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ELLEN MIDDLETON BY LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

IN ONE VOLUME.

ELLEN MIDDLETON.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

LEIPZIG

BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1846.

"I have read of a bird which hath a face like, and yet will prey upon, a man, who, coming to the water to drink, and finding there by reflexion that he had killed one like himself, pineth away by degrees, and never after enjoyeth itself. Such was in some sort the condition of—. This accident that he had killed one put a period to his carnal mirth, and was a covering to his eyes all the days of his life. Death was so sent to him as to allow him time to rise up on his knees and to crie, 'Lord have mercy upon me.'"

Fuller's Worthies, vol. II. p. 17.

INTRODUCTION.

"From each carved nook, and fretted bend,
Cornice and gallery, seem to send
Tones that with Seraph hymns might blend.

"Three solemn parts together twine,
In Harmony's mysterious line,
Three solemn aisles approach the shrine.

"Yet all are one, together all,
With thoughts that awe but not appal,
Teach the adoring heart to fall."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

"But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high-embowered roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light;
There let the pealing organ blow,

To the full voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness through mine ear
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes."

MILTON.

"What child of sorrow
Art thou, that com'st wrapt up in weeds of sadness,
And mov'st as if thy steps were towards a grave?"

OTWAY.

It was on the 15th of October, 18—, that one of the best and most respected clergymen in the town of —, and a canon of the cathedral, turned his steps towards the western door of that ancient pile. It was a little before the hour of evening service; the rays of the declining sun were shining brightly through the windows of painted glass, and producing that mellow and chastened light that accords so well with the feeling of religious awe, which a gothic edifice, the noblest of the works of man, is calculated to inspire; a work where he has been enabled to stamp on what is material an indelible impress of that spirit of devotion, which unites the utmost simplicity of faith with the highest sublimity of creed.

Mr. Lacy's attachment to this particular cathedral had grown with his growth and strengthened with his years. In his youth he had learnt to love its long deep aisles, its solemn arches, its quaint carvings. During the pauses between the several parts of divine service, his childish imagination would dwell upon the topics of thought suggested by the histories of saints and martyrs depicted in the glowing colours of the stained glass windows, or in the intricate workmanship of the minster screen. The swelling peal of the organ, the chaunting of the choristers, awoke in his young mind strange and bright imaginings of those things "which the eye of man has not seen, nor his ear heard, and that it has not entered into his heart to conceive."

To wander in the cloisters, and gather the flowers growing there among the old tombstones, and to think the while of the lilies of the field, which Solomon in all his glory could not equal; or of the wilderness that blossomed like the rose, at the word of the Lord; to collect in his own hands at Christmas as much holly as his puny strength could carry, and add it to the shining heap already standing at the cathedral door; to follow it in, with timid steps, and watch with wondering eyes, the adorning of the altar, the pulpit, the stalls, and the pews; to observe with childish glee two tall branches, all glowing with their coral berries, placed by the bench where he knelt in church with his mother; to sit at home by that mother of an evening, and with his Prayer Book on his knee, learn from her lips how that glorious hymn which he so loved to chaunt in church, and which spoke of angels and martyrs, of saints and apostles, of Heaven and earth, uniting in one concert of adoration, had been bequeathed to the holy church universal by a saint who had served his Creator from the days of his youth, and never wandered from the sacred shade of the sanctuary; for the baptism of another, who, after straying far and wide in the ways of sin and the maze of error, followed the while by a mother's prayers and tears, returned at last to the foot of the cross,* [* The Te Deum is supposed to have been composed by St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, for the baptism of St. Augustine.]

"With that free spirit blest,
Who to the contrite can dispense
The princely heart of innocence;"

to hear her tell how the three solemn parts of his beloved cathedral, all approaching the shrine in distinct majesty, and in mystical union, were a type and an emblem of the "Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity," so devoutly worshipped in the opening verses of the Litany; to be often reminded by her, when the deep melodious bells of the old tower spoke their loud summons to the house of God on festival and holiday, of the time when the faith in Christ was a matter of danger and of death, and the sanctuaries were laid among the vaults and the tombs—when in darkness and in silence Christians knelt on the cold stones, and a short hurried bell from the altar alone warned them of the moment when the blessed pledges of salvation were consecrated there. These were the joys of his childhood. These were the thoughts and the feelings which entwined themselves with his very being, and wound themselves round his heart; blending the memory of the past with the hopes of futurity. And when Mrs. Lacy, whose health had been gradually declining, died soon after her son had received the sacred rite of

confirmation, and for the first time knelt by her side at the altar; it was not before her trembling lips had pronounced a blessing on the child, who, with her hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on hers with the steady gaze of earnest, but, as far as this world was concerned, of hopeless affection, had given her the assurance that her people should be his people, and her God his God; that where she had lived there would he live, there would he die, and there also would he be buried.

As soon as his age warranted it he became a priest; and in the course of time, a canon of the cathedral of—. What had been the joys of his boyhood, became, afterwards, the safe-guards of his manhood, and finally the support and comfort of his declining years. The business of his life was prayer, and the exercise of the most unwearied and ardent charity. Its ruling principle, love to God, and to man. In the few hours of relaxation which he allowed himself, he found his pleasures in the study of ecclesiastical architecture, of the lives of saints and martyrs, above all, of everything that was in any way connected with the foundation, and the history of the several parts of that minster which he loved with all the holy love which men are wont to feel for the country of their birth and for the home of their youth, and, moreover, with a feeling akin to that which made Jacob exclaim, as he rose from his resting-place at Bethel, "This is the house of God, and the gate of Heaven!"

As I am not writing Mr. Lacy's history, it is unnecessary to enter into further details respecting the events of his life, if events they can be called, that chiefly consisted in the casual opportunities vouchsafed to him, of soothing some extraordinary sorrow; of recalling to the fold of Christ some wandering sinner, and of performing works of mercy and self-denial such as are seldom met with or even heard of in this luxurious and self-indulgent age. I will, therefore, revert to that hour of evening prayer which this chapter began by describing, as it will introduce us at once to the subject of this story.

Mr. Lacy had seated himself in his stall, and his eyes were glancing over the small congregation that had gathered together, on a week-day, for divine worship, when his attention was attracted by a woman who was sitting on one of the benches generally occupied by the poorest inhabitants of the town. She was very simply dressed, in deep mourning; but there was something about her attitude and countenance which I plainly indicated that she belonged to the higher classes of society. It was impossible to guess at her age; for although the slightness of her figure and the delicate beauty of her features gave her the appearance of youth, her face bore a wild and haggard expression that we seldom see in those who have not far advanced on their pilgrimage through life. Her arm was thrown against one of the adjoining pillars, and just before the beginning of the service she laid her head upon it, and neither stirred nor looked up during the time the prayers lasted. She neither knelt when others knelt, nor stood when they stood. Once only, when the organ sounded the first notes of one of the most beautiful anthems of our church, she rose from her seat almost mechanically, and an instant after resumed her former attitude. At the conclusion of the service, when the worshippers had all left the cathedral, Mr. Lacy passed near the place where the stranger still remained in a state of apparent abstraction; the sound of his approaching footsteps startled her; she hastily withdrew, and walked rapidly out of the church, and down one of the small streets that faced the entrance door. Two or three times during the succeeding fortnight, Mr. Lacy noticed the same person occupying the same place, and conducting herself in the same manner. His interest was powerfully excited, but he neither ventured to address her, nor could he succeed in ascertaining from the vergers, or from one or two other persons whom he questioned on the subject, anything respecting her. Chance, however, as it often happens in such cases, threw the information he sought in his way.

He was sitting one evening in his room, busily engaged in preparing his sermon for the Feast of All Saints, which occurred on the ensuing day, and on which it was his turn to preach, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door, and the subsequent entrance of an elderly woman, whom he had known for many years, and who had been in the habit of consulting him whenever any little scruple of conscience disturbed her in the exercise of her line of business, which was no other than that of lodging-letting. Mr. Lacy was so well acquainted with the character of his old friend, and with the nature of the difficulties usually submitted to him, that, after begging her to sit down, and draw her chair close to the fire, (for the last day of October was ushering in with suitable severity the first of November,) he immediately began—

"Well, my good Mrs. Denley, any more drunken lodgers, whom you keep on, for fear that no one but yourself would help them up to their rooms, and see that they did not spend the night in a less comfortable place than their beds? or are you still doubting as to the propriety of giving notice to quit to the gentleman who spoils your furniture, and never pays his rent, thereby keeping you from sending Johnny to school, as you had intended?"

"No, no, Sir; it has nothing to do with drunken lodgers, or with poor dear Johnny's going to school, or with not getting the rent paid, and all that, what's disturbing me now; but only just the contrary."

As it was difficult to understand, without farther explanation, how the contrary of these three things could be disturbing Mrs. Denley's mind, Mr. Lacy looked at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"You see, Sir, it is not exactly, as one might say, any business of mine; and I mind well what is said in St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, that women should not be tattlers and busy-bodies; but for all that, I hope it is no sin to wish a young creature that's under one's roof, and that's dying by inches—of something—the Lord only knows what—for Dr. Reid doesn't. He saw her walking in, Sir, the other day, and I made so bold as to ask her if she wouldn't speak to him, but she wouldn't; and he says as how he can't guess what's the matter with her; and if he can't, why, who should? Well, as I was saying, Sir, I hope it isn't a sin to wish the poor young thing not to die, without medicine for her body, or means of grace for her soul."

"Assuredly, you are quite right in forming such a wish, and in endeavouring to prevent so terrible an occurrence. But who is the person you are alluding to?"

"She is my lodger, Sir, and has been for the last six weeks."

"What is her name?" inquired Mr. Lacy.

"Mrs. Rodney, Sir."

"Has she no friends that you know of? How came she to hear of your lodgings?"

"Why, she stopped (on a Monday, I think it was) at the 'Rose,' and she asked Mr. Chapman if he could tell her of a quiet kind of respectable lodging in the town; now, Mr. Chapman is always willing to do one a good turn. It was him, Sir, that sent Johnny back to Ashby, on Tuesday last, in a return post-chaise, after he had sprained his ancle. A very good man, and a neighbourly, is Mr. Chapman; and, as I was saying, he likes to do one a good turn; so that when the lady asked for decent respectable lodgings, he said he knew of the very thing as would suit her; and sure enough, the next morning she came to see the rooms, and took them at once; and nothing would serve her but to pay down at once the rent for six months; and when I made so free as to say she had better not, for fear of changing her mind about them, she grew quite savage like; for all that she is a gentle-looking creature, and said as violent as could be, 'It must be so—take the money.' Well, thought I to myself, may be she fancies I don't like her for a lodger; so I just said, in an easy kind of manner, 'Well, Ma'am, and I hope, when the six months are past, that you may take them on for another half-year.' But 'No,' says she; 'six months will do,' which, to be sure, was a natural thing enough for her to say; but I take it, that if you had been there, Sir, and had heard her say it, you would not have thought it quite natural either."

"Is this lady whom you are speaking of in deep mourning? and does she occasionally attend the cathedral service?"

"She does. Sir; and is always dressed in black. She sits near the pillar where Mrs. Jones used to sit, poor soul, when she was alive."

"I have remarked her; she does indeed look both ill and unhappy. Do you know anything of her history?"

"Not a word, Sir; she wears a wedding-ring, but her clothes are marked with an E. and an M., for all that she calls herself Mrs. Rodney."

"Does she ever enter into conversation with you?"

"Sometimes, a little. Last week, Joe Irving, the undergardener at Clomley lodge, brought me, as a present, a large nosegay of dahlias and china-asters. I carried them upstairs, and while Mrs. Rodney was in church, I put them into jars, on the table, and on the chimney-piece, and very bright and pretty they looked. So when she came in, she noticed them and thanked me, and spoke quite cheerful. As she was standing a-talking to me about them, an insect ran out from between the leaves, and I tried to kill it, but she caught my hand and stopped me; and *her* hand, Sir!—why it was more like one of those bits of hot coal there, than the little white soil thing it looked like, and when I looked at her face, there was a bright fever spot on each cheek, and her lips were as white as could be.

"'You are very ill. Ma'am,' says I to her; 'your hand is burning-hot.' She put it to her forehead and 'it does not feel hot to me,' says she, and walks away to the window and opens it, for all that it was almost as cold and raw as to-night. But, now, and that's what I'm come about. Sir, she has taken to her bed, and is in a very bad way indeed, I take it."

"What! and has not she seen the doctor?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Lacy; she won't as much as let him come into the house. When she found herself so

ill, that she could not do for herself, she sent me to get one of the hospital nurses; and as Mary Evans was to be had, the girl that you was so good to last year when she broke her arm, I got her to come, and she has been with her these two days."

"Has she never spoken of seeing a clergyman?"

"Why, to say the truth, Sir, I made so bold as to ask her on it; it was yesterday when Mary Evans and I had been a-begging of her to let us fetch the doctor. 'No, no,' says she, 'he can do me no good;' and she fell to crying, which I had not seen her do before. 'Well, Ma'am,' says I, 'if he can do you no good, I know some one that would.' 'And who is that?' says she, sitting up in her bed, and looking hard at me. 'Mr. Lacy, Ma'am,' I said, 'the clergyman that read prayers last Sunday afternoon.' She laid down again, disappointed like, and I went on to say how you was quite a saint and a martyr, and a luminary of the church, as Johnny's schoolmaster says..."

"Hush, hush, my good Mrs. Denley; take care how you apply, or rather misapply, such names as those. But did Mrs. Rodney decline seeing me, or any other clergyman?"

"She did, Sir, and begged me not to mention it again."

"This is, indeed, a sad case: a woman young, friendless—dying, perhaps, and probably labouring under some mental affliction, and yet refusing to have recourse to the consolations of religion, and the ministry of the church," said Mr. Lacy, speaking rather to himself than to Mrs. Denley. "Have you," added he, turning to her, "any reason to suppose that this poor woman, notwithstanding her occasional attendance on the cathedral service, is a dissenter?"

"No, Sir, I think not; she has a small prayer-book, which I sometimes see lying on her table."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Denley," said Mr. Lacy, after a few moments' reflection; "we must both pray that God, of his infinite mercy, may dispose the heart of this young creature to turn to Him, and to the means of grace, which He has Himself appointed. To-morrow, when we kneel in the house of God, rejoicing with joy unspeakable over the glory of the church triumphant, and meditating on the blessedness of that holy multitude

'Who climbed the steep ascent to Heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain,'

each in our place, we will bear in mind this suffering lamb of the fold, and pray earnestly that to her, as well as to us,

"Grace may be given, to follow in their train.'"

"I will, Sir: I will," replied the good old woman, with tears in her eyes. "But won't you try and see her?"

"I cannot force myself into her presence," answered Mr. Lacy; "but every day I will call at your house to inquire after her health, hoping and trusting that the hour will come when she will cease to shut her doors against one commissioned by our Lord, to bear words of peace to the wretched, and of pardon to the guilty. Whatever you can do to hasten that moment, I know you will do, my good friend, and so farewell to you."

"Good-night to you, and thank you kindly, Mr. Lacy; it must be a heavy heart indeed, that goes away from you no lighter than when it came to you;" and so saying, Mrs. Denley put on her cloak, took up her lanthorn, and trudged home, through the dark streets of the old town.

The next morning Mr. Lacy's thoughts were divided between the joyful contemplations which the holy festival it was ushering in was calculated to inspire, and the painful solicitude which the conversation of the preceding evening had left on his mind. In church, however, the latter feeling subsided, and gave way to that earnest calmness, and that intense devotion, which absorb for the time the cares and troubles of the soul, "like motes in light divine." When from the pulpit this aged minister dwelt in glowing words on the communion between the saints above and the saints below; on the link that unites the church militant here on earth with the church triumphant in Heaven; above all, when in terms of the deepest reverence and of the intensest love, he spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prayed that he himself, and all those who joined with him in prayer that day, might each, in God's own time, enter into the fulness of his presence, and worship in his courts evermore, yea in time and in eternity, there was something so ardent in his aspirations, and yet so chastened in his devotion, that the assembled multitude heard him with a reverence, mingled with awe; they felt as if Elijah's car of fire might bear him away from their sight; from the shelter of the sanctuary on earth to the glories of the

new Jerusalem on high.

After the conclusion of the sermon, Mr. Lacy remained absorbed in earnest prayer, till the last of the worshippers had withdrawn, and the parting strain from the organ had died away on the walls of the cathedral. As he was slowly descending the aisle, he paused before the place where Mrs. Rodney had been seated some days before; as he stood musing on the account which he had heard of her from Mrs. Denley, he observed a few lines written in pencil on the column against which she had been in the habit of leaning. They were so faintly marked, and had probably been so much effaced since, that he found great difficulty in making them out. At last he succeeded in doing so, and they were as follows:—

"My aching heart is breaking,
My burning brain is reeling,
My very soul is riven,
I feel myself forsaken.
And phantom forms of horror,
And shapeless dreams of terror.
And mocking tones of laughter,
About me seem to gather;
And death, and hell, and darkness
Are driving me to madness."

It would be difficult to describe the revulsion of feeling which Mr. Lacy experience on reading the expression of a despair that contrasted so strikingly with the joy and the peace which had been filling his own heart. There was also something which indicated a kind of reckless helplessness in the fact of leaving that confession of mental agony to be scanned, perhaps, by indifferent eyes. It must have been done in one of those moments when the tortured heart would break if it did not in some mode or other give vent to its anguish. Mr. Lacy, after some minutes' consideration, took out of his pocket a pencil and a bit of paper, and transcribed upon it the lines he had found, and then carefully effaced them from the pillar on which they had been written. As he slowly walked out of the cathedral, and towards Mrs. Denley's house, he revolved in his mind the means by which he would be most likely to gain admission to Mrs. Rodney's presence. It struck him that if she could be made aware that he had read the words that were now in his possession, she would feel less reluctance to enter into communication with him: but it was difficult to convey this fact to her without wounding her feelings. When he reached the house and knocked, he was still undecided as to the course he should pursue. Mary Evans, the girl who was in attendance upon Mrs. Rodney, came to the door; and when Mr. Lacy inquired after Mrs. Rodney's health, answered: "Why, Sir, she says as how she is wonderful better to-day, and so strong that she's been a getting up and walking about her room; but, I take it, her strength is fever strength, for her cheeks are red as crimson, and she seems as if she could not sit still."

"She should not be allowed to exert herself in that way," observed Mr. Lacy;—"she may do herself much harm."

"Indeed, and that's quite true, Sir; but there's no persuading her when she's in one of her ways. She speaks as gentle as a lamb in common, and never scolds or complains; but when she gets into a tantrum about something as one wants her to do or not to do, she grows to look quite wild like. It's just now that Mrs. Denley saw you a-coming down the street; and says she to Mrs. Rodney (Mrs. Denley had stepped up to see how the fire was burning. Sir,)—well, says she to Mrs. Rodney, 'There's Mr. Lacy a-coming down this way Ma'am; I think he'll be after asking to see you:' and Mrs. Rodney on that turns round and says so sudden, 'If I am to be persecuted in this manner, I shall leave the house at once,' that Mrs. Denley let fall the coal-scuttle, and she says as how it gave her quite a revulsion. But won't you walk in, Sir?"

"No; I came only to inquire after Mrs. Rodney's health; and as, from what you have just told me, she certainly would not be inclined to see me, I shall send up no message on the subject." And so saying, Mr. Lacy took his departure.

On the Sunday following, a few minutes after the beginning of evening service, he saw, gliding to her usual place, with a noiseless step, the poor woman who during the past week had so much occupied his thoughts. Her shrunken form and flushed cheeks revealed the fatal progress of a disease which betrays its victims all the more surely, by imparting to them, at certain stages of its course, a false strength, that lures them to exertions only serving to accelerate its fearful termination. As Mr. Lacy mounted the pulpit, he breathed an ardent prayer that something in the words he was going to utter might carry a token of peace to this poor creature's breast, a ray of light to her mind. In the course of his sermon he introduced the following sentences:—

"When the heart of man is breaking, and his brain is reeling, to whom should he turn, but to Him who

said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?' When the soul of man is shaken, and he feels himself forsaken, to whom should he turn, but to Him who once cried out upon the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' When phantom forms of horror, and shapeless dreams of terror, assail the soul of man, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was once in such great agony, that his sweat fell like drops of blood upon the earth? When mocking tones of laughter are wildly ringing round him, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was jeered at, and reviled on the cross, because others he saved, but himself he could not save. When death, and hell, and darkness, are driving man to madness, to whom should he turn, but to him who took from the grave its victory, from death its sting, and from hell its prey?—to Him who died and rose again the third day, in order that death, and hell, and darkness, should never more drive men to madness."

On the evening of this day, Mr. Lacy received the following note. It seemed written at once with difficulty and with rapidity, and in parts was somewhat illegible.

"If you still wish to see me, Mr. Lacy,—if you are not wearied with vainly seeking admittance to one who is not worthy to wipe the dust from your feet, come to me now. You spoke to me to-day, though you never turned your eyes towards me. I looked into your face, and it seemed to me as if it had been the face of an angel and when your lips uttered the words that my hand had written, I hung upon your lips. It was as a voice from Heaven; my heart melted within me, and I wept; not as I have often wept, for my eyes are worn out with crying; not tears that scorch the eyelids as they flow, but tears that seem to loosen the iron band that binds my temples, and to melt the dull hard stone in my breast. I came home, and knelt by my bedside—my Prayer-book was in my hand: I opened it, and these words met my eyes, 'The order for the Visitation of the Sick.' I closed the book, and read no more. Mr. Lacy, I am sick in body, and sick at heart. Will you come and visit me? You will not question me; you will not ask me why my sorrow is like no other sorrow; but you will pray for me, and by me. Perhaps you may say some words like this morning's—not words of comfort, words of hope, but words that will make me weep, as I wept then.

Ellen."

The next morning at twelve o'clock, Mr. Lacy was at the door of Mrs. Denley's house. His Prayer-book was in his hand, and as he entered, he slowly pronounced the appointed blessing, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." Mrs. Denley led the way up stairs, and opened the door of the room, where Ellen was lying on a sofa, supported by cushions. Her face was paler than the day before, but a sudden flush overspread it as Mr. Lacy entered.

"You are welcome," she said, extending to him at the same time her thin transparent hand. "It is kind of you to come, and kind of you (she added, tuning to Mrs. Denley, and to Mary Evans, who were standings by,) to join in these prayers. There are responses to be made, I believe."

Mr. Lacy perceived that she was anxious that he should begin the service at once, without previously entering into conversation with her; and feeling deeply himself that no words of his could bring such powerful consolation to the soul, if burthened with sorrow, or so forcibly awaken the sense of sin, if guilt and remorse were troubling it, as those which the Church supplied him with, he knelt at once by Ellen's couch, and with more emotion than he had perhaps ever felt before in the exercise of this portion of his sacred ministry, he read the solemn prayer for mercy, with which this service opens.

After the Lord's Prayer, in which Ellen had feebly joined, Mr. Lacy and the two women, who knelt opposite to him, repeated alternately the impressive sentences of the Litany, which immediately follows it.

There was something in these supplications that seemed to accord, in some extraordinary manner, with the state of Ellen's mind. When the minister prayed "that her enemy should have no advantage of her," she started convulsively, and gazed wildly about her, as the women responded, "Nor the wicked approach to hurt her." When the words "From the face of her enemy," were uttered, she hid her face in her hands, and a slight shudder shook her frame. After a pause, Mr. Lacy read the prayers that follow, and then rising from his knees, turned towards Ellen, and addressed to her the beautiful and touching exhortation, that forms part of the service; but when towards the end of it—"Forasmuch as after this life there is an account to be given unto the Righteous Judge, by whom all must be judged, without respect of persons"—he required her to examine herself and her estate, both towards God and towards man, so that accusing and condemning herself for her own faults, she might find mercy at our Heavenly Father's hand for Christ's sake, then Ellen trembled. When he rehearsed to her the Apostles' Creed, and asked her if all these articles of the Christian faith she stedfastly believed, she bowed her assent. And now they had arrived at that solemn period in the service when the minister was bound by his sacred office to examine whether she truly repented her of her sins, and was in charity with all the

world;—when he was to exhort her to forgive from the bottom of her heart the persons that had offended her; and if she had offended any other, to ask of them forgiveness; and where she had done injury or wrong to any man, to make amends to the uttermost of her power. He did so in words of awful warning, and at the same time of soothing tenderness; but no answer came from her lips—she turned her face towards the wall; and, to use the expressive words of Holy Scripture, she lifted up her voice and wept.

Mr. Lacy directed Mrs. Denley and Mary Evans to leave him alone with Ellen, but to remain within call in case their presence was required.

When the door was closed he addressed her in the following words:—"Your conscience is troubled with some weighty matter—the heaviness of guilt is on your soul, ay, and that of deep anguish too," he added, as the heart-rending expression of her countenance, which she suddenly turned towards him, revealed the acuteness of her sufferings. "Perhaps, too, you may have been more sinned against than sinning. Perhaps the hand of man has been against you, and you have wandered, young as you are, through the wilderness of the world, and found no rest for the sole of your foot. You have longed, perhaps, like the dove, to flee away and be at rest."

In a hoarse voice Ellen murmured, "There is no peace for the wicked!"

"But there is pardon for the penitent, and peace for the pardoned," rejoined Mr. Lacy.

"Pardoned! pardoned!" exclaimed Ellen, pressing her hand to her forehead, "I shall never feel myself pardoned! Mr. Lacy, I have sometimes opened the Bible, and I have read in it words of pity, words of mercy, words of promise, and for a moment they seemed to bring comfort to my soul; but the dark spirit within me would still whisper, They are not written for thee,—not for thee. O God! O God! when shall I ever feel forgiven?"

"When, laying aside all human pride, all human fears," solemnly replied Mr. Lacy, "in meek distrust of your own judgment, in deep humility of spirit, you make, as the Church requires, a special confession of your sins to one, who, if you truly repent and believe, can absolve you from them, by the authority committed to him by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ellen listened to these words in deep silence, and Mr. Lacy did not interrupt her meditation. After a long pause daring which she seemed absorbed in the most intense thought, she once more extended her hand to him, and said, "I think, I hope, that a change has come over me. Thoughts are crowding upon my mind, that never came there before, and things begin to appear to me in a new light. Perhaps it is from the approach of death, which since yesterday has seemed to draw very near to me; and to one who has suffered as I have suffered, death, if it could be robbed of its terror, ought not to be very dreadful. I have often said, 'Would that I could lay myself down and die;' but now, now that I see death coming in its stern reality, I would fain shrink from it; and yet nothing but the cold hand of death will ever still the passionate throbbings of my heart, and teach it to love less wildly, or to hate less fiercely. Forgive me, forgive me, Mr. Lacy! Oh, do not turn away from me! God has sent you to me as an angel of mercy, not as the minister of his wrath. You bade me confess my sins. See, I confess them! I will kneel to you!" and Ellen, in spite of Mr. Lacy's efforts to prevent her, flung herself on the ground at his feet, and clung to them in an agony of tears. He instantly raised her, and, replacing her on the sofa, with a voice of authority desired her to be calm, and to compose herself. She obeyed, and in a few minutes, and with an altered manner, she again addressed him. "I cannot confess my sins without revealing the history of my life; my guilt and my sorrows are so closely linked together, that they cannot be separated: but I wish to keep no secret from you—you have brought a vision of peace and of hope before me; and perhaps, when you know how miserable I have been, though how guilty, you may not think me utterly unworthy of it."

"None are unworthy of pardon in the eyes of our adorable Saviour," said Mr. Lacy, "who heartily repent and sue for it; but remember that we must forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

"Since I have seen you and heard you," said Ellen, "I can pray, I dare pray, and I will pray that God may change my heart, and teach me to forgive as I hope to be forgiven: and now as I am not strong enough to speak much at a time, and that I wish to open my heart to you without reserve, I will put into your hands a history of my life, which, during days of solitude and nights of weary watchings, I have written—and which will disclose to you all the secrets of my soul; it is the most complete confession I can make. When you have read it, Mr. Lacy, you will return to me. By that time, perhaps, the grace of God will have quelled the storms within me, and I may then hear from your lips the blessed words of absolution."

The following history was contained in the manuscript which
Mr. Lacy carried home with him.

CHAPTER I.

> "What thousand voices pass through all the rooms, What cries and hurries! ..... My cousin's death sits heavy on my conscience; hark! ..... In every room confusion, they're all mad. Most certain all stark mad within the house."
>
> **BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.**

I was born and educated in the house of my uncle, Mr. Middleton, one of the wealthiest squires in D— shire. He had received my mother with kindness and affection, on her return from India, where she had lost her husband and her eldest child. She was his youngest and favourite sister, and when after having given birth to a daughter she rapidly declined in health, and soon after expired, bequeathing that helpless infant to his protection, he silently resolved to treat it as his own, and, like most resolutions formed in silence, it was religiously adhered to. At the time of my birth, my uncle was about forty years old; a country gentleman in the most respectable sense of the word.

Devoted to the improvement of his tenants on the one hand, and to that of his estate on the other; zealous as a magistrate, active as a farmer, charitable towards the poor, and hospitable towards the rich, he was deservedly popular with his neighbours, and much looked up to in his county. He had been attached in his youth to the daughter of a clergyman of eminent abilities and high character, who resided in the neighbourhood of Elmsley. For six years his father had opposed his intended marriage with Miss Selby, and when at the end of that time he extorted from him a reluctant consent, it was too late to press his suit; she was dying of a hopeless decline, and to cheer her few remaining days of life by every token of the most devoted affection, and after her death to mourn deeply and silently over the wreck of his early hopes, was the conclusion of an attachment to which Mr. Middleton had looked, as to the source and means of all his future happiness. At the age of thirty-five he became possessed, by his father's death, of the manor-house of Elmsley, and of the large property adjoining to it. In the happiness which his wealth gave him the means of diffusing around him, in the friendly attachment with which he was regarded by those among whom he now fixed his residence, he found subjects of interest, and sources of gratification, which gradually obliterated the traces of his early affliction.

From what I have already said, it will be plainly perceived that my uncle was a man that one could not fail to esteem; though whether or not it was as easy to love him, may be questioned. To the strictest principles of religious morality, he added a heart full of kind feeling for others, and an invariable serenity of temper, but an unconquerable reserve, a want of confidence in others, and an absence of sympathy in their tastes and pursuits, interfered with the expression, if not with the existence, of those affections, which his merits and his kindness would otherwise have been so well calculated to inspire. I never remember his taking the slightest interest in any of my childish pleasures, or his uttering any but the most formal phrase of commendation when my performances were submitted to his inspection. Young as I was, I felt this want of sympathy, in the only person who was really interested in my welfare, and would have gladly agreed to be less calmly reproved when I was wrong, and more warmly praised when I was right.

Till the age of six years old, I am not conscious of having loved any human being. From accidental circumstances my nurses had been so often changed, that I had not had the opportunity of attaching myself to any of them; and as to my uncle, I believe he might have left Elmsley for days, weeks or months, without causing me the slightest sensation of regret or solitude. He did not often absent himself from home, but on one occasion he did so for three months, and a few days before his return, my nurse informed me that he was married, and that I should soon see my new aunt. The announcement caused me neither pleasure nor pain; and curiosity was the only feeling with which I anticipated the arrival so eagerly looked forward to by the whole of my uncle's establishment. When Mrs. Middleton arrived I was immediately summoned into the drawing-room. The tenderness of her manner, the expressions of fondness with which she greeted me; the emotion which her countenance betrayed, were all so totally different from anything that I had ever witnessed, that I felt as if a being from another world had come among us. There was something heavenly in the expression of her countenance, there was something original in every word she uttered; in her gaiety there was a bubbling joyousness, an intense enjoyment in enjoyment, that was irresistibly attractive, and in sorrow or in emotion, her tears fell unconsciously from her eyes, and would trickle down her cheeks without any of the disfiguring grimaces which usually attend the act of weeping. I loved her from the first instant I saw her, and my childish heart clung to her with all the strength of feeling that had lain dormant in it during the first years of my existence. To use a familiar expression, we took to each other instantaneously; I do not know that she was fond of children, as it is called; she did not stop to caress those we met in our walks, and of romping and noise she grew very soon weary; but there was so much

originality in her understanding, and so much simplicity in her character; she was so in earnest about every employment and amusement which she admitted me to share, that, superior as she was, I never felt that she was making an effort to bring herself down to my level, and consequently in her society never experienced the weariness which children are apt to feel, from those flat and unprofitable attempts to amuse them, which are so often made and so often fail. She required sympathy; it was as necessary to her as the air of heaven, and what she so much needed herself, she amply yielded to others, I never met in my life with any one who entered into the feelings of those about her as she did.

Altogether, she was a person more calculated to diffuse happiness than to enjoy it; perhaps to inspire more enthusiastic feelings of affection, than she herself often experienced. Be that as it may, she opened a new era in the history of my childhood; and, during the six or seven years that followed the epoch of my uncle's marriage, my life was as happy as that of a human creature can be. About a year after that event, Mrs. Middleton was confined of a girl, and this circumstance, far from diminishing my happiness, served but to increase it. My aunt was not a person capable of being engrossed by an infant, and though greatly pleased at the birth of her little girl, her affection for me suffered no diminution. The cares which little Julia required—the task of entertaining her, which often fell to my share—formed a delightful amusement; and I do not remember, till the time when she was eight and I fifteen, having ever felt, or, indeed, having had cause to feel, one jealous pang on her account.

Mrs. Middleton took great pains with my education,—at least with those parts of it which were congenial to her taste and mine; for, to follow with ardour whatever was the impulse and fancy of the moment, was at once the charm and the danger of my aunt's character. She could not resist the temptation of initiating me, perhaps too early, into those studies which captivate the imagination and excite the feelings. German and Italian we studied together. The most romantic parts of history—all that was most interesting and bewitching in poetry, furnished materials for those hours which we devoted to reading. Reading! that most powerful instrument in the education of the heart!—silently searching into its secrets, rousing its dormant passions, and growing sometimes itself into a passion! But there was scarcely less excitement in conversing with my aunt, than in reading with her. She never took a common-place view of any subject, or shrunk from expressing her real opinion upon it, whatever it might be. With regard to her own feelings, she took nothing for granted; she never persuaded herself (as so many people do) that, because it would be right or desirable to feel and to act in a particular manner, she did so feel and act, while her conscience bore witness to the contrary. She was a great searcher into motives, and fearfully true in her judgment of people and of things: had not her character been one of the noblest, and her mind one of the purest that ever woman was gifted with, there would have been something startling in the boldness of her opinions, and in the candour of her admissions. Had she been within reach of any associates whose feelings and understandings were in any way congenial to her own, she would not, in all probability, have treated me, rather as a pupil and companion, than as an intimate friend. She would not have poured out her thoughts, to me with the most unbounded confidence, or taught me to feel that I was essential to her happiness; but, as it was, (for at Elmsley she had neighbours and acquaintances, but no friends,) she did all this, and the intense gratification which I derived from my constant intercourse with one whom I loved with the tenderest affection, kept me in a state of highly wrought excitement, which, while it subdued, and even effaced, the trivial faults of that early age, exercised on my character an influence far from beneficial to my future happiness. One of the subjects on which Mrs. Middleton would often speak to me with eagerness and eloquence, was the self-deception with which most people persuade themselves that their affections flow in their most natural channels, without proving their own feelings by the stern test of *reality*. Fully aware of her partiality to me; aware, too, how unattractive a child my cousin Julia was, and how unsuited to my aunt's nature and taste must be the cold, sluggish, selfish disposition which her daughter evinced, and which she seemed painfully alive to, I never for an instant doubted that her affection for me exceeded in kind, as well as in degree, that which she felt for her own child. Often would she lament to me that Julia gave no promise of future excellence of mind or character; that in her she never expected to find the sympathy, the responsive tenderness, that characterised our intimacy, and which shed such a charm over every detail of life. The selfishness inherent in the human heart, superadded to the exclusive nature of a passionate attachment, made me listen to these forebodings with a secret satisfaction, laying, meanwhile, the flattering unction to my soul, that nothing but the purest spirit of devoted tenderness led me to rejoice that I could fill a place in my aunt's affections, which would prevent her suffering from the disappointment which my cousin's repulsive and apathetic disposition would otherwise have caused to a heart as warm, and a spirit as ardent, as hers.

A few years (the happiest of my life) carried me rapidly to the verge of womanhood. I attained my fifteenth year, and began to form acquaintances, and to mix in the society which occasionally met at Elmsley. It chiefly consisted of relations of my uncle and of Mrs. Middleton, who came at certain intervals, and spent a few weeks at the old Priory, which then became the scene of more active amusements than were customary in our usually retired mode of life. Edward Middleton, a nephew of my uncle, and Henry Lovell, a younger brother of my aunt, who were college friends and constant

associates, were among our most frequent visitors. The latter, who had lost his mother several years before the time I am speaking of, and whose father held a situation in one of the government offices, which obliged him to remain in London almost all the year round, had been in the habit of spending first his holidays from Eton, and subsequently the Oxford vacations, with his sister at Elmsley. There he formed an acquaintance with Edward Middleton, which soon grew into a close intimacy; and both at college and at Elmsley they were inseparable. As it so often happens in such cases, there was hardly any perceptible bond of sympathy between them; they were so strikingly dissimilar in character and in tastes, that one could scarcely understand the pleasure they took in each other's society. It is necessary to the subsequent unfolding of my story that I should give some account of them, and of the feelings with which I regarded, at that time, these two men. They were both several years older than myself, but the disparity was not enough to prevent my considering them as friends and companions. They had both left Oxford some two or three years before the time I am speaking of. Henry Lovell was at once like and unlike his sister, Mrs. Middleton; he was exceedingly attractive; there was no denying the charm that existed in the rapid intelligence, the quick conception, and the ready humour that lit up his eyes and countenance, and sparkled in his repartee. His powers of captivation were as great as hers, but he knew that power, and even used it for an end; while in her it was spontaneous as the bubbling of a stream, as the song of the birds, or as the joy of childhood. Both had a keen perception of the ludicrous, but in her it never amounted to ill-nature: she was as severe upon herself as he was upon others; while she penetrated into their motives she judged them kindly, and was at ready to detect evil in her own heart as he was to suspect it in theirs. His smile was sarcastic, and his remarks were often bitter. If he had not been charming, he would have been odious; and to have been loved at all, he must have been passionately loved, for no feeling short of passion could have withstood the withering influence of his profound selfishness. He was well versed in the language of feeling, in the theory of enthusiasm; he could speak of "whatsoever things are pure, of whatsoever things are lovely, of whatsoever things are honest, of whatsoever things are of good report." Where there was virtue, and where there was praise, there was he ready to descant with eloquence, to discuss with ability; there he was at home, at least in conversation, for, in the varied range of human affections, his intellect conceived what his heart did not feel.

At the time that I am writing of, when he and Edward Middleton were the two persons who most occupied my thoughts, and interested my girlish imagination, it would have been difficult for me to describe what I thought of each. For Edward I felt an involuntary respect, which made me shrink from expressing, before him, any opinion, or any sentiment which he was likely to condemn; he seemed inclined to judge me with peculiar severity, and I sometimes felt provoked at the calm sternness of his manner on these occasions, especially on comparing it with the smiling indifference with which he would listen to Henry Lovell's satirical remarks, which I secretly felt to be more deserving of blame than my own thoughtless observations, little as I could withstand myself the extraordinary fascination which his peculiar tone of mind and conversation exercised on those about him.

In the summer of the year 18—, my cousin Julia had a long and severe illness. For some days she lay at the point of death; and, for the first time in my life, I saw the expression of anguish in the face I loved best in the world. Mrs. Middleton's grief seemed out of proportion with the degree of affection she had hitherto apparently felt for her child; and there was a wildness in her sorrow which surprised as much as it affected me. Long afterwards, it struck me that something of remorse, at the preference she had so openly shown for me, and at the coldness with which she had regarded her daughter, might have added to the misery she then experienced. But, at the time, this idea never occurred to me; I thought I had underrated the strength of my aunt's feelings, and only wondered at the intensity of an affection which had never betrayed itself to that extent before.

After a few anxious days and nights, my cousin rallied, and by degrees recovered; but did not regain the state of robust health which she had previously enjoyed. My aunt's devotion to her was unceasing: she patiently watched over her, and attended to every wish and fancy that she expressed. Julia's temper, which had never been good, grew gradually worse; and it required all a mother's forbearance to endure her continual waywardness and caprice. She had never seemed to feel much affection for me, but now her indifference grew into positive dislike, and nothing I could say or do ever succeeded in pleasing her. When left in my charge, she would invariably insist upon doing something or other which I was obliged to prohibit or prevent; and the slightest opposition to her will would instantly produce such fits of passion, and of crying, that my aunt at her return found her frequently in such a state of hysterical nervousness, or else so pale and exhausted by her own violence, that it was some time before she could be restored to anything like calmness or good-humour. I can truly say that I made every possible effort to gain the affection of my little cousin, and I was seldom betrayed into any irritable expression, or sign of impatience, much as I was daily and hourly tried.

Once or twice I had observed an expression of displeasure in Mrs. Middleton's countenance, on overhearing Julia's screams, on some of the occasions alluded to; and I had sometimes noticed a sudden

cloud pass over her brow, and an abrupt change in her manner, at the moments when she was on the point of giving utterance to those expressions of tenderness which she was wont to bestow upon me: but that tenderness was so evident; it had been spoken in words; it had been proved by deeds; I had read it in every look of her eyes; I had traced it in every tone of her voice, during so many years, that I should as soon have doubted that the rays of the sun cheered and warmed me, as that my aunt loved me.

I am now come to an epoch of my life, the events of which, in their minutest details, are engraved on my memory as if a burning iron had stamped them on my brain. I will not anticipate, but, with unflinching resolution, record every particular of the day which changed me from a happy child into a miserable woman.

Some description of Elmsley Priory is requisite to the understanding of my story, and I will endeavour to make it short and clear.

The house itself, formerly a monastery, was built on the brow of a steep hill; irregular in shape, it seemed to have been added to, bit by bit, according to the increasing size of the convent. A verandah or balcony of modern date, followed the sinuosities of the old pile, and, from its peculiar position, while at one extremity it was on a level with the grounds, at the other it overhung a precipitous declivity. This bank shelved down to the edge of a rapid stream, which chafed and foamed along the base of the hill against which the house stood.

At one of the ends of the verandah was a rough flight of stone steps, much overgrown with moss, at all times difficult to descend, and, after rain, positively dangerous, from the slippery nature of the footing it afforded. It led to the edge of the river down the bank already described. A longer and more circuitous path began at the opposite extremity of the verandah, and ended at the same point.

The view which this balcony commanded was one of the most beautiful that can be conceived; and in the first freshness of a spring morning, in the intense heat and repose of a summer noon, in the glorious beauty of an autumnal sunset, or in the grandeur of a wintry storm, we were wont to stand and revel in the varying aspects which this lovely landscape presented to our eyes. It was a combination of wood, stream, and mountain, with a few cottages scattered here and there, as if a painter's hand had placed them where they stood. Altogether, they formed a picture which the eye loved to dwell upon, and which memory strives to recall.

It was on one of those glorious days, when existence in itself, and apart from all other circumstances, is felt to be a blessing, that I stood leaning against one of the pillars of the gallery I have described.

There had been a thunder-storm, and torrents of rain, in the night, but then the sky was perfectly cloudless; that thin transparent haze, which in England sobers without obscuring the brightness of a hot sunny day, hung lightly on the horizon; the lights and shades played in the stream below, and the busy hum of insects was the only sound that reached my ears. The rose of May, and the slender jessamine, twined round the pilasters, near which I stood. They were giving out all their sweetness, and seemed to be rearing their graceful heads again, after the storm that had so rudely shaken them.

I had thrown back my bonnet, to enjoy more completely the warm perfumed breeze; and was so absorbed by the beauty of the scene, that it was only on being called to for the second time, that I turned round, and saw Julia, standing on the edge of the stone parapet, with her arm round one of the columns. The dangerous nature of her position immediately struck me; I told her to come down, and, on her refusing to do so, took hold of her, and placed her on the ground. She instantly set up one of her loudest screams, and, exclaiming that I had hurt her, she rushed past me, and ran into the drawing-room, one of the recesses of which formed an angle in the building. A small paned latticed window, which opened on the verandah, was at this moment imperfectly closed, and from the spot where I stood, I could hear every word that was spoken in that recess. I heard Julia complaining to her mother of my unkindness, in a voice broken by sobs, and tremulous with passion. The child's statement of the facts that had led to my interference, was totally false; for an instant I felt inclined to follow her, in order to contradict it, but the bane of my nature, *pride*, which always made me hate an explanation or a justification, restrained the impulse, and I then caught the sound of Mrs. Middleton's voice; she was speaking in a low earnest manner to her husband.

"This cannot last," she was saying; "it cannot be suffered to last; these children must be separated, and the sooner the better."

"But what can be done?" was the reply; "Ellen has no home but this."

I listened breathlessly for the answer. It seemed to me, at that moment, as if my life depended upon it; my breath seemed to stop, and my whole frame to quiver.

"She might go to some good school for a year or two," was the answer: "it would be painful to decide on such a step; but nothing can signify to us in comparison with Julia's health." I did not hear any more, but, snatching up my bonnet, I rushed along the verandah till I came to its farthest extremity. I knelt, and leant my head against the stones of the parapet. Every vein in my brow seemed swelled to bursting, and I felt as if I had waked from a happy dream to a state of things which my understanding could scarcely master.

Was it indeed my aunt? was it Mrs. Middleton? who had spoken of sending me away from her—away from Elmsley? Was it she that had said I was *nothing* to her in comparison with the selfish child whom, for her sake alone, I had endured? It was even so—I was *nothing* to her; I felt convinced of it at once; and it seemed to me in that moment as if a sudden chill struck to my heart, and crept through my whole frame. I have often wondered whether the sensation of moral suffering is as nearly allied to physical pain in every one else as in myself. The expression of an *aching* heart has always appeared to me to have a literal as well as a figurative sense; there is a sort of positive pain that accompanies certain kinds of mental sufferings, different in its nature from the feeling of grief, even in its highest degree; and disappointment in its various forms is perhaps the species of suffering which generally produces it.

I was, at the moment I have described, experiencing this kind of pain in its acutest shape. I felt reluctant to move from where I stood; the sound of my own quick breathing was oppressive to me. My eyes were closed, that the light of the sun, in all its glorious brightness, should not reach me. The sounds, the smells, that I was enjoying a few minutes before, were growing intolerable to me. No voice could then have been welcome to me (for the voice I loved best, the voice that had ever spoken peace and joy to my heart, I had just heard utter words that had destroyed at one blow the fabric of bliss which my heart had so long reared for itself); no voice, I say, could have been welcome to me; but when I heard the sharp and querulous tones of Julia, God in mercy forgive me for what I felt. She was again standing at the head of the stone steps, that I have described as forming one of the extremities of the verandah; and as she placed her foot on one of the moss-covered slippery steps, she called out, "I'm going down—I'll have my own way now." I seized her hand, and drawing her back, exclaimed, "Don't, Julia!" on which she said, "You bad better not teaze me; you are to be sent away if you teaze me." I felt as if a viper had stung me; the blood rushed to my head, and I struck her;—she reeled under the blow, her foot slipped, and she fell headlong down the stone steps. A voice near me said, "She has killed her!" There was a plunge in the water below; her white frock rose to the surface—sunk—rose again—and sunk to rise no more. Two men rushed wildly down the bank, and one of them turned and looked up as he passed. I heard a piercing scream—a mother's cry of despair. Nobody said again "She has killed her." I did not die—I did not go mad, for I had not an instant's delusion—I never doubted the reality of what had happened; but those words—"She has killed her!" "She has killed her!"—were written as with a fiery pencil on my brain, and day and night they rang in my ears. Who had spoken them?

There was the secret of my fate!

CHAPTER II.

"Whence is that knocking?
How is 't with me when every noise appals me;
What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

SHAKESPEARE.

"In the wind there is a voice
Shall forbid thee to rejoice;
And to thee shall night deny
All the quiet of her sky;
And the day shall have a sun
Which shall make thee wish it done."

BYRON.

I know not how long I remained in the same place, rooted to the spot, the blood rushing at one instant with such violence to my head, that it seemed as if it would burst from my temples; and the next I felt a cold sweat on my forehead, and a horrible fear creeping over my heart. I could not move, and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth; my eyes felt as if they were starting out of my head, and I sought

to close them and could not. There was that torrent before them; it roared, it foamed; and the foam looked like a shroud; and the roaring of the waters sounded like a scream; and I screamed too—a dreadful scream—and then all at once I grew calm; for there were hurried steps on the gallery, and terror paralysed me. It was the housekeeper and the doctor; as they came, the latter said:—"Take the other child to her,—perhaps she will cry when she sees her." And as I was trembling violently, and did not seem to hear what they said to me, though I did hear every word, the man took me up in his arms, and carried me like a baby into the drawing-room. Mrs. Middleton was there with a face paler than a sheet; when she saw me her mouth quivered, but she did not speak or cry; she waved her hand, and then laid her head again against the open door, and seemed to listen with her heart. I felt as if I could hear it beat where I sat. Five or six minutes passed, and then Mr. Middleton rushed into the room. She looked up into his face and shrieked—the same fearful shriek I had heard once before. He took her hands, which she was wringing wildly, and putting his arm round her, he whispered, "Now, Mary, all is over; show me that you believe in God." She struggled for a moment, her chest heaved convulsively, and then she burst into a violent fit of hysterical crying. He supported her out of the room, and they went away together. The housekeeper came up to the sofa where I was, and taking one of my hands, she said, "And where were you when the poor thing fell?"

I started up as if she had shot me; I rushed out of the room, across the hall, through the winding passages, and up the stairs into my own room. I locked the door, and falling on my knees with my face against the bed-post, I pressed my temples with my hands as if to still their throbbing. During the next two or three hours, each knock at my door made me jump as if a cannon had gone off at my ear; each time I opened it I expected to be accused of Julia's death,—to be told that I had killed her; and once, when it was my uncle's step that I heard approaching, I opened my window, and was on the point of throwing myself out of it: strange to say, the only thing that stopped me was the fear of adding to Mrs. Middleton's anguish. I suppose it was the excessive terror that I felt of being denounced, or of betraying myself, that saved me from a brain fever; the very intensity of this anxiety subdued the extravagance of my despair, and I calmed myself that I might appear calm. I took some food, because I instinctively felt that I needed strength and support. It never occurred to me, it never once crossed my mind, to reveal what I had done. I felt that if any one accused me, I must have died on the spot—fled, destroyed myself—I know not what; but at the same time there was a rigid determination in my soul, that as in the first moments that had followed Julia's death, I *could* not, so now I *would* not, speak. Each hour that elapsed confirmed this resolution; for every hour that passed by in silence, every word that was uttered by me, or before me, on the subject, made the act of self-accusation grow into a moral impossibility.

When it became dusk the solitude of my room grew intolerable to me, and I wandered through the house seeking for companionship, and yet starting off in a different direction, if the sound of steps or of voices drew near to me. At last I found my way unobserved into the drawing-room, and sat there, or paced up and down for a length of time, till at last the door opened, and my uncle came in.

He walked up to me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and said, in a voice of subdued emotion "You are now our only child, Ellen."

I suppose my countenance bore a very wild expression at that moment, for he looked at me with surprise, and then added in a still more soothing manner, "Go to your aunt, my dear Ellen; she will not feel herself childless while you are spared to us."

A choking sensation rose in my throat, and a cold sweat stood on my forehead, but I got up, and walked resolutely to my aunt's room.

She was overwhelmed with grief; her hands were feverish, and her head burning. I sat down by her, and silently employed myself in bathing her temples with cold water. She now and then laid her aching head on my shoulder, and burst into an agony of crying, which seemed to relieve her.

She asked me where my uncle was; and I could have told her, for I had heard the servants say, as I was coming up stairs, that he was returning to the river side, to make one search more after the body of his child.

The moon was shining brightly, and several men were employed in dragging the deep and rapid stream; I pointed that way, and she seemed at once to understand me, for a deep groan was her only answer. Once she said, "Pray for me, Ellen;" and then for the first time remorse took its place by the side of terror in my mind. I felt I could not pray—no exactly-defined idea of guilt presented itself to my mind, and yet there was a murmur in my ears, the burden of which was, "She has killed her—she has killed her;" (and as when standing on a dizzy height, with a firm hold on some railing or plank of support, something whispers to one, "If I should let it go!") I felt afraid that the next moment I should say out loud, "I have killed her."

The idea of prayer made me tremble. Once I said mechanically, "O God! forgive me," and then shuddered. It sounded to myself like a confession of murder. I dared not address God as I had done the day before. One instant I thought of myself as of a guilty wretch, unworthy to live, unworthy to lift up her voice in prayer, or to raise her eyes to the calm and cloudless sky. At other times I felt as if God had dealt too hardly with me: I pitied myself, and my heart waxed rebellious in its grief. I said to myself, like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" and then I almost cursed myself for having thought of Cain—for I had not murdered my cousin, though somebody said I had killed her. For one instant anger had maddened me; without thought, without intention, I had struck her—one hasty blow was given, and now my youth was blighted, my peace of mind was gone; the source of all pure joys, of all holy thoughts, was dried up within me. I should never stand again in the sacred silence of the solemn night, and feel as if its whispering winds were bringing tidings from a better world to my soul. And in those days of glowing beauty, when streams of light intoxicate the eye, when all nature breaks into song, or blossoms into flower, never again should I feel myself as in past years, a part of that bright creation, longing only, in the fulness of my heart, to prostrate myself in fervent adoration before Him who gave to the birds and to the streams a voice to praise Him; to the glorious heavens a charge to magnify Him; and to man, enthusiasm, emotion, poetry, music—*all* that lifts the soul above itself and the material world around it, to the wide fields of enraptured contemplation.

But now a chain would evermore weigh down my spirits—a dark remembrance would ever stand between me and the sunny skies—a tone, as of the dying and the dead, would ever mingle with the sounds of melody, with the voice of love, with the words of affection. Yes—

"All bright hopes and hues of day
Had faded into twilight grey;"

or rather into the darkness of night. I wept over myself, over my blighted youth, my destroyed happiness, my lost innocence—and I was only sixteen!

There I sat, that long night through; my aunt had sunk into the heavy slumber of exhaustion, her hand in mine, her head on my shoulder. I dared not move—scarcely breathe; hot searing tears were slowly chasing each other down my cheeks, and the storm within was raging wildly in my breast—but I did not pray; I could not: a sheet of lead seemed to stretch itself between me and Heaven; and when the light of day broke slowly into the chamber of mourning, I closed my eyes, not to see the sun in its calm majesty, dawning on the first day of changed existence.

The first days that follow a great and sudden misfortune carry with them a kind of excitement that keeps off for a time the stunning sense of desolation from the soul. My uncle returned on the following morning, bearing with him the body of his child, which he had at length succeeded in rescuing from the bed of the torrent, which had carried it down far below Elmsley.

The preparations for the interment in the village church seemed to rouse the afflicted parents to exertions, that, though intimately connected with the loss that had befallen them, were almost a relief to Mrs. Middleton, after the inactivity of the last twenty-four hours.

I had hardly left her room all day, and when she told me that my uncle expected us all to meet him at dinner, I felt it would be impossible to go through the trial; but, as she was going to make the exertion, I could not refuse to follow her.

When we entered the drawing-room together, Edward Middleton and Henry Lovell were both standing before the fire-place. It was well for me that our meeting took place while the catastrophe of the day before was so recent, that the agitation I betrayed could pass under the garb of sorrow and nervousness. I was trembling violently; I felt a degree of conviction, that amounted to moral certainty, that one of those two men had witnessed the frightful scene, which resembled more a hideous dream than an actual reality. Both were coming to me with outstretched hands. Could they both mean to take mine? Did not one of them know what that hand had done? A mist rose before my eyes, and I fainted.

When my senses returned, I found myself in bed, my aunt by my side, and a number of restoratives employed to bring me back from my swoon. I recovered, and the next morning, on awaking after some hours of feverish and restless sleep, I heard a noise in the court under my windows.

I rose hastily, and saw the funeral procession moving slowly from the house across the grounds, and taking its way towards the village church. The little coffin was carried by four of the grey-headed servants of the house; my uncle and aunt were walking on foot beside it, and my cousin and Henry Lovell were following them. The rest of the servants, among whom was Julia's nurse, and almost all the inhabitants of the village, closed the procession. I watched the funeral train till it was out of sight, and for the first time I forgot myself, for a few minutes, and my own dreadful share in this calamity, and thought only of my aunt, and of her misery. I called to mind too the image of that child, whom I had so

often nursed to sleep in her infancy, whom I had carried in my arms, and held to my bosom. When I pictured to myself the little body laid in its narrow grave, and thought how short a time ago life was strong within it, and that it was *my* hand that had sent her to her watery grave, my agony grew so intense that I wonder it did not kill me, or drive me to some desperate act of madness. It did not; and pity for myself soon hardened my heart against the sufferings of others. I ceased to weep for Julia; she was dead indeed; but was not death a blessing compared to such a life as mine would be? My aunt had lost her child; but was not her sorrow as nothing in comparison with mine—mine, who had made her childless? And now a sudden thought flashed on my brain. Why was I at home? Why was I alone? Did they suspect me? Had the master of my fate, the witness of my crime, warned them to keep the murderess away from the grave of their child? Was I already become as a monster to them? Did they loathe the sight of me? Would they send me to prison? or would they turn me out of their house; and should I fly along dusty roads, and through dark alleys and crowded streets, and would the mob follow, as I once read that they followed a woman who was thought to have murdered her child, and point at me, and hoot, and groan, and cry "There goes the wretch that murdered the child?" I fell on my knees; it seemed as if there was a sound of footsteps behind me—a shout of execration in my ears. It wan a waking nightmare; I was growing delirious, and when I felt something touch me, and a warm breath on my shoulders, I gave a piercing scream, and fell with my face on the ground. A low moaning roused me from this state. I looked up and saw my great Newfoundland dog, who always slept in my room; he was licking my hands and neck. His kind eyes were looking at me from under the rough hair that shaded them; and he moaned gently as he did so. I was still *almost* a child, for I suppose that none but a child would have found comfort in this creature's mute sympathy. As it was, I flung my arms wildly round its neck, and sobbed. He did not struggle, but patiently stood there, though my tears were falling fast on his head. "Poor, poor Hector I you never will be told what I have done; you never will turn away from me with horror, though all the world should do so. Poor, poor Hector! my good, my kind dog!" This little incident had done me good, and the tears I had shed had relieved me. I dressed myself, and when my aunt entered my room at her return from the funeral—when she embraced me with much emotion—when she told me how she and my uncle had hoped that I might have slept over the last trying hour—when she tenderly reproached me for having left my bed—when she drew me to her, and, parting the hair that hung loosely and heavily on my forehead, laid her cold hand upon it, and then pressed me to her bosom—I felt a relief that for the moment *almost* resembled joy. Under the influence of this momentary reaction I followed her to the dining-room, where we found my uncle sitting in mournful silence; he pressed my hand as I approached him, and we all sat down to eat, or try to eat, the breakfast prepared for us. This melancholy meal over, I withdrew to the furthest end of the drawing-room, and sat down at my embroidery frame, which stood near to an open window, and began to work with something like composure. From this moment everything about us resumed its former aspect, and the habits of our daily life seemed to have experienced scarcely any change. My uncle's reserve and gloom were, perhaps, somewhat deeper than before; and Mrs. Middleton at times gave way to uncontrollable bursts of grief; but her elastic spirit, bowed down for awhile by the pressure of sorrow, rose again with the buoyancy which affliction can repress, but hardly destroy in a nature like hers, to which happiness seemed almost a condition of existence. A sorrow which would have broken this spring within her must have killed her—but this did not; and the full flow of her affections seemed to return in what had once appeared to be their natural channel—she clung to me with a fondness that seemed every hour to increase. Superior as she was, there was about her a kind of dependence upon others—upon their love and their sympathy—which was inexpressibly endearing. In those early times of sorrow I received her caresses, and listened to the words of love which she addressed to me, with something of the spirit with which I can imagine that the Holy Françoise de Chantal may have pressed to her bosom the burning cross, that stamped upon her breast the sign of salvation,* [* Madame de Chantal, the Founder of the Order of the Visitation, impressed upon her breast, with a burning iron, the sign of the cross.]—at once the object of intense adoration and the instrument of acute torture.

My cousin and Henry Lovell staid on at Elmsley, and nothing, in the manner of either, gave me the least clue to discover which was the possessor of my dreadful secret. Both were kind to me, and both seemed to regard me with more interest than usual. In Edward's countenance I sometimes read a look of severity, which made the blood forsake my heart; but then at other times his voice was so gentle in speaking to me, his countenance had so much sweetness in it, as he turned his eyes full upon me, that I felt re-assured, though, at the same time, intensely miserable.

With Henry I felt more at my ease—why I cannot tell, but he was the only person with whom, since the fatal day of Julia's death, I could speak in the same manner as I did before. There was something soothing to my wayward feelings in the thoughtless gaiety which he soon resumed. In the course of a few weeks I persuaded myself nearly, if not entirely, that fancy, allied with terror, had conjured up, in that fatal hour, the cry which had sounded in my ears; at least I pacified my fears by repeating this supposition to myself. It was like a sedative, that numbs without removing the pain we feel. It made me better able to endure what I had to go through. Church was a terrible ordeal to me. I went of an afternoon only, for several following Sundays, because I could not bear to hear the commandments

read; and yet I hated myself for my weakness. One Sunday morning Edward said to me, across the breakfast-table, "Pray, Ellen, have you made a vow never to go to church of a morning?" I felt myself turning pale, but answered quietly, "I am going now;" and I went, and God only knows what I suffered there.

Biding grew into a passion with me at that time. There is such excitement in the rapid motion—in the impatience of the animal that bears one along—in the sense of power—in the feeling of life, which is never so strong within one, as when, over a common, or a wild muir, one can dash along at the horse's full speed, with the wind in one's face, and the turf under one's feet. In every weather I rode; the more heavily it rained, the more wildly it blew, the more I enjoyed excursions that lasted several hours, and after which I returned home, fatigued in body, excited in mind, and able to sleep at night from sheer exhaustion. Henry was my constant companion on these occasions, and indulged every fancy I formed, as to the length and direction of these excursions. He applauded my courage when, arrested by no obstacles, I cleared fence after fence, or waded through rapid streams, in order to arrive, a quarter of an hour sooner, at some point I had fixed upon. His talent for conversation was great, and he possessed the art of captivating the attention to an extraordinary degree. Intercourse with him became to me, in a moral point of view, what riding was in a physical: It was an exercise of the mental faculties, that stilled the process of self-tormenting within me. He admired me—I saw it plainly, and far more than he had done before the change that had come over me; at least I fancied so; and one day, as I was turning over the leaves of a blotting-paper book, in the library, I found the following verses:

"She was a child, and in her dreamless eyes
There slept a world of unawakened thought—
And in her voice, her laughter, and her sighs,
No spirit lingered, and no magic wrought;
For as the haze that veils the glorious skies
At morning prime; or as the mist that lies
On ocean's might: or as the solemn hour
Of Nature's silence, when the Heavens lower,
Such was her childhood; but its hour is past;
The veil is drawn, the mist has cleared at last.
And what though with a storm! Who does not find
In wind, in waves, in Nature's wildest strife
With things material, or in man's own mind,
A deeper and more glorious sense of life
Than in the calm of silent apathy?
Who would not stand within the Sun's full blaze,
Though scorched and dazzled by his burning rays?
Oh, we can watch with ardent sympathy.
The stormy floods of rising passion roll
Their swelling surges o'er the silent soul!
And we can gaze exulting on the brow
Where restless thoughts and new, are crowding now:
Each throb, each struggle, serving but to feed
The flame of genius, and the source of thought.
Be mine the task, be mine the joy, to read
Each mood, each change, by time and feeling wrought,
And as the mountain stream reflects the light
That shoots athwart the sky's tempestuous track,
So shall my soul, her soul's impassioned might,
As in a broken mirror, image back."

I read these lines with a strange mixture of sensations. "Does he know the truth?" was my first thought; and it made the blood rush to my cheeks. The next was, "Whether he knows it or not, he admires me." I smiled with bitterness indeed, but still I smiled; and as I read these verses, over and over again, they seemed to change the current of my feelings. For the first time, I said to myself, "There are things in the world yet worth living for, besides those I have forfeited—peace of mind, and an untroubled conscience.—There is genius, which, as he says, thrives in the atmosphere of suffering; there is the power which genius gives to 'ride triumphant, and have the world at will;' there are the powerful emotions of the soul when struggling for mastery, when intoxicated with success, when revelling in homage. If sorrow, if guilt, if despair, have made my eyes more bewitching, and my voice more thrilling; if they have roused the latent spirit within me, it shall not be in vain; I will drink deeply at these new sources of enjoyment, if not of happiness; I will cast behind me the burden borne in such anguish; I will break with the *past*, the dreadful past, and begin a new era." And, seizing the paper

which was lying on the table, I walked quickly across the library. As I turned the comer of the recess which formed the eastern end of the gallery, I saw Edward sitting by the window, where often, during the preceding summer, we had watched the sunset together. The last rays of the departing light streamed upon him, as he sat absorbed in thought; a book was on his knees; it seemed to have dropt from his hand in the depth of his abstraction; his faultless features, his chiselled mouth, the peculiar colour of his hair, and the light which shed around him a kind of halo, made him at that moment resemble the pictures of saints which Raphael and Domenichino have painted.

It seemed to me like a vision; in the highly excited state in which I then was I almost fancied it such; and the restless tide of thought within me took a new direction; the tears sprung into my eyes, and I turned away, wit a softer feeling at my heart than I had known there for a long while. As I moved towards the door, the rustling of my gown disturbed Edward; he called to me to come and admire the glowing colours of the sky, where clouds over clouds of red and purple hue were floating in an atmosphere of burnished gold. I went to him, and we stood together for several minutes, till the sun descending quite beneath the horizon, left the room in comparative darkness. I then withdrew, but it was not till I reached my room that I found I had dropt the paper on which Henry's verses were written. I felt annoyed at this, and retraced my steps to the library door, but before I reached it, I met Edward, and in his hand he held the very paper I was come in search of. I did not venture to claim it from him, but he held it out to me at once, and said coldly, "Is this your property?" I felt confused, neither venturing to deny, or liking to admit the fact. In my embarrassment I muttered something about a copy of verses that Henry had written out for me, and, hastily stretching out my hand for the paper, I took it, and walked away without further explanation.

On the evening of this day we were all sitting round a table, on which work, books, and implements for writing were spread about. Henry Lovell was even more than usually animated, and spoke well and eloquently on a variety of subjects. Mrs. Middleton joined eagerly in the conversation; Edward listened attentively, but spoke seldom. I remember every word he said that evening. Once Henry requested us all to say what it was we hated most, and what it was we valued most. I forget what I said, what he said, what my aunt said, but I know that to the first question, Edward answered, *duplicity;* and to the second, *truth;* and as he pronounced the word *truth*, he fixed his eyes upon me, accidentally perhaps, but so sternly that I quailed under his glance. A few minutes after, Henry read aloud from a little book that was lying before him, the following question: "Qu'est-ce que la vie? Quel est son but? Quelle est sa fin?" "I will write my answer on the margin," he cried, and wrote, "Jouir et puis mourir;" and then handed the book to me. I seized the pencil, and hastily added these words, "Souffrir, et puis mourir." Edward read them, and looked at me less sternly than before, but with an earnest inquiring expression of countenance; then lightly drawing a line with a pencil across the two preceding sentences, he wrote this one underneath them, "Bien vivre, pour bien mourir," and gave me back the book.

In general he spoke little; but there was much meaning in what he said. His reserve gave me a feeling of embarrassment with him, which, at the time I am writing of, was particularly irksome. He forced one to *think*, and I preferred dreaming alone, or drowning thought in talk with Henry. With the latter I became more intimate than ever: we read together, and it seemed to me that he always chose such books as excited my imagination to the utmost, and wrought upon my feelings, without touching on any of the subjects that would have painfully affected me. I tried to write too. From my earliest childhood I had felt great facility in composition, and it was one of Mrs. Middleton's favourite amusements to look over my various attempts, and to encourage the talent which she fancied I possessed; but now I vainly tried to exert it; my mind was not capable of a continued effort. I believe it is Madame de Staël who remarks (and how truly) that to write one must have suffered, and have struggled; one must have been acquainted with passion and with grief; but they must have passed away from the soul ere the mind can concentrate its powers, and bring its energies to bear on the stores which an experience in suffering has accumulated within us. And it was this very helplessness of mind, this fever in the intellect, which threw me, with such fatal dependence, on the resources which Henry Lovell's conversation and society afforded me. If he left Elmsley for a single day I felt the want of them so keenly, that I welcomed him back in a way that may have deceived others, deceived him, deceived myself perhaps—I know not—I lived but for excitement, and if the stimulus failed, I sunk for the time into momentary apathy. We sung together sometimes, and my voice seemed to have gained strength during the last few months—the old hall at Elmsley vibrated with the notes which, with the impetuosity that characterised everything I did at that time, I threw out with the full consciousness of power. Often of an evening I sat down at the organ that was placed in the gallery of the hall, and, forming various modulations on its deep melodious keys, soothed myself into a kind of dreamy unconsciousness.

One day I had gone there as usual; it was towards dusk, and I was just come home from a long ride on a cold December day. I began playing, but, gradually overcome by drowsiness, I fell asleep, my hand still on the keys of the organ, and my head resting against the edge of the high-backed chair I was sitting on. Whether it was the uneasiness of this posture, or my damp uncurled hair that was hanging

on my face, or else that in sleep we discern, though it awaken us not, when something is moving near us, I know not, but my sleep was painful in the extreme. I felt as if there was a hard breathing close to me; but, turn which way I would in my dream, I could see nothing. Then I felt as if some one was laying hold of me, and I tried to scream, but could not. Then I seemed suddenly to stand on the steps of the fatal stairs, (I had often since the day of Julia's death dreamt the fearful scene over, and the impression which the dreadful reality had left on my mind was such that I had never since ventured to stand on that spot,) but now it was not of Julia that I dreamed. I was being dragged down myself to the bottom of the precipice, and the person who was forcing me along into the yawning gulf wore the form of Henry Lovell, and spoke with his voice. I called to him to stop—I entreated him with frantic violence to forbear, but just as we were reaching the hollow he suddenly turned round, and there was Edward Middleton's face looking ghastly pale, and frowning upon me fearfully. I fell back, and the movement I must have made at that moment probably awoke me. I roused myself with that uneasy feeling which a terrific dream leaves on one's mind, and timidly looked about me. I was alone; there was the music-book before me, and the two candles burning as I had left them, but by the side of one of them was a coarse bit of paper, and on it was written (oh my God! how fervently I prayed at that moment that I might yet wake, and find I was still dreaming)—on it was written in large round letters "BEWARE! I KNOW YOUR SECRET!"

There have been so many dreadful moments in my life, all turning upon the one event that put the stamp upon it, that I will not vainly endeavour to describe the misery of each; but this was one of the worst. I knew not what to think—what to suspect. Was it indeed some one else, and not Edward Middleton or Henry Lovell, who had seen the share I had had in Julia's death? But no, it could not be. No servant of the house was at hand, no visitor could have been there, for it had been difficult in the extreme, at the fatal moment, to procure any help; and every person in the house had accounted for their absence in some way or other. Why, too, should they have been silent till now? And this paper, these words, there was no demand, no extortion in them—a simple intimation.

