loved, or for me? Is it likely that he would have left everything he possessed to the two sons with whom he had so bitterly quarrelled, that for years they had not even met? Is it likely? Angus, you are a just man, and you will own to the truth. Is it likely, that with his almost dying breath, he should have assured my mother that all was settled that she could bring me up well, in comfort and luxury, that Charlotte Harman and I should be friends? No, Angus! I believe my father; he was a good and just man always; and, even if he was not, dying men don't tell lies."

"I grant that it seems unlikely, Lottie; but then, on the other hand, what do you accuse these men of? Why, of no less a crime than forging a will, of suppressing the real will, and bringing forward one of their own manufacture. Why, my dear wife, such an act of villainy would be not only difficult, but, I should say, impossible."

"I don't know *how* it was done, Angus, but something was done, of that I am sure, and what that thing was I shall live, please God, to find out."

"Then you—you, a clergyman's wife—the wife of a man who lives to proclaim peace on earth, good-will to men, you go into your brother's house as a spy!"

Mrs. Home colored. Her husband had risen from his chair.

"You shall not do that," he said; "I am your husband, and I forbid it. You can only go to the Harmans, if they are indeed the near relations you believe them to be, on one condition."

"And that?" said Charlotte.

"That you see not only Mr. Harman's daughter, but Mr. Harman himself; that you tell him exactly who you are.... If, after hearing your story, he allows you to work for his daughter, you can do so

without again alluding to the relationship. If they wish it dropped, drop it, Lottie; work for them as you would for any other strangers, doing your best work bravely and well. But begin openly. Above all things thinking no evil in your heart of them."

"Then I cannot go on these conditions, Angus, for I cannot feel charity in my heart towards Mr. Harman. It seemed such a good thing this morning. But I must give it up."

"And something else will come in it's place, never fear; but I did not know until to-night that my Lottie so pined for riches."

"Angus, I do—I do—I want Harold to go to a good school, Daisy to be educated, little Angus to get what is necessary for his health, and above all, you, my dearest, my dearest, to have a warm overcoat, and port wine: the overcoat when you are cold, the port wine when you are tired. Think of having these luxuries, not only for yourself, but to give away to your poor, Angus, and I am sure we ought to have them."

"Ah, Lottie! you are a witch, you try to tempt me, and all these things sound very pleasant. But don't dream of what we haven't, let us live for the many, many things we have."

CHAPTER V.

LOVE IN A DIAMOND.

The next day Angus Home went out early as usual, about his many parish duties; this was it was true, neither a feast nor a fast day, nor had he to attend a morning service, but he had long ago constituted himself chief visitor among the sick and poorest of his flock, and such work occupied him from morning to night. Perhaps in a nature naturally inclined to asceticism, this daily mingling with the very poor and the very suffering, had helped to keep down all ambitions for earthly good things, whether those good things came in the guise of riches or honors; but though unambitious and very humble, never pushing himself forward, doing always the work that men who considered themselves more fastidious would shun, never allowing his voice to be heard where he believed wiser men than he might speak, Mr. Home was neither morbid nor unhappy; one of his greatest characteristics was an utter absence of all self-consciousness.

The fact was, the man, though he had a wife whom he loved, and children very dear to him, had grown accustomed to hold life lightly; to him life was in very truth a pilgrimage, a school, a morning which should usher in the great day of the future. His mental and spiritual eyes were fixed expectantly and longingly on that day; and in connection with it, it would be wrong to say that he was without ambition, for he had a very earnest and burning desire, not only for rank but for kingship by and by: he wanted to be crowned with the crown of righteousness.

Angus Home knew well that to wear that crown in all its lustre in the future, it must begin to fit his head down here; and he also knew that those who put on such crowns on earth, find them, as their great and blessed Master did before them, made of thorns.

It is no wonder then that the man with so simple a faith, so Christ-like a spirit, should not be greatly concerned by his wife's story of the night before. He did not absolutely forget it, for he pondered over it as he wended his way to the attic where the orphan Swifts lived. He felt sorry for Lottie as he thought of it, and he hoped she would soon cease to have such uncharitable ideas of her half-brothers; he himself could not even entertain the notion that any fraud had been committed; he felt rather shocked that his Lottie should dwell on so base a thing.

There is no doubt that this saint-like man could be a tiny bit provoking; and so his wife felt when he left her without again alluding to their last night's talk. After all it is wives and mothers who feel the sharpest stings of poverty. Charlotte had known what to be poor meant all her life, as a child, as a young girl, as a wife, as a mother, but she had been brave enough about it, indifferent enough to it, until the children came; but from the day her mother's story was told her, and she knew how close the wings of earthly comfort had swept her by, discontent came into her heart. Discontent came in and grew with the birth of each fresh little one. She might have made her children so comfortable, she could do so little with them; they were pretty children too. It went to her heart to see their beauty disfigured in ugly clothes; she used to look the other way with a great jealous pang, when she saw children not nearly so beautiful as hers, yet looked at and admired because of their bright fresh colors and dainty little surroundings. But poverty brought worse stings than these. The small house in Kentish Town was hot and stifling in the months of July and August; the children grew pale and pined for the fresh country air which could not be given to them; Lottie herself grew weak and languid, and her husband's pale face seemed to grow more ethereal day by day. At all such times as these did Charlotte Home's mind and thoughts refer back to her mother's story, and again and again the idea returned that a great, great wrong had been done.

In the winter when this story opens, poverty came very close to the little household. They were, it is true, quite out of debt, but they were only so because the food was kept so scanty, the fires so low, dress so very insufficient to keep at a distance the winter's bitter cold; they were only out of debt because the mother slaved from morning to night, and the father ate less and less, having, it is to be feared, less and less appetite to eat.

Then the wife and mother grew desperate, money must be brought in—how could it be done? The doctor called and said that baby Angus would die if he had not more milk—he must have what is called in London baby-milk, and plenty of it. Such milk in Kentish Town meant money. Lottie resolved that baby Angus should not die. In answering an advertisement which she hoped would give her employment, she accidentally found herself in her own half-brother's house. There was the wealth which had belonged to her father; there were the riches to which she was surely born. How delicious were those soft carpets; how nice those cushioned seats; how pleasant those glowing fires; what an air of refinement breathed over everything; how grand it was to be served by those noiseless and well-trained servants; how great a thing was wealth, after all!

She thought all this before she saw Charlotte Harman. Then the gracious face, the noble bearing, the kindly and sweet manner of this girl of her own age, this girl who might have been her dearest friend, who was so nearly related to her, filled her with sudden bitterness; she believed herself immeasurably inferior to Miss Harman, and yet she knew that she might have been such another. She left the house with a mingled feeling of relief and bitterness. She was earning present money. What might she not discover to benefit her husband and children by and by?

In the evening, unable to keep her thoughts to herself, she told them and her story for the first time to her husband. Instantly he tore the veil from her eyes. Was she, his wife, to go to her own brother's house as a spy? No! a thousand times no! No wealth, however needed, would be worth purchasing at such a price. If Charlotte could not banish from her mind these unworthy thoughts, she must give up so excellent a means of earning money.

Poor Charlotte! The thoughts her husband considered so mean, so untrue, so unworthy, had become by this time part of her very being. Oh! must the children suffer because unrighteous men enjoyed what was rightfully theirs?

For the first time, the very first time in all her life, she felt discontented with her Angus. If only he were a little more everyday, a little more practical; if only he would go to the bottom of this mystery, and set her mind at rest!

She went about her morning duties in a state of mental friction and aggravation, and, as often happens, on this very morning when she seemed least able to bear it, came the proverbial last straw. Anne, the little maid, put in her head at the parlor door.

"Ef you please, 'em, is Harold to wear 'em shoes again? There's holes through and through of 'em, and it's most desp'rate sloppy out of doors this mornin'."

Mrs. Home took the little worn-out shoes in her hand; she saw at a glance that they were quite past mending.

"Leave them here, Anne," she said. "You are right, he cannot wear these again. I will go out at once and buy him another pair."

The small maid disappeared, and Charlotte put her hand into her pocket. She drew out her purse with a sinking heart. Was there money enough in it to buy the necessary food for the day's consumption, and also to get new shoes for Harold? A glance showed her but too swiftly there was not. She never went on credit for anything—the shoes must wait, and Harold remain a prisoner in the house that day. She went slowly up to the nursery: Daisy and baby could go out and Harold should come down to the parlor to her.

But one glance at her boy's pale face caused her heart to sink. He was a handsome boy—she thought him aristocratic, fit to be the son of a prince—but to-day he was deadly pale, with that washy look which children who pine for fresh air so often get. He was standing in rather a moping attitude by the tiny window; but at sight of his mother he flew to her.

"Mother, Anne says I'm to have new shoes. Have you got them? I am so glad."

No, she could not disappoint her boy. A sudden idea darted through her brain. She would ask Miss Mitchell, the drawing-room boarder, to lend her the three-and-sixpence which the little shoes would cost. It was the first time she had ever borrowed, and her pride rose in revolt at even naming the paltry sum—but, for the sake of her boy's pale face?

"I am going out to buy the shoes," she said, stooping down to kiss the sweet upturned brow; and she flew downstairs and tapped at the drawing-room door.

Miss Mitchell was a lady of about fifty; she had been with them now for nearly a year, and what she paid for the drawing-room and best bedroom behind it, quite covered the rent of the shabby little house. Miss Mitchell was Charlotte Home's grand standby; she was a very uninteresting person, neither giving nor looking for sympathy, never concerning herself about the family in whose house she lived. But then, on the other hand, she was easily pleased; she never grumbled, she paid her rent like clockwork. She now startled Lottie by coming instantly forward and telling her that it was her intention to leave after the usual notice; she found the baby's fretful cries too troublesome, for her room was under the nursery; this was one reason. Another, perhaps the most truthful one, was, that her favorite curate in St. Martin's Church over the way, had received promotion to another and more fashionable church, and she would like to move to where she could still be under his ministry. Charlotte bowed; there was nothing for it but to accept the fact that her comfortable lodger must go. Where could she find a second Miss Mitchell, and how could she possibly now ask for the loan of three and sixpence?

She left the room. Where was the money to come from to buy Harold's shoes? for that little pleading face must not be disappointed. This care was, for the moment, more pressing than the loss of Miss Mitchell. How should she get the money for her boy? She pressed her hand to her brow to think out this problem. As she did so, a ring she wore on her wedding-finger flashed; it was her engagement ring, a plain gold band, only differing from the wedding-ring, which it now guarded, in that it possessed one small, very small diamond. The diamond was perhaps the smallest that could be purchased, but it was pure of its kind, and the tiny gem now flashed a loving fire into her eyes, as though it would speak if it could in answer to her inquiry. Yes, if she sold this ring, the money would be forthcoming. It was precious, it symbolized much to her; she had no other to act as guard; but it was not so precious as the blue eyes of her first-born. Her resolve was scarcely conceived before it was put in practice. She hastened out with the ring; a jeweller lived not far away; he gave her fifteen shillings, and Charlotte, feeling quite rich, bought the little shoes and hurried home.

As she almost flew along the sloppy streets a fresh thought came to her. Yes! she must certainly decline that very excellent situation with Miss Harman. That sorely wanted thirty shillings a week must be given up, there was no question about that. Bitter were her pangs of heart as she relinquished the precious money, but it would be impossible for her to go to her brother's house in the only spirit in which her husband would allow her to go. Yes; she must give it up. When the children were at last fairly started on their walk she would sit down and write to Miss Harman. But why should she write? She stood still as the thought came to her to go to Miss Harman in person; to tell her from her own lips that she must not visit that house, or see her daily. She might or might not tell her who she really was; she would leave that to circumstances; but she would at least once more see her brother's house and look into the eyes of her brother's child. It would be a short, soon-lived-through excitement. Still she was in that mood when to sit still in inactivity was impossible; the visit would lead to nothing, but still she would pay it; afterwards would be time enough to think of finding some one to replace Miss Mitchell, of trying to buy again her engagement ring, of purchasing warm clothes for her little ones.

CHAPTER VI.

IN PRINCE'S GATE.

Having arranged her household matters, been informed of another pair of boots which could not last many days longer, seen to the children's dinner, and finally started the little group fairly off for their walk with Anne, Charlotte ran upstairs, put on her neat though thin and worn black silk, her best jacket and bonnet and set off to Kensington to see Miss Harman.

She reached the grand house in Prince's Gate about twelve o'clock. The day had indeed long begun for her, but she reflected rather bitterly that most likely Miss Harman had but just concluded her breakfast. She found, however, that she had much wronged this energetic young lady. Breakfast had been over with some hours ago, and when Mrs. Home asked for her, the footman who answered her modest summons said that Miss Harman was out, but had left directions that if a lady called she was to be asked to wait.

Charlotte was taken up to Miss Harman's own private sitting room, where, after stirring the fire, and furnishing her with that morning's *Times*, the servant left her alone.

Mrs. Home was glad of this. She drew her comfortable easy chair to the fire, placed her feet upon the neat brass rail, closed her eyes, and tried to fancy herself alone. Had her father lived, such comforts as these would have been matters of everyday occurrence to her. Common as the air she breathed would this grateful warmth be then to her thin limbs, this delicious easy chair to her aching back. Had her father lived, or had justice been done, in either case would soft ease have been her portion. She started from her reclining position and looked round the room. A parrot swung lazily on his perch in one of the windows. Two canaries sang in a gilded cage in the other. How Harold and Daisy would love these birds! Just over her head was a very beautifully executed portrait in oils of a little child, most likely Miss Harman in her infancy. Ah, yes, but baby Angus at home was more beautiful. A portrait of him would attract more admiration than did that of the proud daughter of all this wealth. Tears started unbidden to the poor perplexed mother's eyes. It was hard to sit quiet with this burning pain at her heart. Just then the door was opened and an elderly gentleman with silver hair came in. He bowed, distantly to the stranger sitting by his hearth, took up a book he had come to seek, and withdrew. Mrs. Home had barely time to realize that this elderly man must really be the brother who had supplanted her, when a sound of feet, of voices, of pleasant laughter, drew near. The room door was again opened, and Charlotte Harman, accompanied by two gentlemen, came in. The elder of the two men was short and rather stout, with hair that had once been red, but was now sandy, keen, deep-set eyes, and a shrewd, rather pleasant face. Miss Harman addressed him as Uncle Jasper, and they continued firing gay badinage at one another for a moment without perceiving Mrs. Home's presence. The younger man was tall and square-shouldered, with a rather rugged face of some power. He might have been about thirty. He entered the room by Miss Harman's side, and stood by her now with a certain air of proprietorship.

"Ah! Mrs. Home," said the young lady, quickly discovering her visitor and coming forward and

shaking hands with her at once, "I expected you. I hope you have not waited long, John," turning to the young man, "will you come back at four? Mrs. Home and I have some little matters to talk over, and I daresay her time is precious. I shall be quite ready to go out with you at four. Uncle Jasper, my father is in the library; will you take him this book from me?"

Uncle Jasper, who had been peering with all his might out of his short-sighted eyes at the visitor, now answered with a laugh, "We are politely dismissed, eh? Hinton," and taking the arm of the younger man they left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

IT INTERESTS HER.

"And now, Mrs Home, we will have some lunch together up here, and then afterwards we can talk and quite finish all our arrangements," said the rich Charlotte, looking with her frank and pleasant eyes at the poor one. She rang a bell as she spoke, and before Mrs. Home had time to reply, a tempting little meal was ordered to be served without delay.

"I have been with my publishers this morning," said Miss Harman. "They are good enough to say they believe my tale promises well, but they want it completed by the first of March, to come out with the best spring books. Don't you think we may get it done? It is the middle of January now."

"I daresay it may be done," answered Mrs. Home, rising, and speaking in a tremulous voice. "I have no doubt you will work hard and have it ready—but—but—I regret it much, I have come to-day to say I cannot take the situation you have so kindly offered me."

"But why?" said Miss Harman, "why?" Some color came into her cheeks as she added, "I don't understand you. I thought you had promised. I thought it was all arranged yesterday."

Her tone was a little haughty, but how well she used it; how keenly Mrs. Home felt the loss of what she was resigning.

"I did promise you," she said; "I feel you have a right to blame me. It is a considerable loss to me resigning your situation, but my husband has asked me to do so. I must obey my husband, must I not?"

"Oh! yes, of course. But why should he object. He is a clergyman, is he not? Is he too proud—I would tell no one. All in this house should consider you simply as a friend. Our writing would be just a secret between you and me. Your husband will give in when you tell him that."

"He is not in the least proud, Miss Harman—not proud I mean in that false way."

"Then I am not giving you money enough—of course thirty shillings seems too little; I will gladly raise it to two pounds a week, and if this book succeeds, you shall have more for helping me with the next."

Mrs. Home felt her heart beating. How much she needed, how keenly she longed for that easily earned money. "I must not think of it," she said, however, shaking her head. "I confess I want money, but I must earn it elsewhere. I cannot come here. My husband will only allow me to do so on a certain condition. I cannot even tell you the condition—certainly I cannot fulfil it, therefore I cannot come."

"Oh! but that is exciting. *Do* tell it to me."

"If I did you would be the first to say I must never come to this house again."

"I am quite sure you wrong me there. I may as well own that I have taken a fancy to you. I am a spoiled child, and I always have my own way. My present way is to have you here in this snug room for two or three hours daily—you and I working in secret over something grand. I always get my way so your conditions must melt into air. Now, what are they?"

"Dare I tell her?" thought Mrs. Home. Aloud she said, "The conditions are these:—I must tell you a story, a story about myself—and—and others."

"And I love stories, especially when they happen in real life."

"Miss Harman, don't tempt me. I want to tell you, but I had better not; you had better let me go away. You are very happy now, are you not?"

"What a strange woman you are, Mrs. Home! Yes, I am happy."

"You won't like my story. It is possible you may not be happy after you have heard it."

"That is a very unlikely possibility. How can the tale of an absolute stranger affect my happiness?" These words were said eagerly—a little bit defiantly.

But Mrs. Home's face had now become so grave, and there was such an eager, almost frightened look in her eyes, that her companion's too changed. After all what was this tale? A myth, doubtless; but she would hear it now.

"I accept the risk of my happiness being imperiled," she said. "I choose to hear the tale—I am ready."

"But I may not choose to tell," said the other Charlotte.

"I would make you. You have begun—begun in such a way that you *must* finish."

"Is that so?" replied Mrs. Home. The light was growing more and more eager in her eyes. She said to herself, "The die is cast." There rose up before her a vision of her children—of her husband's thin face. Her voice trembled.

"Miss Harman—I will speak—you won't interrupt me?"

"No, but lunch is on the table. You must eat something first."

"I am afraid I cannot with that story in prospect; to eat would choke me!"

"What a queer tale it must be!" said the other Charlotte. "Well, so be it." She seated herself in a chair at a little distance from Mrs. Home, fixed her gaze on the glowing fire, and said, "I am ready. I won't interrupt you."

The poor Charlotte, too, looked at the fire. During the entire telling of the tale neither of these young women glanced at the other.

"It is my own story," began Mrs. Home: then she paused, and continued, "My father died when I was two years old. During my father's lifetime I, who am now so poor, had all the comforts that you must have had, Miss Harman, in your childhood. He died, leaving my mother, who was both young and pretty, nothing. She was his second wife, for five years she had enjoyed all that his wealth could purchase for her. He died, leaving her absolutely penniless. My mother was, as I have said, a second wife. My father had two grown-up sons. These sons had quarrelled with him at the time of his marrying my young mother; they came to see him and were reconciled on his deathbed. He left to these sons every penny of his great wealth. The sons expressed surprise when the will was read. They even blamed my father for so completely forgetting his wife and youngest child. They offered to make some atonement for him. During my mother's lifetime they settled on her three thousand pounds; I mean the interest, at five per cent., on that sum. It was to return to them at her death, it was not to descend to me, and my mother must only enjoy it on one condition. The condition was, that all communication must cease between my father's family and hers. On the day she renewed it the money would cease to be paid. My mother was young, a widow, and alone; she accepted the conditions, and the money was faithfully paid to her until the day of her death. I was too young to remember my father, and I only heard this story about him on my mother's deathbed; then for the first time I learned that we might have been rich, that we were in a measure meant to enjoy the good things which money can buy. My mother had educated me well, and you may be quite sure that with an income of one hundred and fifty pounds a year this could only be done by practising the strictest economy. I was accustomed to doing without the pretty dresses and nice things which came as natural to other girls as the air they breathed. In my girlhood, I did not miss these things; but at the time of my mother's death, at the time the story first reached my ears, I was married, and my eldest child was born. A poor man had made me, a poor girl his wife, and, Miss Harman, let me tell you, that wives and mothers do long for money. The longing with them is scarcely selfish, it is for the beings dearer than themselves. There is a pain beyond words in denying your little child what you know is for that child's good, but yet which you cannot give because of your empty purse; there is a pain in seeing your husband shivering in too thin a coat on bitter winter nights. You know nothing of such things—may you never know them; but they have gone quite through my heart, quite, quite through it. Well, that is my story; not much, you will say, after all. I might have been rich, I am poor, that is my story."

"It interests me," said Miss Harman, drawing a long breath, "it interests me greatly; but you will pardon my expressing my real feelings: I think your father was a cruel and unjust man."

"I think my brothers, my half-brothers, were cruel and unjust. I don't believe that was my father's real will."

"What! you believe there was foul play? This is interesting—if so, if you can prove it, you may be righted yet. Are your half-brothers living?"

"Yes."

"And you think you have proof that you and your mother were unjustly treated?"

"I have no proof, no proof whatever, Miss Harman, I have only suspicions."

"Oh! you will tell me what they are?"

"Even they amount to very little, and yet I feel them to be certainties. On the night before my father died he told my mother that she and I would be comfortably off; he also said that he wished that I and his son's little daughter, that other Charlotte he called her, should grow up together as sisters. My father was a good man, his mind was not wandering at all, why should he on his deathbed have said this if he knew that he had made such an unjust will, if he knew that he had left my mother and her little child without a sixpence?"

"Yes," said Miss Harman slowly and thoughtfully, "it looks strange."

After this for a few moments both these young women were silent. Mrs. Home's eyes again sought the fire, she had told her story, the excitement was over, and a dull despair came back over her face. Charlotte Harman, on the contrary, was deep in that fine speculation which seeks to succor the oppressed, her grey eyes glowed, and a faint color came in to her cheeks. After a time she said—

"I should like to help you to get your rights. You saw that gentleman who left the room just now, that younger gentleman, I am to be his wife before long—he is a lawyer, may I tell him your tale?"

"No, no, not for worlds." Here Mrs. Home in her excitement rose to her feet. "I have told the story, forget it now, let it die."

"What a very strange woman you are, Mrs. Home! I must say I cannot understand you."

"You will never understand me. But it does not matter, we are not likely to meet again. I saw you for the first time yesterday. I love you, I thank you. You are a rich and prosperous young lady, you won't be too proud to accept my thanks and my love. Now good-bye."

"No, you are not going in that fashion. I do not see why you should go at all; you have told me your story, it only proves that you want money very much, there is nothing at all to prevent your becoming my amanuensis."

"I cannot, I must not. Let me go."

"But why? I do not understand."

"You will never understand. I can only repeat that I must not come here."

Mrs. Home could look proud when she liked. It was now Miss Harman's turn to become the suppliant; with a softness of manner which in so noble-looking a girl was simply bewitching, she said gently——

"You confess that you love me."

Mrs. Home's eyes filled with tears.

"Because I do I am going away," she said.

She had just revealed by this little speech a trifle too much, the trifle reflected a light too vivid to Charlotte Harman's mind, her face became crimson.

"I will know the truth," she said, "I will—I must. This story—you say it is about you; is it all about you? has it anything to say to me?"

"No, no, don't ask me—good-bye."

"I stand between you and the door until you speak. How old are you, Mrs. Home?"

"I am twenty-five."

"That is my age. Who was that Charlotte your dying father wished you to be a sister to?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You cannot—but you must. I will know. Was it—but impossible! it cannot be—am *I* that Charlotte?"

Mrs. Home covered her face with two trembling hands. The other woman, with her superior intellect, had discovered the secret she had feebly tried to guard. There was a pause and a dead silence. That silence told all that was necessary to Charlotte Harman. After a time she said gently, but all the fibre and tune had left her voice,——

"I must think over your story, it is a very, very strange tale. You are right, you cannot come here; good-bye."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMAN BY THE HEARTH.

Mrs. Home went back to the small house in Kentish Town, and Miss Harman sat on by her comfortable fire. The dainty lunch was brought in and laid on the table, the young lady did not touch it. The soft-voiced, soft-footed servant brought in some letters on a silver salver. They looked tempting letters, thick and bulgy. Charlotte Harman turned her head to glance at them but she left them unopened by her side. She had come in very hungry, from her visit to the publishers, and these letters which now lay so close had been looked forward to with some impatience, but now she could neither eat nor read. At last a pretty little timepiece which stood on a shelf over her head struck four, and a clock from a neighboring church re-echoed the sound. Almost at the same instant there came a tap at her room door.

"That is John," said Charlotte. She shivered a little. Her face had changed a good deal, but she

rose from her seat and came forward to meet her lover.

"Ready, Charlotte?" he said, laying his two hands on her shoulders; then looking into her face he started back in some alarm. "My dear, my dearest, something has happened; what is the matter?"

This young woman was the very embodiment of truth. She did not dream of saying, "Nothing is the matter." She looked up bravely into the eyes she loved best in the world and answered,——

"A good deal is the matter, John. I am very much vexed and—and troubled."

"You will tell me all about it; you will let me help you?" said the lover, tenderly.

"Yes, John dear, but not to-night. I want to think to-night. I want to know more. To-morrow you shall hear; certainly to-morrow. No, I will not go out with you. Is my father in? Is Uncle Jasper in?"

"Your father is out, and your uncle is going. I left him buttoning on his great-coat in the hall."

"Oh! I must see Uncle Jasper; forgive me, I must see him for a minute."

She flew downstairs, leaving John Hinton standing alone, a little puzzled and a little vexed. Breathless she arrived in the hall to find her uncle descending the steps; she rushed after him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Uncle Jasper, I want you. Where are you going?"

"Hoity-toity," said the old gentleman, turning round in some surprise, and even dismay when he caught sight of her face. "I am going to the club, child. What next. I sent Hinton up to you. What more do you want?"

"I want you. I have a story to tell you and a question to ask you. You must come back."

"Lottie, I said I would have nothing to do with those books of yours, and I won't. I hate novels, and I hate novelists. Forgive me, child. I don't hate you; but if your father and John Hinton between them mean to spoil a fine woman by encouraging her to become that monster of nature, a blue-stocking, I won't help them, and that's flat. There now. Let me go."

"It is no fiction I want to ask you, Uncle Jasper. It is a true tale, one I have just heard. It concerns me and you and my father. It has pained me very much, but I believe it can be cleared up. I would rather ask you than my father about it, at least at first; but either of you can answer what I want to know; so if you will not listen to me I can speak to my father after dinner."

Uncle Jasper had one of those faces which reveal nothing, and it revealed nothing now. But the keen eyes looked hard into the open gray eyes of the girl who stood by his side.

"What thread out of that tangled skein has she got into her head?" he whispered to himself. Aloud he said, "I will come back to dinner, Charlotte, and afterwards you shall take me up to your little snuggery. If you are in trouble, my dear, you had better confide in me than in your father. He does not—does not look very strong."

Then he walked down the street; but when he reached his club he did not enter it. He walked on and on. He puzzling, not so much over his niece's strange words as over something else. Who was that woman who sat by Charlotte's hearth that day?

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLOTTE CANNOT BEAR THE DARK.

The elder Mr. Harman had retired to his study, and Charlotte and her uncle sat side by side in that young lady's own private apartment. The room looked snug and sheltered, and the subdued light from a Queen's reading-lamp, and from the glowing embers of a half burned-out fire, were very pleasant. Uncle Jasper was leaning back in an armchair, but Charlotte stood on the hearthrug. Soft and faint as the light was, it revealed burning cheeks and shining eyes; but the old face these tokens of excitement appealed to remained completely in shadow.

Charlotte had told the story she had heard that day, and during its whole recital her uncle had sat motionless, making no comment either by word or exclamation.

Mrs. Home's tale had been put into skilful hands. It was well told—all the better because the speaker so earnestly hoped that its existence might turn out a myth—that the phantom so suddenly conjured up might depart as quickly as it had arrived. At last the story came to a conclusion. There was a pause, and Charlotte said,——

"Well, Uncle Jasper?"

"Well, Lottie?" he answered. And now he roused himself, and bent a little forward.

"Is the story true, Uncle Jasper?"

"It is certainly true, Charlotte, that my father and your grandfather married again."

"Yes, uncle."

"It is also highly probable that this young woman is the daughter of that marriage. When I saw her in this room to-day I was puzzled by an intangible likeness in her. This accounts for it."

"Then why——" began Charlotte, and then she stopped. There was a whole world of bitterness in her tone.

"Sit down, child," said her uncle. He pointed to a footstool at his feet. Whenever he came into this room Charlotte had occupied this footstool, and he wanted her to take it now, but she would not; she still kept her place on the hearth.

"I cannot sit," she said. "I am excited—greatly excited. This looks to me in the light of a wrong."

"Who do you think has committed the wrong, Charlotte?"

Before she answered, Charlotte Harman lit a pair of candles which stood on the mantelshelf.

"There, now," she said with a sigh of relief, "I can see your face. It is dreadful to speak to any one in the dark. Uncle Jasper, if I had so near a relation living all these years why was I never told of it? I have over and over again longed for a sister, and it seems I had one or one who might have been to me a sister. Why was I kept in ignorance of her very existence?"

"You are like all women—unreasonable, Lottie. I am glad to find you so human, my dear; so human, and—and—womanly. You jump to conclusions without hearing reasons. Now I will give you the reasons. But I do wish you would sit down."

"I will sit here," said Charlotte, and she drew a chair near the table. The room abounded in easy-chairs of all sizes and descriptions, but she chose one hard and made of cane, and she sat upright upon it, her hands folded on her lap. "Now, Uncle Jasper," she said, "I am ready to hear your reasons."

"They go a good way back, my dear, and I am not clever at telling a story; but I will do my best. Your grandfather made his money in trade; he made a good business, and he put your father and me both into it. It is unnecessary to go into particulars about our special business; it was small at first, but we extended it until it became the great firm of which your father is the present head. We both, your father and I, showed even more aptitude for this life of mercantile success than our father did, and he, perceiving this, retired while scarcely an old man. He made us over the entire business he had made, taking, however, from it, for his own private use, a large sum of money. On the interest of this money he would live, promising, however, to return it to us at his death. The money taken out of the business rather crippled us, and we begged of him to allow us to pay him the interest, and to let the capital remain at our disposal; but he wished to be completely his own master, and he bought a place in Hertfordshire out of part of the money. It was a year or two after, that he met his second wife and married her. I don't pretend," continued Uncle Jasper, "that we liked this marriage or our stepmother. We were young fellows then, and we thought our father had done us an injustice. The girl he had chosen was an insipid little thing, with just a pretty face, and nothing whatever else. She was not quite a lady. We saw her, and came to the conclusion that she was common—most unsuited to our father. We also remembered our own mother; and most young men feel pain at seeing any one put into her place.

"We expostulated with our father. He was a fiery old man, and hot words passed between us. I won't repeat what we all said, my dear, or how bitter John and I felt when we rode away from the old place our father had just purchased. One thing he said as we were going off.

"'My marrying again won't make any money difference to you two fellows, and I suppose I may please myself.'"

"I think my grandfather was very unjust," said Charlotte, but nevertheless a look of relief stole over her face.

"We went back to our business, my dear, and our father married; and when we wrote to him he did not answer our letters. After a time we heard a son had been born, and then, shortly after the birth of this child, the news reached us, that a lawyer had been summoned down to the manor-house in Hertfordshire. We supposed that our father was making provision for the child; and it seemed to us fair enough. Then we saw the child's death in the *Times*, and shortly after the news also came to us that the same lawyer had gone down again to see our father.

"After this, a few years went by, and we, busy with our own life, gave little heed to the old man, who seemed to have forgotten us. Suddenly we were summoned to his deathbed. John, your father, my dear, had always been his favorite. On his deathbed he seemed to have returned to the old times, when John was a little fellow. He liked to have him by his side; in short, he could not bear to have him out of his sight. He appeared to have forgotten the poor, common little wife he had married, and to live his early days over again. He died quite reconciled to us both, and we held his hand as he breathed his last.

"To our surprise, my dear, we found that he had left us every penny of his fortune. The wife and baby girl were left totally unprovided for. We were amazed! We thought it unjust. We instantly resolved to make provision for her and her baby. We did so. She never wanted to the day of her death."

"She did not starve," interrupted Charlotte, "but you shut her out, her and her child, from yourselves, and from me. Why did you do this?"

"My dear, you would scarcely speak in that tone to your father, and it was his wish as well as mine—indeed, far more his wish than mine. I was on the eve of going to Australia, to carry on a branch of our trade there; but he was remaining at home. He was not very long married. You don't remember your mother, Charlotte. Ah! what a fine young creature she was, but proud—proud of her high birth—of a thousand things. It would have been intolerable to her to associate with one like my stepmother. Your father was particular about his wife and child. He judged it best to keep these undesirable relations apart. I, for one, can scarcely blame him."

"I *will* not blame my father," said Charlotte. Again that look of relief had stolen over her face. The healthy tint, which was scarcely color, had returned to her cheek; and the tension of her attitude was also withdrawn, for she changed her seat, taking possession now of her favorite easy-chair. "But I like Charlotte Home," she said after a pause. "She is—whatever her mother may have been—quite a lady. I think it is hard that when she is so nearly related to me she should be so poor and I so rich. I will speak to my father. He asked me only this morning what I should like as a wedding present. I know what I shall like. He will give that three thousand pounds to Charlotte Home. The money her mother had for her life she shall have for ever. I know my father won't refuse me."

Charlotte's eyes were on the ground, and she did not see the dark expression which for a moment passed over Jasper Harman's face. Before he answered her he poked the fire into a vigorous flame.

"You are a generous girl, Lottie," he said then. "I admire your spirit. But it is plain, my dear, that money has come as easily to you as the very air you breathe, or you would not speak of three thousand pounds in a manner so light as almost to take one's breath away. But suppose—suppose the money could be given, there is another difficulty. To get that money for Mrs. Home, who, by the way, has her husband to provide for her, you must tell this tale to your father—you must not do that."

"Why not?" asked Charlotte, opening her eyes wide in surprise.

"Simply because he is ill, and the doctors have forbidden him to be in the least agitated."

"Uncle Jasper—I know he is not well, but I did not hear this; and why—why should what I have to say agitate him?"

"Because he cannot bear any allusion to the past. He loved his father; he cannot dwell on those years when they were estranged. My dear," continued old Uncle Jasper. "I am glad you came with this tale to me—it would have done your father harm. The doctors hope soon to make him much better, but at present he must hear nothing likely to give rise to gloomy thoughts; wait until he is better, my dear. And if you want help for this Mrs. Home, you must appeal to me. Promise me that, Lottie."

"I will promise, certainly, not to injure my father, but I confess you puzzle me."

"I am truly sorry, my dear. I will think over your tale, but now I must go to John. Will you come with me?"

"No, thanks; I would rather stay here."

"Then we shall not meet again, for in an hour I am off to my club. Good-night, my dear."

And Charlotte could not help noticing how soft and catlike were the footsteps of the old Australian uncle as he stole away.

CHAPTER X.

JOHN AND JASPER HARMAN.

Jaspar Harman was sixty years old at this time, but the days of his pilgrimage had passed lightly over him, neither impairing his frame nor his vigor. At sixty years of age he could think as clearly, sleep as comfortably, eat as well—nay, even walk as far as he did thirty years ago. His life in the Antipodes seemed to have agreed with him. It is true his hair was turning gray, and his shrewd face had many wrinkles on it, but these seemed more the effects of climate than of years. He looked like a man whom no heart-trouble had ever touched and in this doubtless lay the secret of his perpetual youth. Care might sweep him very close, but it could not enter an unwelcome guest, to sit on the hearth of his holy of holies; into the innermost shrine of his being it could scarcely find room to enter. His was the kind of nature to whom remorse even for a sin committed must be almost unknown. His affections were not his strong point. Most decidedly his intellect overbalanced his heart. But without an undue preponderance of heart he was good-natured; he would pat a chubby little cheek, if he passed it in the street, and he would talk in a genial and hearty way to those beneath him in life. In business matters he was considered very shrewd and hard, but those who had no such dealings with him pronounced him a kindly soul. His smile was

genial; his manner frank and pleasant. He had one trick, however, which no servant could bear—his step was as soft as a cat's; he must be on your heels before you had the faintest clue to his approach.

In this stealthy way he now left his niece's room, stole down the thickly carpeted stairs, crept across a tiled hall, and entered the apartment where his elder brother waited for him.

John Harman was only one year Jasper's senior, but there looked a much greater difference between them. Jasper was young for his years; John was old; nay, more—he was very old. In youth he must have been a handsome man; in age for every one spoke of him as aged, he was handsome still. He was tall, over six feet; his hair was silver-white; his eyes very deep set, very dark. Their expression was penetrating, kind, but sad. His mouth was firm, but had some lines round it which puzzled you. His smile, which was rare and seldom seen, was a wintry one. You would rather John Harman did not smile at you; you felt miserable afterwards. All who knew him said instinctively that John Harman had known some great trouble. Most people attributed it to the death of his wife, but, as this happened twenty years ago, others shook their heads and felt puzzled. Whatever the sorrow, however, which so perpetually clouded the fine old face, the nature of the man was so essentially noble that he was universally loved and respected.

John Harmon was writing a letter when his brother entered. He pushed aside his writing materials, however, and raised his head with a sigh of relief. In Jasper's presence there was always one element of comfort. He need cover over no anxieties; his old face looked almost sharp as he wheeled his chair round to the fire.

"No, you are not interrupting me," he began. "This letter can keep; it is not a business one. I never transact business at home." Then he added, as Jasper sank into the opposite chair, "You have been having a long chat with the child. I am glad she is getting fond of you."

"She is a fine girl," said Jasper; "a fine, generous girl. I like her, even though she does dabble in literature; and I like Hinton too. When are they to be married, John?"

"When Hinton gets his first brief—not before," answered John Harman.

"Well, well, he's a clever chap; I don't see why you should wait for that—he's safe to get on. If I were you, I'd like to see my girl comfortably settled. One can never tell what may happen!"

"What may happen!" repeated the elder Harman. "Do you allude now to the doctor's verdict on myself. I did not wish Charlotte acquainted with it."

"Pooh! my dear fellow, there's nothing to alarm our girl in that quarter. I'd lay my own life you have many long years before you. No, Charlotte knows you are not well, and that is all she need ever know. I was not alluding to your health, but to the fact that that fine young woman upstairs is, just to use a vulgar phrase, eating her own head off for want of something better to do. She is dabbling in print. Of course, her book must fail. She is full of all kinds of chimerical expedients. Why, this very evening she was propounding the most preposterous scheme to me, as generous as it was nonsensical. No, no, my dear fellow, even to you I won't betray confidence. The girl is an enthusiast. Now enthusiasts are always morbid and unhappy unless they can find vent for their energies. Why don't you give her the natural and healthy vents supplied by wifehood and motherhood? Why do you wait for Hinton's first brief to make them happy? You have money enough to make them happy at once."

"Yes, yes, Jasper—it is not that. It is just that I want the young man not to be altogether dependent on his wife. I am fonder of Hinton than of any other creature in the world except my own child. For his sake I ask for his short delay to their marriage. On the day he brings me news of that brief I take the first steps to settle on Charlotte a thousand a year during my lifetime. I make arrangements that her eldest son inherits the business, and I make further provision for any other children she may have."

"Well, my dear fellow, all that sounds very nice; and if Hinton was not quite the man he is I should say, 'Wait for the brief.' But I believe that having a wife will only make him seek that said brief all the harder. I see success before that future son-in-law of yours."

"And you are a shrewd observer of character, Jasper," answered his brother.

Neither of the men spoke for some time after this, and presently Jasper rose to go. He had all but reached the door when he turned back.

"You will be in good time in the city to-morrow, John."

"Yes, of course. Not that there is anything very special going on. Why do you ask?"

"Only that we must give an answer to that question of the trusteeship to the Rutherford orphans. I know you object to the charge, still it seems a pity for the sake of a sentiment."

Instantly John Harman, who had been crouching over the fire, rose to his full height. His deep-set eyes flashed, his voice trembled with some hardly suppressed anguish.

"Jasper!" he said suddenly and sharply; then he added, "you have but one answer to that question from me—never, never, as long as I live, shall our firm become trustees for even sixpence worth. You know my feelings on that point, Jasper, and they shall never change."

"You are a fool for your pains, then," muttered Jasper, but he closed the door rather hastily

behind him.

CHAPTER XI.

"A PET DAY."

At breakfast the next morning Charlotte Harman was in almost wild spirits. Her movements were generally rather sedate, as befitted one so tall, so finely proportioned, so dignified. To-day her step seemed set to some hidden rhythmic measure; her eyes laughed; her gracious, kindly mouth was wreathed in perpetual smiles. Her father, on the contrary, looked more bent, more careworn, more aged even than usual. Looking, however, into her eyes for light, his own brightened. As he ate his frugal breakfast of coffee and dry toast he spoke:

"Charlotte, your Uncle Jasper came to me last night with a proposal on your behalf."

"Yes, father," answered Charlotte. She looked up expectantly. She thought of Mrs. Home. Her uncle had told the tale after all, and her dear and generous father would refuse her nothing. She should have the great joy of giving three thousand pounds to that poor mother for the use of her little children.

The next words, however, uttered by Mr. Harman caused these dreams to be dispelled by others more golden. The most generous woman must at times think first of herself. Charlotte was very generous; but her father's next words brought dimples into very prominent play in each cheek.

"My darling, Jasper thinks me very cruel to postpone your marriage. I will not postpone it. You and Hinton may fix the day. I will take that brief of his on trust."

No woman likes an indefinite engagement, and Charlotte was not the exception to prove this rule.

"Dearest father," she said, "I am very happy at this. I will tell John. He is coming over this morning. But you know my conditions? No wedding day for me unless my father agrees to live with me afterwards."

"Settle it as you please, dear child. I don't think there would be much sunshine left for me if you were away from me. And now I suppose you will be very busy. You have *carte blanche* for the trousseau, but your book? will you have time to write it, Charlotte? And that young woman whom I saw in your room yesterday, is she the amanuensis whom you told me about?"

"She is the lady whom I hoped to have secured, father, but she is not coming."

"Not coming! I rather liked her look, she seemed quite a lady. Did you offer her too small remuneration? Not that that would be your way, but you do not perhaps know what such labor is worth."

"It was not that, dear father. I offered her what she herself considered a very handsome sum. It was not that. She is very poor; very, very poor and she has three little children. I never saw such a hungry look in any eyes as she had, when she spoke of what money would be to her. But she gave me a reason—a reason which I am not at liberty to tell to you, which makes it impossible for her to come here."

Charlotte's cheeks were burning now, and something in her tone caused her father to gaze at her attentively. It was not his way, however, to press for any confidence not voluntarily offered. He rose from his seat with a slight sigh.

"Well, dear," he said, "you must look for some one else. We can't talk over matters to-night. Ask Hinton to stay and dine. There; I must be off, I am very late as it is."

Mr. Harman kissed his daughter and she went out as usual to button on his great-coat and see him down the street. She had performed this office for him ever since—a little mite of four years old—she had tried to take her dead mother's place. The child, the growing girl, the young woman, had all in turns stood on those steps, and watched that figure walking away. But never until to-day had she noticed how aged and bent it had grown. For the first time the possibility visited her heart that there might be such a thing for her in the future as life without her father.

Uncle Jasper had said he was not well; no, he did not look well. Her eyes filled with tears as she closed the hall door and re-entered the house. But her own prospects were too golden just now to permit her to dwell as long, or as anxiously, as she otherwise would have done, on so gloomy an aspect of her father's case.

Charlotte Harman was twenty-five years of age; but, except when her mother died, death had never come near her young life. She could scarcely remember her mother, and, with this one exception, death and sickness were things unknown. She has heard of them of course; but the grim practical knowledge, the standing face to face with the foe, were not her experience. She was the kind of woman who could develop into the most tender nurse, into the wisest, best, and most helpful guide, through those same dark roads of sickness and death, but the training for this was all to come. No wonder that in her inexperience she should soon cease to dwell on her

father's bent figure and drawn, white face. A reaction was over her, and she must yield to it.

As she returned to the comfortable breakfast-room, her eyes shone brighter through their momentary tears. She went over and stood by the hearth. She was a most industrious creature, having trained herself not to waste an instant; but to-day she must indulge in a happy reverie.

How dark had been those few hours after Mrs. Home had left her yesterday; how undefined, how dim, and yet how dark had been her suspicions! She did not know what to think, or whom to suspect; but she felt that, cost her what it might, she must fathom the truth, and that having once fathomed it, something might be revealed to her that would embitter and darken her whole life.

And behold! she had done so. She had bravely grasped the phantom in both hands, and it had vanished into thin air. What she dreamed was not. There was no disgrace anywhere. A morbid young woman had conjured up a possible tale of wrong. There was no wrong. She, Mrs. Home, was to be pitied, and Charlotte would help her; but beyond this no dark or evil thing had come into her life.

And now, what a great further good was in store for her! Her father had most unexpectedly withdrawn his opposition over the slight delay he had insisted upon to her marriage. Charlotte did not know until now how she had chafed at this delay; how she had longed to be the wife of the man she loved. She said, "Thank God!" under her breath, then ran upstairs to her own room.

Charlotte's maid had the special care of this room. It was a sunshiny morning, and the warm spring air came in through the open window.

"Yes, leave it open," she said to the girl; "it seems as if spring had really come to-day."

"But it is winter still, madam, February is not yet over," replied the lady's maid. "Better let me shut it, Miss Harman, this is only a pet day."

"I will enjoy it then, Ward," answered Miss Harman. "And now leave me, for I am very busy."

The maid withdrew, and Charlotte seated herself by her writing table. She was engaged over a novel which Messrs. M——, of —— Street, had pronounced really good; they would purchase the copyright, and they wanted the MS. by a given date. How eager she had felt about this yesterday; how determined not to let anything interfere with its completion! But to-day, she took up her pen as usual, read over the last page she had written, then sat quiet, waiting for inspiration.

What was the matter with her? No thought came. As a rule thoughts flowed freely, proceeding fast from the brain to the pen, from the pen to the paper. But to-day? What ailed her to-day? The fact was, the most natural thing in the world had come to stop the flow of fiction. It was put out by a greater fire. The moon could shine brilliantly at night, but how sombre it looked beside the sun! The great sunshine of her own personal joy was flooding Charlotte's heart to-day, and the griefs and delights of the most attractive heroine in the world must sink into insignificance beside it. She sat waiting for about a quarter of an hour, then threw down her pen in disgust. She pulled out her watch. Hinton could not be with her before the afternoon. The morning was glorious. What had Ward, her maid, called the day?—"a pet day." Well, she would enjoy it; she would go out. She ran to her room, enveloped herself in some rich and becoming furs, and went into the street. She walked on a little way, rather undecided where to turn her steps. In an instant she could have found herself in Kensington Gardens or Hyde Park; but, just because they were so easy of access, they proved unattractive. She must wander farther afield. She beckoned to a passing hansom.

"I want to go somewhere where I shall have green grass and trees," she said to the cabby. "No, it must not be Hyde Park, somewhere farther off."

"There's the Regent's," replied the man. "I'll drive yer there and back wid pleasure, my lady."

"I will go to Regent's Park," said Charlotte. She made up her mind, as she was swiftly bowled along, that she would walk back. She was just in that condition of suppressed excitement, when a walk would be the most delightful safety-valve in the world.

In half an hour she found herself in Regent's Park and, having dismissed her cab, wandered about amongst the trees. The whole place was flooded with sunshine. There were no flowers visible; the season had been too bad, and the year was yet too young; but for all that, nature seemed to be awake and listening.

Charlotte walked about until she felt tired, then she sat down on one of the many seats to rest until it was time to return home. Children were running about everywhere. Charlotte loved children. Many an afternoon had she gone into Kensington Gardens for the mere and sole purpose of watching them. Here were children, too, as many as there, but of a different class. Not quite so aristocratic, not quite so exclusively belonging to the world of rank and fashion. The children in Regent's Park were certainly quite as well dressed; but there was just some little indescribable thing missing in them, which the little creatures, whom Charlotte Harman was most accustomed to notice, possessed.

She was commenting on this, in that vague and slight way one does when all their deepest thoughts are elsewhere, when a man came near and shared her seat. He was a tall man, very slight, very thin. Charlotte, just glancing at him took in this much also, that he was a clergyman. He sat down to rest, evidently doing so from great fatigue. Selfish in her happiness, Charlotte

presently returned to her golden dreams. The children came on fast, group after group; some pale and thin, some rosy and healthy; a few scantily clothed, a few overladen with finery. They laughed and scampered past her. For, be the circumstances what they might, all the little hearts seemed full of mirth and sweet content. At last a very small nurse appeared, wheeling a perambulator, while two children ran by her side. These children were dressed neatly, but with no attempt at fashion. The baby in the shabby perambulator was very beautiful. The little group were walking past rather more slowly than most of the other groups, for the older boy and girl looked decidedly tired, when suddenly they all stopped; the servant girl opened her mouth until it remained fixed in the form of a round O; the baby raised its arms and crowed; the elder boy and girl uttered a glad shout and ran forward.

"Father, father, you here?" said the boy. "You here?" echoed the girl, and the whole cavalcade drew up in front of Charlotte and the thin clergyman. The boy in an instant was on his father's knee, and the girl, helping herself mightily by Charlotte's dress, had got on the bench.

The baby seeing this began to cry. The small nurse seemed incapable of action, and Charlotte herself had to come to the rescue. She lifted the little seven months old creature out of its carriage, and placed it in its father's arms.

He raised his eyes gratefully to her face and placed his arm round the baby.

"Oh! I'm falling," said the girl. "This seat is so slippy, may I sit on your knee?"

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Charlotte to take this strange, shabbily dressed little girl into her embrace.

The child began to stroke down and admire her soft furs.

"Aren't they lovely?" she said. "Oh, Harold, look! Feel 'em, Harold; they're like pussies."

