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A RED WALLFLOWER

BY SUSAN WARNER AUTHOR OF 'THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD,' 'QUEECHY,' ETC.

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NOTE TO THE READER.

The story following is again in its whole chain of skeleton facts a true story. I beg to observe, in particular, that the denominational feeling described in both families, with the ways it showed itself, is part of the truth of the story, and no invention of mine.

S. W.

MARTLAER'S ROCK, June 25, 1884.

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A RED WALLFLOWER.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER DANDELIONS.

It is now a good many years ago that an English family came over from the old country and established itself in one of the small villages that are scattered along the shore of Connecticut. Why they came was not clearly understood, neither was it at all to be gathered from their way of life or business. Business properly they had none; and their way of life seemed one of placid contentment and unenterprising domestic pleasure. The head of the family was a retired army officer, now past the prime of his years; tall, thin, grey, and grave; but a gentleman through and through. Everybody liked Colonel Gainsborough, although nobody could account for a man of his age leading what seemed such a profitless life. He was doing really nothing; staying at home with his wife and his books. Why had he come to Connecticut at all? If he lived for pleasure, surely his own country would have been a better place to seek it. Nobody could solve this riddle. That Colonel Gainsborough had anything to be ashamed of, or anything to be afraid of, entered nobody's head for a moment. Fear or shame were unknown to that grave, calm, refined face. The whisper got about, how, it is impossible to say, that his leaving home had been occasioned by a disagreement with his relations. It might be so. No one could ask him, and the colonel never volunteered to still curiosity on the subject.

The family was small. Only a wife and one little girl came with the colonel to America; and they were attended by only two old retainers, a man and a woman. They hired no other servants after their arrival, which, however, struck nobody as an admission of scantness of means. According to the views and habits of the countryside, two people were quite enough to look after three; the man outside and the woman inside the house. Christopher Bounder took care of the garden and the cow, and cut and made the hay from one or two little fields. And Mrs. Barker, his sister, was a very capable woman indeed, and quite equal to the combined duties of housekeeper, cook, lady's maid, and housemaid, which she fulfilled to everybody's satisfaction, including her own. However, after two or three years in Seaforth these duties were somewhat lessened; the duties of Mrs. Barker's hands, that is, for her head had more to do. Mrs. Gainsborough, who had been delicate and failing for some time, at last died, leaving an almost inconsolable husband and daughter behind her. I might with truth say quite inconsolable; for at the time I speak of, a year later than Mrs. Gainsborough's death, certainly comfort had come to neither father nor daughter.

It was one morning in spring-time. Mrs. Barker stood at the door of her kitchen, and called to her brother to come in to breakfast. Christopher slowly obeyed the summons, leaving his spade stuck upright in the bed he was digging, and casting loving looks as he came at the budding gooseberry bushes. He was a typical Englishman; ruddy, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, of very solid build, and showing the national tendency to flesh. He was a handsome man, and not without a sufficiency of self-consciousness, both as regarding that and other things. Mrs. Barker was a contrast; for she was very plain, some years older than her brother, and of rather spare habit though large frame. Both faces showed sense, and the manner of both indicated that they knew their own minds.

'Season's late,' observed Mrs. Barker, as she stepped back from the door and lifted her coffee-pot on the table.

'Uncommon late,' answered her brother. 'Buds on them gooseberry bushes only just showin' green. Now everything will be coming all together in a heap in two weeks more. That's the way o' this blessed climate! And then when everything's started, maybe a frost will come and slap down on us.'

'Peas in?'

'Peas in a fortnight ago. They'll be showin' their heads just now.'

'Christopher, can you get me some greens to day?'

'Greens for what?'

'Why, for dinner. Master likes a bit o' boiled beef now and again, which he used to, anyway; and I thought greens is kind o' seasonable at this time o' year, and I'd try him with 'em. But la! he don't care no more what he eats.'

'How is the old gentleman?'

'Doin' his best to kill hisself, I should say.'

'Looks like it,' said Christopher, going on with a good breakfast the while in a business manner. 'When a man don't care no more what he eats, the next thing'll be that he'll stop it; and then there's only one thing more he will do.'

'What's that?'

'Die, to be sure!'

'He ain't dyin' yet,' said Mrs. Barker thoughtfully, 'but he ain't doin' the best he can wi's life, for certain. Can ye get me some greens, Christopher?'

'Nothing in *my* department. I can take a knife and a basket and find you some dandelions.'

'Will ye go fur to find 'em?'

'No furder'n I can help, you may make your affidavit, with all there is to do in the garden yet. What's about it?'

'If you're goin' a walk, I'd let Missie go along. She don't get no chance for no diversion whatsomever when young Mr. Dallas don't come along. She just mopes, she do; and it's on my mind, and master he don't see it. I wish he would.'

'The little one does wear an uncommon solemn countenance,' said the gardener, who was in his way quite an educated man, and used language above his station.

'It do vex me,' repeated the housekeeper.

'But young Mr. Dallas comes along pretty often. If Miss Esther was a little older, now, we should see no more of her solemnity. What 'ud master say to that?'

'It's good things is as they be, and we've no need to ask. I don't want no more complications, for my part. It's hard enough to manage as it is.'

'But things won't stay as they be,' said the gardener, with a twinkle of his shrewd blue eye as he looked at his sister. 'Do you expect they will, Sarah? Miss Esther's growin' up fast, and she'll be an uncommon handsome girl too. Do you know that?'

'I shouldn't say she was what you'd go fur to call handsome,' returned the housekeeper.

'I doubt you haven't an eye for beauty. Perhaps one ought to have a bit of it oneself to be able to see it in others.'

'Well I haven't it,' said Mrs. Barker; 'and I never set up to have it. And I allays thought rosy cheeks went with beauty; and Missie has no more colour in her cheeks, poor child, than well—than I have myself.'

'She's got two eyes, though.'

'Who hasn't got two eyes?' said the other scornfully.

'Just the folks that haven't an eye,' said the gardener, with another twinkle of his own. 'But I tell you,

there ain't two such eyes as Miss Esther's between here and Boston. Look out; other folk will find it out soon if you don't. There ain't but three years between twelve and fifteen; and then it don't take but two more to make seventeen.'

'Three and two's five, though,' said Mrs. Barker; 'and five years is a long time. And Miss Esther ain't twelve yet, neither. Then when'll ye be goin' after the greens, Christopher?'

'It'll be a bit yet. I'll let you know.'

The fair spring morning was an hour or two farther on its way, accordingly, when the gardener and the little girl set out on their quest after greens. Yet it was still early, for the kitchen breakfast was had betimes. The gardener carried a basket, and Esther too did the like; in hers there was a small trowel, for 'she might find something,' she said. Esther always said that, although hitherto her 'findings' had amounted to nothing of any account; unless, indeed, I correct that, and say, in any eyes but her own. For in Esther's eyes every insignificant growth of the woods or the fields had a value and a charm inexpressible. Nothing was 'common' to her, and hardly anything that grew was relegated to the despised community of 'weeds.'

'What are you going for now, Christopher?' she asked as they trudged on together.

'Well, miss, my old woman there has sent me for some greens. She has a wild tooth for greens, she has,' he added, half to himself.

'What sort of greens can you get?'

'There's various sorts to be had, Miss Esther; a great variety of the herbs of the field are good for eating, at the different times o' the year; even here in this country; and I do suppose there ain't a poorer on the face o' the earth!'

'Than *this* country? than Seaforth? O Christopher!'

'Well, m'm, it beats all *I* ever knew for poorness. You should see England once, Miss Esther! That's the place for gardens; and the fields is allays green; and the flowers do be beautiful; and when the sun *shines*, it shines; here it burns.'

'Not to-day,' said Esther gleefully. 'How nice it is!'

She might say so, for if the spring is rough in New England, and there is no denying it, there do nevertheless come days of bewitching, entrancing, delicious beauty, in the midst of the rest. Days when the air and sky and sunlight are in a kind of poise of delight, and earth beneath them, is, as it were, still with pleasure. I suppose the spring may be more glorious in other lands,—more positively glorious; whether relatively, I do not know. With such contrasts before and behind them,—contrasts of raw, chill air, and rough, cutting winds, with skies of grey and gloom,—one of these perfect days of a lost Paradise stands in a singular setting. It was such a day when Esther and Christopher went after dandelions. Still, balmy air, a tender sky slightly veiled with spring mistiness, light and warmth so gentle that they were a blessing to a weary brain, yet so abundant that every bud and leaf and plant and flower was unfolding and out-springing and stretching upward and dispensing abroad all it had of sweetness. The air was filled with sweetness; not the heavy odours of the blossoms of summer, or the South, but a more delicate and searching fragrance from resinous buds and freshly-opened tree flowers and the young green of the shooting leaf. I don't know where spring gets it all, but she does fling abroad her handfuls of perfume such as summer has no skill to concoct, or perhaps she lacks the material. Esther drew in deep breaths for the mere pleasure of breathing, and looked on all the world of nature before her with an eye of quiet but intense content.

Christopher had been quite right in his hint about Esther's eyes. They were of uncommon character. Thoughtful, grave, beautiful eyes; large, and fine in contour and colour; too grave for the girl's years. But Esther had lived all her life so far almost exclusively with grown people, and very sober grown people too; for her mother's last years had been dulled with sickness, and her father's with care, even if he had not been—which he was—of a taciturn and sombre deportment in the best of times. And this last year past had been one heavy with mourning. So it was no wonder if the little girl's face showed undue thoughtfulness, and a shade of melancholy all premature. And Christopher was honestly glad to see the melancholy at least vanish under the influence of the open earth and sky. The thoughtfulness, he hoped, would go too some day.

The walk in itself offered nothing remarkable. Fields where the grass was very green and fast growing; other fields that were rocky and broken, and good for little except the sheep, and sometimes rose into bare ridges and heights where spare savins were mingled with a variety of deciduous trees; such was the ground the two went over this morning. This morning, however, glorified everything; the

fields looked soft, the moss and lichens on the rocks were moist and fresh coloured, grey and green and brown; the buds and young leafage of the trees were of every lovely hue and shade that young vegetation can take; and here and there Esther found a wild flower. When she found one, it was very apt to be taken up by the roots with her little trowel, and bestowed in her basket for careful transport home; and on the so endangered beauties in her basket Esther looked down from time to time with fond and delighted eyes.

'Are you going for cresses, Christopher?'

'No, Miss Esther, not at this time. Sarah has set her mind that she must have boiled greens for dinner; and her will must be done. And here is the article—not boiled yet, however.'

He stopped and stooped, and with a sharp knife cut a bunch of stout-looking leaves growing in the grass; then made a step to another bunch, a yard off, and then to another.

'What are they, Christopher?'

'Just dandelions, Miss Esther. *Leontodon taraxacum*.'

'Dandelions! But the flowers are not out yet.'

'No, Miss Esther. If they was out, Sarah might whistle for her greens.'

'Why? You could tell better where they are.'

'They wouldn't be worth the finding, though.'

Christopher went on busily cutting. He did not seem to need the yellow blossoms to guide him.

'How can you be sure, Christopher, that you are always getting the right ones?'

'Know the look o' their faces, Miss Esther.'

'The *flowers* are their faces,' said the little girl.

Christopher laughed a little. 'Then what are the leaves?' said he.

'I don't know. The whole of them together show the *form* of the plant.'

'Well, Miss Esther, wouldn't you know your father, the colonel, as far off as you could see him, just by his figger?'

'But I know papa so well.'

'Not better than I know the *Leontodon*. See, Miss Esther, look at these runcinate leaves.'

'Runcinate?'

'Toothed-pinnatifid. That's what it gets its name from; lion's tooth. *Leontodon* comes from two Greek words which mean a lion and a tooth. See—there ain't another leaf like that in the hull meadow.'

'There are a great many kinds of leaves!' said Esther musingly.

'Like men's human figgers,' said the gardener sagely. 'Ain't no two on 'em just alike.'

Talking and cutting, they had crossed the meadow and came to a rocky height which rose at one side of it; such as one is never very far from in New England. Here there were no dandelions, but Esther eagerly sought for something more ornamental. And she found it. With exclamations of deep delight she endeavoured to dig up a root of bloodroot which lifted its most delicate and dainty blossom a few inches above the dead leaves and moss with which the ground under the trees was thickly covered. Christopher came to her help.

'What are you goin' to do with this now, Miss Esther?'

'I want to plant it out in my garden. Won't it grow?'

Christopher answered evasively. 'These here purty little things is freaky,' said he. 'They has notions. Now the *Sanguinaria* likes just what it has got here; a little bit of rich soil, under shade of woods, and with covering of wet dead leaves for its roots. It's as dainty as a lady.'

'*Sanguinaria?*' said Esther. 'I call it bloodroot.'

'*Sanguinaria canadensis*. That's its name, Miss Esther.'

'Why isn't the other its name?'

'That's its nickname, you may say. Look here, Miss Esther,—here's the *Hepatica* for you.'

Esther sprang forward to where Christopher was softly pushing dead leaves and sticks from a little low bunch of purple flowers. She stretched out her hand with the trowel, then checked herself.

'Won't that grow either, Christopher?'

'It'll grow *here*, Miss Esther. See,—ain't that nice?' he said, as he bared the whole little tuft.

Esther's sigh came from the depths of her breast, as she looked at it lovingly.

'This is *Hepatica acutiloba*. I dare say we'd find the other, if we had time to go all over the other side of the hill.'

'What other?'

'The *americana*, Miss Esther. But I'm thinking, them greens must go in the pot.'

'But what *is* this lovely little thing? What's its name, I mean?'

'It's the *Hepatica*, Miss Esther; folks call it liverleaf. We ought to find the *Aquilegia* by this time; but I don't see it.'

'Have you got dandelions enough?'

'All I'll try for. Here's something for you, though,' said he, reaching up to the branches of a young tree, the red blossoms of which were not quite out of reach; 'here's something pretty for you; here's *Acer rubrum*.'

'And what is *Acer rubrum?*'

'Just soft maple, Miss Esther.'

'Oh, that is beautiful! Do you know everything that grows, Christopher?'

'No, Miss Esther; there's no man living that does that. They say it would take all one man's life to know just the orchids of South America; without mentioning all that grows in the rest of the world. There's an uncommon great number of plants on the earth, to be sure!'

'And trees.'

'Ain't trees plants, mum?'

'Are they? Christopher, are those dandelions *weeds?*'

'No, Miss Esther; they're more respectable.'

'How do you know they're not weeds?'

Christopher laughed a little, partly at his questioner, partly at the question; nevertheless the answer was not so ready as usual.

'They ain't weeds, however, Miss Esther; that's all I can tell you.'

'What are weeds, then?'

'I don't know, mum,' said Christopher grimly. 'They're plants that has no manners.'

'But some good plants have no manners,' said Esther, amused. 'I know I've heard you say, they ran over everything, and wouldn't stay in their places. You said it of moss pink, and lily of the valley. Don't you remember?'

'Yes mum, I've cause to remember; by the same token I've been trimming the box. That thing grows whenever my back is turned!'

'But it isn't a weed?'

'No mum! No mum! The *Buxus* is a very distinguished family indeed, and holds a high rank, it does.'

'Then I don't see what *is* a weed, Christopher.'

CHAPTER II.

AT HOME.

Upon reaching home Esther sought to place her bloodroot in safety, giving it a soft and well-dug corner in her little plot of garden ground. She planted it with all care in the shadow of a rose-bush; and then went in to put her other flowers in water.

The sitting-room, whither she went, was a large, low, pleasant place; very simply furnished, yet having a cheerful, cosy look, as places do where people live who know how to live. The room, and the house, no doubt, owed its character to the rule and influence of Mrs. Gainsborough, who was there no longer, and to a family life that had passed away. The traces abode still. The chintz hangings and the carpet were of soft colours and in good harmony; chairs and lounges were comfortable; a great many books lined the walls, so many indeed that the room might have been styled the library. A portfolio with engravings was in one place; Mrs. Gainsborough's work-table in another; some excellent bronzes on the bookcases; one or two family portraits, by good hands; and an embroidery frame. A fine English mastiff was sleeping on the rug before the fire; for the weather was still cold enough within doors to make a fire pleasant, and Colonel Gainsborough was a chilly man.

He lay on the couch when Esther came in with her flowers; a book in his hand, but not held before his eyes. He was a handsome man, of a severe, grave type; though less well-looking at this time because of the spiritless, weary, depressed air which had become his habit; there was a want of spring and life and hope in the features and in the manner also of the occupant of the sofa. He looked at Esther languidly, as she came in and busied herself with arranging her maple blossoms, her Hepatica and one or two delicate stems of the bloodroot in a little vase. Her father looked at the flowers and at her, in silence.

'Papa, aren't those *beautiful?*' she asked with emphasis, bringing the vase, when she had finished, to his side.

'What have you got there, Esther?'

'Just some anemones, and liverleaf, and bloodroot, and maple blossoms, papa; but Christopher calls them all sorts of big names.'

'They are very fragile blossoms,' the colonel remarked.

'Are they? They won't do in the garden, Christopher says, but they grow nicely out there in the wood. Papa, what is the difference between a weed and a flower?'

'I should think you were old enough to know.'

'I know them by sight—sometimes. But what is the *difference?*'

'Your eyes tell you, do they not?'

'No, papa. They tell me, sometimes, which is which; but I mean, why isn't a flower a weed? I asked Christopher, but he couldn't tell me.'

'I do not understand the question. It seems to me you are talking nonsense.'

The colonel raised his book again, and Esther took the hint, and went back to the table with her flowers. She sat down and looked at them. Fair they were, and fresh, and pure; and they bore spring's messages, to all that could hear the message. If Esther could, it was in a half-unconscious way, that somehow awakened by degrees almost as much pain as pleasure. Or else, it was simply that the glow and stir of her walk was fading away, and allowing the old wonted train of thought to come in again. The bright expression passed from her face; the features settled into a melancholy dulness, most unfit for a child and painful to see; there was a droop of the corners of the mouth, and a lax fall of the eyelids, and a settled gloom in the face, that covered it and changed it like a mask. The very features seemed to grow heavy, in the utter heaviness of the spirit.

She sat so for a while, musing, no longer busy with such pleasant things as flowers and weeds; then roused herself. The weariness of inaction was becoming intolerable. She went to a corner of the room, where a large mahogany box was half-concealed beneath a table covered with a cloth; with a good deal of effort she lugged the box forth. It was locked, and she went to the sofa.

'Papa, may I look at the casts?'

'Yes.'

'You have got the key, papa.'

The key was fished out of the colonel's waistcoat pocket, and Esther sat down on the floor and unlocked the box. It was filled with casts in plaster of Paris, of old medals and bas-reliefs; and it had long been a great amusement of Esther's to take them all out and look at them, and then carefully pack them all away again between their layers of soft paper and cotton batting. In the nature of the case, this was an amusement that would pall if too often repeated; so it rarely happened that Esther got them out more than three or four times a year. This time she had hardly begun to take them out and place them carefully on the table, when Mrs. Barker came in to lay the cloth for dinner. Esther must put the casts back, and defer her amusement till another time in the day.

Meals were served now for the colonel and his daughter in this same room, which served for sitting-room and library. The dining-room was disused. Things had come by degrees to this irregularity, Mrs. Barker finding that it made her less work, and the colonel in his sorrowful abstraction hardly knowing and not at all caring where he took his dinner. The dinner was carefully served, however, and delicately prepared; for there Barker's pride came in to her help; and besides, little as Colonel Gainsborough attended now to the food he ate, it is quite possible that he would have rebelled against any disorder in that department of the household economy.

The meal times were sorrowful occasions to both the solitary personages who now sat down to the table. Neither of them had become accustomed yet to the empty place at the board. The colonel ate little and talked none at all; and only Esther's honest childish appetite saved these times from being seasons of intolerable gloom. Even so, she was always glad when dinner was done.

By the time that it was over to-day, and the table cleared, Esther's mood had changed; and she no longer found the box of casts attractive. She had seen what was in it so often before, and she knew just what she should find. At the same time she was in desperate want of something to amuse her, or at least to pass away the time, which went so slowly if unaided. She bethought her of trying another box, or series of boxes, over which she had seen her father and mother spend hours together; but the contents hitherto had not seemed to her interesting. The key was on the same chain with the key of the casts; Esther sat down on the floor by one of the windows, having shoved one of the boxes into that neighbourhood, turned the key, and opened the cover. Her father was lying on the couch again and gave her no attention, and Esther made no call upon him for help.

An hour or two had passed. Esther had not changed her place, and the box, which contained a quantity of coins, was still open; but the child's hands lay idly in her lap, and her eyes were gazing into vacancy. Looking back, perhaps, at the images of former days; smiling images of light and love, in scenes where her mother's figure filled all the foreground. Colonel Gainsborough did not see how the child sat there, nor what an expression of dull, hopeless sorrow lay upon her features. All the life and variety of which her face was abundantly capable had disappeared; the corners of the mouth drawn down, the brow rigid, the eyes rayless, she sat an image of childish desolation. She looked even stupid, if that were possible to Esther's features and character.

What the father did not see was revealed to another person, who came in noiselessly at the open door. This new-comer was a young man, hardly yet arrived at the dignity of young manhood; he might have been eighteen, but he was really older than his years. His figure was well developed, with broad shoulders and slim hips, showing great muscular power and the symmetry of beauty as well. The face matched the figure; it was strong and fine, full of intelligence and life, and bearing no trace of boyish wilfulness. If wilfulness was there, which I think, it was rather the considered and consistent wilfulness of a man. As he came in at the open door, Esther's position and look struck him; he paused half a minute. Then he came forward, came to the colonel's sofa, and standing there bowed respectfully.

The colonel's book went down. 'Ah, William,' said he, in a tone of indifferent recognition.

'How do you do, sir, to-day?'

'Not very well! my strength seems to be giving way, I think, by degrees.'

'We shall have warm weather for you soon again, sir; that will do you good.'

'I don't know,' said the colonel. 'I doubt it; I doubt it. Unless it could give me the power of eating, which it cannot.

'You have no appetite?'

'That does not express it.'

There was an almost imperceptible flash in the eyes that were looking down at him, the features, however, retaining their composed gravity.

'Perhaps shad will tempt you. We shall have them very soon now. Can't you eat shad?'

'Shad,' repeated the colonel. 'That's your New England piscatory dainty? I have never found out why it is so reckoned.'

'You cannot have eaten them, sir; that's all. That is, not cooked properly. Take one broiled over a fire of corn cobs.'

'A fire of corn cobs!'

'Yes, sir; over the coals of such a fire, of course, I mean.'

'Ah! What's the supposed advantage?'

'Flavour, sir; gusto; a spicy delicacy, which from being the spirit of the fire comes to be the spirit of the fish. It is difficult to put anything so ethereal into words.' This was spoken with the utmost seriousness.

'Ah!' said the colonel. 'Possibly. Barker manages those things.'

'You do not feel well enough to read to-day, sir?'

'Yes,' said the colonel, 'yes. One must do something. As long as one lives, one must try to do something. Bring your book here, William, if you please. I can listen, lying here.'

The hour that followed was an hour of steady work. The colonel liked his young neighbour, who belonged to a family also of English extraction, though not quite so recently moved over as the colonel's own. Still, to all intents and purposes, the Dallases were English; had English connections and English sympathies; and had not so long mingled their blood with American that the colour of it was materially altered. It was natural that the two families should have drawn near together in social and friendly relations; which relations, however, would have been closer if in church matters there had not been a diverging power, which kept them from any extravagance of neighbourliness. This young fellow, however, whom the colonel called 'William,' showed a carelessness as to church matters which gave him some of the advantages of a neutral ground; and latterly, since his wife's death, Colonel Gainsborough had taken earnestly to the fine, spirited young man; welcomed his presence when he came; and at last, partly out of sympathy, partly out of sheer loneliness and emptiness of life, he had offered to read the classics with him, in preparation for college. And this for several months now they had been doing; so that William was a daily visitor in the colonel's house.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOX OF COINS.

The reading went on for a good hour. Then the colonel rose from his sofa and went out, and young Dallas turned to Esther. During this hour Esther had been sitting still in her corner by her boxes; not doing anything; and her face, which had brightened at William's first coming in, had fallen back very nearly to its former heavy expression. Now it lighted up again, as the visitor left his seat and came over to her. He had not been so taken up with his reading but he had noticed her from time to time; observed the drooping brow and the dull eye, and the sad lines of the lips, and the still, spiritless attitude. He was touched with pity for the child, whom he had once been accustomed to see very different from this. He came and threw himself down on the floor by her side.

'Well, Queen Esther!' said he. 'What have you got there?'

'Coins.'

'Coins! What are you doing with them?'

'Nothing.'

'So it seems. What do you want to do?'

'I wanted to amuse myself.'

'And don't succeed? Naturally. What made you think you would? Numismatology isn't what one would call a *lively* study. What were you going to do with these old things, eh?'

'Nothing,' said Esther hopelessly. 'I used to hear papa talk about them; and I liked to hear him.'

'Why don't you get him to talk to you about them again?'

'Oh, he was not talking to *me*.'

'To whom, then?'

Esther hesitated; the young man saw a veil of moisture suddenly dim the grave eyes, and the lips that answered him were a little unsteady.

'It was mamma,' she breathed rather than spoke.

'And you liked to hear?' he went on purposely.

'Oh, yes. But now I can't understand anything by myself.'

'You can understand by yourself as much as most people I know. Let us see what you have got here. May I look?'

He lifted a small piece of metal out of its nest, in a shallow tray which was made by transverse slips of wood to be full of such nests, or little square compartments. The trays were beautifully arranged, one fitting close upon another till they filled the box to its utmost capacity.

'What have we here? This piece has seen service. Here is a tree, Queen Esther,—a flourishing, spreading tree,—and below it the letters, R. E. P. F., if I read aright, and then the word "Reich." What is that, now? "R. E. P. F. Reich." And here is a motto above, I am sorry to say, so far worn that my reading it is a matter of question. "Er,"—that is plain,—then a worn word, then, "das Land." Do you understand German?'

'No; I don't know anything.'

'Too sweeping, Queen Esther. But I wish I could read that word! Let us try the other side. Ha! here we have it. "Lud. xvi."—two letters I can't make out—then "Fr. and Nav. Rex." Louis the Sixteenth, king of France and Navarre.'

'I know him, I believe,' said Esther. 'He was beheaded, wasn't he, in the great French revolution?'

'Just that. He was not a wise man, you know.'

'If he had been a wise man, could he have kept his life?'

'Well, I don't know, Queen Esther, whether any wisdom would have been wise enough for that. You see, the people of France were mad; and when a people get mad, they don't listen to reason, naturally. Here's another, now; what's this? "Zeelandia, 1792," not so very old. On the other side—here's a shield, peculiar too; with the motto plain enough,—"Luctor et emergo." A good motto that.'

'What does it mean?'

'It means, something like—"Struggle and come out," or "come through,"—literally, "emerge." Our English word comes from it. Colonel Gainsborough does not teach you Latin, then?'

'No,' said Esther, sighing. 'He doesn't teach me much lately, of anything.'

Dallas cast a quick look at the girl, and saw again the expression of quiet hopelessness that had moved him. He went on turning over the coins.

'Do you want to learn Latin?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Why do *you* want to learn it, Pitt?'

'Well, you see, it is different. I must, you know. But queens are not expected to know the dead languages—not Queen Esther, at any rate.'

'Do you learn them because it is expected of you?'

The young man laughed a little.

'Well, there *are* other reasons. Now here's a device. Two lions rampant—shield surmounted by a crown; motto, "Sp. nos in Deo." *Let us hope in God*.'

'Whose motto was that?'

'Just what I can't make out. I don't know the shield—which I ought to know; and the reverse of the coin has only some unintelligible letters: D. Gelriae, 1752. Let us try another, Queen Esther. Ha! here's a coin of William and Mary—both their blessed heads and names; and on the reverse a figure three, and the inscription claiming that over Great Britain, *France* and Ireland, they were "Rex and Regina." Why, this box of coins is a capital place to study history.'

'I don't know history,' Esther said.

'But you are going to know it.'

'Am I? How can I?'

'Read.'

'I don't know what to read. I have just read a little history of England—that's all. Mother gave me that. But when I read, there are so many things I don't know and want to ask about.'

'Ask the colonel.'

'Oh, he doesn't care to be troubled,' the little girl said sadly.

'Ask me.'

'*You!* But you are not here to ask.'

'True; well, we must see. Ah, here's a pretty thing! See, Esther, here's an elegant crown, really beautiful, with the fleurs de lys of France, and the name of the luckless Louis XVI. "Roi de France and de Navarre" but no date. On the other side, "Isles de France and de Bourbon." These coins seem to belong to European history.'

'There's another box with Greek and Roman coins, and, the names of Roman emperors; but I know *them* even less still than I do these,' said Esther.

'Your want of knowledge seems to weigh upon your mind, Queen Esther.'

'I can't help it,' said the little girl resignedly.

'Are you sure of that? I am not. Well, I wish I knew who this is.'

He had taken up a very small coin, much less than a three-cent piece, and with the help of a magnifying glass was studying it eagerly.

'Why?' said Esther.

'It is such a beautiful head! Wonderfully beautiful, and old. Crowned, and with a small peaked beard; but the name is so worn off. On the other side "Justitia." Queen Esther, this box is a first-rate place to study history.'

'Is it?'

'It is. What do you say? Suppose you let me come here and study history with you over these old coins; and then you come over to my house and learn Latin with me. Hey?'

He glanced up, and Esther looked at him with a wondering, grave, inquiring face. He nodded in answer and smiled, a little quizzically.

'What do you mean, Pitt?'

'There was a wise man once, who said, the use of language is to conceal one's thoughts. I hope you are not labouring under the impression that such is *my* practice and belief?'

'But would you teach me?' said the girl gravely.

'If your majesty approves.'

'I think it would be very troublesome to you?'

'I, on the contrary, think it would not.'

'But it would after a little while?' said Esther.

'When I want to stop, I'll let you know.'

'Will you? Would you?'

'Both would and will.'

The girl's face grew intense with life, yet without losing its gravity.

'When, Pitt? When would you teach me, I mean?'

'I should say, every day; wouldn't you?'

'And you'll come here to study the coins?'

'And teach you what I learn.'

'Oh! And you'll give me Latin lessons? Lessons to study?'

'Certainly.'

'And we will study history over the coins?'

'Don't you think it will be a good way? Here's a coin of Maria Theresa, now: 1745, Hungary and Böhmen, that is Bohemia. This old piece of copper went through the Seven Years' war.'

'What war was that?'

'Oh, we'll read about it, Queen Esther. "Ad usum," "Belgae, Austria."
These coins are delightful. See here—don't you want to go for a walk?'

'Oh yes! I've had one walk to-day already, and it just makes me want another. Did you see my flowers?'

She jumped up and brought them to him.

'Here's the liverleaf, and anemone, and bloodroot; and we couldn't find the columbine, but it must be out. Christopher calls them all sorts of hard names, that I can't remember.'

'*Anemone* is anemone, at any rate. These two, Esther, this and the *Hepatica*, belong to one great family, the family of the Crowfoots—Ranunculaceae.'

'Oh, but that is harder and harder!'

'No it isn't; it is easier and easier. See, these belong to one family; so you learn to know them as relations, and then you can remember them.'

'How do you know they are of the same family?'

'Well, they have the family features. They all have an acrid sap or juice, exogenous plants, with many stamens. These are the stamens, do you know? They have calyx and corolla both, and the corolla has separate petals, see; and the Ranunculaceae have the petals and sepals deciduous, and the leaves generally cut, as you see these are. They are what you may call a bitter family; it runs in the blood, that is to say, in the juice of them; and a good many of the members of the family are downright wicked, that is, poisonous.'

'Pitt, you talk very queerly?'

'Not a bit more queer than the things are I am talking of. Now this *Sanguinaria* belongs to the Papaveraceae—the poppy family.'

'Does it! But it does not look like them, like poppies.'

'This coloured juice that you see when you break the stem, is one of the family marks of this family. I won't trouble you with the others. But you must learn to know them, Queen Esther. King Solomon knew every plant from the royal cedar to the hyssop on the wall; and I am sure a queen ought to know as much. Now the blood of the Papaveraceae has a taint also; it is apt to have a narcotic quality.'

'What is narcotic?'

'Putting to sleep.'

'That's a good quality.'

'Hm!' said Dallas; 'that's as you take it. It isn't healthy to go so fast asleep that you never can wake up again.'

'Can people do that?' asked Esther in astonishment.

'Yes. Did you never hear of people killing themselves with laudanum, or opium?'

'I wonder why the poppy family was made so?'

'Why not?'

'So mischievous.'

'That's when people take too much of them. They are very good for medicine sometimes, Queen Esther.'

The girl's appearance by this time had totally changed. All the dull, weary, depressed air and expression were gone; she was alert and erect, the beautiful eyes filled with life and eagerness, a dawning of colour in the cheeks, the brow busy with stirring thoughts. Esther's face was a grave face still, for a child of her years; but now it was a noble gravity, showing intelligence and power and purpose; indicating capacity, and also an eager sympathy with whatever is great and worthy to take and hold the attention. Whether it were history that Dallas touched upon, or natural science; the divisions of nations or the harmonies of plants; Esther was ready, with her thoughtful, intent eyes, taking in all he could give her; and not merely as a snatch-bite of curiosity, but as the satisfaction of a good healthy mental appetite for mental food.

Until to-day the young man had never concerned himself much about Esther. Good nature had moved him to-day, when he saw the dullness that had come over the child and recognised her forlorn solitude; and now he began to be interested in the development of a nature he had never known before. Young Dallas was a student of everything natural that came in his way, but this was the first bit of human nature that had consciously interested him. He thought it quite worth investigating a little more.

CHAPTER IV.

LEARNING.

They had a most delightful walk. It was not quite the first they had taken together; however, they had had none like this. They roved through the meadows and over the low rocky heights and among the copsewood, searching everywhere for flowers, and finding a good variety of the dainty and delicate spring beauties. Columbine, most elegant, stood in groups upon the rocks; *Hepatica* hid under beds of dead leaves; the slender *Uvularia* was met with here and there; anemone and bloodroot and wild geranium, and many another. And as they were gathered, Dallas made Esther observe their various features and family characteristics, and brought her away from Christopher's technical phraseology to introduce her instead to the living and everlasting relations of things. To this teaching the little girl presently lent a very delighted ear, and brought, he could see, a quick wit and a keen power of

discrimination. It was one thing to call a delicate little plant arbitrarily *Sanguinaria canadensis;* it was another thing to find it its place among the floral tribes, and recognise its kindred and associations and family character.

On their way home, Dallas proposed that Esther should stop at his house for a minute, and become a little familiar with the place where she was to come to study Latin; and he led her in as he spoke.

The Dallases' house was the best in the village. Not handsome in its exterior, which bore the same plain and somewhat clumsy character as all the other buildings in its neighbourhood; but inside it was spacious, and had a certain homely elegance. Rooms were large and exceedingly comfortable, and furnished evidently with everything desired by the hearts of its possessors. That fact has perhaps more to do with the pleasant, *liveable* air of a house than aesthetic tastes or artistic combinations apart from it. There was a roomy verandah, with settees and cane chairs, and roses climbing up the pillars and draping the balustrade. The hall, which was entered next, was wide and homelike, furnished with settees also, and one or two tables, for summer occupation, when doors could be set open front and back and the wind play through. Nobody was there to-day, and Dallas turned to a door at the right and opened it. This let them into a large room where a fire was burning, and a soft genial warmth met them, along with a certain odour, which Esther noticed and felt without knowing what it was. It was very faint, yet unmistakeable; and was a compound probably made up from the old wood of the house, burning coals in the chimney, great cleanliness, and a distant, hidden, secret store of all manner of delicate good things, fruits and sweets and spices, of which Mrs. Dallas's store closet held undoubtedly a great stock and variety. The brass of the old-fashioned grate glittered in the sunlight, it was so beautifully kept; between the windows hung a circular mirror, to the frame of which were appended a number of spiral, slim, curling branches, like vine tendrils, each sustaining a socket for a candle. The rest of the furniture was good; dark and old and comfortable; painted vases were on the mantelpiece, and an old portrait hung over it. The place made a peculiar agreeable impression upon any one entering it; ease and comfort and good living were so at home in it, and so invited one to take part in its advantages. Esther had hardly been in the house since the death of her mother, and it struck her almost as a stranger. So did the lady sitting there, in state, as it seemed to the girl.

For Mrs. Dallas was a stately person. Handsome, tall, of somewhat large and full figure and very upright carriage; handsomely dressed; and with a calm, superior air of confidence, which perhaps had more effect than all the other good properties mentioned. She was sitting in an easy-chair, with some work in her hands, by a little work-table on which lay one or two handsomely bound books. She looked up and reviewed Esther as her son and she came in.

'I have brought Esther Gainsborough, mother; you know her, don't you?'

'I know her, certainly,' Mrs. Dallas answered, holding out her hand to the child, who touched it as somewhat embodying a condescension rather than a kindness. 'How is your father, my dear?'

'He does not feel very well,' said Esther; 'but he never does.'

'Pity!' said the lady; but Esther could not tell what she meant. It was a pity, of course, that her father did not feel well. 'Where have you been all this while?' the lady went on, addressing her son.

'Where?—well, in reality, walking over half the country. See our flowers! In imagination, over half the world. Do you know what a collection of coins Colonel Gainsborough has?'

'No,' said the lady coldly.

'He has a very fine collection.'

'I see no good in coins that are not current.'

'Difference of opinion, you see, there, mother. An old piece, which when it was current was worth only perhaps a farthing or two, now when its currency is long past would sell maybe for fifty or a hundred pounds.'

'That is very absurd, Pitt!'

'Not altogether.'

'Why not?'

'Those old coins are history.'

'You don't want them for history. You have the history in books.'

Pitt laughed.

'Come away, Esther,' he said. 'Come and let me show you where you are to find me when you want me.'

'Find you for what?' asked the lady, before they could quit the room.

'Esther is coming to take lessons from me,' he said, throwing his head back laughingly as he went.

'Lessons! In what?'

'Anything she wants to learn, that I can teach her. We have been studying history and botany to-day. Come along, Esther. We shall not take our lessons *here*.'

He led the way, going out into the hall and at the further end of it passing into a verandah which there too extended along the back of the house. The house on this side had a long offset, or wing, running back at right angles with the main building. The verandah also made an angle and followed the side of this wing, which on the ground floor contained the kitchen and offices. Half way of its length a stairway ran up, on the outside, to a door nearer the end of the building. Up this stair young Dallas went, and introduced Esther to a large room, which seemed to her presently the oddest and also the most interesting that she had ever in her life seen. Its owner had got together, apparently, the old bits of furniture that his mother did not want any longer; there was an old table, devoid of all varnish, in the floor, covered, however, with a nice green cloth; two or three chairs were the table's contemporaries, to judge by their style, and nothing harder or less accommodating to the love of ease ever entered surely a cabinetmaker's brain. The wood of which they were made had, however, come to be of a soft brown colour, through the influence of time, and the form was not inelegant. The floor was bare and painted, and upon it lay here an old rug and there a great thick bearskin; and on the walls there were several heads of animals, which seemed to Esther very remarkable and extremely ornamental. One beautiful deer's head, with elegant horns; and one elk head, the horns of which in their sweep and extent were simply enormous; then there were one or two fox heads, and a raccoon; and besides all these, the room was adorned with two or three birds, very well mounted. The birds, as the animals, were unknown to Esther, and fascinated her greatly. Books were in this room too, though not in large numbers; a flower press was in one place, a microscope on the table, a kind of *étagère* was loaded with papers; and there were boxes, and glasses, and cases; and a general air of a place where a good deal of business was done, and where a variety of tastes found at least attempted gratification. It was a pleasant room, though the description may not sound like it; the heterogeneous articles were in nice order; plenty of light blazed in at the windows, and the bearskin on the floor looked eminently comfortable. If that were luxurious, it was the only bit of luxury in the room.

'Where will you sit?' asked its owner, looking round. 'There isn't anything nice enough for you. I must look up a special chair for you to occupy when you come here. How do you like my room?'

'I like it—very much,' said Esther slowly, turning her eyes from one strange object to another.

'Nobody comes here but me, so we shall have no interruption to fear. When you come to see me, Queen Esther, you will just go straight through the house, out on the piazza, and up these stairs, with out asking anybody; and then you will turn the handle of the door and come in, without knocking. If I am here, well and good; if I am not here, wait for me. You like my deer's horns? I got them up in Canada, where I have been on hunting expeditions with my father.'

'Did *you* kill them?'

'Some of them. But that great elk head I bought.'

'What big bird is that?'

'That? That is the white-headed eagle—the American eagle.'

'Did that come from Canada too?'

'No; I shot him not far from here, one day, by great luck.'

'Are they difficult to shoot?'

'Rather. I sat half a day in a booth made with branches, to get the chance. There were several of them about that day, so I lay in wait. They are not very plenty just about here. That other fellow is the great European lammergeyer.'

Esther had placed herself on one of the hard wooden chairs, but now she rose and went nearer the

birds, standing before them in great admiration. Slowly then she went from one thing in the room to another, pausing to contemplate each. A beautiful white owl, very large and admirably mounted, held her eyes for some time.

'That is the Great Northern Owl,' observed her companion. 'They are found far up in the regions around the North Pole, and only now and then come so far south as this.'

'What claws!' said Esther.

'Talons. Yes, they would carry off a rabbit very easily.'

'Do they!' cried Esther, horrified.

'I don't doubt that fellow has carried off many a one, as well as hosts of smaller fry—squirrels, mice, and birds.'

'He looks cruel,' observed Esther, with an abhorrent motion of her shoulders.

'He does, rather. But he is no more cruel than all the rest.'

'The rest of what?' said Esther, turning towards him.

'The rest of creation—all the carnivorous portion of it, I mean.'

'Are they all like that? they don't look so. The eyes of pigeons, for instance, are quite different.'

'Pigeons are not flesh-eaters.'

'Oh!' said Esther wonderingly. 'No, I know; they eat bread and grain; and canary birds eat seeds. Are there *many* birds that live on flesh?'

'A great many, Queen Esther. All creation, nearly, preys on some other part of creation—except that respectable number that are granivorous, and herbivorous, and graminivorous.'

Esther stood before the owl, musing; and Dallas, who was studying the child now, watched her.

'But what I want to know, is,' began Esther, as if she were carrying on an argument, '*why* those that eat flesh look so much more wicked than the others that eat other things?'

'Do they?' said Dallas. 'That is the first question.'

'Why, yes,' said Esther, 'they do, Pitt. If you will think. There are sheep and cows and rabbits, and doves and chickens'—

'Halt there!' cried Dallas. 'Chickens are as good flesh-eaters as anybody, and as cruel about it, too. See two chickens pulling at the two ends of one earthworm.'

'Oh, don't!' said Esther. 'I remember they do; and they haven't nice eyes either, Pitt. But little turkeys have.'

Dallas burst out laughing.

'Well, just think,' Esther persisted. 'Think of horses' beautiful eyes; and then think of a tiger.'

'Or a cat,' said Dallas.

'But why is it, Pitt?'

'Queen Esther, my knowledge, such as it is, is all at your majesty's service; but the information required lies not therein.'

'Well, isn't it true, what I said?'

'I am inclined to think, and will frankly admit, that there is something in it.'

'Then don't you think there must be a *real* difference, to make them look so different? and that I wasn't wrong when I called the owl cruel!'

'The study of animal psychology, so far as I know, has never been carried into a system. Meanwhile, suppose we come from what I cannot teach, to what I can? Here's a Latin grammar for you.'

Esther came to his side immediately, and listened with grave attention to his explanations and

directions.

'And you want me to learn these declensions?'

'It is a necessary preliminary to learning Latin.'

Esther took the book with a very awakened and contented face; then put a sudden irrelevant question. 'Pitt, why didn't you tell Mrs. Dallas what you were going to teach me?'

The young man looked at her, somewhat amused, but not immediately ready with an answer.

'Wouldn't she like you to give me lessons?'

'I never asked her,' he answered gravely.

Esther looked at him, inquiring and uncertain.

'I never asked her whether I might take lessons from your father, either.'

'No, of course not; but'—

'But what?'

'I don't know. I don't want to do it if she would not like it.'

'Why shouldn't she like it? She has nothing to do with it. It is I who am going to give you the lessons, not she. And now for a lesson in botany.'

He brought out a quantity of his dried flowers, beautifully preserved and arranged; and showed Esther one or two groups of plants, giving her various initiatory instruction by the way. It was a most delightful half hour to the little girl; and she went home after it, with her Latin grammar in her hands, very much aroused and wakened up and cheered from her dull condition of despondency; just what Pitt had intended.

CHAPTER V.

CONTAMINATION.

The lessons went on, and the interest on both sides knew no flagging. Dallas had begun by way of experiment, and he was quite contented with his success. In his room, over Latin and botany, at her own home, over history and the boxes of coins, he and Esther daily spent a good deal of time together. They were pleasant enough hours to him; but to her they were sources of life-giving nourishment and delight. The girl had been leading a forlorn existence; mentally in a desert and alone; and, added to that, with an unappeased longing for her departed mother, and silent, quiet, wearing grief for the loss of her. Even now, her features often settled into the dulness which had so struck Dallas; but gradually there was a lightening and lifting of the cloud: when studying she was wholly intent on her business, and when talking or reciting or examining flowers there was a play of life and thought and feeling in her face which was a constant study to her young teacher, as well as pleasure, for the change was his work. He read indications of strong capacity; he saw the tokens of rare sensitiveness and delicacy; he saw there was a power of feeling as well as a capacity for suffering covered by the quiet composure and reserve of manner and habit which, he knew, were rather signs of the depth of that which they covered. Esther interested him. And then, she was so simply upright and honest, and so noble in all her thoughts, so high-bred by nature as well as education, that her young teacher's estimation constantly grew, and to interest was soon added liking. He had half expected that when the novelty was off the pleasure of study would be found to falter; but it was no such matter. Esther studied as honestly as if she had been a fifth form boy at a good school; with a delight in it which boys at school, in any form, rarely bring to their work. She studied absorbedly, eagerly, persistently; whatever pleasure she might get by the way, she was plainly bent on learning; and she learned of course fast. And in the botanical studies they carried on together, and in the historical studies which had the coins for an illumination, the child showed as keen enjoyment as other girls of her age are wont to feel in a story-book or in games and plays. Of games and plays Esther knew nothing; she had no young companions, and never had known any; her intercourse had been almost solely with father and mother, and now only the father was left to her. She would have been in danger of growing morbid in her sorrow and loneliness, and her

whole nature might have been permanently and without remedy dwarfed, if at this time of her life she had been left to grow like the wild things in the woods, without sympathy or care. For some human plants need a good deal of both to develop them to their full richness and fragrance; and Esther was one of these. The loss of her mother had threatened to be an irreparable injury to her. Colonel Gainsborough was a tenderly affectionate father: still, like a good many men, he did not understand child nature, could not adapt himself to it, had no sort of notion of its wants, and no comprehension that it either needed or could receive and return his sympathy. So he did not give sympathy to his child, nor dreamed that she was in danger of starving for want of it. Indeed, he had never in his life given much sympathy to anybody, except his wife; and in the loss of his wife, Colonel Gainsborough thought so much of himself was lost that the remainder probably would not last long. He thought himself wounded to death. That it might be desirable, and that it might be duty to live for his daughter's sake, was an idea that had never entered his very masculine heart. Yet Colonel Gainsborough was a good man, and even had the power of being a tender one; he had been that towards his wife; but when she died he felt that life had gone from him.

All this, more or less, young Dallas came to discern and understand in the course of his associations with the father and daughter. And now it was with a little pardonable pride and a good deal of growing tenderness for the child, that he saw the change going on in Esther. She was always, now as before, quiet as a mouse in her father's presence; truly she was quiet as a mouse everywhere; but under the outward quiet Dallas could see now the impulse and throb of the strong and sensitive life within; the stir of interest and purpose and hope; the waking up of the whole nature; and he saw that it was a nature of great power and beauty. It was no wonder that the face through which this nature shone was one of rare power and beauty too. Others could see that, besides him.

'What a handsome little girl that is!' remarked the elder Dallas one evening. Esther had just left the house, and his son come into the room.

'It seems to me she is here a great deal,' Mrs. Dallas said, after a pause. The remark about Esther's good looks called forth no response. 'I see her coming and going pretty nearly every day.'

'Quite every day,' her son answered.

'And you go there every day!'

'I do. About that.'

'Very warm intercourse!'

'I don't know; not necessarily,' said young Dallas. 'The classics are rather cool—and Numismatics refreshing and composing.'

'Numismatics! You are not teaching that child Numismatics, I suppose?'

'She is teaching me.'

Mrs. Dallas was silent now, with a dissatisfied expression. Her husband repeated his former remark.

'She's a handsome little maid. Are you teaching her, Pitt?'

'A little, sir.'

'What, pray? if I may ask.'

'Teaching her to support existence. It about comes to that.'

'I do not understand you, I confess. You are oracular.'

'I did not understand *her*, until lately. It is what nobody else does, by the way.'

'Why should not anybody else understand her?' Mrs. Dallas asked.

'Should,—but they do not. That's a common case, you know, mother.'

'She has her father; what's the matter with him?'

'He thinks a good deal is the matter with him.'

'Regularly hipped,' said the elder Dallas. 'He has never held up his head since his wife died. He fancies he is going after her as fast as he can go. Perhaps he is; such fancies are often fatal.'

'It would do him good to look after his child,' Mrs. Dallas said.

'I wish you would put that in his head, mother.'

'Does he *not* look after her?'

'In a sort of way. He knows where she is and where she goes; he has a sort of outward care of her, and so far it is very particular care; but there it stops.'

'She ought to be sent to school.'

'There is no school here fit for her.'

'Then she should be sent away, where there *is* a school fit for her.'

'Tell the colonel so.'

'I shall not meddle in Colonel Gainsborough's affairs,' said Mrs. Dallas, bridling a little; 'he is able to manage them himself; or he thinks he is, which comes to the same thing. But I should say, that child might better be in any other hands than his.'

'Well, she is not shut up to them,' said young Dallas, 'since I have taken her in hand.'

He strolled out of the room as he spoke, and the two elder people were left together. Silence reigned between them till the sound of his steps had quite ceased to be heard.

Mrs. Dallas was working at some wool embroidery, and taking her stitches with a thoughtful brow; her husband in his easy-chair was carelessly turning over the pages of a newspaper. They were a contrast. She had a tall, commanding figure, a gracious but dignified manner, and a very handsome, stately face. There was nothing commanding, and nothing gracious, about Mr. Dallas. His figure was rather small, and his manner insignificant. He was not a handsome man, either, although he may be said to have but just missed it, for his features were certainly good; but he did miss it. Nobody spoke in praise of Mr. Dallas's appearance. Yet his face showed sense; his eyes were shrewd, if they were also cold; and the mouth was good; but the man's whole air was unsympathetic. It was courteous enough; and he was careful and particular in his dress. Indeed, Mr. Dallas was careful of all that belonged to him. He wore long English whiskers of sandy hair, the head crop being very thin and kept very close.

'Hildebrand,' said Mrs. Dallas when the sound of her son's footsteps had died away, 'when are you going to send Pitt to college?'

Mr. Dallas turned another page of his newspaper, and did not hurry his answer.

'Why?'

'And *where* are you going to send him?'

'Really,' said Mr. Dallas, without ceasing his contemplation of the page before him, 'I do not know. I have not considered the matter lately.'

'Do you remember he is eighteen?'

'I thought you were not ready to let him go yet?'

Mrs. Dallas stopped her embroidery and sighed.

'But he must go, husband.'

Mr. Dallas made no answer. He seemed not to find the question pressing.
Mrs. Dallas sat looking at him now, neglecting her work.

'You have got to make up your mind to it, and so have I,' she went on presently. 'He is ready for college. All this pottering over the classics with Colonel Gainsborough doesn't amount to anything. It keeps him out of idleness,—if Pitt ever could be idle,—but he has got to go to college after all, sooner or later. He must go!' she repeated with another sigh.

'No special hurry, that I see.'

'What's gained by delay? He's eighteen. That's long enough for him to have lived in a place like this. If I had my way, Hildebrand, I should send him to England.'

'England!' Mr. Dallas put down his paper now and looked at his wife.
What had got into her head?

'Oxford is better than the things they call colleges in this country.'

'Yes; but it is farther off.'

'That's not a bad thing, in some respects. Hildebrand, you don't want Pitt to be formed upon the model of things in this country. You would not have him get radical ideas, or Puritanical.'

'Not much danger!'

'I don't know.'

'Who's to put them in his head? Gainsborough is not a bit of a radical.'

'He is not one of us,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'And Pitt is very independent, and takes his own views from nobody or from anybody. See his educating this girl, now.'

'Educating her!'

'Yes, he is with her and her father a great piece of every day; reading and talking and walking and drying flowers and giving lessons. I don't know what all they are doing. But in my opinion Pitt might be better employed.'

'That won't last,' said the father with a half laugh.

'What ought not to last, had better not be begun,' Mrs. Dallas said sententiously.

There was a pause.

'What are you afraid of, wife?'

'I am afraid of Pitt's wasting his time.'

'You have never been willing to have him go until now. I thought you stood in the way.'

'He was not wasting his time until lately. He was as well at home. But there must come an end to that,' the mother said, with another slight sigh. She was not a woman given to sighing; it meant much from her.

'But England?' said Mr. Dallas. 'What's your notion about England?
Oxford is very well, but the ocean lies between.'

'Where would *you* send him?'

'I'd send him to the best there is on this side.'

'That's not Oxford. I believe it would be good for him to be out of this country for a while; forget some of his American notions, and get right English ones. Pitt is a little too independent.'

The elder Dallas caressed his whiskers and pondered. If the truth were told, he had been about as unwilling to let his son go away from home as ever his mother could be. Pitt was simply the delight and pride of both their hearts; the one thing they lived for; the centre of all hopes, and the end of all undertakings. No doubt he must go to college; but the evil day had been pushed far off, as far as possible. Pitt was a son for parents to be proud of. He had the good qualities of both father and mother, with some added of his own which they did not share, and which perhaps therefore increased their interest in him.

'I expect he will have a word to say about the matter himself,' the father remarked. 'Oh, well! there's no raging hurry, wife.'

'Husband, it would be a good thing for him to see the English Church as it is in England, before he gets much older.'

'What then?'

'He would learn to value it. The cathedrals, and the noble services in them, and the bishops; and the feeling that everybody around him goes the same way; there's a great deal of power in that. Pitt would be impressed by it.'

'By the feeling that everybody around him goes that way? Not he. That's quite as likely to stir him up to go another way.'

'It don't work so, Hildebrand.'

'You think he's a likely fellow to be talked over into anything?'

'No; but he would be influenced. Nobody would try to talk him over, and without knowing it he would feel the influence. He couldn't help it. All the influence at Oxford would be the right way.'

'Afraid of the colonel? I don't think you need. He hasn't spirit enough left in him for proselyting.'

'I am not speaking of anybody in particular. I am afraid of the air here.'

Mr. Dallas laughed a little, but his face took a shade of gravity it had not worn. Must he send his son away? What would the house be without him?

CHAPTER VI.

GOING TO COLLEGE.

Whatever thoughts were harboured in the elder heads, nothing was spoken openly, and no steps were taken for some time. All through the summer the pleasant intercourse went on, and the lessons, and the botanizing, and the study of coins. And much real work was done; but for Esther one invaluable and abiding effect of a more general character was gained. She was lifted out of her dull despondency, which had threatened to become stagnation, and restored to her natural life and energy and the fresh spring of youthful spirits. So, when her friend really went away to college in the fall, Esther did not slip back to the condition from which he had delivered her.

But the loss of him was a dreadful loss to the child, although Pitt was not going over the sea, and would be home at Christmas. He tried to comfort her with this prospect. Esther took no comfort. She sat silent, tearless, pale, in a kind of despair. Pitt looked at her, half amused, half deeply concerned.

'And you must go on with all your studies, Esther, you know,' he was saying. 'I will show you what to do, and when I come home I shall go into a very searching examination to see whether you have done it all thoroughly.'

'Will you?' she said, lifting her eyes to him with a gleam of sudden hope.

'Certainly! I shall give you lessons just as usual whenever I come home; indeed, I expect I shall do it all your life. I think I shall always be teaching and you always be learning. Don't you think that is how it will be, Queen Esther?' he said kindly.

'You cannot give me lessons when you are away.'

'But when I come back!'

There was a very faint yet distinct lightening of the gloom in her face. Yet it was plain Esther was not cheated out of her perception of the truth. She was going to lose her friend; and his absence would be very different from his presence; and the bits of vacation time would not help, or help only by anticipation, the long stretches of months in which there would be neither sight nor sound of him. Esther's looks had brightened for a moment, but then her countenance fell again and her face grew visibly pale. Pitt saw it with dismay.

'But Esther!' he said, 'this is nothing. Every man must go to college, you know, just as he must learn swimming and boating; and so I must go; but it will not last for ever.'

'How long?' said she, lifting her eyes to him again, heavy with their burden of sorrow.

'Well, perhaps three years; unless I enter Junior, and then it would be only two. That isn't much.'

'What will you do then?'

'Then? I don't know. Look after you, at any rate. Let us see. How old will you be in two years?'

'Almost fourteen.'

'Fourteen. Well, you see you will have a great deal to do before you can afford to be fourteen years old; so much that you will not have time to miss me.'

Esther made no answer.

'I'll be back at Christmas anyhow, you know; and that's only three months away, or a little more.'

'For how long?'

'Never mind; we will make a little do the work of a great deal. It will seem a long time, it will be so good.'

'No,' said Esther; 'that will make it only the shorter.'

'Why, Esther,' said he, half laughing, 'I didn't know you cared so much about me. I don't deserve all that.'

'I am not crying,' said the girl, rising with a sort of childish dignity; 'but I shall be alone.'

They had been sitting on a rock, resting and talking, and now set out again to go home. Esther spoke no more; and Pitt was silent, not knowing what to say; but he watched her, and saw that if she had not been crying at the time she had made that declaration, the tears had taken their revenge and were coming now. Yet only in a calm, repressed way; now and then he saw a drop fall, or caught a motion of Esther's hand which could only have been made to prevent a drop from falling. She walked along steadily, turning neither to the right hand nor the left; she who ordinarily watched every hedgerow and ran to explore every group of plants in the corner of a field, and was keen to see everything that was to be seen in earth or heaven. Pitt walked along silently too. He was at a careless age, but he was a generous-minded fellow; and to a mind of that sort there is something exceedingly attractive and an influence exceedingly powerful in the fact of being trusted and depended on.

'Mother,' he said when he got home, 'I wish you would look after that little girl now and then.'

'What little girl?'

'You must know whom I mean; the colonel's daughter.'

'The colonel is sufficient for that, I should say.'

'But you know what sort of a man he is. And she has no mother, nor anybody else, except servants.'

'Isn't he fond of her?'

'Very fond; but then he isn't well, and he is a reserved, silent man; the child is left to herself in a way that is bad for her.'

'What do you suppose I can do?'

'A great deal; if you once knew her and got fond of her, mother.'

Mrs. Dallas made no promise; however, she did go to see Esther. It was about a week after Pitt's departure. She found father and daughter very much as her son had found them the day he was introduced to the box of coins. Esther was on the floor, beside the same box, and the colonel was on his sofa. Mrs. Dallas did take the effect of the picture for that moment before the colonel sprang up to receive her. Then she had to do with a somewhat formal but courtly host, and the picture was lost. The lady sat there, stately in her silks and laces, carrying on a stiff conversation; for she and Colonel Gainsborough had few points of sympathy or mutual understanding; and for a while she forgot Esther. Then her eye again fell upon the child in her corner, sitting by her box with a sad, uninterested air.

'And how is Esther?' she said, turning herself a little towards that end of the room. 'Really I came to see Esther, colonel. How does she do?'

'She is much obliged to you, and quite well, madam, I believe.'

'But she must want playmates, colonel. Why don't you send her to school?'

'I would, if there were a good school at hand.'

'There are schools at New Haven, and Hartford, and Boston,—plenty of schools that would suit you.'

'Only that, as you observe, they are at New Haven, and Hartford, and Boston; out of my reach.'

'You couldn't do without her for a while?'

'I hardly think it; nor she without me. We are all, each of us, that the other has.'

'Pitt used to give you lessons, didn't he?' the lady went on, turning more decidedly to Esther. Esther rose and came near.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'What did he teach you?'

Now Esther felt no more congeniality than her father did with this handsome, stately, commanding woman. Yet it would have been impossible to the girl to say why she had an instant unwillingness to answer this simple question. She did not answer it, except under protest.

'It began with the coins,' she said vaguely. 'He said we would study history with them.'

'And did you?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'How did you manage it? or how did he? He has original ways of doing things.'

'Yes, ma'am. We used to take only one or two of the coins at once, and then Pitt told me what to read.'

'What did he tell you to read?'

'A great many different books, at different times.'

'But tell Mrs. Dallas what books, Esther,' her father put in.

'There were so many, papa. Gibbon's History, and Plutarch's Lives, and Rollin, and Vertot and Hume, and I—forget some of them.'

'How much of all these did you really read, Esther?'

'I don't know, ma'am. I read what he told me.'

The lady turned to Colonel Gainsborough with a peculiar smile. 'Sounds rather heterogeneous!' she said.

It was on Esther's lips to justify her teacher, and say how far from heterogeneous, how connected, and how thorough, and how methodical, the reading and the study had been; and how enriched with talk and explanations and descriptions and discussions. How delightful those conversations were, both to herself and Pitt; how living the truth had been made; how had names and facts taken on them the shape and colouring of nature and reality. It rushed back upon Esther, and her lips opened; and then, an inexplicable feeling of something like caution came down upon her, and she shut her lips again.

'It was harmless amusement,' remarked the colonel carelessly.

Whether the mother thought that, may be questioned. She looked again at the child standing before her; a child truly, with childlike innocence and ignorance in her large eyes and pure lips. But the eyes were eyes of beauty; and the lips would soon and readily take to themselves the sweetness and the consciousness of womanhood, and a new bloom would come upon the cheek. The colonel had never yet looked forward to all that; but the wise eyes of the matron saw it as well as if already before her. This little girl might well by and by be dangerous. If Mrs. Dallas had come as a friend, she went away, in a sort, as an enemy, in so far, at least, as Esther's further and future relations with her son were concerned.

The colonel went back to his sofa. Esther sat down again by the coins. She was not quite old enough to reflect much upon the developments of human nature as they came before her; but she was conscious of a disagreeable, troubled sensation left by this visit of Mrs. Dallas. It had not been pleasant. It ought to have been pleasant: she was Pitt's mother; she came on a kind errand; but Esther felt at once repelled and put at a distance.

The child had not gone back to the dull despondency of the time before Pitt busied himself with her; she was striving to fulfil all his wishes, and working hard in order to accomplish more than he expected of her. With the cherished secret hope of doing this, Esther was driving at her books early and late. She went from the coins to the histories Pitt had told her would illustrate them; she fagged away at the dry details of her Latin grammar; she even tried to push her knowledge of plants and see further into their

relations with each other, though in this department she felt the want of her teacher particularly. From day to day it was the one pressing desire and purpose in Esther's mind, to do more, and if possible much more, than Pitt wanted her to do; so that she might surprise him and win his respect and approbation. She thought, too, that she was in a fair way to do this, for she was gaining knowledge fast, she knew; and it was a great help towards keeping up spirit and hope and healthy action in her mind. Nevertheless, she missed her companion and friend, with an intense longing want of him which nobody even guessed. All the more keen it was, perhaps, because she could speak of it to nobody. It consumed the girl in secret, and was only saved from being disastrous to her by the transformation of it into working energy, which transformation daily went on anew. It did not help her much, or she thought so, to remember that Pitt was coming home at the end of December. He would not stay; and Esther was one of those thoughtful natures that look all round a subject, and are not deceived by a first fair show. He could not stay; and what would his coming and the delight of it do, after all, but renew this terrible sense of want and make it worse than ever? When he went away again, it would be for a long, long time,—an absence of months; how was it going to be borne?

The problem of life was beginning early for Esther. And the child was alone. Nobody knew what went on in her; she had nobody to whom she could open her heart and tell her trouble; and the troubles we can tell to nobody else somehow weigh very heavy, especially in young years. The colonel loved his child with all of his heart that was not buried in his wife's grave; still, he was a man, and like most men had little understanding of the workings of a child's mind, above all of a girl's. He saw Esther pale, thoughtful, silent, grave, for ever busy with her books; and it never crossed his thoughts that such is not the natural condition and wholesome manner of life for twelve years old. He knew nothing for himself so good as books; why should not the same be true for Esther? She was a studious child; he was glad to see her so sensible.

As for Pitt, he had fallen upon a new world, and was busily finding his feet, as it were. Finding his own place, among all these other aspirants for human distinction; testing his own strength, among the combatants in this wrestling school of human life; earning his laurels in the race for learning; making good his standing and trying his power amid the waves and currents of human influence. Pitt found his standing good, and his strength quite equal to the call for it, and his power dominating. At least it would have been dominating, if he had cared to rule; all he cared for, as it happened, in that line, was to be independent and keep his own course. He had done that always at home, and he found no difficulty in doing it at college. For the rest, his abilities were unquestioned, and put him at once at the head of his fellows.

CHAPTER VII.

COMING HOME.

Without being at all an unfaithful friend, it must be confessed Pitt's mind during this time was full of the things pertaining to his own new life, and he thought little of Esther. He thought little of anybody; he was not at a sentimental age, nor at all of a sentimental disposition, and he had enough else to occupy him. It was not till he had put the college behind him, and was on his journey home, that Esther's image rose before his mental vision; the first time perhaps for months. It smote him then with a little feeling of compunction. He recollected the child's sensitive nature, her clinging to him, her lonely condition; and the grave, sad eyes seemed to reproach him with having forgotten her. He had not forgotten her; he had only not remembered. He might have taken time to write her one little letter; but he had not thought of it. Had she ceased to think of *him* in any corresponding way? Pitt was very sure she had not. Somehow his fancy was very busy with Esther during this journey home. He was making amends for months of neglect. Her delicate, tender, faithful image seemed to stand before him;—forgetfulness would never be charged upon Esther, nor carelessness of anything she ought to care for;—of that he was sure. He was quite ashamed of himself, that he had sent her never a little token of remembrance in all this time. He recalled the girl's eagerness in study, her delight in learning, her modest, well-bred manner; her evident though unconscious loving devotion to himself, and her profound grief at his going away. There were very noble qualities in that young girl that would develop—into what might they develop? and how would those beautiful thoughtful eyes look from a woman's soul by and by? Had his mother complied with his request and shown any kindness to the child? Pitt had no special encouragement to think so. And what a life it must be for such a creature, at twelve years old, to be alone with that taciturn, reserved, hypochondriac colonel?

It was near evening when the stage-coach brought Pitt to his native village and set him down at home. There was no snow on the ground yet, and his steps rang on the hard frozen path as he went up to the door, giving clear intimation of his approach. Within there was waiting. The mother and father were sitting at the two sides of the fireplace, busy with keeping up the fire to an unmaintainable standard of brilliancy, and looking at the clock; now and then exchanging a remark about the weather, the way, the distance, and the proper time of the expected arrival,—till that sharp sound of a step on the gravel came to their ears, and both parents started up and rushed to the door. There was a general confusion of kisses and hand-clasps and embraces, from which Pitt at last emerged.

'Oh, my boy, how late you are!'

'Not at all, mother; just right.'

'A tedious, cold ride, hadn't you?'

'No, mother; not at all. Roads in capital order; smooth as a plank floor; came along splendidly; but there'll be snow to-morrow.'

'Oh, I hope not, till you get the greens!'

'Oh, I'll get the greens, never fear; and put them up, too.'

Wherewith they entered the brilliantly-lighted room, where the supper table stood ready, and all eyes could meet eyes, and read tokens each of the other's condition.

'He looks well,' said Mrs. Dallas, regarding her son.

'Why shouldn't I look well?'

'Hard work,' suggested the mother.

'Work is good for a fellow. I never got hard work enough yet. But home is jolly, mother. That's the use of going away, I suppose,' said the young man, drawing a chair comfortably in front of the fire; while Mrs. Dallas rang for supper and gave orders, and then sat down to gaze at him with those mother's eyes that are like nothing else in the world. Searching, fond, proud, tender, devoted,—Pitt met them and smiled.

'I am all right,' he said.

'Looks so,' said the father contentedly. 'Hold your own, Pitt?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Ahead of everybody?'

'Yes, sir,' said the young man, a little more reservedly.

'I knew it!' said the elder man, rubbing his hands; 'I thought I knew it. I made sure you would.'

'He hasn't worked too hard either,' said the mother, with a careful eye of examination. 'He looks as he ought to look.'

A bright glance of the eye came to her. 'I tell you I never had enough to do yet,' he said.

'And, Pitt, do you like it?'

'Like what, mother?'

'The place, and the work, and the people?—the students and the professors?'

'That's what I should call a comprehensive question! You expect one yes or no to cover all that?'

'Well, how do you like the people?'

'Mother, when you get a community like that of a college town, you have something of a variety of material, don't you see? The people are all sorts. But the faculty are very well, and some of them capital fellows.'

'Have you gone into society much?'

'No, mother. Had something else to do.'

'Time enough for that,' said the elder Dallas contentedly. 'When a man has the money you'll have, my boy, he may pretty much command society.'

'Some sorts,' said Pitt.

'All sorts.'

'Must be a poor kind of society, I should say, that makes money the first thing.'

'It's the best sort you can get in this world,' said the elder man, chuckling. 'There's nothing but money that will buy bread and butter; and they all want bread and butter. You'll find they all want bread and butter, whatever else they want,—or have.'

'Of course they want it; but what has that to do with society?'

'You'll find out,' said the other, with an unctuous kind of complacency.

'But there's no society in this country,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'Now, Pitt, turn your chair round,—here's the supper,—if you want to sit by the fire, that is.'

The supper was a royal one, for Mrs. Dallas was a good housekeeper; and the tone of it was festive, for the spirits of them all were in a very gay and Christmas mood. So it was with a good deal of surprise as well as chagrin that Mrs. Dallas, after supper, saw her son handling his greatcoat in the hall.

'Pitt, you are not going out?'

'Yes, mother, for a little while.'

'Where can you be going?'

'I want to run over to Colonel Gainsborough's for a minute or two.'

'Colonel Gainsborough! You don't want to see him to-night?'

'Neither to-night nor any time—at least I can live without it; but there's somebody else there that would like to see me. I'll be back soon, mother.'

'But, Pitt, that is quite absurd! That child can wait till morning, surely; and I want you myself. I think I have a better claim.'

'You have had me a good while already, and shall have me again,' said Pitt, laughing. 'I am just going to steal a little bit of the evening, mother. Be generous!'

And he opened the hall door and was off, and the door closed behind him. Mrs. Dallas went back to the supper room with a very discomfited face.

'Hildebrand,' she said, in a tone that made her husband look up, 'there is no help for it! We shall have to send him to England.'

'What now?'

'Just what I told you. He's off to see that child. Off like the North wind!—and no more to be held.'

'That's nothing new. He never could be held. Pity we didn't name him
Boreas.'

'But do you see what he is doing?'

'No.'

'He is off to see that child.'

'That child to-day, and another to-morrow. He's a boy yet.'

'Hildebrand, I tell you there is danger.'

'Danger of what?'

'Of what you would not like.'

'My dear, young men do not fall dangerously in love with children. And that little girl is a child yet.'

'You forget how soon she will be not a child. And she is going to be a very remarkable-looking girl, I

can tell you. And you must not forget another thing, husband; that Pitt is as persistent as he is wilful.'

'He's got a head, I think,' said Mr. Dallas, stroking his whiskers thoughtfully.

'*That* won't save him. It never saved anybody. Men with heads are just as much fools, in certain circumstances, as men without them.'

'He might fancy some other child in England, if we sent him there, you know.'

'Yes; but at least she would be a Churchwoman,' said Mrs. Dallas, with her handsome face all cloudy and disturbed.

Meanwhile her son had rushed along the village street, or road rather, through the cold and darkness, the quarter of a mile to Colonel Gainsborough's house. There he was told that the colonel had a bad headache and was already gone to his room.

'Is Miss Esther up?'

'Oh yes, sir,' said Mrs. Barker doubtfully, but she did not invite the visitor in.

'Can I see her for a moment?'

'I haven't no orders, but I suppose you can come in, Mr. Dallas. It is
Mr. Dallas, ain't it?'

'Yes, it's I, Mrs. Barker,' said Pitt, coming in and beginning at once to throw off his greatcoat. 'In the usual room? Is the colonel less well than common?'

'Well, no, sir, not to call less well, as I knows on. It's the time o' year, sir, I make bold to imagine. He has a headache bad, that he has, and he's gone off to bed; but Miss Esther's well—so as she can be.'

Pitt got out of his greatcoat and gloves, and waited for no more. He had a certain vague expectation of the delight his appearance would give, and was a little eager to see it. So he went in with a bright face to surprise Esther.

The girl was sitting by the table reading a book she had laid close under the lamp; reading with a very grave face, Pitt saw too, and it a little sobered the brightness of his own. It was not the dulness of stagnation or of sorrow this time; at least Esther was certainly busily reading; but it was sober, steady business, not the absorption of happy interest or excitement. She looked up carelessly as the door opened, then half incredulously as she saw the entering figure, then she shut her book and rose to meet him. But then she did not show the lively pleasure he had expected; her face flushed a little, she hardly smiled, she met him as if he were more or less a stranger,—with much more dignity and less eagerness than he was accustomed to from her. Pitt was astonished, and piqued, and curious. However, he followed her lead, in a measure.

'How do you do, Queen Esther?' he said, holding out his hand.

'How do you do, Pitt?' she answered, taking it; but with the oddest mingling of reserve and doubt in her manner; and the great grave eyes were lifted to his face for a moment, with, it seemed to him, something of inquiry or questioning in them.

'Are you not glad to see me?'

'Yes,' she said, with another glance.

'Then *why* are you not glad to see me?' he asked impetuously.

'I am glad to see you, of course,' she said. 'Won't you sit down?'

'This won't do, you know,' said the young man, half-vexed and half-laughing, but wholly determined not to be kept at a distance in this manner. 'I am not going to sit down, if you are going to treat me like that.'

'Treat you how?'

'Why, as if I were a stranger, that you didn't care a pin about. What's the matter, Queen Esther?'

Esther was silent. Pitt was half-indignant; and then he caught the shimmer of something like moisture in the eyes, which were looking away from him to the fire, and his mood changed.

'What is it, Esther?' he said kindly. 'Take a seat, your majesty, and

I'll do the same. I see there is some talking to be done here.'

He took the girl's hand and put her in her chair, and himself drew up another near. 'Now what's the matter, Esther? Have you forgotten me?'

'No,' she said. 'But I thought—perhaps—you had forgotten me.'

'What made you think that?'

'You were gone away,' she said, hesitating; 'you were busy; papa said'—

'What did he say?'

'He said, probably I would never see you much more.'

But here the tears came to view undeniably; welled up, and filled the eyes, and rolled over. Esther brushed them hastily away.

'And I hadn't the decency to write to you? Had that something to do with it?'

'I thought—if you *had* remembered me, you would perhaps have written, just a little word,' Esther confessed, with some hesitation and difficulty. Pitt was more touched and sorry than he would have supposed before that such a matter could make him.

'Look here, Esther,' he said. 'There are two or three things I want you to take note of. The first is, that you must never judge by appearances.'

'Why not?' asked Esther, considering him and this statement together.

'Because they are deceptive. They mislead.'

'Do they?'

'Very frequently.'

'What is one to judge by, then?'

'Depends. In this case, by your knowledge of the person concerned.'

Esther looked at him, and a warmer shine came into her eye.

'Yes,' she said, 'I thought it was not like you to forget. But then, papa said I would not be likely to see much more of you—ever'—(Esther got the words out with some difficulty, without, however, breaking down)—'and I thought, I had to get accustomed to doing without you—and I had better do it.'

'*Why* should you not see much more of me?' Pitt demanded energetically.

'You would be going away.'

'And coming back again!'

'But going to England, perhaps.'

'Who said that?'

'I don't know. I think Mrs. Dallas told papa.'

'Well, now look here, Queen Esther,' Pitt said, more moderately: 'I told you, in the first place, you are not to judge by appearances. Do you see that you have been mistaken in judging me?'

She looked at him, a look that moved him a good deal, there was so much wistfulness in it; so much desire revealed to find him what she had found him in times past, along with the dawning hope that she might.

'Yes,' said he, nodding, 'you have been mistaken, and I did not expect it of you, Queen Esther. I don't think I am changeable; but anyhow, I haven't changed towards you. I have but just got home this evening; and I ran away from home and my mother as soon as we had done supper, that I might come and see you.'

Esther smiled: she was pleased, he saw.

'And in the next place, as to that crotchet of your not seeing much more of me, I can't imagine how it

ever got up; but it isn't true, anyhow. I expect you'll see an immense deal of me. I may go some time to England; about that I can't tell; but if I go, I shall come back again, supposing I am alive. And now, do you see that it would be very foolish of you to try to get accustomed to doing without me? for I shall not let you do it.'

'I don't want to do it,' said Esther confidingly; 'for you know I have nobody else except you and papa.'

'What put such an absurd notion in your head! You a Stoic, Queen Esther! You look like it!'

'What is a Stoic?'

'The sort of people that bite a nail in two, and smile as if it were a stick of peppermint candy.'

'I didn't know there were any such people.'

'No, naturally. So it won't do for you to try to imitate them.'

'But I was not trying anything like that.'

'What were you trying to do, then?'

Esther hesitated.

'I thought—I must do without you; and so—I thought I had better not think about you.'

'Did you succeed?'

'Not very well. But—I suppose I could, in time.'

'See you don't! What do you think in that case *I* should do?'

'Oh, you!' said Esther; 'that is different. I thought you would not care.'

'Did you! You did me honour. Now, Queen Esther, let us understand this matter. I do care, and I am going to care, and I shall always care. Do you believe it?'

'I always believe what you say,' said the girl, with a happy change in her face, which touched Pitt again curiously. Somehow, the contrast between his own strong, varied, rich, and active life, with its abundance of resources and enjoyments, careless and satisfied,—and this little girl alone at home with her cranky father, and no variety or change or outlook or help, struck him painfully. It would hardly have struck most young men; but Pitt, with all his rollicking waywardness and self-pleasing, had a fine fibre in him which could feel things. Then Esther's nature, he knew, was one rich in possibilities; to which life was likely to bring great joy or great sorrow; more probably both.

'What book have you got there?' he asked suddenly.

'Book?—Oh, the Bible.'

'The Bible! That's something beyond your comprehension, isn't it?'

'No,' said Esther. 'What made you think it was?'

'Always heard it wasn't the thing for children. What set you at that, Queen Esther? Reading about your namesake?'

'I have read about her. I wasn't reading about her to-night.'

'What were you after, then?'

'It's mamma's Bible,' said Esther rather slowly; 'and she used to say it was the best place to go for comfort.'

'Comfort! What do you want comfort for, Esther?'

'Nothing, now,' she said, with a smile. 'I am so glad you are come!'

'What *did* you want comfort for, then?' said he, taking her hand, and holding it while he looked into her eyes.

'I don't know—papa had gone to bed, and I was alone—and somehow it seemed lonesome.'

'Will you go with me to-morrow after Christmas greens?'

'Oh, may I?' cried the girl, with such a flush of delight coming into eyes and cheeks and lips, that Pitt was almost startled.

'I don't think I could enjoy it unless you came. And then you will help me dress the rooms.'

'What rooms?'

'Our rooms at home. And now, what have you been doing since I have been away?'

All shadows were got rid of; and there followed a half-hour of most eager intercourse, questions and answers coming thick upon one another. Esther was curious to hear all that Pitt would tell her about his life and doings at college; and, nothing loath, Pitt gave it her. It interested him to watch the play of thought and interest in the child's features as he talked. She comprehended him, and she seemed to take in without difficulty the strange nature and conditions of his college world.

'Do you have to study hard?' she asked.

'That's as I please. One must study hard to be distinguished.'

'And you will be distinguished, won't you?'

'What do you think? Do you care about it?'

'Yes, I care,' said Esther slowly.

'You were not anxious about me?'

'No,' she said, smiling. 'Papa said you would be sure to distinguish yourself.'

'Did he? I am very much obliged to Colonel Gainsborough.'

'What for?'

'Why, for his good opinion.'

'But he couldn't help his opinion,' said Esther.

'Queen Esther,' said Pitt, laughing, 'I don't know about that. People sometimes hold opinions they have no business to hold, and that they would not hold, if they were not perverse-minded.'

Esther's face had all changed since he came in. The premature gravity and sadness was entirely dispersed; the eyes were full of beautiful light, the mouth taking a great many curves corresponding to as many alternations and shades of sympathy, and a slight colour of interest and pleasure had risen in the cheeks. If Pitt had vanity to gratify, it was gratified; but he had something better, he had a genuine kindness and liking for the little girl, which had suffered absolute pain, when he saw how his absence and silence had worked. Now the two were in full enjoyment of the old relations and the old intercourse, when the door opened, and Mrs. Barker's head appeared.

'Miss Esther, it's your time.'

'Time for what?' asked Pitt.

'It's my time for going to bed,' said Esther, rising. 'I'll come, Mrs. Barker.'

'Queen Esther, does that woman say what you are to do and not do?' said Pitt, in some indignation.

'Oh no; but papa. He likes me not to be up later than nine o'clock.'

'What has Barker to do with it? I think she wants putting in her place.'

'She always goes with me and attends to me. Yes, I must go,' said Esther.

'But the colonel is not here to be disturbed.'

'He would be disturbed, if I didn't go at the right time. Good-night, Pitt.'

'Well, till to-morrow,' said the young man, taking Esther's hand and kissing it. 'But this is what I call a very summary proceeding. Queen Esther, does your majesty always do what you are expected to do, and take orders from everybody!'

'No; only from papa and you. Good-night, Pitt. Yes, I'll be ready to-morrow.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOSEGAY.

Pitt walked home, half amused at himself that he should take so much pains about this little girl, at the same time very firmly resolved that nothing should hinder him. Perhaps his liking for her was deeper than he knew; it was certainly real; while his kindly and generous temper responded promptly to every appeal that her affection and confidence made upon him. Affection and confidence are very winning things, even if not given by a beautiful girl who will soon be a beautiful woman; but looking out from Esther's innocent eyes, they went down into the bottom of young Dallas's heart. And besides, his nature was not only kind and noble; it was obstinate. Opposition, to him, in a thing he thought good to pursue, was like blows of a hammer on a nail; drove the purpose farther in.

So he made himself, it is true, very pleasant indeed to his parents at home, that night and the next morning; but then he went with Esther after cedar and hemlock branches. It may be asked, what opposition had he hitherto found to his intercourse with the colonel's daughter? And it must be answered, none. Nevertheless, Pitt felt it in the air, and it had the effect on him that the north wind and cold are said to have upon timber.