I remained frightened, bewildered, and wholly unable to rally against this new source of anxiety. I kept my bed for two days, confined there by a feverish attack. On the third the doctor pronounced me better, and able to go into the drawing-room. As I was lying there on the sofa, my aunt, who was sitting by me, nursing me as usual with the tenderest solicitude, said, "I have just received a note from Edward, which takes me quite by surprise. You know he left us on the day after the one upon which you were taken ill, to go for a week or two to London, and now he writes me word that he is going abroad for a year, and that he will not be able to return to Elmsley to take leave of us. Such a flighty proceeding would be very like you, Henry, but I do not understand it in Edward."

Gone, and for a year! the day after I was taken ill, too! Quick as lightning a sudden thought Hashed across my mind. I drew a deep breath, but forced myself to say, "Had he told you of this plan, Henry?"

"I have had a letter from him also," was his answer; "and I thought he looked graver than usual."

Later in the afternoon, when we were left alone, became and sat down by me, and drawing a letter from his pocket, he said, "Ellen, I wish you to read this letter, and to tell me frankly what you think of it—I own I do not understand it. He alludes to some secret, to some sorrow, it would almost seem, that he cannot disclose, and that has rendered Elmsley unpleasant to him. There is but one conjecture that I could make; but as nothing in his manner or in his way of going on corroborates it, I cannot seriously entertain it, and that is, that he is in love with you; but you will judge for yourself." Edward's letter was as follows:—

"My dear Lovell,

"A circumstance which I can neither explain nor dwell upon, and which had better remain buried in oblivion, has made a further residence at Elmsley so painful to me, that I have come to the decision of going abroad immediately, and of remaining absent for a year at least. To your sister I have written to announce my intentions, and at the same time to express my deep sense of her own and my uncle's constant kindness to me. To you I do not wish to disguise the fact, that my resolution is not founded on *caprice*,—that I have a *reason* for what I do, however unnecessary it is to state what that reason is. Our friendship makes it incumbent upon me to be so far explicit; but I beg that you will never allude, by word or by letter, to the cause of my absence, and that you will never question me on the subject. I have left in my room a book which I wish you to give Ellen from me. I dislike leave-takings, and shall therefore proceed to Dover from hence, without returning again to Elmsley.

"Sincerely yours,

"Edward Middleton."

It was as I had thought, then. There was the secret I had so anxiously sought to discover. He, Edward Middleton, was the possessor of mine! He had never, then, since the day of Julia's death, looked upon me, or thought of me, but as the murderer of his little cousin—as a wretch whom nothing but his forbearance could keep in the house, from which she ought to have been turned out with horror and execration. He had, however, forborne to ruin, to destroy me; and a feeling of tenderness stole over my heart at the thought. But that paper—that dreadful paper; was that his last farewell to me? Did he wish to make me feel that I was in his power?—that he held the sword of vengeance suspended over my head, and that present, or absent, I was to tremble at his name? This was unlike Edward Middleton; this was unworthy of him. He should have come to me and charged me with my crime. He should have stood before me with that stern commanding brow, and pronounced my sentence; and I would have knelt to him, and submitted to any penance, to any expiation he might have enjoined; but an unsigned, an unavowed threat, a common anonymous letter—away with it! away with it! Base, miserable device for him to resort to! My very soul sickened at the thought; and in the midst of all my other sufferings, I suffered at feeling how low he had fallen in my estimation.

I was so completely absorbed in these reflections, that I was only aroused from my abstraction by Henry's asking me, in an impatient tone, "Well, what do you gather from that letter, every word of which you seem to have learned by heart?"

"Nothing," I replied, "except that Edward is as incomprehensible as he is unsatisfactory."

He seemed tolerably satisfied with my answer, and taking away the letter, did not allude again to the subject, and only sent me by my maid the book which Edward had desired him to transmit to me. It was the "Christian Year," that wonderful, that all but inspired book. I opened it with emotion, and perhaps it might have made a powerful impression upon me, had I not found the passages in it which allude to guilt and to remorse carefully marked with a pencil, and thus, in a manner, forced on my notice. This seemed to me the sequel of the menacing words so cruelly addressed to me, and the pride of my soul—dare I also say, the native integrity of my character—rose against such a system of secret intimidation. My heart hardened against the book, and against the giver, and I thrust it impatiently out of my sight.

Although sick at heart, grieved in spirit, and humbled to the dust at this solution of the mystery which had hung over me, yet there was some repose in the degree of security it afforded against any sudden revolution in my destiny. I was somewhat calmer, and sometimes, for a few hours together I shook off the burden from my breast, and, in outward manner at least, resembled my former self.

CHAPTER III.

In virgin fearlessness, with step that seemed
Caught from the pressure of elastic turf
Upon the mountains, gemmed with morning dew,
In the prime morn of sweetest scents and airs;
Serious and thoughtful was her mind, and yet,
By reconcilement, exquisite and rare,
The form, port, motions, of this cottage girl,
Were such as might have quickened or inspired
A Titian's hand, addressed to picture forth
Oread or Dryad, glancing through the shade,
What time the hunter's earliest horn is heard
Startling the golden hills.

"EXCURSION" - WORDSWORTH.

On one of those mild days, which occur now and then during the winter, and which bear with them a peculiar charm, Mrs. Middleton and I had strolled out together, after breakfast, into her own flower-garden. She was making a winder nosegay of the few hardy flowers that had outlived the frost, and that seemed reviving in the strange softness of this January day.

"What a morning for a ride! my own Ellen," said my aunt, as we leant on the stone wall, which felt quite warm with the rays of the wintry sun. "What do you say to ordering the horses, taking a long gallop, and coming home with me with a bloom on your dear cheeks, which look too often like that flower, and too seldom like this one;" and she showed me, with a smile, a white camellia, and a China rose, which she had just gathered in the green-house.

"I will do as you wish, dear aunt—please myself, and have the merit of obedience into the bargain;

and I shall take these flowers too, to put in my hair this evening. But where shall I ride?"

"If you have no choice, my darling, I will give you an errand.
You know Bridman Manor?"

"O yes! the ruins of the old hall, which my maid used to call the 'ghost-house,'—the old-fashioned gardens, with their broken statues and evergreen alleys, that always put me in mind of your favourite lines, by Mary Howitt—

'O, those old abbey gardens, with their devices rich;
Their fountains and green solemn walks, and saints in many
a niche.'

I shall like of all things to go there to-day; but what is your errand?"

"Why, I do not know if I ever told you that your uncle had been so kind as to give up to me that pretty cottage of his, that stands on the east side of Bridman-terrace wall, for old Mrs. Tracy, who was my nurse, and afterwards Henry's. You have seen her, have you not, Ellen?"

"No," I answered; "but I have often heard you mention her."

"She was a person of some importance in our family at one time. You know that my mother died in childbirth, and that Henry's life as an infant was only saved by this woman's unwearied devotion. She was passionately attached to Henry, and her singular disposition and turn of mind gave her a hold upon him which he did not entirely shake off even when he was taken from under her care. I believe her temper was violent; but as a child he never suffered from it, and quite idolised her. She had a great deal of natural cleverness, and her manners and language were always different from those of persons in her rank of life. I shall be curious to hear what you think of her."

"What made you think of establishing her at Bridman?"

"Her son and his wife, who had gone out to India three years ago, and left their children in her care, had both died of a fever at Madras. She felt anxious to remove from the neighbourhood of London, and to settle in this part of the country. She came to me last summer, and asked my advice on the subject. I felt much interested about her, for it was an only son she had lost, and his children are, with the exception of Henry, the only objects of interest she has in the world. Her voice trembled with emotion whenever she mentioned them; and though she is tolerably well off as to money, I believe, I felt glad to afford her, in her affliction, a quiet and pleasant home. Your uncle agreed to her living in Bridman Cottage, and I hear she settled there a short time ago. I should like to send her a kind message, and to hear how she is going on."

"I shall be delighted to be your messenger, and will instantly prepare for the ride. As you are going back to the breakfast-room, pray tell Henry to be in readiness."

At twelve o'clock the horses came round; we mounted, and set off at a brisk gallop across the Park. As I turned into the lane that led in the direction of Bridman Manor, Henry asked me where I meant to go.

"To pay a visit."

"To whom?"

"To an acquaintance of yours."

"Who can you mean?"

"A very old acquaintance of yours."

"My dear Ellen, you are taking quite a wrong road: this lane leads to no house and to no cottage that we are acquainted with."

"I beg your pardon; it leads to Bridman Manor, and I am going there."

"Who do you know there?"

"Nobody; but I am going to make acquaintance with your old nurse, Mrs. Tracy."

He muttered something which sounded to me like an oath, and as I turned and looked at him, I was astonished at the singular expression of his countenance. He smiled, however, and said:

"You will be making acquaintance in that case with one of the most insupportable women that ever lived. I strongly recommend you to keep out of her way. She wears my life out with her querulous temper and tiresome complaints; and as I do not want to go through a scene with her, you would greatly oblige me, Ellen, by giving up this project."

"I am going there with a message from Mrs. Middleton: but you need not appear. Hide yourself in the manor woods, if you dare not face your nurse, and I will join you there on my way home."

Henry looked both vexed and provoked, but made no answer. He soon rallied, however, and began again talking and laughing in his usual manner. As we were slowly mounting a hill, his horse suddenly stumbled; he jumped off, and, calling to me to stop, he examined his foot; and finding, or pretending to find, a stone in it, he set about vainly endeavouring to knock it out.

"I cannot go on any further, Ellen: all I shall be able to manage will be to get home without laming this horse; so pray turn back now;—you can take this message some other day."

"Sit down on that bank, 'that mossy bank where the violets grow,' my dear Henry, and muse there in sober sadness, while I face the dragon in her den." And saying these words, I galloped off without further discussion. I had not gone far before he overtook me; and quoting the words of Andrew Fairservice in "Rob Roy," which we had been reading lately, he cried out:

"Well, a wilful man maun have his way: he who will to Curragh, must to Curragh!" and we proceeded on our road.

On passing the gates of Bridman Manor, we skirted the edge of the woods till we came to a terrace, where the ground was laid out in quaint patterns; and vases, some broken, some in tolerable preservation, were still ranged with some sort of symmetry. By the side of what had once been a fountain sat a group which attracted my attention by the picturesque effect which it afforded. On the back of one of those nondescript semihuman monsters, whose yawning mouths once formed the spouts of the fountain, sat a girl whose features struck me as perfectly faultless, and delicate almost beyond what one could have fancied possible in a living creature of real flesh and blood. She resembled the *ideal* of a sculptor; her little hand was laid on the moss-stained marble, and though not very white, its shape was so perfect that it was pleasant to gaze upon it—as it is upon any rare work of art. Near her was a little boy, apparently about three years old, who was standing on tiptoe, and thrusting his curly head into the cavity of the sphinx's mouth; another boy, who might have been ten or twelve years of age, had climbed up to the vaulted top of the fountain, and was looking down from that position at a little trickling thread of water, which still found its way into the basin below, though its passage was nearly choked by the moss and the creeping plants that intercepted its course.

As we were passing them the girl looked up, and, suddenly rising, curtseyed; and, taking hold of the little boy's hand, said, "Mr. Henry."

Henry stopped his horse, and, bowing to her in a manner that rather surprised me, in a voice that sounded to me unlike his usual one, he asked her if her grandmother was at home.

"Yes, Sir, she is," was her answer.

He turned to me and said, "That is Alice Tracy, Ellen; you can make acquaintance with her, while I speak to that boy there, who seems in a fair way to break his neck."

Dismounting hastily, he threw his horse's reins over one of the spikes of the adjoining railing, and sprang up to the spot where the boy was perched.

"Is that pretty child your brother?" I inquired of the beautiful girl who stood before me.

"He is," she answered; and lifting up the blushing boy, who was hiding himself behind her, she turned his reluctant glowing little face full towards me, in spite of his struggling efforts to thrust it into her lap, and then bent down to kiss his forehead, saying at the same time, "Naughty Johnny!"

"Will you come to me, Johnny?" was my next attempt at acquaintance.

"No, I won't," was the answer.

"What, not to ride this pretty black horse?"

"Yes, I will," was as resolutely pronounced; and soon the little fellow was hoisted up to my knees, and began amusing himself by vigorously pulling at my Selim's black mane.

"I am come with a message to your grandmother from Mrs.

Middleton; she is anxious to know how you like Bridman."

"I dare say grandmother likes it very much; and Mrs. Middleton is very kind."

"Do you like it?"

"O yes."

"Better than the last place you lived at?"

"That was very nice, but this is better."

"What do you like better in it?"

"Many things."

At this moment I saw the boy who had been speaking with Henry dart off suddenly, and scamper away in the direction of the village. Henry at the same time joined us.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you have contrived to tame that unmanageable little savage, who always screams when he sets eyes on me. Well, suppose you give him a ride up to the entrance of the village, and then Alice can walk home with us, and introduce you to her grandmother."

Alice made some objections to Johnny's lengthened ride, which he (Johnny) resented by pushing her most stoutly away, when she attempted to remove him from his post; and victoriously shouting over her discomfiture, he shook the bridle with exultation, and we proceeded towards the village. As we arrived in sight of Bridman Cottage, the boy who had preceded us came running back to meet us; and I heard him say in a low voice, as he came up to Henry, "Granny's in, and I 've done your bidding."

Henry then advised me to get off my horse; and lifting down the child first, he helped me to dismount, and we walked to the cottage. It was one of those lovely little homes that we rarely see but in England, and that look (would that they always were!) like the chosen abodes of peace and happiness. The low thatched roof—the bright square-paned little windows—the porch overgrown with clematis, jessamine, and honeysuckle—the garden, where gooseberry bushes and stately hollyhocks grow side by side. Of this description was Bridman Cottage, and one of the loveliest that I ever set eyes upon.

As we entered, an elderly female came to the door, and, making me a curtsey, said, in a formal manner, "This is an honour I had not looked to, but I know how to be thankful for it, Miss Middleton. Mr. Henry, I hope I see you well?"

"As well as usual, thank you (he replied). Miss Middleton has brought you a message from her aunt."

"Yes," I immediately said; "Mrs. Middleton is very anxious to know that you find yourself happy and comfortable here, and would have come herself to see you, if she had been able to leave my uncle for so long; but he has been ill lately, and she scarcely ever goes far from the house."

"Tell Mrs. Middleton, Ma'am, that the house is good; that the children are well; and that I am grateful to her."

There was something chilling in the manner with which this was said, and the glassy eyes and thin lips of Mrs. Tracy were far from prepossessing.

I made, however, another effort, and said, "If you could manage to get as far as Elmsley, my aunt would, I know, be glad to see you."

"I have nursed her at my bosom, and carried her in my arms, and I do not care less for her now than I did then; but if it was to save her life, I would not go to Elmsley and see—"

"Me there," exclaimed Henry. "I told you, Ellen, that I should have to go through a scene, and now, I suppose, it must come to pass. Go upstairs with Alice while I make my peace;" and as he spoke, he almost pushed me out of the room, and shut the door.

Alice followed me, and said, in her gentle voice, as I stood at the bottom of the narrow stairs, somewhat puzzled and at a loss what to do,

"If you will come to my room, Miss Middleton, I can show you some of the reasons that make me like Bridman so much."

I gladly assented. She led the way, and opened the door of a small room, in which there was no furniture, but a little bed, with dimity curtains of snowy whiteness, a deal table, and two straw chairs.

"This is a nice room," she said; "but come to the window, and you will see one of my reasons."

She threw up the sash, and pointed with her little hand to the village church, which rose in quiet beauty from among the leafless trees.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked, with a smile.

"Very pretty," I answered; and as I used her own simple words, I felt that there was that in them, said as she said them, that is often wanting in pages of impassioned eloquence, in volumes of elaborate composition,—*reality*. She was happy in this place, because of her little room, and because of the view of the village church, which she could see from its window. How pure must be the mind, how calm must be the life, when such a circumstance can give a colouring to it.

"Alice, have you no books? I see none here."

"I have a few; do you wish to see them?"

"Yes, I do; I should like to know what books you like."

"Then I must show you another of my *reasons*," she said, with one of her sweet, calm smiles, and opened the door of another very small room, which had no other entrance than through her own.

There was a little table in it, and a wooden stool; both were placed near the window. Upon the table lay two books—one was a Bible, the other a large prayer-book, bound in red morocco, and illustrated with prints. A shelf hung in one comer; "Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying," the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Bishop Heber's Hymns," and a few more books besides, were ranged upon it. Among them, a small one, which I was well acquainted with, called "Birds and Flowers," attracted my attention. I asked Alice if she had read it through.

"Yes, I have," she replied. "Mr. Henry gave it me a few months ago."

I involuntarily started, and looked up into her face, as she said this; but not a shade of embarrassment was to be seen there.

She went on to say—"He gave it to me because I was so fond of this poor flower;" and she pointed to a sickly creeping plant, that grew out of a pot, which was placed on the window sill.

"You would not know it again now," she continued; "but last summer it was growing against the wall in the little patch of garden we had at Bromley, and a beautiful flower it was."

"But what had it to do with this book, more than any other flower, Alice?"

"It is a little story, but I will tell it you if you wish it. I sprained my ankle last summer, and could not walk for many weeks. Granny or brother Walter used to drive me in my chair to the open window, to breathe the fresh air, and look at the flowers in our little garden. There was nothing else to look at there—nothing but roofs of houses and black chimneys; but up the wall, and as high as my window, grew this very plant, that looks so dead now, poor thing. Day after day I watched its flowers, though I did not know their names, till I got to see in them things that I thought nobody but me had ever noticed."

"What things, Alice?"

"Across, a crown of thorns, nails, and a hammer."

"The Passion Flower!"

"So Mr. Henry told me one day when he found me reading my new kind of book. It was like a book to me, that pretty flower; it made me think of holy things as much as a sermon ever did."

"And Henry brought you then this book, because of the poem in it on the Passion Flower?"

"He did, and read it to me out loud. It felt strange but pleasant to have one's own thoughts spoken out in such words as those."

"And you brought away your Passion Flower with you?"

"Yes, but it is dying now; and this gives me thoughts too, which I wish somebody would write about. I should like to hear them read out."

I took up her book, and drawing a pencil from my pocket, I rapidly wrote down the following lines:—

"O wish her not to live again,
Thy dying passion flower,
For better is the calm of death
Than life's uneasy hour.

Weep not if through her withered stern
Is creeping dull decay;
Weep not, If ere the sun has set,
Thy nursling dies away.

The blast was keen, the winter snow
Was cold upon her breast;
And though the sun is shining now,
Still let thy flower rest.

Her tale is told; her slender strength
Has left her drooping form.
She cannot raise her bruised head
To face another storm.

Then gently lay her down to die,
Thy broken passion flower;
And let her close her troubled life
With one untroubled hour."

Alice read these lines as I wrote them. When I had finished, she shook her head gently, and said,—

"These are pretty words, and pretty thoughts too; but not my thoughts."

"Tell me your own thoughts, Alice; I would fain hear them."

"I can't," she said.

"Try."

"I think as I see the flowers die so quietly, that they should teach us to die so too. I think, when I see my poor plant give up her sweet life without complaining, that it is because she has done what she ought to do, and left nothing undone which she ought to have done. I planted her in my little garden, and she grew up to my window; she gave me buds first, and then flowers—bright smiling flowers; and when I was ill she gave me holy happy thoughts about God and Christ. And therefore I wish to do likewise—to do my duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call me; and then to die quietly, when it shall please Him, like my passion flower."

As she was finishing these words, I was startled by the loud and angry tones of Henry and of Mrs. Tracy, who seemed to be disputing violently. They were speaking both at the same time, and his voice was quite hoarse with anger. I overheard these words:—"I tell you that if you do not command yourself, and behave as I desire you, I will never see you again, or put my foot into your house."

A tremendous oath followed this threat, and then their voices subsided. I looked at Alice; she seemed concerned, but not surprised or agitated, at what was going on down-stairs, and merely closed the door of her room, which had been left open. A that moment, however, Henry came half-way up the stairs, and calling to me said that it was late, and that we had better be setting out again. I complied, and in coming down into the room below I was civilly greeted by Mrs. Tracy, who thanked me for my visit, and muttered something about hoping we should soon meet again. Had it not been for Alice, who had interested and charmed me to an extraordinary degree, I should have formed exactly a contrary wish, for I had never more heartily agreed with any opinion than with that which Henry had pronounced about his former nurse; and her civility was to my mind more repulsive still than her ungraciousness. I took leave of her coldly enough, but earnestly pressing Alice's hand as I mounted my horse, I whispered in her ear, "Alice, I like your poem better than mine," and rode off.

We took a different road from that we had come by, and skirted the edge of a small lake that lies on the eastern side of the Bridman Woods. The day was altered, and dark clouds were beginning to gather over the sky; the wind was whistling among the bare branches, and Henry was unusually silent and pre-occupied. I felt depressed too, and we did not speak for some time. I was revolving in my mind what possible cause there could be for a man of Henry's character and habits entering into such a violent altercation with a person of Mrs. Tracy's age and inferior rank in life. His temper was generally good, and his manners peculiarly gentlemanlike; his conduct, therefore, (however provoking she might have

been,) appeared to me unaccountable. I could not help wondering also, that he should have associated on evidently intimate terms with that lovely Alice, and yet had never mentioned her to any of us, even in casual conversation. There had not been a word, however, or a look, of his or of hers, that could, for an instant, have allowed one to suppose that there had been anything in their intercourse which either could have wished to hide. As to her, I could as soon have suspected of impurity the pearly drops that hung lightly on each twig of the hawthorn bushes that we passed, as her young life of one evil action, or her young mind of one evil thought. The deep blue waters of the little lake that lay stretched at our feet, were not more calm and more pure than her eyes; and in the marble paleness of her fair brow—in the divine purity of her child-like mouth—in the quiet innocence of her whole demeanour, there was that which seemed to speak of

"Maiden meditation, fancy free."

We were going at a brisk pace alongside the water, and the rapidity of our motion was an excuse for silence; but as we turned away from the lake, and began ascending a steep acclivity, which led to the moors we had yet to cross on our way home, we were forced to slacken our pace; and as we did so, I asked Henry in a half-joking manner, "Have you recovered the passion you were in just now? Your forebodings seem to have been fully realised."

"Thanks to you," he answered in a short dry manner.

"Come, come," I said, "do not visit upon me Mrs. Tracy's disagreeableness. Indeed I think you are not as patient with her as you ought to be, considering she is an old woman, and was your nurse. You were speaking to her with inconceivable violence."

"You overheard what I said to her?"

"Only a few words, and a dreadful oath."

"I was not aware that you were listening at the door. Had I imagined that you had stationed yourself there, I should certainly have been more guarded in my expressions."

I felt the colour rising into my cheeks, for the tone of his voice had something in it still more insulting than his words; but I answered carelessly, "It is a pity you did not think it worth while to controul your temper, whether you were overheard or not."

He coloured in his turn, and bit his lips; but suddenly changing the subject, he abruptly said, "How do you like Alice?"

"As I like all the beautiful things which God has made, and that man has not spoilt."

"She is very pretty; and she has a kind of cleverness too; but there is something tame and insipid about her, notwithstanding. In fact, I do not understand her."

"How should the serpent understand the dove?" I muttered to myself, and then my heart smote me for my unkind thoughts of Henry. I felt myself guilty of ingratitude, nay more, of hypocrisy, in thinking evil of one whose society I so much valued, and who certainly devoted himself to me with no common assiduity. I never could exactly explain to myself what my feelings were with regard to him at that time. As I said before, it would have been a severe trial to me had he left Elmsley, even for a short time.

Hour after hour I spent in conversation with him, hardly aware of the lapse of time, so great was the fascination that his powerful, original, and, withal, cultivated understanding, exercised over me; and yet, at the same time, an involuntary feeling of mistrust—an unaccountable shudder of repugnance—now and then shot over me as I listened to the sound of his voice, or as my eyes met his—and yet they were beautiful; his eyes, with their deep-gray colour that looked black by candle-light, and the fringing of their dark lashes. There was something reined in the shape of his small aquiline nose—in the form of his wide but well-formed mouth, both of which, when he was eager, bore an expression which I can only compare to that of a fiery horse when he tosses his mane, and snuffs the air of the plain which he is about to scour. Then why was it, that as I looked on his beauty, day by day, I found pleasure, if not happiness, in his devotion to me—why was it, that, now and then, the words *fearful*, *false,* and *heartless*, darted across my mind as I thought of him? and were instantaneously followed by a thrill of self-reproach, for I was *false* to him, not he to me; false in the contrast between my outward demeanour and my secret and involuntary impulses. It was I that was heartless, in feeling no real attachment for one whose life evinced an unvarying devotedness to me. False! Heartless! Was I really so? Resentment had hardened my heart against Edward Middleton, and every kind feeling I had ever entertained towards him was turned to bitterness. Painful associations, and fearful remembrances, had thrown a dark shade over the pure and holy love of my childhood—the enthusiastic affection I had felt for my

aunt;—and as to Henry Lovell, whose society I eagerly sought, and whose attachment I appeared to return, I was forced at times to confess to myself that there was not a grain of tenderness in the feverish predilection I entertained for him. I felt to hate myself for the deadness and coldness of my heart. I despised myself for the inconsistent impulses of my soul. Abased in my own eyes, condemned by my own judgment, I often applied to myself the words of Holy Scripture; and in bitterness of spirit exclaimed—"Unstable as water, I cannot excel. Wasted with misery; drunk, but not with wine, my heart is smitten and withered like gnus. I was exalted into Heaven: I am brought down to Hell." These thoughts occupied me during the remainder of our ride.

When Henry uttered the remark which led to this train of reflections in my mind, we had reached the summit of the hill, and coming upon the wild heath that lay between us and Elmsley, we put our horses into a rapid canter, and arrived before the hall-door just as it was getting dusk.

CHAPTER IV.

"How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immoveable—
Looking tranquillity. It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold.
And shoot a chiliness to my trembling heart."

"MOURNING BRIDE."—CONGREVE.

During the ensuing three or four months, nothing occurred in the course of our daily life, in any way worth recording. I had spoken to my aunt of Alice Tracy in such a way as strongly to excite her interest and curiosity about her, and from this reason, as well as from the wish to give me pleasure, which was at all times an all-sufficient inducement to her, she wrote to her grand-mother to request that if she herself did not feel inclined to come to Elmsley, she would at least allow Alice to come and spend a day with us.

Mrs. Tracy wrote a brief answer to the purport that Alice was gone away on a visit to some relations of her father, and was therefore out of reach of the honour intended her.

My uncle received now and then a letter from Edward Middleton, but never communicated its contents beyond the mere facts that he was well, and was staying in this or that town on the Continent.

Henry still remained at Elmsley; and nothing was changed in the state of things between us. The only new feature in our domestic affairs, was the growing dislike which my uncle seemed to feel towards him. He had never appeared much to like him, but now he seemed hardly able to endure his protracted residence at Elmsley, and often inquired of my aunt and myself, if Henry did not mean soon to begin the study of the law; which was the profession he was destined to pursue.

As to Henry himself, he never alluded to it, and seemed to look upon Elmsley as a permanent home. My uncle was too much attached to his wife, and by nature of too kind a disposition, to mark more plainly, than by occasional hints, his displeasure at this line of conduct; but he could hardly conceal his satisfaction, when, at last, a letter from his father obliged Henry to take the subject into consideration.

It became arranged that he should leave Elmsley in three weeks; and I was surprised, and even mortified, at observing how little he seemed grieved or annoyed at this rather abrupt separation, and with what indifference of manner he took leave of me on the day of his departure.

A few days afterwards, there arrived a letter from Mrs. Brandon, a sister of my mother and of Mr. Middleton, containing an urgent request that I might be allowed to spend a few weeks with her in Dorsetshire.

I had only seen this aunt of mine once or twice during the course of my childhood; and she had left no other impression on my mind than that she was a short, pretty-looking woman, with large dark eyes, and a peculiarly gentle voice.

I had dreaded so much the void which Henry's absence would have made in my life, that I welcomed with pleasure the idea of entering upon a new scene. I had also a vague indefinite hope that far from Elmsley—away from the material objects which recalled to me continually my fatal secret—I should,

perhaps, shake off, in some degree, the sense of oppression that weighed upon me. I was only seventeen, and prematurely miserable as I was become, still there remained something in me of the spirit of youth, which pants after new scenes, new companions, and new excitements. I therefore expressed a strong wish to accept Mrs. Brandon's invitation, and this was, as usual, enough to secure Mrs. Middleton's acquiescence, and my uncle made no objection to the plan.

Accordingly, on one of the first days of the month of June, in a small open carriage, accompanied by a lady who had once been my governess, and who had undertaken to escort me to Brandon Park, I left Elmsley, in tears indeed, for as my aunt pressed me to her bosom, I returned her embrace with an intense emotion, that seemed to resume in itself the history of my past life; but still with the eager impatience of the bird who wildly takes his flight from the perch to which he is still confined, and hopes, by the keen impetuosity with which he soars, to shake off the dead weight which chains him down to earth. The day was beautiful: white fleecy clouds were flitting rapidly across the sky; and the mild breeze that fanned my cheek was scented with the perfume of the fields of clover, through which our road chiefly lay during the first stage of our journey. The sky, the air, the smells, the sounds, the rapid motion of the carriage, were all sources of the keenest enjoyment. Fortunately for me, Mrs. Hatton, my travelling companion, possessed the qualification of finding amusement in herself, and by herself, to an extraordinary degree. I have never met with so thoroughly good-humoured a person. She always liked best whatever was proposed to her to do, and never liked at all anything that others were not inclined to. Whatever happened to be ordered for dinner, was invariably the thing she preferred; but if, by any mischance, it did not appear, and something else appeared in its stead, she as suddenly recollected that she liked the new dish a great deal better than the one that had failed. Even the weather received at her hands very different treatment from that which it is accustomed to meet with. A black frost she considered wholesome and bracing; a cutting east wind, she described as a fresh breeze; snow, rain, and hail, had each particular merits, in her eyes. When the sun shone, it was fortunate; when it rained, it was a piece of luck, for she had ever so many letters to write; and there was nothing like a rainy day for getting through business. And if the weather was without any other apology, "Still," as I heard her once say, "it was better than no weather at all."

I never heard her admit that anything was a grievance; that anybody was tiresome. Her friends' misfortunes, indeed, she felt heartily sorry for; but, with respect to them, she found consolation in the fact, that, in proportion to their extent, she could bestow a fuller share of sympathy, a more ample measure of kindness than ever, out of the ever-springing sources of tenderness, with which her own heart overflowed.

Poor Mrs. Hatton! she was the best of women, but not the wisest of governesses. During the years that she superintended my education, she had never been able to disagree with me, as to grammar and arithmetic being dull and perfectly useless studies; or help agreeing with me that Sir Walter Scott's novels improved the mind infinitely more than Goldsmith's History of England; and so I read novels to her, and she listened with delighted attention—I wrote poetry, which she read aloud, and declared was the best that had ever been written—I put aside all the books that bored me, all the exercises that puzzled me, and she heartily concurred with me, in pronouncing them all highly unprofitable and superfluous.

Dear Mrs. Hatton! she was not wise; but such guileless, warm-hearted lack of wisdom as hers, often supplied the place of those mental qualifications which are too seldom united to a perfect singleness of heart and simplicity of character.

She was, indeed, a capital travelling companion; as we passed the gates of Elmsley I said to her, "Do you know, dear Mrs. Hatton, that I am apt to be very silent in a carriage; shall you mind it?"

"It is the very thing I like best, dear, to drive along and look about me, and not have the trouble of talking. The very thing I like best; there is nothing so tiring as to talk in a carriage." And settling herself in her corner, she gave herself up to looking about her; and she was right; for what in the world is so pleasant, as a living German authoress says, as "on a fine summer morning through a lovely country rapidly to fly, like the bird, that wants nothing of the world but its surface to skim over. This is the really enjoyable part of travelling. The inn life is wearisome; the passage through towns is fatiguing. The admiration due to the treasures of art, to the wonders of science, is a task from which one would sometimes gladly buy one's self off, at the price of a day of wood-cleaving or water-carrying. But to lean back in perfect quiet in a carriage while it rolls lightly and easily along a good road; to have a variety of pictures pass before one's eyes as in a dream, each remaining long enough to please, none long enough to tire; to allow the thoughts that spring from the magical connection of ideas to flit across the mind, in unison with the visible objects before us; to be tied down by no earthly cares—sure to find a meal wherever one stops; and should one happen not to find a bed, to have nothing worse in store than to sleep *à la belle étoile*, rocked by the carriage as in a cradle; ever to hear the rolling of the wheels, which, like the murmur of a brook, the clapping of a mill, or the splash of oars in the water, forms, by

its uniformity, a soothing accompaniment to the everlasting fluctuation of thought in the mind. This is a bliss, which, like that of love and lovers, genuine travellers alone believe in; and, except genuine lovers, there is nothing more seldom met with in the world than genuine travellers. For those who travel from curiosity, from ennui, for health, or for fashion, or in order to write books, belong not to them, and know nothing of that intoxicating repose." * [* "Aus der Gesellschaft," by the Countess Hahn-Hahn.]

Such was the enjoyment in which I hoped Mrs. Hatton found ample compensation for my silence. She was no doubt a genuine traveller; for she must have been genuine in every character she assumed; though I fear that her notion of the happiness of not talking, and of looking about her, would have fallen short of the German countess's ideal of a traveller's bliss.

After a journey of about eighty miles, at five o'clock in the evening we reached the town of Salisbury, where we were to sleep that night. We ordered dinner at the inn, and I then walked to the cathedral. I had never seen one before; and when I came in sight of its tower, and then of the whole of its beautiful structure, tears rushed into my eyes, and I stood entranced in contemplation before it. My hands involuntarily clasped themselves as in prayer, and I longed to fall on my knees and adore there the God who had given to man's heart to desire, to his mind to conceive, and to his hand the power of raising, such shrines for His worship.

Salisbury Cathedral stands in the middle of a close, where evergreens and shrubs of all kinds rise from the smooth green grass that grows quite up to the foot of its walls. The door was closed; but while I sent to procure the key from the sexton, I walked slowly round the exterior of the cathedral, and paused for some minutes in a spot where, in a recess formed by the angles of the building, I stood with nothing round me but the beautiful gothic walls—nothing above me but the blue sky. It seemed a spot fitted for holy meditation, for heavenly aspiration; it was a spot that might have been selected when the Saviour's visible presence was withdrawn, by that Mary who chose the good part which was never to be taken from her. It might have been the resort of that Hannah who departed not from the Temple but served the Lord with fastings and with prayers day and night. It might have been the chosen retreat of one who, amidst all the blessings of life, day by day made preparation for the hour of death. The vision of such a life, of a course of sacred duties, of holy affections, of usefulness in life, of resignation in death, of humility in time of weal, of peace in time of woe; such a vision passed before my eyes even then, and my lips murmured: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his."

The sexton arrived with the key; and entering by the great portal door, I wandered for nearly an hour through the aisles, and lingered in the choir and in the chapel, though there was scarcely light to do more than just to trace the outlines of the masses of columns which rise in severe simplicity, and arch above one's head at a height which, in the dimness of the twilight, was scarcely discernible. After having visited the cloisters, and been so beguiled by their beauty as to forget that dinner was to be on the table at six o'clock, and that it was now verging on the half-hour past, I hurried back to the inn just as the first set of mutton-chops were coming up the stairs, and had just time to close Mrs. Hatton's mouth with a kiss as she was beginning to assure me, in answer to my apologies, that there was nothing in the world she liked so much as waiting for dinner.

The weather had grown close and warm; and we were glad, immediately after we had finished eating, to have the table cleared, and to draw our chairs to the open bow-window. It commanded a view all down the street, which at that moment bore the peculiarly dull and dusty appearance which streets in provincial towns are apt to present on a summer's evening. Two or three children were playing at marbles before one door, and screaming at each other in that particular key which games of this description call into exercise. Now and then a small cart drove by, and a few people on foot occasionally walked past the window. The clouds were gathering rapidly over the sky, and the air was becoming every instant more sultry and oppressive. Heavy drops of rain began to fall one by one in large round spots on the dusty pavement. Red and darkgreen umbrellas began to be unfolded; the carts to drive by more briskly; the marble players to withdraw into the house after sundry vociferations from some neighbouring window; and the whole scene fairly assumed the hopeless character of a rainy summer's evening. Meantime two men had stationed themselves under the projecting roof of our inn at the outset of the shower, and kept up between themselves a conversation, of which a few words occasionally reached my ears. One of the speakers was a man seemingly of fifty or thereabouts, of a heavy, dull character of countenance; his dress that of a tradesman, not of the better sort. The other was a young man who would have been handsome had it not been for a scowl which disfigured his otherwise well-shaped features. The oldest of the two men said to the other, apparently in answer to some inquiry, "Not till the old un dies, which he will soon."

"Is he as bad as that comes to?" returned the other. A cart rambled by at that moment, and I heard nothing more, and would have probably left the window had not the next words that were spoken arrested my attention.

"So Alice is here?" observed the youngest of the two speakers.

"And are you still after that ere spec?" was the answer.

I immediately identified the Alice they were speaking of with Alice Tracy, and I could not help listening on with the wish to hear something that would corroborate or destroy this idea.

"She'll never have you, take my word for it," continued the same man.

"May be not, while the gemman's a-courting her; but he's after other game, I take it, now."

"I seed him here, with my own eyes, not four days ago," said the first speaker.—"Old mother Tracy has him in her clutches, I'll warrant you. She didn't come down with the shiners for nothing."

"He's a limb of Satan; and if he were the devil himself, I'd tear his eyes out first," retorted the younger man with a fearful volley of oaths.

"And he'd snap his fingers at you, and give you into a policeman's charge. That's no go, my hearty—"

"But if the old un is dying; as you say, and the lass comes in for the cash, he'll not be such a d—d fool —"

"Ay, ay; but mother Tracy, with the bit of paper you know of, would prove an awkward customer for that ere chap! But I'll tell ye, my lad,—you 've but one chance—"

Here the speaker's voice sunk into a whisper, and I did not catch another word. The two men soon took a reconnoitring glance at the weather; and after looking up the street and down the street, and up at the sky, where nothing was visible but a thick mass of gray clouds, they seemed to awake to the thorough hopelessness of the case, and walked off, muttering imprecations on the weather.

I remained by the window absorbed in thought, till Mrs. Hatton apprised me that tea was come. There was, indeed, matter for thought in the few words these men had uttered; and the thoughts they suggested were perplexing in the extreme. It was of Alice Tracy they had spoken, for I had twice distinctly heard her grandmother's name pronounced. She was in Salisbury at this very moment, it appeared; these two rough and somewhat discreditable men were acquainted with her. A gentleman (to use their own expression) was after her; but the youngest man of the two had expressed a hope that he was at present devoting himself to some other person. Could this gentleman be Henry Lovell? Had he been base, vile enough to attempt the ruin of the lovely girl whose beauty and innocence had seemed to me to belong to a higher sphere than that of this world of ours? Was his devotion to me what was alluded to in the conversation I had overheard? Who was the person whose death they seemed to expect? I was lost in a maze of doubts and conjectures; among which the most distressing was the one that presented to my mind the idea of Alice becoming a victim to the infamous pursuit of Henry Lovell. But again, what could they mean by his (the gentleman, whoever he was,) being in Mrs. Tracy's clutches? I vainly racked my brain to form some conjecture which would account for the different parts of this short conversation. Poor Mrs. Hatton must have thought me apt to be silent, not only in a carriage, but out of one, too, if she judged by my taciturnity on this occasion. When the waiter came in to fetch the tea-things away, I asked him if he knew of any person living in Salisbury, and bearing the name of Tracy? He did not know of any such, he said, but would inquire if I wished. As he was going out of the room, he turned back, and holding the handle of the door with one hand, and passing the other through a bushy head of hair, he added: "I suppose it's quality you are asking for, Ma'am?"

"No; any persons of that name: do you know any?"

"There's an old Miss Tracy, Ma'am, lives in the next street here; she was sister to the grocer that died two years ago."

"Do you happen to know if she has had any relations staying with her lately?"

"I think she has. Ma'am; for she hired a bed, a chair, and a table, some three months ago, of my brother, who lets out furniture; and she'd not go to expense for nothing: her late brother's money is safe enough in her keeping."

As I still looked interested in the subject of Miss Tracy's expenses, the waiter, who was evidently of a communicative turn of mind, closed the door and came back to the table to wipe off some nearly imperceptible crumbs that were lying on the smooth, bright mahogany.

"It was a curious thing enough, Ma'am," he resumed; "nobody in the wide world knowing that the grocer in—street,—old Tracy, as he was called,—had scraped together thirty thousand pounds, and never had been the better for it while he lived."

"Nor when he died," I thought to myself; and inquired if the whole of that sum had been left to the lady who certainly would not go to expense for nothing?

"No, only half, Ma'am," was the answer; "fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash her brother left her; but it is not many folk in Salisbury that have seen the colour of her money. She'll keep adding on to it as long as she lives."

"And where did the other fifteen thousand pounds go?" I asked.

"They was lodged in some Lunnon banker's hands, Ma'am, I fancy. It's said he left that other half of his money to some relations that lived thereabouts, but I can't tell for sure."

I longed to ask him, if he knew what kind of people had been staying with Miss Tracy, and to find out, if possible, if it was Alice, and whether she was still in Salisbury; but I felt ashamed of questioning on, and, during the pause that ensued, my informant gave one more general polishing to the table, pushed one or two chairs out of their places, poked the fire, which did not want poking, and with a side bow left the room. My curiosity was so strongly excited, that I could not refrain from asking Mrs. Hatton if she knew anything of the Mrs. Tracy, who, in old times, had been my aunt's maid, but she had never seen her, and could give me no information on the subject. We were to start the next morning at nine o'clock, and I resolved to make an effort to satisfy myself as to the state of the case by calling at Miss Tracy's door before setting off. At eight o'clock accordingly, having ascertained from my friend, the waiter, the name of the street and the number of the house, I set out, and as I approached it, my heart beat with a strange mixture of shyness, anxiety, and curiosity. I pulled the bell, and was almost tempted to run away when I heard some one walking heavily to the door to open it. It opened however before I had made up my mind to bolt, and I asked the slip-shod, red-faced girl who appeared, whether Miss Tracy lived there?

"Yes, she does (was the answer). What's your will, Miss?"

"Is Miss Alice Tracy staying with her?"

"Yes, she is."

"Is she at home?"

"No, she aint, she's in church, but her grandmother's at home."

I did not feel courage enough to renew my acquaintance with Mrs. Tracy, whose reception of me at Bridman Cottage I well remembered, and whose forbidding countenance had remained strongly impressed on my recollection. I therefore drew a bit of paper from my pocket, and hastily writing my name upon it, I was just handing it to the girl, when it struck me that it was possible, that, after all, there might be two Alice Tracys in the world, and that I had better not leave my name at a venture. I therefore tore off the bit of writing, and on the remaining slip of paper I drew a passion flower, and requested the girl to give it to Miss Alice Tracy when she came home.

"But what's your name. Ma'am?" she inquired.

"Never mind it," I replied. "Miss Alice will know it immediately, if she is my Miss Alice, and if she is not, it does not signify," and I walked off, leaving the puzzled portress with her mouth wide open, my sketch in her hand, and her intellect evidently employed in balancing the probabilities as to the sanity of mine.

The britschka was at the door when I got back to the inn, and Mrs. Hatton with her veil down, and her boa round her neck, was waiting for me in the little sitting-room. We hastened into the carriage and rattled off through the streets of Salisbury, and were soon after ascending at a slow pace the hill that lies on the west side of the town. After a few hours of uninteresting driving along the high road, we turned into a lane which brought us at once into a new kind of scenery, quite different from any that I had yet been acquainted with. On either side of us rose, in gentle acclivities, a boundless extent of down, diversified by large patches of gorse, tall clumps of broom shining in all the gorgeous beauty of their yellow flowers, and spreading beds of fern, that loveliest of leaves, as beautiful in its form, and almost as architectural in its natural symmetry, as the more classical acanthus.

As we advanced into the very heart of the country, the character of the scenery changed, and became of a more woodland description. Hedges on both sides of the road bounded our view, but there was ample compensation for this in these delicious hedges themselves, in which hawthorn stood out in sturdy independence from among the intricacies of shrubs and brambles, that imprisoned their stems, while they scattered their snowy blossoms on the shining leaves and green patches of grass beneath them; in which the frail but daring eglantine twined its weak tendrils round the withered trunk of some

hollow, worn-out oak; in which the wild clematis and the feathery traveller's-joy, as children love to call it, flung their fairy flowers in reckless profusion over the tangled mass from whence they sprung. There was enough in these hedges to make up for the loss of views; but we had views too, when, for a moment, a gate, a stile, a gap in the hedge itself, opened to us glimpses of such woods and dells as we read of in the Midsummer Night's Dream.

We reached Brandon at four o'clock. It stands in the midst of what was formerly a chase of immense extent, and which now forms a park of extraordinary size, and of singular beauty. The hand of man seems to have done but little to improve that beauty: the house stands as if by chance in the midst of a wilderness of downy hills and grassy valleys, of hawthorn groves, and wild commons, of remnants of forests, and miles of underwood. I was so engrossed by the strange character of this, to me, perfectly novel scenery, that I thought little of anything else as we drove up to the house: and when on reaching the entrance door, the servants rushed to let down the step, and seize upon the luggage, I felt taken by surprise; rousing myself, I took an affectionate leave of Mrs. Hatton, who was proceeding to her own home in the town of—, about ten miles beyond Brandon, and we did not part without my promising her, that, if I could possible contrive it, I would visit her there before I left Dorsetshire.

CHAPTER V.

But ever and anon of griefs subdued,
There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
And slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
Aside for ever.

LORD BYRON.

On inquiry, I found that my aunt was out, and as I was not acquainted with a single person staying in the house, I begged to be shown at once to my room, instead of going into the library, where I was told some of the company were to be found. The housekeeper led the way up-stairs, and having established me in a large and very comfortable room, left me to myself. I sat down in an arm-chair, and except the occupation, if it can be so called, of watching my maid, while she unpacked the different parts of my evening dress, I spent the next hour in complete idleness.

At the end of that time, the rolling of wheels and the clatter of horses' feet drew me to the window. I was pleased to have an opportunity of inspecting some part of the society which I was so soon to be introduced to. First, there stopped at the hall door a pony-chaise, from which Mrs. Brandon and another woman got out; behind them sat an elderly man, tall and dark, not Mr. Brandon, though (as far as I recollected) like him: behind them came galloping up to the steps a riding party, two women and three or four men; among them was Henry Lovell, who was certainly about the last person I should have expected to meet. He looked in high spirits, and I heard him calling out to somebody in the house, "Is she come?" and two or three minutes afterwards, Mrs. Brandon and he came into my room together.

She kissed me most affectionately, and keeping both my hands in hers, and diminishing at the same time her beautiful eyes into the sharpest, but most *caressante* expression (I know no English word which expresses the look I mean), she fixed them on mine and said, "I am so much obliged to you, Henry, and to you for coming, dearest Ellen; but I ought to thank him first, for he taught me to wish to know you, and to love you. It is not a hard lesson,"—she added, in the sweetest tone of voice imaginable. I tried to smile and look pleased, but I was out of sorts, though I could hardly tell exactly why. If I had heard at Elmsley that I was to have met Henry at Brandon, I should have probably been glad, but somehow my short journey had put me into a different state of mind. I had been more free from painful thoughts, immediately connected with myself at least, than at any time for a good while past; I had felt an unconscious relief in seeing new faces, and hearing new voices; I longed to feel unwatched, unnoticed. Then the conversation I had heard between the two men at Salisbury had left a disagreeable impression upon my mind, although too vague to influence my judgment. Then again, why, if Mrs. Brandon's wish to see me, and her consequent invitation, were the result of his praises, had he not talked to me of her? Why had he not said he should meet me at her house? Obliged, alas! as I was myself by my miserable fate, to practise constant dissimulation, I still hated it strangely in others, and I felt aware that I answered Mrs. Brandon ungraciously, and greeted Henry coldly. As usual, he was perfectly self-possessed, but soon withdrew, leaving me alone with Mrs. Brandon.

"Do let us sit down here together, dearest Ellen," said she, drawing me to a couch as she spoke; "I do so long to be well acquainted with you, and I feel to know so well all about you, we shall be great

friends soon, I am sure." And she again squeezed my hands, and looked into my eyes with that pretty but over-confidential look in hers.

We talked about my uncle and aunt, on which she said, "Was not dear Mrs. Middleton a little angry with me for seducing you away from Elmsley? But I fancy she is in the secret; is not she?"

"She was much pleased at your kindness in wishing to see me," I answered; quite puzzled as to what the secret she alluded to could be.

"And now, dear Ellen," she continued, "you must treat me quite like a sister, like a friend, not as an old aunt, or I shall be affronted, and very jealous of Mrs. Middleton. You must speak to me quite openly."

"You are so very kind," I said, while all the time I thought, "What on earth are you at?" The idea of her being jealous of my affection for Mrs. Middleton struck me as perfectly ridiculous, and the very fact of being requested to speak openly, effectually inclined me to shut myself up, in an additional amount of reserve. I tried, however, to be amiable and warm; and after a little more conversation, Mrs. Brandon left me, to go and dress for dinner.

A few minutes after the bell had rung, I went down to the library, and found nearly everybody assembled. I went through a number of introductions. The women that I made acquaintance with were Lady Wyndham, Mrs. Ernsley, Miss Moore, and two Miss Farnleys. The men were standing together in the middle of the room, but except Mr. Brandon (who immediately came to me and made a number of civil speeches), none of them approached us before dinner was announced. Sir Charles Wyndham then took me in.

Just as we were sitting down, Mrs. Brandon called to Mr. Ernsley, who was preparing to place himself in the chair on the other side of me; "Dear Mr. Ernsley, won't you come and sit by me? I do so long to hear what you think of Meldon Hall, which I am told you went to see to-day." And as he obeyed her directions, Henry Lovell slipped into the chair by my side, which accounted to me for the look of intelligence which Mrs. Brandon directed to our part of the table, to which he perhaps responded, but to which I certainly did not. I was not sorry, however, to have an opportunity of speaking to him, as I felt curious to know how he would account for his sudden change of plans, and I wished also to find out if he had been at Salisbury during the last few days.

He immediately said to me, "Are you surprised at seeing me here?"

"As much," I replied, "as to find that it is to you I am indebted for being invited here at all."

"And if it was so, would it affront you?"

"It would not be particularly flattering."

"You would think it more flattering, would you, that a woman, who has only seen you once, and that seven years ago, should wish to see you again, than that I (and here he spoke in the lowest possible whisper), after such days, such months, as I spent at Elmsley, should have strained every nerve not to lose sight of you."

"Then this has been a scheme of your forming? I hate scheming."

"I was in London; I detested it, and I came here; but I wish to God I had not I (he added, with more of passion than of tenderness in his voice;) for my coming is evidently disagreeable to you, and I cannot brook the coldness of your manner (he continued, in a still increasing tone of agitation). It puts me beside myself, Ellen, and makes a fool of me, which is of all things what I most dislike to be made."

"What is it you most dislike to be made, Mr. Lovell?" inquired Sir Charles Wyndham, who had been restless and fidgetty, till he could catch at something in our conversation, which would enable him to join in it.

"A fool, Sir Charles," answered Henry, with an expression of countenance, which certainly did not bear in it any consciousness of his own folly.

"The ladies make fools of us all," said Sir Charles, with a bow to me.

"Unless they find us ready made," I heard Henry mutter, while I was obliged to turn round and listen to a string of compliments, and a flow of small talk from my right hand neighbour, which it seemed as if nothing would stop but some lucky accident, some sudden overthrow of the regular course of things, so steady and even was the tenor of its gentle prolixity. He had an eye, the mildness of which was appalling, and a smile of despairing sweetness. As I looked at him, I wished (which had never happened

to me to wish before in looking at anybody's face) that he had been very ugly; no ugly face could have been so hopelessly tiresome. If but for a moment he could have looked cross or ill-natured, it would have been the making of him, or rather of me, for then I should have had courage to cut his discourse short, and turn away; but as it was, dinner was nearly over before I had another opportunity of speaking to Henry, who at last brought about the *event* I had pined for, by overturning a pyramid of red and white cherries, which went rolling all over the table in different directions, and for a moment engrossed Sir Charles's benevolent exertions. Henry immediately seized on the favourable moment, and resumed our conversation, though in an altered tone.

"The fact is, dear Ellen, that, on my arrival in London, I found my solicitor out of town, and my father gone on a visit to some friends of his in Hertfordshire. I have a general invitation to this place; and it struck me (I was wrong perhaps) that it might be, as well as a gratification to myself, a comfort to you, among a set of strangers, to find a friend; and I suppose I may call myself one."

He said all this in such a gentle, earnest manner, and in fact the thought had been such a kind one, that I felt quite ashamed of myself; and in the reaction of the moment, I turned to him with some emotion and said,

"You are very kind to me, Henry, and it grieves me to think that I must have appeared to you ungracious—ungrateful even."

"Only a little capricious," he answered; "and should I prize as much that bright smile of yours, Ellen, if the transient cloud had not made its brightness still dearer?"

At this moment Mrs. Brandon gave the signal for withdrawal. Henry whispered to me, as I was looking for my gloves under the table,

"Now that I have explained my being here, at the expense of a fearful havoc among Mr. Brandon's cherries, I shall be at leisure, when we come to the drawing-room, to give you my opinion of the society here; pray do not make up your mind about anybody till I come."

I left the dining-room in better humour than when I went in, and sat down with the two Miss Farnleys, at a round table covered with annuals and albums. We entered into conversation, and *got on* (as the phrase is) very well. They were both nice-looking girls; the eldest was handsome. It was not difficult to comply with Henry's request, that I should not make up my mind about any one till he had given me his opinion; for a whole quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he made his appearance in the drawing-room, and instantly came and sat down on the couch by me. Lady Wyndham at that moment begged the eldest Miss Farnley to come and give her advice about some pattern or stitch that she was employed upon, and the youngest went to the open window to speak to Mrs. Brandon and to Mrs. Ernsley, who were walking up and down the gravel walk near the house.

"How do you like your aunt, Ellen?"

"Don't call her my aunt; that is a name sacred to me. I cannot call any one but your sister, my aunt."

"Well, Mrs. Brandon, then; how do you like her?"

"I thought I was not to make up my mind about any one without your assistance?"

"True, but I did not include her; she is an old friend of mine, and I might be partial."

"There would be no harm in biassing me in her favour. I ought to like her, and I'm afraid I don't."

"Don't you?" said Henry, in a tone of so much annoyance and mortification, that I looked at him with surprise. "You will like her," he added, "when you know her."

"But when did you see so much of her? And if she is such a friend of yours, why did you never talk to me of her?"

He did not answer immediately, and I went on.

"But you are very mysterious about all your acquaintances; for instance, you know how delighted I was with Alice Tracy."

I was obliged to summon up all my courage to pronounce her name; how often does one feel that there are subjects which become forbidden ones between people with whom in general there exists no reserve, and which, by some strange instinct, one cannot touch upon without emotion, though nothing reasonable can be alleged to account for it. He started, and his countenance instantaneously clouded over; but I went on with a kind of cowardly courage.

"And yet, I dare say, you have seen her, or heard something about her since our visit to Bridman Manor, and have never told me."

"I have *not* seen her."

"Where is she now?" I persisted, feeling that if I let the subject drop, it would require afresh effort to resume it again.

"I don't know."

"Is she likely to be staying at Salisbury?"

"At Salisbury?"

"Yes, there are some people of that name living there. I called at the house early this morning, and asked for Alice. She was out, but if I knew that she was staying on there, nothing would be easier than to go and pay her a visit one morning from hence, and I should like it of all things."

"Ellen," said Henry, "you cannot go on seeing Alice, or have anything to do with any of that family. You are quite a child, and childishly headstrong I well know, but I really must insist upon this."

"I do not exactly see the right that you have to insist upon my doing or my not doing anything; but, at least, give me some good reason for this dictation."

"They are people with whom you cannot with propriety associate; at your age you can be no judge of such things."

"It was my aunt who sent me to them, in the first instance; consequently, she can know nothing against Mrs. Tracy; and, as to Alice, you cannot mean that *she*—unless—"

I stopped short; my heart was beating violently. I felt that modesty, propriety, dignity, forbade my hinting at my suspicions; but they were rushing again on my mind with fresh force; and as I looked at Henry, I felt that my cheeks were burning, and my eyes flashing.

"No," he said, as if he had not remarked my agitation, or else that it had calmed his. "No; Alice's character is perfectly good; but, in visiting her, you would be liable to fall in with persons whom it would be in every way unpleasant to be thrown amongst."

I remembered the two men at Salisbury, and felt this might be true; there was something so plain, and indifferent, too, in his manner of doing justice to Alice, that it removed my suspicions; and when he said—

"Well, now, for Heaven's sake, let us leave off talking on a subject on which it seems we are always destined to quarrel."

I smiled, and made no effort to pursue it farther, but listened to his account of the society at Brandon.

"Lady Wyndham (he said) is as you can see in looks, the very reverse of her husband—quite guiltless of his insipid comeliness. I have never found out anything beyond that; for she is as stern and as silent as he is communicative, perhaps on the system of compensation, and from a strict sense of justice to society."

"And the Miss Farnleys (I said), we have just made acquaintance; but I am quite disposed to like or dislike them, according to the report you make of them."

"The Miss Farnleys (he replied) have been brought almost entirely abroad, and are, perhaps, not spoilt, but certainly fashioned by this circumstance. The oldest is not the least affected in manner, nor indeed in conversation, except that one is willing to attribute to affectation the very silly things which an otherwise intelligent person is in the habit of saying."

"What kind of things?"

"Why, for instance, she will tell you that she cannot exist without flowers, and therefore keeps loads of them in her room at night, though they give her a raging headache. But don't think her silly (though it is difficult to help it, I own), for this very girl, when she broke her arm last year, submitted to the most painful operation without a groan, in order that her father, who was ill at the time, should not be agitated or alarmed, though, when he left the room, she fainted from the intensity of agony. Do not think her wicked, if she tells you that she pines to be overturned in a carriage, or to be wrecked at sea; if she boasts that she throws out of window the medicines that are prescribed for her, or that she swallows poison, to try how she feels after it; for she risked her life a few months ago to save a

drowning child; and when the village near their country place was on fire, she went about among the distracted people like an angel of mercy. Do not, therefore, think her silly, wicked, or mad, whatever she may say to you, but only wonder where she learnt that to seem so was a charm."

"And her sister, that girl with a Grecian profile and straight eyebrows?"

"That girl, who sometimes is hardly pretty, and at other times perfectly beautiful, is very clever, though she too says silly things now and then, but quite in a different line. She is original and agreeable, though she lisps and drawls, till the spirit within her is roused. She is very provoking if you dislike her; still more so, perhaps, if you like her. In short, I hardly know which to recommend you to do; only, I am sure if you do like her, you will like her very much, and will better spare a better woman —Lady Wyndham, for instance."

"And that little Miss Moore, who is sitting over her book with a look of such intense enjoyment in her large eyes, what account do you give of her?"

"Oh, everybody doats upon the little Irish girl; nobody can tell exactly why. It is, I suppose, because her eyes speak to you whether her tongue does or not. It is because she unites the most contrary extremes, and leaves you to puzzle over them; because she sails into the room, with her little stately manner, and salutes you with a formal curtsey; and then, under all this air of dignity, you discover the very merriest-hearted little romp that ever existed. You must be fond of her. As refined in mind and in manner as the most fastidious could require, she has, at the same time, the humour, the native fun of her country—it sparkles in her eyes—it bubbles in her laugh. She is a little patriot, too: when Ireland is mentioned, you will see her cheek flush, and her spirit rise. It is the only strong feeling she seems to have; for, otherwise, like the jolly miller of Dee, she cares for nobody, and if others care for her, she does not appear to thank them for it. I have often heard men say, how in love they would be with Rosa Moore, if it were not for this thankless, hopeless, remorseless indifference. Now, I think this is a mistake; for I believe her great charm really lies in that very recklessness of what others think of her, or feel for her, in the eager, child-like impetuosity with which she seeks amusement, and in the perfect self-possession with which she treats everything and everybody."

"And Mrs. Ernsley, Henry; what do you say of her?"

"Mrs. Ernsley? It is much more difficult to say what she is, than what she is not; so allow me to describe her in negatives. She is *not* handsome, for her features are bad, and her complexion is sallow. She is not plain, for she has pretty eyes, pretty hair, a pretty smile, and a pretty figure. She is not natural, for her part in society is pre-arranged and continually studied. She is not affected, for nobody talks to you with more earnestness, or more of natural impulse and spontaneousness; but still, she is always listening to herself. She is the person who is attracting, who is charming you, natural to a fault, unguarded to excess (she says to herself). Then, she is not a bad sort of woman; she has a great regard for her husband, and takes great pains with her little girls; but she is always playing with edged tools; she is always lingering on the line of demarcation. She is eternally discussing who are in love with her —though she is such a very good sort of a woman—and who would be in love with her if she was not? Above all, she is by no means partial to other women, whether they have stepped over the line, or kept within it. She will hate you, Ellen, depend upon it, with an innocent kind of hatred: she will do you no harm, for she is kind-hearted in reality; only it will be nuts to her if anybody says that Miss Middleton is not near so pretty as they had expected; and she will try to put you down whenever you open your mouth; but don't be put down, and then you will remain mistress of the field, for she will grow so fidgetty, (not cross, for she is, in fact, good-tempered,) that she will lose her self-possession, and then all will be over with her."

"I have not the slightest wish to enter the lists with her.
But now, tell me something of the men who are here."

"That will be quickly done;—Sir Charles is a fool; Mr. Ernsley is a prig; and Mr. Farnley has a broad kind of humour, and a talent for mimicry, but he is coarse and unrefined, which, by the way, is, perhaps, the reason that his daughter thinks it necessary to be so painfully the reverse. Mr. Brandon, your aunt's brother-in-law, is an agreeable man. Mr. Manby is a lout."

"And Sir Edmund Ardern?" I inquired.

"Oh, as to Sir Edmund Ardern, I entreat you, on the same principle on which pastry-cooks cram their apprentices during the first few days, to talk to him incessantly. Let him sit by you to-morrow at breakfast, at luncheon, at dinner, walk with him, and ride with him; I shall not come near you, in order that he may have full scope for his fascinating powers; you shall be fascinated till you cry for mercy."

I laughed, but secretly thought that something of the severity of his satire proceeded from the fact,

that Sir Edmund was the only handsome and pleasing person in the house, and I did not feel inclined to take entirely for granted, that Henry's judgment of him was correct.

Our *tête-à-tête* was soon interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Ernsley, and the arrival of tea. Mrs. Ernsley threw herself into a large arm-chair, flung her bonnet and shawl on the opposite couch, and then began arranging her hair.

"You look tired, Mrs. Ernsley," said Henry.

"To death," she answered. "Dear Mrs. Brandon has been wondering whether the stars are inhabited or not. It is not fair to make one stretch out one's mind so far."

"What did Sir Edmund pronounce on the subject?" inquired Henry.

"That there was much to be said on both sides of the question. I left them at that point."

"Do you like Sir Edmund?"

"I wish you would not ask me."

"Why?"

"Because he hates me, and I won't own to a *passion malheureuse*. He nearly overturned poor Mr. Farnley to-day at dinner, in trying to avoid the chair next me."

"Oh, no; it was in trying to get the one next Miss Middleton," observed Rosa Moore, with an Innocent expression of countenance.

Mrs. Ernsley continued without noticing the interruption, otherwise than by a downward movement of the corners of her mouth—"I had a thousand times rather be hated by him, than be liked in the way in which he seems to like any one, *qui lui tombe sous la main*."

"No doubt," said Henry; "next to being loved there is nothing like being hated."

"You think so too, then?" said Mrs. Ernsley.

"Certainly," he replied. "It gratifies one of the strongest tastes, or rather passions, of one's nature; that of feeling emotion one's self, and exciting it in others. If I could not see the woman I loved agitated by her love for me, I had rather see her tremble, shudder eyen at my presence, than look as if Mr. Manby had come into the room."

"What a detestable lover you would make!" exclaimed Mrs. Ernsley. "Always, by your own admission, on the verge of hatred."

He laughed, and said, "It is an old saying, that love and hatred are closely allied."

"Not more so than hatred and contempt," I said; "and in incurring the one, one might, perhaps, gain the other."

Both my companions looked at me with surprise, for I had not joined before in their conversation, and a secret feeling (I was aware of it) had given a shade of bitterness to my manner of saying it.

Mrs. Ernsley seemed to take the remark as personal to herself; but said good-humouredly, though somewhat sneeringly, "Since Miss Middleton has pronounced so decided an opinion, we had better drop the subject. What is become of Edward Middleton, Mr. Lovell?"

"He has been abroad for some months," replied Henry; and Sir Edmund Ardern, who at that moment joined us, said, "The last time I saw him was at Naples last February; we had just made an excursion into the mountains of Calabria together."

"A very unromantic one, no doubt," said Mrs. Ernsley, "as everything is in our unromantic days. Not a trace of a brigand or of an adventure I suppose?"

"None that we were concerned in. But we saw an ex-brigand, and he told us his adventures."

"Did he really?" exclaimed Miss Farnley; "and was he not adorable?"

"Not exactly," said Sir Edmund with a smile; "but some of his accounts were interesting."

"Was he fierce?"

"No, not the least. I fancy he had followed that line in his younger days, more because his father and his brother were brigands, than from any inclination of his own. One of the stories he told us struck Middleton and myself in a very different manner."

"What was it?" I asked, unable to restrain my anxious curiosity.

"I am afraid you may think it long," said. Sir Edmund; "but if you are to decide the point in question you must have patience to hear the story:—

"Lorenzo, that was our friend's name, had been engaged in several skirmishes with the gendarmerie, that had been sent into the mountains to arrest the gang to which he belonged; he was known by sight, and had once or twice narrowly escaped being seized. He had a personal enemy among the gendarmes —a man called Giacomo, whose jealousy he had excited some years previously at a country fair. They had quarrelled about a girl whom both were making love to. Lorenzo had struck him, and Giacomo had not returned the blow before they were separated, and his rival safe in the mountains beyond the reach of his vengeance. He brooded over this recollection for several years; and when he found himself, at last, officially in pursuit of his enemy, he followed him as a hungry beast tracks his prey. One evening, with two or three of his men, he had dodged him for several hours. Lorenzo had made with incredible speed for a spot where, between the fissures of the rock, he knew of a secret passage by which he could elude the pursuit, and place himself in safety. He strained every nerve to turn the corner before his pursuers could be upon him, and mark the place where he disappeared. Between him and that comer, there was now nothing left but a slight wooden bridge thrown over a precipice. As he was rushing across it, Giacomo, with the instinctive feeling that his enemy was escaping him, by one tremendous leap from the top of the rock which overhung the bridge, reached it at the same moment. The shock broke to pieces the frail support; the hand-rail alone did not give way, and to this, by their hands alone, the two men clung. They were close to each other—they looked into each other's faces—neither could move. Lorenzo's eyes were glazed with terror; Giacomo's glared with fury; he was nearest the edge, his men were in sight, and he called to them hoarsely. Lorenzo gave himself up for lost. At that moment, above their heads, on the edge of the rock, something moved—both looked up. A blow, a tremendous blow, fell on Giacomo's head; his features grew distorted, they quivered in agony—a yell of torture escaped him: another blow, and his brains flew upon the face and hands of his foe. A mist seemed to cover Lorenzo's eyes; but he felt something stretched out to him—he clung to it instinctively, he scrambled, he darted into the cavern, he fainted, but he was safe."

"And who had saved him?" we all exclaimed.

"Amina, a girl whom he was courting, and by whom he was beloved. She was carrying home to her father a large sledge-hammer which he had lent to a neighbour. Passing alone through that wild region, she saw the desperate situation of the two men, recognised her lover struggling with the gendarme, heard the shouts of the latter to his comrades, and rushed to the spot."

"A brave girl," exclaimed Henry.

"How did the *romance* end?" asked Mrs. Ernsley.

"Ah! there's the point," said Sir Edmund. "I asked Lorenzo if he did not love the girl twice as much since her gallant conduct. 'I was very grateful to her,' he answered, 'but I was no longer in love with her.' I exclaimed in astonishment, but he persisted; it was very odd certainly, she had saved his life, and he would have done anything to serve her; 'But you know, gentlemen,' he added, 'one cannot help being in love, or not being in love; and when I looked at Amina's black eyes, I could not help shuddering, for I remembered the look they had, when she gave Giacomo that last blow, and it was not pleasant, and in short I could not be in love with her, and there was an end of it.'"

"And is it possible," exclaimed Mrs. Ernsley, "that he was so ungrateful as to forsake her?"

"No; he told me he would have married her, if she had wished it, but she did not; 'Perhaps,' he said, 'she saw I was no longer in love with her; but she did not seem to care much, and there was an end of it,' as he said before. Now I own I cannot understand the fellow's feeling; if anybody had saved my life, as Amina saved his, I really believe I should have fallen in love with her, had she been old and ugly; but a handsome girl, whom he was in love with before, that she should lose his heart, in consequence of the very act for which he should have adored her, passes, I confess, my comprehension. But Edward Middleton disagreed with me; he thought it perfectly natural. 'It was hard upon her,' he said, 'and could no be defended on the ground of reason; but there were instincts, impulses, more powerful than reason itself; and unjust and cruel as it might seem, he could not wonder at the change in Lorenzo's feelings.'"

"How strange!" said Henry Lovell; "how like Edward, too; though not quite so moral and just, as he

generally piques himself upon being."

"Ay," said Sir Edmund, "I must do him the justice to say, that he added, 'Had I been Lorenzo, I should have felt myself bound to devote my life to Amina, to have made her happy at the expense of my own happiness; but there is, to me, something so dreadful in life destroyed, in death dealt by the hand of a woman, under any circumstances whatever.'"—

As Sir Edmund was saying these last words, I felt the sick faint sensation that had been coming over me during the last few minutes, suddenly increase, and he was interrupted by Mrs. Ernsley exclaiming, "Good Heavens, Miss Middleton, how pale you look! are you ill?"

Mrs. Brandon, who heard her, rushed to me; by a strong effort, I recovered myself, swallowed the glass of water she brought, and walked to the piano-forte, where Rosa Moore was singing.

I laid my head on the comer of the instrument, and as my tears fell fast, I breathed more freely. When, later, Sir Edmund apologised to me for having made me ill with his horrid story, and Henry whispered to me, "Mrs. Ernsley has just announced that you are of the same species as Miss Farnley, who cannot hear of death, or of wounds, without swooing, but that you are only a somewhat better actress," I was able to smile, and speak gaily. Soon after, I went to bed; as I undressed, I thought of these lines of Scott:—

"O I many a shaft at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant
And many a word, at random spoken.
May soothe or wound a heart nigh broken."

That night I had little sleep, and when I woke in the morning, my pillow was still wet with tears.

CHAPTER VI.

"Yes, deep within and deeper yet
The rankling shaft of conscience hide;
Quick let the melting eye forget
The tears that in the heart abide.
.....
Thus oft the mourner's wayward heart
Tempts him to hide his grief and die;
Too feeble for confession's smart—
Too proud to bear a pitying eye."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

The following day was Sunday, and some of us drove, some of us walked, to the village church. It was about two miles distant from the house by the carriage road, but the path that led thither by a short cut across the park, through a small wood, down a steep hill, and up another still steeper, and then by a gentle descent into the village, was not much more than a mile in length. It was a beautiful walk, and the view from the top of that last hill was enough to repay the fatigue of scrambling up that winding path, exposed to the burning heat of the sun, and that is not saying a little. As the last bell had not begun to ring, we sat down on the stile on the brow of the hill, to wait for it, and in the meantime I looked with delight on the picture before my eyes. The little footpath wound down through the daisy-enamelled grass to the edge of a pond of clear water, that lay between the field and the road, and was shaded by half a dozen magnificent oaks, elms, and horse-chesnuts, beyond the little village, which did not seem to contain more than seven or eight cottages, each half-buried in trees, or overgrown with creepers, except one red brick house, that flared in all the pride of newness, and of the gaudy flowers in its spruce little garden. In the middle of the irregular square, or rather of the wide part of the village road, for it could not be called a street, stood a tall May-pole, still adorned with two or three faded remnants of the streamers which had decorated it a month before. On an eminence beyond the village stood the church; one of those small old beautiful parish churches, with one square gray tower, and two wide porches; around it grew yews and thorn trees, of various shapes and sizes, intermingling their white flowers and dark foliage in graceful contrast.