Harold, absorbed with his father, turned his full blue eyes round gravely and fixed them not on the furs, but on the strange lady's face.

"Father," he said in a slow, solemn tone, "may I kiss that pretty lady?"

"My dear boy, no, no. I am ashamed of you. Now run away, children; go on with your walk. Nurse, take baby."

The children were evidently accustomed to implicit obedience. They went without a word.

"But I will kiss Harold first," said Charlotte Harman, and she stooped down and pressed her lips to the soft round cheek.

"Thank you," said the clergyman. Again he looked into her face and smiled.

The smile on his careworn face reminded Charlotte of the smile on St. Stephen's face, when he was dying. It was unearthly, angelic; but it was also very fleeting. Presently he added in a grave tone,——

"You have evidently the great gift of attracting the heart of a little child. Pardon me if I add a hope that you may never lose it."

"Is that possible?" asked Charlotte.

"Yes; when you lose the child spirit, the power will go."

"Oh! then I hope it never will," she replied.

"It never will if you keep the Christ bright within you," he answered. Then he raised his hat to her, smiled again, and walked away.

He was a strange man, and Charlotte felt attracted as well as repelled. She was proud, and at another time and from other lips such words would have been received with disdain. But this queer, shadowy-looking clergyman looked like an unearthly visitant. She watched his rather weak footsteps, as he walked quietly away in the northern direction through the park. Then she got up and prepared to return home. But this little incident had sobered her. She was not unhappy; but she now felt very grave. The child spirit! She must keep it alive, and the Christ must dwell bright within her.

Charlotte's temperament was naturally religious. Her nature was so frank and noble that she could not but drink in the good as readily as the flower receives the dew; but she had come to this present fulness of her youthful vigor without one trial being sent to test the gold. She entered the house after her long walk to find Hinton waiting for her.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUR MONTHS HENCE.

Hinton had gone away the day before rather disturbed by Charlotte's manner. He had found her,

for the first time since their betrothal, in trouble. Wishing to comfort, she had repelled him. He was a strong man, as strong in his own way as Charlotte was in hers, and this power of standing alone scarcely pleased him in her. His was the kind of nature which would be supposed to take for its other half one soft and clinging. Contrary to the established rule, however, he had won this proud and stately Charlotte. She thought him perfection: he was anything but that. But he had good points, there was nothing mean or base about him. There were no secrets hidden away in his life. His was an honorable and manly nature. But he had one little fault, running like a canker through the otherwise healthy fruit of his heart. While Charlotte was frank and open as the day, he was reserved; not only reserved, but suspicious. All the men who knew Hinton said what a capital lawyer he would make; he had all the qualities necessary to insure success in his profession. Above all things in the world secrets oppressed, irritated, and yet interested him. Once having heard of any little possible mystery, he could not rest until it was solved.

This had been his character from a boy. His own brothers and sisters had confided in him, not because they found him particularly sympathetic, or particularly clever, not because they loved him so much, but simply because they could not help themselves. John would have found out all the small childish matter without their aid; it was better, safer to take him into confidence. Then, to do him justice, he was true as steel; for though he must discover, he would scorn to betray.

On the white, untroubled sheet of Charlotte Harmon's heart no secrets yet had been written. Consequently, though she had been engaged for many months to John Hinton, she had never found out this peculiarity about him. Those qualities of openness and frankness, so impossible to his own nature, had attracted him most of all to this beautiful young woman. Never until yesterday had there been breath or thought of concealment about her. But then—then he had found her in trouble. Full of sympathy he had drawn near to comfort, and she had repelled him. She had heard of something which troubled her, which troubled her to such an extent that the very expression of her bright face had changed, and yet this something was to be a secret from him—true, only until the following day, but a whole twenty-four hours seemed like for ever to Hinton in his impatience. Before he could even expostulate with her she had run off, doubtless to confide her care to another. Perhaps the best way to express John Hinton's feelings would be to say that he was very cross as he returned to his chambers in Lincoln's Inn.

All that evening, through his dreams all that night, all the following morning as he tried to engage himself over his law books, he pondered on Charlotte's secret. Such pondering must in a nature like his excite apprehension. He arrived on the next day at the house in Prince's Gate with his mind full of gloomy forebodings. His face was so grave that it scarcely cleared up at the sight of the bright one raised to meet it. He was full of the secret of yesterday; Charlotte, in all the joy of the secret of to-day, had already forgotten it.

"Oh, I have had such a walk!" she exclaimed; "and a little bit of an adventure—a pretty adventure; and now I am starving. Come into the dining-room and have some lunch."

"You look very well," answered her lover, "and I left you so miserable yesterday!"

"Yesterday!" repeated Charlotte; she had forgotten yesterday. "Oh, yes, I had heard something very disagreeable: but when I looked into the matter, it turned out to be nothing."

"You will tell me all about it, dear?"

"Well, I don't know, John. I would of course if there was anything to tell; but do come and have some lunch, I cannot even mention something else much more important until I have had some lunch."

John Hinton frowned. Even that allusion to something much more important did not satisfy him. He must know this other thing. What! spend twenty-four hours of misery, and not learn what it was all about in the end! Charlotte's happiness, however, could not but prove infectious, and the two made merry over their meal, and not until they found themselves in Charlotte's own special sanctum did Hinton resume his grave manner. Then he began at once.

"Now, Charlotte, you will tell me why you looked so grave and scared yesterday. I have been miserable enough thinking of it ever since. I don't understand why you did not confide in me at once."

"Dear John," she said—she saw now that he had been really hurt—"I would not give you pain for worlds, my dearest. Yes, I was much perplexed, I was even very unhappy for the time. A horrid doubt had been put into my head, but it turned out nothing, nothing whatever. Let us forget it, dear John; I have something much more important to tell you."

"Yes, afterwards, but you will tell me this, even though it did turn out of no consequence."

"Please, John dear, I would rather not. I was assailed by a most unworthy suspicion. It turned out nothing, nothing at all. I would rather, seeing it was all a myth, you never knew of it."

"And I would rather know, Charlotte; the myth shall be dismissed from mind, too, but I would rather be in your full confidence."

"My full confidence?" she repeated; the expression pained her. She looked hard at Hinton; his words were very quietly spoken, but there was a cloud on his brow. "You shall certainly have my full confidence," she said after that brief pause; "which will you hear first, what gave me pain yesterday, or what brings me joy to-day?"

"What gave you pain yesterday."

There is no doubt she had hoped he would have made the latter choice, but seeing he did not she submitted at once, sitting, not as was her wont close to his side, but on a chair opposite. Hinton sat with his back to the light, but it fell full on Charlotte, and he could see every line of her innocent and noble face as she told her tale. Having got to tell it, she did so in few but simple words; Mrs. Home's story coming of a necessity first, her Uncle Jasper's explanation last. When the whole tale was told, she paused, then said,—

"You see there was nothing in it."

"I see," answered Hinton. This was his first remark. He had not interrupted the progress of the narrative by a single observation; then he added, "But I think, if even your father does not feel disposed to help her, that we, you and I, Charlotte, ought to do something for Mrs. Home."

"Oh, John dear, how you delight me! How good and noble you are! Yes, my heart aches for that poor mother; yes, we will help her. You and I, how very delightful it will be!"

Now she came close to her lover and kissed him, and he returned her embrace.

"You will never have a secret again from me, my darling?" he said.

"I never, never had one," she answered, for it was impossible for her to understand that this brief delay in her confidence could be considered a secret. "Now for my other news," she said.

"Now for your other news," he repeated.

"John, what is the thing you desire most in the world?"

Of course this young man being sincerely attached to this young woman, answered,—

"You, Charlotte."

"John, you always said you did not like Uncle Jasper, but see what a good turn he has done us—he has persuaded my father to allow us to marry at once."

"What, without my brief?"

"Yes, without your brief; my dear father told me this morning that we may fix the day whenever we like. He says he will stand in the way no longer. He is quite sure of that brief, we need not wait to be happy for it, we may fix our wedding-day, John, and you are to dine here this evening and have a talk with my father afterwards."

Hinton's face had grown red. He was a lover, and an attached one; but so diverse were the feelings stirred within him, that for the moment he felt more excited than elated.

"Your father is very good," he said, "he gives us leave to fix the day. Very well, that is your province, my Lottie; when shall it be?"

"This is the twentieth of February, our wedding-day shall be on the twentieth of June," she replied.

"That is four months hence," he said. In spite of himself there was a sound of relief in his tone. "Very well, Charlotte; yes, I will come and dine this evening. But now I am late for an appointment; we will have a long talk after dinner."

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS FIRST BRIEF.

Hinton, when he left Charlotte, went straight back to his chambers. He had no particular work to hurry him there; indeed, when he left that morning he had done so with the full intention of spending the entire afternoon with his betrothed. He was, as has been said, although a clever, yet certainly at present a briefless young barrister. Nevertheless, had twenty briefs awaited his immediate attention, he could not have more rapidly hurried back as he now did. When he entered his rooms he locked the outer door. Then he threw himself on a chair, drew the chair to his writing table, pushed his hands through his thick hair, and staring hard at a blank sheet of paper which lay before him began to think out a problem. His might scarcely have been called a passionate nature, but it was one capable of a very deep, very real attachment. This attachment had been formed for Charlotte Harman. Their engagement had already lasted nearly a year, and now with her own lips she had told him that it might end, that the end, the one happy end to all engagements, was in sight. With comfort, nay, with affluence, with the full consent of all her friends, they might become man and wife. John Hinton most undoubtedly loved this woman, and yet now as he reviewed the whole position the one pleasure he could deduct for his own reflection was in the fact that there was four months' reprieve. Charlotte had herself postponed their wedding-day for four months.

Hinton was a proud man. When, a year ago, he had gone to Mr. Harman and asked him for his

daughter, Mr. Harman had responded with the very natural question, "What means have you to support her with?"

Hinton had answered that he had two hundred a year—and—his profession.

"What are you making in your profession?" asked the father.

"Not anything—yet," answered the young man.

There was a tone of defiance and withal of hope thrown into that "yet" which might have repelled some men, but pleased Mr. Harman. He paused to consider. He might have got a much, much better match for Charlotte from a temporal standpoint. Hinton was of no family in particular; he had no money worthy of the name. He was simply an honest fellow, fairly good-looking, and with the heart of a gentleman.

"You are doubtless aware," replied Mr. Harman, "that my daughter will inherit a very large fortune. She has been sought for in marriage before now, and by men who could give something to meet what she brings, both with regard to money and position."

"I have heard of Mr. S.'s proposal," answered Hinton. "I know he is rich, and the son of Lord ——; but that is nothing, for she does not love him."

"And you believe she loves you?"

"Most certainly she loves me."

In spite of himself Mr. Harman smiled, then after a little more thought, for he was much taken with Hinton, he came to terms.

He must not have Charlotte while he had nothing to support her with. Pooh! that two hundred a year was nothing to a girl brought up like his daughter. For Hinton's own sake it would not be good for him to live on his wife's money; but when he obtained his first brief then they might marry.

Hinton was profuse in thanks. He only made on his part one stipulation—that brief, which was to obtain for him his bride, was in no way to come to him through Mr. Harman's influence. He must win it by his own individual exertion.

Mr Harman smiled and grew a trifle red. In his business capacity he could have put twenty briefs in this young fellow's way, and in his inmost heart he had resolved to do so; but he liked him all the better for this one proviso, and promised readily enough.

Hinton had no business connections of his own. He had no influential personal friends, and his future father-in-law felt bound in honor to leave him altogether to his own resources. A year had nearly passed since the engagement, and the brief which was to win him Charlotte was as far away as ever. But now she told him that this one embargo to their happiness had been withdrawn. They might marry, and the brief would follow after. Hinton knew well what it all meant. The rich city merchant could then put work in his way. Work would quickly pour in to the man so closely connected with rich John Harman. Yes. As he sat by his table in his small shabbily furnished room, he knew that his fortune was made. He would obtain Charlotte and Charlotte's wealth; and if he but chose to use his golden opportunities, fame too might be his portion. He was a keen and ardent politician, and a seat in the House might easily follow all the other good things which seemed following in his track. Yes; but he was a proud man, and he did not like it. He had not the heart to tell Charlotte to-day, as she looked at him with all the love she had so freely given shining in her sweet and tender face, that he would not accept such terms, that the original bargain must yet abide in force. He could not say to this young woman when she came to him, "I do not want you." But none the less, as he now sat by his writing-table, was he resolved that unless his brief was won before the twentieth of June it should bring no wedding-day to him. This was why he rejoiced in the four months' reprieve. But this was by no means his only perplexity. Had it been, so stung to renewed action was his sense of pride and independence, that he would have gone at once to seek, perhaps to obtain work; but something else was lying like wormwood against his heart. That story of Mrs. Home's! That explanation of Jasper Harman's! The story was a queer one; the explanation, while satisfying the inexperienced girl, failed to meet the requirements of the acute lawyer. Hinton saw flaws in Jasper's narrative, where Charlotte saw none. The one great talent of his life, if it could be called a talent, was coming fiercely into play as he sat now and thought about it all. He had pre-eminently the gift of discovering secrets. He was rooting up many things from the deep grave of the hidden past now. That look of care on Mr. Harman's face, how often it had puzzled him! He had never liked Jasper; indefinite had been his antipathy hitherto, but it was taking definite form now. There *was* a secret in the past of that most respectable firm, and he, John Hinton, would give himself no rest until he had laid it bare. No wedding-day could come to him and Charlotte until his mind was at rest on this point. It was against his interest to ferret out this hidden thing, but that fact weighed as nothing with him. It would bring pain to the woman he loved; it might ruin her father; but the pain and the ruin would be inflicted unsparingly by his righteous young hand, which knew nothing yet of mercy but was all for justice, and justice untempered with mercy is a terrible weapon. This Hinton was yet to learn.

CHAPTER XIV.

LODGINGS IN KENTISH TOWN.

After a time, restless from the complexity of his musings, Hinton went out. He had promised to return to the Harmans for dinner, but their hour for dinner was eight o'clock, and it still wanted nearly three hours of that time. As Charlotte had done before that day, he found himself in the close neighborhood of Regent's Park. He would have gone into the park, but that he knew that the hour of closing the gates at this early period of the year must be close at hand; he walked, therefore, by the side of the park, rather aimlessly it is true, not greatly caring, provided he kept moving, in what direction his footsteps took him.

At last he found himself on the broad tram line which leads to the suburb of Kentish Town. It was by no means an interesting neighborhood. But Hinton, soon lost in his private and anxious musings, went on. At last he left the public thoroughfare and turned down a private road. There were no shops here, nor much traffic. He felt a sense of relief at leaving the roar and bustle behind him. This road on which he had now entered was flanked at each side by a small class of dwelling-houses, some shabby and dirty, some bright and neat; all, however, were poor-looking. It was quite dusk by this time, and the gas had been already lit. This fact, perhaps, was the reason which drew Hinton's much-preoccupied attention to a trivial circumstance.

In one of these small houses a young woman, who had previously lit the gas, stepped to the window and proceeded to paste a card to the pane. There was a gas lamp also directly underneath, and Hinton, raising his eyes, saw very distinctly, not only the little act, but also the words on the card. They were the very common words——

APARTMENTS TO LET

Inquire within.

Hinton suddenly drew up short on the pavement. He did not live in his chambers, and it occurred to him that here he would be within a walk of Regent's Park. In short, that these shabby-looking little lodgings might suit him for the next few uncertain months. As suddenly as he had stopped, and the thought had come to him, he ran up the steps and rang the bell. In a moment or two a little servant-maid opened the door. She was neither a clean nor a tidy-looking maid, and Hinton, fastidious on such matters, took in this fact at a glance. Nevertheless the desire to find for himself a habitation in this shabby little house did not leave him.

"I saw a card up in your window. You have rooms to let," he said to the little maid.

"Oh, yes, indeed, please, sir," answered the servant with a broad and delighted grin. "'Tis h'our drawing-rooms, please, sir; and ef you'll please jest come inter the 'all I'll run and tell missis."

Hinton did so; and in another moment the maid, returning, asked him to step this way.

This way led him into a dingy little parlor, and face to face with a young woman who, pale, self-possessed, and ladylike, rose to meet him. Hinton felt the color rising to his face at sight of her. He also experienced a curious and sudden constriction of his heart, and an overawed sense of some special Providence leading him here. For he had seen this young woman before. She was Charlotte Home. In his swift glance, however, he saw that she did not recognize him. His resolve was taken on the instant. However uncomfortable the rooms she had to offer, they should be his. His interest in this Mrs. Home became intensified to a degree that was painful. He knew that he was about to pursue a course which would be to his own detriment, but he felt it impossible now to turn aside. In a quiet voice, and utterly unconscious of this tumult in his breast, she asked him to be seated, and they began to discuss the accommodation she could offer.

Her back and front drawing-rooms would be vacant in a week. Yes, certainly; Mr. Hinton could see them. She rang the bell as she spoke, and the maid appearing, took Hinton up stairs. The rooms were even smaller and shabbier than he had believed possible. Nevertheless, when he came downstairs he found no fault with anything, and agreed to the terms asked, namely, one guinea a week. He noticed a tremor in the young, brave voice which asked for this remuneration, and he longed to make the one guinea two, but this was impossible. Before he left he had taken Mrs. Home's drawing-rooms for a month, and had arranged to come into possession of his new quarters that day week.

Looking at his watch when he left the house, he found that time had gone faster than he had any idea of. He had now barely an hour to jump into a cab, go to his present most comfortable lodgings, change his morning dress, and reach the Harmans in time for eight o'clock dinner. Little more than these sixty minutes elapsed from the time he left the shabby house in Kentish Town before he found himself in the luxurious abode of wealth, and every refinement, in Prince's Gate. He ran up to the drawing-room, to find Charlotte waiting for him alone.

"Uncle Jasper will dine with us, John," she said, "but my father is not well."

"Not well!" echoed Hinton. Her face only expressed slight concern, and his reflected it in a lesser degree.

"He is very tired," she said, "and he looks badly. But I hope there is not much the matter. He will see you after dinner. But he could not eat, so I have begged of him to lie down; he will be all right

after a little rest."

Hinton made no further remark, and Uncle Jasper then coming in, and dinner being announced, they all went downstairs.

Uncle Jasper and Charlotte were merry enough, but Hinton could not get over a sense of depression, which not even the presence of the woman he loved could disperse. He was not sorry when the message came for him to go to Mr. Harman. Charlotte smiled as he rose.

"You will find me in the drawing-room whenever you like to come there," she said to him.

He left the room suppressing the sigh. Charlotte, however, did not hear or notice it. Still, with that light of love and happiness crowning her bright face, she turned to the old Australian uncle.

"I will pour you out your next glass of port, and stay with you for a few moments, for I have something to tell you."

"What is that, my dear?" asked the old man.

"Something you have had to do with, dear old uncle. My wedding-day is fixed."

Uncle Jasper chuckled.

"Ah! my dear," he said, "there's nothing like having the day clear in one's head. And when is it to be, my pretty lass?"

"The twentieth of June, Uncle Jasper. Just four months from to-day."

"Four months off!" repeated Uncle Jasper. "Well, I don't call that very close at hand. When I spoke to your father last night—for you know I did speak to him, Charlotte—he seemed quite inclined to put no obstacle in the way of your speedy marriage."

"Nor did he, Uncle Jasper. You don't understand. He said we might marry at once if we liked. It was I who said the twentieth of June."

"You, child!—and—and did Hinton, knowing your father had withdrawn all opposition, did Hinton allow you to put off his happiness for four whole months?"

"It was my own choice," said Charlotte. "Four months do not seem to me too long to prepare."

"They would seem a very long time to me if I were the man who was to marry you, my dear."

Charlotte looked grave at this. Her uncle seemed to impute blame to her lover. Being absolutely certain of his devotion, she scorned to defend it. She rose from the table.

"You will find me in the drawing-room, Uncle Jasper."

"One word, Charlotte, before you go," said her uncle. "No, child, I am not going to the drawing-room. You two lovers may have it to yourselves. But—but—you remember our talk of last night?"

"Yes," answered Charlotte, pausing, and coming back a little way into the room. "Did you say anything to my father? Will he help Mrs. Home?"

"I have no doubt he will, my dear. Your father and I will both do something. He is a very just man, is your father. He was a good deal upset by this reference to his early days, and to his quarrel with his own father. I believe, between you and me, that it was that which made him ill this evening. But, Charlotte, you leave Mrs. Home to us. I will mention her case again when your father is more fit to bear the subject. What I wanted to say now, my dear, is this, that I think it would best please the dear old man if—if you told nothing of this strange tale, not even to Hinton, my dear."

"Why, Uncle Jasper?"

"Why, my dear child? The reason seems to me obvious enough. It is a story of the past. It relates to an old and painful quarrel. It is all over years ago. And then you could not tell one side of the tale without the other. Mrs. Home, poor thing, not personally knowing your father as one of the best and noblest of men, imputes very grave blame to him. Don't you think such a tale, so false, so wrong, had better be buried in oblivion?"

"Mrs. Home was most unjust in her ignorance," repeated Charlotte. "But, uncle, you are too late in your warning, for I told John the whole story already to-day."

Not a muscle of Uncle Jasper's face changed.

"Well, child, I should have said that to you last night. After all, it is natural. Hinton won't let it go farther, and no harm is done."

"Certainly, John does not speak of my most sacred things," answered Charlotte proudly.

"No, no, of course he doesn't. I am sorry you told him; but as you say, he is one with yourself. No harm is done. No, thank you, my dear, no more wine now. I am going off to my club."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. HARMAN'S CONFIDENCE.

All through dinner, Hinton had felt that strange sense of depression stealing upon him. He was a man capable of putting a very great restraint upon his feelings, and he so behaved during the long and weary meal as to rouse no suspicions, either in Charlotte's breast or in the far sharper one of the Australian uncle. But, nevertheless, so distressing was the growing sense of coming calamity, that he felt the gay laugh of his betrothed almost distressing, and was truly relieved when he had to change it for the gravity of her father. As he went from the dining-room to Mr. Harman's study, he reflected with pleasure that his future father-in-law was always grave, that never in all the months of their rather frequent intercourse had he seen him even once indulge in what could be called real gayety of heart. Though this fact rather coupled with his own suspicions, still he felt a momentary relief in having to deal to-night with one who treated life from its sombre standpoint.

He entered the comfortable study. Mr. Harman was sunk down in an armchair, a cup of untasted coffee stood by his side; the moment he heard Hinton's step, however, he rose and going forward, took the young man's hand and wrung it warmly.

The room was lit by candles, but there were plenty of them, and Hinton almost started when he perceived how ill the old man looked.

"Charlotte has told you what I want you for to-night, eh, Hinton?" said Mr. Harman.

"Yes; Charlotte has told me," answered John Hinton. Then he sat down opposite his future father-in-law, who had resumed his armchair by the fire. Standing up, Mr. Harman looked ill, but sunk into his chair, with his bent, white head, and drawn, anxious face, and hands worn to emaciation, he looked twenty times worse. There seemed nearly a lifetime between him and that blithe-looking Jasper, whom Hinton had left with Charlotte in the dining-room. Mr. Harman, sitting by his fire, with firelight and candlelight shining full upon him, looked a very old man indeed.

"I am sorry to see you so unwell, sir. You certainly don't look at all the thing," began Hinton.

"I am not well—not at all well. I don't want Charlotte to know. But there need be no disguises between you and me; of course I show it; but we will come to that presently. First, about your own affairs. Lottie has told you what I want you for to-night?"

"She has, Mr. Harman. She says that you have been good and generous enough to say you will take away the one slight embargo you made to our marriage—that we may become man and wife before I bring you news of that brief."

"Yes, Hinton: that is what I said to her this morning: I repeat the same to you to-night. You may fix your wedding-day when you like—I dare say you have fixed it."

"Charlotte has named the twentieth of next June, sir; but——"

"The twentieth of June! that is four months away. I did not want her to put it off as far as that. However, women, even the most sensible, have such an idea of the time it takes to get a trousseau. The twentieth of June! You can make it sooner, can't you?"

"Four months is not such a long time, sir. We have a house to get, and furniture to buy. Four months will be necessary to make these arrangements."

"No, they won't; for you have no such arrangements to make. You are to come and live here when you marry. This will be your house when you marry, and I shall be your guest. I can give you Charlotte Hinton; but I cannot do without her myself."

"But this house means a very, very large income, Mr. Harman. Is it prudent that we should begin like this? For my part I should much rather do on less."

"You may sell the house if you fancy, and take a smaller one; or go more into the country. I only make one proviso—that while I live, I live with my only daughter."

"And with your son, too, Mr. Harman," said Hinton, just letting his hand touch for an instant the wrinkled hand which lay on Mr. Harman's knee.

The old man smiled one of those queer, sad smiles which Hinton had often in vain tried to fathom. Responding to the touch of the vigorous young hand, he said—

"I have always liked you, Hinton. I believe, in giving you my dear child, I give her to one who will make her happy."

"Happy! yes, I shall certainly try to make her happy," answered Hinton, with a sparkle in his eyes.

"And that is the main thing; better than wealth, or position, or anything else on God's earth. Happiness comes with goodness, you know, my dear fellow; no bad man was ever happy. If you and Charlotte get this precious thing into your lives you must both be good. Don't let the evil touch you ever so slightly. If you do, happiness flies."

"I quite believe you," answered Hinton.

"Well, about money matters. I am, as you know, very rich. I shall settle plenty of means upon my daughter; but it will be better for you to enter into all these matters with my solicitor. When can you meet him?"

"Whenever convenient to you and to him, sir."

"I will arrange it for you, and let you know."

"Mr. Harman, may I say a word for myself?" suddenly asked the young man.

"Most certainly. Have I been so garrulous as to keep you from speaking?"

"Not at all, sir; you have been more than generous. You have been showing me the rose-color from your point of view. Now it is not all rose-color."

"I was coming to that; it is by no means all rose-color. Well, say your say first."

"You are a very rich man, and you are giving me your daughter; so endowing her, that any man in the world would say I had drawn a prize in money, if in nothing else."

Mr. Harman smiled.

"I fear you must bear that," he said. "I do not see that you can support Charlotte without some assistance from me."

"I certainly could not do so. I have exactly two hundred a year, and that, as you were pleased to observed before, would be, to one brought up as Charlotte has been, little short of beggary."

"To Charlotte it certainly would be almost beggary."

"Mr. Harman, I have some pride in me. I am a barrister by profession. Some barristers get high in their profession."

"Undoubtedly *some* do."

"Those who are brilliant do," continued Hinton. "I have abilities, whether they are brilliant or not, time will show. Mr. Harman, I should like to bring you news of that brief before we are married."

"I can throw you in the way of getting plenty of briefs when you are my son-in-law. I promise you, you will no longer be a barrister with nothing to do."

"Yes, sir; but I want this before my marriage."

"My influence can give it to you before."

"But that was against our agreement, Mr. Harman. I want to find that brief which is to do so much for me without your help."

"Very well. Find it before the twentieth of June."

After this the two men were silent for several moments. John Hinton, though in no measure comforted, felt it impossible to say more just then, and Mr. Harman, with a face full of care, kept gazing into the fire. John Hinton might have watched that face with interest, had he not been otherwise occupied. After this short silence Mr. Harman spoke again.

"You think me very unselfish in all this; perhaps even my conduct surprises you."

"I confess it rather does," answered Hinton.

"Will you oblige me by saying how?"

"For one thing, you give so much and expect so little."

"Ay, so it appears at first sight; but I told you it was not all rose-color; I am coming to that part. Your pride has been roused—I can soothe it."

"I love Charlotte too much to feel any pride in the matter," replied Hinton, with some heat.

"I don't doubt your affection, my good fellow; and I put against it an equal amount on Charlotte's part; also a noble and beautiful woman, and plenty of money, with money's attendant mercies. I fear even your affection is outweighed in that balance."

"Nothing can outweigh affection," replied Hinton boldly.

Mr. Harman smiled, and this time stretching out his own hand he touched the young man's.

"You are right, my dear boy; and because I am so well aware of this, I give my one girl to a man who is a gentleman, and who loves her. I ask for nothing else in Charlotte's husband, but I am anxious for you to be her husband at once."

"And that is what puzzles me," said Hinton: "you have a sudden reason for this hurry. We are both young; we can wait; there is no hardship in waiting."

"There would be a hardship to me in your waiting longer now. You are quite right in saying I have a sudden reason; this time last night I had no special thought of hurrying on Charlotte's

marriage. Her uncle proposed it; I considered his reasoning good—so good, that I gave Charlotte permission this morning to fix with you the time for the wedding. But even then delay would have troubled me but little; now it does; now even these four short months trouble me sorely."

"Why?" asked Hinton.

"Why? You mentioned my health, and observed that I looked ill; I said I would come to that presently. I am ill; I look very ill. I have seen physicians. To-day I went to see Sir George Anderson; he told me, without any preamble, the truth. My dear fellow, I want you to be my child's protector in a time of trouble, for I am a dying man."

Hinton had never come face to face with death in his life before. He started forward now and clasped his hands.

"Dying!" he repeated, in a tone of unbelief and consternation.

"Yes; you don't see it, for I am going about. I shall go about much as usual to the very last. Your idea of dying men is that they stay in bed and get weak, and have a living death long before the last great mercy comes. That will not be my case. I shall be as you see me now to the very last moment; then some day, or perhaps some night, you will come into this room, or into another room, it does not a bit matter where, and find me dead."

"And must this come soon?" repeated Hinton.

"It may not come for some months; it may stay away for a year; but again it may come to-night or to-morrow."

"Good God!" repeated Hinton.

"Yes, Mr. Hinton, you are right, in the contemplation of such a solemn and terrible event, to mention the name of your Creator. He is a good God, but His very goodness makes Him terrible. He is a God who will see justice done; who will by no means cleanse the guilty. I am going into His presence—a sinful old man. Well, I bow to His decree. But enough of this; you see my reasons for wishing for an early marriage for my child."

"Mr. Harman, I am deeply, deeply pained and shocked. May I know the nature of your malady?"

"It is unnecessary to discuss it, and does no good; suffice it to know that I carry a disease within me which by its very nature must end both soon and suddenly; also that there is no cure for the disease."

"Are you telling me all this as a secret?"

"As a most solemn and sacred secret. My brother suspects something of it, but no one, no one in all the world knows the full and solemn truth but yourself."

"Then Charlotte is not to be told?"

"Charlotte! Charlotte! It is for her sake I have confided to you all this, that you may guard her from such a knowledge."

John Hinton was silent for a moment or two; if he disliked Charlotte having a secret from him much more did he protest against the knowledge which now was forced upon him being kept from her. He saw that Mr. Harman was firmly set on keeping his child in the dark; he disapproved, but he hardly dared, so much did he fear to agitate the old man, to make any vigorous stand against a decree which seemed to him both cruel and unjust. He must say something, however, so he began gently—

"I will respect your most sacred confidence, Mr. Harman; without your leave no word from me shall convey this knowledge to Charlotte; but pardon me if I say a word. You know your own child very well, but I also know Charlotte; she has lived, for all her talent and her five and twenty years, the sheltered life of a child hitherto—but that is nothing; she is a noble woman, she has a noble woman's heart; in trouble, such a nature as hers could rise and prove itself great. Don't you suppose, when by and by the end really comes, she will blame me, and even perhaps, you, sir, for keeping this knowledge from her."

"She will never blame her old father. She will see, bless her, that I did it in love; you will tell her that, be sure you tell her that, when the time comes; please God, you will be her husband then, and you will have the right to comfort her."

"I hope to have the right to comfort her, I hope to be her husband; still, I think you are mistaken, though I can urge the matter no further."

"No, for you cannot see it with my eyes; that child and I have lived the most unbroken life of peace and happiness together; neither storm nor cloud has visited us in one another. The shadow of death must not embitter our last few months; she must be my bright girl to the very last. Some day, if you and she ever have a daughter, you will understand my feelings—at least in part you will understand it."

"I cannot understand it now, but I can at least respect it," answered the young man.

CHAPTER XVI.

"VENGEANCE IS MINE."

When Hinton at last left him, Mr. Harman sat on for a long time by his study fire. The fire burnt low but he did not replenish it, neither did he touch the cold coffee which still remained on his table. After an hour or so of musings, during which the old face seemed each moment to grow more sad and careworn, he stretched out his hand to ring his bell.

Almost instantly was the summons answered—a tall footman stood before him.

"Dennis, has Mr. Jasper left?"

"Yes, sir. He said he was going to his club. I can have him fetched, sir."

"Do not do so. After Mr. Hinton leaves, ask Miss Harman to come here."

The footman answered softly in the affirmative and withdrew, and Mr. Harman still sat on alone. He had enough to think about. For the first time to-day death had come and stared him in the face; very close indeed his own death was looking at him. He was a brave man, but the sight of the cold, grim thing, brought so close, so inevitably near, was scarcely to be endured with equanimity. After a time, rising from his seat, he went to a bookcase and took down, not a treatise on medicine or philosophy, but an old Bible.

"Dying men are said to find comfort here," he said faintly to himself. He put one of the candles on the table and opened the book. It was an old Bible, but John Harman was not very well acquainted with its contents.

"They tell me there is much comfort here," he said to himself. He turned the old and yellow leaves.

"*Vengeance is mine. I will repay.*" These were the words on which his eyes fell.

Comfort! He closed the book with a groan and returned it to the bookshelf. But in returning it he chose the highest shelf of all and pushed it far back and well out of sight.

He had scarcely done so before a light quick step was heard at the door, and Charlotte, her eyes and cheeks both bright, entered.

"My dearest, my darling," he said. He came to meet her, and folded her in his arms. He was a dying man, and a sin-laden one, but not the less sweet was that young embrace, that smooth cheek, those bright, happy eyes.

"You are better, father; you look better," said his daughter.

"I have been rather weak and low all the evening, Lottie; but I am much better for seeing you. Come here and sit at my feet, my dear love."

"I am very happy this evening," said Charlotte, seating herself on her father's footstool, and laying her hand on his knee.

"I can guess the reason, my child; your wedding-day is fixed."

"This morning, father, I said it should be the twentieth of June; John seemed quite satisfied, and four months were not a bit too long for our preparations; but to-night he has changed his mind; he wants our wedding to be in April. I have not given in—not yet. Two months seem so short."

"You will have plenty of time to prepare in two months, dear; and April is a nice time of year. If I were you, I would not oppose Hinton."

Charlotte smiled. She knew in her heart of hearts she should not oppose him. But being a true woman, she laid hold of a futile excuse.

"My book will not be finished. I like to do well what I do at all."

Her father was very proud of this coming book; but now, patting her hand, he said softly,—

"The book can keep. Put it out of your head for the present; you can get it done later."

"Then I shall leave you two months sooner, father; does that not weigh with you at all?"

"You are only going for your honeymoon, darling; and the sooner you go the sooner you will return."

"Vanquished on all points," said Charlotte, smiling radiantly, and then she sat still, looking into the fire.

Long, long afterwards, through much of sorrow—nay, even of tribulation—did her thoughts wander back to that golden evening of her life.

"You remind me of my own mother to-night," said her father presently.

Charlotte and her father had many times spoken of this dead mother. Now she said softly,—

"I want, I pray, I long to make as good a wife as you tell me she did."

"With praying, longing, and striving, it will come Charlotte. That was how she succeeded."

"And there is another thing," continued Charlotte, suddenly changing her position and raising her bright eyes to her old father's face. "You had a good wife and I had a good mother. If ever I die, as my own mother died, and leave behind me a little child, as she did, I pray that my John may be as good a father to it as you have been to me."

But in answer to this little burst of daughterly love, a strange thing happened. Mr. Harman grew very white, so white that he gasped for breath.

"Water, a little water," he said, feebly; and when Charlotte had brought it to him and he raised it to his lips, and the color and power to breathe had come back again, he said slowly and with great pain,—

"Never, never pray that your husband may be like me, Charlotte. To be worthy of you at all, he must be a much better and a very different man."

CHAPTER XVII.

HAPPINESS NOT JUSTICE.

Hinton left Mr. Harman's house in a very perplexed frame of mind. It seemed to him that in that one short day as much had happened to him as in all the course of his previous life, but the very force of the thoughts, the emotions, the hopes, the fears, which had visited him, made him, strong, young and vigorous as he was, so utterly weary, that when he reached his rooms he felt that he must let tired-out nature have its way—he threw himself on his bed and slept the sleep of the young and healthy until the morning.

It was February weather, February unusually mild and genial, and the pet day of yesterday was followed by another as soft and sweet and mild. When Hinton awoke from his refreshing slumbers, the day was so well and thoroughly risen that a gleam of sunshine lay across his bed. He started up to discover a corresponding glow in his heart. What was causing this glow? In a moment he remembered, and the gleam of heart sunshine grew brighter with the knowledge. The fact was, happiness was standing by the young man's side, holding out two radiant hands, and saying, "Take me, take me to your heart of hearts, for I have come to dwell with you." Hinton rose, dressed hastily, and went into his sitting-room. All the gloom which had so oppressed him yesterday had vanished. He could not resist the outward sunshine, nor the heart-glow which had come to him. He stepped lightly, and whistled some gay airs. He ate his breakfast with appetite, then threw himself into an easy-chair which stood near the window; he need not go to his chambers for at least an hour, he might give himself this time to think.

Again happiness stepped up close and showed her beautiful face. Should he take her; should he receive the rare and lovely thing and shut out that stern sense of justice, of relieving the oppressed, of seeing the wronged righted, which had been as his sheet-anchor yesterday, which had been more or less the sheet-anchor of his life. Here was his position. He was engaged to marry Charlotte Harman; he loved her with his whole heart; she loved him with her whole heart; she was a beautiful woman, a noble woman, a wealthy woman. With her as his wife, love, riches, power might all be his. What more could the warm, warm feelings of youth desire? what more could the ambitions of youth aspire to? Yesterday, it is true, he had felt some rising of that noble pride which scorns to receive so much and give so little. He had formed a wild, almost passionate determination to obtain his brief before he obtained his bride, but Mr. Harman had soothed that pride to sleep. There was indeed a grave and sad reason why this beautiful and innocent woman whom he had won should receive all the full comfort his love and protection could give her as quickly as possible. Her father was dying, and she must not know of his approaching death. Her father wished to see her Hinton's wife as soon as possible. Hinton felt that this was reasonable, this was fair; for the sake of no pride, true or false, no hoped-for brief, could he any longer put off their wedding. Nay, far from this. Last night he had urged its being completed two months sooner than Charlotte herself had proposed. He saw by the brightness in Charlotte's eyes that, though she did not at once agree to this, her love for him was such that she would marry him in a week if he so willed it. He rejoiced in these symptoms of her great love, and the rejoicings of last night had risen in a fuller tide this morning. Yes, it was the rule of life, the one everlasting law, the old must suffer and die, the young must live and rejoice. Yes; Hinton felt very deep sympathy for Mr. Harman last night, but this morning, his happiness making him more self-absorbed than really selfish, he knew that the old man's dying and suffering state could not take one iota from his present delight.

What then perplexed him? What made him stand aloof from the radiant guest, Happiness, for a brief half hour? That story of Charlotte's; it would come back to him; he wished now he had never heard it. For having heard he could not forget: he could not exorcise this grim Thing which stood side by side with Happiness in his sunny room. The fact was, his acute mind took in the true bearings of the case far more clearly than Charlotte had done. He felt sure that Mrs. Home had been wronged. He felt equally sure that, if he looked into the case, it lay in his power to right her.

Over and over he saw her pale, sad face, and he hoped it was not going to haunt him. The tale in his mind lay all in Mrs. Home's favor, all against John and Jasper Harman. Was it likely that their wealthy father would do anything so monstrously unjust as to leave all his money to his two eldest sons with whom he had previously quarrelled, and nothing, nothing at all to his young wife and infant daughter? It would be a meaningless piece of injustice, unlike all that he had gleaned of the previous character of the old man. As to John and Jasper, and their conduct in the affair, that too was difficult to fathom. Jasper had spent the greater portion of his life in Australia. Of his character Hinton knew little; that little he felt was repugnant to him. But John Harman—no man in the City bore a higher character for uprightness, for integrity, for honor. John Harman was respected and loved by all who knew him.

Yes, yes: Hinton felt that all this was possible, but also he knew that never in their close intercourse had he been able to fathom John Harman. A shadow rested over the wealthy and prosperous merchant. Never until now had Hinton even approached the cause; but now, now it seemed to him that he was grappling with the impenetrable mystery, that face to face he was looking at the long and successfully hidden sin. Strong man as he was, he trembled as this fear came over him. Whatever the cause, whatever the sudden and swift temptation, he felt an ever-growing conviction that long ago John and Jasper Harman had robbed the widow and fatherless. Feeling this, being almost sure of this, how then should he act? He knew very well what he could do. He could go to Somerset House and see the will of old Mr. Harman. It was very unlikely that a forged will had been attempted. It was, he felt sure, far, far more probable that the real will was left untampered with, that the deed of injustice had been done in the hope that no one who knew anything about such matters would ever inquire into it.

Hinton could go that very day and set his mind at rest. Why then did he hesitate? Ah! he knew but too well. Never and nearer came that shining form of Happiness. If he did this thing, and found his suspicions correct, as he feared much he should, if he then acted upon this knowledge and gave Mrs. Home her own again, happiness would fly from him, it might be for ever. To give Mrs. Home her rights he must cruelly expose a dying old man. Such a shock, coming now, would most probably kill John Harman. After bringing her father to such shame and dishonor, would Charlotte ever consent to be his wife? would she not indeed in very horror fly from his presence? What was Mrs. Home to him, that he should ruin his whole life for her sake, that he should give up wife, wealth, and fame? Nothing—a complete stranger. Why should he, for her sake, pain and make miserable those he loved, above all break the heart of the woman who was more precious to him than all the rest of the world? He felt he could not do this thing. He must take that bright winged happiness and let justice have her day when she could. Some other hand must inflict the blow, it could not be his hand. He was sorry now that he had taken Mrs. Home's lodgings. But after all what did it signify? He had taken them for a month, he could go there for that short period. His quickly approaching marriage would make it necessary for him to leave very soon after, and he would try amongst his many friends to find her a more permanent tenant, for though he had now quite made up his mind to let matters alone, his heart ached for this woman. Yes, he would, if possible, help her in little ways, though it would be impossible for his hand to be the one to give her her own again. Having come to this determination he went out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"SUGAR AND SPICE AND ALL THAT'S NICE."

Perhaps for one day Charlotte Harman was selfish in her happiness. But when she awoke on the morning after her interview with her father, her finely balanced nature had quite recovered its equilibrium. She was a woman whom circumstances could make very noble; all her leanings were towards the good, she had hitherto been unassailed by temptation, untouched by care. All her life the beautiful and bright things of this world had been showered at her feet. She had the friends whom rich, amiable, and handsome girls usually make. She had the devotion of a most loving father. John Hinton met her and loved her. She responded to his love with her full heart. Another father might have objected to her giving herself to this man, who in the fashionable world's opinion was nothing. But Harman only insisted on a slight delay to their marriage, none whatever to their engagement, and now, after scarcely a year of waiting, the embargo was withdrawn, their wedding-day was fixed, was close at hand. The twentieth of April (Charlotte knew she should not oppose the twentieth of April) was not quite two months away. Very light was her heart when she awoke to this happy fact. Happiness, too, was standing by her bedside, and she made no scruple to press the radiant creature to her heart of hearts. But Charlotte's was too fine a nature to be spoiled by prosperity. Independent of her wealth, she must always have been a favorite. Her heart was frank and generous; she was thoughtful for others, she was most truly unselfish. Charlotte was a favorite with the servants; her maid worshipped her. She was a just creature, and had read too much on social reform to give away indiscriminately and without thought; but where her sense of justice was really satisfied, she could give with a royal hand, and there were many poor whom Ward, her maid, knew, who, rising up, called Miss Harman blessed.

Charlotte had taken a great interest in Mrs. Home. Her face attracted, her manner won, before ever her story touched the heart of this young woman. The greatest pain Charlotte had ever gone through in her life had followed the recital of Mrs. Home's tale, a terrible foreboding the awful

shadow which points to wrong done, to sin committed by her best and dearest, had come near and touched her. Uncle Jasper, with his clever and experienced hand, had driven that shadow away, and in her first feeling of intense thankfulness and relief, she had almost disliked the woman who had come to her with so cruel a tale. All yesterday, in the midst of her own happiness, she had endeavored to shut Mrs. Home from her thoughts; but this morning, more calm herself, the remembrance of the poor, pale, and struggling mother rose up again fresh and vivid within her heart. It is true Mrs. Home believed a lie, a cruel and dreadful lie; but none the less for this was she to be pitied, none the less for this must she be helped. Mrs. Home was Charlotte's near relation, she could not suffer her to want. As she lay in bed, she reflected with great thankfulness that John Hinton had said, on hearing the tale, how manifestly it would be his and her duty to help this poor mother. Yes, by and by they would give her enough to raise her above all want, but Charlotte felt she could not wait for that distant time. She must succor Mrs. Home at once. Her father had said last night that, if she married in two months, there would be no time for her to finish her book. He was right; she must give up the book; she would devote this morning to Mrs. Home.

She rose with her determination formed and went downstairs. As usual her father was waiting for her, as usual he came up and kissed her; and as they had done every morning for so many years, they sat down opposite each other to breakfast. Charlotte longed to speak to her father about Mrs. Home, but he looked, even to her inexperienced eyes, very ill and haggard, and she remembered her uncle's words and refrained from the subject.

"You seem so feeble, father, had you not better go into town in the carriage this morning?" she asked, as he rose from his chair.

To her surprise he assented, even confessed that he had already ordered the carriage. He had never to her knowledge done such a thing before, and little as she knew of real illness, nothing as she knew of danger and death, she felt a sharp pain at her heart as she watched him driving away. The pain, however, was but momentary, lost in the pressing interests of other thoughts. Before eleven o'clock she had started off to see Mrs. Home.

Now it was by no means her intention to go to this newly found relation empty handed. Mrs. Home might or might not be willing to receive a gift of money, but Charlotte hoped so to be able to convey it to her as to save her pride from being too greatly hurt.

Charlotte had a small banking account of her own. She drove now straight to her bank in the city, and drawing fifty pounds in one note slipped it into her purse. From the bank she went to a children's West End shop. She there chose a lovely velvet frock for the fair-haired little Daisy, two embroidered white dresses for the baby; and going a little farther she bought a smart tailor suit for the eldest boy. After buying the pretty clothes she visited a toy shop, where she loaded herself with toys; then a cake shop to purchase cakes and other goodies; and having at last exhausted her resources; she desired the coachman to drive to Mrs. Home's address in Kentish Town. She arrived, after a drive of a little over half an hour, to find the lady whom she had come to seek, out. The dirty little maid stared with full round eyes at the beautiful young lady and at the handsome carriage, and declared she did not know when her missis would be in.

For a moment Charlotte felt foiled; but she was excited now—she could not go away, laden as she was with fairy gifts, without making some effort to dispense these blessings.

"I am a relation of Mrs. Home's and I want to see the children. Are the children in?" she asked of the little maid.

Rounder and rounder grew that small domestic's eyes.

"They can't be hout without me," she volunteered; "ain't I the nuss and maid-of-all work? Yes, the children is hin."

Then she opened the dining-room door, and Charlotte, first flying to the carriage and returning laden with brown paper parcels, followed her into the little parlor.

The maid, on the swift wings of excitement, flew upstairs. There was the quick patter of eager little feet, and in a very few moments the door was pushed open and a boy and girl entered. Charlotte recognized them at a glance. They were the very handsome little pair whose acquaintance she had made yesterday in Regent's Park. The girl hung back a trifle shyly, but the boy, just saying to his sister, "The pretty lady," came up, and raised his lips for a kiss.

"You don't think me rude?" he said; "you don't mind kissing me, do you."

"I love to kiss you; I am your own cousin," said Charlotte.

"My own cousin! Then I may sit on your knee. Daisy, come here—the pretty lady is our own cousin."

On hearing this, Daisy too advanced. Neither child had any idea what the word cousin meant, but it seemed to include proprietorship. They stroked Charlotte's furs, and both pairs of lips were raised again and again for many kisses. In the midst of this scene entered the little maid with the baby. Pretty as Daisy and Harold were, they were nothing to the baby; this baby of eight months had a most ethereal and lovely face.

"Oh, you beauty! you darling!" said Charlotte, as she clasped the little creature in her arms, and

the baby, too young to be shy, allowed her to kiss him repeatedly.

"What a lot of lumber!" said Daisy, touching the brown-paper parcels.

This little child's speech brought Charlotte back to the fact of her cakes and toys. Giving baby to his small nurse, she opened her treasures. Daisy received her doll with a kind of awed rapture, Harold rattled his drum and blew his trumpet in a way most distracting to any weak nerves within reasonable distance, and the baby sucked some rather unwholesome sweets. No child thought of thanking their benefactor, but flushed cheeks, bright eyes, eager little voices, were thanks louder and more eloquent than words.

"I want to see your mother; when will she be in?" asked Charlotte, after a little quiet had been restored.

"Not all day," answered Harold. "Mother has gone with father to nurse a poor sick lady; she won't be back till quite night."

"She said we were to be very good; we are, aren't we?" said Daisy.

"Yes, darling; you are quite perfect," replied the inexperienced Charlotte.

"Did our mother ask you to come and play with us and give us lovely things?" demanded Harold.

"She does not know I am here, my dear little boy; but now, if you will show me where I can get a sheet of paper, I will just write your mother a little note."

The paper was quickly found, and Charlotte sat down, a boy and girl on each side. It was not easy to say much under such circumstances, so the words in the little note were few.

"You will give this to your mother when she comes in. See!—I will put it on the mantelpiece," she said to Harold; "and you must not touch these parcels until mother opens them herself. Yes; I will come again. Now, good-by." Her bonnet was decidedly crooked as she stepped into the carriage, her jacket was also much crumpled; but there was a very sweet feel of little arms still round her neck, and she touched her hair and cheeks with satisfaction, for they had been honored by many child kisses.

"I believe she's just a fairy godmother," said Harold, as he watched the carriage rolling away.

"I never seed the like in hall my born days," remarked the small maid-of-all-work.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE PRETTY LADY."

"Mother, mother, mother!"

"And look!—oh, do look at what I have got!" were the words that greeted Mrs. Home, when, very tired, after a day of hard nursing with one of her husband's sick parishioners, she came back.