It was a day of days for Esther. First the delightful roving walk, and cutting the greens, which were bestowed in a cart that attended them; then the wonderful novelty of dressing the house. Esther had never seen anything of the kind before, which did not hinder her, however, from giving very good help. The hall, the sitting-room, the drawing-room, and even Pitt's particular, out-of-the-way work-room, all were wreathed and adorned and dressed up, each after its manner. For Pitt would not have one place a repetition of another. The bright berries of the winterberry and bittersweet were mingled with the dark shade of the evergreens in many ingenious ways; but the crowning triumph of art, perhaps, to Esther's eyes, was a motto in green letters, picked out with brilliant partridge berries, over the end of the sitting-room,—'Peace on earth.' Esther stood in delighted admiration before it, also pondering.

'Pitt,' she said at last, 'those partridge berries ought not to be in it.'

'Why not?' said Pitt, in astonishment. 'I think they set it off capitally.'

'Oh, so they do. I didn't mean that. They are beautiful, very. But you know what you said about them.'

'What did I say?'

'You said they were poison.'

'Poison! What then, Queen Esther? they won't hurt anybody up there. No partridge will get at them.'

'Oh no, it isn't that, Pitt; but I was thinking—Poison shouldn't be in that message of the angels.'

Pitt's face lighted up.

'Queen Esther,' said he solemnly, 'are you going to be *that* sort of person?'

'What sort of person?'

'One of those whose spirits are attuned to finer issues than their neighbours? They are the stuff that poets are made of. You are not a poet, are you?'

'No, indeed!' said Esther, laughing.

'Don't! I think it must be uncomfortable to have to do with a poet. You may notice, that in nature the dwellers on the earth have nothing to do with the dwellers in the air.'

'Except to be food for them,' said Esther.

'Ah! Well,—leaving that,—I should never have thought about the partridge berries in that motto, and my mother would never have thought of it. For all that, you are right. What shall we do? take 'em down?'

'Oh, no, they look so pretty. And besides, I suppose, Pitt, by and by, poison itself will turn to peace.'

'What?' said Pitt. 'What is that? What can you mean, Queen Esther?'

'Only,' said Esther a little doubtfully, 'I was thinking. You know, when the time comes there will be nothing to hurt or destroy in all the earth; the wild beasts will not be wild, and so I suppose poison will not be poison.'

'The wild beasts will not be wild? What *will* they be, then?'

'Tame.'

'Where did you get that idea?'

'It is in the Bible. It is not an idea.'

'Are you sure?'

'Certainly. Mamma used to read it to me and tell me about it.'

'Well, you shall show *me* the place some time. How do you like it, mother?'

This question being addressed to Mrs. Dallas, who appeared in the doorway. She gave great approval.

'Do you like the effect of the partridge berries?' Pitt asked.

'It is excellent, I think. They brighten it up finely.'

'What would you say if you knew they were poison?'

'That would not make any difference. They do no hurt unless you swallow them, I suppose.'

'Esther finds in them an emblem of the time when the message of peace shall have neutralized all the hurtful things in the world, and made them harmless.'

Mrs. Dallas's eye fell coldly upon Esther. 'I do not think the Church knows of any such time,' she answered, as she turned away. Pitt whistled for some time thereafter in silence.

The decorations were finished, and most lovely to Esther's eyes; then, when they were all done, she went home to tea. For getting the greens and putting them up had taken both the morning and the afternoon to accomplish. She went home gaily, with a brisk step and a merry heart, at the same time thinking busily.

Home, in its dull uniformity and stillness, was a contrast after the stir and freshness and prettiness of life in the Dallases's house. It struck Esther rather painfully. The room where she and her father took their supper was pleasant and homely indeed; a bright fire burned on the hearth, or in the grate, rather, and a bright lamp shone on the table; Barker had brought in the tea urn, and the business of preparing tea for her father was one that Esther always liked. But, nevertheless, the place approached too nearly a picture of still life. The urn hissed and bubbled, a comfortable sound; and now and then there was a falling coal or a jet of gas flame in the fire; but I think these things perhaps made the stillness more intense and more noticeable. The colonel sat on his sofa, breaking dry toast into his tea and thoughtfully swallowing it; he said nothing, unless to demand another cup; and Esther, though she had a healthy young appetite, could not quite stay the mental longing with the material supply. Besides, she was pondering something curiously.

'Papa,' she said at last, 'are you busy? May I ask you something?'

'Yes, my dear. What is it?'

'Papa, what is Christmas?'

The colonel looked up.

'What is Christmas?' he repeated. 'It is nothing, Esther; nothing at all. A name—nothing more.'

'Then, why do people think so much of Christmas?'

'They do not. Sensible people do not think anything of it. Christmas is nothing to me.'

'But, papa, why then does anybody make much of it? Mrs. Dallas has her house all dressed up with greens.'

'You had better keep away from Mrs. Dallas's.'

'But it looks so pretty, papa! Is there any harm in it?'

'Harm in what?'

'Dressing the house so? It is all hemlock wreaths, and cedar branches, and bright red berries here and there; and Pitt has put them up so beautifully! You can't think how pretty it all is. Is there any harm in that, papa?'

'Decidedly; in my judgment.'

'Why do they do it then, papa?'

'My dear, they have a foolish fancy that it is the time when Christ was born; and so in Romish times a special Popish mass was said on that day; and from that the twenty-fifth of December got its present name—Christ-mass; that is what it is.'

'Then He was not born the twenty-fifth of December?'

'No, nor in December at all. Nothing is plainer than that spring was the time of our Lord's coming into the world. The shepherds were watching their flocks by night; that could not have been in the depth of winter; it must have been in the spring.'

'Then why don't they have Christmas in springtime?'

'Don't ask *me*, my dear; I don't know. The thing began in the ages of ignorance, I suppose; and as all it means now is a time of feasting and jollity, the dead of winter will do as well as another time. But it is a Popish observance, my child; it is a Popish observance.'

'There's no harm in it, papa, is there? if it means only feasting and jollity, as you say.'

'There is always harm in superstition. This is no more the time of Christ's birth than any other day that you could choose; but there is a superstition about it; and I object to giving a superstitious reverence to what is nothing at all. Reverence the Bible as much as you please; you cannot too much; but do not put any ordinance of man, whether it be of the Popish church or any other, on a level with what the Bible commands.'

The colonel had finished his toast, and was turning to his book again.

'Pitt has been telling me of the way they keep Christmas in England,' Esther went on. 'The Yule log, and the games, and the songs, and the plays.'

'Godless ways,' said the colonel, settling himself to his reading,—'godless ways! It is a great deal better in this country, where they make nothing of Christmas. No good comes of those things.'

Esther would disturb her father no more by her words, but she went on pondering, unsatisfied. In any question which put Mrs. Dallas and her father on opposite sides, she had no doubt whatever that her father must be in the right; but it was a pity, for surely in the present case Mrs. Dallas's house had the advantage. The Christmas decorations had been so pretty! the look of them was so bright and festive! the walls she had round her at home were bare and stiff and cold. No doubt her father must be right, but it was a pity!

The next day was Christmas day. Pitt being in attendance on his father and mother, busied with the religious and other observances of the festival, Esther did not see him till the afternoon. Late in the day, however, he came, and brought in his hands a large bouquet of hothouse flowers. If the two had been alone, Esther would have greeted him and them with very lively demonstrations; as it was, it amused the young man to see the sparkle in her eye, and the lips half opened for a cry of joy, and the sudden flush on her cheek, and at the same time the quiet, unexcited demeanour she maintained. Esther rose indeed, but then stood silent and motionless and said not a word; while Pitt paid his compliments to her father. A new fire flashed from her eye when at last he approached her and offered her the flowers.

'Oh, Pitt! Oh, Pitt!' was all Esther with bated breath could say. The colonel eyed the bouquet a moment and then turned to his book. He was on his sofa, and seemingly gave no further heed to the

young people.

'Oh, Pitt, where *could* you get these?' The girl's breath was almost taken away.

'Only one place where I could get them. Don't you know old Macpherson's greenhouse?'

'But he don't let people in, I thought, in winter?'

'He let *me* in.'

'Oh, Pitt, how wonderful! What is this? Now you must tell me all the names. This beautiful white geranium with purple lines?'

'It's a *Pelargonium;* belongs to the Geraniaceae; this one they call Mecranthon. It's a beauty, isn't it? This little white blossom is myrtle; don't you know myrtle?'

'And this geranium—this purple one?'

'That is Napoleon, and this Louise, and this Belle. This red magnificence is a *Metrosideros;* this white flower, is—I forget its name; but *this*, this sweet one, is Daphne. Then here are two heaths; then this thick leaf is *Laurustinus*, and this other, with the red bud, *Camellia japonica*.'

'Oh, how perfectly beautiful!' exclaimed the delighted child. 'Oh, how perfectly beautiful! And this yellow flower?'

'*Coronilla*.'

'And this, is it a *red* wallflower?'

'A red wallflower; you are right.'

'How lovely! and how sweet! And these blue?'

'These little blue flowers are *Lobelia;* they are cousins of the cardinal flower; *that* is *Lobelia cardinalis;* these are *Lobelia erinus* and *Lobelia gracilis*.'

He watched the girl, for under the surprise and pleasure of his gift her face was itself but a nobler flower, all glowing and flashing and fragrant. With eyes dewy with delight she hung over the bouquet, almost trembling in her eagerness of joy. She set the flowers carefully in a vase, with tender circumspection, lest a leaf might be wronged by chance crowding or inadvertent handling. Pitt watched and read it all. He felt a great compassion for Esther. This creature, full of life and sensibility, receptive to every influence, at twelve years old shut up to the company of a taciturn and melancholy father and an empty house! What would ever become of her? There was the colonel now, on the sofa, attending only to his book; caring nothing for what was so moving his child. Nobody cared, or was anywhere to sympathize with her. And if she grew up so, shut up to herself, every feeling and desire repressed for want of expression or of somebody to express it to, how would her nature ever develop? would it not grow stunted and poor, compared with what it might be? He was sorry for his little playmate and friend; and it did the young fellow credit, I think, for at his age boys are not wont to be tenderly sympathetic towards anything, unless it be a beloved mother or sister. Pitt silently watched the putting the flowers in water, speculating upon the very unhopeful condition of this little human plant, and revolving schemes in his mind.

After he had gone, Colonel Gainsborough bade Esther show him her flowers. She brought the dish to his sofa. The colonel reviewed them with a somewhat jealous eye, did not seem to perceive their beauty, and told her to take them away again. But the next day, when Esther was not in the room, he examined the collection carefully, looking to see if there were anything that looked like contraband 'Christmas greens.' There were some sprigs of laurel and holly, that served to make the hues of the bouquet more varied and rich. *That* the colonel did not think of; all he saw was that they were bits of the objectionable 'Christmas.' Colonel Gainsborough carefully pulled them out and threw them in the fire; and nothing, I fear, saved the laurustinus and japonica from a like fate but their exquisite large blossoms. Esther was not slow to miss the green leaves abstracted from her vase.

'Papa,' she said, in some bewilderment, 'I think somebody has been at my flowers; there is some green gone.'

'I took out some sprigs of laurel and holly,' said her father. 'I cannot have any Christmas decorations here.'

'Oh, papa, Pitt did not mean them for any such thing!'

'Whether he meant it or no, I prefer not to have them there.'

Esther was silenced, but she watched her vase with rather anxious eyes after that time. However, there was no more meddling; the brilliant blossoms were allowed to adorn the place and Esther's life as long as they would, or could. She cherished them to the utmost of her knowledge, all the rather that Pitt was gone away again; she gave them fresh water, she trimmed off the unsightly dry leaves and withered blossoms; but all would not do; they lasted for a time, and then followed the law of their existence and faded. What Esther did then, was to fetch a large old book and lay the different sprigs, leaves or flowers, carefully among its pages and put them to dry. She loved every leaf of them. They were associated in her mind with all that pleasant interlude of Christmas: Pitt's coming, his kindness; their going after greens together, and dressing the house. The bright interlude was past; Pitt had gone back to college; and the little girl cherished the faded green things as something belonging to that good time which was gone. She would dry them carefully and keep them always, she thought.

A day or two later, her father noticed that the vase was empty, and asked Esther what she had done with her flowers?

'They were withered, papa; they were spoilt; I could not keep them.'

'What did you do with them?'

'Papa, I thought I would try to dry them.'

'Yes, and what did you do with them?'

'Papa, I put them in that old, odd volume of the Encyclopaedia.'

'Bring it here and let me see.'

Much wondering and a little discomfited, Esther obeyed. She brought the great book to the side of the sofa, and turned over the pages carefully, showing the dried and drying leaves. She had a great love to them; what did her father want with them?

'What do you propose to do with those things, when they are dry? They are staining the book.'

'It's an old book, papa; it is no harm, is it?'

'What are you going to do with them? Are they to remain here permanently?'

'Oh, no, sir; they are only put here to dry. I put a weight on the book. They will be dry soon.'

'And what then?'

'Then I will take them out, papa. It's an old book.'

'And what will you do with them?'

'I will keep them, sir.'

'What is the use of keeping the flowers after their beauty is gone? I do not think that is worth while.'

'*Some* of their beauty is gone,' said Esther, with a certain tenderness for the plants manifested in her manner,—'but I love them yet, papa.'

'That is not wise, my child. Why should you love a parcel of dry leaves? Love what is worthy to be loved. I think I would throw them all in the fire.'

'Oh, papa!'

'That's the best, my dear. They are only rubbish. I object to the hoarding of rubbish. It is a poor habit.'

The colonel turned his attention again to his book, and perhaps did not even remark how Esther sat with a disconsolate face on the floor, looking at her condemned treasures. He would not have understood it if he had seen. In his nature there was no key to the feeling which now was driving the tears into Esther's eyes and making her heart swell. Like many men, and many women, for the matter of that, Colonel Gainsborough had very little power of association. He would indeed have regarded with sacred reverence anything that had once belonged to his wife, down to her shoe; in that one instance the tension of feeling was strong enough to make the chords tremble under the lightest touch. In other relations, what did it matter? They were nothing to him; and if Colonel Gainsborough made his own estimate the standard of the worth of things, he only did what I am afraid we all do, more or less. At

any rate, his was not one of those finer strung natures which recognise the possibility of worlds of knowledge and feeling not open to themselves. It is also just possible that he divined his daughter's sentiment in regard to the flowers enough to be jealous of it.

But Esther did not immediately move to obey his order. She sat on the floor with the big book before her, the open page showing a half dry blossom of the Mecranthon geranium which was still to her eyes very beautiful. And all the associations of that pleasant Christmas afternoon when Pitt had brought it and told her what its name was, rose up before her. She was exceedingly unwilling to burn it. The colonel perhaps had a guess that he had given a hard command; for he did not look again at Esther or speak to her, or take any notice of her delay of obedience. That she would obey he knew; and he let her take her time. So he did not see the big tears that filled her eyes, nor the quiet way in which she got rid of them; while the hurt, sorrowful, regretful look on her face would have certainly moved Pitt to indignation if he had been where he could see it. I am afraid, if the colonel had seen it, *he* would have been moved quite in a different way. Not to anger, indeed; Colonel Gainsborough was never angry with his child, as truly she never gave him cause; but I think he would privately have applauded the wisdom of his regulation, which removed such objects of misplaced sentiment out of the way of doing further harm. And Esther sat and looked at the Mecranthon, brushed away her tears softly, swallowed her regrets and unwillingness, and finally rose up, carried her book to the fire, and one by one, turning the leaves, took out her drying favourites and threw them into the glowing grate. It was done; and she carried the book away and put it in its old place.

But a week later it happened that Esther bethought her to open the Encyclopaedia again, to look at *the marks her flowers had left* on the pages. For they *had* stained the book a little, and here and there she could discern the outline of a sprig, and trace a faint dash of colour left behind by the petals of some flower rich in its dyes. If it appears from this that the colonel was right in checking the feeling which ran to such extremes, I cannot help that; I am reporting the facts. Esther turned over the book from one place to another where her flowers had lain. Here had been heath; there coronilla; here—oh, here was *still* the wallflower! Dried beautifully; delicate and unbroken, and perfect and sweet. There was nothing else left, but here was the wallflower. A great movement of joy filled Esther's heart; then came a doubt. Must this be burned too? Would this one little sprig matter? She had obeyed her father, and destroyed all the rest of the bouquet; and this wallflower had been preserved without her knowledge. Since it had been saved, might it not be saved? Esther looked, studied, hesitated; and finally could not make up her mind without further order to destroy this last blossom. She never thought of asking her father's mind about it. The child knew instinctively that he would not understand her; a sorrowful thing for a child to know; it did not occur to her that if he *had* understood her feeling, he would have been still less likely to favour it. She kept the wallflower, took it away from its exposed situation in the Encyclopaedia, and put it in great safety among her own private possessions.

CHAPTER IX.

WANT OF COMFORT.

The months were many and long before there came another break in the monotony of Esther's life. The little girl was thrown upon her own ressources, and that is too hard a position for her years, or perhaps for any years. She had literally no companion but her father, and it is a stretch of courtesy to give the name to him. Another child would have fled to the kitchen for society, at least to hear human voices. Esther did not. The instincts of a natural high breeding restrained her, as well as the habits in which she had been brought up. Mrs. Barker waited upon her at night and in the morning, at her dressing and undressing: sometimes Esther went for a walk, attended by Christopher; the rest of the time she was either alone, or in the large, orderly room where Colonel Gainsborough lay upon the sofa, and there Esther was rather more alone than anywhere else. The colonel was reading; reverence obliged her to keep quiet; he drew long breaths of weariness or sadness every now and then, which every time came like a cloud over such sunshine as she had been able to conjure up; and besides all that, notwithstanding the sighs and the reading, her father always noticed and knew what she was doing. Now it is needless to say that Colonel Gainsborough had forgotten what it was to be a child; he was therefore an incompetent critic of a child's doings or judge of a child's wants. He had an impatience for what he called a 'waste of time;' but Esther was hardly old enough to busy herself exclusively with history and geography; and the little innocent amusements to which she had recourse stood but a poor chance under his censorship. 'A waste of time, my daughter,' he would say, when he saw Esther busy perhaps with some childish fancy work, or reading something from which she

promised herself entertainment, but which the colonel knew promised nothing more. A word from him was enough. Esther would lay down her work or put away the book, and then sit in forlorn uncertainty what she should do to make the long hours drag less heavily. History and geography and arithmetic she studied, in a sort, with her father; and Colonel Gainsborough was not a bad teacher, so far as the progress of his scholar was concerned. So far as her pleasure went, the lessons were very far behind those she used to have with Pitt. And the recitations were short. Colonel Gainsborough gave his orders, as if he were on a campaign, and expected to see them fulfilled. Seeing them fulfilled, he turned his attention at once to something else.

Esther longed for her former friend and instructor with a longing which cannot be put into words. Yet longing is hardly the expression for it; she was not a child to sit and wish for the unattainable; it was rather a deep and aching sense of want. She never forgot him. If Pitt's own mother thought of him more constantly, she was the only person in the world of whom that was true. Pitt sometimes wrote to Colonel Gainsborough, and then Esther treasured up every revelation and detail of the letter and added them to what she knew already, so as to piece out as full an image as possible of Pitt's life and doings. But how the child wanted him, missed him, and wept for him! Though of the latter not much; she was not a child given to crying. The harder for her, perhaps.

The Dallases, husband and wife, were not much seen at this time in the colonel's quiet house. Mr. Dallas did come sometimes of an evening and sat and talked with its master; and he was not refreshing to Esther, not even when the talk ran upon his absent son; for the question had begun to be mooted publicly, whether Pitt should go to England to finish his education. It began to be spoken of in Pitt's letters too; he supposed it would come to that, he said; his mother and father had set their hearts on Oxford or Cambridge. Colonel Gainsborough heartily approved. It was like a knell of fate to Esther.

They were alone together one day, as usual, the father and daughter; and silence had reigned a long while in the room, when Esther broke it. She had been sitting poring over a book; now she looked up with a very burdened brow and put her question.

'Papa, how do people get comfort out of the Bible?'

'Eh—what, my dear?' said the colonel, rousing his attention.

'What must one do, to get comfort out of the Bible?'

'Comfort?' repeated the colonel, now looking round at her. 'Are you in want of comfort, Esther?'

'I would like to know how to find it, papa, if it is here.'

'Here? What have you got there? Come where I can see you.'

Esther drew near, unwillingly. 'It is the Bible, papa.'

'And *what* is it you want from the Bible?—Comfort?'

'Mamma used to say one could get comfort in the Bible, and I wanted to know how.'

'Did she?' said the colonel with grave thoughtfulness. But he said no more. Esther waited. Her father's tone had changed; he seemed to have gone back into regions of the past, and to have forgotten her. The minutes ran on, without her daring to remind him that her question was still unanswered. The colonel at last, with a long sigh, took up his book again; then seemed to bethink him, and turned to Esther.

'I do not know, my dear,' he said. 'I never could get it there myself, except in a very modified way. Perhaps it is my fault.'

The subject was disposed of, as far as the colonel was concerned. Esther could ask him no more. But that evening, when Mrs. Barker was attending upon her, she made one more trial.

'Barker, do you know the Bible much?'

'The Bible, Miss Esther!'

'Yes. Have you read it a great deal? do you know what is in it?'

'Well, Miss Esther, I ain't a heathen. I do read my Bible, to be sure, more or less, all my life, so to speak; which is to say, ever since I could read at all.'

'Did you ever find comfort in it?'

'Comfort, Miss Esther? Did I ever find *comfort* in it, did ye ask?' the housekeeper repeated, very much puzzled. 'Well, I can't just say. Mebbe I never was just particlarly lookin' for that article when I went to my Bible. I don't remember as I never was in no special want o' comfort—sich as should set me to lookin' for it; 'thout it was when missus died.'

'*She* said, one could find comfort in the Bible,' Esther went on, with a tender thrill in the voice that uttered the beloved pronoun.

'Most likely it's so, Miss Esther. What my mistress said was sure and certain true; but myself, it is something which I have no knowledge of.'

'How do you suppose one could find comfort in the Bible, Barker? How should one look for it?'

''Deed, Miss Esther, your questions is too hard for me. I'd ask the colonel, if I was you.'

'But I ask you, if you can tell me.'

'And that's just which I ain't wise enough for. But when I don't know where a thing is, Miss Esther, I allays begins at one end and goes clean through to the other end; and then, if the thing ain't there, why I knows it, and if it is there, I gets it.'

'It would take a good while,' said Esther musingly, 'to go through the whole Bible from one end to the other.'

'That's which I am thinkin', Miss Esther. I'm thinkin' one might forget what one started to look for, before one found it. But there! the Bible ain't just like a store closet, neither, with all the things ticketed on shelves. I'm thinkin' a body must do summat besides look in it.'

'What?'

'I don't know, Miss Esther; I ain't wise, no sort o' way, in sich matters; but I was thinkin' the folks I've seen, as took comfort in their Bibles, they was allays saints.'

'Saints! What do you mean by that?'

'That's what they was,' said Barker decidedly. 'They was saints. I never was no saint myself, but I've seen 'em. You see, mum, I've allays had summat else on my mind, and my hands, I may say; and one can't attend to more'n one thing at once in this world. I've allays had my bread to get and my mistress to serve; and I've attended to my business and done it. That's which I've done.'

'Couldn't you do that and be a saint too?'

'There's no one can't be two different people at one and the same time,
Miss Esther. Which I would say, if there is, it ain't me.'

If this was not conclusive, at least it was unanswerable by Esther, and the subject was dropped. Whether Esther pursued the search after comfort, no one knew; indeed, no one knew she wanted it. The colonel certainly not; he had taken her question to be merely a speculative one. It did sometimes occur to Barker that her young charge moped; or, as she expressed it to Mr. Bounder, 'didn't live as a child had a right to;' but it was not her business, and she had spoken truly: her business was the thing Mrs. Barker minded exclusively.

So Esther went on living alone, and working her way, as she could, alone, out of all the problems that suggested themselves to her childish mind. What sort of a character would grow up in this way, in such a close mental atmosphere and such absence of all training or guiding influences, was an interesting question, which, however, never presented itself before Colonel Gainsborough's mind. That his child was all right, he was sure; indeed how could she go wrong? She was her mother's daughter, in the first place; and in the next place, his own; *noblesse oblige*, in more ways than one; and then—she saw nobody! That was a great safeguard. But the one person whom Esther did see, out of her family, or I should say the two persons, sometimes speculated about her; for to them the subject had a disagreeable practical interest. Mr. Dallas came now and then to sit and have a chat with the colonel; and more rarely Mrs. Dallas called for a civil visit of enquiry; impelled thereto partly by her son's instances and reminders. She communicated her views to her husband.

'She is living a dreadful life, for a child. She will be everything that is unnatural and premature.'

Mr. Dallas made no answer.

'And I wish she was out of Seaforth; for as we cannot get rid of her, we must send away our own boy.'

'Humph!' said her husband. 'Are you sure? Is that a certain necessity?'

'Hildebrand, you would like to have him finish his studies at Oxford?' said his wife appealingly.

'Yes, to be sure; but what has that to do with the other thing? You started from that little girl over there.'

'Do you want Pitt to make her his wife?'

'No!' with quiet decision.

'He'll do it; if you do not take all the better care.'

'I don't see that it follows.'

'You do not see it, Hildebrand, but I do. Trust me.'

'What do you reason from?'

'You won't trust me? Well, the girl will be very handsome; she'll be *very* handsome, and that always turns a young man's head; and then, you see, she is a forlorn child, and Pitt has taken it in to his head to replace father and mother, and be her good genius. I leave you to judge if that is not a dangerous part for him to play. He writes to me every now and then about her.'

Not very often; but Mrs. Dallas wanted to scare her husband. And so there came to be more and more talk about Pitt's going abroad; and Esther felt as if the one spot of brightness in her sky were closing up for ever. If Pitt did go,—what would be left?

It was a token of the real strength and fine properties of her mental nature, that the girl did not, in any true sense, *mope*. In want of comfort she was; in sad want of social diversion and cheer, and of variety in her course of thought and occupation; she suffered from the want; but Esther did not sink into idleness and stagnation. She worked like a beaver; that is, so far as diligence and purpose characterize those singular animals' working. She studied resolutely and eagerly the things she had studied with Pitt, and which he had charged her to go on with. His influence was a spur to her constantly; for he had wished it, and he would be coming home by and by for the long vacation, and then he would want to see what she had done. Esther was not quite alone, so long as she had the thought of Pitt and of that long vacation with her. If he should go to England,—then indeed it would be loneliness. Now she studied, at any rate, having that spur; and she studied things also with which Pitt had had no connection; her Bible, for instance. The girl busied herself with fancy work too, every kind which Mrs. Barker could teach her, and her father did not forbid. And in one other pleasure her father was helpful to her. Esther had been trying to draw some little things, working eagerly with her pencil and a copy, absorbed in her endeavours and in the delight of partial success; when one day her father came and looked over her shoulder. That was enough. Colonel Gainsborough was a great draughtsman; the old instinct of his art stirred in him; he took Esther's pencil from her hand and showed her how she ought to use it, and then went on to make several little studies for her to work at. From that beginning, the lessons went forward, to the mutual benefit of father and daughter. Esther developed a great aptitude for the art, and an enormous zeal. Whatever her father told her it would be good for her to do, in that connection, Esther did untiringly—ungrudgingly. It was the one exquisite pleasure which each day contained for her; and into it she gathered and poured her whole natural, honest, childlike desire for pleasure. No matter if all the rest of the day were work, the flower of delight that blossomed on this one stem was sweet enough to take the place of a whole nosegay, and it beautified Esther's whole life. It hardly made the child less sober outwardly, but it did much to keep her inner life fresh and sound.

Pitt this time did not allow it to be supposed that he had forgotten his friends. Once in a while he wrote to Colonel Gainsborough, and sent a message or maybe included a little note for Esther herself. These messages and notes regarded often her studies; but toward the end of term there began to be mention made of England also in them; and Esther's heart sank very low. What would be left when Pitt was gone to England?

CHAPTER X.

THE BLESSING.

So spring came, and then high summer, and the time when the collegian was expected home. The roses were blossoming and the pinks were sweet, in the old-fashioned flower garden in front of the house; and the smell of the hay came from the fields where mowers were busy, and the trill of a bob-o'-link sounded in the meadow. It was evening when Pitt made his way from his father's house over to the colonel's; and he found Esther sitting in the verandah, with all this sweetness about her. The house was old and country fashioned; the verandah was raised but a step above the ground,—low, and with slim little pillars to support its roof; and those pillars were all there was between Esther and the flowers. At one side of the house there was a lawn; in front, the space devoted to the flowers was only a small strip of ground, bordered by the paling fence and the road. Pitt opened a small gate, and came up to the house, through an army of balsams, hollyhocks, roses, and honeysuckles, and balm and southernwood. Esther had risen to her feet, and with her book in her hand, stood awaiting him. Her appearance struck him as in some sense new. She looked pale, he thought, and the mental tension of the moment probably made it true, but it was not merely that. There was a refined, ethereal gravity and beauty, which it is very unusual to see in a girl of thirteen; an expression too spiritual for years which ought to be full of joyous and careless animal life. Nevertheless it was there, and it struck Pitt not only with a sense of admiration, but almost with compassion; for what sort of apart and introverted life could it be which had called forth such a look upon so young a face? No child living among children could ever be like that; nor any child living among grown people who took proper care of her; unless indeed it were an exceptional case of disease, which sets apart from the whole world; but Esther was perfectly well.

'I've been watching for you,' she said as she gave him her hand, and a very lovely smile of welcome. 'I have been looking for you ever so long.'

I don't know what made Pitt do it, and I do not think he knew; he had never done it before; but as he took the hand, and met the smile, he bent down and pressed his lips to those innocent, smiling ones. I suppose it was a very genuine expression of feeling; the fact that he might not know *what* feeling is nothing to the matter.

Esther coloured high, and looked at him in astonishment. It was a flush that meant pleasure quite as much as surprise.

'I came as soon as I could,' he said.

'Oh, I knew you would! Sit down here, Pitt. Papa is sleeping; he had a headache. I am so glad you have come!'

'How is the colonel?'

'He says he's not well. I don't know.'

'And, Queen Esther, how are you?'

'Oh, I'm well.'

'Are you sure?'

'Why, certainly, Pitt. What should be the matter with me? There is never anything the matter with me.'

'I should say, a little too much thinking,' said Pitt, regarding her.

'Oh, but I have to think,' said Esther soberly.

'Not at all necessary, nor in my opinion advisable. There are other people in the world whose business it is to do the thinking. Leave it to them. You cannot do it, besides.'

'Who will do my thinking for me?' asked Esther, with a look and a smile which would have better fitted twice her years; a look of wistful inquiry, a smile of soft derision.

'I will,' said Pitt boldly.

'Will you? Oh, Pitt, I would like to ask you something! But not now,' she added immediately. 'Another time. Now, tell me about college.'

He did tell her. He gave her details of things he told no one else. He allowed her to know of his successes, which Pitt was too genuinely modest and manly to enlarge upon even to his father and mother; but to these childish eyes and this implicit trusting, loving, innocent spirit, he gave the infinite pleasure of knowing what he had secretly enjoyed alone, in the depths of his own mind. It pleased him to share it with Esther. As for her, her interest and sympathy knew no bounds.

Pitt, however, while he was talking about his own doings and affairs, was thinking about Esther. She had changed, somehow. That wonderful stage of life, 'where the brook and river meet,' she had hardly yet reached; she was really a little girl still, or certainly ought to be. What was then this delicate, grave, spiritual look in the face, the thoughtful intelligence, the refinement of perception, so beyond her years? No doubt it was due to her living alone, with a somewhat gloomy father, and being prematurely thrown upon a woman's needs and a woman's resources. Pitt recognised the fact that his own absence might have had something to do with it. So long as he had been with her, teaching her and making a daily breeze in her still life, Esther had been in a measure drawn out of herself, and kept from brooding. And then, beyond all, the natural organization of this fine creature was of the rarest; strong and delicate at once, of large capacities and with correspondingly large requirements; able for great enjoyment, and open also to keen suffering. He could see it in every glance of the big, thoughtful eyes, and every play of the sensitive lips, which had, however, a trait of steadfastness and grave character along with their sensitiveness. Pitt looked, and wondered, and admired. This child's face was taking on already a fascinating power of expression, quite beyond her years; and that was because the inner life was developing too soon into thoughtfulness and tenderness, and too early realizing the meaning of life. Nothing could be more innocent of self-consciousness than Esther; she did not even know that Pitt was regarding her with more attention than ordinary, or, if she knew, she took it as quite natural. He saw that, and so indulged himself. What a creature this would be, by and by! But in the meantime, what was to become of her? Without a mother, or a sister, or a brother; all alone; with nobody near who even knew what she needed. What would become of her? It was not stagnation that was to be feared, but too vivid life; not that she would be mentally stunted, but that the growth would be to exhaustion, or lack the right hardening processes, and so be unhealthy.

The colonel awoke after a while, and welcomed his visitor as truly, if not as warmly, as Esther had done. He always had liked young Dallas; and now, after so long living alone, the sight of him was specially grateful. Pitt must stay and have tea; and the talk between him and the colonel went on unflaggingly. Esther said nothing now; but Pitt watched her, and saw how she listened; saw how her eyes accompanied him, and her lips gave their silent tokens of understanding. Meanwhile she poured out tea for the gentlemen; did it with quiet grace and neatness, and was quick to see and attend to any little occasion for hospitable care.

The old life began again now in good measure. Esther had no need to beg Pitt to come often; he came constantly. He took up her lessons, as of old, and carried them on vigorously; rightly thinking that good sound mental work was wholesome for the child. He joined her in drawing, and begged the colonel to give him instruction too; and they studied the coins in the boxes with fresh zeal. And they had glorious walks, and most delightful botanizing, in the early summer mornings, or when the sun had got low in the western sky. Sometimes Pitt came with a little tax-cart and took Esther a drive. It was all delight; I cannot tell which thing gave her most pleasure. To study with Pitt, or to play with Pitt, one was as good as the other; and the summer days of that summer were not fuller of fruit-ripening sun, than of blessed, warm, healthy, and happy influences for this little human plant. Her face grew bright and joyous, though in moments when the talk took a certain sober tone Pitt could see the light or the shadow, he hardly knew which to call it, of that too early spiritual insight and activity come over it.

One day, soon after his arrival, he asked her what she had been thinking about so much. They were sitting on the verandah again, to be out of the way of the colonel; they were taking up lessons, and had just finished an examination in history. Pitt let the book fall.

'You said the other day, Queen Esther, that you were under the necessity of thinking. May I ask what you have been thinking about?'

'Did I say that?'

'Something like it.'

Esther's face became sober. 'Everybody must think, I suppose, Pitt?'

'That is a piece of your innocence. A great many people get along quite comfortably without doing any thinking at all.'

'One might as well be a squash,' said Esther gravely. 'I don't see how they can live so.'

'Some people think too much.'

'Why?'

'I don't know why, I am sure. It's their nature, I suppose.'

'What harm, Pitt?'

'You keep a fire going anywhere, and it will burn up what is next to it.'

'Is thought like fire?'

'So far, it is. What were you thinking about, Queen Esther?'

'I had been wanting to ask you about it, Pitt,' the girl said, a little with the air of one who is rousing herself up to give a confidence. 'I was looking for something and I did not know where to find it.'

'Looking for what?'

'I remembered, mamma said people could always find comfort in the Bible; but I did not know how to look for it.'

'Comfort, Queen Esther!' said Pitt, rousing himself now; 'you were not in want of that article, were you?'

'After you were gone, you know—I hadn't anybody left. And oh, Pitt, are you going to—England?'

'One thing at a time. Tell me about this extraordinary want of comfort, at twelve years old. That is improper, Queen Esther!'

'Why?' she said, casting up to him a pair of such wistful, sensitive, beautiful eyes, that the young man was almost startled.

'People at your age ought to have comfort enough to give away to other people.'

'I shouldn't think they could, always,' said Esther quaintly.

'What is the matter with you?'

Esther looked down, a little uneasily. She felt that Pitt ought to have known. And he did know; however, he thought it advisable to have things brought out into the full light and put into form; hoping they might so be easier dealt with. Esther's next words were hardly consecutive, although perfectly intelligible.

'I know, of course, you cannot stay here always.'

'Of course. But then I shall always be coming back.'

Esther sighed. She was thinking that the absences were long and the times of being at home short; but what was the use of talking about it? That lesson, that words do not change the inevitable, she had already learned. Pitt was concerned.

'Where did you say your highness went to look for comfort?'

'In the Bible. Oh, yes, that was what I wanted your help about. I did not know how to look; and papa said he didn't; or I don't know if he *said* exactly that, but it came to the same thing. And then I asked Barker.'

'Was she any wiser?'

'No. She said her way of finding anything was to begin at one end and go through to the other; so I tried that. I began at the beginning; and I read on; but I found nothing until—I'll show you,' she said, suddenly breaking off and darting away; and in two minutes more she came back with her Bible. She turned over the leaves eagerly.

'Here, Pitt,—I came to this. Now what does it mean?'

She gave him the volume open at the sixth chapter of Numbers; in the end of which is the prescribed form for the blessing of the children of Israel. Pitt read the words to himself.

'The Lord bless thee, and keep thee. 'The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. 'The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.'

Esther waited till she saw he had read them through.

'Now, Pitt, what does that mean?'

'Which?'

'That last: "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." What does "lift up his countenance upon thee" mean?'

What *did* it mean? Pitt asked himself the question for the first time in his life. He was quite silent.

'You see,' said Esther quaintly, after a pause,—'you see, *that* would be comfort.'

Pitt was still silent.

'Do you understand it, Pitt?'

'*Understand* it, Esther!' he said, knitting his brows, 'No. Nobody could do that, except—the people that had it. But I think I see what it means.'

'The people "that had it"? That had what?'

'This wonderful thing.'

'What wonderful thing?'

'Queen Esther, you ought to ask your father.'

'I can't ask papa,' said the little girl. 'If ever I speak to him of comfort, he thinks directly of mamma. I cannot ask him again.'

'And I am all your dependence?' he said half lightly.

'I mustn't depend upon you either. Only, now you are here, I thought I would ask you.'

'You ought to have a better counsellor. However, perhaps I can tell what you want to know, in part. Queen Esther, was your mother, or your father, ever seriously displeased with you?'

Esther reflected, a little astonished, and then said no.

'I suppose not!' said Pitt. 'Then you don't know by experience what it would be, to have either of them refuse to look at you or smile upon you?—hide their face from you, in short?'

'Why, no! never.'

'You're a happy girl.'

'But what has that to do with it?'

'Nothing to do with it; it is the very contrast and opposite, in fact. Don't you see? "Lift up the light of thy countenance;"—you know what the "light" of a smiling, loving face of approval is? You know *that*, Queen Esther?'

'That?' repeated Esther breathlessly. 'Yes, I know; but this is God.'

'Yes, and I do not understand; but that is what it means.'

'You don't understand!'

'No. How should I? But that is what it means. Something that answers to what among us a bright face of love is, when it smiles upon us. That is "light," isn't it?'

'Yes,' said Esther. 'But how can this be, Pitt?'

'I cannot tell. But that is what it means. "The Lord make His face to shine upon thee." They are very fine words.'

'Then I suppose,' said Esther slowly, 'if anybody had *that*, he wouldn't want comfort?'

'He wouldn't be without it, you mean? Well, I should think he would not. "The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."'

'But I don't understand, Pitt.'

'No, Queen Esther. This is something beyond you and me.'

'How can one come to understand?'

Pitt was silent a minute, looking down at the words. 'I do not know,' he said. 'That is a question. It is a look of favour and love described here; but of course it would not give peace, unless the person receiving it knew he had it. How that can be, I do not see.'

Both were silent a little while.

'Well,' said Esther, 'you have given me a great deal of help.'

'How?'

'Oh, you have told me what this means,' said the child, hanging over the words, which Pitt still held.

'That does not give it to you.'

'No; but it is a great deal, to know what it means,' said Esther, in a tone which Pitt felt had a good element of hopefulness in it.

'What are you going to do about it?'

Esther lifted her head and looked at him. It was one of those looks which were older than her years; far-reaching, spiritual, with an intense mixture of pathos and hope in her eyes.

'I shall go on trying to get it,' she said. 'You know, Pitt, it is different with you. You go out into the world, and you have everything you want; but I am here quite alone.'

CHAPTER XI.

DISSENT.

The summer months were very rich in pleasure, for all parties; even Colonel Gainsborough was a little roused by the presence of his young friend, and came much more than usual out of his reserve. So that the conversations round the tea-table, when Pitt made one of their number, were often lively and varied; such as Esther had hardly known in her life before. The colonel left off his taciturnity; waked up, as it were; told old campaigning stories, and gave out stores of information which few people knew he possessed. The talks were delightful, on subjects natural and scientific, historical and local and picturesque. Esther luxuriated in the new social life which had blossomed out suddenly at home, perhaps with even an intensified keen enjoyment from the fact that it was so transient a blossoming; a fact which the child knew and never for a moment forgot. The thought was always with her, making only more tender and keen the taste of every day's delights. And Pitt made the days full. With a mixture of motives, perhaps, which his own mind did not analyze, he devoted himself very much to the lonely little girl. She went with him in his walks and in his drives; he sat on the verandah with her daily and gave her lessons, and almost daily he went in to tea with her afterwards, and said that Christopher grew the biggest raspberries in 'town.' Pitt professed himself very fond of raspberries. And then would come one of those rich talks between him and the colonel; and when Pitt went home afterwards he would reflect with satisfaction that he had given Esther another happy day. It was true; and he never guessed what heart-aches the little girl went through, night after night, in anticipation of the days that were coming. She did not shed tears about it, usually; tears might have been more wholesome. Instead, Esther would stand at her window looking out into the moonlit garden, or sit on the edge of her bed staring down at the floor; with a dry ache at her heart, such as we are wont to say a young thing like her should not know. And indeed only one here and there has a nature deep and fine-strung enough to be susceptible of it.

The intensification of this pain was the approaching certainty that Pitt was going to England. Esther did not talk of it, rarely asked a question; nevertheless she heard enough now and then to make her sure what was corning. And, in fact, if anything had been wanting to sharpen up Mrs. Dallas's conviction that such a step was necessary, it would have been the experience of this summer. She wrought upon her husband, till himself began to prick up his ears and open his eyes; and between them they agreed that Pitt had better go. Some evils are easier nipped in the bud; and this surely was one, for Pitt was known to be a persistent fellow, if once he took a thing in his head. And though Mr. Dallas laughed, at the same time he trembled. It was resolved that Pitt should make his next term at Oxford. The thought was not for a moment to be entertained, that all Mr. Dallas's money, and all the pretensions properly growing out of it, should be wasted on the quite penniless daughter of a retired

army officer. For in this world the singular rule obtaining is, that the more you have the more you want.

One day Pitt came, as he still often did, to read with the colonel; more for the pleasure of the thing, and for the colonel's own sake, than for any need still existing. He found the colonel alone. It was afternoon of a warm day in August, and Esther had gone with Mrs. Barker to get blackberries, and was not yet returned. The air came in faintly through the open windows, a little hindered by the blinds which were drawn to moderate the light.

'How do you do, sir, to-day?' the young man asked, coming in with something of the moral effect of a breeze. 'This isn't the sort of weather one would like for going on a forlorn-hope expedition.'

'In such an expedition it doesn't matter much what weather you have,' said the colonel; 'and I do not think it matters much to me. I am much the same in all weathers; only that I think I am failing gradually. Gradually, but constantly.'

'You do not show it, colonel.'

'No, perhaps not; but I feel it.'

'You do not care about hearing me read to-day, perhaps?'

'Yes, I do; it distracts me; but first there is a word I want to say to you, Pitt.'

He did not go on at once to say it, and the young man waited respectfully. The colonel sighed, passed his hand over his brow once or twice, sighed again.

'You are going to England, William?'

'They say so, sir. My father and mother seem to have set their minds on it.'

'Quite right, too. There's no place in the world like Oxford or
Cambridge for a young man. Oxford or Cambridge,—which, William?'

'Oxford, sir, I believe.'

'Yes; that would suit your father's views best. How do you expect to get there? Will you go this year?'

'Oh yes, sir; that seems to be the plan. My father is possessed with the fear that I may grow to be not enough of an Englishman—or too much of an American; I don't know which.'

'I think you will be a true Englishman. Yet, if you live here permanently, you will have to be the other thing too. A man owes it to the country of his adoption; and I think your father has no thought of returning to England himself?'

'None at all, sir.'

'How will you go? You cannot take passage to England.'

'That can be managed easily enough. Probably I should take passage in a ship bound for Lisbon; from there I could make my way somehow to London.'

For, it may be mentioned, the time was the time of the last American struggle with England, early in the century; and the high seas were not safe and quiet as now.

The colonel sighed again once or twice, and repeated that gesture with his hand over his brow.

'I suppose there is no telling how long you will be gone, if you once go?'

'I cannot come home every vacation,' said Pitt lightly. 'But since my father and mother have made up their minds to that, I must make up mine.'

'So you will be gone years,' said the colonel thoughtfully. 'Years. I shall not be here when you return, William.'

'You are not going to change your habitation, sir?' said the young man, though he knew what the other meant well enough.

'Not for any other upon earth,' said the colonel soberly. 'But I shall not be here, William. I am failing constantly. Slowly, if you please, but constantly. I am not as strong as I look, and I am far less well than your father believes. I should know best; and I know I am failing. If you remain in England three years, or even two years, when you come back I shall not be here.'

'I hope you are mistaken, colonel.'

'I am not mistaken.'

There was silence a few minutes. Pitt did not place unqualified trust in this judgment, even although, as he could not deny, the colonel might be supposed to know best. He doubted the truth of the prognostication; yet, on the other hand, he could not be sure that it was false. What if it were not false?

'I hope you are mistaken, colonel,' he said again; 'but if you are right—if it should be so as you fear'—

'I do not fear it,' put in the colonel, interrupting him.

'Not for yourself; but if it should be so,—what will become of Esther?'

'It was of her I wished to speak. She will be here.'

'Here in this house? She would be alone.'

'I should be away. But Mrs. Barker would look after her.'

'Barker!' Pitt echoed. 'Yes, Mrs. Barker could take care of the house and of the cooking, as she does now; but Esther would be entirely alone, colonel.'

'I have no one else to leave her with,' said the colonel gloomily.

'Let my mother take charge of her, in such a case. My mother would take care of her, as if Esther were her own. Let her come to my mother, colonel!'

'No,' said the colonel quietly, 'that would not be best. I am sure of Mrs. Dallas's kindness; but I shall leave Esther under the care of Barker and her brother. Christopher will manage the place, and keep everything right outside; and Barker will do her part faithfully. Esther will be safe enough so, for a while. She is a child yet. But then, William, I'll take a promise from you, if you will give it.'

'I will give any promise you like, sir. What is it?' said Pitt, who had never been in a less pleasant mood towards his friend. In fact he was entirely out of patience with him. 'What promise do you want, colonel?' he repeated.

'When you come back from England, Will, if I am no longer here, I want you to ask Esther for a sealed package of papers, which I shall leave with her. Then open the package; and the promise I want from you is that you will do according to the wishes you will find there expressed.'

Pitt looked at the colonel in much astonishment. 'May I not know what those wishes regard, sir?'

'They will regard all I leave behind me.'

There was in the tone of the colonel's voice, and the manner of utterance of his words, something which showed Pitt that further explanations were not to be had from him. He hesitated, not liking to bind himself to anything in the dark; but finally he gave the promise as required. He went home, however, in a doubtful mood as regarded himself, and a very impatient one as concerned the colonel. What ridiculous, precise notion was this that had got possession of him? How little was he able to comprehend the nature or the needs of his little daughter; and what disagreeable office might he have laid upon Pitt in that connection? Pitt revolved these things in a fever of impatience with the colonel, who had demanded such a pledge from him, and with himself, who had given it. 'I have been a fool for once in my life!' thought he.

Mr. and Mrs. Dallas were in the sitting-room, where Pitt went in. They had been watching for his return, though they took care not to tell him so.

'How's your friend the colonel to-day?' his father asked, willing to make sure where his son had been.

'He thinks he is dying,' Pitt answered, in no very good humour.

'He has been thinking that for the last two years.'

'Do you suppose there is anything in it?'

'Nothing but megrims. He's hipped, that's all. If he had some work to do—that he *must* do, I mean—it's my belief he would be a well man to-day; and know it, too.'

'He honestly thinks he's dying. Slowly, of course, but surely.'

'Pity he ever left the army,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'He is one of those men who don't bear to be idle.'

'That's all humankind!' said her husband. 'Nobody bears to be idle.
Can't do it without running down.'

'Still,' said Pitt thoughtfully, 'you cannot tell. A man ought to be the best judge of his own feelings; and perhaps Colonel Gainsborough is ill, as he says.'

'What are you going to do about it?' said his father with a half sneer.

'Nothing; only, *if* he should turn out to be right,—if he should die within a year or two, what would become of his little daughter?'

Mr. and Mrs. Dallas exchanged a scarcely perceptible glance.

'Send her home to his family,' answered the former.

'Has he a family in England?'

'So he says. I judge, not a small one.'

'Not parents living, has he?'

'I believe not; but there are Gainsboroughs enough without that.'

'What ever made him come over here?'

'Some property quarrel, I gather, though the colonel never told me in so many words.'

'Then he might not like to send Esther to them. Property quarrels are embittering.'

'Do you know any sort of quarrel that isn't? It is impossible to say beforehand what Colonel Gainsborough might like to do. He's a fidgety man. If there's a thing I hate, in the human line, it's a fidget. You can't reason with 'em.'

'Then what would become of that child, mother, if her father were really to die?'

Pitt spoke now with a little anxiety; but Mrs. Dallas answered coolly.

'He would make the necessary arrangements.'

'But they have no friends here, and no relations. It would be dreadfully forlorn for her. Mother, if Colonel Gainsborough *should* die, wouldn't it be kind if you were to take her?'

'Too kind,' said Mr. Dallas. 'There is such a thing as being too kind,
Pitt. Did you never hear of it?'

'I do not comprehend, sir. What objection could there be? The child is not a common child; she is one that anybody might like to have in the house. I should think you and my mother might enjoy it very much, especially with me away.'

'Especially,' said the elder man drily. 'Well, Pitt, perhaps you are right; but for me there is this serious objection, that she is a dissenter.'

'A dissenter!' echoed Pitt in unfeigned astonishment. 'What is a "dissenter," here in the new country?'

'Very much the same thing that he is in the old country, I suspect.'

'And what is that, sir?'

'Humph!—well, don't you know? Narrow, underbred, and pig-headed, and with that, disgustingly radical. That is what it means to be a dissenter; always did mean.'

'Underbred! You cannot find, old country or new country, a better-bred man than Colonel Gainsborough; and Esther is perfect in her manners.'

'I haven't tried *her*,' said the other; 'but isn't he pig-headed? And isn't he radical, think you? They all are; they always were, from the days of Cromwell and Ireton.'

'But the child?—Esther knows nothing of politics.'

'It's in the blood,' said Mr. Dallas stroking unmoveably his long whiskers. 'It's in the blood. I'll have no

dissenters in my house. It is fixed in the blood, and will not wash out.'

'I don't believe she knows what a dissenter means.'

'Your father is quite right,' put in Mrs. Dallas. 'I should not like a dissenter in my family. I should not know how to get on with her. In chance social intercourse it does not so much matter—though I feel the difference even there; but in the family— It is always best for like to keep to like.'

'But these are only differences of form, mother.'

'Do you think so?' said Mrs. Dallas, drawing up her handsome person. 'I believe in form, Pitt, for my part; and when you get to England you will find that it is only the nobodies who dispense with it. But the Church is more than form, I should think. You'll find the Archbishop of Canterbury is something besides a form. And is our Liturgy a form?'

Pitt escaped from the discussion, half angry and half amused, but seriously concerned about Esther. And meanwhile Esther was having her own thoughts. She had come home from her blackberrying late, after Pitt had gone home; and a little further on in the afternoon she had followed him, to get her daily lesson. As the weather was warm all windows were standing open; and the talkers within the house, being somewhat eager and preoccupied in their minds, did not moderate their voices nor pay any attention to what might be going on outside; and so it happened that Esther's light step was not heard as it came past the windows; and it followed very easily that one or two half sentences came to her ear. She heard her own name, which drew her attention, and then Mr. Dallas's declaration that he would have no dissenters in his house. Esther paused, not certainly to listen, but with a sudden check arising from something in the tone of the words. As she stood still in doubt whether to go forward or not, a word or two more were spoken and also heard; and with that Esther turned short about, left all thought of her lesson, and made her way home; walking rather faster than she had come.

She laid off her hat, went into the room where her father was, and sat down in the window with a book.

'Home again, Esther?' said he. 'You have not been long away.'

'No, papa.'

'Did you have your lesson?'

'No, papa.'

'Why not?'

'Pitt was talking to somebody.'

The colonel made no further remark, and the room was very still for awhile. Until after au hour or more the colonel's book went down; and then Esther from her window spoke again.

'Papa, if you please, what is a "dissenter"?'

'A *what?*' demanded the colonel, rousing himself.

'A "dissenter," papa.'

'What do you know about dissenters?'

'Nothing, papa. What is it?'

'What makes you ask?'

'I heard the word, papa, and I didn't know what it meant.'

'There is no need you should know what it means. A dissenter is one who dissents.'

'From what, sir?'

'From something that other people believe in.'

'But, papa, according to that, then, everybody is a dissenter; and that is not true, is it?'

'What has put the question into your head?'

'I heard somebody speaking of dissenters.'

'Whom?'

'Mrs. Dallas.'

'Ah!' The colonel smiled grimly. 'She might be speaking of you and me.'

Esther knew that to have been the fact, but she did not say so. She only asked,

'What do we dissent from, papa?'

'We dissent from the notion that form is more than substance, and the kernel less valuable than the shell.'

This told Esther nothing. She was mystified; at the same time, her respect for her father did not allow her to press further a question he seemed to avoid.

'Is Pitt a dissenter, papa?'

'There is no need you should trouble your head with the question of dissent, my child. In England there is an Established Church; all who decline to come into it are there called Dissenters.'

'Does it tire you to have me ask questions, papa?'

'No.'

'Who established the Church there?'

'The Government.'

'What for?'

'Wanted to rule men's consciences as well as their bodies.'

'But a government cannot do that, papa?'

'They have tried, Esther. Tried by fire and sword, and cruelty, and persecution; by fines and imprisonments and disqualifications. Some submitted, but a goodly number dissented, and our family has always belonged to that honourable number. See you do it no discredit. The Gainsboroughs were always Independents; we fought with Cromwell, and suffered under the Stuarts. We have an unbroken record of striving for the right. Keep to your traditions, my dear.'

'But why should a Government wish to rule people's consciences, papa?'

'Power, my dear. As long as men's minds are free, there is something where power does not reach.'

'I should think everybody would *like* Dissenters, papa?' was Esther's simple conclusion.

'Mrs. Dallas doesn't,' said the colonel grimly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VACATION.

The days went too fast, as the last half of Pitt's vacation passed away. Ay, there was no holding them, much as Esther tried to make each one as long as possible. I think Pitt tried too; for he certainly gave his little friend and playmate all he could of pleasure, and all he could of himself. Esther shared everything he did, very nearly, that was not done within his own home. Nothing could have been more delightful than those days of August and September, if only the vision of the end of them had not been so near. That vision did not hinder the enjoyment; it intensified it; every taste of summer and social delight was made keen with that spice of coming pain; even towards the very last, nothing could prevent Esther's enjoyment of every moment she and Pitt spent together. Only to be together was such pleasure. Every word he spoke was good in her ears; and to her eyes, every feature of his appearance, and every movement of his person was comely and admirable. She gave him, in fact, a kind of grave worship, which perhaps nobody suspected in its degree, because it was not displayed in the manner of childish effusiveness. Esther was never effusive; her manner was always quiet, delicate, and dignified,

such as a child's can well be. And so even Pitt himself did not fully know how his little friend regarded him, though he had sometimes a queer approach to apprehension. It struck him now and then, the grave, absorbed look of Esther's beautiful eyes; occasionally he caught a flash of light in them, such as in nature only comes from heavily-charged clouds. Always she liked to do what he liked, and gave quick regard to any expressed wish of his; always listened to him, and watched his doings, and admired his successes, with the unconditional devotion of an unquestioning faith. Pitt was half-aware of all this; yet he was at an age when speculation is apt to be more busy with matters of the head than of the heart; and besides, he was tolerably well accustomed to the same sort of thing at home, and took it probably as very natural and quite in order. And he knew well, and did not forget, that to the little lonely child his going away would be, even more than it might be to his mother, the loss of a great deal of brightness out of her daily life. He did even dread it a little. And as the time drew near, he saw that his fears were going to be justified.

Esther did not lament or complain; she never, indeed, spoke of his going at all; but what was much more serious, she grew pale. And when the last week came, the smile died out of her eyes and from her lips. No tears were visible; Pitt would almost rather have seen her cry, like a child, much as with all other men he hated tears; it would have been better than this preternatural gravity with which the large eyes opened at him, and the soft mouth refused to give way. She seemed to enter into everything they were doing with no less interest than usual; she was not abstracted; rather, Pitt got the impression that she carried about with her, and brought into everything, the perfect recollection that he was going away. It began to oppress him.

'I wish I could feel, mother, that you would look a little after that motherless child,' he said, in a sort of despairing attempt one evening.

'She is not fatherless,' Mrs. Dallas answered composedly.

'No, but a girl wants a mother.'

'She is accustomed to the want now.'

'Mother, it isn't kind of you!'

'How would you have me show kindness?' Mrs. Dallas asked calmly. Now that Pitt was going away and safe, she could treat the matter without excitement. 'What would Colonel Gainsborough like me to do for his daughter, do you think?'

Pitt was silent, and vexed.

'What do you want me to do for her?'

'I'd like you to be a friend to her. She will need one.'

'If her father dies, you mean?'

'If he lives. She will be very lonely when I am gone away.'

'That is because you have accustomed her so much to your company. I never thought it was wise. She will get over it in a little while.'

Would she? Pitt studied her next day, and much doubted his mother's assertion. All the months of his last term in college had not been enough to weaken in the least Esther's love for him. It was real, honest, genuine love, and of very pure quality; a diamond, he was ready to think, of the first water. Only a child's love; but Pitt had too fine a nature himself to despise a child's love; and full as his head was of novelties, hopes and plans and purposes, there was space in his heart for a very tender concern about Esther beside.

It came to the last evening, and he was sitting with her on the verandah. It was rather cool there now; the roses and honeysuckles and the summer moonshine were gone; the two friends chose to stay there because they could be alone, and nobody overhear their words. Words for a little while had ceased to flow. Esther was sitting very still, and Pitt knew how she was looking; something of the dry despair had come back to her face which had been in it when he was first moved to busy himself about her.

'Esther, I shall come back,' he said suddenly, bending down to look in her face.

'When?' she said, half under her breath. It was not a question; it was an answer.

'Well, not immediately; but the years pass away fast, don't you know that?'

'Are you sure you will come back?'

'Why, certainly! if I am alive I will. Why, if I came for nothing else,
I would come to see after you, Queen Esther.'

Esther was silent. Talking was not easy.

'And meanwhile, I shall be busy, and you will be busy. We have both a great deal to do.'

'You have.'

'And I am sure you have. Now let us consult. What have you got to do, before we see one an other again?'

'I suppose,' said Esther, 'take care of papa.'

She said it in a quiet, matter-of-course tone, and Pitt started a little. It was very likely; but it had not just occurred to him before, how large a part that care might play in the girl's life for some time to come.

'Does he need so much care?' he asked.

'It isn't real *care*,' said Esther, in the same tone; 'but he likes to have me about, to do things for him.'

'Queen Esther, aren't you going to carry on your studies for me, all the same?'

'For you!' said she, lifting her heavy eyes to him. It hurt him to see how heavy they were; weighted with a great load of sorrow, too mighty for tears.

'For me, certainly. I expect everything to go on just as if I were here to look after it. I expect everything to go on so, that when I come again I may find just what I want to find. You must not disappoint me.'

Esther did not say. She made no answer at all, and after a minute put a question which was a diversion.

'Where are you going first, Pitt?'

'To Lisbon.'

'Yes, I know that; but when you get to England?'

'London first. You know that is the great English centre?'

'Do you know any people there?'

'Not I. But I have a great-uncle there, living at Kensington. I believe that is part of London, though really I don't know much about it. I shall go to see him, of course.'

'Your great-uncle! That is, Mr. Dallas's own uncle?'

'No, my mother's. His name is Strahan.'

'And then you are going to Oxford? Why do you go there? Are not the colleges in America just as good?'

'I can tell better after I've seen Oxford. But no, Queen Esther; that is larger and older and richer than any college in America can be; indeed it is a cluster of colleges—it is a University.'

'Will you study in them all?'

'No,' said Pitt, laughing, 'not exactly! But it is a fine place, by all accounts—a noble place. And then, you know, we are English, and my father and mother wish me to be as English as possible. That is natural.'

'We are English too,' said Esther, sighing.

'Therefore you ought to be glad I am going.'

But Esther's cheek only grew a shade paler.

'Will you keep up your studies, like a good girl?'

'I will try.'

'And send me a drawing now and then, to let me see how you are getting on?'

She lifted her eyes to him again, for one of those grave, appealing looks. 'How could I get it to you?'

'Your father will have my address. I shall write to him, and I shall write to you.'

She made no answer. The things filling her heart were too many for it, and too strong; there came no tears, but her breathing was laboured; and her brow was dark with what seemed a mountain of oppression. Pitt was half-glad that just now there came a call for Esther from the room behind them. Both went in. The colonel wanted Esther to search in a repository of papers for a certain English print of some months back.

'Well, my boy,' said he, 'are you off?'

'Just off, sir,' said Pitt, eyeing the little figure that was busy in the corner among the papers. It gave him more pain than he had thought to leave it. 'I wish you would come over, colonel. Why shouldn't you? It would do you good. I mean, when there is peace again upon the high seas.'

'I shall never leave this place again till I leave all that is earthly,' Colonel Gainsborough answered.

'May I take the liberty sometimes of writing to you, sir?'

'I should like it very much, William.'

'And if I find anything that would amuse Esther, sir, may I tell her about it?'

'I have no objection. She will be very much obliged to you. So you are going? Heaven be with you, my boy. You have lightened many an hour for me.'

He rose up and shook Pitt's hand, with a warm grasp and a dignified manner of leave-taking. But when Pitt would have taken Esther's hand, she brushed past him and went out into the hall. Pitt followed, with another bow to the colonel, and courteously shutting the door behind him, wishing the work well over. Esther, however, made no fuss, hardly any demonstration. She stood there in the hall and gave him her hand silently, I might say coldly, for the hand was very cold, and her face was white with suppressed feeling. Pitt grasped the hand and looked at the face; hesitated; then opened his arms and took her into them and kissed her. Was she not like a little sister? and was it possible to let this heartache go without alleviation? No doubt if the colonel had been present he would not have ventured such a breach of forms; but as it was Pitt defied forms. He clasped the sorrowing little girl in his arms and kissed her brow and her cheek and her lips.

'I'm coming back again,' said he. 'See that you have everything all right for me when I come.'

Then he let her out of his arms and went off without another word. As he went home, he was ready to smile and shake himself at the warmth of demonstration into which he had been betrayed. He was not Esther's brother, and had no particular right to show himself so affectionate. The colonel would have been, he doubted, less than pleased, and it would not have happened in his dignified presence. But Esther was a child, Pitt said to himself, and a very tender child; and he could not be sorry that he had shown her the feeling was not all on her side. Perhaps it might comfort the child. It never occurred to him to reproach himself with showing more than he felt, for he had no occasion. The feeling he had given expression to was entirely genuine, and possibly deeper than he knew, although he shook his head, figuratively, at himself as he went home.

Esther, when the door closed upon Pitt, stood still for some minutes, in the realization that now it was all over and he was gone. The hall door was like a grim kind of barrier, behind which the light of her life had disappeared. It remained so stolidly closed! Pitt's hand did not open it again; the hand was already at a distance, and would maybe never push that door open any more. He was gone, and the last day of that summer vacation was over. The feeling absorbed Esther for a few minutes and made her as still as a stone. It *did* comfort her that he had taken such a kindly leave of her, and at the same time it sealed the sense of her loss. For he was the only one in the world in whose heart it was to give her good earnest kisses like that; and he was away, away! Her father's affection for her was undoubted, nevertheless it was not his wont to give it that sort of expression. Esther was not comparing, however, nor reflecting; only filled with the sense of her loss, which for the moment chilled and stiffened her. She heard her father's voice calling her, and she went in.

'My dear, you stay too long in the cold. Is William gone?'

'Oh yes, papa.'

'This is not the right paper I want; this is an August paper. I want the one for the last week in July.'

Esther went and rummaged again among the pile of newspapers, mechanically, finding it hard to command her attention to such an indifferent business. She brought the July paper at last.

'Papa, do you think he will ever come back?' she asked, trembling with pain and the effort not to show it.

'Come back? Who? William Dallas? Why shouldn't he come back? His parents are here; if he lives, he will return to them, no doubt.'

Esther sat down and said no more. The earth seemed to her dreadfully empty.

CHAPTER XIII.

LETTERS.

And so life seemed for many days to the child. She could not shake off the feeling, nor regain any brightness of spirit. Dull, dull, everything in earth and heaven seemed to be. The taste and savour had gone out of all her pleasures and occupations. She could not read, without the image of Pitt coming between her and the page; she could not study, without an unendurable sense that he was no longer there nor going to be there to hear her lessons. She had no heart for walks, where every place recalled some memory of Pitt, and what they had done or said there together; she shunned the box of coins, and hardly cared to gather one of the few lingering fall flowers. And the last of them were soon gone, for the pleasant season was ended. Then came rains and clouds and winds, and Esther was shut up to the house.

I can never tell how desolate she was. Truly she was only a girl of thirteen; she ought not to have been desolate, perhaps, for any no greater matter. She had her father, and her books, and her youth. Bat Esther had also a nature delicate and deep far beyond what is common; and then she was unduly matured by her peculiar life. Intercourse with light-hearted children like herself had not kept her thoughtless and careless. At thirteen Esther was looking into life, and finding it already confused and dark. At thirteen also she was learning and practising self-command. Her father, not much of an observer unless in the field of military operations, had no perception that she was suffering; it never occurred to him that she might be solitary; he never knew that she needed his tenderest care and society and guidance. He might have replaced everything to Esther, so that she would have found no want at all. He did nothing of the kind. He was a good man; just and upright and highly honourable; but he was selfish, like most men. He lived to himself in his own deprivation and sorrow, and never thought but that Esther would in a few days get over the loss of her young teacher and companion. He hardly thought about it at all. The idea of filling Pitt's place, of giving her in his own person what left her when Pitt went away, did not enter his head. Indeed, he had no knowledge of what Pitt had done for her. If he had known it, there is little doubt it would have excited his jealousy. For it is quite in some people's nature to be jealous of another's having what they do not want themselves.

And so Esther suffered in a way and to a degree that was not good for her. Her old dull spiritless condition was creeping upon her again. She realized, more than it is the way of thirteen years old to realize, that something more than an ocean of waters—an ocean of circumstances—had rolled itself between her and the one friend and companion she had ever had. Pitt said he would return; but four or five years, for all present purposes, is a sort of eternity at her age; hope could not leap over it, and expectation died at the brink. Her want of comfort came back in full force; but where was the girl to get it?

The sight of Mr. and Mrs. Dallas used to put her in a fever. Once in a while the two would come to make an evening call upon her father; and then Esther used to withdraw as far as possible into a corner of the room and watch and listen; watch the looks of the pair with a kind of irritated fascination, and listen to their talk with her heart jumping and throbbing in pain and anxiety and passionate longing. For they were Pitt's father and mother, and only the ocean of waters lay between him and them, which they could cross at any time; he belonged to them, and could not be separated from them. All which would have drawn Esther very near to them and made them delightful to her, but that she knew very well they desired no such approach. Whether it were simply because she and her father were 'dissenters' Esther could not tell; whatever the reason, her sensitive nature and discerning vision saw

the fact. They made visits of neighbourly politeness to the one English family that was within reach; but more than politeness they desired neither to give nor receive. I suppose it was this perception which made the sight of the pair so irritating to Esther. *They* were near Pitt, but they did not wish that *she* should be. Esther kept well at a distance. But with all this they talked of their son perpetually: of his voyage, of his prospects, of his grand-uncle at Kensington, of his career in college, or at the University rather, and of his possible permanent remaining in the old country; at any rate, of his studying there for a profession. The colonel was only faintly interested, and would take up his book with a sigh of relief when they were gone; but Esther would sit in passionate misery, not shedding any tears; only staring with her big eyes at the lire in a sort of fixed gravity most unfit for her years.

The months went heavily. Winters were rather severe and very long at Seaforth; Esther was much shut up to the house. It made things all the harder for her. To the colonel it made no difference. He lay upon his couch, summer or winter, and went on with his half-hearted reading,—half a heart was all he brought to it; while Esther would stand at the window, watching the snow drive past, or the beating down of the rain, or the glitter of the sunbeams upon a wide white world, and almost wonder at the thought that warm lights and soft airs and flowers and walks and botanizing had ever been out there, where now the glint of the sunbeams on the snow-crystals was as sharp as diamonds, and all vegetable life seemed to be gone for ever.

Pitt had sailed in November, various difficulties having delayed his departure to a month later than the time intended for it. Therefore news from him could not be looked for until the new year was on its way. Towards the end of January, however, as early as could possibly be hoped, a letter came to Colonel Gainsborough, which he immediately knew to be in Pitt's hand.

'No postmark,' he said, surveying it. 'I suppose it came by private opportunity.'

'Papa, you look a long while at the outside!' said Esther, who stood by full of excited impatience which she knew better than to show.

'The outside has its interest too, my dear,' said her father. 'I was looking for the Lisbon postmark, but there is none whatever. It must have come by private hand.'

He broke the seal, and found within an enclosure directed to Esther, which he gave her. And Esther presently left the room. Her father, she saw, was deep in the contents of his letter, and would not notice her going, while if she stayed in the room she knew she would be called upon to read her own letter or to show it before she was ready. She wanted to enjoy the full first taste of it, slowly and thoroughly. Meanwhile, the colonel never noticed her going. Pitt's letter was dated 'Lisbon, Christmas Day, 1813,' and ran as follows:—

'MY DEAR COLONEL,—I have landed at last, as you see, in this dirtiest of all places I ever was in. I realize now why America is called the New world; for everything here drives the consciousness upon me that the world on this side is very old—so old, I should say, that it is past cleansing. I do suppose it is not fair to compare it with Seaforth, which is as bright in comparison as if it were an ocean shell shining with pure lights; but I certainly hope things will mend when I get to London.

'But I did not mean to talk to you about Lisbon, which I suppose you know better than I do. My hope is to give you the pleasure of an early piece of news. Probably the papers will already have given it to you, but it is just possible that the chances of weather and ships may let my letter get to you first, and in that case my pleasure will be gained.

'There is great news. Napoleon has been beaten, beaten! isn't that great? He has lost a hundred thousand men, and is driven back over the Rhine. Holland has joined the Allies, and the Prince of Orange; and Lord Wellington has fought such a battle as history hardly tells of; seven days' fighting; and the victory ranks with the greatest that ever were gained.

'That is all I can tell you now, but it is so good you can afford to wait for further details. It is now more difficult than ever to get into France, and I don't know yet how I am going to make my way to England; it is specially hard for Americans, and I must be reckoned an American, you know. However, money will overcome all difficulties; money and persistence. I have written to Esther something about my voyage, which will, I hope, interest her. I will do myself the pleasure of writing again when I get to London. Meanwhile, dear sir, I remain

'Ever your grateful and most obedient,

'WILM. PITT DALLAS.'

Esther, while her father was revelling in this letter, was taking a very different sort of pleasure in hers. There was a fire up-stairs in her room; she lit a candle, and, in the exquisite sense of having her enjoyment all to herself, went slowly over the lines; as slowly as she could.

'Lisbon, *Christmas Day*, 1813. 'MY DEAR LITTLE ESTHER,—If you think a voyage over the sea is in anything like a journey by land, you are mistaken. The only one thing in which they are alike, is that in both ways you *get on*. But wheels go smoothly, even over a jolty road; and waves do nothing but toss you. It was just one succession of rollings and pitchings from the time we left New Bedford till we got sight of the coast of Portugal. The wind blew all the time *almost* a gale, rising at different points of our passage to the full desert of the name. One violent storm we had; and all the rest of the voyage we were pitching about at such a rate that we had to fight for our meals; tables were broken, and coffee and chocolate poured about with a reckless disregard of economy. For about halt the way it rained persistently; so altogether you may suppose, Queen Esther, that my first experience has not made me in love with the sea. But it wasn't bad, after all. The wind drove us along, that was one comfort; and it would have driven us along much faster, if our sails had been good for anything; but they were a rotten set, a match for the crew, who were a rascally band of Portuguese. However, we drove along, as I said, seeing nobody to speak to all the way except ourselves; not a sail in sight nearer than eight or ten miles off.

'Well, the 23rd we sighted land, to everybody's great joy, you may suppose. The wind fell, and that night was one of the most beautiful and delicious you can imagine. A smooth sea without a ripple, a clear sky without a cloud, stars shining down quietly, and air as soft as May at Seaforth. I stood on deck half the night, enjoying, and thinking of five hundred thousand things one after another. Now that I was almost setting my foot on a new world, my life, past and future, seemed to rise up and confront me; and I looked at it and took counsel with it, as it were. Seaforth on one side, and Oxford on the other; the question was, what should William Pitt be between them? The question never looked so big to me before. Somehow, I believe, the utter perfection of the night suggested to me the idea of perfection generally; what a mortal may come to when at his best. Such a view of nature as I was having puts one out of conceit, I believe, with whatever is out of order, unseemly, or untrue, or what for any reason misses the end of its existence. *Then* rose the question, what is the end of existence?—but I did not mean to give you my moralizings, Queen Esther; I have drifted into it. I can tell you, though, that my moralizing got a sharp emphasis the next day.

'I turned in at last, leaving the world of air and water a very image of peace. I slept rather late, I suppose; was awakened by the hoarse voice of the captain calling all hands on deck, in a manner that showed me there must be urgent cause. I tumbled up as soon as possible. What do you think I saw?

'The morning was as fair as the night had been. The sea was smooth, the sun shining brilliantly. I suppose the colonel would tell you, that seas may be *too* smooth; anyhow I saw the fact now. There had been not wind enough during the night to make our sails of any use; a current had caught us, and we had been drifting, drifting, till now it appeared we were drifting straight on to a line of rocks which we could see at a little distance; made known both to eye and ear: to the former by a line of white where the waves broke upon the rocks, and to the latter by the thundering noise the breakers made. Now you know, where waves break, a ship would stand very little chance of holding together; but what were we to do? The only thing possible we did,—let out our anchors; but the question was, would they hold? They did hold, but none too soon; for we were left riding only about three times our ship's length from the threatening danger. You see, we had a drunken crew; no proper watch was kept; the captain was first roused by the thunder of the waves dashing upon the rocks; and then nothing was ready or in order, and before the anchors could be got out we were where I tell you. The anchors held, but we could not tell how long they would hold, nor how soon the force of the waves would drag us, cables and all, to the rocks. There we sat and looked at the view and situation. We hoisted a signal and fired guns of distress; but we were in front of a rocky shore that gave us little hope of either being of avail. At last, after three hours of this, the captain and some of the passengers got into the yawl and went off to find help. We, left behind, stared at the breakers. After three more hours had gone, I saw the yawl coming back, followed by another small boat, and further off by four royal pilot boats with sails. I saw them with the glass, that is, from my station in the rigging. When they came up, all the passengers except half a dozen, of whom I was one, were transferred to the pilot boats. You should have heard the jabber of the Portuguese when they came on board! But the captain had determined to try to save his brig, as by this time a slight breeze had sprung up, and I stayed with some of the others to help in the endeavour. When the rest of the passengers were safe on board the pilot boats, we set about our critical undertaking. Sails were spread, one anchor hoisted, the cable of the other cut, and we stood holding our breath, to see whether wind or water would prove strongest. But the sails drew; the brig slowly fell off before the wind, and we edged away from our perilous position. Then, when we were fairly off, there rose a roar of shouts that rent the air; for the boats had all waited, lying a few rods off, to see what would become of us. Queen Esther, I can tell you, if I had been a woman, I should have sat

down and cried; what *I* did I won't say. As I looked back to the scene of our danger, there was a most lovely rainbow spanning it, showing in the cloud of spray that rose above the breakers.

'At six o'clock on Christmas eve I landed at Lisbon, where I got comfortable quarters in an English boarding-house. When I can get to London, I do not yet know. I am here at a great time, to see history as it is taking shape in human life and experience; something different from looking at it as cast into bronze or silver in former ages and packed up in a box of coins; hey, Queen Esther? But that's good too in its way. Your father will tell you the news.

'Your devoted subject,

'WILM. PITT DALLAS.'

CHAPTER XIV.

STRUGGLES.

Esther sat, swallowed up of excitement, poring over this letter, longer than she knew; whether it gave her most pain or pleasure she could not have told. Pleasure came in a great wave at first; and then pricks of pain began to make themselves felt, as if the pleasure wave had been full of sharp points. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes sent looks, or rather one steady look, at the paper, which would certainly have bored it through or set it on fire if moral qualities had taken to themselves material power. At last, remembering that she must not stay too long, she folded the letter up and returned to her father. He had taken *his* letter coolly, she saw, and gone back to his book. How far his world was from hers! Absolutely, Pitt's letter was nothing to him.

'Well, my dear,' said he, after a while observing her, 'what does he say?'

'I suppose he told you, papa, what happened to him?'

'No, he did not; he only told me what is happening to the world. He has gone to Europe at a grand time!'

'What is happening to the world, papa?'

'My dear, that arch-usurper and mischief-maker, Napoleon Buonaparte, has been beaten by the allied armies at Leipzig—driven back over the Rhine. It's glorious news! I wish I was with Lord Wellington.'

'To fight, papa?'

'Certainly. I would like to have a hand in what is going on. If I could,' he added with a sigh.

'But papa, I should think fighting was not pleasant work?'

'Women's fighting is not.'

'Is men's fighting, papa? *Pleasant?*'

'It is pleasant to have a blow at a rascal. Ah, well! my fighting days are over. What does Pitt tell you?'

'About his voyage, papa; nothing else.'

'Are you going to let me hear it?'

Esther would a little rather have kept it to herself, simply because it was so precious to her. However, this question was a command, and she read the letter aloud to her father. With that the matter was disposed of, in all but her own mind. For the final result of the letter was to stir up all the pain the writer's absence had caused, and to add to it some new elements of aggravation. Esther had not realized, till those letters came, how entirely the writer of them had gone out of her world. In love and memory she had in a sort still kept him near; without vision she had yet been not fully separated from him. Now these pictures of the other world and of Pitt's life in it came like a bright, sheer blade severing the connection which had until then subsisted between her life and his. Yes, he was in another world! and there was no connection any longer. He had not forgotten her yet, but he would forget; how should he not? how could he help it? In the rich sweep of variety and change and eager action which

filled his experience, what thought could he have any more for that quiet figure on the sofa, or this lonely little child, whose life contained no interest whatever! or how could his thoughts return at all to this dull room, where everything remained with no change from morning to night and from one week to another? Always Colonel Gainsborough there on the sofa; always that same green cloth covering the table in the middle of the floor, and the view of the snow-covered garden and road and fields outside the windows, with those everlasting pollard poplars along the fence. While Europe was in commotion, and armies rolling their masses over it, and Napoleon fleeing and Lord Wellington chasing, and every breath was full of eagerness and hope and triumph and purpose in that world without.

Esther fell back into a kind of despair. Pitt was gone from her; now she realized that fact thoroughly; not only gone in person, but moved far off in mind. Maybe he might write again, once or twice; very likely he would, for he was kind; but his life was henceforth separated from Seaforth and from all the other life that had its home there. The old cry for comfort began to sound in Esther's heart with a terrible urgency. Where was it to come from? And as the child had only one possible outlook for comfort, she began to set her face that way in a kind of resolute determination. That is, she began to shut herself up with her Bible and search it as a man who is poor searches for a hid treasure, or as one who is starving looks for something to eat. Nobody knew. She shut herself up and carried on her search alone, and troubled nobody with questions. Nobody ever noticed the air of the child; the grave, far-away look of her eyes; the pale face; the unnaturally quiet demeanour. At least nobody noticed it to any purpose. Mrs. Barker did communicate to Christopher her belief that that child was 'mopin' herself into ninety years old;' and they were both agreed that she ought to be sent to school. 'A girl don't grow just like one o' my cabbages,' said Mr. Bounder; '*that*'ll make a head for itself.'

'Miss Esther's got a head,' put in Mrs. Barker.

''Twon't be solid and that, if it ain't looked after,' retorted her brother. 'I don't s'pose you understand the natural world, though. What's the colonel thinkin' about?'

'That ain't your and my business, Christopher. But I do worrit myself about Miss Esther's face, the way I sees it sometimes.'

The colonel, it is true, did not see it as Mrs. Barker saw it. Not but that he might, if he had ever watched her. But he did not watch. It never occurred to him but that everything went right with Esther. When she made him his tea, she was attentive and womanly; when she read aloud to him, she read intelligently; and in the reciting of the few lessons she did with her father, there was always no fault to find. How could the colonel suppose anything was wrong? Life had become a dull, sad story to him; why should it be different to anybody else? Nay, the colonel would not have said that in words; it was rather the supine condition into which he had lapsed, than any conclusion of his intelligence; but the fact was, he had no realization of the fact that a child's life ought to be bright and gay. He accepted Esther's sedate unvarying tone and manner as quite the right thing, and found it suit him perfectly. Nobody else saw the girl, except at church. The family had not cultivated the society of their neighbours in the place, and Esther had no friends among them.

There was a long succession of months during which things went on after this fashion. Very weary months to Esther; indeed, months covered by so thick a gloom that part of the child's life consisted in the struggle to break it. Letters did not come frequently from Pitt, even to his father and mother; he wrote that it was difficult to get a vessel to take American letters at all, and that the chances were ten to one, if accepted, that they would never get to the hands they were intended for. American letters or American passengers were sometimes held to vitiate the neutrality of a vessel; and if chased she would be likely to throw them, that is, the former, overboard. Pitt was detained still in Lisbon by the difficulty of getting passports, as late as the middle of March, but expected then soon to sail for England. His passage was taken. So Mr. and Mrs. Dallas reported on one of their evening visits. They talked a great deal of politics at these visits, which sometimes interested Esther and sometimes bored her excessively; but this last bit of private news was brought one evening about the end of April.