After a few moments' rest we walked on to the churchyard, and sat down upon a tombstone close to the principal porch. All the people of the village were assembled, sitting, or standing in groups, waiting for the clergyman's arrival. Mr. Brandon was just telling me, in answer to my expressions of admiration

for a picturesque, ivy-grown old wall and house, which formed one of the boundaries of the churchyard, that they were part of the ruins of an ancient palace of King John's, when the carriage arrived, and we all went into church. It looked smaller still within than without, but its rude architecture had something religious as well as rustic about it, and the simple singing of the morning hymn by the school children seemed in accordance with it. As usual my mind wandered during the whole of the service, and though I knelt when others knelt, and stood when they stood, and though my lips mechanically repeated the responses, I never prayed except when occasionally some words in the Liturgy or in the Bible struck upon the secret feeling of my heart, and drew from it a mental ejaculation, a passionate appeal to Heaven, which was rather the cry of a wounded spirit than a direct address to the God between whom and my soul I felt as if the link of communion was broken. That day, however, little as I regularly attended to the service it had a soothing effect upon me. There was an old monument exactly opposite our seat, to which my eyes were continually reverting. It was that of a knight crusader and of his wife; their statues were lying side by side, in that rigid repose which unites the appearance of sleep and of death. There was peace in each line of those sculptured figures—an intensity of repose, the more striking from its association with some of the emblems of war. As I looked upon them I longed to be resting too.

The clergyman was reading the morning lesson at that moment, and these words attracted my attention, "And they all fell seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest; in the first days in the beginning of barley-harvest; and Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of Heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night."

These words seemed to answer my thoughts; why I cannot tell, perhaps no one but myself could understand what that connection was, and yet it struck me so powerfully that I felt as if a chink had suddenly opened, and given me a glimpse into another world. There was quietness and confidence and strength, in the midst of torture, agony, and despair. The mother, who had lost all her sons, and that by an ignominious death, sat upon the rock days and nights, and she spread sackcloth upon it, and she slept not by night, and she rested not by day, but drove away the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and verily she had her reward; their bones were gathered together by the King's command, and they buried them there. She had her meed, I might have mine at last; I could weep and pray, fast by day and watch by night, give up the joys of life, the hopes of youth; cease to banish the remembrance of the past, but in quiet penitence, in humbled contemplation bear it ever in mind, and carry about with me, through a long life perhaps, the dagger in the wound, till at last the day might come when my own heart would absolve me, and Edward Middleton would pity me.

After the service the clergyman announced his intention of administering the holy sacrament on the following Sunday, to all such as should be religiously and devoutly disposed. For the last year I had always listened to this address either with a feeling of dogged indifference, or, if my heart was less hardened than usual, with a pang of shame and grief; but always with a determination to remain banished from the altar, ex-communicated by my own conscience. Now for the first time, I listened with a somewhat different feeling; I longed to kneel there, and as I looked at the clergyman while he preached, and marked his white hair, his venerable countenance, and the benevolence of his manner, a sudden resolution occurred to me; I would open my heart to him; I would tell him all; I would, for once, pour out the secret anguish of my soul to one who neither loved nor hated me; to one who would tell me what my guilt had been,—who would promise me its pardon, and point out the path of duty to my blinded sight. I felt feverishly impatient to accomplish this determination; and when we came out of church, and Mrs. Brandon asked me if I would walk or drive home, I said I would drive, so as to make the walkers set out without me; and then I drew Mrs. Brandon aside, and told her, that as I had heard that the afternoon service was at half-past two o'clock, I should wait for it, and in the mean time walk about the churchyard and the village. She made some objections to my remaining alone, which was inevitable if I stayed, as all the men had walked on, and the women would none of them be inclined to miss their luncheon; but at last yielding to my earnest wish, she said she would herself come to afternoon church, in order to fetch me back.

I saw them all drive off, and the village people slowly leave the churchyard in different directions, and sat myself down on the same tombstone as in the morning to watch for Mr. Leslie. It was some time before he came out of church, and when he did he remained for several minutes in conversation with the clerk at the door of the porch. At last he dismissed him, and walked my way; he seemed doubtful whether he should stop or not, as he passed me, but I got up, and this decided him.

He smiled, and asked me if I had been forgotten and left behind?

"No," I said, "I am only waiting here, as there is hardly time to go to the house and come back before afternoon church; and this is a pleasant place to spend an hour in."

"I am glad you like our old churchyard," said Mr. Leslie; and then he began talking of the views, of the neighbouring scenery, of the ruined palace now transformed into a farm, of all the subjects he thought would interest me, little thinking that at that moment the secret of a life of anguish, the confession of an over-burthened conscience, was trembling on my lips. The more he talked, too (although there was nothing unsuitable to his sacred office in anything he said), the morel felt to lose sight of the priest of God—of the messenger of Heaven, in the amiable, conversible, gentlemanlike man before me; however, when he pulled out his watch, and apologised for leaving me, pleading a promise he had made to visit a sick parishioner, I made a desperate effort, and said: "May I ask you, Mr. Leslie, to allow me a few moments of conversation with you before the hour of afternoon service, if you can spare time?"

He looked surprised, but bowed assent, and said he would return in half an hour. During that half hour I sat with my face buried in my hands, feeling as if able to count every pulsation of my heart. The excitement under which I had acted was past; I trembled at the idea of what my lips were going to utter; I felt as if I had escaped a great danger; I was astonished at myself for ever having formed such a resolution; and when Mr. Leslie stood before me again, and asked me, with a smile, what my business with him was, I could as soon have destroyed myself in his presence, as have pronounced the words of self-accusation, which had appeared to me so natural and so easy when he was in the pulpit and I on my knees in church. But he was there, and he was waiting for my answer, and my cheeks were flushing, and I knew that the next moment I should burst into tears. With a desperate confusion I drew my purse, which contained several sovereigns, from my pocket, and asked him to distribute it among the poor of the village. He seemed puzzled, but thanked me, and said he should be happy to be the dispenser of such a liberal donation: and I darted away from him, unable to bear the shame and the misery I was enduring; for now it seemed to me that I had added hypocrisy to my guilt; that I had hardened my heart against the best impulse I had yet experienced, and that I had deceived the minister of God, whose praises sounded like curses in my ears.

I attended the afternoon service in a more reckless mood than ever; and that day at dinner, and during all the evening, was more feverishly gay, more wildly excited than usual; and Henry Lovell, who seemed struck with the strangeness of my manner, for the first time made love to me without reserve. The language of passion was new to my ears; his words made my heart throb and my cheeks bum; but even while he spoke, and while under the influence of a bewildering excitement, which made me feel, for the time, as if I shared his sentiments, I once thought of the crusader. I saw a pale, calm face, with its well known features, under the warrior's helmet; and I felt that to lie down and die by his side would be happiness compared to such a life as mine.

A few days after this, we were all sitting in the drawing-room at about twelve o'clock; the day was not tempting, and instead of going out, we had settled to work, while Sir Edmund and Henry alternately read out loud to us; but Rosa Moore, when she heard the plan proposed, screwed up her lips into a decided expression of disapprobation, and slipt out of the room with the look of a child who has escaped its lesson. Two hours after she came in again, and sat down quietly in a chair opposite me; she looked red and out of breath, but a look of mischief and amusement was sparkling in her eyes. She listened patiently to the conclusion of the tragedy, which Sir Edmund was reading well, though rather too theatrically for the occasion; and when the different remarks upon it had subsided, she turned to Henry, and with perfect gravity, but a most mischievous look in her eyes, said to him, "Mr. Lovell, I am sorry to have to break it to you, but, upon pain of death, we must marry immediately."

"I never dreamt of such an honour," said Henry, laughing; "but if there is no other alternative, I can resign myself. But who lays down this law?"

"A gentleman who shortened my walk this morning, for I had no intention of coming home before the end of the tragedy."

"Who can you mean?"

"Somebody who must be either your best friend or your worst enemy, by the interest he seems to take in you."

"What *do* you mean?" said Mrs. Brandon.

"Only that as I was exploring the thicket near East Common, I heard a rustling in the hedge, and suddenly stood face to face with an individual of not very prepossessing appearance."

"What kind of man, my love? you frighten me to death."

"Why he was not like a gentleman, nor yet like a countryman; not like anything good in its way. He opened our interview by laying hold of my arm."

"How dreadful!" "What did he say?" "What did you do?" "How shocking!" "How did you get away?" "I should have died on the spot;" was echoed with different sorts of emphasis round the table.

"Why, I told him I had five shillings and sixpence in my purse, in case it was agreeable to him to take them."

"Did he?"

"No, here they are quite safe; he did not want to take my money, but to give me advice, he said," and Rosa burst into one of her merriest peals of laughter.

"What did he say to you exactly? Now pray be serious, Rosa," cried Mrs. Brandon, impatiently.

"This is what he said, 'Hark'ee, my duck, do you marry that 'ere chap, that Mr. Lovell what's a courting you, and the sooner the better, for if you don't it will be the worse for you and for him, and for some one as shall be nameless. It will be the saving of his life, if you mind me my pretty gal.' He added this, as I wrenched my arm away, and was taking to my legs."

"And he let you go?"

"No, he caught hold of me again, and begged for an answer. I am afraid I should have promised to marry Mr. Lovell, or to kill him, or anything else that was expected of me, in order to get away, when another man joined us, and muttered, 'Fool, you are dropping the Brentford ticket at Hammersmith gate.' Upon which my friend screwed up his mouth into a particular shape, gave a kind of whistle, and both darted away among the bushes; and here I am."

I looked round to see how Henry took this account, but he was gone. Mrs. Brandon noticed also his disappearance, and left the room. Mrs. Ernsley, Sir Edmund, and the eldest Miss Farnley drew round Rosa, to hear her recount again her adventure, and the youngest Miss Farnley whispered to me: "Mr. Lovell must be in love with Miss Moore, for I never saw a man more strangely agitated; but it is an odd story; what do you think it can mean?"

"Perhaps it is a hoax," I said; for I had a vague wish that the whole thing might be hushed up. I felt frightened—I thought it evident that Rosa had been taken for me, and I could not help thinking that the two men she had fallen in with, were those I had seen at Salisbury. Henry's agitation and his sudden disappearance confirmed my suspicions, and I felt the more tormented from having no one near me, to whom I could impart them. When we went into the dining-room to luncheon, Mrs. Brandon looked flushed and worried; she told Rosa that Henry had gone towards the East common, to see if the men who had frightened her, and used his name for that purpose, were lurking in that direction; that Mr. Brandon had sent the gamekeeper and some of his men to make inquiries in the neighbourhood about these fellows, and directed that they should be brought up for examination before him as a magistrate, if they could be found. Rosa proposed to me to ride with her and all the men of the party, that afternoon, and scour the park, the neighbouring woods and downs, in search of the men. Curiosity, and an intense desire to ascertain if I was right in my suppositions, made me agree to this plan. We were soon off, and galloping across the park. Rosa was in tearing spirits; she had been somewhat alarmed in the morning, but the idea of a *quiproquo*, the amusement of a practical riddle, the fun of pursuing her assailant, (whose offence had not been of a nature which would make its results to him so serious as to check any levity on the subject) tickled her fancy exceedingly, and she kept her companions in a continual, roar of laughter. We rode about in different directions for nearly two hours, but, except a few labourers, we met no one. As we were walking our horses through a dell, that divided the upper part of East common from a wood of beautiful oaks, that stretched for miles beyond it, Mr. Manby suddenly exclaimed, "There are two men scrambling over a hedge in the direction of Ash Grove. Now, Miss Moore, for a desperate effort." We all looked in the direction where he pointed with his whip, and all set off at once at full speed. There was a small ditch between the field we were in, and the one we were making for; all the horses took it at a flying leap, except mine, who positively refused to budge. In vain I struck him and urged him on; he began rearing violently, but would neither jump nor walk over it; the groom begged me to get off, while he dragged it across; I did so, and walked on a little to try and find a place where I could step over the ditch myself. I stopped a minute to look at a clump of ash trees, surrounding a little ruined hut, which I thought would make a lovely sketch. At that moment the door of the hut opened; a man came out and looked cautiously about him—It was Henry—two others followed him; the very men I had seen at Salisbury; these last turned into a lane which I knew led into the high-road to Blandford, and were out of sight in a moment. Henry stood still for an instant, and then walked off towards the house. I was not surprised, but my heart sickened within me. I felt a vague pity for Henry, a nervous terror for myself; it never occurred to me to point out the two men, or draw attention to the spot where I had seen them disappear.

In the meantime the groom had brought a plank, by means of which I crossed the ditch; I got on my

horse again, and rode slowly on to meet the rest of the party, who were galloping back in great amusement, at having mistaken Mr. Leslie and his clerk, who had been quietly clambering over a stile, on their way to the cottage of a sick old woman, for the dangerous characters they were in search of. We came up with Henry a few yards from the house. He looked ill and tired; Mr. Brandon hallooed to him, to know if he had seen or heard anything of the vagabonds.

"Have you?" was his answer.

"No," cried Mr. Brandon.

"Well then, Miss Moore," (said Henry, with a forced laugh,) "we must e'en wed to-morrow, or remain single at our peril," and he walked off, humming the tune of "*Gai, gai, mariez-vous*."

The subject of Rosa's adventure was now and then resumed, and became a sort of standing joke against Henry; evidently a disagreeable one to him, though he put a good face on the matter.

One day he asked Rosa, if she had not been laughing at us all, and whether the whole thing was not a practical joke. He took to twitting her about her visions, and proposed to write a ballad on "the two invisible men of Brandon Woods," on which I said, "And I will write a sequel, which shall be called 'The ruined Hut of Ash Grove.'"

Mrs. Ernsley looked at Sir Edmund, as much as to say, "What a silly attempt at *répartie;*" and said in a hesitating manner, "I do not *quite* see what would be the point of that."

Henry looked as if the ground had suddenly opened and shut again before his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

Turn to the watery world; but who to thee
(A wonder yet unviewed) shall paint the sea!
Various and vast, sublime in all its forms,
When lulled by zephyrs, or when roused by storms,
Its colours changing, when from clouds and sun,
Shades after shades, upon the surface run.

CRABBE.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain.

SHAKESPEARE.

Two or three weeks now elapsed, without the occurrence of anything worth relating; but in which I was much struck with two entirely new features in Henry's character, which were gloom and irritability. At times he was still as agreeable as ever, but the least coldness on my part, or the commonest kind of attention paid me by others, seemed to exasperate him beyond any attempt at self-government. He was once on the verge of insulting Sir Edmund Ardern, because I had talked to him for an hour together; and there was nothing touching in the fierce jealousy which he showed on these occasions. When under its influence, he seemed absolutely to hate me, and sometimes he quite frightened me by his violence. However, when that had been the case, he would suddenly recollect himself, and then, by his ardent expressions of passionate affection; by the grief, the misery, he pleaded in justification of his violence; by the words of eloquent appeal, of tender entreaty, which seemed to spring from the very depths of his heart; he moved, he agitated, he persuaded me; and, half in weakness, half in self-deception, partly from the fear of losing the excitement of being adored by one who fascinated my mind, though he did not touch my heart, I tacitly encouraged him in the belief that I returned his affection.

On the 7th of July, after I had been about a month at Brandon, I received a letter from Mrs. Middleton, the purport of which was, that my uncle desired me to return immediately to Elmsley; that she was sorry that he was so positive about it, as she saw by my letters that I was amused there; that she would have been more able to withstand him on the subject, and to obtain for me a prolongation of my visit, had it not been that the very circumstance which had occasioned his decision, was one which, from motives which I could well understand, she could not discuss with him, and in which she could take no part; "and that, my love (she added), is my brother's unexpected visit to Brandon. I have seldom

seen your uncle so much irritated as when he heard of his going there; and it was with difficulty that he refrained from writing by return of post to desire you instantly to come home. This would, however, have caused a sort of sensation, which, he felt himself, was undesirable; but now, he will hear of no delay, and my maid will arrive at Brandon the day after you receive this letter, and you will set off with her on the following morning. I think it right to tell you, dearest child, that Mr. Middleton, in speaking to me of Henry the other day, expressed his determination never again to allow him to make up to you, or you to encourage in him the least hope of a marriage, which he is perfectly resolved never to give his consent to. He has desired me to tell you so, and to write to Henry to the same effect. You know (as we have often said to each other,) your uncle dislikes Henry, and that makes him, no doubt, more positive still on the subject than he might otherwise be; but I must admit myself, that my brother having no fortune whatever, and not having ever set about in earnest following up any profession, a marriage with him would be not only undesirable for you, but, in fact, impossible.

"You may be surprised, my own dearest child, at my speaking to you in this way of an affair which, perhaps, you yourself have not taken into consideration. I earnestly wish that Henry may not have made such an impression upon you, as to make this warning necessary; but, after what I saw here—though perhaps too late—and what I have heard goes on at Brandon, I scarcely venture to hope so.

"I will not talk to you, my own Ellen, of the happiness which your return will give me: you are the joy of my life; the star in my dark night; my best beloved, my precious child. If your tears should flow, if your young heart should ache, come to me, dearest, and lay your head on my bosom, and find in my love, which shall know no change, 'a shelter from the storm, a refuge from the tempest.'"

I pressed to my lips Mrs. Middleton's letter, but remained agitated by a number of conflicting feelings. She seemed unhappy, and I could not help thinking, that besides the anxiety she expressed about the state of my feelings, she was also grieved at my uncle's harsh decision against her brother. I was vexed too at being *ordered* back to Elmsley, I had been spoiled by unlimited indulgence, and unvarying tenderness, and though bitter sorrow had come upon me, and I had gone through severe suffering, it had not come in the form of discipline, or been turned to its salutary use. I dreaded the monotony, the associations of Elmsley, from which I saw, by this letter, that Henry was henceforward to be banished; and, altogether, when I walked into Mrs. Brandon's room, and announced to her my approaching departure, tears of vexation stood in my eyes.

She said a great deal of her own regret, and proposed writing immediately to Mr. Middleton to entreat him to let me stay on longer, and urged me to wait for his answer, but this I could not venture to do. My uncle was a man who seldom gave an order, but when he did, I knew it was not to be trifled with.

I did not state to Mrs. Brandon the *real* reason of my recall; but she gave me to understand that she knew it, and I did not repulse as much as usual, her implied sympathy.

We went down into the drawing-room together; and when Henry appeared, I watched his countenance to try and gather from it, if he too had received the letter which his sister had been desired to write to him; but he puzzled me completely. He was absent and pre-occupied, but did not seem the least depressed; on the contrary, there was a kind of excitement about him, that gave him the appearance of being in high spirits. When Mrs. Brandon spoke of my summons to Elmsley, and the rest of the company were, in their different ways, making civil speeches to me, he said nothing, but in his turn watched me narrowly.

He did not sit next to me at dinner, which I thought, with a little contrivance, he might have done; nor did he come near me during the first part of the evening, but seemed entirely engrossed by a long eager whispering conversation which he kept up with Mrs. Brandon.

At tea-time, she came up to Lady Wyndham and Mrs. Ernsley, and asked if it would suit them to make a party the next day to the sea-side. There was a beautiful little bay about twenty miles off, which would make an excellent object for an expedition, and which she would like to show me, before I left Dorsetshire. It so happened that I had never in my life seen the sea, except from a distance, and this made the idea of this excursion particularly agreeable to me. Everybody approved of it; for once everybody was like Mrs. Hatton, and liked nothing so much as an expedition, and more especially one to the sea-side, so it was settled that we were to be off at eight the following morning. Except in general conversation, Henry did not speak to me that evening, till, as he was lighting a candle for me, near the refreshment table, he said in a low voice, "Have you ever been so interested in a book that you have been obliged to shut it up, and to pause before you opened it again?"

"No," (I answered,) "I always look at the last page."

"I dare not look at my last page," he said, and his voice trembled. At that moment I thought I liked

him.

At six o'clock the next morning, in my dressing-gown and shawl, I was at the window of my bedroom anxiously examining the state of the weather, and trying to stretch my head beyond the comer of the house, in order to find out whether there might not be a very little bit of blue sky visible behind an ominous mass of gray clouds; but either my head would not go far enough, or else there was no blue sky to be seen, and each survey only tending to discourage me more thoroughly, I laid down again, and tried to go to sleep. At seven my maid came in, and informed me that it was a dull morning, but the carriages were to come round all the same, and the ladies were getting up. We met in the breakfast-room, with the weary, cross, sick-looking faces, which early rising, especially on a gloomy day, is apt to produce. In the first carriage went Lady Wyndham, Mrs. Brandon, Mr. Ernsley, and Mr. Moore. In the second, Mrs. Ernsley, the two Miss Farnley's, and Sir Edmund Ardern; Rosa Moore and myself had a pony-chaise to ourselves, and the rest of the men rode. By the time we had reached the gates of the park, the clouds began to break, and to sail across the sky, in white fleecy shapes. Soon the sun himself appeared after a desperate struggle with the clouds that hung about him. Then the birds began to sing in the hedges, and every leaf to glitter in the sunshine, while Rosa, who had been yawning most unmercifully, and, in the intervals, holding her pocket-handkerchief fast upon her mouth to keep the fog out of it, brightened up, and began talking and laughing, as if she had not been forced out of her bed at an unusual hour. We drove through lanes, such lanes as Miss Mitford loves and describes; through villages, each of which might have been *her village*, in which the cottages had gardens full of cabbages and sun-flowers, and the grass plots had geese and pigs and rosy children; through which little girls were walking to school in their straw bonnets and blue checked aprons, and stopped to stare and to curtsey to the grand people that were driving by; in which boys were swinging on gates, and urchins were dabbling in ponds in company with ducks that seemed hardly more amphibious than themselves, and then we drove by parks and lawns,—parks sloping, wooded, wild; lawns studded with beds of flowers, the red geranium or the glowing carnation, forming rich masses of dazzling brilliancy on the smooth surface of the soft green grass. How beautiful they were on that day, that July day, "the ancestral homes of England," as Mrs. Hemans calls them; streams of sunshine gilding their tall elms, their spreading oaks and stately beeches. How that bright sunshine danced among their leaves, and upon the grass amidst their roots, and how the berries of the mountain ash glowed in its light,—the mountain ash, that child of the north, which with its sturdy shape, its coral fruit, and the gray rock from which it springs, looks almost like a stranger in the midst of the more luxuriant foliage of the south. But scarcely two hours had elapsed, when we turned a comer in the road, and for the first time the sea lay stretched before my eyes. It was rough; the waves were crested with foam; and already I heard them break with that sullen roar, with that voice of the ocean, in which, as in the thunder of Heaven, we instinctively recognise the voice of God. We drove up to the little inn where the horses were to be put up; I could hardly wait for the step of the carriage to be let down, and hastened alone to the beach; the sea was not, as I have seen it since, blue and calm, glittering with a thousand sparks of light; not like some quiet lake which ripples on the shore, and murmurs gently, as it bathes the shining pebbles in its limpid wave; no, it was as I would have chosen to see it for the first time, stormy, wild, restless, colourless from the everlasting fluctuation of colour, brown, purple, white, yellow, green, in turns; billows over billows chased each other to the shore, each wave gathering itself in silence, swelling, heaving, and then bursting with that roar of triumph, with that torrent of foam, that cloud of spray, that mixture of fury and of joy, which nothing in nature, but chafed waters combine.* [* See Coleridge's beautiful lines on the Avalanches.] O God, I have suffered much; terror, remorse, agony, have wrung my heart, have shattered my nerves; I have been guilty; I have been wretched; I dare not thank thee for the tumultuous joys of passion, for the feverish cup of pleasure, hastily snatched, and as suddenly dashed to earth; but I will thank thee, for the swelling of the heart, for the lifting up of the soul, for the tears I have shed, for the ecstacy I have known on the sea-shore, in the forest, on the mountain. The heart knoweth its own bitterness; but there is also a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not.

We wandered for some time on the beach, and then began scrambling among the cliffs, and clambering up to the various rocky points from whence the little bay and its wooded coast were seen to most advantage. In doing so, we gradually separated into different parties, and Mrs. Brandon, Rosa, Henry, and myself, went to explore a small cavern, where there were some curious sands of various colours, which Mr. Brandon had described to us the day before.

Rosa was on her knees upon the ground, collecting specimens of each; I was looking at the sea through a natural window in the rock; when Mrs. Brandon asked her if she had got all she wanted, and begged her, if she had, to walk back with her to the inn, as she wished to order luncheon, and speak to Mr. Brandon about the arrangements for our return.

I was preparing to follow them, when Henry laid his hand on my arm, and said in so serious a voice that it quite startled me, "For my sister's sake, Ellen, stay with me here a few moments; we will walk back by the downs; I have much to say to you, and this is my last opportunity."

I stopped immediately, and leant against the entrance of the cavern.

Henry was as pale as death, his lip was quivering, and his hand shook violently as he took hold of mine.

"Ellen," he said, abruptly, "do you know that I love you, as much as a man can love,—more than words can express? Do you know, do you feel it, Ellen?" And he wrung my hand with nervous violence.

"Has your sister written to you?" I asked, with a trembling voice.

"She has. What will you do?"

"What can I do?"

"Do you care for me?"

"I am sorry to part with you."

As I said these words, I hid my face in my hands, and from nervous agitation, burst into tears.

"Then we shall never part!" he exclaimed. "Then to-morrow, at this hour, you shall be mine—mine for ever, beyond all human power to part us!—mine, to worship, to adore, to live for, to die for! Ellen, do you hear me? Speak to me! Answer me! Shall this be? Shall it be? Why do you look so pale and so cold?"

"You are raving, Henry, you are raving; you frighten me, you hurt me; let me go."

I rushed out of the cavern, and sitting down on a stone by the sea-side, cried bitterly.

When I looked up, Henry was standing before me, waiting for my next words with forced calmness; but as I remained silent, he made a strong effort over himself, and said quietly, "I will explain to you what I mean; lam not going to make love to you now; I have not time to tell you what I feel, and what you know as well as I do; but thus much I must tell you, my sister is right when she says that your uncle will never consent to our marriage: he never will, Ellen; and if we part now, we part for ever; and God only knows the misery which hangs over both our heads if we do."

I raised my head at these words, and looked at him with surprise; he had no right to assume that such a separation would make me miserable; my pride was wounded, and spoke in my eyes: he read their language, and went on:—

"This is no time for girlish resentment; forgive me, Ellen; I make you angry, but when the fate of a whole life, and more than one life, hangs on the decision of an hour, it is no tune for weighing words; and mine must be few. Mrs. Brandon knows that I love you, and *how* I love you! she thinks too that you love me. She is well acquainted with her brother's inflexible prejudices, with his stubborn character; she received from your dying mother a charge to shield and protect you; should he ever turn against you, and make you unhappy by the sternness of his conscientious but iron nature, she will obey that charge; she will go with you to-morrow to the church at Henley, and stand by us while we—"

"Stop, Henry, stop, I cannot, will not, listen to such words as these. You ask me to marry; to seal my fate, against my uncle's will, without my aunt's consent; you ask me to add another drop of sorrow to the cup already too bitter and too full. That *I* should do this! Oh, my God, he asks me to do this, and I sit by and listen; Henry, I almost hate you for the thought."

"Can you believe," he rejoined, "that *she* would not bless you for the act? Can you think that when she hears that the child of her adoption, the child of her love, has saved from anguish, from despair, from guilt, the brother whom she nursed in his cradle, whose mother she was, as she has been yours,—can you think that she will not pronounce a secret but fervent blessing on your head? She obeys her husband's stern commands, Ellen, but her heart aches for us. Oh! for her sake, in the name of your dying mother, whose letter Mrs. Brandon will show you; for my sake, for your own; I implore you not to drive me to despair! for again I repeat it, unutterable misery, which you do not, which you cannot, now understand or foresee, awaits you, if you should revise to yield to my entreaties."

"Henry, you speak a strange language, and I must know the truth. I am tired of doubts; I am tired of fears; I am weary of my life; and I must speak. What unknown misery do you threaten me with? What are your secrets? Ay, I must know them!" And in my turn, I seized his arm, and pushing away the hair from my forehead, I looked him full in the face. "Why am I to avoid the Tracys? Why do vulgar ruffians use your name to terrify me into a marriage with you? Why am I now to be forced into a secret marriage, and at a day's notice? and if your ungovernable passions are not instantly gratified, why are you to plunge into guilt and into despair?"

Frightened at my own violence, I sat down breathless and trembling. He on the contrary had grown calm, and there was almost a sneer on his lips as he answered, "Those vulgar ruffians are relatives of the Tracys, and, for their sakes, I wished to spare them an exposure which would have been of no use to any one. I believe that they meant no more than a foolish practical joke, of which the account was highly coloured by Rosa Moore; but you can easily understand that such people would not be desirable acquaintances to make, and I, therefore, recommended you to keep away from a house where you might meet them. As to the misery that you may bring upon yourself, Ellen, if you return to Elmsley, I may not, perhaps, fully make you feel it; but when I tell you, that your uncle, determined as he is to prevent your marrying me, is as much determined to make you marry Edward Middleton, you may, perhaps, form some idea of it."

"Marry Edward," (I muttered to myself,) and then shuddering at the recollection of the words he was reported to have said—I cried, "No, no; that can never be."

"No, never," said Henry, in a solemn voice. "There is a gulf between you which can never be filled up."

"What, what?" I cried with a sensation of terror.

"Did you not say just now yourself, Ellen, that such a marriage never could be? But you know not what persecution would be employed in order to bring it about. Poor Julia's death was, in a worldly sense, a great advantage to you. It made you at once a rich heiress." (I could not stifle a groan of anguish, but Henry went on as if he had not heard it.) "I happen to know that your uncle has settled the whole of his property upon you in the event of your marrying Edward; but I also know that he will disinherit either of you who should refuse to comply with that condition."

"I never will consent to it. Let him have my uncle's fortune; let me be banished from Elmsley; but nothing shall ever make me agree to what would degrade him and myself."

"Then, Ellen," eagerly exclaimed Henry; "then, Ellen, if such is your resolution, do not hesitate an instant more. Once married to me, you are safe in my arms from dangers which you do not dream of, which I dare not point out to you. Ellen, I tremble for myself and for you if you should refuse me. Together, we may have trials to meet; but parted, they will be fearful. We must meet them together. Our fates are linked in a strange mysterious manner. There is a similarity in our destinies, and if you leave me now—"

He paused, his voice was choked with the violence of his emotion; the reckless, the daring Henry Lovell was weeping like a child. Oh, then again I thought I liked him, for I knelt down by his side, I took his hand in mine, I bathed it with my tears, and I whispered to him that I would promise anything, that I would plight my faith to him, do anything but consent to the secret marriage he proposed.

Again and again, he urged it with increasing vehemence, with ardent supplications. Once he said, "Ellen, you are destroying my happiness and your own; but not ours alone; you know not what you do. The fate of a pure and innocent existence is at this moment in your hands; do not doom it to secret anguish, to hopeless sorrow. Have mercy on yourself, on me, on her!"

In vain I pressed him to explain himself; he only protested, over and over again, with still greater agitation, and even swore that we must be married now or never; that it was useless to speak of the future. He spurned every alternative, and every promise I offered to make; till, at last, indignant and irritated, I exclaimed, as I got up and turned towards the town, "Well, then, let it be so; let us part for ever; everything is at an end between us."

He rushed before me, stopped me, held both my hands in his iron grasp, and with a countenance that one could hardly have recognised as his own, so dreadful was its expression of rage, he said, "No; all is *not* at an end between us. We do not part for ever. *Now*, even at this moment, I could bring you on your knees at my feet; I could force you to implore my pity, my forbearance, ill-fated, unhappy girl, whom I love with that fierce love, which idolises one hour and hates the next. No, we do not part for ever; through life I shall be at your side, either to worship and adore you, to be all in all to you, in spite of man and laws, and duties and ties; or else to haunt your path, to spoil your joys, to wring your soul. Ellen, I must be the blessing or the curse of your life. *Never* shall I be indifferent to you. You have refused, in ignorance, in madness, you have refused to be my wife. You shall be my victim! Either you shall love me as wildly, as passionately as I love you, and weep with tears of blood that you spurned me to-day; or if ever you love another, I will stand between him and you, and with each throb of love for him, there will be in your heart a pang of fear, a shudder of terror, a thought of me. This is our parting —you would have it so—farewell!"

He rushed back to the sea-shore; I walked on, unable to collect my thoughts. When I arrived at the

inn, I found everybody at luncheon. There was a great deal of conversation going on, and discussions as to the time and manner of our return; I felt bewildered, and scarcely understood the meaning of what was said.

Mrs. Brandon, in pity for me, I suppose, took Rosa's place in the pony-chaise; she did not say much to me, but had the kindness to allow me to lean back, and cry in quiet. She evidently thought that never had there been a girl so in love, or so broken-hearted before. She was very good-natured, but there was a shade of pique in her manner, which probably arose from my refusal to avail myself of her help for the secret marriage which had been proposed.

We arrived late at Brandon. I was obliged to go to bed with a raging head-ache—found that Mrs. Swift, my aunt's maid, had arrived—took leave of Mrs. Brandon, and of the other women in the house, in my room that night—did not see Henry again—and at seven o'clock the following morning was already at some distance from Brandon, on my way to Elmsley.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?"

SHAKESPEARE.

My journey back to Elmsley was everyway a very different one from that which I had made from it a month before. The weather was cold and windy, and the absence of sunshine made every object we passed appear less attractive than the impression which my memory had retained.

Sir Walter Scott remarks, in one of his novels, that good humour gives to a plain face the same charm as sunshine lends to an ugly country. I agreed entirely with him, as I looked first on Salisbury Plain, without one gleam to diversify its gloomy extent, and then on Mrs. Swift's unmeaning face, the stern rigidity of which never relaxed into a smile, and contrasted it with the cheerful light of dear Mrs. Hatton's radiant, though certainly not beautiful features.

I had much to think about, but I found it difficult to define and collect my ideas. Henry and I had parted in anger, and it was almost with a curse on his lips that he had taken leave of me. He, too, knew my secret; he, too, used that knowledge to threaten and terrify me. Had Edward betrayed it to him, since he left England? or was it he who had denounced me to Edward? Alas! it mattered little which it was. I was stunned, I felt as if one by one all those whom I cared for would upbraid and forsake me. A dreadful recollection remained on my mind of something which Henry had said in that last conversation, of Julia's death having been a great worldly advantage to me, and of my uncle having settled his fortune upon me. My blood ran cold at the thought—a marriage with Edward was the condition annexed. The Exile's dream of the home to which he can never return, the Desert Traveller's vision of water which he can never approach, are to them what to me were those words,—a marriage with Edward. Something which in the shadowy dreams of girlhood had hovered in my fancy; something which the terrors and the trials of the last year had crushed and subdued; something which in the feverish excitement of the last months had been dimmed but not destroyed; something which survived hope, and rose again in the silence of the soul when the restless stimulus of outward excitements failed. But it could never be! How could I ever stand in the place of that wretched child whose image would rise between me and the altar if ever I ventured to approach it, as my uncle's heiress, as Edward's bride? *His* Bride! The very sight of me had rendered Elmsley insupportable to him; the knowledge of my guilt (for guilty I was, though guiltless of the dreadful consequences of my ungovernable impetuosity) had driven him from England. Was he not Julia's cousin? Was not Julia's death the work of my hand? And had not Henry said that her death had been an advantage to me? He had; and then he spoke of bringing me down upon my knees before him to implore his pity; he poisoned his weapon, and then dealt the blow. *His* pity! Oh, as I thought of that, I longed to see him but for one moment again, if only to tell him that I spurned his pity, despised his forbearance, and that, taught by himself, I had learned one lesson at least, which I should never forget, and that was to be revenged! And in the struggle he had begun. I felt myself the strongest, for I did not love him; in that last scene the truth had been revealed to myself as well as to him. The slight links which bound me to him, had in a moment snapt; but *he* loved me, with a fierce and selfish love indeed, but still he loved me; and if there is torment in unrequited love; if there is agony in reading the cold language of indifference in the eyes on which you gaze away the happiness of your life, that torment, that agony, should be his. These thoughts were dreadful; I shudder as I write them; but my feelings were excited, and my pride galled nearly to madness. I remember that I clenched with such violence a smelling-bottle, that it broke to pieces in my hand, and the current of my thoughts was suddenly turned to Mrs. Swift's exclamation of "La, Miss! You've broken your bottle, and spilt the Eau de Cologne! What could you have been thinking of?"

What had I been thinking of? Oh that world of thought within us! That turmoil of restless activity which boils beneath the calm surface of our every day's life! We sit and we talk; we walk and we drive; we lie down to sleep, and we rise up again the next day; as if life offered nothing to rouse the inmost passions of the soul; as if hopes tremblingly cherished were not often dashed to the earth; as if fears we scarcely dare to define were not hovering near our hearts, and resolutions were not formed in silence and abandoned in despair; as if the spirit of darkness was not prompting the soul to deeds of evil, and the hand of God was not stretched out between us and the yawning gulf of destruction. And others look on; and, like Mrs. Swift, wonder what we can be thinking of. God help them! or rather may He help us, for we need it most.

At the end of the second day we reached the well-known gates of Elmsley, and in a few moments more I was locked in my aunt's embrace. I wept bitterly as I kissed her, and she seemed to consider my tears as perfectly natural; her whole manner was soothing and sympathising. My uncle received me kindly enough, though rather coldly even for him. I longed to explain to Mrs. Middleton that I did not care for Henry, and that my uncle's decision against him was not the cause of the deep depression which I could neither struggle with nor conceal; but how could I disclaim *that* cause and allege no other? Also the intimate intercourse which had been formerly habitual between her and myself had been broken up, so that my heart had become as a sealed book to her, and I dared not open it again; its one dark page formed an invincible barrier to that communion of thoughts which had been ours in bygone days.

And so days and weeks went by; I heard nothing of Henry nor of Edward, though both were almost constantly before my mind's eye; in this perpetual wear and tear of feeling my health began to give way, and I grew ever, day paler and thinner.

About three months after my return to Elmsley, I was sitting one afternoon at that library window where I mentioned once before having often watched the sunset with Edward. The autumnal tints were gilding the trees in the park with their glowing hues, and the air had that wintry mildness which is soothing though melancholy. The window was open; and, wrapped up in a thick shawl, I was inhaling the damp moist air, and listening to the rustle of the dried leaves which were being swept from the gravel walk below; the low twitter of some robin-redbreasts was in unison with the scene, and affected me in an Unaccountable manner. My tears fell fast on the book in my hand. This book was the "Christian Year;" that gift of Edward, which I had thrust away in a fit of irritation about a year ago. I had opened it again that morning, and, partly as a kind of expiation, partly with a vague hope of awakening in myself a new tone of feeling—something to put in the place of that incessant review of the past, around which my thoughts were ever revolving,—I forced myself to read a few of the passages marked with a pencil. I had been interrupted while so doing, but had carried away the book with me, and now again applied myself to the same task. I read stanza after stanza which spoke of guilt, of suffering, and of remorse; but I did not close the book in anger as before. It was true that they were carefully chosen, pointedly marked; but what of that? Was I not guilty? Was I not wretched? Did I not deserve worse at his hands? Nay more; *had* I deserved the forbearance, the mercy, he had shown me? Ought I not to bless him for them? It was such thoughts as these that made my tears flow, but that at the same time soothed the bitterness of my feelings.

I put down my book; and, while gazing on the darkening clumps of trees before me, I watched the approach of the boy who was riding through the avenue to the house, with the letter-bag strapped before him. I heard the step of the servant who was crossing the hall on his way to my uncle's study. In a few moments I heard Mrs. Middleton's voice on the stairs; and, about an hour after that, when it was getting quite dark, and I was leaving the library, I met Mrs. Swift, who told me that my aunt wished to speak to me in her dressing-room.

There is something very apt to make one feel nervous in the fact of being sent for; and if it happens to be immediately after the arrival of the post, all the more so. I walked up-stairs in consequence with a kind of feeling that something had happened or was going to happen; so that when I opened the door, and saw at one glance that my aunt was much agitated and in tears, I felt frightened.

"What has happened?" I exclaimed. "What is it? Who is ill?"

"Nobody—nothing of that kind," she replied, "but it is painful" (she paused, struggled with herself, and went on)—"it is painful, and you must prepare yourself, my dear child, to hear something that will shock and grieve you. Henry" (she looked into my face with intense anxiety)—"Henry has made us all very unhappy, but *you*, my child, *you*" (she seized both my hands and put them upon her eyes, as if to give herself courage to speak) "it will make you miserable. What shall I say to you, my own love? He is utterly unworthy of you; he has forgotten you, Ellen—given up all thoughts of you; he is—"

"Is he going to be married?" I eagerly exclaimed, "speak, dearest aunt, speak—is it so?"

"He is married" (she replied in a tone of deep dejection), "disgracefully married!"

She looked up in my face, and seemed quite bewildered at the expression of my countenance. I was expecting her next words with breathless anxiety, and could only repeat, "To whom, to whom?"

"You could not have imagined it," she answered—"you could not have believed it possible; he has married that girl whom you saw at Bridman—Alice Tracy."

Married to Alice Tracy! Was it possible? What a crowd of conjectures, recollections, suppositions, and fears, rushed upon me at that moment!

"What does he say about it? What does he write? When did it happen? May I see his letter?" were the questions which I addressed with breathless rapidity to Mrs. Middleton, who seemed entirely taken aback by the manner in which I received this startling intelligence.

"Here is a strange letter," she said, "from Henry himself; another from my father, who, as you may imagine, is indignant; and one from Mrs. Tracy, which is at once impertinent and hypocritical. I hardly know whether I am acting rightly in showing you Henry's. It *is* so extraordinary; but you must explain to me several things which I have never hitherto questioned you about; and, perhaps together, we may find out the secret of this wretched marriage. I have not ventured to show this strange letter to your uncle; he thinks that it is only from my father that I have heard of Henry's marriage; and I am afraid I am doing wrong in letting you see it; but I am so bewildered—"

I interrupted her by drawing the letters almost forcibly out of her hand. She suffered me to do so, and watched me while I read them. I was conscious of this at first; but the interest was so absorbing, that I soon forgot her presence, and everything, but the letters themselves. I read Henry's first: it was as follows:—

"My dear Sister,

"You have known me long enough not to be surprised at any extravagance that I may be guilty of. You know also that I am somewhat of a fatalist, and that I maintain that our destiny in life is marked out for us in a manner which we can neither withstand nor counteract. I have just done what is commonly called a foolish thing—very likely it is foolish; all I can say is, that I could not help doing it. It is done, and therefore the fewer remonstrances or lamentations that are made on the subject the better. I am married. Last Thursday I married, at—Church, Mrs. Tracy's grand-daughter. Her name is Alice; she is very pretty, and has been well brought up. She has five thousand pounds of her own, left her by an uncle, who died some time ago. I have, as you know, about as much. My father, of course, refuses to see her; and, I conclude, Mr. Middleton will do the same. Do you remember, Mary, the time when, sitting at my bedside, you would kiss my forehead, and tell me how you would love my wife? We used to talk of her, and describe her. She was to be tall; her eyes were to be dark, and their long fringing lashes were to sweep her cheek; her throat was to be white and graceful as a swan's; genius was to give light to her eyes, and eloquence to her words; and you, sister, *you*, on my marriage-day, were to have placed the blossoms of orange flower in the dark hair of my bride. You remember it, don't you? Well, my bride is fair, very fair; but not like the bride we had imagined—or rather that we had foreseen; for, sister, we have seen her, have we not—walking in beauty by our sides? Have we not gazed upon her till we have fancied her a thing too bright, too lovely, for the earth she treads upon? My bride was not kissed by you; she stood by my side, and you were not there to say, 'God bless her!' She put her cold hand into mine, and looked steadily into my face; there was no colour in her cheek; no emotion in her voice. It was all as calm as the life that lies before me. Mary, you had better write and wish me joy; and tell Ellen to wish me joy too; but do not show my letter to your husband; it is not calm enough for his inspection.

"Yours, dear Mary, ever yours,

"Henry Lovell."

There was something inexpressibly painful to me in the tone of this letter; it seemed the sequel of one part of my last conversation with Henry; a pure and innocent existence, he had said, must be sacrificed, and doomed to hopeless disappointment, if I persisted in my refusal. I had persisted, and Alice was sacrificed, though to what I knew not; but to some mysterious necessity—to some secret obligation. A loveless marriage—a lonely passage through life—and God only knew what secret trials—what withering of the heart—what solitude of the soul—what measure of that hope deferred, which makes the heart sick—of that craving void which nothing fills, were to be hers, who had grown up and blossomed like the rose in the wilderness, and who had been, like her own poor flower, too rudely transplanted, doomed perhaps like it, to wither and to die. It was strange, that, never having seen Alice

but once, I should have felt such a deep and complete conviction of her goodness and purity, of the angelic nature of the spirit which was shrouded in that fair form, that as the idea of guilt in her intercourse with Henry, so now, that of worldliness, of ambition, or of indelicacy, in having made this secret marriage, never presented itself to my mind. Perhaps it might yet turn out well; he might grow to love and to prize her, and she would stand between him and me like an angel of peace. He could not but admire the faultless beauty of her face; the poetical nature of her mind; the calm simplicity of her character. I said this to myself; but while I said it, my heart whispered a denial. I knew Henry too well. I had seen too clearly what he admired in me—what subdued him in some measure to my influence, even in his fiercest moments of irritation. It was the very points in my mind and character which were most different from hers. The very defects in myself, that made me look upon her, as a lost and ruined sinner might gaze on a picture of the blessed Virgin, these very defects were what riveted and enthralled him. His last words rang in my ears as I looked on his blotted and hasty signature, and my heart sunk within me as I *felt* "that all was not over between us."

The next letter I read was from Mr. Lovell; it was thus worded:—

"My dear Mary,

"Your affection for your brother has always been so great, that I dread the effect which my present communication will have upon you. It will take you by surprise, as it has done me. That Henry should give us subjects of regret and annoyance would be no strange occurrence; but that he (the goodness of whose understanding, at least, has never been called in question)—that he should have acted in so deplorably foolish a manner, is more than one would be prepared for; the natural refinement of his character alone might have preserved him from a connection which is really disgraceful. It is better to tell you the fact at once, for you certainly could never have imagined or foreseen such an event. Your brother, without having made the slightest communication to me, or to any one else, as far as I can find out, married, last Thursday, at Bromley Church, the grand-daughter of the woman who was your nurse, and afterwards his. He looks wretchedly ill and unhappy, and gives no explanation of his conduct, further than by repeating, that as he was certain that I would not give my consent to his marriage (and he is right there), he thought it best to put the matter at once beyond discussion. In some ways, bad as it is, it might have been worse. I find that the girl is only seventeen—very handsome—has been well brought up for a person in her rank of life, and has a fortune of 5000 *l*. I have refused to see her, as I am determined to mark my indignation to Henry in the strongest manner; and I never, under any circumstances, will consent to see her relations, who have behaved, in my opinion, as ill as possible in hurrying on this marriage.

"Some time hence, it may be advisable to notice his wife; and, for his sake, to try as much as possible to withdraw her from the society and the influence of her relations; but this will be a subject for after-consideration.

"And now, my dear Mary, God bless you. I feel for you, as I know you will for me, in this unpleasant affair. I hope your beautiful Ellen will not take to heart this abominable marriage. Mr. Middleton was perfectly right in preventing her from throwing herself away on that worthless brother of yours; but I wish with all my heart they had eloped together.

"Your affectionate Father,

"William Lovell."

Mrs. Tracy's letter was as follows:—

"Madam,

"The announcement of Mr. Lovell's marriage with my grand-daughter, Alice, will probably have surprised you disagreeably. As he has, I find, written by this day's post to communicate it to you, I take the liberty of addressing to you a few lines on the subject. I grieve that myself or any one belonging to me should be the means of causing you grief or annoyance. But, Madam, remember who it was that said, 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.' Obey that injunction now, and visit not the sins of others on an angel of goodness and purity,—the dust of whose feet, some whom you cherish in your bosom are not worthy to wipe off. I love you, Mrs. Middleton, and would not willingly give you pain; but do not try me too severely by ill-usage of that child, whom my dying son bequeathed to me, and who is now your brother's wife. As God will judge one day betwixt you and me, be kind to her; her presence and her prayers may sanctify your home, and bring down a blessing on your head. If you are tempted to say in your heart, 'Why did this angel of goodness and purity consent to a secret marriage?—why did this saint, whose prayers are to bring down a blessing on

our home, enter our family without our sanction?'—if you are tempted to say this, Mrs. Middleton—yet say it not. Alice has lived alone with her flowers, and with her Bible. She has never opened a novel; she has never conversed with any one but me, and with him who is now her husband, and that but little. She knows nothing of the world and its customs. She was asked as Rebecca was asked—'Wilt thou go with this man?' and she said 'I will go.' I told her it was her duty to marry Mr. Lovell, and she married him; and if you should say, Mrs. Middleton, that it was not her duty to marry him, and that I deceived her as well as you,—again I say, 'Judge not, condemn not;' and thus you may escape a fearful judgment —an awful condemnation."

"Is not that letter the very height of cant and impertinence?" said my aunt, as I laid it down on the table.

"It is a strange letter," I answered; "but what she says of Alice I am certain must be true. It tallies exactly with the impression she made upon me, and with what I should have supposed her part to have been in the whole affair."

"But how can her grandmother justify her own conduct to herself, if it is so?"

"God only knows," I answered; "but if you love me, my dearest aunt,—if you wish me to be happy,—if my supplications have any weight with you…"

"*If* they have, Ellen?"

"No, no!" I exclaimed,—"not *if*—I will not say *if* they have, for I *know* they have. I know you love me, and I know that you will do all you can to make Henry happy with Alice. I shall not have a moment's peace if they are not happy."

"Angel!" said my aunt, as she pressed her lips to my cheek. I drew back with a thrill of horror.

"Never call me an angel,—never say that again: I cannot bear it. I am not disclaiming,—I am not humble,—I am only cowardly. I cannot explain to you everything; indeed, I hardly know if I understand myself, or Henry, or anything; but thus much I do know, that if Alice Tracy has gained his regard—wildly as he talks in that strange letter—if she has a hold on his affections, I shall bless her every day of my life,—she will have saved me from inexpressible misery. Oh, my dearest dear aunt,—write to Henry, write to Alice to-day,—immediately: do not wait for my uncle's permission—write at once."

I seized on the inkstand, and putting paper and pen before her, I stood by in anxious expectation. She sighed heavily, and then said to me:—

"Ellen, will you never again speak openly to me? If you did not care about Henry, what has made you so wretched lately? Why are your spirits broken?—why is your cheek pale and your step heavy? You deceive yourself, my child; you love Henry, and it is only excitement that at this moment gives you false strength."

"Whether I ever have loved Henry," I replied, "is a mystery to myself. I think not;—indeed I believe I can truly say that I never loved him; though at one moment I fancied that I did; and if, yesterday, you had come to me and told me that my uncle had consented to my marrying him,—nay, that he wished me to do so;—had you yourself asked me to marry your brother, I should have refused—yesterday, to-day, always."

"Then you have quarrelled with him," quickly rejoined Mrs. Middleton; "and this marriage of his is the result of wounded feeling,—perhaps of a misunderstanding between you. Poor Henry!"

There was a little irritation in my aunt's manner of saying these last words; and I was on the point of telling her what Henry had proposed and urged upon me in our last interview, and of thus justifying myself from any imputation of having behaved ill to him; but I instantly felt that this would be unfair and ungenerous, especially at this moment. Besides, was I not in his power, and could I venture to accuse him who held in his hands the secret of my fate? So again I shut up my heart, and closed my lips to her who loved me with a love which would have made the discovery of that fatal secret almost amount to a death-blow.

She seemed now to understand better my anxiety for the happiness of her brother and of his young wife. She seemed to think that I was conscious of having, in some manner or other, behaved ill to Henry, and driven him to this marriage, and that I was anxious to make all the amends in my power. But when she had drawn the paper before her, and was beginning to write, she put down her pen, and

exclaimed: "But if he does not love her, what induced him to choose *her?* To make us all wretched!—to inflict upon himself such a connection! I cannot understand it!"

Again and again she cross-questioned me about Alice, about that one memorable visit of mine to Bridman Manor, about Henry's manner to her, and hers to him. I answered in the way best calculated to remove her prejudices, to allay her anxieties, to encourage her hopes of eventual happiness for Henry. My angry feelings with regard to him had for the time quite subsided; I pitied him from the bottom of my heart, and remembered what he had said of a similarity in our destinies. It seemed to me, that he too was bound by some stern necessity, by some secret influence, to work mischief to himself and to others; and it was with intense eagerness that after Mrs. Middleton had written a kind and soothing letter to him (in which she expressed the hope that when in London, where we were going in three months' time, she should see Alice, whom she was prepared to receive and to love as a sister) I scaled it, and gave it to the servant who was just setting off for the post town. She wrote a few lines also to Mrs. Tracy, in which she expressed, in severe terms, her sense of the impropriety, if not of the guilt of her conduct with respect to her own grandchild, as well as with regard to a family, whose indignation she could not but feel that she had justly incurred. Her letter to her father she did not communicate to me. Mr. Middleton took little notice of the whole affair. One day that his wife was beginning to discuss the subject before him, he said, "My dear Mary, there are persons and things about which the less is said the better, and your brother and his marriage are of that number." Another time, when she remarked to him that I was looking much better, he observed, "I am glad that she has come to her senses." Now and then there came letters from Henry to Mrs. Middleton, but she never showed them to me. When I made any inquiries about them, she told me such facts as that he had taken a small house in—street; that he had been with his father once or twice, but that he still refused to see Alice. When I asked if Henry seemed happy, or at least contented, she answered that it had always been difficult to make out his state of mind from what he wrote, and now more so than ever; and then she would abruptly change the subject. My intense curiosity, my still more intense anxiety to hear about them, seemed to give her the idea, that, though my pride had been wounded, I still cared for him. Indeed so much of my future peace of mind turned upon the direction which his feelings would take, that my manner was probably well calculated to give this impression. In despair of overcoming it, unable to speak out, too proud to repeat what I saw she did not believe, I shut myself up in that resolute silence, in that systematic reserve, which had now become habitual to me; but I looked forward to our journey to London with nervous anxiety, and saw the time for its approach with a mixture of hope and fear.

CHAPTER IX.

"Dans le sein du bonheur que son âme désire,
Près d'an amant qu'elle aime et qui brûle à ses pieds,
Ses yeux remplis d'amour, de larmes sont noyés."
.....
"Vous me désespérez;
Vous m'êtes cher sans doute, et ma tendresse extrême
Est le comble des maux pour ce coeur qui vous aime."
"O ciel! expliquez-vous, quoi toujours me troubler,
Se peut-il?" "Dieu puissant, que ne puis-je parler?"

About three weeks before the 1st of March, which was the day fixed upon for our removal to town, I had been taking a long ride, and came home at about four o'clock. My habit was wet and heavy, and I walked with difficulty across the hall, up-stairs, and along the passage which led to my room. As I was passing before the door of what was called the south bed-room, my eyes suddenly fell on two trunks covered with mud, and on the brass plates of which was stamped the name of "Edward Middleton, Esq." At the same moment the door opened, and he stood before me. I felt myself turning as white as a sheet, and was obliged to lean against the wall to prevent myself from falling. He seized my hand, and said, with apparent cordiality, "How are you, Ellen?"

I do not know what I said to him; there was a mist before my eyes, a murmur in my ears, and a feeling about my heart that I was strangely happy, though dreadfully frightened. Soon I was alone in my room, with my feet on the fender, and my eyes fixed on the burning embers, and repeating to myself over and over again, "How are you, Ellen?" and then I remembered that he knew *all*, that he had seen *all*, that he had left Elmsley because he could not bear to stay, knowing all he did, and I trembled; and hiding my face in my hands, I cried as if my heart would break. Then a new thought came to me, and brought an extraordinary peace with it. I would tell him everything, and he should decide what I ought to do; his decision should be law to me; I would submit to it humbly, and obediently, although it might be that I was never to see again any of those whom I loved, and spend my future life in loneliness and penance.

The dressing-bell rang; my maid came in with a muslin gown on her arm, and some camellias in her hand, and there was again a flutter at my heart, as if dressing and going down-stairs and dining, had been as different things yesterday from what they were to-day, as the tamest prose is from the most exciting poetry.

When I opened the door of the library, Edward was sitting with his back towards me, talking eagerly to Mr. Middleton; as I approached them I heard him say, "If I could only be convinced of it, nothing on earth would make me so happy."

As my uncle turned his head, he did so too, and coloured when he saw me. I sat down on the sofa by the chimney; and every corner of that old library seemed to me in some way different from usual. I did not wish Edward to speak to me; on the contrary, it was enough to feel that he was there; that at any moment, by looking up, I could meet his eyes, and to know instinctively when his were fixed on mine. When I fancied myself in love with Henry Lovell, it was chiefly while he was talking to me, in the height of discussion, in the excitement of conversation. When I had not seen him for some hours, I was impatient to see him, and speak to him again, in order to prove to myself that I liked him; but with Edward it was not so. Alas! would it not have been for me the most dreadful misfortune to have loved him? Was not there, as Henry had said, a gulf between us, which could never be filled up? Would he not have shrunk from my love as from a poisonous thing, and have recoiled from the touch of my hand as from a serpent's sting?

Tears gathered in my eyes at this thought; I felt them tremble on my eye-lashes, and brushed them hastily aside as I walked into the dining-room with my uncle. Edward talked of his travels, of various persons whom he had made acquaintance with, in France and in Italy, of English politics, and the approaching session. There was nothing in his conversation peculiarly adapted to my taste; and yet I listened to each word that fell from his lips with an interest which my own feelings stimulated to the highest pitch.

In the evening he asked me to sing to him, and as he leant his head on his hand, and sat in silence by my side, listening to song after song which he had known and liked in former days, I felt my heart grow fuller, till at last my voice failed, and in its place a choking sob rose in my throat. He raised his head abruptly, and looked at me sternly. "It is only that I am a little nervous," I said; "I have taken a long ride, and being tired—"

"Oh, pray make no explanations," he replied; "excuses are perfectly unnecessary;" and he suddenly left the pianoforte.

He spoke to me no more that evening; but the next day he treated me again as he had done at first, and even seemed in some ways more satisfied with me than he had ever been before.

I have never yet described Edward, and I do not think I could describe him. He was always unlike anybody else, and yet it would have been difficult to point out any peculiarity in him. It was not only truth, it was *reality*, that marked his character. He never was, never could be, anything but himself; and, like all perfectly true characters, could not even understand those that were not so, and judged them too severely, or too leniently, from the impossibility of putting himself in their place. His manner was always calm; even emotion in him never partook of the semblance of agitation. Where others were angry, he was stern; a few simple words from him always carried with them a strength of condemnation, which crushed under its weight any attempt to resist it. From a child I had been afraid of Edward, and he had never perfectly understood my character; now that I had so much reason to fear him, in some ways I felt more at my ease with him, because as I had ceased to express all my feelings, and pour forth my thoughts before him, I dreaded less the severity of his judgment.

During the next two or three weeks that he was at Elmsley, I felt in his presence as a criminal before his judge; his sternness was justice, his kindness was mercy; and, in the softened tones of his voice, and in the tenderness of his eyes, I only read the tacit grant of a pardon, which mine mutely implored. This gave to my whole manner, to my disposition I might almost say, for the time, a humility, a submission, which were in no wise affected, but which did not naturally belong to my character. Edward's was despotic, as well as uncompromising; perfectly conscientious himself, strict in the discharge of every duty, he exacted from others what he performed himself. He allowed of no excuses, of no subterfuges, and ranked the weakness that shrinks from suffering in the accomplishment of what is right, in the same line as that which yields to the allurements of pleasure, or the temptations of guilt. In many respects he resembled my uncle, but still the difference between them was perceptibly great. Edward's feelings were stronger; it was impossible to observe the depths of thought manifested in his eyes, and in his pale, high forehead; to hear the sound of his voice, when he addressed those he loved; to see the colour rise slowly in his check, as he spoke of some act of virtue, of heroism, or of self-conquest, without the conviction that powers of heart and mind, not an atom of which were frittered away in vain words and empty fancies, were at work within him.

Once he spoke to me of Henry's marriage, and told me he had seen him in London. They had met accidentally in the street; and he had offered to go and call on his wife; but Henry had made some excuse or other, and the visit had not taken place. He did not add one word regarding Henry's conduct, or what view he had taken of it himself, but looked earnestly into my face, as if he expected me to speak first on the subject; but seeing I was silent, at last he said, "Ellen, was this marriage a disappointment to you?"

"It was a relief to me."

"How so?"

"Because I had deceived Henry, and *almost* deceived myself into the belief that I liked him; and his marriage proved to me bow much I had been mistaken."

Edward took my hand and kissed it; I drew it away with great emotion, and exclaimed, "Good God, don't you know what you are doing?"

He did not say another word, and left me abruptly.

For two days afterwards, he spoke to me but little; and when he did so, his manner was cold.

One day that we were taking a walk together in the park, after one or two insignificant observations had passed between us, Edward asked me if I had ever received the book which lie had left for me the year before. As usual, I had it in my pocket; I took it out, and gave it to him, without making any other answer. He opened it and turned the pages over as we walked along.

"*Now* is the time come," I said to myself; "*now*!" and the blood forsook my heart, and my legs seemed to fail under me.

In a moment of morbid irritation, I had written on the blank page of the book, the words which had remained coupled in my mind with this gift of Edward's: "Beware; I know your secret!" and now they were before his eyes; and now he was reading them; and now the explanation was at hand; and all that I had suffered before was as nothing, compared to what I had wilfully brought on myself.

He turned to me, and said with a smile, "What do those mysterious words mean?"

I felt as if I was dreaming, but as if in my dream a mountain had been removed from my breast. I laughed hysterically, and said they meant nothing. That was the first time I lied to Edward.

He said that I must have read the book attentively, for he saw that it was marked in different places; *he* had never marked a book in his life; it was a thing that never occurred to him to do; and then he gave it back to me; and it felt to me as if the air had grown lighter, and the sky bluer, and as if my feet sprang as by magic from the ground they trod on.

When, that evening, I was with Edward again, I looked up into his face, and talked to him as I had not talked to him for nearly two years; I laughed gaily, as in days of old; I saw with exultation that he laughed too, and that he asked Mrs. Middleton to play at chess with my uncle, instead of him, and that he did not leave my side till the last moment that I remained in the drawing-room; and I was foolishly, wickedly happy, till I went up to my room, and laid my head on my pillow; *then* came, in all its bitterness, the remembrance, that, although *he* might not know my secret, *another* did; that if, indeed, he loved me, as I now thought he did (for I remembered that letter to Henry, which I had so long misunderstood, and now recognised its true meaning),—if indeed he loved me, I must, I ought, to tell him the truth; and then he would despise me, he would hate me, not only for the deed itself, but for my long silence,—for my cowardly concealment. No; I had suffered too dreadfully during those minutes when I had felt myself on the brink of unavoidable confession;—that happen what might, I would not, I could not, disclose to him the *truth*. But should I, then, marry him? Should I inherit my uncle's fortune? Should I become one day the mistress of Elmsley; and, from the midst of all that this world can give of joy, look, as Belshazzar looked on the hand-writing on the wall, on the torrent where my own hand had hurled Mrs. Middleton's child, Edward's cousin; and one day, perhaps, be denounced, betrayed, exposed, by Henry Lovell, whose words began that night to be realised:—"With every throb of love for another, there will be in your heart a pang of fear, a shudder of terror, a thought of me!"

Hour after hour I tossed about my bed, unable to close my eyes in sleep; at times, in spite of everything, feeling wildly happy; at others, forming the most solemn resolutions, that neither the weakness of my own heart, or the persecutions of others, should induce me to think even of marrying Edward, and yet unable to conceal from myself, that the next time I saw him, the next time my eyes met his, they would betray to him all that long-subdued and unconfessed love which had now grown into a

passion astonishing to myself, and ruled my undisciplined mind beyond all power of restraint and control.

In the morning I fell into a short and uneasy slumber, in which, twenty times over, I was confessing my history to Edward, or standing by him at the altar, or else being dragged from his side by Henry, or by my uncle. The visions of sleep, and the thoughts of the night, were strangely mixed up in my mind when I woke: tired and jaded with all I had gone through, I went down-stairs on the morning of the 28th of February, which was the eve of the day of our departure for London.

In the breakfast-room, I found Edward, who asked me with some surprise, how I came to be so late, and if I did not mean to go to church?

"To-day, why to church to-day?" I inquired.

"It is Ash Wednesday," he replied, "the most solemn fast-day in the year."

"Oh, in that case, I will go at once, and do without breakfast; no great self-denial, for I am not in the least hungry." I put on my bonnet and shawl, and we set off on foot together, "Mr. and Mrs. Middleton having previously gone on in the carriage. I was very feverish, and from want of sleep and absence of food together, I felt in an unnaturally excited state. Whenever Edward spoke to me, I gave a start, and when I spoke myself, it was with a sort of nervous irritation, which I could not command; at last he seemed displeased, and when he stood still, to give me his hand, in crossing the stile, at the entrance of the churchyard, I saw in his face that stern expression which I had begun to know and to dread. We went into church; the service was already begun; it is, as it should be on such a day, a solemn and an awful service. The Epistle for the day, that mournful and merciful appeal to the conscience, the Penitential Psalms, which seem to embody the very cry of a bruised and overwhelmed heart, everything struck the same chord, spoke the same language; to my excited imagination, every word that was uttered seemed as if it was addressed to me alone, of all that assembled congregation. Every moment my head was getting more confused, and my soul grew faint within me. And then, when I was not in the least expecting it, (for I had never before paid any attention to the service for Ash Wednesday,) all at once there rose a voice which said, in what sounded to my overwrought nerves, an unnaturally loud tone:

"Brethren, in the Primitive Church there was a godly discipline, that, at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the Day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend."

I believe that at that moment I fell on my knees, but nothing remains very distinctly in my recollection, except that soon the solemn curse of God was pronounced on unrepenting sinners, and as each awful denunciation was slowly uttered, there rose from the aisles, from the galleries, from each nook and each comer of the house of prayer, the loud cry of self-condemning acknowledgment.

Again, again, and again it sounded, and died away. Once more it rose and fell; and then the voice from the pulpit proclaimed, "Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly;" and that time I did not hear the voice of the multitude respond. I heard a low deep *amen* uttered at my side; and that amen was to me as a sentence of eternal condemnation. I fainted, and when I recovered my senses, I was in the vestry with my aunt, and the doctor of the village. Soon I was able to walk to the carriage, and to drive home with Mrs. Middleton.

When I saw Edward again, his manner was gentle and affectionate; and I was myself so wearied with emotion, so exhausted with hopes and fears, that I had grown calm from mere fatigue. I was more determined than ever not to marry Edward, and this resolution gave me a kind of melancholy tranquillity, which allowed me to speak to him with more self-possession than before. I had also a vague idea that, by making this one great sacrifice, I should entitle myself to seek the consolations of religion, after which my soul yearned, especially since the terror which that day's service had struck into my heart; but still I shrunk from the one act which would have given me real peace; as I put into words the account I could give of Julia's death; I fancied I saw before me Edward's countenance, stern in condemnation; or over-coming with difficulty its expression of horror and dismay; or, worse still, incredulous, perhaps, and unable to believe that where there was not crime, there could have been such concealment; as I pictured to myself all this, and foresaw the nameless sufferings of such an hour, the cry of my soul still was, "Never, never, will I marry him! but *never*, also, will I own to him the secret which would make him turn from me with disgust and horror."

We were to set out for London at an early hour the next morning, and before we parted for the night, Edward followed me to the music-room, where I was putting by some books to take with us for the journey.

He stood by me in silence for some time, and then said, "Ellen, it is better, before we part, even for a short time, to understand each other. I have long been attached to you. I gave you up and went abroad, when I thought you were in love with Henry. I tried in vain to forget you. *Now*, Ellen, is there hope for me? Will you be to me, what you alone can be—the blessing that I would prize beyond all earthly blessings—will you be my wife?"

I looked at him; he was pale, and his eyes were full of tears. As mine were raised to his, I knew, I felt that they spoke such unutterable, such passionate love, that when, with a voice hardly articulate, I said in the slow accents of despair, "No, I cannot be your wife;" it seemed to me that he must have read into my heart.

He took my hand, and only said in a low voice, "Why?"

"Because," I exclaimed, with a burst of tears, "because I am utterly unworthy of you."

He let go my hand, and seemed to be struggling with himself: at last he said, "Ellen, if you mean that you feel now that you cared more for Henry Lovell than at one time you fancied, if there is still some affection for him in your heart, it is no doubt a painful trial for me to hear it; but if you tell me so frankly, and at once, I shall not cease to respect you, nor to love you." (His voice trembled as he said these last words.) "I shall leave you for a time; you must soon, you will soon, conquer these feelings; and then—perhaps—only tell me the truth, Ellen—the only thing that could destroy my love would be, if you ever had, if you ever could, deceive me."

"You cannot love me; it is vain to talk of love to *me!*" I exclaimed, "I have told you so; I cannot be your wife; why do you ask me anything else? Leave me! for God's sake leave me! I am miserable enough as it is."

"Ellen! Ellen! with such feelings as these, how could you speak to me of Henry and of his marriage as you did?"

"Henry! I am not thinking of Henry; I am not talking of Henry; I do not care for him; I do not love him, I never did: I should not be so wretched, perhaps, if I had."

Edward remained silent for a moment, and then said, with a deep sigh—

"Would to God, Ellen, that there was *truth* in you! It is equally difficult to believe and to disbelieve you."

"Think not of me; leave me, Edward, leave me. I *have* told you the truth. I do not care for Henry; I solemnly protest to you that I do not; but I cannot be your wife—*that* is the truth, too."

"Then why these tears?" said Edward, sternly. "Why all this *acting?* Why cannot you tell me calmly, and at once, that you care not for me, instead of deluding me into the belief that you do, at the very moment when you refuse me."

Suffocated with grief, I hid my face in my hands while he spoke; and said to myself, "*Acting* he calls it! Oh, God! he calls me an *actress!* He says there is no truth in me! How then would he listen to my tale of guilt and of sorrow? How then could he read truth in my broken accents? How could he discern the workings of a proud and wounded spirit?"

I raised my head slowly—Edward was gone; I rushed to the door to call him back, but was met by the servant, who was come to answer the drawing-room bell. My uncle and aunt came into the room at the same time, and I retired to mine, to pass another night betwixt hours of waking misery, and moments of broken and feverish sleep.

At six o'clock in the morning I was woke out of one of these last, by the sound of carriage-wheels. Jumping out of bed, I went to the window, and unclosing the shutter, I saw Edward's carriage rolling away along the avenue, and ours being packed in the court below. I felt glad that we were going too; glad that we were going to London; glad that there was something to think of—to talk of—to do. *Glad!* what a misuse of words. God knows, there was no gladness in my heart that morning, but it was something to be able to forget myself occasionally in the bustle and excitement around me. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were not aware that anything had passed between Edward and myself. They mentioned him several times in the course of the day, and spoke of seeing him in London in three weeks' time.