The children ought to have been in bed, the baby fast asleep, the little parlor-table tidily laid for tea: instead of which, the baby wailed unceasingly up in the distant nursery, and Harold and Daisy, having nearly finished Charlotte's sweeties, and made themselves very uncomfortable by repeated attacks on the rich plum-cake, were now, with very flushed cheeks, alternately playing with their toys and poking their small fingers into the still unopened brown-paper parcels. They had positively refused to go up to the nursery, and, though the gas was lit and the blinds were pulled down, the spirit of disorder had most manifestly got into the little parlor.

"Oh, mother!—what *do* you think? The lovely lady!—the lady we met in the park yesterday!—she has been, and she brought us *lots* of things—toys, and sweeties, and cakes, and—oh, mother, do look!"

Daisy presented her doll, and Harold blew some very shrill blasts from his trumpet right up into his mother's eyes.

"My dear children," said Mrs. Home, "whom do you mean? where did you get all these things? who has come here? Why aren't you both in bed? It is long past your usual hour."

This string of questions met with an unintelligible chorus of replies, in which the words "pretty lady," "Regent's Park," "father knew her," "we *had* to sit up," so completely puzzled Mrs. Home, that had not her eyes suddenly rested on the little note waiting for her on the mantelpiece she would have been afraid her children had taken leave of their senses.

"Oh, yes; she told us to give you that," said Harold when he saw his mother take it up.

I have said the note was very short. Charlotte Home read it in a moment.

"Mother, mother! what does she tell you, and what are in the other parcels? She said we weren't to open them until you came home. Oh, *do* tell us what she said, and let us see the rest of the pretty things!"

"Do, do mother; we have been so patient 'bout it!" repeated little Daisy.

Harold now ran for the largest of the parcels, and raised it for his mother to take. Both children clung to her skirts. Mrs. Home put the large parcel on a shelf out of reach, then she put aside the hot and eager little hands. At last she spoke.

"My little children must have some more patience, for mother can tell them nothing more to-night. Yes, yes, the lady is very pretty and very kind, but we can talk no more about anything until the morning. Now, Harold and Daisy, come upstairs at once."

They were an obedient, well-trained little pair. They just looked at one another, and from each dimpled mouth came a short, impatient sigh; then they gave their hands to mother, and went gravely up to the nursery. Charlotte stayed with her children until they were undressed. She saw them comfortably washed, their baby prayers said, and each little head at rest on its pillow, then kissing the baby, who was also by this time fast asleep, she went softly downstairs.

Anne, the little maid, was flying about, trying to get the tea ready and some order restored, but when she saw her mistress she could not refrain from standing still to pour out her excited tale.

"Ef you please, 'em, it come on me hall on a 'eap. She come in that free and that bounteous, and seemed as if she could eat all the children up wid love; and she give 'em a lot, and left a lot more fur you, 'em. And when she wor goin' away she put half-a-crown in my hand. I never seed the like—never, 'em—never! She wor dressed as grand as Queen Victory herself, and she come in a carriage and two spanking hosses; and, please, 'em, I heard of her telling the children as she wos own cousin to you, 'em."

"Yes, I know the young lady," replied Mrs. Home. "She is, as you say, very nice and kind. But now, Anne, we must not talk any more. Your master won't be in for an hour, but I shan't wait tea for him; we will have some fresh made later. Please bring me in a cup at once, for I am very tired."

Anne gazed at her mistress in open-eyed astonishment. Any one—any one as poor as she well knew missis to be—who could take the fact of being cousin to so beautiful and rich a young lady with such coolness and apparent indifference quite passed Anne's powers of comprehension.

"It beats me holler—that it do!" she said to herself; then, with a start, she ran off to her kitchen.

Mrs. Home had taken her first cup of tea, and had even eaten a piece of bread and butter, before she again drew Charlotte Harman's little note out of her pocket. This is what her eyes had already briefly glanced over:—

> Dear Friend and Sister—for you must let me call you so—I have come to see you, and finding you out asked to see your children. I have lost my heart to your beautiful and lovely children. They are very sweet! Your baby is more like an angel than any earthly creature my eyes have ever rested on. Charlotte, I brought your children a few toys, and one or two other little things. You won't be too proud to accept them. When I bought them I did not love your children, but I loved you. You are my near kinswoman. You won't take away the pleasure I felt when I bought those things. Dear Sister Charlotte, when shall we meet again? Send me a line, and I will come to you at any time. Yours,
>
> "Charlotte Harman."

It is to be regretted that Charlotte Home by no means received this sweet and loving little note in the spirit in which it was written. Her pale, thin face flushed, and her eyes burnt with an angry light. This burst of excited feeling was but the outcome of all she had undergone mentally since she had left Miss Harman's house a few days ago. She had said then, and truly, that she loved this young lady. The pride, the stately bearing, the very look of open frankness in Charlotte's eyes had warmed and touched her heart. She had not meant to tell to those ears, so unaccustomed to sin and shame, this tale of long-past wrong. It had been in a manner forced from her, and she had seen a flush of perplexity, then of horror, color the cheeks and fill the fine brave eyes. She had come away with her heart sympathies so moved by this girl, so touched, so shocked with what she herself had revealed, that she would almost rather, could her father's money now be hers, relinquish it, than cause any further pain or shame to Charlotte Harman.

She came home and confided what she had done to her husband. It is not too much to say that he was displeased—that he was much hurt. The Charlotte who in her too eagerness for money could so act was scarcely the Charlotte he had pictured to himself as his wife. Charlotte was lowered in the eyes of the unworldly man. But just because her husband was so unworldly, so unpractical, Charlotte's own more everyday nature began to reassert itself. She had really done no harm. She had but told a tale of wrong. Those who committed the wrong were the ones to blame. She, the sufferer—who could put sin at her door? Her sympathy for Charlotte grew less, her sorrow for herself and her children more. She felt more sure than ever that injustice had been committed—that she and her mother had been robbed; she seemed to read the fact in Charlotte Harman's innocent eyes, Charlotte, in spite of herself, even though her own father was the one accused, believed her—agreed with her.

All that night she spent in a sort of feverish dream, in which she saw herself wealthy, her husband happy, her children cared for as they ought to be. The ugly, ugly poverty of her life and her surroundings had all passed away like a dream that is told.

She got up in a state of excitement and expectation, for what might not Charlotte Harman do for her? She would tell the tale to her father, and that father, seeing that his sin was found out, would restore her to her rights. Of course, this must be the natural consequence. Charlotte was not low and mean; she would see that she had her own again. Mrs. Home made no allowance for any subsequent event—for any influence other than her own being brought to bear on the young lady. All that day she watched the post; she watched for the possibility of a visit. Neither letter nor visit came, but Mrs. Home was not discouraged. That day was too soon to hear; she must wait with patience for the morrow.

On the morrow her husband, who had almost forgotten her story, asked her to come and help him in the care of a sick woman at some distance away. Charlotte was a capital sick-nurse, and had often before given similar aid to Mr. Home in parish work.

She went, spent her day away, and returned to find that Charlotte had come—that so far her dream was true. Yes, but only so far, for Charlotte had come, not in shame, but in the plenitude of a generous benefactor. She had come laden with gifts, and had gone away with the hearts of the children and the little maid. Charlotte Home felt a great wave of anger and pain stealing over her heart. In her pain and disappointment she was unjust.

"She is a coward after all. She dare not tell her father. She believes my tale, but she is not brave enough to see justice done to me and mine; so she tries to make up for it; she tries to salve her conscience and bribe me with gifts—gifts and flattery. I will have none of it. My rights—my true and just rights, or nothing! These parcels shall go back unopened to-morrow." She rose from her seat, and put them all tidily away on a side-table. She had scarcely done so before her husband's latch-key was heard in the hall-door. He came in with the weary look which was habitual to his thin face. "Oh, Angus, how badly you do want your tea!" said the poor wife. She was almost alarmed at her husband's pallor, and forgot Charlotte while attending to his comfort.

"What are those parcels, Lottie?" he said, noticing the heaped-up things on the side-table.

"Never mind. Eat your supper first," she said to him.

"I can eat, and yet know what is in them. They give quite a Christmas and festive character to the place. And what is that I see lying on that chair—a new doll for Daisy? Why, has my careful little woman been so extravagant as to buy the child another doll?"

Mr. Home smiled as he spoke. His wife looked at him gravely. She picked up the very pretty doll and laid it with the other parcels on the side-table.

"I will tell you about the parcels and the doll if you wish it," she answered. "Miss Harman called when I was out, and brought cakes, and sweeties, and toys to the children. She also brought those parcels. I do not know what they contain, for I have not opened them. And she left a note for me. I cannot help the sweeties and cakes, for Harold and Daisy have eaten them; but the toys and those parcels shall go back to-morrow."

Mrs. Home looked very proud and defiant as she spoke. Her husband glanced at her face; then, with a slight sigh, he pushed his supper aside.

"No, I am not hungry, dear. I am just a little overtired. May I see Miss Harman's note?"

Charlotte put it at once into his hand.

He read it carefully once—twice. His own spirit was very loving and Christ-like; consequently the real love and true human feeling in the little note touched him.

"Lottie," he said, as he gave it back to his wife, "why do you want to pain that sweet creature?"

Mrs. Home took the note, and flung it into the fire.

"There!" she said, an angry spot on each cheek. "She and hers have injured me and mine. I don't want gifts from her. I want my rights!"

To this burst of excited feeling Mr. Home answered nothing. After a moment or two of silence he rang the bell, and when Anne appeared asked her to take away the tea-things. After this followed an hour of perfect quiet. Mrs. Home took out her great basket of mending. Mr. Home sat still, and apparently idle, by the fire. After a time he left the room to go for a moment to his own. Passing the nursery, he heard a little movement, and, entering softly, saw Harold sitting up in his little cot.

"Father, is that you?" he called through the semi-light.

"Yes, my boy. Is anything the matter? Why are you not asleep?"

"I couldn't, father dear; I'm so longing for to-morrow. I want to blow my new trumpet again, and to see the rest of the brown-paper parcels. Father, do come over to me for a moment."

Mr. Home came, and put his arm round the little neck.

"Did mother tell you that *our* pretty lady came to-day, and brought such a splendid lot of things?"

"Whose pretty lady, my boy?"

"*Ours*, father—the lady you, and I, and Daisy, and baby met in the park yesterday. You said it was

rude to kiss her, and *she* did not mind. She gave me dozens and dozens of kisses to-day."

"She was very kind to you," said Mr. Home. Then, bidding the child lie down and sleep, he left him and went on to his own room. He was going to his room with a purpose. That purpose was quickened into intensity by little Harold's words.

That frank, fearless, sweet-looking girl was Miss Harman! That letter was, therefore, not to be wondered at. It was the kind of letter he would have expected such a woman to write. What was the matter with his Lottie?

In his perplexity he knelt down; he remained upon his knees for about ten minutes, then he returned to the little parlor. The answer to his earnest prayer was given to him almost directly. His wife was no longer proud and cold. She looked up the moment he entered, and said,—

"You are angry with me, Angus."

"No, my darling," he answered, "not angry, but very sorry for you."

"You must not be sorry for me. You have anxieties enough. I must not add to them. Not all the Miss Harmans that ever breathe shall bring a cloud between you and me. Angus, may I put out the gas and then sit close to you? You shall talk me out of this feeling, for I do feel bad."

"I will talk all night if it makes you better, my own Lottie. Now, what is troubling you?"

"In the first instance, you don't seem to believe this story about our money."

"I neither believe it, nor the reverse—I simply don't let it trouble me."

"But, Angus, that seems a little hard; for if the money was left to me by my father I ought to have it. Think what a difference it would make to us all—you, and me, and the children?"

"We should be rich instead of poor. It would make that difference, certainly."

"Angus, you talk as if this difference was nothing."

"Nothing! It is not quite nothing; but I confess it does not weigh much with me."

"If not for yourself, it might for the children's sakes; think what a difference money would make to our darlings."

"My dear wife, you quite forgot when speaking so, that they are God's little children as well as ours. He has said that not a sparrow falls without His loving knowledge. Is it likely when that is so, that He will see His children and ours either gain or suffer from such a paltry thing as money?"

"Then you will do nothing to get back our own?"

"If you mean that I will go to law on the chance of our receiving some money which may have been left to us, certainly I will not. The fact is, Lottie—you may think me very eccentric—but I cannot move in this matter. It seems to me to be entirely God's matter, not ours. If Mr. Harman has committed the dreadful sin you impute to him, God must bring it home to him. Before that poor man who for years has hidden such a sin in his heart, and lived such a life before his fellow-men, is fit to go back to the arms of His father, he must suffer dreadfully. I pray, from my heart I pray, that if he committed the sin he may have the suffering, for there is no other road to the Father; but I cannot pray that this awful suffering may be sent to give us a better house, and our children finer clothes, and that richer food may be put on our table."

Mrs. Home was silent for a moment, then she said,—

"Angus, forgive me, I did not look at it in that light."

"No, my dearest, and because I so pity her, if her father really is guilty, I do not want you unnecessarily to pain Miss Harman. You remember my telling you of that fine girl I met in Regent's Park yesterday, the girl who was so kind and nice to our children. I have just been up with Harold, and he tells me that your Miss Harman and his pretty lady are one and the same."

"Is that really so?" answered Mrs. Home. "Yes. I know that Charlotte Harman is very attractive. Did I not tell you, Angus, that she had won my own heart? But I confess when I saw those gifts and read her note I felt angry. I thought after hearing my tale she should have done more. These presents seemed to me in the light of a bribe."

"Charlotte!"

"Ah! I know you are shocked. You cannot see the thing with my eyes; that is how they really looked to me."

"Then, my dear wife, may I give you a piece of advice?"

"That is what I am hungering for, Angus."

"Tell the whole story, as frankly—more frankly than you have told it to me, to God to-night. Lay the whole matter in the loving hands of your Father, then, Charlotte; after so praying, if in the morning you still think Miss Harman was actuated by so mean a spirit, treat her as she deserves. With your own hands deal the punishment to her, send everything back."

Mrs. Home's face flushed very brightly, and she lowered her eyes to prevent her husband seeing the look of shame which filled them. The result of this conversation was the following note written the next morning to Miss Harman.

> I could not have thanked you last night for what you have done, but I can to-day. You have won my children's little hearts. Be thankful that you have made my dear little ones so happy. You ask to see me again, Miss Harman. I do not think I can come to you, and I don't ask you to come here. Still I will see you; name some afternoon to meet me in Regent's Park and I will be there.

Yours,
CHARLOTTE HOME.

Thus the gifts were kept, and the mother tried to pray away a certain soreness which would remain notwithstanding all her husband's words. She was human after all, however, and Charlotte Harman might have been rewarded had she seen her face the following Sunday morning when she brought her pretty children down to their father to inspect them in their new clothes.

Harold went to church that morning, with his mother, in a very picturesque hat; but no one suspected quite how much it was worth, not even those jealous mothers who saw it and remarked upon it, and wondered who had left Mrs. Home a legacy, for stowed carefully away under the lining was Charlotte Harman's bright, crisp, fifty-pound note.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO CHARLOTTES.

It was a week after; the very day, in fact, on which Hinton was to give up his present most comfortable quarters for the chances and changes of Mrs. Home's poor little dwelling. That anxious young wife and mother, having completed her usual morning duties, set off to Regent's Park to meet Miss Harman. It was nearly March now, and the days, even in the afternoon, were stretching, and though it was turning cold the feeling of coming spring was more decidedly getting into the air.

Mrs. Home had told her children that she was going to meet their pretty lady, and Harold had begged hard to come too. His mother would have taken him, but he had a cold, and looked heavy, so she started off for her long walk alone. Won by her husband's gentler and more Christ-like spirit, Mrs. Home had written to Miss Harman to propose this meeting; but in agreeing to an interview with her kinswoman she had effected a compromise with her own feelings. She would neither go to her nor ask her to come to the little house in Kentish Town. The fact was she wanted to meet this young woman on some neutral ground. There were certain unwritten, but still most stringent, laws of courtesy which each must observe in her own home to the other. Charlotte Home intended, as she went to meet Miss Harman on this day of early spring, that very plain words indeed should pass between them.

By this it will be seen that she was still very far behind her husband, and that much of a sore and angry sensation was still lingering in her heart.

"Miss Harman will, of course, keep me waiting," she said to herself, as she entered the park, and walked quickly towards the certain part where they had agreed to meet. She gave a slight start therefore, when she saw that young woman slowly pacing up and down, with the very quiet and meditative air of one who had been doing so for some little time. Miss Harman was dressed with almost studied plainness and simplicity. All the rich furs which the children had admired were put away. When she saw Mrs. Home she quickened her slow steps into almost a run of welcome, and clasped her toil-worn and badly gloved hands in both her own.

"How glad I am to see you! You did not hurry, I hope. You are quite out of breath. Why did you walk so fast?"

"I did not walk fast until I saw you under the trees, Miss Harman. I thought I should have time enough, for I imagined I should have to wait for you."

"What an unreasonable thing to suppose of me! I am the idle one, you the busy. No: I respect wives and mothers too much to treat them in that fashion." Miss Harman smiled as she spoke.

Mrs. Home did not outwardly respond to the smile, though the gracious bearing, the loving, sweet face were beginning very slowly to effect a thaw, for some hard little ice lumps in her heart were melting. The immediate effect of this was, however, so strong a desire to cry that, to steel herself against these untimely tears, she became in manner harder than ever.

"And now what shall we do?" said Charlotte Harman. "The carriage is waiting for us at the next gate; shall we go for a drive, or shall we walk about here?"

"I would rather walk here," said Mrs. Home.

"Very well. Charlotte, I am glad to see you. And how are your children?"

"Harold has a cold. The other two are very well."

"I never saw sweeter children in my life. And do you know I met your husband? He and your children both spoke to me in the park. It was the day before I came to your house. Mr. Home gave me a very short sermon to think over. I shall never forget it."

"He saw you and liked you," answered Mrs. Home. "He told me of that meeting."

"And I want another meeting. Such a man as that has never come into my life before. I want to see more of him. Charlotte, why did you propose that we should meet here? Why not in my house, or in yours? I wanted to come to you again. I was much disappointed when I got your note."

"I am sorry to have disappointed you; but I thought it best that we should meet here."

"But why? I don't understand."

"They say that rich people are obtuse. I did not want to see your riches, nor for you to behold the poverty of my land."

"Charlotte!"

"Please don't think me very hard, but I would rather you did not say Charlotte."

"You would rather I did not say Charlotte?"

Two large tears of surprise and pain filled Miss Harman's gray eyes. But such a great flood of weeping was so near the surface with the other woman that she dared not look at her.

"I would rather you did not say Charlotte," she repeated, "for we call those whom we love and are friendly with by their Christian names."

"I thought you loved me. You said so. You can't take back your own words."

"I don't want to. I do love you in my heart. I feel I could love you devotedly; but for all that we can never be friends."

Miss Harman was silent for a moment or two, then she said slowly, but with growing passion in her voice, "Ah! you are thinking of that wretched money. I thought love ranked higher than gold all the world over."

"So it does, or appears to do, for those who all their lives have had plenty; but it is just possible, just possible, I say, that those who are poor, poor enough to know what hunger and cold mean, and have seen their dearest wanting the comforts that money can buy, it is possible that such people may prefer their money rights to the profession of empty love."

"Empty love!" repeated Miss Harman. The words stung her. She was growing angry, and the anger became this stately creature well. With cheeks and eyes both glowing she turned to her companion. "If you and I are not to part at once, and never meet again, there must be very plain words between us. Shall I speak those words?" she asked.

"I came here that our words might be very plain," answered Mrs. Home.

"They shall be," said Charlotte Harman.

They were in a very quiet part of the park. Even the nurses and children were out of sight. Now they ceased walking, and turned and faced each other.

They were both tall, and both the poor and the rich young woman had considerable dignity of bearing; but Charlotte Home was now the composed one. Charlotte Harman felt herself quivering with suppressed anger. Injustice was being dealt out to her, and injustice to the child of affluence and luxury was a new sensation.

"You came to me the other day," she began, "I had never seen you before, never before in all my life ever heard your name. You, however, knew me, and you told me a story. It was a painful and very strange story. It made you not only my very nearest kin, but also made you the victim of a great wrong. The wrong was a large one, and the victim was to be pitied; but the sting of it all lay, to me, not in either of the facts, but in this, that you gave me to understand that he who had dealt you such a blow was—my father. My father, one of the most noble, upright, and righteous of men, you made out to me, to me, his only child, to be no better than a common thief. I did not turn you from my doors for your base words. I pitied you. In spite of myself I liked you; in spite of myself I *believed* you. You went away, and in the agony of mind which followed during the next few hours I could have gladly fled for ever from the sight of all the wide world. I had been the very happiest of women. You came. You went. I was one of the most miserable. I am engaged to be married, and the man I am engaged to came into the room. I felt guilty before him. I could not raise my eyes to his, for, again I tell you, I believed your tale, and my father's bitter shame was mine. I could not rest. Happen what would I must learn the truth at once. I have an uncle, my father's brother; he must know all. I sent my lover away and went to this uncle. I asked to have an interview with him, and in that interview I told him all you had told to me. He was not surprised. He acknowledged at once the true and real relationship between us; but he also explained away the base doubts you had put into my head. My father, my own beloved father, is all, and more than all, I have ever thought him. He would scorn to be unjust, to rob any one. You

have been unfortunate; you have been treated cruelly; but the injustice, the cruelty have been penetrated by one long years now in his grave. In short, your father has been the wicked man, not mine."

Here Mrs. Home tried to speak, but Miss Harman held up her hand.

"You must hear me out," she said. "I am convinced, but I do not expect you to be. After my uncle had done speaking, and I had time to realize all the relief those words of his had given me, I said, still an injustice has been done. We have no right to our wealth while she suffers from such poverty. Be my grandfather's will what it may, we must alter it. We must so act as if he had left money to his youngest child. My uncle agreed with me; perhaps not so fully as I could wish, still he did agree; but he made one proviso. My father is ill, I fear. I fear he is very ill. The one dark cloud hanging over his whole life lay in those years when he was estranged from his own father. To speak of you I must bring back those years to his memory. Any excitement is bad for him now. My uncle said, 'Wait until your father is better, then we will do something for Mrs. Home.' To this I agreed. Was I very unreasonable to agree to this delay for my father's sake?"

Here Charlotte Harman paused and looked straight at her companion. Mrs. Home's full gaze met hers. Again, the innocent candor of the one pair of eyes appealed straight to the heart lying beneath the other. Unconvinced she was still. Still to her, her own story held good: but she was softened, and she held out her hand.

"There is no unreasonableness in *you*, Charlotte," she said.

"Ah! then you will call me Charlotte?" said the other, her face glowing with delight.

"I call you so now. I won't answer for the future."

"We will accept the pleasant present. I don't fear the future. I shall win your whole heart yet. Now let us drop all disagreeables and talk about those we both love. Charlotte, what a baby you have got! Your baby must be an angel to you."

"All my children are that to me. When I look at them I think God has sent to me three angels to dwell with me."

"Ah! what a happy thought, and what a happy woman. Then your husband, he must be like the archangel Gabriel, so just, so righteous, so noble. I love him already: but I think I should be a little afraid of him. He is so—so very unearthly. Now you, Mrs. Home, let me tell you, are very earthly, very human indeed."

Mrs. Home smiled, for this praise of her best beloved could not but be pleasant to her. She told Miss Harman a little more about her husband and her children, and Miss Harman listened with that appreciation which is the sweetest flattery in the world. After a time she said,—

"I am not going to marry any one the least bit unearthly, but I see you are a model wife, and I want to be likewise. For—did I not tell you?—I am to be married in exactly two months from now."

"Are you really? Are you indeed?"

Was it possible after this piece of confidence for these two young women not to be friends?

Charlotte Home, though so poor, felt suddenly, in experience, in all true womanly knowledge, rich beside her companion. Charlotte Harman, for all her five and twenty years, was but a child beside this earnest wife and mother.

They talked; the one relating her happy experience, the other listening, as though on her wedding-day she was certainly to step into the land of Beulah. It was the old, old story, repeated again, as those two paced up and down in the gray March afternoon. When at last they parted there was no need to say that they were friends.

And yet as she hurried home the poor Charlotte could not help reflecting that whatever her cause she had done nothing for it. Charlotte Harman might be very sweet. It might be impossible not to admire her, to love her, to take her to her heart of hearts. But would that love bring back her just rights? would that help her children by and by? She reached her hall door to find her husband standing there.

"Lottie, where have you been? I waited for you, for I did not like to go out and leave him. Harold is ill, and the doctor has just left."

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

For many days after that interview in Regent's Park, it seemed that one of the three, who made the little house in Kentish Town so truly like heaven, was to be an angel indeed. Harold's supposed cold had turned to scarlet fever, and the doctor feared that Harold would die.

Immediately after her interview with Charlotte Harman, Mrs. Home went upstairs to learn from the grave lips of the medical man what ailed her boy, and what a hard fight for life or death he had before him. She was a brave woman, and whatever anguish might lie underneath, no tears filled her eyes as she looked at his flushed face. When the doctor had gone, she stole softly from the sick-room, and going to the drawing-room where Hinton was already in possession, she tapped at the door.

To his "Come in," she entered at once, and said abruptly without preface,—

"I hope you have unpacked nothing. I must ask you to go away at once."

She had her bonnet still on, and, but for the pallor of her face, she looked cold, even unmoved.

"I have everything unpacked, and I don't want to go. Why should I?" demanded Hinton, in some surprise.

"My eldest boy has scarlet fever. The other two will probably take it. You must on no account stay here; you must leave to-night if you wish to escape infection."

In an instant Hinton was by her side.

"Your boy has scarlet fever?" he repeated. "I know something of scarlet fever. He must instantly be moved to an airy bedroom. The best bedroom in the house is mine. Your boy must sleep in my bedroom to-night."

"It is a good thought," said Mrs. Home. "Thank you for suggesting it—I will move him down at once; the bed is well aired, and the sheets are fresh and clean. I will have him moved whenever you can go."

She was leaving the room when Hinton followed her.

"I said nothing about going. I don't mean to. I can have a blanket and sleep on the sofa. I am not going away, Mrs. Home."

"Mr. Hinton, have you no one you care for? Why do you run this risk."

"I have some one I care for very much indeed; but I run no risk. I had scarlet fever long ago. In any case I have no fear of infection. Now I know your husband is out; let me go upstairs and help you bring down the little fellow."

"God bless you," said the wife and mother. Her eyes were beautiful as she raised them to the face of this good Samaritan.

The little patient was moved to the large and comfortable room, and Hinton found himself in the position of good angel to this poor family. He had never supposed himself capable of taking such a post with regard to any one; but the thing seemed thrust upon him. An obvious duty had come into his life, and he never even for the briefest instant dreamed of shirking it. He was a man without physical fear. The hardships of life, the roughing of poverty were not worth a passing thought of annoyance; but there was one little act of self-denial which he must now exercise; and it is to be owned that he felt it with a heart-pang. He had never told Charlotte that he was going to live in the house with Mrs. Home. He had not meant to keep this fact a secret from her, but there was still a soreness over him when he thought of this young woman which prevented her name coming readily to his lips. On this first night in his new abode he sat down to write to his promised wife; but neither now did he give his address, nor tell his landlady's name. He had an obvious reason, however, now for his conduct.

This was what Charlotte received from her lover on the following morning,—

> "My Darling,—Such a strange thing has happened; but one which, thank God, as far as I am concerned, need not cause you the least alarm. I moved from my old lodgings to-day and went a little further into the country. I had just unpacked my belongings and was expecting some tea, for I was hot and thirsty, when my landlady came in and told me that her eldest child is taken very ill with scarlet fever. She has other children, and fears the infection will spread. She is a very poor woman, but is one of those who in their bearing and manner, you, Charlotte, would call noble. She wanted me to leave at once, but this, Charlotte, I could not do. I am staying here, and will give her what little help lies in my power. You know there is no fear for me, for I had the complaint long ago. But, dearest, there is just one thing that is hard. Until this little child is better, I must not see you. You have not had this fever, Charlotte, and for you, for my own sake, and your father's sake, I must run no risk. I will write to you every day, or as much oftener as you wish, for I can disinfect my paper; but I will not go to Prince's Gate at present."
>
> "Ever, my own true love,
> "Yours most faithfully,
> "John Hinton."

This letter was posted that very night, but Hinton did not put his new address on it; he meant

Charlotte now for prudential reasons to write to his chambers. He returned to his lodgings, and for many weary and anxious nights to come shared their watch with Mr. and Mrs. Home. So quietly, so absolutely had this young man stepped into his office, that the father and mother did not think of refusing his services. He was a good nurse, as truly tender-hearted and brave men almost always are. The sick child liked his touch. The knowledge of his presence was pleasant. When nothing else soothed him, he would lie quiet if Hinton held his little hot hand in his.

One evening, opening his bright feverish eyes, he fixed them full on Hinton's face and said slowly and earnestly,—

"I did kiss that pretty lady."

"He means a lady whom he met in the Park; a Miss Harman, who came here and brought him toys," explained Mrs. Home.

"Yes, isn't she a pretty lady?" repeated little Harold.

"Very pretty," answered Hinton, bending low over him.

The child smiled. It was a link between them. He again stole his hand into that of the young man. But as days wore on and the fever did not abate, the little life in that small frame began to grow feeble. From being an impossibility, it grew to be probable, then almost certain, that the little lad must die. Neither father nor mother seemed alive to the coming danger; but Hinton, loving less than they did, was not blinded. He had seen scarlet fever before, he knew something of its treatment; he doubted the proper course having ever been pursued here. One evening he followed the doctor from the sick-room.

"The child is very ill," he said.

"The child is so ill," answered the medical man, "that humanly speaking there is very little hope of his life."

"Good sir!" exclaimed Hinton, shocked at his fears being put into such plain language. "Don't you see that those parents' lives are bound up in the child's, and they know nothing? Why have you told them nothing? Only to-night his mother thought him better."

"The fever is nearly over, and in consequence the real danger beginning; but I dare not tell the mother, she would break down. The father is of different stuff, he would bear it. But there is time enough for the mother to know when all is over."

"I call that cruel. Why don't you get in other advice?"

"My dear sir, they are very poor people. Think of the expense, and it would be of no use, no use whatever."

"Leave the expense to me, and also the chance of its doing any good. I should never have an easy moment if I let that little lad die without having done all in my power. Two heads are better than one. Do you object to consulting with Dr. H——?"

"By no means, Mr. Hinton. He is a noted authority on such cases."

"Then be here in an hour from now, doctor, and you shall meet him."

Away flew Hinton, and within the specified time the great authority on such cases was standing by little Harold's bedside.

"The fever is over, but the child is sinking from exhaustion. Give him a glass of champagne instantly," were the first directions given by the great man.

Hinton returned with a bottle of the best his money could purchase in ten minutes.

A tablespoonful was given to the child. He opened his eyes and seemed revived.

"Ah! that is good. I will stay with the little fellow to-night," said Dr. H——. "You, madam," he added, looking at Mrs. Home, "are to go to bed. On no other condition do I stay."

Hinton and Dr. H—— shared that night's watch between them, and in the morning the little life was pronounced safe.

CHAPTER XXII.

EMPTY PURSES.

It was not until Harold's life was really safe that his mother realized how very nearly he had been taken from her. But for Hinton's timely interposition, and the arrival of Doctor H—— at the critical moment, the face she so loved might have been cold and still now, and the spirit have returned to God who gave it.

Looking at the little sleeper breathing in renewed health and life with each gentle inspiration,

such a rush of gratitude and over-powering emotion came over Mrs. Home that she was obliged to follow Hinton into his sitting-room. There she suddenly went down on her knees.

"God bless you," she said. "God most abundantly bless you for what you have done for me and mine. You are, except my husband, the most truly Christian man I ever met."

"Don't," said Hinton, moved and even shocked at her position. "I loved—I love the little lad. It is nothing, what we do for those we love."

"No; it is, as you express it, nothing to save a mother's heart from worse than breaking," answered Charlotte Home. "If ever you marry and have a son of your own, you will begin to understand what you have done for me. You will be thankful then to think of this day."

Then with a smile which an angel might have given him, the mother went away, and Hinton sat down to write to Charlotte. But he was much moved and excited by those earnest words of love and approval. He felt as though a laurel wreath had been placed on his head, and he wondered would his first brief, his first sense of legal triumph, be sweeter to him than the look in that mother's face this morning.

"And it was so easily won," he said to himself. "For who but a brute under the circumstances could have acted otherwise?"

In writing to Charlotte he told her all. It was a relief to pour out his heart to her, though of course he carefully kept back names.

By return of post he received her answer.

"I must do something for that mother. You will not let me come to her. But if I cannot and must not come, I can at least help with money. How much money shall I send you?"

To this Hinton answered,—

"None. She is a proud woman. She would not accept it."

As he put this second letter in the post, he felt that any money gift between these two Charlottes would be impossible. During little Harold's illness he had put away all thoughts of the possibility of Mrs. Home being entitled to any of his Charlotte's wealth. The near and likely approach of death had put far from his mind all ideas of money. But now, with the return of the usual routine of life in this small and humble house, came back to Hinton's mind the thoughts which had so sorely troubled him on the night on which Charlotte had told him Mrs. Home's story. For his own personal convenience and benefit he had put away these thoughts. He had decided that he could not move hand or foot in the matter. But in the very house with this woman, though he might so resolve not to act, he could not put the sense of the injustice done to her away from his heart. He pondered on it and grew uneasy as to the righteousness of his own conduct. As this uneasiness gathered strength, he even avoided Mrs. Home's presence. For the first time, too, in his life Hinton was beginning to realize what a very ugly thing poverty—particularly the poverty of the upper classes—really is. To make things easier for this family in their time of illness, he had insisted on having what meals he took in the house, in the room with Mr. and Mrs. Home. He would not, now that Harold was better, change this custom. But though he liked it, it brought him into direct contact with the small shifts necessary to make so slender a purse as their's cover their necessary expenses. Mr. Home noticed nothing; but Mrs. Home's thin face grew more and more worn, and Hinton's heart ached as he watched it. He felt more and more compunctions as to his own conduct. These feelings were to be quickened into activity by a very natural consequence which occurred just then.

Little Harold's life was spared, and neither Daisy nor the baby had taken the fever. So far all was well. Doctor H——, too, had ceased his visits, and the little invalid was left to the care of the first doctor who had been called in. Yes, up to a certain point Harold's progress towards recovery was all that could be satisfactory. But beyond that point he did not go. For a fortnight after the fever left him his progress towards recovery was rapid. Then came the sudden standstill. His appetite failed him, a cough came on, and a hectic flush in the pale little face. The child was pining for a change of air, and the father's and mother's purse had been already drained almost to emptiness by the expenses of the first illness. One day when Doctor Watson came and felt the feeble, too rapid pulse he looked grave. Mrs. Home followed him from the room.

"What ails my boy, doctor? He is making no progress, none whatever."

"Does he sleep enough?" asked Doctor Watson suddenly.

"Not well; he coughs and is restless."

"Ah! I am sorry he has got that cough. How is his appetite?"

"He does not fancy much food. He has quite turned against his beef-tea."

Doctor Watson was silent.

"What is wrong?" asked Mrs. Home, coming nearer and looking up into his face.

"Madam, there is nothing to alarm yourself with. Your boy has gone through a most severe illness; the natural consequences must follow. He wants change. He will be fit to travel by easy stages in a week at latest. I should recommend Torquay. It is mild and shielded from the spring

east winds. Take him to Torquay as soon as possible. Keep him there for a month, and he will return quite well."

"Suppose I cannot?"

"Ah! then——" with an expressive shrug of the shoulders and raising of the brows, "my advice is to take him if possible. I don't like that cough."

Doctor Watson turned away. He felt sorry enough, but he had more acute cases than little Harold Home's to trouble him, and he wisely resolved that to think about what could not be remedied, would but injure his own powers of working. Being a really kind-hearted man he said to himself, "I will make their bill as light as I can when I send it in." And then he forgot the poor curate's family until the time came round for his next visit. Meanwhile Mrs. Home stood still for a moment where he had left her, then went slowly to her own room.

"Mother, mother, I want you," called the weak, querulous voice of the sick child.

"Coming in a moment, darling," she said. But for that one moment, she felt she must be alone.

Locking her door she went down on her knees. Not a tear came to her eyes, not a word to her lips. There was an inward groan, expressing itself in some voiceless manner after this fashion,—

"My God, my God, must I go through the fiery furnace?" Then smoothing her hair, and forcing a smile back to her lips, she went back to her little son.

All that afternoon she sat with him, singing to him, telling him stories, playing with him. In the evening, however, she sought an opportunity to speak to her husband alone.

"Angus, you know how nearly we lost our boy a week ago?"

The curate paused, and looked at her earnestly, surprised at her look and manner.

"Yes, my dearest," he said. "But God was merciful."

"Oh! Angus," she said; and now relief came to her, for as she spoke she began to weep. "You are good, you are brave, you could have let him go. But for me—for me—it would have killed me. I should have died or gone mad!"

"Lottie dear—my darling, you are over-strung. The trial, the fiery trial, was not sent. Why dwell on what our loving Father has averted?"

"Oh, Angus! but has He—has He," then choking with pent-up emotion, she told what the doctor had said to-day, how necessary the expensive change was for the little life. "And we have no money," she said in conclusion, "our purse is very nearly empty."

"Very nearly empty indeed," answered Angus Home.

He was absolutely silent after this news, no longer attempting to comfort his wife.

"Angus, God is cruel if for the sake of wanting a little money our boy must die."

"Don't," said the curate—God was so precious to him that these words smote on him even now with a sense of agony—"don't," he repeated, and he raised his hand as though to motion away an evil spirit.

"He is cruel if He lets our boy die for want of money to save him," repeated the mother in her desperation.

"He won't do that, Lottie—He will never do that, there is not the least fear."

"Then how are we to get the money?"

"I don't know, I cannot think to-night. I will go up to Harold now."

He turned and left the room with slow steps. As he mounted the stairs his back was so bent, his face so gray and careworn, that though scarcely forty he looked like an old man.

This was Harold's one precious hour with his father, and the little fellow was sitting up in bed and expecting him.

"Father," he said, noticing the anxious look on his face, which was generally as serene and peaceful as the summer sea, "what is the matter? You are ill; are you going to have the scarlet fever too?"

"No, my dear, dear boy. I am quite well, quite well at least in body. I have a care on my mind that makes me look a little sad, but don't notice it, Harold, it will pass."

"*You* have a care on your mind!" said Harold in a tone of surprise. "I know mother often, often has, but I did not think you had cares, father."

"How can I help it, boy, sometimes?"

"I thought you gave your cares to God. I don't understand a bit how you manage it, but I remember quite well your telling mother that you gave your cares away to God."

The father turning round suddenly, stooped down and kissed the boy.

"Thank you, my son, for reminding me. Yes, I will give this care too to God, it shall not trouble me."

Then the two began to talk, and the son's little wasted hand was held in the father's. The father's face had recovered its serenity, and the little son, though he coughed continually, looked happy.

"Father," he said suddenly, "there's just one thing I'm sorry for."

"What's that, my boy?"

"There were a whole lot of other things, father; about my never having gone to live in the country, and those gypsy teas that mother told me of. You light a fire outside, you know, father, and boil the kettle on it, and have your tea in the woods and the fields. It must be just delicious. I was sorry about that, for I've never been to one, never *even* to one all my life long; and then there's the pretty lady—I do want to see my pretty lady once again. I was sorry about those things all day, but not now. 'Tisn't any of those things makes me so sorry now."

"What makes you sorry, Harold?"

"Father, I'm just a little bit jealous about Jesus. You see there's always such a lot of us little children dying and going to heaven, and He can't come for us all, so He has to send angels. Now I don't want an angel, I want Him to come for me Himself."

"Perhaps He will, Harold," said his father, "perhaps Jesus will be so very loving to His little lamb that He will find time to come for him Himself."

"Oh, father! when you are giving Him your new care to-night, will you just ask Him not to be so dreadfully busy, but to try and come Himself?"

"Yes, Harold," said the father.

After this promise little Harold went to sleep very happily.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"THY WILL BE DONE."

"You always give your cares to God," little Harold had said to his father.

That father, on his knees with his head bowed between his hands, and a tempest of agony, of entreaty in his heart, found suddenly that he could not give this care away to God. For a moment, when the boy had spoken, he had believed that this was possible, but when little Harold had himself spoken so quietly of dying and going to Jesus, the father's heart rose suddenly in the fiercest rebellion. No; if it meant the slaying of his first-born he could not so quietly lay it in the hands of God and say, "Thy will be done." This unearthly man, who had always lived with a kind of heaven-sent radiance round his path, found himself suddenly human after all. His earthly arms clung tightly round the earthly form of his pretty little lad and would not unclasp themselves. It was to this man who had so serenely and for many years walked in the sunshine of God's presence, with nothing to hide his glory from his eyes, as though he had come up to a high, a blank, an utterly impenetrable wall, which shut away all the divine radiance. He could neither climb this wall, nor could he see one glimpse of God at the dark side where he found himself. In an agony this brave heart tried to pray, but his voice would not rise above his chamber, would not indeed even ascend to his lips. He found himself suddenly voiceless and dumb, dead despair stealing over him. He did not, however, rise from his knees, and in this position his wife found him when, late that night, she came up to bed. She had been crying so hard and so long that by very force of those tears her heart was lighter, and her husband, when he raised his eyes, hollow from the terrible struggle within, to her face, looked now the most miserable of the two. The mute appeal in his eyes smote on the wife's loving heart, instantly she came over and knelt by his side.

"You must come to bed, Angus dear. I have arranged with Mr. Hinton, and he will sit up with our little lad for the next few hours."

"I could not sleep, Lottie," answered the husband. "God is coming to take away our child and I can't say, 'Thy will be done.'"

"You can't!" repeated the wife, and now her lips fell apart and she gazed at her husband.

"No Lottie; you called God cruel downstairs, and now He looks cruel to me. I can't give Him my first-born. I can't say 'Thy will be done;' but oh!" continued the wretched man, "this is horrible, this is blasphemous. Oh! has God indeed forsaken me?"

"No, no, no!" suddenly almost shrieked the wife; "no, no!" she repeated; and now she had flung her arms round her husband and was straining him to her heart. "Oh, my darling! my beloved! you were never, never, never, so near to me, so dear to me, as now. God does not want you to say that, Angus. Angus, it is *not* God's will that our child should die, it is Satan's will, not God's. God is love, and it can't be love to torture us, and tear our darling away from us like that. The will of

God is righteousness, and love, and happiness; not darkness, and death, and misery. Oh, Angus! let us both kneel here and say, 'Thy will be done,' for I believe the will of God will be to save the child."

A great faith had suddenly come to this woman. She lifted her voice, and a torrent of eloquent words, of passionate utterances, rent the air and went up to God from that little room, and the husband stole his hand into the wife's as she prayed. After this they both slept, and Lottie's heart was lighter than it had ever been in all her life before.

The next morning this lightness, almost gayety of heart, was still there. For the time she had really changed places with her husband; for, believing that the end would be good, she felt strong to endure.

Mr. and Mrs. Home went downstairs to find Hinton regarding them anxiously. He had not spent a long night with the sick child without gathering very clearly how imminent was the peril still hanging over the family. Harold's night had been a wretched one, and he was weaker this morning. Hinton felt that a great deal more must be done to restore Harold to health; but he had not heard what Dr. Watson had said, and was therefore as yet in the dark and much puzzled how best to act. Seeing the mother's face serene, almost calm, as she poured out the tea, and the father's clouded over, he judged both wrongly.

"She is deceived," he said of the one. "He knows," he said of the other. Had he, however, reversed the positions it would have been nearer the truth.

He went away with a thousand schemes in his head. He would visit the doctor. He would—could he—might he, risk a visit to Charlotte? He was resolved that in some way he must save the boy; but it was not reserved for his hand to do the good deed on this occasion. After breakfast he went out, and Mr. Home, feeling almost like a dead man, hurried off to the daily service.

For a brief moment Charlotte was alone. The instant she found herself so, she went straight down on her knees, and with eyes and heart raised to heaven, said, aloud and fervently,—

"Thy holy, loving, righteous Will be done."

Then she got up and went to her little son. In the course of the morning the boy said to his mother,—

"How much I should like to see that pretty lady."

"It would not be safe for her to come to you, my darling," said Mrs. Home. "You are not yet quite free from infection, and if you saw her now she might get ill. You would not harm your pretty lady, Harold?"

"No, indeed, mother, not for worlds. But if I can't see her," he added, "may I have her toys to play with?"

The mother fetched them and laid them on the bed.

"And now give me what was in the brown paper parcels, mother. The dear, dear, dainty clothes! Oh! didn't our baby look just lovely in his velvet frock? Please, mother, *may* I see those pretty things once again?"

Mrs. Home could not refuse. The baby's pelisse, Daisy's frock, and Harold's own hat were placed by his side. He took up the hat with a great sigh of admiration. It was of dark purple plush, with a plume of ostrich feathers.

"May I put it on, mother?" asked the little lad.

He did so, then asked for a glass to look at himself.

"Ah?" he said, half crying, half frightened at his wasted pale little face under this load of finery, "I don't like it now. My pretty, pretty lady's hat is much too big for me now. I can't wear it. Oh! mother, wouldn't she be disappointed?"

"She shan't be," said the mother, "for I will draw in the lining, and then it will fit you as well as possible."

"But oh! mother, do be careful. I saw her put in a nice little bit of soft paper; I saw her put it under the lining my own self. You will crush that bit of paper if you aren't careful, mother."

The mother did not much heed the little eager voice, she drew in a cord which ran round the lining, then again placed the hat on Harold's head.

"Now it fits, darling," she said.

"But I think the bit of paper is injured," persisted the boy. "How funny I should never have thought of it until now. I'll take it out, mother, and you can put it by with the other things."

The little fingers poked under the lining and drew out something thin and neatly folded.

"Look, look, mother!" he said excitedly; "there's writing. Read it, mother; read what she said."

Mrs. Home read,—

"For Harold, with his lady's love."

She turned the paper. There, staring her in the face, lay a fresh, crisp Bank of England note for fifty pounds.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"YOU KEPT A SECRET FROM ME."

Hinton, when he went away that morning, was, as I have said, very undecided how best to act. He saw very clearly the fresh danger arising to Harold. Was he but rescued from the dangerous fever to fall a prey to lingering, or, perhaps, rapid consumption? Even his unprofessional eye saw the danger the boy was in; and the boy himself, lying awake during most of the weary hours of the night, had confided to his friend some thoughts which it seemed to Hinton could only come to such a child as the precursor of death. He now loved the boy for his own sake, and he was determined, even more determined than during the height of the fever, to do something to again save his life.

After a brief pause for rapid thought, he determined to visit Dr. Watson. That busy man was at home and saw Hinton at once.

"Little Home is no better," said Hinton, going straight, as his wont was, to the very heart of his subject.

"He will never be any better unless he has change," replied the doctor. "Neither I nor any other man can now do more for him. He requires, nay, he is dying for want of nature's remedies, complete change, fresh, mild sea-air. I told his mother so most plainly yesterday. I recommended Torquay within a week from now, if she wishes to save his life."

"Torquay is an expensive place, and a very long way from London," replied Hinton. "It seems almost cruel to tell Mrs. Home to do that for her child which must be utterly impossible."

"There is no other chance for his life," replied the doctor. "I should be doing less than my duty, did I for a moment conceal that fact."

Hinton paused for a moment to think, then he abruptly changed the subject.

"I want to visit a friend this morning—a friend who has never had scarlet fever. It is rather important that we should meet; but I must not risk danger. You know I have been a good deal with the little boy. Is there a risk to my friend in our meeting now?"

"Change all your clothes," replied the doctor; "wear nothing you have in the Homes' house. Perhaps it would also be a wise precaution to take a Turkish bath. If you do all this you may meet your friend without the slightest risk of evil consequences."

Hinton thanked the doctor, and as the result of this conversation entered the dining-room in Prince's Gate just as Charlotte was sitting down to her solitary luncheon.

It was over three weeks since these two had met, and the long three weeks had seemed like for ever to the loving heart of the woman, who was so soon now to be Hinton's wife. She expressed her joy at this unexpected meeting, not so much by words, but so effectually with eyes and manner, that Hinton, as he folded his arms round her, could not help a great throb of thankfulness rising up from his heart.

They sat down to lunch, and then afterwards Hinton told her the story of little Harold Home. In telling this tale, however, he omitted again both name and address. He had not meant when beginning his tale to keep these things any longer a mystery from her, but as the words dropped from him, and Charlotte's eyes were fixed on his face, and Charlotte's lips trembled with emotion, some undefined sensation prompted him to keep back these particulars.

Hinton, in coming to Charlotte, relied on her help, but he meant her just now to bestow it as on a stranger. As he had expected, his tale aroused her warmest enthusiasm and interest.

"John," she said, "something must be done. The boy must not die!"

"He must go to Torquay," replied Hinton. "That is most manifest. But the difficulty will be how. They are very proud people. The difficulty will be how to induce them to accept aid from outsiders."

"Do you think they will be proud, John, when their child's life depends on their accepting some aid from others? I don't think they will allow so false an emotion to sacrifice his little precious life. It seems to me, that were I in that mother's place, I would lick the dust off the most menial feet that ever walked, to save my child."

"Perhaps you are right," said Hinton: "there is no doubt that one woman can best read the heart of another. What I propose is, that I take the little boy down to Torquay for a few weeks; I can make an excuse to the mother on my own score, and it will not seem so hard for her to send her boy. And the little lad loves me, I believe."

"Would it not be best for the mother to take her child herself?"

"It undoubtedly would. But it would be placing her under deeper obligation. I want to make it as light as possible to her."

"Then, John, you will give me one happiness? I will provide the money for this expedition."

"You shall, my dearest," answered Hinton, stooping down and kissing her.

He meant her to help Charlotte Home in this way, and he did not notice the slight sigh scarcely allowed to escape her lips. The fact was, Charlotte Harman had grown very hungry, almost starved, for her lover during his three weeks' absence, and now the thought that he was going still farther away from her, and their wedding-day drawing so quickly on, could not but excite a pang; the selfish part of her rose in revolt, and struggled to rebel, but with a firm hand she kept it well under, and Hinton never noticed her strangled little sigh. They talked for a long time of their plans, and Charlotte mentioned what money she had of her very own, and which could be immediately at Hinton's disposal. In the midst of this conversation, the postman's knock was heard, and a moment later a servant brought Charlotte a letter. She did not recognize the handwriting, and laid it for a moment unopened by her side. Then some confused remembrance of having seen it before, caused her to tear open the envelope. This was what her eyes rested on.