'He has not gained much by his winter's work,' remarked the colonel.
'He might as well have studied this term at Yale.'

'He will not have lost his time,' said Mr. Dallas comfortably. 'He is there, that is one thing; and he is looking about him; and now he will have time to feel a little at home in England and make all his arrangements before his studies begin. It is very well as it is.'

'If you think so, it is,' said the colonel drily.

The next news was that Pitt had landed at Falmouth, and was going by post-chaise to London in a day or two. He reported having just got Lord Byron's two last poems,—'The Corsair' and 'The Bride of Abydos'; wished he could send them home, but that was not so easy.

'He had better send them home, or send them anywhere,' said the colonel; 'and give his attention to Sophocles and Euclid. Light poetry does not amount to anything; it is worse than waste of time.'

'I don't want a man to be made of Greek and Latin,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'Do you think, only the Ancients wrote what is worthy to be read, colonel?'

'They didn't write nonsense, my dear madam; and Byron does.'

'Nonsense!'

'Worse than nonsense.'

'Won't do to enquire too strictly into what the old Greeks and Romans wrote, if folks say true,' remarked Mr. Dallas slyly.

'In the dead languages it won't do a young man so much harm,' said the colonel. 'I hope William will give himself now to his Greek, since you have afforded him such opportunity.'

Mrs. Dallas's air, as she rose to take leave, was inimitably expressive of proud confidence and rejection of the question. Mr. Dallas laughed carelessly and said, as he shook the colonel's hand, 'No fear!'

The next news they had came direct. Another letter from Pitt to the colonel; and, as before, it enclosed one for Esther. Esther ran away again to have the first reading and indulge herself in the first impressions of it alone and free from question or observation. She even locked her door. This letter was written from London, and dated May 1814.

'MY DEAR QUEEN ESTHER,—I wish you were here, for we certainly would have some famous walks together. Do you know, I am in London? and that means, in one of the most wonderful places in the world. You can have no idea what sort of a place it is, and no words I can write will tell you. I have not got over my own sense of astonishment and admiration yet; indeed it is growing, not lessening; and every time I go out I come home more bewildered with what I have seen. Do you ask me why? In the first place, because it is so big. Next, because of the unimaginable throng of human beings of every grade and variety. Such a multitude of human lives crossing each other in an intraceable and interminable network; intraceable to the human eye, but what a sight it must be to the eye that sees all! All these people, so many hundreds of thousands, acting and reacting upon one another's happiness, prosperity, goodness, and badness. Now at such a place as Seaforth people are left a good deal to their individuality, and are comparatively independent of one another; but here I feel what a pressure and bondage men's lives draw round each other. It makes me catch my breath. You will not care about this, however, nor be able to understand me.

'But another thing you would care for, and delight in; and that is the historical associations of London. Queen Esther, it is delightful! You and I have looked at coins and read books together, and looked at history so; but here I seem to touch it. I have been to-day to Charing Cross, standing and wandering about, and wondering at the things that have happened there. Ask your father to tell you about Charing Cross. I could hardly come away. If you ask me how *I* know so well what happened there, I will tell you. I have found an old uncle here. You knew I had one? He lives just a little out of London, or out of the thick of London, in a place that is called Kensington; in a queer old house, which, however, I like very much, and that is filled with curiosities. It is in a pleasant situation, not far from one of the public parks,—though it is not called a park, but "Garden,"—and with one or two palaces and a number of noble mansions about it. My uncle received me very hospitably, and would have me come and make my home with him while I am in London. That is nice for me, and in many ways. He is a character, this old uncle of mine; something of an antiquary, a good deal of a hermit, a little eccentric, but stuffed with local knowledge, and indeed with knowledge of many sorts. I think he has taken a fancy to me somehow, Queen Esther; at any rate, he is very kind. He seems to like to go about with me and show me London, and explain to me what London is. He was there at Charing Cross with me, holding forth on history and politics—he's a great Tory; ask the colonel what that is; and really I seemed to see the ages rolling before me as he talked, and I looked at Northumberland House and at the brazen statue of Charles I. If I had time I would tell you about them, as Mr. Strahan told me. And yesterday I was in the House of Commons, and heard some great talking; and to-morrow we are going to the Tower. I think, if you were only here to go too, we should have a first-rate sort of a time. But I will try and tell you about it.

'And talking of history,—Mr. Strahan has some beautiful coins. There is one of Philip of Macedon, and two of Alexander; think of that, Queen Esther; and some exquisite gold pieces of Tarentum and Syracuse. How your eyes would look at them! Well, study up everything, so that when we meet again we may talk up all the world. I shall be very hard at work myself soon, as soon as I go to Oxford. In the

meantime I am rather hard at work here, although to be sure the work is play.

'This is a very miserable bit of a letter, and nothing in it, just because I have so much to say. If I had time I would write it over, but I have not time. The next shall be better. I am a great deal with Mr. Strahan, in-doors as well as out. I wish I could show you his house, Queen. It is old and odd and pretty. Thick old walls, little windows in deep recesses; low ceilings and high ceilings, for different parts of the house are unlike each other; most beautiful dark oaken wainscotings, carved deliciously, and grown black with time; and big, hospitable chimney-pieces, with fires of English soft coal. Some of the rooms are rather dark, to me who am accustomed to the sun of America pouring in at a wealth of big windows; but others are to me quite charming. And this quaint old house is filled with treasures and curiosities. Mr. Strahan lives in it quite alone with two servants, a factotum of a housekeeper and another factotum of a man-servant. I must say I find it intelligible that he should take pleasure in having me with him. Good-bye for to-night. I'll write soon again.

'WM. PITT DALLAS.'

As on occasion of the former letter, Esther lingered long over the reading of this; her uneasiness not appeased by it at all; then at last went down to her father, to whom the uneasiness was quite unknown and unsuspected.

'I think William writes the longest letters to you,' he remarked. 'What does he say this time?'

Esther read her letter aloud.

'Will has fallen on his feet,' was the comment.

'What does he say to you, papa?'

'Not much; and yet a good deal. You may read for yourself.'

Which Esther did, eagerly. Pitt had told her father about his visit to the House of Commons.

'I had yesterday,' he wrote, 'a rare pleasure, which you, my dear colonel, would have appreciated. Mr. Strahan took me to the House of Commons; and I heard Mr. Canning, Mr. Whitbread, Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Ponsonby, and others, on what question, do you think? Nothing less than the duty which lies upon England just at this moment, to use the advantage of her influence with her allies in Europe to get them to join with her in putting down the slave trade. It was a royal occasion; and the enjoyment of it quite beyond description. To-day I have been standing at Charing Cross, looking at the statue of Charles I., and wondering at the world. My grand-uncle is a good Tory and held forth eloquently as we stood there. Don't tell my mother! but privately, my dear colonel, I seem to discover in myself traces of Whiggism. Whether it be nature, or your influence, or the air of America, that has caused it to grow, I know not; but there it is. My mother would be very seriously disturbed if she suspected the fact. As to my father, I really never discovered to my satisfaction what his politics are. To Mr. Strahan I listen reverently. It is not necessary for me to say to him all that comes into my head. *But* it came into my head to-day, as I stood gazing up at the equestrian statue at Charing Cross, that it would better become the English people to have John Hampden there than that miserable old trickster, Charles Stuart.'

Esther read and re-read.

'Papa,' she said at last, 'what is a Tory?'

'It is a party name, my dear; it is given to a certain political party.'

'You are not a Tory?'

'No! If I had been, I should never have found my way here.' The colonel said it with a sigh.

'Then I suppose you are a Whig. And are Mr. and Mrs. Dallas Tories?'

'Humph!—Will says his mother is. He ought to know.'

'What is the difference, papa?'

'My dear, I don't know that you can understand. The names grew up in the old days when the Stuarts were trying to get all the power of the government into their own hands and to leave none to the people. Those who stood by the king, through thick and thin, were called Tories; those who tried to limit him and guard the people's liberties, were Whigs.'

'What queer names! Papa, are there Whigs and Tories in England now?'

'What are called so.'

'Are the kings still trying to get away the liberties of the people?'

'No, my child. Those are pretty well secured.'

'And here we have no king at all. I don't see how you can be a Whig, or Mrs. Dallas a Tory.'

'There are always the two parties. One, that sticks by the government and aims to strengthen its hands, right or wrong; and the other, that looks out for the liberties of the people and watches that they be not infringed or tampered with.'

Esther thought a while, but not exclusively over the political question. It might have occurred to an older person to wonder how William Pitt had got his name from parents who were both Tories. The fact was that here, as in many another case, money was the solution of the difficulty. A rich relation, who was also a radical, had promised a fine legacy to the boy if he were given the name of the famous Whig statesman, and Mr. Mrs. and Dallas had swallowed the pill per help of the sugar. About this Esther knew nothing.

'Papa,' she said, 'don't you think Pitt will get so fond of England that he will never want to come back?'

'It would not be strange if he did.'

'Is England so much better than America, papa?'

'It is England, my dear!' the colonel said, with an expression which meant, she could not tell what.

CHAPTER XV.

COMFORT.

These letters, on the whole, did not comfort Esther. The momentary intense pleasure was followed by inevitable dull reaction and contrast; and before she had well got over the effect of one batch of letters another came; and she was kept in a perpetual stir and conflict. For Pitt proved himself a good correspondent, although it was June before the first letter from his parents reached him. So he reported, writing on the third of that month; and told that the Allied Sovereigns were just then leaving Paris for a visit to the British Capital, and all the London world was on tiptoe. 'Great luck for me to be here just now,' he wrote; and so everybody at home agreed. Mrs. Dallas grew more stately, Esther thought, with every visit she made at the colonel's house; and she and her husband made many. It was a necessity to have some one to speak to about Pitt and Pitt's letters; and it was urgent likewise that Mrs. Dallas should know if letters had been received by the same mail at this other house. She always found out, one way or another; and then she would ask, 'May I see?' and scan with eager eyes the sheet the colonel generally granted her. Of the letters to Esther nothing was said, but Esther lived in fear and trembling that some inadvertent word might let her know of their existence.

Another necessity which brought the Dallases often to Colonel Gainsborough's was the political situation. They could hardly discuss it with anybody else in Seaforth, and what is the use of a political situation if you cannot discuss it? All the rest of the families in the neighbourhood were strong Americans; and even Pitt, in his letters, was more of an American than anything else. Indeed, so much more, that it gave his mother sad annoyance. He told of the temper of the English people at this juncture; of the demands to be made by the English government before they would hear of peace; of a strong force sent to Canada, and the general indignant and belligerent tone of feeling and speech among members of Parliament; but Pitt did not write as if he sympathized with it. 'He has lived here too long already!' sighed his mother.

'Not if he is destined to live here the rest of his life, my dear madam,' said the colonel.

'He will not do that. He will end by settling in England.'

'Will may have his own views, on that as on some other things.'

'By the time he has gone through the University and studied for his profession, he will be more of an Englishman than of an American,' Mr. Dallas observed contentedly. 'He will choose for himself.'

'What profession? Have you fixed upon one? or has he?'

'Time enough yet for that.'

'But your property lies here.'

'I am here to take care of it,' said Mr. Dallas, laughing a little.

All this sort of talk, which Esther heard often, with variations, made one thing clear to her, namely, that if it depended on his father and mother, Pitt's return to his native country would be long delayed or finally prevented. It did not entirely depend on them, everybody knew who knew him; nevertheless it seemed to Esther that the fascinations of the old world must be great, and the feeling of the distance between her and Pitt grew with every letter. It was not the fault of the letters or of the writer in any way, nor was it the effect the latter were intended to produce; but Esther grew more and more despondent about him. And then, after a few months, the letters became short and rare. Pitt had gone to Oxford; and, from the time of his entering the University, plunged head and ears into business, so eagerly that time and disposition failed for writing home. Letters did come, from time to time, but there was much less in them; and those for Colonel Gainsborough were at long intervals. So, when the second winter of Pitt's absence began to set in, Esther reckoned him, to all intents and purposes, lost to her life.

The girl went with increased eagerness and intentness to the one resource she had—her Bible. The cry for happiness is so natural to the human heart, that it takes long oppression to stifle it. The cry was strong in Esther's young nature—strong and imperative; and in all the world around her she saw no promise of help or supply. The spring at which she had slaked her thirst was dried up; the desert was as barren to her eye as it had been to Hagar's; but, unlike Hagar, she sought with a sort of desperate eagerness in one quarter where she believed water might be found. When people search in *that* way, unless they get discouraged, their search is apt to come to something; unless, indeed, they are going after a mirage, and it was no mirage that hovered before Esther,—no vision of anything, indeed; she was searching into the meaning of a promise.

And, as I said, nobody knew; nobody helped her; the months of that winter rolled slowly and gloomily over her. Esther was between fourteen and fifteen now; her mind just opening to a consciousness of its powers, and a growing dawn of its possibilities. Life was unfolding, not its meaning, but something of its extent and richness to her; less than ever could she content herself to have it a desert. The study went on all through the winter with no visible change or result. But with the breaking spring the darkness and ice-bound state of Esther's mind seemed to break up too. Another look came into the girl's face—a high quiet calm; a light like the light of the spring itself, so gracious and tender and sweet. Esther was changed. The duties which she had done all along with a dull punctuality were done now with a certain blessed alacrity; her eye got its life of expression again, and a smile more sweet than any former ones came readily to the lips. I do not think the colonel noticed all this; or if he noticed at all, he simply thought Esther was glad of the change of season; the winter, to be sure, had kept her very much shut up. The servants were more observing.

'Do you know, we're a-goin' to have a beauty in this 'ere house?' inquired Christopher one evening of his sister, with a look of sly search, as if to see whether she knew it.

'Air we?' asked the housekeeper.

'A beauty, and no mistake. Why, Sarah, can't you see it?'

'I sees all there is to see in the family,' the housekeeper returned with a superior air.

'Then you see that. She's grown and changed uncommon, within a year.'

'She's a very sweet young lady,' Mrs. Barker agreed.

'And she's goin' to be a stunner for looks,' Christopher repeated, with that same sly observation of his sister's face. 'She'll be better-lookin' than ever her mother was.'

'Mrs. Gainsborough was a handsome woman too,' said the housekeeper. 'But Miss Esther's very promisin'—you're right there; she's very promisin'. She's just beginnin' to show what she will be.'

'She's got over her dumps lately uncommon. I judged the dumps was natural enough, sitiwated as she is; but she's come out of 'em. She's openin' up like a white camellia; and there ain't anythin' that grows that has less shadow to it; though maybe it ain't what you'd call a gay flower,' added Christopher

thoughtfully.

'Is that them stiff white flowers as has no smell to 'em?'

'The same, Mrs. Barker—if you mean what I mean.'

'Then I wouldn't liken Miss Esther to no sich. She's sweet, she is, and she ain't noways stiff. She has just which I call the manners a young lady ought to have.'

'Can't beat a white camellia for manners,' responded Christopher jocularly.

So the servants saw what the father did not. I think he hardly knew even that Esther was growing taller.

One evening in the spring, Esther was as usual making tea for her father. As usual also the tea-time was very silent. The colonel sometimes carried on his reading alongside of his tea-cup; at other times, perhaps, he pondered what he had been reading.

'Papa,' said Esther suddenly, 'would it be any harm if I wrote a letter to Pitt?'

The colonel did not answer at once.

'Do you want to write to him?'

'Yes, papa; I would like it—I would like to write once.'

'What do you want to write to him for?'

'I would like to tell him something that I think it would please him to hear.'

'What is that?'

'It is just something about myself, papa,' Esther said, a little hesitatingly.

'You may write, and I will enclose it in a letter of mine.'

'Thank you, papa.'

A day or two passed, and then Esther brought her letter. It was closed and sealed. The colonel took it and turned it over.

'There's a good deal of it,' he remarked. 'Was it needful to use so many words?'

'Papa,' said Esther, hesitating, 'I didn't think about how many words I was using.'

'You should have had thinner paper. Why did you seal it up?'

'Papa, I didn't think about that either. I only thought it had got to be sealed.'

'You did not wish to hinder my seeing what you had written?'

'No, papa,' said Esther, a little slowly.

'That will do.' And he laid the letter on one side, and Esther supposed the matter was disposed of. But when she had kissed him and gone off to bed, the colonel brought the letter before him again, looked at it, and finally broke the seal and opened it. There was a good deal of it, as he had remarked.

'Seaforth, *May* 11, 1815. 'MY DEAR PITT,—Papa has given me leave to write a letter to you; and I wanted to write, because I have something to tell you that I think you will be glad to hear. I am afraid I cannot tell it very well, for I am not much accustomed to writing letters; but I will do as well as I can.

'I am afraid it will take me some time to say what I want to say. I cannot put it in two or three sentences. You must have patience with me.

'Do you remember my telling you once that I wanted comfort? And do you remember my asking you once about the meaning of some words in the Bible, where I was looking for comfort, because mamma said it was the best place? We were sitting in the verandah, one afternoon. You had been away, to New Haven, and were home for vacation.

'Well, I partly forgot about it that summer, I was so happy. You know what a good time we had with everything, and I forgot about wanting comfort. But after you went away that autumn to Lisbon and to

England, then the want came back. You were very good about writing, and I enjoyed your letters very much; and yet, somehow, every one seemed to make me feel a little worse than I did before. That is, after the first bit, you know. For an hour, perhaps, while I was reading it, and reading it the second time, and thinking about it, I was almost perfectly happy; the letters seemed to bring you near; but when just that first hour was passed, they made you seem farther off than ever; farther off every time. And then the want of comfort came back, and I did not know where to get it. There was nobody to ask, and no help at all, if I could not find it in the Bible. All that winter, and all the summer, last summer that was, and all the first part of this last winter, I did not know what to do, I wanted comfort so. I thought maybe you would never come back to Seaforth again; and you know there is nobody else here, and I was quite alone. I never do see anybody but papa, except Mr. and Mrs. Dallas, who come here once in a while. So I went to the Bible. I read, and I thought.

'Do you remember those words I once asked you about? Perhaps you do not, so I will write them down here. "The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give the peace." Those are the words.

'Do you remember what you said at that time, about the pleasure of seeing a face that looks brightly and kindly upon one? only you did not know how that could be true of God, because we cannot really *see* His face? Well, I thought a great deal about that. You see, there are the words; and so, I thought, the thing must be possible somehow, and there must be some way in which they can be true, or the Bible would not say so. I began to pray that the Lord would make His face shine upon *me*. Then I remembered another thing. It is only the faces we *love* that we care about seeing—I mean, that we care about so very much; and it is only the faces that love us that *can* "shine" upon us. But I did not love God, for I did not know Him; and I knew He could not love me, for He knew me too well. So I began to pray a different prayer. I asked that God would teach me to love Him, and make me such a person that He could love me. It was all very dark and confused before my mind; I think I was like a person groping about and feeling for things he cannot see. It was very miserable, for I had no comfort at all; and the days and the nights were all sad and dark, only I kept a little bit of hope.

'Then I must tell you another thing. I had been doing nothing but praying and reading the Bible. But one day I came to these words, which struck me very much. They are in the fourteenth chapter of John: —

'"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

'Do you notice those last words? That is like making the face shine, or lifting up the countenance upon a person. But then I saw that to get that, which I wanted. I must *keep His commandments*. I hardly knew what they were, and I began to read to find out. I had been only looking for comfort before. And as fast as I found out one of His commands, I began to do it, as far as I could. Pitt, His commandments are such beautiful things!

'And then, I don't know how it came or when it came, exactly, but I began to *see His face*. And it began to shine upon me. And the darkness began to go away, And now, Pitt, this is what I wanted to tell you: I have found comfort. I am not dark, and I don't feel alone any more. The promise is all true. I think He has manifested Himself to me; for I am sure I know Him a little, and I love Him a great deal; and everything seems changed. It is *so* changed, Pitt. I am happy now, and contented, and things seem beautiful to me again, as they used to do when you were here, only even more, I think.

'I thought you would be glad to know it, and so I have written all this long letter, and my fingers are really tired.

'Your loving friend,

'ESTHER GAINSBOROUGH.'

The colonel read this somewhat peculiar document with wondering attention. He got to the end, and began again, with his mind in a good deal of confusion. A second reading left him more confused than the first, and he began the third time. What did Esther mean by this want of comfort? How could she want comfort? And what was this strange thing that she had found? And how came she to be pouring out her mind in this fashion to Pitt, to him of all people? The colonel was half touched, half jealous, half awed. What had his child learned in her strange solitary Bible study? He had heard of religious ecstasies and religious enthusiasts; devotees; people set apart by a singular experience; was his Esther possibly going to be anything like that? He did not wish it. He wanted her certainly to be a good woman, and a religious woman; he did not want her to be extravagant. And this sounded extravagant, even visionary. How had she got it? What had Pitt Dallas to do with it? Was it for want of *him* that

Esther had set up such a cry for comfort? The colonel liked nothing of all the questions that started up in his mind; and the only satisfactory thing was that in some way Esther seemed to be feeling happy. But her father did not want her to be given over to a visionary happiness, which in the end would desert her. He sat up a long time reading and brooding over the letter. Finally he closed it and sealed it again, and resolved to let it go off, and to have a talk with his daughter.

CHAPTER XVI.

REST AND UNREST.

It cost the colonel a strange amount of trouble to get to that talk. For an old soldier and man of the world to ask a little innocent girl about her meaning of words she had written, would seem a simple matter enough; but there was something about it that tied the colonel's tongue. He could not bring himself to broach the subject at breakfast, with the clear homely daylight streaming upon the breakfast table, and Esther moving about and attending to her usual morning duties; all he could do was to watch her furtively. This creature was growing up out of his knowledge; he looked to see what outward signs of change might be visible. He saw a fair, slim girl, no longer a little girl certainly, with a face that still was his child's face, he thought. And yet, as he looked, he slowly came to the conviction that it was the face of something more than a child. The old simplicity and the old purity were there indeed; but now there was a blessed calm upon the brow, and the calmness had a certain lofty quality; and the sweetness, which was more than ever, was refined and deep. It was not the sweetness of hilarious childhood, but something that had a more distant source than childhood draws from. The colonel ate his breakfast without knowing what he was eating; however, he could not talk to Esther at that time. He waited till evening had come round again, and the lamp was lit, and he was taking his toast and tea, with Esther ministering to him in her wonted course.

'How old are you, Esther?' he began suddenly.

'Near fifteen, papa.'

'Fifteen! Humph!'

'Why, papa? Had you forgotten?'

'At the moment.' Then he began again. 'I sent your letter off.'

'Thank you, papa.'

'It was sealed up. Why did you seal it? Did you mean me not to read it?'

Esther's eyes opened. 'I never thought about it, papa. I didn't know you would care to read it. I thought it must be sealed, and I sealed it.'

'I did care to read it, so I opened it. Had you any objection?'

'No, papa!' said Esther, wondering.

'And having opened it, I read it. I did not quite understand it,
Esther.'

Esther made no reply.

'What do you want *comfort* so much for, my child? I thought you were happy—as happy as other children.'

'I *am* happy now, papa; more happy than other children.'

'But you were not?'

'No, papa; for a while I was not.'

'Why? What did you want, that you had not?—except your mother,' the colonel added, with a sigh of consciousness that there might be a missing something there.

'I was not thinking of her, papa,' Esther said slowly.

'Of what, then?' The colonel was intensely curious.

'I was very happy, as long as Pitt was at home.'

'William Dallas! But what is he to you? he's a collegian, and you are a little girl.'

'Papa, the collegian was very kind to the little girl,' Esther said, with a smile that was very bright, and also merry with a certain sense of humour.

'I grant it; still—it is unreasonable And was it because he was gone, that you wanted comfort?'

'I didn't want it, or I didn't know that I wanted it, while he was here.'

'People that don't know they need comfort, do *not* need it, I fancy. You draw fine distinctions. Well, go on, Esther. You have found it, your letter says.'

'Oh yes, papa.'

'My dear, I do not understand you; and I should like to understand. Can you tell me what you mean?'

As he raised his eyes to her, he saw a look come over her face that he could as little comprehend as he could comprehend her letter; a look of surprise at him, mingled with a sudden shine of some inner light. She was moving about the tea-table; she came round and stood in front of her father, full in view.

'Papa, I thought my letter explained it. I mean, that now I have come to know the Lord Jesus.'

'*Now?* My dear, I was under the impression that you had been taught and had known the truths of the gospel all your life?'

'Oh, yes, papa; so I was. The difference'—

'Well?'

'The difference, papa, is, that now I know *Him*.'

'Him? Whom?'

'I mean Jesus, papa.'

'How do you know Him? Do you mean that lately you have begun to think about Him?'

'No, papa, I had been thinking a great while.'

'And now?'—

'Now I have come to know Him.'

That Esther knew what she meant was evident; it was equally plain that the colonel did not. He was puzzled, and did not like to show it too fully. The one face was shining with clearness and gladness; the other was dissatisfied and perplexed.

'My dear, I do not understand you,' the colonel said, after a pause. 'Have you been reading mystical books? I did not know there were any in the house.'

'I have been reading only the Bible, papa; and *that* is not mystical.'

'Your language sounds so.'

'Why, no, papa! I do not mean anything mystical.'

'Will you explain yourself?'

Esther paused, thinking how she should do this. When one has used the simplest words in one's vocabulary, and is called upon to expound them by the use of others less simple, the task is somewhat critical. The colonel watched with a sort of disturbed pleasure the thoughtful, clear brow, the grave eyes which had become so sweet. The intelligence at work there, he saw, was no longer that of a child; the sweetness was no longer the blank of unconscious ignorance, but the wisdom of some blessed knowledge. What did she know that was hidden from his experience?

'Papa, it is very difficult to tell you,' Esther began. 'I used to know about the things in the Bible, and I

had learned whole chapters by heart; but that was all. I did not know much more than the name of Christ,—and His history, of course, and His words.'

'What more could you know?' inquired the colonel, in increasing astonishment.

'That's just it, papa; I did not know Himself. You know what you mean when you say you don't know somebody. I mean just that.'

'But, Esther, that sounds to me very like—very like—an improper use of language,' said the colonel, stammering. 'How can you *know Him*, as you speak?'

'I can't tell you, papa. I think He showed Himself to me.'

'Showed Himself! Do you mean in a vision?'

'Oh no, papa!' said Esther, smiling. 'I have not seen His face, not literally. But He has somehow showed me how good He is, and how glorious; and has made me understand how He loves me, and how He is with me; so that I do not feel alone any more. I don't think I ever shall feel alone again.'

Was this extravagance? The colonel pondered. It seemed to him a thing to be rebuked or repressed; he knew nothing of this kind in his own religious experience; he feared it was visionary and fanciful. But when he looked at Esther's face, the words died on his tongue which he would have spoken. Those happy eyes were so strong in their wistfulness, so grave in their happiness, that they forbade the charge of folly or fancifulness; nay, they were looking at something which the colonel wished he could himself see, if the sight brought such contentment. They stopped his mouth. He could not say what he thought to say, and his own eyes oddly fell before them.

'What does William Dallas know about all this?' he asked.

'Nothing, papa. I don't think he knows it at all.'

'Why did you write about it to him, then?'

'I was sure he would be glad for me, papa. Once, a good while ago, I asked Pitt what could be the meaning of a verse in the Bible; that beautiful verse in Numbers; and he could not tell me, though what he said gave me a great help. So I knew he would remember, and he would be glad. And I want him to know Jesus too.'

The colonel felt a little twinge of jealousy here; but Esther did not know, he reflected, that her own father was in equal destitution of that knowledge. Or was it all visionary that she had been saying, and his view of religion the right one after all? It *must* be the right one. Yet his religion had never given his face the expression that shone in Esther's now. It almost hurt him.

'And now you have comfort?' he said, after a moment's pause.

'Yes, papa. More than comfort.'

'Because you think that God looks upon you with favour.'

'Because I love Him, papa. I know Him and I love Him. And I know He loves me, and will do everything for me.'

'How do you know it?' asked the colonel almost harshly. 'That sounds to me rather presuming. You may hope it; but how can you know it?'

'He has made me know it, papa. And He has said it in the Bible. I just believe what He says.'

Colonel Gainsborough gave up the argument. Before Esther's face of quiet confidence he felt himself baffled. If she were wrong, he could not prove her wrong. Uneasy and worsted, he gave up the discussion; but thought he would not have any more letters go to William Dallas.

And as the days went on, he watched furtively his daughter. He had not been mistaken in his observations that evening. A steadfastness of sweet happiness was about her, beautifying and elevating all she did and all she was. Fair quiet on the brow, loving gladness on the lips, and hands of ready ministry. She had always been a dutiful child, faithful in her ministering; but now the service was not of duty, but of love, and gracious accordingly, as the service of duty can never be. The colonel watched, and saw something of the difference, without being able, however, to come at a satisfactory understanding of it. He saw how, under this influence of love and gladness, his child was becoming the rarest of servants to him; and more still, how under it she was developing into a most exquisite personal beauty. He watched her, as if by watching he might catch something of the secret mental

charm by virtue of which these changes were wrought. But 'the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him;' and it cannot be communicated from one to another.

As has been mentioned, Pitt's letters after he got to work at Oxford became much fewer and scantier. It was only at very rare intervals that one came to Colonel Gainsborough; and Esther made no proposition of writing to England again. On that subject the colonel ceased to take any thought. It was otherwise with Pitt's family.

Mrs. Dallas sat one evening pondering over the last letter received from her son. It was early autumn; a little fire burning in the chimney, towards which the master of the house stretched out his legs, lying very much at his ease in an old-fashioned chaise lounge, and turning over an English newspaper. His attitude bespoke the comfortable ease and carelessness of his mind, on which certainly nothing lay heavy. His wife was in all things a contrast. Her handsome, stately figure was yielding at the moment to no blandishments of comfort or luxury; she sat upright, with Pitt's letter in her hand, and on her brow there was an expression of troubled consideration.

'Husband,' she said at length, 'do you notice how Pitt speaks of the colonel and his daughter?'

'No,' came slowly and indifferently from the lips of Mr. Dallas, as he turned the pages of his newspaper.

'Don't you notice how he asks after them in every letter, and wants me to go and see them?'

'Natural enough. Pitt is thinking of home, and he thinks of them;—part of the picture.'

'That boy don't forget!'

'Give him time,' suggested Mr. Dallas, with a careless yawn.

'He has had some time,—a year and a half, and in Europe; and distractions enough. But don't you know Pitt? He sticks to a thing even closer than you do.'

'If he cares enough about it.'

'That's what troubles me, Hildebrand. I am afraid he does care. If he comes home next summer and finds that girl— Do you know how she is growing up?'

'That is the worst of children,' said Mr. Dallas, in the same lazy way; 'they will grow up.'

'By next summer she will be—well, I don't know how old, but quite old enough to take the fancy of a boy like Pitt.'

'I know Pitt's age. He will be twenty-two. Old enough to know better.
He isn't such a fool.'

'Such a fool as what?' asked Mrs. Dallas sharply. 'That girl is going to be handsome enough to take any man's fancy, and hold it too. She is uncommonly striking. Don't you see it?'

'Humph! yes, I see it.'

'Hildebrand, I do not want him to marry the daughter of a dissenting colonel, with not money enough to dress her.'

'I do not mean he shall.'

'Then think how you are going to prevent it. Next summer, I warn you, it may be too late.'

In consequence, perhaps, of this conversation, though it is by no means certain that Mr. Dallas needed its suggestions, he strolled over after tea to Colonel Gainsborough's. The colonel was in his usual place and position; Esther sitting at the table with her books. Mr. Dallas eyed her as she rose to receive him, noticed the gracious, quiet manner, the fair and noble face, the easy movement and fine bearing; and turned to her father with a strengthened purpose to do what he had come to do. He had to wait a while. He told the news of Pitt's last letter; intimated that he meant to keep him in England till his studies were all ended; and then went into a discussion of politics, deep and dry. When Esther at last left the room, he made a sudden break in the discussion.

'Colonel, what are you going to do with that girl of yours?'

'What am I going to do with her?' repeated the colonel, a little drily.

'Yes. Forgive me; I have known her all her life, you know, nearly. I am concerned about Esther.'

'In what way?'

'Well, don't take it ill of me; but I do not like to see her growing up so without any advantages. She is such a beautiful creature.'

Colonel Gainsborough was silent.

'I take the interest of a friend,' Mr. Dallas went on. 'I have a right to so much. I have watched her growing up. She will be something uncommon, you know. She ought really to have everything that can help to make humanity perfect.'

'What would you have me do?' the colonel asked, half conscious and half impatient.

'I would give her all the advantages that a girl of her birth and breeding would have in the old country.'

'How is that possible, at Seaforth?'

'It is not possible at Seaforth. There is nothing here. But elsewhere it is possible.'

'I shall never leave Seaforth,' said the colonel doggedly.

'But for Esther's sake? Why, she ought to be at school now, colonel.'

'I shall never quit Seaforth,' the other repeated. 'I do not expect to live long anywhere; when I die, I will lie by my wife's side, here.'

'You are not failing in health,' Mr. Dallas persisted. 'You are improving, colonel; every time I come to see you I am convinced of it. We shall have you a long while among us yet; you may depend on it.'

'I have no particular reason to wish you may be right. And I see myself no signs that you are.'

'You have your daughter to live for.'

'She will be taken care of. I have little fear.'

There was a somewhat grim set of Mr. Dallas's mouth in answer to this speech; his words however were 'smoother than butter.'

'You need have no fear,' he said. 'Miss Gainsborough, with her birth and beauty and breeding, will do —what you must wish her to do,—marry some one well able to take care of her; but—you are not doing her justice, colonel, in not giving her the education that should go with her birth and breeding. I speak as a friend; I trust you will not take it ill of me.'

'I cannot send her to England.'

'You do not need. There are excellent institutions of learning in this country now.'

'I do not know where.'

'My wife can tell you. She has some knowledge of such things, through friends who have daughters at school. She could tell you of several good schools for girls.'

'Where are they?'

'I believe in or near New York.'

'I do not wish to leave Seaforth,' said the colonel gloomily.

'And I am sure we do not wish to have you leave it,' said the other, rising. 'It would be a terrible loss to us. Perhaps, after all, I have been officious; and you are giving Esther an education more than equal to what she could get at school.'

'I cannot quit Seaforth,' the colonel repeated. 'All that I care for in the world lies here. When I have done with the world, I wish to lie here too; and till then I will wait.'

Mr. Dallas took his leave; and the set of his mouth was grim again as he walked home.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOVING.

Mr. Dallas's visits became frequent. He talked of a great variety of things, but never failed to bring the colonel's mind to the subject of Esther's want of education. Indirectly or directly, somehow, he presented to the colonel's mind that one idea: that his daughter was going without the advantages she needed and ought to have. It was true, and the colonel could not easily dispose of the thought which his friend so persistently held up before him. Waters wear away stones, as we know to a proverb; and so it befell in this case, and Mr. Dallas knew it must. The colonel began to grow uneasy. He often reasserted that he would never leave Seaforth; he began to think about it, nevertheless.

'What should I do with this place?' he asked one evening when the subject was up.

'What do you wish to do with it?'

'I wish to live in it as long as I live anywhere,' said the colonel, sighing; 'but you say—and perhaps you are right—that I ought to be somewhere else for my child's sake. In that case, what could I do with my place here?'

'I ask again, what do you wish to do with it? Would you let it?'

'No,' said the colonel, sighing again; 'if I go I must sell. My means will not allow me to do otherwise.'

'I will buy it of you, if you wish to sell.'

'You! What would you do with the property?'

'Keep it for you, against a time when you may wish to buy it back. But indeed it would come very conveniently for me. I should like to have it, for my own purposes. I will give you its utmost value.'

The colonel pondered, not glad, perhaps, to have difficulties cleared out of his way. Mr. Dallas waited, too keen to press his point unduly.

'I should have to go and reconnoitre,' the former said presently. 'I must not give up one home till I have another ready. I never thought to leave Seaforth. Where do you say this place is that Mrs. Dallas recommends?'

'In New York. The school is said to be particularly good and thorough, and conducted by an English lady; which would be a recommendation to me, as I suppose it is to you.'

'I should have to find a house in the neighbourhood,' said the colonel, musing.

Mr. Dallas said no more, and waited.

'I must go and see what I can find,' the colonel repeated. 'Perhaps Mrs. Dallas will be so good as to give me the address of the school in question.'

Mrs. Dallas did more than that. She gave letters to friends, and addresses of more than one school teacher: and the end was, Colonel Gainsborough set off on a search. The search was successful. He was satisfied with the testimonials he received respecting one of the institutions and respecting its head; he was directed by some of Mr. Dallas's business friends to various houses that might suit him for a residence; and among them made his choice, and even made his bargain, and came home with the business settled.

Esther had spent the days of his absence in a very doubtful mood, not knowing whether to be glad or sorry, to hope or to fear. Seaforth was the only home she had ever known; she did not like the thought of leaving it; but she knew by this time as well as Mr. Dallas knew that she needed more advantages of education than Seaforth could give her. On the whole, she hoped.

The colonel was absent several days. There was no telegraphing in those times, and so the day of his return could not be notified; but when a week had passed, Esther began to look for him. It was the first time he had ever been away from her, and so, of course, it was the first coming home. Esther felt it deserved some sort of celebration. The stage arrived towards evening, she knew.

'I think maybe he will be here to-night, Barker,' she said. 'What is there we could have for supper that papa likes particularly?'

'Indeed, Miss Esther, the colonel favours nothing more than another, as I know. His toast and tea, that is all he cares for nights, mostly.'

'Toast and tea!' said Esther disparagingly.

'It's the most he cares for, as I know,' the housekeeper repeated. 'There's them quails Mr. Dallas sent over; they's nice and fat, and to be sure quails had ought to be eaten immediate. I can roast two or three of 'em, if you're pleased to order it; but the colonel, it's my opinion he won't care what you have. The gentlemen learns it so in the army, I'm thinkin'. The colonel never did give himself no care about what he had for dinner, nor for no other time.'

Esther knew that; however, she ordered the quails, and watched eagerly for her father. He came, too, that same evening. But the quails hardly got their deserts, nor Esther neither, for that matter. The colonel seemed to be unregardful of the one as much as of the other. He gave his child a sufficiently kind greeting, indeed, when he first came in; but then he took his usual seat on the sofa, without his usual book, and sat as if lost in thought. Tea was served immediately, and I suppose the colonel had had a thin dinner, for he consumed a quail and a half; yet satisfactory as this was in itself, Esther could not see that her father knew what he was eating. And after tea he still neglected his book, and sat brooding, with his head leaning on his hand. He had not said one word to his daughter concerning the success or non-success of his mission; and eager as she was, it was not in accordance with the way she had been brought up that she should question him. She asked him nothing further than about his own health and condition, and the length and character of his journey; which questions were shortly disposed of, and then the colonel sat there with his head in his hand, doing nothing that he was wont to do. Esther feared something was troubling him, and could not bear to leave him to himself. She came near softly, and very softly let her finger-tips touch her father's brow and temples, and stroke back the hair from them. She ventured no more.

Perhaps Colonel Gainsborough could not bear so much. Perhaps he was reminded of the only other fingers which had had a right since his boyhood to touch him so. Yet he would not repel the gentle hand, and to avoid doing that he did another very uncommon thing; he drew Esther down into his arms and put her on his knee, leaning his head against her shoulder. It was exceeding pleasant to the girl, as a touch of sympathy and confidence; however, for that night the confidence went no further; the colonel said nothing at all. He was in truth overcome with the sadness of leaving his home and his habits and the place of his wife's grave. As he re-entered Seaforth and entered his house, this sadness had come over him; he could not shake it off; indeed, he did not try; he gave him self up to it, and forgot Esther, or rather forgot what he owed her. And Esther, who had done what she could, sat still on her father's knee till she was weary, and wished he would release her. Yet perhaps, she thought, it was a pleasure to him to have her there, and she would not move or speak. So they remained until it was past Esther's bedtime.

'I think I will go now, papa,' she said. 'It is getting late.'

He kissed her and let her go.

But next morning the colonel was himself again,—himself as if he had never been away, only he had his news to tell; and he told it in orderly business fashion.

'I have taken a house, Esther,' he said; 'and now I wish to get moved as soon as possible. You must tell Barker, and help her.'

'Certainly, papa. Whereabouts is the house you have taken?'

'On York Island. It is about a mile out of the city, on the bank of the river; a very pretty situation.'

'Which river, papa?'

'The Hudson.'

'And am I to go to school?'

'Of course. That is the purpose of the movement. You are to enter Miss Fairbairn's school in New York. It is the best there, by all I can gather.'

'Thank you, papa. Then it is not near our new house?'

'No. You will have to drive there and back. I have made arrangements for that.'

'Won't that cost a good deal, papa?'

'Not so much as to live in the city would cost. And we are accustomed to the country; it will be pleasanter.'

'Oh, much pleasanter! What will be done with this house, papa?'

'Mr. Dallas takes it and the place off my hands.'

Esther did not like that; why, she could not possibly have told. For, to be sure, what could be better?

'Will he buy it?'

'Yes, he buys it.'

Again a little pause. Then—'What will become of the furniture and everything, papa?'

'That must be packed to go. The house I have taken is empty. We shall want all we have got.'

Esther's eye went round the room. Everything to be packed! She stood like a young general, surveying her battlefield.

'Then, papa, you never mean to come back to Seaforth again?'

The colonel sighed. 'Yes, when I die, Esther. I wish my bones to be laid here.'

He said no more. Having made his communications, he took up his book; his manner evidently saying to Esther that in what came next he had no particular share. But could it be that he was leaving it all to her inexperience? Was it to be her work, and depend on her wisdom?

'Papa, you said we were to move soon; do you wish me to arrange with
Barker about it?'

'Yes, my dear, yes; tell her, and arrange with her. I wish to make the change as early as possible, before the weather becomes unfavourable; and I wish you to get to school immediately. It cannot be too soon, tell Barker.'

So he was going to leave it all to her! On ordinary occasions he was wont to consider Esther a child still; now it was convenient to suppose her a woman. He did not put it so to himself; it is some men's way. Esther went slowly to the kitchen, and informed Barker of what was before her.

'An' it's mor'n the middle of October,' was the housekeeper's comment.

'That's very good time,' said Esther.

'You're right, Miss Esther, and so it is, if we was all ready this minute. All ain't done when you are moved, Miss Esther; there's the other house to settle; and it'll take a good bit o' work before we get so far as to that.'

'Papa wants us to be as quick as we can.'

'We'll be as quick as two pair o' hands is able for, I'll warrant; but that ain't as if we was a dozen. There's every indiwiddle thing to put up, Miss Esther, from our chairs to our beds; and books, and china, and all I'll go at the china fust of all, and to-day.'

'And what can I do, Barker?'

'I don' know, Miss Esther. You hain't no experience; and experience is somethin' you can't buy in the shops—even if there was any shops here to speak of. But Christopher and me, we'll manage it, I'll warrant. The colonel's quite right. This ain't no place for you no longer. We'll see and get moved as quick as we can, Miss Esther.'

Without experience, however, it was found that Esther's share of the next weeks of work was a very important one. She packed up the clothes and the books; and she did it 'real uncommon,' the housekeeper said; but that was the least part. She kept her father comfortable, letting none of the confusion and as little as possible of the dust come into the room where he was. She stood in the gap when Barker was in the thick of some job, and herself prepared her father's soup or got his tea. Thoughtful, quiet, diligent, her head, young as it was, proved often a very useful help to Barker's experience; and something about her smooth composure was a stay to the tired nerves of her subordinates. Though Christopher Bounder really had no nerves, yet he felt the influence I speak of.

'Ain't our Miss Esther growed to be a stunner, though!' he remarked more than once.

'I'm sure I don't rightly know what you mean, Christopher,' his sister answered.

'Well, I tell you she's an uncommon handsome young lady, Sarah. An' she has the real way with her; the real thing, she has.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I'll wager a cucumber you can tell,' said Christopher, shutting up his eyes slyly. 'There ain't no flesh and blood round in these parts like that;—no mor'n a cabbage ain't like a camellia. An' *that* don't tell it. She's that dainty and sweet as a camellia never was—not as ever I see; and she has that fine, soft way with her, that is like the touch of a feather, and yet ain't soft neither if you come to go agin it. I tell you what, Sarah, that shows blood, that does,' concluded Christopher with a competent air. 'Our young lady, she's the real thing. You and me, now, we couldn't be like that if we was to die for it. That's blood, that is.'

'I don't know,' said the housekeeper. 'She *is* sweet, uncommon; and she is gentle enough, and she has a will of her own, too; but I don't know—she didn't use for to be just so.'

''Cause she's growin' up to years,' said the gardener. 'La, Sally, folks is like vegetables, uncommon; you must let 'em drop their rough leaves, before you can see what they're goin' to be.'

'There warn't never no rough leaves nor rough anything about Miss
Esther. I can't say as I knows what you mean, Christopher.'

'A woman needn't to know everything,' responded her brother with superiority; 'and the natural world, to be sure, ain't your department, Sarah. You're good for a great deal where you be.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NEIGHBOUR.

The packing and sending off of boxes was ended at last; and the bare, empty, echoing, forlorn house seemed of itself to eject its inhabitants. When it came to that, everybody was ready to go. Mrs. Barker lamented that she could not go on before the rest of the family, to prepare the place a bit for them; but that was impossible; they must all go together.

It was the middle of November when at last the family made their flitting. They had no dear friends to leave, and nothing particular to regret, except that one low mound in the churchyard; yet Esther felt sober as they drove away. The only tangible reason for this on which her thoughts could fix, was the fact that she was going away from the place where Pitt Dallas was at home, and to which he would come when he returned from England. She would then be afar off. Yet there would be nothing to hinder his coming to see them in their new home; so the feeling did not seem well justified. Besides that, Esther also had a somewhat vague sense that she was leaving the domain of childhood and entering upon the work and sphere of a woman. She was just going to school! But perhaps the time of confusion she had been passing through might have revealed to her that she had already a woman's life-work on her hands. And the confusion was not over, and the work only begun. She had perhaps a dim sense of this. However, she was young; and the soberness was certainly mixed with gladness. For was she not going to school, and so, on the way to do something of the work Pitt was doing, in mental furnishing and improvement? I think, gladness had the upper hand.

It took two days of stage travelling to get them to their destination. They were days full of interest and novelty for Esther; eager anticipation and hope; but the end of the second day found her well tired. Indeed, it was the case with them all. Mrs. Barker had lamented that she and Christopher were not allowed to go off some time before 'the family,' so as to have things in a certain degree of readiness for them; the colonel had said it was impossible: they could not be spared from Seaforth until the last minute. And now here they were 'all in a heap,' as Mrs Barker expressed it, 'to be tumbled into the house at once.' She begged that the colonel would stay the night over in the city, and give her at least a few hours to prepare for him. The colonel would not hear of it, however, but at once procured vehicles to take the whole party and their boxes out to the place that was to be their new home. It was then already evening; the short November day had closed in.

'He's that simple,' Mrs. Barker confided to her brother, 'he expects to find a fire made and a room

ready for him! It's like all the gentlemen. They never takes no a 'Thinks the furniture 'll hop out o' the boxes, like, 'count of how things is done, if it ain't *their* things.' and stan' round,' echoed Christopher. 'I'm afeard they won't be so obligin'.'

The drive was somewhat slower in the dark than it would have been otherwise, and the stars were out and looking down brilliantly upon the little party as they finally dismounted at their door. The shadow of the house rising before them, a cool air from the river, the sparkling stars above, the vague darkness around; Esther never forgot that home-coming.

They had stopped at a neighbour's house to get the key; and now, the front door being unlocked, made their way in, one after another. Esther was confronted first by a great packing-case in the narrow hall, which blocked up the way. Going carefully round this, which there was just room to do, she stumbled over a smaller box on the floor.

'Oh, papa, take care!' she cried to her father, who was following her; 'the house is all full of things, and it is so dark. Oh, Barker, can't you open the back door and let in a gleam of light?'

This was done, and also in due time a lantern was brought upon the scene. It revealed a state of things almost as hopeless as the world appeared to Noah's dove the first time she was sent out of the ark. If there was rest for the soles of their feet, it was all that could be said. There was no promise of a place to sit down; and as for *lying* down and getting their natural rest, the idea was Utopian.

'Now look here,' said a voice suddenly out of the darkness outside: 'you're all fagged out, ain't ye? and there ain't nothin' on arth ye kin du to-night; there's no use o' your tryin'. Jes' come over to my house and hev some supper. Ye must want it bad. Ben travellin' all day, ain't ye? Jes' come over to me; I've got some hot supper for ye. Lands sakes! ye kin't do nothin' here to-night. It *is* a kind of a turn-up, ain't it? La, a movin's wuss'n a weddin', for puttin' everybody out.'

The voice, sounding at first from the outside, had been gradually drawing nearer and nearer, till with the last words the speaker also entered the back room, where Esther and her father were standing. They were standing in the midst of packing-cases, of every size and shape, between which the shadows lay dark, while the faint lantern light just served to show the rough edges and angles of the boxes and the hopeless condition of things generally. It served also now to let the new-comer be dimly seen. Esther and her father, looking towards the door, perceived a stout little figure, with her two hands rolled up in her shawl, head bare, and with hair in neat order, for it glanced in the lantern shine as only smooth things can. The features of the face were not discernible.

'It's the cunnel himself, ain't it?' she said. 'They said he was a tall man, and I see *this* is a tall un. Is it the cunnel himself? I couldn't somehow make out the name—I never kin; and I kin't *see* nothin', as the light is.'

'At your service, madam,' said the person addressed. 'Colonel
Gainsborough.'

The visitor dropped a little dot of a curtsey, which seemed to Esther inexpressibly funny, and went on.

'Beg pardon for not knowin'. Wall, cunnel, I'm sure you're tired and hungry,—you and your darter, is it?—and I've got a hot supper for you over to my house. I allays think there's nothin' like hevin' things hot,—cold comfort ain't no comfort, for me,—and I've got everythin' hot for you—hot and nice; and now, will you come over and eat it? You see, you kin't do nothin' here to-night. I don't see how ever you're to sleep, in this world; there ain't nothin' here but the floor and the boxes, and if you'll take beds with me, I'm sure you're welcome.'

'I thank you, madam; you are very kind; but I do not think we need trouble you,' the colonel said, with civil formality. Esther was amused, but also a little eager that her father should accept the invitation. What else would become of him? she thought. The prospect was desolation. Truly they had some cooked provisions; but that was only cold comfort, as their visitor had said; doubtful if the term could be applied at all.

'Now you'd jes' best come right over!' the fluent but kind voice said persuasively. 'It's all spilin' to be eat. An' what kin you do? There ain't no fire here to warm you, and it'll take a bit of a while before you kin get one; an' you're all tired out. Jes' come over and hev a cup o' hot coffee, and get heartened up a bit, and then you'll know what to do next. I allays think, one thing at a time.'

'Papa,' said Esther a little timidly, 'hadn't you better do it? There's nothing but confusion here; it will be a long time before we can get you even a cup of tea.'

'It's all ready,' their visitor went on,—'ready and spilin'; an' I got it for you o' purpose. Now don't stan' thinkin' about it, but jes' come right over; I'll be as glad to hev you as if you was new apples.'

'How far is it, ma'am?' Esther asked.

'Jes' two steps—down the other side o' the field; it's the very next house to your'n. Oh, I've lived there a matter o' ten year; and I was main glad to hear there was somebody comin' in here agin; it's so sort o' lonesome to see the winders allays shut up; and your light looks real cheery, if it is only a lantern light. I knowed when you was a comin', and says I, they'll be real tired out when they gits there, says I; and I'll hev a hot supper ready for 'em, it's all I kin du; but I'm sure, if you'll sleep, you're welcome.'

'If you please, sir,' put in Mrs. Barker, 'it would be the most advisedest thing you could do; for there ain't no prospect here, and if you and Miss Esther was away for a bit, mebbe me and Christopher would come to see daylight after a while; which it is what I don't do at present.'

The good woman's voice sounded so thoroughly perturbed, and expressed such an undoubted earnest desire, that the colonel, contrary to all his traditions, gave in. He and Esther followed their new friend, ''cross the field,' as she said, but they hardly knew where, till the light and warmth of her hospitable house received them.

How strange it was! The short walk in the starlight; then the homely hospitable room, with its spread table—the pumpkin pie, and the sausage, and the pickles, and the cheese, and the cake! The very coarse tablecloth; the little two-pronged forks, and knives which might have been cut out of sheet iron, and singular ware which did service for china. The extreme homeliness of it all would almost have hindered Esther from eating, though she was very hungry. But there was good bread and butter; and coffee that was hot, and not bad otherwise, although assuredly it never saw the land of Arabia; certainly it seemed very good to Esther that night, even taken from a pewter spoon. And the tablecloth was clean, and everything upon it. So, with doubtful hesitation at first, Esther found the supper good, and learned her first lesson in the broadness of humanity and the wide variety in the ways of human life.

Their hostess, seen by the light of her dip candles, was in perfect harmony with her entertainment. A round little woman, very neat, and terribly plain, with a full oval face, which had no other characteristic of beauty; insignificant features, and a pale skin, covered with freckles. Out of this face, however, looked a pair of small, shrewd, and kind grey eyes; their owner could be no fool.

Esther was surprised to see that her father, who was, to be sure, an old campaigner, made a very fair supper.

'In the darkness I could hardly see where we went,' he remarked. 'But I suppose your husband is the owner of the neat gardens I observed formerly near our house?'

'Wall, he would be if he was alive,' was the answer, 'but that's what he hain't ben this five year.'

'Then, do *you* manage them?'

'Wall, cunnel, I manage 'em better'n he did. Mr. Blumenfeld was an easy kind o' man; easy to live with, tu; but when you hev other folks to see to, it don't du no ways to let 'em hev their own head too much. An' that's what he did. He was a fust-rate gardener and no mistake; he knowed his business; but the thing he *didn't* know was folks. So they cheated him. La, folks ain't like flowers, not 'zactly; or if they be, as he used to say, there's thorns among 'em now and then and a weed or two!'

'Blumenfeld?' repeated the colonel. 'You are not German, surely?'

'Wall, I guess I ain't,' said the little woman, 'Not if I know myself. I ain't sayin' nothin' agin what *he* was; but la, there's different naturs in the world, and I'm different. Folks doos say, his folks is great for gittin' along; but *he* warn't; that's all I hev to say. He learned me the garden work, though; that much he did.'

'And now you manage the business?'

'I do so. Won't you hev another cup, cunnel?'

They went back to their disordered house, resisting all further offers of hospitality. And in time, beds were got out and prepared; how, Esther could hardly remember afterwards, the confusion was so great; but it was done, and she lost every other feeling in the joy of repose.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAPPY PEOPLE.

At Esther's age nature does her work of recuperation well and fast. It was early yet, and the dawn just breaking into day, when she woke; and, calling to mind her purposes formed last night, she immediately got up. The business of the toilet performed as speedily as possible, she stole down-stairs and roused Mrs. Barker; and while waiting for her to be ready, went to the back door and opened it. A fresh cool air blew in her face; clouds were chasing over the sky before a brisk wind, and below her rolled the broad Hudson, its surface all in commotion; while the early light lay bright on the pretty Jersey shore. Esther stood in a spell of pleasure. This was a change indeed from her Seaforth view, where the eye could go little further than the garden and the road. Here was a new scene opening, and a new chapter in life beginning; Esther's heart swelled. There was a glad mental impulse towards growth and developement, which readily connected itself with this outward change, and with this outward stir also. The movement of wind and water met a movement of the animal spirits, which consorted well with it; the cool air breathed vigour into her resolves; she turned to Mrs. Barker with a very bright face.

'Oh, Barker, how lovely it is!'

'If you please, which is it, Miss Esther?'

'Look at that beautiful river. And the light. And the air, Barker. It is delicious!'

'I can't see it, mum. All I can see is that there ain't an indiwiddle cheer standin' on its own legs in all the house; and whatever'll the colonel do when he comes down? and what to begin at first, I'm sure I don't know.'

'We'll arrange all that. Where is Christopher? We want him to open the boxes. We'll get one room in some sort of order first, and then papa can stay in it. Where is Christopher?'

They had to wait a few minutes for Christopher, and meanwhile Esther took a rapid review of the rooms; decided which should be the dining-room, and which the one where her father should have his sofa and all his belongings. Then she surveyed the packing-cases, to be certain which was which, and what ought to be opened first; examining her ground with the eye of a young general. Then, when the lagging Mr. Bounder made his appearance, there was a systematic course of action entered upon, in which packing-cases were knocked apart and cleared away; chairs, and a table or two, were released from durance and set on their legs; a rug was found and spread down before the fireplace; the colonel's sofa was got at, and unboxed, and brought into position; and finally a fire was made. Esther stood still to take a moment's complacent review of her morning's work.

'It looks quite comfortable,' she said, 'now the fire is burning up. We have done pretty well, Barker, for a beginning?'

'Never see a better two hours' job,' said Christopher. ''Tain't much more. That's Miss Esther. Sarah there, she wouldn't ha' knowed which was her head and which was her heels, and other things according, if she hadn't another head to help her. What o'clock is it now, Miss Esther?'

'It is some time after eight. Papa may be down any minute. Now, Barker, the next thing is breakfast.'

'Breakfast, Miss Esther?' said the housekeeper, standing still to look at her.

'Yes. Aren't you hungry? I think we must all want it.'

'And how are we goin' to get it? The kitchen's all cluttered full o' boxes and baggage and that; and I don' know where an indiwiddle thing is, this minute.'

'I saw the tea-kettle down-stairs.'

'Yes 'm, but that's the sole solitary article. I don' know where there's a pan, nor a gridiron; and there's no fire, Miss Esther; and it'll take patience to get that grate agoin'.'

The housekeeper, usually so efficient, now looked helpless. It was true, the system by means of which so much had been done that morning, had proceeded from Esther's head solely. She was not daunted now.

'I know the barrel in which the cooking things were packed stands there; in the hall, I think.

Christopher, will you unpack it? But first, fill the kettle and bring it here.'

'*Here*, Miss Esther?' cried the housekeeper.

'Yes; it will soon boil here. And, Barker, the hampers with the china are in the other room; if you will unpack them, I think you can find the tea-pot and some cups.'

'They'll all want washin', Miss Esther.'

'Very well; we shall have warm water here by that time. And then I can give papa his tea and toast, and boil some eggs, and that will do very well; everything else we want is in the basket, and plenty, as we did not eat it last night.'

It was all done,—it took time, to be sure, but it was done; and when Colonel Gainsborough came down, hesitating and somewhat forlorn, he found a fire burning in the grate, Mrs. Barker watching over a skillet in one corner, and Esther over a tea-kettle in the other. The room was filled with the morning light, which certainly showed the bare floor and the packing-boxes standing around; but also shone upon an unpacked table, cups, plates, bread and butter. Esther had thought it was very comfortable. Her father seemed not to take that view.

'What are you doing there?' he said. 'Is this to be the kitchen?'

'Only for this morning, papa,' said Esther cheerfully. 'This is just the kettle for your tea, and Barker is boiling an egg for you; at least she will as soon as the water boils.'

'All this should have been done elsewhere, my dear.'

'It was not possible, papa. The kitchen is absolutely full of boxes—it will take a while to clear it; and I wanted first to get a corner for you to be comfortable in. We will get things in order as fast as we can. Now the kettle boils, Barker, don't it? You may put in the eggs.'

'My dear, I do not think this is the place for the sofa.'

'Oh no, papa, I do not mean it; the room looking towards the water is the prettiest, and will be the pleasantest; that will be the sitting-room, I think; but we could only do one thing at a time. Now, you shall have your tea and toast in two minutes.'

'There is no doing anything well without system,' said the colonel. 'Arrange your work always, and then take it in order, the first thing first, and so on. Now I should have said, the *first* thing here was the kitchen fire.'

Esther knew it was not, and that her doings had been with admirable system; she was a little disappointed that they met with no recognition. She had counted upon her father's being pleased, and even a little surprised that so much had been done. Silently she made his tea, and toasted him with much difficulty a slice of bread. Mrs. Barker disappeared with her skillet. But the colonel was in the state of mind that comes over many ease-loving men when their ease is temporarily disturbed.

'How long is it going to take two people to get these things unboxed and in their places?' he inquired, as his eye roved disconsolately over the room and its packing-cases. 'This is pretty uncomfortable!'

'*Three* people, papa. I shall do the very best I can. You would like the sitting-room put in order first, where your sofa and you can be quiet?'

'You are going to school.'

'Oh, papa! but I must see to the house first. Barker cannot get along without me.'

'It is her business,' said the colonel. 'You are going to school.'

'But, papa, please, let me wait a few days. After I once begin to go to school I shall be so busy with study.'

'Time you were. That's what we are come here for. The season is late now.'

'But your comfort, and the house, papa?'

'My comfort must take its chance. I wish you to go to Miss Fairbairn on Monday. Then Barker and Christopher can take the house between them.'

There was no gainsaying her father when once an order was given, Esther knew; and she was terribly disappointed. Her heart was quite set on this business of righting and arranging the new home; nobody

could do it as it should be done, she knew, except by her order; and her own hand longed to be in the work. A sudden cloud came over the brightness of her spirit. She had been very bright through all the strain and rush of the morning; now she suddenly felt tired and dispirited.

'What is Christopher doing?'

'Papa, I do not know; he has been opening boxes.'

'Let him put the kitchen in order.'

'Yes, papa.' Esther knew it was impossible, however.

'And let Barker get the rooms up-stairs arranged.'

'Papa, don't you want your sitting-room prepared first?—just so that you may have a corner of comfort?'

'I do not expect to see comfort, my dear, for many a day—to judge by what I have around me.'

Esther swallowed a choking feeling in her throat, commanded back some tears which had a mind to force their way, and presided over the rest of the meal with a manner of sweet womanly dignity, which had a lovely unconscious charm. The colonel did even become a little conscious of it.

'You are doing the best you know, my dear,' he condescended kindly. 'I do not grudge any loss of comfort for your sake.'

'Papa, I think you shall not lose any,' Esther said eagerly; but then she confined her energies to doing. And with nerves all strung up again, she went after breakfast at the work of bringing order out of disorder.

'The first thing for you to do, Barker,' she said, 'is to get papa's sleeping-room comfortable. He will have the one looking to the west, I think; that is the prettiest. The blue carpet, that was on his room at Seaforth, will just do. Christopher will undo the roll of carpet for you.'

'Miss Esther, I can't do nothing till I get the kitchen free. There'll be the dinner.'

'Christopher will manage the kitchen.'

'He can't, mum. He don't know one thing that's to be done, no more'n one of his spades. It's just not possible, Miss Esther.'

'I will oversee what he does. Trust me. I will not make any bad mistakes, Barker. You put papa's room in order. He wishes it.'

What the colonel desired had to be done, Barker knew; so with a wondering look at Esther's sweet, determined face, she gave in. And that day and the next day, and the third, were days very full of business, and in which a vast deal was accomplished. The house was really very pretty, as Esther soon saw; and before Saturday night closed in, those parts of it at least which the colonel had most to do with were stroked into order, and afforded him all his wonted ease and luxury. Esther had worked every hour of those days, to the admiration of her subordinates; the informing spirit and regulating will of every step that was taken. She never lost her head, or her patience, or her sweet quiet; though she was herself as busy as a bee and at the same time constantly directing the activity of the others. Wise, and quick-witted, and quick to remember, her presence of mind and readiness of resource seemed unfailing. So, as I said, before Saturday night came, an immense deal of work was accomplished, and done in a style that needed not to be done over again. All which, however, was not finished without some trace of the strain to which the human instrument had been put.

The sun had just set, and Esther was standing at the window of her father's room, looking out to the west. She had been unpacking his clothes and laying them in the drawers of his bureau and press.

'Miss Esther, you're tired, bad!' said the housekeeper wistfully, coming up beside her. 'There's all black rings under your eyes; and your cheeks is pale. You have worked too hard, indeed.'

'Never mind,' said Esther cheerfully; 'that will pass. How pretty it is, Barker! Look out at that sky.'

'Yes 'm, it's just the colour from that sky that keeps your cheeks from showin' how white they be. Miss Esther, you've just done too much.'

'Never mind,' said the girl again. 'I wanted to have papa comfortable before I went to school. I am going to school Monday morning, Barker. Now I think he'll do very nicely.' She looked round the room,

which was a pattern of neatness and of comfort that was both simple and elegant. But the housekeeper's face was grave with disapproval and puckered with lines of care. The wistful expression of anxiety upon it touched Esther.

'Barker,' she said kindly, 'you do not look happy.'

'Me! No, Miss Esther, it is which I do not expect to look.'

'Why not?'

'Mum, things is not accordin' in this world.'

'I think you are mistaken. Do you know who the happy people are?'

'Indeed, Miss Esther, I think they're the blessed ones that has gone clean away from the earth.'

'Oh no! I mean, people that are happy now and happy here, Barker.'

'I am sure and I don't know, Miss Esther; if it wouldn't be little children,—which is, them that is too young to know what the world is like. I do suppose they are happy.'

'Don't you know, the Bible says some other people are happy?'

'The Bible!'

Mrs. Barker stared, open-mouthed, at the face before her. Esther had sat down by the window, where the glow from the west was upon it, like a glory round the head of a young saint; and the evening sky was not more serene, nor reflected more surely a hidden light than did the beautiful eyes. Mrs. Barker gazed, and could not bring out another word.

'You read your Bible, don't you?'

'Yes 'm, in course; which it isn't very often; but in course I reads it.'

'Don't you know what it says about happy people?'

'In Paradise,' gasped the housekeeper.

'No, not in Paradise. Listen; let me tell you. "Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered."'

Mrs. Barker met the look in Esther's eyes, and was absolutely dumb.

'Don't you know that?'

'I've heerd it, mum.'

'Well, you understand it?'

'If you please, Miss Esther, I think a body could be that knowed it; that same, I mean.'

'How can anybody be happy that does *not* know it?'

'True enough, mum; but how is anybody to know it for sure, Miss Esther?'

'*I* know it, Barker.'

'*You*, Miss Esther! Yes, mum, that's easy, when you never did nothin' wrong in your life. 'Tain't the way with the likes o' us.'

'It is not the way with anybody. Nothing but the blood of Christ can make any one clean. But that will. And don't you see, Barker, *that* is being happy?'

There was indeed no dissent in the good woman's eyes, but she said nothing. Esther presently went on.

'Now I will tell you another word. Listen. "Blessed is the man whose strength the Lord is." Don't you think so, Barker? Don't you see? He *can never be weak*.'

'Miss Esther, you do speak beautiful!' came out at last the housekeeper.

'Don't you think that is being happy?'

'It do sound so, mum.'

'I can tell you it feels so, Barker. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." And that is, they are happy. And I trust in Him; and I love Him; and I know my sins are forgiven and covered; and my strength is in Him—all my strength. But that makes me strong.'

She went away with that from the window and the room, leaving the housekeeper exceedingly confounded; much as if a passing angel's wings had thrown down a white light upon her brown pathway. And from this time, it may be said Mrs. Barker regarded her young lady with something like secret worship. She had always been careful and tender of her charge; now in spirit she bowed down before her to the ground. For a while after Esther had left the room she stood very still, like one upon whom a spell had fallen. She was comparing things; remembering the look Mrs. Gainsborough had used to wear—sweet, dignified, but shadowed; then the face that at one time was Esther's face, also sweet and dignified, but uneasy and troubled and dark; and now—what was her countenance like? The housekeeper was no poet, nor in any way fanciful; otherwise she might have likened it to some of the fairest things in nature; and still the comparison would have fallen short. Sweet as a white rose; untroubled as the stars; full of hope as the flush of the morning. Only, in the human creature there was the added element of *life*, which in all these dead things was wanting. Mrs. Barker probably thought of none of these images for her young mistress; nevertheless, the truth that is in them came down upon her very heart; and from that time she was Esther's devoted slave. There was no open demonstration of feeling; but Esther's wishes were laws to her, and Esther's welfare lay nearest her heart of all things in the world.

CHAPTER XX.

SCHOOL.

After much consideration the colonel had determined that Esther should be a sort of half boarder at Miss Fairbairn's school; that is, she should stay there from Monday morning to Saturday night. Esther combated this determination as far as she dared.

'Papa, will not that make me a great deal more expense to you than I need be?'

'Not much difference, my dear, as to that. If you came back every night
I should have to keep a horse; now that will not be necessary, and
Christopher will have more time to attend to other things.'

'But, papa, it will leave you all the week alone!'

'That must be, my child. I must be alone all the days, at any rate.'

'Papa, you will miss me at tea, and in the evenings.'

'I must bear that.'

It troubles me, papa.'

'And that you must bear. My dear, I do not grudge the price I pay. See you only that I get what I pay for.'

'Yes, papa,' Esther said meekly. She could go no further.

Miss Fairbairn was a tall woman, but not imposing either in manner or looks. Her face was sensible, with a mixture of the sweet and the practical which was at least peculiar; and the same mixture was in her manner. This was calm and gentle in the utmost degree; also cool and self-possessed equally; and it gave Esther the impression of one who always knew her own mind and was accustomed to make it the rule for all around her. A long talk with this lady was the introduction to Esther's school experience. It was a very varied talk; it roved over a great many fields and took looks into others; it was not inquisitive or prying, and yet Esther felt as if her interlocutor were probing her through and through, and finding out all she knew and all she did not know. In the latter category, it seemed to Esther, lay almost everything she ought to have known. Perhaps Miss Fairbairn did not think so; at any rate her face expressed no disappointment and no disapproval.

'In what way have you carried on your study of history, my dear?' she finally asked.

'I hardly can tell; in a box of coins, I believe,' Esther answered.

'Ah? I think I will get me a box of coins.'

Which meant, Esther could not tell what. She found herself at last, to her surprise, put with the highest classes in the English branches and in Latin.

Her work was immediately delightful. Esther was so buried in it that she gave little thought or care to anything else, and did not know or ask what place she took in the esteem of her companions or of her teachers. As the reader may be more curious, one little occurrence that happened that week shall serve to illustrate her position; did illustrate it, in the consciousness of all the school family, only not of Esther herself.

It was at dinner one day. There was a long table set, which reached nearly from the front of the house to the back, through two rooms, leaving just comfortable space for the servants to move about around it. Dinner was half through. Miss Fairbairn was speaking of something in the newspaper of that morning which had interested her, and she thought would interest the girls.

'I will read it to you,' she said. 'Miss Gainsborough, may I ask you to do me a favour? Go and fetch me the paper, my dear; it lies on my table in the schoolroom; the paper, and the book that is with it.'

There went a covert smile round the room, which Esther did not see; indeed, it was too covert to be plain even to the keen eyes of Miss Fairbairn, and glances were exchanged; and perhaps it was as well for Esther that she did not know how everybody's attention for the moment was concentrated on her movements. She went and came in happy ignorance.

Miss Fairbairn received her paper, thanked her, and went on then to read to the girls an elaborate account of a wonderful wedding which had lately been celebrated in Washington. The bride's dress was detailed, her trousseau described, and the subsequent movements of the bridal party chronicled. All was listened to with eager attention.

'What do you think of it, Miss Dyckman?' the lady asked after she had finished reading.

'I think she was a happy girl, Miss Fairbairn.'

'Humph! What do you say, Miss Delavan?'

'Uncommonly happy, I should say, ma'am.'

'Is that your opinion, Miss Essing?'

'Certainly, ma'am. There could be but one opinion, I should think.'

'What could make a girl happy, if all that would not?' asked another.

'Humph! Miss Gainsborough, you are the next; what are your views on the subject?'

Esther's mouth opened, and closed. The answer that came first to her lips was sent back. She had a fine feeling that it was not fit for the company, a feeling that is expressed in the admonition not to cast pearls before swine, though that admonition did not occur to her at the time. She had been about to appeal to the Bible; but her answer as it was given referred only to herself.

'I believe I should not call "happiness" anything that would not last,' she said.

There was a moment's silence. What Miss Fairbairn thought was not to be read from her face; in other faces Esther read distaste or disapprobation.

'Why, Miss Fairbairn, nothing lasts, if you come to that,' cried a young lady from near the other end of the table.

'Some things more than others,' the mistress of the house opined.

'Not what you call "happiness," ma'am.'

'That's a very sober view of things to take at your age, Miss Disbrow.'

'Yes, ma'am,' said the young lady, tittering. 'It is true.'

'Do you think it is true, Miss Jennings?'

There was a little hesitation. Miss Jennings said she did not know.
Miss Lawton was appealed to.

'Is there no happiness that is lasting, Miss Lawton?'

'Well, Miss Fairbairn, what we call happiness. One can't be married but once,' the young lady hazarded.

That called forth a storm of laughter. Laughter well modulated and kept within bounds, be it understood; no other was tolerated in Miss Fairbairn's presence.

'I have *heard* of people who had that happiness two or three times,' the lady said demurely. 'Is there, then, no happiness short of being married?'

'Oh, Miss Fairbairn! you know I do not mean that, but all the things you read to us of: the diamonds, and the beautiful dresses, and the lace, and the presents; and then the travelling, and doing whatever she liked.'

'Very few people do whatever they like,' murmured Miss Fairbairn.

'I mean all that. And that does not last—only for a while. The diamonds last, of course'—

'But the pleasure of wearing them might not. True. Quite right, Miss Lawton. But I come back to my question. Is there *no* happiness on earth that lasts?'

There was silence.

'We are in a bad way, if that is our case. Miss Gainsborough, what do you say? I come back to you again. Is there any such thing on earth as happiness, according to your terms?—something that lasts?'

Esther was in doubt again how to answer.

'I think there is, ma'am,' she said, with a look up at her questioner.

'Pray what is it?'

Did she know? or did she not know? Esther was not certain; was not certain that her words would find either understanding or sympathy in all that tableful. Nevertheless, the time had come when they must be spoken. Which words? for several Bible sayings were in her mind.

'"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord: that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt them be, and it shall be well with thee."'

The most profound silence followed this utterance. It had been made in a steady and clear voice, heard well throughout the rooms, and then there was silence. Esther fancied she discerned a little sympathetic moisture in the eyes of Miss Fairbairn, but also that lady at first said nothing. At last one voice in the distance was understood to declare that its owner 'did not care about eating the labour of her hands.'

'No, my dear, you would surely starve,' replied Miss Fairbairn. 'Is that what the words mean, do you think, Miss Gainsborough?'

'I think not, ma'am.'

'What then? won't you explain?'

'There is a reference, ma'am, which I thought explained it. "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings." And another word perhaps explains it. "Oh fear the Lord, ye His saints; for there is no want to them that fear Him."'

'No want to them, hey?' repeated Miss Fairbairn. 'That sounds very much like happiness, I confess. What do you say, Miss Lawton?—Miss Disbrow? People that have no want unsatisfied must be happy, I should say.'

Silence. Then one young lady was heard to suggest that there were no such people in the world.

'The Bible says so, Miss Baines. What can you do against that?'

'Miss Fairbairn, there is an old woman that lives near us in the country—very poor; she is an old Christian,—at least so they say,—and she is *very* poor. She has lost all her children and grandchildren; she cannot work any more, and she lives upon charity. That is, if you call it living. I know she often has

very little indeed to live upon, and that very poor, and she is quite alone; nobody to take the least care for her, or of her.'

'So you think she *does* want some things. Miss Gainsborough, what have you to say to that?'

'What does *she* think about it?' Esther asked.

She looked as she spoke at the young lady who had given the instance, but the latter took no notice, until Miss Fairbairn said,

'Miss Baines, a question was put to you.'

'I am sure I don't know,' Miss Baines replied. 'They *say* she is a very happy old woman.'

'You doubt it?'

'I should not be happy in her place, ma'am. I don't see, for my part, how it is possible. And it seems to me certainly she wants a great many things.'

'What do you think, Miss Gainsborough.'

'I think the Bible must be true, ma'am.'

'That is Faith's answer.'

'And then, the word is, "Blessed is every one that *feareth the Lord;*" it is true of nobody else, I suppose.'

'My dear, is that the answer of Experience?'

'I do not know, ma'am.' But Esther's smile gave a very convincing affirmative. 'But the promise is, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."'

'There you have it. "No good thing;" and, "from them that walk uprightly." Miss Disbrow, when you were getting well of that fever, did your mother let you eat everything?'

'Oh no, ma'am; not at all.'

'What did she keep from you?'

'Nearly everything I liked, ma'am.'

'Was it cruelty, or kindness?'

'Kindness, of course. What I liked would have killed me.'

'Then she withheld from you "no good thing," hey? while she kept from you nearly everything you liked.'

There was silence all round the table. Then Miss Baines spoke again.

'But, ma'am, that old woman has not a fever, and she don't get any nice things to eat.'

'It is quite likely she enjoys her meals more than you do yours. But granting she does not, are you the physician to know what is good for her?'

'She does not want any physician, ma'am.'

A laugh ran round the table, and Miss Fairbairn let the subject drop.
When dinner was nearly over, however, she remarked:

'You want light for your practising. I will excuse you, Miss
Gainsborough, if you wish to go.'

Esther went, very willingly. Then Miss Fairbairn held one of her little discourses, with which now and then she endeavoured to edify her pupils.

'Young ladies, I am going to ask you to take pattern by Miss Gainsborough. Did you notice her movements when she went to do that little errand for me?'

Silence. Then murmurs of assent were heard, not very loud, nor enthusiastic. Miss Fairbairn did not expect that, nor care. What she wanted was to give her lesson.

'Did you observe how she moved? She went like a swan'—

'On land' her keen ears heard somebody say under breath.

'No, not on the land; like a swan on the water; with that smooth, gliding, noiseless movement which is the very way a true lady goes. There was the cat lying directly in her way; Miss Gainsborough went round her gracefully, without stopping or stumbling. The servant came right against her with a tray full; Miss Gainsborough stood still and waited composedly till the obstacle was removed. You could not hear her open or shut the door; you could not hear her foot on the stairs, and yet she went quick. And when she came back, she did not rustle and bustle with her newspaper, but laid it nicely folded beside me, and went back to her seat as quietly as she had left it. Young ladies, that is good breeding in motion.'

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COLONEL'S TOAST.

It is just possible that the foregoing experiences did not tend to increase Esther's popularity among her companions. She got forthwith the name of *favourite*, the giving of which title is the consolatory excuse to themselves of those who have done nothing to deserve favour. However, whether she were popular or not was a matter that did not concern Esther. She was full of the delight of learning, and bent upon making the utmost of her new advantages. Study swallowed her up, so to speak; at least, swallowed up all lesser considerations and attendant circumstances. Not so far but that Esther got pleasure also from these; she enjoyed the novelty, she enjoyed the society, even she enjoyed the sight of so many in the large family; to the solitary girl, who had all her life lived and worked alone, the stir and breeze and bustle of a boarding-school were like fresh air to the lungs, or fresh soil to the plant. Whether her new companions liked her, she did not so much as question; in the sweetness of her own happy spirit she liked *them*, which was the more material consideration. She liked every teacher that had to do with her; after which, it is needless to add, that Miss Gainsborough had none but favourers and friends in that part of her new world. And it was so delicious to be learning; and in such a mood one learns fast. Esther felt, when she went home at the end of the week, that she was already a different person from the one who had left it on Monday morning.

Christopher came for her with an old horse and a gig, which was a new subject of interest.

'Where did you get them?' she asked, as soon as she had taken her seat, and begun to make her observations.

'Nowheres, Miss Esther; leastways *I* didn't. The colonel, he's bought 'em of some old chap that wanted to get rid of 'em.'

'Bought? Then they are ours!' exclaimed Esther with delight. 'Well, the gig seems very nice; is it a good horse, Christopher?'

'Well, mum,' said Mr. Bounder in a tone of very moderate appreciation, 'master says he's the remains of one. The colonel knows, to be sure, but I can't say as I see the remains. I think, maybe, somewheres in the last century he may have deserved high consideration; at present, he's got four legs, to be sure, such as they be, and a head. The head's the most part of him.'

'Obstinate?' said Esther, laughing.

'Well, mum, he thinks he knows in all circumstances what is best to be done. I'm only a human, and naturally I thinks otherwise. That makes differences of opinion.'

'He seems to go very well.'

'No doubt, mum,' said Christopher; 'you let him choose his way, and he'll go uncommon; that he do.'

He went so well, in fact, that the drive was exhilarating; the gig was very easy; and Esther's spirits rose. At her age, the mind is just opening to appreciate keenly whatever is presented to it; every new bit of knowledge, every new experience, a new book or a new view, seemed to be taken up by her senses and her intelligence alike, with a fresh clearness of perception, which had in itself something very enjoyable. But this afternoon, how pleasant everything was! Not the weather, however; a grey mist

from the sea was sweeping inland, veiling the country, and darkening the sky, and carrying with it a penetrating raw chillness which was anything but agreeable. Yet to Esther it was good weather. She was entered at school; she had had a busy, happy week, and was going home; there were things at home that she wanted to put in order; and her father must be glad to have her ministry again. Then learning was so delightful, and it was so pleasant to be, at least in some small measure, keeping step with Pitt. No, probably not *that;* certainly not that; Pitt would be far in advance of her. At least, in some things, he would be far in advance of her; in others, Esther said to herself, he should not. He might have more advantages at Oxford, no doubt; nevertheless, if he ever came back again to see his old friends, he should find her doing her part and standing up to her full measure of possibilities. Would Pitt come back? Surely he would, Esther thought. But would he, in such a case, make all the journey to New York to look up his old teacher and his old playmate and scholar? She answered this query with as little hesitation as the other. And so, it will be perceived, Esther's mind was in as brisk motion as her body during the drive out to Chelsea.

For at that day a wide stretch of country, more or less cultivated, lay between what is now Abingdon Square and what was then the city. Esther's new home was a little further on still, down near the bank of the river; a drive of a mile and a half or two miles from Miss Fairbairn's school; and the short November day was closing in already when she got there.

Mrs. Barker received her almost silently, but with gladness in every feature, and with a quantity of careful, tender ministrations, every one of which had the effect of a caress.

'How is papa? Has he missed me much?'

'The colonel is quite as usual, mum; and he didn't say to me as his feelin's were, but in course he's missed you. The house itself has missed you, Miss Esther.'

'Well, I am glad to be home for a bit, Barker,' said Esther, laughing.

'Surely, I know it must be fine for you to go to school, mum; but a holiday's a holiday; and I've got a nice pheasant for your supper, Miss Esther, and I hope as you'll enjoy it.'

'Thank you, Barker. Oh, anything will be good;' and she ran into the sitting-room to see her father.

The greetings here were quiet, too; the colonel was never otherwise, in manner. And then Esther gave a quick look round the room to see if all were as she wanted it to be.

'My dear,' said the colonel, gazing at her, 'I had no idea you were so tall!'

Esther laughed. I seem to have grown, oh, inches, in feeling, this week, papa. I don't wonder I look tall.'

'Never "wonder," my dear, at anything. Are you satisfied with your new position?'

'Very much, papa. Have you missed me?—badly, I mean?'

'There is no way of missing a person pleasantly, that I know,' said her father; 'unless it is a disagreeable person. Yes, I have missed you, Esther; but I am willing to miss you.'