At seven that evening we arrived in London, where I had not been for several years before; its immensity, the perpetual noise of carriages, the heaviness of the atmosphere, made me feel in another state of existence, and when giddy with the rapid motion of the carriage, flushed by the sudden transition from the cold night air to the vicinity of a blazing coal fire, I sat down to dinner in the small

front dining-room of a house in Brook-street. It was only the uneasiness which I felt at the idea that any moment might bring Henry Lovell into my presence, that made me aware that nothing in myself or in my fate was changed. Really very much fatigued, I begged to go to bed, immediately after dinner, and, for many hours, slept heavily, in oblivion of all I had suffered, and all I feared.

CHAPTER X.

"Some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
Point to rich ends."

SHAKESPEARE.

The next morning, after breakfast, I asked Mrs. Middleton what were her plans for the day. She told me she had got a note from Henry after I had gone to bed the evening before, to ask her when and where she wished to see him; that she had sent him word to come to her before two o'clock, but that she thought I had better not be present at their first interview. I instantly proposed to her to go to Alice as soon as I could be sure that Henry had left his house, and prepare her for the visit which I knew my aunt intended to make to her in the afternoon, or else to bring her back with me to Brookstreet. I felt I had better meet Henry again in her presence than alone. Mrs. Middleton agreed to all this; and I went to my room to wait there for his arrival, which was to be the signal for my departure. In about an hour's time I heard a knock at the house-door, and having ascertained that Henry was with his sister, I got into the carriage, and drove off to—Street.

I remember that accidentally I had in my hands a card of address which my maid had just given me for some shop in Regent-street, with a long list, in small print, at its back, of the various articles to be procured there, and that I read it over and over again, with that nervous attention which we give to anything that will fix our eyes, and the mechanical part of our thoughts, when we are in a state of restless impatience. The carriage stopped at No. 3, in—Street, and I told the servant to inquire if Mrs. Lovell was at home. The door was opened by a man who had been Henry's servant since he went first to Oxford, and who, on seeing me, came up to the carriage, and told me that Mrs. Lovell was in the square; but that if I would walk in, and wait a few minutes, he would go and tell her that I was come.

I followed him up the narrow carpeted stairs; he opened the door of the back drawing-room, and left me there. For a moment I sat down on the nearest chair to subdue the quick beating of my heart. I then looked about me, and examined Alice's room. It was furnished just as most rooms in London are furnished, where no particular care has been taken to superintend their arrangement. There were blue striped sofas and chairs, a large table and a little table, blue and muslin curtains, and that was all. Everything was in the nicest order possible. On the small table which was placed near the window, with a chair before it, were laid, one upon the other, the same Bible and Prayer Book which I had seen in the closet at Bridman; in a bookcase between the chimney and the window were ranged the same books which had stood there on the wooden shelf; on the round table were a few flowers in a glass, and a basket containing some hemming. There was no fire in the chimney, and the room felt rather cold.

After a few minutes had elapsed, the door opened and Alice came in. As she came up to me, her perfect calmness gave me at once that self-possession which I had vainly struggled for before-hand. As I kissed her, and sat down by her side, it felt to me like entering a church on a hot and dusty summer's day; like leaving behind me the glare and the noise of the busy world without; like plunging into those

"Arched retreats, where passion's thirst is calmed,
And care's unthankful gloom." *

[* Lyra Apostolica.]

She was simply dressed in a brown silk gown. As she took off her straw bonnet, and laid it, and a handful of daisies by it, on the table, she turned to me with one of those grave smiles which were peculiar to her, and said—

"I have longed to see you again, I am so glad you are come. It seemed to me as if the trees would never get their leaves in London; but they are growing at last, and you are come. But you are looking pale. You are not ill, I hope?"

"No; only very tired, Alice. I am unused to London, and the noise stuns and bewilders me. You look just as you did a year ago at Bridman."

A slight colour rose in her cheek at the name of Bridman. "I was a child *then*, though an old one, and now—"

As she paused I said, "Now a woman, and a happy one I hope, dear Alice."

She turned her large blue eyes full upon me, something like a sigh rose in her throat, and she only said, in so low a voice that I could hardly catch the sound, "God is everywhere!"

After this answer I did not feel courage to speak to her of Henry, of her own relations, of the circumstances attending her marriage, of anything, in short, that could cause her pain or disturbance, and I therefore asked her how she spent her time in London.

"That will be easily described," she said; "for in London one day exactly resembles another,—in its employment, at least."

"Does it really?" I exclaimed; for this was certainly not my idea of a London life.

"Yes," she replied. "I get up every day at six o'clock; and, after attending to some of my household concerns, I walk to Church, at St. Margaret's, where there is a service every morning. It feels almost like the country to walk at that hour."

"You must have found it piercingly cold in the winter?"

"It was cold enough sometimes; but lately it has been so mild that I walk slowly by the balconies to smell longer the mignonette which fills them. After Church comes breakfast; and then I go to the square."

"To walk there?"

"Yes; a kind of a walk."

"Alone?"

"Oh, no; I have plenty of companions—but never mind that. I will tell it you all another time."

"No; tell it me now; it interests me so much."

"It will make you think me a child still, though we said I was a woman just now. Well, then, first there are the birds,—the black, starved, unhappy-looking London birds; you cannot think how pleased they are with the seed and the crumbs which I take them every morning. I have chosen a particular old thorn-tree for our meeting-place; its leaves are beginning now to peep out, and it will be a great day for the birds and me when its white blossoms appear. As it is, they flock to it quick enough when I come into the square, and seem almost to call to me to make haste."

"You love them, Alice, as you used to love your Passion Flower?"

"Not exactly; I loved my Passion Flower because it did me good; my birds I love because I do *them* good. But I have greater friends than these in the square; friends that run to me too when I come in—the darling children."

"How do you love *them*, Alice?"

"Oh, as God's own chosen ones, whose Angels behold his face in Heaven. They seem so very *near* Heaven. Will you come some day into the square with me, Miss Middleton?"

"Call me Ellen, and I will go with you wherever you like."

"Well, then, dear Ellen, you must come and see those I love best. There is one so like Johnny!" (her eyes filled with tears as she said this) "only that he looks as if he belonged to some noble race, like those that the verses talk about; and another looks like the picture in my prayer-book of young David going to fight Goliath. I am so happy with them that I sometimes forget myself, and stay longer in the square than I ought."

"Why, what have you to do afterwards?"

"Oh, then, it is time to go to the hospital."

"What do you mean? What hospital?"

"The hospital in—Place. I go there every day for five or six hours."

"What to do?"

"Whatever they give me to do."

"I don't understand you, Alice."

"You mean how I got leave to go there? I will tell you;—one of the nurses, sisters they call them now, knew me when we lived at Bromley, and two or three times I had met her in the street, and talked with her. She took me one day with her into the hospital to see a poor woman who had broken her leg; she was in sad distress of mind, and could not bear to be left alone, and, as the sisters had too much to do to sit much by her bed-side, they were glad enough to leave me with her. Ever since, I have gone there almost every day, and they always find something or other for me to do."

"And when you leave the hospital, what do you do?"

"Generally I go to the square again for an hour, and then to evening prayers; but sometimes, if Mr. Henry is at home, he walks with me for a little while."

"And does Mr. Henry," I said with a smile, "approve of your long visits to the hospital, and your walks in the square, and all your solitary proceedings? He must be rather lonely at home all the morning without you?"

"He gets up late," answered Alice, "and always goes out immediately after breakfast."

"And then at dinner, or in the evening, I suppose, you give him an account of the proceedings of the day?"

"No, Mr. Henry does not care for birds and flowers, or children. He is very kind to poor people; twice, when I have asked him, he has given me some money for them, but he does not like to hear about them."

"Mrs. Middleton wishes very much to see you to-day, Alice."

"Does she? I shall be so glad to see her. When may I go to her? Is she like Mr. Henry?"

"In some ways she is, but you will find that she does care for birds and flowers" (I was going to add children, but something at my heart stopped me). "Come, dear Alice, put on your bonnet, and we will go to her immediately if you will come with me."

While she was tying on her bonnet, I went up to the book-case, and, looking over it said, "I do not see any new books here. I should have thought you would have added to your stock in London?"

"Mr. Henry has plenty of books in his study," answered Alice; "and when I was first married, as he had given me leave to take them when I liked, I read some of them."

"And liked them?"

"Some not enough—some too much."

When we were in the carriage I aske Alice which of the books that she had read she liked too much.

"Some books of verses," she answered. "I do love verses so much. They give me the same sort of feeling as a fine day, or like the birds when they sing more sweetly than usual, or when in a storm the thunder is very loud."

"Whose poems are you speaking of?"

"Lord Byron's; and as I read them, I felt all this more than I had ever done before, and it was very pleasant. He writes such beautiful things about the sky and the fields, and the country and children, that it made me quite happy to read them and think about them. But then I found that he wrote too of terrible and wicked things, things that made one tremble and shudder to think of, so I put that book away, and read it no more."

"And what did you try next?"

"Some long stories written by Sir Walter Scott."

"You must have liked them?"

"Yes, indeed I did; they are full of good and right things; and I spent many pleasant hours in reading them. But then, Ellen, somehow they made me think too much. They gave me thoughts that were not

wrong perhaps, but which were not good for me. Thoughts that did not help to make me, what St. Paul says we ought to be, 'content with that state of life in which God has put us.'"

"So then you left off reading altogether?"

"No, I read my own old books again; I picked out verses and stories for the happy children in the square, and hymns and chapters in the Bible for the sick people at the hospital, and all was right again."

As we drove into Brook-street, I told Alice that we were now close to Mrs. Middleton's house; but I did not see in her the least sign of nervousness or agitation at the idea of the approaching interview. I felt calmer myself than I had expected, for it seemed to me that, in her presence, Henry must forget the past; that her husband could not be the Henry I had known, and whom I so much dreaded to meet again; and yet, at the same time, I hardly felt as if she was his wife. As it generally happens when one has speculated much before-hand, on a person's probable conduct and appearance under certain circumstances, Alice, as a wife, though exactly like herself, was quite unlike the various pictures which my imagination had drawn of her during the last few months. At times I had fancied her beaming with happiness, loving and beloved, and in the full enjoyment of those early days of bliss which a young wife so often dreams away in enviable unconsciousness of its transient nature. At other times, and oftener, I had feared that her cheek might be pale, and her spirits broken; that disappointment might have fastened its poisonous fang in her heart; and that I should read in her eyes the fatal secret of an unhappy marriage. But I had found her calm as the surface of a summer sea; and no Virgin Martyr walking with a firm step to the fiery trial: no dying saint closing his eyes in the joyful hope of a certain resurrection, ever seemed more free from earthly passions, earthly cares, or earthly hopes, than the beautiful bride of eighteen who sat by my side.

When we entered the drawing-room in Brook-street, Henry was sitting by his sister. She got up hastily, came up to Alice, and kissing her affectionately, drew her to a couch at the end of the room, and entered into conversation with her, in that kind and eager manner which was peculiar to her. Henry made a step towards them, and then turned back; and, holding out his hand to me, said in a low voice, "You are very kind to her, and so you ought to be."

I returned the pressure of his hand, and answered in the same tone, "Who in the world could be otherwise than kind to her?"

"Poor Alice!" he said, and drew his hand across his brow, as if in pain.

He was pale, and he had grown very thin since I last had seen him. He drew me to the furthest window by some insignificant question, and then told me that his father was expected in town the next day; and now that his sister had seen Alice, he supposed that he would do so too.

"I am glad, very glad of it, Henry; I am not sure if he will appreciate her thoroughly; but I know she will," I said looking at Mrs. Middleton.

"She will do her harm," he muttered.

"Harm!"

"Yes, as she has done you harm."

"What harm has she ever done me?"

"Made you what you are,—too good to be bad, and …"

"Too bad to be good? True; but that has not been her doing."

"Has it not?" he retorted, and fixed his eyes upon me, as if he would have read into my soul.

After a pause, he said, glancing at Alice, "Take care what you do with *her*. She lives in a dream; and if you show her but once life as it is—as it ought to have been for her,—she will wake, break her heart, if she has one, or that of someone else, if she has not."

I could hardly command myself sufficiently to speak; but, laying my head against the window pane, and without looking at him, I said in a low voice, "Surely, Henry, you try to make her happy—you *must* feel affection for her?"

"Enough to wish, with all my soul, that I had never set eyes on her, or on you.—Don't go—don't stir from where you are. Once for all, hear it—you *must* listen to whatever I may choose to say to you. Once you would not believe me, when I told you that, by your obstinacy, you would sacrifice the happiness of

three persons. You have done it; for mine" (he said this with a bitter laugh) "and your own and hers hang upon a thread. If you think to brave me, do so; go away now, and never speak to me again; but then, by Heaven, the thread snaps; and you will believe me this time, I hope!"

I did *not* stir; and that mute ackowledgment of Henry's secret power, which my soul rebelled against, but dared not defy, humbled me more bitterly than anything I had yet gone through.

After a few minutes of this speaking silence,—for, alas! how much the compliance of that hour revealed,—he himself walked away, joined his sister and his wife; and, after a few moments' conversation, he took his leave, and Alice went home in our carriage.

It was settled before they went, that on the next day they should dine in Brook-street; and Mrs. Middleton told me afterwards that she had arranged with Henry to use her best endeavours to persuade Mr. Lovell to meet them. He had charged her not to say before Alice that there would be any difficulty in obtaining this, as she had not the slightest idea that their marriage had been disapproved of by his family.

"Nothing seems to me so useless," added Mr. Middleton, "as to reproach, to remonstrate, or even to wonder, over an act which is past recall; but it is impossible to see Henry look so miserable, to hear him speak so coldly of that beautiful young wife of his, and at the same time conceal from her with nervous anxiety that it was a step which nothing but the most violent passion could justify, without feeling bewildered at the strangeness of the whole affair."

"What has he said to you, Ellen? and what impression has your visit to her left upon your mind?"

"I think," was my answer, "what I always have thought of her; that she is more like an angel, in spirit as well as in face, than any other human being I ever saw; she seems happy, but it is hardly the happiness of this world which she seems to enjoy; but, whether it is that of the saint who has built upon a rock, or that of a child which a breath can destroy, I hardly know."

"I felt," said Mrs. Middleton, "while I was talking to her, as if she hardly belonged to this world. Do you know, Ellen," she continued, with a smile, "I could not have asked her if she was in love with Henry. I should have feared to see her vanish away like that beautiful apparition in the German Legend, which dissolved into air, if a word of mortal love reached her ears. But this is all nonsense," she said with a sigh; "I hope they are happy; yet, after having looked forward so much to seeing them, I now have a more vague feeling of discomfort about them than I had before."

My uncle came in just then; and I was glad to leave the room, and thus escape a repetition of the question which I bad left unanswered with respect to Henry's conversation with me.

CHAPTER XI.

"I do not love her, nor will strive to do it."

SHAKESPEARE.

What course was I to pursue? Should I take the first opportunity that would offer of approaching Henry, and, by charging him solemnly to tell me at once the meaning of his hints and threats, relieve myself from the tormenting uncertainty under which I suffered, and obtain from him some promise which would, comparatively at least, set my mind at ease? These questions I asked myself over and over again during the rest of that day and the succeeding night, till, towards morning, I fell asleep without having come to any decision. Day after day passed on, and still no explanation occurred between us. The projected dinner had taken place; Mr. Middleton and Mr. Lovell had both been captivated and touched by the beauty, simplicity, and sweetness of Alice's face and manner. They seemed instinctively to feel that there was something holy about her,—something that forbade one to doubt or distrust her, had appearances been even twenty times more against her than they were; and both were now still more indignant with Henry for the coldness and indifference with which he seemed to regard her, than they had previously been at his marriage. I admired Alice from the bottom of my soul; she was, to me, the very type of purity,—the ideal of perfection; but I did not seek her much. Obliged to see Henry often at home, I shrank from going to his house; and her life was so full of holy duties; the tone of her mind, the character of her conversation, breathed a spirit of such earnest faith, of such religious peace, that after awhile my troubled spirit chafed in the presence of what formed such a contrast to its own restless waywardness. When bewildered with passion—when lost in the mazes of sin and error, we may feel repose for an instant in prostrating ourselves at the foot of the cross; we may wander into a church, and for a moment cool our burning foreheads against the cold marble; but the deep silence of the

sanctuary soon grows oppressive.

"There's a tone in its voice which we fain would shun,
For it asks what the secret soul has done." *

[* From "The Revellers," by Mrs. Hemans.]

Thus it was with me with respect to Alice; and other causes also contributed to the same effect. Henry was often in Brookstreet, but she seldom came. Either he discouraged a frequent intercourse between us, and threw impediments in its way, which effectually checked it, or else it never occurred to Alice herself to interrupt the uniform course of her daily employments and pursuits, in order to accommodate herself to our totally different mode of life.

We had begun going out a great deal in society, and Mrs. Middleton proposed to Henry that Alice should do so too, and offered to take her with us wherever we went; but he declined this offer in the most positive manner; and when his sister almost indignantly pressed him to explain his refusal, he said that Alice had peculiar notions on the subject which he did not wish to thwart.

"But we could persuade her out of those notions," persisted Mrs. Middleton; "for surely it is a great pity for you and for herself that she should remain a stranger to your friends and acquaintances, while you associate with them as much as before your marriage."

"It may be a pity, Mary," was his impatient answer, "but it is inevitable, and you only torment me by urging me on the subject."

Mrs. Middleton, who was not easily *put down*, after vainly remonstrating with him upon it, entered on the question with Alice one morning that we were calling upon her, and tried to explain to her that for her husband's sake she should endeavour to make friends with his friends, and to go where he went.

Alice looked at her with surprise, and assured her that she was perfectly ready to make acquaintance with any of Henry's friends, or to comply with any request of his.

"Then, my dear child," replied Mrs. Middleton, "why does your husband object to your going out with us of an evening? You ought not to shut yourself up;—you should endeavour to assimilate your tastes to his."

"I do not known what his tastes are," said Alice, "nor where he is while I am at home."

"He is," said Mrs. Middleton, "among his friends and his acquaintance. He is where I want to take you,—where he will see you amused and admired, and love you all the better for it."

"Not for going against his wishes?" said Alice, gently.

"He *must* have misunderstood you, my dear child."

"No, he has *not*," she answered with firmness; the colour in her cheek was slightly heightened; and after a pause she said earnestly—"I think I understand you now, dear Mrs. Middleton, and I feel your kindness; but do not urge me on this subject: you would give me more pain than pleasure, and do me more harm than good."

She rose suddenly, went to the table, and took from it a bunch of violets, which she gave me. When she sat down again, her face was as calm as usual.

On our way home, Mrs. Middleton seemed absorbed in thought; and her manner to Henry, whom we found waiting for us in Brook-street, was unusually cold.

Whenever we went into society we met him, and he still contrived never to lose sight of me; and by looks, by words quickly uttered, by sudden changes of tone and manner, to convey to me the knowledge of his secret feelings. The tone of those feelings, and his mode of conversation, varied from day to day. Sometimes he was moody and almost savage in his manner, and every word he uttered bordered on a threat. At other times he seemed only anxious to re-establish between us a footing of confidence and intimacy. On one of these occasions, I met him at a ball at Lady Wyndham's, my Dorsetshire acquaintance. I had been dancing with him, and afterwards had walked into a room which was cool, compared with those that preceded it. Several people were standing about a round table covered with prints, albums, and caricatures. We sat down on a small couch by the window; and after some trifling conversation, in which he incidentally named his wife, I told him that I could not understand his line of conduct with regard to her. "I am not speaking, now, of your feelings or your affections," I added hastily; "although God knows there would be enough to wonder over on that score; but of your way of

going on as a married man. There may be excuses for what is involuntary in our feelings, but surely none for determined and systematic neglect."

"Neglect," he replied, "is a word easily uttered; but could you as easily prescribe to me a line of conduct to follow?"

"Of that, your conscience, if you have one," I answered impatiently, "ought to inform you."

"Would you wish me," he returned with a sneer, "to feed birds in the square half the day, and nurse sick people during the other half? Shall I learn to make lint and choose baby-clothes?"

"Oh no!" I exclaimed; "I never supposed for a single instant that you could equal Alice, or do, in all your life, the good that she does in one day; but if you showed her confidence and kindness,—if you treated her as she ought to be treated…"

"She would love me,—which she does not now!"

"I am persuaded she does."

"No she does *not*," he answered, with some vehemence. "I do not call that *love* which never made the voice tremble, or the heart beat. *Is* that love which never betrays itself by emotion, Ellen? Can *love* leave the soul calm, and the spirits unruffled?"

"Not yours—not mine, perhaps, Henry; but oh, let us not judge purer and higher natures than ours, by the tests of our own wayward and ill-governed minds. Indeed—indeed, Alice loves you."

"She loves me as she loves her grandmother, her brother Johnny, and half the children and the beggars in the square. You must excuse me if that is not my notion of *love*. Do not look so indignantly at me, Ellen; I speak bitterly, but it is not against *her* that I am bitter. I would give all I possess at this moment that I could set her free, and send her out into life once more, unshackled by hateful ties, and at liberty to choose another destiny. But the die is cast; and she and I must drag on existence together through the dreary journey of life."

"But, Henry—dear Henry," I exclaimed, "why will you not try to gain her love? If you do not think she loves you *now*, she might—she would, if you sought it."

"And if she did? If that calm nature was roused into something like feeling; if a spark of passion lighted on that frozen surface; if, following my sister's blind advice, I sent out that ignorant child into the world and society, to learn what it is to love and to be loved; to hear that she is beautiful; to be told that her husband ought to live in the light of her eyes; ought to carry her in his heart, and prize each hair of her head as a treasure of countless price. If she was to be told all this, and then at home find his eyes averted, his voice cold, his spirits gone, and the sight of her beauty as much lost upon him as if he had been born blind; could she bear this, Ellen? Do you think she could? Would she not curse the day of her birth, and the day of her marriage? Would she not perhaps enter upon a course which would end in shame and misery; or if her religion kept her from that, would she not return to her poor people, to her flowers and her birds, with a breaking heart and a wounded spirit? You are crying, Ellen? Do not cry for *her*; she is calm and happy now, and I pray God she may long remain so; but if you are grieving for me —if you have ever felt the least affection for me, then cry on; for God only knows how miserable I am!"

My tears were indeed falling fast; and it was with a voice, hardly articulate, that I addressed to Henry the question which for so many days had trembled on my lips, and never jet found utterance.

"Why did you marry her?"

He looked at me steadily for a few moments, and then said,

"Ellen, the day will come when I shall answer that question—and *another*, which you wish to ask—but cannot find words or courage for. There is much that we must say to each other—something, perhaps, that we may do for each other; but then there must be no reserve, no coldness, no false pride, or affected prudery in our intercourse. You must trust me completely, as I will trust you; we have both of us secrets which have weighed upon our souls, and made silence and solitude dreadful to us. Judge then what I have suffered! Ellen, I will tell you my secret—I know *yours*."

"Hush, hush!" I exclaimed wildly, and looked about me with terror, but I saw we were alone; the people who were in the room when we had entered it had all gradually withdrawn, and the sound of music and of voices reached us faintly, where we sat. I covered my face with my hands and murmured, "Speak on."

"Ellen," continued Henry, "Ellen, I have threatened, I have tormented, I have tortured you; but each

time I have done so I have writhed myself under the sense of what I was doing; and when you know *all* —when you know under what constraints, with what hopes, with what fears, I have acted—"

He stopped suddenly short; I raised my head abruptly, and in the door-way before us stood Sir Charles Wyndham and Edward Middleton. Never in my life did I act from a more sudden impulse than at that moment. I started forward, and in one minute was at Edward's side. My cheeks were flushed, and my eyes swelled with crying. I pushed by Sir Charles, and seizing on Edward's arm, I whispered to him, "Take me where I can speak to you—don't judge me—don't condemn me."

He did not say a single word, but gave me his arm, and walked with me through all the crowded rooms to the one where Mrs. Middleton was sitting. He almost thrust me into a chair by her side, and disappeared without one word or look.

After an hour of talking and dancing, both of which it seemed to me that I accomplished by some mechanical power, I prevailed on Mrs. Middleton to go home. While we were looking for our cloaks in the ante-room, Henry joined us again. He was holding mine, when Edward rapidly approached us, and in a quiet but imperious manner took it from him, and put it on me himself; on which Sir Charles Wyndham remarked, "That's right, Mr. Middleton—you should never allow married men to play the gallants with young ladies." I don't know if any of us smiled at that observation. If there was a smile, it must have been a strange one.

As we were driving home, after a few moments of silence, I asked Mrs. Middleton if she had been aware that Edward was arrived in London.

"We expected him in a day or two," she answered; "but I believe he came up to town to-day, only to return into the country to-morrow."

"Has he seen my uncle?" I inquired.

"No," she replied; "he breakfasts with us to-morrow."

There was joy in *that* as far as it went, though what I was to say to him, and how I was to explain the state of emotion in which he had found me that evening when alone with Henry, was more than I could devise, and, as usual, before the moment arrived, I had come to the conclusion that to say *nothing* was the safest course to pursue.

When, at eleven o'clock the next day, I came into the breakfast-room, Edward was just arrived. He shook hands with me kindly; but his countenance was still more grave than usual.

As I was pouring out some tea, my hand trembled—Mrs. Middleton observed it, and said with a smile, "The effects of dissipation, Ellen. We really must pull up, or we shall have you regularly *nervous*."

"How did you like your ball last night, Ellen?" asked Mr.
Middleton.

"Not at all," I answered, and felt my cheeks grow crimson.

"Edward," said Mrs. Middleton, "you renewed your acquaintance with Mrs. Ernsley last night; did you not?"

"Yes, I had not seen her since my return."

As he said these insignificant words, he sighed deeply. I could not help instantly connecting in my mind this sigh of his with something which I fancied Mrs. Ernsley might have told him of, that had fallen under her observation at Brandon; and I said in a tone of irritation, "I know nobody whom I would not talk to rather than to Mrs. Ernsley. She invariably takes a wrong view of people and of things."

Edward looked at me steadily, and again I felt my cheeks flushing; and, in my embarrassment, I exclaimed that the fire was very hot, and got up to place a screen before it. He helped me to carry it, and said in a whisper as he did so, "Do not be ashamed of blushing; there is *truth* in *that* at least." After this, I did not open my lips again while breakfast lasted.

When my aunt had left the room, and my uncle was completely engrossed by the newspaper, Edward walked to the chimney, leant his back against it, and, taking hold of my gloves, which were lying on the slab, he twisted them in his hand; and then, as by a sudden effort, said, "Ellen, come here."

I obeyed, and in a voice which I felt was humble, though it tried to be careless and gay, I said—"Give me back my gloves, Edward; you are spoiling them."

He detained them an instant, as I took hold of them, and said half sternly, half tenderly—"Have you

nothing to say to me? I thought last night—"

"Oh, last night, I was quite beside myself," I interrupted, with a nervous attempt at a laugh. "I talked nonsense to everybody, and you must not call me to account for what I may have said or done."

"I am afraid not," he answered coldly; and, taking up a newspaper, he sat down again at the table.

I remained standing where he had left me, with my eyes fixed upon him, vainly endeavouring to find out some means of appeasing him. Nothing but openness and frankness could reinstate me in his favour: and how could I be open and frank? What *could* I tell him that would justify my intimacy with Henry? or account for the agitation which his words had caused me? Nothing; nothing short of the *truth;* and *that*—oh! how wearied I was with that eternal combat with myself—with that everlasting question, so often asked, and so often answered by my own mind. I absolutely shrunk from discussing it with myself again.

I walked impatiently up and down the room, and when Mrs. Middleton came in with a note in her hand, which she gave me to read, I felt glad of anything which would break the course of these harassing thoughts. The note was from Henry, to tell his sister that Alice was poorly, and would be glad to see herself or me.

"Shall you go?" I asked.

"Will you, my love?" she answered. "I expect my father at twelve, and your visit will, I have no doubt, be more acceptable to Alice than mine."

"Is the carriage at the door?" I inquired, and, having ascertained that it was, I ran up-stairs to put on my bonnet.

On my way down, I opened the door of the breakfast-room, to see if Edward was gone. He was alone; and as I came in, he said, "Are you going to see Mrs. Lovell?"

"Yes; she is not well, I hear, and wishes to see me."

"Do you like her as much as you once told me that you did?"

"I do like her, and admire her, as you would too, if you knew her. Oh, how you would approve of her! she is so unlike me!" I added, with a deep sigh.

Edward coloured, and said, "Is she happy with Henry?"

"I do not exactly know if she is happy with him; happy at least in the sense which I attach to the word; but I do know that I ardently wish her to be so, and there is truth in *this*, Edward."

"I believe you," he answered, and held out his hand to me; "I believe you in spite of myself." He hesitated, and seemed to wish to say something more, but just at that moment my uncle called him from the next room; again pressing my hand, he took leave of me, and I got into the carriage, and drove off to — street.

CHAPTER XII.

When I behold a genius bright and base,
Of towering talents, and terrestrial alms,
Methinks I see, as thrown from her high sphere,
The glorious fragments of a soul immortal
With rubbish mixed, and glittering in the dust.

YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

When I arrived, and was shown into the drawing-room, I found, for the first time, Alice and Henry sitting together; she was looking very pale, and her head was resting on her hand; but when I came in, she smiled, and asked me to sit by her. She said her head ached very much, but that it did not signify; it would be better soon.

I advised her not to keep near her a large nosegay of lilacs and seringa, the odour of which was overpowering.

"I do not think they hurt me," she said; "and it was so kind of him" (looking at Henry) "to get them for

me this morning, that it is a pleasure to look at them."

He coloured slightly, as she said this; and taking the jug in which they were, he carried it to the open window.

"I was not aware that they were bad for you, Alice," he said; "but if they are, you must keep them at a distance."

"She is really very unwell," he continued, turning to me; "she has overtired herself completely. Ellen, you must persuade her to give up going to that horrid hospital; she stayed there so many hours yesterday, that it has brought on this feverish attack. The doctor saw her this morning, and says that it comes from nervous exhaustion. You will give it up, Alice; won't you?"

"If you wish it," she answered, in a tone of voice which had a note of sadness in it.

"She stayed there till twelve o'clock last night," (he whispered to me; and there was some emotion in his voice;) "in a little close room, with a dying woman."

"While we were at the ball," I thought to myself; and taking
Alice's hand, I kissed it with a feeling like remorse; though,
God knows, I had not wronged her, in word or in thought.

After a few minutes, during which she made a few languid attempts at conversation, her head sunk back on the pillow of the couch, and she fell asleep. Her hands were joined together, and supported her cheek; the transparent paleness of her complexion made her delicately-chiselled features appear as if they were carved out of the purest marble, and in that attitude of perfect repose she looked more beautiful than I had ever yet seen her.

Henry and I sat silently for some time, by the side of her couch. When her regular breathing and her divided lips showed that she had fallen into a deep slumber, he got up and partly closed the shutters; then opening the door of the back sitting-room, he beckoned to me to follow him. I did so; but, putting on my bonnet and shawl at the same time, I prepared to go away immediately.

On which he said to me in a low voice, "Now, Ellen, for once I can speak to you alone, and without interruption, and you must listen to me."

I answered in the same tone, but with the most determined accent, "This tyranny is intolerable, and I cannot submit to it; if, as you have often hinted to me, you have the power and the will to make me miserable,—to destroy the small remnant of happiness which I can ever enjoy,—do so! I am at your mercy."

"At *my* mercy!" he exclaimed, "at *my* mercy! Ellen, the time is come when everything must be revealed to you, when there must be no secrets between us; and all I implore is, that you will hear me. It is of the utmost importance to you, even more than for me, that you should do so. I saw by your manner yesterday, and by Edward Middleton's also, that subjects of such vital importance as those we have to discuss together cannot be carried on in common conversation, without conveying an impression which might be injurious to your reputation; and you cannot imagine how much this idea has tormented me. Your peace of mind, your reputation, Ellen, are dearer to me than life itself; and such love as mine cannot be selfish—"

"Henry, Henry, your very words belie you. I am indeed fallen low in your eyes, since you, the husband of another, dare to speak of love to me."

"Not of such love as mine. You do not think, Ellen, you cannot believe that I am such a wretch as here, in my own house, with my wife ill in that next room, to speak to you of my love with any object but that of proving to you, that to the uttermost of my power I will guard you from the evils which hang over your head. Be calm, Ellen; be reasonable, I implore you (he continued, as I wrung my hands, and then clasped them in an attitude of despair;) Alice did not close her eyes last night. After undergoing great fatigue, she is now fallen asleep, and will probably slumber on for some hours. We may never have another such opportunity of speaking without restraint or interruption; and nothing can seem more natural than that you should remain here, and be ready to comfort and amuse her when she does wake."

"Deceit! deceit! everlasting deceit!" I exclaimed, as I sunk down on a chair which he had placed for me near the window. "How my soul loathes it, how I hate and despise myself!"

"But will it not be some comfort to you, Ellen, to open your heart to me? Have I not been a friend to you? You see how guarded I am—how careful to choose words that can neither shock nor offend you.

Show me confidence, show me kindness, and you can obtain from me every effort that a man can make, every sacrifice which a woman can require from one whose whole soul is bound up in her, whose existence but one long dream of her… But this is not what I meant to say," he exclaimed, abruptly, and getting up, he walked up and down the room, and passed his hand over his eyes: then sitting down again, he said, "I had better begin by giving you an account of the circumstances of my life, which will explain the difficulties I have been entangled in, the sufferings I have endured, aggravated by remorse, and by the consciousness that I had brought them on myself."

"Have *you* suffered in this way, Henry? Oh, then, speak on, for I shall understand you, I shall feel for you though no one else in the world should."

"I know it, Ellen; I am persuaded of it. Circumstances have raised a barrier between us, which ought never to have existed; but there must always be a bond of sympathy in our feelings which nothing ever can or will annihilate. Do you remember that when I left college I went to Elmsley, and spent three or four weeks there?"

"Yes, I do: it was then that you and Edward began to treat me as a grown up woman, and that we took those long walks in the country which first made me feel intimate with you both."

"It was," he resumed; "and those days were the last that I ever spent free from care and anxiety. I sometimes look back to them and live them over again in thought, till I long to blot out from my life and my memory all that has intervened between that time and this. But the one is not more impossible than the other," he added with a sigh, and for a moment leant his face on his hand, and remained silent. "Well," he resumed after a pause, "I left Elmsley, and went to London; there I immediately plunged into the wildest dissipation, and led a life, the details of which I am ashamed to describe in speaking to you. With an income scarcely sufficient to enable me to live as a gentleman, I indulged in every species of extravagance and lavish expenditure; but, above all, my passion for gambling was at that time such, that it seemed to me as if life was not worth having, without the means of gratifying it. For weeks I lived in a state of continual fever; my nights were turned into days; and, during the few hours of sleep—but not of repose—which gave me strength to return to the gaming-table, the rattling of the dice and the shuffling of the cards haunted me in my dreams, with alternations of exultation and despair, as vivid though not as distinct, as in my waking hours. At first, (the old history of all such cases,) I won immensely, and this encouraged me to play higher and higher stakes, which, when the tide of fortune turned, involved me, almost before I was conscious of it, in debts of honour, far exceeding in amount what I could even contemplate ever having the power to discharge. Still I played on; a gleam of success now and then giving me a feverish hope that I might regain at least a part of what I had lost. I played on till the case grew so desperate, that I dared no longer look it in the face; and I lived under a sort of perpetual nightmare.

"As long as I had any money left, I paid what I lost; then I ran into debt to the masters of the different clubs, and borrowed money of such of my acquaintance as were kind or imprudent enough to lend it. To others I lost large sums on credit, under promises to pay them on a future day. When the day arrived and found me unable to meet my engagements, I was induced to give bills to my creditors for other and distant days. Again those days came, and again they found me insolvent. I will not, I need not, go through all the miserable details of the difficulties in which I was entangled, of the humiliating excuses I had to make, and the more humiliating threats and reproaches I had to endure. It is enough to say that, with desperate infatuation, I made a solemn promise to my creditors to satisfy them all on the first day of the ensuing month, and on the fulfilment of that promise it depended, whether my character as a gentleman was still preserved or irretrievably lost. Ellen, I cannot attempt to describe to you what I suffered at that time. The wrestling with an impossibility, the struggle after what was unattainable, the incapability of resigning myself to what seemed inevitable, the powerless rage, the smarting pride, the agonised self-reproach; it was dreadful, and no one to speak to, or turn to…"

"And why, in the name of Heaven, why did you not appeal to my uncle? Why did you not speak to Edward Middleton?"

An expression of sudden pain and a burning flush spread over Henry's countenance at this question. After a moment's hesitation he said, "I must tell you *all*, though to tell you this gives me a pang which would almost atone for any degree of guilt. You must know, then, that it was at Oxford that I acquired a taste for gambling, and that there, I ran in some measure the same course of imprudence, and went through the same suffering that I have just described to you, except that the sums which I lost amounted to hundreds instead of thousands. Edward, at that time, observed that something weighed on my spirits, and easily drew from me a confession of my folly, and my embarrassments. After lecturing me for some days on the subject, he brought me a draught for the amount of what I had lost, which he had obtained for me from Mr. Middleton, but only on the condition that I would give them both my most solemn word of honour that I would never play again. Mr. Middleton's letter was not only stern, it was

also contemptuous; and had I then been able to devise any mode of extricating myself from my difficulties, I would have refused the money and the promise exacted from me; but it was vain to seek for any such; and with feelings more wounded than grateful, I gave the promise required. *How* I kept it, you have seen; and now you can understand that I would sooner have fled to America, and never shown my face in England again, than have turned to Mr. Middleton for aid or assistance. To my father it would have been useless to apply; he has, as you know, no income but what he derives from the Navy Pay Office—"

Here Henry paused, and drew a long breath as if to gain courage to proceed. He went to the door of the next room to ascertain if Alice was still fast asleep; and, having done so, he again sat down by my side, and went on with his history:—

"At about six o'clock on the day on which I had pledged myself to pay my debts, after several hours of weary pacing up and down the dusty and sultry streets, in which I had met with several acquaintances, who had turned their heads away when they saw me coming, I walked into my father's office and found him dressed for dinner, with his hat and his gloves in his hand, and a strong expression of impatience in his countenance.

"'Oh, how-do-you-do, Henry, my boy,' he said as I came in, 'Do you know, my dear fellow, you could do me a great kindness. I had appointed the chief clerk to be here at half-past six upon business, quite forgetting that I was engaged to dine and sleep at Percy Cross. Now, if you have nothing particular to do and could wait for him here, I should still be in time for dinner.'

"'But what is the business to be done?' I asked, and threw myself at full length on one of the benches of the office. 'Am I competent to perform it?'

"'It only consists in unlocking that drawer,' he replied, 'and putting into his hands bank-notes to the amount of £5,000, which are wanted for some payments to be made to-morrow morning. There is nobody here at this moment with whom I should like to leave this key; but if you can stay—'

"'Oh I can stay; I have nothing to do.'

"'I held out my hand for the key, put it in my pocket, wished my father good-night, and returned to my pleasant meditations. I had been alone for about a quarter of an hour, when the porter of the office came in and told me, as he handed me a card, that a gentleman was without and wished to speak to me. As I glanced at the name on the card, a disagreeable sort of feeling came over me; and as I desired the porter to show the gentleman into my father's private room, and followed him there, I mentally resolved to pick a quarrel with this individual, and to give him an opportunity of blowing my brains out —about the best thing that could happen to me, as I thought, at that moment.

"Mr. Escourt, the person in question, had been one of my intimates on my first arrival in London, and more than any one else had encouraged me in every species of extravagance, and especially in my passion for gambling. Often, when I was on the point of checking myself in the insane course I was pursuing, he had urged me on by a few dexterous words, and laughed at those fears which the desperate condition of my affairs suggested. Latterly he had won from me large sums of money; and I now owed him between three and four thousand pounds. He had always kept on good terms with me; but I had reason to know that he was one of those who had been most active in circulating reports against my character; and that he had secretly, and in the unfairest manner, used his influence with my other creditors to deter them from granting me any further indulgence. Possessed with this idea, I walked into the room where he was waiting. I cannot exactly describe to you what passed between us; that it drove me mad for the time is all I can say. He did not utter one word for which I could personally call him to account; he even maintained the character of my friend throughout; but he contrived at the same time to wound, insult, and exasperate me into a state bordering on frenzy. He informed me that, in spite of his efforts to prevent it, my creditors had come to the resolution of taking no more excuses; and if their claims were not satisfied on that very day, to make my conduct known to the world, and to take such measures as should lead to my expulsion from the clubs of which I was a member. He ended by expressing his pity for me, and his willingness, as far as his own case went, to forego all claim for what I owed him. How can I describe to you the insulting sneer that pierced through the hypocritical sympathy of his countenance? How shall I tell you—how will you understand—what passed through me in that moment? I drew up haughtily; I desired him to spare his pity, to reserve his forbearance for another occasion; that if he would wait five minutes I would satisfy him that his *friends* had been over-hasty in their conclusions; and that, having so satisfied him, I hoped he would take the opportunity of stating to them that very evening, that, as far as his case was concerned, there was nothing to complain of in my conduct as a *man of honour*. I said all this in a calmer tone than I now repeat it to you, and I walked out of the room with a steady step. Do you guess where I went? I went to the drawer in the office, unlocked it, counted out the money that I wanted, £3,500, and said to myself while I did it, 'At twelve o'clock to-night I shall shoot myself.' I locked the drawer again, put the key in my pocket, went

back to Escourt, and handed to him the bank-notes. He bowed, offered to shake hands with me, hoped I did full justice to his good intentions, would make a point of stating at —'s that very evening what had passed between us, and walked away. I walked away too; but, as I was opening the door of the office to take away my hat and stick, I met Harding, who I must tell you (if you do not know it already) is a half-brother of Mrs. Tracy, and consequently *her* uncle," he said, pointing to the next room. "He bowed, and told me that, having met my father in Piccadilly, who had stopped in his gig to inform him I was waiting at the office for him, he had come on as fast as he could in case I was in a hurry. I looked at him in a strange manner I suppose, for he seemed puzzled and said, 'I'm afraid you are not well, Sir.'

"'Not very well,' I stammered out, and walked towards the door.

"He followed me and said, 'I had understood Mr. Lovell to say,
Sir, that he had left with you the key of———'

"'Oh, the key,—yes, I have the key at my lodgings; my father called on me, and left it there. Can you come and fetch it to-morrow morning?'

"'Why, Sir, if it suited you as well,' he began.

"'I am not going home at present, and as it comes to the same—' I rejoined.

"'I must come early then, Sir?'

"'As early as you please,' I said, and walked into the street, where the air appeared to me to have grown ten times more sultry than it was an hour before. The pavement seemed literally to burn under my feet: and the sky had that heavy leaden look, 'dark as if the day of doom hung o'er Nature's shrinking head;' which produces a feeling of intolerable oppression. When I reached my lodgings it was beginning to rain. I threw open the window of my room, and then flung myself on my bed in a state which baffles all description. The prisoner in Newgate, who has just had his sentence read to him, cannot feel himself more inevitably condemned to death than I did at that moment. If before the next morning I did not destroy myself, I was nothing but a common thief. I knew that the only circumstance which distinguished the act I had committed from other crimes of the same sort, was, that detection was so inevitable, the evidence against me so indisputable, that it could only have been the act of a man who had made up his mind to die.

"I was to die, then, and by my own hand. Ellen, I do not believe that I am a coward; I know I am not, and yet I trembled dreadfully when death, real, actual, bloody death, stood before me in unavoidable, almost tangible, shape; a deadly sickness crept over my heart, and such a feebleness into my limbs, that a worse terror seized me lest I should faint and not recover till the moment when Harding should arrive; that perhaps I should not have strength to load and discharge the pistol; then a horrible vision passed before me of arrest, trial, execution; of scenes to which all that had tortured me some hours ago seemed but as child's play. I started wildly from my bed, and flung my arms about to prove to myself that I had yet life and strength enough to kill myself. A racking pain shot across my head; I ground my teeth, and then I felt a sudden impulse to laugh and to make mouths, which felt very like going mad. I saw a bottle of laudanum on the chimney-piece, and seized hold of it with desperate eagerness; had it been full, I should have drunk every drop in it; but as it was, there was only a small quantity, which quieted me. I sat down by the window shivering with cold. The heavy rain was driven in by sudden gusts of wind, and I remained there till gradually, as the night grew darker and the sedative began to take effect, I sunk into a heavy, stupid kind of calmness. I started when the clock struck ten; and, groping about the room, I found the match-box and struck a light. I then went to my bureau; and, taking out of the drawer my pistol-case, I placed it on the table, and then sat down to write a few lines to my father. I gave him a short and tolerably coherent account of what I had done, and begged him to avert inquiry until he had procured the means of replacing the sum I had taken. Mr. Middleton will not refuse (I added) to save my name from public disgrace; for Mary's sake—

"When I wrote that last sentence—when I came to my sister's name, I threw down the pen, and gave myself up for a few minutes to a burst of grief, in which I forgot everything but the misery I was going to bring upon her. As I was searching a drawer for some sealing-wax, my hand touched a book which had lain there for many a day unopened. It was a small New Testament, which she had given me before I went to Oxford. I must hurry on with my story, Ellen, or I would tell you how this accidental circumstance gave a new turn to my thoughts; how I suddenly remembered that when I was a child I had believed what that book taught, and that since, I had never once thought whether I did believe it or not. I knew I was going to die; and there was a certain phrase in that book which seemed very plain to me at that moment, 'It is appointed to all men once to die, and after that the judgment.' I don't know how it happened that I recollected it so well, for it was years since I had read it; but somehow I did; and again I thought that my brain would give way, for kill myself I must; and if *that* was true, it would not do to think any more; and so I got up and walked to the table. Now, Ellen, listen to me quietly; don't

agitate yourself in this manner; for God's sake be calm. If Alice should wake, what would she think?"

I struggled with myself, conquered my agitation, and made a sign to him to go on.

"Just as I was loading the pistol," he said, "some one knocked at the door; I instinctively seized on the case; and putting it into the bureau locked it up, and went to the door. I had expected to see the housemaid or my own servant, and almost staggered back when, on opening it, I saw Mrs. Tracy, Alice's grandmother. Her coming took me so entirely by surprise that I did not attempt at first to send her away, or to conceal from her that I was in a state of mental agitation. I sat down on the nearest chair, and stared at her in silence. She locked the door; and, sitting down opposite to me, said in a calm and perfectly resolute tone of voice:

"'Mr. Henry, you have done something dreadful to-night, and now you intend to do something worse; but you shall not.'

"I tried to rouse myself. I stammered out that she was out of her mind—beside herself; that I was busy, worried; that I begged she would go; that I insisted upon it; and I tried to work myself into a passion. She got up; and looking me full in the face, said sternly,

"'Don 't lie to me, Henry. I know you; I know what you have done; I know what you mean to do, but God has sent me to save you.'

"'None of your cant, Tracy,' I now exclaimed in a violent passion; 'leave me; this moment leave me.'

"'Mr. Henry,' she said, 'do you remember *this?*' and she put something into my hands.

"What a strange change is sometimes wrought in us in an instant, Ellen! It was a small picture of my mother—of her who died in giving me birth—of her whose image had often stood between me and temptation, and delayed the ruin it could not avert. I had given this miniature to Tracy, and had charged her to keep it for me on the day when I first left home for school. It brought back to my mind a train of childish recollections, and vague reminiscences, which completely overcame me. I pressed the picture to my lips. My pride gave way; tears burst from my eyes; and in that moment of emotion I confessed the whole truth to her. She had guessed it all before.

"Her brother had been aware for some time past how deeply I was involved in debt. He knew the state of my affairs, and that I neither possessed, nor had the means of raising a single shilling. Escourt, with whom he had some previous acquaintance, had informed him, as they met at the door of the office, that I had just paid him the large sum of £3,500. These facts, coupled with my paleness and incoherence; my pretending that the key was at my lodgings, while he perfectly knew that my father had given it me a moment before in the office; above all, my telling him that I was not going home, and appointing him for the next morning, while, by dodging me in the streets, he ascertained that I had gone straight home;—all this had left no doubt in his mind as to the state of the case; and his sister happening to be in town, and at his house, he had imparted to her his surmises. All this she repeated to me; and then, crossing her arms and standing before mo, she said, 'And now what is to be done?'

"Upon this followed a conversation, all the details of which I need not give you. It began by her suggesting a variety of plans for extricating me from my difficulties, each one more hopeless and more unfeasible than the other. It ended by her proposing an arrangement, which she had long previously had in contemplation, and which the events of that evening had only hurried into maturity.

"And now that I am arrived at this point in my history, Ellen, it is necessary that I should explain to you some circumstances which can alone account for this strange proposal. My sister has told you, I believe, that I owed my life as a child to this woman's unwearied devotion. The kind of passionate attachment which she showed me, and the influence of a strong though uncultivated mind, kept up in me an habitual regard for her which lasted beyond my childish years. When a boy at Eton, and even when I was at Oxford, I used often to write to her, and always to visit her whenever I went through London. On these occasions I always saw her beautiful little grand-daughter, whom she brought up in the strictest seclusion, and with the most anxious care. Even then, I detected the dawning of a scheme which she had evidently formed, and dwelt upon, and cherished, till it had grown into a passionate desire to see Alice married to me. She used occasionally to throw out hints on the subject, which I treated as jokes; and when she confided to me, two years before the time which I am speaking of, that her brother-in-law, an old miserly grocer at—, had left Alice £1,500, she looked anxiously into my face, and seemed disappointed at the indifference with which I received this communication, which she charged me to keep a secret. She lived so much alone, and the nature of her character was such, that whatever idea suggested itself strongly to her mind, took by degrees such a hold of it, that it absorbed all other considerations, and acquired a disproportionate magnitude. She admitted to herself no possibility of happiness for Alice but in a marriage with me. She had a superstitions conviction that

such an event was predestined: she had dreamt dreams and had visions on the subject, and would gladly, I believe, have sacrificed her life to accomplish it.

"When, therefore, by a singular train of circumstances, she found me in a situation of hopeless difficulty and danger, from which nothing but the immediate possession of a large sum of money could rescue me, she offered me Alice's fortune and hand; but annexed to this proposal the following conditions. She said—

"'Give me a written promise, signed by yourself, and witnessed by two persons whom I shall bring with me here, that you will marry her, when I call upon you to do so. Give me, besides that, a written statement of all the circumstances which have led to this arrangement between us. Let it be signed and witnessed in the same manner. Execute a deed, by which, in the event of your dying before this marriage takes place, Alice will be entitled to whatever you possess, and in which you will give me full sanction to reveal all the particulars of this transaction to your family, and call upon them to make up to me for the sum which I shall now place at your disposal. Give me your promise that Alice shall never, as long as she lives, be made acquainted with the circumstances which have led to this compact, and neither before or after her marriage have any reason to suppose that such an arrangement was entered upon. Do this, Mr. Henry, and by to-morrow morning £10,000, paid into your hands, will enable you to discharge your debts, and to reassume your position in the world.'

"I need not tell you, Ellen, how much my pride, how much my feelings, revolted against the sale of myself which this bargain involved, and, above all, how hateful it was to me to place myself in the power of this woman and of her brother; but situated as I was, there was no choice between death or disgrace on the one hand, and a blind acceptance of her conditions on the other.

"'I strongly remonstrated, however, against the second of her stipulations, which seemed to have no other object but that of keeping me continually in her power; but she was determined to carry this point; and at last I consented to give up to her the letter I had already written to my father, which, together with the other papers, to be drawn up the next day, made out a case against me, such as would enable her at any moment to expose me to the world, and blast my reputation. These papers are no doubt to this day in her possession. I have never offended or displeased her without her recalling this fact to my recollection. *Now* it signifies comparatively little to me whether she has destroyed them or not. I told her she was in honour bound to do so on the day I married Alice; but whether she has or not, I have not been able clearly to ascertain. *Now*, she cannot use them against me without doing an injury to her; and on this subject I have ceased to trouble myself. Well, she left me that evening, having, a second time, saved my life; and grateful I should have been to her, had it not been for the spirit of distrust, and hard bargaining, which she had evinced throughout, and which modified my gratitude in a way which I regretted myself. The next morning she returned with her brother, and a lawyer, who drew up my will, and saw me sign it, as well as my promise of marriage. John Harding looked gloomy and dark; he evidently disapproved of the whole affair, and thought his niece had the worst of the bargain, as I heard him muttering to himself; but he was always completely governed by his sister; and though he has since attempted to annoy me in different ways, he has never yet ventured to act for himself, except in that foolish attempt to frighten you at Brandon, which his son forced him into, and which he thought, if successful, might be more profitable to himself than the arrangement as it then stood. Now, Ellen, can you understand, that, after all this, in spite of Alice's beauty and of her merits (for I do not attempt to deny them), the idea of marrying her was always connected in my mind with so much that was painful and disgraceful in my past life, that I shrunk from it with a morbid repugnance, which I vainly tried to conquer?

"Now, Ellen—now I am come to the time when every feature of my history is closely connected with yours. Dearest Ellen, listen to me calmly; and if I speak of feelings which must not now be proclaimed to the world; if, in going over the ground which we once trod together, words of love and of regret escape my lips; forgive me! bear with me! and forget everything but that I have loved and lost you—that I deserve to be pitied."

After a pause, he said, "I have not asked you for a promise of secrecy; I am not afraid of being in *your* power; but, dear Ellen, there are facts which I am now going to reveal to you, which concern you personally; and yet which you must give me a solemn promise never to reveal to any one."

"If they concern me personally," I hastily replied, "surely I can decide for myself on that point; I will bind myself by no promise. You are not afraid of being in my power, and you are right; but you wish—forgive me, Henry, I must speak the truth—you wish to keep me in yours; and this is ungenerous."

"When you know the truth," he answered coldly, "you will retract this unkind accusation. If you intend, which I suppose is the case, to marry Edward Middleton, you are no doubt anxious to keep no secret from him; but I protest unto you, Ellen, that if you do marry him, especially in ignorance of the real nature of your position, you will bring upon yourself,—I said it to you once before,—incalculable

misery! You do not believe me,—I see you do not!" he exclaimed, with impatience; "but you *must* believe me if I swear!" and snatching up Alice's Bible from the table near us, he laid his hand upon it, and swore that he spoke nothing but the truth.

"I do not intend to marry Edward Middleton," I said; "I never will inflict upon him a wife, whose heart and whose life cannot be laid open before him. I would sooner die than reveal to him the dissimulation I have already practised, the threats I have heard from your lips, the words of love I have been compelled to endure from you,—from you, the husband of Alice, of whom you are as unworthy, as I am of him. No, I shall never be Edward's wife; I never will bring sorrow and disgrace upon *him*. I have stooped to deceit; I am entangled in falsehood; I must drink of the poisoned cup which you hold to my lips; but, with *you* at least, I will be true! Since there are to be no secrets between us, Henry Lovell, I will tell you what I have never told any human being; and that is, that I love Edward with all the powers of my soul; with all the passion, and all the tenderness, which outlives hope, and feeds upon despair!"

As this burst of wounded feeling escaped from me, I laid my hand on the sacred book before me, and, turning to Henry with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks, I said, "What are your conditions?—dictate them."

Again I saw in his face the fearful expression which recalled to me the scene on the sea-shore at—Bay.

"I make none," he replied, with a withering sneer; "I leave you to the tender mercies of those whom you love. When Edward learns, not from me, but from one who shares with me the secret of Julia's death, the details of that catastrophe; you may then seek for consolation and tenderness at his hands."

I saw, by a sudden change in Henry's countenance, how deadly pale, how dreadfully agitated mine must have been, for he looked almost as terrified as I felt; and, giving one rapid glance into the next room, he seized on some water that was on the table, and held it to my lips. I swallowed a few drops; and in a hoarse voice articulated—"Speak, speak!"

"Swear solemnly," he cried; "call God to witness, that you will never reveal to Edward the facts that I will now disclose to you, nor the history of Julia's death."

"I do; so help me God! and may He judge between you and me!
Speak, while I have strength to hear you!"

"Your strength is not likely to fail you," he retorted, with a sneer; "for your courage and your eloquence seem always equal to the task of braving and insulting me: when you hear what I have now to tell, perhaps you will regret the harshness of your language."

He paused for a moment, and then, in a more natural tone of voice, he said, "A few months after the occurrences which I related to you just now, I went to Elmsley. You know as well as I do in what way we spent that summer. You were grown into a woman: but you were still a child, a child in spirits, and in careless gaiety; and I scarcely thought of you but as such. I hardly was conscious of my own feelings, till I was enlightened as to their nature by the increasing dislike and repugnance with which I turned from the idea of my engagement to Alice. One day, to my great surprise, my sister told me that Mrs. Tracy had been with her to consult her as to her future abode; and, to my inexpressible annoyance, she also informed me that she had offered her the cottage at Bridman, and that she had readily accepted it. From the moment that I heard this, I was in continual dread of a meeting, that might bring to light our relative positions; for I still had a vague hope that something or other might occur to prevent the accomplishment of this hateful marriage. I wrote to Mrs. Tracy, to urge her, in the strongest manner, not to come to Bridman, a step which, I assured her, would answer to none of the parties. She instantly conceived the idea that I had fallen in love with you; and she wrote me letters full of the most violent reproaches and upbraidings; and, a short time after, having come alone to Bridman, to inspect the arrangement of the cottage, she walked over to Elmsley, and made her way to my room, unobserved, as it turned out, by any one in or about the house, with the exception of my own servant. *That* day," continued Henry in a hurried and nervous manner, "was the 15th of July. You know my room at Elmsley—the window was open—we heard voices and footsteps on the verandah—we looked out—I need not tell you what we saw—dreadful words burst from Tracy's lips—"

"O God! O God!" I exclaimed, as Henry paused in the excess of his agitation, "O God of mercy, my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Henry went on—"I know not what inspired me to act as I did. I locked the door of the room inside, and, springing from the window on to the verandah, and then down the bank, I was in a moment where at one glance I saw the hopeless result of what had occurred. I felt terrified for you—"

"Would to God!" I cried out in so loud a voice, that, with a look of terror, Henry laid his hand on my

mouth; "would to God!" I repeated in a lower tone, "that you had then proclaimed to them all what I had done. Would to God! that you had dragged me into my uncle's presence, and denounced me as—"

"Hush, hush, be quiet and listen to me: I rushed back to my room; I found Tracy pale with horror; and when I told her that the child was dead, she wrung her hands, and again cried out that you had killed her—murdered her. My rage then grew so dreadful, that it overpowered hers. You know, alas! you know, how fearfully I can give way to anger; but it must have been horrible that day, for that iron-nerved and ungovernable woman trembled like a leaf before me. I forced her to promise, that if you did not accuse yourself, she would never reveal what she had seen, or let it be known that she had been at Elmsley that day. I made her leave the house in secret, and laid the strictest commands upon my servant not to tell any one that she had been with me, which, as he evidently suspected me of a love affair with Alice, seemed to him quite natural. Hitherto she has kept her word to me; but I cannot conceal from you that no efforts of mine have ever succeeded in rooting out of her mind the conviction that Julia's death was not accidental. In the stupid and malicious obstinacy of her nature, she persists in believing that you intentionally removed the obstacle that stood between you and the eventual possession of Mr. Middleton's fortune. She had been unfortunately told by some of the servants of the house, at her previous visit to Elmsley, that there were constant disputes between you and Julia; and her suspicious jealousy on Alice's account had worked her up into such animosity against you, that she even then carried home with her the idea that you hated and persecuted my sister's child. She has, however, as I have already told you, kept her word to me; but there is one circumstance under which I am perfectly certain that she would break it; and that is, if, by a marriage with Edward, she saw you on the point of obtaining those worldly advantages, which she supposes that you sought in so dreadful a manner. She is haunted by the idea that Mr. Middleton will leave his fortune to you; and, by a strange mixture of vengeance and conscientiousness, she is really tormented by the belief that she is committing a heinous sin in keeping the truth from him; and the only way which I could find of calming her scruples, was by informing her of the conditions under which I happen to know that your uncle has settled his property, and by solemnly assuring her that you will never submit to them."

"Thank you," I answered coldly, and got up to go. Everything in that moment seemed turned to stone. I owed Henry an immense debt of gratitude according to this account, but not an atom of it could I show or feel. On the contrary, ail the evil in my nature was stirred up, and I felt more than I had ever done before, as if I hated him. Perhaps it was that he had proved to me what I had hitherto never in reality believed, though I had often said it to myself, and that was, that a barrier indeed existed between me and Edward, which no effort of mine could remove.

"Do not go yet," he said; "there is more that I must say to you. You have a right to ask me—"

"I have nothing to ask you," I hastily replied; "from the fatal hour when, by an unpremeditated act, I put the seal to the misery of my whole life; when by the most unfortunate union of circumstances, you and your tyrant became the witnesses of that act, I have lost the power of free agency—I have lost the power, the right to resent, what every woman should and does resent."

"Ellen!" exclaimed Henry, "your coldness, your calmness, make me more miserable than your violence did just now. Do not you *now* understand, why with tears, with threats, with supplications, with the energy of despair, I implored you to become my wife—and in secret? I thought you loved me; had I not a right to believe it, too? Had not your words and your actions given me that right? Once married to you, your fortune—(I could not say this to many women, but to you I can)—your fortune transferred to Alice freed me at least from that part of my engagement to her; and, as your husband, would I not have toiled day and night to supply its place? Would we not have both scorned all that calumniators, or enemies, could do against us? If in her anger Tracy had spoken out—which was not likely, when she saw nothing to be gained by it—would I not have carried you away from all that could have marred your peace? Would I not have cherished you, and worshipped you through life, and to the hour of death, and warded away from you every harsh word or unkind look? Ay!" he exclaimed suddenly, as I turned coldly away from him, "hate me as much as you choose, but do not set me at defiance! It is not Edward, your excellent, your conscientious lover, who would take to his arms, and cherish in his bosom—"

"Do not talk of *him*, Henry," I exclaimed; "do not for God's sake talk of him. I have told you already that I shall never marry him; I have made all the promises that you required. I am *here*, where I should not be, if I wished to set you at defiance; but in mercy do not taunt me; do not torture me by alluding—"

A loud rap at the door startled us both, and awakened Alice.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where cither I must live, or bear no life,
The fountain from which my current runs
Or else dries up—To be discarded thence!"

"I know his eye doth homage other where,
Or else what lets it but he would he here?
.....
Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
I'll weep what's left away and weeping die."

SHAKESPEARE.

The knock at the door, which had put an abrupt end to the long and painful conversation between Henry and myself, was soon followed up by a message from Mr. Middleton to say he was waiting for me at the door to take our afternoon drive. I kissed Alice hastily, rejoicing that the room was dark, and hurried down stairs. I found my uncle evidently much put out. Whether he immediately saw in my face traces of emotion which displeased him, or whether he had heard before something which had annoyed and irritated him, I could not at first discover; but I felt sure that he was working himself up to a scene, which, to say the truth, is a difficult business to a man of a naturally calm and even temper. We drove however for some time in silence, which was only broken by two or three attempts on my part to enter into conversation, he answered each of my remarks by a short yes or no; and as we turned back towards London, after having driven on for some time along the Paddington road, he suddenly said, "I really cannot understand how a girl, brought up as you have been, can conduct herself in the way you do. I am sorry to say so, Ellen; but you really are a thorough coquette—a regular actress."

"How so? What do you mean?" I stammered out. "What have I done?"

"I was not aware till to-day," he rejoined, "that you had refused Edward. It is strange enough that you should not have mentioned this circumstance, if not to me, at least to Mrs. Middleton, who, certainly, deserved your confidence; but I suppose you felt ashamed, and so you ought to be; for, after all the encouragement you gave Edward, after speaking, looking, and acting as you did during the month that he spent at Elmsley, none but a heartless flirt could have refused him." Weakened and agitated by the scenes I had gone through during the last twenty-four hours, I burst into tears at this harsh reproof. Mr. Middleton hated seeing a woman cry, and still more making her cry; but as he had made up his mind to treat me with great severity, my tears, by annoying him excessively, only added to his anger.

"I must also tell you, Ellen," he continued, "that I am shocked and disgusted at the manner in which you allow Henry Lovell to dance with you, and talk to you wherever you meet him. You sanction in this way his neglect of his wife; and, considering all the circumstances of the case, your conduct, in that respect, is unjustifiable. Pray, may I ask if he was at home during the four hours you have just passed in his house?" I coloured violently, and muttered that he was, but added, "Did not my aunt tell you that Alice had sent for me?"

"She told me," replied Mr. Middleton, "that *Henry* had requested one of you to go to her. She ought to have gone herself; but, considering how little in general you seek Mrs. Lovell's society, and that for days together you do not go near her, I should have thought that a shorter visit might have sufficed. But be that as it may, I positively declare to you, that unless there is an immediate change in your whole manner and way of going on, I shall forbid Henry my house, and lay my strictest orders upon you not to go to his. This may painfully enlighten Mrs. Lovell," he continued, "but it will be better for her to be thus enlightened, than for a coquette like you to be allowed to rob her of the affection of her husband."

"This is unjust, this is cruel," I exclaimed; "Alice herself is not more pure than I am from an indelicate thought, or an evil design. You wrong me; I do not deserve such language; and even from you I will not endure it. Forgive me, dearest uncle, forgive me; but indeed you do me a grievous injustice." I seized his hand and pressed it to my lips.

"Why did you refuse Edward?" asked my uncle, in a softened tone.

"Because I do not wish to marry; because I am certain that I could not make him happy."

"All humbug and nonsense," interrupted Mr. Middleton, angrily; "I only hope that he will soon make up his mind to give up all thoughts of you, and to marry…"

"Who?" I inquired, with breathless anxiety.

"A girl," answered my uncle, "who has good sense and good feeling sufficient to appreciate him as he deserves to be appreciated." As he said these words Mr. Middleton drew from his pocket a newspaper, and began reading it in that pertinacious manner which puts a full stop to any further conversation.

I would have given a great deal to have asked him if he had alluded to any particular person, or whether he was speaking in general; but I had not courage either to interrupt him or to begin upon the subject again. During the first part of our drive I had made a great many reflections and resolutions; amongst others, I had come to the determination that I would give up steadfastly and for ever, all thoughts of Edward as a husband, and content myself with the measure of kindness and regard, which, in spite of what had occurred between us he had not withdrawn from me. I hoped that this decision, consistently acted up to, would satisfy Henry, and induce him to treat me with consideration and respect. I had even formed a plan of prevailing on Mr. and Mrs. Middleton to leave London almost immediately; and in the idea of devoting myself to them, and to a life of domestic duties and charitable exertions, away from the two persons who, on different grounds and in different ways, I feared most in the world, a prospect, of tranquillity at least, offered itself to my mind. But unfortunately for me Mr. Middleton's last remark threw me into a state of agitation, which overturned in one instant all these visions of peace and self-denial. I could have made up my mind to give up Edward, but when it occurred to me that, at that very moment, he had, perhaps, given me up, and was on the point of attaching himself to another, the jealous pang that shot across my heart, proved to me that I would endure any suffering rather than passively resign my claim on his affections. This new anxiety superseded, for the time, all my other griefs and vexations, and the instant I got home I went to Mrs. Middleton's room, and tried to find out from her (what I had not ventured to ask my uncle) whether there was any particular person whom he wished Edward to marry. She assured me that she had not heard of anybody being in question for him; but added, that as Mr. Middleton was very anxious that he should marry, and as, to their great surprise and regret, they had heard that morning, that I had refused him, and so put an end to what she knew had been a favourite scheme of my uncle's, it was not improbable he might have formed some other project; and then, in a manner as kind as Mr. Middleton's had been harsh, she blamed and wondered over my apparent inconsistency and caprice. She did not, however, allude to Henry, or repulse my lame attempts at self-defence, with anything but a deep sigh and a melancholy shake of the head.

There was to be a ball the next night at a Mrs. Miltown's, a sister-in-law of Mrs. Brandon, And among my good resolutions bad been that of excusing myself, on some pretext or other, from going to it, for I did not know how to comply with Mr. Middleton's orders with respect to Henry, without irritating the latter in a way which I dreaded to encounter. What made me most uneasy was, that quite contrary to his usual habits, my uncle had announced his intention of going with us to this ball, and I could not help thinking that it was for the express purpose of watching me, and under his severe and observant eye, it would be next to impossible to convey to Henry the explanation which would account for my change of manner to him; but now that my whole soul was bent on finding out who the person was to whom my uncle hoped that Edward would devote himself, every other consideration gave way before that overwhelming interest. I could not have imagined beforehand to what a degree it would have harassed me. I felt as if the time that was to intervene between that evening and the next would be interminable; the images of Henry, of Alice, of Mrs. Tracy, faded away before the phantom which my imagination had conjured up, and it was with feverish impatience that I awaited the approach of that hour which I thought would confirm or dispel my fears. It came at last, as all hours do, whether they have been longed for with all the intensity of ardent expectation, or dreaded with all the anguish of terrified apprehension.

When I came down to the drawing-room, dressed for the ball, Mrs. Middleton exclaimed, "You look unlike yourself to-night, Ellen I Have you done your hair differently from usual? No" (she continued, as she passed her hand gently over my forehead)—"no, it is not that; I can't make it out: that darling face of yours changes often enough from sunshine to clouds, and from clouds to sunshine; but I never saw it look just like to-night."

I kissed her fondly, but said with some impatience, "Let us go—we are very late."

We went accordingly, and my uncle with us. When we entered the room, it was crowded to suffocation, and we made our way with difficulty to some seats, near which Mrs. Miltown and Mrs. Brandon were. Henry was talking to the latter when we came up to them; he gave me his chair, and ensconced himself in a corner behind us. I felt that Mr. Middleton's eye was upon me, and I entered into conversation in the most eager manner with Mrs. Brandon, in order to avoid speaking to him. He bore it for a little while; but soon touching my arm gently, he said in a low voice, "Come and dance; I want to speak to you."

I answered in the same tone, "No, I can't—don't ask me."

"Very well; you will explain this to me later," he rejoined, in a manner in which my penetration or my fancy detected something dictatorial, which annoyed and provoked me. Wherever I stood, whenever I danced, to whoever I talked during the next two hours, I felt conscious that his piercing eyes were fixed upon me with a scrutinizing expression which I could hardly bear. Added to this, I saw that Mr. Middleton, who knew nobody, and spoke to nobody, was concentrating all his powers of observation upon us both, and was watching him as pertinaciously as he watched me. At last, unable to endure this any longer, and grievously disappointed that Edward had not appeared, I asked Mrs. Middleton to go. She consented to do so, and we walked together into the tea-room on our way out. Henry followed us, and while his sister was speaking to some one else, he whispered to me in the bitterest tone imaginable, "Pray is this dead cut the result of our yesterday's conversation?"

"How is Alice to-night?" I asked with a trembling voice; for Mr. Middleton at that moment had joined us again and was standing by my side.

"Much better, thank you, and very anxious to see you to-morrow morning," he said in a pointed manner.

"That will be impossible," observed Mr. Middleton, coldly; "for we have promised to go to-morrow to Mrs. Moore's, at Hampstead, and we shall remain there two or three days."

A sudden cloud passed over Henry's countenance; but he said, in a manner which was meant to be careless, "I wish you joy, Ellen, of leaving London in this hot weather. The country will be delightful. I suppose it was at your desire that this arrangement was made?"

"No," I answered; "it was an agreeable surprise to me. I was not aware till to-day that my uncle knew Mrs. Moore so well, nor that she had a villa at Hampstead, nor that I was likely to see Rosa again so soon; and delighted I shall be to see her again."

"Oh, she is charming," answered Henry, in the same indifferent manner; "I always told you so. I wonder if you will have anything of a party. You will meet Edward there, I suppose; I saw him for a moment this morning, and he said he was going to the play with the Moores to-night."

He turned away, and whispered something to Mrs. Middleton which made her smile and answer, "It would do very well."