> Charlotte—my sister and friend—I have found the little piece of paper you put into my Harold's hat. I never knew it was there until to-day. Thank God I did not know, for had I seen it after your visit, I should certainly, in my mad, ungracious, evil pride, have returned it to you.
>
> Dear Charlotte—God nearly broke my heart since I saw you. He nearly took my boy away. In that process my pride has gone, though my love and tenderness and gratitude to you remain, for with this fifty pounds you are saving my child's little life. Thank you for it. God will bless you for it. You will never—never regret this deed. It will come back to you, the remembrance of it, in the midst of your own wealth and affluence, or if dark days visit you, you will let your thoughts wander to it as a place of safe anchorage in the storm. It will, all your life long, be a source to you of rejoicing that you saved a father's and mother's hearts from breaking, and kept a precious little life in this world.
>
> I can add no more now, my dear. For this money must be spent, and at once. Oh! precious, valuable gold, which is to keep Harold with me! I will write to you when we come back from Torquay; do not come to see me before, it would not be safe for you.
>
> Ever, my dear friend, because of you, the happiest and most grateful mother on God's earth,
>
> Charlotte Home.

Charlotte Harman's face was very white when, after reading this letter, she raised her eyes to Hinton's. What had been written with all joy and thankfulness was received with pain. Why had Hinton kept this thing from her? Why had he not told her where he had been staying?

"You kept a secret from me," she said, and her eyes filled with heavy tears.

Then as he tried to comfort her, being very compunctious himself at having failed utterly to trust one so brave and noble, she suddenly drew herself from his embrace.

"John," she said, with some pride in her voice, "did you in any degree keep this thing from me because you believed Mrs. Home's story about my grandfather's will?"

"I had a thousand nameless reasons for not telling you, Charlotte. My principal one after the child got ill was my fear that you would come to the house, and so run the risk of infection."

"Then you do not at all believe Mrs. Home's story?"

"I have not investigated it, my darling. I have done nothing but simply listen to what you yourself told me. *You* do not believe it?"

"Certainly not! How could I? It implicates my father."

"We will not think of it, Charlotte."

"We must think of it, for justice must be done to this woman and to her children; and besides, I wish to clear it up, for I will not have my father blamed."

Hinton was silent. Charlotte gazed at him eagerly, his silence dissatisfied her. His whole manner carried the conviction that his faith in her father was by no means equal to hers.

"Is it possible to see wills?" she asked suddenly.

"Certainly, dear; anybody can see any will by paying a shilling, at Somerset House."

"Would my grandfather's will be kept at Somerset House?"

"Yes. All wills are kept there."

"Then," said Charlotte, rising as she spoke, "before our wedding-day I will go to Somerset House and read my grandfather's will."

CHAPTER XXV.

THEY RECALL TOO MUCH.

Mr. Harman had a hard task before him. He was keeping two things at bay, two great and terrible things, Death and Thought. They were pursuing him, they were racing madly after him, and sometimes the second of these his enemies so far took possession of him as to grasp him by the heartstrings. But though he knew well that in the end both one and the other would conquer and lay him low, yet still he was in a measure victor. That strong nourishment, those potent medicines were keeping the life in him; while his still eager absorption in business prevented that time for reflection which was worse than death. His medical man, knowing nothing of his inner history, had begged of him to rest, to give up business, assuring him that by so doing he would prolong his short span of life. But Harman had answered, and truly, "If I give up business I shall be in my grave in a fortnight;" and there was such solemn conviction in his voice and manner, that the physician was fain to bow to the dictum of his patient. Except once to his brother Jasper, and once to Hinton, Mr. Harman had mentioned to no one how near he believed his end to be. The secret was not alluded to, the master of the house keeping up bravely, bearing his pains in silence and alone, and that subtle element of rejoicing began to pervade this quiet, luxurious home which precedes a wedding. Only one in the dwelling ever thought of funeral gloom.

Little Harold Home had gone to Torquay with his mother. Hinton was once more free to go in and out of the house in Prince's Gate, and he and Charlotte were necessarily much occupied with each other. There seemed to these two so much to be done, and the time seemed so short until the twentieth of April, that had the very sun stood still for them, they would have felt no undue sensation of surprise.

When people are about to step into the Garden of Eden even nature must sympathize, and marriage seemed that to Charlotte and Hinton. After their wedding tour it was arranged that they were to come to the house in Prince's Gate. For some time Mr. Harman had begged them to make it their home; but though Hinton could not oppose, he had a hope of some day settling down in a smaller house. He liked the power which wealth could give, but he was so unused to luxuries, that they were in themselves almost repellent to him. Charlotte, on the contrary, was perfectly happy to live in the old place. Home to this womanly heart was wherever her loved ones were; and she also acceded joyfully to another question which otherwise might have appeared a little either strange or selfish. Her father begged of her not to extend her wedding tour beyond a week. "Come back to me," said the old man, "at the end of a week; let me feel that comfort when you say good-by on your wedding-day."

Charlotte had promised, with her arms round his neck and her bright hair touching his silver locks. And now April had set in, and the days flew fast. All was bustle and confusion, and milliners and dressmakers worked as though there had never been a bride before, and Charlotte, too, believed there had never been so happy, so fortunate, so altogether blessed a woman as herself.

One of those spring days, for the weather was particularly lovely, Mr. Harman came home earlier than usual and went to his study. For no special reason he had found it impossible to settle to any active work that morning. He had hastened home, and now taking his accustomed medicine, lay back in his armchair to rest. The medicine he had taken was partly of a sedative character, but to-day it failed in all soothing effects. That bloodhound Thought was near, and with a bound it sprang forward and settled its fangs into his heartstrings.

Mr. Harman could not sit still, he rose and began to pace his room. Stay—how could he quiet this monster of remorse and reflection? Would death do it by and by? He shook his head as this idea came to him. Were death but an annihilation he could, would, how gladly, welcome it, but all his firmest convictions pointed to a God and a future. A future to him meant retribution. He found it absolutely impossible to comfort his heart with so false a doctrine as that of annihilation. In the midst of his meditations his brother Jasper entered.

"Good Heavens! John, you do look bad!" he exclaimed almost involuntarily, noticing the anguish on the fine old face.

"I'm a very miserable man," answered John Harman, and he sank down into a chair as he spoke.

"I would not think so much about my health," said Jasper; "doctors are the most mistaken fools under the sun. I knew a man out in Australia, and the first medical man in Sydney told him he had not a week to live. He came home and made his will and bid all his relations good-by. Well, what were the consequences? The week came to an end, but not the man; my dear John, that man is alive now, and what is more, he is in the enjoyment of perfect health. The doctor was all wrong; they are mortal like ourselves, man, and by no means infallible. I would not take my death for granted, if I were you; I would determine to take out a fresh lease of life when Charlotte is married. Determination does wonders in such cases."

"I am not thinking of my death," answered Mr. Harman; "were death but all, I could almost welcome it. No, it is not death, it is memory. Jasper," he added, turning fiercely on his brother, "you were as the very devil to me once, why do you come to preach such sorry comfort now?"

Jasper Harman had an impenetrable face, but at these words it turned a shade pale. He went to the fire and stirred it, he put on more coal, he even arranged in a rather noisy way one or two of the chimney ornaments.

"If only that trustee had not died just then—and if only—only you had not tempted me," continued the elder man.

"You forget, John," suddenly said Jasper, "what the alternative would have been just then, absolute ruin, ruin coupled with disgrace!"

"I do not believe in the disgrace, and as to the ruin, we could have started afresh. Oh! to start even now with but sixpence in my pocket, and with clean hands! What would have been the old disgrace compared to the present misery?"

"Take comfort, John, no one knows of it; and if we are but careful no one need ever know. Don't excite yourself, be but careful, and no one need ever know."

"God knows," answered the white-headed elder brother. And at these words Jasper again turned his face away. After a time, in which he thought briefly and rapidly, he turned, and sitting down by John, began to speak.

"Something has come to my knowledge which may be a comfort to you. I did not mention it earlier, because in your present state of health I know you ought not to worry yourself. But as it seems you are so over-sensitive, I may as well mention that it will be possible for you to make reparation without exposing yourself."

"How?" asked Mr. Harman.

"I know where Daisy Harman's daughter lives—you know we completely lost sight of her. I believe she is poor; she is married to a curate, all curates are poor; they have three children. Suppose, suppose you settled, say, well, half the money her mother had for her lifetime, on this young woman. That would be seventy-five pounds a year; a great difference seventy-five pounds would make in a poor home."

"A little of the robbery paid back," said Mr. Harman with a dreary smile. "Jasper, you are a worse rogue than I am, and I believe you study the Bible less. God knows I don't care to confront myself with its morality, but I have a memory that it recommends, nay, commands, in the case of restoring again, or of paying back stolen goods, that not half should be given, but the whole, multiplied fourfold!"

"Such a deed, as Quixotic as unnecessary, could not be done, it would arouse suspicion," said Jasper decidedly.

After this the two brothers talked together for some time. Jasper quiet and calm, John disturbed and perplexed, too perplexed to notice that the younger and harder man was keeping back part of the truth. But conversation agitated John Harman, agitated him so much that that evening some of the veil was torn from his daughter's eyes, for during dinner he fainted away. Then there was commotion and dismay, and the instant sending for doctors, and John Hinton and Jasper Harman both felt almost needless alarm.

When the old man came to himself he found his head resting on his daughter's shoulder. During all the time he was unconscious she had eyes and ears for no one else.

"Leave me alone with the child," he said feebly to all the others. When they were gone, he looked at her anxious young face. "There is no cause, my darling, no cause whatever; what does one faint signify? Put your arms round me, Charlotte, and I shall feel quite well."

She did so, laying her soft cheek against his.

"Now you shall see no one but me to-night," she said, "and I shall sit with you the whole evening, and you must lie still and not talk. You are ill, father, and you have tried to keep it from me."

"A little weak and unfit for much now, I confess," he said in a tone of relief. He saw she was not seriously alarmed, and it was a comfort to confide so far in her.

"You are weak and tired, and need rest," she said: "you shall see no one to-night but me, and I will stay with you the whole evening!"

"What!" said her father, "you will give up Hinton for me, Lottie!"

"Even that I will do for you," she said, and she stooped and kissed his gray head.

"I believe you love me, Lottie. I shall think of that all the week you are away. You are sure you will only remain away one week?"

"Father, you and I have never been parted before in all my life; I promise faithfully to come back in a week," she answered.

He smiled at this, and allowing her still to retain his hand in hers, sank into a quiet sleep. While

he slept Charlotte sat quietly at his feet. She felt perplexed and irresolute. Her father's fainting fit had alarmed her, and now, looking into his face, even to her inexperience, the ravages which disease, both mental and physical, had brought there could not but be apparent to her. She had to acknowledge to herself that her father, only one year her Uncle Jasper's senior, looked a very old, nay, she could not shut her eyes to the fact, a very unhappy man. What brought that look on his face? A look which she acknowledged to herself she had seen there all her life, but which seemed to be growing in intensity with his added years. She closed her own eyes with a pang as a swift thought of great anguish came over her. This thought passed as quickly as it came; in her remorse at having entertained it she stooped down and kissed the withered old hand which still lay in hers.

It was impossible for Charlotte really to doubt her father; but occupied as she was with her wedding preparations, and full of brightness as her sky undoubtedly looked to her just now, she had not forgotten Hinton's manner when she had asked him what faith he put in Mrs. Home's story. Hinton had evaded her inquiry. This evasion was as much as owning that he shared Mrs. Home's suspicions. Charlotte must clear up her beloved father in the eyes of that other beloved one. If on all hands she was warned not to agitate him, there was another way in which she could do it: she could read her grandfather's will. But though she had made up her mind to do this, she had an unaccountable repugnance to the task. For the first time in all her open, above-board life she would be doing something which she must conceal from her father. Even John Hinton should not accompany her to Somerset House. She must find the will and master its contents, and the deed once done, what a relief to her! With what joy would she with her own lips chase away the cloud which she felt sure rested over her beloved father in her lover's heart!

"It is possible that, dearly as we love each other, such a little doubt might divide us by and by," she said to herself. "Yes, yes, it is right that I should dissipate it, absolutely right, when I feel so very, very sure."

At this moment her father stirred in his sleep, and she distinctly heard the words drop from his lips——

"I would make reparation."

Before she had even time to take these words in, he had opened his eyes and was gazing at her.

"You are better now," she said, stooping down and kissing him.

"Yes, my darling; much, much better." He sat up as he spoke, and made an effort to put on at least a show of life and vigor. "A man of my age fainting, Charlotte, is nothing," he said; "really nothing whatever. You must not dwell on it again."

"I will not," she said.

Her answer comforted him and he became really brighter and better.

"It is nice to have you all to myself, my little girl; it is very nice. Not that I grudge you to Hinton; I have a great regard for Hinton; but, my darling, you and I have been so much to each other. We have never in all our lives had one quarrel."

"Quarrel, father! of course not. How can those who love as we do quarrel?"

"Sometimes they do, Lottie. Thank God, such an experience cannot visit you; but it comes to some and darkens everything. I have known it."

"You have, father?" In spite of herself, Charlotte felt her voice trembling.

"I had a great and terrible quarrel with my father, Charlotte; my father who seemed once as close to me as your father is to you. He married again, and the marriage displeased me, and such bitter words passed between us, that for years that old man and I did not speak. For years, the last years of his life, we were absolutely divided. We made it up in the end; we were one again when he died; but what happened then has embittered my whole life—my whole life."

Charlotte was silent, though the color was coming into her cheeks and her heart began to beat.

"And to-day, Lottie," continued Mr. Harman, "to-day your uncle Jasper told me about my father's little daughter. You have never heard of her; she was a baby-child when I saw her last. There were many complications after my father's death; complications which you must take on trust, for I cannot explain them to you. They led to my never seeing that child again. Lottie, though she was my little half-sister, she was quite young, not older than you, and to-day Jasper told me about her. He knows where she lives; she is married and has children, and is poor. I could never, never bring myself to look on her face; but some day, not when I am alive, but some day you may know her; I should like you to know her some day, and to be kind to her. She has been hardly treated, into that too I cannot go; but I must set it right. I mean to give her money; you will not be quite so rich; you won't mind that?"

"Mind it! mind it! Oh, father!" And Charlotte suddenly began to weep; she could not help that sudden, swift shower, though she struggled hard to repress it, seeing how her father trembled, and how each moment he looked more agitated.

"Do you know," she said, checking her sobs as soon as she possibly could, "that Uncle Jasper, too, has told me that story; he asked me not to speak of it to you, for you would only be upset. He said

how much you took to heart, even still, that time when your father was angry with you."

"And I angry with him, Lottie; and I with him. Don't forget that."

"Yes, dear father, he told me the tale. I longed to come to you with it, for it puzzled me, but he would not let me. Father, I, too, have seen that little sister; she is not little now, she is tall and noble-looking. She is a sweet and brave woman, and she has three of the most lovely children I ever saw; her children are like angels. Ah! I shall be glad to help that woman and those children. I cannot thank you enough for doing this."

"Don't thank me, child; in God's name don't thank me."

"If you could but see those children."

"I would not see them; I would not; I could not. Charlotte, you don't know what bygone memories are to an old man like me. I could never see either the mother or the children. Lottie, tell me nothing more about them; if you love me never mention their names to me. They recall too much, and I am weak and old. I will help them; yes, before God I promise to help them; but I can never either see or speak of them, they recall too much."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAD HE SEEN A GHOST?

At this time Jasper Harman was a very perplexed man. Unlike his brother John, he was untroubled by remorse. Though so outwardly good-tempered and good-natured, his old heart was very hard; and though the arrows of past sins and past injustices might fly around him, they could not visit the inner shrine of that adamantine thing which he carried about instead of a heart of flesh within him.

What the painful process must be which would restore to Jasper Harman the warm living heart of a little child, one must shudder even to contemplate. At present that process had not begun. But though he felt no remorse whatever, and stigmatized his brother as an old fool, he had considerable anxiety.

There was an ugly secret in the back parts of these two brothers' lives; a secret which had seemed all these years safe and buried in the grave, but over which now little lights were beginning to pour. How could Jasper plaster up the crevices and restore the thing to its silent grave? Upon this problem he pondered from morning to night.

He did not like that growing anxiety of his brother's; he could not tell to what mad act it would lead him; he did not like a new look of fear which, since her father's fainting fit, he had seen on Charlotte's smooth brow; he did not like Mrs. Home coming and boldly declaring that an injustice had been done; he felt that between them these foolish and miserable people would pull a disgraceful old secret out of its grave, unless he, Jasper Harman, could outwit them. What a blessing that that other trustee was dead and buried, and that he, Jasper Harman, had really stood over his grave. Yes, the secret which he and his brother had guarded so faithfully for over twenty years might remain for ever undiscovered if only common sense, the tiniest bit of common sense, was exercised. Jasper paced his room as he thought of this. Yes, there could be no fear, unless—here he stood still, and a cold dew of sudden terror stole over him—suppose that young woman, that wronged young woman, Charlotte Home, should take it into her head to go and read her father's will. The will could not be put away. For the small sum of one shilling she might go and master the contents, and then the whole fraud would be laid bare. Was it likely that Mrs. Home would do this? Jasper had only seen her for a moment, but during that brief glance he read determination and fixity of purpose in her eyes and mouth. He must trust that this thought would not occur to her; but what a miserable uncertainty this was to live in! He did not know that the graver danger lay still nearer home, and that his own niece Charlotte was already putting the match to this mine full of gunpowder. No, clever as he thought himself, he was looking for the danger at the front door, when it was approaching him by the back.

After many days of most anxious thought he resolved to go and see the Homes, for something must be done, and he could feel his way better if he knew something of his opponents.

Getting Mr. Home's address in the Post Office Directory, for he would not betray himself by questioning Charlotte, he started off one evening to walk to Kentish Town. He arrived in the dusk, and by good fortune or otherwise, as he liked best to term it, the curate was at home, and so far disengaged as to be able to give him a little leisure time.

Jasper sent in his card, and the little maid, Anne, showed him into the small parlor. There was a musty, unused smell in the dingy little room, for Mrs. Home was still at Torquay, and the curate during her absence mostly occupied his study. The maid, however, turned on the gas, and as she did so a small girl of four slipped in behind her. She was a very pretty child, with gray eyes and black eyelashes, and she stared in the full, frank manner of infancy at old Jasper. She was not a shy child, and felt so little fear of this good-natured, cherry-cheeked old man, that when Anne withdrew she still remained in the room.

Jasper had a surface love for children; he would not take any trouble about them, but they amused him, and he found pleasure in watching their unsophisticated ways. His good-natured, smiling face appealed to a certain part of Daisy Home, not a very high part certainly, but with the charming frankness of babyhood, the part appealed to gave utterance to its desire.

"Have 'ou brought me a present?" she demanded, running up to old Jasper and laying her hand on his knee.

"No, my dear," he replied quickly. "I'm so sorry; I forgot it."

"Did 'ou?" said Daisy, puckering her pretty brows; "Then 'ou're not like our pretty lady; she did not forget; she brought lots and lots and lots."

"I am very sorry," replied Jasper; "I will think of it next time." And then Mr. Home coming in, the two went into the little study.

"I am your wife's half-brother," said Jasper, introducing himself without preface, for he had marked out his line of action before he came.

"Indeed!" replied Mr. Home. He was not a man easily surprised, but this announcement did bring a slight color into his face. "You are Mr. Harman," he repeated. "I am sorry my wife is away. She is staying at Torquay with our eldest boy, who has been ill. She has seen your daughter."

"Not my daughter, sir, my niece—a fine girl, but Quixotic, a little fanciful and apt to take up whims, but a fine girl for all that."

"I, too, have seen Miss Harman," answered Mr. Home. "I met her once in Regent's Park, and, without knowing anything about us, she was good to our children. You must pardon me, sir, if in expressing the same opinion about her we come to it by different roads. It seems to me that the fine traits in Miss Harman's character are *due* to her Quixotic or unworldly spirit."

For a moment Jasper Harman felt puzzled, then he chuckled inwardly. "The man who says that, is unworldly himself, therefore unpractical. So much the better for my purpose." Aloud he said, "Doubtless you put the case best, sir; but I will not take up your valuable time discussing my niece's virtues. I have come to talk to you on a little matter of business. Your wife has told you her story?"

"My wife has certainly concealed nothing from me," replied Mr. Home.

"She has mentioned her father's very curious will?"

"His very unjust will," corrected Mr. Home.

"Yes, sir, I agree with you, it was unjust. It is to talk to you about that will I have come to you to-night."

"Sit nearer to the fire," replied Mr. Home, poking up the handful in the grate into as cheerful a blaze as circumstances would permit.

"It was, as you say, an unjust will," proceeded old Jasper, peering hard with his short-sighted eyes at the curate, and trying to read some emotion beneath his very grave exterior. Being unable to fathom the depths of a character which was absolutely above the love of money, he felt perplexed, he scarcely liked this great self-possession. Did this Home know too much? "It was an unjust will," he repeated, "and took my brother and myself considerably by surprise. Our father seemed fond of his young wife, and we fully expected that he would leave her and her child well provided for. However, my dear sir, the facts could not be disputed. Her name was not mentioned at all. The entire property was left principally to my elder brother John. He and I were partners in business. Our father's money was convenient, and enabled us to grow rich. At the time our father died we were very struggling. Perhaps the fact that the money was so necessary to us just then made us think less of the widow than we should otherwise have done. We did not, however, forget her. We made provision for her during her life. But for us she must have starved or earned her own living."

"The allowance you made was not very ample," replied Mr. Home, "and such as it was it ceased at her death."

"Yes, sir; and there I own we—my brother and I—were guilty of an act of injustice. I can only exonerate us on the plea of want of thought. Our father's widow was a young woman—younger than either of us. The child was but a baby. The widow's death seemed a very far off contingency. We placed the money we had agreed to allow her the interest on, in the hands of our solicitor. We absolutely forgot the matter. I went to Australia, my brother grew old at home. When, five or six years ago, we heard that Mrs. Harman was dead, and that our three thousand pounds could return to us, we had absolutely forgotten the child. In this I own we showed sad neglect. Your wife's visit to my niece, through a mere accident, has recalled her to our memory, and I come here to-night to say that we are willing, willing and anxious, to repay that neglect, and to settle on your wife the sum of three thousand pounds; that sum to be hers unconditionally, to do what she pleases with."

When Jasper ceased to speak, Mr. Home was quite silent for a moment, then he said, "My wife is away at present. I would rather not trouble her with money matters during her short holiday. When she returns I will tell her what you say and communicate to you the result."

There was neither exultation nor annoyance in the quiet manner in which these few words were spoken. Uncle Jasper found it impossible to understand this man. He spoke as indifferently as if three thousand pounds were nothing to him and yet, to judge from appearances, his whole yearly income seemed hardly to represent the interest on so much capital. Did this quiet manner but hide deep designs? Jasper Harman fidgeted in his chair as this thought occurred to him.

"There is just one thing more to add," he said. "I will leave you my club address. Kindly communicate with me there. I should like, while carrying out my elder brother's wish, to act entirely on it without troubling him in any way. He is, I am sorry to say, very ill, so ill that the least, the very least, agitation is dangerous to him. He feels with me the unintentional injustice done to your wife, but he cannot bear the subject alluded to.

"Would it not rather be an ease to his mind to feel that what he looks on and perhaps dwells on as a sin has been expiated, as far as his own earthly act can expiate it?" inquired the clergyman gently.

"He shall know it, but from my lips. I should like him best to hear it from me," said Jasper Harman.

A few moments after, he went away, Mr. Home accompanying him to the hall door. The strong light of the gas lamp fell on his ruddy face and sandy hair. He bade his host good-bye, and hurried down the street, never observing that a man, much larger and much rougher than himself, was bearing down upon him. It was raining, and the large man had an umbrella up. The two came full tilt against each other. Jasper felt his breath taken away, and could only gasp out a word of remonstrance and apology.

But the other, in a full, round, cheery voice, replied, "I'm home from the Colonies, stranger—you need not mention a tiff like that to *me*. Bless you! I guess you got the worst of it."

He passed on with a laugh, never noticing that he had left Jasper standing in the middle of the road, gasping indeed now, but from a different cause. He put his hand to his heart. He felt his breath come too fast for comfort. What had come to him? Had he seen a ghost?

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHILDREN'S GREAT-UNCLE.

It was a few days after this that, the morning being very bright and sunshiny, the little maid, Anne, determined to give Daisy and the baby a long morning in the park. Mrs. Home was expected back in a few days. Harold was very much better, and Anne, being a faithful and loving little soul, was extremely anxious that Daisy and the baby should show as rosy faces as possible to greet their mother's return. Hinton, who still occupied the drawing-rooms, was absent as usual for the day. Mr. Home would not come in until tea time. So Anne, putting some dinner for the children and herself, in the back of the perambulator, and the house latch-key in her pocket, started off to have what she called to Daisy, a "picnic in the park."

The baby was now nearly ten months old. His beauty had increased with his growing months, and many people turned to look at the lovely little fellow as Anne gayly wheeled him along. He had a great deal of hair, which showed in soft golden rings under his cap, and his eyes, large and gentle as a gazelle's, looked calmly out of his innocent face. Daisy, too, was quite pretty enough to come in for her share of admiration, and Anne felt proud of both her little charges.

Reaching the park, she wheeled the perambulator under the shade of a great tree, and sitting down herself on a bench, took little Angus in her arms. Daisy scampered about and inquired when her namesakes, the starry daisies of the field, would be there for her to gather.

As the little child played and shouted with delight, and the baby and small maid looked on, a stout, florid-faced man of foreign appearance, passing slowly by, was attracted by the picturesque group. Daisy had flung off her shabby little hat. Her bright hair was in wild confusion. Her gray eyes looked black beneath their dark lashes. Running full tilt across the stranger's path, she suddenly stumbled and fell. He stooped to pick her up. She hardly thanked him, but flew back to Anne. The foreign-looking man, however, stood still. Daisy's piquant little face had caused him to start and change color.

"Good gracious! what a likeness," he exclaimed, and he turned and sat down on the bench beside Anne and the baby.

"I hope the little thing didn't get hurt by that fall," he said to the small maid.

Anne, who was accustomed to having all admiration bestowed on her baby, replied briefly that missy was right enough. As she spoke she turned baby Angus round so that the stranger might see his radiant little face. The dark eyes, however, of the pretty boy had no attraction for the man. He still watched Daisy, who had resumed her amusements at a little distance.

Anne, who perceived that Daisy had attracted the stranger's admiration, was determined to stay to watch the play out. She pretended to amuse little Angus, but her eyes took furtive glances at

the foreign-looking man. Presently Daisy, who was not at all shy, came up.

"You never thanked me for picking you up from the ground," said the stranger to the little girl.

Four year old Daisy turned up her eyes to his face.

"I wor *so* busy," she apologized. "T'ank 'ou now."

The light on her face, her very expression, caused this rough-looking man's heart to beat strangely. He held out his hand. Daisy put her soft little palm into his.

"Come and sit on my knee," he said.

Daisy accepted the invitation with alacrity. She dearly liked attention, and it was not often, with baby by, that she came in for the lion's share.

"What a funny red beard you have!" she said, putting up a small finger to touch it delicately.

This action, however, scandalized Anne, who, awaking to a sudden sense of her responsibilities, rose to depart.

"Come along, Miss Daisy," she exclaimed; "'tis time we was a-moving home, and you mustn't trouble the gentleman no further, missy."

"I s'ant go home, and I will stay," responded Daisy, her face growing very red as she clung to her new friend. The man put his arm round her in delight.

"Sit down, my girl," he said, addressing Anne, "the little miss is not troubling me. Quite the contrary, she reminds me of a little lassie I used to know once, and she had the same name too, Daisy. Daisy Wilson was her name. Now this little kid is so like her that I shouldn't a bit wonder if she was a relation—perhaps her daughter. Shall I tell you what your two names are, little one?"

Daisy nodded her head and looked up expectantly. Anne, hoping no harm was done, and devoured with curiosity, resumed her seat.

"Your mamma's name was Daisy Wilson. You are her dear little daughter, and your name is Daisy Harman. Well, I'm right, ain't I?" The man's face was now crimson, and he only waited for Daisy's reply to clasp her to his breast. But Daisy, in high delight at his mistake, clapped her pretty hands.

"No, no," she said, "you're quite wrong. Guess again, guess again."

Instantly his interest and excitement died out. He pushed the child a trifle away, and said,—

"I made a mistake. I can't guess."

"I'm Daisy Home," replied Daisy, "and my mamma was never no Daisy Wilson. Her name is Sarlotte Home."

The stranger put Daisy gently from his lap, and the discovery which was to affect so many people might never have been made but for Anne, who read the *Family Herald*, was burning with anxiety and wonder. Many kinds of visions were flashing before her romantic young eyes. This man might be very rich—very, very rich. He must have something to say to them all. She had long ago identified herself with the Home family. This man was coming to give them gold in abundance. He was not so beautiful to look at, but he might be just as valuable as the pretty lady of Harold's dreams. That pretty lady had not come back, though Anne had almost prayed for her return. Yes, she was sure this man was a relation. It was highly probable. Such things were always happening in the *Family Herald*. Raising her shrill, high-pitched voice, she exclaimed,—

"Miss Daisy, you're too young to know, or may be you furgets. But I think the gen'leman is near right. Yer mamma's name wos Harman afore she married yer papa, missy, and I ha' seen fur sure and certain in some old books at the house the name o' Daisy Wilson writ down as plain as could be, so maybe that wor yer grandma's name afore she married too."

At these words the stranger caught Daisy up and kissed her.

"I thought that little face could only belong to one related to Daisy Wilson," he said. "Little one, put yer arms round me. I'm your great-uncle—your great-uncle! I never thought that Daisy Wilson could have a daughter married, and that that daughter could have little ones of her own. Well, well, well, how time does fly! I'm your grandmother's brother—Sandy Wilson, home from Australia, my little pet; and when shall I see you all? It does my old heart good to see my sister over again in a little thing like you."

"My great-uncle?" repeated Daisy. She was an affectionate little thing, and the man's agitation and delight so far touched her baby heart as to induce her to give him one very slight, dainty kiss. Then she sidled down to the ground.

"Ef you please, sir," said Anne again, who felt absolutely certain that she had now made the fortune of her family, and who thought that that fact ought to be recognised—"ef you please, sir, 'tis but right as you should know as my missis's mother have long bin dead. My missis as is her living model is away, and won't be back afore Thursday. She's down by the seaside wid Master Harold wot' ad the scarlet fever, and wor like to die; and the fam'ly address, please sir, is 10, Tremins Road, Kentish Town."

At the news of his sister's death so curtly announced by Anne, the man's rough, weatherbeaten face grew white. He did not touch Daisy again, or even look at little Angus; but going up to Anne, he slipped a sovereign into her hand.

"Take those children safely home now," he said; "the day is turning chilly, and—and—thank you for what you told me of, my good lass. I'll come and see your missis on Thursday night."

Then, without another word, he hurried away.

Quickly this big, rough man, who had nearly knocked down Jasper Harman the night before, hurried through the park. The exultation had died out of his face; his heart had ceased to beat wildly. Little Daisy's pretty figure was still before his eyes; but, weatherbeaten and lifebeaten man that he was, he found himself looking at it through a mist of tears. "'Tis a bit of a shock," he said to himself. "I'll take it quietly, of course. Sandy Wilson learned long ago to take everything quietly; but it's a rare bit of a shock. I never guessed as my little Daisy would die. Five and twenty years since we met, and all that time I've never once clasped the hand of a blood-relation —never had one belonging to me. I thought I was coming back to Daisy, and Daisy has died. She was very young to die—quite five years younger than me. A pretty, pretty lass; the little 'un is her image. How odd I should have knocked up against Daisy's grandchild, and should find her out by the likeness. Well, well, I'll call at 10, Tremins Road. I'll call, of course; not that I care much now, as my little sister Daisy Wilson is dead."

He pressed his hand before his eyes; they felt weak and dim. The rough man had got a considerable shock; he did not care to look at London sights again to-day; he returned to the Commercial Hotel in the Strand, where for the present he was staying.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CUT OFF WITH A SHILLING.

Never was a little maid-of-all-work more excited than Anne on the night on which her mistress was expected home from Torquay. A secret—quite a great secret—had been burning a hole in her heart ever since Monday, and to-night she expected this secret to result in something grand. Anne felt that the days of poverty for the family were over; the days for scraping and toiling were at an end. The uncle from Australia would give her missis everything that money could buy; he must be a very rich man indeed, for had he not given her a sovereign? Whoever before had even dreamed of giving little hard-worked Anne a sovereign? It meant unheard-of wealth to this childish soul of sixteen; it filled her with delight, and, carefully put away in a little gingham bag, it lay golden and warm now against her heart.

But Anne's honest little heart had another and less selfish cause for rejoicing. It was she who was bringing this uncle and niece to meet again; but for her prompt interference Daisy and her great-uncle would never have discovered their relationship; but for her the uncle, so blessed with riches, would not have known where to seek for his niece. In a big place like London was it likely, was it at all likely, that they would meet? No, no, he would look for his poor dead sister for a little while, and then go back to Australia, and perhaps give his money to some one else. Anne felt that the family owed her a great deal; but she had full confidence in them, and felt sure that in their rise in life they would not forget her. Missis could keep plenty of servants now; she would have a cook and a housemaid, and probably some one to help in the nursery. This was what a family whom Anne thought immensely wealthy, did in a house just round the corner. In that case she, Anne, would be promoted to the proud position of head nurse—head nurse with wages—well, say wages as high as £13 a year. Even to think of being raised to so dazzling a height made Anne's head a trifle giddy. On the strength of it, and all the riches in prospect, she became quite reckless in preparing missis's tea. She put out the best table-linen, and all the silver the house possessed, and she filled a great dish with water-cresses, and had hot buttered scones and a seed-cake and eggs—rather fresh for London—and finally half a pound of sliced ham.

She was standing contemplating her well-laden board when the cab drove up, and out stepped her master and mistress and little Harold—Harold looking white and thin even yet, but still with an altogether improved expression on his little face. Anne was so excited, knowing all that was to come, that she caught Harold up in her arms and kissed him, which proceeding he bore with more patience than appreciation. Then ensued bustle and confusion and pleasant excitement. Charlotte Home felt so well and rested from her change, her husband was so delighted to have her back, and little Harold was so manifestly better, that Anne flew about nearly wild with delight. "They'll be a deal, deal 'appier by-and-by, and 'tis hall 'long of HAnne," she kept whispering to herself.

And now, tea being over, and Harold tucked up comfortably once more in his own little cot in the nursery, the small maid began to be devoured with impatience for the expected ring. It came at last; Anne with her own hands unfastened the door, showed the rich uncle into the dining-room, and danced upstairs to find her mistress. Charlotte Home was unpacking a trunk in her own room.

"What do you say, Anne? A gentleman is downstairs, and wants to see me? But I am so dreadfully

busy. What does he want? Do you think he has come about the drawing-rooms? They will be vacant next week."

"I don't think 'tis about the drawing-rooms, 'em," answered Anne as demurely as she could speak. "I 'avent put no card hup yet. Please, 'em, he looks a most benevolent gen'leman, and he axed fur you, yer hown self, 'em, most partic'lar bad."

"I wish he had not come this evening, everything is in such confusion. Anne, are you sure your master is out?"

"Yes, 'em, sure and certain; and ef you please, 'em, it wor fur you as the strange gen'leman axed."

"Well, I suppose I must go down. He may have heard of the drawing-rooms through Mr. Hinton, and it would not do to lose a good lodger."

Charlotte went to the looking-glass to smooth her hair. She felt travel-stained and dusty; she was only a worn, pale-looking woman at the best of times. She ran downstairs, and Anne's heart beat as she heard the dining-room door shut behind her.

Mr. Wilson—Sandy Wilson as he preferred to be called—had got himself up with due care for his interview with his niece. He had a perfectly new and shining broadcloth suit on, a diamond pin was in his necktie, and a very massive gold chain could be seen dangling from his vest pocket. His full face, always florid, was now flushed with extra color from agitation. Yes, Daisy might be dead, but the next best thing was to see Daisy's child. When the door opened he came forward eagerly, with outstretched hands. A pale, slight, cold-looking woman had come in. He drew back in dismay. She showed but too plainly by one swift glance that she thought him a stranger, and a vulgar one. He owned to himself that he looked at her with a kind of shock. This Daisy Wilson's Daughter? This pale, dark, thin woman the child of that little, bright, curly-locked, golden-headed sister, whose face was as the sun, whose gay, rounded figure he had seen flitting before his eyes during all the weary years of his exile? It could scarcely be possible. Perhaps it was not possible?

"I have come to see Mrs. Home," he began.

"And I am Mrs. Home," answered the distinct, quiet voice.

No, there was no hope; his Daisy's daughter was not in the least like her. Well, she was at least her child. He must take what comfort he could out of the relationship without the likeness.

"You are Daisy's Wilson's child?" he said, and now again his hands were outstretched, and the smiles had returned to his face.

But Mrs. Home, completely in the dark, rather startled than otherwise, made no gesture of welcome. Her hands were not held out, her lips remained unsmiling.

"My mother's name was Wilson," she admitted. "Yes, it was Daisy Wilson. I did not recognize it at first, as of course she was never called it to me."

"Ay, ay, likely enough; but she was never anything else to me, just always little bright Daisy Wilson. I thought I'd find her before me, something as she used to be, a bit stoutened, perhaps, but not greatly altered. I have pictured her for the last six and twenty years just as I saw her last the bonniest bit of a thing the sun ever shone on."

"You knew my mother then?" said Charlotte.

"Knew her, lass, knew her! good heavens, what next? Did Daisy never speak to you about me? I don't believe it. Before I left it was 'Sandy, Sandy,' from morning to night. It was not in her to forget. Tell me, lass, did you never hear of your mother's big brother, Sandy Wilson who went to Australia?"

Charlotte's eyes began to dilate.

"My mother often spoke of this brother," she said slowly. "My mother would have liked to have met you, had you known him. She never fretted for any one so much, except when my father died. My mother's brother is dead for many, many years. They are together now."

"In spirit, lass, in spirit, I doubt not, but not otherwise. Why, is it possible you don't know me? Aren't you prepared? Did not your little lass tell you? I am your mother's brother, I am alive, as you see; I am Sandy Wilson."

"You!" Charlotte looked at him half incredulous, half pained; but then a sudden joy came over her, she forgot the vulgarity in the love for her dead mother which still shone out of those honest blue eyes. She glanced up again; those eyes were her mother's eyes; instantly they acted as open sesame to her heart. She held out her own hands now and her eyes filled with tears. "Forgive me, Uncle Sandy; if you are indeed he. I did not know you, I could not know you; I have believed you dead for many, many years. But you have a look of my mother. She would welcome you to-night, so I must in her name."

"Will you kiss me in her name, my lassie? Ah! that's good; 'tis long since I kissed one of my own. Yes, I've come back. I never did die, you see, though I knew that the report had reached England. I let it be, I did not trouble to contradict it."

"But it was wrong of you, Uncle Sandy. You said you loved my mother, and that report of your

death gave her terrible pain."

"I am sorry for it, lass; I never guessed about the pain, though I might have thought of it, sweet soul; but I knew she was married to a very rich man. I was poor, so poor as to know what hunger meant, I thought she could do without me. I went up into the bush and stayed there until I had made my fortune. After a time I got accustomed to knowing that every one in England would think me dead. I used to laugh in my sleeve at the surprise I meant to give Daisy when I walked in rich some day. Well, well, what an old fool I made of myself! I never once thought of *her* dying. She is dead, and I am left; there's no one to welcome me back, after all."

"She has been dead for over six years now; but come to the fire, uncle. I welcome you in my mother's name, and my children will love you. Now you must sit there and I will ring for Anne to bring in some tea."

After this the uncle and niece talked together for some time. Anne brought in the tea, and looked at them with eyes rendered round and large from excitement. They both nodded to her, for both felt pleased. Uncle Sandy had discovered that his niece had a voice like her mother, if not a face. It was delicious to him to sit so close to his own flesh and blood, and Charlotte, who had heard of Uncle Sandy during all her early days, who had seen her mother's eyes filling with tears when she mentioned him, felt now that for her mother's sake she could not make enough of this newly recovered relation. His rough, honest, kindly nature was finding its way too, very straight, to her heart. There was nothing innately common or vulgar about Uncle Sandy. Charlotte was a keen observer of character, and she detected the ring of the true metal within.

"To think I should have mistaken my uncle for some one going to see after the drawing-rooms!" she said after a pause.

"Ay, lass, you looked fairly dazed when I came up with my hand stretched out, hoping for a kiss," he said; "but no wonder: I never reckoned that that little maid-servant of yours would have told you nothing—nothing whatever. But what is that about drawing-rooms? You don't mean to tell me that you, Daisy Wilson's child, let lodgings?"

The color flew into Charlotte's pale, proud face.

"We do not need all the room in this house, so I generally have some one in the drawing-room," she answered—"the drawing-room and the bedroom beyond."

"Are your rooms free now, Charlotte?"

"No; but in a week they will be."

"Suppose you let the old uncle have them? I will pay any rent you like to ask. The fact is, I have lost my whole heart to that little Daisy of yours. I want to be near the child. I won't spoil her more than I can help."

"Then I *was* called down to my drawing-room lodger," answered Charlotte with a faint sweet smile.

"Yes, and I don't expect he will want to leave in a hurry. The fact is I have been so utterly friendless and homeless for such a number of years, that it is *nearly* as good as finding Daisy to be with her child. But, my dear lass, you will forgive a frank old man asking you a frank question. It's all moonshine about the house being too big for you. These houses are not so very monstrous, to judge by the looks of them. You have three children, so you tell me; if you let two rooms you must be a bit crippled, put as good a face on it as you will."

"We also want the money. The want of the help this brings in, in the matter of rent, is our true reason for letting," replied Charlotte. "You see, Uncle Sandy, my husband is a clergyman—a clergyman and curate. Such men are never over-burdened with money."

Sandy Wilson had small, penetrating, but very bright blue eyes; they were fixed now earnestly on his niece. He took a glance round the little parlor where they sat. He was an old Australian, accustomed to bush life, but even he noticed how threadbare was the carpet, how poor and meagre the window curtains. Charlotte herself, too, how thin and worn she was! Could those pale and hollow cheeks mean insufficient food?

"How old are you, niece Charlotte?" he suddenly demanded.

"I was twenty-five my last birthday."

"Forgive me, my lass, you look very old for that; I should have taken you for thirty. The fact is you are poor, nothing ages like poverty. And the greater fact remains that it was full time for old Uncle Sandy to come home and prove himself of some use in the world."

"We are poor," answered Charlotte; "we certainly are very poor. But poverty is not the greatest of troubles."

"No, but it puzzles me why you should be poor. When I left my little sister, she had been married about three months to that rich old Mr. Harman. He seemed devoted to her. He had surrounded her with wealth; and he assured me when I came to bid her good-bye, and she put her dear arms round my neck, that my little darling should never want for anything. He was a good old man, ages too old of course for my bright little Daisy. But it seemed better than leaving her as a governess. It was my one comfort when parting with Daisy, to feel that she could never want for

anything that money could get her."

"My mother has told me that during my father's life she lived as a rich woman," answered Charlotte.

"That means she did not afterwards. Did the old gentleman die bankrupt? I don't see how he could, for he had retired from business."

"No, my father died a very wealthy man."

"Then he did not leave her well off! You don't surely mean to tell me, Charlotte Home, that that old man dared to do anything but leave a large sum of money to your pretty young mother and to you? Why, be told me with his own lips that he would make most ample provision for her."

At these words Charlotte's white face grew yet whiter, and a piteous look of terror came into her eyes, but all she said was,—

"Nevertheless, after my father's death we were poor."

"Oh! the scoundrel! 'Tis well he's out of Sandy Wilson's power. To think of my Daisy not profiting by his wealth at least. How much did he leave to your mother, Charlotte?

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" Here Uncle Sandy sprang to his feet. "Mr. Harman left my Daisy nothing—nothing whatever! Then he did die bankrupt?"

"No, Uncle Sandy, he died rich."

"And her name was not mentioned in the will?"

"No."

"Ah! there was a will. Have you seen it?"

"No; why should I? It all happened long, long ago."

"And your mother never saw the will?"

"I don't think she did."

"Then to whom, may I ask, did he leave all his wealth?"

"You forget, Uncle Sandy, that my father was married before. He had two sons by his first marriage. These sons came in for his fortune. They were—they said they were, sorry for my mother, and they settled on her one hundred and fifty pounds a year for her life."

"Ay, I suppose you have got that pittance now?"

"No, it was only for my mother. When she died six years ago it ceased."

Sandy Wilson began to pace up and down the little parlor.

"Nothing left to Daisy. Daisy's name not mentioned in the will. Brothers sorry—pretend to be. Give my Daisy a pittance for her life—nothing to the child. Charlotte," he suddenly stopped in front of his niece, "don't you think you are a good bit of a fool?"

"Perhaps I am, Uncle Sandy. But I never recognized the fact before."

"You believe that story about the will?"

"I tell you the tale as my own mother told it to me."

"Ay, Daisy was always too credulous, a foolish little thing, if you like. But you—you are of different metal. You believe that story?"

"I—I—Don't ask me, Uncle Sandy."

"You do not believe it?"

"If you will have it so, I do not believe it."

"Ay, my lass, shake hands on that. You are not a fool. Oh! it was full time Sandy Wilson came home. Sandy can see to your rights, late as it is in the day."

Mrs. Home was silent. The old Australian was stamping his feet on the hearthrug. His face was now crimson from excitement and anger.

"Charlotte," he repeated, "why don't you speak to me? I have come back to see to your rights. Do you hear me, niece?"

Charlotte put her hand into his.

"Thank you, Uncle Sandy." Then she added, "You can do nothing. I mean you can take no legal steps without my knowledge and sanction."

"Well, it is not likely you will withhold your sanction from getting back what is your own.

Charlotte, where are these half-brothers of yours? Why, they were a good bit older than Daisy. They must be old men now. Where are they, Charlotte? Are they alive?"

"They are alive. I will tell you about them to-morrow. I want to think to-night."

"And so do I want to think. I will run away now, my dear niece. I am staggered by this tale, perfectly staggered. I will look in to-morrow evening, and you shall tell me more. Ay, I guess they never reckoned that Sandy Wilson would turn up. They thought with the rest of you that old Sandy—sharp old Sandy was safe in his grave, and they said to themselves that dead men tell no tales. If I remember aright, your father told me I should be one of the trustees to my sister. He *did* mention it; though, just like me, I never thought of it until this minute. Is it likely that he would speak of trustees if he meant to cut off that poor darling with a shilling? Oh! it's preposterous, preposterous. But I'll sleep over it. We'll think how best to expose the villains!"

"Uncle Sandy, you will promise me one thing: you will do nothing until you see me again?"

"Well, child, I can scarcely do much. I don't want to be long away from you, niece Charlotte. I'll look in to-morrow, about six o'clock. See that little Daisy is up, and introduce me to your husband. Oh! it was plain to be seen that Sandy Wilson was wanting in this country. Bless my old heart, what a Providence is over everything! Oh, the scoundrels! But Sandy will expose them. My Daisy cut off with a shilling!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"SOMETHING BETTER FOR THE CHILDREN THAN MONEY."

After her newly found uncle had left her, Charlotte Home sat on by the fire; her face was very pale; she looked a quite broken-down and troubled woman. Little Anne, almost on tiptoe, crept into the room. She was all quivering with excitement. She expected her mistress to turn to her—almost to fling her arms around her neck—to thank her with the warmest expressions for what she had done.

"Anne," rehearsed the little maid, imagining Charlotte's words, "you have saved us all; you are our lifelong benefactor. Henceforth partake of our wealth. Be not only our servant, but our friend."

This was how matters would have been managed in the *Family Herald*. Anne raised expectant eyes to her mistress's face, but one glance at it scattered her golden visions. She softly lifted up the tea-tray and withdrew. Her faith and hope had gone down to zero. She was a very dispirited little girl as she returned to her kitchen. That uncle from Australia was not a rich uncle. Missis would never look so miserable if he was rich. As a poor relation he was no use whatever; and Anne had done nothing for the family she loved. Oh, how *very* disappointing life was after all!

Meanwhile what now troubled Charlotte Home had very little to do with Uncle Sandy's possible gold. She was solving another problem, and the task was a difficult one.

For the past month Charlotte had been making up her mind to a certain line of action. Before she left Torquay her resolution was formed. She had been over four weeks there, and during those four weeks she and her boy had lived on Charlotte Harman's money. That money had saved the life of her child. When she first saw it and thanked for it, and each succeeding day, each succeeding hour, as she saw the color which was health, and the appetite which was life, returning to her darling, the conviction was growing upon her, that her hand could never inflict a blow upon the woman who had done so much for her. Her children wanted money, and her husband wanted money, and she herself too! A little dip into this world's softnesses, she owned, would be very pleasant; but, for all that, her hand must be still; her lips could not speak to cause pain and agony to one who had done so much for her. Miss Harman was going to be married. Was it possible that on the eve of her marriage she, Charlotte Home, could deal to her so cruel a blow? No, it was not possible. For Charlotte's sake, her father and uncle might keep their ill-gotten wealth. Mrs. Home believed more and more firmly that she and hers were robbed of their money. But now she could do nothing. She had been so treated by her enemy's daughter that to appear against that daughter's father would be impossible. As this conviction came to her, and she resolved to act upon it, and to let all chance of recovering her lost wealth go, a wonderful peace and calm stole over her. She almost used to fancy she heard the voice of God saying to her,—

"I will provide for your children, I can give them riches. There are better things to be won for those little ones than what money can give. There is such a thing as a heavy purse and a poor and empty heart. Suppose I fill those hearts with goodness, and greatness, and generosity, and love; is not that a better portion for these creatures who are to live for all eternity than the gold which lasts only for a time?"