This was not quite satisfactory to Esther's feeling; but her father's wonted way was somewhat dry and self-contained. The fact that this was an unwonted occasion might have made a difference, she thought; and was a little disappointed that it did not; but then, as the colonel went back to his book, she put off further discussions till supper-time, and ran away to see to some of the house arrangements which she had upon her heart. In these she was soon gaily busy; finding the work delightful after the long interval of purely mental action. She had done a good many things, she felt with pleasure, before she was called to tea. Then it was with new enjoyment that she found herself ministering to her father again; making his toast just as he liked it, pouring out his tea, and watching over his wants. The colonel seemed to take up things simply where she had left them; and was almost as silent as ever.

'Who has made your toast while I have been away, papa?' Esther asked, unable to-night to endure this silence.

'My toast? Oh, Barker, of course.'

'Did she make it right?'

'Right? My dear, I have given up expecting to have servants do somethings as they ought to be done. Toast is one of the things. They are outside of the limitations of the menial mind.'

'What is the reason, papa? Can't they be taught?'

'I don't know, my dear. I never have been able to teach them. They always think toast is done when it is brown, and the browner the better, I should say. Also it is beyond their comprehension that thickness makes a difference. There was an old soldier once I had under me in India; he was my servant; he was the only man I ever saw who could make a piece of toast.'

'What are some of the other things that cannot be taught, papa?'

'A cup of tea.'

'Does not Barker make your tea good?' asked Esther, in some dismay.

'She can do many other things,' said the colonel. 'She is a very competent woman.'

'So I thought. What is the matter with the tea, papa—the tea she makes?'

'I don't know, my dear, what the matter is. It is without fragrance, and without sprightliness, and generally about half as hot as it ought to be.'

'No good toast and no good tea! Papa, I am afraid you have missed me very much at meal times?'

'I have missed you at all times—more than I thought possible. But it cannot be helped.'

'Papa,' said Esther, suddenly very serious, '*can* it not be helped?'

'No, my dear. How should it?'

'I might stay at home.'

'We have come here that you might go to school.'

'But if it is to your hurt, papa'—

'Not the question, my dear. About me it is of no consequence. The matter in hand is, that you should grow up to be a perfect woman—perfect as your mother was; that would have been her wish, and it is mine. To that all other things must give way. I wish you to have every information and every accomplishment that it is possible for you in this country to acquire.'

'Is there not as good a chance here as in England, papa?'

'What do you mean by "chance," my dear? Opportunity? No; there cannot yet be the same advantages here as in an old country, which has been educating its sons and its daughters in the most perfect way for hundreds of years.'

Esther pricked up her ears. The box of coins recurred to her memory, and sundry conversations held over it with Pitt Dallas. Whereby she had certainly got an impression that it was not so very long since England's educational provisions and practices, for England's daughters at least, had been open to great criticism, and displayed great lack of the desirable. 'Hundreds of years!' But she offered no contradiction to her father's remark.

'I would like you to be equal to any Englishwoman in your acquirements and accomplishments,' he repeated musingly. 'So far as in New York that is possible.'

'I will try what I can do, papa. And, after all, it depends more on the girl than on the school, does it not?'

'Humph! Well, a good deal depends on you, certainly. Did Miss Fairbairn find you backward in your studies, to begin with?'

'Papa,' said Esther slowly, 'I do not think she did.'

'Not in anything?'

'In French and music, of course.'

'Of course! But in history?'

'No, papa.'

'Nor in Latin?'

'Oh no, papa.'

'Then you can take your place well with the rest?'

'Perfectly, papa.'

'Do you like it? And does Miss Fairbairn approve of you? Has the week been pleasant?'

'Yes, sir. I like it very much, and I think she likes me—if only you get on well, papa. How have you been all these days?'

'Not very well. I think, not so well as at Seaforth. The air here does not agree with me. There is a rawness—I do not know what—a peculiar quality, which I did not find at Seaforth. It affects my breast disagreeably.'

'But, dear papa!' cried Esther in dismay, 'if this place does not agree with you, do not let us stay here! Pray do not for me!'

'My dear, I am quite willing to suffer a little for your good.'

'But if is bad for you, papa?'

'What does that matter? I do not expect to live very long in any case; whether a little longer or a little shorter, is most immaterial. I care to live only so far as I can be of service to you, and while you need me, my child.'

'Papa, when should I not need you?' cried Esther, feeling as if her breath were taken away by this view of things.

'The children grow up to be independent of the parents,' said the colonel, somewhat abstractly. 'It is the way of nature. It must be; for the old pass away, and the young step forward to fill their places. What I wish is that you should get ready to fill your place well. That is what we have come here for. We have taken the step, and we cannot go back.'

'Couldn't we, papa? if New York is not good for you?'

'No, my dear. We have sold our Seaforth place.'

'Mr. Dallas would sell it back again.'

'I shall not ask him. And neither do I desire to have it back, Esther.
I have come here on good grounds, and on those grounds I shall stay.
How I personally am affected by the change is of little consequence.'

The colonel, having by this time finished his third slice of toast and drunk up his tea, turned to his book. Esther remained greatly chilled and cast down. Was her advantage to be bought at the cost of shortening her father's life? Was her rich enjoyment of study and mental growth to be balanced by suffering and weariness on his part?—every day of her new life in school to be paid for by such a day's price at home? Esther could not bear to think it. She sat pondering, chewing the bitter cud of these considerations. She longed to discuss them further, and get rid, if possible, of her father's dismal conclusions; but with him she could not, and there was no other. When her father had settled and dismissed a subject, she could rarely re-open a discussion upon it. The colonel was an old soldier; when he had delivered an opinion, he had in a sort given his orders; to question was almost to be guilty of insubordination. He had gone back to his book, and Esther dared not say another word; all the more her thoughts burnt within her, and for a long time she sat musing, going over a great many things besides those they had been talking of.

'Papa,' she said, once when the colonel stirred and let his book fall for a minute, 'do you think Pitt Dallas will come home at all?'

'William Dallas! why should he not come home? His parents will want to see him. I have some idea they expect him to come over next summer.'

'To *stay*, papa?'

'To stay the vacation. He will go back again, of course, to keep his terms.'

'At Oxford?'

'Yes; and perhaps afterwards in the Temple.'

'The Temple, papa? what is that?'

'A school of law. Do you not know so much, Esther?'

'Is he going to be a lawyer?'

'His father wishes him to study for some profession, and in that he is as usual judicious. The fact that William will have a great deal of money does not affect the matter at all. It is my belief that every man ought to have a profession. It makes him more of a man.'

'Do you think Pitt will end by being an Englishman, papa?'

'I can't tell, my dear. That would depend on circumstances, probably. I should think it very likely, and very natural.'

'But he *is* an American.'

'Half.'

The colonel took up his book again.

'Papa,' said Esther eagerly, 'do you think Pitt will come to see us here?'

'Come to see us? If anything brings him to New York, I have no doubt he will look us up.'

'You do not think he would come all the way on purpose? Papa, he would be very much changed if he did not.'

'Impossible to say, my dear. He is very likely to have changed.' And the colonel went back to his reading.

'Papa does not care about it,' thought Esther. 'Oh, can Pitt be so much changed as that?'

CHAPTER XXII.

A QUESTION.

The identically same doubt busied some minds in another quarter, where Mr. and Mrs. Dallas sat expecting their son home. They were not so much concerned with it through the winter; the Gainsboroughs had been happily got rid of, and were no longer in dangerous proximity; that was enough for the time. But as the spring came on and the summer drew nigh, the thought would recur to Pitt's father and mother, whether after all they were safe.

'He mentions them in every letter he writes,' Mrs. Dallas said. She and her husband were sitting as usual in their respective easy chairs on either side of the fire. Not for that they were infirm, for there was nothing of that; they were only comfortable. Mrs. Dallas was knitting some bright wools, just now mechanically, and with a knitted brow; her husband's brow showed no disturbance. It never did.

'That's habit,' he answered to his wife's remark.

'But habit with Pitt is a tenacious thing. What will he do when he comes home and finds they are gone?'

'Make himself happy without them, I expect.'

'It wouldn't be like Pitt.'

'You knew Pitt two and a half years ago. He was a boy then; he will be a man now.'

'Do you expect the man will be different from the boy?'

'Generally are. And Pitt has been going through a process.'

'I can see something of that in his letters,' said the mother thoughtfully. 'Not much.'

'You will see more of it when he comes. What do you say in answer to his inquiries?'

'About the Gainsboroughs? Nothing. I never allude to them.'

Silence. Mr. Dallas read his paper comfortably. Mrs. Dallas's brow was still careful.

'It would be like him as he used to be, if he were to make the journey to New York to find them. And if we should seem to oppose him, it might set his fancy seriously in that direction. There's danger, husband. Pitt is very persistent.'

'Don't see much to tempt him in that direction.'

'Beauty! And Pitt knows he will have money enough; he would not care for that.'

'I do,' said Mr. Dallas, without ceasing to read his paper.

'I would not mind the girl being poor,' Mrs. Dallas went on, 'for Pitt *will* have money enough—enough for both; but, Hildebrand, they are incorrigible dissenters, and I do *not* want Pitt's wife to be of that persuasion.'

'I won't have it, either.'

'Then we shall do well to think how we can prevent it. If we could have somebody here to take up his attention at least'—

'Preoccupy the ground,' said Mr. Dallas. 'The colonel would say that is good strategy.'

'I do not mean strategy,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'I want Pitt to fancy a woman proper for him, in every respect.'

'Exactly. Have you one in your eye? Here in America it is difficult.'

'I was thinking of Betty Frere.'

'Humph! If she could catch him,—she might do.'

'She has no money; but she has family, and beauty.'

'You understand these things better than I do,' said Mr. Dallas, half amused, half sharing his wife's anxiety. 'Would she make a comfortable daughter-in-law for you?'

'That is secondary,' said Mrs. Dallas, still with a raised brow, knitting her scarlet and blue with out knowing what colour went through her fingers. Perhaps her husband's tone had implied doubt.

'If she can catch him,' Mr. Dallas repeated. 'There is no calculating on these things. Cupid's arrows fly wild—for the most part.'

'I will ask her to come and spend the summer here,' Mrs. Dallas went on. 'There is nothing like propinquity.'

In those days the crossing of the Atlantic was a long business, done solely by the help or with the hindrance of the winds. And there was no telegraphing, to give the quick notice of a loved one's arrival as soon as he touched the shore. So Mr. and Mrs. Dallas had an anxious time of watching and uncertainty, for they could not tell when Pitt might be with them. It lasted, this time of anxiety, till Seaforth had been in its full summer dress for some weeks; and it was near the end of a fair warm day in July that he at last came. The table was set for tea, and the master and mistress of the house were seated in their places on either side the fireplace, where now instead of a fire there was a huge jar full of hemlock branches. The slant sunbeams were stretching across the village street, making that peaceful alternation of broad light and still shadows which is so reposeful to the eye that looks upon it. Then Mrs. Dallas's eye, which was not equally reposeful, saw a buggy drive up and stop before the gate, and her worsteds fell from her hands and her lap as she rose.

'Husband, he is come' she said, with the quietness of intensity; and the next moment Pitt was there.

Yes, he had grown to be a man; he was changed; there was the conscious gravity of a man in his look and bearing; the cool collectedness that belongs to maturer years; the traces of thought and the lines of purpose. It had been all more or less to be seen in her boy before, but now the mother confessed to herself the growth and increase of every manly and promising trait in the face and figure she loved. That is, as soon as the first rush of delight had had its due expression, and the first broken and scattering words were spoken, and the three sat down to look at each other. The mother watched the broad brow, which was whiter than it used to be; the fine shoulders, which were even straighter and broader than of old; and the father noticed that his son overtopped him. And Mrs. Dallas's eyes shone with an incipient moisture which betrayed a soft mood she had to combat with; for she was not a

woman who liked sentimental scenes; while in her husband's grey orbs there flashed out every now and then a fire of satisfied pride, which was touching in one whose face rarely betrayed feeling of any kind. Pitt was just the fellow he had hoped to see him; and Oxford had been just the right place to send him to. He said little; it was the other two who did most of the talking. The talking itself for some time was of that disjointed, insignificant character which is all that can get out when minds are so full, and enough when hearts are so happy. Indeed, for all that evening they could not advance much further. Eyes supplemented tongues sufficiently. It was not till a night's sleep and the light of a new day had brought them in a manner to themselves that anything less fragmentary could be entered upon. At breakfast all parties seemed to have settled down into a sober consciousness of satisfied desire. Then Mr. Dallas asked his son how he liked Oxford?

Pitt exhausted himself in giving both the how and the why. Yet no longer like a boy.

'Think you'll end by settling in England, eh?' said his father, with seeming carelessness.

'I have not thought of it, sir.'

'What's made old Strahan take such a fancy to you? Seems to be a regular love affair.'

'He is a good friend to me,' Pitt answered seriously. 'He has shown it in many ways.'

'He'll put you in his will, I expect.'

'I think he will do nothing of the kind. He knows I will have enough.'

'Nobody knows it,' said the older Dallas drily. 'I might lose all *my* money, for anything you can tell.'

The younger man's eyes flashed with a noble sparkle in them. 'What I say is still true, sir. What is the use of Oxford?'

'Humph!' said his father. 'The use of Oxford is to teach young men of fortune to spend their money elegantly.'

'Or to enable young men who have no fortune to do elegantly without it.'

'There is no doing elegantly without money, and plenty of it,' said the elder man, looking from under lowered eyelids, in a peculiar way he had, at his son. 'Plenty of it, I tell you. You cannot have too much.'

'Money is a good dog.'

'A good *what?*'

'A good servant, sir, I should say. You may see a case occasionally where it has got to be the master.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'A man unable to be anything and spoiled for doing anything worth while, because he has so much of it; a man whose property is so large that he has come to look upon money as the first thing.'

'It is the first thing and the last thing, I can tell you. Without it, a man has to play second fiddle to somebody else all his life.'

'Do you think there is no independence but that of the purse, sir?'

'Beggarly little use in any other kind. In fact, there is not any other kind, Pitt. What passes for it is just fancy, and struggling to make believe. The really independent man is the man who need not ask anybody else's leave to do anything.'

Pitt let the question drop, and went on with his breakfast, for which he seemed to have a good appetite.

'Your muffins are as good as ever, mother,' he remarked.

Mrs. Dallas, to judge by her face, found nothing in this world so pleasant as to see Pitt eat his breakfast, and nothing in the world so important to do as to furnish him with satisfactory material. Yet she was not a foolish woman, and preserved all the time her somewhat stately presence and manner; it was in little actions and words now and then that this care for her son's indulgence and delight in it made itself manifest. It was manifest enough to the two who sat at breakfast with her; Mr. Dallas observing it with a secret smile, his son with a grateful swelling of the heart, which a glance and a word sometimes conveyed to his mother. Mrs. Dallas's contentment this morning was absolute and unqualified. There could be no doubt what Betty Frere would think, she said to herself. Every quality

that ought to grace a young man, she thought she saw embodied before her. The broad brow, and the straight eyebrow, and the firm lips, expressed what was congenial to Mrs. Dallas's soul; a mingling of intelligence and will, well defined, clear and strong; but also sweet. There was thoughtfulness but no shadow in the fine hazel eyes; no cloud on the brow; and the smile when it came was frank and affectionate. His manner pleased Mrs. Dallas infinitely; it had all the finish of the best breeding, and she was able to recognise this.

'What are you going to be, Pitt?' his father broke in upon some laughing talk that was going on between mother and son.

'To be, sir? I beg your pardon!'

'After you have done with Oxford, or with your college course. You know I intend you to study for a profession. Which profession would you choose?'

Pitt was silent.

'Have you ever thought about it?'

'Yes, sir. I have thought about it.'

'What conclusion did you come to?'

'To none, yet,' the young man answered slowly. 'It must depend.'

'On what?

'Partly,—on what conclusion I come to respecting something else,' Pitt went on in the same manner, which immediately fastened his mother's attention.

'Perhaps you will go on and explain yourself,' said his father. 'It is good that we should understand one another.'

Yet Pitt was silent.

'Is it anything private and secret?' his father asked, half laughing, although with a touch of sharp curiosity in his look.

'Private—not secret,' Pitt answered thoughtfully, too busy with his own thoughts to regard his father's manner. 'At least the conclusion cannot be secret.'

'It might do no harm to discuss the subject,' said his father, still lightly.

'I cannot see how it would do any good. It is my own affair. And I thought it might be better to wait till the conclusion was reached. However, that may not be for some time; and if you wish'—

'We wish to share in whatever is interesting you, Pitt,' his mother said gently.

'Yes, mother, but at present things are not in any order to please you.
You had better wait till I see daylight.'

'Is it a question of marriage?' asked his father suddenly.

'No, sir.'

'A question of Uncle Strahan's wishes?' suggested Mrs. Dallas.

'No, mother.' And then with a little hesitation he went on: 'I have been thinking merely what master I would serve. Upon that would depend, in part, what service I would do;—of course.'

'What master? Mars or Minerva, to wit? or possibly Apollo? Or what was the god who was supposed to preside over the administration of justice? I forget.'

'No, sir. My question was broader.'

'Broader!'

'It was, briefly, the question whether I would serve God or Mammon.'

'I profess I do not understand you now!' said his father.

'You are aware, sir, the world is divided on that question; making two parties. Before going any

farther, I had a mind to determine to which of them I would belong. How can a navigator lay his course, unless he knows his goal?'

'But, my boy,' said his mother, now anxiously and perplexedly, 'what do you mean?'

'It amounts to the question, whether I would be a Christian, mother.'

Mr. Dallas slued his chair round, so as to bring his face somewhat out of sight; Mrs. Dallas, obeying the same instinctive impulse, kept hers hidden behind the screen of her coffee-urn, for she would not her son should see in it the effect of his words. Her answer, however, was instantaneous:

'But, my dear, you *are* a Christian.'

'Am I? Since when, mother?'

'Pitt, you were baptized in infancy,—you were baptized by that good and excellent Bishop Downing, as good a man, and as holy, as ever was consecrated, here or anywhere. He baptized you before you were two months old. That made you a Christian, my boy.'

'What sort of a one, mother?'

'Why, my dear, you were taught your catechism. Have you forgotten it? In baptism you were made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." You have learned those words, often enough, and said them over.'

'That will do to talk about, mother,' said Pitt slowly; 'but in what sense is it true?'

'My dear!—in every sense. How can you ask? It is part of the
Prayer-Book.'

'It is not part of my experience. Up to this time, my life and conscience know nothing about it. Mother, the Bible gives certain marks of the people whom it calls "disciples" and "Christians." I do not find them in myself.'

Pitt lifted his head and looked at his mother as he spoke; a grave, frank, most manly expression filling his face. Mrs. Dallas met the look with one of intense worry and perplexity. 'What do you mean?' she said helplessly; while a sudden shove of her husband's chair spoke for *his* mood of mind, in its irritated restlessness. 'Marks?' she repeated. 'Christians are not *marked* from other people.'

'As I read the Bible, it seems to me they must be.'

'I do not understand you,' she said shortly. 'I hope you will explain yourself.'

'I owe it to you to answer,' the young man said thoughtfully; 'it is better, perhaps, you should know where I am, that you may at least be patient with me if I do not respond quite as you would wish to your expectations. Mother, I have been studying this matter a great while; but as to the preliminary question, whether I am already what the Bible describes Christians to be, I have been under no delusion at all. The marks are plain enough, and they are not in me.'

'What marks?'

'It is a personal matter,' Pitt went on a little unwillingly; 'it must be fought through somehow in my own mind; but some things are plain enough. Mother, the servants of Christ "follow" Him; it is the test of their service; I never did, nor ever thought or cared what the words meant. The children of God are known by the fact that they love Him and keep his commandments. So the Bible says. I have not loved Him, and have not asked about His commandments. I have always sought my own pleasure. The heirs of the kingdom of heaven have chosen that world instead of this; and between the two is just the choice I have yet to make. That is precisely where I am.'

'But, my dear Pitt,' said Mrs. Dallas, while her husband kept an ominous silence, 'you have always led a most blameless life. I think you judge yourself too hardly. You have been a good son, always!' and her eyes filled, partly with affection and partly with chagrin. To what was all this tending? 'You have *always* been a good son,' she repeated.

'To you, mother. Yes, I hope so.'

'And, my dear, you were confirmed. What did that mean?'

'It meant nothing, mother, so far as I was concerned. It amounted to nothing. I did not know what I was doing. I did not think of the meaning the words might bear. It was to me a mere form, done

because you wished it, and because it was said to be proper; the right thing to do; I attached no weight to it, and lived just the same after as before. Except that for a few days I went under a little feeling of constraint, I remember, and also carried my head higher with a sense of added dignity.'

'And what is your idea of a Christian now, then?' Mrs. Dallas asked, between trouble and indignation.

'I am merely taking what the Bible says about it, mother.'

'Which every man interprets for himself,' added Mr. Dallas drily.

'Where words are so plain, there can hardly be any question of interpretation. For instance'—

'Let that be,' said Mr. Dallas; 'and tell us, if you can, what is your idea of the "choice" you say you have to make. A choice between what?'

'The one thing runs into the other,' said Pitt; 'but it does not signify at which end we begin. The question is, I suppose, in short, which world I will live for.'

'Live for both! That is the sensible way.'

'But, if you will pardon me, sir, impracticable.'

'How impracticable?'

'It has been declared so by the highest authority, and it has been found so in practice. I see it to be impracticable.'

'*I* do not. Where's the impracticability?' Mr. Dallas had wheeled round now and was regarding his son attentively, with a face of superior, cold, rather scornful calm. Mr. Dallas's face was rarely anything else but calm, whatever might be going on beneath the calm. Pitt's face was not exactly so quiet; thought was working in it, and lights and shades sometimes passed over it, which his father carefully studied. 'Where's the impossibility?' he repeated, as Pitt's answer tarried.

'The impossibility of walking two ways at once.'

'Will you explain yourself? I do not see the application.'

He spoke with clear coldness, perhaps expecting that his son would be checked or embarrassed by coming against that barrier to enthusiasm, a cold, hard intellect. Pitt, however, was quite as devoid of enthusiasm at the moment as his father, and far more sure of his ground, while his intellect was full as much astir. His steadiness was not shaken, rather gained force, as he went on to speak, though he did not now lift his eyes, but sat looking down at the white damask which covered the breakfast table, having pushed his plate and cup away from him.

'Father and mother,' he said, 'I have been looking at two opposite goals. On one side there is—what people usually strive for—honour, pleasure, a high place in the world's regard. If I seek that, I know what I have to do. I suppose it is what you want me to do. I should distinguish myself, if I can; climb the heights of greatness; make myself a name, and a place, and then live there, as much above the rest of the world as I can, and enjoying all the advantages of my position. That is about what I thought I would do when I went to Oxford. It is a career bounded by this world, and ended when one quits it. You ask why it is impossible to do this and the other thing too? Just look at it. If I become a servant of Christ, I give up seeking earthly honour; I do not live for my own pleasure; I apply all I have, of talents or means or influence, to doing the will of a Master whose kingdom is not of this world, and whose ways are not liked by the world. I see very plainly what His commands are, and they bid one be unlike the world and separate from it. Do you see the impossibility I spoke of?'

'But, my dear,' said Mrs. Dallas eagerly, 'you exaggerate things.'

'Which things, mother?'

'It is not necessary for you to be unlike the world; that is extravagance.'

Pitt rose, went to the table, where a large family Bible and Book of Common Prayer lay, and fetched the Bible to the breakfast-table. During which procedure Mr. Dallas shoved his chair round again, to gain his former position, and Mrs. Dallas passed her hand over her eyes once or twice, with her a gesture of extreme disturbance. Pitt brought his book, opened it on the table before him, and after a little turning of the leaves stopped and read the following:

'"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."'

'Yes, *at that time*,' said Mrs. Dallas eagerly,—'at that time. Then the heathen made great opposition. All that is past now.'

'Was it only the heathen, mother?'

'Well, the Jews, of course. They were as bad.'

'Why were they? Just for this reason, that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. They chose this world. But the apostle James,—here it is,—he wrote:

'"Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."'

'Wouldn't you then be a friend of the world, Pitt?' his mother asked reprovingly.

'I should say,' Mr. Dallas remarked with an amused, indifferent tone,—'I should say that Pitt had been attending a conventicle; only at Oxford that is hardly possible.'

The young man made no answer to either speaker; he remained with his head bent down over the Bible, and a face almost stern in its gravity. Mrs. Dallas presently repeated her question.

'Pitt, would you not be a friend to the world?'

'That is the question, mother,' he said, lifting his face to look at her. 'I thought it right to tell you all this, that you may know just where I stand. Of course I have thought of the question of a profession; but this other comes first, and I feel it ought first to be decided.'

With which utterance the young man rose, put the big Bible in its place, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DEBATE.

The two who were left sat still for a few moments, without speaking.
Mrs. Dallas once again made that gesture of her hand across her brow.

'You need not disturb yourself, wife,' said her husband presently. 'Young men must have a turn at being fools, once in a way. It is not much in Pitt's way; but, however, it seems his turn has come. There are worse types of the disorder. I would rather have this Puritan scruple to deal with than some other things. The religious craze passes off easier than a fancy for drinking or gambling; it is hot while it lasts, but it is easier to cure.'

'But Pitt is so persistent!'

'In other things. You will see it will not be so with this.'

'He's very persistent,' repeated the mother. 'He always did stick to anything he once resolved upon.'

'He is not resolved upon this yet. Distraction is the best thing, not talk. Where's Betty Frere? I thought she was coming.'

'She is coming. She will be here in a few days. I cannot imagine what has set Pitt upon this strange way of thinking. He has got hold of some Methodist or some other dreadful person; but where? It couldn't be at Oxford; and I am certain it was never in Uncle Strahan's house; where could it be?'

'Methodism began at Oxford, my dear.'

'It is one mercy that the Gainsboroughs are gone.'

'Yes,' said her husband; 'that was well done. Does he know?'

'I have never told him. He will be asking about them directly.'

'Say as little as you can, and get Betty Frere here.'

Pitt meanwhile had gone to his old room, his work-room, the scene of many a pleasant hour, and

where those aforetime lessons to Esther Gainsborough had been given. He stood and looked about him. All was severe order and emptiness, telling that the master had been away; his treasures were safe packed up, under lock and key, or stowed away upon cupboard shelves; there was no pleasant litter on tables and floor, alluring to work or play. Was that old life, of work and play which mixed and mingled, light-hearted and sweet, gone for ever? Pitt stood in the middle of the floor looking about him, gathering up many a broken thread of association; and then, obeying an impulse which had been on him all the morning, he turned, caught up his hat, and went out.

He loitered down the village street. It was mid-morning now, the summer sun beating down on the wide space and making every big tree shadow grateful. Great overarching elms, sometimes an oak or a maple, ranged along in straight course and near neighbourhood, making the village look green and bowery, and giving the impression of an easy-going thrift and habit of pleasant conditions, which perhaps was not untrue to the character of the people. The capital order in which everything was kept confirmed the impression. Pitt, however, was not thinking of this, though he noticed it; the village was familiar to him from his childhood, and looked just as it had always done, only that the elms and maples had grown a little more bowery with every year. He walked along, not thinking of that, nor seeing the roses and syringa blossoms which gave him a sweet breath out of some of the gardens. He was not in a hurry. He was going back in mind to that which furnished the real answer to his mother's wondering query,—whence Pitt could have got his new ideas? It was nobody at Oxford or in London, neither conventicle nor discourse; but a girl's letter. He went on and on, thinking of it and of the writer. What would *she* say to his disclosures, which his father and mother could do nothing with? Would she be in condition to give him the help he knew he must not expect from them? She, a girl? who did not know the world? Yet she was the goal of Pitt's present thoughts, and her house the point his footsteps were seeking, slowly and thoughtfully.

He was not in a hurry. Indeed, he was too absorbedly busy with his own cogitations and questions to give full place to the thought of Esther and the visit he was about to make. Besides, it was not as in the old time. He had no image before him now of a forlorn, lonely child, awaiting his coming as the flowers look for the sun. Things were rather turned about; he thought of Esther as the one in the sunlight, and himself as in need of illumination. He thought of her as needing no comfort that he could give; he half hoped to find the way to peace through her leading. But yes, she would be glad to see him; she would not have forgotten him nor lost her old affection for her old playfellow, though the entire cessation of letters from either her or her father had certainly been inexplicable. Probably it might be explained by some crankiness of the colonel. Esther would certainly be glad to see him. He quickened his steps to reach the house.

He hardly knew it when he came to it, the aspect of things was so different from what he remembered. Truly it had been always a quiet house, with never a rush of company or a crowd of voices; but there had been life; and now?—Pitt stood still at the little gate and looked, with a sudden blank of disappointment. There could be nobody there. The house was shut up and dead. Not a window was open; not a door. In the little front garden the flowers had grown up wild and were struggling with weeds; the grass of the lawn at the side was rank and unmown; the honeysuckle vines in places were hanging loose and uncared-for, waving in the wind in a way that said eloquently, 'Nobody is here.' There was not much wind that summer day, just enough to move the honeysuckle sprays. Pitt stood and looked and queried; then yielding to some unconscious impulse, he went in through the neglected flowers to the deserted verandah, and spent a quarter of an hour in twining and securing the loose vines. He was thinking hard all the time. This was the place where he remembered sitting with Esther that day when she asked help of him about getting comfort. He remembered it well; he recalled the girl's subdued manner, and the sorrowful craving in the large beautiful eyes. *Now* Esther had found what she sought, and to-day he was nearly as unable to understand her as he had been to help her then. He fastened up the honeysuckles, and then he went and sat down on the step of the verandah and took Esther's letter out of his breast pocket, and read it over. He had read it many times. He did not comprehend it; but this he comprehended—that to her at least there was something in religion more heartfelt than a form, and more satisfying than a profession. To her it was a reality. The letter had set him thinking, and he had been thinking ever since. He had come here this morning, hoping that in talking with her she might perhaps give him some more light, and now she had disappeared. Strange that his mother should not have told him! What could be the explanation of this sudden disappearance? Disaster or death it could not be, for that she certainly would have told him.

Sitting there and musing over many things, his own great question ever and again, he heard a mower whetting his scythe somewhere in the neighbourhood. Pitt set about searching for the unseen labourer, and presently saw the man, who was cutting the grass in an adjoining field. Dismissing thought for action, in two minutes he had sprung over the fence and was beside the man; but the mower did not intermit the long sweeps of his scythe, until he heard Pitt's civil 'Good morning.' Then he stopped, straightened himself up, and looked at his visitor—looked him all over.

'Good mornin',' he replied. 'Guess you're the young squoire, ain't ye?'

If Pitt's appearance had been less supremely neat and faultless, I think the honest worker would have offered his hand; but the white linen summer suit, the polished boots, the delicate gloves, were too much of a contrast with his own dusty and rough exterior. It was no feeling of inferiority, be it well understood, that moved him to this bit of self-denial; only a self-respecting feeling of fitness. He himself would not have wanted to touch a dusty hand with those gloves on his own. But he spoke his welcome.

'Glad to see ye hum, squoire. When did ye come?'

'Last night, thank you. Whom am I talking to? I have been so long away,
I have forgotten my friends.'

'I guess there's nobody hain't forgotten you, you'll find,' said the man, wiping his scythe blade with a wisp of grass; needlessly, for he had just whetted it; but it gave him an opportunity to look at the figure beside him.

'More than I deserve,' said Pitt. 'But I seem not to find some of my old friends. Do you know where is the family that used to live here?'

'Gone away, I guess.'

'I see they have gone away; but where have they gone?'

'Dunno, no more'n the dead,' said the man, beginning to mow again.

'You know whom I am speaking of?—Colonel Gainsborough.'

'I know. He's gone—that's all I kin tell ye.'

'Who takes care of the place?'

'The place? If you mean the house, nobody takes keer of it, I guess. There ain't nobody in it. The land hez as good keer as it ever hed. The squoire, he sees to that.'

'My father, do you mean?'

'Who else? It belongs to the squoire now, and he takes good keer o' all *he* sees to. He bought it, ye know, when the cunnel went away,' said the man, stopping work and resting on his scythe to look at Pitt again. 'He'd ha' let it, I guess, ef he could; but you see there ain't nobody that wants it. The folks in Seaforth all hez their own houses, and don't want nobody else's. There *is* folks, they say, as 'd like to live in two houses to once, *ef* they could manage it; but I never heerd o' no one that could.'

'Do you know at all why the colonel went away?'

'Hain't an idee. Never knowed him particular, ye see, and so never heerd tell. The cunnel he warn't a sociable man by no means, and kep' himself mostly shut up. I think it's a man's loss; but there's different opinions, I suppose, on that p'int. As on every other! Folks du say, the cunnel warn't never to hum in Seaforth. Anyway, he ain't now.'

With which utterance he went to mowing again, and Pitt, after a courteous 'Good day,' left him.

Where could they be gone? And why should they have gone? And how was it that his mother in her many letters had never said a word about it? Nay, had let him go out this very morning to look for what she knew he would not find? And his father had bought the ground! There was something here to be inquired into. Meanwhile, for the present, he must do his thinking without Esther.

He walked on and on, slowly, under the shade of the great trees, along the empty, grassy street. He had plucked one or two shoots from the honeysuckles, long shoots full of sweetness; and as he went on and thought, they seemed to put in a word now and then. A word of reminder, not distinct nor logical, but with a blended meaning of Esther and sweetness and truth. Not *her* sweetness and truth, but that which she testified to, and which an inner voice in Pitt's heart kept declaring to be genuine. That lured him and beckoned him one way; and the other way sounded voices as if of a thousand sirens. Pleasure, pride, distinction, dominion, applause, achievement, power, and ease. Various forms of them, various colours, started up before his mind's eye; vaguely discerned, as to individual form, but every one of them, like the picadors in a bull-fight, shaking its little banner of distraction and allurement. Pitt felt the confusion of them, and at the same time was more than vaguely conscious on the other side of a certain steady white light which attracted towards another goal. He walked on in meditative musing, slowly and carelessly, not knowing where he was going nor what he passed on the way; till he had walked far. And then he suddenly stopped, turned, and set out to go back the road he had come, but

now with a quick, measured, steady footfall which gave no indication of a vacillating mind or a laboured question.

He went into the breakfast-room when he got home, which was also the common sitting-room and where he found, as he expected, his mother alone. She looked anxious; which was not a usual thing with Mrs. Dallas.

'Pitt, my dear!—out all this time? Are you not very hot?'

'I do not know, mother; I think not. I have not thought about the heat, I believe.'

He had kept the honeysuckle sprays in his hand all this while, and he now went forward to stick them in the huge jar which occupied the fireplace, and which was full of green branches. Turning when he had done this, he did not draw up a chair, but threw himself down upon the rug at his mother's feet, so that he could lay back his head upon her knees. Presently he put up his two hands behind him and found her hands, which he gently drew down and laid on each side of his head, holding them there in caressing fashion. Caresses were never the order of the day in this family; rarely exchanged even between mother and son, who yet were devoted faithfully to each other. The action moved Mrs. Dallas greatly; she bent down over him and kissed her son's brow, and then loosening one of her hands thrust it fondly among the thick brown wavy locks of hair that were such a pride to her. She admired him unqualifiedly, with that blissful delight in him which a good mother gives to her son, if his bodily and mental properties will anyway allow of it. Mrs. Dallas's pride in this son had always been satisfied and unalloyed; all the more now was the chagrin she felt at the first jar to this satisfaction. Her face showed both feelings, the pride and the trouble, but for a time she kept silence. She was burning to discuss further with him the subject of the morning; devoured with restless curiosity as to how it could ever have got such a lodgment in Pitt's mind; at the same time she did not know how to touch it, and was afraid of touching it wrong. Her husband's counsel, *not to talk*, she did not indeed forget; but Mrs. Dallas had her own views of things, and did not always take her husband's advice. She was not minded to follow it now, but she was uncertain how best to begin. Pitt was busy with his own thoughts.

'I have invited somebody to come and make your holiday pass pleasantly,' Mrs. Dallas said at last, beginning far away from the burden of her thoughts.

'Somebody?—whom?' asked Pitt a little eagerly, but without changing his attitude.

'Miss Betty Frere.'

'Who is she, that she should put her hand on my holiday? I do not want any hands but yours, mother. How often I have wanted them!'

'But Miss Frere *will* make your time pass more pleasantly, my boy. Miss Frere is one of the most admired women who have appeared in Washington this year. She is a sort of cousin of your father's, too; distant, but enough to make a connection. You will see for yourself what she is.'

'Where did you find her out?'

'In Washington, last winter.'

'And she is coming?'

'She said she would come. I asked her to come and help me make the time pass pleasantly for you.'

'Which means, that I must help you make the time pass pleasantly for her.'

'That will be easy.'

'I don't know; and *you* do not know. When is she coming?'

'In a few days, I expect her.'

'Young, of course. Well, mother, I really do not want anybody but you; but we'll do the best we can.'

'She is handsome, and quick, and has excellent manners. She would have made a good match last winter, at once,—if she had not been poor.'

'Are men such cads as that on this side the water too?'

'*Cads*, my dear!'

'I call that being cads. Don't you?'

'My boy, everybody cannot afford to marry a poor wife.'

'Anybody that has two hands can. Or a head.'

'It brings trouble, Pitt.'

'Does not the other thing bring trouble? It would with me! If I knew a woman had married me for money, or if I knew I had married *her* for money, there would be no peace in my house.'

Mrs. Dallas laughed a little. 'You will have no need to do the latter thing,' she said.

'Mother, nobody has any need to do it.'

'You, at any rate, can please yourself. Only'—

'Only what?' said Pitt, now laughing in his turn, and twisting his head round to look up into her face. 'Go on, mother.'

'I am sure your father would never object to a girl because she was poor, if you liked her. But there are other things'—

'Well, what other things?'

'Pitt, a woman has great influence over her husband, if he loves her, and that you will be sure to do to any woman whom you make your wife. I should not like to have you marry out of your own Church.'

Pitt's head went round, and he laughed again.

'In good time!' he said. 'I assure you, mother, you are in no danger yet.'

'I thought this morning,' said his mother, hesitating,—'I was afraid, from what you said, that some Methodist, or some other Dissenter, might have got hold of you.'

Pitt was silent. The word struck him, and jarred a little. Was his mother not grazing the truth? And a vague notion rose in his mind, without actually taking shape, which just now he had not time to attend to, but which cast a shadow, like a young cloud. He was silent, and his mother after a little pause went on.

'Methodists and Dissenters are not much in Mr. Strahan's way, I am sure; and you would hardly be troubled by them at Oxford. How was it, Pitt? Where did you get these new notions?'

'Do they sound like Dissent, mother?'

'I do not know what they sound like. Not like you. I want to know what they mean, and how you came by them?'

He did not immediately answer.

'I have been thinking on this subject a good while,' he said slowly,—'a good while. You know, Mr. Strahan is a great antiquary, and very full of knowledge about London. He has taken pleasure in going about with me, and instructing me, and he is capital company; but at last I learned enough to go by myself sometimes, without him; and I used to ramble about through the places where he had taken me, to review and examine and ponder things at my leisure. I grew very fond of London. It is like an immense illustrated book of history.

'One day I was wandering in one of the busy parts of the city, and turned aside out of the roar and the bustle into a little chapel, lying close to the roar but separate from it. I had been there before, and knew there were some fine marbles in the place; one especially, that I wanted to see again. I was alone that day, and could take my time; and I went in. It is the tomb of some old dignitary who lived several centuries ago. I do not know what he was in life; but in death, as this effigy represents him, it is something beautiful to look upon. I forget at this minute the name of the sculptor; his work I shall never forget. It is wonderfully fine. The gravity, and the sweetness, and the ineffable repose of the figure, are beyond praise. I stood looking, studying, thinking, I cannot tell for how long—or rather feeling than thinking, at the moment. When I left the chapel and came out again into the glare and the rush and the confusion, then I began to think, mother. I went off to another quiet place, by the bank of the river, and sat down and thought. I can hardly tell you how. The image of that infinite repose I carried with me, and the rush of human life filled the streets I had just come through behind me, and I looked at the contrast of things. There, for ages already, that quiet; here, for a day or two, this driving and

struggling. Even suppose it be successful struggling, what does it amount to?'

'It amounts to a good deal while you live,' said Mrs. Dallas.

'And after?'—

'And after too. A man's name, if he has struggled successfully, is held in remembrance—in honour.'

'What is that to him after he is gone?'

'My dear, you would not advocate a lazy life?—a life without effort?'

'No, mother. The question is, what shall the effort be for?'

Mrs. Dallas was in the greatest perplexity how to carry on this conversation. She looked down on the figure before her,—Pitt was still sitting at her feet, holding her two hands on either side of his head; and she could admire at her leisure the well-knit, energetic frame, every line of which showed power and life, and every motion of which indicated also the life and vigour of the spirit moving it. He was the very man to fight the battle of life with distinguished success—she had looked forward to his doing it, counted upon it, built her pride upon it; what did he mean now? Was all that power and energy and ability to be thrown away? Would he decline to fill the place in the world which she had hoped to see him fill, and which he could so well fill? Young people do have foolish fancies, and they pass over; but a fancy of this sort, just at Pitt's age, might be fatal. She was glad it was *herself* and not his father who was his confidant, for Pitt, she well knew, was one neither to be bullied nor cajoled. But what should she say to him?

'My dear, I think it is duty,' she ventured at last. 'Everybody must be put here to do something.'

'What is he put here to do, mamma? That is the very question.'

Pitt was not excited, he showed no heat; he spoke in the quiet, calm tones of a person long familiar with the thoughts to which he gave utterance; indeed, alarmingly suggestive that he had made up his mind about them.

'Pitt, why do you not speak to a clergyman? He could set you right better than I can.'

'I have, mamma.'

'To what clergyman?'

'To Dr. Calcott of Oxford, and to Dr. Plympton, the rector of the church to which Uncle Strahan goes.'

'What did they say?'

'Dr. Calcott said I had been studying too hard, and wanted a little distraction; he thought I was morbid, and warned me against possible listening to Methodists. Said I was a good fellow, only it was a mistake to try to be *too* good; the consequence would be a break-down. Whether physical or moral, he did not say; I was left to apprehend both.'

'That is very much as I think myself, only not the fear of break-downs. I see no signs of that in you, my boy. What did the other, Dr.—whom did you say?—what did he tell you?'

'Dr. Plympton. He said he did not understand what I would be at.'

'I agree with him too,' said Mrs. Dallas, laughing a little. Pitt did not laugh.

'I quoted some words to him out of the Bible, and he said he did not know what they meant.'

'I should think he ought to know.'

'So I thought. But he said it was for the Church to decide what they meant.'

Mrs. Dallas was greatly at a loss, and growing more and more uneasy. Pitt went on in such a quiet, meditative way, not asking help of her, and, she fancied, not intending to ask it of anybody. Suddenly, however, he lifted his head and turned himself far enough round to enable him to look in her face.

'Mother,' said he, 'what do you think those words mean in one of the psalms,—"Thou hast made me exceeding glad with thy countenance"?'

'Are they in the Psalms? I do not know.'

'You have read them a thousand times! In the psalter translation the wording is a little different, but it comes to the same thing.'

'I never knew what they meant, my boy. There are a great many things in the Bible that we cannot understand.'

'But is this one of them? "Exceeding glad—*with thy countenance*."
David knew what he meant.'

'The Psalmist was inspired. Of course he understood a great many things which we do not.'

'We ought to understand some things that he did not, I should think. But this is a bit of personal experience—not abstruse teaching. David was "exceeding glad"—and what made him glad? that I want to know.'

Pitt's thoughts were busy with the innocent letter he had once received, in which a young and unlearned girl had given precisely the same testimony as the inspired royal singer. Precisely the same. And surely what Esther had found, another could find, and he might find. But while he was musing, Mrs. Dallas grew more and more uneasy. She knew better than to try the force of persuasion upon her son. It would not avail; and Mrs. Dallas was a proud woman, too proud to ask what would not be granted, or to resist forcefully what she might not resist successfully. She never withstood her husband's plans, or asked him to change them, except in cases when she knew her opposition could be made effective; so it did not at all follow that she was pleased where she made no effort to hinder. It was the same in the case of her son, though rarely proved until now. In the consciousness of her want of power she was tempted to be a little vexed.

'My dear,' she said, 'what you say sounds to me very like Methodist talk! They say the Methodists are spreading dreadfully.'

Pitt was silent, and then made a departure.

'How often I have wanted just the touch of these hands!' he said, giving those he held a little squeeze. 'Mother, there is nothing in all the world like them.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

It was not till the little family were seated at the dinner-table, that
Pitt alluded to the object of his morning ramble.

'I went to see Colonel Gainsborough this morning,' he began; 'and to my astonishment found the house shut up. What has become of him?'

'Gone away,' said his father shortly.

'Yes, that is plain; but where is he gone to?'

'New York.'

'New York! What took him away?'

'I believe a desire to put his daughter at school. A very sensible desire.'

'To New York!' Pitt repeated. 'Why did you never mention it, mamma?'

'It never occurred to me to mention it. I did not suppose that the matter was of any great interest to you.'

Mrs. Dallas had said just a word too much. Her last sentence set Pitt to thinking.

'How long have they been gone?' he asked, after a short pause.

'Not long,' said Mr. Dallas carelessly. 'A few months, I believe.'

'A man told me you had bought the place?'

'Yes; it suited me to have it. The land is good, what there is of it.'

'But the house stands empty. What will you do with it?'

'Let it—as soon as anybody wants it.'

'Not much prospect of that, is there?'

'Not just now,' Mr. Dallas said drily.

There was a little pause again, and then Pitt asked,—

'Have you Colonel Gainsborough's address, sir?'

'No.'

'I suppose they have it at the post office.'

'They have not. Colonel Gainsborough was to have sent me his address, when he knew himself what it would be, but he has never done so.'

'Is he living in the city, or out of it.'

'I have explained to you why I am unable to answer that question.'

'Why do you want to know, Pitt?' his mother imprudently asked.

'Because I have got to look them up, mother; and knowing whereabouts they are would be rather a help, you see.'

'You have not got to look them up!' said his father gruffly. 'What business is it of yours? If they were here, it would be all very well for you to pay your respects to the colonel; it would be due; but as it is, there is no obligation.'

'No obligation of civility. There is another, however.'

'What, then?'

'Of friendship, sir.'

'Nonsense. Friendship ought to keep you at home. There is no friendship like that of a man's father and mother. Do you know what a piece of time it would take for you to go to New York to look up a man who lives you do not know where?—what a piece of your vacation?'

'More than I like to think of,' said Pitt; 'but it will have to be done.'

'It will take you two days to get there, and two more days to get back, merely for the journey; and how many do you want to spend in New York?'

'Must have two or three, at least. It will swallow up a week.'

'Out of your little vacation!' said his mother reproachfully. She was angry and hurt, as near tears as she often came; but Mrs. Dallas was not wont to show her discomfiture in that way.

'Yes, mother; I am very sorry.'

'Why do you care about seeing them?—care so much, I mean,' his father inquired, with a keen side-glance at his son.

'I have made a promise, sir. I am bound to keep it.'

'What promise?' both parents demanded at once.

'To look after the daughter, in case of the father's death.'

'But he is not dead. He is well enough; as likely to live as I am.'

'How can I be sure of that? You have not heard from him for months, you say.'

'I should have heard, if anything had happened to him.'

'That is not certain, either,' said Pitt, thinking that Esther's applying to his father and mother in case of distress was more than doubtful.

'How can you look after the daughter in the event of her father's death? *You* are not the person to do it,' said his mother.

'I am the person who have promised to do it,' said Pitt quietly. 'Never mind, mother; you see I must go, and the sooner the better. I will take the stage to-morrow morning.'

'You might wait and try first what a letter might do,' suggested his father.

'Yes, sir; but you remember Colonel Gainsborough had very little to do with the post office. He never received letters, and he had ceased taking the London *Times*. My letter might lie weeks unclaimed. I must go myself.'

And he went, and stayed a week away. It was a busy week; at least the days in the city were busily filled. Pitt inquired at the post office; but, as he more than half expected, nobody knew anything of Colonel Gainsborough's address. One official had an impression he had heard the name; that was all. Pitt beleaguered the post office, that is, he sat down before it, figuratively, for really he sat down in it, and let nobody go out or come in without his knowledge. It availed nothing. Either Christopher did not at all make his appearance at the post office during those days, or he came at some moment when Pitt was gone to get a bit of luncheon; if he came, a stupid clerk did not heed him, or a busy clerk overlooked him; all that is certain is, that Pitt saw and heard nothing which led to the object of his quest. He made inquiries elsewhere, wherever he could think it might be useful; but the end was, he heard nothing. He stayed three days; he could stay no longer, for his holiday was very exactly and narrowly measured out, and he felt it not right to take any more of it from his father and mother.

The rest of the time they had him wholly to themselves, for Miss Frere was hindered by some domestic event from keeping her promise to Mrs. Dallas. She did not come. Pitt was glad of it; and, seeing they were now free from the danger of Esther, his father and mother were glad of it too. The days were untroubled by either fear or anxiety, while their son made the sunshine of the house for them; and when he went away he left them without a wish concerning him, but that they were going too. For it was to be another two years before he would come again.

The record of those same summer months in the house on the bank of the Hudson was somewhat different. Esther had her vacation too, which gave her opportunity to finish everything in the arrangements at home for which time had hitherto been lacking. The girl went softly round the house, putting a touch of grace and prettiness upon every room. It excited Mrs. Barker's honest admiration. Here it was a curtain; there it was a set of toilet furniture; in another place a fresh chintz cover; in a fourth, a rug that matched the carpet and hid an ugly darn in it. Esther made all these things and did all these things herself; they cost her father nothing, or next to nothing, and they did not even ask for Mrs. Barker's time, and they were little things, but the effect of them was not so. They gave the house that finished, comfortable, home-like air, which nothing does give but the graceful touch of a woman's fingers. Mrs. Barker admired; the colonel did not see what was done; but Esther did not work for admiration. She was satisfying the demand of her own nature, which in all things she had to do with called for finish, fitness, and grace; her fingers were charmed fingers, because the soul that governed them had itself such a charm, and worked by its own standard, as a honey bee makes her cell. Indeed, the simile of the honey bee would fit in more points than one; for the cell of the little winged worker is not fuller of sweetness than the girl made all her own particular domicile. If the whole truth must be told, however, there was another thought stirring in her, as she hung her curtains and laid her rugs; a half recognised thought, which gave a zest to every additional touch of comfort or prettiness which she bestowed on the house. She thought Pitt would be there, and she wanted the impression made upon him to be the pleasantest possible. He would surely be there; he was coming home; he would never let the vacation go by without trying to find his old friends. It was a constant spring of pleasure to Esther, that secret hope. She said nothing about it; her father, she knew, did not care so much for Pitt Dallas as she did; but privately she counted the days and measured the time, and went into countless calculations for which she possessed no sufficient data. She knew that, yet she could not help calculating. The whole summer was sweetened and enlivened by these calculations, although indeed they were a little like some of those sweets which bite the tongue.

But the summer went by, as we know, and nothing was seen of the expected visitor. September came, and Esther almost counted the hours, waking up in the morning with a beat of the heart, thinking, to-day he may come! and lying down at night with a despairing sense that the time was slipping away, and her only consolation that there was some yet left. She said nothing about it; she watched the days of the vacation all out, and went to school again towards the end of the month with a heart very disappointed, and troubled besides by that feeling of unknown and therefore unreachable hindrances, which is so tormenting. Something the matter, and you do not know what and therefore you cannot act

to mend matters. Esther was sadly disappointed. Three years now, and she had grown and he had changed,—must have changed,—and if the old friendship were at all to be preserved, the friends ought to see each other before the gap grew too wide, and before too many things rushed in to fill it which might work separation and not union. Esther's feelings were of the most innocent and childlike, but very warm. Pitt had been very good to her; he had been like an elder brother, and in that light she remembered him and wished for him. The fact that she was a child no longer did not change all this. Esther had lived alone with her father, and kept her simplicity.

Going to school might have damaged the simplicity, but somehow it did not. Several reasons prevented. For one thing, she made no intimate friends. She was kind to everybody, nobody was taken into her confidence. Her nature was apart from theirs; one of those rare and few whose fate it is for the most part to stand alone in the world; too fine for the coarseness, too delicate for the rudeness, too noble for the pettiness of those around them, even though they be not more coarse or rude or small-minded than the generality of mankind. Sympathy is broken, and full communion impossible. It is the penalty of eminence to put its possessor apart. I have seen a lily stand so in a bed of other flowers; a perfect specimen; in form and colouring and grace of carriage distinguished by a faultless beauty; carrying its elegant head a little bent, modest, but yet lofty above all the rest of the flower bed. Not with the loftiness of inches, however, for it was of lower stature than many around it; the elevation of which I speak was moral and spiritual. And so it was alone. The rest of the flowers were more or less fellows; this one in its apart elegance owned no social communion with them. Esther was a little like that among her school friends; and though invariably gracious and pleasant in her manners, she was instinctively felt to be different from the rest. Only Esther was a white lily; the one I tried to describe, or did not try to describe, was a red one.

Besides this element of separateness, Esther was very much absorbed in her work. Not seeking, like most of the others, to pass a good examination, but studying in the love of learning, and with a far-off ideal of attainment in her mind with which she hoped one day to meet Pitt, and satisfy if not equal him. I think she hardly knew this motive at work; however, it *was* at work, and a powerful motive too.

And lastly, Esther was a 'favourite.' No help for it; she was certainly a favourite, the girls pronounced, and some of them had the candour to add that they did not see how she could help it, or how Miss Fairbairn could help it either.

'Girls, she has every right to be a favourite,' one of them set forth.

'Nobody has a right to be a favourite!' was the counter cry.

'But think, she never does anything wrong.'

'Stupid!'

'Well, she never breaks rules, does she?'

'No.'

'And she always has her lessons perfect as perfect can be.'

'So do some other people.'

'And her drawings are capital.'

'That's her nature; she has a talent for drawing; she cannot help it.
She just *cannot help* it, Sarah Simpson. That's no credit.'

'Then she is the best Bible scholar in the house, except Miss Fairbairn herself.'

'Ah! There you've got it. That's just it. She is one of Miss Fairbairn's kind. But everybody can't be like that!' cried the objector. 'I, for instance. I don't care so much for the Bible, you see; and *you* don't if you'll tell the truth; and most of us don't. It's an awful bore, that's what it is, all this eternal Bible work! and I don't think it's fair. It isn't what *I* came here for, I know. My father didn't think he was sending me to a Sunday school.'

'Miss Fairbairn takes care you should learn something else besides
Bible, Belle Linders, to do her justice.'

'Well, she's like all the rest, she has favourites, and Esther Gainsborough is one of 'em, and there ought to be no favourites. I tell you, she puts me out, that's what she does. If I am sent out of the room on an errand, I am sure to hit my foot against something, just because *she* never stumbles; and the door falls out of my hand and makes a noise, just because I am thinking how it behaves for her. She just puts

me out, I give you my word. It confuses me in my recitations, to know that *she* has the answer ready, if I miss; and as for drawing, it's no use to try, because she will be sure to do it better. There ought to be no such thing as favourites!'

There was some laughter at this harangue, but no contradiction of its statements. Perhaps Esther was more highly gifted than any of her fellows; beyond question she worked harder. She had motives that wrought upon none of them; the idea of equalling or at least of satisfying Pitt, and the feeling that her father was sacrificing a great deal for her sake, and that she must do her very utmost by way of honouring and rewarding his kindness. Besides still another and loftier feeling, that she was the Lord's servant, and that less than the very best she could do was not service good enough for him.

'Papa,' she said one evening in October, 'don't you think Pitt must have come and gone before now?'

'William Dallas? If he has come, he is gone, certainly.'

'Papa, do you think he *can* have come?'

'Why not?'

'Because he has not been to see us.'

'My dear, that is nothing; there is no special reason why he should come to see us.'

'Oh, papa!' cried Esther, dismayed.

'My dear, you have put too much water in my tea; I wish you would think what you are about.'

Now Esther *had* thought what she was about, and the tea was as nearly as possible just as usual.

'Shall I mend it, papa?'

'You cannot mend it. Tea must be made right at first, if it is ever to be right. And if it is *not* right, it is not fit to be drunk.'

'I am very sorry, papa. I will try and have it perfect next time.'

It was plain her father did not share her anxiety about Pitt; he cared nothing about the matter, whether he came or no. He did not think of it. And Esther had been thinking of it every day for months, and many times a day. She was hurt, and it made her feel alone. Esther had that feeling rather often, for a girl of her age and sound health in every respect, bodily and mental. The feeling was quite in accordance with the facts of the case; only many girls at seventeen would not have found it out. She was in school and in the midst of numbers for five and a half days in the week; yet even there, as has been explained, she was in a degree solitary; and both in school and at home Esther knew the fact. At home the loneliness was intensified. Colonel Gainsborough was always busy with his books; even at meal times he hardly came out of them; and never, either at Seaforth or here, had he made himself the companion of his daughter. He desired to know how she stood in her school, and kept himself informed of what she was doing; what she might be *feeling* he never inquired. It was all right, he thought; everything was going right, except that he was such an invalid and so left to himself. If asked by *whom* he was left to himself, he would have said, by his family and his country and the world generally. His family and his country might probably have charged that the neglect was mutual, and the world at large could hardly be blamed for not taking up the old soldier whom it did not know, and making much of him. The care which was failing from all three he got from his daughter in full measure, but she got little from him. It was not strange that her thoughts went fondly to Pitt, who *had* taken care of her and helped her and been good to her. Was it all over? and no more such kindly ministry and delightful sympathy to be ever hoped for any more? Had Pitt forgotten her? It gave Esther pain, that nobody guessed, to be obliged to moot this question; and it busied her a good deal. Sometimes her thoughts went longingly back beyond Pitt Dallas to another face that had always been loving to her; soft eyes and a tender hand that were ever sure to bring sympathy and help. She could not much bear to think of it. *That* was all gone, and could not be called back again; was her one other earthly friend gone too? Pitt had been so good to her! and such a delightful teacher and helper and confidant. She thought it strange that her father did not miss him; but after the one great loss of his life, Colonel Gainsborough missed nobody any more.

CHAPTER XXV.

One afternoon in the end of October, Esther, who had just come home from school was laid hold of by Mrs. Barker with a face of grave calculation.

'Miss Esther, will ye approve that I send Christopher over to that market woman's to get a head o' lettuce for the colonel's supper? There's nought in the house but a bit o' cold green tongue, savin', of course, the morrow's dinner. I thought he might fancy a salad.'

'Tongue?' said Esther. 'Haven't you a quail, or a sweetbread, or something of that sort?'

'I haven't it, Miss Esther; and that's the truth.'

'Forgotten?' said Esther, smiling.

'Mum, I couldn't forget the likes o' that,' Barker said solemnly. 'Which I mean, as I haven't that to own up to. No, mum, I didn't forget.'

'What's the matter, then? some carelessness of Christopher's. Yes, have a salad; that will do very well.'

'Then, mum,' said Barker still more constrainedly, 'could you perhaps let me have a sixpence? I don't like to send and ask a stranger like that to wait for what's no more'n twopence at home.'

'Wait?' repeated Esther. 'Didn't papa give you money for the housekeeping this week?'

'Miss Esther, he did; but—I haven't a cent.'

'Why? He did not give you as much as usual?'

The housekeeper hesitated, with a troubled face.

'Miss Esther, he did give me as much as usual,—I would say, as much as he uses to give me nowadays; but that ain't the old sum, and it ain't possible to do the same things wi' it.' And Mrs. Barker looked anxiously and doubtfully at her young mistress. 'I wouldn't like to tell ye, mum; but in course ye must know, or ye'd maybe be doubtful o' *me*.'

'Of course I should know!' repeated Esther. 'Papa must have forgotten. I will see about it. Give me a basket, Barker, and I will go over to the garden myself and get a head of lettuce,—now, before I take my things off. I would like to go.'

Seeing that she spoke truth, Mrs. Barker's scruples gave way. She furnished the basket, and Esther set forth. There was but a field or two to cross, intervening between her own ground and the slopes where the beds of the market garden lay trim and neat in the sun. Or, rather, to-day, in the warm, hazy, soft October light; the sun's rays could not rightly get through the haze. It was one of the delicious times of October weather, which the unlearned are wont to call Indian summer, but which is not that, and differs from it essentially. The glory of the Indian summer is wholly ethereal; it belongs to the light and the air; and is a striking image and eloquent testimony of how far spirit can overmaster matter. The earth is brown, the trees are bare; the drapery and the colours of summer are all gone; and then comes the Indian summer, and makes one forget that the foregoing summer had its glories at all, so much greater is the glory now. There is no sense of bareness any longer, and no missing of gay tints, nor of the song of birds, nor of anything else in which June revelled and August showed its rich maturity; only the light and the air, filling the world with such unearthly loveliness that the looker-on holds his breath, and the splendour of June is forgotten. This October day was not after such a fashion; it was steeped in colour. Trees near at hand showed yellow and purple and red; the distant Jersey shore was a strip of warm, sunburnt tints, merged into one; over the river lay a sunny haze that was, as it were, threaded with gold; as if the sun had gone to sleep there and was in a dream; and mosses, and bushes, and lingering asters and golden-rod, on rocks or at the edges of the fields near at hand, gave the eye a welcome wherever it turned. Not a breath of air was stirring; the landscape rested under a spell of peace.

Esther walked slowly, every step was so full of pleasure. The steps were few, however, and her pleasure was mingled with an odd questioning in her mind, what all this about money could mean? A little footpath worn in the grass led her over the intervening fields to Mrs. Blumenfeld's garden. Christopher must have worn that path, going and coming; for the family had been supplied through the summer with milk from the dairy of the gardener's wife. Mrs. Blumenfeld was out among her beds of vegetables, Esther saw as she drew near; she climbed over the fence, and in a few minutes was beside her.

'Wall, ef you ain't what I call a stranger!' said the woman good-humouredly. 'I don't see you no more'n the angels, for all you're so near!'

'I am going to school, Mrs. Blumenfeld; and that keeps me away from home almost all the week. How do you do?'

'Dear me, I dursn't be anything but well,' said the gardener's widow. 'Ef I ain't at both ends o' everything, there ain't no middle to 'em. There ain't a soul to be trusted, 'thout it's yourself. It's kind o' tedious. I get to the wrong end o' my patience once in a while. Jest look at them rospberry canes! and I set a man only yesterday to tie 'em up. They ain't done nohow!'

'But your garden always looks beautiful.'

'Kin you see it from your windows? I want to know!'

'Not very much of it; but it always looks so bright and trim. It does now.'

'Wall, you see,' said Mrs. Blumenfeld, 'a garden ain't nothin' ef it ain't in order. I do despise shiftless ways! Now jes' see them rospberry canes!'

'What's the matter with them?'

'I don't suppose you'd know ef I showed you,' said the good woman, checking herself with a half laugh; 'and there ain't no need, as I know, why I should bother you with my bothers. But it's human natur', ain't it?'

'Is *what* human nature?'

'Jes' that same. Or don't you never want to tell no one your troubles? Maybe ye don't hev none?' she added, with an inquiring look into Esther's face. 'Young folks!—the time for trouble hain't come yet.'

'Oh yes,' said Esther. 'I have known what trouble is.'

'Hev ye?' said the woman with another inquisitive look into the fair face. 'Mebbe. There is folks that don't show what they goes through. I guess I'm one o' that sort myself.'

'Are you?' said Esther, smiling. 'Certainly, to look at you, I never should think your life had been very crooked or very rough. You always seem bright and peaceful.'

It was true. Mrs. Blumenfeld had a quiet steady way with her, and both face and voice partook of the same calm; though energy and activity were at the same time as plainly manifested in every word and movement. Esther looked at her now, as she went among her beds, stooping here and there to remove a weed or pull off a decayed leaf, talking and using her eyes at the same time. Her yellow hair was combed smooth and flat at both sides of her head and knotted up firmly in a tight little business knot behind. She wore a faded print dress and a shawl, also faded, wrapped round her, and tied by the ends at the back; but both shawl and gown were clean and whole, and gave her a thoroughly respectable appearance. At Esther's last remark she raised herself up and stood a moment silent.

'Wall,' she said, 'that's as fur as you kin see. It's ben both crooked *and* rough. I mayn't look it,—where's the use? And I don't talk of it, for I've nobody to talk to; but, as I said, human natur' 'd like to, ef it had a chance. I hain't a soul in the world to speak to; and sometimes I feel as ef I'd give all I've got in the world to talk. Then, mostly, I go into the garden and rout out the weeds. I tell you they has to fly, those times!—But I believe folks was made to hev company.'

'Have you no children?'

'Five of 'em, over there,' the woman said, pointing away, Esther could only guess where, as it was not to the house. She was sorry she had asked, and stood silent.

'Five of 'em,' Mrs. Blumenfeld repeated slowly. 'I had 'em,—and I haven't 'em. And now, there is times when the world seems to me that solitary that I'm a'most scared at myself.'

Esther stood still, with mute sympathy, afraid to speak.

'I s'pose, to you now, the world is all full o' friends?' the other went on more lightly, turning from her own troubles, as it were.

'No,' said Esther gently; 'not at all. I am very much alone, and always have been.'

'Mebbe you like it?'

'No, I do not like it. I sometimes wish very much for one or two friends who are not here.'

There came a sigh from the bosom of the other woman, unwonted, and tale-telling, and heavy.

'My marriage warn't happy,' she said, lower than her usual tone. 'I kin manage the garden alone; and I'd jes' as lieve. Two minds about a thing makes unpeace; and I set a great deal by peace. But it's awful lonely, life is, now and then!'

'It is not that to me,' said Esther sympathizingly; she was eager to speak, and yet doubtful just what to say. She fell back upon what perhaps is the safest of all, her own experience. 'Life *used* to be like that to me—at one time,' she went on after a little pause. 'I was very lonely and sad, and didn't know how I could live without comfort. And then I got it; and as I got it, I think so may you.'

The woman looked at her, not in the least understanding what she would be at, yet fascinated by the sympathy—which she read plainly enough—and held by the beauty. By something besides beauty, too, which she saw without being able to fathom it. For in Esther's eyes there was the intense look of love and the fire of joy, and on her lips the loveliest lines of tenderness were trembling. Mrs. Blumenfeld gazed at her, but would almost as soon have addressed an angel, if one had stood beside her with wings that proclaimed his heavenly descent.

'I'll tell you how I got comfort,' Esther went on, keeping carefully away from anything that might seem like preaching. 'I was, as I tell you, dark and miserable and hopeless. Then I came to know the Lord Jesus; and it was just as if the sun had risen and filled all my life with sunlight.'

The woman did not remove her eyes from Esther's face. 'I want to know!' she said at last. 'I've heerd tell o' sich things;—but I never see no one afore that hed the knowledge of 'em, like you seem to hev. I've heerd parson talk.'

'This is not parson talk.'

'I see 'tain't. But what is it then? You see, I'm as stupid as a bumble bee; I don't understand nothin' without it's druv into me—unless it's my garden. Ef you ask me about cabbages, or early corn, I kin tell you. But I don't know no more'n the dead what you are talkin' of.'

Esther's eyes filled with tender tears. 'I want you to know,' she said.
'I wish you could know!'

'How am I goin' to?'

'Do what I did. I prayed the Lord Jesus to let me know Him; I prayed and prayed; and at last He came, and gave me what I asked for. And now, I tell you, my life is all sunlight, because He is in it. Don't you know, the Bible calls Him the Sun of righteousness! You only want to see Him.'

'See Him!' echoed the woman. 'There's only one sun I kin see; and that's the one that rises over in the east there and sets where he is goin' to set now,—over the Jersey shore, across the river.'

'But when this other Sun rises in the heart, He never sets any more; and we have nothing to do with darkness any more, when once we know Him.'

'Know Him?' Mrs. Blumenfeld again repeated Esther's words. 'Why, you're speaking of God, ain't you? You kin know a human critter like yourself; but how kin you know Him?'

'I cannot tell,' said Esther; 'but He will come into your heart and make you know Him. And when once you know Him, then, Mrs. Blumenfeld, you'll not be alone any more, and life will not be dark any more; and you will just grow happier and happier from day to day. And then comes heaven.'

Mrs. Blumenfeld still gazed at her.

'I never heerd no sich talk in all my life!' she said. 'An' that's the way you live now?'

Esther nodded.

'An' all you did was to ask for it?'

'Yes. But of course I studied the Bible, to find out what the Lord says of Himself, and to find out what He tells me to do and to be. For of course I must do His will, if I want Him to hear my prayers. You see that.'

'I expect that means a good deal, don't it?'

'Yes.'

'Mebbe somethin' I wouldn't like to do.'

'You will like to do it, when once you know Him,' Esther said eagerly. 'That makes all the difference. You know, we always love to please anybody that we love.'

The gardener's wife had become very thoughtful. She went along her garden bed, stooping here to strip a decayed leaf from a cabbage, and there to pick up a dry bean that had fallen out of its pod, or to pull out a little weed from among her lettuces.

'I'm much obliged to you,' she said suddenly.

'You see,' said Esther, 'it is as free to you as to me. And why shouldn't we be happy if we can?'

'But there's those commandments! that's what skeers me. You see, I'm a kind o' self-willed woman.'

'It is nothing but joy, when once you know Him.'

'But you say I must *begin* with doin' what's set down?'

'Certainly; as far as you know; or the Lord will not hear our prayers.'

'Wouldn't it do *after?*' said Mrs. Blumenfeld, raising herself up, and again looking Esther in the face. There was an odd mixture in the expression of her own, half serious, half keenly comic.

'It is not the Lord's way,' said Esther gravely. 'Seek Him and obey Him, and you shall know. But if you cannot trust the Lord's word for so much, there is no doing anything. Without faith it is impossible to please Him.'

'I don't suppose you come here jes' fur to tell me all this,' said Mrs. Blumenfeld, after again a pause, 'but I'm real obleeged to ye. What's to go in that basket?'

'I brought it to see if you could let us have a head of lettuce. I see you have some.'

'Yes; and crisp, and cool, and nice they be—just right. Wall, I guess we kin. See here, that basket won't hold no more'n a bite for a bird; mayn't I get you a bigger one?'

As Esther refused this, Mrs. Blumenfeld looked out her prettiest head of lettuce, skillfully detached it from the soil, and insinuated it into the little basket. But to the enquiry, how much was to pay, Mrs. Blumenfeld returned a slight shake of the head.

'I should like to see myself takin' a cent from you! Jes' you send over—or come! that's better—whenever you'd like a leaf o' salad, or anythin' else; and if it's here, you shall hev it, and glad.'

'You are very kind!'

'Wall, no; I don't think that's my character. They'll all tell you I'm honest. Wall, good-bye. An' come agin!' she cried after Esther. 'It's more 'n likely I'll want some more talkin' to.'

Esther went home slowly and musing. The beauty around her, which she had but half noticed at first coming out, now filled her with a great delight. Or, rather, her heart was so full of gladness that it flowed over upon all surrounding things. Sunny haze, and sweet smells of dry leaves and moss, and a mass of all rich neutral tints in browns and purples, just touched here and there for a painter's eye with a spot of clear colour, a bit of gold, or a flare of flame—it all seemed to work its way into Esther's heart and make it swell with pleasure. She stood still to look across the river, which lay smooth like a misty mirror, and gave only a rich, soft, indeterminate reflection of the other shore. But the thoughts in Esther's mind were clear and distinct. Lonely? Had she ever been lonely? What folly! How could any one be lonely who had the knowledge of Christ and His presence? What sufficient delight it was to know Him, and to love Him, and to be always with Him, and always doing His will! If poor Mrs. Blumenfeld only knew!

CHAPTER XXVI.

Esther walked slowly home, delivered her basket to Barker, and went to her father. After the usual kiss and inquiry about how the week had been, he relapsed into his book; and she had to wait for a time to talk of anything else. Esther sat down with a piece of fancy work, and held her tongue till tea-time. The house was as still as if nobody lived in it. The colonel occasionally turned a leaf; now and then a puff of gas or a sudden jet of flame in the Liverpool coal fire gave a sort of silent sound, rebuking the humanity that lived there. No noise was heard from below stairs; the middle-aged and well-trained servants did their work with the regularity and almost with the smoothness of machines. It occurred to Esther anew that her life was excessively quiet; and a thought of Pitt, and how good it would have been to see him, arose again, as it had risen so many times. And then came the thoughts of the afternoon. With Christ,—was not that enough? Doing His will and having it—could she want anything more? Esther smiled to herself. She wanted nothing more.

Barker came in with the tea-kettle, and the cold tongue and the salad made the supper-table look very comfortable. She made the tea, and the colonel put down his book.

'Do you never get tired of reading, papa?'

'Yes, my dear. One gets tired of everything!'

This was said with a discouraging half breath of a sigh.

'Then you might talk a little, for a change, papa.'

'Humph! Whom should I talk to?'

'Me, papa, for want of somebody else.'

This suggestion fell dead. The colonel took his toast and tried the salad.

'Is it good, papa?' Esther asked, in despair at the silence.

'Yes, my dear, it is good. Vegetable salads are a little cold at this time of year.'

'Papa, we were driven to it. Barker had not money enough this week to get you a partridge. And she says it has happened several times lately that you have forgotten to give her the usual amount for the week's housekeeping.'

'Then she says wrong.'

'She told me, several times she has not had enough, sir.'

'In that she may be right.'

Esther paused, questioning what this might mean. She must know.

'Papa, do you mean you gave her insufficient money and knew it at the time?'

'I knew it at the time.'

There was another interval, of greater length. Esther felt a little chill creeping over her. Yet she must come to an understanding with her father; that was quite indispensable.

'Papa, do you mean that it was inadvertence? Or was it necessity?'

'How could it be inadvertence, when I tell you I knew what I did?'

'But, papa'— Esther's breath almost failed her. 'Papa, we are living just as we always have lived?'

'Are we?'—somewhat drily.

'There is my schooling, of course'—

'And rent, and a horse to keep, and a different scale of market prices from that which we had in Seaforth. Everything costs more here.'

'There was the money for the sale of the place,' said Esther vaguely.

'That was not a great deal, after all. It was a fair price, perhaps, but less than the house and ground were worth. The interest of that does not cover the greater outlay here.'

This was very dismayful, all the more because Colonel Gainsborough did not come out frankly with the whole truth. Esther was left to guess it,—to fear it,—to fancy it more than it was, perhaps. She felt that she could not have things left in this in indeterminate way.

'Papa, I think it would be good that I should know just what the difference is; so that I might know how to bring in our expenses within the necessary limits.'

'I have not cyphered it out in figures. I cannot tell you precisely how much my income is smaller than it used to be.'

'Can you tell me how much we ought to spend in a week, papa?—and then we will spend no more.'

'Barker will know when I give it to her.'

The colonel had finished his tea and toast, which this evening he certainly did not enjoy; and went back to his book and his sofa. Though, indeed, he had not left his sofa, he went back to a reclining position, and Esther moved the table away from him. She was bewildered. She forgot to ring for Barker; she sat thinking how to bring the expenses of the family within narrower limits. Possible things alternated with impossible in her mind. She mused a good while.

'Papa,' she said, breaking the silence at last, 'do you think the air suits you here?'

'No, I do not. I have no cause.'

'You were better at Seaforth?'

'Decidedly. My chest always feels here a certain oppression. I suppose there is too much sea air.'

'Was not the sea quite as near them at Seaforth, and salt air quite as much at hand?' Esther thought. However, as she did not put entire faith in the truth of her father's conclusions, it was no use to question his premises.

'Papa,' she said suddenly, 'suppose we go back to Seaforth?'

'Suppose nonsense!'

'No, sir; but I do not mean it as nonsense. I have had one year's schooling—that will be invaluable to me; now with books I can go on by myself. I can, indeed, papa, and will. You shall not need to be ashamed of me.'

'You are talking foolishly, Esther.'

'I do not mean it foolishly, papa. If we have not the means to live here, and if the Seaforth air is so much better for you, then there is nothing to keep us here but my schooling; and that, as I tell you, I can manage without. And I can manage right well, papa; I have got so far that I can go on alone now. I am seventeen; I am not a child any longer.'

There was a few minutes' silence, but probably that fact, that Esther was a child no longer, impelled the colonel to show her a little more consideration.

'Where would you go?' he asked, a trifle drily.

'Surely we could find a place, papa. Couldn't you, perhaps, buy back the old house—the dear old house!—as Mr. Dallas took it to accommodate you? I guess he would give it up again.'

'My dear, do not say "guess" in that very provincial fashion! I shall not ask Mr. Dallas to play at buying and selling in such a way. It would be trifling with him. I should be ashamed to do it. Besides, I have no intention of going back to Sea forth till your education is ended; and by that time—if I live to see that time—I shall have so little of life left that it will not matter where I spend it.'

Esther did not know how to go on.

'Papa, could we not do without Buonaparte? I could get to school some other way?'

'How?'

Esther pondered. 'Could I not arrange to go in Mrs. Blumenfeld's waggon, when it goes in Monday morning?'

'Who is Mrs. Blumenfeld?'

'Why, papa, she is the woman that has the market garden over here. You know.'

'Do I understand you aright?' said the colonel, laying his book down for the moment and looking over at his daughter. 'Are you proposing to go into town with the cabbages?'

'Papa, I do not mind. I would not mind at all, if it would be a relief to you. Mrs. Blumenfeld's waggon is very neat.'

'My dear, I am surprised at you!'

'Papa, I would do *anything*, rather than give you trouble. And, after all, I should be just as much myself, if I did go with the cabbages.'

'We will say no more about it, if you please,' said the colonel, taking up his book again.

'One moment, papa! one word more. Papa, I am so afraid of doing something I ought not. Can you not give me a hint, what sort of proportion our expenditures ought to bear to our old ways?'

'There is the rent, and the keeping of the horse, to be made good. Those are additions to our expenses; and there are no additions to my income. You know now as much as I can tell you.'

The discussion was ended, and left Esther chilled and depressed. The fact itself could be borne, she thought, if it were looked square in the face, and met in the right spirit. As it was, she felt involved in a mesh of uncertainty. The rent,—she knew how much that was,—no such great matter; how much Buonaparte's keep amounted to she had no idea. She would find out. But how to save even a very few hundred dollars, even one or two hundred, by retrenchment of the daily expenses, Esther did not see. Better, she thought, make some great change, cut off some larger item of the household living, and so cover the deficit at once, than spare a partridge here and a pound of meat there. That was a kind of petty and vexing care which revolted her. Far better dispense with Buonaparte at once, and go into town with the cabbages. It will be seen that Esther as yet was not possessed of that which we call knowledge of the world. It did not occur to her that the neighbourhood of the cabbages would hurt her, though it might hurt her fastidious taste. It would not hurt *her*, Esther thought; and what did the rest matter? Anything but this pinching and sparing penny by penny. But if she drove into town with the cabbages, that would only dispose of Buonaparte; the other item—the rent—would remain unaccounted for. How should that be made up?

Esther pondered, brooded, tired herself with thinking. She could not talk to Barker about it, and there was no one else. Once more she felt a little lonely and a good deal helpless, though energies were strong within her to act, if she had known how to act. She mounted the stairs to her room with an unusual slow step, and shut her door, but she had brought her trouble in with her. Esther went to her window to look out, as we all are so apt to do when some trouble seems too big for the house to hold. There is a vague counsel-taking with nature, to which one is impelled at such times; or is it sympathy-seeking? The sweet October afternoon had passed into as sweet an evening, the hazy stillness was unchanged, and through the haze the silver rays of a half moon high in the heavens came with the tenderest touch and the most gracious softness upon all earthly things. There was a vapourous glitter on the water of the broad river, a dewy or hazy veil on the land; the scene could not be imagined more witching fair or more removed from any sort of discordance. Esther stood looking, and her heart calmed down. She had been feeling distressed under the question of ways and means; now it occurred to her, 'Take no thought for the morrow, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' And as the words came, Esther shook off the trouble they condemn; shook it off her shoulders, as it were, and left it lying. Still she felt alone, she wished for Pitt Dallas, or for *somebody;* she had no one but her father in all the world, nor the hope of any one. And happy as she really was, yet the human instinct would stir in Esther—the instinct that longs for intercourse, sympathy, affection; somebody to talk to, to counsel with, to share in her joys and sorrows and experiences generally. It is a perfectly natural and justifiable desire; stronger, perhaps, in the young than in the old, for the old know better how much and how little society amounts to, and are not apt to have such violent longings in general for anything. But also to the old, loving companionship is inexpressibly precious; the best thing by far that this world contains or this life knows. And Esther longed for it now, even till tears rose and dimmed her sight, and made all the moonshiny landscape swim and melt and be lost in the watery veil. But then, as the veil cleared and the moonlight came into view again, came also other words into Esther's mind,—'Be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.'

She cleared away her tears and smiled to herself, in happy assurance and wonder that she should have forgotten. And with that, other words still came to her; words that had never seemed so exceeding sweet before.

'None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.'—That is a sure promise. 'Fear not, Abraham; *I* am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward.'—Probably, when this word was given, the father of the faithful was labouring under the very same temptation, to think himself alone and lonely. And the answer to his fears must be sufficient, or He who spoke it would never have spoken it to him just at that time.

Esther stood a while at her window, thinking over these things, with a rest and comfort of heart indescribable; and finally laid herself down to rest with the last shadow gone from her spirit.

It could not be, however, but that the question returned the next day, what was to be done? Expenses must not outrun incomings; that was a fixed principle in Esther's mind, resting as well on honour as honesty. Evidently, when the latter do not cover the former, one of two things must be done; expenses must be lessened, or income increased. How to manage the first, Esther had failed to find; and she hated the idea, besides, of a penny-ha'penny economy. Could their incomings be added to? By teaching! It flashed into Esther's mind with a disagreeable illumination. Yes, that she could do, that she must do, if her father would not go back to Seaforth. There was no other way. He could not earn money; she must. If they continued to live in or near New York, it must be on her part as a teacher in a school. The first thought of it was not pleasant. Esther was tempted to wish they had never left Seaforth, if the end of it was to be this. But after the first start of revulsion she gathered herself together. It would put an end to all their difficulties. It would be honourable work, and good work; and, after all, *work* in some sort is what everybody should have; nobody is put here to be idle. Perhaps this pressure of circumstances was on purpose to push her into the way that was meant for her; the way in which it was the Lord's pleasure she should serve Him and the world. And having got this view of it, Esther's last reluctance was gone. For, you see, what was the Lord's pleasure was also hers.

Her heart grew quite light again. She saw what she had to do. But for the first, the thing was, to go as far in her learning as her father desired her to go. She must finish her own schooling. And if Esther had studied hard before, she studied harder now; applied herself with all the power of her will to do her utmost in every line. It was not a vague thought of satisfying Pitt Dallas that moved her now; but a very definite purpose to take care of her father, and a ready joy to do the will of Him whom Esther loved even better than her father.