If there is in the varied range of human feelings one of pain, which in its mere *sensation* resembles joy, it is that of pouncing, if one may say so, on something tangible when the mind has been racked by a vague jealousy. It is like the relief which we feel when, after anger and indignation have been for some time smouldering in our breasts, at length they burst all barriers and find vent in words. At once I remembered that Rosa was, as Henry had said, charming—that she had a good fortune—that she was the most likely person in the world for Edward to admire, and for my uncle to approve of; and that very evening he was with her, with them all; he had preferred their society to ours; it was *sure*—it was hopeless—it was *too late*. Too late! that cry of bitter regret, or of agonized despair, whether it comes from the lips of those who lose all that makes to them life worth having, or from those from whose trembling grasp that same mysterious thing called life is escaping. It was too late to struggle—too soon to submit. Oh, that I had run all hazards—accepted all chances—braved all dangers but the one of losing him! If I had ever told him of my love—if I had revealed to him the depths of passionate affection which those only feel who love in spite of all that should make them tremble and despair! If I had done this but once, he might have forsaken me, scorned me, abandoned me, but he never would have forgotten me. Other eyes would have seemed to him without light—other smiles without brightness; in their tame affection, in their common-place regard, he would have missed what my proud heart and my eager spirit yielded him; all its prostrate enthusiasm—its impassioned humility—its boundless devotion; abject as a slave's, exalted as a guardian angel's.

"How do you do, dearest Ellen? how glad I am to see you again!
Will you let me introduce mama to you?"

The violent start that I gave as Rosa stood before me and addressed me in this manner, made her laugh, and the silvery tone of that little gay laugh grated upon my ear.

"Why, I have frightened you as much as the invisible men of
Brandon frightened me!" she exclaimed. "What fun that was,
Ellen! I am afraid we shall have no adventures at Hampstead,
but I'm so glad you are coming there to-morrow."

As Henry approached us she turned to him.

"How are you, Mr. Lovell? It is ages since we have seen you."

"You come so late," said Henry; "was the play so charming that you could not tear yourself away?"

"Oh, we should have been here long ago if your friend Mr. Middleton had allowed it; but when papa and mama, with their undramatic, unexcitable spirits, were preparing to go, he interfered so successfully that we carried our point, heard the very last words, saw the curtain drop—"

"And enjoyed it all very much?"

"Oh thoroughly—entirely! We cried at the tragedy and laughed at the farce, till I have no strength left for the dull bit of real life that's going on in the next room."

"Come, Ellen, the carriage stops the way," cried Mr. Middleton; and in a moment we were down the stairs and in the carriage. My aunt's first words as we drove home were, "How uncommonly pretty Rosa Moore is! There is something very attractive about her."

"Very," I answered; and there was something in the manner in which I pronounced this single word that made her try to get a glimpse of my face as we went by the next lamp-post. I threw my head back impatiently into the corner, and exclaimed, "Really, one does get tired to death with this going out night after night."

"Then I suppose you like the idea of our visit to Hampstead?"

"Oh, particularly! Who shall we meet, do you think?"

"Nobody but Edward, and one or two other men, Mrs. Moore told me to-night."

The carriage stopped and I went to bed, but not to sleep; not at least till I had tossed about for some hours, with a feverish pulse and a perturbed spirit.

The next morning ushered in one of those broiling days which destroy all one's energies, and take away all wish for motion and exertion. The shutters of the drawing-room were partly closed to exclude the rays of the sun; the smell of the flowers in the *jardinière* was almost oppressive, and the very cries in the street seemed uttered languidly, and without their usual shrill spirit. After breakfast I sat down at my drawing-table, and tried to finish a sketch of the inside of Westminster Abbey, which I had begun the day before. As I was preparing my colours and arranging my brushes, the door opened and Henry walked in. "Your sister is in her room," I immediately said; "I will tell her that you are here;" and I got up for the purpose.

"Really, Ellen," he said, "I suppose you are not going to behave to me now as you did last night. I protest to you that I cannot and will not bear it. I am come for the express purpose of seeking an explanation."

"Then go to Mr. Middleton, and ask him to give it you. After undergoing all that I suffered yesterday at your house; after leaving it with a throbbing head and an aching heart, I had to go through a scene with my uncle, in which my feelings were wounded to the quick and my pride cruelly humbled. What is all this to lead to, Henry? What do you expect? What do you require? I am accused of thoughts, of designs, of conduct, which are as foreign to my mind as they are abhorrent to my feelings; but if this is nothing to you—if you care neither for what I may suffer, or for what others may think of me, let me tell you that if at this moment Mr. Middleton knew that you were here—if last night he had seen me speak to you, or dance with you as usual, an order would be given at the door never to let you in again."

"He would not dare to insult me in such a manner," exclaimed
Henry with violence; "my sister would never endure it."

"He *would* do it," I repeated earnestly; "he is stern and uncompromising to a degree which, till latterly, I did not know myself; and if now—"

"He has hated and persecuted me from a boy; he is the original cause of all I suffer; he will drive me to some desperate act of guilt or folly before he has done; but, by God, if I am not revenged—"

"Hush, hush; you don't know what you are saying or doing," I cried, as he walked about the room in the most vehement agitation. "Be calm, I implore you. We are going out of town now for a few days; soon after that, we return to Elmsley. We shall be separated for a long while, Henry. Why will you not strive to conquer this unhappy, this fatal fancy? That I should be forced to speak of it—to acknowledge its existence—is dreadful enough; but do give me hopes, dear Henry, that you will try to overcome it; that you will endeavour to make Alice happy, and to find happiness yourself in your home, that when we all meet again, we may be happy together, and the miseries and agitations of this last terrible year may seem to us as a dream."

He did not answer, but I fancied he was touched by this appeal, and I went on: "I owe you much gratitude; I feel it, I acknowledge it. Perhaps I was hard and ungracious yesterday, when I ought to have been softened by your kindness; but how can I feel towards you what I wish to feel, while you speak and act in a way which you know you would despise me yourself if I did not resent?"

He interrupted me by abruptly inquiring if we were indeed going to Elmsley soon.

"Almost immediately, my uncle said this morning."

"For how long?"

"An indefinite time."

He knit his brows, and said, after a pause,—

"There is truth in what you said just now. We ought all to live happily together, and I have not taken the right means of promoting that end. I have been foolish, mad; I now see the consequences of it all. Ellen, speak to me often as you did just now; it soothes, it calms me. I see things in a different way from what I did a moment ago. O, dearest, best beloved! say to me sometimes, dear Henry, as you said it just now, and I will try to be to you, and for you, all that you can wish and desire. Open your heart to me without reserve, Ellen; if new difficulties present themselves to you, perhaps I may be able to serve you in cases where it might seem hopeless to apply to me—where you might suspect me of not even wishing to be of use to you. I cannot explain myself now, for you had better go and call my sister. After what you said had passed between you and Mr. Middleton yesterday, I feel that we must not remain here alone together. You see," he said, with a melancholy smile, "how reasonable I am grown. Go, dearest Ellen, but remember what I have said to you. For your sake I would make sacrifices, even," he added, in a low and tremulous voice—"even if your happiness required it, the greatest of all. Good-bye, dearest Ellen—God bless you!"

I left the room; and, was it strange that after this conversation, I left town for Hampstead, carrying away with me a better opinion of Henry than I had ever had before? Was it strange, too, that a vague hope arose in my heart, from the few words he had said, that my fate, with regard to Edward; might not be hopelessly sealed, if at least the hateful vision of his dawning attachment to Rosa Moore did not realise itself? Whether it was strange or not, the fact was so; and, in such a state of mind, at about four o'clock, I drove out of London, and in a short time arrived at the gates of Mrs. Moore's villa.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mark where she smiles with amiable cheer,
And tell me, whereto can ye liken it?
When on each eyelid sweetly do appear
An hundred graces as in shade to sit,
Liketh, it seemeth in my simple wit,
Unto the first sunshine in summer's day,
That when a dreadful storm away is flit,
Through the broad world doth spread his goodly ray.

SPENCER.

I do not know a pleasanter sensation than that of driving into the grounds of a country house or a villa, after a prolonged stay in London. The change is so sudden from oppressive heat, bad smells, and ceaseless noise, to bright sunshine, (for even the sun seems to be contaminated by all it shines upon in a large town,) pure air, delicious perfume, and the voices of the birds, who, I maintain, never sing so sweetly and so unceasingly, as within a few miles of London. The change is so great, that we feel more strongly than ever the value of that we have been voluntarily foregoing, at that time of the year.

Those days when summer supersedes the spring.
And smiling June's expanding roses fling
Their perfumed odours o'er the passing breeze,
That sweeps enamoured o'er the fairy trees;
When melody pervades the cloudless sky,
When streams of light intoxicate the eye,
And every waving branch, and leafy bower,
Bursts into song, or blossoms into flower.

As we got out of the carriage, and walked on to the lawn to meet Mrs. Moore, my eyes fell on a group, which not all the soothing effect of the change I have just described could enable me to look upon without disturbance.

On a swing, fastened by ropes to two horse-chesnut trees, stood Rosa, with a bright colour in her cheeks, a large straw hat loosely tied with blue ribbons, and her hair falling on her shoulders in rich curls, which the wind blew about in every direction. Three men were standing near her; two of whom (and Edward was one of them) were gently moving the ropes backwards and forwards, while she shouted out in that silvery voice, which, however loud, was always sweet, "Higher, higher still!"

When she caught sight of us, she sprang hastily down from her elevated position, and rushing to me across the grass, seized both my hands, and exclaimed in the eager tone of a child who offers his favourite toy to a new comer, "Should you like to swing?" I smiled, and shook my head; on which she drew me to a bench, and sitting down herself on the grass before me, began rattling away in her usual manner, at the same time making garlands of all the daisies within her reach.

As Edward and the two other men approached us, I recognised in one of them Mr. Manby; the other was unknown to me, but Rosa said carelessly, without looking up from her wreath, "Mr. Escourt,—Miss Middleton."

It immediately struck me, that this must be the very person who had played so conspicuous a part in Henry's unfortunate history; and my bow of acknowledgment was stiff and ungracious. That portion of Henry's narrative had made a deep impression upon me. The form of wickedness which I have always held in the greatest abhorrence, is a deliberate attempt to lead others into vice; and the efforts which this man had made to complete Henry's ruin, after having so largely contributed to bring it about, and the hypocrisy with which he had sought to conceal his malice, appeared to me instances of those crimes, which are not the less revolting because they do not render the perpetrator of them amenable to the laws. It was not in my nature to weigh with accuracy the correctness of such impressions, or to make allowances for the probable exaggeration of Henry's statement; but, if I had doubted before, one glance at Mr. Escourt's countenance would have been enough to dispel that doubt. I took a sudden and violent aversion to him. His was one of those calm faces that concealed the lurking devil of his malignity; there was a repulsive gentleness in his voice, and a detestable sweetness in his manner, which made me thoroughly comprehend the feelings Henry described himself to have experienced during the interview that had proved so fatal to him.

Edward's manner to me was more friendly perhaps than usual; it seemed in the same spirit as his last words in the breakfast-room in Brook-street. Little did he know all that had passed through my mind, and worked upon my feelings, since that time. I was almost angry with him for speaking to me so kindly and gaily; I fancied that it was since his new attachment, that he had ceased to look upon me with severity; that he had become indulgent, because he had grown indifferent; and the pain which this supposition gave me, involuntarily, though not unconsciously, influenced my manner to him; and I answered with irritation some trifling question which he addressed to me. As usual, when this was the case, he suddenly broke off the conversation; but, this time, instead of walking away, sat down on the other side of Rosa; and while Mr. Manby was plying me with the heaviest kind of small-talk, I heard her telling Edward one piece of nonsense after another, which made him laugh in a short, sudden, joyous manner, which had the effect of making me snub Mr. Manby, in a way which even his pertinacity was not proof against. He turned to Mr. Escourt, who was standing near him, and whose very disagreeable eyes had been fixed upon me for the last few minutes, and proposed to him a game at billiards. They walked away; and Rosa, turning suddenly round, and observing probably that I looked vexed and discomposed, asked me if I should like to see my room. I jumped up, and followed her to the house; she led the way up-stairs, and established me in a charming room; where, as soon as the door was closed upon her, I threw myself down on the couch, with a feeling of utter wretchedness and discouragement, differing from anything I had yet experienced.

The window was open; there were green trees close to it, the waving of whose branches I could see from where I was. Large nosegays of flowers were placed upon the table, and now and then the air from the garden dispensed the delicious perfume which it had stolen from a bed of mignonette. There was also that drowsy hum of insects, the very song of summer, which we love, not for its beauty (though there *is* beauty in its sleepy busy monotony), but for all it recalls; for all the associations it brings to our minds. I was very tired; and I remained some time on the sofa in a state of abstraction bordering on sleep. I was roused from it in about half-an-hour by some snatches of an old song, which sounded almost like the chirpings of a bird, so sweet, and wild, and unconnected was their melody. I jumped up from the couch, and went to the window; it looked on a small garden, closed in by a slight green railing. It was one mass of flowers, perfectly dazzling in their profusion, variety, and beauty. In the centre was a large cage made of trellis-work, within which creepers grew, and marble vases filled with fresh water stood. Dozens of birds,

"Whose starry wings
Bore the rich hues of all glorious things,"

were flying about it in giddy enjoyment. The love birds sitting quietly and lovingly together on a corner of the same perch, the weavers with their endless tails, the miniature dove, the cordon bleu, with his turquoise breast, and the little cardinal, with his self-sufficient pomp, were all there, and seemed to bathe and to fly, to eat and to drink, to love and to quarrel, as freely as if they still ranged through the boundless depths of their native woods.

And near them stood the singer of that wild melody, which had woke me from my short sleep. There she was like a little queen in the midst of her own fairy kingdom. She was dressed in a silk gown, whose train swept over the gravel walks as she moved slowly along. A berthe of the richest Guipure old lace was clasped on her breast by one single pearl pin; some sprigs of the deep red salvia were fastened in her hair. She held a large pair of garden scissors in her hand; and, as she walked along, she cut the dead flowers from the bushes, as she passed, and flung them aside; every now and then a fresh burst of song springing from lips which seemed only made to smile. She came nearer to the house; and, while cutting off a drooping moss-rose from its stem, she stood where the slanting rays of the evening sun threw a rich glow over her auburn hair and her blooming cheek.

I could hear now the words of her song, and recognised those lines of Montrose, the Hero and the Bard:

"My dear and only love, I pray,
That little world of thee,
Be governed by no other sway
But purest monarchy."

The dead rose, the song, those images of beauty and of joy, the connection of ideas which they suggested, were all too much for me. I turned back into the room, and, as I did so, I caught sight of myself in the standing looking-glass opposite. My pale face, my heavy dark eyes, my black uncurled hair, were before me; they seemed to tell my life's history; all, all its sad secrets were there; its love, its hate, its pride; its remorse, its anguish, and its despair.

I remarked that day at dinner that Mr. Escourt seemed particularly anxious to ingratiate himself with me, perhaps because I had seemed reluctant to allow him to do so, which with some men is apt to make them strain every nerve to succeed; but, as I decidedly repulsed all his attempts to make himself agreeable, he devoted his attentions to Mrs. Middleton, who seemed amused and interested by his conversation; and I was obliged to admit that he was clever, in spite of my antipathy to him.

It is unpleasant to meet in society a man, who we have secret reasons to know would be shunned by all those who value truth and honour, if certain facts were revealed, and the veil drawn aside which hides from the world his real character and conduct. And when those we love and respect speak of their regard for such a person, and call him their friend, it is difficult to repress the accusing words which tremble on our lips. Such thoughts passed through my mind as I sat at dinner that day watching Mr. Escourt, while he poured into Mrs. Middleton's ear his amusing anecdotes, and saw her look of interest as she listened to him. I felt it yet more when, after dinner, I heard my uncle invite him in the most cordial manner to Elmsley; and above all, when Edward addressed him as "My dear fellow," I gave a start of impatience which must have seemed unaccountable to Edward, who looked at me with unaffected surprise.

After dinner we all sat on the stone terrace before the house; and while I strove in vain to shake off the gloom which gathered over my spirits more darkly every hour, I could not disguise from myself that Rosa had never looked more lovely—had never appeared to greater advantage. Whether with perfect gravity and a genuine brogue she related, at Edward's request, the wonderful history of Daniel O'Rourke, who held on to the moon by its horns; or whether, on some remark of Mr. Escourt's on the subject to which all her feelings were alive, in a few words of rapid and fervent eloquence, she spoke of the sufferings and the wrongs of Ireland, of its injured honour, its misrepresented creed: whether with the joyousness of a child she showed off the tricks of her little dog by the side of the garden lake, or, stepping into the boat which was made expressly for her use, she seized her oars and rowed us across like the Lady of Loch Katrine: in each movement there was grace; in each mischievous glance there was playfulness; in each word there was animation; and Edward laughed gaily, or listened with interest, while even Mr. Middleton seemed excited and amused.

When we returned into the house, Mr. Manby asked Rosa to sing; and as we all pressed her to do so, she sat down at the pianoforte, and sang in succession English ballads, Irish melodies, and Jacobite songs, which last she seemed to take particular pleasure in. During a pause, Mr. Escourt said,

"Pray, Miss Moore, what was it you were singing to-day before dinner, in your own garden? Something very wild and pretty."

"Did you detect me making a noise?" she asked with a smile; "a shocking noise, my little brother calls it. He did not wish to find fault with me himself the other day, so he whispered to me while he was playing with some wooden animals, 'Rosa, these deer say to me that you make a shocking noise.' But this is what you mean, I suppose," and she began Montrose's love-song.

"This may be all very well," exclaimed Mr. Escourt, when she had sung it, "for a man who fights and writes verses; who carries, as he says, a sword and a pen, as should his mistress discard him, he would no doubt console himself with that same sword and pen: but I should think, with nine women out of ten, a dismissal would be the result of so very dictatorial a declaration. With, only listen to him:" and he repeated the following lines:—

"Like Alexander I would reign,
And I would reign alone;
My soul did evermore disdain
A rival in my throne,
He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.

Would you stand this, Miss Moore?"

"Why," she said, as her fingers ran carelessly over the keys, "I should not feel much inclined to let Alexander reign *at all;* but I should not quarrel with him for choosing to reign *alone*. Would you, Ellen?"

"No," I answered, "only for believing it possible that he did *not* reign alone."

I involuntarily turned my eyes towards Edward's as I said this. They met his, and their expression was so earnest and affectionate that a thrill of pleasure ran through me.

Mr. Escourt laughed and said,

"Why, you would have your hero still more convicted than he is. To my mind,

'I'll never love thee more,'

is, under any circumstances, the most impertinent speech a lover can make, and one which no woman ought to forgive."

"Oh, indeed[]" exclaimed Mr. Manby, "I am quite like Montrose, I would never care for a woman who did not love me above all things."

"Nor make her famous by your pen, nor glorious by your sword?" murmured Rosa, as she bent over the music-books.

Edward smiled; but this time it was my eyes he sought; and by my side he sat down, when we left the pianoforte and went into the next room.

I will not minutely record the details of our proceedings, or of the various alternations of hopes and fears which agitated me during the next few days. Sometimes when Edward spoke to me, his voice had a tone, his eyes an expression, which made me forget for an instant everything but what I heard in that tone and read in those eyes; and the ecstacy of such moments made the contrast darker and bitterer each time, when, under the influence of my secret misgivings, or of my jealous pangs, that flash of transient joy gave way before the gloom which suddenly succeeded it. Mrs. Middleton had taught me to tear away the veil from my own thoughts and feelings—to be true to myself, and merciless to my own illusions; and therefore, though I could sometimes read love in Edward's eyes,—though I could see, that when an expression of strong feeling escaped me, it awoke emotion in his soul, and struck a chord which vibrated to the touch; I could also see the struggle which he made to master and repress these feelings. I saw well his deep appreciation of the pure and unsullied truth of Rosa's character. When her eyes were fixed upon him with the bold simplicity and innocent daring of one

"Who feared no danger, for she knew no sin,"

I have seen him turn to me with an earnest gaze of thoughtful inquiry, which I dared not meet but by a mute appeal for mercy. I had heard him murmur in a low voice one evening, in which storms of

jealous anger and gloomy abstraction had swept over my soul and clouded my brow, I heard him murmur, as Rosa's joyous laugh reached our ears,

"O, blest with temper, whose unclouded ray
Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day!"

I had heard this, and yet I did not hate her. No, God be praised, and I bless him for it! not all my sufferings, not all my faults, not even the tortures of jealousy itself, have robbed me of that one pure emotion, that one spontaneous impulse—instinctive homage to what is pure, admiration of what is good. But how I envied her the privilege of truth! how bitterly I contrasted her fate with mine! when, one day, I saw her snatch up her little sister to her knees, while Mr. Escourt was asserting that there was no one who would willingly consent to lay open their thoughts to another, and devouring her with kisses, exclaim, "Now, Minny, you know I should not mind if you could read every one of my thoughts."

At the outset of this history of myself, and of my sufferings, I had to gather strength for the task: one fatal day stood out in dreadful prominence; and to describe it was to live over again its agonising hours. Again I feel the same kind of emotion; again I must pause; for I am arrived at that moment which dragged me down a step lower into the abyss which I had seen from afar off, and from which I had vainly struggled to recede. For days, for weeks, I have shut up this book, and put it aside as an enemy whose sight I feared; but, like the rattlesnake, this very fear fascinates and subdues me; and as the stern spells of memory cannot be conjured away, they must be braved and conquered.

CHAPTER XV.

"'La douleur a trahi les secrets de son âme,
Et ne nous permet plus de douter de sa flamme."

RACINE.

"Cet Hymen m'est fatal, je crains et le souhaite,
Je n'ose en espérer qu'une Joie imparfaite.
.....
Que je meurs s'il s'achève ou ne s'achève pas."

CORNEILLE.

One morning, after we had been a few days at Hampstead, I felt the greatest wish to slip quietly out of the house and stroll about alone for an hour or two. I had been in the habit of doing so at Elmsley, and I found nothing so effectual as this in subduing agitation, and recalling my mind to a state of composure. After making the tour of the grounds, walking round the lake, and dawdling some time in the shrubberies, I opened a small gate into a lane which led towards the common. This lane was scarcely wider than a path, and was only divided from the grounds of the villa by a ditch and a slight railing. I was intently occupied in examining an ant's nest, and the various evolutions performed by its black citizens on the sudden fall of a snail among them, which had dropt off a branch of dog-roses while I was gathering it, when all at once a sound as of many people running, joined to loud cries and vociferations, caught my ear. There was something ominous in the noise, and my heart beat quick as I looked with a mixture of fear and curiosity towards the end of the lane which opened on the heath. The noise increased; and suddenly round the corner and into the lane dashed a dog, followed by several men armed with pitchforks, and shouting. The appalling cry of "A mad dog! a mad dog!" struck distinctly upon my ears, and brought a deadly faintness over my limbs, and a cold sweat on my forehead. I tried to run, and my strength utterly failed me. I tried to scream and could not. The animal was coming nearer and nearer. I clung to the railing; the shouts grew louder: "Get out of the way!—a mad dog!—get out of the way!" Two more seconds, and the beast would have been upon me, with swollen tongue, glaring eye, and foaming mouth, when, quick as lightning, across the ditch, and over the railing, sprang Edward, with a face as pale as a sheet, and almost convulsed with terror. The dog was close to me; he seized it, flung it across the hedge into a pond on the other side, and dragged me to the grounds, and up to a bank, on which he placed me. For a moment I closed my eyes, overpowered by the terror I had felt, and the sense of escape from it; but I heard Edward murmur, in a tone of anguish, "Good God, what shall I do?" I opened my eyes and looked up into his face; it was so dreadfully pale that I exclaimed, "You are ill, very ill; for God's sake sit down."

"No," he answered, "no; now that you are better, it is all right; I will go home and send somebody to

you."

"I can go now," I said; "I can walk." But what was it I saw at that moment on the ground before me? There were spots of blood on the gravel! There was blood on Edward's sleeve! Sudden as the flash that rends the skies, as the bolt that blasts the oak, the truth burst upon me! I neither shrieked nor swooned; the very excess of anguish made me calm. On Edward's hand was the fatal scar. I seized his arm, and so quickly and suddenly, that he neither foresaw nor could prevent the act. I pressed my lips to it, and sucked the poisoned blood from the wound. When he tried to draw his hand from my grasp, I clung to it and retained it with the strength which nothing but love and terror can give.

When, at last, by a violent effort he disengaged it, I fell on my knees before him, and clinging to his feet, in words which I cannot write, with passion which no words can describe, I implored him by that love which had been the torture and the joy of my life, its bane and its glory, to yield again his hand to me that I might save his life as he had saved mine. As he still refused, still struggled to get away, I seized on the blood-stained handkerchief with which I wiped my mouth, and eagerly clasping it to my bosom I exclaimed, "*This*, if you leave me, shall make me run the same risks as yourself. If there is poison in *this* blood it shall mingle with mine."

An expression of intense emotion passed over Edward's face in a moment, and his resolution suddenly changed. He sat down on the bench and held out his hand to me. "Do what you will," he said. "Nothing but death shall part us now."

There was such thrilling tenderness, such intense feeling in these few words, such belief in me, that, as I sank on my knees by his side, and pressed my lips again on that hand, now passive in my grasp, while with the other he supported me as I knelt; as he fixed his eyes in silent but ardent affection on mine, there was such a suspension in my soul of everything but deep, boundless, inexpressible love, which thrilled through every nerve, and absorbed every faculty, that I could have wished to die in that state of blissful abstraction...

The blood had ceased to flow; the task of love was over, and still I knelt by Edward's side; still his arm supported my head; still he murmured words of tenderness in my ear—when we were roused by the sudden approach of Mr. Middleton, who, having heard of the pursuit, and of the death of a mad dog in the immediate vicinity of the grounds, had been anxiously looking out for me. I started hastily from my kneeling position, but Edward still kept his arm round me; and turning to my uncle he gave him, in a few words, an account of what had occurred, of my danger, of his agony, when, from the fishing-house, he saw the imminence of that danger, of my escape through his means, of the bite which he had received as he seized on the dog, and of the manner in which I had drawn the poison from the wound. "She has done by me," he said with a voice which trembled with emotion; "she has done by me what Queen Eleanor did by her husband; but when I suffered her to do so, she had confessed what makes me happier, on this day of terror and anxiety, than I have ever been on any other day of my life. Wish me joy, Mr. Middleton, of the dearest, of the tenderest, of the most courageous, as well as of the loveliest bride that ever man was blest with."

As Edward finished these words, his arms drew me closer to him, and he kissed my cheek, which had grown, during the last few seconds, as pale as it had been crimson a moment before; and it was not love that now blanched my cheek, and made me tremble in a way which made the support of Edward's arm a matter of necessity. It was not the emotion of happiness that kept me as silent as the grave, when Mr. Middleton fondly kissed me, and blessed me for what I had done, and for what I had acknowledged. My uneasiness grew so evident that both my uncle and Edward were suddenly struck with the same fear. It occurred to them both, at the same time, that I was ill from the terror I had undergone, and the exertion I had made; both led me towards the house with anxious solicitude, and with the tenderest care. A change had come over Edward's manner; he too looked dreadfully ill, and the nervous tension of his usually calm features was painful to see. They carried me up to my room, and when I was laid on the bed, Mrs. Middleton's dear voice and tender kisses occasioned me a burst of crying, which relieved the intolerable oppression under which I was labouring. My uncle took Edward almost by force out of the room, and Mrs. Middleton followed them, after placing my maid by my bedside. She returned in a few moments, and by the direction of the doctor, who had been sent for, she gave me a nervous draught, and kept me as quiet as possible. I grew calmer, but my tears continued to flow in silence. I did not see my way before me; it seemed to me that suddenly, involuntarily, almost unconsciously, I had become pledged to Edward, that our engagement might at any moment be proclaimed to the world, and the dreadful results which I knew would follow, stared me in the face; and yet how to retract—what to say—what to do, was a difficulty which I saw no means of surmounting, and every kind of congratulatory whisper of Mrs. Middleton, which was meant to soothe and gratify me, threw me into inexpressible agitation, as it showed me that Edward, my uncle, and herself, considered me as much pledged to him, and our marriage as much the natural result of the acknowledgment, which in that hour of anguish and of terror had escaped from me, as if the settlements had been signed

and the wedding-day named.

Towards evening I fancied that I saw on Mrs. Middleton's countenance an expression of uneasiness, as she came into my room; and, with trembling anxiety, I asked her how Edward was.

"He is not well; but nothing to make us uneasy," she added, as she observed the look of terror in my face. "What you so courageously did, dear child, and the subsequent searing of the scar, which, as a measure of further precaution, was done, have entirely secured him from any danger of that dreadful kind; but the exertion, the agitation, and the operation itself, which was very painful, have brought on some fever, which it will require care and prudence to subdue."

This new anxiety diverted my thoughts, for the time, from the difficulties of my own position, and I roused and exerted myself in order to be allowed to leave my room, the solitude of which I dreaded in my present state of restless excitement; but society seemed to me still more trying when I had to encounter it. I could hardly bear to hear the occurrences of the day discussed. Everybody was informed of what I had done; and the praises which were bestowed on my courage and presence of mind, were uttered with smiles and tones which proved to me, that if they were not aware of all the circumstances of the case, it was at least sufficiently evident that the feelings which had prompted me at the moment had been attributed to their true cause. Rosa, especially, tormented me by allusions and playful attacks, which I could hardly bear with patience; and at last I showed my annoyance in so marked a manner, that she abstained from any farther reference to the subject.

Later in the evening, when the doctor came again, he found Edward's fever much increased; and when this intelligence was brought to the drawing-room, Rosa showed true and warm sympathy in the anxiety which I could no longer conceal.

A few minutes afterwards, Mrs. Middleton beckoned me out of the room, and told me that Edward was in a state of intense nervous irritation, which was the more extraordinary, from its contrast with his usual calm and quiet disposition. "He is quite unlike himself," she continued, "and can hardly be persuaded to submit to the necessary restraint which the doctor prescribes. He says he *must* see you, and speak to you, this evening; and insisted on getting up and coming to the drawing-room. At last, I persuaded him to lie down again on his couch, by promising that you should come to him. After what passed between you this morning, there can be no objection to it. Only, remember, dear child, that everything you say to him must be calculated to soothe and calm him, for Dr. Nevis says that he could not answer for the consequences of any agitation or sudden emotion at this moment. This it was that determined me to come and fetch you, when I saw him so feverishly anxious to see you; especially, as now, I am sure, that you can have nothing to say to him that will not have a tranquillising effect on his nerves, and help to give him a good night's rest, which is the greatest possible object in his present state."

As my aunt talked on in this manner, while she led the way to Edward's room, I could not summon courage to object to this visit, till when we got near to the door, I drew back and whispered to her, "Indeed I had better not go in; after what occurred this morning, considering all things, it may agitate him to see me. Indeed, indeed, it will be better not." Mrs. Middleton looked at me with surprise, "Have I not told you, Ellen, that he has been working himself into a fever, from his anxiety to speak, to you? The only chance of calming him is by yielding to this wish, and I assure you," she continued in an earnest manner, "it may be more important than you seem to think, to accomplish this. The consequences may be very serious, if this fever and nervous agitation should increase."

As she said these words, without any further discussion she opened the door, and I found myself in another moment seated by Edward's side, his burning hand in mine, and his eyes fixed upon me with that intense and overstrained expression which fever gives.

"Dearest Ellen," he exclaimed, as Mrs. Middleton left the room, "I am unreasonable, and ashamed of myself, but I could not rest, or have a moment's peace, before I had again heard from your lips the blessed assurance, that all that made me so happy this morning, in spite of our fears and anxieties, was not a dream. Say it was not, dearest."

"It was no dream," I answered, in a low voice, "but we must not speak of such dream-like things to-night. When you are well—"

"I am well now," he interrupted, "if you relieve my mind from a vague fear that has haunted me ever since. Ellen, there is no obstacle to our marriage, is there? You will be my wife? You do not answer; you do not speak?"

His hand, which held mine, trembled, and he grew paler still than when I had entered the room. Terrified at his agitation, I lost the last opportunity of retracting, and murmured, "Yes, yes, dearest

Edward, I will be your wife.—May God in Heaven bless you, and forgive me!" internally added; "and now that I have set your mind at rest," I said with a forced smile, "I will leave you."

"Leave me!" he rejoined, "now that you have made me happier than words can express! No; don't leave me now, my Ellen, my darling Ellen; whom I have loved since the days of childhood; whom I have watched with an earnest anxiety, that has made me, I will own it now," (he kissed my hand tenderly as he said this,) "often unreasonable—often unjust."

"No, no!" I exclaimed, "that you have never been."

"Yes I have, Ellen," he continued, with earnestness; "though I saw much in your voice, in your countenance, and in your manner, that made me feel I was not indifferent to you; still I was tormented with doubts and with jealousies, which were unworthy of you and of myself. What I now see was only pity and kindness for others, I construed into causes for suspicion: what I now feel was forbearance and delicacy of feeling on your part, I called *deceit*. I thought you deceitful; I called you deceitful: yet my own heart contradicted me, Ellen: for it would never have loved you, clung to you, as it has done, had you not been true, truer in your changeable moods and unguarded impulses, 'than those that have more cunning to be strange.' No, my dearest, my precious love! if falsehood or deceit had ever stained those dear lips of yours, if they had ever sullied the purity of your spotless nature, my love would have vanished, and my heart hardened against you. The very strength of my own affection pleaded for you, when appearances, or my own jealous feelings, accused you. Will you forgive me, dearest?"

"Forgive you!" I exclaimed, while a choking sob rose in my throat, "God knows—"

"I do not doubt you," he eagerly cried; "I do not ask you to explain or to reassure me. Have I not already acquitted you, and accused myself? I should be a wretch, my Ellen, if, after having received from you the greatest proof of lore which a woman could give, the shadow of a doubt could remain on my mind, of the purity and of the strength of your affection. Do you think, my own love, that I should have suffered you to give me that proof of unexampled devotion, had I not believed and felt that you were then suffering the agony of apprehension, which I had suffered a moment before? that your love was great as mine, and that is saying everything; for I feel now, Ellen, that to lose you would kill me."

I laid my head on his shoulder, and murmured a few words of tenderness in his ear. My heart was swelling, and my head was dizzy. Three times, while he had spoken, I had been on the point of breaking out into vehement denials, and passionate self-accusations; and each time the doctor's warning, confirmed by Edward's tremulous voice and eager hurried manner, so different from his usual composure, checked the words on my lips, and thrust back into my bosom the remorse and shame which overwhelmed me. Yet, in the midst of all this suffering and this shame, there was a joy which, like a meteor in a stormy sky, illuminated at moments the darkness with which it struggled; and, to drown the voice of conscience, I repeated to myself, that in spite of the deceit I had practised under the influence of what I deemed an irresistible fatality, there was truth, there was reality, in the ardent affection which I bore to him whose hand I held, and against whose breast my burning forehead was laid, as if I sought there a refuge from the world, from myself, and from my own upbraiding memory.

After a pause, but in a voice of perfect confidence and tenderness, Edward said to me, "Why would you not marry me three months ago, dearest? Did you think that my love was not great enough, or was yours not yet—?"

"Oh, no," I interrupted; "such love as mine is not the growth of a few days; but ask me not to explain the waywardness, the strange inconsistency of a character, which you, wise and good as you are, can never perfectly understand."

There passed a slight cloud over Edward's countenance at that moment, but it was only for an instant; and in the gentlest manner he said, "Perhaps I may never quite understand you, Ellen, but I can always trust you. You have always been unlike everybody else, particularly unlike me, with my matter-of-fact stubbornness, and that is probably why you bewitched me against my will; and in spite of all my resolutions," (he added, with a smile,) "I suppose I never have quite understood you; but to admire blindly and ardently what we least understand, is one of the peculiarities of human nature; so you must e'en admit this excuse."

Again he kissed my hand with the fondest affection; and then at my earnest request he suffered me to leave him. Before I went, I told him that while we were staying at the Moores' I was anxious that our engagement should not be openly acknowledged, as in so small a party, and with people whom I knew so little intimately, it was pleasanter to me not to have to talk over the subject. He submitted to my wish, and I left him to go to my own room, and devise there some means of escaping from the difficulties in which I had entangled myself more fatally than ever.

It was not till in the silence of the night I sat alone and undisturbed, that I realised to myself the occurrences of the day, or saw in its full force the importance of what I had done. There I sat, Edward's affianced wife; and any moment after this fact was made public, my persecutor might seek him or Mr. Middleton, and tell them that but for me, Julia would be still alive; and when summoned to deny the foul charge, and confound the vile calumniator, should I say, "Yes, I struck the helpless child in my anger, but I meant not to kill her; I have buried the secret in my heart; day by day I have received her father's blessings, and her mother's kisses, in hypocritical silence. I have listened, Edward, to your words of love; I have promised to be your wife, with a lie in my mouth and deceit in my heart; but now I am found out, and I implore mercy at your hands; and that you will believe me when I say, that I did not mean to kill my cousin;" and may be, (I exclaimed, interrupting myself with a burst of anguish,) may be, he would not believe me! There is no medium in Edward's judgment when truth is concerned; implicit confidence on the one hand, unmitigated condemnation on the other. Oh! how dreadful it would be to meet his eyes, from which love would have vanished, and to feel that no protestations, no appeals, could reach his heart; hardened, as it would be in that hour, against the miserable deceiver who had usurped its tenderness and betrayed its trust.

After an hour of harassing indecision I determined to consult Henry, and sitting down at a table near the open window, I wrote to him the following letter:—

"The last time I saw you, my dear Henry, you gave me reason to hope that I might in future consider you as a friend. You bade me open my heart to you, and seek your aid when new difficulties should beset my path. The moment is come when I must do so, and if you will not, if you cannot, save me, nothing can. I once told you, that I never intended to marry Edward; and, believe me (you know I have ever spoken the truth to *you*, Henry, even at the risk of rousing your utmost anger); believe me, when I say that *then*, and even as late as twelve hours ago, such a resolution was the steady purpose of my soul. An involuntary, spontaneous acknowledgment of affection, which escaped me in a moment of imminent peril to him, incurred in rescuing me from a similar peril, was followed by an assumption on his part, that our marriage was to be the natural result of such a confession. My uncle considered it in the same light; and I found myself involved in an engagement, which, in cool blood, I could never have contracted. An attack of illness, resulting from the events of the morning, has since kept Edward in a state which would have made any extraordinary emotion dangerous in the extreme. Against my will, and at the same time, impressing this warning upon me, my aunt took me to him, and in terror for his health, with outward calmness, and inward shame and misgivings, I gave the promise, which must lead to my ruin, unless you can save me. I do not ask your aid, Henry, as a girl who wishes to marry her lover, and frets at the obstacles in her way. No; if at this moment I could cancel the events of this day, and place myself again in the position in which I stood yesterday, I would do so; but, as it is, on cither side, I see nothing now but disgrace and misery; and from these I implore you to rescue me. I do not know how far you have the power to do so. I cannot help thinking that your influence with that terrible woman must be great; hitherto I have doubted your willingness to exert it in my behalf; but, in the circumstances in which I now stand, I feel a strong confidence, that what you can do for me, you will do. I have obtained from Edward, that our engagement shall be kept a secret for a few days, which will give you time to act in my behalf, and to communicate with me on the subject. Obliged to conceal the torturing anxiety of my soul from those about me, miserable in the midst of what ought to be my happiness, I feel some comfort in speaking openly to you, and in looking to you for aid, for consolation, and for sympathy. *You* know my sufferings; *you* know my guilt and my innocence, my life's deceit, and my soul's truth. *You* will pity me; *you* will help me; and, in this hope, I make my appeal to you.

"E.M."

I debated some time with myself, as to the means of sending this letter unobserved and undetected. After a few minutes of anxious consideration, I recollected that Mrs. Hatton (the companion of my journey to Dorsetshire the year before) was staying with her sister, the wife of a surgeon, in London; and it occurred to me, that, by inclosing it to her, and requesting her to put it herself into Henry's hands, I should attain my object, and expose myself to no risk of discovery, as I could rely upon her discretion, and was certain that she would put only the most benevolent construction on my strange request. I accordingly wrote to her these few lines:—

"My dear Mrs. Hatton,

"As you are the kindest person in the world, I am sure you will not be angry with me for giving you a little trouble. Do me the kindness to take this letter yourself to Henry Lovell, and give it into his own hands; and do not mention to any one that I have entrusted you with this commission, as it would defeat my purpose if it was known that I had written to him, or heard from him, in reply. He will probably entrust you with his answer; and I cannot say how much obliged to you I shall be for

undertaking this little commission.

"Yours, dear Mrs. Hatton, very truly,

"E.M."

As I sealed these two letters and directed the cover to Mrs. Hatton, I felt that for the first time I was stooping to positive artifice, and that, too, at the very moment when Edward's words were still ringing in my ears. Disgusted with myself, I threw down my pen; and, turning my flushed cheeks and aching head to the window, I tried to catch the night breeze, which was gently rustling among the leaves of the catalpas. When I went to sleep that night, it was to dream over and over again that I was reading Henry's answer to my letter; sometimes it was such as to drive me to despair; sometimes it exceeded my most sanguine hopes; each time that I awoke I glanced at the table on which mine was lying to convince myself that nothing real had hitherto justified these alternations of fear and hope—that made me feel in the morning as if I had gone through a life of agitation, instead of a few hours of restless sleep.

When my maid came in to call me I told her to put my letter into the post-bag, and sent her to inquire how Edward had passed the night. The answer which she brought me was, that the fever still continued strong, but that Mr. Middleton seemed calmer and more composed than the day before; "more comfortable like," was her expression.

I dressed myself hastily, and finding that my aunt was not yet awake, I went down into the garden, and walked to the spot where my fate had been sealed, for good or for evil I know not yet. As I looked upon the bank where Edward had placed me out of reach of so appalling a danger—as I stood again on that spot where I had seen his blood on the ground—as I knelt against the bench where we had sat together, and hastily murmured over the form of prayer, which I was accustomed to utter more as a sort of charm than as a direct address to God—I felt *then* that to part with him would be, after all, the worst misfortune that could befall me, and a kind of fierce resolution came over me to struggle to the last—to marry him in spite of all dangers; and even the devil whispered to me at that moment that if denounced and accused I might still deny the charge; accuse my accuser in her turn; charge her with having invented a calumnious lie, and with Henry's aid (which one look, one kind word, from me could command) ride off triumphantly, and defy them all. But as the thought passed through my mind, I shuddered at the rapid strides I was making in falsehood, and felt a horror of myself which I can hardly describe. There was I, kneeling in mock homage before God (that God who had saved both Edward and myself from a fate worse than death), while bad passions were raging in my soul, and thoughts of evil working in my mind.

The posture of prayer, the words which I had mechanically uttered, brought on one of those sudden and unaccountable revulsions of feeling which sometimes succeed the fiercest assaults of the tempter, as if our guardian angel had wrestled with the spirit of evil, and driven him away for the time. I remembered her to whom much was forgiven because she had loved much; and as I thought of that Saviour—that man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, at whose feet she knelt—ay, even while seven foul fiends were struggling in her heart, I longed to kneel before Him too in deep prostration of spirit, and lay all my sorrows, all my sins, all my difficulties, at His sacred feet, bathing them as she did with tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. Oh! if in that moment of emotion, in that hour of penitence, I could have gone to one of those, who, ministering at God's altar, and endowed with His commission, have authority from Him to pronounce words of pardon in His name; if the fatal barrier which habit and prejudice so often raise between the priest of God and the erring and overburthened souls committed to his charge, had not in my case existed; if from his lips I could have heard the injunction to forsake all and follow Jesus, and he had added, "Do this and be forgiven," it might have changed my fate. But, as it was, my penitence spent itself in unavailing tears, and my yearnings towards a better course ended in the same bewildering and oft-repeated question, which I could not, dared not, answer to myself, or for myself: "Where lies the path of duty through the intricate maze in which guilt, misfortune, and weakness have so hopelessly entangled me?" Once more I rose from my knees, without any fixed purpose, without any steady resolution; the creature of circumstance, and the sport of events.

As I was walking back to the house, I met Mr. Escourt, who joined me, much to my annoyance. After a trifling remark or two, he, apparently as if by accident, mentioned Henry Lovell; I answered coldly, but was conscious that I coloured; more, however, from the recollection of the part which he himself had acted towards him than from any other reason. He fixed his scrutinising eyes upon me, and evidently remarked that something had moved me.

"He is married, is not he, and to a very beautiful woman?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lovell is very pretty."

"I had heard of his marriage," he continued, "but had doubted the truth of the report, from seeing him so constantly about in the world unaccompanied by a wife."

He looked at me inquiringly; but as I said nothing in answer, he went on:—

"I met them walking one day; and by Jove, if he is of a jealous turn of mind, he does well to shut her up. A more beautiful creature I never set eyes upon. Is she clever?"

This was one of those trifling questions which it is particularly disagreeable to answer, especially when put by a person with whom one wishes to converse as little as possible. Alice was not clever according to the common acceptation of the word; and to explain to a hardened man of the world in what consisted the superiority of her understanding, seemed to me like throwing pearls before swine; but in this I was mistaken; for when I answered, "I cannot exactly say whether she is or not," he immediately replied,

"I think I can guess at your meaning. She has no doubt a mind as fair as her face, but none of the tinsel which we so often take for gold. Is it not so?"

I nodded assent and he continued—

"Is she a saint, that she thus forswears the pomps and vanities of this world?"

"She is, no doubt," I replied, "one of those to whom the world is in the habit of giving the appellation of saints, whatever sense impiety on the one hand, or cant on the other, may attach to that designation."

"In that case," returned Mr. Escourt, "I will e'en take her for my patron saint; hang up her picture in my room, if I can get it; and say, like Romeo, I'll turn, fair saint, idolater to thee!"

As he said these words, I gave this hateful man a look of mingled scorn and disgust. He returned it with a steady gaze of insulting pertinacity, and said—

"Kill me not with a look, fair lady; for though lovely is the light of a dark eye in woman, it is also wondrous strong, and can deal wounds which time may not heal."

"It speaks," I replied, "what time cannot change, nor flattery
avert."
"Indeed," he rejoined, "are its decrees so unchangeable?"

After a pause he continued—

"Mr. Lovell is an excellent husband, is not he? and amiable in all the relations of life? He is your uncle by marriage, I believe? It is touching to see his devotion to you in that character."

The calm insolence with which this was said stung me to the quick, and I answered with vehemence—

"He is at least neither a liar nor a hypocrite; and it would have been well for him had he never fallen in with either."

Not a muscle of Mr. Escourt's face moved; and, with a bland smile, he said—

"Your remark is just, fair depositary of your adopted uncle's secrets. Your descriptions of character are admirable, refined in their conception, and bold in their execution—very bold indeed. This last specimen shall remain engraved in my memory. It fully deserves it."

We had now reached the house; and I entered it with the consciousness, that, in addition to my other difficulties and dangers, I had made myself that morning a deadly enemy.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Do you not fear, I will stand between you and danger."

SHAKESPEARE.

The tedious hours of the two next days dragged on their weary length through the ordinary course of meals, walks, idle occupation, and unprofitable talk. Everything jarred upon my nerves and irritated my

temper during this trying time of suspense. Edward's fever still continued, and though there was nothing positively alarming in it, yet it kept us in a state of anxiety. He was not allowed to get up, and I did not see him; but almost all my time was spent in watching for Mrs. Middleton, who was indefatigable in her attention to him, and who, from hour to hour, brought me messages from him, and accounts of the various fluctuations in his state. When I went into the drawing-room, Rosa's liveliness, Mr. Escourt's mute attitude of defiance, Mr. Manby's tediousness, and Mr. and Mrs. Moore's over-solicitude about everything, in turns worried and bored me.

At the end of the second day, as the time drew near when I might expect to receive Henry's answer, this feverish impatience increased to such a degree that I could hardly bear to be spoken to, or noticed in any way. Each time the house-bell rang I gave a start and a rapid glance towards the door; and each time a servant came in, my heart beat with intense excitement, which each time subsided into that moody heaviness which disappointment brings on. On the third evening since the one I had spent with Edward, I was allowed to go to him for a few minutes; he was much better, but forbidden to exert himself. I found him pale but very calm; he seemed touched with the alternation in my countenance, and implored me not to worry myself, assuring me that he now felt almost quite well, and the day after to-morrow he hoped we should all return to London, announce our marriage, and begin all the preparations for its celebration. This assurance drove me almost frantic, for if, during the next twenty-four hours, I did not hear from Henry, such a proceeding was like plunging blindfold down a precipice. The only resource I could think of was to persuade Mr. Middleton to go to London ourselves on the next day, and as it would be natural that after this week's absence I should visit Alice, thus to contrive to speak to Henry. When I went back into the drawing-room I was assailed by pressing entreaties to sing; and Mr. Middleton's "Come, Ellen, nonsense!" rendered all excuses or refusals on my part quite unavailing. I went to the pianoforte, envying the woman who said to the King of Prussia, when he had put her in prison for breach of engagement, "You can make me cry, but you can't make me sing;" for I was assuredly made to sing, while my heart was quivering with anxiety, and my mind haunted with fears, which would have made solitude and tears bliss in comparison to what I had to go through. I had just begun, at Rosa's request, a French romance, in fourteen stanzas, when the door opened and a servant walked in with a letter in his hand, which he put down on a little table where I had laid my work. To this letter my eyes and all my thoughts were directed; but the excess of impatience made me afraid of interrupting myself and asking for it. I sang on, and each time that I attempted to skip a verse and arrive at the conclusion, Mr. Manby, civilly and assiduously, reminded me of the omission. At last I arrived at the fourteenth stanza, and then positively refusing to sing any more, I gave up my place to Rosa. At that moment Mr. Middleton, who was walking up and down the room, went up to the table where my letter was laid, took it up, looked at the seal, then at the handwriting; after turning it on all sides for a minute or two, while I stood by straining every nerve to appear indifferent, he held it out to me and said, "Who on earth can this be from, Ellen?"

I took it and glanced at the direction—"From Mrs. Hatton," I said; and slipping it carelessly into the inside of my gown, I sat on and worked in silence, listening to the singing till I could find an opportunity of leaving the room unobserved. I flew rather than walked to mine, locked the door, and tearing open the letter read the enclosure it contained with that breathless eagerness which makes us feel as if our eyes were too slow in conveying the sense to our minds.

HENRY'S LETTER.

"I will not attempt to describe to you the state of mind into which your letter threw me. It was no doubt carefully worded, and I give you credit for the pains which you evidently took not to wound my feelings. You have at last learnt to know the nature you have to deal with, and you have not, perhaps, bought that knowledge too dearly, by all you have suffered at my hands. Your power over me is a strange one: when I submit to it, I despise myself; when I resist it, I hate myself. I can never now be happy by you, or without you; and in the wreck of all that once was happiness, I cling to some unsubstantial shadows, which, when I grasp them, only mock my utter desolation. Such are those held out by the last lines of your letter. You never wrote truer or more artful words; true as the arrow which strikes to the heart—artful as the skill of the archer who aims it. You are right—I alone know you; I alone can read every turn of your countenance, every emotion of your soul. I know 'your eye's quick flash through its troubled shroud.' I see the dark shade that passes over your spirit, the clouds which sweep over your soul, rising in anger, and melting into tenderness. I alone know the secret of your wild beauty, of your fierce humility, of your transient joys, and of your lasting sorrows. This knowledge, this power is mine, Ellen, and shall be mine to the last day of our lives; and as long as your eyes shall meet mine, as long as your hand shall press mine, in the spirit which dictated those lines of your letter, I shall not be utterly miserable, or altogether without consolation. I shall have one share in your soul which not even Edward can rob me of. And now what shall I say? You foresee it, do you not? Your cheek is flushed with joy, and your breast heaves with triumph. Go, then, and proclaim your marriage. Marry Edward; and when the

priest says at the altar, 'Who gives this woman to be married to this man?' think of him who, 'loving you not wisely, but too well,' at the price of his own jealous tortures, of his pride, and of his conscience, opened the way before you. At the price of my conscience I have done this; and now listen to me, Ellen,—I will tell you how. After I had received your letter, and reflected on its contents, till anxiety for you and for your happiness superseded every selfish thought which passion and jealousy awoke, I went to Bromley, where Mrs. Tracy took up her abode again a few months ago. I had hardly had any communication with her since my marriage; and our meeting, as you may well imagine, was anything but cordial. When I opened to her the subject of my visit, she gave way to a burst of anger, in which she vented the long-compressed violence, jealousy, and hatred of her soul. I shudder when I think how often you have been on the brink of what we most have dreaded; twice she had written to Mr. Middleton, and only kept back her letters at the very moment of putting them into the post. She has kept up, by means of her relations, and of her relations' friends, a constant system of *espionnage* upon me, and had been worked up into a state of violent irritation, by exaggerated reports of my neglect of Alice, and of my devotion to you. Far from listening to me, or giving me the least hope that she would yield to my entreaties, she pronounced the most vehement denunciations against you, and vowed that nothing now should prevent her from exposing you—the murderer of Julia, the hateful rival of Alice. Forgive me, dearest Ellen, that my hand can write such horrible words; but it is necessary that you should know what that terrible woman, as you rightly call her, is capable of saying and of doing, and also to account for the line of conduct which I took in consequence. I suddenly changed my tone, and said to her in the coldest and most determined manner, 'Very well; I leave you to write your letter—to ruin the whole existence of a person who I declare to you is as innocent as yourself of the crime which you impute to her,—to throw into agitation and despair my sister, whom you profess to love,—and to break your promise to me in the most shameful manner. But mark me! while *you* do this, *I* go home also, to break a promise not more sacred than yours,—to reveal to Alice, from beginning to end, the whole history of our engagement, and of our marriage; to tell her that you have unjustly accused Ellen Middleton of murder, and irretrievably ruined and destroyed her happiness; to tell her that I once loved Ellen Middleton, that I love her still, and that if such is to be *her* fate, *mine* shall be to leave England *to-morrow*, *alone*, and *for ever*.'

"It was frightful to see the look of rage that convulsed the features of that intractable woman as I pronounced these words. She absolutely writhed with anger, and it was deadly anger, for her cheek was pale and her lips white. She gasped for breath, and then murmured: 'Villain! she is with child.'

"God forgive me, I was indeed a villain! For, although not even to save you would I have endangered Alice's safety, yet my first thought was of the new power which this circumstance gave me over her fierce grandmother; and, without giving a sign of emotion, I begged to know her final decision.

"Then began a fearful contest between us; one of those struggles on which more than life is staked. I conquered at last, and that indomitable will was forced to bend before mine. You are safe, as long as Alice remains in ignorance of the dark parts of our histories; as long as I live with her, and by kindness and respect ensure her comfort and peace of mind, so long will her grandmother adhere to the promise, which she has renewed on these conditions. But you must help me to fulfil them, Ellen. You must not leave me to myself, for then my strength would fail me. It must be under your eyes, and in constant association with you, that I must learn to treat Alice as I now feel myself bound to treat her. One of the principal complaints which her, grandmother made, was of the seclusion in which she lived; and on this point I must give way, though, as I once said to you, I tremble for the consequences; but you must be near us—with us. Though scarcely older than her, you know where the dangers of the world lie, and you will watch over one who, in her childish ignorance, stands like a guardian angel between you and your persecutor. There is something sacred in the feelings with which we must both regard and cherish her. Hook at her now with emotion, as the mother of my child. I bless her in my heart for having saved you from misery and exposure. If you will allow no common prejudices, no vulgar scruples to stand in the way of the good you may effect, then, Ellen, there may be better days in store for us all.

"Remember to announce your marriage in form to us, as soon as it is declared; and remember also, that I will be guarded, prudent, and considerate, as long as you show me unlimited confidence. I cannot answer for my self if caprice, or unjust apprehensions, should estrange you from me.

"Once more, farewell,

"And God bless you!

"Your devoted

"Henry Lovell."

This letter dropt from my hands as I read the last words, and a tumultuous rush of feelings made my heart throb with indefinable emotion. In my most sanguine moments I had not perhaps anticipated so favourable an answer, nor hoped that Henry would have exerted himself so earnestly in my behalf; and yet I felt more afraid of him and of his power than ever, as I saw his determination in some manner or other to link his fate with mine, and to make his conduct to me to depend upon mine. There was something fearful in the conditions in the frail tenure under which alone I was to escape the threatened vengeance of Mrs. Tracy. There was something horribly humiliating in the terms (however veiled in plausible language) which Henry was evidently prescribing to me as the price of his protection. I was never a self-deceiver, and I saw clearly through the shallow pretence of better hopes for the future—of kindness to Alice—of help to pursue the better course—his unswerving determination never to give up those habits of intimacy, which would give full scope for the exercise of his secret power. I did not charge him with hypocrisy, nor with malice; no, he was only selfish, selfish to the very heart's core. I read his letter again, and when he bade me think of him, even at the altar, even when pledging my faith to Edward, I murmured to myself, "Ever between him and me, in thought if not in deed; ever with thy smooth tongue, thy determination strong as iron, and thy character pliant as steel; ever claiming thy share in my heart, and thy place in my thoughts; ever toiling for thine own ends, and hinting at revenge, even while boasting of thy love, and of the sacrifices it makes."

As this mental accusation passed through my mind, I felt its harshness, its ingratitude, and as usual, having begun by condemning him, I ended by hating myself. I could not but acknowledge that all he said of Alice was touching and true, and I religiously resolved to undertake the part he pointed out to me in the spirit of expiation, and while in one sense I gave her my weak and unworthy support, on the other to cling to her, as to my refuge and my shield, from a love and from a hatred which made me equally tremble. The self-reproach which had immediately followed my harsh condemnation of Henry, at the very moment when he had made a great sacrifice in my behalf, however incomplete its generosity might have been, brought on as usual a reaction, and something of tenderness stole into my heart at the thought of so deep, so unconquerable an attachment as his. In Henry there always seemed to me to be two different natures, one harsh, selfish, sneering and heartless, the other tender almost as a woman's is tender, and gentle even to a fault. Notwithstanding all that I so often suffered from the first, I could not help being at times strangely subdued and touched by the last. His letter, too, like himself, appeared to have a two-fold character, and as I considered it under each in turn, my heart was alternately softened and hardened towards the writer.

Soon I experienced one of those changes of mood, one of those abrupt transitions of feeling, which seem to transform us for the time into a different sort of being from that with which we are usually conscious of identity. A kind of feverish determination to be happy took possession of me, a careless disregard of the future, a sort of impassioned levity, of reckless childishness. I walked up and down my room with restless excitement; I longed now to return to London, to have my marriage declared, to be congratulated, to be talked to, to enter on a new state of things, and efface as much as possible, from my life and from my mind, the traces of the past.

When the next morning I got up and dressed, threw open my window, looked upon the bright summer sky, and saw Edward standing on the gravel walk before the house, my heart beat with that hurried pulse of joy, that tumult of emotion which drowns all thought and all care, as a whirlpool sucks in the straws that float near it.

Edward beckoned to me to join him; he received me with a smile of tenderness, and, pushing back the curls from my face, whispered, "My dark-eyed Ellen!" His words of love sunk into my heart, like the rain of Heaven on the scorched and burning sands of the desert, as I gave utterance to the long-subdued and deeply-tried passion of my soul, prostrate in spirit before him, living in the light of his eyes, and almost longing to die in his presence, and by his hand, ere aught in earth, or in Heaven, should divide us. The wilful, terrified abstraction, that made me repulse every thought connected with the future, and cling with frantic intensity to my happiness while it lasted, gave it a character difficult to describe; and Edward, in the very height of his love, and while carried out of himself by its resistless influence, would sometimes ask me, why there was no peace in my happiness, no repose in my love;—why, when his hand held mine, and my head was resting on his shoulder, I sometimes murmured in a tone of thrilling and passionate emotion, "Let me die *here*."

"Ask not," I would then reply. "Ask not why some flowers shut their leaves beneath the full blaze of the sun. Ask not why the walls of the Abbey Church tremble, as the full peal of the organ vibrates through the aisles. Ask not why the majesty of a starry night makes me weep, or why the intensity of bliss makes me shudder."

"But I love you, my Ellen," Edward would answer; "I, too, love you with all the powers of my soul. My happiness is intense as yours; and yet, in the very excess of both, there is trust and peace."

"Because," I replied, "because no two characters were ever more dissimilar than ours. A calm and mighty river is not more unlike the torrent which swells with the rain, and ebbs the next day, than your nature is to mine. Do not try to understand me, Edward: I say it in the deepest humility, you cannot fathom the folly and the weakness of my soul; but thus much you may believe, that as the mountain stream, chafe and foam as it may, has but one object and one end, so, the varied impulses and the restless fluctuations of my uneasy spirit tend but to one result—its unlimited love, its boundless devotion, to you."

Edward always seemed touched by the expression of my ardent affection, and responded to it in the tenderest and kindest manner; but it did not always efface from his countenance something of perplexity and regret, which the inequality of my spirits, and of my temper, raised in his mind.

Before we left Hampstead, Mrs. Middleton told the Moores of my engagement; and Rosa, who had for some days past guessed at the state of things, wished me joy, with the greatest warmth and animation; but she unconsciously threw a bitter ingredient into her congratulations, by adding to them with a smile, "It is strange how disobedient you have ventured to be to the invisible men of Brandon. I hope you do not reckon on being punished, as well as threatened, by proxy?"

CHAPTER XVII.

"Too high, too grave, too largo, too deep,
Her love could neither laugh nor sleep,
And thus it tired him: his desire
Was for a less consuming fire.
He wished that she should love him well.
Not wildly; wished her passion's spell
To charm her heart, but leave her fancy free;
To quicken converse, not to quell.
He granted her to sigh, for so could he;
But when she wept, why should it be?
'T was irksome, for it stole away
The joy of his love holiday."

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

During our drive to London, Edward asked Mr. Middleton how long he intended to remain in town, and where he meant our marriage to take place.

"Why that must depend on you both," said my uncle. "What do you say to being married at Elmsley?"

The proposal struck me so painfully, that I looked at Edward with the anxious wish that he might make some objection to it, though I could scarcely hope so. As I feared, he only turned to me, and asked what my wishes were; before I could answer, however, Mrs. Middleton said, that considering all that was to be done about getting my trousseau, and making various preparations for the wedding, she thought it would be better to remain in London. Edward then added that it would be his interest to keep us there, as the settlements would often require his presence in town, but that we might go to Elmsley to be married, if my uncle wished it. To my inexpressible relief, Mrs. Middleton again objected; and urged, that as my uncle and herself would go abroad soon after my marriage, it was useless to add a journey to Elmsley, and back again, to the one they would subsequently undertake. I looked at my aunt with surprise, but she made me a sign not to pursue the subject any further for the present. I gladly acquiesced; but the idea of this journey abroad weighed on my spirits, and made me silent during the rest of our drive.

As we came into London, and arrived in Brook-street, it seemed to me that months instead of days had elapsed since I had left it; and when I entered the drawing-room, I sat down on a chair near the window, and leaning my head on my hand, I tried to realise to myself all that had occurred during the last eventful week. The busy tide of life was at its height in the streets, the noise was stunning, and the air close and disagreeable, after what we had been used to at Hampstead. Nobody had followed me into the drawing-room, and I sat there for an hour or two absorbed in thought, and reviewing in my mind the principal events of my past life. One by one they passed before me; my aunt's first arrival at Elmsley, the day of Julia's birth, when I was called from my drawing-lesson to come and kiss my little cousin in her cradle; the happy time of childhood and of early youth; my hours of study with Mrs. Middleton; my walks and rides through the beautiful scenery that surrounds Elmsley, sometimes with Edward and with Henry, or only with old James behind me; my favourite chesnut wood, where I used to

throw the bridle over Selim's neck, and leave him to follow his own fancy, unguided and unchecked, through the winding paths and bushy dells; the sound of his hoofs on the crushed leaves, and the murmur of the little waterfall, were in my ears, as when I took Edward there on my fourteenth birth-day, and as we were coming home, after much hesitation, and with a beating heart, asked him if I might take care of his Newfoundland dog, Hector, when he went back to town; and I did not remember the events of the last week more distinctly than I did his nod of acquiescence, and the gush of delight with which I received that permission.

Then came in succession the recollections of Julia's illness—of her recovery—of her death; of the acute and then protracted anguish that followed it; of the delirious agony that seized me on the day of her funeral. I lived over again the time of Edward's departure, the feverish dream of excitement which followed it; I visited again in fancy the cottage at Bridman, and the cavern at the sea-side in Dorsetshire. I thought of the day of Edward's return to Elmsley, and of the Ash-Wednesday service in the village church—that same church where Julia was buried, and where Edward's lips had said *Amen!* to the curse which had seemed to light on my guilty and shrinking head; and *there* they had proposed that I should be married to him I—*there*, in sight of the vault where *she* lay! within the walls which had rung with *that* curse!

"O, no—no," I exclaimed; "not at Elmsley—not at Elmsley!"

A hand was gently laid on my shoulder, and Edward said—

"Why not at Elmsley?"

As I turned suddenly towards him, and then away from him, to hide the tears which were streaming down my cheeks, he said, coldly—

"Are you weeping now over the excess of your happiness?"

I did not answer immediately, for in truth I could not; and, taking a book, Edward walked away, and sat down by the chimney. Other people came in—I had to dress for dinner, and it was not till late in the evening that, by alluding artfully, though not altogether untruly, to the pain with which I had heard of my aunt's probable departure from England (for it had, indeed, been the original cause of my deep depression), I succeeded in removing the tacit displeasure which had obscured Edward's countenance.

I had rather expected that Henry would call in Brook-street that evening, but he did not.

The next day, while I was dressing, Mrs. Hatton asked to see me. I was anxious to know what construction she had put on the commission I had entrusted to her; and I hardly knew how to treat it myself, for if I allowed her to suppose that there was nothing but a trifle in question, she might, at some future time, allude to it without any scruple.

After she had sat down for a few minutes, and answered my inquiries about her numerous nephews and nieces, to whom she was the most beloved, the most tyrannised over, and the happiest of aunts, she said with a smile, "I hope you got the letter in time, dear Miss Middleton?"

"Quite in time," I answered, colouring in spite of myself.

"I thought you would," she rejoined, "for I had calculated that Tuesday being the 5th of July, there would be plenty of time to write again and get an answer before the 9th, in case the patterns did not suit you. I remember so well, in old times, we used always to have little contrivances about Mrs. Middleton's birth-day."

This was exactly what I had feared. Henry had made up some story connected with his sister's birth-day, to account for our secret correspondence; or else he had taken up this idea from her own suppositions; and now there was no reason why she should not, when the day was past, inquire after the result of what had been settled between us before any one who might happen to be present. I therefore resolved to tell her as much of the truth as I could venture to do; and, taking her hand in mine, I said, "My dear Mrs. Hatton, either Henry, with very good intentions, has deceived you on the subject, or your own suppositions have misled you. The letter which I wrote to him, and the answer which he sent me, related to something of the greatest importance, in which the welfare and the happiness of more than one person are closely involved: both would be endangered if the most absolute secrecy was not observed by you as well as by us, as to this correspondence between Henry and myself. If I felt justified in doing so, I would explain to you—"

"Don't, my dear, don't; I had rather not have it explained; I had rather not hear a secret," cried Mrs. Hatton. "I never liked them; it is much pleasanter not to know things which concern other people; but you may be sure I shall never breathe a syllable to any one about the letters. I only hope, my darling

Miss Ellen, that you will always be as happy as you ought to be, so good as you are, and always trying to do good to people, and to be of use. God bless your Sweet face!"

My heart smote me at the praises of this excellent woman; and I answered with a deep sigh, "My fate is a far happier one than I deserve, or ever can deserve, dear Mrs. Hatton; for I am engaged to Edward Middleton, and am to be married to him in a fortnight."

"Well, my dear Miss Ellen, I do wish you joy, with all my heart!" (and what a heart it was; there are not many such.) "How happy you will all be! Of all the husbands you could have had, I would have chosen Mr. Edward Middleton for you—so handsome—so good—so clever as he is! I remember one day, that poor little Julia was still alive, I said to Mrs. Middleton, 'Now, what a nice thing it would be if your little girl was to marry her cousin some day, and those two fine fortunes were to make but one.' 'No, no,' she cried, 'he admires Ellen too much to wait for Julia;' and then she added—'Mrs. Hatton, I am afraid that I love Ellen more than Julia; is it not dreadful?' 'And if you do,' I answered, 'what does it signify? Julia will never be the worse for it; there is enough tenderness in your heart for both of them.' But I am grieving you, dear Miss Ellen, by talking of that poor dear little cousin of yours; but you know, dear, everything is for the best, and the dear child might have lived to be wretched, poor thing! Well, well, I will say nothing more about it; but only that it is very pretty of you, my darling, to have kept all your love and your sorrow for Julia so fresh in your heart, in the midst of your own happiness. No doubt, she is a blessed little angel now; and, perhaps, she can see into your thoughts, and is blessing you even now, for remembering her so kindly, and loving her still so much."

Alarmed at the excess of my emotion, which I could no longer command, Mrs. Hatton's distress was so great, that she almost groaned at finding that, instead of soothing me, every word that she uttered increased my agitation. At last, recovering myself, I abruptly changed the subject, and a few minutes after she took her leave.

Later that day I had a long conversation with my aunt; she explained to me, that the doctors had assured her, that it was of the greatest importance that my uncle should spend the following winter in a southern climate; that he was himself extremely opposed to this plan, chiefly on account of his inveterate dislike to leaving Elmsley for such a length of time; and that, she was afraid that if he returned there at all that year, she should never be able to persuade him to leave it again. She seemed very much out of spirits; and she, who seldom gave way to her feelings, although their secret workings were evident enough to me, who knew every turn of her countenance, at this moment seemed unable to struggle with her deep depression.

After a few efforts to overcome it, she threw her arms round me, and hid her face on my neck.

"Dearest child," she said, "never let me suffer through you; anything else I can bear. I see things through a dark mist to-day, and there is a gloom about me which I cannot shake off. I do not often talk to you of myself, Ellen, at least not lately—not since the days when we lived but for each other, and I would not do so now, if an irresistible impulse did not urge me to it. In a few days you will be married, and then will come a separation, which I shall bear with courage; but which will require courage, my Ellen, for I have loved you too much as an idol, too much as a treasure, which nothing could rob me of, and to which I have clung with all the tenacity of a crushed but ardent spirit. All my life I have had to meet indifference, and to struggle with disappointment in various forms. Self-devotion was the dream of my youth; I conceived no other happiness, and wished to live for no other purpose. My father was one of those men who can so little understand this sort of feeling in others, that, with perfect kindness and perfect candour, I am sure he would have said, if his daughter had done for him what the Russian girl, Elizabeth, did for her father, 'I suppose she was tired of Siberia, and liked the journey.' When I married, I found in your uncle a character exactly opposed to my father's, but not perhaps more suited to mine. The invincible reserve, the minute despotism, or rather absolutism, of his nature, raised between us the same barrier, which worldliness of mind and absence of warm feelings had caused to exist between my father and myself. You have seen and observed this drawback to our happiness, Ellen, or I should not have pointed out to you this single imperfection in as amiable and excellent a character as ever existed. Your uncle's favourite maxim is, 'Deeds, not words;' and well has he acted up to it himself; but his mistake is, in not perceiving that there are characters in which, without *words*, there can scarcely be *deeds;* for which sympathy and encouragement are as necessary as air is to life, or sunshine to vegetation. For some time after I was married, I struggled to supply the want of responsiveness in his nature, by the expansive enthusiasm of mine; but, worn out at last, by the fruitless and fatiguing exertion of heart and mind, which this kind of continual drawing upon one's own feelings entails, bruised and jarred by the unflinching positiveness which met them at every turn, I gave up the attempt in despair. I did my *duty;* I performed the *deeds* required of me; but the *words*, the unsubstantial, but not unreal, part of our daily lives, of our busy minds,—which must assert itself in some shape or other,—which must find vent in some form, or recoil upon ourselves in moral or physical suffering,—that half of my being remained closed to him, whom I loved and respected, but between

whose mind and my own the point of contact was wanting. Of Henry, for many reasons, I had rather not talk to you. You know that I have never hesitated to tell myself the truth, or to destroy an illusion, which in the secrecy of my heart I have felt to be such; but it requires a courage and a strength which, to-day especially, I do not find in myself, to trace the progress of estrangement in an affection once as intense as a mother's; and which still asserts its own existence by the sufferings it inflicts. Do not look inquiringly at me, Ellen; I have nothing to tell, nothing to explain, nothing to complain of; I only know that there was a time when my whole soul was wrapped up in Henry, as it has since been in you;—a time when his eyes would seek mine in the hour of joy or of sorrow,—a time when his thoughts were mine, and mine were his;—till something, I know not what,—a mysterious influence, a nameless cloud, passed between him and me, and threw a cold shade over the spirit of our affection; each succeeding year has widened the chasm, has seared the wound, without healing it, and loosened without breaking the links which bound us together. Hush, dear Ellen I do not attempt to speak to me on the subject; there has been a secret sympathy between us lately, which has supplied the place of those unreserved communications, which once were our habit and our joy. Where we have not spoken, we have felt together; and, without the utterance of a word, we have shared each other's sorrows, and each other's fears. And now, child of my heart, be happy if you can. Let nothing of gloom, of suffering, or of bitterness, be connected with my thoughts of you; let no cloud ever obscure your spotless character; let your name never be pronounced but with blessings; your presence never be hailed but with joy. Then, when in absence, I call to mind your loved features, your proud smile, and the light of your dark eyes, I shall need no other vision for my waking hours, no other dream for my nights."