Yes, Charlotte felt that it was a better portion. And such peace and contentment came to this woman during the last week at Torquay that she thought it the happiest week of her whole life. But now—now she sat by her own hearth in troubled maze. She had come back to find her resolve sorely shaken. With no one to help her, she had resolved to let her chance of riches go. She came

back to find an unexpected deliverer come to her. A strong, brave, practical man had appeared. This man was her own uncle—her beloved mother's brother. He knew how to act. While she alone must stumble in the dark, he would know what to do. He would—he could get her back her own. It seemed hard to reject such help; and yet her resolve was scarcely shaken, and the temptation, though severe, was not allowed to prevail. The voice of God was still talking to the woman, and she was not turning from Him.

Since the life of her child had been given back to her, a great softness and sweetness had come to Mrs. Home; she had tasted of a mother's bitterest cup, but God had not asked her to drink it to the dregs. Her dark eyes, always beautiful, had now grown very lovely, being filled with a tenderness which not only took in her own child, but, for his sake, all the other children in the world.

Yes, Charlotte loved God as she had never loved Him before, and it was becoming impossible for her to do that which might pain Him. After a time her husband came in, and the two sat and talked for some time. They had a great deal to say, and the hours flew on as each poured out a full heart to the other.

After a time Charlotte told of her visit from the uncle whom she had supposed for so many years to be dead. Mr. Home was interested, and asked many questions. Charlotte repeated, almost word for word, what Uncle Sandy had said. Her husband regarded her attentively. After a time he spoke.

"Lottie, you remember when first you told me that queer story about your father's will?"

"Yes," she said.

"I own I did not believe it; I own I thought very little about it. I ask your pardon, my dear. I now believe you are right."

"Oh, Angus!" a great flood of color came up to her face. "Oh! why," she added in a voice of pain, "why do you say this to me now?"

"Partly from what your uncle said to-night; partly for another reason. The fact is, my dear wife, while you were away I had a visit from your half-brother, Mr. Jasper Harman.".

"Angus!"

"Yes, he came here one evening. He told a tale, and he made a proposition. His tale was a lame one; his proposition scarcely came well from his lips. He evidently thought of me as of one unworldly and unpractical. I believe I am unpractical, but he never guessed that in my capacity as clergyman I have had much to do with sinners. This man has a conscience by no means void of offence. He is hardened. Charlotte, when I saw him, I instantly believed your story."

Mr. Home then told his wife the whole of his interview with Jasper Harman, and the proposal he had made to settle on Charlotte and on her children the three thousand pounds which had been her mother's for that mother's lifetime.

"I gave him no answer, my Lottie," he said in conclusion. "I told him you were away—that I would tell you all on your return."

"Then the decision is to rest with me, Angus?"

"Yes, I think it must."

"You do not mind whether I decline or accept?"

"I trust you absolutely. You shall do as you think best."

After this Mrs. Home was silent for a moment or two; then she got up, went on her knees by her husband's side, and laying her head against his breast, said,—

"We will be poor, my darling—poor and blessed. I will not touch their gold."

"My Lottie!" he answered. He did not quite understand her, but his heart began to beat.

"I will tell you all in a few words, Angus. I longed for money—be my reason base or noble, I longed for money. A month ago how sorely we needed it! God saw our need and sent it to us. He sent it through a channel and by a means which tried my proud heart. I accepted the gracious boon, and, when I accepted it, instantly I loved the giver; I loved—I love Charlotte Harman. She is innocent of all wrong. Angus, I cannot disturb her peace. My uncle has come home. My uncle, with his knowledge and his worldly skill, could now win my cause for me, and get back for me and mine what is ours. I will not let him. These old men may keep their ill-gotten wealth, for I cannot break the daughter's heart. I made my resolve at Torquay, Angus; and, though I own I have been tempted to-night—yes, I believe I have been tempted—still I must let this money go. I will leave those wicked men to God; but I cannot take their punishment into my own hands. And, Angus, dearest, neither can I take that small sum of money; for, though I cannot prosecute, neither can I accept a bribe. This money comes as a bribe. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Lottie, I fear it is so."

"I am right not to take it?"

"You are absolutely right."

"Then we will not touch it. I and mine can live without it."

"You and yours can live well and nobly without it, my most precious wife."

"Ah! there is rest and peace in my heart; and the little house, though so poor and shabby, seems very home-like. Angus, I am so tired after all this! I will go to bed."

Long after his wife had left him, the husband remained up. He had gone down on his knees, and he remained there for some hours. He had to thank God for his Charlotte, but even while he thanked a weight was heavy on his heart. Sin was very terrible to this man, and he feared that a very grievous sin had been committed. Long, long, into the night he cried to God for these sinners.

CHAPTER XXX.

SHE COULD NOT POSTPONE HER ENGAGEMENT.

Mr. Harman felt himself growing weaker and weaker. The disease which was to lay him in his grave was making slow, but steady progress. It was just possible that, had his mind been at rest, the weakness of body, the pain of body, the slow decay might have been, not removed, but at least arrested. Had Mr. Harman been a very happy man, he might have lived, even with so fatal a malady, for many years. He had lived a life of almost perfect physical health for over sixty years, and during all that time he had been able to keep mental pains at bay; but in his present weakness he found this impossible. His whole nervous system became affected, and it was apparent even to his daughter's eyes, that he was a very unhappy man. For her sake, however, he still did wonders. He dragged himself up to breakfast morning after morning, when he would have given worlds to remain in bed. He still went every day to his office in the city, though, when there, he sat in his office chair dull and unmindful of what was going on. Jasper did the work. Jasper was here, there, and everywhere; but it had come to such a pass with John Harman, that he now almost disliked gold. Still, for Charlotte's sake, he went there. Charlotte on the verge of her marriage must suspect nothing. In the evenings he sat with his daughter, he looked with apparent interest at the many presents which came pouring in, he made her show herself to him in each of the new dresses, and he even went himself with her to choose her wedding wreath and veil. But all these things had become such a weariness to the man that, dearly as he loved this one precious daughter, he began to look forward with almost a sense of relief to the one week of her absence. During that week he need disguise nothing, he need not go to the office, he need not put on this forced cheerfulness. He might stay in bed all day long if he pleased.

That week was near now, for it was the twelfth of April. In another eight days the wedding morning would dawn.

Charlotte was very busy. What young woman is not busy at such a time? Friends poured in, presents arrived at all hours. There were dressmakers and milliners to see and consult, from morning to night. Then Hinton took up some of his bride-elect's time, and the evening hours were given to her father. Seeing how much he liked having her all to himself after dinner each night, Charlotte had begged her lover not to come to see her at this particular time.

"You will have me for all the rest of my life, John," she would say, "and I think it does my father good to be quite alone with me. It reminds him of old times." Then, when Hinton acceded to her request, she often added, "My father puzzles me. Is it the parting from me makes him look so ill and sad? I often fear that there is more the matter with him than he lets appear. I wish he would consult a good doctor."

Hinton dared not tell her that he had consulted the very best. He could only try to turn her attention, and in this he believed that he succeeded much better than he really did. For when the night came after those quiet evenings, Charlotte found that she could not sleep. Was it excitement at her coming happiness, or was it anxiety?

Anxiety was new to this happy nature—new to this prosperous life. She shuddered at the grim thing, as it visited her night after night, in the solitude of her luxurious room. But shut her eyes to it, fight against it, as she would, it could not be got to depart from her. The fact was, a dreadful thing had happened to this frank and loving nature, she was beginning to suspect the father whom she loved. These suspicions had first come into play on the night when he had fainted in her presence. Some words he had used that night, some expressions which had fallen from his lips, had aroused a new and dreadful thought, that thought would not go to sleep, would not depart. Was it possible that her father had done something wrong long ago in his life, and that the remembrance of that wrong—that sin—was what ailed him now? Was it possible that her uncle Jasper, who always appeared so frank and open, had deceived her? Was it possible that Hinton knew that she was deceived? These thoughts did not trouble her much in the daytime, but at night they rose to agonies. They kept sleep far away: so much so, that in the morning she often came downstairs heavy-eyed and weary. She blamed herself, then, for her mean suspicions; she said to herself, as she gave her father his morning cup of coffee, that no face could be more incapable of concealing a wrong than that noble old face opposite to her, and she tried to atone

for her feelings by extra tenderness of voice and manner. But though this revulsion of feeling came with the morning, the night brought back the same agony. She now disliked even to think of Mrs. Home, she never spoke of her to John Hinton. He watched for her to do so, but the name of this young woman which had so intensely interested her never passed her lips. When Hinton told her that little Harold was better, and that on a certain day he and his mother would be in Kentish Town once more, she colored slightly and changed the subject. Hinton rather wondered at this. Uncle Jasper also remarked it. It was now a week to the wedding-day, and Charlotte was nerving herself for an effort. She had firmly resolved that before she really gave herself to Hinton, she would read her grandfather's will. She felt that nothing else would completely set her mind at rest. She dreaded doing this as much as she longed for it. Each day as it dawned she had put off the task, but when the day just a week before her wedding came, she felt that she must overcome what she called a weakness. She would learn the worst that very day. She had little or no idea how to carry out her design. She only knew that the will was kept at Somerset House, that if she went there and allowed herself to go through certain forms she should see it. She had never seen a will in her life, she scarcely knew even what it would look like. Nevertheless, she could consult no one. She must just go to the place and trust to circumstances to do the rest.

On the thirteenth of April she resolved, as she put on her dress and hurried down to meet her father at breakfast, that before that night came she would carry out her design. Her father seemed better that morning. The day was a specially lovely one, and Charlotte said to herself that, before that time to-morrow, her heart would be at rest; she would not even allow herself to glance at a darker alternative. Indeed, happy in having at last firmly made up her mind; she became suddenly scarcely at all fearful, scarcely anything but completely hopeful. She resolved that nothing should turn her from her purpose to-day.

Her father kissed her, told her he felt certainly better, and went off to the city.

Immediately after, her uncle Jasper came in.

"Lottie, child! I can take you to the private view of Mrs. ——'s pictures; I have just got an invitation. You know how wild you are to see them. Be ready at two o'clock. I will call for you then."

"I am very sorry, but I cannot go with you this afternoon, Uncle Jasper."

"Oh! You have made an engagement with Hinton. Can't you put it off? This is the last day for the pictures. You can go with Hinton to-morrow."

"It is not an engagement with John, Uncle Jasper. It is something else, and I cannot put it off."

All the time a rather loud voice within was saying to her, "Go and see the pictures. Put off the reading of the will. Be happy for one more day." But because this voice, which became so loud, frightened her, she would not yield to it.

"I am very sorry," she repeated; "I should have liked it greatly. But I cannot go."

"Well! it is a pity, and I took some trouble about it. However, it can't be helped."

"No, it can't be helped," repeated Charlotte.

Uncle Jasper went, feeling some annoyance, and also a little curiosity.

"Strange cattle—women," he said to himself. "I confess I don't understand 'em. Charlotte, wild to get to that private view two days ago, now won't go because of a whim. Well! I'm glad I never took a wife. I rather pity Hinton. I would not be tied even to that fine creature, Lottie, forever."

Jasper Harman had scarcely turned the corner of the street, before a cab drew up at the house, and Hinton came in. Charlotte had not yet left the breakfast-room.

"Ah! my dearest, I am afraid you might be out I must hurry away at once; but I just called to say that I have had a telegram from Webster. You know how I have longed for you two to meet. Well, he is coming to town to-day, and I want to bring him here at three o'clock. You will be sure to be at home."

"I am afraid I can't, John; I have an engagement."

"Oh! but you must put it off, you really *must* see Webster. He is my greatest friend, and is to be my best man. You really must, Lottie! and he telegraphs that he is coming up from Oxford on purpose."

"I am ever so sorry. Could not you telegraph to him to put off his visit until to-morrow?"

"No, my dear; he has started before this."

"I am very sorry; I am unfortunate," repeated Charlotte. A certain degree of obstinacy, altogether foreign to her nature, had crept into her voice.

Hinton looked at her in undisguised astonishment.

"You don't mean to say that you are not going to see Webster, when he is coming up to town on purpose?"

"John, dear, I will see him at five o'clock, I shall be home then. But I have an engagement at

three."

"I cannot bring Webster here at five, he must be on his way back then. You must put off your engagement."

"I really cannot. Uncle Jasper has just been here, and he asked me to go with him to see the private views at Mrs. ——'s studio. He took some trouble to get the invitation for us both, but I could not go with him, nor can I stay in. Mr. Webster must wait to make my acquaintance on our wedding-day, John."

"And I am to tell him that?"

"Say everything as nice and polite as you can. Say that I am most truly sorry."

Hinton turned his back on his promised bride; there was a cloud on his brow, he felt both hurt and angry.

"Lottie! what is your engagement?" This was said while pretending to look down the street.

Charlotte came close and put her hand a little timidly on his shoulder. "I know you will be vexed," she said "but I cannot tell you."

Hinton held up his hand to a passing hansom.

"Yes, I am vexed," he said, "but I cannot wait any longer now. You know I hate secrets, and I think you might have obliged me, Charlotte."

"I wish I could," she said, and now her eyes filled with tears.

Hinton scarcely kissed her before he rushed away, and Charlotte sank down on the nearest chair. The unaccountable feeling which had prompted her to refuse both her uncle and her lover, and to fix just that hour of three o'clock to visit Somerset House, was too strange and strong to be overcome. But the hope which had brightened her breakfast hour had now all departed. Her heart felt like lead within her breast, she dared not fully contemplate the realization of her worst fears. But they thronged like legion round her path.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHERE HAD THE MONEY CARES VANISHED TO?

Hinton felt thoroughly angry; perhaps he had some cause. Webster, his college chum, his greatest friend, was coming up to town. He had heard many times and often of Hinton's promised bride, and he was coming to town, Hinton knew well at some personal inconvenience, to see her, and she refused to see him.

Hinton, as well as Uncle Jasper, considered it a whim of Charlotte's. He was surprised. Nay, he was more than surprised. He was really angry. Here was the woman, who in a week's time now must stand up before God and promise solemnly to obey him for all the remainder of her life, refusing to attend to his most natural desire. She had an engagement, and she would not tell him what it was; she made a secret of it. Be the secret little or great, she knew how he disliked all such concealments.

Was it possible that he was deceived in Charlotte after all? No, no, he was too really loyal to her, too sincerely attached to her: her frankness and sweetness were too natural, too complete, for him really to doubt her; but he owned that he was disappointed—he owned that he had not the greatness which she under similar circumstances would have exercised. She was keeping him in the dark—in the dark he could not trust. He recalled, with feelings of anything but pleasure, her last secret. She thought little of it. But Hinton knew how differently he had received it; he did not like to be reminded of it now. During the last few weeks he had managed almost completely to banish it from his thoughts; but now it came back to his memory with some force; it reminded him of Mrs. Home. Was it possible that he was acting wrongly in not searching into her rights? Was it possible that things had already come to such a pass with him, that he would not do the right because he feared the consequences? Had riches and wealth and worldly honor already become dearer to his soul than righteousness and judgment and truth?

These condemnatory thoughts were very painful to the young man; but they turned his feelings of indignation from Charlotte to himself.

It was nearly a month now since he had left Mrs. Home. When he went away he had provided her with another lodger. He remembered that by this time she must have come back from Torquay. As this thought came to him he stopped suddenly and pulled out his watch. Webster would not be at Paddington before two o'clock. He had nothing very special to do that morning, he would jump into a hansom and go and see Mrs. Home and Harold. He put his ideas into execution without an instant's delay, and arrived at Kentish Town and drew up at the well-known door at quite an early hour. Daisy and the baby were already out, but Harold, still something of an invalid, stood by the dining-room window. Harold, a little weary from his journey, a little spoiled by his happy month at Torquay was experiencing some of that flatness, which must now and then visit even a little

child when he finds he must descend from a pedestal. For a very long time he had been first in every one's thoughts. He had now to retire from the privileges of an invalid to the everyday position, the everyday life of a healthy child. While at Torquay his mother had no thought for any one but him; but now, this very morning, she had clasped the baby in such an ecstasy of love to her heart, that little spoiled Harold felt quite a pang of jealousy. It was with a shout therefore of almost ecstasy that he hailed Hinton. He flew to open the door for him himself, and when he entered the dining-room he instantly climbed on his knee. Hinton was really fond of the boy, and Harold reflected with satisfaction that he was altogether his own friend, that he scarcely knew either Daisy or the baby.

In a moment entered the happy, smiling mother.

"Ah! you have come to see your good work completed," she said. "See what a healthy little boy I have brought back with me."

"We had just a delicious time," said Harold, "and I'm very strong again now, ain't I, mother? But it wasn't Mr. Hinton gave us the money to go to Torquay, it was my pretty lady."

"Do you know," said Mrs. Home, "I think you were scarcely, for all your great, great, and real kindness, scarcely perfect even in that respect. I never knew until a few days ago, and then it was in a letter from herself, that you are so soon to marry Charlotte Harman."

"Yes, we are to be married on the twentieth," answered Hinton, "Has she written to you? I am glad."

"I had one letter from her. She wrote to ask about my boy, and to tell me this of you."

"She takes a great interest in you," said Hinton.

"And I in her. I believe I can read character fairly well, and in her I see——"

"What?" asked the lover, with a smile.

"In brow, eyes, and lips I see truth, honor, love, bravery. Mr. Hinton, you deserve it all, but, nevertheless, you are drawing a great prize in your wife."

"I believe I am," answered the young man, deeply moved.

"When *can* I see my pretty lady again?" asked Harold, suddenly. "If you are going to marry her, do you mean to take her quite, quite away? When may I see her?"

"Before very long, I hope, my dear boy," answered Hinton.

"He has talked of her so often," said the mother. "I never saw any one who in so short a time so completely won the heart of a little child; I believe the thought of her helped to make him well. Ah! how thankful I am when I look at him; but Mr. Hinton, there is another thing which gives me great joy just now."

"And that?" said Hinton.

"Last night something very wonderful happened. I was at home not two hours, when I was surprised by a visit from one whom I had never seen before and whom I had supposed to be in his grave for over twenty years. My dear mother had one brother who went to Australia shortly after her marriage. From Australia the news reached her of his death. He was not dead; he came back again. I had a visit from that uncle last night."

"How strange!" said Hinton.

"Yes; I have not heard his story yet. He met my little Daisy in Regent's Park, and found out who she was through her likeness to my mother. Is it not all like a romance? I had not an idea who the dear old man was when he came to visit me last night; but how glad I am now to feel that my own mother's brother is still alive!"

Hinton asked a few more questions; then after many promises of effecting a meeting very soon between Charlotte and little Harold he went away. He was puzzled by Mrs. Home. The anxious woman he had thought of, whose sad face often haunted him, was gone, and another peaceful, happy, almost beautiful in her serenity, had come in her place. Her joy at Harold's recovery was both natural and right; but where had the money cares vanished to? Surely Charlotte's fifty pounds could not have done more than pay the Torquay trip. As to her delight over her Australian uncle's return, he rather wondered at it, and then forgot it. He little guessed, as he allowed it to vanish from his mind, how it was yet to influence the fate of more lives than his.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JASPER'S TERROR.

Uncle Jasper, too, left Charlotte on that special morning with some displeasure, some surprise, and some anxiety. Remorse, as I have said, did not visit the man. Long ago, a very long time ago

now, he and his brother John had touched an evil thing. For both men the natural consequences followed; but how differently? John wanted to fling the base defilement from his soul; Jasper wanted so to bury it there, so deftly, so cleverly to hide it within his very heart of hearts, that it should not appear to dishonor him in the eyes of his fellow-men. Of the final judgment and its disclosure he never thought. It was his inability to cover up the secret; it was his ever-growing knowledge that the garment was neither long enough nor broad enough to wrap it round, that caused his anxiety from day to day. In spite of his cheerful and ruddy face he was feeling quite worn and old. If this continues, if these people will insist on pulling the house down over their heads, I shall fall ill like John, he reflected. He was very angry with these stupid and silly people, who were bringing such shame and dishonor on themselves. He often found himself wishing that his niece Charlotte had not been the fine and open character she was. Had Charlotte been different he might have ventured to confide in her. He felt that with Charlotte on his side all might yet be well. This, however, was absolutely impossible. To tell Charlotte would be to tell the world. Bad as her father was in keeping this ugly secret quiet, Charlotte would be ten times, twenty times, worse. What an unfortunate thing it was that Charlotte had put that advertisement in the papers, and that Mrs. Home had answered it! Mrs. Home of all people! Well, well, it came of that dreadful meddling of women in literature. *He*, Jasper, had known no peace since the day that Charlotte had wished for an amanuensis to help her with her silly book.

Jasper on this particular morning, as he hurried off from the Harman house, felt less and less comfortable. He was sure, by Charlotte's manner, that her engagement was something very particular. He feared she was going to meet Mrs. Home. He came, with all his surmises, very far short of the real truth, but he was in that state of mind when the guilty fly, with no man pursuing. It had been an awful moment for old Jasper Harman when, a week ago, he had suddenly knocked up against that solitary, foreign-looking man. He had heard his voice and seen his face, and he had felt his own heart standing still. Who *was* this man? Was he a ghost? the ghost of the long-dead trustee? Jasper began to hope that it was but an accidental likeness in voice and manner. For was not this man, this Alexander Wilson, named in his father's will, dead and buried for many a day? Had not he, Jasper, not, indeed, seen him die, but had he not stood on his grave? Had not he travelled up some hundreds of miles in that wild Australian country for the sole purpose of standing on that special grave? And had not he read name and age, and date of death, all fully corroborating the story which had been sent to him? Yes, Jasper hoped that it was but a very remarkable likeness—a ghost of the real man. How, indeed, could it be anything but a ghost when he had stood upon the man's very grave? He hoped this. He had brought himself almost to believe it; but for all that, fear and uneasiness were becoming more and more his portion, and he did not like to dwell even in thought upon that night's adventures. He walked on fast. He disliked cabs, and never took them. One of his great secrets of health was exercise, and plenty of it; but he was rather in a hurry; he had an appointment in town for a comparatively early hour, and he wanted to call at his club for letters. He reached his destination, entered the building, and found a little pile awaiting him. He turned slowly into the reading-room to read them. One after the other he tore them open. They were not very interesting, and a rapid glance of his quick, deep eye was sufficient to enable him to master the contents. In ten minutes he had but one letter left to read, and that was in a strange handwriting. "Another begging epistle," he said to himself. He felt inclined to tear it up without going to the trouble of opening it. He had very nearly slipped it into his pocket, to take its chance at some future time, for he remembered that he was already late. Finally he did neither; he opened the letter and read it where he sat. This was what his eyes rested on—

10, Tremins Road, Kentish Town.
Sir:—

> According to your wish I write to you at your club. My wife returned from Torquay last night, and I told her of your visit and your proposal. She desires me to say, and this I do, both from her and myself, that she will not accept your offer, for reasons which we neither of us care to explain. We do not wish for the three thousand pounds you are willing to settle on my wife.

I remain, sir,
Yours faithfully,
Angus Home.

To Jasper Harman, Esq.

This letter fell from the hands of Jasper. His lips came a little apart, and a new look of terror came into his eyes. So absorbed was he, so thoroughly frightened by this letter, that he forgot where he was. He neither saw the looks of surprise, nor heard the words of astonishment made by those about him. Finally he gathered up envelope and paper and hurried out. As he walked down the street he looked by no means so young as he had done when he got up that morning. His hat was put on crooked, his very gait was uncertain. Jasper had got a shock. Being utterly unable to read the minds of the people who had written to him, he could but imagine one meaning to their words. They were not so unworldly as he had hoped. They saw through his bribe; they would not accept it, because—because—*they knew better*. Mrs. Home had read that will. Mrs. Home meant to prosecute. Yes, yes, it was all as plain as that the sun was shining overhead. Mrs. Home meant to go to law. Exposure, and disgrace, and punishment were all close at hand. There was no doubt of it, no doubt whatever now. Those were the reasons which neither Mr. nor Mrs. Home cared to explain. Turning a corner he came suddenly full tilt against Hinton.

The young man turned and walked down the street with him.

"You are on your way to Charlotte?" remarked the old man.

"No: I have been to her already. She has an engagement this afternoon. Did she not tell you? She said you wanted her to go somewhere with you, and this same engagement prevented it. No, I am not going to Prince's Gate, but I am off to Paddington in about an hour to meet a friend."

Hinton spoke cheerfully, for his passing annoyance with Charlotte had absolutely vanished under Mrs. Home's words of loving praise. When Mrs. Home spoke as she had done of his brave and noble Charlotte the young man had felt quite ashamed of having doubted her even for a brief moment.

Jasper had, however, been told of little Harold's illness, and Hinton, knowing this, continued,—

"I have just come from the Homes. You know whom I mean? Their little boy was the one I helped to nurse through scarlet fever. Mother and boy have come back from Torquay like different creatures from the pleasant change. Mrs. Home looked absolutely bright. Charlotte will like to hear of her; and by the way, a curious thing, a little bit of a romance has happened to her. An uncle from Australia, whom she had supposed to be dead and in his grave for over twenty years, walked in alive and hale last night. She did not know him at first, but he managed to prove his identity. He——good heavens! Mr. Harman, what is the matter? You are ill; come in here."

Hinton led Jasper into a chemist's shop, which they happened to be passing at the moment, for his ruddy face had suddenly become ghastly white, and he had to clutch the young man's arm to keep himself from falling.

"It is nothing," he explained, when he had been given a restorative. "Yes, I felt faint. I hope I am not going to be taken bad like my brother. What do you say? a hansom? Well, yes, perhaps I had better have one."

Jasper was bowled rapidly out of sight and Hinton walked on. No dust had been thrown in his eyes as to the cause of Jasper's agitation. He had observed the start of almost terror with which he had turned on him when he had first mentioned the long-lost Australian uncle of Mrs. Home's. He had often seen how uneasy he was, however cleverly he tried to hide it, when the Homes were mentioned. What did it all mean? Hinton felt very uncomfortable. Much as he loved Charlotte, it was not nice to marry into a family who kept concealed an ugly secret. Hinton was more and more convinced that there was a secret, and that this uncle who was supposed to be dead was in some way connected with it. Hinton was too acute, too clever, to put down Jasper's agitation to any other cause. Instantly he began to see a reason for Mrs. Home's joy in the recovery of this long-lost relation. It was a reason unworthy of her, unworthy and untrue; but nevertheless it took possession of the mind of this young man. The uncle ceased to be an object of little interest to him. He walked on, feeling downcast and perplexed. This day week would be his wedding-day, and Charlotte—Charlotte, beautiful and noble, nothing should part them. But what was this secret? Could he, dare he, fathom it? No, because of Charlotte he must not—it would break Charlotte's heart; because of Charlotte's father he must not, for it would cause his death; and yet, because of Jasper, he longed to, for he owned to himself that he disliked Jasper more and more.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE READING OF THE WILL.

Charlotte's depression did not remain with her all through the day. She was a healthy creature, healthy both in body and mind. It was impossible for her, with the bright spring sun shining, and with her wedding-day but one week absent, not to turn again to hope. She saw that she had vexed Hinton. She still felt that queer and uncomfortable desire to be at Somerset House, just at the very hour when her lover had pleaded for her society. But she reflected that when she told him the story, when she proudly cleared her father in his eyes, he would most abundantly forgive her.

"He hates secrets," she said to herself; "and it is the last, the very last, little, tiny secret I shall ever have from my darling."

By this it will be seen that she had ceased to fear her grandfather's will. She had ordered the carriage immediately after lunch, and now asked the coachman to drive to the Strand. As she lay back at her ease she reflected how soon now her anxiety would be over.

"Dear father," she whispered to her heart, "how extra loving and tender I must be to him to-night! I believe him now—fully and absolutely believe him now. I am only doing this for John's sake."

When she reached the Strand she desired the coachman to stop. She would not have him drive to Somerset House. Her secret was a secret, even the old coachman, who had known her from her birth, must not guess it. She told him that she had some business to transact, but that he might meet her at a certain part of the Embankment in an hour.

The carriage rolled out of sight. Now she was alone. She was not accustomed to walking the London streets by herself. Certainly she had never been in the Strand before alone. She had dressed herself with studied plainness, and now, with her veil drawn tightly over her face, she hurried on. She had consulted the map, and knew exactly where Somerset House was. She also had obtained a little, a very little information as to how she was to act for the pursuit of her purpose, from a young barrister who had visited at her home with Hinton some few weeks before. She considered that she had gained her knowledge with considerable skill; and now, with a beating heart, she proceeded to act on it. She turned into the great square which Somerset House encloses, found the particular building where wills are kept, and entered. She was now in a large room, or entrance-hall. There were many desks about, and some clerks, who did not seem particularly busy. Charlotte went up to one of the desks, a clerk lent an attentive ear, she told her errand.

"Ah! you want to read a will," said the gentleman. "You must first produce the proper stamp. Yes, yes, you can certainly see any will you desire. Just go through that door to your right, walk down the passage; you will see a door with such a direction written on it; ask for a search stamp. It will cost you a shilling. Bring it back to me."

Charlotte did as she was desired. The clerk she had appealed to, attracted by her appearance and manner, was willing to be both helpful and polite.

"Whose will do you want, madam?"

"I want my grandfather's will. His name was Harman."

"What year did he die?"

"Twenty-three years ago."

"Ah! just so. This is 1880. So he died in the year 1857. Do you see those catalogues to your left? Go up to those marked 1857. Look under letter H, until you find Harman. Bring the book open at that name to me."

Charlotte was clever at carrying out her instructions. She quickly returned with the book opened at the desired name. The clerk wrote Mr. Harman's name and a number of a folio on a small piece of blue paper. This he gave to Charlotte.

"Take this piece of paper to room number 31, along the passage," he said. "You will have the will very soon now."

She bowed, thanked him, and went away. At room 31 she was desired to wait in the reading-room. She found it without difficulty. It was a small room, with a long table in the middle, and benches round it. At one end sat a clerk at a desk. Charlotte seated herself at the table. There were other people about, some reading wills, some others waiting like herself. She happened just then to be the only woman in the room. She drew up her veil, pressed her hand to her pale face, and waited with what patience she could. She was too much excited to notice how she was looked at and her appearance commented upon. Sitting there and waiting with what courage she could muster, her fear returned. What stealthy thing was this she was doing in the dark? What march was she stealing on her father, her beloved and honored father? Suddenly it appeared to her that she had done wrong. That it would be better, more dignified, more noble, to ask from his own lips the simple truth, than to learn it by such underhand means as these. She half rose to go away; but at this moment a clerk entered, gave a piece of folded paper to the man at the desk, who read aloud the one word,—

"Harman."

Charlotte felt herself turning deadly white as she stood up to receive it. But when she really held her grandfather's will in her hand all desire not to read it had left her. She opened the folio with her shaking fingers, and began to read as steadily as she could. Her eyes had scarcely, however, turned over the page, and most certainly her mind had failed to grasp the meaning of a single word, before, for some unaccountable reason, she raised her head. A large man had come in and had seated himself opposite to her. He was a man on an immense scale, with a rough, red, kind face, and the longest, most brilliantly colored beard Charlotte had ever seen. His round, bright blue eyes were fixed earnestly on the young lady. She returned his glance, in her own peculiar full and open way, then returned to her interrupted task. Ah! what a task it was after all. Hard to understand, how difficult to follow! Charlotte, unused to all law phraseology, failed to grasp the meaning of what she read. She knit her pretty brows, and went over each passage many times. She was looking for certain names, and she saw no mention of them. Her heart began to leap with renewed joy and hope. Ah! surely, surely her grandfather had been unjust, and her own beloved father was innocent. Mrs. Home's story was but a myth. She had read for such a long, long time, and there was no mention of her or of her mother. Surely if her grandfather meant to leave them money he would have spoken of it before now. She had just turned another page, and was reading on with a light heart, when the clerk again entered. Charlotte raised her head, she could not tell why. The clerk said something to the clerk at the desk, who, turning to the tall foreign-looking man said,—

"The will of the name of Harman is being read just now by some one in the room."

"I will wait then," answered the man in his deep voice.

Charlotte felt herself turning first crimson, then pale. She saw that the man observed her. A sudden sense of fright and of almost terror oppressed her. Her sweet and gracious calm completely deserted her. Her fingers trembled so that she could scarcely turn the page. She did not know what she feared. A nightmare seemed pressing on her. She felt that she could never grasp the meaning of the will. Her eyes travelled farther down the page. Suddenly her finger stopped; her brain grew clear, her heart beat steadily. This was what she read,—

> "I will and bequeath all the residue of my real and personal estate and effects to the said John Harman, Jasper Harman, and Alexander Wilson, in trust to sell and realize the same, and out of the proceeds thereof to invest such a sum in public stocks or funds, or other authorized securities, as will produce an annual income of £1,200 a year, and to hold the investment of the said sum in trust to pay the income thereof to my dear wife for her life: and after her decease to hold the said investment in trust for my daughter Charlotte to her sole and separate use, independently of any husband with whom she may intermarry."

Charlotte Harman was not the kind of woman who faints. But there is a heart faintness when the muscles remain unmoved, and the eyes are still bright. At that moment her youth died absolutely. But though she felt its death pang, not a movement of her proud face betrayed her. She saw, without looking at him, that the red-faced man was watching her. She forced herself to raise her eyes, and saying simply, "This is Mr. Harman's will," handed it to him across the table. He took it, and began to devour the contents with quick and practised eyes. What she had taken so long to discover he took it in at a glance. She heard him utter a a smothered exclamation of pain and horror. She felt not the least amazement or curiosity. All emotion seemed dead in her. She drew on her gloves deliberately, pulled down her veil, and left the room. That dead, dead youth she was dragging away with her had made her feel so cold and numb that she never noticed that the red faced man had hastily folded up the will, had returned it to the clerk at the desk, and was following her. She went through the entrance hall, glancing neither to the left or right. The man came near. When they both got into the square he came to her side, raised his hat and spoke.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TRUSTEES.

"Madam," said the stranger, "you will pardon my intruding on you, but I saw it in your face. You are interested in that will you have just read."

"Yes," answered Charlotte simply.

At another time she would have given an indignant retort to what she would have considered a liberty. Now she turned her eyes with a mute appeal in them to this stranger, for she recognized kindness in his tones.

"It was my grandfather's will," she said, responding yet farther to the full, kind gaze he gave her back.

"Ah! then that sets me right," said Sandy Wilson, for it was he. "That sets me right, young lady. Now I saw you got a considerable bit of a shock just then. You ain't, you'll forgive me for saying so, but you ain't quite fit to meet any of your people for a bit; you may want them not to guess, but any one with half an eye can see you're not the young lady you were even when I entered that reading-room not half an hour back. I'm a rough, plain man, but I'm very much interested in that will too, and I'd like to have a little bit of a talk with you about it, if you'll allow me. Suppose, miss, that you and I just take a turn round the square for a few moments."

Charlotte's answer to this was to turn her face again towards the particular building where she had read the will, and her companion, turning with her, began to talk eagerly.

"You see, miss, it was quite a little bit of luck brought you and me together to-day. The gentleman who made that will was your grandfather; your name is——"

"Harman," answered Charlotte.

"Ah! yes, I see; and I—I am Alexander Wilson. I don't suppose you ever saw me before; but I, too, am much interested in that will. I have been abroad, and—and—supposed to be dead almost ever since that will was made. But I was not dead, I was in Australia; I came home a week ago, and found out my one living relation, my niece, my sister's child. She is married and is a Mrs. Home now, but she is the Charlotte named in Mr. Harman's will, the Charlotte to whom, and to her mother before her, Mr. Harman left £1,200 a year."

"Yes," said Charlotte Harman. She found difficulty in dragging this one word from her lips.

"Madam, I find my niece very poor; very, very poor. I go and look at her father's will. I see there that she is entitled to wealth, to what she would consider riches. I find also that this money is left for her benefit in the hands of trustees; two of the trustees are called Harman, the other, madam, is—is I—myself; I—Alexander Wilson, am the other trustee, supposed to be dead. I could not hitherto act, but I can act now. I can get that wronged woman back her own. Yes, a monstrous

piece of injustice has been done. It was full time for Sandy Wilson to come home. Now the first thing I must do is to find the other trustees; I must find the Harmans, wherever they are, for these Harmans have robbed my niece."

"I can give you their addresses," answered Charlotte, suddenly pausing in her walk and turning and facing her companion. "John Harman, the other trustee, who, as you say, has robbed Mrs. Home, is my father. I am his only child. His address is Prince's Gate, Kensington."

"Good heavens!" said Wilson, shocked and frightened by her manner; "I never guessed that you were his child—and yet you betray him."

"I am his only child. When do you wish to see him?"

To this question Wilson made no answer for a few moments. Though a just man, he was a kind one. He could read human nature with tolerable accuracy. It was despair, not want of feeling, which put those hard tones into that young voice. He would not, he could not, take advantage of its bewilderment.

"Miss Harman," he said after a pause, "you will pardon me, but I don't think you quite know what you are saying; you have got a considerable bit of a shock; you were not prepared for this baseness—this baseness on your father's part."

Here her eyes, turned with a sudden swift flash of agony upon him, said as plainly as eyes could speak—

"Need you ask?"

"No, you could not have guessed it," continued Sandy, replying to this mute, though beautiful appeal, almost with tears. "You are Mr. Harman's only child. Now I daresay you are a good bit of an idol with him. I know how I'd worship a fine lassie like you if I had her. Well, well, miss: I don't want to pain you, but when young things come all on a heap on a great wrong like you have done to-day, they're apt, whatever their former love, to be a bit, just a bit, too hard. They do things, in their first agony, that they are sorry enough for by and by. Now, miss, what I want to say is this, that I won't take down your father's address to-day nor listen indeed to anything you may tell me about him. I want you to sleep it over, miss. Of course something must be done, but if you will sleep it over, and I, Sandy Wilson sleep it over too, we'll come together over the business with our heads a deal clearer than we could when we both felt scared, so to speak, as we doubtless do just at present. I won't move hand or foot in the matter until I see you again, Miss Harman, When do you think you will be able to see me again?"

"Will this hour to-morrow do?"

"Yes; I shall be quite at your service. And as we may want to look at that will again, suppose we meet just here, miss?"

"I will be here at this hour to-morrow," said Charlotte, and as she spoke she pulled out her watch to mark the exact time. "It is a quarter past four now," she said; "I will meet you here at this hour to-morrow, at a quarter past four."

"Very well, young lady, and may God help you! If I might express a wish for you, it is that you may have a good hard cry between now and then. When I was told, and quite sudden like too, that my little sister, Daisy Wilson, was dead nothing took off the pressure from my heart and brain like a good hearty cry. So I wish you the same. They say women need it more than men."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DAN'S WIFE.

Charlotte watched Wilson out of the square, then she slowly followed him. The numbness of that dead youth was still oppressing her heart and brain. But she remembered that the carriage must be waiting for her on the Embankment, also that her father—she gasped a little as the thought of her father came to her—that her father would have returned from the city; that he might ask for her, and would wonder and grow uneasy at her absence. She must go home, that was her first thought. She hurried her steps, anxious to take the first turning which would lead to the Embankment.

She had turned down a side street and was walking rapidly, when she heard her name called suddenly and eagerly, and a woman, very shabbily dressed, came up to her.

"Oh, Miss Harman—Miss Harman—don't you know me?"

Charlotte put her hand to her brow.

"Yes," she said, "I know you now; you are Hester Wright. Is your husband out of prison yet?"

"He is, Miss, and he's dying; he's dying 'ard, 'ard; he's allers saying as he wants to see either you or his master. We are told that the master is ill; but oh! miss, miss, ef you would come and see him, he's dreadful anxious—dreadful, dreadful anxious. I think it's jest some'ut on his mind; ef he

could tell it, I believe as he'd die easy. Oh! my beautiful, dear young lady, every one has a good word for you. Oh! I was going to make bold to come to Prince's Gate, and ask you to come to see him. You'll never be sorry, miss, if you can help a poor soul to die easy."

"You say he is really dying?" said Charlotte.

"Yes, indeed, indeed, miss; he never held up his head since he saw the inside of the prison. He's dying now of a galloping waste, so the doctors say. Oh! Miss Harman, I'll bless you for ever if you'll come and see him."

"Yes, I will come," said Charlotte. "Where do you live?"

"Away over at Poplar, miss. Poor place enough, and unfit for one like you, but I'll come and fetch you my own self, and not a pin's worth of harm shall come to you; you need have no cause to fear. When shall I come for you, my dear, dear young lady?"

"The man is dying, you say," said Charlotte. "Death doesn't wait for our convenience; I will come with you now. My carriage is waiting quite near, I must go and give directions to the coachman: you can come with me: I will then get a cab and drive to see your husband."

After this the two women—the rich and the poor—walked on side by side, quickly and in silence. The heart of the one was dry and parched with the sudden fire of that anguish and shame, the heart of the other was so soothed, so thankful, that soft tears came, to be wiped stealthily away.

"Ain't she an angel?" she said to herself, knowing nothing, guessing less, of the storm which raged within her companion's soul; "and won't my poor Dan die easy now?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN OLD WEDDING-RING.

Once in Charlotte's life before now, she had remembered her father doing what she considered a strangely hard thing. A valet in whom he had always reposed full confidence had robbed him of one hundred pounds. He had broken open his master's desk at night and taken from thence notes to that amount. The deed had been clumsily done, and detection was very easy. The name of this valet was Wright. He was young and good-looking, and had been lately married; hitherto he had been considered all that was respectable. When his crime was brought home to him, he flew to seek Charlotte, then a very young girl; he flung himself on his knees in her presence, and begged of her to ask her father to show mercy to him. Scarcely half a dozen words of passionate, terrified entreaty had passed his trembling lips, before there came a tap at the door and the young wife rushed in to kneel by his side. Together they implored; their words were poor and halting, but the agony of their great plea for mercy went straight to the young generous heart they asked to intercede for them. Charlotte promised to do what she could. She promised eagerly, with hope in her tones.

Never afterwards did she forget that day. Long indeed did the faces of those two continue to haunt her, for she had promised in vain; her father was obdurate to all her entreaties; even her tears, and she had cried passionately, had failed to move him. Nothing should save Wright from the full penalty of his crime. He was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison.

From that moment the Harmans lost sight of the couple. Charlotte had tried, it is true, to befriend Hester Wright, but the young woman with some pride had refused all assistance from those whom she considered strangely hard and cruel. It was some years now since anything had been heard of either of them. Charlotte, it is true, had not forgotten them, but she had put them into a back part of her memory, for her father's conduct with regard to Wright had always been a sore puzzle to her. And now, on this day of all days, she was driving in a cab by the side of Hester Wright to see her dying husband. She had sent a message home by the coachman which would allay all immediate anxiety on her account, and she sat back in the cab by the side of the poor and sad woman with a sense of almost relief, for the present. For an hour or two she had something outside of herself and her home to turn her thoughts to. After what seemed a very long drive, they reached the shabby court and shabbier house where the Wrights lived.

Charlotte had heard of such places before, but had never visited them. Shabby women, and dirty and squalid children surrounded the young lady as she descended to the pavement. The children came very close indeed, and some even stroked her dress. One mite of three years raised, in the midst of its dirt and neglect, a face of such sweetness and innocence, that Charlotte suddenly stooped down and kissed it. That kiss, though it left a grimy mark on her lips, yet gave the first faint touch of consolation to her sorely bruised heart. There was something good still left on God's earth, and she had come to this slum, in the East end of London, to see it shine in a baby's eyes.

"Ef you please, Miss, I think we had better keep the cab," said Hester Wright; "I don't think there's any cabstand, not a long way from yere."

Charlotte spoke to the cabby, desired him to wait, then she followed Hester into the house.

"No, I have no children," said the woman in answer to a question of the young lady's; "thank God fur that; who'd want to have young 'uns in a hole like this?"

By this time they had reached their destination. It was a cellar; Hester was not so very far wrong in calling it a hole. It was damp, dirty, and ill-smelling, even to the woman who was accustomed to it; to Charlotte it was horrible beyond words. For a time, the light was so faint she could distinguish nothing, then on some straw in a corner she saw a man. He was shrunken, and wasted, and dying, and Charlotte, prepared as she was for a great change, could never have recognized him. His wife, taking Charlotte's hand in hers, led her forward at once.

"You'd never ha' guessed, Dan, as I'd have so much luck," she said. "I met our young lady in the street, and I made bold to 'ax her and come and see you, and she come off at once. This is our Miss Harman, Dan dear."

"Our Miss Harman," repeated the dying man, raising his dim eyes. "She's changed a goodish bit."

"Don't call me yours," said Charlotte. "I never did anything for you."

"Ay, but you tried," said the wife. "Dan and me don't furget as we heerd you cryin' fit to break yer heart outside the study door, and him within, wid a heart as hard as a nether mill-stone, would do nought. No, you did yer werry best; Dan and me, we don't furget."

"No, I don't furget," said the man. "It wor a pity as the old man were so werry 'ard. I wor young and I did it rare and clumsy; it wor to pay a debt, a big, big debt. I 'ad put my 'and to a bit of paper widhout knowing wot it meant, and I wor made to pay for it, and the notes they seemed real 'andy. Well, well, I did it badly, I ha' larnt the right way since from some prison pals. I would not be found out so easy now."

He spoke in an indifferent, drawling kind of voice, which expressed no emotion whatever.

"You are very ill, I fear," said Charlotte, kneeling by his side.

"Ill! I'm dying, miss dear."

Charlotte had never seen death before. She noticed now the queer shade of grey in the complexion, the short and labored breath. She felt puzzled by these signs, for though she had never seen death, this grayness, this shortness of breath, were scarcely unfamiliar.

"I'm dying," continued the man. "I don't much care; weren't it fur Hetty there, I'd be raythe glad. I never 'ad a chance since the old master sent me to prison. I'd ha' lived respectable enough ef the old master 'ad bin merciful that time. But once in prison, always in prison fur a friendless chap like me. I never wanted to steal agen, but I jest 'ad to, to keep the life in me. I could get no honest work hanywhere; then at last I took cold, and it settled yere," pointing to his sunken chest, "and I'm going off, sure as sure!"

"He ain't like to live another twenty-four hours, so the doctor do say," interrupted the wife.

"No, that's jest it. Yesterday a parson called. I used ter see the jail chaplain, and I never could abide him, but this man, he did speak hup and to the point. He said as it wor a hawful thing to die unforgiven. He said it over and over, until I wor fain to ax him wot I could do to get furgiven, fur he did say it wor an hawful thing to die without having parding."

"Oh, it must be, it must be!" said Charlotte, suddenly clasping her hands very tightly together.

"I axed him how I could get it from God h'Almighty, and he told me, to tell him, the parson, first of all my whole story, and then he could *adwise* me; so I hup and telled him heverything, hall about that theft as first tuk me to prison and ruined me, and how 'ard the old master wor, and I telled him another thing too, for he 'ad sech a way, he seemed to draw yer werry 'art out of you. Then he axed me ef I'd furgiven the old master, and I said no, fur he wor real, real 'ard; then he said so solemn-like, 'That's a great, great pity, fur I'm afraid as God can't furgive you, till you furgives.' Arter that he said a few more words, and prayed awhile, and then he went away. I could not sleep hall night, and to-day I called Hetty there, over, and she said as she'd do her werry best to bring either the old master yere, or you miss, and you see you are come; 'tis an awful thing to die without parding, that's why I axed you to come."

"Yes," said Charlotte very softly.

"Please, miss, may a poor dying feller, though he ain't no better nor a common, common thief, may he grip, 'old of yer and?"

"With all my heart."

"There now, it don't seem so werry 'ard. *Lord Jesus, I furgives Mr. Harman.* Now I ha' said it. Wife dear, bring me hover that little box, that as I allers kep' so close."

His wife brought him a tiny and very dirty cardboard box.

"*She* kep' it when I wor locked up; I allers call it my bit o' revenge. I'll give it back now. Hetty, open it."

Hetty did so, taking from under a tiny bit of cotton-wool a worn, old-fashioned wedding-ring.

"There, miss dear," said Wright, handing it to her, "that wor the old master's wife's ring. I knew

as he set more prize to it nor heverything else he had, he used to wear it on a bit of ribbon round his neck. One day he did not put it on, he furgot it, and I, when I found he meant to be so werry, werry 'ard, I took it and hid it, and took it away wid me. It comforted me when I wor so long in prison to think as he might be fretting fur it, and never guess as the lad he were so 'ard on had it. I never would sell it, and now as I has furgiven him, he may have it back agen. You tell him arter I'm dead, tell him as I furgives him, and yere's the ring back agen."

Charlotte slipped the worn little trinket on her finger.

"I will try and give my father your message," she said. "I may not be able at once, but I will try. I am glad you have forgiven him; we all stand in sore, sore need of that, not only from our fellow-men, but much more from our God. Now good-bye, I will come again." She held out her hand.

"Ah, but miss dear, I won't be yere fur no coming again, I'll be far away. Hetty knows that, poor, poor, gal! Hetty'll miss me, but only fur that I could be real glad, fur now as I ha' furgiven the old master, I feels real heasy. I ain't nothing better nor a common thief, but fur hall that, I think as Jesus 'ull make a place for me somehow nigh of hisself."

"And, miss," said Hester, "I'm real sorry, and so will Dan be when I tell him how bad the old master is."

"My father is not well; but how do you know?" said Charlotte.

"Well, miss, I went to the house to-day, a-looking fur you and the servant she told me, she said as there worn't never a hope, as the old master were safe to die."

"Then maybe I can tell himself hup in heaven as I quite furgives him," said Dan Wright.

Charlotte glanced from one speaker to the other in a kind of terrible astonishment. Suddenly she knew on whose brow she had seen that awful grayness, from whose lips she had heard that short and hurried breath. A kind of spasm of great agony suddenly contracted her heart. Without a word, however, she rose to her feet, gave the wife money for her present needs, bade the dying husband good-bye, and stepped into the cab which still waited for her. It was really late, and all daylight had faded as she gave the direction for her own luxurious home.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THREE FACTS.

Dinner was more than half over when she reached Prince's Gate. She was glad of this. She went straight up to her own room and sent for her maid.

"Ward, I am very tired and not very well. I shall not go down again to-night, nor do I wish to see any one. Please bring up a cup of strong tea here, and a little dry toast, and then you may leave me. I shall not want you again to-night."

"You won't see Mr. Harman again to-night, miss. Am I to take him that message?"

"Yes; say that I have a headache and think I had better stay quiet. I will be down to breakfast as usual."

Ward went away, to return in a few moments with the tea and toast.

"If you please, Miss Harman, they have just sent the wedding dress and veil from ——. Are you too tired to be fitted to-night?"

Charlotte gave a little involuntary shudder.