The thought of Pitt Dallas, indeed, went into abeyance. Esther had something else to do. And the summer had passed and he had not come; that hope was over; and two years more must go by, according to the plan which Esther knew, before he would come again. Before that time, who could tell? Perhaps he would have forgotten them entirely.

It happened one day, putting some drawers in order, that Esther took up an old book and carelessly opened it. Its leaves fell apart at a place where there lay a dry flower. It was the sprig of red Cheiranthus; not faded; still with its velvety petals rich tinted, and still giving forth the faint sweet fragrance which belongs to the flower. It gave Esther a thrill. It was the remaining fragment of Pitt's Christmas bouquet, which she had loved and cherished to the last leaf as long as she could. She remembered all about it. Her father had made her burn all the rest; this blossom only had escaped, without her knowledge at the time. The sight of it went to her heart. She stood still by her chest of drawers with the open book in her hand, gazing at the wallflower in its persistent beauty. All came back to her: Seaforth, her childish days, Pitt and her love for him, and his goodness to her; the sorrow and the joy of that old time; and more and more the dry flower struck her heart. Why had her father wanted her to burn the others? why had she kept this? And what was the use of keeping it now? When anything, be it a flower, be it a memory, which has been fresh and sweet, loses altogether its beauty and its savour, what is the good of still keeping it to look at? Truly the flower had not lost either beauty or savour; but the memory that belonged to it? what had become of that? Pitt let himself no more be heard from; why should this little place-keeper be allowed to remain any longer? Would it not be wiser to give it up, and let the wallflower go the way of its former companions? Esther half thought so; almost made the motion to throw it in the fire; but yet she could not. She could not quite do it. Maybe there was an explanation; perhaps Pitt would come next time, when another two years had rolled away, and tell them all about it. At any rate, she would wait.

She shut up the book again carefully, and put it safely away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It seemed very inexplicable to Esther that Pitt was never heard from. Not a scrap of a letter had they had from him since they came to New York. Mr. Dallas, the elder, had written once or twice, mostly on business, and said nothing about his son. That was all. Mrs. Dallas never wrote. Esther would have been yet more bewildered if she had known that the lady had been in New York two or three times, and not merely passing through, but staying to do shopping. Happily she had no suspicion of this.

One day, late in the autumn, Christopher Bounder went over to Mrs. Blumenfeld's garden. It lay in pretty fall order, trim and clean; bushes pruned, canes tied up, vines laid down, leaves raked off; all the work done, up to the very day. Christopher bestowed an approving glance around him as he went among the beds; it was all right and ship-shape. Nobody was visible at the moment; and he passed on round the house to the rear, from whence he heard a great racket made by the voices of poultry. And there they were; as soon as he turned the corner he saw them: a large flock of hens and chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys, all wobbling and squabbling. In the midst of them stood the gardener's widow, with her hands in the pockets of a great canvas apron; or rather, with her hands in and out, for from the pockets, which were something enormous, she was fetching and distributing handfulls of oats and corn to her feathered beneficiaries. Christopher drew near, as near as he could, for the turkeys, and Mrs. Blumenfeld gave him a nod.

'Good morning, mum!'

'Good day to ye.'

'Them's a fine lot o' turkeys!' Christopher really had a good deal of education, and even knew some Latin; nevertheless, in common life, the instincts of his early habits prevailed, and he said 'Them' by preference.

'Ain't they!' rejoined Mrs. Blumenfeld. 'They had ought to be, for they've given me plague enough. Every spring I think it's the last turkeys I'll raise; and every winter, jes' as regular, I think it 'ud be well to set more turkey eggs next year than I did this'n. You see, a good fat roast turkey is what you can't beat—not in this country.'

'Nor can't equal in England, without you go to the game covers for it.
They're for the market, I s'pose?'

'Wall, I calkilate to send some on 'em. I do kill a turkey once in a while for myself, but la, how long do ye think it takes me to eat up a turkey? I get sick of it afore I'm done.'

'You want company,' suggested Mr. Bounder.

But to this the lady made no answer at all. She finished scattering her grain, and then turned to her visitor, ready for business. Christopher could not but look at her with great approbation. She was dressed much as Esther had seen her a few weeks before: a warm shawl wrapped and tied around the upper part of her person, bareheaded, hair in neat and tight order, and her hands in her capacious pockets.

'Now, I kin attend to ye,' she said, leaving the chickens and geese, which for the present were quiet, picking up their breakfast. But Mr. Bounder did not go immediately to business.

'That's a capital notion of an apron!' he said admiringly.

'Ain't it!' she answered. 'Oh, I'm great on notions. I believe in savin' yourself all the trouble you kin, provided you don't lose no time by it. There is folks, you know, that air soft-headed enough to think they kin git rid o' trouble by losin' their time. I ain't o' that sort.'

'I should say, you have none o' that sort o' people about you.'

'Wall, I don't—not ef I kin help it. Anyhow, ef I get 'em I contrive to lose 'em agin. But what was you wantin'?'

'I came to see if you could let us have our winter's onions? White onions, you know. It's all the sort we can do with, up at the house.'

'Onions!' said Mrs. Blumenfeld. 'Why hain't you riz your own onions, I want to know? You've got a garden.'

'That is true, mum,' said Christopher; 'but all the onions as was in it is gone.'

'Then you didn't plant enough.'

'And that's true too,' said Christopher; 'but I can't say as I takes any blame to myself for it.'

'Sakes alive, man! ain't you the gardener?'

'At your service, mum.'

'Wall, then, why, when you were about it, why didn't you sow your seeds accordin' to your needs?'

'I sowed all the seed I had.'

'All you had!' cried the little woman. 'That sounds kind o' shiftless; and I don't take you for that sort of a man neither, Mr. Bounder.'

'Much obleeged for your good opinion, mum.'

'Then why didn't you git more onion seed, du tell, when you knowed you hadn't enough?'

'As I said, mum, I am much obleeged for your good opinion, which I hope I deserve. There is reasons which must determine a man, upon occasion, to do what you would not approve—unless you also knowed the reasons.'

This sounded oracular. The two stood and looked at one another. Christopher explained himself no further; however, Mrs. Blumenfeld's understanding appeared to improve. She looked first inquisitive, and then intelligent.

'That comes kind o' hard upon me, at the end,' she said with a somewhat humorous expression. 'You see, I've made a vow— You believe in vows, Mr. Bounder?'

'I do, mum,—of the right sort.'

'I don't make no other. Wall, I've made a vow to myself, you see. Look here; what do you call that saint o' your'n? up to your house.'

'I don't follow you, mum,' said Christopher, a good deal mystified.

'You know you've got a saint there, I s'pose. What's her name? that's what I want to know.'

'Do you mean Miss Esther?'

'Ah! that's it. I never heerd of a Saint Esther. There was an Esther in the Bible—I'll tell you! she was a Queen Esther; and that fits. Ain't she a kind o' a queen! But she's t'other thing too. Look here, Mr. Bounder; be you all saints up to your house?'

'Well, no, mum, not exactly; that's not altogether the description I'd give of some of us, if I was stating my opinion.'

'Don't you think you had ought to be that?'

'Perhaps we ought,' said Christopher, with wondering slow admission.

'I kin tell you. There ain't no question about it. Folks had ought to live up to their privileges; an' you've got a pattern there right afore your eyes. I hev no opinion of you, ef you ain't all better'n common folks. I'd be, I know, ef I lived a bit where she was.'

'It's different with a young lady,' Christopher began.

'Why is it different?' said the woman sharply. 'You and me, we've got as good right to be saints as she has, or anybody. I tell you I've made a vow. *I* ain't no saint, but I'm agoin' to sell her no onions.'

'Mum!' said Christopher, astounded.

'Nor nothin' else,' Mrs. Blumenfeld went on. 'How many d'ye want?'

Mr. Bounder's wits were not quick enough to follow these sharp Yankee turns. Like the ships his countrymen build, he could not come about so quick. It is curious how the qualities of people's minds get into their shipbuilding and other handicraft. It was not till Mrs. Blumenfeld had repeated her question that he was able to answer it.

'I suppose, mum, a half a bushel wouldn't be no more'n enough to go through with.'

'Wall, I've got some,' the gardener's widow went on; 'the right sort; white, and as soft as cream, and as sweet as onions kin be. I'll send you up a bag of 'em.'

'But then I must be allowed to pay for 'em,' said Christopher.

'I tell you, I won't sell her nothin'—neither onions nor nothin' else.'

'Then, mum,—it's very handsome of you, mum; that I must say, and won't deny—but in that case I am afraid Miss Esther would prefer that I should get the onions somewheres else.'

'Jes' you hold your tongue about it, an' I'll send up the sass; and ef your Queen Esther says anything, you tell her it's all paid for. What else do you want that's my way?'

While she spoke, Mrs. Blumenfeld was carefully detaching a root of celery from the rich loose soil which enveloped it, and shaking the white stalks free from their encumbrance, Mr. Bounder the while looking on approvingly, both at the celery, which was beautifully long and white and delicate, and at the condition of things generally on the ground, all of which his eye took in; although he was too much of a magnate in his own line to express the approval he felt.

'There!' said Mrs. Blumenfeld, eyeing her celery stalks; 'kin you beat that where you come from?'

'It's very fair,' said Christopher—'very fair. But England can beat the world, mum, in gardening and that. I suppose you can't expect it of a new country like this.'

'Can't expect what? to beat the world? You jes' wait a bit, till you see. You jes' only wait a bit.'

'What do you think of England and America going into partnership?' asked Mr. Bounder, bending to pick up a refuse stem that Mrs. Blumenfeld had rejected. 'Think we couldn't be a match for most things u-nited?'

'I find myself a match for most things, as it is,' returned the lady promptly.

'But you must want help sometimes?' said Christopher, with a sharp and somewhat sly glance at her.

'When I do, I git it,—or I do without it.'

'That's when you can't get the right kind.'

'Jes' so.'

'It ain't for a man properly to say what he can do or what he can't do; words is but breath, they say; and those as know a man can give a pretty good guess what he's good for; but, however, when he's speakin' to them as don't know him, perhaps it ain't no more but fair that he should be allowed to speak for himself. Now if I say that accordin' to the best o' my knowledge and belief, what I offer you *is* the right kind o' help, you won't think it's brag or bluster, I hope?'

'Why shouldn't I?' said the little woman. But Christopher thought the tone of the words was not discouraging. 'They does allays practise fence,' he thought to himself.

'Well, mum, if you hev ever been up to our place in the summer-time, you may hev seen our garden; and to a lady o' your experience I needn't to say no more.'

'Wall,' said Mrs. Blumenfeld, by way of conceding so much, 'I'll allow Colonel Gainsborough has a pretty fair gardener, ef he *hes* some furrin notions.'

'I'll bring them furrin notions to your help, mum,' said Mr. Bounder eagerly. 'I know my business as well as any man on this side or that side either. It's no boastin' to say that.'

'Sounds somethin' like it. But what'll the colonel do without you, or the colonel's garden? that's what I can't make out. Hev you and he hed a falling out?' And the speaker raised herself up straight and looked full at her visitor.

'There's nothin' like that possible!' said Mr. Bounder solemnly. 'The colonel ain't agoin' to do without me, my woman. No more can't I do with out the colonel, I may say. I've lived in the family now this twenty year; and as long as I can grow spinach they ain't agoin' to eat no other—without it's yours, mum,' Christopher added, with a change of tone; 'or yours and mine. You see, the grounds is so near, that goin' over to one ain't forsakin' the other; and the colonel, he hasn't really space and place for a man that can do what I can do.'

'An' what is it you propose?'

'That you should take me, mum, for your head man.'

The two were standing now, quite still, looking into one another's eyes; a little sly audacity in those of Christopher, while a smile played about his lips that was both knowing and conciliating. Mrs. Blumenfeld eyed him gravely, with the calm air of one who was quite his match. Christopher could tell nothing from her face.

'I s'pose,' she said, 'you'll want ridiculous wages?'

'By no means, mum!' said Christopher, waving his hand. 'There never was nothin' ridiculous about *you*. I'll punch anybody's head that says it.'

Mrs. Blumenfeld shook the last remnant of soil from the celery roots, and handed the bunch to Christopher.

'There,' she said; 'you may take them along with you—you'll want 'em for dinner. An' I'll send up the onions. An' the rest I'll think about. Good day to ye!'

Christopher went home well content.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STRAWBERRIES.

The winter passed, Esther hardly knew how. For her it was in a depth of study; so absorbing that she only now and then and by minutes gave her attention to anything else. Or perhaps I should say, her thoughts; for certainly the colonel never lacked his ordinary care, which she gave him morning and evening, and indeed all day, when she was at home, with a tender punctuality which proved the utmost attention. But even while ministering to him, Esther's head was apt to be running on problems of geometry and ages of history and constructions of language. She was so utterly engrossed with her work that she gave little heed to anything else. She did notice that Pitt Dallas still sent them no reminders of his existence; it sometimes occurred to her that the housekeeping in the hands of Mrs. Barker was becoming more and more careful; but the only way she saw to remedy that was the way she was pursuing; and she went only the harder at her constructions and translations and demonstrations. The colonel lived *his* life without any apparent change.

And so went weeks and months: winter passed and spring carne; spring ran its course, and the school year at last was at an end. Esther came home for the long vacation. And then one day, Mrs. Barker confided to her reluctantly that the difficulties of her position were increasing.

'You ask me, why don't I get more strawberries, Miss Esther. My dear, I can't do it.'

'Cannot get strawberries? But they are in great plenty now, and cheap.'

'Yes, mum, but there's so many other things, Miss Esther.' The housekeeper looked distressed. Esther was startled, and hesitated.

'You mean you have not money, Barker? Papa does not give you enough?'

'He gives me the proper sum, Miss Esther, I'm certain; but I can't make it do all it should do, to have things right and comfortable.'

'Do you have less than you used at the beginning of winter?'

'Yes, mum. I didn't want to trouble you, Miss Esther, for to be sure you can't do nothin' to help it; but it's just growin' slimmer and slimmer.'

'Never mind; I think I know how to mend matters by and by; if we can only get along for a little further. We must have some things, and my father likes fruit, you can get strawberries from Mrs. Blumenfeld down here, can you not?'

'No, mum,' said the housekeeper, looking embarrassed. 'She won't sell us nothin', that woman won't.'

'Will not sell us anything? I thought she was so kind. What is the matter? Is there not a good

understanding between her and us?'

'There's too good an understanding, mum, and that's the truth. We don't want no favours from the likes o' her; and now Christopher'—

'What of Christopher?'

'Hain't he said nothin' to the colonel?'

'To papa? No. About what?'

'He's gone and made an ass o' himself, has Christopher,' said the housekeeper, colouring with displeasure.

'Why? How? What has he done?'

'He hain't done nothin' yet, mum, but he's bound he will, do the foolishest thing a man o' his years can do. An' he wants me to stan' by and see him! I do lose my patience whiles where I can't find it. As if Christopher hadn't enough to think of without that! Men is all just creatures without the power o' thought and foresight.'

'Thought?—why, that is precisely what is supposed to be their distinguishing privilege,' said Esther, a little inclined to laugh. 'And Christopher was always very foresighted.'

'He ain't now, then,' muttered his sister.

'What is he doing?'

'Miss Esther, that yellow-haired woman has got holt o' him.'

This was said with a certain solemnity, so that Esther was very much bewildered, and most incoherent visions flew past her brain. She waited dumbly for more.

'She has, mum,' the housekeeper repeated; 'and Christopher ain't a babby no more, but he's took—that's what he is. I wish, Miss Esther—as if that would do any good!—that we'd stayed in Seaforth, where we was. I'm that provoked, I don't rightly know myself. Christopher ain't a babby no more; but it seems that don't keep a man from bein' wuss'n a fool.'

'Do you mean'—

'Yes 'm, that's what he has done; just that; and I might as well talk to my spoons. I've knowed it a while, but I was purely ashamed to tell you about it. I allays gave Christopher the respect belongin' to a man o' sense, if he warn't in high places.'

'But what has he done?'

'Didn't I tell you, Miss Esther? That yellow-haired woman has got holt of him.'

'Yellow-haired woman?'

'Yes, mum,—the gardener woman down here.'

'Is Christopher going to take service with *her?*'

'He don't call it that, mum. He speaks gay about bein' his own master. I reckon he'll find two ain't as easy to manage as one! She knows what she's about, that woman does, or my name ain't Sarah Barker.'

'Do you mean,' cried Esther,—'do you mean that he is going to *marry* her?'

'That's what I've been tellin' you, mum, all along. He's goin' to many her, that he is; and for as old as he is, that should know better.'

'Oh, but Christopher is not *old;* that is nothing; he is young enough.
I did not think, though, he would have left us.'

'An' that, mum, is just what he's above all sure and certain he won't do. I tell him, a man can't walk two ways to once; nor he can't serve two masters, even if one of 'em is himself, which that yellow-haired woman won't let come about. No, mum, he's certain sure he'll never leave the colonel, mum; that ain't his meaning.'

Esther went silently away, thinking many things. She was more amused than anything else, with the

lightheartedness of youth; yet she recognised the fact that this change might introduce other changes. At any rate, it furnished an occasion for discussing several things with her father. As usual, when she wanted a serious talk with the colonel, she waited till the time when his attention would be turned from his book to his cup of tea.

'Papa,' she began, after the second cup was on its way, 'have you heard anything lately of Christopher's plans?'

'Christopher's plans? I did not know he had any plans,' said the colonel drily.

'He has, papa,' said Esther, divided between a desire to laugh and a feeling that after all there was something serious about the matter. 'Papa, Christopher has fallen in love.'

'Fallen in *what?*' shouted the colonel.

'Papa! please take it softly. Yes, papa, really; Christopher is going to be married.'

'He has not asked my consent.'

'No, sir, but you know—Christopher is of age,' said Esther, unable to maintain a gravity in any way corresponding to that on her father's face.

'Don't talk folly! What do you mean?'

'He has arranged to marry Mrs. Blumenfeld, the woman who keeps the market garden over here. He does not mean to leave us, papa; the places are so near, you know. He thinks, I believe, he can manage both.'

'He is a fool!'

'Barker is very angry with him. But that does not help anything.'

'He is an ass!' repeated the colonel hotly. 'Well, that settles one question.'

'What question, papa?

'We have done with Christopher. I want no half service. I suppose he thinks he will make more money; and I am quite willing he should try.'

Esther could see that her father was much more seriously annoyed than he chose to show; his tone indicated a very unusual amount of disturbance. He turned from the table and took up his book.

'But, papa, how can we do without Christopher?'

There was no answer to this.

'I suppose he really has a great deal of time to spare; our garden ground is so little, you know. He does not mean to leave us at all.'

'*I* mean he shall!'

Esther sat silent and pondered. There were other things she wished to speak about; was not this a good occasion? But she hesitated long how to be gin. The colonel was not very deep in his book, she could see; he was too much annoyed.

'Papa,' she said slowly after a while, 'are our circumstances any better than they were?'

'Circumstances? what do you mean?'

'Money, papa; have we any more money than we had when we talked about it last fall?'

'Where is it to come from?' said the colonel in the same short, dry fashion. It was the fashion in which he was wont to treat unwelcome subjects, and always drove Esther away from a theme, unless it were too pressing to be avoided.

'Papa, you know I do not know where any of our money comes from, except the interest on the price of the sale at Seaforth.'

'I do not know where any *more* is to come from.'

'Then, papa, don't you think it would be good to let my schooling stop here?'

'No.'

'Papa, I want to make a very serious proposition to you. Do not laugh at me' (the colonel looked like anything but laughing), 'but listen to me patiently. You know we *cannot* go on permanently as we have done this year, paying out more than we took in?'

'That is my affair.'

'But it is for my sake, papa, and so it comes home to me. Now this is my proposal. I have really had schooling enough. Let me give lessons.'

'Let you do *what?*'

'Lessons, papa; let me give lessons. I have not spoken to Miss Fairbairn, but I am almost sure she would be glad of me; one of her teachers is going away. I could give lessons in Latin and French and English and drawing, and still have time to study; and I think it would make up perhaps all the deficiency in our income.'

The colonel looked at her. 'You have not spoken of this scheme to anybody else?'

'No, sir; of course not.'

'Then, do not speak of it.'

'You do not approve of it, papa?'

'No. My purpose in giving you an education was not that you might be a governess.'

'But, papa, it would not hurt me to be a governess for a while; it would do me no sort of hurt; and it would help our finances. There is another thing I could teach—mathematics.'

'I have settled that question,' said the colonel, going back to his book.

'Papa,' said the girl after a pause, 'may I give lessons enough to pay for the lessons that are given me?'

'No.'

'But, papa, it troubles me very much, the thought that we are living beyond our means; and on my account.' And Esther now looked troubled.

'Leave all that to me.'

Well, it was all very well to say, 'Leave that to me;' but Esther had a strong impression that matters of this sort, so left, would not meet very thorough attention. There was an interval here of some length, during which she was pondering and trying to get up her courage to go on.

'Papa,'—she broke the silence doubtfully,—'I do not want to disturb you, but I must speak a little more. Perhaps you can explain; I want to understand things better. Papa, do you know Barker has still less money now to do the marketing with than she had last year?'

'Well, what do you want explained?' The tone was dry and not encouraging.

'Papa, she cannot get the things you want.'

'Do I complain?'

'No, sir, certainly; but—is this necessary?'

'Is what necessary?'

'Papa, she tells me she cannot get you the fruit you ought to have; you are stinted in strawberries, and she has not money to buy raspberries.'

'Call Barker.'

The call was not necessary, for the housekeeper at this moment appeared to take away the tea-things.

'Mrs. Barker,' said the colonel, 'you will understand that I do not wish any fruit purchased for my table. Not until further orders.'

The housekeeper glanced at Esther, and answered with her decorous,

'Certainly, sir;' and with that, for the time, the discussion was ended.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HAY AND OATS.

But it is in the nature of this particular subject that the discussion of it is apt to recur. Esther kept silence for some time, possessing herself in patience as well as she could. Nothing more was said about Christopher by anybody, and things went their old train, minus peaches, to be sure, and also minus pears and plums and nuts and apples, articles which Esther at least missed, whether her father did or not. Then fish began to be missing.

'I thought, Miss Esther, dear,' said Mrs. Barker when this failure in the *menu* was mentioned to her, —'I thought maybe the colonel wouldn't mind if he had a good soup, and the fish ain't so nourishin', they say, as the meat of the land creatures. Is it because they drinks so much water, Miss Esther?'

'But I think papa does not like to go without his fish.'

'Then he must have it, mum, to be sure; but I'm sure I don't just rightly know how to procure it. It must be done, however.'

The housekeeper's face looked doubtful, notwithstanding her words of assurance, and a vague fear seized her young mistress.

'Do not get anything you have not money to pay for, at any rate!' she said impressively.

'Well, mum, and there it is!' cried the housekeeper. 'There is things as cannot be dispensed with, in no gentleman's house. I thought maybe fish needn't be counted among them things, but now it seems it must. I may as well confess, Miss Esther; that last barrel o' flour ain't been paid for yet.'

'Not paid for!' cried Esther in horror. 'How came that?'

'Well, mum, just that I hadn't the money. And bread must be had.'

'Not if it cannot be paid for! I would rather starve, if it comes to that. You might have got a lesser quantity.'

'No, mum,' replied the housekeeper; 'you have to have the whole barrel in the end; and if you get it by bits you pay every time for the privilege. No, mum, that ain't no economy. It's one o' the things which kills poor people; they has to pay for havin' every quart of onions measured out to 'em. I'm afeard Christopher hain't had no money for his hay and his oats that he's got latterly.'

'Hay and oats!' cried Esther. 'Would he get them without orders and means?'

'I s'pose he thinks he has his orders from natur'. The horse can't be let to go without his victuals, mum. And means Christopher hadn't, more'n a quarter enough. What was he to do?'

Esther stood silent and pale, making no demonstration, but the more profoundly moved and dismayed.

'An' what's harder on *my* stomach than all the rest,' the housekeeper went on, 'is that woman sendin' us milk.'

'That woman? Mrs. Blumenfeld?'

'Which it *was* her name, mum.'

'*Was!* You do not mean— Is Christopher really married?'

'He says that, mum, and I suppose he knows. He's back and forth, and don't live nowheres, as I tells him. And the milk comes plentiful, and to be sure the colonel likes his glass of a mornin'; and curds, and blancmange, and the like, I see he's no objection to; but thinks I to myself, if he knowed, it wouldn't go down quite so easy.'

'If he knew what? Don't you pay for it?'

'I'd pay that, Miss Esther, if I paid nothin' else; but Christopher's beyond my management and won't hear of no money, nor his wife neither, he says. It's uncommon impudence, mum, that's what I think it is. Set her up! to give us milk, and onions, and celery; and she would send apples, only I dursn't put 'em on the table, being forbidden, and so I tells Christopher.'

Esther was penetrated through and through with several feelings while the housekeeper spoke; touched with the kindness manifested, but terribly humbled that it should be needed, and that it should be accepted. This must not go on; but, in the meantime, there was another thing that needed mending.

'Have you been to see your new sister, Barker?'

'Me? That yellow-haired woman? No, mum; and have no desire.'

'It would be right to go, and to be very kind to her.'

'She's that independent, mum, she don't want no kindness. She's got her man, and I wish her joy.'

'I am sure you may,' said Esther, half laughing. 'Christopher will certainly make her a good husband. Hasn't he been a good brother?'

'Miss Esther,' said the housekeeper solemnly, 'the things is different. It's my belief there ain't half a dozen men on the face o' the earth that is fit to have wives, and one o' the half dozen I never see yet. Christopher's a good brother, mum, as you say; as good as you'll find, maybe,—I've nought against him as sich; but then, I ain't his wife, and that makes all the differ. There's no tellin' what men don't expect o' their wives, when once they've got 'em.'

'Expectations ought to be mutual, I should think,' said Esther, amused. 'But it would be the right thing for you to go and see Mrs. Bounder at any rate, and to be very good to her; and you know, Barker, you always like to do what is right.'

There was a sweet persuasiveness in the tone of the last words, which at least silenced Mrs. Barker; and Esther went away to think what she should say to her father. The time had come to speak in earnest, and she must not let herself be silenced. Getting into debt on one hand, and receiving charity on the other! Esther's pulses made a bound whenever she thought of it. She must not put it *so* to Colonel Gainsborough. How should she put it? She knelt down and prayed for wisdom, and then she went to the parlour. It was one Saturday afternoon in the winter; school business in full course, and Esther's head and hands very much taken up with her studies. The question of ways and means had been crowded out of her very memory for weeks past; it came with so much the sharper incisiveness now. She went in where her father was reading, poked the fire, brushed up the hearth, finally faced the business in hand.

'Papa, are you particularly busy? Might I interrupt you?'

'You *have* interrupted me,' said the colonel, letting his hand with the book sink to his side, and turning his face towards the speaker. But he said it with a smile, and looked with pleased attention for what was coming. His fair, graceful, dignified daughter was a constant source of pride and satisfaction to him, though he gave little account of the fact to himself, and made scarce any demonstration of it to her. He saw that she was fair beyond most women, and that she had that refined grace of carriage and manner which he valued as belonging to the highest breeding. There was never anything careless about Esther's appearance, or hasty about her movements, or anything that was not sweet as balm in her words and looks. As she stood there now before him, serious and purposeful, her head, which was set well back on her shoulders, carried so daintily, and the beautiful eyes intent with grave meaning amid their softness, Colonel Gainsborough's heart swelled in his bosom, for the delight he had in her.

'What is it?' he asked. 'What do you want to say to me? All goes well at school?'

'Oh yes, papa, as well as possible. It isn't that. But I am in a great puzzle about things at home.'

'Ah! What things?'

'Papa, we want more money, or we need to make less expenditure. I must consult you as to the which and the how.'

The colonel's face darkened. 'I see no necessity,' he answered.

'But I do, papa. I see it so clearly that I am forced to disturb you. I am very sorry, but I must. I am sure the time has come for us to take some decided measures. We cannot go on as we are going now.'

'I should like to ask, why not?'

'Because, papa—because the outlay and the income do not meet.'

'It seems to me that is rather my affair,' said the colonel coolly.

'Yes, papa,' said Esther, with a certain eagerness, 'I like it to be your affair—only tell me what I ought to do.'

'Tell you what you ought to do about what?'

'How to pay as we go, papa,' she answered in a lower tone.

'It is very simple,' the colonel said, with some impatience. 'Let your expenses be regulated by your means. In other words, do not get anything you have not the money for.'

'I should like to follow that rule, papa; but'—

'Then follow it,' said the colonel, going back to his book, as if the subject were dismissed.

'But, papa, there are some things one *must* have.'

'Very well. Get those things. That is precisely what I mean.'

'Papa, flour is one of them.'

'Yes. Very well. What then?'

'Our last barrel of flour is not paid for.'

'Not paid for! Why not?'

'Barker could not, papa.'

'Barker should not have got it, then. I allow no debts.'

'But, papa, we must have bread, you know. That is one of the things that one cannot do with out. What should she do?' Esther said gently.

'She could go to the baker's, I suppose, and get a loaf for the time.'

'But, papa, the bread costs twice as much that way; or one third more, if not twice as much. I do not know the exact proportion; but I know it is very greatly more expensive so.'

The colonel was well enough acquainted with details of the commissary department to know it also. He was for a moment silenced.

'And, papa, Buonaparte, too, must eat; and his oats and hay are not paid for.' It went sharp to Esther's heart to say the words, for she knew how keenly they would go to her father's heart; but she was standing in the breach, and must fight her fight. The colonel flew out in hot displeasure; sometimes, as we all know, the readiest disguise of pain.

'Who dared to get hay and oats in my name and leave it unpaid for?'

'Christopher had not the money, papa; and the horse must eat.'

'Not without my order!' said the colonel. 'I will send Christopher about his own business. He should have come to me.'

There was a little pause here. The whole discussion was exceedingly painful to Esther; yet it must be gone through, and it must be brought to some practical conclusion. While she hesitated, the colonel began again.

'Did you not tell me that the fellow had some ridiculous foolery with the market woman over here?'

'I did not put it just so, papa, I think,' said Esther, smiling in spite of her pain. 'Yes, he is married to her.'

'Married!' cried the colonel. '*Married*, do you say? Has he had the impudence to do that?'

'Why not, sir? Why not Christopher as well as another man?'

'Because he is my servant, and had no permission from me to get married while he was in my service.

He did not *ask* permission.'

'I suppose he dared not, papa. You know you are rather terrible when you are displeased. But I think it is a good thing for us that he is married. Mrs. Blumenfeld is a good woman, and Christopher is disposed of, whatever we do.'

'Disposed of!' said the colonel. 'Yes! I have done with him. I want no more of him.'

'Then, papa,' said Esther, sinking down on her knees beside her father, and affectionately laying one hand on his knee, 'don't you see this makes things easy for us? I have a proposition. Will you listen to it?'

'A proposition! Say on.'

'It is evident that we must take some step to bring our receipts and expenses into harmony. Your going without fruit and fish will not do it, papa; and I do not like that way of saving, besides. I had rather make one large change—cut off one or two large things—than a multitude of small ones. It is easier, and pleasanter. Now, so long as we live in this house we are obliged to keep a horse; and so long as we have a horse we must have Christopher, or some other man; and so long as we keep a horse and a man we *must* make this large outlay, that we cannot afford. Papa, I propose we move into the city.'

'Move! Where?' asked the colonel, with a very unedified expression.

'We could find a house in the city somewhere, papa, from which I could walk to Miss Fairbairn's. That could not be difficult.'

'Who is to find the house?'

'Could not you, papa? Buonaparte would take you all over; the driving would not do you any harm.'

'I have no idea where to begin,' said the colonel, rubbing his head in uneasy perplexity.

'I will find out that, papa. I will speak to Miss Fairbairn; she is a great woman of business. She will tell me.'

The colonel still rubbed his head thoughtfully. Esther kept her position, in readiness for some new objection. The next words, however, surprised her.

'I have sometimes thought,'—the colonel's fingers were all the while going through and through his hair; the action indicating, as such actions do, the mental movement and condition, 'I have sometimes thought lately that perhaps I was doing you a wrong in keeping you here.'

'*Here*, papa?—in New York?'

'No. In America.'

'In America! Why, sir?'

'Your family, my family, are all on the other side. You would have friends if you were there,—you would have opportunities,—you would not be alone. And in case I am called away, you would be in good hands. I do not know that I have the right to keep you here.'

'Papa, I like to be where you like to be. Do not think of that. Why did we come away from England in the first place?'

The colonel was silent, with a gloomy brow.

'It was nothing better than a family quarrel,' he said.

'About what? Do you mind telling me, papa?'

'No, child; you ought to know. It was a quarrel on the subject of religion.'

'How, sir?'

'Our family have been Independents from all time. But my father married a second wife, belonging to the Church of England. She won him over to her way of thinking. I was the only child of the first marriage; and when I came home from India I found a houseful of younger brothers and sisters, all belonging, of course, to the Establishment, and my father with them. I was a kind of outlaw. The advancement of the family was thought to depend very much on the stand I would take, as after my

father's death I would be the head of the family. At least my stepmother made that a handle for her schemes; and she drove them so successfully that at last my father declared he would disinherit me if I refused to join him.'

'In being a Church of England man?'

'Yes.'

'But, papa, that was very unjust!'

'So I thought. But the injustice was done.'

'And you disinherited?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, papa! Just because you followed your own conscience!'

'Just because I held to the traditions of the family. We had *always* been Independents—fought with Cromwell and suffered under the Stuarts. I was not going to turn my back on a glorious record like that for any possible advantages of place and favour.'

'What advantages, papa? I do not understand. You spoke of that before.'

'Yes,' said the colonel a little bitterly, 'in that particular my stepmother was right. You little know the social disabilities under which those lie in England who do not belong to the Established Church. For policy, nobody should be a Dissenter.'

'Dissenter?' echoed Esther, the word awaking a long train of old associations; and for a moment her thoughts wandered back to them.

'Yes,' the colonel went on; 'my father bade me follow him; but with more than equal right I called on him to follow a long line of ancestors. Rather hundreds than one!'

'Papa, in such a matter surely conscience is the only thing to follow,' said Esther softly. 'You do not think a man ought to be either Independent or Church of England, just because his fathers have set him the example?'

'You do not think example and inheritance are anything?' said the colonel.

'I think they are everything, for the right;—most precious!—but they cannot decide the right. *That* a man must do for himself, must he not?'

'Republican doctrine!' said the colonel bitterly. 'I suppose, after I am gone, you will become a Church of England woman, just to prove to yourself and others that you are not influenced by me!'

'Papa,' said Esther, half laughing, 'I do not think that is at all likely; and I am sure you do not. And so that was the reason you came away?'

'I could not stay there,' said the colonel, 'and see my young brother in my place, and his mother ruling where your mother should by right have ruled. They did not love me either,—why should they?—and I felt more a stranger there than anywhere else. So I took the little property that came to me from my mother, to which my father in his will had made a small addition, and left England and home for ever.'

There was a pause of some length.

'Who is left there now, of the family?' Esther asked.

'I have not heard.'

'Do they never write to you?'

'Never.'

'Nor you to them, papa?'

'No. Since I came away there has been no intercourse whatever between our families.'

'Oh, papa!'

'I am inclined to regret it now, for your sake.'

'I am not thinking of that. But, papa, it must be sixteen or seventeen years now; isn't it?'

'Something like so much.'

'Oh, papa, do write to them! do write to them, and make it up. Do not let the quarrel last any longer.'

'Write to them and make it up?' said the colonel, rubbing his head again. In all his life Esther had hardly ever seen him do it before. 'They have forgotten me long ago; and I suppose they are all grown out of my remembrance. But it might be better for you if we went home.'

'Never mind that, papa; that is not what I am thinking of. Why, who could be better off than I am? But write and make it all up, papa; do! It isn't good for families to live so in hostility. Do what you can to make it up.'

The colonel sat silent, rubbing the hair of his head in every possible direction, while Esther's fancy for a while busied itself with images of an unknown crowd of relations that seemed to flit before her. How strange it would be to have aunts and cousins; young and old family friends, such as other girls had; instead of being so entirely set apart by herself, as it were. It was fascinating, the mere idea. Not that Esther felt her loneliness now; she was busy and healthy and happy; yet this sudden vision made her realise that she *was* alone. How strange and how pleasant it would be to have a crowd of friends, of one's own blood and name! She mused a little while over this picture, and then came back to the practical present.

'Meanwhile, papa, what do you think of my plan? About getting a house in the city, and giving up Buonaparte and his oats? Don't you think it would be comfortable?'

The colonel considered the subject now in a quieter mood, discussed it a little further, and finally agreed to drive into town and see what he could find in the way of a house.

CHAPTER XXX.

A HOUSE.

Yet the colonel did not go. Days passed, and he did not go. Esther ventured some gentle reminders, which had no effect. And the winter was gone and the spring was come, before he made the first expedition to the city in search of a house. Once started on his quest, it is true the colonel carried it on vigorously, and made many journeys for it; but they were all in vain. Rents in the city were found to be so much higher than rents in the country as fully to neutralize the advantage hoped for in a smaller household and the dismissal of the horse. Not a dwelling could be found where this would not be true. The search was finally given up; and things in the little family went on as they had been going for some time past.

Esther at last, under stress of necessity, made fresh representations to her father, and besought leave to give lessons. They were running into debt, with no means of paying. It went sorely against the grain with the colonel to give his consent; pride and tenderness both rebelled; he hesitated long, but circumstances were too much for him. He yielded at last, not with a groan, but with many groans.

'I came here to take care of you,' he said; 'and *this* is the end of it!'

'Don't take it so, papa,' cried Esther. 'I like to do it. It is not a hardship.'

'*It* is a hardship,' he retorted; 'and you will find it so. I find it so now.'

'Even so, papa,' said the girl, with infinite sweetness; 'suppose it be a hardship, the Lord has given it to me; and so long as I am sure it is something He has given, I want no better. Indeed, papa, you know I *could have* no better.'

'I know nothing of the kind. You are talking folly.'

'No, papa, if you please. Just remember,—look here, papa,—here are the words. Listen: "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; *no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly*."'

'Do you mean to tell me,' said the colonel angrily, 'that—well, that all the things that you have not just now, and ought to have, are not good things?'

'Not good for me, or at least not the *best*, or I should have them.'

This answer was with a smile so absolutely shadowless, that the colonel found nothing to answer but a groan, which was made up of pain and pride and pleasure in inscrutable proportions.

The next step was to speak to Miss Fairbairn. That wise woman showed no surprise, and did not distress Esther with any sympathy; she took it as the most natural thing in the world that her favourite pupil should wish to become a teacher; and promised her utmost help. In her own school there was now no longer any opening; that chance was gone; but she gave Esther a recommendation in person to the principal of another establishment, where in consequence Miss Gainsborough found ready acceptance.

And now indeed she felt herself a stranger, and found herself alone. This was a different thing from her first entering school as a pupil. And Esther began also presently to perceive that her father had not been entirely wrong in his estimate of a teacher's position and experiences. It is not a path of roses that such a one has to tread; and even the love she may bear to those she teaches, and even the genuine love of teaching them, do not avail to make it so. Woe to the teacher who has not those two alleviations and helps to fall back upon! Esther soon found both; and yet she gave her father credit for having known more about the matter than she did. She was truly alone now; the children loved her, but scattered away from her as soon as their tasks were done; her fellow-teachers she scarcely saw—they were busy and jaded; and with the world outside of school she had nothing to do. She had never had much to do with it; yet at Miss Fairbairn's she had sometimes a little taste of society that was of high order, and all in the house had been at least well known to her and she to them, even if no particular congeniality had drawn them together. She had lost all that now. And it sometimes came over Esther in those days the thought of her English aunts and cousins, as a vision of strange pleasantness. To have plenty of friends and relations, of one's own blood, and therefore inalienable; well-bred and refined and cultivated (whereby I am afraid Esther's fancy made them a multiplication of Pitt Dallas),—it looked very alluring! She went bravely about her work, and did it beautifully, and was very contented in it, and relieved to be earning money; yet these visions now and again would come over her mind, bringing a kind of distant sunshiny glow with them, different from the light that fell on that particular bit of life's pathway she was treading just then. They came and went; what came and did not go was Esther's consciousness that she was earning only a little money, and that with that little she could not clear off all the debts that had accrued and were constantly accruing. When she had paid the butcher, the grocer's bill presented itself, and when she had after some delay got rid of that, then came the need for a fresh supply of coal. Esther spent nothing on her own dress that she could help, but her father's was another matter, and tailors' charges she found were heavy. She went bravely on; she was young and full of spirit, and she was a Christian and full of confidence; nevertheless she did begin to feel the worry of these petty, gnawing, money cares, which have broken the heart of so many a woman before her. Moreover, another thing demanded consideration. It was necessary, now that she had no longer a home with Miss Fairbairn, that she should go into town and come back every day, and, furthermore, as she was giving lessons in a school, no circumstance of weather or anything else must hinder her being absolutely punctual. Yet Esther foresaw that as the winter came on again it would be very difficult sometimes to maintain this punctuality; and it became clear to her that it would be almost indispensable for them to move into town. If only a house could be found!

Meantime Christopher went and came about the house, cultivated the garden and took care of the horse and drove Esther to school, all just as usual; his whilome master never having as yet said one word to him on the subject of his marriage and consequent departure. Whether his wages were paid him, Esther was anxiously doubtful; but she dared not ask. I say 'whilome' master, for there is no doubt that Mr. Bounder in these days felt that nobody was his master but himself. He did all his duties faithfully, but then he took leave to cross the little field which lay between his old home and his new, and to disappear for whole spaces of time from the view of the colonel's family.

It was one evening in November. Mrs. Barker was just sitting down to her tea, and Christopher was preparing himself to leave her. I should remark that Mrs. Barker had called on the former Mrs. Blumenfeld, and established civil relations between the houses.

'Won't you stay, Christopher?' asked his sister.

'No, thank ye. I've got a little woman over there, who's expecting me.'

'Does she set as good a table for you as I used to do? in those days when I could?' the housekeeper added, with a sigh.

'Well, she ain't just up to some o' your arts,' said Christopher, with a contented face, in which his blue

eye twinkled with a little slyness; 'but I'll tell you what, she can cook a dish o' pot-pie that you can't beat, nor nobody else; and her rye bread is just uncommon!'

'Rye bread!' said the housekeeper, with an utterance of disdain.

'I'll bring a loaf over,' said Christopher, nodding his head; 'and you can give some to Miss Esther if you like. Good-night!'

He made few steps of it through the dark cold evening to the house that had become his home. The room that received him might have pleased a more difficult man. It was as clean as hands could make it; bright with cleanliness, lighted and warmed with a glowing fire, and hopeful with a most savoury scent of supper. The mistress of the house was busy about her hearth, looking neat and comfortable enough to match her room. As Christopher came in she lit a candle that stood on the supper-table. Christopher hugged himself at this instance of his wife's thrift, and sat down.

'You've got something that smells uncommon good there!' said he approvingly.

'I allays du think a hot supper's comfortable at the end o' a cold day,' returned the new Mrs. Bounder. 'I don't care what I du as long's I'm busy with all the world all the day long; I kin take a piece and a bite and go on, but when it comes night, and I hev time to think I'm tired, then I like a good hot something or other.'

'What have you got there?' said Christopher, peering over at the dish on the hearth which Mrs. Bounder was filling from a pot before the fire. She laughed.

'You wouldn't be any wiser ef I told you. It's a little o' everything. Give me a good garden, and I kin live as well as I want to, and cost no one more'n a few shillin's, neither. 'Tain't difficult, ef you know how. Now see what you say to that.'

She dished up her supper, put a plate of green pickles on the table, filled up her tea-pot, and cut some slices from a beautiful brown loaf, which must have rivalled the rye, though it was not that colour. Christopher sat down, said grace reverently, and attacked the viands, while the mistress poured him out a cup of tea.

'Christopher,' she said, as she handed it to him, 'I'd jes' like to ask you something.'

'What is it?'

'I'd like to know jes' why you go through that performance?'

'Performance?' echoed Christopher. 'What are you talkin' about?'

'I mean, that bit of a prayer you think it is right to make whenever you're goin' to put your fork to your mouth.'

'Oh! I couldn't imagine what you were driving at. Why do I do it?'

'I'd like to know, ef you think you kin tell.'

'Respectable folk always does it.'

'Hm! I don' know about that. So it's for respectability you keep it up?'

'No,' said Christopher, a little embarrassed how to answer. 'It's proper. Don't you know the Bible bids us give thanks?'

'Wall, hev you set out to du all the rest o' the things the Bible bids you du?—that's jes' what I'm comin' to.'

A surly man would not perhaps have answered at all, resenting this catechizing; but Christopher was not surly, and not at all offended. He was perplexed a little; looked at his wife in some sly wonder at her, but answered not.

'Ef I began, I'd go through. I wouldn't make no half way with it; that's all I was goin' to say,' his wife went on, with a grave face that showed she was not jesting.

'It's saying a good deal!' remarked Christopher, still looking at her.

'It's sayin' a good deal, to make the first prayer; but ef I made the first one, I'd make all the rest. I don't abide no half work in *my* garden, Christopher; that's what I was thinkin'; and I don't believe Him you pray to likes it no better.'

Christopher was utterly unprepared to go on with this subject; and finally gave up trying, and attended to his supper. After a little while his wife struck a new theme. She was not a trained rhetorician; but when she had said what she had to say she was always contented to stop.

'How are things going up your way to-day?' she asked.

'My way is down here, I'm happy to say.'

'Wall, up to the colonel's, then. What's the news?'

'Ain't no sort o' news. Never is. They're always at the old things. The colonel he lies on his sofy, and Miss Esther she goes and comes. They want to get a house in town, now she's goin' so regular, only they can't find one to fit.'

'Kin't find a house? I thought there was houses enough in all New York.'

'Houses enough, but they all is set up so high in their rents, you see.'

'Is that the trouble?'

'That is exactly the trouble; and Miss Esther, I can see, she doesn't know just what to do.'

'They ain't gittin' along well, Christopher?'

'Well, there is no doubt they ain't! I should say they was gettin' on uncommon bad. Don't seem as if they could any way pay up all their bills at once. They pay this man, and then run up a new score with some other man. Miss Esther, she tries all she knows; but there ain't no one to help her.'

'They git this house cheaper than they'd git any one in town, I guess.
They'd best stay where they be.'

'Yes, but you see, Miss Esther has to go and come every day now; she's teachin' in a school, that's what she is,' said Christopher, letting his voice drop as if he were speaking of some desecration. 'That's what she is; and so she has to be there regular, rain or shine makes no difference. An' if they was in town, you see, they wouldn't want the horse, nor me.'

'*You* don't cost 'em nothin'!' returned Mrs. Bounder.

'No; but they don't know that; and *if* they knowed it, you see, there'd be the devil to pay.'

'I wouldn't give myself bad names, ef I was you,' remarked Mrs. Bounder quietly. 'Christopher'—

'What then?'

'I'm jes' thinkin''—

'What are you thinkin' about?'

'Jes' you wait till I know myself, and I'll tell ye.'

Christopher was silent, watching from time to time his spouse, who seemed to be going on with her supper in orderly fashion. Mr. Bounder was not misled by this, and watched curiously. He had acquired in a few months a large respect for his wife. Her very unadorned attire, and her peculiar way of knotting up her hair, did not hinder that he had a great and growing value for her. Christopher would have liked her certainly to dress better and to put on a cap; nevertheless, and odd as it may seem, he was learning to be proud of his very independent wife, and even boasted to his sister that she was a 'character.' Now he waited for what was to come next.

'I guess I was a fool,' began Mrs. Bounder at last. 'But it came into my head, ef they're in such a fix as you say, whether maybe they wouldn't take up with my house. I guess, hardly likely.'

'*Your* house?' inquired Christopher, in astonishment. But his wife calmly nodded.

'*Your* house!' repeated Christopher. 'Which one?'

'Wall, not this one, I guess,' said his wife quietly. 'But I've got one in town.'

'A house in town! Why, I never heard of it before.'

'No, 'cause it's been standin' empty for a spell back, doin' nothin'. Ef there had been rent comin' in, I guess you'd have heard of it. But the last folks went out; and I hadn't found no one that suited me to let

hev it.'

'Would it do for the colonel and Miss Esther?'

'That's jes' what I don' know, Christopher. It would du as fur's the rent goes; an' it's all right and tight. It won't let the rain in on 'em; I've kep' it in order.'

'I should like to see what you don't keep in order!' said Christopher admiringly.

'Wall, I guess it's my imagination. For, come to think of it, it ain't jes' sich a house as your folks are accustomed to.'

'The thing is,' said Christopher gravely, 'they can't have just what they're accustomed to. Leastways I'm afeard they can't. I'll just speak to Miss Esther about it.'

'Wall, you kin du that. 'Twon't du no harm. I allays think, when anybody's grown poor he'd best take in his belt a little.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

MAJOR STREET.

According to the conclusion thus arrived at, Christopher took the opportunity of speaking to Esther the very next time he was driving her in from school. Esther immediately pricked up her ears, and demanded to know where the house was situated. Christopher told her. It was a street she was not acquainted with.

'Do you know how to find the place, Christopher?'

'Oh, yes, Miss Esther; I can find the place, to be sure; but I'm afraid my little woman has made a mistake.'

'What is the rent?'

Christopher named the rent. It was less than what they were paying for the house they at present occupied; and Esther at once ordered Christopher to turn about and drive her to the spot.

It was certainly not a fashionable quarter, not even near Broadway or State Street; nevertheless it was respectable, inhabited by decent people. The house itself was a small wooden one. Now it is true that at that day New York was a very different place from what it is at present; and a wooden house, and even a small wooden house, did not mean then what it means now; an abode of Irish washerwomen, or of something still less distinguished. Yet Esther startled a little at the thought of bringing her father and herself to inhabit it. Christopher had the key; and he fastened Buonaparte, and let Esther in, and went all over the house with her. It was in order, truly, as its owner had said; even clean; and nothing was off the hinges or wanting paint or needing plaster. 'Right and tight' it was, and susceptible of being made an abode of comfort; yet it was a very humble dwelling, comparatively, and in an insignificant neighbourhood; and Esther hesitated. Was it pride? she asked herself. Why did she hesitate? Yet she lingered over the place, doubting and questioning and almost deciding it would not do. Then Christopher, I cannot tell whether consciously or otherwise, threw in a makeweight that fell in the scale that was threatening to rise.

'If you please, Miss Esther, would you speak to the master about the blacksmith's bill? I don't hardly never see the colonel, these days.'

Esther faced round upon him. The word 'bill' always came to her now like a sort of stab. She repeated his words. 'The blacksmith's bill?'

'Yes, mum; that is, Creasy, the blacksmith; just on the edge o' the town. It's been runnin' along, 'cause I never could get sight o' the colonel to speak to him about it.'

'Bill for what?'

'Shoes, mum.'

'*Shoes?*' repeated Esther. 'The blacksmith? What do you mean?'

'Shoes for Buonaparty, mum. He does kick off his shoes as fast as any horse ever I see; and they does wear, mum, on the stones.'

'How much is the bill?'

'Well, mum,' said Christopher uneasily, 'it's been runnin' along—and it's astonishin' how things does mount up. It's quite a good bit, mum; it's nigh on to fifty dollars.'

It took away Esther's breath. She turned away, that Christopher might not see her face, and began to look at the house as if a sudden new light had fallen upon it. Small and mean, and unfit for Colonel Gainsborough and his daughter,—that had been her judgment concerning it five minutes before; but now it suddenly presented itself as a refuge from distress. If they took it, the relief to their finances would be immediate and effectual. There was a little bit of struggle in Esther's mind; to give up their present home for this would involve a loss of all the prettiness in which she had found such refreshment; there would be here no river and no opposite shore, and no pleasant country around with grass and trees and a flower garden. There would be no garden at all, and no view, except of a very humdrum little street, built up and inhabited by mechanics and tradespeople of a humble grade. But then—no debt! And Esther remembered that in her daily prayer for daily bread she had also asked to be enabled to 'owe no man anything.' Was here the answer? And if this were the Lord's way for supplying her necessities, should she refuse to accept it and to be thankful for it?

'It is getting late,' was Esther's conclusion as she turned away. 'We had better get home, Christopher; but I think we will take the house. I must speak to papa; but I think we will take it. You may tell Mrs. Bounder so, with my thanks.'

It cost a little trouble, yet not much, to talk the colonel over. He did not go to see the house, and Esther did not press that he should; he took her report of it, which was an unvarnished one, and submitted himself to what seemed the inevitable. But his daughter knew that her task would have been harder if the colonel's imagination had had the assistance of his eyesight. She was sure that the move must be made, and if it were once effected she was almost sure she could make her father comfortable. To combat his objections beforehand might have been a more difficult matter. Esther found Mrs. Barker's dismay quite enough to deal with. Indeed, the good woman was at first overwhelmed; and sat down, the first time she was taken to the house, in a sort of despair, with a face wan in its anxiety.

'What's the matter, Barker?' Esther said cheerily. 'You and I will soon put this in nice order, with Christopher's help; and then, when we have got it fitted up, we shall be as comfortable as ever; you will see.'

'Oh dear Miss Esther!' the housekeeper ejaculated; 'that ever I should see this day! The like of you and my master!'

'What then?' said Esther, smiling. 'Barker, shall we not take what the
Lord gives us, and be thankful? I am.'

'There ain't no use for Christopher here, as I see,' Mrs. Barker went on.

'No, and he will not be here. Do you see now how happy it is that he has got a home of his own?—which you were disposed to think so unfortunate.'

'I haven't changed my mind, mum,' said the housekeeper. 'How's your horse goin' to be kep', without Christopher?'

'I am not going to keep the horse. Here I shall not need him.'

'The drives you took was very good for you, mum.'

'I will take walks instead. Don't you be troubled. Dear Barker, do you not think our dear Lord knows what is good for us? and do you not think what He chooses is the best? I do.'

Esther's face was very unshadowed, but the housekeeper's, on the contrary, seemed to darken more and more. She stood in the middle of the floor, in one of the small rooms, and surveyed the prospect, alternately within and without the windows.

'Miss Esther, dear,' she began again, as if irrepressibly, 'you're young, and you don't know how queer the world is. There's many folks that won't believe you are what you be, if they see you are livin' in a place like this.'

Did not Esther know that? and was it not one of the whispers in her mind which she found it hardest to combat? She had begun already to touch the world on that side on which Barker declared it was 'queer.' She went, it is true, hardly at all into society; scarce ever left the narrow track of her school routine; yet even there once or twice a chance encounter had obliged her to recognise the fact that in taking the post of a teacher she had stepped off the level of her former associates. It had hurt her a little and disappointed her. Nobody, indeed, had tried to be patronizing; that was nearly impossible towards anybody whose head was set on her shoulders in the manner of Miss Gainsborough's; but she felt the slighting regard in which low-bred people held her on account of her work and position. And so large a portion of the world is deficient in breeding, that to a young person at least the desire of self-assertion comes as a very natural and tolerably strong temptation. Esther had felt it, and trodden it under foot, and yet Mrs. Barker's words made her wince. How could anybody reasonably suppose that a gentleman would choose such a house and such a street to live in?

'Never mind, Barker,' she said cheerfully, after a pause. 'What we have to do is the right thing; and then let all the rest go.'

'Has the colonel seen it, Miss Esther?'

'No, and I do not mean he shall, till we have got it so nice for him that he will feel comfortable.'

The work of moving and getting settled began without delay. Mrs. Barker spent all the afternoons at the new house; and thither came Esther also every day as soon as school was out at three o'clock. The girl worked very hard in these times; for after her long morning in school she gave the rest of the daylight hours to arranging and establishing furniture, hanging draperies, putting up hooks, and the like; and after that she went home to make her father's tea, and give him as much cheery talk as she could command. In the business of moving, however, she found unexpected assistance.

When Christopher told his wife of the decision about the house, the answering remark, made approvingly, was, 'That's a spunky little girl!'

'What do you mean?' said Christopher, not approving such an irreverent expression.

'She's got stuff in her. I like that sort.'

'But that house ain't really a place for her, you know.'

'That's what I'm lookin' at,' returned Mrs. Bounder, with a broad smile at him. 'She ain't scared by no nonsense from duin' what she's got to du. Don't you be scared neither; houses don't make the folks that live in 'em. But what I'm thinkin' of is, they'll want lots o' help to git along with their movin'. Christopher, do you know there's a big box waggin in the barn?'

'I know it.'

'Wall, that'll carry their things fust-rate, ef you kin tackle up your fine-steppin' French emperor there with our Dolly. Will he draw in double harness?'

'Will he! Well, I'll try to persuade him.'

'An' you needn't to let on anything about it. They ain't obleeged to know where the waggin comes from.'

'You're as clever a woman as any I know!' said Mr. Bounder, with a smile of complacency. 'Sally up there can't beat you; and *she's* a smart woman, too.'

A few minutes were given to the business of the supper table, and then
Mrs. Bounder asked,—

'What are they goin' to du with the French emperor?'

'Buonaparte?' (Christopher called it 'Buonaparty.') 'Well, they'll have to get rid of him somehow. I suppose that job'll come on me.'

'I was thinkin'. Our Dolly's gittin' old'—

'Buonaparty was old some time ago,' returned Christopher, with a sly twinkle of his eyes as he looked at his wife.

'There's work in him yet, ain't there?'

'Lots!'

'Then two old ones would be as good as one young one, and better, for they'd draw the double waggin. What'll they ask for him?'

'It'll be what I can get, I'm thinking.'

'What did you pay for him?'

Christopher named the sum the colonel had given. It was not a high figure; however, he knew, and she knew, that a common draught horse for their garden work could be had for something less. Mrs. Bounder meditated a little, and finally concluded,—

'It won't break us.'

'Save me lots o' trouble,' said Christopher; 'if you don't mind paying so much.'

'If *you* don't mind, Christopher,' his wife returned, with a grin. 'I've got the money here in the house; you might hand it over to Miss Esther to-morrow; I'll bet you she'll know what to du with it.'

Christopher nodded. 'She'll be uncommon glad of it, to be sure! There ain't much cash come into her hands for a good bit. And I see sometimes she's been real worrited.'

So Esther's path was smoothed in more ways than one, and even in more ways than I have indicated. For Mrs. Bounder went over and insinuated herself (with some difficulty) so far into Mrs. Barker's good graces that she was allowed to give her help in the multifarious business and cares of the moving. She was capital help. Mrs. Barker soon found that any packing intrusted to her was sure to be safely done; and the little woman's wits were of the first order, always at hand, cool, keen, and comprehensive. She followed, or rather went with the waggon to the house in Major Street; helped unpack, helped put down carpets, helped clear away litter and arrange things in order; and further still, she constantly brought something with her for the bodily refreshment and comfort of Esther and the housekeeper. Her delicious rye bread came, loaf after loaf, sweet butter, eggs, and at last some golden honey. There was no hindering her; and her presence and ministry grew to be a great assistance and pleasure also to Esther. Esther tried to tell her something of this. 'You cannot think how your kindness has helped me,' she said, with a look which told more than her words.

'Don't!' said Mrs. Bounder, when this had happened a second time. 'I was readin' in the Bible the other day—you set me readin' the Bible, Miss Esther—where it says somethin' about a good woman "ministerin' to the saints." I ain't no saint myself, and I guess it'll never be said of me; but I suppose the next thing to *bein'* a saint is ministerin' to the saints, and I'd like to du that anyhow, ef I only knowed how.'

'You have been kind ever since I knew you,' said Esther. 'I am glad to know our Christopher has got such a good wife.'

Mrs. Bounder laughed a little slyly, as she retorted, 'Ain't there nothin' to be glad of on my side tu?'

'Indeed, yes!' answered Esther. 'Christopher is as true and faithful as it is possible to be; and as to business— But you do not need that I should tell you what Christopher is,' she broke off, laughing.

There was a pleasant look in the little woman's eyes as she stood up for a moment and faced Esther.

'I guess I took him most of all because he be longed to you!' she said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOVING.

Esther made to herself a pleasure of getting the little dwelling in order. With two such helpers as she had, the work went on bravely, and Christopher got in coal and chopped wood enough to last all winter. The ready money from the sale of Buonaparte had given her the means for that and for some other things. She was intent upon making the new home look so homelike that her father should be in some measure consoled for the shock which she knew its exterior would give him. The colonel liked no fire so well as one of his native 'sea-coal.' The house had open fireplaces only. So Esther had some neat grates

put in the two lower rooms and in her father's sleeping chamber. They had plenty of carpets, and the two little parlours were soon looking quite habitable.

'We will keep the back one for a dining-room,' she said to Mrs. Barker; 'that will be convenient for you, being nearest the kitchen stairs, and this will be for papa's study. But it has a bare look yet. I must make some curtains and put up, to hide the view of that dreadful street.'

'That'll cost money, mum,' observed the housekeeper. 'Wouldn't some o' them old ones at home be passable, if they was made over a bit?'

'The colour would not fit here. No, that would not do. I'll get some chintz that is dark and bright at once. I have money. Oh, we are going to be rich now, Barker; and you shall not be stinted in your marketing any more. And this is going to be very nice, *inside*.'

To the outside Esther could not get accustomed. It gave her a kind of prick of dismay every time she saw it anew. What would her father say when *he* saw it? Yet she had done right and wisely; of that she had no doubt at all; it was very unreasonable that, her judgment being satisfied, her feeling should rebel. Yet it did rebel. When did ever one of her family live in such a place before? They had come down surely very far, to make it possible. Only in the matter of money, to be sure; but then, money has to do largely with the outward appearance one makes, and upon the appearance depends much of the effect upon one's fellow-creatures. The whisper would come back in Esther's mind: Who will believe you are what you are, if they see you coming out of such a house? And what then? she answered the whisper. If the Lord has given us this place to dwell in, that and all other effects and consequences of it are part of His will in the matter. What if we are to be overlooked and looked down upon? what have I to do with it? what matters it? Let pride be quiet, and faith be very thankful. Here are all my difficulties set aside, and no danger of not paying our debts any more.

She reasoned so, and fought against pride, if pride it were, which took the other side. She *would* be thankful; and she was. Nevertheless, a comparison would arise now and then with the former times, and with their state at Seaforth; and further back still, with the beauties and glories of the old manor house in England. Sometimes Esther felt a strange wave of regret come over her at the thought of the gay circle of relations she did not know, who were warm in the shelter of prosperity and the cheer of numbers. She knew herself in a better shelter, yes, and in a better cheer; and yet sometimes, as I said, an odd feeling of loss and descent would come over her as she entered Major Street Esther was working hard these days, which no doubt had something to do with this. She rushed from her morning duties to the school; then at three o'clock rushed to Major Street; and from there, when it grew too dark to work, drove home to minister to her father. Probably her times of discouragement were times when she was a little tired. The thought was very far from her usually. In her healthy and happy youth, busy life, and mental and spiritual growth and thrift, Esther's wants seemed to be all satisfied; and so long as things ran their ordinary course, she felt no deficiency. But there are conditions in which one is warm so long as one does not move, while the first stir of change brings a chill over one. And so sometimes now, as Esther entered Major Street or set her face towards it, she would think of her far-off circle of Gainsborough cousins, with a half wish that her father could have borne with them a little more patiently; and once or twice the thought came too, that the Dallases never let themselves be heard from any more. Not even Pitt. She would not have thought it of him, but he was away in a foreign country, and it must be that he had forgotten them. His father and mother were near, and could not forget; was not the old house there before them always to remind them? But they were rich and prosperous and abounding in everything; they had no need of the lonely two who had gone out of their sight and who did need them. It was the way of the world; so the world said. Esther wondered if that were really true, and also wondered now and then if Major Street were to be henceforth not only the sphere but the limit of her existence. She never gave such thoughts harbour; they came and they went; and she remained the cheerful, brave, busy girl she had long been.

The small house at last looked homelike. On the front room Esther had put a warm, dark-looking carpet; the chintz curtains were up and in harmony with the carpet; and the colonel's lounge was new covered with the same stuff. The old furniture had been arranged so as to give that pleasant cosy air to the room which is such a welcome to the person entering it, making the impression of comfort and good taste and of the habit of good living; not good living in matters of the table, but in those other matters which concern the mind's nourishment and social well-being. Everything was right and in order, and Esther surveyed her work with much content.

'It looks *very* nice,' she said to her good friend the housekeeper.

'It do, mum,' Mrs. Barker answered, with a reservation. 'But I'm thinkin', Miss Esther, I can't stop thinkin', whatever'll the colonel say when he sees the outside.'

'He shall see the inside first. I have arranged that. And, Barker, we must have a capital supper ready

for him. We can afford it now. Have a pheasant, Barker; there is nothing he likes better; and some of that beautiful honey Mrs. Bounder has brought us; I never saw such rich honey, I think. And I have good hope papa will be pleased, and put up with things, as I do.'

'Your papa remembers Gainsborough Manor, mum, and that's what you don't.'

'What then! Mrs. Barker, do you really think the Lord does *not* know what is good for us? That is sheer unbelief. Take what He gives, and be thankful. Barker, why do you suppose the angels came to the sepulchre so, as they did the morning of the resurrection?'

'Mum!' said Mrs. Barker, quite taken aback by this sudden change of subject. But Esther went on in a pleasant, pleased tone of interest.

'I was reading the last chapter of Matthew this morning, and it set me to thinking. You know a number of them, the angels, came, and were seen about the sepulchre; and I suppose there was just a crowd of them coming and going that morning. What for, do you suppose?'

'Miss Esther!' said the housekeeper open-mouthed, 'I'm sure I can't say.'

'Why, they came *to see the place*, Barker; just for that. They knew what had been done, and they just came in crowds, as soon as Jesus had left the sepulchre—perhaps before—to look at the spot where that wonder of all wonders had been. But it never occurred to me before how like it was to the way we human creatures feel and do. *That* was what they came for; and don't you remember what one of them, with his lightning face and his robes of whiteness, sitting on the stone, said to the women? He told them to do what he had been doing. "*Come see the place*." It brought the angels nearer to me than ever they had seemed to be before.'

Mrs. Barker stood there spellbound, silenced. To be sure, if Miss Esther's head was so busy with the angels, she was in a sort lifted up above the small matters or accidents of common earthly life. And as much as the words the girl's face awed her too, its expression was so consonant with them.

'Now, Barker, Christopher may bring up some coal and make a fire before he drives back for papa. In both rooms, Barker. And— Hark! what is that?'

A long-drawn, musical cry was sounding a little distance off, slowly coming nearer as it was repeated. A cry that New York never hears now, but that used to come through the streets in the evening with a sonorous, half melancholy intonation, pleasant to hear.

'Oys——ters!——Oys——ters! Here's your fresh oys——ters!'

'That's just what we want, Barker. Get Christopher to stop the man.'

Esther had arranged that her father's room and belongings at home should not be disturbed until the very day when he himself should make the transfer from the one house to the other. So until that morning even the colonel's sofa had not been moved. Now it was brought over and placed in position between the fireplace and the window, where the occupant would have plenty of light and warmth. The new chintz cover had been put on it; the table was placed properly, and the books which the colonel liked to have at hand lay in their usual position. In the back room the table was set for supper. The rooms communicated, though indeed not by folding doors; still the eye could go through and catch the glow of the fire, and see the neat green drugget on the floor and the pleasant array on the supper table.

'It looks *very* nice, Barker!' Esther could not help saying again.

'It certainly do, mum,' was the answer, in which, nevertheless, Esther heard the aforementioned mental reservation. If her father liked it! Yes, that could not be known till he came; and she drew a breath of patient anxiety. It was too dark for him to take the effect of anything outside; she had arranged that. One thing at a time, she thought. The house to-day; Major Street to-morrow.

She met him in the hall when he came, giving him a kiss and a welcome; helped him to take off his greatcoat, and conducted him into the small apartment so carefully made ready for him. It offered as much tasteful comfort as it was possible for a room of its inches to do. Esther waited anxiously for the effect. The colonel warmed his hands at the blaze, and took his seat on the sofa, eyeing things suspiciously.

'What sort of a place is this we have come to?' were his first words.

'Don't you think it is a comfortable place, papa? This chimney draws beautifully, and the coal is excellent. It is really a very nice little house, papa. I think it will be comfortable.'

'Not very large,' said the colonel, taking with his eye the measure of the room.

'No, papa; and none the worse for that. Room enough for you, and room enough for me; and quite room enough for Barker, who has to take care of it all. I like the house very much.'

'What sort of a street is it?'

Must that question come up to-night! Esther hesitated.

'I thought, sir, the street was of less importance to us than the home. It is *very* comfortable; and the rent is so moderate that we can pay our way and be at ease. Papa, I would not like the finest house in the world, if I had to run in debt to live in it.'

'What is the name of the street?'

'Major Street'

'Whereabouts is it? In the darkness I could not see where we were going.'

'Papa, it is in the east part of the city, not very far from the river.
Fulton Market is not very far off either, which is convenient.'

'Who lives here?' asked the colonel, with a gathering frown on his brow.

'I know none of the people; nor even their names.'

'Of course not! but you know, I suppose, what sort of people they are?'

'They are plain people, papa; they are not of our class. They seem to be decent people.'

'Decent? What do you mean by decent?'

'Papa, I mean not disorderly people; not disreputable. And is not that enough for us, papa? Oh, papa, does it matter what the people are, so long as our house is nice and pretty and warm, and the low rent just relieves us from all our difficulties? Papa, do be pleased with it! I think it is the very best thing we could have done.'

'Esther, there are certain things that one owes to oneself.'

'Yes, sir; but must we not pay our debts to other people first?'

'Debts? We were not in debt to anybody!'

'Yes, papa, to more than one; and I saw no way out of the difficulty till I heard of this house. And I am so relieved now—you cannot think with what a relief;—if only *you* are pleased, dear papa.'

He must know so much of the truth, Esther said to herself with rapid calculation. The colonel did not look pleased, it must be confessed. All the prettiness and pleasantness on which Esther had counted to produce a favourable impression seemed to fail of its effect; indeed, seemed not to be seen. The colonel leaned his head on his hand and uttered something very like a groan.

'So this is what we have come to!' he said. 'You do not know what you have done, Esther.'

Esther said nothing to that. Her throat seemed to be choked. She looked at her beautiful little fire, and had some trouble to keep tears from starting.

'My dear, you did it for the best, I do not doubt,' her father added presently. 'I only regret that I was not consulted before an irrevocable step was taken.'

Esther could find nothing to answer.

'It is quite true that a man remains himself, whatever he does that is not morally wrong; it is true that our real dignity is not changed; nevertheless, people pass in the world not for what they are, but for what they seem to be.'

'Oh, papa, do you think that!' Esther cried. But the colonel went on, not heeding her.

'So, if you take to making shoes, it will be supposed that you are no better than a cobbler; and if you choose your abode among washerwomen, you will be credited with tastes and associations that fit you for your surroundings. Have we *that* sort of a neighbourhood?' he asked suddenly.

'I do not know, papa,' Esther said meekly. The colonel fairly groaned again. It was getting to be more

than she could stand.

'Papa,' she said gently, 'we have done the best we knew,—at least I have; and the necessity is not one of our own making. Let us take what the Lord gives. I think He has given us a great deal. And I would rather, for my part, that people thought anything of us, rather than that we should miss our own good opinion. I do not know just what the inhabitants are, round about here; but the street is at least clean and decent, and within our own walls we need not think about it. Inside it is *very* comfortable, papa.'

The colonel was silent now, not, however, seeming to see the comfort. There was a little interval, during which Esther struggled for calmness and a clear voice. When she spoke, her voice was very clear.

'Barker has tea ready, papa, I see. I hope that will be as good as ever, and better, for we have got something you like. Shall we go in? It is in the other room.'

'Why is it not here, as usual, in my room? I do not see any reason for the change.'

'It saves the mess of crumbs on the floor in this room. And then it saves Barker a good deal of trouble to have the table there.'

'Why should Barker be saved trouble here more than where we have come from? I do not understand.'

'We had Christopher there, papa. Here Barker has no one to help her—except what I can do.'

'It must be the same thing, to have tea in one room or in another, I should think.'

Esther could have represented that the other room was just at the head of the kitchen stairs, while to serve the tea on the colonel's table would cost a good many more steps. But she had no heart for any further representations. With her own hands, and with her own feet, which were by this time wearily tired, she patiently went back and forth between the two rooms, bringing plates and cups and knives and forks, and tea-tray, and bread and butter and honey and partridge, and salt and pepper, from the one table to the other, which, by the way, had first to be cleared of its own load of books and writing materials. Esther deposited these on the floor and on chairs, and arranged the table for tea, and pushed it into the position her father was accustomed to like. The tea-kettle she left on its trivet before the grate in the other room; and now made journeys uncounted between that room and this, to take and fetch the tea-pot. Talk languished meanwhile, for the spirit of talk was gone from Esther, and the colonel, in spite of his discomfiture, developed a remarkably good appetite. When he had done, Esther carried everything back again.

'Why do you do that? Where is Barker?' her father demanded at last.

'Barker has been exceedingly busy all day, putting down carpets and arranging her storeroom. I am sure she is tired.'

'I suppose you are tired too, are you not?'

'Yes, papa.'

He said no more, however, and Esther finished her work, and then sat down on a cushion at the corner of the fireplace, in one of those moods belonging to tired mind and body, in which one does not seem at the moment to care any longer about anything. The lively, blazing coal fire shone on a warm, cosy little room, and on two somewhat despondent figures. For his supper had not brightened the colonel up a bit. He sat brooding. Perhaps his thoughts took the road that Esther's had often followed lately, for he suddenly came out with a name now rarely spoken between them.

'It is a long while that we have heard nothing from the Dallases!'

'Yes,' Esther said apathetically.

'Mr. Dallas used to write to me now and then.'

'They are busy with their own concerns, and we are out of sight; why should they remember us?'

'They used to be good neighbours, in Seaforth.'

'Pitt. Papa, I do not think his father and mother were ever specially fond of us.'

'Pitt never writes to me now,' the colonel went on, after a pause.

'He is busy with *his* concerns. He has forgotten us too. I suppose he has plenty of other things to think of. Oh, I have given up Pitt long ago.'

The colonel brooded over his thoughts a while, then raised his head and looked again over the small room.

'My dear, it would have been better to stay where we were,' he said regretfully.

Esther could not bear to pain him by again reminding him that their means would not allow it; and as her father lay back upon the sofa and closed his eyes, she went away into the other room and sat down at the corner of that fire, where the partition wall screened her from view. For she wanted to let her head drop on her knees and be still; and a few tears that she could not help came hot to her eyes. She had worked so hard to get everything in nice order for her father; she had so hoped to see him pleased and contented; and now he was so illogically discontented! Truly he could tell her nothing she did not already know about the disadvantages of their new position; and they all rushed upon Esther's mind at this minute with renewed force. The pleasant country and the shining river were gone; she would no longer see the lights on the Jersey shore when she got up in the morning; the air would not come sweet and fresh to her windows; there would be no singing of birds or fragrance of flowers around her, even in summer; she would have only the streets and the street cries and noises, and dust, and unsweet breath. The house would do inside; but outside, what a change! And though Esther was not very old in the world, nor very worldly-wise for her years, she knew—if not as well as her father, yet she knew—that in Major Street she was pretty nearly cut off from all social intercourse with her kind. Her school experience and observation had taught her so much. She knew that her occupation as a teacher in a school was enough of itself to put her out of the way of invitations, and that an abode in Major Street pretty well finished the matter. Esther had not been a favourite among her school companions in the best of times; she was of too uncommon a beauty, perhaps; perhaps she was too different from them in other respects. Pleasant as she always was, she was nevertheless separate from her fellows by a great separation of nature; and that is a thing not only felt on both sides, but never forgiven by the inferiors. Miss Gainsborough, daughter of a rich and influential retired officer, would, however, have been sought eagerly and welcomed universally; Miss Gainsborough, the school teacher, daughter of an unknown somebody who lived in Major Street, was another matter; hardly a desirable acquaintance. For what should she be desired?

Esther had not been without a certain dim perception of all this; and it came to her with special disagreeableness just then, when every thought came that could make her dissatisfied with herself and with her lot. Why had her father ever come away from England, where friends and relations could not have failed? Why had he left Seaforth, where at least they were living like themselves, and where they would not have dropped out of the knowledge of Pitt Dallas? The feeling of loneliness crept again over Esther, and a feeling of having to fight her way as it were single-handed. Was this little house, and Major Street, henceforth to be the scene and sphere of her life and labours? How could she ever work up out of it into anything better?

Esther was tired, and felt blue, which was the reason why all these thoughts and others chased through her mind; and more than one tear rolled down and dropped on her stuff gown. Then she gathered herself up. How had she come to Major Street and to school teaching? Not by her own will or fault. Therefore it was part of the training assigned for her by a wisdom that is perfect, and a love that never forgets. And Esther began to be ashamed of herself. What did she mean by saying, 'The Lord is my Shepherd,' if she could not trust Him to take care of His sheep? And now, how had she been helped out of her difficulties, enabled to pay her debts, brought to a home where she could live and be clear of the world; yes, and live pleasantly too? And as for being alone— Esther rose with a smile. 'Can I not trust the Lord for that too?' she thought. 'If it is His will I should be alone, then that is the very best thing for me; and perhaps He will come nearer than if I had other distractions to take my eyes in another direction.'

Barker came in to remove the tea-things, and Esther met her with a smile, the brightness of which much cheered the good woman.

'Was the pheasant good, mum?' she asked in a whisper.

'Capital, Barker, and the honey. And papa made a very good supper. And I am so thankful, Barker! for the house is very nice, and we are moved.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was summer again, and on the broad grassy street of Seaforth the sunshine poured in its full power. The place lay silent under the heat of mid-day; not a breath stirred the leaves of the big elms, and no passing wheels stirred the dust of the roadway, which was ready to rise at any provocation. It was very dry, and very hot. Yet at Seaforth those two facts, though proclaimed from everybody's mouth, must be understood with a qualification. The heat and the dryness were not as elsewhere. So near the sea as the town was, a continual freshness came from thence in vapours and cool airs, and mitigated what in other places was found oppressive. However, the Seaforth people said it was oppressive too; and things are so relative in the affairs of life that I do not know if they were more contented than their neighbours. But everybody said the heat was fine for the hay; and as most of the inhabitants had more or less of that crop to get in, they criticised the weather only at times when they were thinking of it in some other connection.

At Mrs. Dallas's there was no criticism of anything. In the large comfortable rooms, where windows were all open, and blinds tempering the too ardent light, and cool mats on the floors, and chintz furniture looked light and summery, there was an atmosphere of pure enjoyment and expectation, for Pitt was coming home again, and his mother was looking for him with every day. She was sitting now awaiting him; no one could tell at what hour he might arrive; and his mother's face was beautiful with hope. She was her old self; not changed at all by the four or five years of Pitt's absence; as handsome and as young and as stately as ever. She made no demonstration now; did not worry either herself or others with questions and speculations and hopes and fears respecting her son's coming; yet you could see on her fine face, if you were clever at reading faces, the lines of pride and joy, and now and then a quiver of tenderness. It was seen by one who was sitting with her, whose interest and curiosity it involuntarily moved.

This second person was a younger lady. Indeed a *young* lady, not by comparison, but absolutely. A very attractive person too. She had an exceedingly good figure, which the trying dress of those times showed in its full beauty. Woe to the lady then whose shoulders were not straight, or the lines of her figure not flowing, or the proportions of it not satisfactory. Every ungracefulness must have shown its full deformity, with no possibility of disguise; every angle must have been aggravated, and every untoward movement made doubly fatal. But the dress only set off and developed the beauty that could bear it. And the lady sitting with Mrs. Dallas neither feared nor had need to fear criticism. Something of that fact appeared in her graceful posture and in the brow of habitual superiority, and in the look of the eyes that were now and then lifted from her work to her companion. The eyes were beautiful, and they were also queenly; at least their calm fearlessness was not due to absence of self-consciousness. She was a pretty picture to see. The low-cut dress and fearfully short waist revealed a white skin and a finely-moulded bust and shoulders. The very scant and clinging robe was of fine white muslin, with a narrow dainty border of embroidery at the bottom; and a scarf of the same was thrown round her shoulders. The round white arms were bare, the little tufty white sleeves making a pretty break between them and the soft shoulders; and the little hands were busy with a strip of embroidery, which looked as if it might be destined for the ornamentation of another similar dress. The lady's face was delicate, intelligent, and attractive, rather than beautiful; her eyes, however, as I said, were fine; and over her head and upon her neck curled ringlets of black, lustrous hair.

'You think he will be here to-day?' she said, breaking the familiar silence that had reigned for a while. She had caught one of Mrs. Dallas's glances towards the window.

'He may be here any day. It is impossible to tell. He would come before his letter.'

'You are very fond of him, I can see. What made you send him away from you? England is so far off!'

Mrs. Dallas hesitated; put up the end of her knitting-needle under her cap, and gently moved it up and down in meditative fashion.

'We wanted him to be an Englishman, Betty.'

'Why, Mrs. Dallas? Is he not going to live in America?'

'Probably.'

'Then why make an Englishman of him? That will make him discontented with things here.'

'I hope not. He was not changed enough for that when he was here last.
Pitt does not change.'

'He must be an extraordinary character!' said the young lady, with a glance at Pitt's mother. 'Dear

Mrs. Dallas, how am I to understand that?'

'Pitt does not change,' repeated the other.

'But one *ought* to change. That is a dreadful sort of people, that go on straight over the heads of circumstances, just because they laid out the road there before the circumstances arose. I have seen such people. They tread down everything in their way.'

'Pitt does not change,' Mrs. Dallas said again. Her companion thought she said it with a certain satisfied confidence. And perhaps it was true; but the moment after Mrs. Dallas remembered that if the proposition were universal it might be inconvenient.

'At least he is hard to change,' she went on; 'therefore his father and I wished him to be educated in the old country, and to form his notions according to the standard of things there. I think a republic is very demoralizing.'

'Is the standard of morals lower here?' inquired the younger lady, demurely.

'I am not speaking of *morals*, in the usual sense. Of course, that—
But there is a little too much freedom here. And besides,—I wanted
Pitt to be a true Church of England man.'

'Isn't he that?'

'Oh yes, I have no doubt he is now; but he had formed some associations I was afraid of. With my son's peculiar character, I thought there might be danger. I rely on you, Betty,' said Mrs. Dallas, smiling, 'to remove the last vestige.'

The young lady gave a glance of quick, keen curiosity and understanding, in which sparkled a little amusement. 'What can I do?' she asked demurely.

'Bewitch him, as you do everybody.'

'Bewitch him, and hand him over to you!' she remarked.

'No,' said Mrs. Dallas; 'not necessarily. You must see him, before you can know what you would like to do with him.'

'Do I understand, then? He is supposed to be in some danger of lapsing from the true faith'—

'Oh, no, my dear! I did not say that. I meant only, if he had stayed in
America. It seems to me there is a general loosening of all bonds here.
Boys and girls do their own way.'