With fervently murmured blessings, my aunt dismissed me; and I went to prepare for a ride with Edward. Before I set out, I wrote a note to Alice, in which I announced to her my approaching marriage; and, by Mrs. Middleton's desire, begged that she and Henry would come to us in the evening.

During our ride Edward was very silent; and when he spoke it was to find some trifling fault with my way of sitting on my horse, and holding my bridle. My heart was still thrilling with emotions awakened by my conversation with my aunt; her expressions of enthusiastic tenderness were still sounding in my ears, and the words of reproof, however slight, which fell from Edward's lips, contrasted with them, grated on my feelings, and irritated my susceptibility. Unlike as they were in many respects, there was one resemblance between Mrs. Middleton and Henry Lovell, which never failed to strike me. Without affectation or exaggeration, by the peculiar qualities of their minds, by the union of a powerful understanding with a lively imagination, joined to a kind of spontaneous eloquence, and a ready command of language, they made every subject which they handled more or less picturesque and exciting. I remembered at that moment that Henry had once said to me, that his sister had done me harm; and I almost trembled as I asked myself, if I should not painfully miss (in spite of my devoted attachment to Edward) that ready sympathy which I had been so long used to, which it was in my nature to require, and not in his to yield.

We were just then passing through some fields near Fulham, and came to a deep ditch with a fence beyond it. Edward crossed it; but strictly charged me not to attempt to follow him, while he examined the next field, and found out another exit; but piqued at his previous observations on my horsemanship, I pushed Selim on, and with a flying leap arrived on the other side. Edward joined me; and when I looked at him triumphantly, he was quite pale.

We rode on without speaking for a few minutes; and when to break this silence, I said to him, "I hope you admire my courage?" he answered drily, "I dislike unnecessary emotions, as much as you appear to delight in them."

After a pause, he added, "Such an instance of disobedience in a wife would be inexcusable; and though submission may be only a duty *after* marriage, I own *I* think it a charm before."

I held out my hand to Edward, with an imploring countenance. He took it; and kissing it tenderly, said with a smile, "I am like the mothers, Ellen, who scold their children when they have been frightened about them; but still remember, my love, that I would rather see you afraid of displeasing me, than displaying a courage which never captivated me in a woman. It is a dangerous way of working upon my feelings; and would, I assure you, never answer."

As I had not heard from Alice before dinner, I concluded they would come in the evening; and even while Edward was speaking to me of some arrangements connected with our future plans, I could not keep out of my thoughts a variety of conjectures as to the tone and manner which Henry would adopt in this new state of things. My eyes were fixed on a plan for altering the house at Hillscombe, when a knock at the house-door turned my hands cold and my cheeks hot, and a moment afterwards Alice and Henry walked into the room. She came quietly up to me, kissed me, and said in an earnest tone, "I am so glad you are happy." I held out my hand to Henry, cold and trembling as it was. He carried it hastily to his lips, which felt dry and burning, and said in a rapid indistinct manner, so that no ears but mine

should catch the sense of his words, "I wish you joy, and never to feel what I do now." He then went up to Edward, and shaking hands with him in the most cordial manner, he warmly congratulated him, and then presented him to Alice.

Turning to my uncle, he said, "I have just heard a piece of news at the club, which will take you by surprise. Mr.—, your county member, is dead."

"Good Heavens! you don't say so?" exclaimed my uncle; "I saw him yesterday in St. James's-street. Are you quite certain of it?"

"Perfectly certain; and if Edward intends to canvass the county, he had better start directly."

"Edward, you *must* stand," cried my uncle, with all the eagerness of a politician. "You have long wished to get into parliament, and this is a glorious opportunity."

"Not the *time* I would have chosen," said Edward, with a smile and a look at me.

"Nonsense," cried Henry, with the most apparently unaffected gaiety. "It is the best of times. You will be eloquent on the hustings, in order that Ellen may read your speeches in the newspaper. You must be so broken in to making love, that it will come quite naturally to you to do so to every voter's wife or daughter. With what wonderful effect you will expatiate on the patriotism which tears you away from your affianced bride, to undertake the arduous duties of a champion of the popular cause, or an inveterate enemy of the new Poor Law. But, really, there is no time to lose, my dear fellow; the enemy will take the field to-morrow; and if you do not get the start—."

I impatiently got up, and, standing behind my uncle's chair, I fixed my eyes on Henry, with an expression of stern and indignant inquiry. His eyes met mine for a moment, and the colour rose in his cheek; but he persisted, with unabated eagerness, in urging Edward and my uncle not to lose the opportunity of securing to the former a seat in parliament; to the latter a permanent influence in the county; and to the government an additional vote.

Edward turned to me, and asked me half seriously, and half in joke, for my opinion on the subject. Before I could answer, my uncle said, "I entreat you, Ellen, not to interfere, by any childish nonsense, with what is really important to Edward and to me. For some years past, I have had such a scheme in view, and if we do not carry it into execution now, it may escape us altogether."

I had, in fact, no objection to offer, and, indeed, felt none, except that Henry had suggested it, and seemed anxious to bring it about; therefore, when Edward, more seriously than the first time, asked for my opinion, I made an effort, and constrained myself to say, that he could not do better.

"You must start for Elmsley to-morrow, and take up your quarters there," said my uncle. "I do not feel a doubt of your success, but there must be no remissness on our parts to secure it."

At that moment the servant came up to Mr. Middleton, and told him, that Mr.—, and Sir—, were in the carriage at the door, and wished to speak to him upon business. One was a cabinet minister, and die other one of the most influential land-owners in our part of the country.

"They are come about this very affair," said my uncle, "and just at the right moment; show them into my room down-stairs. Just give orders, Edward, that Lawson may be sent for; he is personally acquainted with every voter on your estates, as well as on mine, and had better go with you to Elmsley to-morrow; and then be so kind as to join us in the library."

Edward went up to Henry, and said something to him in a low voice, on which Henry followed him out of the room; and Mrs. Middleton, Alice, and I, were left alone together. I had leisure then to look at Alice, and to observe that her situation had become very evident, and that her face, though as beautiful as ever, was paler and thinner than usual. Mrs. Middleton remarked it too; and Alice told her that she expected to be confined in four or five months. The quiet tone of voice, and the gentle smile with which this was said, seemed in strange contrast with the stormy scene in which that fact had been disclosed to Henry.

Mrs. Middleton seemed delighted at finding that this was the case; and asked her several questions, and gave much advice about her health. I fixed my eyes upon them both, and a train of thought was started in my mind, which engrossed me completely, while they went on conversing in a low tone. There we were, sitting quietly together, with smiles on our lips, and the whole appearance of peace, harmony, and comfort, around us. If any one could have looked upon us, themselves unseen, could they ever have imagined on what frail foundation that peace and that comfort rested?

Alice's little hand (which she had just held out to me, as I seated myself at the back of the sofa where

she was placed) was looked in mine; Mrs. Middleton, who had shaken off the depression which had weighed upon her in the morning, now talked gaily of my marriage, and the occupations it imposed upon her—of her approaching expedition, and the delight with which she should again return to us in the spring.

If, like the angel who conducted Parnell's Hermit, some heavenly guide had pointed out to an invisible witness of this quiet scene of domestic happiness, the secrets that were buried under its smooth surface, what a start of horror would he not have given, how would he not have shuddered if that angel had said, "Look upon those three women! See that fair young creature, in whose pure eyes there is a depth of holy thought and tranquil peace, such as this world can never give or take away; and it is well for her that it should be so; for, beautiful as she is, and priceless as are the treasures of her heart and mind, she has been delivered over to one who counts these treasures as dross, and whose perverted taste sees more of beauty in the turbid stream than in the pure lake,—in the flashing eye and stormy brow, than in the calm gaze of purity and love. She stands alone in the strength of her faith, in the might of her innocence; but even now a new link has wound itself round her heart; and though her step be firm, and her soul be strong, they must wax firmer and stronger still, for the sake of the child whom she bears in her womb. Now she is chained down to earth; now she can no longer say with St. Paul, 'To die is gain.' Now she can no longer pass through the world as if she belonged not to it. She must cling to him whose name she bears; she must follow his steps; she must watch his eyes;

'She most pour her hearths rich treasures forth,
Although unrepaid for their priceless worth;'

for he is the father of her child; and what God has thus joined together, nothing in Heaven or on earth can put asunder. But who stands between her and her husband? Whose eyes draw away the glances that should be fixed on hers? Whose ears hear and tolerate the words of love which should be hers alone? Do you see the girl that holds her hand, and leans on the back of the couch where she sits? One hair of her unworthy head is more dear to that infatuated man, than all the matchless beauty, the sacred purity, the unstained affection of his young wife. Look at that other woman, whose eyes are fixed with such tender and ardent affection on the same girl, whose childhood she has blessed, whose youth she has watched over, and on whose head she has heaped blessings without end; in whose existence she has centred all the happiness of her own. *That* girl, with that very hand which has been so often and so fondly kissed by a childless mother; *that* girl (cursed be her anger, for it was fierce, and her wrath, for it was cruel!) hurled to a watery grave the only child of that devoted friend, of that more than mother; and there she sits by the side of her whom she has made childless; and she holds the hand of the wife whose husband adores her, and whose love she dares not check; there she sits, as if a mine was not ready to spring under their feet; and even now a smile is on her face, for some gay remark has been addressed to her, and, like the Indian at the stake, she must die before she writhes, and must look upon the deeds she has done, and the pangs she endures, as if her nerves were of iron, and her heart of stone."

A servant came up-stairs to tell Alice that her husband was waiting for her in the carriage, and a moment after she was gone Edward announced to us that everything was settled about his standing for the county, and that he should start at six o'clock the next morning for Elmsley. "Lovell will go with me," he added; "he has not been well lately, and thinks the change of air will do him good." And turning to Mrs. Middleton, he continued, "Henry promises to help me in canvassing, and as neither you nor Ellen can be with me, his eloquence will be invaluable. You do not think Mrs. Lovell will be annoyed at his going?"

"Not at all," answered Mrs. Middleton; "and we will ask her to come and stay with us here during your and Henry's absence. How long will it be do you suppose?"

"Not more than three or four days, I should imagine; and now I must consult you upon a plan which my uncle and myself have formed, but for which we require your sanction, and Ellen's consent. The election will take place in about a fortnight, exactly the time we had fixed upon for our marriage; Lawson has just told us that the settlements could without much difficulty be got ready by this day week; and if we were married on that day, we could go and spend a week at Hillscombe, and then join you at Elmsley, where my uncle is quite determined to go for the election."

My aunt was preparing to make some objections to this plan, when Mr. Middleton came into the room, and by assuming that it was thus settled, and declaring that any further discussion of it was unnecessary, put a stop to the conversation. Edward took me into the next room, and asked me if I had any objection to the arrangement. As I saw by his face that he would be exceedingly annoyed if I did object, I expressed my perfect readiness to agree to it. He seemed altogether so much pleased and excited, that my self-tormenting disposition immediately suggested to me, that politics interested him more than anything else, and that no one day since our engagement had he appeared so satisfied and

so cheerful. I was also foolish enough to be annoyed at his seeming so thoroughly reconciled to Henry; I felt a kind of vague irritation at Henry's accompanying him on this journey, and the more his spirits rose, the more mine fell. As I did not seem to take much interest in his electioneering concerns he dropped the subject, and began to talk of Alice, whose beauty and manners he warmly praised. "You do not think that Henry appreciates her, do you?"

"Who can tell," I exclaimed, "when a woman is appreciated?
Once secure in the affection he has inspired, a man's lore
often waxes wondrous cool." As I said this I had what the
French call "des larmes dans la voix."

Edward fixed his eyes on the ground and knit his brows, but after a moment looked up into my face and said, "How well Lovell knows you!"

I coloured, and asked him what he meant.

"I heard him say one day that it was difficult to tell if you felt what you acted, or acted what you felt."

This severe sarcasm cut me to the heart, and to have Henry quoted against me by Edward, was more than I could bear. Pride and anger struggled for a moment with grief in my breast, but were soon conquered by it. I must have looked intensely unhappy, for Edward took my hand in his, and drawing me kindly to him, said, "My dearest love, I did not mean to vex you."

"If you had you would have succeeded," I answered with bitterness. "No, Edward," I continued, passionately; "from you I can bear everything. Reprove me as often and as severely as you please; treat me harshly when I deserve it; I shall never be weary of *your* reproof, nor complain of *your* severity; but that you should allow Henry to influence you against me—that you should quote his sarcasms and call them truth, even when their object is to make you doubt the reality of my feelings, the sincerity of my affection—"

Edward got up, and walked up and down the room; his countenance was more disturbed than it had yet been at any time since our engagement. At last he stopped before me, and after looking at me in silence for a few minutes, he said, "You are a spoilt child, my Ellen, in the fullest sense of the word. Your life has been too happy"—(Good God! was *that* the conclusion he had come to?)—"you have known nothing of the real trials of life, or you would not take pleasure in creating them for yourself. Believe me, Ellen, do not plant unnecessary thorns in a path where they will spring up but too naturally. What is there wanting to your happiness *now?* Is not our mutual love as strong as ever? Is not my whole soul devoted to you? In a few days you will be my wife, and when I promise to love and cherish you until death shall part us, it will be no empty vow that will pass my lips, but a solemn pledge which my whole life shall redeem. But do not expect from me the language of romance, the cant of sentiment; I look upon you as the dearest and most precious treasure that was ever consigned to a man's keeping, but not as an idol before which I must bow. I must strengthen you with my strength, rather than yield to your weakness; in my very harshness, Ellen, there is a tenderness which you may trust in, for though it may sometimes wound, it will never fail you."

Penitent and subdued I listened in silence to Edward's words. Earnestly and humbly I pressed his hand to my heart, and when we parted that night I felt that though I feared him more, I loved him also with a more solemn tenderness and a deeper reverence than ever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"'T is done **** the fatal vow
Has passed my lips! Methought in those sad moments,
The tombs around, the saints, the darkened altar
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook."

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

The following morning, when Henry came to breakfast with Edward previous to their departure, Mrs. Middleton had a long conversation with him. She proposed to him that Alice should come and stay with us during his absence. He gladly accepted this offer, and wrote a line to his wife recommending her to do so in a way that left her no option.

Edward had left me in a state of mind which made Alice's society very acceptable to me; my spirits were subdued, and Henry's absence removed the restless irritation which I usually felt in his presence.

My time was taken up in a great measure by the number of little occupations which my approaching marriage occasioned. Presents came pouring in daily from relations and friends; I had also to answer letters of congratulation, and all the business of that great change in one's existence was in the full tide of activity.

The second morning after Edward's departure, I asked Alice to go with me to a shop in St. James's-street, where I wanted to buy a present for Mrs. Hatton. We set out together, but as the day was fine and not too hot for walking, we resolved to go first into Hyde Park. The dusty burnt-up grass was still pleasanter to tread upon than the broad flag-stones; and there was a breeze that felt pure and refreshing to lungs that had been obliged for so long to inhale the foggy atmosphere of London. Alice was talking more eagerly than usual; and when she mentioned Henry, there was an expression in her lovely face which I had never seen in it before. As we were speaking of the probable day of Edward's return, she drew from her pocket the note which Henry had written to her that morning, and holding it out to me she said, "You see he talks of coming back on Friday." The note was a kind one, and by the way in which she read it over, as I gave it back to her, and then folded it carefully and replaced it in her bosom, I could see the pleasure it had given her. As we entered the Green Park, I saw a man who seemed to me to be watching us. There was something in his figure and in the way in which his head was set on his shoulders, which seemed not new to me; but I did not look back long enough to ascertain this, and only walked faster from the suspicion that we were followed. On turning out of the gate of the park into Piccadilly I gave another glance, and saw the man in question standing by the side of the basin with his eyes fixed on the water. As we went on towards St. James's-street, I saw him once again, walking in a parallel line with us on the other side of the street. After awhile he disappeared, and I concluded that the whole thing was accidental. We entered the jeweller's shop and were busily engaged in examining several brooches, among which I was to choose one for my present, when on turning to show one which took my fancy to Alice, whose back was to the door, I saw against one of the panes of the shop-window the face of the man who had followed us, and whom I now recognised as that cousin of Alice's whom I had seen at Salisbury and once again at Brandon; but who Henry had given me to understand had left England for America some months before. I gave an involuntary start and turned my head away, for there was something very dark and unpleasant in this man's countenance. Alice perceived nothing, gave me her advice about the brooch, and when I had taken and paid for it we prepared to go. I gave a hurried glance towards the window; the man was gone, and I breathed more freely. We walked out of the shop, and I debated with myself whether there could be any harm in questioning Alice about this person, and in telling her that he had been dodging us in this strange manner. While I was hesitating about it we had arrived at the turning into Berkeley-street. Suddenly Alice drew her arm out of mine and turned abruptly round. She gazed intently for a moment down Piccadilly, and then turning to me she said, "I thought I had seen my cousin, Robert Harding. It was foolish of me to imagine it," she added, smiling, "for he is at New York. What strange fancies one has sometimes!"

"Who is Robert Harding? Your cousin, did you say?"

"Yes; the son of James Harding, my uncle."

"What sort of man is he?"

"I know him very little. I have scarcely spoken to him since we have been both grown up; but he was very fond of me when I was a little girl, and I have always felt a kindness for him."

"Were you brought up together?"

"Oh, no; when I was about eight years old the scarlet fever was in our house, and I was sent to my uncle's for two or three weeks. Robert was then twelve years old; he was called a very naughty boy, and nobody liked him or said a kind word to him. The first day I came there he asked me to play with him, and I was going to say yes, when my aunt called out, 'Don't play with him, Alice,—don't speak to him; he is in disgrace, and nobody must talk to him.' He scowled dreadfully and walked out of the room. In the evening I was dressing my doll in a room up-stairs, where I was to sleep with Anne Harding, when I heard somebody sobbing in the next room. I went on tip-toe to the door and opened it gently. I saw Robert sitting on a bed and crying bitterly. Anne had told me he never cried, not even when his father beat him; but he was crying now, and I stood looking at him till I began to cry too. At last he got up, and climbing on the bed, he pulled off his handkerchief and tied it to the post. I did not know what he was doing, but he looked so odd and so red in the face, that I felt frightened, and called out 'Robert.'

"He turned round and said, 'What are you doing there? Go away, you must not see what I am about to do.'

"'It must be something very wrong then,' I said, 'and I hope you won't do it.'

"'Why not?' he muttered. 'What's it to you? I'm going to hang myself; but you must not tell, for they'd come and cut me down and punish me very much.'

"'Perhaps they would,' I said; 'but not so much as God will punish you if you do such a wicked thing.'

"'It isn't wicked,' he answered. 'Nobody loves me or cares about me. They won't let you play with me, and, perhaps, when I've hanged myself, they'll be sorry for it.'

"'But I'm sorry for you *now*,' I cried; 'and though I must not play with you while you are naughty, I will play with you and love you very much if you are good.'

"'Are you sure you will.'

"'Quite sure, Robert.'

"'Well, if you do I don't much care who doesn't. But mind if you don't love me I'll hang myself.'

"'But I will, indeed,' I said; and all the time I staid at my uncle's, Robert was very good, and we played every day together. After I went home again I did not see him very often. When he came to us he always brought me some little present of his own making; and he had a great turn for cutting things in wood with his knife. About three years ago he made my grandmother angry, I don't know how, but she would not let him come and see us any more."

"And he is now in America?" [I] asked.

"Yes," replied Alice. "My grandmother told me he was gone to New York a few days before I was married. I should have liked to have said good-bye to him. How like that man in Piccadilly was to him!"

We reached home just as Alice said this; and I felt glad that I had not told her that the man she had seen must have been the same who had dodged us, and that it could have been no other than this Robert Harding, whose countenance had remained indelibly impressed on my mind; but I resolved at the first opportunity to tell Henry of this circumstance, for I felt afraid of this man, and anxious to know whether his return to England was a secret to the rest of his family as well as to Alice.

When the post came in the next morning, we received letters from Elmsley. Edward's to me was kind and affectionate, but short and hurried. He had written a long one to my uncle, full of all the details connected with his canvass, which promised to be very successful. One phrase in this letter particularly attracted my attention:—"Henry's exertions in my behalf, and anxiety for my success, are beyond what I could have expected even in the early days of our friendship. He is most amiable and agreeable; and when I compare his destiny to mine (much as it may have been his own imprudence that ruined his prospects), I feel that there is generosity in the warm attachment which he shows me. We shall be in town on Saturday, and I hope and trust that nothing will prevent our marriage taking place on Monday, as we must be here again at the beginning of the ensuing week; and one week, at least, I must have for Ellen and for Hillscombe, before I plunge again into all the business and excitement of the election."

Henry's letter to his sister was as follows:—

[I have never known or understood how Mrs. Middleton came to give me this letter to read. She handed it to me with several others, which had reference to my marriage; and I imagine that it must have slipped among the rest unawares to her. I returned the whole packet to her without making any observation upon it, and she made none either.]

"My dear Mary,

"Can you understand me when I say that I retain a livelier sense of the loveliness of those scenes which are connected in my mind with acute sorrow (provided they be beautiful in themselves), than of those where I have only known happiness? Or does this seem to you nonsense? There is a spot in the world where I once stood for a quarter of an hour alone, suffering so intensely, that even now, when I think of it, I wonder how, at the end of that time, I could meet the eyes of others as I did, and show no outward signs of the anguish I was enduring. Well, Mary, strange as it may seem to you, there is not another spot in the world, the natural beauties of which are so indelibly stamped on my recollection, or which seem to have so entered into my soul. I never feel so much the unalterable beauty and perfect harmony of the material world as when the moral world within me is shaken to pieces and leaves me not even a reed to lean upon. It is the same with music. Once, when a fearful struggle was going on within me, and (no matter whether right or wrong) I thought myself very near death, an organ in the street played a Scotch air which I had heard a thousand times before; but then, for the first time, I understood it. Each note had a meaning, each modulation had a sense, which has never been lost to me

since. Suffering and emotion are necessary (I believe it firmly) to expand our faculties in every line, and, with our powers of comprehension, increase our powers of admiration. I shall never feel the real beauty of military music, or the full sense of the muffled roll of the drum, till it leads me to battle, or marshals me to execution. Is it the same with my affections? Perhaps it is. Perhaps it is not in my nature passionately to love where I have never suffered. Perhaps if it had been my fate, after having from the days of childhood formed to myself an ideal image of what my soul could worship; after having met with the realisation of that dream of my fancy—a realisation as much more beautiful, as much more enchanting as life is superior in its most perfect form to the highest stretch of genius in the painter; if it had been my fate, after having watched, and followed, and loved, and doated on this woman during a year, which seemed to me but as an hour, so great was the love I bore her; had it been my fate to possess her, to call her mine, perhaps I should only have been, after a while, very fond of her, as men are of their wives—very glad to find her at home, after a day spent in the House of Commons, at one time of the year, or in shooting, at another. She might only have been one object to me among many others. It might have been so, though it is difficult to believe it; but we must believe what we see, nor dare to assert that the idol enshrined in our heart in hope, in fear, and in suffering, would have maintained its sway in the dull atmosphere of secure possession.

"We arrived at Elmsley on a lovely evening, and not a room in the house, not a spot in the grounds did I leave unvisited. While Edward and Lawson were engaged on the county registers and reports, as if their whole souls were bound up in them, I stood on the verandah, and looked on each well-known object in that lovely view till the whole was wrapt in darkness. That gradual obscuring of each spot which, when I first stood there, was glowing in the light of the evening sun, reminded me of my last conversation with you, when, in answer to the confession you extorted from me, you took up a book from your table and pointed to these lines, which I only read once, but have remembered ever since:—

'Nay, rather steel thy melting heart
To act the martyr's sternest part;
To watch, with firm unshrinking eye,
Thy darling visions as they die;
Till all bright hopes and hues of day
Have faded into twilight gray.'—*Christian Year*.

"But enough of all this. Our canvass has been eminently successful; Edward has exerted himself amazingly. On the nomination-day he really spoke admirably. It is impossible not to be struck with his strong sense, his uncompromising rectitude and steady moral decision of character. He is so animated, too, by all these subjects; quite enthusiastic, in his way, about the interests of the people, and the new field of exertion which his present prospects open to him. It is plain that he has a genius more fitted for active than for contemplative life,—and so much the better for him; for a man, this is the happiest of dispositions: and he will be happy; for there is nothing in his character incompatible with quiet enjoyment; no violent passions and feelings; no morbid sensibility; with him all is sober, practical, and rational.

"Good-bye, my dear Mary. I am happy to think that Alice is with you. Remember what you promised me; watch over her as you would over a flower which a breath might, sully or a breeze destroy. Thank God, you and I are no longer strangers to each other's thoughts and hearts.

"Your ever affectionate brother,

"H. LOVELL."

Could Mrs. Middleton have intended me to see this letter? Had she, perhaps, promised Henry to show it me? No, this was entirely, utterly impossible. It must have been a mistake; and I would not inform her of it, lest it should agitate and distress her. Henry had evidently imparted to her the secret of his unconquerable attachment to me. Was this wise in his own interest? Did it correspond with his usual caution, and, above all, with his recent behaviour? It seemed to me strange; but Mrs. Middleton was easily worked upon: she did not know Henry as I knew him; she thought him like herself; and because their minds were in unison, she fancied their hearts were alike. His power was so great over those who loved him, when he chose to exert it, that it seemed to me, now, as if he had taken up a new position, and, through his wife and his sister, meant to rivet the chain which bound us together. Never did two people know each other as well as Henry and myself. I always read his motives through the veil which he flung over them, and which, perhaps, concealed them sometimes from himself. He was a practical artist; his own life was the canvass on which he worked; and that was the reason why, with a selfish heart and an unprincipled mind, he possessed all the graces of emotion, all the charms of feeling. This letter (clever and well aimed as it was—for it touched upon the very wound which had been rankling in my heart during the last few days) failed in its object, if, indeed, he had hoped that it would meet my

eyes; for, as I read his account of Edward—as I felt the pain it was meant to inflict—as I acquiesced in the truth of some of his remarks, and indignantly repelled others, the cry of my heart, as I threw it from me, was in these words: "Rather be *his* slave than *your* idol."

On the following Saturday they both returned to London, and when I found myself again with Edward, I forgot everything in the joy of the moment. But when I was told that the day of our marriage was positively fixed for the following Monday, it seemed to me as if it was the first time that I had really believed it would take place, as if I had never considered before all that that step involved. For the first time I thought of what it would be to one in my peculiar situation, not only to love as I had long done, but to be bound by irrevocable ties to one who, ignorant of all the circumstances of my miserable fate, would wonder over each inequality of spirits I betrayed, condemn every tear I shed, read every letter I received, and, at the slightest appearance of equivocation or deceit, would banish me from his heart, and overwhelm me with his just anger. But it was *too late*, I said to myself—too late to retract, too late to think. I mentally closed my eyes, and passed through the next twenty-four hours like some one walking in his sleep.

On the next day (Sunday) I saw Henry for one moment as we were walking out of church. I told him, in a low voice, of Robert Harding's appearance in the parks on the last Wednesday, and of his following us through the streets.

"*You* saw him," he exclaimed. "Then it was not Alice's fancy?"

"No, no—I could swear to him. He had followed us, and stood at the shop-window long before Alice observed him."

Henry looked extremely discomposed, and muttered something to himself; then turning to me, he said—

"That fellow has been desperately in love with Alice for years—since she was quite a child. Her grandmother turned him out of the house on that account three years ago. Just before our marriage took place, he made some outrageous scenes; I threatened to give him into custody, and warned Mrs. Tracy that I should do so. Two or three days after, she told me he had sailed for America, and from that day to this I had heard nothing more about him; but I must find out if she knows of his return. Perhaps she employs him as a spy. I shall let you know what I hear."

After a pause, I said, with a great effort—

"You must not write to me on any account; remember that, Henry. Edward will read all my letters; he is already in the habit of doing so."

"It was exceedingly foolish of you not to object to it. Pray, how am I to communicate with you if anything should occur to make it desirable? Is your maid to be trusted?"

I coloured with anger and with shame, and gave Henry a look of indignant reproach.

"I really beg your pardon if this offends you; but it is not for my own sake that I ask the question. You yourself employed a third person when you required my assistance."

"I was not married then, Henry; and deceit, contemptible as it always is, was not as guilty as it will henceforward be. For God's sake, spare me the shame of a secret correspondence. You need not be afraid of my being too happy, or of my forgetting that you hold my fate in your hands."

"Do not impute to me as a crime, Ellen, that, unfortunately, *your* safety depends on *my* conduct. I have exercised the greatest control over myself lately, and I had hoped that you would have done justice to my motives."

As he said this we had reached the door of our house, and anxious not to part with him in anger, I whispered to him, as we shook hands—

"I do you justice, Henry. Forgive, and spare me!"

He wrung my hand and walked away, without waiting for his wife, who had gone into the house with Mrs. Middleton.

Mr. Lovell, who was at that moment calling on my uncle, took her home in his carriage. When I heard my aunt arrange with them at what hour they were to be at church the next day, and ask them to come home to luncheon afterwards, I stood by in a sort of stupified bewilderment. I then went into the back drawing-room, and wrote a note to Mrs. Hatton, to ask her to be present at my marriage the next day. As I was finishing it my aunt came in, and tried on the wreath of orange flowers, and the veil which she

had chosen for me.

I walked up and down the room—I stood at the window—I wished that Edward would come; I was getting frightened at my own nervousness. I went to the pianoforte, and sang Mrs. Hemans's "Two Voices," that cry of alternate mournful depression, and highly-wrought enthusiasm, in which the words and the music seem to be but the expression of one thought. My voice was unnaturally loud and thrilling; there was a sound in it which I could not bear. A moment afterwards I was desired to go to my uncle in the library; Edward was with him, and Lawson, the man of business. I was directed to sign some papers. I did so, and Lawson left the room. My uncle then said to me—

"On you, Ellen, and on Edward, I have settled all my property. Since the day that I lost my only child this has been my fixed purpose. I was anxious to live long enough to see it accomplished, and I am thankful that wish has been granted. I have one request to make to you both. Call your eldest girl *Julia* —make her wear this chain—it was round my child's neck when she died—and if I live, let me see her often. Now go, and God bless you both!"

I don't know what I said or did; these words fell like burning lead on my soul, and I almost sank on the ground. Edward took me out of the room; and the only hour of relief which that day afforded was when, with his arm around me, and my head on his shoulder, he suffered me to weep in silence.

…Then he raised my head gently but forcibly; then, with his sweet smile, and his low deep voice, he whispered to me that his happiness was unutterable—his love boundless—his soul mine for ever. His words—words of passion from him whom I worshipped—at whose side I felt myself unworthy to live—at whose feet I would have been content to die;—those words, those looks, those tones, thrilled through my whole frame, and wrought on my brain, turning remorse for the past, and fear for the future, into a delirious dream of joy, even as laudanum can change pain itself into ecstacy.

I dreamed that night that I was in church, and that everything was prepared for my marriage. We stood before the altar, and the priest opened the book for the marriage service; but as he began, it was the burial service that he read. They stopped him, and he turned the pages; but ever as he began again to read, the same words came to his lips, and the book in his hands grew larger and larger, and the words, "For the Burial of the Dead," stood out in bloody letters, and seemed to rise from the page. I looked up into the priest's face, and that was changing too. I had seen those features before; but I knew them not till the thin lips moved, and said—"Julia's murderer—Julia's murderer!" And then the book and the altar were gone, and a coffin stood in its place; and the same voice said, "Open it!"—and the lid rose, and there was a corpse in its shroud. It lifted itself up slowly, and I could not see the face; but I cried out in terror "Who is it?" and the grave-clothes fell—it was Alice! I closed my eyes and shrieked; and the same voice said, "Look again—look again!" I looked, and it was Edward. Over and over again, during that night, I awoke in speechless terror; and when I went to sleep again, the same dream, with slight variations, haunted me anew.

The last time I woke, Mrs. Middleton was standing by my bed-side; and as she pressed me to her heart, I clung to her convulsively, and repeated wildly, "Save me—save me!"

"From what, my child?" she whispered—"from what? Speak to me, Ellen. One word only; and at whatever cost it may be, it shall be done. Is it possible you do not love Edward?"

"O, too much! only too much!" I exclaimed, and burst into an agony of tears. Mrs. Middleton seemed relieved—assured me I was only very nervous—gave me something to drink, which calmed me—and stayed with me while I dressed.

We sat down to breakfast, and Edward soon arrived; he remarked my paleness, and spoke to me with a tenderness which brought again into my eyes the tears which I had resolutely repressed during the last hour. The time drew near, and I was taken to my room to put on my wedding-gown. By the time I was dressed, and the whole of the family were gathered together to look at me, and blessings were pronounced, and good wishes were uttered, and kisses were given, I had become quite calm again.

I had gone through so much that the power of emotion seemed almost worn out, and I felt as if I had grown callous and cold. We drove to church, and I looked quietly out of window while my hand was locked in Mrs. Middleton's. I saw two or three acquaintances as we drove along, and read the names on the shops that we passed, with that kind of mechanical attention which fixes our eyes without occupying our thoughts.

When we came into the vestry of—church, there were a number of people in it,—all my relations, and some friends. My eyes sought out Henry; he was speaking to Mrs. Brandon; and, except that he was much flushed, there was nothing unusual in his appearance. Alice was standing by him. Mr. Middleton came for me, and the door of the vestry was opened. We walked up to the altar. The clergyman was

already there, with the open book before him. I felt as if I was dreaming again. I trembled violently, and my teeth struck against each other. My aunt, Alice, and Henry, took their places on one side of the altar, and the rest of the people sat down in the surrounding pews. The clergyman bent forward and beckoned to my uncle, who went up to speak to him. At that moment I heard a step behind us, and somebody passed on Edward's side. I looked up, and saw a tall woman in deep mourning, and with a veil over her face, take her place in a pew which was nearly opposite to me. A vague terror seized me, and I could not take my eyes off this person. When everybody rose at the beginning of the opening exhortation, she remained sitting, till, when the priest said these words—

"Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

She slowly rose, drew back her veil, and fixed her eyes upon me; her thin lips moved as I had seen them move in my dream, and she seemed about to speak. I gave a hurried glance of despair at Henry; our eyes met, and then mine were rivetted to the ground, and my limbs and my heart seemed turned to stone. I *felt* that woman's gaze upon me. I knew that at the close of the exhortation she sat down, and that she rose again when the clergyman said—

"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" When Mr. Middleton took my hand and placed it in Edward's, the sound of a groan reached my ears; and when I raised my eyes, and, for the second time, fixed them by a kind of fascination on those malignant features and glassy eyes, they glared upon me with an expression which I cannot describe, and hardly dare to recall. The service went on, and when we knelt down to pray, while my face was buried in my hands, I heard the sound of receding footsteps; I looked up; she was gone, but I felt that she had cursed me as she went.

The ceremony was concluded. I was Edward's wife. I rose from my knees and looked about me. Henry was gone. Alice was pale, and her eyes were full of tears; she, too, was like what I had seen in my dream. We went into the vestry and signed some papers. As I was stepping into Edward's chariot to drive home again, a paper was thrust into my hand; I took it mechanically, and held it unconsciously in my clenched hand. I smiled when Edward spoke tome, and looked at him with inexpressible affection when he drew me to him, and called me his wife—his own beloved wife!

We arrived in Brook-street, and I went to dress for the journey. They brought me some biscuits and wine and water. I drank some hastily, but could not eat. Mrs. Middleton gave me her last kiss, and my uncle took me down to the carriage. I stepped into it, and Edward after me. The door was closed. I opened mechanically the paper in my hand; it contained these words—"Your sin shall find you out." I crumpled it again, and flung it out of window. I talked fast and eagerly to Edward. After an hour or two I fell into a heavy sleep. When we reached Dashminster, I awoke in a burning fever. Edward carried me upstairs, and laid me on a bed. I grew delirious, and raved all night. They bled me, I believe, and in two days I was better, and able to proceed to Hillscombe.

CHAPTER XIX.

"We take fair days in winter for the spring."

YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

"O how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the scene,
And by and by a cloud takes all away."

SHAKESPEARE.

Edward, I kneel to you in spirit while I write this record of our married life. By all the trembling hope I feel that a day may come, not of mercy, but of justice—a day when, though you will not forgive me, yet you will believe in me—when, though you will not open your arms to me, yet you will say, "She was false, but not false to me." By this hope I gather strength to write. But as I pace up and down my narrow room, or lay my head on the marble slab, the only cold place it can find, dare I think of what has been, of what is not? Shall I not go mad, and in my madness shall I not accuse you, Edward? Shall I not tell God and man, that you have shut your heart against me, and broken mine? And on the day of judgment, will not God ask you what you have done with her, who, however guilty, was guiltless to you? Oh, deeply loved and deeply mourned, ever absent from my sight, ever present to my thoughts! lord of

my bosom's love, object of its idolatry, I do not accuse you. If a fallen spirit banished from Heaven ever mourned over his fall, without a murmur for the past or a hope for the future, his feelings are like mine, when in my solitude I think that once you loved me and called me yours.

Can it be that such things are and pass away, and leave no traces behind them, save broken hearts and mental agonies? Does Nature, while it rejoices with those who rejoice, never weep with those who weep? Does the sun shine as brightly on the forest glades of Hillscombe as when I wandered through them with Edward? Does the stream dash through them with the same reckless joy as when he helped me over its mossy stones? Is the thyme as sweet, is the heather as purple, as when by his side I scrambled over its wild moors? And thyself, Edward, thyself—art thou as strong, as beautiful, as stern as ever? Hast thou driven me from thy side, and when the first anguish of that hour was gone by, hast thou said, "The bitterness of death is past," and raised again thy stately head in its beauty and its pride?

Is joy more sacred than grief, or is it so strange to the human heart that, when present, we dare not scan its fleeting form, nor recall its image when it is past. One short dream of bliss was mine; it stands alone in a life, which, though not long in years, has been long in sorrow. Once the cup has been raised to my lips; one draught I took of that for which my soul longs with a burning and quenchless thirst. Happiness! yes, happiness; one hour of which reveals to us what an eternity of bliss can be; for time and space, beginning and end, are as though they were not, in that intense life of the soul.

For seven days the sun rose in cloudless majesty; for seven days he sunk to rest "in one unclouded blaze of living light." Sunshine streamed on the grassy hills; it gilded the fields of ripening corn; it pierced into the depths of the forest; it bathed the world in light, and gladdened the heart of man. And I too, for a while, was glad; in the fierce fever which for some hours had robbed me of my senses, the anguish of my soul seemed to have passed away. Nothing was changed in my fate, but I felt weak, and there is something in weakness which resembles peace; and in the love which we give to man, when it is entire and undivided, there is a power which is strong for good or for evil, as the hand of the master wields it.

We were alone; no familiar faces—no accustomed objects reminded me of myself—of that self which had so straggled, so sinned, and so suffered. I gazed on the beautiful works of God; I raised my eyes from the green sward on which we trod, to the soft blue sky, and my soul was melted within me. I listened to Edward's words, and in that blessed solitude nothing disturbed the silent echo which his voice of music left upon my ear. As I closed my eyes in sleep, I blessed him; as I opened them again I beheld him; and when he knelt in prayer, I knelt too, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

"Ellen, my love, shall you be ready to set off at nine to-morrow? We must be at Elmsley by six.—In tears, Ellen? What is the matter, my love? Now, really, this is childish."

"I cannot bear to go—I cannot bear to leave this place. I shall never return to it if I leave it now. In the murmur of the river—in the songs of the birds, in the rustling of the leaves, there has been all day a voice of lamentation which has haunted me; something mournful which has sounded to me like an eternal adieu. I have tried to exclude these thoughts, but they return in spite of me; and when you spoke of going, your words—"

"My dearest Ellen, I really cannot listen to such absurd nonsense. You know how much I admire your love of the beauties of nature—how much I appreciate your eloquence in describing them; but when all this degenerates into sentimentality, I own I cannot stand it."

"Dearest Edward, for you everything in nature wears a smile, and I thank God that it is so. You have never had cause to shrink from what is pure and bright and beautiful, with an aching heart and a self-accusing spirit."

As I raised my eyes to Edward's face, I was startled at its expression. There was a sternness in it which made me tremble.

"Ellen," he said, "listen to me, and mark my words. Either a morbid sensibility, which I despise, or a mawkish affectation, which I detest, injures the tone of your mind, and the truth of your character. Never let me hear again of wounded spirits, and self-reproaches, and poetic sufferings. When you were a girl you almost frightened away my love for you by these mysterious exclamations, and I hate the very sound of them. Do not let me hear that my wife cannot look upon the face of nature with a calm and hopeful eye, or on her past life with a self-approving conscience. I know there is no reality in such language, God knows, I should not speak so calmly if I could suppose there was; but as you value my love, or dread my anger, never use expressions again which in your mouth are senseless."

"You are severe," I said, with an attempt at a smile, which made my mouth quiver; "your wife should

indeed be perfect, for it is evident that her faults would meet with no mercy from you."

"You think me harsh, Ellen? Perhaps I am. But look here; there are four lines in this book (and he took up a volume of Metastasio's plays which was lying on the table), which makeup, in my opinion, for all the sentimental non-sense it contains." He pointed to these lines:

"La gloria nostra
E geloso cristallo, e debil canna
Ogni aura ch'inchina, ogni respiro ch'appanna."

"My feelings are, perhaps, exaggerated, but I own it fairly to you. I can conceive that, as a woman's reputation might suffer from trifles light as air, so a man's love might vanish from what would appear but a slight cause for such an effect. You were about to speak, Ellen, and you have checked the words that were rising to your lips, but I read them in your eyes, and I will answer them. It is not because my love is weak, that a fault in you would seem to me as a crime in another. It is because, to discover that you were not pure and good and true, beyond any other woman in the world, would be so dreadful to me, that I doubt if in that overthrow of all my pride and my happiness, my love could survive. My pride, I say, as well as my happiness, for I *am* proud of you, my beloved wife, when I look at your dark eyes—at your clear brow—at your curling lip, and feel that no word has ever passed those lips which an angel might not have uttered, nor any eye has ever been raised to yours but with respect and affection. They are glorious gifts, Ellen, precious treasures which you possess—an innocent mind and a spotless reputation. Beware how you accustom yourself to talk, for effect, of remorse and self-reproach. They *are* too dark and too bitter things to be trifled with."

"True," I answered, "they are too dark and too bitter subjects for us to discuss. You are right. Forgive me my folly. I shall not fall again into the same error."

And back into the deepest recesses of a swelling heart were thrust regrets, fears, hopes, which were thus commanded never again to trouble the smooth surface of married life. Henceforward I was ordered to stand like a painted sepulchre, in all the outward form and show of virtue, nor ever dare to utter in Edward's hearing that life was not always fair, its memories sweet, and its prospects bright. The dream was over, and its danger too, for in its happiness my soul had grown weak; it had pouted forth its love, and in the rushing tide of feeling the secret of its misery was escaping it. Now the barrier was raised again—now the mental separation was begun; for as we drove out of sight of Hillscombe on the following day, with that self-command which, while the heart is aching, teaches the tongue to utter some common-place remark in an indifferent voice and careless manner, I turned to Edward and asked him some trifling question, while at that very moment burning tears stood in my eyes, and a passionate farewell was uttered in my soul.

One of the strangest feelings in life, is that of gliding into a new state of things with a kind of matter-of-course facility which we do not beforehand imagine to be possible. This struck me much, when, on the day of our arrival at Elmsley, I found myself once more seated at dinner in that well-known dining-room, in which every bit of furniture, from the picture of a certain Admiral Middleton, which stood over the chimney-piece with a heap of blue cannon-balls by his side, to the heavy, sweeping, red curtains in which I had often hid myself in a game of hide-and-seek, was as familiar to me as the face of a friend. Here, in the house where in despair I had once refused Edward, I was sitting as his bride, and bowing in return for the healths which were drunk in honour of my marriage; and Henry—Henry, who had so often threatened, upbraided, once almost cursed me—greeted me now with a smile, and the bridal nosegay of white camellias and jessamine which I held in my hand was gathered and given by him. Alice, also, the child of Bridman cottage, the tradesman's daughter, was sitting by Mr. Middleton in all the quiet dignity of her natural manner. For the first time she was dressed in an evening gown of white muslin, and a wreath of shining holly was in her hair. Mr. Middleton seemed particularly happy; he had obtained the great object of all his wishes; he had married me to Edward. Edward's return for the county was next to certain; and such was the softening influence of this state of things that he asked Henry to drink wine with him, and nodded to him good-humouredly as he did so. Mrs. Middleton, on the contrary, looked anxious and careworn, and once or twice I saw her eyes filled with tears, as she turned them alternately upon Alice and me.

In the evening Henry spoke to me but little, and nothing could be more amiable and gentle than his manner. He carefully avoided every subject that could have been painful to me, and whatever he said was soothing. He was out of spirits, but there was no bitterness in his depression. In trifles which will not bear recital, by some scarcely perceptible change of tone, by an answer given in the right place, by a look of assent when no word was uttered, he gave what at that moment I wanted—sympathy, and that silent, constant, unobtrusive sympathy, fell like oil on troubled waters.

"Does she like Elmsley?" I asked, as Alice sat opposite to us, earnestly reading a book which she had

just taken out of the bookcase.

"I hardly know. The kind of life she leads here, quiet as it seems to us, is so new to her that I fancy it almost oppresses her. She has not been quite like herself since she came here. I cannot call it a cloud, but a shade has sometimes passed over her face whose expression formerly never used to vary. Do you remember the first day you ever saw her?"

"Don't I—the old fountain and the blooming children: what a picture that was! But look at her *now;* is she not like what our fancy, aided by the loveliest conceptions of genius, presents to our thoughts, when we think of *her* whom all generations call blessed?"

I murmured in a low tone, more to myself than to him, the beautiful appellations of the blessed Virgin —"Lily of Eden—mystic rose—star of the morning!"

Henry added, in as low a voice, and without looking at me,
"Notre Dame de bon secours."

I understood him, and acknowledged to myself the truth of his prediction, that there was one share in my soul which nothing could ever rob him of, and that was that undefinable communion of thought and feeling, which an extraordinary fatality of circumstances, and a natural congeniality of mind, had created between us.

The next day there was nothing but bustle and excitement in the house, and in the neighbourhood. The polling was to begin at twelve o'clock that morning; and, at an early hour, we all drove to the town of—, to take up our quarters for the day in the drawing-room of the inn which belonged to my uncle, and the landlord of which was one of Edward's staunch supporters.

The loud cries of "Middleton for ever!" the enthusiastic cheering as we drove along; the occasional groans and hisses, which were too feeble to depress our spirits; the flags; the music; the bustle; Edward's heightened colour and animated countenance; the interest felt and expressed by all those about us; the eagerness of contest; the anxiety for success; the anticipated triumph over the enemy—all this together worked me up into such a state of excitement, that I could hardly sit still in the carriage, or at the window, or forbear to shout with the shouting mob.

Henry seemed as much interested as any of us; he was continually going backwards and forwards from the poll to the inn: he won even my uncle's heart, by the look of dismay with which he brought, at one moment, the news that our antagonists were unexpectedly getting ahead of us, and the burst of joy with which, towards one o'clock on the second day, he dashed into the room with the account of Edward's triumphant return by a considerable majority. His face had worn a look of zealous anxiety during the hours when the result had been doubtful; and, not my uncle, in all the gratification of party spirit, and of successful influence; nor myself, when I saw Edward chaired and cheered, and extolled to the skies; were more intensely pleased, or more wildly gay, than Henry.

I was bent upon hearing Edward speak in the Town-hall, and insisted upon going there with Henry and Alice. Mr. Middleton made some objections to this, but I overruled them all; and soon I found myself in a kind of gallery, which had been hastily adorned with flags and ribbons of our political and family colours.

As I bowed, in return to the bursts of cheering which greeted me, at once as a bride, and as the wife of the successful candidate; as I looked upon that dense mass of human beings, who were all vociferating the name I loved, and calling for long life to him whom I adored,—never before having witnessed a scene of popular excitement, I felt carried out of myself by the tumultuous agitation of that moment. I felt that the eyes of the multitude were upon me; and, for the first time in my life, I felt certain and glad that I was handsome.

There ran a murmur of applause through the crowd; the air was rent by cries of "Long live Middleton's bride! Long live the bride of Elmsley!" and, as Edward walked into the hall, and looked up at the gallery where I was, the smile that lighted up his features, and the earnest gaze which he fixed upon me for an instant before he began to speak, conveyed to me more than any words could have done, that the beauty which had excited the enthusiasm of the mob reigned over his heart, and captivated his proud spirit.

He began to speak: I mechanically seized Henry's hand, while I listened with breathless attention. His first words were uttered slowly; but they were well chosen, and well applied. Gradually he warmed with his subject; and, in the summary which he gave of his political opinions, there were that good sense and power of expression, which indicate a high order of eloquence—above all, there was in his countenance, and in his words, that consciousness of unsullied worth and integrity, the moral effects of

which no flights of genius and no zeal of party can supply. When he spoke of responsibility and its duties, it was responsibility to God as well as to man: when he spoke of the welfare of the people and of the country, there was not a human being, private friend or political opponent, (enemies he had none,) who could not have borne witness, that each day of his life was spent in unwearied efforts for the good of others; and, therefore, he had a right to speak of God, for he served Him; of His church, for he honoured it; of his country, for he loved it; of virtue, for he practised it; of character, for his was unblemished; of honour, for his was unstained; and among all that assembled multitude, there was not one whose hand could point to a word or deed of his, that had not made his light to shine before men, and glorified his Father in Heaven, or whose voice could have named his name as connected with aught of shame or dishonour.

"Speak on, Edward, speak on, and let all who hear you and see you to-day, feel for an instant what I spend my life in feeling, that if many have done virtuously, you excel them all."

* * * * * * * * * * * *

"Ay, that's fine speaking for the husband of she as killed the child, and got the property!"

Was that a voice from the lowest depths of hell? Had I heard those words—and did I not fall down upon my face, and call to the mountains to fall on me, and to the hills to cover me? No; I sat on and grasped Henry's hand, and saw his deadly pale face turned to the gallery over our heads; and I heard a scuffle above, and a row beginning, and a sound of voices like the hoarse murmur of the sea when the waves are rising; then Edward's voice ceased, and loud deafening cheers rang through the building; and Henry dragged me through the crowd; and among that world of faces, and in that rushing noise, and in that hurrying to and fro, I felt as if I must eternally wander, and hear again and again those words which had curdled my blood, and sickened my heart.

"Oh, no!" I cried, as Henry carried me to the carriage, and placed me by Alice's side, "Oh, no!" I cried, regardless of her presence, and almost wild with despair, "now, my punishment is greater than I can bear. I must leave him,—I must fly,—I must hide myself for ever… I am mad. Don't you see I am mad, Henry? Don't try to stop me. She must know it—he must know it—all the world must know it now. Let me go, let me go!"

I sunk back into the carriage; and the last thing I heard, before I fainted, was Henry saying to his wife, "The excitement has been too much for her. I fear the brain fever will return."

CHAPTER XX.

"For now I stand as one upon a rock,
Environed with a wilderness of sea,
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
Expecting ever, when some curious surge
Will, in his brinish bowels, swallow him."

SHAKESPEARE.

When I opened my eyes again, my head was leaning on Alice's shoulder, and Henry was springling water on my face. We were just arriving at the inn; and, half supported, half carried by Henry and Mr. Middleton, who met us at the door, I reached my own room.

At first I had no distinct recollection of what had occurred, but gradually the whole of it came back to my mind. Dreadful is that return of memory, after nature has for a while suspended the consciousness of pain. I turned with a feeling that was almost like aversion from my aunt and from Alice, who were bathing my head and hands with eau de Cologne, and offering me sal volatile and water to drink. There seemed a want of sympathy in their very kindness. I almost felt to dislike them for their ignorance of what I was enduring, and for talking of past fatigue and present rest, while I was suffering so acutely.

"I should like to be alone, and to try and sleep."

"Should you, my love? Then we will go, and leave your maid in the next room, in case you should want anything."

For a few minutes I lay in silence, feeling cold and wretched, the throbbing in my head and the ticking of the clock in the passage seeming to keep time. The faint echo of some distant cries reached

my ears, and I could distinguish the words of "Middleton for ever!" I trembled and hid my face in my pillow. What would they cry out next? They shouted louder still; and my maid came in on tiptoe, and when I turned round and looked at her, she said, "I thought they would have woke you, Ma'am. They are hallooing so, because Mr. Middleton is coming home; and they are cheering him all the way."

Coming home! He, Edward! To me! The husband of *her* who... Oh, had he heard those words? had he noticed them? Would he repeat them? and as he did, would a sudden light flash on his brain, and the whole truth burst upon him at once? There had been a scuffle in that gallery. What was it? I must know; I must hear; I must speak to Henry.

"More shouting! more hallooing!"

"Mr. Middleton is coming in, Ma'am."

"Lock the door, and say I am asleep."

"What were you pleased to say, Ma'am?"

"Nothing, nothing. Do I look very ill?"

"Not very ill, Ma'am."

Edward came, and in a kind manner said, "My own love, I am so vexed to hear that you have been poorly. You ought not to have come. How are you now?"

"Better, dearest."

"Your aunt says you are not to talk; so now be quite still, and try to go to sleep. I am going to dinner, where I shall have to speak again. Did you like my speech this morning?"

I seized his hand, kissed it over and over again, and then pressed it upon my eyes, as I answered; "Perfect,—perfect as yourself."

He drew me fondly to him; and I whispered in his ear, "Come to Elmsley now. Do not leave me; I am weak; I am ill. Give up this dinner; I shall be miserable if you go to it. Take me back to Elmsley *now*, immediately."

"My dear love, what are you talking about? You know the thing is impossible. You can go when you like with your aunt; I shall come in the evening."

"That will not do, Edward. I entreat, I implore you not to leave me. Have I no influence with you? Have those detestable politics already so engrossed you, that my wishes, my entreaties, are vain?"

"For Heaven's sake, Ellen, do not be so foolish! Again in tears! Again a scene! This is really past endurance."

He walked up and down the room, while I stood by the chimney, and with clasped hands and streaming eyes repeated, "Scold me; reproach me; but do not leave me! Do, do, I implore you, come with me at once to Elmsley."

At this moment my maid came in, and put a letter into Edward's hands. The direction was exactly in the same round, peculiar characters, in which the threatening words that had been twice addressed to me were written. I felt myself turning as pale as death, and then the blood rushed to my head with violence. I darted upon the letter, and in a second I had snatched it out of Edward's hand and thrown it into the fire. He looked at me for an instant in silent astonishment; and, partly to implore forgiveness, partly because I trembled so that I could not stand, I fell on my knees, and hid my face in my hands.

"What is the meaning of this, Ellen? Explain yourself immediately. Speak if you do not wish me to leave you in anger," he added, with his hand on the handle of the door.

"Oh, for God's sake, for mercy's sake, do not go now! do not leave me in this way!"

"Then speak!" he rejoined almost fiercely; "give some explanation of an act which I cannot understand or forgive."

"I thought—I fancied—that that letter came from some woman;—a woman who has watched you, followed you. Forgive me, Edward; I was jealous—I was mad! Oh, have pity upon me and do not drive me quite mad!"

As I said these words, I held my hand to my head, and staggered towards the bed. Edward lifted me

up, placed me upon it, and kissing my forehead, said, "God help you, poor child!"

I threw my arms round his neck, and clung to him.

When he disengaged himself, and left me, I felt as if it might be for the last time; other voices, other letters might reach him; and then all my previous conduct would rise up in judgment against me. What he might once have thrown aside as the scrawl of a madman, would now appear to him in the form of an explanation. I rang the bell with violence; and when my maid came, I desired her to find Henry and send him to me immediately.

"Shall I go and tell him in the drawing-room, Ma'am?"

"No; I will go there myself."

I put on my bonnet and shawl, and answered all inquiries by assurances that I was well again, and ready to drive back to Elmsley. The carriages were ordered; and calling Henry to the window, I asked him in a low voice if he had anything to tell me; if he knew anything more. He put his finger on his lip and turned away. An instant afterwards he asked me aloud if I would give up my place in the close carriage to Alice, who had a slight cold, and go with him in his. I nodded assent; and when my uncle said, as I thought sternly, "This is a very foolish plan, Ellen; you had better come with us;" I cried out that the air would do me good; and, springing in by Henry's side, drove off to Elmsley.

"What have you heard? What have you found out?"

"In the first place, tell me, have you had a scene with Edward since you came home? Has he questioned you about anything?"

"How do you mean? About what?"

"Perhaps he will take no notice; but you must be prepared with an answer if he should; and we had better talk it over together. It makes me miserable to give you pain; but you must not be taken by surprise: a letter has been sent to him, and is in his hands now, whether he has read it or not as yet."

"Who sent it? Who spoke in the gallery?"

"I believe it was Robert Harding; but I cannot be sure of it. The moment after we brought you home, I tried to find out. All I could gather was that one of the servants struck the speaker, whoever he was; that he returned the blow, and that a scuffle ensued; the police interfered, and the man slipped away. I returned to the inn; and as I was standing by the window half an hour afterwards, I saw Harding walking down the street; I went down-stairs and asked your servant at the door if he knew that man, or had ever seen him before. He told me that he had just given him a letter for Edward, which he had requested should be delivered to him immediately. It must have been Harding who spoke in the gallery, and whom I saw in the street. Mrs. Tracy denied the other day all knowledge of his being in England; but I can swear to him. I asked your servant for the letter, which he must have thought strange enough, and I do not know what I could have done had he produced it; but as it was, he had given it an instant before to your maid to take up-stairs, and I have been in cruel anxiety ever since."

"That letter is destroyed."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I snatched it out of Edward's hand and burnt it. It is almost a relief to find from what this has saved me, for it was at a dreadful cost, as Edward was fearfully incensed. But, for Heaven's sake, Henry, tell me what are we to do now? Harding will write again; there is no security, no hope. This cannot last."

"Something must certainly be done, and I must find out this Harding. I am enraged with old Tracy, for having betrayed it all to him; but money, perhaps… Have you much at your disposal, Ellen?"

"Some, not a great deal; but I can get more, perhaps. Oh, Heavens! is it come to this: must I buy the silence of a set of wretches, as if I had indeed been a vile criminal? And what have I done after all? Good God! what have I done? Nothing that I might not proclaim to the world, with regret and sorrow indeed, but without shame or remorse."

"You should in that case have proclaimed it sooner. It is too late now."

"So you say, and so you have made me act. If it had not been for you, if I had never known you, if you had never crossed my path, I should not be the miserable creature I am now. But I am driven to extremities; sorrow and shame compass me about on every side. I can never look Edward, you, or the world in the face again, |till you release me from the fatal oath which you extorted from me in an hour

of weakness and of despair."

"It is from your own weakness, from your rash and foolish despair, that in spite of yourself I will guard you."

"Oh, Heaven, deliver me from such guardianship as yours! God save me from your counsels, and rescue me from your power!"

"Go, then, go, and tell your husband that you killed your cousin by mistake. Tell him that you were on the point of marrying me by mistake; that you married him by mistake; and have deceived him and me, and every one you have had to do with, all by mistake. Go and break the most solemn engagement, which you called upon God to witness; heap fresh guilt and fresh remorse on your head; but, if Edward should not give credit to your story, and should hint at separation, remember that there is a man in the world who loves you in spite of all your scorn and your violence, and who would kneel at your feet if the rest of the world contemned and deserted you."

"Another word of this kind, Henry, and I never speak to you again."

"You forget yourself, Ellen. Poor weak woman, what could you do without me? Look at this letter, which in your difficulties you once wrote to me, when you dared not marry Edward without my consent. It never leaves me; there, in my bosom, I keep it as a charm to recall softer thoughts and better feelings when an evil spirit takes possession of me, and urges me to drive you to desperation. Have mercy on yourself, and on me, Ellen. Your present position is far more awful than it then was; but if you will be patient and trust in me, all may yet be well. I will find this Harding out, and take some means to stop his mouth. Think of all you would forego, if in one rash moment I suffered you to disclose the truth to Edward. I solemnly swear to you, that I speak the truth, when I assert that from what I know of him and of his character, and something of his past history too, I am certain that he would part from you if these circumstances were to come to his knowledge. And do you know, Ellen, what I save you from? No, you do not know what it is to part. You do not know what it is to give up love, and hope, and joy; never to see the face which to see is in itself happiness; not to hear the voice which to hear is to be blest; and to feel that there is life before us, life to be gone through, and no light to gild it, no music in our souls, no hopes nor even fears; and oh, how wretched is that state where even fear would seem a blessing! No, no, do not part from him you love; never feel what I have felt; but feel for me sometimes: and when you wake to-morrow, and remember that but for me your eyes would not be gladdened by the sight of your husband, treasure up that thought against the next time that harsh words and cutting reproaches are rising to your lips against one who seeks to save you from the anguish he himself endures."

I returned the pressure of Henry's hand, and we drove on in silence for some time. He had as usual subdued and reconciled me to a return to the ordinary state of things between us. He went on to advise me strongly, and apparently with great good sense, not to oppose a speedy return to London, and to promote, instead of discouraging, the interest which Edward took in politics. "Your spirits are naturally unequal," he said; "and you have often causes for worry and anxiety. It is easy enough to command one's self for an hour or two in the course of the day; and the very joy which you will feel in Edward's society during those intervals which he will devote to you, will enable you to keep from him those alternations which must affect him in a disagreeable manner. It is impossible to say what stories this Harding may have spread in the neighbourhood, and till they have died away you will feel much more comfortable in London, where Edward will have constant occupation, and you yourself resources of all sorts for interest and amusement. A quiet life may be a good thing for those who have no cares or troubles; but when, to use a common expression, one has anything on one's mind, it is the worst possible plan of existence: it is equally difficult to shake it off one's self, or to conceal it from others, without the aid of external excitements."

In this manner Henry talked on till we reached Elmsley.

Late that evening Edward returned. He had made another excellent speech; and in order to prevent any allusion to my conduct in the morning, I questioned him about politics, and listened with apparent interest to explanations about divers party questions, and details relative to the measures expected during the next session.

During a pause, however, he said to me in a low voice, "I have made inquiries about the letter which you destroyed in so rash a manner this morning. Your groundless jealousy entirely misled you. It was left for me by a man whom nobody knew, and must have been some petition I suppose. I ought not to have forgiven you so easily, for it was unjustifiable to destroy a letter in that way from some absurd suspicion; but you owned your folly so frankly that it disarmed me."

I sighed deeply, but made no answer.

The next morning, at breakfast, Edward asked Henry if he knew how the row had begun, which took place in the gallery during the conclusion of his speech.

"Some one called you names, I believe," Henry carelessly answered; "and one of our people resented it. That was all."

"Do you know who it was that took up my cause in that way?" said Edward.

"Old James, the coachman, I believe," answered Henry.

Old James had known me from a baby—had taught me to ride; he had always been much attached to me, and I could easily understand his anger at the horrible imputation cast upon me; but I trembled from head to foot at the idea that in his very indignation he would spread the report, and, above all, that if Edward spoke to him he would repeat it. I did not feel courage to speak to him myself on the subject, and, therefore, as usual, I turned to Henry for assistance. I whispered to him a few words, and he immediately left the room.

"What have you sent Henry about?" my uncle asked.

The question was a simple one, but at the moment I could not find an answer to it; and as Alice fixed her large calm eyes upon me, I coloured and stammered out something unintelligible about ordering the horses. She looked at me steadily for an instant, and then taking up her knitting she worked on in silence. I was copying out some music, and for a quarter of an hour there was no other sound in the room but the scratching of my pen and the rustling of Mr. Middleton's and Edward's newspapers. When Henry returned I felt to colour again, and breathed more freely when he took up a third newspaper and sat down by the fire. After a few minutes were elapsed I went to the pianoforte and began playing. Henry got up and joined me.

"All is right," he said, "about James, but the sooner you leave this place the better. There are all sorts of stories about. They will soon die a natural death; but your absence would be very desirable."

"Heaven knows I do not wish to stay here. But how can I make
Edward and my uncle go?"

"I will try to persuade my sister, what is, in fact, true, that, if they are going abroad for this winter, they ought to be setting out now. You will naturally accompany them to London; indeed, you can make a point of it with Edward; and then, once in London, you can easily contrive to stay there. As Parliament meets at the beginning of November, your coming back here would probably be out of the question."

"Edward will wish to shoot next month."

"Then go to Hillscombe;—anywhere but here."

"Have you seen that man?"

"Not yet; I shall ride to Bridman this afternoon and find him out."

"What is he doing there?"

"I don't know; but James tells me he has been staying at the inn there for the last three weeks."

"Oh, that I were gone from hence! That I had the wings of a dove to flee away and be at rest! Henry, shall I ever know again what it is to be at rest?"

"Rest would not do for you. You have too keen a spirit, too strong a will, and too much genius to know what rest is. A good thing in its way I grant; but neither for you nor me was it ever decreed. We can be intensely happy, we can be intensely miserable. We tremble in the midst of joy, for we feel that it is too exquisite to last. In anguish we hope on, for we cannot conceive life without something to brighten its dull course; and we would rather die than live without a fear, a hope, an emotion of any sort."

As he said these words he fixed his eyes on his wife, who was still apparently absorbed in her work at some distance from us.

She got up at this moment and came towards us. She had a letter in her hand, which she held out to Henry, and at the same time she said distinctly and slowly, "This letter was found at the bottom of *our* carriage. It was brought to *me*, and I return it to *you*."

The delicate colour of her cheek was slightly heightened, but her voice was perfectly calm, and she walked slowly out of the room. It was my letter to Henry, the only one I had ever written to him. He had shown it to me the day before, and now she had seen it, at least, she must have recognised the

handwriting. Henry bit his lip, tore up the paper into fragments, and threw them into the fire.

He returned to me, and said in a low voice, "Would that my love, my guilty love for you, could die away like those fragments in the flame. But, Ellen, it is too late; we have sown the whirlwind, and we must reap the storm."

When I came down to luncheon, I hardly dared to look towards Alice. Never had I feared anything so much as to meet those calm and gentle eyes. She came up to me as we were leaving the dining-room, and with her sweet voice asked me if I would drive with her. I gave a hasty assent, although I dreaded beyond expression to find myself alone with her, and I was much relieved when my uncle volunteered to accompany us.

It was a fine October afternoon, and as we were driving out of the gates of the park, Mr. Middleton turned to Alice and asked her if she knew the drive by Shirley Common, and back by the Woods of Bridman.

"No," she said; "I have often walked through Bridman Woods; but I do not know the drive you mention."

"Then we will take it to-day. Drive to Shirley Common, stop when you come to Euston Gate, and come back through Bridman Woods and home by the village."

There seemed in truth to be some fatality pursuing me. I could not take a common drive without some fresh cause for anxiety; and as we proceeded in the appointed direction, I thought of the day when I had so much annoyed Henry by persisting in visiting Bridman Cottage. As we drove along the terrace where I had seen Alice for the first time, I saw her eyes fixed on the broken fountain, and her lips moved as if she was repeating something to herself. She suddenly turned to my uncle, and asked him if he would put her down at the corner of the terrace and wait for her a few minutes, while she went to look at the house where she had once lived.

"I want to see Bridman Cottage myself," answered my uncle. "I have had the offer of a tenant, and shall be glad to go over it."

He desired the coachman to drive there. As we passed the inn, I saw Henry's horse standing in the yard. I instantly turned Mr. Middleton's attention to an old oak on the other side of the road, and this circumstance escaped unobserved. When we reached the cottage, the door was opened by an old woman who had had the care of it since Mrs. Tracy had given it up. She threw open the shutters, and the slanting rays of the evening sun shone, through the casement on the dusty brick floor. When we followed her into the back parlour, she opened the door into the little garden, the neat and gay appearance of which contrasted with the dirty and forlorn aspect of the cottage. A spade and a rake were lying on the grass-plot in front of it. Mr. Middleton inquired of the old woman how she managed to keep the garden in so good a state, and who she got to work in it.

"Why, Sir, if you had come some four weeks ago, you would have hardly said the same, for it's nothing as I can do myself; and my son as comes home from a Saturday to a Monday, it's not much that he can do either; but last month a man from London, what lives at the Crown, he came here and asked me to show him the house, and when he see'd the garden and the condition it was in, he asked me to let him set to work in it and put it to rights; and a deal he has done in it to be sure for the time. He got Madge, the washerwoman, to come over one day and tell him how it all was when them people as lived in it last were here. And a power of work he did to put up that arbour there, as she told him it was afore the neighbour's boys had got in and pulled it to pieces."

"But what is that man doing here? What is he?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Sir; he does jobs for the carpenter sometimes, and turns a penny may be that way."

"You should not let people into the house whom you know nothing about."

"Lord, Sir! what harm can he do? There's nothing to take in the place, and sure he has made the garden look gay to what it did."

Mr. Middleton went to look at the cow-shed; and the old woman, turning to Alice and myself, continued, "Madge says as how he has written a name with them flowers out in that corner; but I can't say I reads it myself—it's a queer sort of print enough."

We both moved in that direction, and saw at the same time, under the wall, traced in the delicate lilac flowers of the Virginian Stock, the name of *Alice*. She looked steadily on the spot for a few seconds, and

then turning to the woman, asked her the name of the man whom she had spoken of.

"Robert Harding, Ma'am."

Alice only said, "Poor fellow! I understand it all."

She turned away and walked into the house. I leant against the wall, and remained buried in thought till my uncle returned. He was in a hurry to go, and desired me to look for Alice. Not finding her in the rooms below, I went up the narrow staircase, opened the door of what had once been her bed-room, and looked into the closet within. There was the view of the church, such as she had once shown it me from that window: she was on her knees, and her head was resting on her hands; the sound of a deep sigh caught my ear. I looked at her kneeling in that bare and empty room where I had seen her once before with her books and her flowers, her sweet and pleasant thoughts, her bright and quiet smiles. I looked on this picture and on that, and something whispered to my soul, "Who has done this?" and conscience answered, "*Thou*, even *thou*." I heard my uncle's impatient step below, and I said, "Alice, will you come?" She rose from her knees, and there was in her face that peace which passeth all understanding. She looked into mine and, doubtless, saw in it the storms which swept over my soul, for her meek eyes looked kindly upon me. She drew from her bosom a small wooden cross, which hung by a black ribbon round her neck; she held it to her lips and then to mine, and said, "Borne for us, and by us."