"Yes, I am much too tired," she said; "put everything away, I do not want even to look at them. Thank you, Ward, this tea looks nice. Now you need not come in again. Good-night."

"Good night, Miss Harman," said the maid, going softly to the door and closing it behind her.

Charlotte got up at once and turned the key. Now, at last, thank God, she was quite alone. She threw off her bonnet and cloak and going straight to her bed flung herself upon it. In this position she lay still for over an hour. The strong tension she had put on herself gave way during that hour, for she groaned often and heavily, though tears were very far from her eyes. At the end of about an hour she got up, bathed her face and hands in cold water, drank a cup of tea, and put some coals on a fire in the grate. She then pulled out her watch. Yes; she gave a sigh of relief—it was not yet ten o'clock, she had the best part of twelve hours before her in which to prepare to meet her father at breakfast. In these hours she must think, she must resolve, she must prepare herself for action. She sat down opposite the little cheerful fire which, warm though the night was, was grateful to her in her chilled state of mind and body. Looking into its light she allowed thought to have full dominion over her. Hitherto, from the moment she had read those words in her grandfather's will until this present moment, she had kept thought back. In the numbness which immediately followed the first shock, this was not so difficult. She had heard all Sandy Wilson's words, but had only dimly followed out their meaning. He wanted to meet her on the morrow. She had promised to meet him, as she would have promised also to do anything else,

however preposterous, at that moment. Then she had felt a desire, more from the force of habit than from any stronger motive, to go home. She had been met by Hester Wright, and Hester had taken her to see her dying husband. She had stood by the deathbed and looked into the dim and terrible eyes of death, and felt as though a horrible nightmare was oppressing her, and then at last she had got away, and at last, at last she was at home. The luxuries of her own refined and beautiful home surrounded her. She was seated in the room where she had slept as a baby, as a child, as a girl; and now, now she must wake from this semi-dream, she must rouse herself, she must think it out. Hinton was right in saying that in a time of great trouble a very noble part of Charlotte would awake; that in deep waters such a nature as hers would rise, not sink. It was awakening now, and putting forth its young wings, though its birth-throes were causing agony. "I *will* look the facts boldly in the face," she said once aloud, "even my own heart shall not accuse me of cowardice." There were three facts confronting this young woman, and one seemed nearly as terrible as the other. First, her father was guilty. During almost all the years of her life he had been not an honorable, but a base man; he had, to enrich himself, robbed the widow and the fatherless; he had grown wealthy on their poverty; he had left them to suffer, perhaps to die. The will which he had thought would never be read was there to prove his treachery. Believing that his fellow-trustee was dead, he had betrayed his sacred trust. Charlotte could scarcely imagine a darker crime. Her father, who looked so noble, who was so tender and good to her, who bore so high a character in the eyes of the world, was a very bad man. This was her first fact. Her second seemed, just because of the first, even a shade darker. This father, whom she had loved, this poor, broken-down, guilty father, who, like a broken idol, had fallen from his high estate in her heart, was *dying*. Ah! she knew it now; that look on his old face could only belong to the dying. How blind she had been! how ignorant! But the Wrights' words had torn the veil from her eyes; the guilty man was going fast to judgment. The God whom he had sinned against was about to demand retribution. Now she read the key to his unhappiness, his despair. No wonder, no wonder, that like a canker it had eaten into his heart. Her father was certainly dying; God himself was taking his punishment into His own hands. Charlotte's third fact, though the most absolutely personal of the whole, scarcely tortured her as the other two did to-night. It lay so clearly and so directly in her path, that there was no pausing how best to act. The way for action was too clear to be even for an instant disobeyed. Into this fire she must walk without hesitation or pause. Her wedding-day could not be on the twentieth; her engagement must be broken off; her marriage at an end. What! she, the daughter of a thief, ally herself to an upright, honorable man! Never! never! Whatever the consequences and the pain to either, Hinton and she must part. She did not yet know how this parting would be effected. She did not know whether she would say farewell to her lover telling him all the terrible and bitter disgrace, or with a poor and lame excuse on her lips. But however she did it, the thing must be done. Never, never, never would she drag the man she loved down into her depths of shame.

To-night she scarcely felt the full pain of this. It was almost a relief, in the midst of all the chaos, to have this settled line of action around which no doubt must linger. Yes, she would instantly break off her engagement. Now she turned her thoughts to her two former facts. Her father was guilty. Her father was dying. She, in an underhand way, for which even now she hated herself had discovered her father's long-buried crime. But she had not alone discovered it. Another had also gone to see that will in Somerset House; another with eyes far more practised than hers had read those fatal words. And that other, he could act. He would act; he would expose the guilty and dying old man, for he was *the other trustee*.

Charlotte was very ignorant as to how the law would act with regard to such a crime as her father's. Doubtless there would be a public trial, a public disgrace. He would be dragged into the prisoner's dock; his old white head would be bowed low there, and he was a dying man.

In the first shock and horror of finding that the father she had always almost worshipped could be guilty of such a terrible crime, a great rush of anger and almost hardness had steeled her heart against him; but now tenderer feelings came back. Pity, sad-eyed and gentle, knocked at her heart, and when she let in pity, love quickly resumed its throne. Yes; whatever his crime, whatever his former life, she loved that old man. That white-headed, broken-hearted man, so close to the grave, was her father, and she his only child. When she spoke to Sandy Wilson to-day she had felt no desire to save the guilty from his rightful fate. But now her feelings were different. A great cry arose in her heart on his behalf. Could she screen him? could she screen him from his fate? In her agony she rose and flung herself on her knees. "My God, help me; my God, don't forsake me; save my father. Save him, save him, save him."

She felt a little calmer after this broken prayer, and something to do occurred to her with its instant power of tranquillizing. She would find out the doctor whom her father consulted. She would ask Uncle Jasper. She would make him tell her, and she would visit this man early in the morning, and, whatever the consequence, learn the exact truth from his lips. It would help her in her interview later on with Mr. Wilson. Beyond this little immediate course of action, there was no light whatever; but she felt so far calmed, that, about two o'clock, she lay down and sleep came to her—healthy and dreamless sleep, which was sent direct from God to put strength into the brave heart, to enable it to suffer and endure. Many weeks before Mr. Home had said to Charlotte Harman, "You must keep the Christ bright within you." Was His likeness to shine henceforth through all the rest of her life, in those frank eyes, that sweet face, that noble woman's heart, because of and through that great tribulation? We have heard tell of the white robes which they wear who go through it. Is it not worth while for so sacred a result to heat the furnace seven times?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE DOCTOR'S VERDICT.

In her terrible anger and despair Charlotte had almost forgotten Uncle Jasper; but when she came down to breakfast the following morning and saw him there, for he had come to Prince's Gate early, and was standing with her father on the hearthrug, she suddenly remembered that he too must have been guilty; nay, worse, her father had never tried to deceive her, and Uncle Jasper had. She remembered the lame story he had told her about Mrs. Home; how fully she had believed that story, and how it had comforted her heart at the time! Now she saw clearly its many flaws, and wondered at her own blindness. Charlotte had always been considered an open creature—one so frank, so ingenuous, that her secrets, had she ever tried to have any, might be read like an open book; but last night she had learned to dissemble. She was glad when she entered the cheerful breakfast-room to find that she was able to put her hardly learned lesson in practice. Knowing what she did, she could yet go up and kiss her father, and allow her uncle to put his lips to her cheek. She certainly looked badly, but that was accounted for by the headache which she confessed still troubled her. She sat down opposite the tea-urn, and breakfast was got through in such a manner that Mr. Harman noticed nothing particular to be wrong. He always drove to the City now in his own private carriage, and after he had gone Charlotte turned to Jasper.

"Uncle Jasper," she said, "you have deceived me."

"Good heavens! how, Charlotte?" said the old uncle.

"My father is *very* ill. You have given me to understand that there was nothing of serious consequence the matter with him."

Uncle Jasper heaved a slight but still audible sigh of relief. Was this all? These fears he might even yet quiet.

"I have not deceived you, Charlotte," he said, "for I do not believe your father to be seriously ill."

He fixed his keen gray eyes on her face as he spoke. She returned his gaze without shrinking.

"Still you do think him ill?" she said.

"Well, any one to look at him must admit that he is not what he was."

"Just so, Uncle Jasper. So you have told me very many times, when you have feared my troubling him on certain matters. Now it has come to me from another source that he is very ill. My eyes have been opened, and I see the fact myself. I wish to learn the simple and exact truth. I wish to see the doctor he has consulted."

"How do you know he has consulted any?"

"Has he?"

Uncle Jasper was silent for a moment. He felt in a difficulty. Did Charlotte know the worst, she might postpone her marriage, the last thing to be desired just now; and yet where had she got her information? It was awkward enough, though he felt a certain sense of relief in thus accounting for the change in her appearance since yesterday morning. He got up and approached her side softly.

"My dear, I do own that your father is ill. I own, too, that I have, by his most express wish, made as light of the matter to you as I could. The fact is, Charlotte, he is anxious, very anxious, about himself. He thinks himself much worse than I believe him to be; but his strongest desire is, that now, on the eve of your marriage, you should not be alarmed on his account. I firmly believe you have no cause for any special fear. Ought you not to respect his wishes, and rest satisfied without seeking to know more than he and I tell you? I will swear, Charlotte, if that is any consolation to you, that I am not immediately anxious about your father."

"You need not swear, Uncle Jasper. Your not being anxious does not prevent my being so. I am determined to find out the exact truth. If he thinks himself very ill he has, of course, consulted some medical man. If you will not tell me his name I will myself ask my father to do so to-night."

"By so doing you will shock him, and the doctor does not wish him to be shocked."

"Just so, Uncle Jasper, and you can spare him that by telling me what you know."

"My dear niece, if you *will* have it?"

"I certainly am quite resolved, uncle."

"Well, well, you approach this subject at your peril. If you *must* see the doctor you must. Wilful woman over again. Would you like me to go with you?"

"No, thank you; I prefer to go alone. What is the doctor's name?"

"Sir George Anderson, of B—— Street."

"I will go to him at once," said Charlotte.

She left the room instantly, though she heard her uncle calling her back. Yes, she would go to Sir George at once. She pulled out her watch, ran upstairs, put on some out-door dress, and in ten minutes from the time she had learned the name of the great physician was in a hansom driving to his house. This rapid action was a relief to her. Presently she arrived at her destination. Yes, the doctor was at home. He was engaged for the present with another patient, but if Charlotte liked to wait he would see her in her turn. Certainly she would wait. She gave her card to the man who admitted her, and was shown into a room, very dark and dismal, where three or four patients were already enduring a time of suspense waiting for their interviews. Charlotte, knowing nothing of illness, knew, if possible, still less of doctors' rooms. A sense of added depression came over her as she seated herself on the nearest chair, and glanced, from the weary and suffering faces of those who waited anxiously for their doom, to the periodicals and newspapers piled on the table. A gentleman seated not far off handed her the last number of the *Illustrated London News*. She took it, turning the pages mechanically. To her dying day she never got over the dislike to that special paper which that half hour created.

One by one the patients' names were called by the grave footman as he came to summon them. One by one they went away, and at last, at last, Charlotte's turn came. She had entered into conversation with a little girl of about sixteen, who appeared to be in consumption, and the little girl had praised the great physician in such terms that Charlotte felt more than ever that against his opinion there could be no appeal. And now at last she was in the great man's presence, and, healthy girl that she was, her heart beat so loud, and her face grew so white, that the practised eyes of the doctor might have been pardoned for mistaking her for a *bona-fide* patient.

"What are you suffering from?" he asked of her.

"It is not myself, Sir George," she said, then making a great effort to control her voice—"I have come about my father—my father is one of your patients. His name is Harman."

Sir George turned to a large book at his side, opened it at a certain page, read quietly for a moment, then closing it, fixed his keen eyes on the young lady.

"You are right," he said, "your father, Mr. Harman, is one of my patients. He came to see me no later than last week."

"Sir," said Charlotte, and her voice grew steadier and braver as she spoke, "I am in perfect health, and my father is ill. I have come here to-day to learn from your lips the exact truth as to his case."

"The exact truth?" said the doctor. "Does your father know you have come here, Miss—Miss Harman?"

"He does not, Sir George. My father is a widower, and I am his only child. He has endeavored to keep this thing from me, and hitherto has partially succeeded. Yesterday, through another source, I learned that he is very seriously ill. I have come to you to know the truth. You will tell it to me, will you not?"

"I certainly *can* tell it to you."

"And you will?"

"Well, the fact is, Miss Harman, he is anxious that you should not know. I am scarcely prepared to fathom your strength of character. Any shock will be of serious consequence to him. How can I tell how you will act when you know all?"

"You are preparing me for the worst now, Sir George. I solemnly promise you in no way to use my knowledge so as to give my father the slightest shock."

"I believe you," answered the doctor. "A brave woman can do wonders. Women are unselfish; they can hide their own feelings to comfort and succor another. Miss Harman, I am sorry for you, I have bad news for you."

"I know it, Sir George. My father is very ill."

"Your father is as seriously ill as a man can be to be alive; in short, he is—dying."

"Is there no hope?"

"None."

"Must he die soon?" asked Charlotte, after a brief pause.

"That depends. His malady is of such a nature that any sudden shock, any sudden grief will probably kill him instantly. If his mind is kept perfectly calm, and all shocks are kept from him, he may live for many months."

"Oh! terrible!" cried Charlotte.

She covered her face. When she raised it at last it looked quite haggard and old.

"Sir George," she said, "I do not doubt that in your position as a doctor you have come across some secrets. I am going to confide in you, to confide in you to a certain measure."

"Your confidence shall be sacred, my dear young lady."

"Yesterday, Sir George, I learned something, something which concerns my father. It concerns him most nearly and most painfully. It relates to an old and buried wrong. This wrong relates to others; it relates to those now living most nearly and most painfully."

"Is it a money matter?" asked the doctor.

"It is a money matter. My father alone can set it right. I mean that during his lifetime it cannot possibly in any way be set right without his knowledge. Almost all my life, he has kept this thing a secret from me and—and—from the world. For three and twenty years it has lain in a grave. If he is told now, and the wrong cannot be repaired without his knowledge, it will come on him as a—disgrace. The question I ask of you is this: can he bear the disgrace?"

"And my answer to you, Miss Harman, is, that in his state of health the knowledge you speak of will instantly kill him."

"Then—then—God help me! what am I to do? Can the wrong never be righted?"

"My dear young lady, I am sincerely sorry for you. I cannot enter into the moral question, I can only state a fact. As your father's physician I forbid you to tell him."

"You forbid me to tell him?" said Charlotte. She got up and pulled down her veil. "Thank you," she said, holding out her hand. "I have that to go on—as my father's physician you forbid him to know?"

"I forbid it absolutely. Such a knowledge would cause instant death."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

PUZZLED.

The old Australian Alexander Wilson, had left his niece, Charlotte Home, after his first interview with her, in a very disturbed state of mind. More disturbed indeed was he than by the news of his sister's death. He was a rich man now, having been successful in the land of his banishment, and having returned to his native land the possessor of a moderate fortune. He had never married, and he meant to live with Daisy and share his wealth with her. But in these day-dreams he had only thought of his money as giving some added comforts to his rich little sister, enabling her to have a house in London for the season, and, while living in the country, to add more horses to her establishment and more conservatories to build and tend. His money should add to her luxuries and, consequently, to her comforts. He had never heard of this unforgotten sister for three and twenty years, the strange dislike to write home having grown upon him as time went on but though he knew nothing about her, he many a time in his own wild and solitary life pictured her as he saw her last. Daisy never grew old to him. Death and Daisy were not connected. Daisy in his imagination was always young, always girlish always fresh and beautiful. He saw her as he saw her last in her beautiful country home standing by her rich husband's side, looking more like his daughter than his wife. No, Sandy never dreamed that Daisy would or could die, but in thinking of her he believed her to be a widow. That husband, so old, when he went away, must be dead.

On his arrival in England, Sandy went down into Hertfortshire. He visited the place where he had last seen his sister. It was in the hands of strangers—sold long ago. No one even remembered the name of Harman. Then he met little Daisy Home, and learned quite by accident that his Daisy was dead, and that the pretty child who reminded him of her was her grandchild. He went to visit Charlotte Home, and there made a fresh discovery. Had his Daisy been alive she would have wanted far more from his well-filled purse than horses and carriages. She would have needed not the luxuries of life, but the necessities. He had imagined her rich, while she had died in poverty. She had died poor, and her child, her only child, bore evident marks of having met face to face with the sorest of all want, that which attacks the gently born. Her face, still young, but sadly thin and worn, the very look in her eyes told this fact to Sandy.

Yes; his pretty Daisy, whom he had imagined so rich, so bountifully provided for, had died a very poor and struggling woman. Doubtless this sad and dreadful fact had shortened her days. Doubtless but for this monstrous injustice she would be alive now, ready to welcome her long-lost brother back to his native land.

All that night Sandy Wilson lay awake. He was a hale and hearty man, and seldom knew what it was to toss for any time on his pillow; but so shocked was he, that this night no repose would visit him. An injustice had been done, a fraud committed, and it remained for him to find out the evil thing, to drag it to the light, to set the wronged right once more. Charlotte Home was not at all the character he could best understand. She was not in the least like her mother. She told the tale of her wrongs with a strange and manifest reluctance. She believed that a fraud had been committed. She was fully persuaded that not her long-dead father but her living half-brothers were the guilty parties. In this belief Sandy most absolutely shared. He longed to drag these villains into the glaring light of justice, to expose them and their disgraceful secret to the

shameful light of day. But in this longing he saw plainly that Charlotte did not share. He was puzzled, scarcely pleased that this was so. How differently little Daisy would have acted had she been alive. Dear little innocent Daisy, who all alone could do nothing, would in his strong presence have grown so brave and fearless. She would have put the case absolutely and once for all into his hands. Now this her daughter did not seem disposed to do. She said to him, with most manifest anxiety, "You will do nothing without me. You will do nothing until we meet again."

This he had promised readily enough, for what *could* he do in the short hours which must elapse between now and their next meeting? As he was dressing, however, on the following morning, a sudden idea did occur to him, and on this idea he resolved to act before he saw Charlotte at six o'clock in the evening. He would go to Somerset House and see Mr. Harman's will. What Daisy first, and now Charlotte, had never thought of doing during all these years he would do that very day. Thus he would gain certain and definite information. With this information it would be comparatively easy to know best how to act.

He went to Somerset House. He saw the will; he saw the greatness of the robbery committed so many years ago; he saw and he felt a wild kind of almost savage delight in the fact that he could quickly and easily set the wrong right, for he was one of the trustees. He saw all this, and yet—and yet—he went away a very unhappy and perplexed man, for he had seen something else—he had seen a woman's agony and despair. Sandy Wilson possessed the very softest soul that had ever been put into a big body. He never could bear to see even a dog in pain. How then could he look at the face of this girl which, all in a moment, under his very eyes, had been blanched with agony? He could not bear it. He forgot his fierce longing for revenge, he forgot his niece Charlotte's wrongs, in this sudden and passionate desire to succor the other Charlotte, the daughter of the bad man who had robbed his own sister, his own niece; he became positively anxious that Miss Harman should not commit herself; he felt a nervous fear as each word dropped from her lips; he saw that she spoke in the extremity of despair. How could he stop the words which told too much? He was relieved when the thought occurred to him to ask her to meet him again—again when they both were calmer. She had consented, and he found himself advising her, as he would have advised his own dear daughter had he been lucky enough to have possessed one. He promised her that nothing, nothing should be done until they met again, and so afraid was he that in his interview that evening with his niece, Mrs. Home, he might be tempted to drop some word which might betray ever so little that other Charlotte, that instead of going to Tremin's Road as he had intended, he wrote a note excusing himself and putting off his promised visit until the following evening.

CHAPTER XL.

CHARLOTTE'S PLEA.

When at last the time drew near for him to bend his steps in the direction of Somerset House he had by no means made up his mind how to act. His sympathies were still with Miss Harman. Her face had haunted him all night long; but he felt that every sense of justice, every sense of right, called upon him to befriend Mrs. Home. His dearly loved dead sister seemed to call to him from her grave and to ask him to rescue those belonging to her, to give again to these wronged ones what was rightfully theirs. In any case, seeing the wrong as he so plainly did, he would have felt called upon to take his sister's part in the matter. But as circumstances now stood, even had Mrs. Home been no relation to him whatever, he still must have acted for her and her alone. For was he not the *other trustee*? and did not the very law of the land of his birth demand that he should see that the terms of the will were carried out?

He arrived at the square of Somerset House, and found Miss Harman waiting for him.

She came up to him at once and held out her hand. His quick eye detected at a glance that she was now quite calm and collected, that whatever she might have done in the first agony of her despair yesterday, to-day she would do nothing to betray herself. Strange to say, he liked her far less well in this mood than he had done yesterday, and his heart and inclination veered round again to his wronged niece and her children with a sense of pleasure and almost triumph.

They began to walk up and down, and Miss Harman, finding that her companion was silent, was the first to speak.

"You asked me to meet you here to-day. What do you want to say to me?"

Good heavens! was she going to ride the high horse over him in this style? Sandy's small eyes almost flashed as he turned to look at her.

"A monstrous wrong has been done, Miss Harman," he answered. "I have come to talk about that."

"I know," replied Charlotte. "I have thought it all out. I know exactly what has been done. My grandfather died and left a sum of twelve hundred a year to my—to his wife. He left other moneys to my father and his brother. My father and his brother, my uncle, disregarded the claims of the widow and the orphan child. They appropriated the money—they—*stole it*—giving to my grandfather's widow a small sum during her life, which small sum they did not even allow to be

retained by her child."

"That is pretty much the case, young lady. You have read the will with tolerable accuracy."

"I do not know in the least how the deed was done," continued Charlotte. "How such a crime could be committed and yet lie hidden all these years remains a terrible and mysterious thing to me. But that it was done, I can but use my own eyes in reading my grandfather's will to see."

"It was done easily enough, Miss Harman. They thought the other trustee was dead. Your father and his brother were false to their trust, and they never reckoned that Sandy Wilson would come back all alive and blooming one fine morning—Sandy, whose duty it is to see this great wrong put right."

"Yes, it is your duty," said Charlotte; and now, again, she grew very white; her eyes sought the ground and she was silent.

"It is my most plain duty," repeated Wilson, shuffling with his great feet as he walked by her side.

"I should like to know what steps you mean to take," continued Charlotte, suddenly raising her eyes to his face.

"Steps! Good gracious! young lady, I have not had time to go into the law of the thing. Besides, I promised to do nothing until we met again. But one thing is plain enough,and obvious enough—my niece, that young woman who might have been rich, but who is so poor—that young woman must come in for her own again. It is three-and-twenty years since her father died. She must receive from your father that money with all back interest for the last three and twenty years. That means a goodish bit of money I can tell you."

"I have no doubt it does," replied Charlotte. "Mrs. Home shall have it all."

"Well, I hope so, young lady, and soon, too. It seems to me she has had her share of poverty."

"She has had, as you say, her share of that evil. Mr. Wilson," again raising her eyes to his face, "I know Mrs. Home."

"You know her? You know my niece Charlotte personally? She did not tell me that."

"Yes, I know her. I should like to see her now."

"You would?—I am surprised! Why?"

"That I might go down on my knees to her."

"Well, good gracious! young lady, I supposed you might feel sorry, but I did not know you would humble yourself to that extent. It was not *your* sin."

"Hush! It was my father's sin. I am his child. I would go lower than my knees—I would lie on the ground that she might walk over me, if the better in that position I might plead for mercy."

"For mercy? Ay, that's all very well, but Charlotte must have her rights. Sandy Wilson must see to that."

"She shall have her rights! And yet I would see her if I could, and if I saw her I would go on my knees and plead for mercy."

"I don't understand you, Miss Harman."

"I do not suppose you do. Will you have patience with me while I explain myself?"

"I have come here to talk to you and to listen to you," said Wilson.

"Sir, I must tell you of my father, that man whom you (and I do not wonder) consider so bad—so low! When I read that will yesterday—when I saw with my own eyes what a fraud had been committed, what a great, great evil had been done, I felt in my first misery that I almost hated my father! I said to myself, 'Let him be punished!' I would have helped you then to bring him to punishment. I think you saw that?"

"I did, Miss Harman. I can see as far through a stone wall as most people. I saw that you were a bit stunned, and I thought it but fair that you should have time to calm down."

"You were kind to me. You acted as a good man and a gentleman. Then I scarcely cared what happened to my father; now I do."

"Ay, ay, young lady, natural feelings must return. I am very sorry for you."

"Mr. Wilson, I hope to make you yet more sorry. I must tell you more. When I saw you yesterday I knew that my father was ill—I knew that he was in appearance an old man, a broken down man, a very unhappy man; but since I saw you yesterday I have learned that he is a dying man—that old man against whom I hardened my heart so yesterday is going fast to judgment. The knowledge of this was kept from me, for my father so loved me, so guarded me all my life that he could not bear that even a pin's point of sorrow should rest upon me. After seeing you yesterday, and leaving you, I visited some poor people who, not knowing that the truth was hidden from me, spoke of it as a well known fact. I went away from them with my eyes opened. I only wondered they had been closed so long. I went away, and this morning I did more. I visited one of the

greatest and cleverest doctors in London. This doctor my father, unknown to me, had for some time consulted. I asked him for his candid opinion on my father's case. He gave it to me. Nothing can save my father. My father must die! But he told me more; he said that the nature of his complaint was such that any shock must instantly kill him. He said without that shock he may live for months; not many months, but still for a few. Hearing this, I took the doctor still further into my confidence. I told him that a wrong had been committed—that during my father's lifetime that wrong could not be set right without his knowledge. I said that he must know something which would disgrace him. His answer was this: 'As his medical man, I forbid him to know; such a knowledge will cause certain and instant death.'"

Charlotte paused. Wilson, now deeply interested, even appalled, was gazing at her earnestly.

"I know Charlotte Home," continued Miss Harman; "and, as I said just now, I would see her now. Yes, she has needed money; she has longed for money; she has been cruelly wronged—most cruelly treated! Still, I think, if I pleaded long enough and hard enough, she would have mercy; she would not hurry that old man to so swift a judgment; she would spare him for those few, few months to which his life is now limited. It is for those months I plead. He is a dying man. I want nothing to be done during those months. Afterwards—afterwards I will promise, if necessary sign any legal paper you bring to me, that all that should have been hers shall be Charlotte Home's—I restore it all! Oh, how swiftly and how gladly! All I plead for are those few months."

Wilson was silent.

Charlotte suddenly looking at him almost lost her self-control.

"Must I go down on my knees to you, sir? I will if it is necessary. I will here—even here do so, if it is necessary."

"It is not, it is not, my dear Miss Harman. I believe you; from my soul I pity you! I will do what I can. I can't promise anything without my niece's permission; but I am to see her this evening."

"Oh, if you plead with her, she will have mercy; for I know her—I am sure of her! Oh! how can I thank you?—how can I thank you both?"

Here some tears rose to Charlotte's eyes, and rolled fast and heavily down her cheeks. She put up her handkerchief to wipe them away.

"You asked me to cry yesterday, but I could not; now I believe I shall be able," she said with almost a smile. "God bless you!"

Before Wilson could get in another word she had left him and, hurrying through the square, was lost to sight.

Wilson gazed after her retreating form; then he went into Somerset House, and once more long and carefully studied Mr. Harman's will.

CHAPTER XLI.

NO WEDDING ON THE TWENTIETH.

Charlotte was quite right in saying that now she could cry; a great tension had been removed, an immediate agony lightened. From the time she had left the doctor's presence until she had met Sandy Wilson, most intolerable had been her feelings. She would sink all pride when she saw him; for her father's sake, she would plead for mercy; but knowing nothing of the character of the man, how could she tell that she would be successful? How could she tell that he might not harden his heart against her plea? When she left him, however, she knew that her cause was won. Charlotte Home was to be the arbitrator of her fate; she had never in all her life seen such a hunger for money in any eyes as she had done in Charlotte's, and yet she felt a moral certainty that with Charlotte she was safe. In the immediate relief of this she could cry, and those tears were delicious to her. Returning from her drive, and in the solitude of her own room, she indulged in them, weeping on until no more tears would flow. They took the maddening pressure of heart and brain, and after them she felt strong and even calm. She had washed her face and smoothed her hair, and though she could not at once remove all trace of the storm through which she had just passed, she still looked better than she had done at breakfast that morning, when a tap came to her door, and Ward, her maid, waited outside.

"If you please, Miss Harman, the dressmaker has called again. Will you have the wedding dress fitted now?"

At the same instant and before Charlotte could reply, a footman appeared at the head of the stairs—"Mr. Hinton had arrived and was waiting for Miss Harman, in her own sitting-room."

"Say, I will be with him directly," she answered to the man, then she turned to Ward. "I will send you with a message to the dressmaker this evening; tell her I am engaged now."

The two messengers left, and Charlotte turned back into her room. She had to go through another fire. Well! the sooner it was over the better. She scarcely would give herself time for any

thought as she ran quickly down the stairs and along the familiar corridor, and in a moment found herself in Hinton's presence. They had not met since yesterday morning, when they had parted in apparent coldness; but Hinton had long forgotten it, and now, when he saw her face, a great terror of pity and love came over him.

"My darling! my own darling!" he said. He came up to her and put his arms round her. "Charlotte, what is it? You are in trouble? Tell me."

Ah! how sweet it was to feel the pressure of his arms, to lay her head on his breast. She was silent for quite a minute, saying to herself, "It is for the last time."

"You are in great trouble, Charlotte? Charlotte, what is it?" questioned her lover.

"Yes, I am in great trouble," she said then, raising her head and looking at him. Her eyes were clear and frank and open as of old, and yet at that moment she meant to deceive him; she would not tell him the real reason which induced her to break off her engagement. She would shelter her father in the eyes of the man she loved, at any cost.

"You are in great trouble," he repeated, seeing that she paused.

"Yes, John—for myself—for my father—for—for you. Dear John, we cannot be married on the twentieth, we must part."

"Charlotte!" he stepped back a pace or two in his astonishment, and her arms fell heavily to her sides. "Charlotte!" he repeated; he had failed to understand her. He gave a short laugh.

She began to tremble when she heard him laugh, and seeing a chair near, she sunk into it. "Yes, John, we must part," she repeated.

He went down on his knees then by her side, and looked into her face. "My poor darling, you are really not well; you are in trouble, and don't know what you are saying. Tell me all your trouble, Charlotte, but don't mind those other words. It is impossible that you and I can part. Have we not plighted our troth before God? We cannot take that back. Therefore we cannot part."

"In heart we may be one, but outwardly we must part," she repeated, and then she began to cry feebly, for she was all unstrung. Hinton's words were too much for her.

"Tell me all," he said then, very tenderly.

"John, a dark thing was kept from me, but I have discovered it. My father is dying. How can I marry on the twentieth, when my father is dying?"

Hinton instantly felt a sense of relief. Was this all the meaning of this great trouble? This objection meant, at the most, postponement, scarcely that, when Charlotte knew all.

"How did you learn that about your father?" he said.

"I went to see some poor people yesterday, and they told me; but that was not enough. To-day I visited the great doctor. My father has seen Sir George Anderson; he told me all. My father is a dying man. John, can you ask me to marry when my father is dying?"

"I could not, Charlotte, if it were not his own wish."

"His own wish?" she repeated.

"Yes! some time ago he told me of this; he said the one great thing he longed for was to see you and me—you and me, my own Charlotte—husband and wife before he died."

"Why did he keep his state of health as a secret from me?"

"I begged of him to tell you, but he wanted you to be his own bright Charlotte to the end."

Then Hinton told her of that first interview he had with her father. He told it well, but she hardly listened. Must she tell him the truth after all? No! she would not. During her father's lifetime she would shield him at any cost. Afterwards, ah! afterwards all the world would know.

When Hinton had ceased speaking, she laid her hand on his arm. "Nevertheless, my darling, I cannot marry next week. I know you will fail to understand me. I know my father will fail to understand me. That is hard—the hardest part, but I am doing right. Some day you will acknowledge that. With my father dying I cannot stand up in white and call myself a bride. My marriage-day was to have been the entrance into Paradise to me. With a funeral so near, and so certain, it cannot be that. John—John—I—cannot—I cannot. We must not marry next week."

"You put it off, then? You deny your dying father his dearest wish? That is not like you, Charlotte."

"No, it is unlike me. Everything, always, again, will be unlike me. If you put it so, I deny my father his dearest wish."

"Charlotte, I fail to understand you. You will not marry during your father's lifetime. But it may be very quiet—very—very quiet, I can manage that; and you need not leave him, you can still be altogether his daughter, and yet make him happy by letting him feel that you are also my wife; that I have the right to shield you, the right to love and comfort you. Come, Charlotte! come, my darling! we won't have any outward festivity, any outward rejoicing. This is but natural, this can

be managed, and yet we may have that which is above and beyond it all—one another. We may be one in our sorrow instead of our joy."

"Oh! if it could be," she sobbed; and now again she laid her head on his shoulder.

"It shall be, Charlotte; we will marry like that on the twentieth. I will manage it with your father."

"No John! no, my dearest, my best beloved, I cannot be your wife. Loving you as I never—never—loved you before, I give you up; it is worse than the agony of death to me. But I give you up."

"You postpone our marriage during your father's lifetime?"

"I postpone it—I do more—I break it off. Oh! John, don't look at me like that; pity me—pity me, my heart will break."

But he had pushed her a little away from him. Pale as death he rose to his feet. "Charlotte! you are deceiving me; you have another reason for this?"

"If you will have it so," she said.

"You are keeping a secret from me."

"I do not say so, but you are likely enough to think this," she repeated.

"Can you deny it?"

"I will not try, I know we must part."

"If this is so, we must. A secret between husband and wife is fatal."

"It would be, but I admit nothing, we cannot be husband and wife."

"Never, Charlotte?"

"Never!" she said.

Hinton thought for a moment, and then he came up and again took her hand. "Lottie, tell me that secret; trust me; I know there is a secret, tell it to me, all of it, let me decide whether it must part us."

"I cannot, my darling—my darling—I can say nothing, explain nothing, except that you and I must part."

"If that is so, we must," he said.

He was pained, shocked, and angry, beyond words. He left the room and the house without even another look.

CHAPTER XLII.

"I LOVE HIM," SHE ANSWERED.

That evening Charlotte came softly into her father's study and sat down by his side. She had not appeared at dinner-time, sending another excuse. She was not very well, she said; she would see her father later in the evening. But as she could not eat, she did not care to come to dinner. She would like to see her father quite alone afterwards. Charlotte had worded this verbal message with great care, for she wished to prepare her father for something of extra importance. Even with the tenderest watching it was impossible to avoid disturbing him a little, and she wished to prepare him for the very slight but unavoidable shock she must give. Jasper dined at Prince's Gate as usual. But after dinner he went away. And Charlotte, when she knew this, instantly went down to her father. She was now perfectly calm. For the time being had forgotten herself absolutely. Nothing gives outward composure like self-forgetfulness, like putting yourself in your fellow-man's place. Charlotte had done this when she stepped up to her old father's side. She had dressed herself, too, with special thought for him. There was a muslin frock, quite clear and simple, which he had loved. It was a soft Indian fabric, and clung to her fine figure in graceful folds. She had made Ward iron it out, and had put it on. Of late she had considered it too girlish, but to-night she appeared in it knowing it would please the eyes for which it was worn.

Mr. Harman was chilly and sat by the fire. As usual the room was softly but abundantly lit by candles. Charlotte loved light, and, as a rule, hated to talk to any one without looking at that person fully. But to-night an opposite motive caused her to put out one by one all the candles.

"Does not the room look cosy with only the firelight?" she said. And then she sat down on a low stool at her father's feet.

"You are better now, my love. Tell me you are better," he said, taking her hand in his.

"I am well enough to sit and talk to you, father," she said.

"But what ailed you, Lottie? You could not come to dinner either yesterday or to-day; and I

remember you looked ill this morning. What is wrong?"

"I felt troubled, and that has brought on a headache. But don't let us talk about me. I mean, I suppose we must after a little, but not at first."

"Whom shall we talk about first? Who is more important? Is it Hinton? You cannot get *me* to think that Charlotte."

"You are more important. I want to talk about you."

Now she got hold of his hand, and, turning round, gazed firmly into his face.

"Father, you have troubled me. You have caused my headache."

Instantly a startled look came into his eyes; and she, reading him now—as, alas! she knew how to do but too well—hastened to soothe it.

"You wanted to send me away, to make me less your own, if that were possible. Father, I have come here to-night to tell you that I am not going away—that I am all your own, even to the end."

"My own to the end? Yes, you must always be that. But what do you mean?"

She felt the hand she held trembling, and hastened to add,—

"Why did you keep the truth from me? Why did you try to deceive me, your nearest and dearest, as to your state of health? But I know it all now. I am not going away from you."

"You mean—you mean, Charlotte, you will not marry Hinton next week?"

"No, father."

"Have you told him?"

"Yes."

"Charlotte, do you know the worst about me?"

"I know all about you. I went to see Sir George Anderson this morning. I forced from him the opinion he has already given to you. He says that I cannot keep you long. But while I can, we will never part."

Mr. Harman's hand had now ceased to tremble. It lay warm and quiet in his daughter's clasp. After a time he said—

"Put your arms round me darling."

She rose to her feet, clasped her hands round his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder. In this position he kissed first her bright hair, then her cheek and brow.

"But I want my little girl to leave me," he said. "Illness need not make me selfish. You can still be my one only dear daughter, and yet be Hinton's wife."

"I am your only dear daughter," she repeated. "Never mind about my being any man's wife." She tried to smile as she resumed her seat at his feet.

Mr. Harman saw the attempt at a smile, and it instantly strengthened him to proceed.

"Charlotte, I am not sorry that you know that which I had not courage either to tell you or to cause another to tell you. I am—yes, I am dying. Some day before long I must leave you, my darling. I must go away and return no more. But before I die I want to see you Hinton's wife. It will make me happier to see this, for you love him, and he can make you happy. You do love him, Charlotte?"

"Yes, I love him," she answered.

"Then we will not postpone the marriage. My child shall marry the man she loves, and have the strength of his love in the dark days that must follow; and in one week you will be back with me, no less my child because you are Hinton's wife."

"Father, I cannot."

"Not if I wish it, dear—if I have set my heart on it?"

"I cannot," she repeated.

She felt driven to her wits' end, and pressed her hands to her face.

"Charlotte, what is the meaning of this? There is more here than meets the eye. Have you and Hinton quarrelled?"

"No, except over this. And even over this it takes two to make a quarrel. I cannot marry next week; I have told him so. He is vexed, and you—you are vexed. Must I break my heart and leave you? You have always given me my own way; give it now. Don't send me away from you. It would break my heart to marry and leave you now."

"Is this indeed so, Charlotte?" he said. "Would you with your whole heart rather put it off?"

"With my whole, whole heart, I would rather," she said.

"I will not urge it. I cannot; and yet it destroys a hope which I thought might cheer me on my dying bed."

"Never mind the hope, father; you will have me. I shall not spend that week away from you."

"No, that week did seem long to look forward to."

"Ah! you are glad after all that I am to be with you," she said. "You will let me nurse you and care for you. You will not force yourself to do more than you are able. Now that I know all, I can take such care of you, and the thought of that will make me happier by and by."

"It is a relief that you know the worst," said Mr. Harman, but he did not smile or look contented; he, as well as Hinton, felt that there was more in this strange desire of Charlotte's than met the eye.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"YOU DON'T WANT MONEY?"

Sandy Wilson having again very carefully read Mr. Harman's will, felt much puzzled how to act. He was an honest, upright, practical man himself. The greatness of the crime committed quite startled him. He had no sympathy for the wicked men who had done the deed, and he had the very keenest sympathy for those against whom the deed was done. His little orphan and widowed sister and her baby child were the wronged ones. The men who had wronged her he had never seen. He said to himself that he had no sympathy, no sympathy whatever for Mr. Harman. What if he was a dying man, was that fact to screen him? Was he to be allowed to go down to his grave in peace, his gray head appearing to be to him a crown of glory, honored by the world, cheered for his great success in life? Was all this to be allowed to continue when he was worthy not of applause but of hisses, of the world's most bitter opprobrium?

And yet Sandy felt that, little or indeed no pity as he had for this most wicked man, even if Charlotte had not come to him and pleaded with eyes, voice, and manner he could scarcely have exposed Mr. Harman. He could scarcely, after hearing that great doctor's verdict, have gone up to the old man and said that which would hurry him without an instant's time for repentance, to judgment.

Alexander Wilson believed most fully in a judgment to come. When he thought of it now, a certain sense of relief came over him. He need not trouble so sorely; he might leave this sinner to his God. It is to be feared that he thought more of God's justice than of His loving mercy and forgiveness, as he decided to leave John Harman in His hands.

That evening at six o'clock he was to be again with Charlotte Home. For Charlotte Harman's sake, he had denied himself that pleasure the night before; but this evening the solitary man might enjoy the keen pleasure of being with his very own. Mrs. Home was his nearest living relation—the child of his own loved sister. He did not know yet whether he could love her at all as he had loved his little Daisy; but he felt quite sure that her children would twine themselves round his heart; for already the remembrance of Daisy Home was causing it to beat high with pleasure.

As the hour approached for his visit, he loaded himself with presents not only for the children, but for the whole family. He said to himself with much delight, that however much Mr. Harman's will might be tied up for the present, yet Sandy Wilson's purse was open. He had far less idea than Charlotte Harman what children really liked, but he loaded himself with toys, cakes, and sweeties; and for his special pet Daisy over and above the other two he bought the very largest doll that a Regent Street shop could furnish him with. This doll was as heavy as a baby, and by no means so beautiful to look at as its smaller companions. But Sandy was no judge in such matters.

With his presents for the adults of the party he was more fortunate. For his niece he purchased a black silk, which in softness, lustre, and quality could not be surpassed; for Mr. Home he bought two dozen very old port; for Anne, a bright blue merino dress.

These goods were packed into a four-wheeler, and, punctually at six o'clock, that well-laden cab drew up at 10, Tremins Road. Three eager pairs of eyes watched the unpacking, for the three pretty children, dressed in their best, were in the dining-room; Mr. Home was also present, and Charlotte had laid her tea-table with several unwonted dainties in honor of her uncle's visit. Anne, the little maid, was fluttering about; that well-laden cab had raised her spirits and her hopes. She flew in and out, helping the cabby to bring the numerous parcels into the hall.

"Ah! Annie, my girl, here's something for you," said Uncle Sandy, tossing her dress to her. After which, it is to be feared, Anne went off her head for a little bit.

The children, headed by their mother, came into the little hall to meet and welcome their uncle. He entered the dining-room with Daisy riding on his shoulder. Then before tea could even be thought of, the presents must be discussed. The cakes, the sweeties, the toys were opened out;

the children scampered about, laughed, shouted, and kissed the old Australian. Never in all his life had Uncle Sandy felt so happy.

Over an hour passed in this way, then the mother's firm voice was heard. The little heads were raised obediently. Good-night kisses were given, and Harold, Daisy, and little Angus were led off to their nursery by the highly flushed and excited Anne.

The tea which followed and the quiet talk were nearly as pleasant, and Uncle Sandy so enjoyed himself, that for a time he completely forgot old Harman's will, his own half promise, Charlotte Harman's despair.

It was all brought back to him, however, and by the Homes themselves. The tea things had been removed, the gas was lit, the curtains drawn, and Charlotte Home had insisted on her old uncle seating himself in the one easy-chair which the room possessed. She herself stood on the hearthrug, and glancing for a moment at her husband she spoke.

"Uncle Sandy, it is so good to have you back again, and Angus and I are so truly glad to welcome my dear mother's brother to our home, that we think it hard to have to touch on anything the least gloomy to-night. Just a word or two will be sufficient, and then we must drop the subject for ever."

Uncle Sandy raised his wrinkled old face.

"Ah," he said. "If there's anything unpleasant, have it cut by all means—out and over—that's my own motto."

"We spoke the other night," continued Charlotte, "about my dear mother. I told you that she was poor—that she had to do with poverty, from the hour of my father's death until the end of her own life. It is all over for her now, she is at rest. If plenty of money could be found for her she would not need it. When I told you the story you expressed a doubt that all was not right; you said it was absolutely impossible that my father could have left my mother nothing; you said that either the will was tampered with or not acted on. Well, Uncle Sandy, I agree with you. I had long felt that something was not right."

"Ay, ay, my girl; I said before, you had a brain in your head and a head on your shoulders. Trust Uncle Sandy not to know a clever woman when he sees her."

"Well, uncle, I can say all the rest in a very few words. You said you could investigate the matter; that you could discover whether any foul play had been committed. I asked you not to do so until I saw you again; I now ask you not to do so at all; to let the whole matter rest always. In this I have my husband's sanction and wish."

"Yes, Lottie has my full approval in this matter," said Mr. Home, coming forward and laying his hand on his wife's shoulder. "We don't want money, we would rather let the matter rest."

"You don't want money!" said Uncle Sandy, gazing hard from the ethereal worn-looking man, to the woman, tall and thin, in her rusty dress, with every mark of poverty showing in thin cheek, in careworn eyes, in labor-stained hands. "You don't want money!" he repeated. "Niece Charlotte, I retract what I said of you—I thought you were not quite a fool. As to you, Home, I don't pretend to understand you. You don't want money?"

Mr. Home smiled. Charlotte bent down and kissed her old uncle's brow.

"Nevertheless, you will do what we wish, even though you don't understand," she said.

Uncle Sandy took her hand.

"Sit down near me, Niece Charlotte," he said. "And as to you, Home, you have a long story to hear. After you have heard it, it will be time enough to discuss your proposition. The fact is, Charlotte, I disobeyed you in part. You asked me to do nothing in this matter until we met again. I did nothing to compromise you; but, nevertheless, I was not idle, I wanted to set my own mind at rest. There was an easy way of doing this which I knew of, and which I wondered had not occurred to you. Charlotte, I went yesterday to Somerset House; doubtless, you know nothing of what took me there. I can soon enlighten you. In a certain part of that vast pile, all wills are obliged to be kept. Anyone who likes may go there, and, by paying the sum of one shilling, read any will they desire. I did so. I went to Somerset House and I saw your father's will."

"Yes," said Charlotte. Whatever her previous resolution, she no doubt felt keenly excited now. "Yes," she repeated, "you read my father's will."

"I read it. I read it in a hurry yesterday; to-day I saw it again and read it carefully. There is no flaw in it; it is a will that must stand, that cannot be disputed. Charlotte, you were right in your forebodings. Niece Charlotte, you and your mother, before you, were basely robbed, cruelly wronged; your dead father was just and upright; your living brothers are villains; your father left, absolutely to your mother first, and to you at her death, the sum of twelve hundred a year. He left to you both a large enough sum of money to realize that large yearly income. You were robbed of it. Do you know how?"

"No," said Charlotte. She said that one little word almost in a whisper. Her face was deadly pale.

"That money was left in your father's will in trust; it was confided to the care of three men, whose solemn duty it was to realize it for your mother first, afterwards for you and your children. Those

men were called trustees; two of them, Charlotte, were your half-brothers, John and Jasper Harman; the other was your mother's only living brother, Sandy Wilson. These trustees were false to you: two of them by simply ignoring the trust and taking the money to themselves; the other, by pretending to be dead when he ought to have been in England attending to his duty. The Harmans, the other trustees, so fully believed me to be dead that they thought their sin would never be found out. But they reckoned without their host, for Sandy has returned, and the missing trustee can act now. Better late than never—eh, Niece Charlotte?"

"My poor mother!" said Charlotte, "my poor, poor mother!"

She covered her face with her hands. The suddenness and greatness of the crime done had agitated her. She was very much upset. Her husband came again very near and put his hand on her shoulder. His face, too, was troubled.

"It was a terrible sin," he said, "a terrible sin to lie on these men's breasts for three and twenty years. God help these sinners to repentance!"

"Yes, God help them," repeated Uncle Sandy, "and also those they have wronged. But now look up, Charlotte, for I have not told you all. A man never sins for himself alone; if he did it would not so greatly matter, for God and the pangs of an evil conscience would make it impossible for him to get off scot free; but—I found it out in the bush, where, I can tell you, I met rough folks enough—the innocent are dragged down with the guilty. Now this is the case here. In exposing the guilty the innocent must suffer. I don't mean you, my dear, nor my poor little wronged Daisy. In both your cases the time for suffering, I trust, is quite at an end, but there is another victim." Here Uncle Sandy paused, and Charlotte, having recovered her composure, stood upright on the hearthrug ready to listen. "When I went to Somerset House yesterday, I had, in order to obtain a sight of Mr. Harman's will, to go through a little ceremony. It is not necessary to go into it. I had to get certain papers, and take orders to certain rooms. All this was the little form imposed on me by the Government for my curiosity. At last I was told to go to a room, called the reading room, and asked to wait there until the will was brought to me. It was a small room, and I sat down prepared to wait patiently enough. There were about half-a-dozen people in the room besides myself, some reading wills, others waiting until they were brought. One woman sat at the table exactly opposite to me. She was the only woman in the room at the time, and perhaps that fact made me first notice her; but when I looked once, I could not have been old Sandy Wilson without wanting to look again. I have a weakness for fine women, and this woman was fine, in the sense that makes you feel that she is lovable. She was young, eager-looking. I have no doubt her features were handsome, but it was her open, almost childlike expression which attracted most. She was essentially a fine creature, and yet there was a peculiar childish innocence about her, that made old Sandy long to protect her on the spot. I was looking at her, and hoping she would not notice it and think old Sandy Wilson a bore, when a man came into the room and said something to the clerk at the desk. The clerk turned to me and said, 'The will of the name of Harman is being read at this moment by some one else in the room.' Instantly this girl looked up, her eyes met mine, her face grew all one blaze of color, though she was a pale enough lass the moment before, and a frightened expression came into her eyes. She looked down again at once, and went on reading in a hurried, puzzled way, as if she was scarcely taking in much. Of course I knew she had the will, and I did not want to hurry or confuse her, so I pretended to turn my attention to something else. It must have been quite a couple of minutes before I looked again, and then—I confess that I am not easily startled, but I did have to smother an exclamation—the poor girl must have discovered the baseness and the fraud in those two minutes. Had she been any other but the plucky lass she is, she would have been in a dead faint on the floor, for I never, never in all my pretty vast experience, saw a living face so white. I could not help looking at her then, for I was completely fascinated. She went on reading for half a minute longer; then she raised her eyes and gazed straight and full at me. She had big, open gray eyes, and a moment before, they were full of innocence and trust like a child's, now there was a wild anger and despair in them. She was quite quiet however, and no one else in the room noticed her. She pushed the will across the table to me and said, "That is Mr. Harman's will," then she put on her gloves quite slowly and drew down her veil, and left the room as sedately and quietly as you please. I just glanced my eye over the will. I took in the right place and saw the shameful truth. I was horrified enough, but I could not wait to read it all. I gave the will back intending to go to it another time, for I felt I must follow that girl at any cost. I came up to her in Somerset House square. I did not care what she thought; I must speak to her; I did. Poor lass! I think she was quite stunned. She did not resent the liberty old Sandy had taken. When I asked her to wait and let me talk to her she turned at once—I have not lived in the bush so long without being, I pride myself, sharp enough in reading character. I saw the girl, proud girl enough at ordinary times, was in that state of despair which makes people do desperate things. She was defiant, and told more than I expected. She was Miss Harman—Charlotte Harman, by the way, she said. Yes; her father had stolen that money; would I like to see him? he lived in such a place; his name was so-and-so. Yes; she was his only child. Her manner was so reckless, so defiant, and yet so full of absolute misery, that I could do nothing but pity her from my very heart. I forgot you, Niece Lottie, and your rights, and everything but this fine creature stricken so low through another's sins. I said, 'Hush, you shall say no more to-day. You are stunned, you are shocked, you must have time to think; I won't remember a thing you say about your father now. Go home and come back again to-morrow,' I said; 'sleep over it, and I will sleep over it, and I will meet you here to-morrow, when you are more calm.' She agreed to this and went away. I felt a little compunction for my own softness during that evening and night, Niece Charlotte, I felt that I was not quite true to you; but then you had not seen her face, poor brave young thing, poor young thing!"