'Was it only the general spirit of the air, Mrs. Dallas, or was it a particular influence, that you feared?'

'Well—both,' said Mrs. Dallas, again applying her knitting-needle under her cap.

The younger lady was silent a few minutes; going on with her embroidery.

'This is getting to be very interesting,' she remarked.

'It is very interesting to me,' replied the mother, with a thoughtful look. 'For, as I told you, Pitt is a very fast friend, and persistent in all his likings and dislikings. Here he had none but the company of dissenters; and I did not want him to get *in* with people of that persuasion.'

'Is there much society about here? I fancied not.'

'No society, for him. Country people—farmers—people of that stamp.
Nothing else.'

'I should have thought, dear Mrs. Dallas, that *you* would have been quite a sufficient counteraction to temptation from such a source?'

Mrs. Dallas hesitated. 'Boys will be boys,' she said.

'But he is not a boy now?'

'He is twenty-four.'

'Not a boy, certainly. But do you know, that is an age when men are very hard to manage? It is easier

earlier, or later.'

'Not difficult to you at any time,' said the other flatteringly.

The conversation dropped there; at least there came an interval of quiet working on the young lady's part, and of rather listless knitting on the part of the mother, whose eyes went wistfully to the window without seeing anything. And this lasted till a step was heard at the front door. Mrs. Dallas let fall her needles and her yarn and rose hurriedly, crying out, 'That is not Mr. Dallas!' and so speaking, rushed into the hall.

There was a little bustle, a smothered word or two, and then a significant silence; which lasted long enough to let the watcher left behind in the drawing-room conclude on the very deep relations subsisting between mother and son. Steps were heard moving at length, but they moved and stopped; there was lingering, and slow progress; and words were spoken, broken questions from Mrs. Dallas and brief responses in a stronger voice that was low-pitched and pleasant. The figures appeared in the doorway at last, but even there lingered still. The mother and son were looking into one another's faces and speaking those absorbed little utterances of first meeting which are insignificant enough, if they were not weighted with such a burden of feeling. Miss Betty, sitting at her embroidery, cast successive rapid glances of curiosity and interest at the new-comer. His voice had already made her pulses quicken a little, for the tone of it touched her fancy. The first glance showed him tall and straight; the second caught a smile which was both merry and sweet; a third saw that the level brows expressed character; and then the two people turned their faces towards her and came into the room, and Mrs. Dallas presented her son.

The young lady rose and made a reverence, according to the more stately and more elegant fashion of the day. The gentleman's obeisance was profound in its demonstration of respect. Immediately after, however, he turned to his mother again; a look of affectionate joy shining upon her out of his eyes and smile.

'Two years!' she was exclaiming. 'Pitt, how you have changed!'

'Have I? I think not much.'

'No, in one way not much. I see you are your old self. But two years have made you older.'

'So they should.'

'Somehow I had not expected it,' said the mother, passing her hand across her eyes with a gesture a little as if there were tears in them. 'I thought I should see *my* boy again—and he is gone.'

'Not at all!' said Pitt, laughing. 'Mistaken, mother. There is all of him here that there ever was. The difference is, that now there is something more.'

'What?' she asked.

'A little more experience—a little more knowledge—let us hope, a little more wisdom.'

'There is more than that,' said the mother, looking at him fondly.

'What?'

'It is the difference I might have looked for,' she said, 'only, somehow, I had not looked for it.' And the swift passage of her hand across her eyes gave again the same testimony of a few minutes before. Her son rose hereupon and proposed to withdraw to his room; and as his mother accompanied him, Miss Betty noticed how his arm was thrown round her and he was bending to her and talking to her as they went. Miss Betty stitched away busily, thoughts keeping time with her needle, for some time thereafter. Yet she did not quite know what she was thinking of. There was a little stir in her mind, which was so unaccustomed that it was delightful; it was also vague, and its provoking elements were not clearly discernible. The young lady was conscious of a certain pleasant thrill in the view of the task to which she had been invited. It promised her possible difficulty, for even in the few short minutes just passed she had gained an inkling that Mrs. Dallas's words might be true, and Pitt not precisely a man that you could turn over your finger. It threatened her possible danger, which she did not admit; nevertheless the stinging sense of it made itself felt and pricked the pleasure into livelier existence. This was something out of the ordinary. This was a man not just cut after the common work-a-day pattern. Miss Betty recalled involuntarily one trait after another that had fastened on her memory. Eyes of bright intelligence and hidden power, a very frank smile, and especially with all that, the great tenderness which had been shown in every word and look to his mother. The good breeding and ease of manner Miss Betty had seen before; this other trait was something new; and perhaps she was conscious of a

little pull it gave at her heartstrings. This was not the manner she had seen at home, where her father had treated her mother as a sort of queen-consort certainly,—co-regent of the house; but where they had lived upon terms of mutual diplomatic respect; and her brothers, if they cared much for anybody but Number One, gave small proof of the fact. What a brother this man would be! what a—something else! Miss Betty sheered off a little from just this idea; not that she was averse to it, or that she had not often entertained it; indeed, she had entertained it not two hours ago about Pitt himself; but the presence of the man and the recognition of what was in him had stirred in her a kindred delicacy which was innate, as in every true woman, although her way of life and some of her associates had not fostered it. Betty Frere was a true woman, originally; alas, she was also now a woman of the world; also, she was poor, and to make a good marriage she had known for some years was very desirable for her. What a very good marriage this would be! Poor girl, she could not help the thought now, and she must not be judged hardly for it. It was in the air she breathed, and that all her associates breathed. Betty had not been in a hurry to get married, having small doubt of her power to do it in any case that pleased her; now, somehow, she was suddenly confronted by a doubt of her power.

I am pulling out the threads of what was to Betty only a web of very confused pattern; *she* did not try to unravel it. Her consciousness of just two things was clear: the pleasant stimulus of the task set before her, and a little sharp premonition of its danger. She dismissed that. She could perform the task and detach Pitt from any imaginary ties that his mother was afraid of, without herself thereby becoming entangled. It would be a game of uncommon interest and entertainment, and a piece of benevolence too. But Betty's pulses, as I said, were quickened a little.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOLIDAYS.

She did not see her new acquaintance again till they met at the supper-table. She behaved herself then in an extremely well-bred way; was dignified and reserved and quiet; hardly said anything, as with a nice recognition that her words were not wanted; scarce ever seemed to look at the new arrival, of whom, nevertheless, not a word nor a look escaped her; and was simply an elegant quiet figure at the table, so lovely to look at that words from her seemed to be superfluous. Whether the stranger saw it, or whether he missed anything, there was no sign. He seemed to be provokingly and exclusively occupied with his father and mother; hardly, she thought, giving to herself all the attention which is due from a gentleman to a lady. Yet he fulfilled his duties in that regard, albeit only as one does it to whom they are a matter of course. Betty listened attentively to everything that was said, while she was to all appearance indifferently busied with her supper.

But the conversation ran, as it is wont to run at such times, when hearts long absent have found each other again, and fling trifles about, knowing that their stores of treasure must wait for a quieter time to be unpacked. They talked of weather and crops and Pitt's voyage, and the neighbours, and the changes in the village, and the improvements about the place; not as if any of these things were much cared for; they were bubbles floating on their cups of joy. Questions asked and questions answered, as if in the pleasure of speaking to one another again the subject of their words did not matter; or as if the supreme content of the moment could spare a little benevolence even for these outside things. At last a question was asked which made Betty prick up her ears; this must have been due to something indefinable in the tone of the speakers, for the words were nothing.

'Have you heard anything of the Gainsboroughs?'

'No.'

It was the elder Dallas who answered.

'What has become of them?'

'I am not in condition to tell.'

'Have you written to them?'

'No, not since the last time; and that was a good while ago.'

'Then you do not know how things are with them, of course. I do not see how you have let them drop

out of knowledge so. They were not exactly people to lose sight of.'

'Why not, when they went out of sight?'

'You do not even know, sir, whether Colonel Gainsborough is still living?'

'How should I? But he was as likely to live as any other man.'

'He did not think so.'

'For which very reason he would probably live longer than many other men. There is nothing like a hypochondriack for tough holding out.'

'Well, I must search New York for them this time, until I find them.'

'What possible occasion, Pitt?' said his mother, with a tone of uneasiness which Betty noted.

'Duty, mamma, and also pleasure. But duty is imperative.'

'I do not see the duty. You tried to look them up the last time you were here, and failed.'

'I shall not fail this time.'

'If it depended on your will,' remarked his father coolly. 'But I think the probability is that they have gone back to England, and are consequently no longer in New York.'

'What are the grounds of that probability?'

'When last I heard from the colonel, he was proposing the question of reconciliation with his family. And as I have heard no more from him since then, I think the likeliest thing is that he has made up his quarrel and gone home.'

'I can easily determine that question by looking over the shipping lists.'

'Perhaps not,' said Mr. Dallas, rubbing his chin. 'If he has gone, I think it will have been under another name. The one he bore here was, I suspect, assumed.'

'What for?' demanded Pitt somewhat sharply.

'Reasons of family pride, no doubt. That is enough to make men do foolisher things.'

'It would be difficult to find a foolisher thing to do,' replied his son. But then the conversation turned. It had given Miss Betty something to think of. She drew her own conclusions without asking anybody. And in some indefinite, inscrutable way it stimulated and confirmed her desire for the game Mrs. Dallas had begged her to play. Human hearts are certainly strange things. What were the Gainsboroughs to Miss Betty Frere? Nothing in the world, half an hour before; now? Now there was a vague suspicion of an enemy somewhere; a scent of rivalry in the air; an immediate rising of partisanship. Were these the people of whom Mrs. Dallas was afraid? against whom she craved help? She should have help. Was it not even a meritorious thing, to withdraw a young man from untoward influences, and keep him in the path marked out by his mother?

Miss Frere scented a battle like Job's war-horse. In spirit, that is; outwardly, nothing could show less signs of war. She was equal to Pitt, in her seeming careless apartness; the difference was, that with her it *was* seeming, and with him reality. She lost not a word; she failed not to observe and regard every movement; she knew, without being seen to look, just what his play of feature and various expressions were; all the while she was calmly embroidering, or idly gazing out of the window, or skilfully playing chess with Mr. Dallas, whom she inevitably beat.

Pitt, the while, his mother thought (and so thought the young lady herself), was provokingly careless of her attractions. He was going hither and thither; over the farm with his father; about the village, to see the changes and look up his old acquaintances; often, too, busy in his room where he had been wont to spend so many hours in the old time. He was graver than he used to be; with the manner of a man, and a thoughtful one; he showed not the least inclination to amuse himself with his mother's elegant visitor. Mrs. Dallas became as nearly fidgety as it was in her nature to be.

'What do you think of my young friend?' she asked Pitt when he had been a day or two at home.

'The lady? She is a very satisfactory person, to the eye.'

'To the eye!'

'It is only my eyes, you will remember, mother, that know anything about her.'

'That is your fault. Why do you let it be true?'

'Very naturally, I have had something else to think of.'

'But she is a guest in the house, and you really seem to forget it, Pitt. Can't you take her for a drive?'

'Where shall I take her?'

'*Where?* There is all the country to choose from. What a question! You never used to be at a loss, as I remember, in old times, when you went driving about with that little protegée of yours.'

It was very imprudent of Mrs. Dallas, and she knew it immediately, and was beyond measure vexed with herself. But the subject was started.

'Poor Esther!' said Pitt thoughtfully. 'Mamma, I can't understand how you and my father should have lost sight of those people so.'

'They went out of our way.'

'But you sometimes go to New York.'

'Passing through, to Washington. I could not have time to search for people whose address I did not know.'

'I cannot understand why you did not know it. They were not the sort of people to be left to themselves. A hypochondriack father, who thought he was dying, and a young girl just growing up to need a kind mother's care, which she had not. I would give more than I can tell you to find her again!'

'What could you possibly do for her, Pitt? You, reading law and living in chambers in the Temple,—in London,—and she a grown young woman by this time, and living in New York. No doubt her father is quite equal to taking care of her.'

Pitt made no reply. His mother repeated her question. 'What could you do for her?'

She was looking at him keenly, and did not at all like a faint smile which hovered for a second upon his lips.

'That is a secondary question,' he said. 'The primary is, Where is she? I must go and find out.'

'Your father thinks they have gone back to England. It would just be lost labour, Pitt.'

'Not if I found that was true.'

'What *could* you do for them, if you could discover them?'

'Mother, that would depend on what condition they were in. I made a promise once to Colonel Gainsborough to look after his daughter.'

'A very extraordinary promise for him to ask or for you to give, seeing you were but a boy at the time.'

'Somewhat extraordinary, perhaps. However, that is nothing to the matter.'

There was a little vexed pause, and then Mrs. Dallas said:

'In the meanwhile, instead of busying yourself with far-away claims which are no claims, what do you think of paying a little attention to a guest in your own house?'

Pitt lifted his head and seemed to prick up his ears.

'Miss Frere? You wish me to take her to drive? I am willing, mamma.'

'Insensible boy! You ought to be very glad of the privilege.'

'I would rather take you, mother.'

The drive accordingly was proposed that very day; did not, however, come off. It was too hot, Miss Frere said.

She was sitting in the broad verandah at the back of the house, which looked out over the garden. It was an orderly wilderness of cherry trees and apple trees and plum trees, raspberry vines and gooseberry bushes; with marigolds and four o'clocks and love-in-a-puzzle and hollyhocks and daisies and larkspur, and a great many more sweet and homely growths that nobody makes any account of nowadays. Sunlight just now lay glowing upon it, and made the shade of the verandah doubly pleasant, the verandah being further shaded by honeysuckle and trumpet creeper which wreathed round the pillars and stretched up to the eaves, and the scent of the honeysuckle was mingled with the smell of roses which came up from the garden. In this sweet and bowery place Miss Frere was sitting when she declared it was too hot to drive. She was in an India garden chair, and had her embroidery as usual in her hand. She always had something in her hand. Pitt lingered, languidly contemplating the picture she made.

'It *is* hot,' he assented.

'When it is hot I keep myself quiet,' she went on. 'You seem to be of another mind.'

'I make no difference for the weather.'

'Don't you? What energy! Then you are always at work?'

'Who said so?'

'I said so, as an inference. When the weather has been cool enough to allow me to take notice, I have noticed that you were busy about something. You tell me now that weather makes no difference.'

'Life is too short to allow weather to cut it shorter,' said Pitt, throwing himself down on a mat. 'I think I have observed that you too always have some work in hand whenever I have seen you.'

'My work amounts to nothing,' said the young lady. 'At least you would say so, I presume.'

'What is it?'

Miss Betty displayed her roll of muslin, on the free portion of which an elegant line of embroidery was slowly growing, multiplying and reproducing its white buds and leaves and twining shoots. Pitt regarded it with an unenlightened eye.

'I am as wise as I was before,' he said.

'Why, look here,' said the young lady, with a slight movement of her little foot calling his attention to the edge of her skirt, where a somewhat similar line of embroidery was visible. 'I am making a border for another gown.'

Pitt's eye went from the one embroidery to the other; he said nothing.

'You are not complimentary,' said Miss Frere.

'I am not yet sure that there is anything to compliment.'

The young lady gave him a full view of her fine eyes for half a second, or perhaps it was only that they took a good look at him.

'Don't you see,' she said, 'that it is economy, and thrift, and all the household virtues? Not having the money to buy trimming, I am manufacturing it.'

'And the gown must be trimmed?'

'Unquestionably! You would not like it so well if it were not.'

'That is possible. The question remains'—

'What question?'

'Whether Life is not worth more than a bit of trimming.'

'Life!' echoed the young lady a little scornfully. 'An hour now and then is not Life.'

'It is the stuff of which Life is made.'

'What is Life good for?'

'That is precisely the weightiest question that can occupy the mind of a philosopher!'

'Are you a philosopher, Mr. Dallas!'

'In so far as a philosopher means a lover of knowledge. A philosopher who has attained unto knowledge, I am not;—that sort of knowledge.'

'You have been studying it?'

'I have been studying it for years.'

'What Life is good for?' said the young lady, with again a lift of her eyes which expressed a little disdain and a little impatience. But she saw Pitt's face with a thoughtful earnestness upon it; he was not watching her eyes, as he ought to have been. Her somewhat petulant words he answered simply.

'What question of more moment can there be? I am here, a human creature with such and such powers and capacities; I am here for so many years, not numerous; what is the best thing I can do with them and myself?'

'Get all the good out of them you can.'

'Certainly! but you observe that is no answer to my question of "how."'

'Good is pleasure, isn't it?'

'Is it?'

'I think so.'

'Make pleasure lasting, and perhaps I should agree with you. But how can you do that?'

'You cannot do it, that ever I heard. It is not in the nature of things.'

'Then what is the good of pleasure when it is over, and you have given your life for it?'

'Well, if pleasure won't do, take greatness, then.'

'What sort of greatness?' Pitt asked in the same tone. It was the tone of one who had gone over the ground.

'Any sort will do, I suppose,' said Miss Frere, with half a laugh. 'The thing is, I believe, to be great, no matter how. I never had that ambition myself; but that is the idea, isn't it?'

'What is it worth, supposing it gained?'

'People seem to think it is worth a good deal, by the efforts they make and the things they undergo for it.'

'Yes,' said Pitt thoughtfully; 'they pay a great price, and they have their reward. And, I say, what is it worth?'

'Why, Mr. Dallas,' said the young lady, throwing up her head, 'it is worth a great deal—all it costs. To be noble, to be distinguished, to be great and remembered in the world,—what is a worthy ambition, if that is not?'

'That is the general opinion; but what is it *worth*, when all is done?
Name any great man you think of as specially great'—

'Napoleon Buonaparte,' said the young lady immediately.

'Do not name *him*,' said Pitt. 'He wore a brilliant crown, but he got it out of the dirt of low passions and cold-hearted selfishness. His name will be remembered, but as a splendid example of wickedness. Name some other.'

'Name one yourself,' said Betty. 'I have succeeded so ill.'

'Name them all,' said Pitt. 'Take all the conquerors, from Rameses the Great down to our time; take all the statesmen, from Moses and onward. Take Apelles, at the head of a long list of wonderful painters; philosophers, from Socrates to Francis Bacon; discoverers and inventors, from the man who first made musical instruments, in the lifetime of Adam our forefather, to Watt and the steam engine. Take any or all of them; *we* are very glad they lived and worked, *we* are the better for remembering them; but I ask you, what are they the better for it?'

This appeal, which was evidently meant in deep earnest, moved the mind of the young lady with so great astonishment that she looked at Pitt as at a *lusus naturae*. But he was quite serious and simply matter of fact in his way of putting things. He looked at her, waiting for an answer, but got none.

'We speak of Alexander, and praise him to the skies, him of Macedon, I mean. What is that, do you think, to Alexander now?'

'If it is nothing to him, then what is the use of being great?' said Miss Frere in her bewilderment.

'You are coming back to my question.'

There ensued a pause, during which the stitches of embroidery were taken slowly.

'What do you intend to do with *your* life, Mr. Dallas, since pleasure and fame are ruled out?' the young lady asked.

'You see, that decision waits on the previous question,' he answered.

'But it has got to be decided,' said Miss Frere, 'or you will be'—

'Nothing. Yes, I am aware of that.'

There was again a pause.

'Miss Frere,' Pitt then began again, 'did you ever see a person whose happiness rested on a lasting foundation?'

The young lady looked at her companion anew as if he were to her a very odd character.

'What do you mean?' she said.

'I mean, a person who was thoroughly happy, not because of circumstances, but in spite of them?'

'To begin with, I never saw anybody that was "thoroughly happy." I do not believe in the experience.'

'I am obliged to believe in it. I have known a person who seemed to be clean lifted up out of the mud and mire of troublesome circumstances, and to have got up to a region of permanent clear air and sunshine. I have been envying that person ever since.'

'May I ask, was it a man or a woman?'

'Neither; it was a young girl.'

'It is easy to be happy at *that* age.'

'Not for her. She had been very unhappy.'

'And got over it?'

'Yes; but not by virtue of her youth or childishness, as you suppose. She was one of those natures that are born with a great capacity for suffering, and she had begun to find it out early; and it was from the depths of unhappiness that she came out into clear and peaceful sunshine; with nothing to help her either in her external surroundings.'

'Couldn't you follow her steps and attain her experience?' asked Miss Frere mockingly.

Pitt rose up from the mat where he had been lying, laughed, and shook himself.

'As you will not go to drive,' he said, 'I believe I will go alone.'

But he went on horseback, and rode hard.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ANTIQUITIES.

As Pitt went off, Mrs. Dallas came on the verandah. 'You would not go to drive?' she said to Betty.

'It is so hot, dear Mrs. Dallas! I had what was much better than a drive—a good long talk.'

'What do you think of my boy?' asked the mother, with an accent of happy confidence in which there was also a vibration of pride.

'He puzzles me. Has he not some peculiar opinions?'

'Have you found that out already?' said Mrs. Dallas, with a change of tone. 'That shows he must like you very much, Betty; my son is not given to letting himself out on those subjects. Even to me he very seldom speaks of them.'

'What subjects do you mean, dear Mrs. Dallas?' inquired the young lady softly.

'I mean,' said Mrs. Dallas uneasily and hesitating, 'some sort of religious questions. I told you he had had to do at one time with dissenting people, and I think their influence has been bad for him. I hoped in England he would forget all that, and become a true Churchman. What did he say?'

'Nothing about the Church, or about religion. I do not believe it would be easy for any one to influence him, Mrs. Dallas.'

'You can do it, Betty, if any one. I am hoping in you.'

The young lady, as I have intimated, was not averse to the task, all the rather that it promised some difficulty. All the rather, too, that she was stimulated by the idea of counter influence. She recalled more than once what Pitt had said of that 'young girl,' and tried to make out what had been in his tone at the time. No passion certainly; he had spoken easily and frankly; too easily to favour the supposition of any very deep feeling; and yet, not without a certain cadence of tenderness, and undoubtedly with the confidence of intimate knowledge. Undoubtedly, also, the influence of that young person, whatever its nature, had not died out. Miss Betty had little question in her own mind that she must have been one of the persons referred to and dreaded by Mrs. Dallas as dissenters; and the young lady determined to do what she could in the case. She had a definite point of resistance now, and felt stronger for the fray.

The fray, however, could not be immediately entered upon. Pitt departed to New York, avowedly to look up the Gainsboroughs. And there, as two years before, he spent unwearied pains in pursuit of his object; also, as then, in vain. He returned after more than a week of absence, a baffled man. His arrival was just in time to allow him to sit down to dinner with the family; so that Betty heard his report.

'Have you found the Gainsboroughs?' his father asked.

'No, sir.'

'Where did you look?'

'Everywhere.'

'What have you done?' his mother asked.

'Everything.'

'I told you, I thought they were gone back to England.'

'If they are, there is no sign of it, and I do not believe it. I have spent hours and hours at the shipping offices, looking over the lists of passengers; and of one thing I am certain, they have not sailed from that port this year.'

'Not under the name by which you know them.'

'And not under any other. Colonel Gainsborough was not a man to hide his head under an alias. But they know nothing of any Colonel Gainsborough at the post office.'

'That is strange.'

'They never had many letters, you know, sir; and the colonel had given up his English paper. I think I know all the people that take the London *Times* in New York; and he is not one of them.'

'He is gone home,' said Mr. Dallas comfortably.

'I can find that out when I go back to England; and I will.'

Miss Betty said nothing, and asked never a word, but she lost none of all this. Pitt was becoming a problem to her. All this eagerness and painstaking would seem to look towards some very close relations between the young man and these missing people; yet Pitt showed no annoyance nor signs of trouble at missing them. Was it that he did not really care? was it that he had not accepted failure, and did not mean to fail? In either case, he must be a peculiar character, and in either case there was brought to light an uncommon strength of determination. There is hardly anything which women like better in the other sex than force of character. Not because it is a quality in which their own sex is apt to be lacking; on the contrary; but because it gives a woman what she wants in a man—something to lean upon, and somebody to look up to. Miss Betty found herself getting more and more interested in Pitt and in her charge concerning him; how it was to be executed she did not yet see; she must leave that to chance. Nothing could be forced here. Where liking begins to grow, there also begins fear.

She retreated to the verandah after dinner, with her embroidery. By and by Mrs. Dallas came there too. It was a pleasant place in the afternoon, for the sun was on the other side of the house, and the sea breeze swept this way, giving its saltness to the odours of rose and honeysuckle and mignonette. Mrs. Dallas sat down and took her knitting; then, before a word could be exchanged, they were joined by Pitt. That is, he came on the verandah; but for some time there was no talking. The ladies would not begin, and Pitt did not. His attention, wherever it might be, was not given to his companions; he sat thoughtful, and determinately silent. Mrs. Dallas's knitting needles clicked, Miss Betty's embroidering thread went noiselessly in and out. Bees hummed and flitted about the honeysuckle vines; there was a soft, sweet, luxurious atmosphere to the senses and to the mind. This went on for a while.

'Mr. Pitt,' said Miss Betty, 'you are giving me no help at all.'

He brought himself and his attention round to her at once, and asked how he could be of service.

'Your mother,' began Miss Betty, stitching away, 'has given me a commission concerning you. She desires me to see to it that *ennui* does not creep upon you during your vacation in this unexciting place. How do I know but it is creeping upon you already? and you give me no chance to drive it away.'

Pitt laughed a little. 'I was never attacked by *ennui* in my life,' he said.

'So you do not want my services!'

'Not to fight an enemy that is nowhere in sight. Perhaps he is your enemy, and I might be helpful in another way.'

It occurred to him that *he* had been charged to make Miss Frere's sojourn in Seaforth pleasant; and some vague sense of what this mutual charge might mean dawned upon him, with a rising light of amusement.

'I don't know!' said the young lady. 'You did once propose a drive. If you would propose it again, perhaps I would go. We cannot help its being hot?'

So they went for a drive. The roads were capital, the evening was lovely, the horses went well, and the phaeton was comfortable; if that were not enough, it was all. Miss Frere bore it for a while patiently.

'Do you dislike talking?' she asked at length meekly, when a soft bit of road and the slow movement of the horses gave her a good opportunity.

'I? Not at all!' said Pitt, rousing himself as out of a muse.

'Then I wish you would talk. Mrs. Dallas desires that I should entertain you; and how am I to do that unless I know you better?'

'So you think people's characters come out in talking?'

'If not their characters, at least something of what is in their heads—what they know—and don't know; what they can talk about, in short.'

'I do not know anything—to talk about.'

'Oh, fie, Mr. Dallas! you who have been to Oxford and London. Tell me, what is London like? An overgrown New York, I suppose.'

'No, neither. "Overgrown" means grown beyond strength or usefulness.
London is large, but not overgrown, in any sense.'

'Well, like New York, only larger?'

'No more than a mushroom is like a great old oak. London is like that; an old oak, gnarled and twisted and weather-worn, with plenty of hale life and young vigour springing out of its rugged old roots.'

'That sounds—poetical.'

'If you mean, not true, you are under a mistake.'

'Then it seems you know London?'

'I suppose I do; better than many of those who live in it. When I am there, Miss Frere, I am with an old uncle, who is an antiquary and an enthusiast on the subject of his native city. From the first it has been his pleasure to go with me all over London, and tell me the secrets of its old streets, and show me what was worth looking at. London was my picture-book, my theatre, where I saw tragedy and comedy together; my museum of antiquities. I never tire of it, and my Uncle Strahan is never tired of showing it to me.'

'Why, what is it to see?' asked Miss Frere, with some real curiosity.

'For one thing, it is an epitome of English history, strikingly illustrated.'

'Oh, you mean Westminster Abbey! Yes, I have heard of that, of course.
But I should think *that* was not interminable.'

'I do not mean Westminster Abbey.'

'What then, please?'

'I cannot tell you here,' said Pitt smiling, as the horses, having found firm ground, set off again at a gay trot. 'Wait till we get home, and I will show you a map of London.'

The young lady, satisfied with having gained her object, waited very patiently, and told Mrs. Dallas on reaching home that the drive had been delightful.

Next day Pitt was as good as his word. He brought his map of London into the cool matted room where the ladies were sitting, rolled up a table, and spread the map out before Miss Frere. The young lady dropped her embroidery and gave her attention.

'What have you there, Pitt?' his mother inquired.

'London, mamma.'

'London?' Mrs. Dallas drew up her chair too, where she could look on; while Pitt briefly gave an explanation of the map; showed where was the 'City' and where the fashionable quarter.

'I suppose,' said Miss Frere, studying the map, 'the parts of London that delight you are over here?' indicating the West End.

'No,' returned Pitt, 'by no means. The City and the Strand are infinitely more interesting.'

'My dear,' said his mother, 'I do not see how that can be.'

'It is true, though, mother. All this,' drawing his finger round a certain portion of the map, 'is crowded with the witnesses of human life and history; full of remains that tell of the men of the past, and their doings, and their sufferings.'

Miss Frere's fine eyes were lifted to him in inquiry; meeting them, he smiled, and went on.

'I must explain. Where shall I begin? Suppose, for instance, we take our stand here at Whitehall. We are looking at the Banqueting House of the Palace, built by Inigo Jones for James I. The other buildings of the palace, wide and splendid as they were, have mostly perished. This stands yet. I need not tell you the thoughts that come up as we look at it.'

'Charles I was executed there, I know. What else?'

'There is a whole swarm of memories, and a whole crowd of images, belonging to the palace of which this was a part. Before the time you speak of, there was Cardinal Wolsey'—

'Oh, Wolsey! I remember.'

'His outrageous luxury and pomp of living, and his disgrace. Then comes Henry VIII., and Anne Boleyn, and their marriage; Henry's splendours, and his death. All that was here. In those days the buildings of Whitehall were very extensive, and they were further enlarged afterwards. Here Elizabeth held her court, and here she lay in state after death. James I comes next; he built the Banqueting House. And in his son's time, the royal magnificence displayed at Whitehall was incomparable. All the gaieties and splendours and luxury of living that then were possible, were known here. And here was the scaffold where he died. The next figure is Cromwell's.'

'Leave him out!' said Mrs. Dallas, with a sort of groan of impatience.

'What shall I do with the next following, mamma? That is Charles II.'

'He had a right there at least.'

'He abused it.'

'At least he was a king, and a gentleman.'

'If I could show you Whitehall as it was in his day, mother, I think you would not want to look long. But I shall not try. We will go on to Charing Cross. The old palace extended once nearly so far. Here is the place.' He pointed to a certain spot on the map.

'What is there now?' asked Betty.

'Not the old Cross. That is gone; but, of course, I cannot stand there without in thought going back to Edward I. and his queen. In its place is a brazen statue of Charles I. And in fact, when I stand there the winds seem to sweep down upon me from many a mountain peak of history. Edward and his rugged greatness, and Charles and his weak folly; and the Protectorate, and the Restoration. For here, where the statue stands, stood once the gallows where Harrison and his companions were executed, when "the king had his own again." Sometimes I can hardly see the present, when I am there, for looking at the past.'

'You are enthusiastic,' said Miss Frere. 'But I understand it. Yes, that is not like New York; not much!'

'What became of the Cross, Pitt?'

'Pulled down, mother—like everything else in its day.'

'Who pulled it down?'

'The Republicans.'

'The Republicans! Yes, it was like them!' said Mrs. Dallas. 'Rebellion, dissent, and a want of feeling for whatever is noble and refined, all go together. That was the Puritans!'

'Pretty strong!' said Pitt. 'And not quite fair either, is it? How much feeling for what is noble and refined was there in the court of the second Charles?—and how much of either, if you look below the surface, was in the policy or the character of the first Charles?'

'He did not destroy pictures and pull down statues,' said Mrs. Dallas.
'He was at least a gentleman. But the Puritans were a low set, always.
I cannot forgive them for the work they did in England.'

'You may thank heaven for some of the work they did. But for them, you would not be here to-day in a land of freedom.'

'Too much freedom,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'I believe it is good to have a king over a country.'

'Well, go on from Charing Cross, won't you,' said Miss Frere. 'I am interested. I never studied a map of London before. I am not sure I ever saw one.'

'I do not know which way to go,' said Pitt. 'Every step brings us to new associations; every street opens up a chapter of history. Here is Northumberland House; a grand old building, full of its records. Howards and Percys and Seymours have owned it and built it; and there General Monk planned the bringing back of the Stuarts. Going along the Strand, every step is full of interest. Just *here* used to be the palace of Sir Nicholas Baron and his son; then James the First's favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, lived in it; and the beautiful water-gate is yet standing which Inigo Jones built for him. All the Strand was full of palaces which have passed away, leaving behind the names of their owners in the streets which remain or have been built since. Here Sir Walter Raleigh lived; *here* the Dudleys had their abode, and Lady Jane Grey was married; here was the house of Lord Burleigh. But let us go on to the

church of St. Mary-le-Strand. Here once stood a great Maypole, round which there used to be merry doings. The Puritans took that down too, mother.'

'What for?'

'They held it to be in some sort a relic of heathen manners. Then under Charles II. it was set up again. And here, once, four thousand children were gathered and sang a hymn, on some public occasion of triumph in Queen Anne's reign.'

'It is not there now?'

'Oh, no! It was given to Sir Isaac Newton, and made to subserve the uses of a telescope.'

'How do you know all these things, Mr. Pitt.'

'Every London antiquary knows them, I suppose. And I told you, I have an old uncle who is a great antiquary; London is his particular hobby.'

'He must have had an apt scholar, though.'

'Much liking makes good learning, I suppose,' said the young man. 'A little further on is the church of St. Clement Danes, where Dr. Johnson used to attend divine service. About *here* stands Temple Bar.'

'Temple Bar!' said Miss Frere. 'I have heard of Temple Bar all my life, and never connected any clear idea with the name. What *is* Temple Bar?'

'It is not very much of a building. It is the barrier which marks the bound of the city of London.'

'Isn't it London on both sides of Temple Bar?'

'London, but not the City. The City proper begins here. On the west of this limit is Westminster.'

'There are ugly associations with Temple Bar, I know,' said Miss Frere.

'There are ugly associations with everything. Down here stood Essex House, where Essex defended himself, and from which he was carried off to the Tower. *There*, in Lincoln's Inn fields, Thomas Babington and his party died for high treason, and there Russell died. And just up here is Smithfield. It is all over, the record of violence, intolerance, and brutality. It meets you at every turn.'

'It is only what would be in any other place as old as London,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'In old times people were rough, of course, but they were rough everywhere.'

'I was thinking'— said Miss Frere. 'Mr. Dallas gives a somewhat singular justification of his liking for London.'

'Is it?' said Pitt. 'It would be singular if the violence were there now; but to read the record and look on the scene is interesting, and for me fascinating. The record is of other things too. See,—in this place Milton lived and wrote; here Franklin abode; here Charles Lamb; from an inn in this street Bishop Hooper went away to die. And so I might go on and on. At every step there is the memorial of some great man's life, or some noted man's death. And with all that, there are also the most exquisite bits of material antiquity. Old picturesque houses; old crypts of former churches, over which stands now a modern representative of the name; old monuments many; old doorways, and courts, and corners, and gateways. Come over to London, and I will take you down into the crypt of St. Paul's, and show you how history is presented to you there.'

'The crypt?' said Miss Frere, doubting somewhat of this invitation.

'Yes, the old monuments are in the crypt.'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Dallas, 'I do not understand how all these things you have been talking about should have so much charm for you. I should think the newer and handsomer parts of the city, the parks and the gardens, and the fine squares, would be a great deal more agreeable.'

'To live in, mother.'

'And don't you go to the British Museum, and to the Tower, and to Hyde Park?'

'I have been there hundreds of times.'

'And like these old corners still?'

'I am very fond of the Museum.'

'There is nothing like that is this country,' said Mrs. Dallas, with an accent of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

INTERPRETATIONS.

Miss Betty hereupon begged to be told more distinctly what was in the British Museum, that anybody should go there 'hundreds of times.' Pitt presently got warm in his subject, and talked long and well; as many people will do when they are full of their theme, even when they can talk upon nothing else. Pitt was not one of those people; he could talk well upon anything, and now he made himself certainly very entertaining. His mother thought so, who cared nothing for the British Museum except in so far that it was a great institution of an old country, which a young country could not rival. She listened to Pitt. Miss Betty gave him even more profound interest and unflagging attention; whether she too were not studying the speaker full as much as the things spoken, I will not say. They had a very pleasant morning of it; conversation diverging sometimes to Assyria and Egypt, and ancient civilizations and arts, and civilization in general. Mrs. Dallas gradually drew back from mingling in the talk, and watched, well pleased, to see how eager the two other speakers became, and how they were lost in their subject and in each other.

In the afternoon there was another drive, to which Pitt did not need to be stimulated; and all the evening the two young people were busy with something which engaged them both. Mrs. Dallas breathed freer.

'I *think* he is smitten,' she said privately to her husband. 'How could he help it? He has seen nobody else to be smitten with.'

But Betty Frere was not sure of any such thing; and the very fact of Pitt's disengagedness made him more ensnaring to her. There was nobody else in the village to divert his attention, and the two young people were thrown very much together. They went driving, they rode, and they talked, continually. The map of London was often out, and Mrs. Dallas saw the two heads bent over it, and interested faces looking into each other; and she thought things were going on very fairly. If only the vacation were not so short! For only a little time more, and Pitt must be back at his chambers in London. The mother sighed to herself. She was paying rather a heavy price to keep her son from Dissenters!

Betty Frere too remembered that the vacation was coming to an end, and drew her breath rather short. She was depending on Pitt too much for her amusement, she told herself, and to be sure there were other young men in the world that could talk; but she felt a sort of disgust at the thought of them all. They were not near so interesting. They all flattered her, and some of them were supposed to be brilliant; but Betty turned from the thought of them to the one whose lips never condescended to say pretty things, nor made any effort to say witty things. They behaved towards her with a sort of obsequious reverence, which was the fashion of that day much more than of this; and Betty liked far better a manner which never made pretence of anything, was thoroughly natural and perfectly well-bred, but which frankly paid more honour to his mother than to herself. She admired Pitt's behaviour to his mother. Even to his mother it had less formality than was the custom of the day; while it gave her every delicate little attention and every possible graceful observance. The young beauty had sense enough to see that this promised more for Pitt's future wife than any amount of civil subserviency to herself. Perhaps there is not a quality which women value more in a man, or miss more sorely, than what we express by the term manliness. And she saw that Pitt, while he was enthusiastic and eager, and what she called fanciful, always was true, honest, and firm in what he thought right. From that no fancy carried him away.

And Miss Betty found the days pass with almost as much charm as fleetness. How fleet they were she did not bear to think. She found herself recognising Pitt's step, distinguishing his voice in the distance, and watching for the one and the other. Why not? He was so pleasant as a companion. But she found herself also starting when he appeared suddenly, thrilled at the unexpected sound of his voice, and conscious of quickened pulses when he came into the room. Betty did not like these signs in herself; at the same time, that which had wrought the spell continued to work, and the spell was not broken. In

justice to the young lady, I must say that there was not the slightest outward token of it. Betty was as utterly calm and careless in her manner as Pitt himself; so that even Mrs. Dallas—and a woman in those matters sees far—could not tell whether either or both of the young people had a liking for the other more than the social good-fellowship which was frank and apparent. It might be, and she confessed also to herself that it might not be.

'You must give that fellow time,' said her husband. Which Mrs. Dallas knew, if she had not been so much in a hurry.

'If he met those Gainsboroughs by chance, I would not answer for anything,' she said.

'How should he meet them? They are probably as poor as rats, and have drawn into some corner, out of the way. He will never see them.'

'Pitt is so persistent!' said Mrs. Dallas uneasily.

'He'll be back in England in a few weeks.'

'But when he comes again!'

'He shall not come again. We will go over to see him ourselves next year.'

'That is a very good thought,' said Mrs. Dallas.

And, comforted by this thought and the plans she presently began to weave in with it, she looked now with much more equanimity than Betty herself towards the end of Pitt's visit. Mrs. Dallas, however, was not to get off without another shock to her nerves.

It was early in September, and the weather of that sultry, hot, and moist character which we have learned to look for in connection with the first half of that month. Miss Frere's embroidery went languidly; possibly there might have been more reasons than one for the slow and spiritless movement of her fingers, which was quite contrary to their normal habit. Mrs. Dallas, sitting at a little distance on the verandah, was near enough to hear and observe what went on when Pitt came upon the scene, and far enough to be separated from the conversation unless she chose to mix in it. By and by he came, looking thoughtful, as Betty saw, though she hardly seemed to notice his approach. There was no token in her quiet manner of the quickened pulses of which she was immediately conscious. Something like a tremulous thrill ran through her nerves; it vexed her to be so little mistress of them, yet the pleasure of the thrill at the moment was more than the pain. Pitt threw himself into a chair near her, and for a few moments watched the play of her needle. Betty's eyelashes never stirred. But the silence lasted too long. Nerves would not bear it.

'What can you find to do in this weather, Mr. Pitt?' she asked languidly.

'It is good weather,' he answered absently. 'Do you ever read the
Bible?'

Miss Betty's fine eyes were lifted now with an expression of some amusement. They were very fine eyes; Mrs. Dallas thought they could not fail of their effect.

'The Bible?' she repeated. 'I read the lessons in the Prayer-book; that is the same.'

'Is it the same? Is the whole Bible contained in the lessons?'

'I don't know, I am sure,' she answered doubtfully. 'I think so. There is a great deal of it.'

'But you read it piecemeal so.'

'You must read it piecemeal any way,' returned the young lady. 'You can read only a little each day; a portion.'

'You could read consecutively, though, or you could choose for yourself.'

'I like to have the choice made for me. It saves time; and then one is sure one has got hold of the right portion, you know. I like the lessons.'

'And then,' remarked Mrs. Dallas, 'you know other people and your friends are reading that same portion at the same time, and the feeling is very sacred and sweet.'

'But if the Bible was intended to be read in such a way, how comes it that we have no instruction to that end?'

'Instruction was given,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'The Church has ordered it.'

'The Church' said Pitt thoughtfully. 'Who is the Church?'

'Why, my dear,' said Mrs. Dallas, 'don't ask such questions. You know as well as I do.'

'As I understand it, mother, what you mean is simply a body of Christians who lived some time ago.'

'Yes. Well, what then?'

'I do not comprehend how they should know what you and I want to read to-day. I am not talking of Church services. I am talking of private reading.'

'But it is pleasant and convenient,' said Betty.

'May be very inappropriate.'

'Pitt,' said his mother, 'I wish you would not talk so! It is really very wrong. This comes of your way of questioning and reasoning about everything. What we have to do with the Church is to *obey*.'

'And that is what we have to do with the Bible, isn't it?' he said gravely.

'Undoubtedly.'

'Well, mother, I am not talking to you; I am attacking Miss Frere. I can talk to her on even terms. Miss Frere, I want to know what you understand by obeying, when we are speaking of the demands of the Bible?'

'Obeying? I understand just what I mean by it anywhere.'

'Obeying what?'

'Why, obeying God, of course.'

'Of course! But how do we know what His commands are?'

'By the words—how else?' she asked, looking at him. He was in earnest, for some reason, she saw, and she forbore from the light words with which at another time she would have given a turn to the subject.

'Then you think, distinctly, that we ought to obey the words of the Bible?'

'Ye-s,' she said, wondering what was coming.

'*All* the words?'

'Yes, I suppose so. All the words, according to their real meaning.'

'How are we to know what that is?'

'I suppose—the Church tells us.'

'Where?'

'I do not know—in books, I suppose.'

'What books? But we are going a little wild. May I bring you an instance or two? I am talking in earnest, and mean it earnestly.'

'Do you ever do anything in any other way?' asked the young lady, with a charming air of fine raillery and recognition blended. 'Certainly; I am in earnest too.'

Pitt went away and returned with a book in his hand.

'What have you there? the Prayer-book?' his mother asked, with a doubtful expression.

'No, mamma; I like to go to the Fountain-head of authority as well as of learning.'

'The Fountain-head!' exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, in indignant protest; and then she remembered her wisdom, and said no more. It cost her an effort; however, she knew that for her to set up a defence of either Church or Prayer-book just then would not be wise, and that she had better leave the matter in

Betty's hands. She looked at Betty anxiously. The young lady's face showed her cool and collected, not likely to be carried away by any stream of enthusiasm or overborne by influence. It was, in fact, more cool than she felt. She liked to get into a good talk with Pitt upon any subject, and so far was content; at the same time she would rather have chosen any other than this, and was a little afraid whereto it might lead. Religion had not been precisely her principal study. True, it had not been his principal study either; but Betty discerned a difference in their modes of approaching it. She attributed that to the Puritan or dissenting influences which had at some time got hold of him. To thwart those would at any rate be a good work, and she prepared herself accordingly.

Pitt opened his book and turned over a few leaves.

'To begin with,' he said, 'you admit that whatever this book commands we are bound to obey?'

'Provided we understand it,' his opponent put in.

'Provided we understand it, of course. A command not understood is hardly a command. Now here is a word which has struck me, and I would like to know how it strikes you.'

He turned to the familiar twenty-fifth of Matthew and read the central portion, the parable of the talents. He read like an interested man, and perhaps it was owing to a slight unconscious intonation here and there that Pitt's two hearers listened as if the words were strangely new to them. They had never heard them sound just so. Yet the reading was not dramatic at all; it was only a perfectly natural and feeling deliverance. But feeling reaches feeling, as we all know. The reading ceased, nobody spoke for several minutes.

'What does it mean?' asked Pitt.

'My dear,' said his mother, 'can there be a question what it means? The words are perfectly simple, it seems to me.'

'Mamma, I am not talking to you. You may sit as judge and arbiter; but it is Miss Frere and I who are disputing. She will have the goodness to answer.'

'I do not know what to answer,' said the young lady. 'Are not the words, as Mrs. Dallas says, perfectly plain?'

'Then surely it cannot be difficult to say what the teaching of them is?'

If it was not difficult, the continued silence of the lady was remarkable. She made no further answer.

'*Are* they so plain? I have been puzzling over them. I will divide the question, and perhaps we can get at the conclusion better so. In the first place, who are these "servants" spoken of?'

'Everybody, I suppose. You have the advantage of me, Mr. Dallas; I have *not* been studying the passage.'

'Yet you admit that we are bound to obey it.'

'Yes,' she said doubtfully. 'Obey what?'

'That is precisely what I want to find out. Now the servants; they cannot mean everybody, for it says, he "called *his own* servants;" the Greek is "bond-servants."'

'His servants would be His Church then.'

'His own people. "He delivered unto them His goods." What are the goods he delivered to them? Some had more, some had less; all had a share and a charge. What are these goods?'

'I don't know,' said Miss Frere, looking at him.

'What were they to do with these goods?'

'Trade with them, it seems.'

'In Luke the command runs so: "Trade till I come." Trading is a process by which the goods or the money concerned are multiplied. What are the goods given to you and me?—to bring the question down into the practical. It must be something with which we may increase the wealth of Him who has entrusted it to us.'

'Pitt, that is a very strange way of speaking,' said his mother.

'I am talking to Miss Frere, mamma. You have only to hear and judge between us. Miss Frere, the question comes to you.'

'I should say it is not possible to increase "His wealth."'

'That is not *my* putting of the case, remember. And also, every enlargement of His dominion in this world, every addition made to the number of His subjects, may be fairly spoken of so. The question stands, What are the goods? That is, if you like to go into it. I am not catechizing you,' said Pitt, half laughing.

'I do not dislike to be catechized,' said Miss Frere slowly. *By you*, was the mental addition. 'But I never had such a question put to me before, and I am not ready with an answer.'

'I never heard the question discussed either,' said Pitt. 'But I was reading this passage yesterday, and could not help starting it. The "goods" must be, I think, all those gifts or powers by means of which we can work for God, and so work as to enlarge His kingdom. Now, what are they?'

'Of course we can pay money,' said the young lady, looking a good deal mystified. 'We can pay money to support ministers, if that is what you mean.'

'So much is patent enough. Is money the only thing?'

Miss Frere looked bewildered, Mrs. Dallas impatient. She restrained herself, however, and waited. Pitt smiled.

'We pay money to support ministers and teachers. What do the ministers work with? what do they *trade* with?'

'The truth, I suppose.'

'And how do they make the truth known? By their lips, and by their lives; the power of the word, with the power of personal influence.'

'Yes,' said Miss Frere; 'of course.'

'Then the goods, or talents, so far as they are commonly possessed, and so far as we have discovered, are three: property, speech, and personal example. But the two last are entrusted to you and me, are they not, as well as the former?'

The girl looked at him now with big eyes, in which no shadow of self-consciousness was any more lurking. Eyes that were bewildered, astonished, inquiring, and also disturbed. 'What do you mean?' she said helplessly.

'It comes to this,' said Pitt. 'If we are ready to obey the Bible, we shall use not only our money, but our tongues and ourselves to do the work which—you know—the Lord left to His disciples to do; make disciples of every creature. It will be our one business.'

'How do you mean, our one business?'

'That to which we make all others subservient.'

'Subservient! Yes,' said Miss Frere. 'Subservient in a way; but that does not mean that we should give up everything else for it.'

Pitt was silent.

'My dear boy,' said his mother anxiously, 'it seems to me you are straining things quite beyond what is intended. We are not all meant to be clergymen, are we?'

'That is not the point, mamma. The point is, what work is given us?'

'That work you speak of is clergymen's work.'

'Mamma, what is the command?'

'But that does not mean everybody.'

'Where is the excepting clause?'

'But, my dear, what would become of Society?'

'We may leave that. We are talking of obeying the Bible. I have given you one instance. Now I will give you another. It is written over here,' and he turned a few leaves,—'it is another word of Christ to those whom He was teaching,—"If any man serve me, let him follow me." Now here is a plain command; but what is it to follow Christ?'

'To imitate him, I suppose,' said Miss Frere, to whom he looked.

'In what?'

The young lady looked at him in silence, and then said, 'Why, we all know what it means when we say that such a person or such a thing is Christlike. Loving, charitable, kind'—

'But to *follow* Him,—that is something positive and active. Literal following a person is to go where he has gone, through all the paths and to all the places. In the spiritual following, which is intended here, —what is it? It is to do as He did, is it not? To have His aims and purposes and views in life, and to carry them out logically.'

'What do you mean by "logically"?'

'According to their due and proper sequences.'

'Well, what are you driving at?' asked Miss Frere a little worriedly.

'I will tell you. But I do not mean to drive *you*,' he said, again with a little laugh, as of self-recollection. 'Tell me to stop, if you are tired of the subject.'

'I am not in the least tired; how could you think it? It always delights me when people talk logically. I do not very often hear it. But I never heard of logical religion before.'

'True religion must be logical, must it not?'

'I thought religion was rather a matter of feeling.'

'I believe I used to think so.'

'And pray, what is it, then, Pitt?' his mother asked.

'Look here, mamma. "If any man will serve me, *let him follow me*."'

'Well, what do you understand by that, Pitt? You are going too fast for me. I thought the love of God was the whole of religion.'

'But here is the "following," mamma.'

'What sort of following?'

'That is what I am asking. As it cannot be in bodily, so it must be in mental footsteps.'

'I do not understand you,' said his mother, with an air both vexed and anxious; while Miss Frere had now let her embroidery fall, and was giving her best consideration to the subject and the speaker. She was a little annoyed too, but she was more interested. This was a different sort of conversation from any she had been accustomed to hear, and Pitt was a different sort of speaker. He was not talking to kill time, or to please her; he was—most wonderful and rare!—in earnest; and that not in any matter that involved material interests. She had seen people in earnest before on matters of speculation and philosophy, often on stocks and schemes for making money, in earnest violently on questions of party politics; but in earnest for the truth's sake, never, in all her life. It was a new experience, and Pitt was a novel kind of person; manly, straightforward, honest; quite a person to be admired, to be respected, to be— Where were her thoughts running?

He had sat silent a moment, after his mother's last remark; gravely thinking. Betty brought him back to the point.

'You will tell us what you think "following" means?' she said gently.

'I will tell *you*,' he said, smiling. 'I am not supposed to be speaking to mamma. If you will look at the way Christ went, you will see what following Him must be. In the first place, Self was nowhere.'

'Yes,' said Miss Frere.

'Who is ready to follow Him in that?'

'But, my dear boy!' cried Mrs. Dallas. 'We are human creatures; we cannot help thinking of ourselves; we are *meant* to think of ourselves. Everybody must think of self; or the world would not hold together.'

'I am speaking to Miss Frere,' he said pleasantly.

'I confess I think so too, Mr. Dallas. Of course, we ought not to be *selfish;* that means, I suppose, to think of self unduly; but where would the world be, if everybody, as you say, put self nowhere?'

'I will go on to another point. Christ went about doing good. It was the one business of His life. Whenever and wherever He went among men, He went to heal, to help, to teach, or to warn. Even when He was resting among friends in the little household at Bethany, He was teaching, and one of the household at least sat at His feet to listen.'

'Yes, and left her sister to do all the work,' remarked Mrs. Dallas.

'The Lord said she had done right, mamma.'

There ensued a curious silence. The two ladies sat looking at Pitt, each apparently possessed by a kind of troubled dismay; neither ready with an answer. The pause lasted till both of them felt what it implied, and both began to speak at once.

'But, my son'—

'But, Mr. Dallas!'—

'Miss Frere, mamma. Let her speak.' And turning to the young lady with a slight bow, he intimated his willingness to hear her. Miss Frere was nevertheless not very ready.

'Mr. Dallas, do I understand you? Can it be that you mean—I do not know how to put it,—do you mean that you think that everybody, that all of us, and each of us, ought to devote his life to helping and teaching?'

'It can be of no consequence what I think,' he said. 'The question is simply, what is "following Christ"?'

'Being His disciple, I should say.'

'What is that?' he replied quickly. 'I have been studying that very point; and do you know it is said here, and it was said then, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple"?'

'But what do you mean, Pitt?' his mother asked in indignant consternation.

'What did the Lord mean, mother?' he returned very gravely.

'Are we all heathen, then?' she went on with heat. 'For I never saw anybody yet in my life that took such a view of religion as you are taking.'

'Do we know exactly Mr. Pitt's view?' here put in the other lady. 'I confess I do not. I wish he would say.'

'I have been studying it,' said Pitt, with an earnest gravity of manner which gave his mother yet more trouble than his words. 'I have gone to the Greek for it; and there the word rendered "forsake" is one that means to "take leave of"—"bid farewell." And if we go to history for the explanation, we do find that that was the attitude of mind which those must needs assume in that day who were disposed to follow Christ. The chances were that they would be called upon to give up all—even life—as the cost of their following. They would begin by a secret taking leave, don't you see?'

'But the times are not such now,' Miss Frere ventured.

Pitt did not answer. He sat looking at the open page of his Bible, evidently at work with the problem suggested there. The two women looked at him; and his mother got rid as unobtrusively as possible of a vexed and hot tear that would come.

'Mr. Dallas,' Miss Frere urged again, 'these are not times of persecution any more. We can be Christians—disciples—and retain all our friends and possessions; can we not?'

'Can we without "taking leave" of them?'

'Certainly. I think so.'

'I do not see it!' he said, after another pause. 'Do you think anybody will be content to put self nowhere, as Christ did, giving up his whole life and strength—and means—to the help and service of his fellow men, *unless* he has come to that mental attitude we were speaking of? No, it seems to me, and the more I think of it the more it seems to me, that to follow Christ means to give up seeking honour or riches or pleasure, except so far as they may be sought and used in His service. I mean *for* His service. All I read in the Bible is in harmony with that view.'

'But how comes it then that nobody takes it,' said Miss Frere uneasily.

'I suppose,' said Pitt slowly, 'for the same reason that has kept me for years from accepting it;—because it was so difficult.'

'But religion cannot be a difficult thing, my dear son,' said Mrs.
Dallas.

He looked up at her and smiled, an affectionate, very expressive, wistful smile.

'Can it not, mother? What mean Christ's words here,—"Whosoever doth not *take up his cross* and follow me, he cannot be my disciple"? The cross meant shame, torture, and death, in those days; and I think in a modified way, it means the same thing now. It means something.'

'But Mr. Pitt, you do not answer my argument,' Miss Frere repeated. 'If this view is correct, how comes it that nobody takes it but you?'

'Your argument is where the dew is after a hot sun,—nowhere. Instead of nobody taking this view, it has been held by hundreds of thousands, who, like the first disciples, *have* forsaken all and followed Him. Rather than be false to it they have endured the loss of all things, they have given up father and mother, they have borne torture and faced the lions. In later days, they have been chased and worried from hiding-place to hiding-place, they have been cut down by the sword, buried alive, thrown from the tops of rocks, and burned at the stake. And in peacefuller times they have left their homes and countries and gone to the ends of the earth to tell the gospel. They have done what was given them to do, without regarding the cost of it.'

'Then you think all the people who fill our churches are no Christians!'

'I say nothing about the people who fill our churches.'

Pitt rose here.

'But, Mr. Dallas, how can all the world be so mistaken? Our clergymen, our bishops, do not preach such doctrine as you do, if I understand you.'

'That has been a great puzzle to me,' he said.

'Is it not enough to make you doubt?'

'Can I question the words I have read to you?'

'No, but perhaps your interpretation of them.'

'When you have got down to the simplest possible English, there is no room that I see for interpretation. "Follow me" can mean nothing but "follow me;" and "forsaking all" is not a doubtful expression.'

The discussion would probably have gone on still further, but the elder
Dallas's step was heard in the house, and Pitt went away with his book.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STAND.

Mrs. Dallas was very deeply disturbed. She saw in these strange views of Pitt's all sorts of possible dangers to what she had hoped would be his future career in life. Even granting that they were a youthful folly and would pass away, how soon would they pass away? and in the meantime what

chances Pitt might lose, what time might be wasted, what fatal damage his prospects might suffer! And Pitt held a thing so fast when he had once taken it up. Almost her only hope lay in Betty's influence.

Betty herself was disturbed, much more than she cared to have known. If *this* fascination got hold of Pitt, she knew very well he would, for the time at least, be open to no other. Her ordinary power would be gone; he would see in her nothing but a talking machine with whom he could discuss things. It was not speculation merely that busied his thoughts now, she could see; not mere philosophy, or study of human nature; Pitt was carrying all these Bible words in upon himself, comparing them with himself, and working away at the discrepancy. Something that he called conscience was engaged, and restless. Betty saw that there was but one thing left for her to do. Diversion was not possible; she could not hope to turn Pitt aside from his quest after truth; she must seem to take part in it, and so gain her advantage from what threatened to be her discomfiture.

The result of all which was, that after this there came to be a great deal of talk between the two upon Bible subjects, intermingled with not a little reading aloud from the Bible itself. This was at Betty's instance, rather than Pitt's. When she could she got him out for a walk or a drive; in the house (and truly, often out of the house too) she threw herself with great apparent interest into the study of the questions that had been started, along with others collateral, and desired to learn and desired to discuss all that could be known about them. So there were, as I said, continual Bible readings, mingled occasionally with references to some old commentary; and Betty and Pitt sat very near together, looking over the same page; and remained long in talk, looking eagerly into one another's eyes. Mrs. Dallas was not satisfied.

She came upon Betty one day in the verandah, just after Pitt had left her. The young lady was sitting with her hand between the leaves of a Bible, and a disturbed, far-away look in her eyes, which might have been the questioning of a troubled conscience, or—of a very different feeling. She roused up as Mrs. Dallas came to her, and put on a somewhat wan smile.

'Where is Pitt?'

'Going to ride somewhere, I believe.'

'What have you got there? the Bible again? I don't believe in all this Bible reading! Can't you get him off it?'

'It is the only thing to do now.'

'But cannot you get him off it?'

'Not immediately. Mr. Dallas takes a fancy hard.'

'So unlike him!' the mother went on. 'So unlike all he used to be. He always took things "hard," as you say; but then it used to be science and study of history, and collecting of natural curiosities, and drawing. Have you seen any of Pitt's drawings? He has a genius for that. Indeed, I think he has a genius for everything,' Mrs. Dallas said with a sigh; 'and he used to be keen for distinguishing himself, and he did distinguish himself everywhere, always; here at school and at college, and then at Oxford. My dear, he distinguished himself at *Oxford*. He was always a good boy, but not in the least foolish, or superstitious, or the least inclined to be fanatical. And now, as far as I can make out, he is for giving up everything!'

'He does nothing by halves.'

'No; but it is very hard, now when he is just reading law and getting ready to take his place in the world—and he would take no mean place in the world, Betty—it is hard! Why, he talks as if he would throw everything up. I never would have thought it of Pitt, of all people. It is due, I am convinced, to the influence of those dissenting friends of his!'

'Who are they?' Miss Betty asked curiously.

'You have heard the name,' said Mrs. Dallas, lowering her voice, though Pitt was not within hearing. 'They used to live here. It was a Colonel Gainsborough—English, but of a dissenting persuasion. That kind of thing seems to be infectious.'

'He must have been a remarkable man, if his influence could begin so early and last so long.'

'Well, it was not just that only. There was a daughter'—

'And a love affair?' asked Miss Betty, with a slight laugh which covered a sudden down-sinking of her

heart.

'Oh dear no! she was a child; there was no thought of such a thing. But Pitt was fond of her, and used to go roaming about the fields with her after flowers. My son is a botanist; I don't know if you have found it out.'

'And those were the people he went to New York to seek?'

'Yes, and could not find—most happily.'

Miss Betty mused. Certainly Pitt was 'persistent.' And now he had got this religious idea in his head, would there be any managing it, or him? It did not frighten Miss Betty, so far as the religious idea itself was concerned; she reflected sagely that a man might be worse things than philanthropic, or even than pious. She had seen wives made unhappy by neglect, and others made miserable by the dissipated habits or the ungoverned tempers of their husbands; a man need not be unendurable because he was true and thoughtful and conscientious, or even devout. She could bear that, quite easily; the only thing was, that in thoughts which possessed Pitt lately he had passed out of her influence; beyond her reach. All she could do was to follow him into this new and very unwonted sphere, and seem to be as earnest as he was. He met her, he reasoned with her, he read to her, but Betty did not feel sure that she got any nearer to him, nevertheless. She was shrewd enough to divine the reason.

'Mr. Pitt,' she said frankly to him one day, when the talk had been eager in the same line it had taken that first day on the verandah, and both parties had held the same respective positions with regard to each other,—'Mr. Pitt, are you fighting me, or yourself?'

He paused and looked at her, and half laughed.

'You are right,' said he. And then he went off, and for the present that was all Miss Betty gained by her motion.

Nobody saw much of Pitt during the rest of the day. The next morning, after breakfast, he came out to the two ladies where as usual they were sitting at work. It was another September day of sultry heat, yet the verandah was also in the morning a pleasant place, sweet with the honeysuckle fragrance still lingering, and traversed by a faint intermittent breeze. Both ladies raised their heads to look at the young man as he came towards them, and then, struck by something in his face, could not take their eyes away. He came straight to his mother and stood there in front of her, looking down and meeting her look; Miss Frere could not see how, but evidently it troubled Mrs. Dallas.

'What is it now, Pitt?' she asked.

'I have come to tell you, mother. I have come to tell you that I have given up fighting.'

'Fighting!?'

'Yes. The battle is won, and I have lost, and gained. I have given up fighting, mother, and I am Christ's free man.'

'What?' exclaimed Mrs. Dallas bewilderedly.

'It is true, mother. I am Christ's servant. The things are the same. How should I not be the servant, the *bond-servant*, of Him who has made a free man of me?'

His tone was not excited; it was quiet and sweet; but Mrs. Dallas was excited.

'A free man? My boy, what are you saying? Were you not always free?'

'No, mother. I was in such bonds, that I have been struggling for years to do what was right—what I knew was right—and was unable.'

'To do what was right? My boy, how you talk! You *always* did what was right.'

'I was never Christ's servant, mamma.'

'What delusion is this!' cried Mrs. Dallas. 'My son, what do you mean? You were baptized, you were confirmed, you were everything that you ought to be. You cannot be better than you have always been.'

He smiled, stooped down and kissed her troubled face.

'I was never Christ's servant before,' he repeated. 'But I am His servant now at last, all there is of me. I wanted you to know at once, and Miss Frere, I wanted her to know it. She asked me yesterday whom I

was fighting? and I saw directly that I was fighting a won battle; that my reason and conscience were entirely vanquished, and that the only thing that held out was my will. I have given that up, and now I am the Lord's servant.'

'You were His servant before.'

'Never, in any true sense.'

'My dear, what difference?' asked Mrs. Dallas helplessly.

'It was nominal merely.'

'And now?'

'Now it is not nominal; it is real. I have come to know and love my Master. I am His for life and death; and now His commands seem the pleasantest things in the world to me.'

'But you obeyed them always?'

'No, mamma, I did not. I obeyed nothing, in the last resort, but my own supreme will.'

'But, Pitt, you say you have come to know; what time has there been for any such change?'

'Not much time,' he replied; 'and I cannot tell how it is; but it seemed as if, so soon as I had given up the struggle and yielded, scales fell from my eyes. I cannot tell how it was; but all at once I seemed to see the beauty of Christ, which I never saw before; and, mamma, the sight has filled me with joy. Nothing now to my mind is more reasonable than His demands, or more delightful than yielding obedience to them.'

'Demands? what demands?' said Mrs. Dallas.

Her son repeated the words with which the twelfth chapter of Romans begins.

'"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and be not conformed to this world."'

'But, my dear, that means'—

'It means all.'

'How all?'

'There is nothing more left to give, when this sacrifice is presented. It covers the whole ground. The sacrifice is a living sacrifice, but it gives all to God as entirely as the offering that imaged it went up in smoke and flame.'

'What sacrifice imaged it?'

'The burnt-sacrifice of old. That always meant consecration.'

'How do you know? You are not a clergyman.'

Pitt smiled again, less brightly. 'True, mother, but I have been studying all this for years, in the Bible and in the words of others who *were* clergymen; and now it is all plain before me. It became so as soon as I was willing to obey it.'

'And what are you going to do?'

'Do? I cannot say yet. I am a soldier but just enlisted, and do not
know where my orders will place me or what work they will give me. Only
I *have* enlisted; and that is what I wanted you to know at once.
Mother, it is a great honour to be a soldier of Christ.'

'I should think,—if I did not see you and hear your voice,—I should certainly think I heard a Methodist talking. I suppose that is the way they do.'

'Did you ever hear one talk, mother?'

'No, and do not want to hear one, even if it were my own son!' she answered angrily.

'But in all that I have been saying, if they say it too, the Methodists are right, mother. A redeemed

sinner is one bought with a price, and thenceforth neither his spirit nor his body can be his own. And his happiness is not to be his own.'

Mrs. Dallas was violently moved, yet she had much self-command and habitual dignity of manner, and would not break down now. More pitiful than tears was the haughty gesture of her head as she turned it aside to hide the quivering lips. And more tender than words was the air with which her son presently stooped and took her hand.

'Mother!' he said gently and tenderly.

'Pitt, I never would have believed this of you!' she said with bitter emphasis.

'You never could have believed anything so good of me.'

'What are you going to *do?*' she repeated vehemently. 'What does all this amount to? or is it anything but dissenting rant?'

'Anything but that,' he answered gravely. 'Mother, do you remember the words,—"No man when he hath lighted a lamp covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but putteth it on a stand, that they which enter in may see the light"? Every Christian is such a lighted lamp, intended for some special place and use. My special use and place I do not yet know; but this I know plainly, that my work in the world, one way or another, must be the Lord's work. For that I live henceforth.'

'You will go into the Church?' cried his mother.

'Not necessarily.'

'You will give up reading law?'

'No, I think not. At present it seems to me I had better finish what I have begun. But if I do, mother, my law will be only one of the means I have to work with for that one end.'

'And I suppose your money would be another?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'What has money to do with teaching people?' Miss Frere asked. It was the first word she had spoken; she spoke it seriously, not mockingly. The question brought his eyes round to her.

'Do you ask that?' said he. 'Every unreasoning, ignorant creature of humanity understands it. The love that would win them for heaven would also help them on earth; and if they do not see the one thing, they do not believe in the other.'

'Then— But— What do you propose?'

'It is simple enough,' he said.

'It is too simple for Betty and me,' said his mother. 'I would be obliged to you, Pitt, to answer her.'

The young man's countenance changed; a shadow fell over it which raised Miss Frere's sympathy. He went into the house, however, for a Bible, and coming back with it sat down and read quietly and steadfastly the beautiful words in Isaiah:

'"To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke. ... To deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh."'

'It would take a good deal of money, certainly,' said Miss Frere, 'to do all that; indeed, I hardly think all the fortunes in the world would be sufficient.'

Pitt made no answer. He sat looking down at the page from which he had been reading.

'Nobody is required to do more than his part of the work,' said Mrs.
Dallas. 'If Pitt will be contented with that'—

'What is my part of it, mother?'

'Why, your share; what you can do properly and comfortably, without any fanaticism of sacrifice.'

'Must I not do all I can?'

'No, not all you *can*. You *could* spend your whole fortune in it.'

'I was thinking, easily,' observed Miss Frere.

'What is the Bible rule? "When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him"—"that ye break every yoke." And, "he that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise."'

'You can find Scripture to quote for everything, said Mrs. Dallas, rising in anger; 'that is the way Methodists and fanatics always do, as I have heard. But I can tell you one thing, Pitt, which you may not have taken into account; if you persist in this foolishness, your father, I know, will take care that the fortune you have to throw away shall not be large!'

With these words she swept into the house. The two left behind were for some moments very still. Pitt had drooped his head a little, and rested his brow in his hand; Miss Betty watched him. Her dismay and dislike of Pitt's disclosures were scarcely less than his mother's, but different. Disappointed pride was not here in question. That he should give up a splendid and opulent career did not much trouble her. In the first place, he might modify his present views; in the second place, if he did not, if he lived up to his principles, there was something in her which half recognised the beauty and dignity and truth of such a life. But in either case, alas, alas! how far was he drifted away out of her sphere, and beyond her reach? For the present, at least, his mind was utterly taken up by this one great subject; there was no room in it left for light things; love skirmishes could not be carried on over the ground he now occupied; he was wholly absorbed in his new decisions and experiences, and likely to be engaged with the consequences of them. Betty was sorry for him just now, for she saw that he felt pain; and at the same time she admired him more than ever. His face was more sweet, she thought, and yet more strong, than she had ever seen it; his manner to his mother was perfect. So had not been her manner towards him. He had been gentle, steadfast, and true, manly and tender. 'Happy will be the woman that will share his life, whatever it be!' thought Betty, with some constriction of heart; but to bring herself into that favoured place she saw little chance now. She longed to say a word of some sort that might sound like sympathy or intelligence; but she could not find it, and wisely held her peace.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LIFE PLANS.

Happily or unhappily,—it was as people looked at it,—Pitt's free days in America were drawing to a close. There were few still remaining to him before he must leave Seaforth and home, and go back to his reading law in the Temple. In those days there was a little more discussion of his new views and their consequences between him and his mother, but not much; and none at all between him and his father.

'Pitt is not a fool,' he had said, when Mrs. Dallas, in her distress, confided to him Pitt's declaration; 'I can trust him not to make an ass of himself; and so can you, wife.'

'But he is very strong when he takes a thing in his head; always was.'

'This thing will get out of his head again, you will see.'

'I do not believe it. It isn't his way.'

'One thing is certain,—I shall never give my money to a fool to make ducks and drakes with; and you may hint as much to him.'

'It would be very unwise policy,' said Mrs. Dallas thoughtfully.

'Then let it alone. I have no idea there is any need. You may depend upon it, London and law will scare all this nonsense away, fast enough.'

Mrs. Dallas felt no comforting assurance of the kind. She watched her son during the remaining days of his presence with them—watched him incessantly; so did Betty Frere, and so, in truth, secretly, did his father. Pitt was rather more quiet than usual; there was not much other change to be observed in him, or so Mrs. Dallas flattered herself.

'I see a difference,' said Miss Frere, to whom she communicated this opinion.

'What is it?' asked the mother hastily. For she had seen it too.

'It is not just easy to put it in words; but I see it. Mrs. Dallas, there is a wonderful *rest* come into his face.'

'Rest?' said the other. 'Pitt was never restless, in a bad sense; there was no keep still to him; but that is not what you mean.'

'That is not what I mean. I never in my life saw anybody look so happy.'

'Can't you do something with him?'

'He gives me no chance.'

It may seem strange that a good mother should wish to interfere with the happiness of a good son; but neither she nor Miss Frere adverted to that anomaly.

'I should not wonder one bit,' said Mrs. Dallas bitterly, 'if he were to disinherit himself.'

That would be bad, Betty agreed—deplorable; however, the thought of her own loss busied her most just now; not of what Pitt might lose. Two days before his departure all these various feelings of the various persons in the little family received a somewhat violent jar.

It was evening. Miss Frere and Pitt had had a ride that afternoon—a long and very spirited one. It might be the last they would take together, and she had enjoyed it with the keenness of that consciousness; as a grain of salt intensifies sweetness, or as discords throw out the value of harmony. Pitt had been bright and lively as much as ever, the ride had been gay, and the one regret on Betty's mind as they dismounted was that she had not more time before her to try what she could do. Pitt, as yet at least, had not grown a bit precise or sanctimonious; he had not talked nonsense, indeed, but then he never had paid her the very poor compliment of doing that. All the more, she as well as the others was startled by what came out in the evening.

All supper-time Pitt was particularly talkative and bright. Mrs. Dallas's face took a gleam from the brightness, and even Mr. Dallas roused up to bear his part in the conversation. When supper was done they still sat round the table, lingering in talk. Then, after a slight pause which had set in, Pitt leaned forward a little and spoke, looking alternately at one and the other of his parents.

'Mother,—father,—I wish you would do one thing before I go away.'

At the change in his tone all three present had pricked up their ears, and every eye was now upon him.

'What is that, Pitt?' his mother said anxiously.

'Have family prayer.'

If a bombshell had suddenly alighted on the table and there exploded, there would have been, no doubt, more feeling of fright, but not more of shocked surprise. Dumb silence followed. Angry eyes were directed towards the speaker from the top and from the bottom of the table. Miss Frere cast down hers with the inward thought, 'Oh, you foolish, foolish fellow! what did you do that for, and spoil everything!' Pitt waited a little.

'It is duty,' he said. 'You yourselves will grant me that.'

'And you fancy it is *your* duty to remind us of ours!' said his father, with contained scorn.

The mother's agitation was violent—so violent that she had difficulty to command herself. What it was that moved her so painfully she could not have told; her thoughts were in too much of a whirl. Between anger, and fear, and something else, she was in the greatest confusion, and not able to utter a syllable. Betty sat internally railing at Pitt's folly.

'The only question is, Is it duty?—in either case,' the son said steadfastly.

'Exactly!' said his father. 'Well, you have done yours; and I will do mine.'

His wife wondered at his calmness, and guessed that it was studied.
Neither of them was prepared for Pitt's next word.

'Will you?' he said simply. 'And will you let me make a beginning now?

Because I am going away?'

'Do what you like,' said the older man, with indescribable expression. Betty interpreted it to be restrained rage. His wife thought it was a moved conscience, or mere policy and curiosity; she could not tell which. The words were enough, however, whatever had moved them. Pitt took a Bible and read, still sitting at the table, the Parable of the Talents; and then he kneeled down. The elder Dallas never stirred. Betty knelt at once. Mrs. Dallas sat still at first, but then slipped from her chair to the floor and buried her face in her hands, where tears that were exceedingly bitter flowed beyond all her power to hinder them. For Pitt was praying, and to his mother's somewhat shocked astonishment, not in any words from a book, but in words—where did he get them?—that broke her heart. They were solemn and sweet, tender and simple; there was neither boldness nor shyness in them, although there was a frankness at which Mrs. Dallas wondered, along with the tenderness that quite subdued her.

The third one kneeling there was moved differently. The fountain of her tears was not touched at all, neither had she any share in the passion of displeasure which filled the father and mother. Yet she was in a disturbance almost as complete as theirs. It was a bitter and secret trouble, which as a woman she had to keep to herself, over which her head bowed as she knelt there. Just for that minute she might bow her head and confess to her trouble, while no one could see; and her head, poor girl, went low. She did not in the least approve of Pitt's proceedings; she did not sympathize with his motives; at the same time they did not make her like him the less. On the contrary, and Betty felt it was on the contrary, she could not help admiring his bravery, and she was almost ready to worship his strength. Somebody brave enough to avow truth that is unwelcome, and strong enough to do what goes against the grain with himself; such a person is not to be met with every day, and usually excites the profound respect of his fellows, even when they do not like him. But Betty liked this one, and liked him the more for doing the things she disliked, and it drove her to the bounds of desperation to feel that in the engrossment of his new principles he was carried away from her, and out of her power. Added to all this was the extreme strangeness of the present experience. Absolutely kneeling round the dinner-table!—kneeling to pray! Betty had never known such a thing, nor conceived the possibility of such a thing. In an unconsecrated place, led by unconsecrated lips, in words nowhere set down; what could equal the irregularity and the impropriety? The two women, in their weakness, kneeling, and the master of the house showing by his unmoved posture that he disallowed the whole thing! Incongruous! unfortunate! I am bound to say that Betty understood little of the words she so disapproved; the sea under a stormy wind is not more uneasy than was her spirit; and towards the end her one special thought and effort was bent upon quieting the commotion, and at least appearing unmoved. She was pretty safe, for the other members of the family had each enough to busy him without taking much note of her.

Pitt had but a day or two more to stay; and Miss Frere felt an irresistible impulse to force him into at least one talk more. She hardly knew what she expected, or what she wished from it; only, to let him go so, without one more word, was unbearable. She wanted to get nearer to him, if she could, if she might not bring him nearer to her; and at any rate she wanted the bitter-sweet pleasure of arguing with him. Nothing might come of it, but she must have the talk if she could. So she took the first chance that offered.

The family atmosphere was a little oppressive the next morning; and after breakfast Mr. and Mrs. Dallas both disappeared. Betty seized her opportunity, and reminded Pitt that he had never showed her his particular room, his old workshop and play place. 'It was not much to see,' he said; however, he took her through the house, and up the open flight of steps, where long ago Esther had been used to go for her lessons. The room looked much as it had done at that time; for during Pitt's stay at home he had pulled out one thing after another from its packing or hiding place; and now, mounted birds and animals, coins, shells, minerals, presses, engravings, drawings, and curiosities, made a delightful litter; delightful, for it was not disorderly; only gave one the feeling of a wealth of tastes and pursuits, every one of them pursued to enjoyment. Betty studied the place and the several objects in it with great and serious attention.

'And you understand all these things!' said she.

'So little, that I am ashamed to speak of it.'

'I know!' said Betty; 'that is what nobody says whose knowledge is small. It takes a good deal of knowing to perceive how much one does *not* know.'

'That is true.'

'And what becomes of all these riches when you are gone away?'

'They remain in seclusion. I must pack them up to-day. It is a job I have reserved to the last, for I like to have them about while I am here.'

He began as he spoke to put away some little articles, and got out paper to wrap up others.

'And how came you by all these tastes? Mr. and Mrs. Dallas do not share them, I think.'

'No. Impossible to say. Inherited from some forgotten ancestor, perhaps.'

'Were there ever any Independents or Puritans among your ancestors?'

'No!' said Pitt, with a laughing look at her. 'The record is clean, I believe, on both sides of the house. My mother has not that on her conscience.'

'But you sympathize with such supposititious ancestors?'

'Why do you say so?'

'Mr. Pitt,' said Betty, sitting down and folding her hands seriously in her lap, 'I wish you would let me ask you one thing.'

'Ask it certainly,' said he.

'But it is really not my business; only, I am puzzled, and interested, and do not know what to think. You will not be displeased?'

'I think I can answer for that.'

'Then do tell me why, when you are just going away and cannot carry it on, you should have done what you did last night?'

'As I am just going away, don't you see, it was my only chance.'

'But I do not understand why you did it. You knew it would be something like an earthquake; and what is the use of earthquakes?'

'You remember the Eastern theory—Burmese, is it? or Siamese?—according to which the world rests on the heads of four elephants; when one of the elephants shakes his head, there is an earthquake. But must not the elephant therefore move his head?'

'But the world does not rest on *your* head.'

'I do not forget that,' said Pitt gravely. 'Not the world, but a small piece of it does rest on my head, as on that of every other human creature. On the right position and right movement of every one of us depends more than we know. What we have to do is to keep straight and go straight.'

'But did you think it was *duty* to do what you did last night?'

'I did it in that faith.'

'I wish you would explain to me!' cried the lady. 'I cannot understand. I believe you, of course; but *why* did you think it duty? It just raised a storm; you know it did; they did not like it; and it would only make them more opposed to your new principles. I do not see how it could do any good.'

'Yes,' said Pitt, who meanwhile was going on with his packing and putting away. 'I know all that. But don't you think people ought to show their colours, as much as ships at sea?'

'Ships at sea do not always show their colours.'

'If they do not, when there is occasion, it is always ground for suspicion. It shows that they are for some reason either afraid or ashamed to announce themselves.'

'I do not understand!' said Miss Frere perplexedly. 'Why should *you* show your colours?'

'I said I was moved by duty to propose prayers last night. It was more than that.' Pitt stopped in his going about the room and stood opposite his fair opponent, if she can be called so, facing her with steady eyes and a light in them which drew her wonder. 'It was more than duty. Since I have come to see the goodness of Christ, and the happiness of belonging to Him, I wish exceedingly that everybody else should see it and know it as I do.'

'And, if I remember, you intimated once that it was to be the business of your life to make them know it?'

'What do you think of that purpose?'

'It seems to me extravagant.'

'Otherwise, fanatical!'

'I would not express it so. But what are clergymen for, if this is your business?'

'To whom was the command given?'

'To the apostles and their successors.'

'No, it was given to the whole band of disciples; the order to go into all the world and make disciples of every creature.'

'All the disciples!'

'And to all the disciples that other command was given,—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." And of all the things that a man can want and desire to have given him, there is nothing comparable for preciousness to the knowledge of Christ.'

'But, Mr. Dallas, this is not the general way of thinking?'

'Among those who'—he paused—'who are glad in the love of Christ, I think it must be.'

'Then what are those who are not "glad" in that way?'

'Greatly to be pitied!'

There was a little pause. Pitt went on busily with his work. Betty sat and looked at him, and looked at the varieties of things he was putting under shelter or out of the way. One after another, all bearing their witness to the tastes and appetite for knowledge possessed by the person who had gathered them together. Yes, if Pitt was not a scientist, he was very fond of sciences; and if he were not to be called an artist in some kinds, he was full of feeling for art. What an anomaly he was! how very unlike this room looked to the abode of a fanatic!

'What is to become of all these things?' she asked, pursuing her thoughts.

'They will be safe here till I return.'

'But I mean— You do not understand me. I was thinking rather, what would become of all the tastes and likings to which they bear evidence? How do they match with your new views of things?'

'How do they not match?' said Pitt, stopping short.

'You spoke of giving up all things, did you not?'

'The Bible does,' said Pitt, smiling. 'But that is, *if need be* for the service or honour of God. Did you think they were to be renounced in all cases?'