Dinner was half over that day before Henry came in; his face was flushed, and his brow clouded. He answered roughly and abruptly his sister's questions as to the cause of his lateness; drank a great deal of wine, and maintained a gloomy and sullen silence. Partly from a kind of utter discouragement, partly from the fear of giving pain to Alice, instead of eagerly watching for an opportunity of speaking to him after dinner, and learning the result of his interview with Harding, I avoided Henry, and even left the drawing-room; and going up to my own turret sitting-room, I raked up the embers of the fire, and sat before it in gloomy contemplation. At the end of about half an hour, Henry burst into the room, and, as I looked at him in astonishment, he exclaimed bitterly, "Pray be so good as to dispense with forms for once, and receive me graciously if you can, for my patience is exhausted, and I would recommend you not to trifle with me. Do you imagine," he continued, with increasing violence, "that I am to submit to the most painful and humiliating interviews, and at my return to be treated as a footman whom you have sent on an errand? If you hate me, conceal it at least. Act the hypocrite once more, and to good purpose, for I am weary of the part you play, and make me play."

"Leave me, leave me this moment; and O that I might never set eyes on you again."

"So you said once before; and did I not tell you then, that all was not over between us? Are you not bound to me by a tie so powerful that nothing can sever it? Has not your heart softened to me in spite of all I have ever done or said to make you hate me? And is it not because you know, you feel, that, whatever I may do and say in ungovernable anger, I love you ardently, passionately, unspeakably—"

"For God's sake, for mercy's sake, go! that is Edward's voice in the hall—he is coming."

Henry rushed to the door and locked it; at the same moment the handle was seized and turned outside. I grew very pale, but sprang forward to open it; before I had reached it, Henry had seized my hands, and in a whisper he said, "As you value your future peace, do not open it."

"I would die at his feet rather than not let him in."

I disengaged myself from Henry's grasp, and flung open the door; but whoever had been there was gone, and I heard the one that led into the hall slammed with violence. I returned into the room burning with shame and indignation; and throwing myself down on the chair before the fire, I hid my face in my hands and refused to listen to Henry.

"Calm yourself, I entreat you," said Henry; "after this it will not do to appear again with red and swollen eyes. Besides, I must speak to you—I must tell you about Harding."

I got up with the courage of despair, and the recklessness of a nature that was growing hardened, and listened in silence to his recital of the scene he had had with that wild man, who seemed careless of all ties and considerations, save the one feeling which overruled all others in his strange nature—his unconquerable and hopeless attachment to Alice.

"I have borne much for your sake, to-day, Ellen; it is well for us both that I have more self-command than you have. That coarse and vulgar lout knows my secrets as well as yours; he almost threw into my face the money I offered him. He almost called me a villain, and I was forced to bear with it all, and even to let him depart with nothing but a silent curse, when he said 'Make Alice happy, and I will hold my tongue, and only thank God that though I'm a blackguard, I'm no thief; and though I've knocked

down many a man, I've never killed a child; but if you bring tears into her eyes, and break her heart, my name is not Robert Harding, or there are no clubs or knives in the world, if I do not give you a taste of mine.' Now you know why I came home with the spirit of a demon and the temper of a fiend, and vented upon you the tortures I had been enduring. Oh, Ellen, we cannot bear this life much longer; if you could but—"

"Ellen! Ellen! where are you? The Brandons are arrived, and have been asking for you over and over again. Mr. Middleton and Edward wish you to come down directly."

I rushed down the steps of the turret stairs, at the bottom of which my aunt was standing, and went with her into the library, and had to talk and to smile, and to be told that I looked a little pale and tired, and to be asked by Edward if I knew where Henry was, and to deny all knowledge of it, and to feel as if myself and all about me were acting a heartless play, with fevered cheeks and breaking hearts.

CHAPTER XXI.

"There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and Mercy sighed farewell."

THE CORSAIR.

From this day forward Henry's manner and conduct lost that degree of gentleness and consideration which had marked it since the moment that I had thrown myself on his mercy at the time of my hasty engagement to Edward. Whenever I was alone with him, he spoke of his attachment as of a matter of course; and with alternate bursts of anger and of tenderness, met every attempt I made to check or resent this: sometimes with bitter scorn he hinted that I had lost all right to do so, and asked, with a sneer, if I supposed that he was to be treated like any presumptuous admirer who happened to make love to me. In a hundred trifles he contrived to make me feel his power. He engaged me in a course of petty deceits and contrivances; he humbled me in my own eyes, and practically pointed out to me the degradation of my position, and the deterioration of my character. He held me now, indeed, completely in his power; for if I made the slightest attempt to struggle against his tyranny, he threatened to abandon Alice, and to seek in absence and change of scene, relief to the sufferings which his hopeless passion caused him. He knew well that such a project must drive me to despair, on her account as well as my own; and one evening (about a fortnight after the conversation I last recorded), when I had turned abruptly from him, and refused to accede to his usual threatening offers of reconciliation after a very violent scene, he wrote to me to announce his determination of carrying this resolution into effect. His letter was as follows:—

"Do not upbraid me—upbraid yourself for the step to which you drive me. You must foresee what it is, and you probably rejoice at the prospect which it holds out to you of escape from an attachment which, though it has often stood between you and danger and disgrace, you treat with contempt when not forced to have recourse to it. My self-control is at an end—my powers of endurance are exhausted—I can struggle no longer—and if I leave my wife at a moment when she should most require the support of my presence, and such comfort as it would afford her, it is because the discovery of all which I have hitherto laboured to conceal, would be a more severe blow to her than my absence will prove. I shall endeavour to give as plausible an appearance as I can to the step which I am about to take. It is madness to hazard it; but you drive me mad. I cannot trust myself to take leave of you; by the time you awake to-morrow, I shall have left Elmsley, unless I receive from you some token of regard, some expression of regret, some promise, that for the future you will have patience with me. Is it much to ask that my love should be *endured?* Would not others in my place exact more? My fate, yours, and Alice's, are for a second time in your hands. I am still near you—near her; she is sleeping quietly, unconscious that the fate of my life and of hers is at this moment deciding. Write to me one word of kindness, and I am still ready to conquer my stormy feelings—to subdue my selfish impulses—to be to her a kind and constant protector—and to you, a friend. I shall wait here, and count the minutes till your answer reaches me, and each will seem to me a century; but do not imagine that I write this only to frighten you into a reconciliation. I solemnly swear, that, if you do not bid me stay, and bind yourself to a patient, constant, and generous indulgence to feelings, which, if concealed from others, must be appreciated and respected by you; if you do not send me such an answer, I swear that I have seen you and Alice for the last time; and that the misery which may in consequence befall her and you, my sister, and Edward himself, is your doing, and not mine. Ellen, decide!"

I read this letter in my dressing-room with my maid waiting in the passage, and in momentary expectation of Edward's coming up-stairs. Bewildered, I stood with it in my hand, unable to think or to decide. In five minutes there was a knock at the door; and my maid said—"Mr. Lovell is waiting for the answer, Ma'am."

The clock struck twelve; the door of the billiard-room opened, and I heard the voices of the men preparing to leave it. I snatched a bit of paper on the table and wrote hastily in pencil upon it—"Do not go, I implore you. I forgive, and will bear with you."

I sealed and gave it; and the instant afterwards would have given worlds to recall it—but it *was* gone; and when we all sat down at breakfast the next morning, and everything went on as usual; and when, for a few days at least, Henry seemed to take no advantage of my cowardly concession, I did not feel its folly, or its guilt, as I ought to have done.

I could not find out by Alice's manner how far her suspicions had been awakened, or her feelings wounded, by the discovery of my letter to her husband. She was certainly a different person from what she had been in the early days of her marriage. She had altogether lost the childish artlessness with which she used to communicate her thoughts, and relate the incidents of her daily life and innocent occupations; but on the other hand, she no longer avoided those subjects of conversation, or those books, which related to the actual state of society, or the history of the human mind. She read a great deal; book after book I saw her carry up to her own room, and the intense interest with which I watched, without daring to question her, made me closely observe her course of reading. Her mind seemed to feed upon it, and her intellect to expand; but at the same time her cheek grew pale, and in the expression of her countenance, what once was peace, had become composure; and in her character, what had been only simplicity, had grown into reserve. Her eyes were often rivetted upon Henry, with an expression not of love or of fear, but of deep and painful interest.

It was at the end of the third week in October that we moved to London, and that I took possession of my new house there.

Alice's confinement was near at hand, and so was the departure of my uncle and aunt. This was a pang which some time before would have been inexpressibly painful to me, but now I grieved over it—more from the recollection of what had once been my happiness with my aunt, and of the manner in which that happiness had passed away, than from the actual grief of separation itself. Since my marriage, her manner to me, without being cold, had grown constrained, and she had often been on the point of giving utterance to something that seemed to agitate and distress her, but which had, however, never passed her lips. I fancied it might have reference to Henry and Alice, and I dreaded so much her speaking to me on a subject on which, alas! I could give no explanation, nor in any way change my own conduct, that instead of seeking her society during those last days in London, I, on the contrary, avoided it, and shrunk with nervous dread from being alone with her. They went; and when she took leave of me, she folded me in her arms, and whispered in my ear, "God guide thee—God bless thee! my beloved child!"

I hid my face in her bosom; and the burning tears which I shed there, were my only answer to a blessing which seemed to heap coals of fire on my head. I turned from the window whence I had watched their departure, and a sense of desolation took possession of me. I had never opened my heart to her; I had never *told* her that I was wretched; but if at any moment the cup was too full, and my heart-strings stretched to bursting, I could turn to her and say, "My soul is heavy within me," and she never said, "Why is it thus with you?" She never told me that life was fair, and my share of its blessings great, and that I *ought* to be happy. She did not *know* that I was miserable—but she *felt* it; and to me, young, strong and blooming as I then was—to me the idol of the man I adored—the spoilt child of fortune—she had in those moments the heart's instinct to say—"Earth, my child, has a grave; and in Heaven there is rest."

We went for the few days which intervened between Mr. and Mrs. Middleton's departure and the meeting of parliament, to the Moores' at Hampstead; and I enjoyed more quiet there than I had done since we had left Hillscombe.

Rosa was absent; and the society might have been reckoned dull; but to me it was a time of comparative peace, and sometimes almost of happiness.

Edward was in good spirits; and the emotion which he evinced on seeing again the spot where our destinies had been sealed, was a proof how truly he loved me. And, oh, with what tenderness, with what affection, I regarded him; but how I feared him too, and with what moral weariness I strove to keep up before him, in very fear, the appearance of that character which he fondly supposed me to

possess. He sternly reproved me for each act, for each word, that fell short of that standard of perfection which his imagination had drawn. He attributed to me merits and qualities which I did not possess; but, on the other hand, he looked upon me as a spoilt and fanciful child, who must be taught to see life as it is, and to fulfil its every-day duties. His praise and his blame depressed and discouraged me alike.

I was idle, for repose was a strange luxury to my weary spirit; and Edward gave me books to read, and plans to draw, and subjects to discuss, and called me severely to task when my eye was abstracted, and my manner listless. As long as he spoke to me of his affection,—as long as he listened, with fond delight, to the words of love which I addressed to him,— I forgot every painful thought, every fear, and every regret, in the happiness of the moment; but as soon as my attention was forced away from ourselves, and directed to abstract subjects, it wandered to the thousand objects of alarm and disquietude which compassed me about.

When Edward spoke to me of establishing family prayers in our house, I tremblingly objected. I went to church as often as he did; but always let him draw near to the altar alone; for, unforgiven, unabsolved, unreconciled, I dared not approach it.

On the Sunday which we spent at Hampstead, and on which this occurred, I wandered about the churchyard in solitary wretchedness, as if a spirit of evil had possession of me, and kept me away

"From Mercy's inmost shrine."

When Edward joined me again, he was low and depressed; there was a struggle in his countenance, and we walked home in silence.

In the evening, as I was sitting writing in my own room, he came in; there was a deep shade of gloom in his face; and when I knelt by his side, and threw my arms round his neck he disengaged himself from me, and, leaning his head on his hand, said, with a voice of emotion, "I little thought when we married, that on the most sacred of all subjects, we felt so differently."

I drew from my bosom a paper, on which I had been writing the following lines, and held it out to him:—

"Self-banished, self-condemned, I stand alone,
And the closed doors between us seem to rise
In judgment and in wrath: a dull hard stone
Is in my breast; a cloud before my eyes.
I kneel; but my clasped hands are raised in vain;
They sink, weighed down by mem'ry's spell again.
My soul is mute, no melodies arise;
No sacred accents, from her shattered chords;
And speechless prayers alone, in broken sighs,
Struggle for utterance, and find no words.
But is there not a strange mysterious cry,
A mute appeal in each unconscious sigh—
A silent prayer in every secret tear,
Which man discerns not, but which God will hear?"

Edward gave me back the paper, and said coldly, "Poetry is not religion; and sentiment is not piety."

"But they may lead to them, Edward."

"They *mislead* you, I fear."

He turned away and took up a book; so did I: it was the Bible; and as I opened it, my eyes fell on the following passage:— "Hadst thou know, even thou, in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thy sight." How long? my God, how long?

Upon our return to town, I found how much truth there had been in Henry's remark, that for the present London would suit me better than any other place. He had foreseen and calculated upon what, in fact, did happen.

I felt an involuntary relief in the way in which Edward's time was taken up, and his attention engrossed by a variety of affairs relative to his estates, as well as by a diligent attendance upon the House of Commons. When he came home to a late dinner, or took a short ride with me in the park,

there was in those brief moments so much to talk about, so much to interest us both, such intense enjoyment in each other's society, that there was no opportunity for Edward to find fault with me, or for me to show him anything of that wayward and gloomy abstraction which irritated and displeased him. The echo of his step, the sound of his voice, was like music in my ears; and as I rushed to meet him, with a bright smile and an eager welcome, he received me with a tenderness which was too often changed to severity, when, in an hourly association, he had to observe the thousand faults which marked the course of my daily life.

There is no existence much more lonely than that of a woman just married, whose husband is constantly engaged in business, or in politics, and who happens to have no near relations or intimate friends about her. This was the case with me; I had formed none of those intimacies which fill up so large a portion in a woman's life; and the love of reading and of study; which had been strong in my girlish days, had latterly completely given way to the necessity for constant stimulus and excitement.

I found it, unfortunately, in Henry's society. As a matter of course, he was admitted to me whenever he called, and he assumed that the order, or the prayer, whichever it was, that had prevented his leaving us, gave him an indisputable right to maintain, in their fullest extent, those privileges of intimacy, which the nearness of our connection, as well as the ties that had bound us to each other, had established between us.

I had so often vainly struggled to assert my independence, that I felt afraid and ashamed of entering into further contests with him. There seemed to be more dignity in submitting, to a certain extent, to his demands, than in renewing those harassing scenes which we had so often gone through. I allowed him, day after day, to sit for hours alone with me; to read to me the most exciting books; to discuss with me subjects of the deepest interest; and to talk of his attachment to me in a way which I now never attempted to check.

Nothing could be more baneful to my character than such a state of things. The very struggle to appear better than I was in Edward's eyes, wearisome as I often found it, kept up a certain degree of straining after better things, and some remorse at the contrast which the reality presented to the outward appearance.

With Henry, on the contrary, there was no necessity to conceal the evil that was in me; and the more I gave way to the waywardness and impetuosity of my undisciplined character, the more he fed me with that most insidious of poisons, the constant homage of a blind and passionate admiration.

The beginning of that winter in London was one of those periods of false peace which sometimes occur in our lives. My hardened conscience, like the guilty prophet's of old, prophesied peace where there was no peace, and spoke smooth things while destruction was hovering around me. Now and then I made an attempt (not to repulse Henry, in very pride I dared not begin another contest with him, but) to see more of Alice, and to re-establish between us our former habitual intercourse; but there were dangers and difficulties in this which I could hardly surmount. As the time of her confinement drew near, she would seldom leave her own house; and her grandmother occasionally visited her there, which, during the preceding year, she had not done. I therefore never paid her a visit without previously ascertaining from Henry if there was any chance of meeting with this old woman, which I dreaded beyond expression; and while I was with her I could not command a restless nervousness which she evidently attributed to another cause. She was neither unkind nor repulsive in her manner to me, but a shade of coldness and reserve showed me that her eyes were, to a certain extent, opened. With regard to Edward, Henry practised a degree of caution which, though I did not dare counteract it, disgusted me at times with him and with myself. His self-command was complete; and in his presence, no word or look ever betrayed that devotion, which in his absence was so constantly displayed; and his visits were so skilfully conducted, that Edward never suspected their frequency or their length. To remain passive in such a system of deception, and when practised with regard to Edward, was sometimes more than I could do; and it occasionally happened that, in a moment of irritation, I exposed him in some artifice, or betrayed him in some scheme, in a way which required all his presence of mind to meet, and his consummate skill in dissimulation to carry off. After this had occurred, he generally left me in anger; and the nervous feeling which such an abrupt separation caused me—the means of revenge which were constantly in his hands—the helpless ignorance in which I remained—and, in truth, I must add, the way in which I missed the excitement of his society—made me eagerly welcome, and sometimes even seek, a renewal of intercourse.

One day that Henry called at the usual hour, and that Edward happened to be at home, I saw that he was put out and annoyed at the impossibility of speaking to me alone. He gave me various hints that he had something important to say; and at last, as he was standing behind Edward, he wrote on a bit of paper, which he contrived to give me, the following words: "Alice asks to have her grandmother with her during her confinement; what can I do?" It had often occurred to me that this would happen; and

much as it complicated and aggravated all my difficulties, I was not heartless enough to urge him to refuse such a request, made at such a moment. I conveyed this to him by a few words; and soon after he took his leave.

I did not see him again till two days afterwards, when he joined us at the play. Mr. Escourt was in our box. Edward had met him in the lobby, and had asked him to come in and renew his acquaintance with me. I received him coldly but civilly. My heart beat quickly each time that the door of the box opened, at the idea of a meeting between him and Henry. I did not know if they were on speaking terms; and after the insolent manner in which he had alluded the year before to Henry's devotion to me, I felt my cheeks flush as I thought of what would pass through his mind, when he should see him take his place by my side. When he did arrive, to my great surprise, I saw them shake hands, and exchange a few words with perfect civility.

How strange it is to those who are in some sense new to the world, to see the way in which time can scar those wounds which we should have imagined that nothing could have healed; wounds which we should have expected to see bleed afresh at the sight of the inflictor, as it was said of old, that those of the murdered did at the approach of the murderer. Sometimes we almost feel as if nothing was real in that singular existence called *the world*. Like the performers, who laugh and talk behind the scenes after the close of some dreadful tragedy; we see around us men who have ruined the fortunes and destroyed the happiness of others, women who have betrayed and been betrayed, whose existence has been perhaps devoted to misery and to infamy by the first step they have taken in the path of guilt, and whose hearts, if they did not break, grew hard; we see the victims and the destroyers, those who have loved and those who have hated, those who have injured and those who have been injured, mix together in the common thoroughfares of life, meet even in social intimacy, with offered hands and ready smiles; not because "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" not because "To those who forgive, shall much be forgiven;" but because what is genuine and true, what is deep and what is strong, takes no root in that worn-out soil on which we tread, thrives not in that withering air which we breathe, in that fictitious region which we live in, and which we so emphatically and so presumptuously call *the world*.

I started when Edward turned to me and said, "How very grave you look, Ellen! One would imagine by your face that a tragedy and not a farce was going on."

I smiled and shook my head.

"Mrs. Middleton looks like the Muse of Tragedy herself," observed Mr. Escourt. "Have you ever acted, Mrs. Middleton?"

"Never."

"Indeed, I should think you would excel in it. Such a countenance! Such a play of features! Your thoughts speak in your face! Mr. Lovell, would not Mrs. Middleton make an admirable actress?"

"Where the part suited her."

"*That* would be no test of talent. I would pledge my existence that she could act to the life the most contrary characters, and enchant us in each. Which of the passions, of love or of hatred, would seem to you most difficult to represent, Mrs. Middleton?"

"Scorn would be easier than either."

"To my mind a sudden transition is finer than anything: an instantaneous change of expression, for instance, from *scorn* to *fear;* it is one of the most striking pieces of acting that can occur, and most interesting to observe." He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon me; I riveted mine upon the stage.

In a moment, with a totally different manner, I heard him say,
"Pray, Mr. Lovell, do you know anything of my new gamekeeper,
Robert Harding?"

I did not start, I did not move an eyelash; I heard Henry answer in a husky, uncertain manner, "Very little."

I felt that he had lost his self-command; and by a strong effort I retained mine. I made two or three remarks in an indifferent tone, and then asked Edward to change places with me, alleging that the light was in my eyes. Mr. Escourt left the box and seated himself in one exactly opposite a moment afterwards. Some friends of Edward came in, and while he was speaking to them, I whispered to Henry, "Does he know? Is it all over with me? If he does, I destroy myself! I have lived through much; but to be in *that* man's power… Never! never!"

"Hush, take care; do not get excited. I am *sure* he does not know. Harding may have dropped some obscure hint and I see clearly by his manner what he suspects; he thinks Harding was a messenger, or something of that sort, between us. It is all the better that he should think *that;* but I must try to get Harding away from him. Ellen, my home is insufferable; the old woman is come, and watches me like a lynx; Alice looks miserable, and she sees it."

"But then, for Heaven's sake exert yourself! Make her happy; do not neglect her as you do. Oh, Henry, is she unhappy? that is worse than anything! Would to God I were dead! you would all be at peace!"

"Hush, do not talk so wildly. I will exert myself, if you promise never to be harsh or cold to me again. Do not turn away; I do not ask you to love me. Don't I know that you adore *him?* Don't I see it in your eyes? don't I hear it in your voice, twenty times in the day? Would you not have been mine long ago, but for that cursed attachment to Edward…"

"The curtain has dropped, Ellen; don't you intend to go?"

I hastily got up, put on my cloak, and taking Edward's arm, went down stairs with him. When we got into the carriage, I knew by the determined silence which he maintained, that he was displeased with me.

As we were waiting for some tea in the drawing-room, he said to me abruptly, "Pray, why did you treat Escourt in the way you did this evening?"

"I have a bad opinion of him, and I cannot endure him."

"On what is that bad opinion founded?"

"I have been told that he is thoroughly unprincipled."

"Who told you this?"

I did not feel courage to name Henry; and as I hesitated, Edward went on: "If you think that a sufficient reason for not treating a person with common civility, I own I cannot understand your strict and intimate friendship with Henry. I feel a regard for him, founded on early association, and his many captivating qualities; on the same grounds, and as Mrs. Middleton's brother, it is very natural that you should feel the same; but there is a wide difference between this kind of regard, and the confidential and intimate footing you are on with him; and it is, to say the least, in very bad taste, that, at home and in the world, you should neglect my friends and acquaintances, in order to sit for hours gossiping with Henry. It seems to me extraordinary that he should devote so much time to society when Alice is unwell, and so near her confinement. Have you seen her to-day?"

"No; not to-day; her grandmother is with her."

I said this supposing he would think it a sufficient reason for not going there, as none of the family had seen Mrs. Tracy since the marriage, or had had any communication with her.

"You do not mean that you intend not to see Alice while her grandmother is with her?"

"Neither my aunt nor any of the family have met that woman…"

"They may do as they please about it; but I shall suffer no such ridiculous pride to stand in the way of your being of as much use and comfort to Alice as you possibly can. She is only too good for Henry; and he ought to bless the day on which she married him. Go there to-morrow, Ellen, and behave civilly to Mrs. Tracy."

"I really wish, Edward, that you would let me judge for myself on this subject. I love Alice dearly, but I cannot go there now. Henry himself does not wish it."

"Is Henry's opinion to be followed rather than mine?"

"No, dearest Edward, do not take it in that way; but *pray* do not insist upon my doing this."

"I *do* insist upon it, and beg to hear nothing more said against it. I desire you to go there to-morrow morning; I am sorry you have not right feeling enough to do it of your own accord, but whether you agree with me or not you must obey me."

I was going to persist; but Edward's countenance was so stern that I dared not utter another word; and all night long I lay awake racking my brain to find out some expedient, some pretext, some excuse, for eluding this order, which it seemed to me equally dangerous to obey or to resist.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I know not what I said;
I've said too much unless I could speak all.
* * * * * * * * * * * *
****** You've raised the storm
Will sever us for ever ******
The rugged hand of fate has got between
Our meeting hearts, and thrusts them from their joys."

FATAL MARRIAGE.

"Farewell; God knows when we shall meet again;
I have a faint cold fear thrill through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life."

SHAKESPEARE.

The following morning I got up with that jaded feeling which an anxious and sleepless night produces. As I went into my dressing-room I saw a note lying on the chimney, and recognised Henry's handwriting. I darted upon it and tore it open; the few words it contained gave me the sincerest pleasure, and put an end for the moment to the difficulty under which I laboured. This was his note:—"Alice was confined a few hours ago of a small and delicate, but I hope healthy boy. They are both, I am happy to say, doing as well as possible. Ask Edward if I can come and dine with you to-day?"

On a separate paper in the same cover were written these words:—"You need be under no fresh apprehensions from what occurred last night. It is as I thought, but you had better be civil to Escourt; he is a dangerous enemy."

I burnt this last note, and carried the other to Edward. He read it, and put it down without making any comment upon it. "Shall I send an answer directly, or wait to call there in the carriage after breakfast?"

"Just as you please."

"Is Henry to dine here?"

"Of course, as he proposes it."

I sat down to write a note in acknowledgment of Henry's, and to tell him that we should expect him to dinner. In the afternoon, when I drove out in the carriage at the usual hour, I went to his house to inquire after Alice. He came down to the door of the carriage and gave me a good account of her, but he looked gloomy and preoccupied. "How long does *she* stay?" I inquired, with a timid glance at the window.

"Ten days, I believe—ten mortal days. It is hell upon earth to play the hypocrite, from morning to night."

"If you have any good feeling you ought to be happy to-day."

"Are *you* come to preach to me too? Are *you* going to talk of the *duty* of being happy? But, come, I will be happy if I can; take me a drive, Ellen—I want air and change—my head aches horribly."

Before I could answer he had made a sign to the servant to let down the step, and had seated himself by my side. We had often driven alone together; and though after what Edward had said to me the night before, I should very much have wished to avoid this display of intimacy, I knew it would have the appearance of caprice if I refused so simple a request, and Henry did not seem in a humour to be trifled with. I said, however, in a whisper, and glancing at the windows, "Do you think this judicious?"

"She is out," he answered, in the same way; "and when we come back, you can put me down at the comer of the street."

I could not repress a sigh, but desired the coachman to drive towards the King'-road. "If I had known that she was out I should have gone up-stairs to see your child."

"Poor little thing," answered Henry; "I am more pleased with it than I should have thought possible. It

is quite pretty, as white as wax, and has Alice's small regular features. It was pleasant to see her smile again as she used to do, when she kissed it this morning, and held it to her heart. Do you know, Ellen, that this child will be a great blessing to her and to me too. He will fill up her thoughts, occupy her time, and engross her affections."

"He will be a link between you," I said; "it is impossible that with such a wife as Alice, and a child to love and educate together, you should not end by finding happiness in your home. Do not deny it, Henry; do not tell me I am wrong."

"You only talk for effect, that is all. You know perfectly well that happiness, in the sense in which you mean it, can never be mine."

"Well, then, the less is said on that subject the better," I interrupted impatiently. "And now, may I know why there is nothing to fear from Mr. Escourt, except his general ill-nature?"

"I must tell you that I had an explanation with Mrs. Tracy this morning. She was in tolerable good humour with me; I suppose because she had not found me quite such a brute as she expected. I mean that I showed some natural anxiety about Alice, and some joy at her safety, which was indeed what I felt. When she is not angry, I have a great deal of power over her; and I got her to tell me everything about Harding. She confessed he knew a great deal of what concerns us, partly from his father, and partly from herself, for one day that he brought her home some account of my proceedings she was so exasperated that, in her anger, she betrayed to him the whole history of Julia's death. It seems that a short time ago Escourt met him accidentally in the street, and asked him if he was not James Harding's son, and Mrs. Lovell's cousin. He had known something of his father for many years; and after one or two more interviews with him, he offered to engage him as a gamekeeper. Harding, who had no situation, and had given up carpentering, jumped at the offer. Just before Mrs. Tracy left Bromley he came and told her this. She warned him not to let out what he knew; for, half from fear of me, half, I believe, from some vague hope that I am growing attached to Alice, she seems anxious to keep her promise in the spirit as well as in the letter of it. She seems at last to understand, that she cannot do you a mischief without injuring Alice at the same time; and she has taken pains to inculcate the same idea on Harding's dull brain. In the course of the same visit, he confessed to his aunt that Escourt had often questioned him about Alice; and on one of these occasions had made some coarse allusions to our intimacy, which drew from him (Harding) the boast that he could, any day, get you turned out of your husband's house. This, then, explains sufficiently Escourt's manner last night; but he will not get anything more out of Harding, or I am much mistaken."

"I own that I do not understand, or share that confidence."

"The fact is, that Harding has found out, or thinks he has found out, that Escourt has taken a wonderful fancy to Alice; he is just the sort of man to *be* taken by that innocent placid kind of beauty. Now, I am next to certain that his game is to get me out of the way by pushing on matters to an extremity between Edward, you, and myself, and to accomplish this by means of Harding's knowledge of what he calls our intrigue."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, with painful emotion, "if Edward was to hear the words you use, the things you say to me, and which are said of me, by such men as those! No woman has ever been so deeply degraded, so cruelly insulted, before." I threw up my veil and pushed back the hair from my checks, which felt burning with shame and indignation.

"It is useless to think what Edward would feel or say if he were to be acquainted with all these things; but he must and shall be kept in ignorance of them, if you will learn a little self-command, if you will only be reasonable—"

"Reasonable! Reasonable! Henry, do you know these lines?

'Go to the raging sea and say be still,
Bid the wild lawless winds obey your will,
Preach to the storm, and reason with despair,
But tell not Misery's child—'"

I could not finish the line; an overpowering sob shook my whole frame, and I threw myself back in the carriage, weeping passionately.

"Ellen, what are you doing? put down your veil and sit up.
Here is the very man we have been speaking of."

I gave a violent start, but did as he bid me, and looked up in time to see Mr. Escourt riding with two other men, and taking his hat off as he passed me with the lowest possible bow. I returned it haughtily,

and then turning to Henry, I said, with the utmost bitterness, "This is the consequence of your selfish determination to force your society upon me at all times and in all places. Edward is on the point of suspecting me. I have no doubt that, before to-morrow, it will be all over London that I was met driving alone with you; and, drowned in tears! This is *your* doing, *your* work, and you expect me not to hate you, not to curse the day on which—No, I do not mean all I am saying; I do not hate you, Henry; but it is hard to suffer as I do, and not to grow wicked. Stop the carriage, I implore you, and walk home."

"My dearest Ellen, this will only make matters worse. It will seem as if you were ashamed of being seen alone with me. Now, considering the closeness of our connection and our old friendship, any appearance of that sort would have a much worse effect than anything else. Drive straight to your own house, and I will walk home from there. It is much better that Edward himself should see how little you dread observation."

I gave way in silence; but as we drew near home I looked anxiously at the windows, for I felt that after Edward's remarks on the preceding evening, to drive in that way with Henry, was very like braving him. I felt relieved at not seeing him, and as I walked through the hall I inquired if he was at home.

"No, Ma'am, Mr. Middleton called an hour ago to say that two gentlemen, beside Mr. Lovell, would dine here to-day; that I was to tell you so when you came home."

I went up to the drawing-room and sat down at the piano-forte, to try to get over the time till Edward's return as well as I could. I was bent upon mentioning to him the drive I had taken with Henry, as I quite agreed with the latter that any attempt at concealment would fatally endanger my future peace, and I had made the firmest resolution that nothing should ever lead me again into an unnecessary act of deceit. It was dressing-time, and still Edward was not come home. I walked impatiently up and down the room, and at last it grew so late that I was obliged to ring for my maid and to begin dressing.

While I was doing my hair, Edward rushed into the room in a great hurry, and said as he held the door open, "Ellen, love, dress as quick as you can, and go into the drawing-room. Sir Edmund Ardern and Escourt are arrived." Changing into French, he added, "I should not have asked Escourt, as I know you do not like him, if it had not been that when I pressed Ardern to come, he said before him that they were engaged to dine together at the club, which obliged me to invite them both."

I was inexpressibly annoyed, especially at having had no opportunity of informing Edward of my drive with Henry. As soon as I was dressed I went to his room; but he desired me so impatiently to go to the drawing-room, that it took away my courage to tell him all I had intended to say.

Pride enabled me to make a strong effort over myself and to meet Mr. Escourt without embarrassment; but turning immediately away from him, I entered into conversation with Sir Edmund. He took up a newspaper and read it assiduously, till first Henry, and then Edward came into the room.

We went down to dinner, and nothing passed for some time but conversation on general subjects. I could not conquer my uneasiness. Whenever I heard the sound of Mr. Escourt's voice, or felt his eyes fixed upon me, a kind of shudder ran through me, and the cold dry manner in which I answered his questions, though each time I repented of it, still re-occurred the next minute. I knew that this was bad policy, and that it made Edward angry; but much as I had deceived in my life, I had never been able to dissemble; and the effort to do so in this case was beyond my strength.

After one of those pauses during which everybody wonders who will speak next, and which had been brought on by some short answer I had given to a question of Mr. Escourt, he abruptly turned to me and said, "By the way, Mrs. Middleton, you could decide a bet we made this morning, Ardern and I. Did you happen to observe if it was Mrs. Ernsley that we passed a few minutes after we met you on the King's-road this morning?"

"I don't know, I did not observe."

"Did you, Mr. Lovell?"

"It struck me that it was Mrs. Ernsley."

"Then I am afraid I have lost my bet, unless Mrs. Middleton would try to remember the contrary. Come, Mrs. Middleton, make an effort in my behalf. Did Mr. Lovell turn to you and say, 'Is not that Mrs. Ernsley?' or did he positively say, 'There is Mrs. Ernsley.' A great deal would depend upon that."

My mouth quivered while I repeated, with what must have had the appearance of ill-humour, that I remembered nothing about it. In vain I tried to turn the conversation; he continued to appeal

alternately to Henry and to me about the gay appearance of the nursery gardens we had passed, and the style of architecture of the new church at Chelsea, until he had succeeded in plainly establishing the fact that we had been that day taking a long drive together. While this was going on I had not ventured to look at Edward; but when at last another subject was started, and I had heard him make some indifferent remark in his natural tone of voice, I raised my eyes to his. He was pale, and his lips were firmly compressed, but he exerted himself and talked a great deal. I was so entirely occupied in watching him, that, when Henry bent forward and said to me, "Sir Edmund is asking you to drink wine with him," I gave a violent start, and my hand shook so, that I could hardly hold the glass.

I left the room soon after, and as I walked into the drawing-room, its very look of brightness and comfort made my heart ache. It would have been a relief to cry, but I dared not give way; it *would not do* (that phrase which Henry was eternally repeating to me); it would not do to be found in tears. I would *not* think. I tried to play; but whether the tune was sad or gay it seemed equally to affect me. I took up book after book from the table; but whether it was "Macaulay's Reviews," or "Southey's Poems," a volume of Shakespeare, or a book of sermons, there was in each page some passage or expression, which, by its eloquence or its simplicity, its gaiety or its grief, touched the spring of sorrow which was swelling up to the brink, and that was only kept down by a sort of passive resistance.

I took refuge in an Annual, and page after page of short tales and addresses to Finden's Beauties, I glanced over successfully, till the following lines, by Miss Landon, caught my eye, as I was rapidly turning over the leaves:—

"I see the clouds pass o'er the moon, and my spirit
Grows dark with the terrors that round it are thrown;
O Surrey, whatever my lot may inherit,
I care not, so suffering but reach me alone."

I do not know that they are good lines—very likely not—but they burst from the heart and from the lips like a groan or a sob, and they gave words to what I had felt since I had looked upon Edward's face, and seen in it, for the first time since our marriage, not anger, not sternness, but suffering.

I shut the book hastily, and snatched up a newspaper, as I heard the door of the first drawing-room open.

Henry brought me some flowers which I had left in the dining-room, and said to me in a low voice, "For Heaven's sake don't look so miserable! Exert yourself; this will never do."

There are sometimes particular phrases which try one, and jar upon one's feelings; and this last was of that number. I darted upon Henry a look of angry reproach, and said in a hurried manner, "*It will never do* to be goaded in this way! I cannot answer for what I may say if you stay here. Your presence and your advice are insults which drive me mad, and if you do not go, I feel that I shall lose my head."

As I spoke, I tore the flowers in my hand into pieces, which I flung one by one into the fire.

"Have mercy upon your bouquet, Mrs. Middleton! You are beheading those beautiful camellias in the most cruel manner," exclaimed Sir Edmund.

"The organ of destructiveness must be strong in you, fair lady," observed Mr. Escourt, with one of his blandest smiles.

Again an icy chill ran through me; but I hated this man so intensely, that not even terror could subdue me: and when Sir Edmund asked me if I had courage to kill an insect, I answered—"There are insects so loathsome and contemptible, that to crush them is a pleasure."

I felt that I was making an odious speech; I saw in Edward's face an expression almost of disgust. I felt that I was sinking every moment in his opinion; perhaps, losing ground in his affections. I felt that this was the work of those men who, one under the cover of a devoted attachment, the other of playful gallantry, were ruining and exposing me.

A spirit of reckless defiance took possession of me, and I completely lost my head. A torrent of words burst from my lips, of which I hardly knew the meaning, as I uttered them. I said there were crimes worse than murder. I said that to torture was worse than to kill: to make life a curse worse than to take it away. I pointed to the insect that was crawling on the table, and asked if it would not be mercy to kill it, and cruelty, damnable cruelty, to tear off a wing one day, and a limb the next, and so on, till nothing remained of its tortured frame but the quivering pulse of life. I spoke of men who die on the scaffold, or who drag on existence in jails and hulks, and whose hearts are not so hard, whose spirits are not so brutal, as those of others who come into our houses, who sit at our tables, with smiles on their lips and

poison in their tongues, whose language is refined, and whose thoughts are devilish.

Strange and terrible words they were which I spoke in that hour; there was eloquence and power in them, for what is so eloquent as the pent-up agony of years, when at last it finds a vent? What is so powerful as the outpouring of the soul, when it breaks down the barriers it has long respected?

They quailed before my glance, those two men whose victim I was. Mr. Escourt's pale cheek was flushed, and Henry's grew pale. He trembled for himself and for me. The fabric which he had raised by his cunning, and maintained by his arts, was tottering to its base. Like to Samson in the temple of the Philistines, strength had returned to me in the hour of abasement; and I was dragging down upon him, and upon myself, the ruin which had so long hung over my head.

"I would advise you to choose another theme for the display of your eloquence, than the apology of *murder*."

A convulsive shudder seized me as Edward addressed to me these terrible words. If he had charged me with the guilt of murder, I could not have trembled more violently.

"You are ill, Mrs. Middleton; I am sure you are ill!" exclaimed Sir Edmund, springing forward to support me.

I felt myself falling, and stretched out my hand to take hold of Edward's; when I grasped it, it was as cold as ice. He led me out of the room; and when he had placed me on the sofa in my dressing-room, he rang the bell. As soon as my maid came in, he left me without a look or a word.

I did not attempt to recall him; I was stunned and exhausted. I felt an inexpressible longing to forget the anguish I was enduring; and, while my maid was for a moment out of the room, I hastily took a large dose of laudanum, which first stupified, and then sent me to sleep.

When I woke again it was with that sense of complete bewilderment which that sort of sleep produces. The shutters and curtains were closed, the candles were lit on the dressing-room table, and my maid was sitting on a chair near the fire. I called her and asked in a drowsy voice what o'clock it was.

"It is near nine o'clock, Ma'am."

"Why is it so dark? Why are the shutters shut? Have I been ill?"

"You have been sleeping a long time. Ma'am. The doctor thinks you must have taken a little too much laudanum."

"Laudanum! How? When?"

Gradually the recollection of the scene of the preceding evening returned to me, and of the sedative I had so rashly taken. I held my head with my hands, and asked where Edward was?

"Mr. Middleton desired to be told when you should awake,
Ma'am; and he wishes the doctor to see you too."

She went out of the room, and I felt as if some new form of misery was hanging over me. Why had Edward desired to be informed of my waking instead of watching over me himself? If my long sleep had been alarming, ought I not to have awoke in his arms? I now remembered all that had occurred during the last two days, and I felt as if a crisis was approaching. The door opened, but instead of Edward, Dr. Harris came in; and after hoping I felt pretty well, and feeling my pulse, he asked me some questions about the quantity of laudanum I had taken. I named a certain number of drops at a guess, for I had hardly measured the quantity. He left me, and a moment afterwards I heard him speaking with Edward in the dressing-room. I sprang out of bed, glided to the door, and listened.

"Indeed I can assure you," I heard him say, "that you need be under no alarm about Mrs. Middleton's health. The quantity of sedative she has taken can produce only temporary inconvenience if she keeps quiet. It cannot affect her materially. I would not tell you so if I did not feel convinced of it. Indeed, the very fact of being under its influence will make the intelligence you have to communicate less likely to affect her in an alarming manner than at any other time."

"Then I shall go to her at once."

I hurried back into bed; my teeth chattering with cold, and my heart throbbing to suffocation. An instant after I heard his step, and he walked up to the bed. His face was as pale as death, and he wore his travelling fur coat. I uttered a faint scream, and clasped my hands.

"Do not agitate yourself, Ellen."

I burst into tears; for although he had not said one word of kindness, he had called me Ellen, and that was something. He went on in a dry, broken, and hurried manner: "I have, indeed, bad news to tell you; but I hope and pray that the case may be one of more alarm than of actual danger. Your uncle has sent an express for me; he believes himself to be dying, and he charges me not to lose a minute in hurrying to him. The carriage is at the door, and I must take leave of you. Here is your aunt's letter, and one from the physician at Hyéres. This last affords considerable hope that Mr. Middleton may yet be spared to us..."

"Oh! may I not—should I not go to him too?"

"The state to which you have reduced yourself by your imprudence makes it impossible."

"For God's sake, let me go with you, Edward."

I took his hand, but he drew it abruptly away. I mentally cursed the day on which I was born.

"Calm yourself," said Edward, sternly; "I cannot speak to you now: I shall write to you. A new state of things must begin between us; but this is no time for an explanation."

"No, no! you *cannot*, you *shall* not leave me with so horrible a doubt, so dreadful a fear..."

"Have you forgotten that your uncle is dying? Is this a moment for theatrical display?—for the exhibition of a feigned tenderness?"

"Feigned! Good God! is it come to that?"

"Have you no message to send him?—no pardon to implore of him as well as of me?"

"Edward! what are you saying? Edward! Edward!—do you know? Have you heard?—Do you forgive? I am innocent!—on my knees I swear that I am innocent!"

"Innocent! Yes, I believe you are what you have learned to call innocent,—and may God keep you so. I dare not trust myself to say another word. I have struggled to be calm; I have prayed earnestly for strength against myself,—strength not to cast you off, and it has been given me. God bless you, and forgive you! I shall write to you soon and often, and, I hope, send better accounts of Mr. Middleton. Write to me and to your aunt."

He coldly held out his hand to me, and I felt as if I was dying. I opened my arms wildly, and cried, "Kill me, but do not leave me so!"

A convulsive emotion passed over his face; he bent over me and kissed me. I threw my arms round his neck and clung to him. Oh! did not all the love of my soul pass into his, in that one last embrace? As my throbbing heart was pressed to his, did not each pulsation tell all its passionate tenderness? For an instant he seemed to feel it, for he drew me closer and closer to him; but suddenly he started back, as if he recoiled from my touch, and almost flung me from him; and, disengaging his hand from mine, he left me abruptly.

I heard his steps down the stairs; I heard his voice in the hall; then there was a moment during which I heard nothing; and then there was the sound of the carriage-wheels; and then the hall-door was shut; and then all was over; and I wrung my hands, and thrust the bed-clothes into my mouth to stifle my groans. I felt as if my head would burst. Sob after sob rose in my chest and shook my frame; and all night the doctor was by my side, and he and my maid gave me draughts to drink, which I took eagerly, for my mouth was parched and my lips burning; and towards morning I fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Oh there's a fatal story to be told,
Be deaf to that as Heaven has been to me.
* * * * * * * * * * * *
How wilt thou curse thy fond believing heart,
Tear me from the warm bosom of thy love,
And throw me like a poisonous weed away.
Can I bear that? hear to be curst and torn
And thrown out of thy family and name—
Like a disease? Can I bear this from thee?
I never can, no, all things have their end,

When I am dead, forgive and pity me."

FATAL MARRIAGE.

"I must be patient till the Heavens look
With an aspect more favourable * * * * * *
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance, shall dry your pities, but I have
That honourable grief lodged here, which bums
Worse than tears drown."

SHAKESPEARE.

The next day I did not attempt to get up; it seemed to me that Edward's absence, and his last words, had taken from me all energy—all power of thinking or acting. It was as a dream that I could not shake off, though at the same time I felt all its dreadful reality. I dared not stir in body or in spirit; the quiet of a sick-room—the silence around me—the exclusion of light and noise—harmonised with the extraordinary state in which I was. Strange delusions haunted me; I often saw figures pass and repass before my bed; and when it was Edward's form that I discerned, I held my breath, and prayed that the illusion might last. But sometimes they were dreadful; the visions I had—the voices I heard! I dare not think of them now; for the night is coming—my room is dark—my sight is weak—and my brain is on fire.

* * * *

On the third morning after Edward's departure a letter was brought to me. The direction was in his handwriting, and a mist obscured my sight. I pressed it to my heart, and closed my eyes for an instant. *Now*, I should know all. *Now*, I should know my sentence. Alice's rival—Henry's accomplice—I stood condemned by my own heart; and as I broke the seal of Edward's letter, I felt as if I should read my death-warrant.

EDWARD'S LETTER.

"CALAIS, *Saturday*.

"This is the first time I have written to you since our marriage. This is better for yourself and for me, and makes it easier to write now in the way in which henceforward we must act and feel towards each other. I will not upbraid you. God has visited upon me the sin of my heart, and I pray to Him that yours may never find you out. To save you from the last step in guilt, and all its misery, is now my only object.

"I shall return to you as soon as the sacred duty I am now engaged in is fulfilled; I shall return to you, for I wish your reputation to be preserved. The only request I make is, that you will never again attempt to act the part which you have hitherto so ably performed. I shall expect from you respect and submission, for without them, how can I save you? but one of those looks—one of those words which once made my happiness, would *now* drive me from you for ever. Attempt no defence; offer no explanations; if you repent, mourn over the past in silence, and silently resign yourself, as I do, to the life which lies before us. Write to me, but do not answer this letter. That you may not be tempted to do so, I will go through the painful task of explaining to you the manner in which my eyes have been opened to what I might have seen long ago, had it not been for the deep hypocrisy of your life, and of your character. I said I would not upbraid you; but the simple mention of facts must become the most cutting reproach. When I look back to the last two years, and remember the many proofs I have had of your secret and powerful interest in Henry's fate, and of the tenacity with which you have clung to his society, I ask myself how you could ever have deceived me as you have done? But when I recollect what you have professed, the way in which you have acted, all that you have said to me, I almost doubt the evidence of my senses.

"Vague but painful doubts had latterly shot across me; and had I believed it to be in human nature, or in woman's power, to feign such love as you seemed to feel for me, I should have *feared* what I *now know*. From the moment when, in accidental conversation, I heard that in defiance of my advice, you had spent the day alone with Henry, to that in which I received anonymously the notes I now send you, the truth was gradually disclosed to me. I saw you change colour; I saw your lip quiver, and heard your voice tremble. I saw you in ungovernable passion upbraid the man who you fancied had betrayed you,

and then, in the excess of your agitation, you fainted at my feet. When I went to your bedside, and gazed on your pale face, with the faint hope that I had been mistaken, that I had not read right your uncontrollable agitation—even then your lips opened and uttered a passionate adjuration to Henry, not to leave or forsake you, which drove me from your side with thoughts and feelings that time and prayer alone can subdue. When, on the following day, in a cover, directed by an unknown hand, I received the confirmation of what was already too sure, in the first agony of grief and indignation, I resolved to part from you for ever; and it was not till I had gone through the severest struggles with myself, that I came to my present determination. The summons I received a few hours afterwards to your uncle's death-bed, confirmed it. I would not carry to his dying ears the intelligence of your guilt, and of its results; nor would I load my conscience with promises which, had I discarded you, could never have been fulfilled. You have not yet been criminal save in thought and in heart; you have sworn it, and I believe you. God have mercy upon you, if in this too you have deceived me; but if you are not perjured—if you have not called upon God Almighty to witness a lie—then kneel to Him each day of your life, and bless Him that he has saved you. And now listen to the commands I lay upon you, and obey them strictly, as you value—what shall I say? What have you ever valued? What have you ever respected? You have profaned the most sacred feelings—the holiest emotions of our nature; and I know not by what tie, by what hope, or by what fear to adjure you. If you would not become a mark for the finger of scorn to point at; if you would not die of a broken heart, or live with a hardened one; if you have any horror of the lowest depths of vice, or any lingering sense of duty, weigh the importance of this moment of your life, and throw not away this last hope of salvation. I have written to Mrs. Moore to propose to her that as soon as you are well enough to move, you should go to Hampstead, and remain there till my return. I forbid you, in the most positive manner, to receive a single visit from Henry, or to open a letter from him. I not only request, but command you, neither by letter or by word to make any answer to *this* letter, or to allude to the subject of it. By your strict compliance with these injunctions, I shall judge of your desire to enter upon a new course, and, save in the secret penitence of your heart, to discard the remembrance of the past.

"E. MIDDLETON."

Inclosed in this letter were the following notes:

"Do not go, I implore you; I forgive, and will bear with you,—*Thursday*."

"You left me in anger three days ago, and I feel a nervous dread of what will happen next. I cannot bear this suspense; write or come.—*Sunday*."

"I shall have no rest till I have seen you; since that woman is arrived, I feel as if all would be discovered.—*Friday*."

The chain of evidence against me was overpowering, and I clasped my hands in silent despair. I read Edward's letter upon my knees; and murmured blessings were choked in their utterance, by the convulsive emotion which mastered me. At that moment it seemed to me agony past endurance that he should accuse and judge me falsely; that he should call my love hypocrisy; I thought I would rather die, than meet him in the way he prescribed, as life could have no greater misery in store for me than this; but by degrees I grew conscious that there was not so heavy a load on my breast, so racking an anguish in my brain, as I had known in those hours when, tortured with anxiety, I had been commanded to smile; when, degraded in my own eyes, and condemned by my own heart, I had been placed by him on a pinnacle, from which I dreaded each moment to be hurled. His praises had often run like daggers into my heart; but now his reproaches, his upbraidings, were answered by the mute consciousness of a love, which in the midst of guilt and misery, and bitter humiliation, had remained pure, sacred, and entire. Then flashed for an instant through my mind, like a ray of light and hope, the thought of *confession*, full, ample, and complete confession! What depths of repose in that word! What pledge of peace! What renewal of confidence! What possibility of happiness! I rose suddenly and threw the window open; and as the cold air fanned my cheek, I felt that I might be happy still. Again I seized his letter, and as I opened it, my eyes fell on the passage where he said, "If you are not perjured, if you have not called upon Almighty God to witness a lie." It froze in its current the source of hope, which for an instant had sprung up in my breast, for it reminded me of the oath by which I had bound myself never to reveal the truth to Edward. It was as if a hand of ice had chilled the warm blood that had begun to circulate freely about my heart. I set my teeth together, and muttered to myself that I would break that fatal oath; but even while I said it, I felt I dared not do it. I needed all my strength, all my courage; I needed God's help, and God's mercy, even now to confess to Edward the dreadful secret of my life, the horrible trials, the bitter humiliations I had gone through; and in the face of a broken oath, with the guilt of perjury on

my soul, how could I hope for mercy or for peace? I struggled with my conscience; I bade it be silent; but in vain. This new form of crime staggered and confounded me; I dared not add fuel to the flame, or a new kind of remorse to the dark visions that already haunted my days, and visited my dreams. I gazed upon those blotted scraps of paper before me, the records of weakness and misery, but not of guilt; and the veins of my temple swelled, and my hands were clenched with powerless rage as I thought of the part which Henry had throughout acted by me, and of which this was the close. He had either betrayed me himself; or by a cruel carelessness, a heartless negligence, he had failed to destroy the proofs of our fatal intimacy, and had left them in the power of my *relentless* enemy.

A servant came in, and putting down a letter on the table, he said, "Mr. Lovell has been very often to inquire after you, Ma'am, and he begs to know if he can see you now; or if he shall call again this afternoon."

I would have given worlds to have admitted Henry, to have poured forth in words the burning anger of my soul, or implored a release from my fatal oath; but Edward's command was before my eyes; his letter was in my hand; and I said, in as calm a voice as I could command, "Tell Mr. Lovell that I am engaged now, and that I shall not be at home this afternoon." I glanced at the letter on the table, and saw that it was not from Henry, but from Mrs. Moore, who, with a thousand regrets and apologies for having been suddenly obliged to leave home for the sea-side, put her villa at my disposal, and hoped I would stay there as long as might suit me. This opened a new source of embarrassment to me. I could not resolve with myself whether to accept this offer or to refuse it. If Henry was determined to force his visits upon me, I felt that I should be more unprotected at Hampstead, less able to exclude him there than in town, and yet I was afraid that Edward should suppose I was not prepared in everything to follow his directions. I determined at last to write to him that Mrs. Moore had left Hampstead, and that I should therefore remain in town till I heard from him again, or till the blessed moment of his return. As I looked over my letter I seized the pen and scratched oat that word *blessed*, which he would have branded with hypocrisy. Never did a letter of a few lines cost such painful labour or such anxious thought as that I sent to Edward in return for his. Many and many a foul copy I wrote, in which protestations and prayers, self-accusations and passionate justifications, succeeded each other with frantic vehemence; but as I read over these bursts of feeling, these impassioned appeals, I tore them up and gave them to the flames; for to disobey him *now*, was to endanger the frail tenure by which I clung to him, and, as he had said himself, to drive him from me; and yet to accept the conditions of pardon, to submit humbly to the terms held out to me, was a tacit admission of the truth of his accusations and of the justice of my condemnation.

At one moment I resolved to brave his anger; boldly and earnestly to declare to him my innocence, not from crime only, but from a feeling or a thought inconsistent with the truest and most ardent affection that ever woman felt, or man inspired; and, in defiance of his orders, but in the strictest integrity of heart, to seek Henry, and by prayers, by reproaches, by upbraidings, by all the power which a strong will, and the consciousness of his unconquerable passion for me, could give, to obtain from him a release from my oath, and liberty to kneel at Edward's feet, and to clasp his knees, with a confession of every sin, but that of not loving him.

But then, again, I shrank from the rash efforts, from the fatal risks, which this plan involved, and it seemed to me best to submit in humble resignation to his will; to accept his mistaken severity, his coldness, and his scorn, as a just expiation for a course of sin and deceit; and to trust that, in a life spent by his side, in compliance with his will, in submission to his dictates, in absolute devotion, and unremitting tenderness, which my lips would never express, but which my conduct would reveal, I should at last have my reward—his belief in that love which could bear, believe, endure, and hope all things.

Tossed by these conflicting thoughts, jaded by this incessant and racking anxiety, at last I sent a few lines which I had copied out several times—for sometimes a word had seemed to me too cold, or too abrupt, too like, or too unlike those which were struggling to escape from my heart and from my pen, or else my tears had stained the paper.

In conclusion, I said, "If, on his dying bed, my uncle names me, do not ask him to say 'God bless her!' but 'God forgive her.'"

I also wrote to Mrs. Middleton, and when these two letters were gone, I felt relieved.

The state in which I lived during the next few days was strange. In the midst of London I was in perfect solitude. Rather than forbid the servants to let Henry in, I gave a general order to deny me to every one, without exception.

Early in the morning, I drove into the country for some hours, and the rest of the day I spent in my back drawing-room buried in thought, and alternately giving way to the gloomiest anticipations, or the

most vague and groundless visions of future happiness.

Every day I sent a servant to inquire after Alice; and the report of her continued to be favourable.

On the third day after Edward's departure, and after Henry had made several fruitless attempts to see me, a letter was brought to me, and I immediately felt it was from him. My first impulse was to seize a cover and enclose it back to him, without a word of explanation; but, on cooler reflection, I determined to write to him.

Edward had not forbidden me to do so; and to explain my present conduct, was the only chance of keeping up that power over him, on which so much depended. I therefore wrote as fellows:—

"The crisis of my fate is come. Henceforward, if I take one more step in the downward course in which I have been so cruelly entangled, I am lost for ever. If you feel any of that regard for me which you have so long professed, I need not make any comments upon the fact which I now disclose to you.

"The notes which at different times I have sent you, and which so fatally misrepresent our relative positions, have been sent to Edward; and this letter, of which I inclose you a copy, is the result. I will not attempt to make you understand what I have suffered—what I suffer. I dare not see you; I dare not receive a letter from you; and yet, before Edward's return, I *must;* for there is an oath which you once imposed upon me, which must be cancelled—you *must* absolve me from it, if you do not wish to drive me to despair—to perjury on the one hand, or to a life of hopeless misery on the other.

"Henry! you who have been my best friend, and my worst enemy, have pity upon me. Do not condemn me to fresh remorse—to further struggles—to eternal hypocrisy. Do not write to me any sophistry on this subject; do not try to blind my eyes again; to deceive me to my ruin. If you have the cruelty to steel yourself against my prayers, against my earnest supplications, then leave me to myself; and take with you the consciousness that you have filled up the measure of your iniquities, and heaped upon my head all the miseries which the most savage hatred could devise.

"Would to God that I could find words to touch you! Would to God that I could reach your heart! and carry to it the conviction, that you would be happier yourself by giving way to my entreaties, than by maintaining a tyranny which is as criminal as it is cruel.

"By all that you hold sacred, hear me, Henry! In the name of your sister—in the name of your child—hear me! As you would not bring misery upon them, hear me! My whole soul is in this prayer—the fate of my whole life is in its issue—have mercy upon me, as you ever hope for mercy yourself.

"Yours,

"Ellen Middleton."

This was my letter, and day by day I watched and trembled each time that the sound of the bell or a knock at the door roused a hope that its answer might come. During that period I received two short and hurried letters from Edward, dated from the towns where he stopped for an hour or two on his way to Hyéres. The solitude of my life became at last intolerable; I began to feel an impetuous desire to change something in the course of my days; to see some one, to speak to some one, and yet I shrunk from the sight of a common acquaintance, or of a commonplace friend. At last, one morning, a note was brought to me, but the direction was written not by Henry but by Alice. It only contained these words:—

"My dear Ellen,

"I wish to see you, and I beg of you to come to me.

"Yours, Alice Lovell."

I knew not whether Mrs. Tracy was gone—I knew not whether I should see Henry—I was in total ignorance of what this visit might produce: but it was a relief to do something—to change something in the order of my day; and as Edward had not forbidden me to visit Alice, I felt justified in going to her, and prepared to do so. As I arrived at her door and walked up-stairs to her, for the first time I felt a sensation of bodily weakness, which gave me a sudden apprehension that my physical strength was giving way under such protracted mental suffering. The door was opened, and I found Alice alone. As I looked at her I felt one of the severest pangs I had ever yet experienced. Never in my life had I seen anybody so altered. There was not a single speck of colour in her cheek; her eyes looked unnaturally large, and the black under them was deeply marked She came to meet me, but did not offer to kiss me; she held out her thin pale hand; and, slightly pressing mine, made me sit down by her. She inquired

about Mr. Middleton; and after I had answered her questions, there was a pause, which I broke by saying, in a trembling voice, "How is your child, Alice? May I not see him?"

She opened the door of the next room, and showed me the cradle. The child was asleep, and as I gazed upon it the tears which I struggled to repress almost choked me. "He is beautiful," I said.

"Yes, he *is* beautiful," she murmured, as she knelt down by the cradle. "He *is* beautiful, but he does not thrive; he is not strong." She took the tiny hand pressed it to her pale lips; and then she rose, and we returned to the drawing-room.

"How you must love him, Alice," I said, with a sigh.

"I do," she answered; and then she put her hand to her forehead, and a sudden flush overspread her face, her brow, her neck. Her breathing was quick; and she added, in a voice of intense emotion, "But if you think I do not love his father, you are mistaken."

"Alice, I never said—I never thought—"

"Oh yes you did, and you were right to think so; for when I married him I loved him as a child, not as a woman loves; but real love and real sorrow came in time, and strength and courage are come with them. Ellen, I love him; and I charge you not to stand between him and me. I suppose I am doing a strange thing now, but it seems to me right. I have none to help me, none to counsel me but my own heart, and the sorrow which has long been secretly buried within it. I married, and the world before me was a blank, but a blank in which the spirit of God seemed to me to move as it did in the beginning of time, on the face of the waters. All was outside then in my life, inside in my brain in my heart there was nothing but peace and joy—joy that the sky was bright, and the earth gay with flowers in the summer, and white with pure snow in the winter. I *learnt* what life and love are in the books Henry gave me. I *felt* what they were the first time I saw him with you. I shut the books—I shut my eyes—I was a coward —I was afraid of my own heart—afraid of the life I saw before me, till strength was given me to encounter it. I saw that mine was Leah's and not Rachael's portion, and I prayed for grace not to shrink from my cup of sorrow. I do not shrink from it now; but, for Henry's sake, for the sake of my child, I must struggle with you and with your strange power, and God will be with me, Ellen, for you seek to put asunder what He has joined together."

"Alice, Alice, spare me, for I am miserable. Spare me, for your sorrows are no more like my sorrows than the martyr's sufferings resemble the dying criminal's agony. Let me hide my face on your knees—cover me with the them of your garment, and let the tears that fall on my head plead for me to the God whom you adore, for they are like those which the angels in Heaven shed over a sinner who repents. Pray—pray that his heart may be softened; pray for him, for yourself, for me. Pray that I may prevail or die; God forgive me, I dare not die, but I cannot live as I have lived—"

"Ellen, do not talk so wildly. I dare not speak words of hope or of comfort if you do not cast this weakness from you—if you do not struggle with a passion begun in sin, and which can only end in destruction."

"Alice, I swear by all that is most sacred,—I swear it as I would on my dying bed,—that I do not love your husband; and that now—"

"Oh, then you have done wickedly! You have never loved him, and yet you have sought his love, and worked on his feelings, till his nature, which was kind, has grown fierce; and his pale cheek has grown paler still. You have never loved him? and yet you have made him forget every duty and every tie. You have taken his heart from me, from his child, from his home, and you value it not. In wantonness you have taken his love and my happiness away—you have played with it and destroyed it. Oh, Ellen, God have mercy upon you, for you are very wicked!"

"I have been guilty, I have been wicked, Alice, but not in the way you think. Believe me, there is a mystery in all this which I dare not explain."

"Oh, yes; there has been a mystery in the air we breathe, in the words we have all spoken to each other, in our lives, and in our hearts. My grandmother trembles and turns pale when you are named, or when your carriage drives by in the street; and even now the colour forsakes your cheek, and your lips quiver as I speak of her. Henry married *me* an ignorant child—as I have learnt since that men wed brides who are rich and noble, for their rank and for their riches, without loving me or trying to make me love him. He hates Robert Harding and curses him in a low voice when we meet him, and yet he speaks to him civilly, and offers him money which he spurns, and presents which he refuses. You say you do not love Henry, you swear it, and yet day after day you spend hours with him, and when he has been absent from you, you have called him back. You have written to him in secret, and turned pale when your letters have been discovered. Oh, there is a deep and terrible mystery in all this, and we

have walked in darkness till we have almost forgotten what light is."

I hid my face in my hands, overcome by the force of Alice's words, and unable to meet the searching power of her glance. There was a long deep silence between us, and then I rose to go, and said to her as I did so, with my eyes fixed on the ground, "You pray for your enemies, pray for me. You pray for those who suffer in body and in mind—pray for me. You may never learn how right and how wrong you have been to-day; but you cannot be wrong in praying to God for me, for He has vexed me with all His storms, all His waves have gone over me, and I am well-nigh overwhelmed. My only hope is in the mercy of one who has never yet showed mercy either to you or to me."

I left her, and never again have I seen that angel face, that pale and blighted form, or heard the accents of her low and solemn voice; but if there is a saint who pleads for me on earth, or an angel who intercedes for me in Heaven, it is she whose life I have blighted, and whose heart I have broken.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Some sadden flash of lightning strike me blind,
Or cleave the centre of the earth, that I
May living find a sepulchre to swallow
Me and my shame together!"

THE GUARDIAN-MASSINGER.

"So the struck deer, the arrow at his heart,
Lies down to die in some sequestered part;
There stretched unseen, in coverts hid from day,
Bleeds drop by drop, and pants his life away."

POPE.

I went home, and as I walked into the house I saw a letter in Henry's handwriting lying on the table. I took it, and having locked myself in my dressing-room, I opened it with trembling fingers and read as follows:—

"You do not choose to answer my letters, and I am sent away from your door like a troublesome beggar. My sister is in the deepest affliction, and I vainly inquire of you what accounts you have of her. You are playing a desperate game, if you imagine, by such heartless insults, to rid yourself of my love. They change its nature I own. I get weary of suffering alone, and life is not long enough to waste it in the burning strife and heart-consuming agitations in which we live. There is an end to all things; and if for twenty-four hours longer you trifle with me you will repent it to the day of your death. Have I not told you that the time must come when, if you have not learnt to love me, I shall make you hate me?"

My last letter to Henry had been intercepted; I saw it clearly and with despair, for I had written it with that intensity of supplication, that strength of appeal which must have reached his heart. I had built all my hopes upon it, and now the apparent scorn and unfeelingness of my conduct had brought him to that hard and reckless mood which I most dreaded. I felt that at any cost I must pacify him; and in the explanation I sent him there was more of self-defence than accusation, more entreaty than reproach; I addressed him rather as an injured friend than as a cruel enemy. It was late in the day before I had satisfied myself that the tone of my letter was calculated to soothe and pacify him, and then I dared not trust to chance for its delivery. With an unsteady hand I gave it to the servant, and desired him to deliver it into Mr. Lovell's own hand: and then the night came with its long hours of darkness, of restless sleep and of waking misery.

How was it, that when I woke on the next morning, and felt that the air was heavy and the atmosphere dark, I did not see in it a sign of what that day would bring forth? How was it that when I went into Edward's room, and gazed on every familiar object which seemed to bring his image before me, I did not feel more wretched than usual,—I did not long for his return, or dread it with more intensity than the day before; and when I pressed his picture to my lips, the tears that dimmed my eyes did not flow more bitterly than usual? The post came in; and there were letters for me,—letters from abroad: a black seal was upon one of them; and as I saw it, at once I felt that my uncle was dead. A gush of purer and more sacred sorrow than had ever yet sprung from my eyes or wrung my heart, overcame for a while the selfish fears and sufferings of my soul. But even my grief for him,—the kindest

though the sternest of friends,—was not unmixed with dark and bitter associations. It was a strange fear that seized me; I was weakened by suffering, and a superstitious dread took possession of me. He was gone, and he had been deceived to the end; he had mourned over his child long and deeply, and had died in ignorance of my share in her death; but now, his disembodied spirit seemed to haunt and accuse me; and that first link which connects us with the unknown world, by the loss of one we love, was to me a dreadful as well as a solemn thought. "His last words," thus wrote my aunt, "his last words were of you; he raised himself with difficulty in his bed, and with a strong effort pronounced your name, and then, after another struggle, added, 'Tell her to make Edward happy;' after this, he held my hand in his for a few minutes; once he pressed it, a change came over his face, and then he died in perfect peace. Oh, my Ellen, to die must be a dark and dreadful thing to those who have lived without God in the world! but to die as he did is not terrible; for his life had been void of offence, and irreproachable, as far as a human being's can be, and his death was indeed the death of the righteous." Edward, a voice from the grave calls upon me to make you happy. Where are you; that I may be at your feet and fulfil that dying charge? Where are you, that I too may die in peace, nor close my eyes for ever without a word of pity or of pardon from you?

Twice I read over my aunt's letter, and then I opened Edward's. He had not reached Hyéres before my uncle's death: and had met Mrs. Middleton on her way back to England: he was travelling home with her, and meant to precede her by a few days to London, which he intended to reach by the twenty-third of the month. He said she was powerfully and deeply affected by the loss she had sustained; but that she was calm and composed, and only intensely anxious to be with me again. He said he had received my letter, and concluded his with an earnest request that I would take care of my health. I might then expect him in two days;—I should see him again whom my soul worshipped,—him whom I loved with a strength of passion and a fervour of devotion which absorbed every feeling of my heart;—and yet no faithless wife, no guilty woman, ever looked to the return, or anticipated the presence, of the husband she had betrayed, with more nervous terror, or more deep depression, than I did Edward's.

His letter was in my hand, and I was gazing intently upon it, when the door opened, and Henry came in. The blood forsook my cheek, and I gasped for breath. Mr. Middleton's death—his sister's grief—his pale and haggard expression of countenance—a vague hope that he was come, at last, to set me free forever—kept me silent and subdued. He sat down opposite to me, and said, "I have forced my way in, and brought you this letter."

Glancing at the table, he added, "You have received the last account, I see. Has my sister written to you?"

I could not speak, but I took her fetter and put it into his hands. He read it, and then laid it down with a deep sigh.

"He used me hardly, and hated the sight of me; but I respected him, and would fain have seen his life prolonged for Mary's sake."

There was a long pause after this; we were afraid of each other, and of what each might say next. It was now three weeks since we had met; an eternal separation was at hand; it rested with Henry to decide how we should part. Would he break the chain with which he had bound me? or would he leave upon me for ever the mark of my abhorred slavery? I stood before him, and fixed my eyes upon him.

"Henry, the moment is come when we must part."

"Part!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I am come to part with you? Do you imagine that I will leave you and Edward—whom I now hate as much as I once loved him—to exult over my despair, and to banish me from your house after mine has been tamed into a hell—"

"What words do you dare to utter? Do not blaspheme. Your house is sanctified by the presence of an angel."

"It is haunted by a fiend, Ellen,—that woman who betrayed us,—that woman who, in one of her paroxysms of rage, broke open my desk, and drew from it those fatal letters which she sent to Edward in the vain hope of separating us for ever. She it was who intercepted and destroyed the letter you wrote to me a fortnight ago; and she had the audacity to admit this iniquity, when last night I charged her with it. She gloried in the act, and cast back in my teeth the reproaches I addressed to her. Then, in my fury, I spoke out. I tore aside the veil from Alice's eyes. I broke my promises. I told the mother of my child why, and how, I had married her. I saw her tremble with horror, and turn from me with shuddering aversion, when I proclaimed in her pure ears my guilty passion for you, and my resolution, strong as death, never to give you up. I have broken every tie; I have renounced every duty; and now you *must* be mine—you *shall* be mine. I have long been your slave, but I knew it must come to this at last. You have struggled in vain; you cannot escape me. My love must be the bane of your life or its joy

—its ruin or its glory; and unrequited as it has been, it yet has stood, and will stand, between you and your husband to the day of your death, and turn your wedded joys into deadly poisons."