Here Uncle Sandy paused and looked hard from his niece to her husband. Charlotte's eyes were full of tears, Mr. Home was smiling at him. There was something peculiar in this man's rare smiles which turned them into blessings. They were far more eloquent than words, for they were fed from some illumination of strong approval within. Uncle Sandy, without understanding, felt a warm glow instantly kindling in his heart.

Charlotte said, "Go on," in a broken voice.

"To-day, at the appointed hour, I met her again," proceeded the Australian. "She was changed, she was composed enough now, she was on her guard, she did not win my sympathy so much as in her despair. She was quite open, however, as to the nature of the crime committed, and told me she knew well what a sin her father had been guilty of. Suddenly she startled me by saying that she knew you, Charlotte. She said she wished she could see you now. I asked her why. She said, 'That I might go down on my knees to her.' I was surprised at such words coming from so proud a creature. I said so. She repeated that she would go down on her knees that she might the better plead for mercy. I was beginning to harden my old heart at that, and to think badly of her, when she stopped me, by telling me a strange and sad thing. She said that she had discovered something, something very terrible, between that hour and yesterday. Her father had been ill for some time, but the worst had been kept from her. She said yesterday that a poor person let her know quite accidentally that he was not only ill but dying. She went alone that morning to consult a doctor, one of those first-rate doctors whose word is law. Mr. Harman, it seemed, unknown to her, was one of this man's patients. He told her that he was hopelessly ill; that he could only live for a few months, and that any shock might end his days in a moment. She then told this doctor in confidence something of what she had discovered yesterday. He said, 'As his medical man, I forbid you to tell to your father this discovery you have made; if you do so he will die instantly.' Miss Harman told me this strange tale, and then she began to plead with me. She begged of me to show mercy; not to do anything in this matter during the few months which still remained of her father's life. Afterwards, she promised to restore all, and more than all of what had been stolen. I hesitated; I scarcely knew how to proceed. She saw it and exclaimed, 'Do you want me to go on my knees to you? I will this moment, and here.' Then I said I could do nothing without consulting you, I could do nothing without your consent. Instantly the poor thing's whole face changed—I never saw such a change from despair to relief. She held out her hand to me; she said she was safe; she said she knew you; and that with you she was safe. She said she never saw any one in her life seem to want money so badly as you; but for all that, with you she was quite safe. She looked so thankful. 'I can cry now,' she said as she went away." Uncle Sandy paused again, and again looked at his niece and her husband. "I told her that I would come to you to-night," he said, "that I would plead her cause, and I have, have I not?"

"Well and nobly," answered Mrs. Home. "Angus, think of her trusting me! I am so glad she could trust me. Indeed she is safe with us."

"How soon can you go to her in the morning, Lottie?" asked the curate.

"With the first dawn I should like to go, I only wish I could fly to her now. Oh, Angus! what she must suffer; and next Tuesday is to be her wedding-day. How my heart does ache for her! But I am glad she trusts me."

Here Mrs. Home become so excited that a great flood of tears came into her eyes. She must cry them away in private. She left the room, and the curate, sitting down, told to Uncle Sandy how Charlotte Harman had saved little Harold's life.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LOVE BEFORE GOLD.

For the first time in all her life, Mrs. Home laid her head on her pillow with the knowledge that she was a rich woman. Those good things which money can buy could be hers; her husband need want no more; her children might be so trained, so nurtured, so carefully tended that their beauty, their beauty both physical and moral, would be seen in clearest lustre. How often she had dreamed of the possibility of such a time arriving, and now at last it had come. Ever since her dying mother had told her own true history, she had dwelt upon this possible moment, dwelt upon it with many murmurings, many heart frettings. Could it be realized, she would be the happiest of women. Then she had decided to give it all up, to put the golden dream quite out of her life and, behold! she had scarcely done so before it had come true, the dream was a reality, the riches lay at her feet. In no way through her interference had this come about. Yes, but in the moment of her victory the woman who had so longed for money was very miserable; like Dead Sea apples was the taste of this eagerly desired fruit. She was enriched through another's anguish and despair, through the wrecking of another's happiness, and that other had saved the life of her child. Only one thing comforted Charlotte Home during the long hours of that weary night; Charlotte Harman had said.—

"With her I am safe; dearly as she loves money, with her I am quite safe."

Mrs. Home thought the slow moments would never fly until she was with the sister friend, who in

her own bitter humiliation and shame could trust her. In the morning, she and her husband had a talk together. Then hurrying through her household duties, she started at a still very early hour for Prince's Gate. She arrived there before ten o'clock, and as she mounted the steps and pulled the ponderous bell she could not help thinking of her last visit; she had felt sore and jealous then, to-day she was bowed down by a sense of unworthiness and humility. Then, too, she had gone to visit this rich and prosperous young woman dressed in her very best, for she said to herself that whatever her poverty, she would look every inch the lady; she looked every inch the lady to-day, though she was in her old and faded merino. But that had now come to her which made her forget the very existence of dress. The grand footman, however, who answered her modest summons, being obtuse and uneducated, saw only the shabby dress; he thought she was a distressed workwoman, he had forgotten that she had ever come there before. When she asked for Miss Harman, he hesitated and was uncertain whether she could see his young lady; finally looking at her again, he decided to trust her so far as to allow her to wait in the hall while he went to inquire. Charlotte gave her name, Mrs. Home, and he went away. When he returned there was a change in his manner. Had he begun to recognize the lady under the shabby dress; or had Charlotte Harman said anything? He took Mrs. Home up to the pretty room she had seen before, and left her there, saying that Miss Harman would be with her in few moments. The room looked just as of old. Charlotte, as she waited, remembered that she had been jealous of this pretty room. It was as pretty to-day, bright with flowers, gay with sunshine; the same love-birds were in the same cage, the same canary sang in the same window, the same parrot swung lazily from the same perch. Over the mantelpiece hung the portrait in oils of the pretty baby, who yet was not so pretty as hers. Charlotte remembered how she had longed for these pretty things for her children, but all desire for them had left her now. There was the rustling of a silk dress heard in the passage, and Charlotte Harman carelessly, but richly attired, came in. There was, even in their outward appearance, the full contrast between the rich and the poor observable at this moment, for Charlotte Harman, too, had absolutely forgotten her dress, and had allowed Ward to put on what she chose. When they were about to reverse positions, this rich and this poor woman stood side by side in marked contrast. Charlotte Harman looked proud and cold; in the moment when she came to plead, she held her head high. Charlotte Home, who was to grant the boon, came up timidly, almost humbly. She took the hands of this girl whom she loved, held them firmly, then gathering sudden courage, there burst from her lips just the last words she had meant at this moment to say.

"How much I love you! how much I love you!"

As these fervent, passionate words were almost flung at her, Charlotte Harman's eyes began suddenly to dilate. After a moment she said under her breath, in a startled kind of whisper?

"You know all?"

"I know everything."

"Then you—you will save my father?"

"Absolutely. You need fear nothing from me or mine; in this we are but quits. Did not you save Harold?"

"Ah," said Charlotte Harman; she took no notice of her friend and guest, she sat down on the nearest chair and covered her face. When she raised her head, Mrs. Home was kneeling by her side.

"Charlotte," said Miss Harman—there was a change in her, the proud look and bearing were gone —"Charlotte," she said, "you and I are one age, but you are a mother; may I lay my head on your breast just for a moment?"

"Lay it there, my darling. As you have got into my heart of hearts, so would I comfort you."

"Ah, Charlotte, how my heart has beat! but your love is like a cool hand laid upon it, it is growing quiet."

"Charlotte, you are right in reminding me that I am a mother. I must treat you as I would my little Daisy. Daisy trusts me absolutely and has no fear; you must trust me altogether, and fear nothing."

"I do. I fear nothing when I am with you. Charlotte, next Tuesday was to have been my wedding-day."

"Yes, dear."

"But it is all on an end now; I broke off my engagement yesterday. And yet, how much I love him! Charlotte, don't look at me so pityingly."

"Was I doing so? I was wondering if you slept last night."

"Slept! No, people don't sleep when their hearts beat as hard as mine did, but I am better now."

"Then, Charlotte, I must prescribe for you, as a mother. For the next two hours you are my child and shall obey me; we have a great deal to say to each other; but first of all, before we say a single word, you must lie on this sofa, and I will hold your hand. You shall try and sleep."

"But can you spare the time from your children?"

"You are my child now; as long as you want me I will stay with you. See, I am going to draw down the blinds, and I will lock the door; you must not be disturbed."

It was thus that these two spent the morning. When Charlotte Harman awoke some hours later, quiet and refreshed, they had a long, long talk. That talk drew their hearts still closer together; it was plain that such a paltry thing as money could not divide these friends.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE FATE OF A LETTER.

Hinton had left the Harmans' house, after his strange interview with Charlotte, with a stunned feeling. It is not too much to say of this young man that he utterly failed to realize what had befallen him. He walked like one in a dream, and when he reached his lodgings in Jermyn Street, and sat down at last by his hearth, he thought of himself in a queer way, as if he were some one else; a trouble had come to some one else; that some one was a friend of his so he was called on to pity him. Gradually, however, it dawned upon him that the friend was unpleasantly close, that the some one else reigned as lord of his bosom. It was he—he himself he was called on to pity. It was on his hitherto so prosperous, young head that the storm had burst. Next Tuesday was to have been his wedding-day. There was to be no wedding. On next Tuesday he was to have won a bride, a wife; that other one dearer than himself was to give herself to him absolutely. In addition to this he was to obtain fortune: and fortune was to lead to far dearer, far nobler fame. But now all this was at an end; Tuesday was to pass as any other day—gray, neutral-tinted, indifferent, it was to go over his head. And why? This was what caused the sharpest sting of the anguish. There seemed no reason for it all. Charlotte's excuse was a poor one; it had not the ring of the true metal about it. Unaccustomed to deceive, she had played her part badly. She had given an excuse; but it was no excuse. In this Hinton was not blinded, even for a moment. His Charlotte! There, seemed a flaw in the perfect creature. His Charlotte had a second time turned away her confidence from him. Yes, here was the sting; in her trouble she would not let him comfort her. What was the matter? What was the mystery? What was the hidden wrong?

Hinton roused himself now. As thought and clearness of judgment came more vividly back to him, his anger grew and his pity lessened. His mind was brought to bear upon a secret, for there *was* a hidden secret. His remembrance travelled back to all that had happened since the day their marriage was fixed—since the day when he first saw a troubled look on Charlotte's face—and she had told him, though unwillingly, that queer story of Mrs. Home's. Yes, of course, he knew there was a mystery—a strange and dark mystery; like a coward he had turned away from investigating it. He had seen Uncle Jasper's nervous fear; he had seen Mrs. Home's poverty; he had witnessed Mr. Harman's ill-concealed disquietude—all this he had seen, all this he had known. But for Charlotte's sake, he had shut his eyes; Charlotte's sake he had forbidden his brain to think or his hands to work.—

And now—now—ah! light was dawning. Charlotte had fathomed what he had feared to look at. Charlotte had seen the dread reality. The secret was disgraceful. Nothing else could so have changed his one love. Nothing but disgrace, the disgrace of the one nearest to her, could bring that look to her face. Scarcely had he thought this before a memory came to him. He started to his feet as it came back. Charlotte had said, "Before our wedding-day I will read my grandfather's will." Suppose she had done so, and her grandfather's will had been—what? Hinton began to see reason now in her unaccountable determination not to see Webster. She had doubtless resolved on that very day to go to Somerset House and read that fatal document. Having made up her mind she would not swerve from her purpose. Then, though she was firm in her determination, her face had been bright, her brow unfurrowed, she had still been his own dear and happy Charlotte. He had not seen her again until she knew all. She knew all, and her heart and spirit were alike broken. As this fact became clear to Hinton, a sense of relief and peace came over him; he began once more to understand the woman he loved. Beside the darkness of misunderstanding *her*, all other misunderstandings seemed light. She was still his love, his life; she was still true to herself, to the beautiful ideal he had enthroned in his heart of hearts. Poor darling! she would suffer; but he must escape. Loving him as deeply, as devotedly as ever, she yet would give him up, rather than that he should share in the downfall of her house. Ah! she did not know him. She could be great; but so also could he. Charlotte should see that her love was no light thing for any man to relinquish: she would find that it weighed heavier in the balance than riches, than fame; that disgrace even could not crush it down. Knowing all, he would go to her; she should not be alone in her great, great trouble; she should find out in her hour of need the kind of man whose heart she had won. His depression left him as he came to this resolve, and he scarcely spent even an anxious night. On the next day, however, he did not go to Charlotte; but about noon he sat down and wrote her the following letter:—

My Darling:

> You gave me up yesterday. I was—I don't mind telling you this now—stunned, surprised, pained. Since then, however, I have thought much; all my thought has been about you. Thought sometimes leads to light, and light has come to me. Charlotte, a contract entered into by two takes two to undo. I refuse to undo this

contract. Charlotte, I refuse to give you up. You are my promised wife; our banns have been read twice in church already. Have you forgotten this? In the eyes of both God and man you are almost mine. To break off this engagement, unless I, too, wished it, would be, whatever your motive, a *sin*. Charlotte, the time has come, when we may ruin all the happiness of both our lives, unless very plain words pass between us. I use very plain words when I tell you that I most absolutely refuse to give you up. That being so, *whatever* your motive, you are committing a sin in refusing to give yourself to me. My darling, it is you I want, not your money—you—not—not—But I will add no more, except one thing. Charlotte, I went this morning to Somerset House, and I *read your grandfather's will*.

Now, what hour shall I come to you? Any hour you name I will fly to you. It is impossible for you to refuse what I demand as a right. But know that, if you do refuse, I will come notwithstanding.

Yours ever,
JOHN HINTON.

This letter, being directed, was quickly posted, and in due time reached its address at Prince's Gate.

Then a strange thing happened to it. Jasper Harman, passing through the hall, saw the solitary letter waiting for his niece. It was his habit to examine every letter that came within his reach; he took up this one for no particular reason, but simply from the force of this long established habit. But having taken it in his hand, he knew the writing. The letter was from Hinton, and Charlotte had told him—had just told him—that her engagement with Hinton was broken off, that her wedding was not to be. Old Jasper was beset just now by a thousand fears, and Charlotte's manner and Charlotte's words had considerably added to his alarm. There was a mystery; Charlotte could not deny that fact. This letter might elucidate it—might throw light where so much was needed. Jasper Harman felt that the contents of Hinton's letter might do him good and ease his mind. Without giving himself an instant's time for reflection, he took the letter into the dining-room, and, opening it, read what was meant for another. He had scarcely done so before Charlotte unexpectedly entered the room. To save himself from discovery, when he heard her step, he dropped the letter into the fire. Thus Charlotte never got her lover's letter.

Hinton, bravely as he had spoken, was, nevertheless, pained at her silence. After waiting for twenty-four hours he, however, resolved to be true to his word. He had said to Charlotte, "If you refuse what I demand as a right, nevertheless I shall exercise my right. I will come to you." But he went with a strange sinking of heart, and when he got to Prince's Gate and was not admitted he scarcely felt surprised.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS."

It is one of those everlasting truths, which experience and life teach us every day, that sin brings its own punishment, virtue its own reward: peace, the great divine reward of conscience to the virtuous; misery and despair, and that constant apprehension which dreads discovery, and yet which in itself is worse than discovery, to the transgressors.

"The way of transgressors is hard."

That Bible text was proving itself once more now in the cases of two old men. John Harman was sinking into his grave in anguish at the thought of facing an angry God: Jasper Harman was preparing to fly from what, alas! he dreaded more, the faces of his angry fellow-creatures.

Yes; it had come to this with Jasper Harman; England had become too hot to hold him; better fly while he could. Ever since the day Hinton had told him that he had really and in truth heard of the safe arrival of the other trustee, Jasper's days and nights had been like hell to him. In the morning, he had wondered would the evening find him still a free man; in the evening, he had trembled at what might befall him before the morning dawned. Unaccustomed to any mental anguish, his health began to give way; his heart beat irregularly, unevenly, he lost his appetite; at night he either had bad dreams or he could not sleep. This change began to tell upon his appearance; his hair grew thinner and whiter, he stooped as he walked, there was very little apparent difference now between him and John.

He could not bear the Harmans' house, for there he might meet Hinton. He dreaded his office in the City, for there the other trustee might follow him and publicly expose him. He liked his club best; but even there he felt scarcely safe, some one might get an inkling of the tale, there was no saying how soon such a story, so strange, so disgraceful, pertaining to so well-known a house as that of Harman Brothers, might get bruited about. Thus it came to pass that there was no place where this wretched old man felt safe; it became more and more clear to him day by day that England was too hot to hold him. All these growing feelings culminated in a sudden accession of terror on the day that Charlotte, with her strangely changed face, had asked him the truth with regard to her father's case, when, with the persistence of almost despair, she had insisted on

knowing the very worst; then had quickly followed the announcement that her marriage had been broken off by herself; that it was postponed, her father thought, simply for the short remaining span of his own life; but Charlotte had taken little pains to conceal from Uncle Jasper that she now never meant to marry Hinton. What was the reason of it all? Jasper Harman, too, as well as Hinton, was not deceived by the reason given. There was something more behind. What was that something more?

In his terror and perplexity, Jasper opened Hinton's letter. One sentence in that letter, never meant for him, burnt into the unhappy man as the very fire of hell.

"I went this morning to Somerset House, and I read your grandfather's will."

Then Jasper's worst fears had come true; the discovery was made; the hidden sin brought to the light, the sinners would be dragged any moment to punishment.

Jasper must leave England that very night. Never again could he enter his brother's house. He must fly; he must fly at once and in secret, for it would never do to take any one into his confidence. Jasper Harman had a hard and evil heart; he was naturally cold and unloving; but he had one affection, he did care for his brother. In mortal terror as he was, he could not leave that dying brother without bidding him good-bye.

John Harman had not gone to the City that day, and when Charlotte left the room, Jasper, first glancing at the grate to make sure that Hinton's letter was all reduced to ashes, stole, in his usual soft and gliding fashion, to John's study. He was pleased to see his brother there, and alone.

"You are early back from the City, Jasper," said the elder brother.

"Yes; there was nothing to keep me this afternoon, so I did not stay."

The two old men exchanged a few more commonplaces. They were now standing by the hearth. Suddenly John Harman, uttering a half-suppressed groan, resumed his seat.

"It is odd," he said, "how the insidious something which men call Death seems to grow nearer to me day by day. Now, as we stood together, I felt just a touch of the cold hand; the touch was but a feather weight, but any instant it will come down like a giant on its prey. It is terrible to stand as I do, looking into the face of Death; I mean it is terrible for one like me."

"You are getting morbid, John," said Jasper; "you always were given to look on the dismals. If you must die, as I suppose and fear you must, why don't you rouse yourself and enjoy life while you may?"

To this John Harman made no answer. After a moment or two of silence, during which Jasper watched him nervously, he said;—

"As you have come back so early from the City, can you give me two hours now? I have a great deal I want to say to you."

"About the past?" questioned Jasper.

"About the past."

Jasper Harman paused and hesitated; he knew well that he should never see his brother again; that this was his last request. But dare he stay? Two hours were very precious, and the avenger might even now be at the door. No; he could not waste time so precious in listening to an old, old tale.

"Will two hours this evening do equally well, John?"

"Yes, if you prefer it. I generally give the evening to Charlotte; but this evening, if it suits you better."

"I will go now, then," said Jasper.

"Charlotte has told you of her resolve?"

"Yes, and I have spoken to her; but she is an obstinate minx."

"Do not call her so; it is because of her love for me. I am sorry that she will not marry at once; but it is not, after all, a long postponement and it is I own, a relief, not to have to conceal my state of health from her."

"It is useless arguing with a woman," said Jasper. "Well, good-bye, John."

"Good-bye," said the elder Harman, in some surprise that Jasper's hand was held out to him.

Jasper's keen eyes looked hard into John's for a moment. He wrung the thin hand and left the room. He had left for ever the one human being he loved, and even in his throat was a lump caused by something else than fear. But in the street and well outside that luxurious home, his love sank out of sight and his fear returned; he must get out of England that very night, and he had much to do.

He pulled out his watch. Yes, there was still time. Hailing a passing hansom he jumped into it, and drove to his bank. There, to the astonishment of the cashier, he drew all the money he kept

there. This amounted to some thousands. Jasper buttoned the precious notes into a pocket-book. Then he went to his lodgings and began the task of tearing up letters and papers which he feared might betray him. Hitherto, all through his life he had kept these things precious; but now they all went, even to his mother's portrait and the few letters she had written to him when a boy at school. Even he sighed as he cast these treasures into the fire and watched them being reduced to ashes; but though they had gone with him from place to place in Australia, and he had hoped never to part from them, he must give them up now, for, innocent as they looked, they might appeal against him. He must give up all the past, name and all, for was he not flying from the avengers? flying because of his sin? Oh! surely the way of transgressors was hard!

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHARLOTTE HARMAN'S COMFORT.

Jasper Harman did not come to his brother's house that night, but about the time he might be expected to arrive there came a note from him instead. It was plausibly written, and gave a plausible excuse for his absence. He told John of sudden tidings with regard to some foreign business. These tidings were really true. Jasper said that a confidential clerk had gone to the foreign port where they dealt to inquire into this special matter, but that he thought it best, as the stakes at issue were large, to go also himself, to inquire personally. He would not be long away, &c. &c. He would write when to expect his return. It was a letter so cleverly put together, as to cause no alarm to any one. John Harman read it, folded it up, and told Charlotte that they need not expect Jasper in Prince's Gate for at least a week. The week passed, and though Jasper had neither come nor written, there was no anxiety felt on his account. In the mean time affairs had outwardly calmed down in Prince's Gate. The agitation, which had been felt even by the humblest servant in the establishment had ceased. Everything had returned to its accustomed groove. The nine days' wonder of that put off wedding had ceased to be a wonder. It still, it is true, gave zest to conversation in the servants' hall, but upstairs it was never mentioned. The even routine of daily life had resumed its sway, and things looked something as they did before, except that Mr. Harman grew to all eyes perceptibly weaker, that Charlotte was very grave and pale and quiet, that old Uncle Jasper was no longer in and out of the house, and that John Hinton never came near it. The luxurious house in Prince's Gate was unquestionably very dull; but otherwise no one could guess that there was anything specially amiss there.

On a certain morning, Charlotte got up, put on her walking things, and went out. She had not been out of doors for a week, and a sudden longing to be alone in the fresh outer world came over her too strongly to be rejected. She called a hansom and once more drove to her favorite Regent's Park. The park was now in all the full beauty and glory of its spring dress, and Charlotte sat down under the green and pleasant shade of a wide spreading oak-tree. She folded her hands in her lap and gazed straight before her. She had lived through one storm, but she knew that another was before her. The sky overhead was still gray and lowering; there was scarcely even peace in this brief lull in the tempest. In the first sudden fierceness of the storm she had acted nobly and bravely, but now that the excitement was past, there was coming to her a certain hardening of heart, and she was beginning to doubt the goodness of God. At first, most truly she had scarcely thought of herself at all, but it was impossible as the days went on for her not to make a moan over her own altered life. The path before her looked very dark, and Charlotte's feet had hitherto been unaccustomed to gloom. She was looking forward to the death, the inevitable and certainly approaching death of her father. That was bad, that was dreadful; but bad and dreadful as it would be to say good-bye to the old man, what must follow would be worse; however she might love him, however tenderly she might treat him, during his few remaining days or weeks of life, when all was over and he could return no more to receive men's praise or blame, then she must disgrace him, she must hold him up for the world's scorn. It would be impossible even to hope that the story would not be known, and once known it would heap dishonor on the old head she loved. For Charlotte, though she saw the sin, though the sin itself was most terrible and horrible to her, was still near enough to Christ in her nature to forgive the sinner. She had suffered; oh, how bitterly through this man! but none the less for this reason did she love him. But there was another cause for her heartache; and this was more personal. Hinton and she were parted. That was right. Any other course for her to have pursued would have been most distinctly wrong. But none the less did her heart ache and feel very sore; for how easily had Hinton acquiesced in her decision! She did not even know of his visit to the house. That letter, which would have been, whatever its result, like balm to her wounded spirit, had never reached her. Hinton was most plainly satisfied that they should meet no more. Doubtless it was best, doubtless in the end it would prove the least hard course; but none the less did hot tears fall now; none the less heavy was her heart. She was wiping away a tear or two, and thinking these very sad thoughts, when a clear little voice in her ear startled her.

"My pretty lady!" said the sweet voice, and looking round Charlotte saw little Harold Home standing by her side. Charlotte had not seen Harold since his illness. He had grown taller and thinner than of old, but his loving eyes were fixed on her face, and now his small brown hands beat impatiently upon her knees.

"Daisy and Angus are just round the corner," he whispered. "Let us play a game of hide and seek,

shall we?"

He pulled her hand as he spoke, and Charlotte got up to humor him at once. They went quickly round to the other side of the great oak-tree, Harold sitting down on the grass pulled Charlotte to his side.

"Ah! don't speak," he said, and he put his arms round her neck.

She found the feel of the little arms strangely comforting, and when a moment or two afterwards the others discovered them and came close with peals of merry laughter, she yielded at once to Harold's eager request.

"May they go for a walk for half an hour, and may I stay with you, pretty lady?"

"Yes," she answered, stooping down to kiss him.

Anne promised to return at the right time, and Charlotte and Harold were alone. The boy, nestling close to her side, began to chatter confidentially.

"I'm *so* glad I came across you," he said; "you looked very dull when I came up, and it must be nice for you to have me to talk to, and 'tis very nice for me too, for I am fond of you."

"I am glad of that, Harold," said Charlotte.

"But I don't think you are quite such a pretty lady as you were," continued the boy, raising his eyes to her face and examining her critically. "Mr. Hinton and I used to think you were perfectly lovely! You were so *bright*—yes, bright is the word. Something like a dear pretty cherry, or like my little canary when he's singing his very, very best. But you ain't a bit like my canary to-day; you have no sing in you to-day; ain't you happy, my pretty lady?"

"I have had some trouble since I saw you last, Harold," said Charlotte.

"Dear, dear!" sighed Harold, "everybody seems to have lots of trouble. I wonder why. No; I don't think Mr. Hinton would think you pretty to-day. But," as a sudden thought and memory came over him—"I suppose you are married by this time? Aren't you married to my Mr. Hinton by this time?"

"No, dear," answered Charlotte.

"But why?" questioned the inquisitive boy.

"I am afraid I cannot tell you that, Harold."

Harold was silent for about half a minute. He was sitting down on the grass close to Charlotte, and his head was leaning against her shoulder. After a moment he continued with a sigh,—

"I guess *he's* very sorry. He and I used to talk about you so at night when I had the fever. I knew then he was fond of you, nearly as fond as I am myself."

"I am glad little Harold Home loves me," said Charlotte, soothed by the pretty boy's talk, and again she stooped down to kiss him.

"But everybody does," said the boy. "There's father and mother, and my Mr. Hinton and me, myself, and above all, the blessed Jesus."

A strange feeling, half pleasure, half surprise, came over Charlotte.

"How do you know about that last?" she whispered.

"Of course I know," replied Harold. "I know quite well. I heard father and mother say it; I heard them say it quite plainly one day; 'She's one of those blessed ones whom Jesus Christ loves very much.' Oh dear! I wish the children weren't back so dreadfully soon."

Yes, the children and Anne had returned, and Harold had to say good-bye, and Charlotte herself had to retrace her steps homewards. But her walk had not been for nothing, and there was a new peace, a new quiet, and a new hope in her heart. The fact was, she just simply, without doubt or difficulty, believed the child. Little Harold Home had brought her some news. The news was strange, new, and wonderful; she did not doubt it. Faithful, and therefore full of faith, was this simple and upright nature. There was no difficulty in her believing a fact. What Harold said was a fact. She was one of those whom Jesus loved. Straight did this troubled soul fly to the God of consolation. Her religion, from being a dead thing, began to live. She was not friendless, she was not alone, she had a friend who, knowing absolutely all, still loved. At that moment Charlotte Harman put her hand into the hand of Christ.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE CHILDREN'S ATTIC.

It was one thing for Alexander Wilson to agree to let matters alone for the present, and by so

doing to oblige both Charlotte Home and Charlotte Harman, but it was quite another thing for him to see his niece, his own Daisy's child, suffering from poverty. Sandy had been accustomed to roughing it in the Australian bush. He had known what it was to go many hours without food, and when that food could be obtained it was most generally of the coarsest and commonest quality. He had known, too, what the cold of lying asleep in the open air meant. All that an ordinary man could endure had Sandy pulled through in his efforts to make a fortune. He had never grumbled at these hardships, they had passed over him lightly. He would, he considered, have been less than man to have complained. But nevertheless, when he entered the Home's house, and took possession of the poorly-furnished bedroom, and sat down day after day to the not too abundant meals; when he saw pretty little Daisy cry because her mother could not give her just what was most nourishing for her breakfast, and Harold, still pale and thin, having to do without the beef-tea which the doctor had ordered for him; when Sandy saw these things his heart waxed hot, and a great grumbling fit took possession of his kindly, genial soul. This grumbling fit reached its culminating point, when one day—mother, children, and maid all out—he stole up softly to the children's nursery. This small attic room, close to the roof, low, insufficiently ventilated, was altogether too much for Sandy. The time had come for him to act, and he was never the man to shirk action in any way. Charlotte Harman was all very well; that dying father of hers, whom he pronounced a most atrocious sinner, and took pleasure in so thinking him, he also was well enough, but everything could not give way to them. Though for the present Mr. Harman's money could not be touched for the Home's relief, yet Sandy's own purse was open, and that purse, he flattered himself, was somewhat comfortably lined. Yes, he must do something, and at once. Having examined with marked disgust the children's attic, he marched down the street. Tremins Road was long and narrow, but leading out of it was a row of fine new houses. These houses were about double the size of number ten, were nicely finished, and though many of them were already taken, two or three had boards up, announcing that they were still to let. Sandy saw the agent's name on the board, and went off straight to consult with him. The result of this consultation was that in half an hour he and the agent were all over the new house. Sandy went down to the basement, and thought himself particularly knowing in poking his nose into corners, in examining the construction of the kitchen-range, and expecting a copper for washing purposes to be put up in the scullery. Upstairs he selected a large and bright room, the windows of which commanded a peep of distant country. Here his pretty little Pet Daisy might play happily, and get back her rosy cheeks, and sleep well at night without coming downstairs heavy-eyed to breakfast. Finally he took the house on the spot, and ordered in paperers and painters for the following Monday.

He was asked if he would like to choose the papers. "Certainly," he replied, inwardly resolving that the nursery should be covered with pictures. He appointed an hour on Monday for his selections. This day was Saturday. He then went to the landlord of No. 10, Tremins Road, and made an arrangement for the remainder of the Homes' lease. This arrangement cost him some money, but he reflected again with satisfaction that his purse was well lined. So far he had conducted his plans without difficulty. But his next step was not so easy; without saying a word to either Charlotte or her husband, he had deprived them of one home, while providing them with another. No doubt the new home was vastly superior to the old. But still it came into his mind that they might consider his action in the light of a liberty; in short, that this very peculiar and unworldly couple might be capable of taking huff and might refuse to go at his bidding. Sandy set his wits to work over this problem, and finally he concocted a scheme. He must come round this pair by guile. He thought and thought, and in the evening when her husband was out he had a long talk with his niece. By a few judiciously chosen words he contrived to frighten Charlotte about her husband's health. He remarked that he looked ill, worn, very much older than his years. He said, with a sigh, that when a man like Home broke down he never got up again. He was undermining his constitution. When had he had a change?

"Never once since we were married," answered the wife with tears in her eyes.

Sandy shook his head very sadly and gravely over this, and after a moment of reflection brought out his scheme.

Easter was now over, there was no special press of parish work. Surely Homes' Rector would give him a holiday, and allow him to get away from Monday to Saturday night? Why not run away to Margate for those six days, and take his wife and three children with him? No, they need take no maid, for he, Uncle Sandy, having proposed this plan must be answerable for the expense. He would put them all up at a good hotel, and Anne could stay at home to take care of him. Of course to this scheme there were many objections raised. But, finally, the old Australian overruled them each and all. The short leave was granted by the Rector. The rooms at the hotel which commanded the best sea-view were taken by Sandy, and the Homes left 10 Tremins Road, little guessing that they were not to return there. When he had seen father, mother, and three happy little children off by an early train, Sandy returned quickly to Tremins Road. There he called Anne to him, and unfolded to the trembling and astonished girl his scheme.

"We have to be in the new house as snug as snug by Saturday night, my girl," he said in conclusion. "We have to bring away what is worth moving of this furniture, and it must all be clean and fresh, for a clean new house. And, look here, Anne, you can't do all the work; do you happen to know of a good, hard-working girl, who would come and help you, and stay altogether if Mrs. Home happened to like her, just a second like yourself, my lass?"

"Oh, please, sir, please, sir," answered Anne, "there's my own sister, she's older nor me, and more knowing. She's real 'andy, and please, sir, she'd like it real awful well."

"Engage her by all means," said Wilson, "go at once for her. See; where does she live? I will pay the cab fare."

"Oh, was anything so exactly like the *Family Herald*," thought Anne as she drove away.

Uncle Sandy then went to a large West End furniture shop, and chose some sensible and nice furniture. The drawing-room alone he left untouched, for he could not pretend to understand how such a room should be rigged out—that must be Charlotte's province. But the nice large dining-room, the bedrooms, the stairs and hall, were made as sweet and gay and pretty as the West End shopman, who had good taste and to whom Uncle Sandy gave carte blanche, could devise. Finally, on Saturday, he went to a florist's and from there filled the windows with flowers, and Anne had orders to abundantly supply the larder and store-room; and now at last, directions being given for tea, the old man went off to meet his niece, her husband and her children, to conduct them to their new home.

"Oh, we did have such a time," said Harold, as, brown as a berry, he looked up at his old great-uncle. "Didn't we, Daisy?" he added, appealing to his small sister, who clung to his hand.

"Ess, but we 'onted 'oo, Uncle 'Andy," said the small thing, looking audaciously into his face, which she well knew this speech would please.

"You're just a dear, little, darling duck," said Sandy, taking her in his arms and giving her a squeeze. But even Daisy could not quite monopolize him at this moment. All the success of his scheme depended on the next half-hour, and as they all drove back to Kentish Town, Sandy on the box-seat of the cab, and the father, mother, and three children inside, his heart beat so loud and hard, that he had to quiet it with some sharp inward admonitions.

"Sandy Wilson, you old fool!" he said to himself more than once; "you have not been through the hardships of the Australian bush to be afraid of a moment like this. Keep yourself quiet; I'm ashamed of you."

At last they drew up at the address Sandy had privately given. How beautiful the new house looked! The hall door stood open, and Anne's smiling face was seen on the threshold. The children raised a shout at sight of her and the flowers, which were so gay in the windows. Mr. Home in a puzzled kind of way was putting out his head to tell the cabby that he had made a mistake, and that he must just turn the corner. Charlotte was feeling a queer little sensation of surprise, when Uncle Sandy, with a face almost purple with emotion, flung open the door of the cab, took Daisy in his arms, and mounting her with an easy swing on to his shoulder said to Charlotte,—

"Welcome, in the name of your dear, dead mother, Daisy Wilson, to your new home, Niece Lottie."

The children raised a fresh shout.

"Oh, come, Daisy," said Harold; she struggled to the ground and the two rushed in. Anne came down and took the baby, and Mr. and Mrs. Home had no help for it but to follow in a blind kind of way. Uncle Sandy pushed his niece down into one of the hall chairs.

"There!" he said; "don't, for Heaven's sake, you two unpractical, unworldly people, begin to be angry with me. That place in Tremins Road was fairly breaking my heart, and I could not stand it, and 'tis—well—I do believe 'tis let, and you *can't* go back to it, and this house is yours, Niece Charlotte, and the furniture. As to the rent, I'll be answerable for that, and you won't refuse your own mother's brother. The fact was, that attic where the children slept was too much for me, so I had to do something. Forgive me if I practised a little bit of deception on you both. Now, I'm off to an hotel to-night, but to-morrow, if you're not too angry with your mother's brother, I'm coming back for good. Kept a fine room for myself, I can tell you. Anne shall show it to you. Trust Sandy Wilson to see to his own comforts. Now good-bye, and God bless you both."

Away he rushed before either of the astonished pair had time to get in a word.

"But I do think they'll forgive the liberty the old man took with them," were his last waking thoughts as he closed his eyes that night.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HE WEPT.

Mr. Harman was beginning to take the outward circumstances of his life with great quietness. What, three months before, would have caused both trouble and distress, now, was received with equanimity. The fact was, he felt himself day by day getting so near eternity, that the things of time, always so disproportionately large to our worldly minds, were assuming to him their true proportions.

John Harman was being led by a dark road of terrible mental suffering to his God; already he was drawing near, and the shadow of that forgiveness which would yet encircle him in its perfect rest

and peace was at hand.

Days, and even weeks, went by, and there was no news of Jasper. John Harman would once have been sorely perplexed, but now he received the fact of his brothers absence with a strange quietness, even apathy. Charlotte's postponed marriage, a little time back, would have also fretted him, but believing surely that she would be happy after his death, he did not now trouble; and he could not help owning to himself that the presence of his dearly loved daughter was a comfort too great to be lightly dispensed with. He was too much absorbed with himself to notice the strangeness of Hinton's absence, and he did not perceive, as he otherwise would have done, that Charlotte's face was growing thin and pale, and that there was a subdued, almost crushed manner about the hitherto spirited creature, which not even his present state of health could altogether account for.

Yes, John Harman lived his self-absorbed life, going day by day a little further into the valley of the shadow of death. The valley he was entering looked very dark indeed to the old man, for the sin of his youth was still unforgiven, and he could not see even a glimpse of the Good Shepherd's rod and staff. Still he was searching day and night for some road of peace and forgiveness; he wanted the Redeemer of all the world to lay His hand upon his bowed old head. The mistake he was still making was this—he would not take God's way of peace, he must find his own.

One evening, after Charlotte had left him, he sat for a long time in his study lost in thought. After a time he rose and took down once more from the shelf the Bible which he had opened some time before; then it had given him the reverse of comfort, and he scarcely, as he removed it from the place where he had pushed it far back out of sight, knew why he again touched it. He did, however, take it in his hand, and return with it to his chair. He drew the chair up to the table and laid the old Bible upon it. He opened it haphazard; he was not a man who had ever studied or loved the Bible; he was not acquainted with all its contents and the story on which his eyes rested came almost with the freshness of novelty.

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

"The publican would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

John Harman read the story twice.

"This man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

The other! he fasted, and gave alms, and thanked God that he was not as this publican—this publican, who was a sinner.

But the Bible words were clear enough and plain enough. He, the sinner, was justified.

John Harman covered his face with his hands. Suddenly he fell on his knees.

"God be merciful to me a sinner," he said.

He said the few words twice aloud, in great anguish of spirit, and as he prayed he wept.

Afterwards he turned over the Bible pages again. This time he read the story of Zacchæus.

"If I have taken anything from any man, I restore him fourfold."

It was very late when Mr. Harman at last went to bed, but he slept better that night than he had done for years. He was beginning to see the possible end.

CHAPTER L.

HOME'S SERMON.

It was impossible for the Homes to refuse Uncle Sandy's kindness. Their natural pride and independence of character could not stand in the way of so graciously and gracefully offered a gift. When the old man came to see them the next day, he was received with all the love and gratitude he deserved. If he could give well, Charlotte and her husband knew how to receive well. He now told his niece plainly that he had come to pass the remainder of his days with her and hers; and father, mother, and children welcomed him with delight.

Charlotte was now a very happy woman. The new and pretty house was delightful to her. She began to understand what it was not to have to look twice at a pound, for Uncle Sandy's purse was for ever at her command. When she went with her old uncle to choose the furniture for the new drawing room, she laughed so merrily and seemed so gay that Uncle Sandy informed her that she had already lost five years of her age. Harold and Daisy used to look into her face at this time, and say to one another, "Isn't our mother pretty?" For, indeed, the peace in her heart, and the little unexpected glow of worldly prosperity which had come into her life, had wonderfully softened and beautified her face. Her eyes, when she looked at her children's blooming faces, were often bright as stars. At all times now they were serene and happy. She had one little cross,

however, one small shadow in her happy time. She wanted to be much—daily, if possible—with Charlotte Harman. Her heart yearned over Charlotte, and she would have almost neglected her children to give her one ray of comfort just now. But Charlotte herself had forbidden this daily intercourse.

"I love you, Charlotte," she had said, "and I know that you love me. But at present we must not meet. I cannot leave my father to go to see you, and you must not come here, for I cannot risk the chance of seeing you. He may question me, and I shall not be able to answer his questions. No, Charlotte, we must not meet."

Charlotte Home felt much regret at this. Failing Charlotte Harman, she turned her attention to Hinton. She was fully resolved that no stone should remain unturned by her to enable those two yet to marry, and she thought she might best effect her object by seeing the young man. She wrote to him, asking him to call, telling him that she had much of importance to tell him; but both from his private address and also from his chambers the letters were, in due course of time, returned. Hinton was not in town, and had left no clue to his whereabouts. Thus she was cut off from helping, in any way, those who were in great darkness, and this fact was an undoubted sorrow to her. Yes, Mrs. Home was full of pity for Charlotte, full of pity for Charlotte's lover. But it is to be feared that both she and Uncle Sandy retained a strong sense of indignation towards the one who had caused the anguish—towards the one, therefore, on whom the heaviest share of the punishment fell. Very terrible was it for Charlotte, very terrible for Hinton. But were they asked to tell their true feeling towards old John Harman, they might have whispered, "Serve him right." There was one, however, besides his daughter, whose warmest sympathies, whose most earnest and passionate prayers were beginning day by day and night by night, to centre more and more round the suffering and guilty man, and that one was the curate, Home. Angus Home had never seen John Harman, but his sin and his condition were ever before him. He was a dying man, and—he was a sinner. With strong tears and lamentation did this man cry to God for his fellow man. His tears and his prayers brought love for the sinner. Angus Home would have gladly died to bring John Harman back to God.

One Saturday night he sat up late over his sermon. He was not an eloquent preacher, but so earnest was his nature, so intense his realization of God's love and of the things unseen, that it was impossible for his words not to be winged with the rare power of earnestness. He was neither gifted with language nor with imagination; but he could tell plain truths in such a way that his hearers often trembled as they listened. At such times he looked like an avenging angel. For the man, when he felt called on to rebuke sin, was very jealous for his God. Then, again, he could whisper comfort; he could bring down Heaven, and looked, when he spoke of the land which is very far off, as though even now, and even here, his eyes were seeing the King in His beauty. Nevertheless, so little was that real power of his understood, so much better were empty words gracefully strung together preferred, that Home was seldom asked to preach in the large parish church. His congregation were generally the very poorest of his flock. These very poor folks learned to love their pastor, and for them he would very gladly spend and be spent. He was to preach to-morrow in a small iron building to these poor people. He now sat up late to prepare his sermon. He found himself, however, sadly out of tune for this work. He took his Bible in hand and turned page after page; he could find no suitable text; he could fix his attention on no particular line of argument. He unlocked a drawer, and took from thence a pile of old sermons; should he use one of these? He looked through and through his store. None pleased, none satisfied him. Finally, overcome by a sudden feeling, he forgot his sermon of to-morrow. He pushed his manuscripts aside, and fell on his knees. He was in terror about the soul of John Harman, and he prayed for him in groans that seemed almost as though they must rend the heavens in their pleadings for a reply. "Lord, spare the man. Lord, hear me; hear me when I plead with Thee. It was for sinners such as he Thou didst die. Oh, spare! oh, save!—save this great sinner. Give me his soul, Lord. Lord, give me his soul to bring to Thee in Heaven." He went up to bed in the early hours of the May morning quite exhausted. He had absolutely forgotten his sermon. He had not prepared a word for his congregation for the next day. Before he went to church he remembered this. There was no help for it now. He could but put two of his already prepared sermons in his pocket and set out. He was to read the service as well as to preach the sermon. There were about sixty poor people present. Charlotte and the children went to the parish church. There was not a really well-dressed person in all his congregation. He had just finished reading the Absolution when a slight stir near the door attracted his attention. He raised his eyes to see the verger leading up the centre aisle an old man with bowed head and silver hair, accompanied by a young woman. The young woman Home recognized at a glance. She was Charlotte Harman; the old man then was her father. He did not ask himself why they had come here or how, but instantly he said to his own heart, with a great throb of ecstatic joy, "God has heard my prayer; that soul is to be mine." When he mounted the pulpit stairs he had absolutely forgotten his written sermons. For the first time he stood before his congregation without any outward aid of written words, or even notes. He certainly did not need them, for his heart was full. Out of that heart, burning with love so intense as to be almost divine, he spoke. I don't think he used any text, but he told from beginning to end the old, old tale of the Prodigal Son. He told it as, it seemed to his congregation, that wonderful story had never been told since the Redeemer Himself had first uttered the words. He described the far country, the country where God was not; and the people were afraid and could scarcely draw their breath. Then he told of the Father's forgiveness and the Father's welcome home; and the congregation, men and women alike, hid their faces and wept. Added to his earnestness God had given to him the great gift of eloquence to-day. The people said afterwards they scarcely knew their pastor. There was not a dry eye in his church that morning.

CHAPTER LI.

A SINNER.

Home went back to his new and pretty house and sat down with his wife and children, and waited. He would not even tell Charlotte of these unlooked-for additions to his small congregation. When she asked him if he had got on well, if his sermon had been a difficulty, he had answered, with a light in his eyes, that God had been with him. After this the wife only took his hand and pressed it. She need question no further: but even she wondered at the happy look on his face.

He had two more services for that day, and also schools to attend, and through all his duties, which seemed to come without effort or annoyance, he still waited. He knew as well as if an angel had told him that he should see more of Mr. Harman. Had he been less assured of this he would have taken some steps himself to secure a meeting; he would have gone to the daughter, he would have done he knew not what. But having this firm assurance, he did not take any steps; he believed what God wished him to do was quietly to wait.

When he went out on Monday morning he left word with his wife where he might be found without trouble or delay, if wanted.

"Is any one ill in the congregation?" she inquired.

"Some one is ill, but not in the congregation," he answered.

He came home, however, late on Monday night, to find that no one had sent, no one in particular had inquired for him. Still his faith was not at all shaken; he still knew that Harman's soul was to be given to him, and believing that he would like to see him, he felt that he should yet be summoned to his side.

On Tuesday morning prayers were to be read in the little iron church. Never full even on Sundays, this one weekday service was very miserably attended. Home did not often take it, the duty generally devolving on the youngest curate in the place. He was hurrying past to-day, having many sick and poor to attend to, when he met young Davenport—a curate only just ordained.

"I am glad I met you," said the young man, coming up at once and addressing the older clergyman with a troubled face. "There would not have been time to have gone round to your place. See, I have had a telegram; my father is ill. I want to catch a train at twelve o'clock to go and see him; I cannot if I take this service. Will it be possible for you to do the duty this morning?"

"Perfectly possible," answered Home heartily. "Go off at once, my dear fellow; I will see to things for you until you return."

The young man was duly grateful, and hurried away at once, and Home entered the little building. The moment he did so he saw the reason of it all. Mr. Harman was in the church; he was in the church and alone. His daughter was not with him. There was no sermon that day, and the short morning prayers were quickly over. The half-dozen poor who had come in went out again; but Mr. Harman did not stir. Home took off his surplice, and hurried down the church. He meant now to speak to Mr. Harman, if Mr. Harman did not speak to him; but he saw that he would speak. As he approached the pew the white-headed old man rose slowly and came to meet him.

"Sir, I should like to say a few words to you."

"As many as you please, my dear sir; I am quite at your service."

Home now entered the pew and sat down.

"Shall we talk here or in the vestry?" he inquired, after a moment's silence.

"I thought perhaps you would come to my house later on," said Mr. Harman. "I have a long story to tell you; I can tell it best at home. I am very ill, or I would come to you. May I expect you this evening?"

"I will certainly come," answered Home. "What is your address?"

Mr. Harman gave it. Then, after a pause, he added—

"I seek you as a minister."

"And I come to you as a servant of God," replied the curate, now fixing his eyes on his companion.

Mr. Harman's gaze did not quail before that steady look. With an unutterable sadness he returned it fully. Then he said,

"I came here on Sunday."

"I saw you," answered Home.

"Ah! can it be possible that you preached to me?"

"To you, if you think so. I spoke to every sinner in the congregation."