'Then what did you mean?'

'The Bible means, evidently, that we are to be so minded, toward them and toward God, that we are ready to give them up and do give them up just so far and so fast as His service calls for it. That is all, and it is enough!'

Betty watched him a little longer, and then began again.

'You say, it is to be the business of your life to—well, how shall I put it?—to set people right, in short. Why don't you begin at the beginning, and attack me?'

'I don't know how to point my guns.'

'Why? Do you think me such a hard case?'

He hesitated, and said 'Yes.'

'Why?' she asked again, with a mixture of mortification and curiosity.

'Your defences have withstood all I have been able to bring to bear in the shape of ordnance.'

'Why do you say that? I have been very much interested in all I have heard you say.'

'I know that; and not in the least moved.'

Betty was vexed. Had her tactics failed so utterly? Did Pitt think she was a person quite and irremediably out of his plane, and inaccessible to the interests which he ranked first of all? She had wanted to get nearer to him. Had she so failed? She would not let the tears come into her eyes, but they were ready, if she would have let them.

'So you give me up!' she said.

'I have no alternative.'

'You have lost all hope of me?'

'No. But at present your eyes are so set in another direction that you will not look the way I have been pointing you. Of course, you do not see what I see.'

'In what direction are my eyes so set?'

'I will not presume to tell Miss Frere what she knows so much better than I do.'

Betty bit her lip.

'What is in that cabinet?' she asked suddenly.

'Coins.'

'Oh, coins! I never could see the least attractiveness in coins.'

'That was because—like some other things—they were not looked at.'

'Well, what *is* the interest of them?'

'To find out, I am afraid you must give them your attention. They are like witnesses, stepping out from the darkness of the past and telling the history of it—history in which they moved and had a part, you understand.'

'But the history of the past is not so delightful, is it, that one would care much about hearing the witnesses? What is in that other cabinet, where you are standing?'

'That contains my herbarium.'

'All that? You don't mean that all those drawers are filled with dried flowers?'

'Pretty well filled. There is room for some more.'

'How you must have worked!'

'That was play.'

'Then what do you call work?'

'Well, reading law rather comes into that category.'

'You expect to go on reading law?'

'For the present. I approve of finishing things when they are begun.'

'Mr. Dallas, what are you going to *do?* In what, after all, are you going to be unlike other men? Your mother seems to apprehend some disastrous and mysterious change in all your prospects; I cannot see the necessity of that. In what are you going to be other than she wishes you to be? Are not her fears mistaken?'

Pitt smiled a grave smile; again stopped in his work and stood opposite her.

'I might say "yes" and "no,"' he answered. 'I do not expect to have a red cross embroidered on my sleeve, like the old crusaders. But judge yourself. Can those who live to do the will of God be just like those whose one concern is to do their own will?'

'Mr. Dallas, you insinuate, or your words might be taken to insinuate, that all the rest of us are in the latter class!'

'Whose will do you do?' he said.

There was no answer, for Betty had too much pluck to speak falsely, and too much sense not to know

what was truth. She accordingly did not say anything, and after waiting a minute or two Pitt went on with his preparations, locking up drawers, packing up boxes, taking down and putting away the many objects that filled the room. There was not a little work of this sort to be done, and he went on with it busily, and with an evidently trained and skilled hand.

'Then, after finishing with law, do you expect to come back here and unpack all these pretty things again?' she said finally.

'Perhaps. I do not know.'

'Perhaps you will settle in England?'

'I do not yet know what is the work that I have to do in the world. I *shall* know, but I do not know now. It may be to go to India, or to Greenland; or it may be to come here. Though I do not now see what I should do in Seaforth that would be worth living for.'

India or Greenland! For a young man who was heir to no end of money, and would have acres of land! Miss Betty perceived that here was something indeed very different from the general run of rich young men, and that Mrs. Dallas had not been so far wrong in her forebodings. 'How very absurd!' she said to herself as she went away down the open staircase; 'and what a pity!'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SKIRMISHING.

To the great chagrin of his mother, and, indeed, of everybody, Pitt took his departure a few days before the necessary set termination of his visit. He must, he declared, have a few days to run down from London into the country and find out the Gainsborough family; if Colonel Gainsborough and his daughter had really gone home, he must know.

'What on earth do you want to know for?' his lather had angrily asked.
'What concern is it to you, in any way? Pitt, I wish you would take all
the time you have and use it to make yourself agreeable to Miss Frere.
Where could you do better?'

'I have no time for that now, sir.'

'Time! What is time? Don't you admire her?'

'Everyone must do that.'

'I have an idea she don't dislike you. It would suit your mother and me very well. She has not money, but she has everything else. There has been no girl more admired in Washington these two winters past; no girl. You would have a prize, I can tell you, that many a one would like to hinder your getting.'

'I have no time, sir, now; and I must find out my old friends, first of all.'

'Do you mean, you want to marry *that* girl?' said Mr. Dallas, imprudently flaming out.

Pitt was at the moment engaged in mending up a precious old volume, which by reason of age and use had become dangerously dilapidated. He was manipulating skilfully, as one accustomed to the business, with awl and a large needle, surrounded by his glue-pot and bits of leather and paper. At the question he lifted up his head and looked at his father. Mr. Dallas did not like the look; it was too keen and had too much recognition in it; he feared he had unwarily showed his play. But Pitt answered then quietly, going on with his work again.

'I said nothing of that, sir; I do not know anything about that. My old friends may be in distress; both or one of them; it is not at all unlikely, I think. If things had gone well with them, you would have been almost sure to hear of their whereabouts at least. I made a promise, at any rate, and I am bound to find them, one side or the other of the Atlantic.'

'Don Quixote!' muttered his father. 'Colonel Gainsborough, I have no doubt, has gone home to his people, whom he ought never to have left.'

'In that case I can certainly find them.'

Mr. Dallas seldom made the mistake of spoiling his cause with words; he let the matter drop, though his mouth was full of things he would have liked to speak.

So the time came for Pitt's departure, and he went; and the two women he left behind him hardly dared to look at each other; the one lest she should betray her sorrow, and the other lest she should seem to see it. Betty honestly suffered. She had found Pitt's society delightful; it had all the urbanity without the emptiness of that she was accustomed to. Whether right or wrong, he was undoubtedly a person in earnest, who meant his life to be something more than a dream or a play, and who had higher ends in view than to understand dining, or even to be an acknowledged critic of light literature, or a leader of fashion. Higher ends even than to be at the head of the State or a leader of its armies. There was enough natural nobleness in Betty to understand Pitt, at least in a degree, and to be mightily attracted by all this. And his temper was so fine, his manners so pleasant, his tender deference to his mother so beautiful. Ah, such a man's wife would be well sheltered from some of the harshest winds that blow in the face of human nature! Even if he were a little fanatical, it was a fanaticism which Betty half hoped, half inconsistently feared, would fade away with time. He had stayed just long enough to kindle a tire in her heart, which now she could not with a blow or a breath extinguish; not long enough for the fire to catch any loose tinder lying about on the outskirts of his. Pitt rode away heart-whole, she was obliged to confess to herself, so far, at least, as she was concerned; and Betty had nothing to do now but to feel how that fire bit her, and to stifle the smoke of it. Mrs. Dallas was a woman and a mother, and she saw what Betty would not have had her see for any money.

'*I* think Pitt was taken with her,' she said to her husband, as one seeks to strengthen a faint belief by putting it into words.

'He is taken with nothing but his own obstinacy!' growled Mr. Dallas.

'His obstinacy never troubled you,' said the mother. 'Pitt was always like that, but never for anything bad.'

'It's for something foolish, then; and that will do as well.'

'Did you sound him?'

'Yes!'

'And what did he say?'

'Said he must see Esther Gainsborough first, confound him!'

'Esther Gainsborough! But he tried and could not find them.'

'He will try on the other side now. He'll waste his time running all over England to discover the family place; and then he will know that there is more looking to be done in America.'

'And he talked of coming over next year! Husband, he must not come. We must go over there.'

'Next summer. Yes, that is the only thing to do.'

'And we will take Betty Frere along with us.'

Mrs. Dallas said nothing of this scheme at present to the young lady, though it comforted herself. Perhaps it would have comforted Betty too, whose hopes rested on the very faint possibility of another summer's gathering at Seaforth. That was a very doubtful possibility; the hope built upon it was vaporously unsubstantial. She debated with herself whether the best thing were not to take the first passable offer that should present itself, marry and settle down, and so deprive herself of the power of thinking about Pitt, and him of the fancy that she ever had thought about him. Poor girl, she had verified the truth of the word which speaks about going on hot coals; she had burned her feet. She had never done it before; she had played with a dozen men at different times, allowed them to come near enough to be looked at; dallied with them, discussed, and rejected, successively, without her own heart ever even coming in danger; as to danger to their's, that indeed had not been taken into consideration, or had not excited any scruple. Now, now, the fire bit her, and she could not stifle it; and a grave doubt came over her whether even that expedient of marriage might be found able to stifle it. She went away from Seaforth a few days after Pitt's departure, a sadder woman than she had come to it, though, I fear, scarce a wiser.

On her way to Washington she tarried a few days in New York; and there it chanced that she had a meeting which, in the young lady's then state of mind, had a tremendous interest for her.

Society in New York at that day was very little like society there now. Even granting that the same principles of human nature underlay its developments, the developments were different. Small companies, even of fashionable people, could come together for an evening; dancing, although loved and practised, did not quite exclude conversation; supper was a far less magnificent affair; and fashion itself was much more necessarily and universally dependent on the accessories of birth, breeding, and education, than is the case at present. It was known who everybody was; parvenus were few; and there was still a flavour left of old-world traditions and colonial antecedents. So, when Miss Frere was invited to one of the best houses in the city to spend the evening, she was not surprised to find only a moderate little company assembled, and dresses and appointments on an easy and unostentatious footing, which now is nearly unheard of. There was elegance enough, however, both in the dresses and persons of many of those present; and Betty was quite in her element, finding herself as usual surrounded by attentive and admiring eyes, and able to indulge her love of conversation; for this young lady liked talking better than dancing. Indeed, there was no dancing in the early part of the evening; it was rather a musical company, and Betty's favourite amusement was often interrupted; for the music was too good, and the people present too well-bred, to allow of that jumble of sounds musical and unmusical which is so distressing, and alas! not so rare.

Several bits of fine, old-fashioned music had been given, from Mozart and Beethoven and Handel; and Betty had got into full swing of conversation again, when a pause around her gave notice that another performer was taking her seat at the piano. Betty checked her speech with a little impulse of vexation, and cast her eyes across the room.

'Who is it now?' she asked.

There was a little murmur of question and answer, for the gentlemen immediately at hand did not know; then she was told, 'It is a Miss Gainsborough.'

'Gainsborough!' Betty's eyes grew large, and her face took a sudden gravity. 'What Gainsborough?'

Nobody knew. 'English, I believe,' somebody said.

All desire to talk died out of Betty's lips; she became as silent as the most rigid decorum could have demanded, and applied herself to listen, and of course those around her were becomingly silent also. What was the astonishment of them all, to hear the notes of a hymn, and then the hymn itself, sung by a sweet voice with very clear accent, so that every word was audible! The hymn was not known to Miss Frere; it was fine and striking; and the melody, also unfamiliar, was exceedingly simple. Everybody listened, that was manifest; it was more than the silence of politeness which reigned in the rooms until the last note was ended. And Betty listened more eagerly than anybody, and a strange thrill ran through her. The voice which sang the hymn was not finer, not so fine as many a one she had heard; it was thoroughly sweet and had a very full and rich tone; its power was only moderate. The peculiarity lay in the manner with which the meaning was breathed into the notes. Betty could not get rid of the fancy that it was a spirit singing, and not a woman. Simpler musical utterance she had never heard, nor any, in her life, that so went to the heart. She listened, and wondered as she listened what it was that so moved her. The voice was tender, pleading, joyous, triumphant. How anybody should dare sing such words in a mixed company, Betty could not conceive; yet she envied the singer; and heard with a strange twinge at her heart the words of the chorus, which was given with the most penetrating ring of truth—

'Glory, glory, glory, glory,
Glory be to God on high,
Glory, glory, glory, glory,
Sing His praises through the sky;
Glory, glory, glory, glory,
Glory to the Father give:
Glory, glory, glory, glory,
Sing His praises, all that live!'

The hymn went on to offer Christ's salvation to all who would have it; and closed with a variation of the chorus, taken from the song of the redeemed in heaven,—'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.'

As sweet and free as the jubilant shout of a bird the notes rang; with a *lift* in them, however, which the unthinking creature neither knows nor can express. Betty's eye roved once or twice round the room during the singing to see how the song was taken by the rest of the company. All listened, but she could perceive that some were bored and some others shocked. Others looked curiously grave.

The music ceased and the singer rose. Nobody proposed that she should sing again.

'What do you think of the good taste of that?' one of Betty's cavaliers asked her softly.

'Oh, don't talk about good taste! Who is she?'

'I—really, I don't know—I believe somebody said she was a teacher somewhere. She has tried her hand on us, hasn't she?'

'A teacher!' Betty repeated the word, but gave no attention to the question. She was looking across the room at the musician, who was standing by the piano talking with a gentleman. The apartment was not so large but that she could see plainly, while it was large enough to save her from the charge of ill-bred staring. She saw a moderately tall figure, as straight as an Indian, with the head exquisitely set on the shoulders, the head itself covered with an abundance of pale brown hair, disposed at the back in a manner of careless grace which reminded Betty of a head of Sappho on an old gem in her possession. The face she could not see quite so well, for it was partly turned from her; Betty's attention centred on the figure and carriage. A pang of jealous rivalry shot through her as she looked. There was not a person in the room that carried her head so nobly, nor whose pose was so stately and graceful; yet, stately as it was, it had no air of proud self-consciousness, nor of pride at all; it was not that; it was simple, maidenly dignity, not dignity aped. Betty read so much, and rapidly read what else she could see. She saw that the figure she was admiring was dressed but indifferently; the black silk had certainly seen its best days, if it was not exactly shabby; no ornaments whatever were worn with it. The fashion of garments at that day was, as I have remarked, very trying to any but a good figure, while it certainly showed such a one to advantage. Betty knew her own figure could bear comparison with most; the one she was looking at would bear comparison with any. Miss Gainsborough was standing in the most absolute quiet, the arms crossed over one another, with no ornament but their whiteness.

'A good deal of *aplomb* there?' whispered one of Betty's attendants, who saw whither her eyes had gone.

'*Aplomb!*' repeated Betty. 'That is not *aplomb!*'

'Isn't it? Why not?'

'It is something else,' said Betty, eyeing still the figure she was commenting on. 'You don't speak of *balance* unless—how shall I put it? Don't you know what I mean?'

'No!' laughed her companion.

'You might save me the trouble of telling you, if you were clever. You know you do not speak of "balance," except—well, except where either the footing or the feet are somehow doubtful. You would not think of "balance" as belonging to a mountain.'

'A mountain!' said the other, looking over at Esther, and still laughing.

'Yes; I grant you there is not much in common between the two things; only that element of undisturbableness. Do you know Miss Gainsborough?'

'I have not the honour. I have never met her before.'

'I must know her. Who can introduce me?' And finding her hostess at this moment near her, Betty went on: 'Dear Mrs. Chatsworth, do take me over and introduce me to Miss Gainsborough! I am filled with admiration and curiosity. But first, who is she?'

'I really can tell you little. She is a great favourite of my friend Miss Fairbairn; that is how I came to know her. She teaches in Mme. Duval's school. She is English, I believe. Miss Fairbairn says she is very highly accomplished; and I believe it is true.'

'Well, please introduce me. I am dying to know her.'

The introduction was made; the gentleman who had been talking to Miss Gainsborough withdrew; the two girls were left face to face.

Yes, what a face! thought Betty, as soon as it was turned upon her; and with every minute of their being together the feeling grew. Not like any face she had ever seen in her life, Betty decided; what the difference was it took longer to determine. Good features, with refinement in every line of them; a fair, delicate skin, matching the pale brown hair, Betty had seen as good repeatedly. What she had not seen was what attracted her. The brow, broad and intellectual, had a most beautiful repose upon it; and from under it looked forth upon Betty two glorious grey eyes, pure, grave, thoughtful, penetrating, sweet. Yet more than all the rest, perhaps, which struck Miss Frere, was an expression, in mouth and eyes

both, which is seen on no faces but of those who have gone through discipline and have learned the habit of self-renunciation, endurance, and loving ministry.

The two girls sat down together at Betty's instance.

'Will you forgive me?' she said. 'I am a stranger, but I do want to ask you a question or two. May I? and will you hear me patiently? I see you will.'

The other made a courteous, half smiling sign of assent, *not* as if she were surprised. Betty noticed that.

'It is very bold, for a stranger,' she went on, making her observations while she spoke; 'but the thing is earnest with me, and I must seize my chance, if it *is* a chance. It has happened,'—she lowered her voice somewhat and her words came slower,—'it has happened that I have been studying the subject of religion a good deal lately; it interests me; and I want to ask you, why did you sing that hymn?'

'That particular hymn?'

'No, no; I mean, why did you sing a hymn at all? It is not the usual thing, you know.'

'May I ask you a counter question? What should be the motive with which one sings, or does anything of the sort?'

'Motive? why, to please people, I suppose.'

'And you think my choice was not happy?'

'What does she ask me that for?' thought Betty; 'she knows, just as well as I do, what people thought of it. What is she up to?' But aloud she answered,—

'I think it was very happy, as regarded the choice of the hymn; it was peculiar, but very effective. My question meant, why did you sing a hymn at all?'

'I will tell you,' said the other. 'I do not know if you will understand me. I sang that, because I have given myself to Christ, and my voice must be used only as His servant.'

Quick as thought it flashed upon Betty, the words she had heard Pitt Dallas quote so lately, quote and descant upon, about giving his body 'a living sacrifice.' 'How you two think alike!' was her instant reflection; 'and how you would fit if you could come together!—which you never shall, if I can prevent it.' But her face showed only serious attention and interest.

'I do *not* quite understand,' she said. 'Your words are so unusual'—

'I cannot put my meaning in simpler words.'

'Then do you think it wrong to sing common songs?—those everybody sings?'

'*I* cannot sing them,' said Esther simply. 'My voice is Christ's servant.' But the smile with which these (to Betty) severe words were spoken was entirely charming. There was not severity but gladness upon every line of the curving lips, along with a trait of tenderness which touched Betty's heart. In all her life she had never had such a feeling of inferiority. She had given due reverence to persons older than herself; it was the fashion in those days; she had acknowledged a certain social precedence in ladies who were leaders of society and heads of families; she had never had such a feeling of being set down, as before this young, pure, stately creature. Mentally, Betty, as it were, stepped down from the dais and stood with her arms folded over her breast, in the Eastern attitude of reverence, during the rest of the interview.

'Then you do not do anything,' said Betty incredulously, 'if you cannot do it *so?*'

'Not if I know it,' the other said, smiling more broadly and with some archness.

'But still—may I speak frankly?—that does not tell me all. You know—you *must* know—that not everybody would like your choice of music?'

'I suppose, very few.'

'Would it do any good, in any way, to displease them?'

'That is not the first question. The first question, in any case, is,
How may I best do this thing for God?—for His honour and His kingdom.'

'I do not see what His honour and His kingdom have to do with it.'

'It is for His honour that His servants should obey Him, is it not?' said Esther, with another smile. 'And is it not for His kingdom, that His invitations should be given?'

'But *here?*'

'Why not here?'

'It is unusual.'

'I have no business to be anywhere where I cannot do it.'

'That sounds—dreadful!' said Betty honestly.

'Why?'

'Oh, it sounds strict, narrow, like a sort of slavery, as if one could never be free.'

'Free for what?'

'Whatever one likes! I should be miserable if I felt I could not do what I liked!'

'Can you do it now?' said Esther.

'Well, not always; but I am free to try,' said Betty frankly.

'Is that your definition of happiness?—to try for that which you cannot attain.'

'I do attain it,—sometimes.'

'And keep it?'

'Keep it? You cannot keep anything in this world.'

'I do not think anything is happiness, that you cannot keep.'

'But—if you come to that—what *can* you keep?' said Betty.

Esther bent forward a little, and said, with an intense gleam in her grey eyes, which seemed to dance and sparkle,

'"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."'

'I do not know Him,' Betty breathed out, after staring at her companion.

'I saw that.'

Esther rose, and Betty felt constrained to rise too.

'Oh, are you going?' she cried. 'I have not done talking. How can I know Him?'

'Do you wish me to tell you?'

'Indeed, yes.'

'If you are in dead earnest, and seek Him, He will reveal Himself to you. But then, you must be willing to obey every word He says. Good night.'

She offered her hand. Before Miss Frere, however, could take it, up came the lady of the house.

'You are not *going*, Miss Gainsborough?'

'My father would be uneasy if I stayed out late.'

'Oh, well, for once! What have you two been talking about? I saw several gentlemen casting longing looks in this direction, but they did not venture to interrupt. What were you discussing?'

'Life in general,' said Betty.

'Life!' echoed the older woman, and her brow was instantly clouded. 'What is the use of talking about that? Can either of you say that her life is not a failure?'

'Miss Gainsborough will say that,' replied Betty. 'As for me, my life is a problem that I have not

solved.'

'What do you mean by a "failure," Mrs. Chatsworth?' the other girl asked.

'Oh, just a failure! Turning out nothing, coming to nothing; nothing, I mean, that is satisfying. "*Tout lasse,—tout casse,—tout passe!*" A true record; but isn't it sorrowful?'

'I do not think it need be true,' said Esther.

'It is not true with you?'

'No, certainly not.'

'Your smile says more than your words. What a smile! My dear, I envy you. And yet I do not. You have got to wake up from all that. You are seventeen, eighteen—nineteen, is it?—and you have not found out yet that the world is hollow and your doll stuffed with sawdust.'

'But the world is not all.'

'Isn't it? What is?'

'The Lord said, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."'

'Everlasting life! In the next world! Oh yes, my dear, but I was speaking of life now.'

'Does not everlasting life begin now?' said Esther, with another of those rare smiles. They were so rare and so beautiful that Betty had come to watch for them,—arch, bright, above all happy, and full of a kind of loving power. 'The Lord said "hath"; He did not say will "have."'

'Miss Gainsborough, you talk riddles.'

'I am sorry,' said Esther; 'I do not mean to do that. I am speaking the simplest truth. We were made to be happy in the love of God; and as we were made for that, nothing less will do.'

'Are you happy? My dear, I need not ask; your face speaks for you. I believe that pricked me on to ask the question with which we began, in pure envy. I see you are happy. But confess honestly now, honestly, and quite between ourselves, confess there is some delightful lover somewhere, who provokes those smiles, with which no doubt you reward him?'

Esther's grey eyes opened unmistakeably at her hostess while she was speaking, and then a light colour rose on her cheek, and then she laughed.

'I neither have, nor ever expect to have, anything of the kind,' she said. And then she was no longer to be detained, but took leave, and went away.

'She is a little too certain about the lover,' remarked Miss Frere.
'That looks as if there were already one, *in petto*.'

'She is poor,' said Mrs. Chatsworth. 'She has not much chance. I believe she supports herself and her father—he is old or invalid or something—by teaching; perhaps they have a little something to help her out. But I fancy she sees very little society. I never meet her anywhere. The lady in whose house she was educated is a very warm friend of hers, and she introduced her to me. So I get her to come here sometimes for a little change.'

Betty went home with a great many thoughts in her mind, which kept her half the night awake. Jealousy perhaps pricked her the most. Not that Pitt loved this girl; about that Betty was not sure; but how he would love her if he could see her! How anybody would, especially a man of refined nature and truth of character, who requires the same in those connected with him. What a pure creature this was! and then, she was not only tender, but strong. The look on her face, the lines of her lips, told surely of self-control, self-denial, and habitual patience. People do not look so, who have all they need of this world's goods, and have always dipped their hands into full money bags. No; Esther had something to bear, and something to do, both of which called for and called out that strength and sweetness; and yet she was so happy!—happy after Pitt's fashion. And this was the girl he had been looking to find. Betty could deserve well of him by letting him know where to find her! But then, all would be lost, and Betty's life a failure indeed. She could not face it. And besides, as things were, they were quite safe for the other two. The childish friendship had faded out; would start up again, no doubt, if it had a chance; but there was no need that it should. Pitt was at least heart-whole, if not memory-free; and as for Esther, she had just declared a lover to be a possibility nowhere within the range of her horizon. Esther would not lose anything by not seeing Pitt any more. But then, *would* she lose nothing? The girl teaching to support herself and her father, alone and poor, what would it be to her life if Pitt suddenly came into it,

with his strong hand and genial temper and plenty of means? What would it be to Betty's life, if he went out of it? She turned and tossed, she battled and struggled with thoughts; but the end was, she went on to Washington without ever paying Esther a visit, or letting her know that her old friend was looking for her.

CHAPTER XL.

LONDON.

The winter passed. In the spring Betty received a letter from Mrs. Dallas, part of which ran as follows:—

'My husband and I have a new plan on foot; we have been meditating it all winter, so it ought to be ripe now. We are going over to spend the summer in England. My son talked of making us a visit again this year, and we decided it was better we should go to him. Time is nothing to us, and to him it is something; for although he will have no need to practise in any profession, I agree with him and Mr. Dallas in thinking that it is good a young man should *have* a profession; and, at any rate, what has been begun had better be finished. So, some time in May we think to leave Seaforth, on our way to London. Dear Betty, will you take pity on an old woman and go with us, to give us the brightness of your youth? Don't you want to see London? and I presume by this time Pitt has qualified himself to be a good cicerone. Besides, we shall not be fixed in London. We will go to see whatever you would most like to see in the kingdom; perhaps run up to Scotland. Of course what *I* want to see is my boy; but other things would naturally have an attraction for you. Do not say no; it would be a great disappointment to me. Meet us in New York about the middle of May. Mr. Dallas wishes to go as soon as the spring storms are over. I have another reason for making this journey; I wish to keep Pitt from coming over to America.'

Betty's heart made a bound as she read this letter, and went on with faster beats than usual after she had folded it up. A voyage, and London, and Pitt Dallas for a showman! What could be more alluring in its temptation and promise? Going about in London with him to guide and explain things—could opportunity be more favourable to finish the work which last summer left undone? Betty's heart jumped at it; she knew she would say yes to Mrs. Dallas; she could say nothing but yes; and yet, questions did come up to her. Would it not be putting herself unduly forward? would it not look as though she went on purpose to see—not London but somebody in London? That would be the very truth, Betty confessed to herself, with a pang of shame and humiliation; the pang was keen, yet it did not change her resolution. What if? Nobody knew, she argued, and nobody would have cause to suspect. There was reason enough, ostensible, why she should go to England with Mrs. Dallas; if she refused to visit all the old ladies who had sons, her social limits would be restricted indeed. But Mrs. Dallas herself; would not she understand? Mrs. Dallas understood enough already, Betty said to herself defiantly; they were allies in this cause. It was very miserable that it should be so; however, not now to be undone or set aside. Lightly she had gone into Mrs. Dallas's proposition last summer; if it had grown to be life and death earnest with her, there was no need Mrs. Dallas should know *that*. It *was* life and death earnest, and she must go to London. It was a capital plan. To have met Pitt Dallas again at Seaforth and again spent weeks in his mother's house while he was there, would have been too obvious; this was better every way. Of course she could not refuse such an invitation; such a chance of seeing something of the world; she who had always been too poor to travel. Pitt could not find any matter of surprise nor any ground for criticism in her doing that. And it would give her all the opportunity she wished for.

Here, most inopportunely, came before her the image of Esther. How those two would suit each other! How infallibly Pitt would be devoted to her if he could see her! But Betty said to herself that *she* had a better right. They did not know each other; he was nothing to Esther, Esther was nothing to him. She set her teeth, and wrote to Mrs. Dallas that she would be delighted to go.

And then, having made her choice, she put away thought. All through the voyage she was a most delightful companion. A little stifled excitement, like forcing heat in a greenhouse, made all her social qualities blossom out in unwonted brilliancy. She was entertaining, bright, gay, witty, graceful; she was the admiration and delight of the whole company on board; and Mrs. Dallas thought to herself with proud satisfaction that Pitt could find nothing better than that, nor more attractive, and that she need wish nothing better than that at the head of her son's household and by his side. That Pitt could withstand such enchantment was impossible. She was doing the very best thing she could do in coming

to England and in bringing Betty with her.

Having meditated this journey for months, Mr. Dallas had made all his preparations. Rooms had been engaged in a pleasant part of the city, and there, very soon after landing, the little party found themselves comfortably established and quite at home.

'Nothing like England!' Mr. Dallas grumbled with satisfaction. 'You couldn't do this in New York; they understand nothing about it, and they are too stupid to learn. I believe there isn't a lodging-house in all the little Dutch city over there; you could not find a single house where they let lodgings in the English fashion.'

'Mr. Dallas, it is not a Dutch city!'

'Half Dutch, and that's enough. Have you let Pitt know we are here, wife?'

Mrs. Dallas had done that; but the evening passed away, nevertheless, without any news of him. They made themselves very comfortable; had an excellent dinner, and went to rest in rooms pleasant and well appointed; but Betty was in a state of feverish excitement which would not let her be a moment at ease. Now she was here, she almost was ready to wish herself back again. How would Pitt look at her? how would he receive her? and yet, what affair was it of his, if his mother brought a young friend with her, to enjoy the journey and make it agreeable? It was nothing to Pitt; and yet, if it *were* nothing to him, Betty would want to take passage in the next packetship sailing for New York or Boston. She drew her breath short, until she could see him.

He came about the middle of the next morning. Mr. Dallas had gone out, and the two ladies were alone, in a high state of expectancy; joyous on one part, most anxious and painful on the other. The first sight of him calmed Betty's heart-beating; at the same time it gave her a great thrill of pain. Pitt was himself so frank and so quiet, she said to herself, there was no occasion for her to fear anything in his thoughts; his greeting of her was entirely cordial and friendly. He was neither surprised nor displeased to see her. At the same time, while this was certainly comforting, Pitt looked too composedly happy for Betty's peace of mind. Apparently he needed neither her nor anybody;—'Do men ever?' said Betty to herself bitterly. And besides, there was in his face and manner a nobleness and a pureness which at one blow drove home, as it were, the impressions of the last year. Such a look she had never seen on any face in her life; *except*—yes, there was one exception, and the thought sent another pang of pain through her. But women do not show what they feel; and Pitt, if he noticed Miss Frere at all, saw nothing but the well-bred quiet which always belonged to Betty's demeanour. He was busy with his mother.

'This is a pleasure, to have you here!' he was saying heartily.

'I thought we should have seen you last night. My letter was in time.
Didn't you get it?'

'It went to my chambers in the Temple; and I was not there.'

'Where were you?'

'At Kensington.'

'At Kensington! With Mr. Strahan.'

'Not with Mr. Strahan,' said Pitt gravely. 'I have been with him a great deal these last weeks. You got my letter in which I told you he was ill?'

'Yes, and that you were nursing him.'

'Then you did *not* get my letter telling of the end of his illness?
You left home before it arrived.'

'You do not mean that uncle Strahan is dead?'

'It is a month ago, and more. But there is nothing to regret, mother.
He died perfectly happy.'

Mrs. Dallas passed over this sentence, which she did not like, and asked abruptly,—

'Then what were you doing at Kensington?'

'There was business. I have been obliged to give some time to it. You will be as much surprised as I was, to learn that my old uncle has left all he had in the world to me.'

'To you!' Mrs. Dallas did not utter a scream of delight, or embrace her son, or do anything that many women would have done in honour of the occasion; but her head took a little loftier set upon her shoulders, and in her cheeks rose a very pretty rosy flush.

'I am not surprised in the least,' she said. 'I do not see how he could have done anything else; but I did not know the old gentleman had so much sense, for all that. Is the property large?'

'Rather large.'

'My dear, I am very glad. That makes you independent at once. I do not know whether I ought to be glad of that; but you would never be led off from any line of conduct you thought fit to enter, by either having or wanting money.'

'I hope not. It is not *high* praise to say that I am not mercenary.
Who was thinking to bribe me? and to what?'

'Never mind,' said Mrs. Dallas hastily. 'Was not the house at
Kensington part of the property?'

'Certainly.'

'And has that come to you too?'

'Yes, of course; just as it stood. I was going to ask if you would not move in and take possession?'

'Take possession!—we?'

'Yes, mother; it is all ready. The old servants are there, and will take very passably good care of you. Mrs. Bunce can cook a chop, and boil an egg, and make a piece of toast; let me see, what else can she do? Everything that my old uncle liked, I know; beyond that, I cannot say how far her power extends. But I think she can make you comfortable.'

'My dear, aren't you going to let the house?'

'No, mother.'

'Why not? You cannot live in chambers and there too?'

'I can never let the house. In the first place, it is too full of things which have all of them more or less value, many of them *more*. In the second place, the old servants have their home there, and will always have it.'

'You are bound by the will?'

'Not at all. The will binds me to nothing.'

'Then, my dear boy! it may be a long time before you would want to set up housekeeping there yourself; you might never wish it; and in the meantime all this expense going on?'

'I know what uncle Strahan would have liked, mamma; but apart from that, I could never turn adrift his old servants. They are devoted to me now; and, besides, I wish to have the house taken care of. When you have seen it, you will not talk any more about having it let. You will come at once, will you not? It is better than *this*. I told Mrs. Bunce she might make ready for you; and there is a special room for Miss Frere, where she may study several things.'

He gave a pleasant glance at the young lady as he spoke, which certainly assured her of a welcome. But Betty felt painfully embarrassed.

'This is something we never contemplated,' she said, turning to Mrs. Dallas. 'What will you do with me? *I* have no right to Mr. Pitt's hospitality, generous as it is.'

'You will come with us, of course,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'You are one of us, as much as anybody could be.'

'And you would be very sorry afterwards if you did not, I can tell you,' said Pitt frankly. 'My old house is quite something to see; and I promise myself some pleasure in the enjoyment you all will have in it. I hope we are so much old friends that you would not refuse me such an honour?'

There was no more to say, after the manner in which this was spoken; and from embarrassment Betty went over to great exultation. What *could* be better than this? and did even her dreams offer her such a bewildering prospect of pleasure. She heard with but half an ear what Pitt and his mother were saying; yet she did hear it, and lost not a word, braiding in her own reflections diligently with the thoughts thus

suggested. They talked of Mr. Strahan, of his illness, through which Pitt had nursed him; of the studies thus interrupted; of the property thus suddenly come into Pitt's hands.

'I do not see why you should go on with your law reading,' Mrs. Dallas broke out at last. 'Really,—why should you? You are perfectly independent already, without any help from your father; house and servants and all, and money enough; your father would say, too much. Haven't you thought of giving up your chambers in the Temple?'

'No, mother.'

'Any other young man would. Why not you? What do you want to study law for any more?'

'One must do something, you know.'

'Something—but I never heard that law was an amusing study. Is it not the driest of the dry?'

'Rather dry—in spots.'

'What is your notion, then, Pitt?—if you do not like it.'

'I do like it. And I am thinking of the use it may be.'

'The *use?*' said Mrs. Dallas bewilderedly.

'It is a grand profession,' he went on; 'a grand profession, when used for its legitimate purposes! I want to have the command of it. If the study is sometimes dry, the practice is often, or it often may be, in the highest degree interesting.'

'Purposes! What purposes?' Mrs. Dallas pursued, fastening on that one word in Pitt's speech.

'Righting the wrong, mother, and lifting up the oppressed. A knowledge of law is necessary often for that; and the practice too.'

'Pitt,' said his mother, 'I don't understand you.'

Betty thought *she* did, and she was glad that Mr. Dallas's entrance broke off the conversation. Then it was all gone over again, Mr. Strahan's illness, Pitt's ministrations, the will, the property, the house; concluding with the plan of removing thither. Betty, saying nothing herself, watched the other members of the party; the gleam in Mr. Dallas's money-loving eyes, the contained satisfaction of Mrs. Dallas's motherly pride, and the extremely different look on the younger man's face. With all the brightness and life of his talk to them, with all the interest and pleasure he showed in the things talked about, there was a quiet apartness on his brow and in his eyes, a lift above trifles, a sweetness and a gravity that certainly found their aliment neither in the sudden advent of a fortune nor in any of the accessories of money. Betty saw and read, while the others were talking; and her outward calm and careless demeanour was no true indication of how she felt. The very things which drew her to Pitt, alas, made her feel set away at a distance from him. What had her restless soul in common with that happy repose that was about him? And yet, how restlessness is attracted by rest! Of all things it seemed to Betty one of the most delightful and desirable. Not to be fretted, not to be anxious; to be never 'out of sorts,' never, seemingly, discontented with anything or afraid of anything!—while these terms were the very reverse of all which must describe her and every one else whom she knew. Where did that high calm come from? No face that Betty had ever seen had that look upon it; except—

Oh, she wished she had never seen that other, or that she could forget it. Those two fitted together. 'But I should make him just as good a wife,' said Betty to herself; 'perhaps better. And *she* does not care; and I do. Oh, what a fool I was ever to go into this thing!'

CHAPTER XLI.

AN OLD HOUSE.

Arrangements were soon made. The landlady of the house was contented with a handsome bonus; baggage was sent off; a carriage was ordered, and the party set forth.

It was a very strange experience to Betty. If her position was felt to be a little awkward, at the same

time it was most deliciously adventurous and novel. She sat demurely enough by Mrs. Dallas's side, eyeing the strange streets through which they passed, hearing every word that was spoken by anybody, and keeping the while herself an extremely smooth and careless exterior. She was full of interest for all she saw, and yet the girl saw it as in a dream, or only as a background upon which she saw Pitt. She saw him always, without often seeming to look at him. The content of Mr. and Mrs. Dallas was inexpressible.

'Where will you find anything like that, now?' said Mr. Dallas, as they were passing Hyde Park. 'Ah, Miss Betty, wait; you will never want to see Washington again. The Capitol? Pooh, pooh! it may do for a little beginning of a colony; but wait till you have seen a few things here. What will you show her first, Pitt?'

'Kensington.'

'Kensington! Ah, to be sure. Well, I suppose your new house takes precedence of all other things for the present.'

'Not my *new* house,' said Pitt. 'It is anything but that. There is nothing new about it but the master. I thought I should bring you back with me, mother; so I told Mrs. Bunce to have luncheon ready. As I said, she can cook a chop.'

By degrees the houses became thinner, as they drove on; grass and trees were again prominent; and it was in a region that looked at least half country that the carriage at last stopped. Indeed more than half country, for the city was certainly left behind. Everything was in fresh green; the air was mild and delicious; the place quiet. The carriage turned from the road and passed through an iron gateway and up a gravel sweep to the door of an old house, shaded by old trees and surrounded by a spread of velvety turf. The impression, as Betty descended from the carriage, was that here had been ages of dignified order and grave tranquillity. The green-sward was even and soft and of vivid freshness; the old trees were stately with their length of limb and great solid trunks; and the house?—

The house, towards which she turned, as if to ask questions of it, was of moderate size, built of stone, and so massively built as if it had been meant to stand for ever. That was seen at once in the thickness of the walls, the strong oaken doorway, and the heavy window frames. But as soon as Betty set foot within the door she could almost have screamed with delight.

'Upon my word, very good! very well!' said Mr. Dallas, standing in the hall and reviewing it. And then, perceiving the presence of the servants, he checked himself and reviewed them.

'These are my uncle's faithful old friends, mother,' Pitt was saying; 'Mrs. Bunce, and Stephen Hill. Have you got something ready for travellers, Mrs. Bunce?'

Dignified order and grave tranquillity was the impression on Betty's mind again, as they were ushered into the dining-room. It was late, and the party sat down at once to table.

But Betty could hardly eat, for feasting her eyes. And when they went up-stairs to their rooms that feast still continued. The house was irregular, with rather small rooms and low ceilings; which itself was pleasant after the more commonplace regularity to which Miss Frere had been accustomed; and then it was full—all the rooms were full—of quaintness and beauty. Oak wainscottings, dark with time; oaken doorways with singular carvings; chimney-pieces, before which Betty stood in speechless delight and admiration; small-paned windows set in deep window niches; in one or two rooms dark draperies; but the late Mr. Strahan had not favoured anything that shut out the light, and in most of the house there were no curtains put up. And then, on the walls, in cupboards and presses, on tables and shelves, and in cabinets, there was an endless variety and wealth of treasures and curiosities. Pictures, bronzes, coins, old armour, old weapons, curiosities of historical value, others of natural production, others, still, of art; some of all these were very valuable and precious. To examine them must be the work of many days; it was merely the fact of their being there which Betty took in now, with a sense of the great riches of the new mental pasture-ground in which she found herself. She changed her dress in a kind of breathless mood; noticing as she did so the old-fashioned and aged furniture of her room. Aged, not infirm; the manufacture solid and strong as ever; the wood darkened by time, the patterns quaint, but to Betty's eye the more picturesque. Her apartment was a corner room, with one deep window on each of two sides; the look-out over a sunny landscape of grass, trees, and scattered buildings. On another side was a deep chimney-place, with curious wrought-iron fire-dogs. What a delightful adventure—or what a terrible adventure—was it which had brought her to this house! She would not think of that; she dressed and went down.

The rest of the party were gathered in the library, and this room finished Betty's enchantment. It was a well-sized room, the largest in the house, on the second floor; and all the properties that made the

house generally interesting were gathered and culminated here. Dark wainscotting, dark bookcases, and dark books, gave it an aspect that might have been gloomy, yet was not so; perhaps because of the many other objects in the room, which gave points of light or bits of colour. What they were, Betty could only find out by degrees; she saw at once, in general, that this must have been a favourite place of the late owner, and that here he had collected a special assemblage of the things that pleased him best. A table at one side must have been made, she thought, about the same time with her chamber furniture, and by the same hand. The floor was dark and polished, and on it lay here and there bits of soft carpeting, which were well worn. Betty advanced slowly to the corner where the party were siting, taking in the effect of all this; then almost started as Pitt gave her a chair, to see in the corner just beyond the group a stuffed bear showing his teeth at her.

The father and mother had been talking about various matters at home, and the talk went on. Betty presently left them, and began to examine the sides of the room. She studied the bear, which was in an upright position, resting one paw on a stick, while the other supported a lamp. From the bear her eyes passed on to a fire-screen, which stood before the empty chimney, and then she went to look at it nearer by. It was a most exquisite thing. Two great panes of plate glass were so set in a frame that a space of some three or four inches separated them. In this space, in every variety of position, were suspended on invisible wires some twenty humming birds, of different kinds; and whether the light fell upon this screen in front or came through it from behind, the display was in either case most beautiful and novel. Betty at last wandered to the chimney-piece, and went no farther for a good while; studying the rich carving and the coat of arms which was both sculptured and painted in the midst of it. By and by she found that Pitt was beside her.

'Mr. Strahan's?' she asked.

'No; they belonged to a former possessor of the house. It came into my uncle's family by the marriage of his father.'

'It is very old?'

'Pretty old; that is, what in America we would call so. It reaches back to the time of the Stuarts. Really that is not so long ago as it seems.'

'It is worth while to be old, if it gives one such a chimney-piece as that. But I should not like another man's arms in it, if I were you.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know—I believe it diminishes the sense of possession.'

'A good thing, then,' said Pitt. 'Do you remember that "they that have" are told to be "as though they possessed not"?'

'How can they?' answered Betty, looking at him.

'You know the words?'

'I seem to have read them—I suppose I have.'

'Then there must be some way of making them true.'

'What is this concern, Pitt?' inquired his father, who had followed them, and was looking at a sort of cabinet which was framed into the wall.

'I was going to invite Miss Frere's attention to it; yet, on
reflection, I believe she is not enthusiastic for that sort of thing.
That is valuable, father. It is a collection of early Greek coins.
Uncle Strahan was very fond of that collection, and very proud of it.
He had brought it together with a great deal of pains.'

'Rubbish, I should say,' observed the elder man; and he moved on, while
Betty took his place.

'Now, I do not understand them,' she said.

'You can see the beauty of some of them. Look at this head of Apollo.'

'That is beautiful—exquisite! Was that a common coin of trade?'

'Doubtful, in this case. It is not certain that this was not rather a medal struck for the members of the

Amphictyonic Council. But see this coin of Syracuse; *this* was a common coin of trade; only of a size not the most common.'

'All I can say is, their coinage was far handsomer than ours, if it was like that.'

'The reverse is as fine as the obverse. A chariot with four horses, done with infinite spirit.'

'How can you remember what is on the other side—I suppose this side is what you mean by the *obverse*—of this particular coin? Are you sure?'

Pitt produced a key from his pocket, unlocked the glass door of the cabinet, and took the coin from its bed. On the other side was what he had stated to be there. Betty took the piece in her hands to look and admire.

'That is certainly very fine,' she said; but her attention was not entirely bent on the coin 'Is this lovely head meant for Apollo too?'

'No; don't you see it is feminine? Ceres, it is thought; but Mr. Strahan held that it was Arethusa, in honour of the nymph that presided over the fine fountain of sweet water near Syracuse. The coinage of that city was extremely beautiful and diversified; yielding to hardly any other in design and workmanship. Here is an earlier one; you see the very different stage art had attained to.'

'A regular Greek face,' remarked Betty, going back to the coin she held in her hand. 'See the straight line of the nose and the very short upper lip. Do you hold that the Greek type is the only true beauty?'

'Not I. The only *true* beauty, I think, is that of the soul; or at least that which the soul shines through.'

'What are these little fish swimming about the head? They would seem to indicate a marine deity.'

'The dolphin; the Syracusan emblem.'

'I wish I had been born in those times!' said Betty. And the wish had a meaning in the speaker's mind which the hearer could not divine.

'Why do you wish that?' asked Pitt, smiling.

'I suppose the principal reason is, that then I should not have been born in this. Everything is dreadfully prosy in our age. Oh, not *here*, at this moment! but this is a fairy tale we are living through. I know how the plain world will look when I go back to it.'

'At present,' said Pitt, taking the Syracusan coin and restoring it to its place, 'you are not an enthusiastic numismatist!'

'No; how should I? Coins are not a thing to excite enthusiasm. They are beautiful, and curious, but not exactly—not exactly stirring.'

'I had a scholar once,' remarked Pitt, as he locked the glass door of the cabinet, 'whose eyes would have opened very wide at sight of this collection. Have you heard anything of the Gainsboroughs, mother?'

Betty started, inwardly, and was seized with an unreasoning fear lest the question might next be put to herself. Quietly, as soon as she could, she moved away from the coin cabinet, and seemed to be examining something else; but she was listening all the while.

'Nothing whatever,' Mrs. Dallas had answered.

'They have not come back to England. I have made out so much. I looked up the family after I came home last fall; their headquarters are at a nice old place down in Devonshire. I introduced myself and got acquainted with them. They are pleasant people. But they knew nothing of the colonel. He has not come home, and he has not written. Thus much I have found out.'

'It is not certain, however,' grumbled Mr. Dallas. 'I believe he *has* come home; that is, to England. He was on bad terms with his people, you know.'

'When are you going to show Miss Frere and me London?' asked Mrs. Dallas. She was as willing to lead off from the other subject as Betty herself.

'Show you London, mamma! Show you a bit of it, you mean. It would take something like a lifetime to show you London. What bit will you begin with?'

'What first, Betty?' said Mrs. Dallas.

Betty turned and slowly came back to the others.

'Take her to see the lions in the Tower,' suggested Mr. Dallas; 'and the wax-work.'

'Do you think I have never seen a lion, Mr. Dallas?' said the young lady.

'Well,—small ones,' said the gentleman, stroking his chin. 'But the Tower is a big lion itself. I believe *I* should like to go to the Tower. I have never been there yet, old as I am.'

'I do not want to go to the Tower,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'I do not care for that kind of thing. I should like to see the Temple, and Pitt's chambers.'

'So should I,' said the younger lady.

'You might do worse,' said Pitt. 'Then to-morrow we will go to the Temple, and to St. Paul's.'

'St. Paul's? *that* will not hold us long, will it?' said Betty. 'Is it so much to see?'

'A good deal, if you go through and study the monuments!'

'Well,' said Betty, 'I suppose it will be all delightful.'

But when she had retired to her room at night, her mood was not just so. She sat down before her glass and ruminated. That case of coins, and Pitt's old scholar, and the Gainsboroughs, who had not come home. He would find them yet; yes, and Esther would one day be standing before those coins; and Pitt would be showing them to her; and she—she would enter into his talk about them, and would understand and have sympathy, and there would be sympathy on other points too. If Esther ever stood there, in that beautiful old library, it would be as mistress and at home. Betty had a premonition of it; she put her hands before her eyes to shut out the picture. Suppose she earned well of the two and gained their lasting friendship by saying the words that would bring them to each other? That was one way out of her difficulty. But then, why should she? What right had Esther Gainsborough to be happy more than Betty Frere? The other way out of her difficulty, namely, to win Pitt's liking, would be much better; and then, they both of them might be Esther's friends. For of one thing Betty was certain; *if* she could win Pitt, he would be won. No half way-work was possible with him. He would never woo a woman he did not entirely love; and any woman so loved by him would not need to fear any other woman; it would be once for all. Betty had never, as it happened, met thoroughgoing truth before; she recognised it and trusted it perfectly in Pitt; and it was one of the things, she confessed to herself, that drew her most mightily to him. A person whom she could absolutely believe, and always be sure of. Whom else in the world could she trust so? Not her own brothers; not her own father; mother she had none. How did she know so securely that Pitt was an exception to the universal rule?—the question might be asked, and she asked it. She had not seen him tested in any great thing. But she had seen him tried in little bits of everyday things, in which most people think it is no harm to dodge the truth a little; and Betty recognised the soundness of the axiom,—'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.'

CHAPTER XLII.

THE TOWER.

The next morning they went to inspect the Temple; Pitt and the two ladies. Mr. Dallas preferred some other occupation. But the interest brought to the inspection was not altogether legitimate. Mrs. Dallas cared principally to see how comfortable her son's chambers were, and to refresh herself with the tokens of antiquity and importance which attached to the place and the institution to which he belonged. Betty was no antiquarian in the best of times, and at present had all her faculties concentrated on one subject and one question which was not of the past. Nevertheless, it is of the nature of things that a high strain of the mind renders it intensely receptive and sensitive for outward impressions, even though they be not welcomed; like a taut string, which answers to a breath breathed upon it. Betty did not care for the Temple; had no interest in the old Templars' arms on the sides of the gateways; and thought its medley of dull courts and lanes a very undesirable place. What was it to her where Dr. Johnson had lived? she did not care for Dr. Johnson at all, and as little for Oliver Goldsmith.

Pitt, she saw, cared; how odd it was! It was some comfort that Mrs. Dallas shared her indifference.

'My dear,' she said, 'I do not care about anybody's lodgings but yours.
Dr. Johnson is not there now, I suppose. Where are *your* rooms?'

But Pitt laughed, and took them first to the Temple church.

Here Betty could not refuse to look and be interested a little. How little, she did not show. The beauty of the old church, its venerable age, and the strange relics of the past in its monuments, did command some attention. Yet Betty grudged it; and went over the Halls and the Courts afterward with a half reluctant foot, hearing as if against her will all that Pitt was telling her and his mother about them. Oh, what did it matter, that one of Shakspeare's plays had been performed in the Middle Temple Hall during its author's lifetime? and what did it signify whether a given piece of architecture were Early English or Perpendicular Gothic? What did interest her, was to see how lively and warm was Pitt's knowledge and liking of all these things. Evidently he delighted in them and was full of information concerning them; and his interest did move Betty a little. It moved her to speculation also. Could this man be so earnest in his enjoyment of Norman arches and polished shafts and the effigies of old knights, and still hold to the views and principles he had avowed and advocated last year? Could he, who took such pleasure in the doings and records of the past, really mean to attach himself to another sort of life, with which the honours and dignities and delights of this common world have nothing to do?

The question recurred again afresh on their return home. As Betty entered the house, she was struck by the beauty of the carved oak staircase, and exclaimed upon it.

'Yes,' said Pitt; 'that is the prettiest part of the house. It is said to be by Inigo Jones; but perhaps that cannot be proved.'

'Does it matter?' said Betty, laughing.

'Not to any real lover of it; but to the rest, you know, the name is the thing.'

'"Lover of it"!' said Betty. 'Can you love a staircase?'

Pitt laughed out; then he answered seriously.

'Don't you know that all that is good and true is in a way bound up together? it is one whole; and I take it to be certain that in proportion to anyone's love for spiritual and moral beauty will be, *coeteris paribus*, his appreciation of all expression of it, in nature or art.'

'*But*', said Betty, '"spiritual and moral beauty"! You do not mean that this oak staircase is an expression of either?'

'Of both, perhaps. At any rate, the things are very closely connected.'

'You are an enigma!' said Betty.

'I hope not always to remain so,' he answered.

Betty went up the beautiful staircase, noting as she went its beauties, from storey to storey. She had not noticed it before, although it really took up more room than was proportionate to the size of the house. What did Pitt mean by those last words? she was querying. And could it be possible that the owner of a house like this, with a property corresponding, would not be of the world and live in the world like other men? He must, Betty thought. It is all very well for people who have not the means to make a figure in society, to talk of isolating themselves from society. A man may give up a little; but when he has much, he holds on to it. But how was it with Pitt? She must try and find out.

She accordingly made an attempt that same evening, beginning with the staircase again.

'I admired Inigo Jones all the way up-stairs,' she said, when she had an opportunity to talk to Pitt alone. Mr. Dallas had gone to sleep after dinner, and his wife was knitting at a sufficient distance. 'The quaint fancies and delicate work are really such as I never imagined before in wood-carving. But your words about it remain a puzzle to me.'

'My words? About art being an expression of truth? Surely that is not new?'

'It may be very old; but I do not understand it.'

'You understand, that so far as art is genuine, it is a setter forth of truth?'

'Well, I suppose so; of some truth. Roses must be roses, and trees must be trees; and of course must

look as like the reality as possible.'

'That is the very lowest thing art can do, and in some cases is not true art at all. Her business is to tell truth—never to deceive.'

'What sort of truth then?'

'What I said; spiritual and moral.'

'Ah, there it is! Now you have got back to it. Now you are talking mystery, or—forgive me—transcendentalism.'

'No; nothing but simple and very plain fact. It is this first,—that all truth is one; and this next,—that in the world of creation things material are the expression of things spiritual. So all real beauty in form or colour has back of it a greater beauty of higher degree.'

'You are talking pure mystery.'

'No, surely,' said Pitt eagerly. 'You certainly recognise the truth of what I am saying, in some things. For instance, you cannot look up steadily into the blue infinity of one of our American skies on a clear day—at least *I* cannot—without presently getting the impression of truth, pure, unfailing, incorruptible truth, in its Creator. The rose, everywhere in the world, so far as I know, is the accepted emblem of love. And for another very familiar instance,—Christ is called in the Bible the Sun of righteousness—the Light that is the life of man. Do you know how close to fact that is? What this earth would be if deprived of the sun for a few days, is but a true image of the condition of any soul finally forsaken by the Sun of righteousness. In one word, death; and that is what the Bible means by death, of which the death we commonly speak of is again but a faint image.'

Betty fidgeted a little; this was not what she wished to speak of; it was getting away from her point.

'Your staircase set me wondering about *you*,' she said boldly, not answering his speech at all.

'In yet another connection?' said Pitt, smiling.

'In another connection. You remember you used to talk to me pretty freely last summer about your new views and plans of life?'

'I remember. But my staircase?'—

'Yes, your staircase. You know it is rich and stately, as well as beautiful. Whatever it signifies to you, to my lower vision it means a position in the world and the means to maintain it. And I debated with myself, as I went up the stairs, whether the owner of all this would *still* think it his duty to live altogether for others, and not for himself like common people.'

She looked at him, and Pitt met her inquiring eyes with a steady, penetrating, grave look, which half made her wish she had let the question alone. He delayed his answer a little, and then he said,—

'Will you let me meet that doubt in my own way?'

'Certainly!' said Betty, surprised; 'if you will forgive me its arising.'

'Is one responsible for doubts? One *may* be responsible for the state of mind from which they spring. Then, if you will allow me, I will say no more on the subject for a day or two. But I will not leave you unanswered; that is, unless you refuse to submit to my guidance, and will not let me take my own way.'

'You are mysterious!'

'Will you go with me when I ask you?'

'Yes.'

'Then that is sufficient.'

Betty thought she had not gained much by her move.

The next day was given to the Tower. Mrs. Dallas did not go; her husband was of the party instead. The inspection of the place was thorough, and occupied some hours; Pitt, being able, through an old friend of Mr. Strahan's who was now also *his* friend, to obtain an order from the Constable for seeing the whole. At dinner Betty delivered herself of her opinion.

'Were you busy all day with nothing but the Tower? asked Mrs. Dallas.

'Stopped for luncheon,' said her husband.

'And we did our work thoroughly, mamma,' added Pitt. 'You must take time, if you want to see anything.'

'Well,' said Betty, 'I must say, if this is what it means, to live in an old country, I am thankful I live in a new one.'

'What now?' asked Mr. Dallas. 'What's the matter?'

'Mrs. Dallas was wiser, that she did not go,' Betty went on. '"I have supped fall of horrors." Really I have read history, but that gives it to one diluted. I had no notion that the English people were so savage.'

'Come, come! no worse than other people,' Mr. Dallas put in.

'I do not know how it is with other people. I am thankful we have no such monument in America. I shouldn't think snow would lie on the Tower!'

'Doesn't often,' said Pitt.

'Think, Mrs. Dallas! I stood in that little chapel there,—the prisoners' chapel,—and beneath the pavement lay between thirty and forty people, the remains of them, who lay there with their heads separated from their bodies; and some of them with no heads at all. The heads had been set up on London bridge, or on Temple Bar, or some other dreadful place. And then as we went round I was told that here was the spot where Lady Jane Grey was beheaded; and there was the window from which she saw the headless body of her husband carried by; and *there* stood the rack on which Anne Askew was tortured; and there was the prison where Arabella Stuart died insane; and here was the axe which used to be carried before the Lieutenant when he took a prisoner to his trial, and was carried before the prisoner when he returned, mostly with the sharp edge turned towards him. I do not see how people used to live in those times. There are Anne Boleyn and her brother, Lady Jane Grey and her husband, and other Dudleys innumerable'—

'My dear, do stop,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'I cannot eat my dinner, and you cannot.'

'Eat dinner! Did anybody use to eat dinner, in those times? Did the world go on as usual? with such horrors on the throne and in the dungeon?'

'It is a great national monument,' said Mr. Dallas, 'that any people might be proud of.'

'Proud! Well, I am glad, as I said, that the sky is blue over America.'

'The blue looks down on nothing so fine as our old Tower. And it isn't so blue, either, if you could know all.'

'Where are you going to take us next, Pitt?' Mrs. Dallas asked, to give things a pleasanter turn.

'How did you like St. Paul's, Miss Betty?' her husband went on, before Pitt could speak.

'It is very black!'

'That is one of its beauties,' remarked Pitt.

'Is it? But I am accustomed to purer air. I do not like so much smoke.'

'You were interested in the monuments?' said Mrs. Dallas.

'Honestly, I am not fond of monuments. Besides, there is really a reminiscence of the Tower and the axe there very often. I had no conception London was such a place.'

'Let us take her to Hyde Park and show her something cheerful, Pitt.'

'I should like above all things to go to the House of Commons and hear a debate—if it could be managed.'

Pitt said it could be managed; and it was managed; and they went to the Park; and they drove out to see some of the beauties near London, Richmond, Hampton Court, and Windsor; and several days passed away in great enjoyment for the whole party. Betty forgot the Tower and grew gay. The strangeness of her position was forgotten; the house came to be familiar; the alternation of sight-seeing with the quiet household life was delightful. Nothing could be better, might it last. Could it not last?

Nay, Betty would have relinquished the sight-seeing and bargained for only the household life, if she could have retained that.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MARTIN'S COURT.

'What is for to-day, Pitt?'

There had been a succession of rather gay days, visiting of galleries and palaces. Mrs. Dallas put the question at breakfast.

'I am going to show Miss Frere something, if she will allow me.'

'She will allow you, of course. You have done it pretty often lately.
Where is it now?'

'Nowhere for you, mamma. My show to-day is for Miss Frere alone.'

'Alone? Why may I not go?'

'You would not enjoy it.'

'Then perhaps she will not enjoy it.'

'Perhaps not.'

'But, Pitt, what do you mean? and what is this you want to show her which she does not want to see?'

'She can tell you all about it afterwards, if she chooses.'

'Perhaps she will not choose to go with you on such a doubtful invitation.'

Betty, however, declared herself ready for anything. So she was, under such guidance.

They took a cab for a certain distance; then Pitt dismissed it, and they went forward on foot. It was a dull, hot day; clouds hanging low and threatening rain, but no rain falling as yet. Rain, if decided, to a good degree keeps down exhalations in the streets of a city, and so far is a help to the wayfarer who is at all particular about the air he breathes. No such beneficent influence was abroad to-day; and Betty's impressions were not altogether agreeable.

'What part of the city is this?' she asked.

'Not a bad part at all. In fact, we are near a very fashionable quarter. This particular street is a business thoroughfare, as you see.'

Betty was silent, and they went on a while; then turned sharp out of this thoroughfare into a narrow alley. It was hot and close and dank enough here to make Miss Frere shrink, though she would not betray it. But dead cats and decaying cabbage leaves, in a not very clean alley, where the sun rarely shines, and briefly then, with the thermometer well up, on a summer day, altogether make an atmosphere not suited to delicate senses. Pitt picked the way along the narrow passage, which at the end opened into a little court. This was somewhat cleaner than the alley; also it lay so that the sun sometimes visited it, though here too his visits could be but brief, for on the opposite side the court was shut in and overshadowed by the tall backs of great houses. They seemed, to Betty's fancy, to cast as much moral as physical shadow over the place. The houses in this court were small and dingy. If one looked straight up, there was a space of grey cloud visible; some days it would no doubt be a space of blue sky. No other thing even dimly suggesting refreshment or purity was within the range of vision. Pitt slowly paced along the row of houses.

'Who lives here?' Betty asked, partly to relieve the oppression that was creeping upon her.

'No householders, that I know of. People who live in one room, or perhaps in two rooms; therefore in every house there are a number of families. This is Martin's court. And *here*,'—he stopped before one of the doors,—'in this house, in a room on the third floor—let me suppose a case'—

'Third floor? why, there are only two stories.'

'In the garret, then,—there lives an old woman, over seventy years old, all alone. She has been ill for a long time, and suffers a great deal of pain.'

'Who takes care of her?' Betty asked, wondering at the same time why Pitt told her all this.

'She has no means to pay anybody to take care of her.'

'But how does she *live?*—if she cannot do anything for herself.'

'She can do nothing at all for herself. She has been dependent on the kindness of her neighbours. They are poor, too, and have their hands full; still, from time to time one and another would look in upon her, light a fire for her, and give her something to eat; that is, when they did not forget it.'

'And what if they did forget it?'

'Then she must wait till somebody remembered; wait perhaps days, to get her bed made; lie alone in her pain all day, except for those rare visits; and even have to hire a boy with a penny to bring her a pitcher of water; lie alone all night and wait in the morning till somebody could give her her breakfast.'

'Why do you tell me all this, Mr. Pitt?' said Betty, facing round on him.

'Ask me that by and by. Come a little farther. Here, in this next house but one, there is a man sick with rheumatism—in a fever; when I first saw him he was lying there shivering and in great pain, with no fire; and his daughter, a girl of perhaps a dozen years old, was trying to light a fire with a few splinters of sticks that she had picked up. That was last winter, in cold weather. They were poverty-stricken, since the man had been some time out of work.'

'Well?' said Betty. 'I must not repeat my question, but what is all this to me? I have no power to help them. Do you know these people yourself?'

'Yes, I know them. In the last house of the row there is another old woman I want to tell you of; and then we will go. She is not ill, nor disabled; she is only very old and quite alone. She is not unhappy either, for she is a true old Christian. But think of this: in the room which she occupies, which is half underground, there is just one hour in the day when a sunbeam can find entrance. For that hour she watches; and when the sky is not clouded, and it comes, she takes her Bible and holds it in the sunshine to read for that blessed hour. It is all she has in the twenty-four. The rest of the time she must only think of what she has read; the place is too dark for any more.'

'Do let us go!' said Betty; and she turned, and almost fled back to the alley, and through the alley back to the street. There they walked more moderately a space of some rods before she found breath and words. She faced round on her conductor again.

'Why do you take me to such a place, and tell me such things?'

'Will you let that question still rest a little while?' Almost as he spoke Pitt called another cab, and Betty and he were presently speeding on again, whither she knew not. It was a good time to talk, and she repeated her question.

'Instead of answering you, I would like to put a question on my side,' he returned. 'What do you think is duty, on the part of a servant of Christ, towards such cases?'

'Pray tell me, is there not some system of poor relief in this place?'

'Yes, there is the parish help. And sorrowful help it is! The parishes are often very large, the sufferers very many, the cases of fraud and trickery almost—perhaps quite—as numerous as those at least which come to the notice of the parish authorities. The parish authorities are but average men; is it wonderful if they are hard administrators? I can tell you, justice is bitterly hard, as she walks the streets here; and mercy's hand has grown rough with friction!'

Betty looked at the speaker, whose brow was knit and his eye darkened and flashing; she half laughed.

'You are eloquent,' she said. 'You ought to be representing the case on the floor of the House of Commons.'

'Well,' he said, coming down to an easier tone, 'the parish authorities are but men, as I said, and they grow suspicious, naturally; and in any case the relief they give is utterly insufficient. A shilling a week,

or two shillings a week,—what would they do for the people I have been telling you of? And it is hard dealing with the parish authorities. I know it, for here and there at least I have followed Job's example; "the cause I knew not, I searched out." One must do that, or one runs the risk of being taken in, and throwing money away upon rogues which ought to go to help honest people.'

'But that takes time?'

'Yes.'

'A great deal of time, if it is to be done often.'

'Yes.'

'Mr. Pitt, if you follow out that sort of business, it would leave you time for nothing else.'

'What better can I do with my time?'

'Just suppose everybody did the like!'

'Suppose they did.'

'What would be the state of things?'

'I should say, the world would be in a better state of health; and that elephant we once spoke of would not shake his head quite so often.'

'But you are not the elephant, as I pointed out, if I remember; the world does not rest on your head.'

'Part of it does. Go on and answer my question. What ought I to do for these people of whom I have told you?'

'But you cannot reach everybody. You can reach only a few.'

'Yes. For those few, what ought I to do?'

'I daresay you know of other cases, that you have not said anything about, equally miserable?'

'*More* miserable, I assure you,' said Pitt, looking at her. 'What then? Answer my question, like a good woman.'

'I am not a good woman.'

'Answer it *like* a good woman, anyhow,' said Pitt, smiling. 'What should I do, properly, for such people as those I have brought to your notice? Apply the golden rule—the only one that *can* give the measure of things. In their place, what would you wish—and have a right to wish—that some one should do for you? what may those who have nothing demand from those who have everything?'

'Why, they could demand all you have got!'

'Not justly. Cannot you set your imagination to work and answer me? I am not talking for nothing. Take my old Christian, near eighty, who sees a sunbeam for one hour in the twenty-four, when the sun shines, and uses it to read her Bible. The rest of the twenty-four hours without even the company of a sunbeam. Imagine—what would you, in her place, wish for?'

'I should wish to die, I think.'

'It would be welcome to Mrs. Gregory, I do not doubt, though perhaps for a different reason. Still, you would not counsel suicide, or manslaughter. While you continued in life, what would you like?'

'Oh,' said Betty, with an emphatic utterance, 'I would like a place where I could breathe!'

'Better lodgings?'

'Fresh air. I would beg for air. Of all the horrors of such places, the worst seems to me the want of air fit to breathe.'

'Then you think she ought to have a better lodging, in a better quarter. She cannot pay for it. I can. Ought I to give it to her?'

Betty fidgeted, inwardly. The conditions of the cab did not allow of much external fidgeting.

'I do not know why you ask me this,' she said.

'No; but indulge me! I do not ask you without a purpose.'

'I am afraid of your purpose! Yes; if I must tell you, I should say, Oh, take me out of this! Let me see the sun whenever he can be seen in this rainy London; and let me have sweet air outside of my windows. Then I would like somebody to look after me; to open my window in summer and make my fire in winter, and prepare nice meals for me. I would like good bread, and a cup of drinkable tea, and a little bit of butter on my bread. And clothes enough to keep clean; and then I would like to live to thank you!'

Betty had worked herself up to a point where she was very near a great burst of tears. She stopped with a choked sob in her throat, and looked out of the cab window. Pitt's voice was changed when he spoke.

'That is just what I thought.'

'And you have done it!'

'No; I am doing it. I could not at once find what I wanted. Now I have got it, I believe. Go on now, please, and tell me what ought to be done for the man in rheumatic fever.'

'The doctor would know better than I.'

'He cannot pay for a doctor.'

'But he ought to have one!'

'Yes, I thought so.'

'I see what you are coming to,' said Betty; 'but, Mr. Pitt, I can *not* see that it is your duty to pay physician's bills for everybody that cannot afford it.'

'I am not talking of everybody. I am speaking of this Mr. Hutchins.'

'But there are plenty more, as badly off.'

'As badly,—and worse.'

'You *cannot* take care of them all.'

'Therefore—? What is your deduction from that fact?'

'Where are you going to stop?'

'Where ought I to stop? Put yourself, in imagination, in that condition I have described; the chill of a rheumatic fever, and a room without fire, in the depth of winter. What would your sense of justice demand from the well and strong and comfortable and *able?* Honestly.'

'Why,' said Betty, again surveying Pitt from one side, '*with my notions*, I should want a doctor, and an attendant, and a comfortable room.'

'I do not doubt his notions would agree with yours,—if his fancy could get so far.'

'But who ought to furnish those things for him is another question.'

'Another, but not more hard to answer. The Bible rule is, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it—"'

'Will you, ought you, to do all that you find to do?'

But Pitt went on, in a quiet business tone: 'In that same court I found, some time ago, a man who had been injured by an accident. A heavy piece of iron had fallen on his foot; he worked in a machine shop. For months he was obliged to stay at home under the doctor's care. He used up all his earnings; and strength and health were alike gone. The man of fifty looked like seventy. The doctor said he could hardly grow strong again, without change of air.'

'Mr. Pitt!'—said Betty, and stopped.

'He has a wife and nine children.'

'What did you do?'

'What would you have done?'

'I don't know! I never thought it was my business to supplement all the world's failures.'

'Suppose for a moment it were Christ the Lord himself in either of these situations we have been looking at?'

'I cannot suppose it!'

'How would you feel about ministry *then?*'

Betty was silent, choked with discomfort now.

'Would you think you could do enough? But, Miss Frere, He says it *is* Himself, in every case of His servants; and what is done to them He counts as done to Himself. And so it is!'

Looking again keenly at the speaker, Betty was sure that the eyes, which did not meet hers, were soft with moisture.

'What did you do for that man?'

'I sent him to the seaside for three weeks. He came back perfectly well. But then his employers would not take him on again; they said they wanted younger men; so I had to find new work for him.'

'There was another old woman you told me of in that dreadful court; what did you do for her?'

'Put her in clover,' said Pitt, smiling. 'I moved Hutchins and his family into a better lodging, where they could have a room to spare; and then I paid Mrs. Hutchins to take care of her.'

'You might go on, for aught I see, and spend your whole life, and all you have, in this sort of work.'

'Do you think it would be a disagreeable disposition to make of both?'

'Why, yes!' said Betty. 'Would you give up all your tastes and pursuits,—literary, and artistic, and antiquarian, and I don't know what all,—and be a mere walking Benevolent Society?'

'No need to give them up, any further than as they would interfere with something more important and more enjoyable.'

'*More enjoyable!*'

'Yes. I think, Miss Betty, the pleasure of doing something for Christ is the greatest pleasure I know.'

Betty could have cried with vexation; in which, however, there was a distracting mingling of other feelings,—admiration of Pitt, envy of his evident happiness, regret that she herself was so different; but, above all, dismay that she was so far off. She was silent the rest of the drive.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DUKE OF TREFOIL.

They drove a long distance, much of the way through uninteresting regions. Pitt stopped the cab at last, took Betty out, and led her through one and another street and round corner after corner, till at last he turned into an alley again.

'Where are you taking me now, Mr. Pitt?' she asked, in some trepidation. 'Not another Martin's Court?'

'I want you to look well at this place.'

'I see it. What for?' asked Betty, casting her eyes about her. It was a very narrow alley, leading again, as might be seen by the gleam of light at the farther end, into a somewhat more open space—another court. *Here* the word open had no application. The sides of the alley were very near together and very high, leaving a strange gap between walls of brick, at least strange when considered with reference to human habitation; all of freedom or expanse there was indicated anywhere being a long and very distant strip of blue sky overhead when the weather was clear. Not even that to-day. The heavy clouds hung low, seeming to rest upon the house-tops, and shutting up all below under their breathless

envelopment. Hot, sultry, stifling, the air felt to Betty; well-nigh unendurable; but Pitt seemed to be of intent that she should endure it for a while, and with some difficulty she submitted. Happily the place was cleaner than Martin's Court, and no dead cats nor decaying vegetables poisoned what air there was. But surely somewhat else poisoned it. The doors of dwellings on the one side and on the other stood open, and here and there a woman or two had pressed to the opening with her work, both to get light and to get some freshness, if there were any to be had.

Half way down the alley, Pitt paused before one of these open doors. A woman had placed herself as close to it as she could, having apparently some fine work in hand for which she could not get light enough. Betty could without much difficulty see past her into the space behind. It was a tiny apartment, smaller than anything Miss Frere had ever seen used as a living room; yet a living room it was. She saw that a very minute stove was in it, a small table, and another chair; and on some shelves against the wall there was apparently the inmate's store of what stood to her for china and plate. Two cups Betty thought she could perceive; what else might be there the light did not serve to show. The woman was respectable-looking, because her dress was whole and tolerably clean; but it showed great poverty nevertheless, being frequently mended and patched, and of that indeterminate dull grey to which all colours come with overmuch wear. She seemed to be middle-aged; but as she raised her head to see who had stopped in front of her, Betty was so struck by the expression and tale-telling of it that she forgot the question of age. Age? she might have been a hundred and fifty years old, to judge by the life-weary set of her features. A complexion that told of confinement, eyes dim with over-straining, lines of face that spoke weariness and disgust; and further, what to Betty's surprise seemed a hostile look of defiance. The face cleared, however, as she saw who stood before her; a great softening and a little light came into it; she rose and dropped a curtsey, which was evidently not a mere matter of form.

'How do you do, Mrs. Mills?' said Pitt, and his voice was very gentle as he spoke, and half to Betty's indignation he lifted his hat also. 'This is rather a warm day!'

'Well, it be, sir,' said the woman, resuming her seat. 'It nigh stifles the heart in one, it do!'

'I am afraid you cannot see to work very well, the clouds are so thick?'

'I thank you, sir; the clouds is allays thick, these days. Had you business with me, Mr. Dallas?'

'Not to-day, Mrs. Mills. I am showing this lady a bit of London.'

'And would the lady be your wife, sir?'

'Oh no,' said Pitt, laughing a little; 'you honour me too much. This is an American lady, from over the sea ever so far; and I want her to know what sort of a place London is.'

'It's a bitter poor place for the likes of us,' said the woman. 'You should show her where the grand folk lives, that built these houses for the poor to be stowed in.'

'Yes, I have showed her some of those, and now I have brought her to see your part of the world.'

'It's not to call a part o' the world!' said the woman. 'Do you call this a part of the world, Mr. Dallas? I mind when I lived where trees grow, and there was primroses in the grass; them's happier that hasn't known it. If you axed me sometimes, I would tell you that this is hell! Yet it ain't so bad as most. It's what folk call very decent. Oh yes! it's decent, it is, no doubt. I'll be carried out of it some day, and bless the day!'

'How is your boy?'

'He's fairly, sir, thank you.'

'No better?' said Pitt gently.

'He won't never be no better,' the woman said, with a doggedness which Betty guessed was assumed to hide the tenderer feeling beneath. 'He's done for. There ain't nothin' but ill luck comes upon folks as lives in such a hole, and couldn't other!'

'I'll come and see you about Tim,' said Pitt. 'Keep up a good heart in the mean while. Good-bye! I'll see you soon.'

He went no farther in that alley. He turned and brought Betty out, called another cab, and ordered the man to drive to Kensington Gardens. Till they arrived there he would not talk; bade Betty wait with her questions. The way was long enough to let her think them all over several times. At last the cab stopped, Pitt handed her out, and led her into the Gardens. Here was a change. Trees of noble age and growth shadowed the ground, greensward stretched away in peaceful smoothness, the dust and the

noise of the great city seemed to be escaped. It was fresh and shady, and even sweet. They could hear each other speak, without unduly raising their voices. Pitt went on till he found a place that suited him, and they sat down, in a refreshing greenness and quiet.

'Now,' said Betty, 'I suppose I may ask. What did you take me to that last place for?'

'That will appear in due time. What did you think of it?'

'It is difficult to tell you what I think of it. Is much of London like that?'

'Much of it is far worse.'

'Well, there is nothing like that in New York or Washington.'

'Do not be too sure. There is something like that wherever rich men are congregated in large numbers to live.'

'Rich men!' cried Betty.

'Yes. So far as I know, this sort of thing is to be found nowhere else, but where rich men dwell. It is the growth of their desire for large incomes. That woman we visited—what did you think of her?'

'She impressed me very much, and oddly. I could not quite read her look. She seemed to be in a manner hostile, not to you, but I thought to all the world beside; a disagreeable look!'

'She is a lace-mender'—

'A lace-mender!' broke in Betty. 'Down in that den of darkness?'

'And she pays— Did you see where she lived?'

'I saw a room not bigger than a good-sized box; is that all?'

'There is an inner room—or box—without windows, where she and her child sleep. For that lodging that woman pays half-a-crown a week—that is, about five shillings American money—to one of the richest noblemen in England.'

'A nobleman!' cried Betty.

'The Duke of Trefoil.'

'A nobleman!' Betty repeated. 'A duke, and a lace-mender, and five shillings a week!'

'The glass roofs of his hothouses and greenhouses would cover an acre of ground. His wife sits in a boudoir opening into a conservatory where it is summer all the year round; roses bloom and violets, and geraniums wreathe the walls, and palm trees are grouped around fountains. She eats ripe strawberries every day in the year if she chooses, and might, like Judah, "wash her feet in the blood of the grape," the fruit is so plenty, the while my lace-mender strains her eyes to get half-a-crown a week for his Grace. All that alley and its poor crowded lodgings belong to him.'

'I don't wonder she looks bitter, poor thing. Do you suppose she knows how her landlord lives?'

'I doubt if she does. She perhaps never heard of the house and gardens at Trefoil Park. But in her youth she was a servant in a good house in the country,—not so great a house,—and she knows something of the difference between the way the rich live and the poor. She is very bitter over the contrast, and I cannot much blame her!'

'Yet it is not just.'

'Which?' said Pitt, smiling.

'That feeling of the poor towards the rich.'

'Is it not? It has some justice. I was coming home one night last winter, late, and found my way obstructed by the crowd of arrivals to an entertainment given at a certain great house. The house stood a little back from the street, and carpeting was laid down for the softly shod feet to pass over. Of course there were gathered a small crowd of lookers-on, pressing as near as they were allowed to come; trying to catch, if they might, a gleam or a glitter from the glories they could not approach. I don't know if the contrast struck them, but it struck me; the contrast between those satin slippers treading the carpet, and the bare feet standing on the muddy stones; feet that had never known the touch of a carpet anywhere, nor of anything else either clean or soft.'

'But those contrasts must be, Mr. Dallas.'

'Must they? Is not something wrong, do you think, when the Duke of Trefoil eats strawberries all the year long, and my lace-mender, in the height of the season, perhaps never sees one?—when the duchess sits in her bower of beauty, with the violets under her feet and the palms over her head, and the poor in her husband's houses cannot get a flower to remind them that all the world is not like a London alley? Does not something within you say that the scales of the social balance might be a little more evenly adjusted?'

'How are you going to do it?'

'If you do not feel that,' Pitt went on, 'I am afraid that some of the lower classes do. I said I did not know whether the contrast struck the people that night, but I do know it did. I heard words and saw looks that betrayed it. And when the day comes that the poor will know more and begin to think about these things, I am afraid there will be trouble.'

'But what can you do?'

'That is exactly what I was going to ask you,' said Pitt, changing his tone and with a genial smile. 'Take my lace-mender for an example. These things must be handled in detail, if at all. She is bitter in the feeling of wrong done her somewhere, bitter to hatred; what can, not you, but I, do for her, to help her out of it?'

'I should say that is the Duke of Trefoil's business.'

'I leave his business to him. What is mine?'

'You have done something already, I can see, for she makes an exception of you.'

'I have not done much,' said Pitt gravely. 'What do you think it was? Her boy was ill; he had met with an accident, and was a thin, pale, wasted-looking child when I first saw them. I took him a rosebush, in full flower.'

'Were they so glad of it?'

Pitt was silent a minute.

'It was about as much as I could stand, to see it. Then I got the child some things that he could eat. He is well now; as well as he ever will be.'

'I did not see the rosebush.'

'Ah, it did not live. Nothing could there.'

'Well, Mr. Pitt, haven't you done your part, as far as this case is concerned?'

'Have I? Would *you* stop with that?'

Betty sat very quiet, but internally fidgeted. What did Pitt ask her these questions for? Why had he taken her on this expedition? She wished she had not gone; she wished she had not come to England; and yet she would not be anywhere else at this moment but where she was, for any possible consideration. She wished Pitt would be different, and not fill his head with lace-menders and London alleys; and yet—even so—things might be worse. Suppose Pitt had devoted his energies to gambling, and absorbed all his interests in hunters and racers. Betty had known that sort of thing; and now summarily concluded that men must make themselves troublesome in one way or another. But this particular turn this man had taken did seem to set him so far off from her!

'What would you do, Mr. Pitt?' she said, with a somewhat weary cadence in her voice which he could not interpret.

'Look at it, and tell me, from your standpoint.'

'If you took that woman out of those lodgings, there would come somebody else into them, and you might begin the whole thing over again. In that way the Duke of Trefoil might give you enough to do for a lifetime.'

'Well?—the conclusion?'

'How can you ask? Some things are self-evident.'

'What do you think that means: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none"?'

'I don't think it means *that*,' said Betty. 'That you are to give away all you have, till you haven't left yourself an overcoat.'

'Are you sure? Not if somebody else needed it more? That is the question. We come back to the —"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you." "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils." How, do you think, can I best do that in the case of Mrs. Mills and her boy? One thing at a time. Never mind what the Duke of Trefoil may complicate in the future.'

'Raise the dead!' Betty echoed.

'Ay,' he said. 'There are worse deaths than that of the body.'