"Your power is gone—your threats are vain; I defy your vengeance; I scorn your hatred. Denounce me to the world and to Edward. Tell them all that it was not love, but terror that made me tremble before you. Tell them that you have tortured me, and that I have writhed in agonies under your secret power. Tell them that my soul has been wrung, that my heart has been bruised. Tell them that you have changed my nature and made me what I am; and then let Edward, and the world, and Heaven itself, judge between you and me."

"You defy my vengeance? You scorn my hatred? Am I not *here*, weak and imprudent woman? Have you not written to me letters of frantic entreaty? Have you not broken the commands of your despotic and jealous husband? You have not been wise in your anger, or prudent in your wrath."

"You have no power against me if I confess the whole truth to Edward,—if I kneel at his feet—"

"And perjure yourself!"

"Oh, talk not to me of perjury,—talk not to me of crime. You have steeped yourself in guilt and iniquity; and be my sin what it may, upon *your* head it shall rest if you drive me to this act,—if you refuse to release me—"

A dreadful smile curled Henry's lip; and he said, with a sneer, "What an admirably got-up story this will be for Edward! It is a pity you did not think of it sooner. It would have appeared more plausible than it will *now* do. An accidental homicide, carefully suppressed for four years, and confessed, at last, for the purpose of accounting for our intimacy! Your husband will admire the fertility of your powers of invention, which, by the way, he seems, from the tenor of his letter, to be pretty well acquainted with."

"Henry, your malice, your wickedness, *cannot* extend as far as this. You are not a demon; and it would be diabolical to refuse your testimony to my confession; besides, there are other witnesses—"

"In *your* interest, no doubt," retorted Henry with another sneer. "I shall certainly not admit that I allowed Edward to marry a woman whom I saw with my own eyes murder his cousin."

"Murder! murder my cousin! Is it you that speak? Is it I who hear you? Are there no limits—merciful Heaven!—are there no limits to this man's wickedness?"

"There are no limits to despair. I struggle for life and death. You think of nothing but the misery you suffer. You have no mercy for that which you inflict. If I give way to you now, I lose you for ever, and—"

He stopped and hid his face in his hands; his breast heaved with convulsive emotion. I felt he was softened, and I flung myself on my knees before him.

"You lose your victim, but you gain a friend, who, though she may never see you, will bless you every day of her life; and, as she kneels in penitence before God, will mix your name with hers in every prayer she breathes."

I clasped my hands in supplication, and sought to read into his soul.

"Never to see you?—never to hear your voice?—No, no—you *must* love me,—you *shall* love me; and even if you hate me you shall be mine. Your fierce beauty, your pride, your scorn, have not subdued me; nor shall your streaming eyes and trembling accents avail you now. I love you more passionately in your grief than in your pride; and, prostrate before me, I adore you as I never adored you before. I could kill you if at this moment you named Edward; and the curse of a broken oath, the mysterious guilt of perjury, be upon your soul if you play me false, and place the last barrier of separation between yourself and me."

"Oh, do not go with such words in your mouth;—do not leave such a curse behind you: it will fall upon your own head, and follow you to your death-bed. Henry! cling to your feet!—I implore your mercy—"

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Was it the angel of death?—was it the vision of judgment that passed before me? Was it Edward I saw?—and did I live over that hour? I must have seen him—for never since that day, in dreams or in thought, have I beheld him without that dreadful expression which haunts and pursues me. It deprived me of my senses then—it has been killing me ever since.

When I came to myself, I was in my own room, and all the women in the house were about me; they looked frightened and curious, and spoke to each other in a low voice.

"Who is in the house? Who is here?" I asked with a trembling voice.

"There's nobody here, Ma'am; Mr. Middleton is gone out; and the carriage, which had driven to the door, is gone to the Clarendon Hotel."

"Give me my bonnet and shawl. Make haste."

I attempted to get up, but my strength failed me.

"Bring me some wine directly."

I drank a large glassful and stood up. As I was tying on my bonnet with trembling hands, a servant knocked at the door, and put a letter into my maid's hand. I turned faint at the sight of it, but took it from her and bade her leave me.

There are moments which we live through, but which we cannot speak of. I read these words; I read them every day:—

"This is the last communication I shall ever make to you. I shall not return to my house till you have left it. I will never see you again, or hear your name pronounced, as long as I live. Your own fortune, and any allowance you may desire out of mine, will be remitted to you by my solicitors in the manner you will direct; should you address any letters to me, they will be returned to you unopened."

I did not faint again; I did not shed a single tear; a dreadful weight oppressed my limbs and checked my breathing; the source of tears was dried up within me; I groaned in spirit; I expected nothing; I hoped nothing. I did not dare to take a step forward; my eyes were fixed on those words, "Leave my house for ever. I never will see you again." If I stirred, it was to go for ever! and it could not be; it must not be. I had not seen him for the last time; life was not over with me; I was not condemned to that death of the soul, and endless separation; nor sentenced to a living grave, with a heart still throbbing with ardent and passionate affection.

Would no one help me? Would no one have mercy upon me? Was there no voice that he would listen to,—no appeal that would reach him? There *was* one whom I had wronged; but whose image rose before me in that hour of despair; there was one whom I would seek, and who would plead for me, with Edward on earth, and with God in Heaven. I would go to her, and if *her* cold, pale hands were laid upon my burning brow, if *her* voice, like a moist, refreshing wind, passed through the fiery furnace of my affliction, I should not die but live—I should weep at her feet, not writhe and agonise alone.

I rose from my knees; I smoothed my hair, and drew my shawl round me. I had lost my gloves, and opened a drawer to look for them; the only pair I could find was one which Edward had made me put aside because he disliked their colour. What his letter had not done,—what the horrible sufferings of the last hour had not done,—this trifling circumstance did. I cried bitterly; and the pressure on my brain subsided. I walked rapidly through the hall, and as the porter opened the door, he stopped me and said, "Shall not John go with you, Ma'am?" I shook my head and darted on; but before he had closed the door, I came back to say, "I shall be home again in an hour." Why did I do so? Oh, because in its anguish the heart is weak, and I needed to tell myself that I was not going for ever.

To walk through the crowded streets, with a horrible grief in one's heart, and a dizzy aching in one's head; to push by happy, careless, busy creatures, and have a dreadful question shoot across one's brain of eternity,—of infinity,—which is answered by nothing but a vague though acute sense of suffering;—to meet the vacant stare, or the bow of recognition, when the head is splitting and the heart breaking;—who is there that has known all this? *I have;* and dreams have not pictured anything worse; though mine have been dreadful enough!

I walked fast; but the flagstones seemed to extend under my feet, and each carriage that whirled along, might be bearing Edward away. Once a travelling chariot dashed past me; I uttered a faint cry, and rushed towards it; the bystanders looked round in astonishment, and, as it turned the corner, I saw Mr. Escourt's face; he smiled and bowed.

I reached the house at last, and rang the bell. I waited long, and the maid who opened the door stared at me in silence. I ran by her, and up the narrow stairs. She followed me and laid hold of my arm, "You cannot see her; the child is dead," I staggered, and leant against the wall; before me, pale as a sheet, but with eyes which flashed fire, like an apparition, stood Mrs. Tracy; her withered features were convulsed, and the sound of her voice was horrible.

"Darken not these doors with your presence; the curse of Cain is upon you; his mark in on your forehead; and the vengeance of Heaven shall overtake you! The voice of the murdered child calls it down upon you from her watery grave! The last convulsive struggle of the babe who died this morning cries out against you! Ay, tremble and turn pale, and fall upon your knees, for your turn shall come at last! You shall weep, who have made others weep! You shall be trampled upon, who have trampled upon others! Your husband shall discard you! your vile lover shall forsake you; and when my child—when my Alice is dead—"

"Dead! Alice! Good God! Is *Alice* in danger?"

"In danger! Did you think that—betrayed, insulted, forsaken, with a child at her breast, and a dagger in her heart—my flower, my treasure, my child, would live? You have murdered her! Go, go to Henry Lovell, tell him that his child is dead, that his wife is dying; and the curse of a bereaved mother, the agonies of long lingering years of remorse, the hatred of life, and the terror of death, be upon you both! And may the Almighty, to whom vengeance belongs, pour down upon your guilty heads the full vials of His wrath!"

I closed my eyes, and murmured "God forbid." When I opened them again, she was gone: the maid was holding the street-door open, and I walked out of the house. As I got into the street I grew dizzy, and caught hold of the railing. A hand was stretched out to me, and supported me for an instant. I recovered myself, and saw that it was Robert Harding on whom I was leaning. I started back, and looked into his face with wild affright. "Shall I call a coach for you?" he said, gently. I bowed my head in assent, and he went to fetch one. When it came, he let down the step and put me in. As he did so, I pointed to the window and said, "Will she die?"

"God only knows that," he answered in a gruff voice. "You seem like to die too; and well you may!"

I bade the coachman drive me home; and all the way I repeated to myself in a low voice—*home*, *home;* and when we reached it, I hardly dared to enter again that house from which Edward had banished me. The porter put into my hand some notes and letters. I took them, and, for the last time, went up to my own room. It was getting dark, and I rang for candles. I looked at the letters in my hand with a sort of vague groundless hope, that something in them might alter the dreadful certainty of my fate. The servant swept the hearth, and put on fresh coals, and then asked, "Do you expect Mr. Middleton home to dinner, Ma'am?"

I could not say no; I could not speak; I shook my head, and made a sign to him to go; and when the door was closed upon him, I flung myself with my face on the ground, and wept in anguish of spirit.

Then, for the first time, I asked myself what I should do, where I should go. To speak to any one I had ever known before, to justify myself to any one but to Edward, to leave his house for that of any friend or acquaintance, was impossible. Condemned and discarded by him, I had no other thought, but as a wounded animal to creep to some corner of the world, and die there in silence.

I glanced at the letters before me; one was an invitation for the Wednesday in the following week. My name and Edward's were joined together, as they *never* would be again. The details of that every-day happiness of life, which was for ever destroyed, rose before me; and my heart rebelled against its fate, and murmured against God. I opened the next; it was from Henry. The image of his dying and childless wife was before me; and I shuddered as I read these lines:

"Your character is gone, your reputation is lost, you are for ever parted from Edward. Nothing remains to you now but the proffered devotion of my whole life. I have not returned to my detested home since the last scene that drove me from it, and never shall again. As long as you live I shall be at your side; wherever you go I shall follow you. There is a wild joy in my heart, for our destiny is accomplished; and henceforward we must be all in all to each other. Ellen, idol of my soul, you shall be mine. The excess of my love must win back love at last. Write me one line; tell me where you go; what you do. Life has not strength, language has not words, for this tumultuous fever of agitation, for this hour of love and terror, of anguish and of joy."

I tore open the next letter, and read as follows:

"My blessed child, I shall see you to-morrow, and I can feel *almost* happy in that prospect. You and Edward occupied your uncle's last thoughts; and on you both he pronounced his last blessing. The sight of your mutual happiness, your devotion to each other, will seem to me a tribute to his memory, and a consolation to my own sorrows. Edward has been as a son to me in my affliction, and I like to think that in you he possesses the greatest blessing that my grateful tenderness could desire for him.

"I wish I could feel happy about Henry and Alice; I had hoped that the birth of their child would have made him more domestic, and drawn them more closely together; but, except a few hurried lines in which he announced the fact to me, and another short letter since, I have heard nothing from him; and I have received a strange one from her grandmother. She insists upon seeing me immediately on my return to England, and speaks of communicating some dreadful secret to me. If I did not think her mad, this would frighten me; but her language and conduct ever since the marriage have been so strange, that I suspect she must be out of her mind. I shall go to Henry's house at once on my arrival to-morrow; and by the middle of the day I hope to be once more with you, my beloved and precious child. The past is sad, the future is gloomy; I have many fears and disquietudes; but *you* are my light in darkness, my bird of peace amid the storms of life; and in your happiness I shall forget my own sorrows. Give my best love to dearest Edward.

"Ever your most affectionate,

"M. M."

The cup was full at last; I was drinking it to the dregs; what wonder if it turned my brain? Banished for ever by Edward—persecuted by Henry's fatal passion—denounced to Mrs. Middleton—accused of murder—what was I doing here? Could I not walk out, and, in the black cold depths of the river, still for ever the passionate beating of that heart which had throbbed so long? Could I not swallow poison; and, in the agonies of deaths send for Edward?

Death! No; I dared not die! I was afraid to die: but I would seek a living grave. I would fly from the face of those who loved, and of those who hated me.

Edward had forbidden my name to be uttered before him. Never again should it be uttered as the name of a living creature. I would take another, and bury myself in a seclusion where I might linger through the increasing symptoms of that illness which, during the last few days, I had detected and recognised by the hectic spots on my cheeks, by a racking cough, and nightly sweats. There I should live alone, suffer alone, and die alone; and when the record of my death, if recorded at all, should casually meet the eyes of those who once loved me, it would pass unnoticed; and my own name, my fatal name, if ever pronounced by them, would sound as the knell of blighted joys—of hopes gone by—as the memory of a mysterious shame, and of a nameless sorrow.

My eyes turned accidentally to a painting of the Cathedral at —, which hung over the chimney-piece in my room. A superstitious and nervous fancy took possession of me. I felt as if my fate directed me there. I turned my eyes away, and tried to *think*, but could not. A vague terror pursued me; and still, as I fixed my eyes on this picture, I felt as if *there*, among those solemn arches, in those dim aisles, I should be *safe*. I felt as if a mountain would be removed from my breast as soon as I had reached a place where my name and my fate were unknown. *There*, Henry would not pursue me; *there*, I should never be told that Alice was dead, and that I had destroyed her; *there*, I should never hear that Mrs. Middleton had learnt to hate me; there, she would never ask me what I had done with her child; and miles and miles would lie between me and *him*, whom I so hopelessly loved, and so wildly feared.

The hours went by, and each time the clock struck I startled with affright; but I grew calmer as the night advanced; I had something to do, for my strange vague fancy was changed into a settled resolve.

I fetched a small portmanteau, and put into it some linen and some money, Edward's miniature, and a small prayer-book, which he had once given to me. My cough was dreadful, and shook me to pieces; but I listened to its hollow sound with a terrible joy; and as I counted the bank-notes in my pocket-book, I wrote with a pencil on the back of the last—"For my burial."

The clock struck five, and I put on my bonnet and my cloak. The light was faintly dawning. I opened with a trembling hand the door of the adjoining room, and unclosed the shutters, to look once and for the last time on Edward's full-length picture. The light was so faint, and my swelled and burning eyes were so dim, that I could hardly discern its features, and I saw nothing before me but the vision of that dreadful moment when I last beheld him, I knelt before it, and breathed a prayer for *him*, which will be heard at the throne of Grace, if prayers can avail from the lips of those who cannot, and dare not, pray for themselves.

A noise in the room above my head startled and hurried me. I took up the portmanteau in my room, and carried it with difficulty down the stairs; I reached the hall door, and pushed it open—I closed it behind me; and, if ever there was a pang which baffles description—if ever there was an act which resembles suicide, in all but the apparent suspension of agony which death seems to yield, it was mine, when I closed that door; and, with a weakened frame, an aching head, and a broken heart, dragged myself with difficulty along the street, and stood shivering and burning at once, to wait till the first

hackney-coach appeared on the stand.

I called one, and drove to the place from which I had seen that the stage-coaches set off. I saw the name of—on one of them, and secured a place. An hour afterwards we started; and, as I drove out of London, it was snowing hard.

After a few hours' travelling, the burning fever which had supported me, subsided: and the horrible solitude of the future appalled me. Nothing like a hope before me—nothing but the cold chill of despair in my heart—nothing but strange voices and faces about me. A dark, heavy, speechless grief weighed like lead on my soul, but wrought like fire in my brain.

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Late that night I reached this place.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

From that moment to this, a night of horror has gathered around me. No tidings have reached, no enemy has pursued, no friend has discovered me. I am alone, and I am dying. I watch day by day the progress of the disease which is killing mc. In reckless despair I accelerate its progress; and then I tremble and shudder at the approach of death. I drag myself to the cathedral, and in its awful silence, or in the low chaunting of the choir, I find a soothing power, which acts at times as a spell over the dark visions and secret terrors of my soul.

But I cannot pray when others pray. My brain is confused, and my spirit weary. I cannot kneel in mockery before God, while my soul rebels against Him. The voices of the dead and of the dying mingle with the rise and fall of the organ. Sometimes a note vibrates on my ear like a death-cry—the sound of rushing waters besets me—the curse of Cain follows me, and his words of complaint are ever upon my lips—"My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Is there no balm for such sorrows? No refuge for such despair?
Tell me, ye who know; for verily, my soul is in great agony,
and there is none to comfort me! I am passing through the
Valley of the Shadow of Death, and God is not with me!

CONCLUSION.

"What angel shall
Bless this unworthy husband? He cannot thrive
Unless her prayers, whom Heaven delights to hear
And loves to grant, reprieve him from the wrath
Of greatest Justice."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Love her, Angelo,
I have confessed her, and I know her virtue."

SHAKESPEARE.

"Une vie à bien faire uniquement passée
D'innocence, d'amour, d'espoir, de pureté,
Tant d'aspirations vers son Dieu répétées,
Tant de foi dans la mort, tant de vertus jetées
En gage à l'Immortalité.

"Tant de nuits sans sommeil pour veiller la souffrance,
Tant de pain retranché pour nourrir l'Indigence;
Tant de pleurs toujours prêts à s'unir à des pleurs,
Tant de soupirs brûlans vers une autre patrie,
Et tant de patience, à porter une vie,

Dont la Couronne était ailleurs."

LAMARTINE.

On a cold evening in February, Mrs. Middleton was sitting alone in the library of Elmsley Priory; the wind was howling round the old house in that mournful key which stirs up in the soul a vague emotion; the roaring of the swollen torrent was audible, and the low distant barking of the keeper's dogs chimed in with it. Mrs. Middleton was dressed in the deep mourning of a widow. She was not more than forty, and yet her hair was prematurely grey, and the heavy listlessness with which one of her hands hung by her side, and the other struck repeatedly and unconsciously the table on which she leant, told that the spring within was broken, and that suffering, and not time, had done its work upon her.

An embroidering-frame was near her, and after a while she drew it to herself and began to work. When she had made a few stitches she let the needle fall, and her head sank upon the support of the frame, and there she remained buried in thought till the door at the end of the library was softly opened. She looked up eagerly, and gazed in silence on the beautiful being who was approaching her, and who after kissing her on the forehead sat down near her, and employed herself with the work she had given up.

And that lovely vision, what was she like? What did that pale smooth brow, those earnest eyes, that bloodless cheek, and delicate form resemble? A lily shattered by the storm; a dove scared from her nest, but faithful in her fear. An expression wholly at variance with the features that wear it, is a startling thing. Tears in the eyes of an old and iron-featured man; laughter on a pale and dying face; care and deep-seated sorrow in the round lineaments of childhood, make us wonder and grieve; but more at variance than any of these was the expression of Alice Lovell's beautiful features with the character they seemed made to bear. Intense and anxious watchfulness marked it now, a tremulous quiver shook her hand as she drew the threads through the canvas; and though her large eyes were calm, and her attitude composed, the least sound made her start.

"How is he now?" inquired Mrs. Middleton in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Sleeping, thank God, and quietly too. Oh, Mrs. Middleton, hope is strong within me yet, and strength will be given us never to forsake him."

"Hope! strength! Alice, where are they to be found?"

Alice pointed to the sky and then to her own heart, and said, "*There* and *here*. In quietness and in confidence shall be our strength." After a pause she resumed, "You were with him some time to-day, did he speak to you?"

Mrs. Middleton grew paler still at this question, and bowed her head in assent.

"What did he say?" continued Alice. "Oh, do not spare *me!*—do not think of *me!* What did *he* say?"

Mrs. Middleton joined her hands together and exclaimed, "'Where is she? Where is she?' was what he said. Again and again he repeated these words in a tone of indescribable anguish, and I was almost thankful when his mind wandered again, and I could leave his dreadful question unanswered. Alice, my child, I am so weak, and you are so strong in your faith, in your hope, in your boundless charity, that I must give way before you, and for once ask you in mercy to let me speak of *her*. I could kneel on her grave and pray to be resigned; but now as it is I grow wild with terror—"

"Oh, let us speak of her, and let us pray for her; let us never have another secret fear, another unspoken terror. Let us pray that in this world she may still be blessed, or in a better she may have been mercifully received."

"You do not understand me yet, Alice. *He* does. The same horrible fear has darted through his mind, darkened and clouded as it is. Her own deed; her own hand,... Alice, you never guessed the extent of his misery or of mine."

"Never guessed it, Mrs. Middleton? I have been with him in his hours of fierce delirium; I have been with him when he has taken me for *her*, and addressed to me words which have made my blood run cold; words of guilty love and of horrible remorse. I have lived between you and him during these days of darkness and agony. I have seen your hope die, and your terror grow; and do I not know what your fear is?—Suicide! Yes, let me speak the word at once, let me dive into your inmost thoughts, and let me carry consolation even into that extremity of misery. Who can declare the point where despair becomes *madness?* Who shall judge? Who shall condemn? Who can tell the secret things of the soul save the God who made it? He has set no limits to our prayers; and shall we say to His mercy, so far shalt thou go

and no further?"

They knelt together, those two women; they poured forth their souls in prayer, and when they rose from their knees, and the elder of them leant her forehead against the breast of the younger and wept in silence, she blessed her in her heart; and she was right to bless her, for nobly and tenderly had Alice Lovell borne her part through the heavy trials that had assailed her. We heard of her last on the bed of sickness, and death was drawing near to her; but youth, and strength of body and mind carried her through, and when she rose from her couch of weakness and of pain, it was to hurry to the bed-side of the husband who had forsaken her, and who, after some days of agonised search after the victim of his relentless passion, maddened by the conviction that he had destroyed her, and haunted by an indescribable remorse, had lost in a brain fever all consciousness save of some intolerable anguish, and of that endless remorse. For many days he hovered between life and death, while his pale wife stood by his side and held his burning hand in hers; even while he raved in dreadful delirium of his love and his despair, and with frantic cries called upon the grave to give up its dead. She was indeed a ministering angel in that house of mourning, for there was another fierce but now subdued spirit, who without daring to approach the bed of suffering, was undergoing all the anguish of the blow she had struck, and which had recoiled upon herself. It was a fearful sight to see that old woman crying like a child over the ruin she had made, wringing her hands in despair, and with straining eyes and blanched cheeks, listening at the door of the room where the being, whom she had nursed as a child, and idolised as a man, whose passions she had fostered, whose life she had saved and embittered, to whom she had confided her child, and whom she had at last ruined by her blind and furious revenge, was raving, cursing, and dying. Between them stood that child whom she had sacrificed, and he had betrayed. With words of peace and of holy confidence, passing from one to the other, Alice spoke of hope and pardon, and turned the agony of the aged sufferer into penitence. By degrees she learnt from her lips all the secrets of her soul. From her she gathered the knowledge of that dark cloud which had hung over Ellen's life, and while she trembled and wept, in her heart there rose (as Mrs. Middleton had said) an immense pity, a boundless charity. Day by day she watched and prayed by Henry's side, and at last discerned a ray of light through the gloom. The fever left him, and one day that she had supported his head for several weary hours, he opened his languid eyes and said, "Alice, is it you?"

She pressed upon his cheek a kiss, like a mother's to a rescued child; but when he whispered in her ear the terrible question on which his life and his reason depended, her face was as pale as his, and her tears fell like rain-drops on his brow. Gradually his strength returned, but still at times his mind wandered. For hours he would remain with his eyes fixed on vacancy, and his lips would move as if unconsciously, and form the fatal words of inquiry which never received an answer. Sometimes he took Alice for Ellen, and kneeling at her feet he, would implore her pardon, and curse and upbraid himself as her murderer and destroyer. With heroic patience, but with a sickening heart and a shuddering frame she listened to these ravings, and met his wild and involuntary confessions with a silent appeal to Heaven for mercy for him, and for strength for herself.

After a while she went with him to Elmsley, and there continued her work of love and endurance. Her strength seemed to increase with the demands upon it. Mrs. Middleton's broken spirit, and helpless despondency, needed her support almost as much as Henry's weakened mind. Her grandmother had returned to the cottage at Bridman, and nothing cheered the solitude of that melancholy abode, but the occasional visits of that angel who moved amidst all these various sufferings and dark associations like a messenger of peace. It was as a hard task, and many a martyr's palm has perchance been more easily won. She became identified with all their sorrows—almost with the remorse she witnessed; perhaps she suffered more than any of them, for she knew more than any one else of that terrible history which had driven Henry to madness, and Ellen (as she supposed) to self-destruction. Through her grandmother's tardy and unavailing misgivings, she learnt the details of that obstinate belief in the lost Ellen's guilt which had led her to hate and persecute her. She heard from her lips how that sentiment had grown into a passion when fostered by a bitter and burning resentment; how, under the influence of that feeling, she had one night made her way into the house at Elmsley at dusk, with the intention of upbraiding Henry, and denouncing Ellen. She had found her alone, and asleep before the organ on which she had been playing. A savage hatred filled her soul, and she bent over that sleeping form with a fierce impulse to revenge upon her at once the death of Julia, and Henry's desertion of her own child. Conscience and terror alike checked her uplifted arm; she withdrew in silence, but left behind her the first of that series of mysterious threats, by which she haunted the mind, and scared the peace of that wretched and deeply-tried being. She confessed to Alice how she had employed and excited Robert Harding to act the part of a spy, to dodge the steps and watch the actions of her faithless husband, and of the unhappy object of his fatal passion. A superstitious belief in a mysterious call to denounce and to visit the crime she had witnessed, constantly counteracted by the influence which Henry possessed over her, and an intense anxiety for the innocent girl she had committed to his reckless hands, had kept her in a state of mind bordering on distraction. Harding was one of those men, who, dogged and obstinate in one respect, was weak and manageable in all others. He blindly followed her dictates, as

long as she persuaded him that her aim was to protect or to avenge Alice, whom he loved with an instinctive, faithful, and humble devotion. He shared her hatred of Ellen, and on the day of her marriage had mixed with the crowd at the church door, and thrust into her hand that warning which had been so awfully realised. At the time of the election at—, he had watched from the gallery where he stood, with a strange mixture of grief and rage, Alice's altered countenance, and her husband's open and shameless devotion to her rival. He had in his possession one of those letters which Mrs. Tracy had so often written and then recalled; he resolved to deliver it at once, and thus bring sudden disgrace and misery upon that guilty pair whose destiny was in his hands. When he had done the deed, and retired to his solitary abode at Bridman, he felt frightened at what he had hazarded, and trembled like a child at the idea of Mrs. Tracy's anger. It was, therefore, a relief to him when Henry sought him out, and humbled himself before him. He was released from an awful responsibility, and returned to his post, supported by his aunt's bounty, obedient to her orders, and with a dog-like, self-denying fidelity, ready to die at Alice's feet, to kill her husband, or to save his life at the expense of his own, according as he was told that *she* willed it—that *she* required it. During the time he was in Mr. Escourt's service he might have been betrayed into more active steps, had he not detected, with a keen and instinctive jealousy, the motive which dictated his patron's sharp investigations, and the object he had in view; which, with a singular mixture of cunning and honesty, he contrived to defeat.

Mrs. Tracy described to Alice, in tones and with looks that made her shudder, how her spirit was moved, even at the altar where Ellen's ill-omened marriage was solemnised, to denounce that pale, stern bride as a homicide, and to proclaim aloud that the trembling hand which one man bestowed, and another received, with such loving trust, was stained with blood. She had risen to speak; the words were upon her lips:

"Phrenzy to her heart was given,
To speak the malison of Heaven,"

when she met the full and glaring force of Henry's flashing eyes. She could not withstand their dark and dreadful power; Alice, her helpless child, was by his side, and she sunk back in her seat, overcome and subdued. On the day of Alice's confinement her hopes had been raised, and her heart softened, by some indications of sensibility on Henry's part. The reaction was violent when he returned after an absence of several hours, which she knew had been devoted to Ellen. She reproached and upbraided him, and he answered her by a careless and brutal avowal of the nature of his feelings, and he left the house again at dinner-time without even visiting his wife. Then in her fury she resolved at all risks to separate him from Ellen; she broke open his desk, where she found notes which excited her hatred and anger to such a degree that she determined to send them at once to Edward Middleton, and thus place an eternal barrier between the guilty pair. The result of that fatal act she now deplored with a ceaseless and bitter sorrow, and day after day, with tears and groans, entreated the forgiveness of her thrice-injured child. Patiently and mercifully did Alice listen to that misguided and unhappy woman's confessions; she abstained by a reproachful look or a severe word from heaping fresh misery on that aged and humbled head, but she pondered over these things in silence; and when she returned to Henry's side and he held out his hand to greet her, hers was cold and nervous, and her heart sunk within her as she fished her eyes on his, and in their wild and restless expression read that fearful retribution which sometimes falls on those who have walked in their own ways, and defied the justice of an Almighty Judge, till the light that was in them has become darkness, and His awful vengeance has overtaken them. Great indeed was that darkness in Henry Lovell's case—greater still from the light that had once been in him. Sparks of genius, touches of feeling, relics of the high capabilities of mind that had once been his, flashed through the night of his soul, and made its present darkness more sadly visible.

Alas, for all that God gives and man destroys! Alas, for all that might be and is not! Genius and intellect, which should subdue and regenerate worlds, and with noble thoughts, and words of fire, carry the truth from one hemisphere to the other—where are ye? What do ye? Consumed upon the altar of a withering selfishness—cramped and debased by the bonds of a narrow scepticism—man has prostituted you to vile uses. Slaves of his passions, and ministers of evil, He has made you;—and where God had said, "Let there be light," has too often answered, "Let there be darkness."

Henry's gloomy and wayward depression increased every day, although his intellect was not wholly obscured; but at the times that it was clearest, he seemed to suffer more than during its hours of partial aberration. He gave way less than at first to fits of violent irritation; the terrible expressions he used to utter, and the murmurs and curses which rose to his lips with such frightful bitterness, were at an end. He even ceased to ask that fatal question with which he had been wont to torture his wife and sister; he listened in silence to what they said, and once made a faint attempt to smile when Alice spoke cheerfully to him. He often gazed on her in silence, and watched her intently as she moved about the room. Once, when she was sitting at her work opposite to him, she heard him say, in a low voice, "*Notre Dame de bon secours*." She looked up with tears in her eyes; he rose wildly, and cried, "Your

tears shall not avail you;" and then he turned away, and did not speak for some hours.

One morning that the sun was shining brightly, and the mild air forestalled the spring, Alice had thrown open a window that looked upon the flower-garden. A bird was chirping a few shrill notes near it; and Henry listened to them with an appearance of pleasure. When the bird flew away, he went to the window, and gazed earnestly on some early spring flowers, which were just coming into blossom. Alice opened a book on the table, and read aloud the following lines:—

"Sweet nurslings of the vernal skies.
Bathed in soft airs and fed with dew,
What more of magic in you lies
To fill the hearths fond view?
In childhood's sports, companions gay
In sorrow, on life's downward way,
How soothing! In our last decay.
Memorials prompt and true."

Henry held out his hand for the book, and read over these lines in silence; he then glanced at the title-page, shuddered, and flung it from him. Alice picked it up, and looked anxiously at him.

"Was not Dr. Dodd hung for forgery?" he exclaimed. She turned very pale. He saw it; and said, "You need not be frightened now. I am not *mad*. In that very book I *forged* the first link of that infernal chain with which I bound and destroyed her."

Alice knelt by him, and whispered—

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

He drew fiercely back, and cried—

"There may be mercy for others; there can be none for me. Look into your Bible, you will see in it what I have done. Turned her body and her soul into hell! God alone should do *that*. *I* have done it. Alice, if you believe, you must tremble. Ay, the devils do so too. Poor angel! God has turned thee into an earthly hell. Pure spirit! chained to a fiend, thy fiery trial draws to an end."

He sank back into his chair, and muttered—

"The worm that never dies. Ay, I understand it now."

One day that Alice had been walking before breakfast, and was returning home with that heaviness of step, and abstraction from outward things, which prolonged and acute mental suffering produces, the porter's wife stopped her as she passed the lodge, to tell her that half an hour before a gentleman had come to the gate in a post-chaise, and had expressed an anxious desire to see her; that on finding she was out, he had hesitated a moment as to what he should do, but that at last he had stepped into the lodge, and written a letter, which he had desired her to deliver to Mrs. Lovell as soon as she returned. Alice took it with a mixture of fear and curiosity. The only conjecture she could form was, that it came from Edward Middleton. The unbroken solitude in which he had lived—the obstinate silence which he had maintained when Mrs. Middleton once ventured to address a few lines to him, imploring him to aid her in the search of his guilty but unfortunate wife—made her break the seal of this letter with nervous anxiety.

She glanced at the signature, and, at once relieved and disappointed, she saw it was not from him, and then read as follows:—

"Madam,

"As one who, in his ministry, has received from dying lips a solemn confession—as a man who has witnessed a deep repentance, and a great affliction, I address you.

"There is one who has been for a while as if she had been dead to you and yours, but who is yet alive, although her life is passing away like a morning cloud. In His name, who never broke the bruised reed, I ask you to smooth her pillow, and to bring peace and pardon to that weary spirit. She has made the sacrifice of her life to God; and her only desire is to be forgiven by those whom she has trespassed against, and to forgive those who have trespassed against her. I dare not say more. Just, it is hardly possible that you *can* be; merciful, I am certain that you *will* be. Mrs. Edward Middleton is at —; she is in the last stage of a rapid consumption, and before many days are gone by, her spirit will have returned to the God who gave it. She has confessed to me the sins and the sorrows of her short and

troubled life. One heavy trial she has been spared, in the knowledge that your life, Madam, has been saved; and if she could receive from you, from her aunt, and, above all, from the husband whom she has offended, a token of forgiveness, her life might still close (I use her own expression) 'with one untroubled hour.' I heard her murmur these last words to herself, as, out of a nosegay, which had been in kindness sent her, she selected a passionflower, the sight of which affected her strangely.

"I have undertaken this journey for the sole purpose of informing you of Mrs. Middleton's present residence. I shall await your answer at the inn at Elmsley. My reason for addressing this letter to you, Madam, was the fear of causing Mrs. William Middleton too sudden an emotion in her present state of health. To your hand I commit the task, and I pray that you may be guided and blessed in the performance of it.

"William Lacy."

Alice had begun to read this letter as she was walking towards the house; but as soon as she had read the few first lines, and that the sense of them burst upon her, she staggered to a bench, and a great faintness came over her. She read on, however; and, as the letter ended with that prayer for her which had been so fervently put up, she closed her eyes for an instant, and said *Amen* with her whole heart.

The letter had rolled at her feet, and as she stooped for it, her husband suddenly joined her. He picked it up, and asked whence it came. She trembled and turned pale. He saw it, and guessed it all. He seized her hands, and looked wildly into her face—

"Is she alive?"

"She is, Henry, she is."

He fell with his face to the ground, and for the first time in his life his soul spoke to God.

When he arose he was very pale, but he took the letter from Alice's hand, and read it through in silence. "Not dead, but dying!" He hid his face in his hands and wept convulsively.

"Alice," he cried at last, as his wife bent over him in speechless sympathy, "Alice, my guardian angel! never forsake me—never leave me! Teach me to live; teach me to die; teach me to see *her* die, and not to blaspheme and to curse. Put your hand on my forehead, and drive away the dreadful thoughts that come over me... She is dying; she is alone: what are we doing here? Alice, I must see this man, this priest; quick, quick—send him to me; there is no time to lose."

There was a wildness in Henry's countenance and manner which alarmed Alice. She walked fast with him to the house, and despatched a groom to the inn with an earnest entreaty to Mr. Lacy that he would come to them directly. She then went to Mrs. Middleton, and, with tenderness and caution, informed her of that glad, mournful news, which relieved her worst fears, only by summoning her to the death-bed of that Ellen whom she so passionately loved, and whose name vibrated in her ear, and thrilled through her heart, with a strange and undying power. She rose as from a deep sleep, and prepared to go to her; but there was no gladness in the revival of her fainting spirit, and no hope in the pilgrimage before her.

An hour afterwards Henry Lovell received Mr. Lacy in his room. He had spoken kindly and tenderly to Mrs. Middleton. When Alice met him, overcome by the sense of all that they two alone as yet knew and felt, and by an instinctive dread of the interview about to take place with Henry, she fell on her knees before him; he laid his hand upon her head, and said in a voice which trembled with emotion—

"The blessing of an old man be upon you, my daughter; and may the God whose servant I am never forsake you in life or in death."

Alice rose and fixed her earnest eyes on Mr. Lacy's venerable countenance, and said slowly and solemnly—

"You have brought us tidings of mournful joy, and you will carry back with you tidings of peace and of hope to poor Ellen's dying spirit. Oh, Mr. Lacy, have you not a blessing to leave behind you? Have you no words of peace to speak to him, even to him who is now waiting for you? I know not in what spirit he will receive you. Dark shades sweep over his soul, and his sufferings are terrible. He is recovering slowly from a brain fever—"

Henry opened the door of the adjoining room. The colour of his face was changed; he looked quite unlike himself; and Alice started at the strange sound of his voice, when he said, "Do not detain Mr. Lacy, Alice: my time is short, and I have much to say to him."

Mr. Lacy followed him into his study; he shut the door, and begged him to sit down. He looked at him steadily for a minute, and then said—

"You know all my history?"

"Some parts of it," Mr. Lacy replied.

"You know, then, that you speak to a man who has destroyed, by a series of iniquitous persecutions, a woman whom he so devotedly loved that even now—"

"Mr. Lovell, I am not come here to listen to the avowal of an unholy passion; I am come to bring you that forgiveness which you so much need, and to claim from you a confession—"

"Stop, Mr. Lacy; you must listen to me, or you will drive me mad," said Henry, with a terrible laugh, "and then what confession will you get? Listen to me. I love Ellen Middleton so passionately, that were I not dying myself, I could not even now do her justice. Though two hours ago I fancied I could have given my existence only to know her alive and in her husband's arms, even though I might never see her again, yet *now—now* that I have heard of her,—that I see you who have seen her face and heard her voice, the dreadful struggles I go through only leave me life and sense enough to prove to you that I was in my right mind when I wrote *this*."

He held out a letter to Mr. Lacy, who took it in silence.

"Take that letter to Edward Middleton, Mr. Lacy; you may read it first yourself. If, when he reads it, he forgives his wife and curses me, I shall be satisfied. Tell him, then, that I am mad or dead; I shall be so by that time. When you see *her* again, tell her not to look so pale, or stare so wildly when I dream of her; tell her not to hang over me, or stand by my bedside and moan so piteously. Did you say she was dead?"

"No; she is dying; and she is prepared to die; she prays, she hopes, she submits, and God will receive her, for His mercy is infinite."

"A ministering angel she will then be, while I lie howling! A gulf between us! What am I thinking of? Where have I read that? There is something very wrong *here!* I beg your pardon, Mr. Lacy, I will not detain you a moment more. Perhaps you will be so kind as to let me know the result of your interview with Edward Middleton? and give my love to Ellen; I shall call upon her to-morrow."

There was something so horrible in the familiar tone with which these last words were spoken, that Mr. Lacy shuddered, and breathed a mental prayer for the wretched man whose senses seemed to have failed him after the strong and persevering effort he had made to collect them for one important object. In a few brief words he warned Alice, as he left him, of the wild and sudden manner in which their conversation had been broken off, and strongly urged her to send for instant medical advice. She did so; and after taking leave of him, and murmuring in an almost inaudible voice the words, "Pray for us!" she returned to her post with that sinking of heart, and strength of spirit, which those only know who feel acutely, and never give way. She did not inform Mrs. Middleton of the alarming symptoms which indicated the return of what they most dreaded. She would not, by rousing her fears, detain her from the death-bed of Henry's victim; she sent her there, as to a mournful refuge from the terrors she herself anticipated. When she had seen her take her departure, she knelt alone for a few minutes in her room before a picture of the Crucifixion, which hung there; she offered to God, in a few brief words, the agony she was about to endure; and then, with a steady step and a calm countenance, she walked into the room where Henry was, and sat down quietly to her work at a small distance from him. She saw by his eye and his countenance that he was struggling with the delirious fever which was coming upon him; and while she kept her hand near the bell, which at an instant's notice was to be answered, and her eye upon the avenue through which she could see the doctor arrive, she spoke now and then in a quiet tone, and gently and firmly answered the wild questions he addressed to her. Once he called loudly and fiercely for music; he muttered something about David and his harp; he bade her drive the evil spirit from him; he began to speak rapidly and incoherently, and to chafe at her silence. She could not play; she had never sung to him before; for the first time, she did. Her voice was pure, and sweet, and loud; it rose in the silence of that twilight hour with a strange and awful harmony. She sang the airs of those sacred chaunts which fall on the ear like dreamings of eternity. Two old servants who were in the outward room fell on their knees and listened. For more than an hour that solemn, mournful song continued; it thrilled through their very souls, and affected them more deeply than the most passionate cries of grief or of terror could have done. It only ceased when the doctor arrived; and Henry was persuaded, in a moment of gloomy and indifferent abstraction, to retire to bed, and yield himself to his care. But no remedies, no treatment availed to check the progress of the fever, which increased every hour, and which was accompanied by the fiercest delirium, and the most frantic ravings. His struggles were fearful: his attempts at self-destruction frequent; three men could hardly

hold him down. Towards morning, in one of those paroxysms of delirious fury, he broke a blood-vessel, and Alice, who had never left his bed-side, was covered with blood. She stirred not even then; she saw in the doctor's face that the danger was imminent; for the prostration of strength which followed the accident was sudden and awful; and one of those indescribable changes which announce the approach of dissolution was apparent. She whispered to one of the servants to send for the clergyman, and then she knelt by the bed-side and gazed with an agonising intensity on Henry's deathly pale face. His eyes were closed in the helplessness of utter exhaustion, and his breath hardly dimmed the mirror that was held to his lips. After a few minutes of that nameless anguish which thought dares not dwell upon, nor words describe, she saw his eyes open and turn to her with an expression of intense inquiry, full of the consciousness of death, of the sense of a coming eternity, and of that question, deferred too long, and asked too late, "What shall I do to be saved?"

She bent over him in speechless sorrow; his dying eyes caught sight of the cross which hung from her neck; she saw it; she held it to his lips, and whispered, "None ever perished at His feet."

He heard her; and his lips moved, and his hand grasped hers; he looked at her, raised his eyes to Heaven,—and he died.

On that murmured prayer, on that expiring glance, she built hopes which we may not scan,—which we dare not judge. We dare not break the bruised but not broken reed on which she leant, nor quench the uncertain light which its memory threw upon the remaining years of her earthly pilgrimage.

When the clergyman arrived, he found her still on her knees by the bed of death, still covered with the blood of her dead husband. He has often since said, that when she rose from her knees, and silently held out her hand to him, it was with a reverence mingled with awe that he took it. He felt (this was his expression) that she had drawn very near to God in the prayers which she had poured forth in that chamber of death, during its first and solemn hour of silence and of loneliness.

It was an irksome and trying task which Mr. Lacy, from a sense of duty, and of profound interest and pity, had undertaken; and the part of it which he most dreaded was now at hand. For those he had left behind, he felt the sincerest compassion, and for Alice, the highest admiration. When he had drawn near to Elmsley, he had formed beforehand a tolerably just idea of the situation and state of mind of its inmates. He had expected to find a woman bowed down with grief, worn out with sorrow, and by her side another, more like an angelic than a human being, and such were those he had seen. He had expected to find a man with a mind weakened, torn by a keen remorse, and still struggling with unconquered passions; he had heard with his own ears the confirmation of his anticipations, and he had left him, sinking under that delirious agony which he had struggled with long, and mastered for one moment, but which had subdued him at last. He had sent one of these sufferers to the bed-side of his dying penitent, and had left the others in God's hands, and had prayed earnestly for them, as he foresaw the dark and troubled scenes on which they were entering. But now, as he travelled from Elmsley to Hillscombe, he felt quite uncertain as to the character, and the state of mind, of the man whom he was seeking. Ellen's journal had given him a clear idea of every individual connected with her history save of that husband whom she had so loved, so feared, and so offended. Whether a strong principle of duty, or an implacable strength of resentment characterised him, he could not exactly discern; and he felt the difficulty of obtruding himself, a perfect stranger, into those sorrows which dignity, or pride, wounded affection, or stern implacability, had shrouded from every eye, and buried in that solitude which he was now on the point of disturbing.

With intense anxiety and curiosity he opened the letter which Henry Lovell had placed in his hands; and, according to his permission, proceeded to read it.

"This letter will be placed in your hands by a clergyman, who will at the same time inform you that I am dying, and that, as a dying man, I solemnly address you, and charge you to read the whole of this letter. Your wife is not dead; and on my death-bed I desire to do her that justice which I withheld from her so long, while she vainly sought for it at my hands. I have loved her passionately and for years; and if she had returned my affection, she would not be dying now of a broken heart, and I should not be on the brink of madness. Do not imagine that I am mad *now*. I am in the full possession of my senses; and if I could, or dared, thank God for anything, it would be for this interval of reason, which allows me to declare, with all the force of a death-bed assertion, that the woman, whom you have turned out of your house as my mistress, is as pure as she was on the fatal day when we both first saw her; and loves you with a passion which has made the misery of my life, which has baffled every effort I made to destroy her virtue, and which she dies of at last, blessing you, and hating me as a woman; but, perhaps, forgiving me as a Christian. Not quite three years ago, a dreadful accident, an extraordinary train of circumstances, threw her into my power. I saw her in a fit of almost childish passion strike her cousin Julia; the child was standing in a dangerous position, her foot slipped, and she fell down the cliff; you know the rest; had you known it sooner you might now be the happy husband of the woman whom I

adore. *You* too will know the meaning of those horrible words *too late*, which I have repeated to her in malice, and to myself in despair, till I feel as if they would ring in my ears through an eternity of misery. She wanted courage, she wanted opportunity, to accuse herself of the involuntary act which resembled murder in its results, and which, in the secret cogitations of her restless soul, and excited imagination, assumed a form of guilt and of terror which nothing could efface. *I* kept her secret! I forced Mrs. Tracy, (Alice's grandmother,) who was in my room, on some matters of business at the time, to keep it too. I devoted myself to my victim; I watched her continually; I read each emotion of her soul; I soothed her terrors; I flattered her; I made her believe, by a series of artful contrivances, that *you* were the possessor of her secret, and thus sought, by fear, by distrust, by every pang which that belief occasioned, to crush that passion, the dawn of which I had detected with rage and despair. Under that impression, she saw you depart with a resigned and sullen indifference; and for some months I thought myself, if not loved, at least liked, to a degree which justified my hopes and my designs. They were cruelly disappointed;—a fatal engagement, an entanglement in which guilt and folly had involved me, prevented my offering myself to her in any way but that of urging her to a secret marriage, which I proposed on the score of her uncle's implacable opposition. She steadily refused to yield to my passionate entreaties, and we parted with threats and upbraidings on my part, and contempt and defiance on hers. I was, of course, banished from Elmsley, and soon afterwards, for the purpose of saving myself from a threatened and disgraceful exposure, of a nature needless now to detail, I made a victim of that gentle and perfect Alice, who has almost as much reason as Ellen herself to curse the day on which I crossed her path. When I met the latter again, in London, some time after my marriage, I began to use that power which accident had given me. She had then found out that you were not, as she had imagined, aware of the event which had so fearfully blighted her peace. I then avowed myself the possessor of her secret; and alternately as a friend and as a foe—by devotion one while, and by threats another—I forced her to endure my presence,—to tolerate the expression of a passion, against which her heart revolted, but which she dared not peremptorily repel. I employed every art which cunning can devise to entangle and to bind her. In Mrs. Tracy's knowledge of her secret, and violent enmity against her, I held an engine which I skilfully turned to my purpose. I bound her by an oath never to reveal to you the history of Julia's death. She pronounced it; but even while she protested that she would never marry you, she declared to me, with the accents of intense passion, that though she had refused, she adored you, and that she would rather die at your feet, than live by my side.

"After betraying her feelings in a moment of extraordinary agitation, she found herself almost involuntarily engaged to you; she wrote to me, and threw herself on my mercy. My feelings and my conduct, at that time, appear strange to myself. I was excluded from her uncle's house, and that intercourse with her, which was dearer to me than existence, was interrupted and thwarted in every way. By one effort, one great sacrifice, I regained her confidence, and re-established myself in that forfeited intimacy, at the same time that I bound her by fresh ties of fear and obligation. Perhaps I was also touched by her terrible situation: but be that as it may, I *allowed* her to marry you; and by some concessions on my own part to her inveterate enemy, that old woman,—whose vindictive malice has ruined and undone us all,—I bought her silence, and once more shielded Ellen from disgrace and exposure.

"I need not go into further details. You now can trace for yourself the whole course of my relentless persecution, and of her long and bitter struggles. From first to last,—from the hour she pledged her faith to you at the altar, to that in which you surprised her at my feet,—she has been true to you. I say it even now, with jealous rage; for the fierce love with which I have loved her is still smouldering in my breast, and will only die when I die; I say it with the agony of death in my soul,—with the vision of an approaching eternity before me,—she has been true to you: she has loved you as I loved her; and when she clung to my feet, and vainly sued for mercy at my hands, it was to implore that I would suffer her to reveal the truth to you, the acknowledgment of which might then have saved her. She is dying now, and I have not long to live. She has never loved me, and I have loved her,—and I am sometimes mad—not *now*. If you do not believe me, send for the woman who saw her strike the child. Speak to Robert Harding. Curse *me*, and forgive *her*. Alice has forgiven me. Shall you forgive Ellen, and go to her?

"I have nothing more to say, and I sit writing to you as if the end of all things was at hand.

"Henry Lovell."

With a deep-drawn sigh, and a steady gaze on the calm pure sky before him, Mr. Lacy folded and put up this letter. During the rest of his short journey he meditated in silence, on the sorrows he had left behind him, and those he was going in search of; and as he fixed his eyes on the blue and boundless arch over his head, his lips unconsciously repeated that sublime passage in the prophecies of Isaiah: —"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

On his arrival at the lodge of the park at Hillscombe, his inquiries after Mr. Middleton were answered by a positive assurance that he was not at home; and it was only after stating that the business he was come upon was of the highest importance, that he could induce the porter to dispatch a note from himself to Mr. Middleton, requesting an immediate interview, and reminding him of some circumstances connected with his late uncle, which gave him an especial claim upon his regard and respect. After a while, the servant returned, and requested Mr. Lacy to proceed to the house. As he drove through those grounds,—as he entered that house, the scene of poor Ellen's brief dream of happiness—as he prepared to meet her husband, he felt nearly overcome by his anxiety for the result of this important interview.

He was shown into the library, and at the end of a few minutes Edward Middleton came in, and, requesting him to be seated, alluded briefly to the circumstances which Mr. Lacy had mentioned, and begged to be informed as to the object of his visit. As Mr. Lacy looked on the pale stern countenance before him, and in its inflexible expression, and deeply-marked lines, read all he feared, he murmured to himself, "Unrelenting;" and his heart sunk within him.

"I am come here, Mr. Middleton, to perform a great duty, and to clear up a great mystery. As a minister of God, I claim from you a patient hearing, and that you will read a letter which I bring to you from one death-bed, and hearken to a dying appeal from another."

"Sir, I respect your character, and I revere your office; but if what you have to say relates to me, and not to yourself, let us break off this conversation at once. There are subjects, there are names which I never suffer any human being to allude to before me; and the sacred character which you bear, gives you no right to force them upon me."

"It has given me the right to receive from your dying wife a confession—"

Mr. Lacy stopped and hesitated; a convulsive emotion had passed over Edward's face, and he turned frightfully pale; but in an instant his features resumed their iron rigidity, and he waved his hand impatiently. "And it gives me the right," continued Mr. Lacy, "to tell you that you are committing a fearful injustice; that you are under a fatal delusion."

"She will die, then, as she has lived!" exclaimed Edward with violence. "She has lied, then, to God, as well as to me."

"Beware! beware," returned Mr. Lacy, "how you speak of one whom God has absolved,—whom He will receive; for He shows great mercy where man has none."

"There are crimes," rejoined Edward, fiercely,—"there are crimes which God may forgive but which man cannot."

He glanced at the letter which Mr. Lacy held; and, as he recognised the handwriting, the blood rushed violently to his face, and then forsaking it, left it as pale as ashes.

"Is *he* dead?" he asked, faintly, as he pointed to it.

"Life and reason are both forsaking him; but by a last effort, he gathered strength to write what you *must* read. You must read it; for a voice from the grave calls upon you to do so. You must read it; for your wife is dying, and she must be justified in your eyes; she must be forgiven by you, before her spirit returns to Him who gave it. Listen to me, listen to me, Mr. Middleton: as you fear God, and hope for Heaven, it is not the cause of a faithless life I plead; it is that of a deeply-injured and much-belied woman; she has sinned, indeed, but not against you. God has, through my mouth, absolved her,—at His altar He has received her; and shall you, whom she has loved too much—too fondly—too tremblingly,—with a worship due to Him alone; shall you refuse her that hearing which, with dying accents, she craves,—that justice which, in her name, I demand from you?"

"God forgive me!" cried Edward, wildly; "God forgive me! for I cannot forgive her. She has made her peace with Heaven, you say. So be it, then,—let her die in peace. She has told you that she loved me? Did she tell you how I loved, how I worshipped her?—What is the punishment for those who betray, if those who are betrayed suffer as I have done! She has told you she is innocent; she has told you she is belied: has she told you that I found her prostrate at the feet of that man, who you say is now mad and dying?—that man, who it has almost maddened me not to kill,—whom it has almost killed me to spare—Go, go, Mr. Lacy!—pray for her—pray with her; but do not ask *me* to forgive her."

"Have you not heard me, Mr. Middleton? Have you not understood me? I repeat to you, solemnly and earnestly, with all the conviction that a minute acquaintance with the sad history of her life can give, that your wife is not guilty of the crime which you impute to her; and that she has only loved you too passionately; only feared you too much. The pride, the sternness of your character, acted fatally upon a

nature like hers. Beware, that, even now, God does not look down upon you both, and judge *you* the betrayer, and *her* the betrayed. *One* hour's indulgence, *one* moment's confidence, might have brought her to your feet, to confess, not a crime, but a fact, 'which has been a covering to her eyes all the days of her life;' an accident which, in a fatal hour of weakness, she concealed; an accident which threw her into the power of those who, in hatred, or under the impulse of a guilty passion, sought to blight her peace, and ruin her virtue. That love which you doubt, in the place of a higher principle, saved her from guilt, and only left her a prey to the most protracted agony. Read this letter—it is from the man who vainly sought to gain her love, by wringing her heart—read this journal—read this confession of many sins, of many fears, of much sorrow; but own, as you read it, that her love to you was wonderful, and passing the common love of woman; and then come to forgive, and be forgiven, ere God takes to himself the being whom you once swore at the altar to keep, to comfort, and to cherish, until death parted you."

Edward Middleton made no answer to this solemn address. He appeared stunned and bewildered. He stretched out his hand in silence for the papers which Mr. Lacy held;—he wrung his hand, and took leave of him. He watched his carriage out of sight, and then locked the door, and remained alone for many hours.

A fearful communing with himself took place that night. He was a calm and a stern man; but bursts of passion shook his frame, and terrible words sprung from his lips, in the solitude of that night's watch; and tears, those dreadful tears which nothing but agony wrings from manhood's eye, fell on the pages before him. Who can tell what he suffered?—who can tell how he struggled? what curses rose to his lips?—what mental prayers recalled them?—what fierce anger burned within him?—what returning tenderness overcame him?

At seven o'clock the following morning, an express from Elmsley brought the intelligence of Henry Lovell's death. An hour afterwards Edward Middleton was on his way to the cathedral town of—.

It was on a mild day, as the sun was shining brightly on the leafless groves of Hillscombe, its slanting rays gilding the lawn on which the house stood, that a carriage drove slowly up the avenue. When it stopped at the door, and the step was let down, Edward Middleton sprang out, lifted his wife in his arms, and carried her into the library.

Once before, a few months ago, he had led her into that room his bride—his idol—his flower of beauty—the pride of his soul. Now, he had brought her back to it to die—for there was death in that marble forehead; death in those painfully bright eyes; death in those transparent hands which held his; in that hollow voice, which murmured, as he laid that weak frame and weary head on the pillowed couch—"Home, home once more!"

He had sought her—he had found her dying—he had taken her in his arms—he had pressed upon her fevered lips such kisses as their hours of hope and of joy had never known—he had hoped against hope. When she had clasped her thin weak arms round his neck, and whispered, "Take me home, Edward, to die;" he had answered in the words of Scripture, "Thou Shalt not die, but live!"

And, verily, in her deep love's excess, she found a short renewal of life. She gathered strength to rise from her bed of weakness and of pain, and, with her head on his bosom, and her hand in his, to breathe again the free air of Heaven, and gaze with a languid eye on those beauties of earth and sky, which have such a deep meaning, such a strange effect, on those who are about to die.

For she must die!—she feels it—she knows it—but not as once
she thought to die; unreconciled to God, unforgiven by man.
Her weary pilgrimage is drawing to a close; but the light of
Heaven dawns upon it now.

She has a great duty to perform, and perform it she will; for she has learnt that the cross which saves us in eternity must be taken up on earth; and that without sacrifice there is no peace for the soul.

She has called Edward to her side; she has mentally prayed that strength may be given her for the trial at hand; she has said to herself, "The scene, his tears, his passion, his soul will too deeply move;" and she has charged him, with solemn earnestness, to leave her for some hours to herself, and then to return and bless the remaining days of that life he cannot save.

She remained alone; and deep and intense were the prayers she poured forth, as she waited for those she had sent for; those whom she had summoned around her in that solemn hour.

She had never looked so beautiful in her days of pride and health, as now, on her bed of sickness and sorrow, of penitence and peace. Yea, of peace; for, although the approaching hour was one of pain and trial; ay, and of shame too, yet her way was clear before her, and she turned not now her head aside

from the cup of sorrow and of humiliation, but steadily prepared to drink it to the dregs.

When she saw Mrs. Middleton, the mother of her childhood, the friend of her youth; the friend who had lately sought her with a message of peace, when she had forsaken, and been forsaken by all the world, when she remembered what she had to tell her, her soul well-nigh fainted within her; but she held out her hand in silence, and prayed more earnestly.

When Alice, the widowed, the childless Alice, entered the room; when their eyes met, she opened her arms. Oh, what depths of mysterious feeling, of unutterable memories, of silent aspirations, were crowded in that embrace. O language, where is your strength? O words, your power, compared with the mute communion of such an hour?

But all are not assembled yet; and Ellen's eyes are fixed on the door with earnest expectation; and when it opened, and she saw Mr. Lacy, her guide, her friend; he who by his sacred ministry had prepared her for death, she turned paler than before, for he was not alone—an aged woman followed him, and gazed upon her with a strange and bewildered expression. There was a moment's deep silence, and then Ellen, turning successively to each of them, addressed them thus:—

"You who have been to me all tenderness—you who have been to me just and merciful, with a justice and a mercy more than human; you whom God made His instrument to bring me through much sorrow unto repentance; and you through whose means He brought me back to Himself, listen to me, and hearken to my dying words. Mrs. Middleton, you had a child, and you lost her; my hand, unwittingly, unknowingly (so help me God! as I speak the truth)—*my* hand was the instrument of her death; it was lifted up in anger but not in malice, and that anger has been visited upon me by a fearful punishment, which, like the mark which was set on Cain's brow, has followed me all my days since, and has brought me to an early grave. Can you forgive me? Oh yes, by that hand which I grasp—by these tears which fall on my brow, and which wash away that fiery mark which has branded *it so long*, you do forgive me —you say of me what our Saviour said of his murderers, 'God forgive her, she knew not what she did.' And now," she continued after a pause, during which there was no sound in that room but stifled sobs, "and now let me take a solemn leave of you all; let me ask for your prayers, for my end is at hand."

Mrs. Tracy knelt by Ellen's bed-side, and said, in hardly articulate tones, "Pray for us when you are in Heaven."

"God bless you," answered Ellen, faintly, and closed her eyes. After an instant she opened them again, and turning to Mr. Lacy, she said, in a voice of the deepest emotion, "Oh, Mr. Lacy, is it not merciful that death has been so sent to me as to allow me time to rise up on my knees, and to cry, 'Lord have mercy upon me?'" She was seized with a sudden faintness, and sunk back on the bed exhausted.

All withdrew in silence except Mrs. Middleton, who, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, kept watch by the pale sufferer as she slept. She hardly realised to herself the truth of what Ellen had said; she could form but one idea, feel but one conviction—this cherished, this idolised being, was to die. Death had done its work with all she loved; she had before borne up against grief; now, for the first time, she resigned herself; out of the deep she called upon God, and in the horror, in the pity, in the unconquerable tenderness which vaguely filled her bewildered soul, she learnt "to cease from man and turn to God." She dared not *think*, and so she only prayed.

When Edward returned that day, he found his wife weaker than ever, but calmer still than she had yet been. She received him with a smile which pierced through his soul. The fearful truth broke slowly upon him that he *must* lose her: that the days of trembling hope and fear, which he had gone through, since he had taken her back to his heart, must give way to that desolating certainty—to that inevitable anguish against which the feelings rebel while the understanding acquiesces. There was no secret between them now; they knew they must part; and her remaining days were spent in a long and deep farewell. She was more resigned than he was—she was nearer Heaven; she had suffered and struggled, and through much tribulation had reached the haven at last; life's last wave had carried her to the shores of eternity, and death for her bruised heart had a balm, for her weary spirit a rest, which life could never yield. She gazed upon him hour after hour, and her very soul seemed to speak out of her dying eyes;

"And it seemed as the harps of the skies had rung.
And the airs of Heaven played round her tongue,"

as she spoke of that death which had lost its sting—of that grave which had lost its victory; for in the might of her earthly love—in the ardour of her living faith, she discerned the shortness of time, the fulness of eternity; life seemed to her now but a little span, and she could say in the spirit of David, "I may not stay with thee, but thou wilt come to me."

Edward, the strong, the stern, the self-relying Edward, suffered more. His faith was as firm, but his hopes were less vivid; a vague remorse agitated him; Mr. Lacy's words to him on the day of their first interview had sown a seed of self-reproach in his heart which had wrought painfully since. Had not her face been so divinely serene, and her spirit so full of hope and of peace that it tempered the agony of his, he would have been still more miserable. Life, which to her appeared short, seemed to him so long; the path he was to tread so lonely; the hope he was to cherish so distant; the world as it is, so dreary; the world to come, so mysterious. One day that she seemed a little better, a shade stronger, than usual, he passionately kissed her pale cheek, and whispered, "You will not leave me, Ellen,—you will not die?"

"I *cannot* live," she answered; "Edward, dearest, I ought not to live, I have suffered too much, too acutely, to raise my head again, and meet what all must meet with in this world of sin and of sorrow. Believe me, Edward, my lot has been wisely ordered. I bless God, who in his boundless mercy has gently laid me down to die here at your side, your hand in mine, your words of love in my ears; they will follow me to the last, and 'When my failing lips grow dumb—when thought and memory flee,' the consciousness that you are near me will remain, and I shall die as I have lived—no, no, not as I have lived—my life has been dreadful, and my death is not."

She hid her eyes with her thin transparent hands, and a slight contraction for an instant wrinkled her brow. The vision of past sufferings had risen up before her; she remembered what she had gone through and trembled. But as she turned towards Edward the expression of mute anguish in his face affected her suddenly and deeply. She threw her arms around his neck, and cried, "I would stay if I could, Edward, but it is too late; the spring is broken, the light is quenched: we must part for a while."

"O God! O God!" murmured Edward, as he clasped his hands in an agony of grief and supplication. "Thou didst give her to me, and I cast her away from me. I was blind and had no mercy; now I see, and my misery is complete. Thy ways are just, but Thy judgments are dreadful!"

"But in the midst of them, my own, He remembers mercy. He has tried us. He has proved us. He has marked out for each of us our way to Heaven. Mine is short, for He saw my weakness. Yours may be long and arduous, for He knows you strong; but both will meet in the end. With one Lord, one Faith, one Hope, I die. With the same Lord, with the same Faith, with the same Hope, you will live. There is a blessed communion, in which we both believe, between those who rest in Heaven, and those who struggle on earth. You will pray for me when I am gone; I will pray for you where I go. At the altar, think of me, as if kneeling mysteriously at your side. Give me a secret chamber in your soul, where my spirit may meet yours, when you retire from the world to commune with God and be still; and when death comes at last to you, as it is now coming to me, think of this hour, think of one so sinful and so weak, passing with a strength not her own, through its dark portal in peace, and God be with you then, my beloved, as He is now with me."

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Her prayer was heard in the hour of trial; when he lost all earthly hope, and felt himself of all men the most miserable, God was with him. When, two days later, she murmured in his ear, as he was supporting her head against his breast,

"Read the prayers for dying," he read with a swelling heart and an unsteady voice, and at the end of each she faintly said, *Amen*. When he came to the last, no *Amen* was uttered on earth; the light was gone; the soul was fled; he was alone; and if God had *not* been with him then, he would indeed have been desolate and utterly forsaken, for he had few connections, few friends; he never opened his heart to any one, and in his grief he hid himself from the eyes of men, and communed with his own soul. God was with him during the first hours of agonising grief; during long days of gloom and silent loneliness; during years of calm sorrow, and quiet exertion, in which he did much good, and learnt that lesson which affliction teaches, "In all things to be more resigned than blest;" and when he dies He will be with him still, for He never forsakes in death those who have served Him in life. He travelled for a few years, and then returned to Hillscombe, where he lived much alone. Once, five years after Ellen's death, while he was calling on Mrs. Moore, at Hampstead, he accidentally met Mr. Escourt, who slightly bowed to him and left the room. Edward turned deadly pale; and that night he had to struggle long and deeply with himself, before he could utter the most solemn sentence in the Lord's Prayer. With Mr. Lacy he formed a strict intimacy, which lasted as long as the life of that venerable man.

Mrs. Middleton never returned to Elmsley; and spent her remaining days in one of those beautiful and quiet spots on the coast of Devonshire. The sight and sound of the sea soothed and quieted the restless nervousness from which she suffered. She would sit for hours on the shore and watch attentively the advancing and receding of the tide, or the fishermen's children playing on the sand at her feet.

"How much that woman must have suffered," was the remark often made by strangers as they passed by her, and observed the expression of her face.

Once a little scene occurred which excited some attention in the by-standers. A pretty little girl, whom Mrs. Middleton had often noticed and caressed, was playing near her with another child. They quarrelled, and in her anger the little girl struck her playmate, who fell on the ground.

A loud and wild cry burst from Mrs. Middleton's lips; she laid hold of the child, and in a hoarse and trembling voice exclaimed, "You know not what you do! you know not what you do!"

Abashed and terrified, the child looked at her and began to cry. She never forgot that scene, nor the words of the pale lady in black, who so loved the sea and its loud roar, and who had started so violently and shrieked so wildly, when she had struck her playfellow.

Of Alice! What shall I say of Alice? What did she once say of her favourite flower, her type and her emblem, for it bore in its bosom the Cross and the Crown of Thorns, and it was pure and spotless as those that

"Won Eve's matron smile in the world's opening glow."

She said it had done what God had sent it into the world to do. It had given her buds in the spring, and flowers in the summer; thoughts of joy in health, thoughts of peace in sickness, thoughts of God and of Christ always. Alice has gone and done likewise. She goes about doing good. She weeps with those who weep, she rejoices with those who rejoice, she feeds the hungry, she clothes the naked, she visits the sick and those in prison, she teaches the ignorant, she prays for the guilty. Into the haunts of misery, into the abodes of despair, she goes; and speaks of peace where peace has never been, and of hope to those in whose ears the words sound strangely. "When the ear hears her it blesses her; when the eye sees her it gives witness to her; and the blessings of those who are ready to perish come upon her. She is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, a mother to the fatherless, and to those who have none to help them."

Morning and evening she kneels in church, and, like Anna, serves the Lord with fastings and with prayers. There she takes up the cross in the morning, bears it through the day, and returns at night to give thanks, and press it to her bosom with all its thorns and all its sharpness.

Is she happy? I have studied her face; I have watched her life; I have seen her pray by a death-bed; I have heard her sing to herself as she sat at work in her room; I have seen her play with joyous children; I have seen her weave garlands of bright flowers, but then I saw her lay them on a grave—and I dare not say she is happy; but I know she is of those who, if they mourn, shall be comforted; who, if they sow in tears, shall reap in joy; and I remember that a sword pierced through the soul of her whom all generations call blessed.

There is a man who goes every day to the same church, who sometimes supports an aged woman, and leads her gently to the bench where Alice sits; who kneels himself at a distance, and listens to the sound of her voice, as she utters the responses. This is Robert Harding; he visits the poor she visits; he hears the blessings they pour upon her; he talks of her to Mrs. Tracy; and he hopes that the time will come, when he may conceal his love so well, that she will speak to him familiarly again, as in the days of their childhood.

As time went by, its soothing effect told upon these mourners; those sorrows which had at first driven them to solitude as a refuse, when their acuteness was past, drew them together again. That mute sympathy which the heart can scarcely value during the first bitterness of its grief, became to each of them a source of consolation. Mrs. Middleton was to Edward and to Alice an object of tender solicitude. How often *he* felt that when they spoke together of things indifferent, or listened to music, or looked upon the beauties of nature, the same thought was in their minds, the same image before their eyes. On these occasions she sometimes pressed his hand in silence, and both felt, without saying it, that their treasure was in Heaven.

In Mrs. Middleton's features, in the tone of her voice, in the expression of her face, Alice found a resemblance to the husband of her youth, which gave her an interest in her eyes which no other human being could have had; and in the tender and earnest affection which united them, both found their highest earthly comfort. They had learnt—one, after striving for it long and vainly,—the other, on the threshold of life,—that happiness is not the portion of earth; but they looked beyond it; and found, in the meantime, that each returning day, even to the deepest mourner, brings new blessings in the shape

"Of perils past, of sins forgiven,
Of thoughts of God, and hopes of Heaven."

THE END.

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Typographical errors silently corrected:

Chapter 4: =inlcined to= replaced by =inclined to=

Chapter 5: =Middleton, You must speak= replaced by =Midleton. You must speak=

Chapter 5: =up all may courage= replaced by =up all my courage=

Chapter 8: =I ventured to approch= replaced by =I ventured to approach=

Chapter 8: =This book was the "Christan Year;"= replaced by =This book was the "Christian Year;"=

Chapter 8: =hetwixt you and me= replaced by =betwixt you and me=

Chapter 10: =to say before Alice: that= replaced by =to say before Alice that=

Chapter 10: =escape a repetiton= replaced by =escape a repetition=

Chapter 12: ="Don 't lie to me, Henry= replaced by ="'Don 't lie to me, Henry=

Chapter 12: =and and had charged her to keep= replaced by a=nd had charged her to keep=

Chapter 13: =interupt= replaced by =interrupt=

Chapter 13: =we shoud have been here long= replaced by =we should have been here long=

Chapter 13: =now for a fews days= replaced by =now for a few days=

Chapter 17: =the orignal cause= replaced by =the original cause=

Chapter 17: =this is a glorius opportunity= replaced by =this is a glorious opportunity=

Chapter 18: =as I acquisced= replaced by =as I acquiesced=

Chapter 18: =a dilirious dream of joy= replaced by =a delirious dream of joy=

Chapter 19: =something in weaknes= replaced by =something in weakness=

Chapter 20: =bnt last month= replaced by =but last month=

Chapter 22: =exlaimed Sir Edmund= replaced by =exclaimed Sir Edmund=

Chapter 24: =what I should do.= replaced by =what I should do,=

Chapter 24: =Eward, dearest= replaced by =Edward, dearest=

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