"You spoke of a land where God is not; you described the terrible country well."

"An arid land?" answered Home.

"Ay, a thirsty land."

"Those that find it so generally find also that they are being led back to a land where God is."

"You believe, then, in the forgiveness of sin?"

"If I did not I should go mad."

"My good sir, you are not much of a sinner."

"I am a sinner, sir; and if I were not—if I dared to lift up my eyes to a holy, a righteous God, and say, 'I am pure'—I yet, if I did not believe as fully as I am now sitting by your side in the perfect forgiveness of sin, I yet should go mad; for I have seen other men's sins and other men's despair; I should lose my reason for their sakes, if not for my own."

"Should you, indeed? You see now before you a despairing man and a dying man."

"And a sinner?" questioned Home.

"Ay, ay, God knows, a sinner."

"Then I see also before me a man whose despair can be changed to peace, and his sin forgiven. What hour shall I call upon you this evening?"

Mr. Harman named the hour. Then he rose feebly; Home gave him his arm and conducted him to his carriage; afterwards he re-entered the church to pray.

CHAPTER LII.

A HIDDEN SIN.

Nine o' clock in the evening was the hour named by Mr. Harman, and punctually at that hour Home arrived at Prince's Gate. He was a man who had never been known to be late for an appointment; for in little things even, this singular man was faithful to the very letter of the trust. This nice observance of his passed word, in a great measure counteracted his otherwise unpractical nature. Home was known by all his acquaintances to be a most dependable man.

Mr. Harman had told Charlotte that he was expecting a friend to visit him. He said he should like to see that friend alone; but, contrary to his wont, he did not mention his name. This cannot be wondered at, for Mr. Harman knew of no connection between the Homes and Charlotte. He had chosen this man of God, above his fellow-men, because he had been haunted and impressed by his sermon, but he scarcely himself even knew his name. It so happened, however, that Charlotte saw Mr. Home entering her father's study. It is not too much to say that the sight nearly took her breath away, and that she felt very considerable disquietude.

"Sit here," said Mr. Harman to his guest.

The room had been comfortably prepared, and when Home entered Mr. Harman got up and locked the door; then, sitting down opposite to Home, and leaning a little forward, he began at once without preface or preamble.

"I want to tell you without reservation the story of my life."

"I have come to listen," answered Home.

"It is the story of a sin."

Home bent his head.

"It is the story of a successfully hidden sin—a sin hidden from all the world for three and twenty years."

"A crushing weight such a sin must have been," answered the clergyman. "But will you just tell me all from the beginning?"

"I will tell you all from the beginning. A hidden sin is, as you say, heavy enough to crush a man into hell. But I will make no more preface. Sir, I had the misfortune to lose a very noble mother when I was young. When I was ten years old, and my brother (I have one brother) was eight, our mother died! We were but children, you will say; but I don't, even now that I am a dying, sinful old man, forget my mother. She taught us to pray and to shun sin. She also surrounded us with such high and holy thoughts—she so gave us the perfection of all pure mother love, that we must have been less than human not to be good boys during her lifetime. I remember even now the

look in her eyes when I refused on any childish occasion to follow the good, and then chose the evil. I have a daughter—one beloved daughter, something like my mother. I have seen the same high and honorable light in her eyes, but never since in any others. Well, my mother died, and Jasper and I had only her memory to keep us right. We used to talk about her often, and often fretted for her as, I suppose, few little boys before or since have fretted for a mother. After her death we were sent to school. Our father even then was a rich man: he was a self-made man; he started a business in a small way in the City, but small beginnings often make great endings, and the little business grew, and grew, and success and wealth came almost without effort. Jasper and I never knew what poverty meant. I loved learning better than my brother did, and at the age of eighteen, when Jasper went into our father's business, I was sent to Oxford. At twenty-two I had taken my degree, and done so, not perhaps brilliantly, but with some honor. Any profession was now open to me, and my father gave me full permission to choose any walk in life I chose; at the same time he made a proposal. He was no longer so young as he had been; he had made his fortune; he believed that Jasper's aptitude for business excelled his own. If we would become partners in the firm which he had made, and which was already rising into considerable eminence, he would retire altogether. We young men should work the business in our own way. He was confident we should rise to immense wealth. While making this proposal our father said that he would not give up his business to Jasper alone. If both his sons accepted it, then he would be willing to retire, taking with him a considerable sum of money, but still leaving affairs both unencumbered and flourishing. 'You are my heirs eventually.' he said to us both; 'and now I give you a week to decide.' At the end of the allotted time we accepted the offer. This was principally Jasper's doing, for at that time I knew nothing of business, and had thought of a profession. Afterwards I liked the counting-house, and became as absorbed as others in the all-engrossing accumulation of wealth. Our father had taken a very large sum of money out of the business, and it was impossible for us not to feel for a time a considerable strain; but Jasper's skill and talent were simply wonderful, and success attended all our efforts.

"Two years after I joined the business, I married my Charlotte's mother. I was a wealthy man even then. Though of no birth in particular, I was considered gentlemanly. I had acquired that outward polish which a university education gives; I was also good-looking. With my money, good looks, and education, I was considered a match for the proud and very poor daughter of an old Irish baronet. She had no money; she had nothing but her beautiful face, her high and honorable spirit, her blue blood. You will say, 'Enough!' Ay, it was more than enough. She made me the best, the truest of wives. I never loved another woman. She was a little bit extravagant. She had never known wealth until she became my wife, and wealth, in the most innocent way in the world, was delightful to her. While Jasper saved, I was tempted to live largely. I took an expensive house—there was no earthly good thing I would not have given to her. She loved me; but, as I said, she was proud. Pride in birth and position was perhaps her only fault. I was perfect in her eyes, but she took a dislike to Jasper. This I could have borne, but it pained me when I saw her turning away from my old father. I dearly loved and respected my father, and I wanted Constance to love him, but she never could be got to care for him. It was at that time, that that thing happened which was the beginning of all the after darkness and misery.

"My father, finding my proud young wife not exactly to his taste, came less and less to our house. Finally, he bought an old estate in Hertfordshire, and then one day the news reached us that he had engaged himself to a very young girl, and that he would marry at once. There was nothing wrong in this marriage, but Jasper and I chose to consider it a sin. We had never forgotten our mother, and we thought it a dishonor to her. We forgot our father's loneliness. In short, we were unreasonable and behaved as unreasonably as unreasonable men will on such occasions. Hot and angry words passed between our father and ourselves. We neither liked our father's marriage nor his choice. Of course, we were scarcely likely to turn the old man from his purpose, but we refused to have anything to do with his young wife. Under such circumstances we had an open quarrel. Our father married, and we did not see him for years. I was unhappy at this, for I loved my father. Before his second marriage, he always spent from Saturday to Monday at our house, and though my own wife not caring for him greatly marred our pleasure, yet now that the visits had absolutely ceased I missed them—I missed the gray head and the shrewd, old, kindly face; and often, very often, I almost resolved to run down into Hertfordshire and make up my quarrel. I did not do so, however; and as the years went on, I grew afraid to mention my father's name to either my wife or brother. Jasper and I were at this time deeply absorbed in speculation; our business was growing and growing; each thing we embarked in turned out well; we were beginning quite to recover from the strain which our father's removal of so large a sum of money had caused. Jasper was a better man of business than I was. Jasper, though the junior partner, took the lead in all plans. He proposed that an Australian branch of our business should be opened. It was done, and succeeded well.

"About this time we heard that a little son had arrived at the Hermitage in Hertfordshire. He did not live long. We saw his birth announced in *The Times*. It may have been some months later, though, looking back on it, it seems but a few days, that the birth was followed by the death. A year or two passed away, and my wife and I were made happy by the arrival of our first child. The child was a daughter. We called her Charlotte, after my much-loved mother. Time went on, until one day a telegram was put into my hand summoning my brother and myself to our father's deathbed. The telegram was sent by the young wife. I rushed off at once; Jasper followed by the next train.

"The hale old man had broken up very suddenly at last, and the doctor said he had but a few days to live. During those few days, Jasper and I scarcely left his bedside; we were reconciled fully and

completely, and he died at last murmuring my own mother's name and holding our hands.

"It was during this visit that I saw the little wife for the first time. She was a commonplace little thing, but pretty and very young; it was impossible to dislike the gentle creature. She was overpowered with grief at her husband's death. It was impossible not to be kind to her, not to comfort her. There was one child, a girl of about the age of my own little Charlotte. This child had also been named Charlotte. She was a pale, dark-eyed child, with a certain strange look of my mother about her. She was not a particle like her own. My father loved this little creature, and several times during those last days of his he spoke of her to me.

"'I have called her after your own mother,' he said. 'I love my second wife; but the Charlotte of my youth can never be forgotten. I have called the child Charlotte; you have called your daughter Charlotte. Good! let the two be friends.'

"I promised readily enough, and I felt pity and interest for the little forlorn creature. I also, as I said, intended to be good to the mother, who seemed to me to be incapable of standing alone.

"Immediately after my father's death and before the funeral, I was summoned hastily to town. My wife was dangerously ill. A little dead baby had come into the world, and for a time her life was despaired of; eventually she got better; but for the next few days I lived and thought only for her. I turned over all business cares to Jasper. I was unable even to attend our father's funeral. I never day or night left Constance's bedside. I loved this woman most devotedly, most passionately. During all those days when her life hung in the balance, my time seemed one long prayer to God. 'Spare her, spare her precious life at any cost, at any cost.' Those were the words, forever on my lips. The prayer was heard; I had my wife again. For a short time she was restored to me. I have often thought since, was even that precious life worth the price I paid for it?"

Here Mr. Harman paused. Some moisture had gathered on his brow; he took out his handkerchief to wipe it away. A glass of water stood by his side; he drank a little.

"I am approaching the sin," he said addressing the clergyman. "The successfully buried sin is about to rise from its grave; pardon me if I shrink from the awful sight."

"God will strengthen you, my dear sir," answered Home. "By your confession, you are struggling back into the right path. What do I say? Rather you are being led back by God himself. Take courage. Lean upon the Almighty arm. Your sin will shrink in dimensions as you view it; for between you and it will come forgiveness."

Mr. Harman smiled faintly, After another short pause, he continued.

"On the day on which my dear wife was pronounced out of danger, Jasper sent for me. My brother and I had ever been friends, though in no one particular were we alike. During the awful struggle through which I had just passed. I forgot both him and my father. Now I remembered him and my father's death, and our own business cares. A thousand memories came back to me. When he sent for me I left my wife's bedside and went down to him. I was feeling weak and low, for I had not been in bed for many nights, and a kind of reaction had set in. I was in a kind of state when a man's nerves can be shaken, and his whole moral equilibrium upset. I do not offer this as an excuse for what followed. There is no excuse for the dark sin; but I do believe enough about myself to say that what I then yielded to, I should have been proof against at a stronger physical moment. I entered my private sitting-room to find Jasper pacing up and down like a wild creature. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair tossed. He was a calm and cheerful person generally. At this instant, he looked like one half bereft of reason. 'Good heavens! what is wrong?' I said. I was startled out of myself by his state of perturbation.

"'We are ruined; that is what is wrong,' answered Jasper.

"He then entered into particulars with which I need not trouble you. A great house, one of the greatest and largest houses in the City, had come to absolute grief; it was bankrupt. In its fall many other houses, ours amongst them, must sink.

"I saw it all quite plainly. I sat down quiet and stunned; while Jasper raved and swore and paced up and down the room, I sat still. Yes we were, beggars, nothing could save the house which our father had made with such pride and care.

"After a time I left Jasper and returned to my wife's room. On the way I entered the nursery and paid my pretty little Charlotte a visit. She climbed on my knee and kissed me, and all the time I kept saying to myself, 'The child is a beggar, I can give her no comforts; we are absolutely in want.' It was the beginning of the winter then, and the weather was bitterly cold. The doctor met me on the threshold of my wife's room; he said to me, 'As soon as ever she is better, you must either take or send her out of England. She may recover abroad; but to winter in this climate, in her present state, would certainly kill her.' How bitter I felt; for was I not a beggar? How could I take my wife away? I sat down again in the darkened room and thought over the past. Hitherto the wealth, which was so easily won, seemed of comparatively small importance. It was easy with a full purse to wish, then to obtain. I had often wondered at Constance's love for all the pretty things with which I delighted to surround her, her almost childish pleasure in the riches which had come to her. She always said to me at such times:

"'But I have known such poverty; I hate poverty, and I love, I love the pretty things of life.'

"This very night, as I sat by her bedside, she opened her lovely eyes and looked at me and said:

"'John, I have had such a dream so vivid, so, so terrible. I thought we were poor again—poorer than I ever was even with my father; so poor, John, that I was hungry, and you could give me nothing to eat. I begged you to give me food. There was a loaf in a shop window, such a nice crisp loaf; and I was starving. When you said you had no money, I begged of you to steal that loaf. You would not, you would not, and at last I lay down to die. Oh! John, say it was a dream.'

"'Of course it was only a dream, my darling!' I answered, and I kissed her and soothed her, though all the time my heart felt like lead.

"That evening Jasper sent for me again. His manner now was changed. The wildness and despair had left it. He was his old, cool, collected self. He was in the sort of mood when he always had an ascendency over me—the sort of mood when he showed that wonderful business faculty for which I could not but admire him.

"'Sit down, John,' he said, 'I have a great deal to say to you. There is a plan in my head. If you will agree to act with me in it, we may yet be saved.'

"Thinking of my Constance lying so ill upstairs, my heart leaped up at these words.

"'What is your plan?' I said. 'I can stay with you for some time. I can listen as long as you like.'

"'You hate poverty?' said Jasper.

"'Yes,' I said, thinking of Constance, 'I hate it.'

"'If you will consent to my scheme; if you will consent before you leave this room, we need not sink with Cooper, Cooper and Bennett.'

"'I will listen to you,' I said.

"'You have always been so absorbed lately in your wife,' continued Jasper, 'that you have, I really believe, forgotten our father's death: his funeral was last Thursday. Of course you could not attend it. After the funeral I read the will.'

"'Yes,' I said, 'I had really forgotten my father's will. He left us money?' I said. 'I am glad; it will keep us from absolute want. Constance need not be hungry after all.'

"My brother looked at me.

"'A little money has been left to us,' he said, 'but so little that it must go with the rest. In the general crash those few thousands must also go. John, you remember when our father took that very large sum out of the business, he promised that we should be his heirs. It was a loan for his lifetime.'

"'He had not married then,' I said.

"'No,' answered Jasper, 'he had not married. Now that he has married he has forgotten all but this second wife. He has left her, with the exception of a few thousands, the whole of that fine property. In short, he has left her a sum of money which is to realize an income of twelve hundred a year.'

"'Yes,' I said, wearily.

"Jasper looked at me very hard. I returned his gaze.

"'That money, if left to us, would save the firm. *Quite absolutely save the firm in this present crisis*,' he said, slowly and emphatically.

"'Yes,' I said again. I was so innocent, so far from what I since became, at that moment, that I did not in the least understand my brother. 'The money is not ours,' I said, seeing that his eyes were still fixed on me with a greedy intense light.

"'If my father were alive now,' said Jasper, rising to his feet and coming to my side, 'if my father were alive now, he would break his heart, to see the business which he made with such pride and skill, come to absolute grief. If my father were still alive; if that crash had come but a fortnight ago, he would say, 'Save the firm at any cost.'

"'But he is dead,' I said, 'we cannot save the firm. What do you mean, Jasper? I confess I cannot see to what you are driving.'

"'John,' said my brother, 'you are stupid. If our father could speak to us now, he would say, 'Take the money, all the money I have left, and save the firm of Harman Brothers.'

"'You mean,' I said, 'you mean that we—we are to *steal* that money, the money left to the widow, and the fatherless?'

"I understood the meaning now. I staggered to my feet. I could have felled my brother to the ground. He was my brother, my only brother; but at that moment, so true were my heart's instincts to the good and right, that I loathed him. Before however, I could say a word, or utter a reproach, a message came to me from my wife. I was wanted in my wife's room instantly, she was excited, she was worse. I flew away without a word.

"'Come back again, I will wait for you here,' called after me my brother.

"I entered Constance's room. I think she was a little delirious. She was still talking about money, about being hungry and having no money to buy bread. Perhaps a presentiment of *the* evil news had come to her. I had to soothe, to assure her that all she desired should be hers. I even took my purse out and put it into her burning hand. At last she believed me; she fell asleep with her hand in mine. I dared not stir from her; and all the time as I sat far into the night, I thought over Jasper's words. They were terrible words, but I could not get them out of my head, they were burning like fire into my brain. At last Constance awoke; she was better, and I could leave her. It was now almost morning. I went to my study, for I could not sleep. To my surprise, Jasper was still there. It was six hours since I had left him, but he had not stirred.

"'John,' he said, seeing that I shrank from him, 'you must hear me out. Call my plan by as ugly a name as you like, no other plan will save the firm. John, will you hear me speak?'

"'Yes, I will hear you,' I said. I sank down on the sofa. My head was reeling. Right and wrong seemed confused. I said to myself, My brain is so confused with grief and perplexity that it is no matter what Jasper says just now, for I shall not understand him. But I found to my surprise, almost to my horror, that I understood with startling clearness every word. This was Jasper's plan. There were three trustees to the will; I was one, my brother Jasper another, a third was a man by the name of Alexander Wilson. He was brother to my father's second wife. This Alexander Wilson I had never seen. Jasper had seen him once. He described him to me as a tall and powerful man with red hair. 'He is the other trustee,' said my brother, 'and he is dead.'

"'Dead!' I said, starting.

"'Yes, he is without doubt dead; here is an account of his death.'

"Jasper then opened an Australian paper and showed me the name, also the full account of a man who answered in all particulars to the Alexander Wilson named as a third trustee. Jasper then proceeded to unfold yet further his scheme.

"That trustee being dead, we were absolute masters of the situation, we could appropriate that money. The widow knew nothing yet of her husband's will; she need never know. The sum meant for her was, under existing circumstances, much too large. She should not want, she should have abundance. But we too should not want. Were our father living he would ask us to do this. We should save ourselves and the great house of Harman Brothers. In short, to put the thing in plain language, we should, by stealing the widow's money, save ourselves. By being faithless to our most solemn trust, we could keep the filthy lucre. I will not say how I struggled. I did struggle for a day; in the evening I yielded. I don't excuse myself in the very least. In the evening I fell as basely as a man could fall. I believe in my fall I sank even lower than Jasper. I said to him, 'I cannot bear poverty, it will kill Constance, and Constance must not die; but you must manage everything. I can go into no details; I can never, never as long as I live, see that widow and child. You must see them, you must settle enough, abundance on them, but never mention their names to me. I can do the deed, but the victims must be dead to me.'

"To all this Jasper promised readily enough. He promised and acted. All went, outwardly, smoothly and well; there was no hitch, no outward flaw, no difficulty, the firm was saved; none but we two knew how nearly it had been engulfed in hopeless shipwreck. It recovered itself by means of that stolen money, and flew lightly once again over the waters of prosperity. Yes, our house was saved, and from that hour my happiness fled. I had money, money in abundance and to spare; but I never knew another hour, day or night, of peace. I had done the deed to save my wife, but I found that, though God would give me that cursed wealth, He yet would take away my idol for whom I had sacrificed my soul. Constance only grew well enough to leave England. We wintered abroad, and at Cannes, surrounded by all that base money could supply, she closed her eyes. I returned home a widower, and the most wretched man on the face of the earth. Soon after, the Australian branch of our business growing and growing, Jasper found it well to visit that country. He did so, and stayed away many years. Soon after he landed, he wrote to tell me that he had seen the grave of Alexander Wilson; that he had made many inquiries about him, and that now there was not the least shadow of doubt that the other trustee was dead. He said that our last fears of discovery might now rest.

"Years went by, and we grew richer and richer; all we put our hands to prospered. Money seemed to grow for us on every tree. I could give my one child all that wealth could suggest. She grew up unsullied by what was eating into me as a canker. She was beautiful alike in mind and body; she was and is the one pure and lovely thing left to me. She became engaged to a good and honorable man. He had, it is true, neither money nor position, but I had learned, through all these long years of pain, to value such things at their true worth. Charlotte should marry where her heart was. I gave her leave to engage herself to Hinton. Shortly after that engagement, Jasper, my brother, returned from Australia. His presence, reminding me, as it did, day and night, of my crime, but added to my misery of soul. I was surprised, too, to see how easily what was dragging me to the very gate of hell seemed to rest on him. I could never discover, narrowly as I watched him, that he was anything but a happy man. One evening, after spending some hours in his presence, I fainted away quite suddenly. I was alone when this fainting fit overtook me. I believe I was unconscious for many hours. The next day I went to consult a doctor. Then and there, in that great physician's consulting-room, I learned that I am the victim of an incurable complaint; a complaint that must end my life, must end it soon, and suddenly. In short, the doctor said to me, not in words, but by look, by manner, by significant hand pressure, and that silent sympathy which speaks a terrible fact. 'Prepare to meet thy God.' Since the morning I left the doctor's presence I have been trying to prepare; but between God and me stands my sin. I cannot

get a glimpse of God. I wait, and wait, but I only see the awful sin of my youth. In short, sir, I am in the far country where God is not."

"To die so would be terrible," said Mr. Home.

"To die so will be terrible, sir; in, short, it will be hell."

"Do not put it in the future tense, Mr. Harman, for you that day is past."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that even now, though you know it not, you are no longer in the far country. You are the prodigal son if you like, but you are on the road back to the Father. You are on the homeward road, and the Father is looking out for you. When you come to die you will not be alone, the hand of God will hold yours, and the smile of a forgiving God will say to you, as the blessed Jesus said once to a poor sinful woman, who yet was not *half* as great a sinner as you are, 'Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee.'"

"You believe then in the greatness of my sin?"

"I believe, I *know* that your sin was enormous; but so also is your repentance."

"God knows I repent," answered Mr. Harman.

"Yes; when you asked me to visit you, and when you poured out that story in my ears, your long repentance and anguish of heart were beginning to find vent."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you will make reparation."

"Ay, indeed I am more than willing. Zacchæus restored fourfold."

"Yes, the road for you, straight to the bosom of the Father, is very prickly and full of sharp thorns. You have held a high character for honor and respectability. You have a child who loves you, who has thought you perfect. You must step down from your high pedestal. You must renounce the place you have held in your child's heart. In short, you must let your only child, and also the cold, censorious world, see you as God has seen you for so long."

"I don't mind the world, but—my child—my only child," said Mr. Harman, and now he put up his trembling hands and covered his face. "That is a very hard road," he said after a pause.

"There is no other back to the Father," answered the clergyman.

"Well, I will take it then, for I *must* get back to Him. You are a man of God. I put myself in your hands. What am I to do?"

"You put yourself not into my hands, sir, but into the loving and merciful hands of my Lord Christ. The course before you is plain. You must find out those you have robbed; you must restore all, and ask these wronged ones' forgiveness. When they forgive, the peace of God will shine into your heart."

"You mean the widow and the child. But I do not know anything of them; I have shut my eyes to their fate."

"The widow is dead, but the child lives; I happen to know her; I can bring her to you."

"Can you? How soon?"

"In an hour and a half from now if you like. I should wish you to rest in that peace I spoke of before morning. Shall I bring her to-night?"

"Yes, I will see her; but first, first, will you pray with me?"

Mr. Home knelt down at once. The gray-headed and sinful man knelt by his side. Then the clergyman hurried away to fetch his wife.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE PRINCE OF PEACE.

It was very nearly midnight when Mr. Home, entering the sitting-room where his wife waited up for him, asked her to come with him at once.

"There is a hansom at the door," he said, "put on your bonnet and come. I will tell you all as we drive along; come at once, we have not a moment to lose."

Charlotte Home, accustomed as Home's wife to imperative demands, only thought of a night's nursing of some specially poor patient. She rose without a word, and in two minutes they were driving, as fast as a fleet horse could take them to Prince's Gate.

"Charlotte," said her husband, taking her hand, "God has heard my prayer, God has given me the man's soul."

"Whose soul, my dearest?"

"The soul of John Harman. Charlotte, I have prayed as I never prayed before in all my life for that guilty and troubled sinner's soul. I have been in an agony for it; it has seemed to me at times that for this lost and suffering brother I could lay down my very life. On Sunday last I went to conduct service in the small iron church. I tried the night before to prepare a sermon; no thought would come to me. I tried at last to look up an old one; no old sermon would commend itself. Finally I dropped all thought of the morrow's sermon and spent the greater part of the night in prayer. My prayer was for this sinner, and it seemed to me, that as I struggled and pleaded, God the Father and God the Son drew nigh. I went to bed with a wonderfully close sense of their presence. At morning prayers the next day, Miss Harman and her father entered the church. You may well look at me in surprise, Charlotte, but when I saw them I felt quiet enough; I only knew that God had sent them. For the first time in my life I preached without note or written help. I felt, however, at no loss for words; my theme was the Prodigal Son. I thought only of Mr. Harman; I went home and continued to pray for him. On Tuesday morning—that is, this morning—he was again at the church. After the prayers were over he waited to speak to me: he asked me to visit him at his own house this evening. I went there; I have been with him all the evening; he told me his life story, the bitter story of his fall. I am now come for you, for he must confess to you—you are the wronged one."

"I am going to see John Harman, my half-brother who has wronged me?" said Mrs. Home; "I am going to him now without preparation? Oh! Angus, I cannot, not to-night, not to-night."

"Yes, dear, it must be to-night; if there is any hardness left in your heart it will melt when you see this sinner, whom God has forgiven."

"Angus, you are all tenderness and love to him; I cannot aspire to your nature, I cannot. To this man, who has caused such misery and sin, I feel hard. Charlotte I pity, Charlotte I love; but this man, this man who deliberately could rob my dead mother! It is against human nature to feel very sorry for him."

"You mean to tell me, Charlotte, that you refuse to forgive him?"

"No; eventually you will conquer me; but just now, I confess, my heart is not full of pity."

Mr. Home thought for a moment. He was pained by his wife's want of sympathy. Then he reflected that she had not seen Mr. Harman. It was plain, however, that they must not meet until her spirit towards him had changed.

"Do not stop at Prince's Gate," he called out to the cabby, "drive on until I ask you to stop."

During the drive that followed, he told his wife Mr. Harman's story. He told it well, for when he had finished, Charlotte turned to him eyes which had shed some tears.

"Does Charlotte know of this?" she said.

"I do not think so. Will you come to Mr. Harman now?"

"Yes. I will come on one condition!"

"What is that?"

"That I may see Charlotte afterwards."

"I am sure that can be managed."

Then Mr. Home desired the cabby to stop at Prince's Gate. A sleepy-looking servant waited up for them. He manifested no surprise at sight of the lady and gentleman at such an hour. Mr. Home took his wife's hand, and the servant led them straight to his master's study.

"I have told her the story," said Mr. Home; "she is your father's child, she comes to——" Here the clergyman paused and looked at his wife, he wanted the word "forgive" to come from her own lips. Mrs. Home had grown white to her very lips. Now instead of replying, she fell upon her knees and covered her face.

"Charlotte," said Mr. Harman, "can you do what this clergyman wants? Can you forgive the sin?" There was no answer; Mrs. Home was sobbing aloud. "I have robbed you, I have robbed you most cruelly. My dying father asked me to be good to you; I have been worse than cruel. You see before you an old, old man, as great a sinner as can be found on God's earth. Can you forgive me? Dare I ask it? At last, at last I make full reparation; I repent me, in dust and ashes; I repent, and I restore all fourfold." But here Charlotte Home had risen suddenly to her feet. She came up close to Mr. Harman, and taking his hand raised it to her lips.

"My husband has told me all. I, I quite forgive you," she said.

Mr. Harman glanced at the clergyman. "Your husband?" he said.

"Yes; she is my wife," answered Mr. Home. "Sir, you heard my wife say that she quite forgives. You may go to rest to-night, with a very peaceful heart; the peace of God which passes all understanding may encompass your pillow to-night. It is late and you have gone through much,

may I go with you to your room? There will be many explanations yet to make; but though a clergyman, I am also in some measure a physician. I see you can go through no more emotion to-night, rest satisfied that all explanations can wait till to-morrow."

"I will go with you," answered Mr. Harman, "but may I first thank your wife?" Charlotte Home's bonnet had fallen off as she knelt on the floor, now suddenly a withered and trembling hand was placed on her head. "God bless you! Even from a sinner like me, such words from a full heart must be heard."

"Ay," said Mr. Home, in a loud, exultant voice, "the Prince of peace and forgiveness has come into this house to-night."

CHAPTER LIV.

CHARLOTTE'S ROOM.

Mr. Home and Mr. Harman went away together, and Charlotte was left alone in the study. By the profound stillness which now reigned in the house she guessed that every one had gone to bed. The servant who had admitted them at so late an hour had looked sleepy as he had done so. Doubtless Mr. Harman had desired him not to wait longer. Charlotte felt there was no use in ringing a bell. She scarcely knew her way about this great house. Nevertheless she must find Charlotte; she could not wait until the morning to throw her arms round her neck. She took one of the candles from the mantelpiece and began her tour through the silent house. She felt strangely timid as she commenced this midnight pilgrimage. The softly-carpeted stairs echoed back no footfall; she passed door after door. At last she recognized Charlotte's own private sitting-room, she had been there two or three times, but had never seen the room where her friend slept. A corridor, however, ran directly from this sitting-room, and Charlotte saw a closed door at the further end. "That must be the room," she said to herself, and she went straight towards it. The door was closed, but Charlotte heard a faint sound within. Instantly on hearing it she knocked lightly, but distinctly. There was a quick sound of hurried and surprised feet, and Charlotte Harman opened the door. Her eyes were heavy and red, as though she had been weeping. Her face was pale. She had not begun to undress.

"Charlotte; Charlotte Home!" she exclaimed. "Oh, what is wrong? My father!"

"Nothing is wrong, dear Charlotte, dear, dear Charlotte; but may I come in? I have a great deal to tell you."

"Oh, I shall be glad! but how astonished I am to see you. I could not sleep. Yes, come in, you shall keep me company. Charlotte, you have been crying. Charlotte, there *is* something wrong."

"You may well be surprised to see me here," said Mrs. Home, "but, strange as it may seem, things are more right than wrong. My husband came first, then he brought me."

"Yes, I saw Mr. Home early in the evening. I saw him go into my father's study. When he went away I went there myself; but the door was locked, and my father called out from within, 'Not to-night, my child; don't sit up for me, come to me in the morning, I would rather be alone to-night.' He never before refused to see me to say good-night. I went to my room. I could not rest. Everything seems very dark. I have been crying, and now you have come. Oh, Charlotte! what is the meaning of it all?"

"The meaning is good, Charlotte; but good or bad, you have to thank yourself for it. Why did you take your father to my husband's church on Sunday?"

"He came to me on Sunday morning," answered Miss Harman. "He said he would like to go to church with me. He never did go to church with me—never, for many months. I asked him where he would go. He said he would leave it to me. Then it flashed across me that he did not know Mr. Home, also that I had never heard Mr. Home preach. I resolved to go to his church. We drove to Kentish Town. I made a few inquiries. I found out the little church where your husband told the people of his congregation how best to live, how best to die. Ah, Charlotte! he *did* preach to us. What a man he is!"

"He realizes the absolute daily presence of God more perfectly than any man I ever met," answered the wife. "My dear, it was God himself led you to my husband's church on Sunday. Your father went there again to-day. After the service he stopped to speak to Angus. He asked him to come to him this evening. This evening he told my husband all; all the story of his sin, his repentance. Angus heard all, and when it was over he sent for me. I saw your father. Charlotte, your father may have been a sinner, but with such sinners, as he was once, the New Jerusalem will be filled by and by. Ah! thank God for the peace I saw on his face before I left him. Do you know that he put his hand on my head and blessed me. Angus is with him now, and I have come to you."

"My father has told all!" said Charlotte Harman. Her face could scarcely grow any whiter. She made no further exclamation, but sat quiet. Charlotte Home, having told her story, watched her face. Suddenly, with tears springing to her eyes, she turned to the wife and mother who stood by

her side.

"Charlotte, how hard my heart has been! I have passed through some dreadful weeks. Oh! how heavy was my burden, how heavy was my heart! My heart was growing very hard; but the hardness has gone now. Now, Charlotte, I believe, I believe fully what your little Harold said to me some weeks ago."

"What did he say to you, dearest?"

"He said that Jesus Christ loved me very much. Yes, I believe Jesus does love me very much. Oh, Charlotte! do you know that I am tired and rested, and I want to sleep altogether. Will you lie down beside me? You will not leave me to-night?"

"No, darling; I will not leave you to-night."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW SANDY WILSON SPEAKS OUT HIS MIND.

Early in the morning, the father and daughter met. Not very many words passed between them. Mr. Harman knew that Mrs. Home had told Charlotte all. Now, coming to his side, she put her arms about him, and knelt, looking into his face.

"Charlotte, you know what I have been," he said.

"Father, I know what you are now," she answered.

After these few words, she would scarcely allow him to speak again, for he was very weak, too weak to leave his bed; but later on, in the course of the day, they had a long talk together, and Charlotte told her father of her own suffering during the past weeks. There was no longer need of concealment between them, and Charlotte made none. It was a very few days later that two trustees of the late Mr. Harman's will saw each other for the first time.

Sandy Wilson had often looked forward to the moment when he could speak out his mind as to the enormity of the crime committed by Mr. Harman. Hitherto, this worthy man had felt that in this respect circumstances had been hard on him. *His* Daisy, his pretty little gentle sister, had been treated as hardly, as cruelly, as woman could be treated, and yet the robber—for was he not just a common robber?—had got off scot free; he was to get off scot free to the very end; he was to be let die in peace; and afterwards, his innocent child, his only daughter, must bear the brunt of his misdeeds. She must be put to grief and shame, while he, the one on whose head the real sin lay, escaped. Sandy felt that it would have been some slight relief to his wounded feelings if he could find some one to whom he could thoroughly and heartily abuse Mr. Harman. But even this satisfaction was denied him. Mr. Home was a man who would listen to abuse of none; and even Charlotte, though her eyes did flash when his name was mentioned, even she was simply silent, and to all the rest of the world Sandy must keep the thing a secret.

There was no doubt whatever that when, the day after Mr. Harman's confession, the Homes came to Uncle Sandy and told him, not only all, but also that at any moment he might receive a summons to visit Mr. Harman, he felt a sense of exultation; also that his exultation was caused, not by the fact that his niece would now get back her own, for he had supplied her immediate need for money, but by the joyful sense that at last, at last, he, Sandy, could speak out his full mind. He could show this bad man, about whom every one was so strangely, so absurdly silent, what *he* thought of his conduct to his dear little sister. He went away to Prince's Gate, when at last the summons came, bristling over with a quite delightful sense of power. How well he would speak! how cleverly he would insert the arrow of remorse into that cruel heart! As he entered the house he was met by Miss Harman. She held out her hand to him without a word, and led him to the door of her father's study. Her eyes, however, as she looked at him for a moment, were eloquent. Those eyes of hers had exercised a power over him in Somerset House; they were full of pleading now. He went into Mr. Harman's presence softened, a little confused, and with his many excellent, to the point, and scathing remarks running riot in his brain.

Thus it came to pass that Sandy said no word of reproach to the broken-down man who greeted him. Nay, far from reproaching, he felt himself sharing in the universal pity. Where God's hand was smiting hard, how could man dare to raise his puny arm?

The two trustees, meeting for the first time after all these years, talked long over that neglected, that unfulfilled trust, and steps were put in train to restore to Charlotte Home what had for so many years been held back from her. This large sum, with all back interest, would make the once poor Charlotte very rich indeed. There would still be, after all was settled, something left for Charlotte Harman, but the positions of the two were now virtually reversed.

"There is one thing which still puzzles me," said Mr. Harman before they parted. "Leaving my terrible share in this matter alone, my brother and I could never have carried out our scheme if you had not been supposed to be dead. How is it you gave no sign of your existence for three and twenty years? My brother even wrote me word from Australia that he had himself stood on your grave."

"He stood on the grave of Sandy Wilson, but never on mine," answered the other trustee. "There was a fellow bearing my name, who was with me in the Bush. He was the same age. He was like me too in general outline; big, with red hair and all that kind of thing. His name was put into the papers, and I remember wondering if the news would reach home, and if my little Daisy—bless her!—would think it was me. I was frightfully poor at the time, I had scarcely sixpence to bless myself with, and somehow, your father, sir, though he did eventually trust me, as circumstances proved, yet he gave me to understand that in marrying the sister he by no means intended to take the brother to his bosom. I said to myself, 'A poor lost dog like Sandy may as well appear to be dead to those at home. I love no one in England but my little Daisy, and she does not need me, she has abundance without me.' So I ceased to write. I had gone to a part of the country where even an English paper reached us but once or twice a year. I heard nothing of the old home; and by degrees I got out of the habit of writing. I was satisfied to be considered dead. I did wrong, I confess."

"By coming back, by proclaiming your existence, you could have exposed me years ago," said Mr. Harman; "how I dreaded exposure; how little I knew, when it did come, that it would fall lightly in comparison with——"

"What?" asked Wilson.

"The awful frown of God's displeasure. Man, to be shut away from God through your own sin is to be in hell. I have dwelt there for three and twenty years. Until two nights ago, I have known no peace; now, I know God can forgive even such a sin as mine."

"I believe you have suffered, Mr. Harman," answered Wilson. "For the matter of that, we are all poor sinners. God have mercy upon us all!"

"Amen," said Mr. Harman.

And that was all the reproof Sandy ever found in his heart to give to his fellow trustee.

CHAPTER LVI.

MRS. HOME'S DREAM.

Still, there was a weight on Charlotte Home's mind. Much had been given to her, so much that she could scarcely believe herself to be the same woman, who a few short months ago had pawned her engagement ring to buy her little son a pair of shoes. She was now wealthy beyond her wildest dreams; she was wealthy not only in money but in friends. Charlotte Harman was her almost daily companion. Charlotte Harman clung to her with an almost passionate love. Uncle Sandy, too, had made himself, by his cheerfulness, his generosity, his kindness of nature, a warm place in her affections; and Mr. Harman saw her more than once, and she found that she could love even Mr. Harman. Then—how well, how beautiful her children looked! How nice it was to see them surrounded by those good things of life which, despise them as some people will, still add charms to those who possess them! Above all, how happy her dear husband was! Angus Home's face was like the sun itself, during the days which followed Mr. Harman's confession. This sunshine with him had nothing to say to the altered and improved circumstances of his life; but it had a great deal to say to the altered circumstances of his mind. God had most signally, most remarkably, heard his prayer. He had given to him the soul for which he pleaded. Through all eternity that suffering, and once so sinful, soul was safe. Mr. Home rejoiced over that redeemed soul as one who finds great spoil. Added love to God filled his grateful heart; his faith in God became more and more, day by day, a mighty power. Thus Charlotte Home was surrounded by as much sunshine as often visits a human being in this mortal life; yet still this unreasonable woman was discontented. The fact was, success had made her bold. She had obtained what her heart had pined for. She wanted another little drop of bliss to complete her overflowing cup. Charlotte Home was unselfish in her joy. There was a shadow on another's brow. She wanted that shadow to depart; in short, she wanted Hinton and Charlotte to meet; not only to meet, but as quickly as possible to marry. Charlotte's heart was still with this lover whom she had given up, and who seemed to have forsaken her. Mrs. Home saw this, though on the subject of Hinton Charlotte still refused to speak. She said once, and only once, to her friend:

"We have parted, we have most absolutely parted. There is no use now looking back on the past; he must never share my disgrace. Yes, my dear and beloved father has repented nobly: but the disgrace remains. He must never share it. He sees the wisdom of this himself, so we will not speak of him, dear Charlotte; I can bear it best so."

This little speech was made with great firmness; but there was a strained look about the lips, and a sorrow about the eyes which Mrs. Home understood very well. She must not speak, but no one could prevent her acting. She resolved to leave no stone unturned to bring these two together again. In doing this she would act for the good of two whom she loved, for Hinton was also very dear to her. She could never forget those nights when he sat by the bed of her almost dying child. She could never forget the prompt interference which saved that child's life. She had learned enough of his character, during those few weeks which they had spent together, to feel sure that no disgrace such as Charlotte feared would influence him to cause her pain. It is true she could

not in any measure account for his absence and his silence; but she was quite wise enough and quite clever enough to believe that both could be satisfactorily accounted for. She could, however, do nothing without seeing Hinton. How could she see him? She had written to his chambers, she had written to his lodgings; from both addresses had the letters been returned. She thought of advertising. She lay awake at night trying to devise some scheme. At last one night she had a dream; so far curious, in that it conducted her to the desired end. She dreamt that Hinton came to Waterloo station, not to remain in London, but to pass through to another part of England. There was nothing more in her dream; nevertheless, she resolved to go to that station on the next day. Her dream had not even pointed to any particular hour. She looked in *Bradshaw*, saw when a great express from the south was due, and started off on what might truly be called a wild-goose chase.

Nevertheless, instinct, if nothing higher, had guided Charlotte Home; for the first person she saw stepping out of a carriage of this very train was Hinton. She saw Hinton, he also saw her.

"You must come with me," she said, going up to him and laying her hand on his arm. "You must come with me, and at once, for God has sent me to you."

"But I cannot," he answered, "I am catching another train at Euston. I am going on special business to Scotland. It is important. I cannot put it off. I am ever so sorry; but I must jump into a cab at once." He held out his hand as he spoke.

Mrs. Home glanced into his face. His face was changed; it was pale and worn. There was a hard look about both eyes and mouth, which both altered and considerably spoiled his expression.

"I will not keep you if you still wish to go, after hearing my story," answered Mrs. Home; "but there will be room for two in your hansom. You do not object to my driving with you to Euston?"

Hinton could not say he objected to this, though in his heart he felt both annoyed and surprised.

As they were driving along, Mrs. Home said,—

"Have you heard anything lately of Mr. Harman?"

To this Hinton replied, "I have not; and pardon me, Mr. Harman does not interest me."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Home, "he interests me very much. He—he told my husband a strange tale—a tale about himself."

"Did he confess his guilt? I know that he is a very sinful man."

"He has been a great sinner, but he has repented. He has confessed that early and terrible sin of his youth. He has not only confessed, but he is taking steps to make full reparation."

"Indeed! then you will come into your rights? Let me congratulate you."

"You knew of his sin? You knew what his sin was Mr. Hinton?"

"Yes, I knew."

"Charlotte had hoped to keep that disgrace from you."

"Ah!"

"She gave you another reason for breaking off her engagement?"

"Yes, a weak and futile one. She could not expect me to believe it. I did what she had but done before me. I went to Somerset House and saw that will which has been so greatly abused."

"She never knew that."

"Pardon me, she did."

"I fear I must be rude enough to contradict you. She said most distinctly that you were fully satisfied with the reasons she had given for breaking off the engagement, that perhaps you might never now learn what her father had done."

Hinton looked at his companion in some perplexity.

"But I wrote to her," he said. "I wrote a letter which, it seemed to me, any woman who had a spark even of kindness would have answered. In that letter, I told her that I held her to her promise; that I knew all; that even if she did not write to me I would call and try to see her. She never replied to my letter, and when, after waiting for twenty-four hours, I went to the house, she absolutely refused to see me."

"She never knew you called," answered Mrs. Home, "and she never got your letter."

"Good heavens! how do you know?"

"I know her too well; but I will ask her directly."

Hinton was silent.

After a short pause, Mrs. Home broke out passionately,—

"How dare you insinuate doubts of so noble a creature?"

"I could only believe facts."

"Has a letter never gone astray? Has a letter never failed to reach the hands it was meant for? Mr. Hinton, I am ashamed of you."

"If you can prove that she never got it?"

"I know she never got it. She is changed; her heart is half broken. But I will prove it. I will go to her at once. Are you still going to Scotland?"

"I need not go until I hear from you. You have astonished me greatly."

"Then drive to my house. Ah! you do not know our new address; it is ——; wait for me there, I will be with you in an hour or so."

CHAPTER LVII.

JOHN.

Hinton went to Mrs. Home's house. The children were out, Mr. Home was not visible. Anne, now converted into a neat parlor-maid, received him with broad grins of pleasure. She ushered him into the pretty, newly-furnished drawing-room, and asked him to wait for her mistress.

"Missis 'ull be back afore long," she said, lingering a little to readjust the blinds, and half hoping, half expecting, Hinton to make some surprised and approving remark on the changed circumstances of the Homes' surroundings.

He made none, however; and Anne, with a slight sigh, left him alone. When she did so he rose to his feet and began to pace quickly up and down the room. After a time, half an hour or so, he pulled out his watch. Yes, he had already lost that express to the north. A good piece of business would probably be also lost. But what matter! beyond ascertaining the fact that he had missed his train, he did not give the affair another thought. To tell the truth, his mind was agitated, his heart was full; hope once more peeped upon the horizon of his being. A month ago—for it was quite a month ago now—he had received as sharp and cruel a shock as falls on most men. Fortune, love, and trust had all been dashed from the lips which were already so close to the charmed cup that its very flavor was apparent. The cup had never reached the lips of Hinton. Fortune was gone, love was gone; worst of all, yes, hardest of all, trust was gone. The ideal he had worshipped was but an ideal. The Charlotte he had loved was unworthy. She had rejected him, and cruelly. His letter was unanswered. He himself was refused admittance. Then his pride had risen in revolt. If she could so treat him, he would sue no longer. If she could so easily give him up, he would bow to her decision. She was not the Charlotte of his love and his dream. But what matter! Other men had come to an ideal and found it but a clay idol. He would recover: he would not let his heart break. He found, however, that he could not stay in London. An uncle of his, his only living near relation, was a solicitor in the south of England. Hinton went to visit his uncle. He received him warmly and kindly. He not only promised him work, but kept his word. Hinton took chambers in a fashionable part of the town, and already was not idle. But he was a changed man. That shattered trust was making his spirit very hard. The cynical part of him was being fostered. Mrs. Home, when she looked into his face, was quite right in saying to herself that his expression had not improved. Now, however, again, as he paced up and down, soft thoughts were visiting him. For what doubts, what blessed doubts had Mrs. Home not insinuated? How irregularly his heart beat; how human he felt once more! Ah! what sound was that? A cab had drawn up at the door. Hinton flew to the window; he saw the soft fawn shade of a lady's dress, he could not see the lady. Of course, it was Mrs. Home returning. What news did she bring? How he longed to fly to meet her! He did not do so, however; his feet felt leaden weighted. He leant against the window, with his back to the door. His heart beat harder and harder; he clenched his hands hard. There was a quick step running up the stairs, a quick and springing step. The drawing-room door was opened and then shut. He heard the rustle of soft drapery, then a hand was laid on his arm. The touch of that hand made him tremble violently. He turned his head, and—not Charlotte Home—but *his* Charlotte, beautiful and true, stood by his side. Their eyes met.

"John!" she said.

"My own, my darling!" he answered.

In an instant they were clasped in each other's arms. That swift glance, which each had given the other, had told all.

"John, I never got your letter."

"No!"

"John, you doubted me."

"I did, I confess it; I confess it bitterly. But not now, not after one glance into your eyes."

"John, what did you say in that letter?"

"That I held you to your sacred promise; that I refused to give you up."

"But—but—you did not know my true reason. You did not know why—why——"

"Yes, I knew all. Before I wrote that letter I went to Somerset house. I read your grandfather's will."

"Ah! did you—did you indeed? Oh! what a dreadful time I have gone through."

"Yes, but it is over now. Mrs. Home told me how your father had repented. The sin is forgiven. The agony is past. What God forgets don't let us remember. Lottie, cease to think of it. It is at an end, and so are our troubles. I am with you again. Oh! how nearly I had lost you."

Charlotte's head was on her lover's shoulder. His arm was round her. "Charlotte, I repeat what I said in that letter which never reached you. I refuse to absolve you from your promise. I refuse to give you up. Do you hear? I refuse to give you up."

"But, John, I am poor now."

"Poor or rich, you are yourself, and you are mine. Charlotte, do you hear me? If you hear me answer me. Tell me that you are mine."

"I am yours, John," she said simply, and she raised her lips to kiss him.

CHAPTER LVIII.

BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM.

A month after—just one month after, there was a very quiet wedding; a wedding performed in the little church at Kentish Town. The ceremony was thought by the few who witnessed it to be, even for that obscure part, a very poor one. There were no bridesmaids, or white dresses, or, indeed, white favors in any form. The bride wore the plainest gray travelling suit. She was given away by her gray-headed father; Charlotte Home stood close behind her; Mr. Home married the couple, and Uncle Sandy acted as best man. Surely no tamer ending could come to what was once meant to be such a brilliant affair. Immediately after the ceremony, the bride and bridegroom went away for two days and Mrs. Home went back to Prince's Gate with Mr. Harman, for she had promised Charlotte to take care of her father until her return.

Many changes were contemplated. The grand house in Prince's gate was to be given up, and the Hintons were to live in that large southern town where Hinton was already obtaining a young barrister's great ambition—briefs. Mr. Harman, while he lived, was to find his home with his son and daughter.

Mr. Harman was now a peaceful and happy man, and so improved was his health—so had the state of his mind affected his body, that though he could never hope for cure of his malady, yet Sir George Anderson assured him that with care he might live for a very much longer time than he had thought possible a few months before. Thus death stood back, not altogether thrust aside, but biding its time.

On the morning of Charlotte's wedding-day there arrived a letter from Jasper.

"So you have told all?" he said to his brother. "Well, be it so. From the time I knew the other trustee was not dead and had reached England, I felt that discovery was at hand. No, thank you; I shall never come back to England. If you can bear poverty and public disgrace, I cannot. I have some savings of my own, and on these I can live during my remaining days. Good-bye—we shall never meet again on earth! I repent, do you say, of my share? Yes, the business turned out badly in the end. What a heap of money those Homes will come in for! Stolen goods don't prosper with a man! So it seems. Well, I shall stay out of England."

Jasper was true to his word. Not one of those who knew him in this tale ever heard of him again.

Yes, the Homes were now very rich; but both Mr. and Mrs. Home were faithful stewards of what was lent them from the Lord. Nor did the Hintons miss what was taken from them. It is surely enough to say of Charlotte and her husband that they were very happy.

But as sin, however repented of, must yet reap its own reward, so in this instance the great house of Harman Brothers ceased to exist. To pay that unfulfilled trust the business had to be sold. It passed into the hands of strangers, and was continued under another name. No one now remembers even its existence.

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