Betty paused, but Pitt waited.

'If they are to be kept alive in any sense,' she said at last, 'they must be taken out of that hole where they are now.'

'And, as you truly suggest that the number of persons wanting such relief is unlimited, the first thing to be done is to build proper houses for the poor. That is what I have set about.'

'*You* have!' cried Betty.

'I cannot do much. True, but that is nothing whatever to the question. I have begun to put up a few houses, which shall be comfortable, easy to keep clean, and rentable for what the industrious poor can afford to pay. That will give sufficient interest for the capital expended, and even allow me, without further outlay, to go on extending my accommodations. Mrs. Mills will move into the first of my new houses, I hope, next month.'

'What have you taken me all this day's expedition for, Mr. Dallas?'
Betty asked suddenly. The pain of the thing was pressing her.

'You remember, you asked a question of me; to wit, whether I were minded still as I seemed to be minded last year. I have showed you a fraction of the reasons why I should not have changed, and you have approved them.'

Betty found nothing to answer; it was difficult not to approve them, and yet she hated the conclusion. The conversation was not resumed immediately. All the quiet beauty of the scene around them spoke, to Betty, for a life of ease and luxury; it seemed to say, Keep at a distance from disagreeable things; if want and squalor are in the world, you belong to a different part of the world; let London be London, you stay in Kensington Gardens. Take the good of your advantages, and enjoy them. That this was the noblest view or the justest conclusion, she would not say to herself; but it was the view in which she had been brought up; and the leopard's spots, we know, are persistent. Pitt had been brought up so too; what a tangent he had taken from the even round of society in general! Not to be brought back?

'I see,' she began after a while,—'from my window at your house I see at some distance what looks like a large and fine mansion, amongst trees and pleasure grounds; whose is it?'

'That is Holland House.'

'Holland House! It looks very handsome outside.'

'It is one of the finest houses about London. And it is better inside than outside.'

'You have been inside?'

'A number of times. I am sorry I cannot take you in; but it is not open to strangers.'

'How did you get in?'

'With my uncle.'

'Holland House! I have heard that the society there is very fine.'

'It has the best society of any house in London; and that is the same,
I suppose, as to say any house in the world.'

'Do you happen to know that by experience?'

'Yes; its positive, not its relative character,' he said, smiling.

'But you— However, I suppose you pass for an Englishman.'

'Yes, but I have seen Americans there. My late uncle, Mr. Strahan, was a very uncommon man, full of rare knowledge, and very highly regarded by those who knew him. Lord Holland was a great friend of his, and he was always welcomed at Holland House. I slipped in under his wing.'

'Then since Mr. Strahan's death you do not go there any more?'

'Yes, I have been there. Lord Holland is one of the most kindly men in the kingdom, and he has not withdrawn the kindness he showed me as Mr. Strahan's nephew and favourite.'

'If you go *there*, you must go into a great deal of London society,' said Betty, wondering. 'I am afraid you have been staying at home for our sakes. Mrs. Dallas would not like that.'

'No,' said Pitt, 'the case is not such. Once in a while I have gone to Holland House, but I have not time for general society.'

'Not time!'

'No,' said Pitt, smiling at her expression.

'Not time for society! That is—*is* it possibly—because of Martin's court, and the Duke of Trefoil's alley, and the like?'

'What do you think?' said Pitt, his eyes sparkling with amusement. 'There is society and society, you know. Can you drink from two opposite sides of a cup at the same time?'

'But one has *duties* to Society!' objected Betty, bewildered somewhat by the argument and the smile together.

'So I think, and I am trying to meet them. Do not mistake me. I do not mean to undervalue *real* society; I will take gladly all I can that will give me mental stimulus and refreshment. But the round of fashion is somewhat more vapid than ever, I grant you, after a visit to my lace-mender. Those two things cannot go on together. Shall we walk home? It is not very far from here. I am afraid I have tired you!'

Betty denied that; but she walked home very silently.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE ABBEY.

This interruption of the pleasure sights was alone in its kind. Pitt let the subject that day so thoroughly handled thenceforth drift out of sight; he referred to it no more; and continually, day after day, he gave himself up to the care of providing new entertainment for his guests. Drives into the country, parties on the river, visits to grand places, to picture galleries, to curiosities, to the British Museum, alternated with and succeeded each other. Pitt seemed untireable. Mrs. Dallas was in a high state of contentment, trusting that all things were going well for her hopes concerning her son and Miss Frere; but Betty herself was going through an experience of infinite pain. It was impossible not to enjoy at the moment these enjoyable things; the life at Pitt's old Kensington house was like a fairy tale for strangeness and prettiness; but Betty was living now under a clear impression of the fact that it *was* a fairy tale, and that she must presently walk out of it. And gradually the desire grew uppermost with her to walk out of it soon, while she could do so with grace and of her own accord. The pretty house which she had so delighted in began to oppress her. She would presently be away, and have no more to do with it; and somebody else would be brought there to reign and enjoy as mistress. It tormented Betty, that thought. Somebody else would come there, would have a right there; would be cherished and cared for and honoured, and have the privilege of standing by Pitt in his works and plans, helping him, and sympathizing with him. A floating image of a fair, stately woman, with speaking grey eyes and a wonderful pure face, would come before her when she thought of these things, though she told herself it was little likely that *she* would be the one; yet Betty could think of no other, and almost felt superstitiously sure at last that Esther it would be, in spite of everything. Esther it would be, she was almost sure, if she, Betty, spoke one little word of information; would she have done well to speak it? Now it was too late.

'I think, Mrs. Dallas,' she began, one day, 'I cannot stay much longer with you. Probably you and Mr.

Dallas may make up your minds to remain here all the winter; I should think you would. If I can hear of somebody going home that I know, I will go, while the season is good.'

Mrs. Dallas roused up, and objected vehemently. Betty persisted.

'I am in a false position here,' she said. 'It was all very well at first; things came about naturally, and it could not be helped; and I am sure I have enjoyed it exceedingly; but, dear Mrs. Dallas, I cannot stay here always, you know. I am ashamed to remember how long it is already.'

'My dear, I am sure my son is delighted to have you,' said Mrs. Dallas, looking at her.

'He is not delighted at all,' said Betty, half laughing. Poor girl, she was not in the least light-hearted; bitterness can laugh as easily as pleasure sometimes. 'He is a very kind friend, and a perfect host; but there is no reason why he should care about my coming or going, you know.'

'Everybody must care to have you come, and be sorry to have you go,
Betty.'

'"Everybody" is a general term, ma'am, and always leaves room for important exceptions. I shall have his respect, and my own too, better if I go now.'

'My dear, I cannot have you!' said Mrs. Dallas uneasily, but afraid to ask a question. 'No, we shall not stay here for the winter. Wait a little longer, Betty, and we will take you down into the country, and make the tour of England. It is more beautiful than you can conceive. Wait till we have seen Westminster Abbey; and then we will go. You can grant me that, my dear?'

Betty did not know how to refuse.

'Has Pitt got over his extravagancies of last year?' the older lady ventured, after a pause.

'I do not think he gets over anything,' said Betty, with inward bitter assurance.

The day came that had been fixed for a visit to the Abbey. Pitt had not been eager to take them there; had rather put it off. He told his mother that one visit to Westminster Abbey was nothing; that two visits were nothing; that a long time and many hours spent in study and enjoyment of the place were necessary before one could so much as begin to know Westminster Abbey. But Mrs. Dallas had declared she did not want to *know* it; she only desired to see it and see the monuments; and what could be answered to that? So the visit was agreed upon and fixed for this day.

'You did not want to bring us here, because you thought we would not appreciate it?' Betty said to Pitt, in an aside, as they were about entering.

'Nobody can appreciate it who takes it lightly,' he answered.

That day remained fixed in Betty's memory for ever, with all its details, sharp cut in. The moment they entered the building, the greatness and beauty of the place seemed to overshadow her, and roused up all the higher part of her nature. With that, it stirred into keen life the feeling of being shut out from the life she wanted. The Abbey, with the rest of all the wonders and antiquities and rich beauties of the city, belonged to the accessories of Pitt's position and home; belonged so in a sort to him; and the sense of the beauty which she could not but feel met in the girl's heart with the pain which she could not bid away, and the one heightened the other, after the strange fashion that pain and pleasure have of sharpening each other's powers. Betty took in with an intensity of perception all the riches of the Abbey that she was capable of understanding; and her capacity in that way was far beyond the common. She never in her life had been quicker of appreciation. The taste of beauty and the delight of curiosity were at times exquisite; never failing to meet and heighten that underlying pain which had so moved her whole nature to sentient life. For the commonplace and the indifferent she had to-day no toleration at all; they were regarded with impatient loathing. Accordingly, the progress round the Poets' corner, which Mrs. Dallas would make slowly, was to Betty almost intolerable. She must go as the rest went, but she went making silent protest.

'You do not care for the poets, Miss Betty,' remarked Mr. Dallas jocosely.

'I see here very few names of poets that I care about,' she responded. 'To judge by the rest, I should say it was about as much of an honour to be left out of Westminster Abbey as to be put in.'

'Fie, fie, Miss Betty! what heresy is here! Westminster Abbey! why, it is the one last desire of ambition.'

'I am beginning to think ambition is rather an empty thing, sir.'

'See, here is Butler. Don't you read *Hudibras?*'

'No, sir.'

'You should. It's very clever. Then here is Spenser, next to him. You are devoted to *The Faerie Queene*, of course!'

'I never read it.'

'You might do worse,' remarked Pitt, who was just before them with his mother.

'Does anybody read Spenser now?'

'It is a poor sign for the world if they do not.'

'One cannot read everything,' said Betty. 'I read Shakspeare; I am glad to see *his* monument.'

It was a relief to pass on at last from the crowd of literary folk into the nobler parts of the Abbey; and yet, as the impression of its wonderful beauty and solemn majesty first fully came upon Miss Frere, it was oddly accompanied by an instant jealous pang: 'He will bring somebody else here some day, who will come as often as she likes, be at home here, and enjoy the Abbey as if it were her own property.' And Betty wished she had never come; and in the same inconsistent breath was exceedingly rejoiced that she had come. Yes, she would take all of the beauty in that she could; take it and keep it in her memory for ever; taste it while she had it, and live on the after-taste for the rest of her life. But the taste of it was at the moment sharp with pain.

Pitt had procured from one of the canons, who had been his uncle's friend, an order which permitted them to go their own way and take their own time, unaccompanied and untrammelled by vergers. No showman was necessary in Pitt's presence; he could tell them all, and much more than they cared about knowing. Mrs. Dallas, indeed, cared for little beyond the tokens of England's antiquity and glory; her interest was mostly expended on the royal tombs and those connected with them. For was not Pitt now, virtually, one of the favoured nation, by habit and connection as well as in blood? and did not England's greatness send down a reflected light on all her sons?—only poetical justice, as it was earlier sons who had made the greatness. But of that Mrs. Dallas did not think. 'England' was an abstract idea of majesty and power, embodied in a land and a government; and Westminster Abbey was in a sort the record and visible token of the same, and testimony of it, in the face of all the world. So Mrs. Dallas enjoyed Westminster Abbey, and her heart swelled in contemplation of its glories; but its real glories she saw not. Lights and shadows, colouring, forms of beauty, associations of tenderness, majesties of age, had all no existence for her. The one feeling in exercise, which took its nourishment from all she looked upon, was pride. But pride is a dull kind of gratification; and the good lady's progress through the Abbey could not be called satisfactory to one who knew the place.

Mr. Dallas was neither proud nor pleased. He was, however, an Englishman, and Westminster Abbey was intensely English, and to go through and look at it was the right thing to do; so he went; doing his duty.

And beside these two went another bit of humanity, all alive and quivering, intensely sensitive to every impression, which must needs be more or less an impression of suffering. Her folly, she told herself, it was which had so stripped her of her natural defences, and exposed her to suffering. The one only comfort left was, that nobody knew it; and nobody should know it. The practice of society had given her command over herself, and she exerted it that day; all she had.

They were making the tour of St. Edmund's chapel.

'Look here, Betty,' cried Mrs. Dallas, who was still a little apart from the others with her son,—'come here and see this! Look here—the tomb of two little children of Edward III.!'

'After going over some of the other records, ma'am, I can but call them happy to have died little.'

'But isn't it interesting? Pitt tells me there were *six* of the little princess's brothers and sisters that stood here at her funeral, the Black Prince among them. Just think of it! Around this tomb!'

'Why should it be more interesting to us than any similar gathering of common people? There is many a spot in country graveyards at home where more than six members of a family have stood together.'

'But, my dear, these were Edward the Third's children.'

'Yes. He was something when he was alive; but what is he to us now? And why should we care,'—Betty hastily went on to generalities, seeing the astonishment in Mrs. Dallas's face,—'why should we be

more interested in the monuments and deaths of the great, than in those of lesser people? In death and bereavement all come down to a common humanity.'

'Not a *common* humanity!' said Mrs. Dallas, rather staring at Betty.

'All are alike on the other side, mother,' observed Pitt. 'The king's daughter and the little village girl stand on the same footing, when once they have left this state of things. There is only one nobility that can make any difference then.'

'"One nobility!"' repeated Mrs. Dallas, bewildered.

'You remember the words,—"Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is *my mother*, *and my sister*, *and brother*." The village girl will often turn out to be the daughter of the King then.'

'But you do not think, do you,' said Betty, 'that *all* that one has gained in this life will be lost, or go for nothing? Education—knowledge—refinement,—all that makes one man or woman really greater and nobler and richer than another,—will *that* be all as though it had not been?—no advantage?'

'What we know of the human mind forbids us to think so. Also, the analogy of God's dealings forbids it. The child and the fully developed philosopher do not enter the other world on an intellectual level; we cannot suppose it. *But*, all the gain on the one side will go to heighten his glory or to deepen his shame, according to the fact of his having been a servant of God or no.'

'I don't know where you are getting to!' said Mrs. Dallas a little vexedly.

'If we are to proceed at this rate,' suggested her husband, 'we may as well get leave to spend all the working days of a month in the Abbey. It will take us all that.'

'After all,' said Betty as they moved, 'you did not explain why we should be so much more interested in this tomb of Edward the Third's children than in that of any farmer's family?'

'My dear,' said Mrs. Dallas, 'I am astonished to hear you speak so. Are not *you* interested?'

'Yes ma'am; but why should I be? For really, often the farmer's family is the more respectable of the two.'

'Are you such a republican, Betty? I did not know it.'

'There is a reason, though,' said Pitt, repressing a smile, 'which even a republican may allow. The contrast here is greater. The glory and pomp of earthly power is here brought into sharp contact with the nothingness of it, So much yesterday,—so little to-day. Those uplifted hands in prayer are exceedingly touching, when one remembers that all their mightiness has come down to that!'

'It is not every fool that thinks so,' remarked Mr. Dallas ambiguously.

'No,' said Betty, with a sudden impulse of championship; 'fools do not think at all.'

'Here is a tablet to Lady Knollys,' said Pitt, moving on. 'She was a niece of Anne Boleyn, and waited upon her to the scaffold.'

'But that is only a tablet,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'Who is this, Pitt?' She was standing before an effigy that bore a coronet; Betty beside her.

'That is the Duchess of Suffolk; the mother of Lady Jane Grey.'

'I see,' said Betty, 'that the Abbey is the complement of the Tower. Her daughter and her husband lie there, under the pavement of the chapel. How comes she to be here?'

'Her funeral was after Elizabeth came to the throne. But she had been in miserable circumstances, poor woman, before that.'

'I wonder she lived at all,' said Betty, 'after losing husband and daughter in that fashion! But people do bear a great deal and live through it!'

Which words had an application quite private to the speaker, and which no one suspected. And while the party were studying the details of the tomb of John of Eltham, Pitt explaining and the others trying to take it in, Betty stood by with passionate thoughts. '*They* do not care,' she said to herself; 'but he will bring some one else here, some day, who will care; and they will come and come to the Abbey, and delight themselves in its glories, and in each other, alternately. What do I here? and what is the English

Abbey to me?'

She showed no want of interest, however, and no wandering of thought; on the contrary, an intelligent, thoughtful, gracious attention to everything she saw and everything she heard. Her words, she knew, though she could not help it, were now and then flavoured with bitterness.

In the next chapel Mrs. Dallas heard with much sympathy and wonder the account of Catharine of Valois and her remains.

'I don't think she ought to lie in the vault of Sir George Villiers, if he *was* father of the Duke of Buckingham,' she exclaimed.

'That Duke of Buckingham had more honour than belonged to him, in life and in death,' said Betty.

'It does not make much difference now,' said Pitt.

They went on to the chapel of Henry VII. And here, and on the way thither, Betty almost for a while forgot her troubles in the exceeding majesty and beauty of the place. The power of very exquisite beauty, which always and in all forms testifies to another world where its source and its realization are, came down upon her spirit, and hushed it as with a breath of balm; and the littleness of this life, of any one individual's life, in the midst of the efforts here made to deny it, stood forth in most impressive iteration. Betty was awed and quieted for a minute. Mr. and Mrs. Dallas were moved differently.

'And this was Henry the Seventh's work!' exclaimed Mr. Dallas, making an effort to see all round him at once. 'Well, I didn't know they could build so well in those old times. Let us see; when was he buried? —1509? That is pretty long ago. This is a beautiful building! And that is his tomb, eh? I should say this is better than anything he had in his lifetime. Being king of England was not just so easy to him as his son found it. Crowns are heavy in the best of times; and his was specially.'

'It is a strange ambition, though, to be glorified so in one's funeral monument,' said Betty.

'A very common ambition,' remarked Pitt. 'But this chapel was to be much more than a monument. It was a chantry. The king ordered ten thousand masses to be said here for the repose of his soul; and intended that the monkish establishment should remain for ever to attend to them. Here around his tomb you see the king's particular patron saints,—nine of them,—to whom he looked for help in time of need; all over the chapel you will find the four national saints, if I may so call them, of the kingdom; and at the end there is the Virgin Mary, with Peter and Paul, and other saints and angels innumerable. The whole chapel is like those touching folded hands of stone we were speaking of,—a continual appeal, through human and angelic mediation, fixed in stone; though at the beginning also living in the chants of the monks.'

'Well, I am sure that is being religious!' said Mrs. Dallas. 'If such a place as this does not honour religion, I don't know what does.'

'Mother, Christ said, "*I* am the door."'

'Yes, my dear, but is not all this an appeal to Him?'

'Mother, he said, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." What have saints and angels to do with it? "He that *believeth*."'

'Surely the builder of all this must have believed,' said Mrs. Dallas, 'or he would never have spent so much money and taken so much pains about it.'

'If he had believed on Christ, mother, he would have known he had no need. Think of those ten thousand masses to be said for him, that his sins might be forgiven and his soul received into heaven; you see how miserably uncertain the poor king felt of ever getting there.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Dallas, 'every one must feel uncertain! He cannot *know*—how can he know?'

'How can he live and not know?' Pitt answered in a lowered tone. 'Uncertainty on that point would be enough to drive a thinking man mad. Henry the Seventh, you see, could not bear it, and so he arranged to have ten thousand masses said for him, and filled his chapel with intercessory saints.'

'But I do not see how any one is to have certainty, Mr. Pitt,' Betty said. 'One cannot see into the future.'

'It is only necessary to believe, in the present.'

'Believe what?'

'The word of the King, who promised,—"Whosoever liveth and believeth in me *shall never die*." The love that came down here to die for us will never let slip any poor creature that trusts it.'

'Yes; but suppose one cannot trust *so?*' objected Betty.

'Then there is probably a reason for it. Disobedience, even partial disobedience, cannot perfectly trust.'

'How can sinful creatures do anything perfectly, Pitt?' his mother asked, almost angrily.

'Mamma,' said he gravely, 'you trust *me* so.'

Mrs. Dallas made no reply to that; and they moved on, surveying the chapels. The good lady bowed her head in solemn approbation when shown the place whence the bodies of Cromwell and others of his family and friends were cast out after the Restoration. 'They had no business to be there,' she assented.

'Where were they removed to?' Betty asked.

'Some of them were hanged, as they deserved,' said Mr. Dallas.

'Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw, at Tyburn,' Pitt added. 'The others were buried, not honourably, not far off. One of Cromwell's daughters, who was a Churchwoman and also a royalist, they allowed to remain in the Abbey. She lies in one of the other chapels, over yonder.'

'Noble revenge!' said Betty quietly.

'Very proper,' said Mrs. Dallas. 'It seems hard, but it is proper. People who rise up against their kings should be treated with dishonour, both before and after death.'

'How about the kings who rise up against their people?' asked Betty.

She could not help the question, but she was glad that Mrs. Dallas did not seem to hear it. They passed on, from one chapel to another, going more rapidly; came to a pause again at the tomb of Mary, Queen of Scots.

'I am beginning to think,' said Betty, 'that the history of England is one of the sorrowfullest things in the world. I wonder if all other countries are as bad? Think of this woman's troublesome, miserable life; and now, after Fotheringay, the honour in which she lies in this temple is such a mockery! I suppose Elizabeth is here somewhere?'

'Over there, in the other aisle. And below, the two Tudor queens, Elizabeth and Mary, lie in a vault together, alone. Personal rivalries, personal jealousies, political hatred and religious enmity,—they are all composed now; and all interests fade away before the one supreme, eternal; they are gone where "the honour that cometh from God" is the only honour left. Well for them if they have that! Here is the Countess of Richmond, the mother of Henry VII. She was of kin or somehow connected, it is said, with thirty royal personages; the grand-daughter of Catharine of Valois, grandmother of Henry VIII., Elizabeth's great-grandmother. She was, by all accounts, a noble old lady. Now all that is left is these pitiful folded hands.'

Mrs. Dallas passed on, and they went from chapel to chapel, and from tomb to tomb, with unflagging though transient interest. But for Betty, by and by the brain and sense seemed to be oppressed and confused by the multitude of objects, of names and stories and sympathies. The novelty wore off, and a feeling of some weariness supervened; and therewith the fortunes and fates of the great past fell more and more into the background, and her own one little life-venture absorbed her attention. Even when going round the chapel of Edward the Confessor and viewing the grand old tombs of the magnates of history who are remembered there, Betty was mostly concerned with her own history; and a dull bitter feeling filled her. It was safe to indulge it, for everybody else had enough beside to think of, and she grew silent.

'You are tired,' said Pitt kindly, as they were leaving the Confessor's chapel, and his mother and father had gone on before.

'Of course,' said Betty. 'There is no going through the ages without some fatigue—for a common mortal.'

'We are doing too much,' said Pitt. 'The Abbey cannot be properly seen in this way. One should take part at a time, and come many times.'

'No chance for me,' said Betty. 'This is my first and my last.' She looked back as she spoke towards the tombs they were leaving, and wished, almost, that she were as still as they. She felt her eyes

suffusing, and hastily went on. 'I shall be going home, I expect, in a few days—as soon as I find an opportunity. I have stayed too long now, but Mrs. Dallas has over-persuaded me. I am glad I have had this, at any rate.'

She was capable of no more words just then, and was about to move forward, when Pitt by a motion of his hand detained her.

'One moment,' said he. 'Do you say that you are thinking of returning to America?'

'Yes. It is time.'

'I would beg you, if I might, to reconsider that,' he said. 'If you could stay with my mother a while longer, it would be, I am sure, a great boon to her; for *I* am going away. I must take a run over to America—I have business in New York—must be gone several weeks at least. Cannot you stay and go down into Westmoreland with her?'

It seemed to Betty that she became suddenly cold, all over. Yet she was sure there was no outward manifestation in face or manner of what she felt. She answered mechanically, indifferently, that she 'would see'; and they went forward to rejoin their companions. But of the rest of the objects that were shown them in the Abbey she simply saw nothing. The image of Esther was before her; in New York, found by Pitt; in Westminster Abbey, brought thither by him, and lingering where her own feet now lingered; in the house at Kensington, going up the beautiful staircase, and standing before the cabinet of coins in the library. Above all, found by Pitt in New York. For he would find her; perhaps even now he had news of her; *she* would be coming with hope and gladness and honour over the sea, while she herself would be returning, crossing the same sea the other way,—in every sense the other way,—in mortification and despair and dishonour. Not outward dishonour, and yet the worst possible; dishonour in her own eyes. What a fool she had been, to meddle in this business at all! She had done it with her eyes open, trusting that she could exercise her power upon anybody and yet remain in her own power. Just the reverse of that had come to pass, and she had nobody to blame but herself. If Pitt was leaving his father and mother in England, to go to New York, it could be on only one business. The game, for her, was up.

There were weeks of torture before her, she knew,—slow torture,—during which she must show as little of what she felt as an Indian at the stake. She must be with Mrs. Dallas, and hear the whole matter talked of, and from point to point as the history went on; and must help talk of it. For if Pitt was going to New York now, Betty was not; that was a fixed thing. She must stay for the present where she was.

She was a little pale and tired, they said on the drive home. And that was all anybody ever knew.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A VISIT.

Pitt sailed for America in the early days of Autumn; and September had not yet run out when he arrived in New York. His first researches, as on former occasions, amounted to nothing, and several days passed with no fruit of his trouble. The intelligence received at the post office gave him no more than he had been assured of already. They believed a letter did come occasionally to a certain Colonel Gainsborough, but the occasions were not often; the letters were not called for regularly; and the address, further than that it was 'New York,' was not known. Pitt was thrown upon his own resources, which narrowed down pretty much to observation and conjecture. To exercise the former, he perambulated the streets of the city; his brain was busy with the latter constantly, whenever its energies were not devoted to seeing and hearing.

He roved the streets in fair weather and foul, and at all hours. He watched keenly all the figures he passed, at least until assured they had no interest for him; he peered into shops; he reviewed equipages. In those days it was possible to do this to some purpose, if a man were looking for somebody; the streets were not as now filled with a confused and confusing crowd going all ways at once; and no policeman was needed, even for the most timid, to cross Broadway where it was busiest. What a chance there was then for the gay part of the world to show itself! A lady would heave in sight, like a ship in the distance, and come bearing down with colours flying; one all alone, or two together,

having the whole sidewalk for themselves. Slowly they would come and pass, in the full leisure of display, and disappear, giving place to a new sail just rising to view. No such freedom of display and monopoly of admiration is anywhere possible any longer in the city of Gotham.

Pitt had been walking the streets for days, and was weary of watching the various feminine craft which sailed up and down in them. None of them were like the one he was looking for, neither could he see anything that looked like the colonel's straight slim figure and soldierly bearing. He was weary, but he persevered. A man in his position was not open to the charge of looking for a needle in a haystack, such as would now be justly brought to him. New York was not quite so large then as it is now. It is astonishing to think what a little place it was in those days; when Walker Street was not yet built on its north side, and there was a pond at the corner of Canal Street, and Chelsea was in the country; when the 'West End' was at State Street, and St. George's Church was in Beekman Street, and Beekman Street was a place of fashion. The city was neither so dingy nor so splendid as it is now, and the bright sun of our climate was pouring all the gold it could upon its roofs and pavements, those September days when Pitt was trying to be everywhere and to see everything.

One of those sunny, golden days he was sauntering as usual down Broadway, enjoying the clear aether which was troubled by neither smoke nor cloud. Sauntering along carelessly, yet never for a moment forgetting his aim, when his eye was caught by a figure which came up out of a side street and turned into Broadway just before him. Pitt had but a cursory glance at the face, but it was enough to make him follow the owner of it. He walked behind her at a little distance, scrutinizing the figure. It was not like what he remembered Esther. He had said to himself, of course, that Esther must be grown up before now; nevertheless, the image in his mind was of Esther as he had known her, a well-grown girl of thirteen or fourteen. This was no such figure. It was of fair medium height, or rather more. The dress was as plain as possible, yet evidently that of a lady, and as unmistakeable was the carriage. Perhaps it was that more than anything which fixed Pitt's attention; the erect, supple figure, the easy, gliding motion, and the set of the head. For among all the multitude that walk, a truly beautiful walk is a very rare thing, and so is a truly fine carriage. Pitt could not take his eye from this figure. A few swift strides brought him near her, and he followed, watching; balancing hopes and doubts. That was not Esther as he remembered her; but then years had gone by; and was not that set of the head on the shoulders precisely Esther's? He was meditating how he could get another sight of her face, when she suddenly turned and ran up a flight of steps and went in at a door, without ever giving him the chance he wanted. She had a little portfolio under her arm, like a teacher, and she paused to speak to the servant who opened the door to her; Pitt judged that it was not her own house. The lady was probably a teacher. Esther could not be a teacher. But at any rate he would wait and get another sight of her. If she went in, she would probably come out again.

But Pitt had a tiresome waiting of an hour. He strolled up and down or stood still leaning against a railing, never losing that door out of his range of vision. The hour seemed three; however, at the end of it the lady did come out again, but just when he was at his farthest, and she turned and went up the street again the way she had come, walking with a quick step. Pitt followed. Where she had turned into Broadway she turned out of it, and went down an unattractive side street; passing from that into another and another, less and less promising with every corner she turned, till she entered the one which we know was not at all eligible where Colonel Gainsborough lived. Pitt's hopes had been gradually falling, and now when the quarry disappeared from his sight in one of the little humble houses which filled the street, he for a moment stood still. Could she be living here? He would have thought she had come merely to visit some poor protégé, but that she had certainly seemed to take a latch-key from her pocket and let herself in with it. Pitt reviewed the place, waited a few minutes, and then went up himself the few steps which led to that door, and knocked. Bell there was none. People who had bells to their doors did not live in that street.

But as soon as the door was opened Pitt knew where he was; for he recognised Barker. She was not the one, however, with whom he wished first to exchange recognitions; so he contented himself with asking in an assured manner for Colonel Gainsborough.

'Yes, sir, he's in,' said Barker doubtfully; as he stood in the doorway she could not see the visitor well. 'Who will I say wants to see him, sir?'

'A gentleman on business.'

Another minute or two, and Pitt stood in the small room which was the colonel's particular room, and was face to face with his old friend. Esther was not there; and without looking at anything Pitt felt in a moment the change that must have come over the fortunes of the family. The place was so small! There did not seem to be room in it for the colonel and him. But the colonel was like himself. They stood and faced each other.

'Have I changed so much, colonel?' he said at last. 'Do you not know me?'

'William Dallas?' said the colonel. 'I know the voice! But yes, you have changed,—you have changed, certainly. It is the difference between the boy and the man. What else it is, I cannot see in this light,—or this darkness. It grows dark early in this room. Sit down. So you have got back at last!'

The greeting was not very cordial, Pitt felt.

'I have come back, for a time; but I have been home repeatedly before this.'

'So I suppose,' said the colonel drily. 'Of course, hearing nothing of you, I could not be sure how it was.'

'I have looked for you, sir, every time, and almost everywhere.'

'Looked for us? Ha! It is not very difficult to find anybody, when you know where to look.'

'Pardon me, Colonel Gainsborough, that was precisely not my case. I did not know where to look. I have been here for days now, looking, till I was almost in despair; only I knew you must be somewhere, and I would not despair. I have looked for you in America and in England. I went down to Gainsborough Manor, to see if I could hear tidings of you there. Every time that I came home to Seaforth for a visit I took a week of my vacation and came here and hunted New York for you; always in vain.'

'The shortest way would have been to ask your father,' said the colonel, still drily.

'My father? I asked him, and he could tell me nothing. Why did you not leave us some clue by which to find you?'

'Clue?' said the colonel. 'What do you mean by clue? I have not hid myself.'

'But if your friends do not know where you are?'

'Your father could have told you.'

'He did not know your address, sir. I asked him for it repeatedly.'

'Why did he not give it to you?' said the colonel, throwing up his head like a war-horse.

'He said you had not given it to him.'

'That is true since we came to this place. I have had no intercourse with Mr. Dallas for a long time; not since we moved into our present quarters; and our address *here* he does not know, I suppose. He ceased writing to me, and of course I ceased writing to him. From you we have never heard at all, since we came to New York.'

'But I wrote, sir,' said Pitt, in growing embarrassment and bewilderment. 'I wrote repeatedly.'

'What do you suppose became of your letters?'

'I cannot say. I wrote letter after letter, till, getting no answer, I was obliged to think it was in vain; and I too stopped writing.'

'Where did you direct your letters?'

'Not to your address here, which I did not know. I enclosed them to my father, supposing he did know it, and begged him to forward them.'

'I never got them,' said the colonel, with that same dry accentuation. It implied doubt of somebody; and could Pitt blame him? He kept a mortified silence for a few minutes. He felt terribly put in the wrong, and undeservedly; and—but he tried not to think.

'I am afraid to ask, what you thought of me, sir?'

'Well, I confess, I thought it was not just like the old William Dallas that I used to know; or rather, not like the *young* William. I supposed you had grown old; and with age comes wisdom. That is the natural course of things.'

'You did me injustice, Colonel Gainsborough.'

'I am willing to think it. But it is somewhat difficult.'

'Take my word at least for this. I have never forgotten. I have never neglected. I sought for you as long as possible, and in every way that was possible, whenever I was in this country. I left off writing,

but it was because writing seemed useless. I have come now in pursuance of my old promise; come on the mere chance of finding you; which, however, I was determined to do.'

'Your promise?'

'You surely remember? The promise I made you, that I would come to look for you when I was free, and if I was not so happy as to find *you*, would take care of Esther.'

'Well, I am here yet,' said the colonel meditatively. 'I did not expect it, but here I am. You are quit of your promise.'

'I have not desired that, sir.'

'Well, that count is disposed of, and I am glad to see you.' (But Pitt did not feel the truth of the declaration.) 'Now tell me about yourself.'

In response to which followed a long account of Pitt's past, present, and future, so far as his worldly affairs and condition were concerned, and so far as his own plans and purposes dealt with both. The colonel listened, growing more and more interested; thawed out a good deal in his manner; yet maintained on the whole an indifferent apartness which was not in accordance with the old times and the liking he then certainly cherished for his young friend. Pitt could not help the feeling that Colonel Gainsborough wished him away. It began to grow dark, and he must bring this visit to an end.

'May I see Esther?' he asked, after a slight pause in the consideration of this fact, and with a change of tone which a mother's ear would have noted, and which perhaps Colonel Gainsborough's was jealous enough to note. The answer had to be waited for a second or two.

'Not to-night,' he said a little hurriedly. 'Not to-night. You may see her to-morrow.'

Pitt could not understand his manner, and went away with half a frown and half a smile upon his face, after saying that he would call in the morning.

It had happened all this while that Esther was busy up-stairs, and so had not heard the voices, nor even knew that her father had a visitor. She came down soon after his departure to prepare the tea. The lamp was lit, the little fire kindled for the kettle, the table brought up to the colonel's couch, which, as in old time, he liked to have so; and Esther made his toast and served him with his cups of tea, in just the old fashion. But the way her father looked at her was *not* just in the old fashion. He noticed how tall she had grown,—it was no longer the little Esther of Seaforth times. He noticed the lovely lines of her supple figure, as she knelt before the fire with the toasting-fork, and raised her other hand to shield her face from the blaze. His eye lingered on her rich hair in its abundant coils; on the delicate hands; but though it went often to the face it as often glanced away and did not dwell there. Yet it could not but come back again; and the colonel's own face took a grim set as he looked. Oddly enough, he said never a word of the event of the afternoon.

'You had somebody here, papa, a little while ago, Barker says?'

'Yes.'

'Who was it?'

'Called himself a gentleman on business.'

'What business, papa? It is not often that business comes here. It wasn't anything about taxes?'

'No.'

'I've got all *that* ready,' said Esther contentedly, 'so he may come when he likes,—the tax man, I mean. What business was this then, papa?'

'It was something about an old account, my dear, that he wanted to set right. There had been a mistake, it seems.'

'Anything to pay?' inquired Esther with a little anxiety.

'No. It's all right; or so he says.'

Esther thought it was somewhat odd, but, however, was willing to let the subject of a settled account go; and she had almost forgotten it, when her father broached a very different subject.

'Would you like to go to live in Seaforth again, Esther?'

'Seaforth, papa?' she repeated, much wondering at the question. 'No, I think not. I loved Seaforth once—dearly!—but we had friends there then; or we thought we had. I do not think it would be pleasant to be there now.'

'Then what do you think of our going back to England? You do not like *this* way of life, I suppose, in this pitiful place? I have kept you here too long!'

What had stirred the colonel up to so much speculation? Esther hesitated.

'Papa, I know our friends there seem very eager to have us; and so far it would be good; but—if we went back, have we enough to live upon and be independent?'

'No.'

'Then I would rather be here. We are doing very nicely, papa; you are comfortable, are you not? I am very well placed, and earning money—enough money. Really we are not poor any longer. And it is so nice to be independent!'

'Not poor!' said the colonel, between a groan and a growl. 'What do you call poor? For you and for me to be in this doleful street is to be all that, I should say.'

'Papa,' said Esther, her lips wreathing into a smile, 'I think nobody is poor who can live and pay his debts. And we have no debts at all.'

'By dint of hard work on your part, and deprivation on mine!'

'Papa,' said Esther, the smile fading away,—what did he mean by deprivation?—'I thought—I hoped you were comfortable?'

'Comfortable!' groaned and growled the colonel again. 'I believe, Esther, you have forgotten what comfort means. Or rather, you never knew. For *us* to be in a prison like this, and shut out from the world!'

'Papa, I never thought you cared for the world. And this does not feel like a prison to me. I have been very happy here, and free, and oh, so thankful! If you remember how we were before, papa.'

'All the same,' said the colonel, 'it is not fitting that those who are meant for the world should live out of it. I wish I had taken you home years ago. You see nobody. You have seen nobody all your life but one family; and I wish you had never seen them!'

'The Dallases? Oh, why, papa?'

'You do not care for them, I suppose, *now?*'

'I do not care for them at all, papa. I did care for one of them very much, once; but I have given him up long ago. When I found he had forgotten us, it was not worth while for me to remember. That is all dead. His father and mother,—I doubt if ever they were real friends, to you or to me, papa.'

'I am inclined to think William was not so much to blame. It was his father's fault, perhaps.'

'It does not make much difference,' said Esther easily. 'If anything could make him forsake us—after the old times—he is not worth thinking about; and I do not think of him. That is an ended thing.'

There was a little something in the tone of the last words which allowed the hearer to divine that the closing of that chapter had not been without pain, and that the pain had perhaps scarcely died out. But he did not pursue the subject, nor say any more about anything. He only watched his daughter, uninterruptedly, though stealthily. Watched every line of her figure; glanced at the sweet, fair face; followed every quiet graceful movement. Esther was studying, and part of the time she was drawing, absorbed in her work; yet throughout, what most struck her father was the high happiness that sat on her whole person. It was in the supreme calm of her brow; it was in a half-appearing smile, which hardly broke, and yet informed the soft lips with a constant sweetness; it seemed to the colonel to appear in her very positions and movements, and probably it was true, for the lines of peace are not seen in an uneasy figure, nor do the movements of grace come from a restless spirit. The colonel's own brow should have unbent at the sweet sight, but it did not. He drew his brows lower and lower over his watching eyes, and now and then set his teeth, in a grim kind of way for which there seemed no sort of provocation. 'The heart knoweth his own bitterness;' no doubt Colonel Gainsborough's tasted its own particular draught that night, which he shared with nobody.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A TALK.

The next day began for Esther quite in its wonted wise, and it will be no harm to see how that was. She was up very early, a long while before the sun; and after a somewhat careful dressing, for it was not in Esther's nature to do anything imperfectly, she went down-stairs, to her father's little study or dwelling room. It was free for her use at this time of day; the colonel took a late breakfast, and was never up long before it. This had grown to be his invalid habit; in the early days of his life and of military service, no doubt it had been different. The room was empty and still at this hour; even Mrs. Barker was not yet astir, and a delightful sense of privacy and security encompassed the temporary occupant. The weather was still warm; no fire would be needed till it was time for the colonel's toast. Moving like a mouse, or better, like a gentle domestic spirit, Esther lit a lamp, opened a window to let the morning air in, and sat down to her book.

Do you think it was philosophy, or science, or languages, or school work? Nay, it was something which with Esther went before all these, and if need were would have excluded all of them. She had time for them too, as things were, but this must come first. She must 'draw water from the wells of salvation,' before she felt freshened up for the rather weary encounters and dry routine of school life; she must feel the Rock under her feet, and breathe the air of heaven a bit before she ventured forth into the low-lying grounds and heavy vapours of earthly business and intercourse; and she must have her armour well on, and bright, before she dared to meet the possible dangers and temptations which might come to her in the course of the day. It is true, this day was a free day, but that made no difference. Being at home had its trials and difficulties as well as being abroad.

But drawing from those wells, and breathing that air, Esther thought nothing of trials or difficulties; and, in matter of fact, for her they hardly seemed to exist, or were perceived, as it were, dimly, and their contact scarce felt. I suppose it is true in all warfares, that a well-armed and alert soldier is let alone by the foes that would have swallowed him up if he had been defenceless or not giving heed. And if you could have seen Esther's face during that hour, you would understand that all possible enemies were, at least for the time, as hushed as the lions in Daniel's den; so glad, so grave, so pure and steadfast, so enjoying, was the expression which lay upon it. Reading and praying—praying and reading—an hour good went by. Then Esther rose up, ready for the work of the day.

She threw open all the windows and put out her lamp. Then she gave both the rooms a careful cleaning and dusting and putting in order; set the table in the one for breakfast, and laid the fire in the other, to be lit whenever her father might desire it. All this done and in readiness, she sat down again to study. This time it was study of a lower grade; partly preparation for school work, partly reading for her own advancement, though there was not much time for this latter. It was long past eight, and Mrs. Barker came with the chafing-dish of red coals and the tea-kettle. She stood by while Esther made the tea, looking on or meditating; and then began to blow the coals in the chafing-dish. She blew the coals and looked at Esther.

'Miss Esther,' she began, 'did master say anything about the visitor that came to see him yesterday?'

'Not much. Why? He said it was somebody on business.'

'Well, mum, he didn't look like that sort o' pusson at all.'

'Why not? Any sort of person might come on business, you know.'

'True, mum, but this wasn't that sort o' pusson. If Christopher had opened the door for him, he'd ha' knowed; but my eyes is that poor, when I'm lookin' out into the light, I can't seem to see nothin' that's nearer me. But howsomever, mum, what I did see of him, somehow, it put me in mind of Seaforth.'

'Seaforth! Why? Who did you think it was?'

'I am sure, mum, I don't know. I couldn't see good, with the light behind him, and he standin' in the doorway. And I can't say how it was, but what he made me think of, it was Seaforth, mum.'

'I am afraid you have been thinking of Seaforth, Barker,' said Esther, with half a sigh. 'It could not have been anybody we used to know. Papa went there, you know, last summer, to see old friends, or to see what had become of them; and Mr. and Mrs. Dallas were gone to England, to their son, and with them the young lady he is to marry. I daresay he may be married by this time, or just going to be married. He has quite forgotten us, you may be sure. I do not expect ever to see him again. Was this man yesterday young or old?'

'Young, mum, and tall and straight, and very personable. I'd like to see his face!—but it may be as you say.'

Perhaps Esther would have put some further question to her father at breakfast about his yesterday's visit, but as it happened she had other things to think of. The colonel was in a querulous mood; not altogether uncommon in these days, but always very trying to Esther. When he seemed contented and easy, she felt repaid for all labours or deprivations; but when that state of things failed, and he made himself uncomfortable about his surroundings, there would come a miserable *cui bono* feeling. If *he* were not satisfied, then what did she work for? and what was gained by it all? This morning she was just about to put a question, when Colonel Gainsborough began.

'Is this the best butter one can get in this town?'

'Papa, I do not know!' said Esther, brought back from yesterday to to-day with a sudden pull. 'It is Mrs. Bounder's butter, and we have always found it very good; and she lets us have it at a lower rate than we could get it in the stores.'

'Nothing is good that is got "at a low rate." I do not believe in that plan. It is generally a cheat in the end.'

'It has been warm weather, you know, papa; and it is difficult to keep things so nice without a cool cellar.'

'That is one of the benefits of living in Major Street. It ought to be called "Minor,"—for we are "minus" nearly everything, I think.'

What could Esther say?

'My dear, what sort of bread is this?'

'It is from the baker's, papa. Is it not good?'

'Baker's bread is never good; not fit to nourish life upon. How comes it we have baker's bread? Barker knows what I think of it.'

'I suppose she was unable to bake yesterday.'

'And of course to-day her bread will be too fresh to be eatable! My dear, cannot you bring a little system into her ways?'

'She does the very best she can, papa.'

'Yes, yes, I know that; as far as the intention goes; but all such people want a head over them. They know nothing whatever about system. By the way, can't she fry her bacon without burning it? This is done to a crisp.'

'Papa, I am very sorry! I did not mean to give you a burnt piece. Mine is very good. Let me find you a better bit.'

'It doesn't matter!' said the colonel, giving his plate an unloving shove. 'A man lives and dies, all the same, whether his bacon is burnt or not. I suppose nothing matters! Are you going to that party, at Mrs.— I forget her name?'

'I think not, papa.'

'Why not?'

Esther hesitated.

'Why not? Don't you like to go?'

'Yes, sir. I like it very well.'

'Then why don't you go? At least you can give a reason.'

'There are more reasons than one,' said Esther. She was extremely unwilling to reveal either of them.

'Well, go on. If you know them, you can tell them to me. What are they?'

'Papa, it is really of no consequence, and I do not mind in the least; but in truth my old silk dress has been worn till it is hardly fit to go anywhere in.'

'Can't you get another?'

'I should not think it right, papa. We want the money for other things.'

'What things?'

Did he not know! Esther drew breath to answer.

'Papa, there are the taxes, which I agreed with Mrs. Bounder I would pay, you know, as part of the rent. The money is ready, and that is a great deal more pleasure than a dress and a party would be to me. And then, winter is coming on, and we must lay in our fuel. I think to do it now, while it is cheaper.'

'And so, for that, you are to stay at home and see nobody!'

'Isn't it right, papa? and whatever is right is always pleasant in the end.'

'Deucedly pleasant!' said the colonel grimly, and rising from the table. 'I am going to my room, Esther, and I do not wish to be called to see any body. If business comes, you must attend to it.'

'Called to see anybody'! Who ever came to that house, on business or otherwise, but at the most rare intervals! And now one business visit had just come yesterday, there might not be another in months. Esther looked a little sorrowful, for her father's expression, most unwonted from his mouth, showed his irritation to be extreme; but what had irritated him? However, she was somewhat accustomed to this sort of demonstration, which nevertheless always grieved her; and she was glad that she had escaped telling her father her second reason. The truth was, Esther's way of life was so restricted and monotonous outwardly—she lived so by herself and to herself—that the stimulus and refreshment of a social occasion like that one when she had met Miss Frere a year ago was almost too pleasant. It made Esther feel a little too sensibly how alone and shut out from human intercourse was the nobler part of herself. A little real intellectual converse and contact was almost too enjoyable; it was a mental breath of fresh air, in which life seemed to change and become a different thing; and then—we all know how close air seems after fresh—the routine of school teaching, and the stillness and uniformity of her home existence, seemed to press upon her painfully, till after a time she became wonted to it again. So, on the whole, she thought it not amiss that her old party dress had done all the service it decently could, and that she had no means to get another. And now, after a few moments' grave shadow on her face, all shadows cleared away, as they usually did, and she set herself to the doing of what this holiday at home gave her to do. There was mending, making up accounts, a drawing to finish for a model; after that, if she could get it all done in time, there might be a bit of blessed reading in a new book that her old friend Miss Fairbairn had lent her. Esther set her face bravely to her day's work.

The morning was not far advanced, and the mending was not finished, when the unwonted door-knocker sounded again. This time the door was opened by some one whom Pitt did not know, and who did not know him; for Mrs. Bounder had come into town, and, as Barker's hands were just in her bread, had volunteered to go to the door for her. Pitt was ushered into the little parlour, in which, as nobody was there, he had leisure to make several observations. Yesterday he had had no leisure for them. Now he looked about him. That the fortunes of the family must have come down very much it was evident. Such a street, in the first place; then this little bit of a house; and then, there was more than that; he could see tokens unmistakeable of scantness of means. The drugget was well worn, had been darned in two places—very neatly, but darned it was, and the rest of it threatened breaches. The carpet beyond the drugget was old and faded, and the furniture?—Pitt wondered if it could be the same furniture, it looked so different here. There was the colonel's couch, however; he recognised that, although in its chintz cover, which was no longer new, but faded like the carpet. Books on the table were certainly the colonel's books; but no pictures were on the walls, no pretty trifles lying about; nothing was there that could testify of the least margin of means for anything that was not strictly necessary. Yet it was neat and comfortable; but Pitt felt that expenditures were very closely measured, and no latitude allowed to ease or to fancy. He stood a few minutes, looking and taking all this in; and then the inner door opened, and he forgot it instantly. At one stroke, as it were, the mean little room was transformed into a sacred temple, and here was the priestess. The two young people stood a second or two silent, facing each other.

But Esther knew him at once; and more, as she met the frank, steadfast eyes that she had known and trusted so long ago, she trusted them at once again and perfectly. There was no mistaking either their truth or their kindness. In spite of his new connections and alienated life, her old friend had not forgotten her. She extended her hand, with a flash of surprise and pleasure in her face, which was not a flash but a dawn, for it grew and brightened into warmer kindliness.

'Pitt Dallas!' she said. 'It is really you!'

The two hands met and clasped and lay in each other, but Pitt had no words for what went on within

him. With the first sight of Esther he knew that he had met his fate. Here was all that he had left six or seven years ago, how changed! The little head, so well set on its shoulders, with its wealth of beautifully ordered hair; those wonderful grave, soft, sweet, thoughtful eyes; the character of the quiet mouth; the pure dignity and grace of the whole creature,—all laid a spell upon the man. He found no words to speak audibly; but in his mind words heaped on words, and he was crying to himself, 'Oh, my beauty! Oh, my gazelle! My fair saint! My lily! My Queen!' What right he had to the personal pronoun does not appear; however, we know that appropriation is an instinct of humanity for that which it likes. And it may also be noted, that Pitt never thought of calling Esther a *rose*. Nor would any one else. That was not her symbol. Roses are sweet, sweeter than anything, and yielding in fairness to nothing; but—let me be pardoned for saying it—they are also common. And Esther was rather something apart, rare. If I liken her to a lily, I do not mean those fair white lilies which painters throw at the feet of Franciscan monks, and dedicate also to the Virgin,—Annunciation lilies, so called. They are common too, and rather specially emblems of purity. What I am thinking of, and what Pitt was thinking of, is, on the contrary, one of those unique exotic lilies, which are as much wonders of colour as marvels of grace; apart, reserved, pure, also lofty, and delicate to the last degree; queening it over all the rest of the flowers around, not so much by official pre-eminence of beauty as by the superiority of the spiritual nature. A difference internal and ineffable, which sets them of necessity aside of the crowd and above it.

Pitt felt all this in a breath, which I have taken so many words clumsily to set forth. He, as I said, took no words, and only gave such expression to his thoughts as he could at the moment by bowing very low over Esther's hand and kissing it. Something about the action hurt Esther; she drew her hand away.

'It is a great surprise,' she said quietly. 'Won't you sit down?'

'The surprise ought to have been, that you did not see me before; not that I am here now.'

'I got over *that* surprise a great while ago,' said Esther. 'At least I thought I did; but it comes back to me now that I see you. How was it? How could it be?'

In answer to which, Pitt gave her a detailed account of his various efforts in past years to discover the retreat of his old friends. This was useful to him; he got his breath, as it were, which the sight of Esther had taken away; was himself again.

Esther listened silently, with perfect faith in the speaker and his statements, with a little undefined sort of regretfulness. So, then, Pitt need not have been lost to them, if only they could have been found! Just what that thought meant she had no time then to inquire. She hardly interrupted him at all.

'What do you suppose became of your letters?' she asked when he had done. For Pitt had not said that they went to his father's hands.

'I suppose they shared the fate of all letters uncalled for; if not the dead-letter office, the fire.'

'It was not very strange that you could not find us when you came to New York. We really troubled the post office very little, having after a while nothing to expect from it, and that was the only place where you could hope to get a clue.' Neither would Esther mention Mr. Dallas. With a woman's curious fine discernment, she had seen that all was not right in that quarter; indeed, had suspected it long ago.

'But you got some letters from me?' Pitt went on, 'while you were in Seaforth? One or two, I know.'

'Yes, several. Oh yes! while we were in Seaforth.'

'And I got answers. Do you remember one long letter you wrote me, the second year after I went?'

'Yes,' she said, without looking at him.

'Esther, that letter was worth everything to me. It was like a sunbeam coming out between misty clouds and showing things for a moment in their true colours. I never forgot it. I never could forget it, though I fought for some years with the truth it revealed to me. I believed what you told me, and so I knew what I ought to do; but I struggled against my convictions. I knew from that time that it was the happiest thing and the worthiest thing to be a saint; all the same, I wanted to be a sinner. I wanted to follow my own way and be my own master. I wanted to distinguish myself in my profession, and rise in the world, and tower over other men; and I liked all the delights of life as well as other people do, and was unwilling to give up a life of self-indulgence, which I had means to gratify. Esther, I fought hard! I fought for years—can you believe it?—before I could make up my mind.'

'And now?' she said, looking at him.

'Now? Now,' said he, lowering his voice a little,—'now I have come to know the truth of what you told me; I have learned to know Christ; and I know, as you know, that all things that may be desired are not to be compared with that knowledge. I understand what Paul meant when he said he had suffered the loss of all things for it and counted them less than nothing. So do I; so would I; so have I, as far as the giving up of myself and them to their right owner goes. *That* is done.'

Esther was very glad; she knew she ought to be very glad, and she was; and yet, gladness was not precisely the uppermost feeling that possessed her. She did not know what in the world could make her think of tears at that moment; but there was a strange sensation as if, had she been alone, she would have liked to cry. No shadow of such a softness appeared, however.

'What decided you at last?' she said softly.

'I can scarce tell you,' he answered. 'I was busy studying the matter, arguing for and against; and then I saw of a sudden that I was lighting a lost battle; that my sense and reason and conscience were all gained over, and only my will held out. Then I gave up fighting any more.'

'You came up to the subject on a different side from what I did,'
Esther remarked.

'And you, Esther? have you been always as happy as you were when you wrote that letter?'

'Yes,' she said quietly. 'More happy.' But she did not look up.

'The happiness in your letter was the sunbeam that cleared up everything for me. Now I have talked enough; tell me of yourself and your father.'

'There is not much to tell,' said Esther, with that odd quietness. She felt somehow oppressed. 'We are living in the old fashion; have been living so all along.'

'But— *Quite* in the old fashion?' he said, with a swift glance at the little room where they were sitting. 'It does not look so, Esther.'

'This is not so pleasant a place as we were in when we first came to
New York,' Esther confessed. 'That was very pleasant.'

'Why did you change?'

'It was necessary,' she said, with a smile. 'You may as well know it; papa lost money.'

'How?'

'He invested the money from the sale of the place at Seaforth in some stocks that gave out somehow. He lost it all. So then we had nothing but the stipend from England; and I think papa somehow lost part of that, or was obliged to take part of it to meet obligations.'

'And you?'

'We did very well,' said Esther, with another smile. 'We are doing very well now. We are out of debt, and that is everything. And I think papa is pretty comfortable.'

'And Esther?'

'Esther is happy.'

'But—I should think—forgive me!—that this bit of a house would hardly hold you.'

'See how mistaken you are! We have two rooms unused.'

Pitt's eye roved somewhat restlessly over the one in which they were, as he remarked,—

'I never comprehended just why you went away from Seaforth.'

'For my education, I believe.'

'You were getting a very good education when I was there!'

'When *you* were there,' repeated Esther, smiling; but then she went on quickly: 'Papa thought he could not give me all the advantages he wished, if we stayed in Seaforth. So we came to New York. And now, you see, I am able to provide for him. The education is turning to account.'

'How?' asked Pitt suddenly.

'I help out his small income by giving lessons.'

'*You*, giving lessons? Not that, Esther!'

'Why not?' she said quietly. 'The thing given one to do is the thing to do, you know; and this certainly was given me. And by means of that we get along nicely.'

Again Pitt's eye glanced over the scanty little apartment. What sort of 'getting along' was it which kept them here?

'What do you teach?' he asked, speaking out of a confusion of thoughts the one thing that occurred which it was safe to say.

'Drawing, and music, and some English branches.'

'Do you *like* it?'

She hesitated. 'I am very thankful to have it to do. I do not fancy that teaching for money is just the same as teaching for pleasure. But I am very glad to be able to do it. Before that, there was a time when I did not know just what was going to become of us. Now I am very happy.'

Pitt could not at the moment speak all his thoughts. Moreover, there was something about Esther that perplexed him. She was so unmovedly quiet in her manner. It was kind, no doubt, and pleasant, and pleased; and yet, there was a smooth distance between him and her that troubled him. He did not know how to get rid of it. It was so smooth, there was nothing to take hold of; while it was so distant, or put her rather at such a distance, that all Pitt's newly aroused feelings were stimulated to the utmost, both by the charm and by the difficulty. How exquisite was this soft dignity and calm! but to the man who was longing to be permitted to clasp his arms round her it was somewhat aggravating.

'What has become of Christopher?' he asked after a pause.

'Oh, Christopher is happy!' said Esther, with a smile that was only too frank and free. Pitt wished she would have shown a little embarrassment or consciousness. 'Christopher is happy. He has become a householder and a market-gardener, and, above all, a married man. Married a market-gardener's widow, and set up for himself.'

'What do you do without him?'

'Oh, we could not afford him now,' said Esther, with another smile. 'It was very good for us, almost as good for us as for him. Christopher has become a man of substance. We hire this house of him, or rather of his wife.'

'Are the two not one, then?'

Esther laughed. 'Yes,' she said; 'but you know, *which* one it is depends on circumstances.'

And she went on to tell about her first meeting with the present Mrs. Bounder, and of all the subsequent intercourse and long chain of kindnesses, to which Pitt listened eagerly though with a some what distracted mind. At the end of her story Esther rose.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SETTLEMENT.

'Will you excuse me, if I leave you for one moment to go down into the kitchen?'

'What for,' said Pitt, stopping her.

'I want to see if Mrs. Barker has anything in the house for lunch.'

'Sit down again. She certainly will. She always does.'

'But I want to let her know that there will be one more at table to-day.'

'Never mind. If the supplies fall short, I will go out and get some oysters. I know the colonel likes oysters. Sit still, and let us talk while we can.'

Esther sat down, a little wondering, for Pitt was evidently in earnest; too much in earnest to be denied. But when she had sat down he did not begin to talk. He was thinking; and words were not ready. It was Esther who spoke first.

'And you, Pitt? what are you going to do?'

It was the first time she had called him by his name in the old fashion. He acknowledged it with a pleased glance.

'Don't you know all about me?' he said.

'I know nothing, but what you have told me. And hearsay,' added Esther, colouring a little.

'Did your father not tell you?'

'Papa told me nothing.' And therewith it occurred to Esther how odd it was that her father should have been so reticent; that he should not have so much as informed her who his visitor had been. And then it also occurred to her how he had desired not to be called down to see anybody that morning. Then it must be that he did not want to see Pitt? Had he taken a dislike to him? disapproved of his marriage, perhaps? And how would luncheon be under these circumstances? One thought succeeded another in growing confusion, but then Pitt began to talk, and she was obliged to attend to him.

'Then your father did not tell you that I have become a householder too?'

'I—no—yes! I heard something said about it,' Esther answered, stammering.

'He told you of my old uncle's death and gift to me?'

'No, nothing of that. What is it?'

Then Pitt began and gave her the whole story: of his life with his uncle, of Mr. Strahan's excellences and peculiarities, of his favour, his illness and death, and the property he had bequeathed intact to his grand-nephew. He described the house at Kensington, finding a singular pleasure in talking about it; for, as his imagination recalled the old chambers and halls, it constantly brought into them the sweet figure of the girl he was speaking to, and there was a play of light often, or a warm glow, or a sudden sparkle in his eyes, which Esther could not help noticing. Woman-like, she was acute enough also to interpret it rightly; only, to be sure, she never put *herself* in the place of the person concerned, but gave all that secret homage to another. 'It is like Pitt!' she thought, with a suppressed sigh which she could not stop to criticize,—'it is like him; as much in earnest in love as in other things; always in earnest! It must be something to be loved so.' However, carrying on such aside reflections, she kept all the while her calm, sweet, dignified manner, which was bewitching Pitt, and entered with generous interest into all he told her; supplying in her own way what he did not tell, and on her part also peopling the halls and chambers at Kensington with two figures, neither of which was her own. Her imagination flew back to the party, a year ago, at which she had seen Betty Frere, and mixed up things recklessly. How would *she* fit into this new life of Pitt, of which he had been speaking a little while ago? Had she changed too, perhaps? It was to be hoped!

Pitt ended what he had to say about his uncle and his house, and there was a little pause. Esther half wondered that he did not get up and go away; but there was no sign of that. Pitt sat quietly, thoughtfully, also contentedly, before her, at least so far as appeared; of all his thoughts, not one of them concerned going away. It had begun to be a mixed pleasure to Esther, his being there; for she thought now that he was married he would be taken up with his own home interests, and the friend of other days, if still living, would be entirely lost. And so every look and expression of his which testified to a fine and sweet and strong character, which proved him greatly ennobled and beautified beyond what she had remembered him; and all his words, which showed the gentleman, the man of education and the man of ability; while they greatly delighted Esther, they began oddly to make her feel alone and poor. Still, she would use her opportunity, and make the most of this interview.

'And what are you going to be, Pitt?' she asked, when both of them had been quite still for a few minutes. He turned his face quick towards her with a look of question.

'Now you are a man of property,' said Esther, 'what do you think to do?
You were going to read law.'

'I have been reading law for two or three years.'

'And are you going to give it up?'

'Why should I give it up?'

'The question seems rather, why should you go on with it?'

'Put it so,' he said. 'Ask the question. Why should I go on with it?'

'I *have* asked the question,' said Esther, laughing. 'You seem to come to me for the answer.'

'I do. What is the answer? Give it, please. Is there any reason why a man who has money enough to live upon should go to the bar?'

'I can think of but one,' said Esther, grave and wondering now.
'Perhaps there is one reason.'

'And that?' said Pitt, without looking at her.

'I can think of but one,' Esther repeated. 'It is not a man's business view, I know, but it is mine. I can think of no reason why, for itself, a man should plunge himself into the strifes and confusions of the law, supposing that he *need* not, except for the one sake of righting the wrong and delivering the oppressed.'

'That is my view,' said Pitt quietly.

'And is that what you are going to do?' she said with smothered eagerness, and as well a smothered pang.

'I do not propose to be a lawyer merely,' he said, in the same quiet way, not looking at her. 'But I thought it would give me an advantage in the great business of righting the wrong and getting the oppressed go free. So I propose to finish my terms and be called to the bar.'

'Then you will live in England?' said Esther, with a most unaccountable feeling of depression at the thought.

'For the present, probably. Wherever I can do my work best.'

'Your work? That is—?'

'Do you ask me?' said he, now looking at her with a very bright and sweet smile. The sweetness of it was so unlike the Pitt Dallas she used to know, that Esther was confounded. 'Do you ask me? What should be the work in life of one who was once a slave and is now Christ's freeman?'

Esther looked at him speechless.

'You remember,' he said, 'the Lord's word—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, *as I have loved you*." And then He immediately gave the gauge and measure of that love, the greatest possible,—"that a man *lay down his life for his friends*."'

'And you mean—?'

'Only that, Queen Esther. I reckon that my life is the Lord's, and that the only use of it is to do His work. I will study law for that, and practise as I may have occasion; and for that I will use all the means He may give me: so far as I can, to "break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free;" to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils," so far as I may. Surely it is the least I can do for my Master.'

Pitt spoke quietly, gravely, with the light of a settled purpose in his eye, and also with the peace of a fixed joy in his face. Indeed, his face said more than his words, to Esther who knew him and it; she read there the truth of what he said, and that it was no phantasy of passing enthusiasm, but a lifelong choice, grave and glad, of which he was telling her. With a sudden movement she stretched out her hand to him, which he eagerly clasped, and their hands lay so in each other for a minute, without other speech than that of the close-held fingers. Esther's other hand, however, had covered her eyes.

'What is the matter, Queen Esther?' said Pitt, seeing this.

'I am so glad—so glad!—and so sorry!' Esther took down her hand; she was not crying. 'Glad for you,—and sorry that there are so very few who feel as you do. Oh, how very strange it is!'

He still held her other hand.

'Yes,' he said thoughtfully, 'it is strange. What do you think of the old word in the Bible, that it is not good for man to be alone?'

'I suppose it is true,' said Esther, withdrawing her hand. 'Now,' she thought, 'he is going to tell me about his bride and his marriage.' And she rather wished she could be spared that special communication. At the same time, the wondering speculation seized her again, whether Betty Frere, as she had seen her, was likely to prove a good helpmeet for this man.

'You suppose it is true? There can be no doubt about that, I think, for the man. How is it for the woman?'

'I have never studied the question,' said Esther. 'By what people say, the man is the more independent of the two when he is young, and the woman when she is old.'

'Neither ought to be independent of the other!'

'They seldom are,' said Esther, feeling inclined to laugh, although not in the least merry. Pitt was silent a few minutes, evidently revolving something in his mind.

'You said you had two rooms unoccupied,' he began at last. 'I want to be some little time in New York yet; will you let me move into them?'

'*You!*' exclaimed Esther.

'Yes,' he said, looking at her steadfastly. 'You do not want them,—and
I do.'

'I do not believe they would suit you, Pitt,' said Esther, consumed with secret wonder.

'I am sure no other could suit me half so well!'

'What do you think your bride would say to them? you know that must be taken into consideration.'

'*My bride?* I beg your pardon! Did I hear you aright?'

'Yes!' said Esther, opening her eyes a little. 'Your bride—your wife.
Isn't she here?'

'Who is she?'

'Who *was* she, do you mean? Or are you perhaps not married yet?'

'Most certainly not married! But may I beg you to go on? You were going to tell me who the lady is supposed to be?'

'Oh, I know,' said Esther, smiling, yet perplexed. 'I believe I have seen her. And I admire her too, Pitt, very much. Though when I saw her I do not think she would have agreed with the views you have been expressing to me.'

'Where did you see her?'

'Last fall. Oh, a year ago, almost; time enough for minds to change. It was at a party here.'

'And you saw—whom?'

'Miss Frere. Isn't she the lady?'

'Miss Frere!' exclaimed Pitt; and his colour changed a little. 'May I ask how this story about me has come to your ears, and been believed? as I see you have accepted it.'

'Why very straight,' said Esther, her own colour flushing now brightly. 'It was not difficult to believe. It was very natural; at least to me, who have seen the lady.'

'Miss Frere and I are very good friends,' said Pitt; 'which state of things, however, might not long survive our proposing to be anything more. But we never did propose to be anything more. What made you think it?'

'Did papa tell you that he went up to Seaforth this summer?'

'He said nothing about it.'

'He did go, however. It was a very great thing for papa to do, too; for he goes nowhere, and it is very

hard for him to move; but he went. It was in August. We had heard not a word from Seaforth for such a long, long time,—not for two or three years, I think,—and not a word from you; and papa had a mind to see what was the meaning of it all, and whether anybody was left in Seaforth or not. I thought everybody had forgotten us, and papa said he would go and see.'

'Yes,' said Pitt, as Esther paused.

'And, of course, you know, he found nobody. All our friends were gone, at least. And people told papa you had been home the year before, and had been in Seaforth a long while; and the lady was there too whom you were going to marry; and that this year they had all gone over to see you, that lady and all; and the wedding would probably be before Mr. and Mrs. Dallas came home. So papa came back and told me.'

'And you believed it! Of course.'

'How could I help believing it?' said Esther, smiling; but her eyes avoided Pitt now, and her colour went and came. 'It was a very straight story.'

'Yet not a bit of truth in it. Oh yes, they came over to see me; but I have never thought of marrying Miss Frere, nor any other lady; nor ever shall, unless—you have forgotten me, Esther?'

Esther sat so motionless that Pitt might have thought she had not heard him, but for the swift flashing colour which went and came. She had heard him well enough, and she knew what the words were meant to signify, for the tone of them was unmistakeable; but answer, in any way, Esther could not. She was a very fair image of maidenly modesty and womanly dignity, rather unmistakeable, too, in its way; but she spoke not, nor raised an eyelid.

'Have you forgotten me, Esther?' he repeated gently.

She did not answer then. She was moveless for another instant; and then, rising, with a swift motion she passed out of the room. But it was not the manner of dismissal or leave-taking, and Pitt waited for what was to come next. And in another moment or two she was there again, all covered with blushes, and her eyes cast down, down upon an old book which she held in her hand and presently held open. She was standing before him now, he having risen when she rose. From the very fair brow and rosy cheek and soft line of the lips, Pitt's eye at last went down to the book she held before him. There, on the somewhat large page, lay a dried flower. The petals were still velvety and rich coloured, and still from them came a faint sweet breath of perfume. What did it mean? Pitt looked, and then looked closer.

'It is a Cheiranthus,' he said; 'the red variety. What does it mean,
Esther? What does it say to my question?'

He looked at her eagerly; but if he did not know, Esther could not tell him. She was filled with confusion. What dreadful thing was this, that his memory should be not so good as hers! She could not speak; the lovely shamefaced flushes mounted up to the delicate temples and told their tale, but Pitt, though he read them, did not at once read the flower. Esther made a motion as if she would take it away, but he prevented her and looked closer.

'The red Cheiranthus,' he repeated. 'Did it come from Seaforth? I remember, old Macpherson used to have them in his greenhouse. Esther!—did *I* bring it to you?'

'Christmas'—stammered Esther. 'Don't you remember?'

'Christmas! Of course I do! It was in *that* bouquet? What became of the rest of it?'

'Papa made me burn all the rest,' said Esther, with her own cheeks now burning. And she would have turned away, leaving the book in his hands, with an action of as shy grace as ever Milton gave to his Eve; but Pitt got rid of the book and took herself in his arms instead.

And then for a few minutes there was no more conversation. They had reached a point of mutual understanding where words would have been superfluous.

But words came into their right again.

'Esther, do you remember my kissing you when I went away, six or seven years ago?'

'Certainly!'

'I think that kiss was in some sort a revelation to me. I did not fully recognise it then, what the revelation was; but I think, ever since I have been conscious, vaguely, that there was an invisible silken thread of some sort binding me to you; and that I should never be quite right till I followed the clue and

found you again. The vagueness is gone, and has given place to the most daylight certainty.'

'I am glad of that,' said Esther demurely, though speaking with a little effort. 'You always liked certainties.'

'Did you miss me?'

'Pitt, more than I can possibly tell you! Not then only, but all the time since. Only one thing has kept me from being very downhearted sometimes, when time passed, and we heard nothing of you, and I was obliged to give you up.'

'You should not have given me up.'

'Yes; there was nothing else for it. I found it was best not to think about you at all. Happily I had plenty of duties to think of. And duties, if you take hold of them right, become pleasures.'

'Doing them for the Master.'

'Yes, and for our fellow-creatures too. Both interests come in.'

'And so make life full and rich, even in common details of it. But,
Queen Esther,—my Queen!—do you know that you will be my Queen always?
That word expresses your future position, as far as I am concerned.'

'No,' said Esther a little nervously; 'I think hardly. Where there is a queen, there is commonly also a king somewhere, you know.'

'His business is to see the queen's commands carried out.'

'We will not quarrel about it,' said Esther, laughing. 'But, after all, Pitt, that is not like you. You always knew your own mind, and always had your own way, when I used to know you.'

'It is your turn.'

'It would be a very odd novelty in my life,' said Esther. 'But now, Pitt, I really must go and see about luncheon. Papa will be down, and Mrs. Barker does not know that you are here. And it would be a sort of relief to take hold of something so commonplace as luncheon; I seem to myself to have got into some sort of unreal fairyland.'

'I am in fairyland too, but it is real.'

'Let me go, Pitt, please!'

'Luncheon is of no consequence.'

'Papa will think differently.'

'I will go out and got some oysters, to conciliate him.'

'To *conciliate* him!'

'Yes. He will need conciliating, I can tell you. Do you suppose he will look on complacently and see you, who have been wholly his possession and property, pass over out of his hands into mine? It is not human nature.'

Esther stood still and coloured high.

'Does papa know?'

'He knows all about it, Queen Esther; *except* what you may have said to me. I think he understood what I was going to say to you.'

'Poor papa!' said Esther thoughtfully.

'Not at all,' said Pitt inconsistently. 'We will take care of him together, much better than you could alone.'

Esther drew a long breath.

'Then you speak to Barker, and I will get some oysters,' said Pitt with a parting kiss, and was off in a moment.

The luncheon after all passed off quite tolerably well. The colonel took the oysters, and Pitt, with a kind of grim acquiescence. He was an old soldier, and no doubt had not forgotten all the lessons once learned in that impressive school; and as every one knows, to accept the inevitable and to make the best of a lost battle are two of those lessons. Not that Colonel Gainsborough would seriously have tried to fight off Pitt and his pretensions, if he could; at least, not as things were. Pitt had told him his own circumstances; and the colonel knew that without barbarity he could not refuse ease and affluence and an excellent position for his daughter, and condemn her to school-keeping and Major Street for the rest of her life; especially since the offer was accompanied with no drawbacks, except the one trifle, that Esther must marry. That was an undoubtedly bitter pill to swallow; but the colonel swallowed it, and hardly made a wry face. He would be glad to get away from Major Street himself. So he ate his oysters, as I said, grimly; was certainly courteous, if also cool; and Pitt even succeeded in making the conversation flow passably well, which is hard to do, when it rests upon one devoted person alone. Esther did everything but talk.

After the meal was over, the colonel lingered only a few minutes, just enough for politeness, and then went off to his room again, with the dry and somewhat uncalled-for remark, that they 'did not want him.'

'That is true!' said Pitt humorously.

'Pitt,' said Esther hurriedly, 'if you don't mind, I want to get my work. There is something I must do, and I can do it just as well while you are talking.'

She went off, and returned with drawing-board and pencils; took her seat, and prepared to go on with a drawing that had been begun.

'What are the claims of this thing to be considered work?' said Pitt, after watching her a minute or two.

'It is a copy, that I shall need Monday morning. Only a little thing. I can attend to you just the same.'

'A copy for whom?'

'One of my scholars,' she said, with a smile at him.

'That copy will never be wanted.'

'Yes, I want it for Monday; and Monday I should have no time to do it; so I thought I would finish it now. It will not take me long, Pitt.'

'Queen Esther,' said he, laying his hand over hers, 'all that is over.'

'Oh no, Pitt!—how should it?' she said, looking at him now, since it was no use to look at her paper.

'I cannot have you doing this sort of work any longer.'

'*But!*' she said, flushing high, 'yes, I must.'

'That has been long enough, my queen! I cannot let you do it any longer. You may give me lessons; nobody else.'

'But!'—said Esther, catching her breath; then, not willing to open the whole chapter of discussion she saw ahead, she caught at the nearest and smallest item. 'You know, I am under obligations; and I must meet them until other arrangements are made. I am expected, I am depended on; I must not fail. I must give this lesson Monday, and others.'

'Then I will do this part of the work,' said he, taking the pencil from her fingers. 'Give me your place, please.'

Esther gave him her chair and took his. And then she sat down and watched the drawing. Now and then her eyes made a swift passage to his face for a half second, to explore the features so well known and yet so new; but those were a kind of fearful glances, which dreaded to be caught, and for the most part her eyes were down on the drawing and on the hands busied with it. Hands, we know, tell of character; and Esther's eyes rested with secret pleasure on the shapely fingers, which in their manly strength and skilful agility corresponded so well to what she knew of their possessor. The fingers worked on, for a time, silently.

'Pitt, this is oddly like old times!' said Esther at last.

'Things have got into their right grooves again,' said he contentedly.

'But what are you doing? That is beautiful!—but you are making it a great deal too elaborate and difficult for my scholar. She is not far enough advanced for that.'

'I'll take another piece of paper, then, and begin again. What do you want?'

'Just a tree, lightly sketched, and a bit of rock under it; something like that. She is a beginner.'

'A tree and a rock?' said Pitt. 'Well, here you shall have it. But,
Queen Esther, this sort of thing cannot go on, you know?'

'For a while it must.'

'For a very little while! In fact, I do not see how it can go on at all. I will go and see your school madam and tell her you have made another engagement.'

'But every honest person fulfils the obligations he is under, before assuming new ones.'

'That's past praying for!' said Pitt, with a shake of his head. 'You have assumed the new ones. Now the next thing is to get rid of the old. I must go back to my work soon; and, Queen Esther, your majesty will not refuse to go with me?'

He turned and stretched out his hand to her as he spoke. In the action, in the intonation of the last words, in the look which went with them, there was something very difficult for Esther to withstand. It was so far from presuming, it was so delicate in its urgency, there was so much wistfulness in it, and at the same time the whole magnetism of his personal influence. Esther placed her hand within his, she could not help that; the bright colour flamed up in her cheeks; words were not ready.

'What are you thinking about?' said he.

'Papa,' Esther said, half aloud; but she was thinking of a thousand things all at once.

'I'll undertake the colonel,' said he, going back to his drawing, without letting go Esther's hand. 'Colonel Gainsborough is not a man to be persuaded; but I think in this case he will be of my mind.'

He was silent again, and Esther was silent too, with her heart beating, and a quiet feeling of happiness and rest gradually stealing into her heart and filling it; like as the tide at flood comes in upon the empty shore. Whatever her father might think upon the just mooted question, those two hands had found each other, once and for all. Thoughts went roving, aimlessly, meanwhile, as thoughts will, in such a flood-tide of content. Pitt worked on rapidly. Then a word came to Esther's lips.

'Pitt, you have become quite an Englishman, haven't you?'

'No more than you are a Englishwoman.'

'I think, I am rather an American,' said Esther; 'I have lived here nearly all my life.'

'Do you like New York?'

'I was not thinking of New York. Yes, I like it. I think I like any place where my home is.'

'Would you choose your future home rather in Seaforth, or in London?
You know, *I* am at home in both.'

Esther would not speak the woman's answer that rose to her lips, the immediate response, that where he was would be what she liked best. It flushed in her cheek and it parted her lips, but it came not forth in words. Instead came a cairn question of business.

'What are the arguments on either side?'

'Well,' said Pitt, shaping his 'rock' with bold strokes of the pencil, 'in Seaforth the sun always shines, or that is my recollection of it.'

'Does it not shine in London?'

'No, as a rule.'

Esther thought it did not matter!

'Then, for another consideration, in Seaforth you would never see, I suppose,—almost never,—sights of human distress. There are no poor there.'

'And in London?'

'The distress is before you and all round you; and such distress as I suppose your heart cannot imagine.'

'Then,' said Esther softly, 'as far as *that* goes, Pitt, it seems to me an argument for living in London.'

He met her eyes with an earnest warm look, of somewhat wistful recognition, intense with his own feeling of the subject, glad in her sympathy, and yet tenderly cognizant of the way the subject would affect her.

'There is one point, among many, on which you and Miss Frere differ,' he said, however, coolly, going back to his drawing.

'She does not like, or would not like, living in London?'

'I beg your pardon! but she would object to your reason for living there.'

Esther was silent; her recollection of Betty quite agreed with this observation.

'You say you have seen her?' Pitt went on presently.

'Yes.'

'And talked with her?'

'Oh yes. And liked her too, in a way.'

'Did she know your name!' he asked suddenly, facing round.

'Why, certainly,' said Esther, smiling. 'We were properly introduced; and we talked for a long while, and very earnestly. She interested me.'

Pitt's brows drew together ominously. Poor Betty! The old Spanish proverb would have held good in her case; 'If you do not want a thing known of you, *don't do it*.' Pitt's pencil went on furiously fast, and Esther sat by, wondering what he was thinking of. But soon his brow cleared again as his drawing was done, and he flung down the pencil and turned to her.

'Esther,' he said, 'it is dawning on me, like a glory out of the sky, that you and I are not merely to live our earthly life together, and serve together, in London or anywhere, in the work given us to do. That is only the small beginning. Beyond all that stretches an endless life and ages of better service, in which we shall still be together and love and live with each other. In the light of such a distant glory, is it much, if we in this little life on earth give all we have to Him who has bought all that, and all this too, for us?'

'It is not much,' said Esther, with a sudden veil of moisture coming over her eyes, through which they shone like two stars. Pitt took both her hands.

'I mean it literally,' he said.

'So do I.'

'We will be only stewards, using faithfully everything, and doing everything, so as it seems would be most for His honour and best for His work.'

'Yes,' said Esther. But gladness was like to choke her from speaking at all.

'In India there is not the poorest Hindoo but puts by from his every meal of rice so much as a spoonful for his god. That is the utmost he can do. Shall we do less than our utmost?'

'Not with my good-will,' said Esther, from whose bright eyes bright drops fell down, but she was looking steadfastly at Pitt.

'I am not a very rich man, but I have an abundant independence, without asking my father for anything. We can live as we like, Esther; you can keep your carriage if you choose; but for me, I would like nothing so well as to use it all for the Lord Christ.'

'Oh Pitt! oh Pitt! so would I!'

'Then you will watch over me, and I will watch over you,' said he, with a glad sealing of this compact; 'for unless we are strange people we shall both need watching. And now come here and let me tell you

about your house. I think you will like that.'

There is no need to add any more. Except only the one fact, that on the day of Esther's marriage Pitt brought her a bunch of red wallflowers, which he made fast himself to her dress. She must wear, he said, no other flower but that on her wedding-day.

THE END.

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Typographical errors silently corrected:

chapter 8: =half dry-blossoms= replaced by =half-dry blossoms=

chapter 16: =could get at school= replaced by =could get at school.'=

chapter 17: =I don't know, Miss Esther.= replaced by =I don' know, Miss Esther.=

chapter 19: =And how are we going to get it= replaced by =And how are we goin' to get it=

chapter 25: =Maybe ye don't have none= replaced by =Maybe ye don't hev none=

chapter 25: =human nature 'd= replaced by =human natur' 'd=

chapter 25: =real oblidged to ye= replaced by =real obleeged to ye=

chapter 26: =not ef I can help it= replaced by =not if I kin help it=

chapter 26: =them foreign notions= replaced by =them furrin notions=

chapter 26: =had a falling out= replaced by =hed a falling out=

chapter 30: =that's what I was thinking;= replaced by =that's what I was thinkin';=

chapter 30: =it's been standing empty= replaced by =it's been standin' empty=

chapter 34: =W'hat do you mean= replaced by ='What do you mean=

chapter 36: =the Prayer-book? his mother= replaced by =the Prayer-book?' his mother=

chapitre 38: =son said stedfastly= replaced by =son said steadfastly=

chapter 45: =mother of Henry VIII= replaced by =mother of Henry VII=

chapter 47: =standing in the doorway= replaced by =standin' in the doorway=

chapter 47: =stedfast eyes= replaced by =steadfast eyes=

chapter 48: =looking stedfastly= replaced by =looking steadfastly=

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